

## ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Reproductive and sexual health implications of illegal migration among young adults in Benin Metropolis, Edo State, Nigeria

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## Abstract

Reproductive and sexual health implications of illegal migration among young adults encompass a range of complex and interconnected challenges that demand attention and comprehensive solutions. This study is aimed at determining the reproductive and sexual health implications of illegal migration among young adults in Benin metropolis. Analytical cross-sectional study design was adopted. A purposive sampling technique was used to select a sample size of three hundred and forty-four participants. A one-time-survey method was adopted for the study as the questionnaire was administered on a face-to-face basis. Simple frequencies, percentage, charts, and graph were used to analyze the data, with the statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS) version 22. The results showed that majority of the respondents were sexually abused which resulted in unwanted pregnancies, when travelling through an illegal route. Majority of irregular migrants were doing so for socio-economic reasons in search of greener pastures. It was concluded that most of the respondents were faced by unethical challenges while travelling through the route like sexual harassment and robbery.. Most returnees are likely to contact STD/STIs including HIV/AIDS, as well as engage in abortion especially among the young adults, which may have some adverse effects on their reproductive and sexual health later in the future. It is recommended that there is a need to enlighten the young adults who want to migrate illegally on the implication of the illegal migration on their reproductive and sexual health. Campaigns against illegal migration/trafficking should be conducted regularly, stressing the negative effects such as the risks to which victims are exposed along the routes. (*Afr J Reprod Health 2023; 27 [9]: 96-107*).

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**Keywords:** Reproductive, sexual health, illegal migration

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## Résumé

Les implications de la migration illégale chez les jeunes adultes sur la santé reproductive et sexuelle englobent une série de défis complexes et interconnectés qui nécessitent une attention et des solutions globales. Cette étude vise à déterminer les implications sur la santé reproductive et sexuelle de la migration illégale chez les jeunes adultes de la métropole béninoise. Un plan d'étude analytique transversale a été adopté. Une technique d'échantillonnage raisonné a été utilisée pour sélectionner un échantillon de trois cent quarante-quatre participants. Une méthode d'enquête ponctuelle a été adoptée pour l'étude puisque le questionnaire était administré en face à face. Des fréquences simples, des pourcentages, des tableaux et des graphiques ont été utilisés pour analyser les données, avec le progiciel statistique pour les sciences sociales (SPSS) version 22. Les résultats ont montré que la majorité des personnes interrogées ont été victimes d'abus sexuels, ce qui a entraîné des grossesses non désirées, lors de voyages à travers le pays. un itinéraire illégal. La majorité des migrants irréguliers le faisaient pour des raisons socio-économiques, à la recherche de pâturages plus verts. Il a été conclu que la plupart des personnes interrogées ont été confrontées à des défis contraires à l'éthique lors de leur voyage, comme le harcèlement sexuel et le vol. La plupart des rapatriés sont susceptibles de contracter des MST/IST, y compris le VIH/SIDA, et de se livrer à l'avortement, en particulier parmi les jeunes adultes. , ce qui pourrait avoir des effets néfastes sur leur santé reproductive et sexuelle plus tard dans le futur. Il est recommandé d'éclairer les jeunes adultes qui souhaitent migrer illégalement sur les implications de la migration illégale sur leur santé reproductive et sexuelle. Des campagnes contre l'immigration clandestine/le trafic devraient être menées régulièrement, en soulignant les effets négatifs tels que les risques auxquels les victimes sont exposées le long des routes. (*Afr J Reprod Health 2023; 27 [9]: 96-107*).

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**Mots-clés:** Santé reproductive, santé sexuelle, migration clandestine

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## Introduction

Illegal migration is the unlawful entry of a person or group of persons across a country's border in a way

that violates the immigration laws of the destination; as well as people who remain living in another country when they do not have the legal right to do so. Child trafficking and illegal migration are

becoming serious phenomena in the sub-Saharan Africa, especially Nigeria in recent years<sup>1</sup>. It is a practice whereby young adults, especially young adults move from their country of origin, mostly through illegal routes and adopting series of unconventional means to get to foreign countries in search of what they see as greener pastures and better life opportunities.

This group of young adults and adolescents cut across sex, religion and cultural background. The worrisome aspect of this illegal movement is that most of those involved fall within the young adult age of 10 - 24 years of age, who are supposed to still be in the school system and under parental guidance. Young adults are an integral component of the migrant population, in terms of volume and the effects they have on both their points of origin and destination. About 15 percent (approximately 26 million) of the migrant population are youths<sup>12</sup>. Young adults may be involved in illegal migration in the belief of searching for better opportunities abroad because of lack of job opportunities at home and to escape poverty<sup>3</sup>. It is so overwhelming that these young adults opting for this migration, especially through the illegal routes have no adequate preparation or consideration towards the potential challenges and dangers that are likely to be faced in host countries, and sometimes along their ways. Traffickers often take advantage of these desperate young ones in the process of arranging their travels. In Edo state, especially in Benin metropolis, series of unconventional, sometimes sacrilegious oaths of allegiance take place among the traffickers, their client migrants and their parents<sup>4</sup>.

According to United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the migrant youths are commonly depicted as desperate and (supposedly passive) victims of merciless, ruthless and "unscrupulous" traffickers and criminal run smuggling gangs. Young adults in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) tend to migrate to other countries to escape poverty. However, these vulnerable youths are unprepared for the risks that await them; many turn to violent acts of theft, robbery, and prostitution when basic needs cannot be met, hence many young ones tend to be forced to consider migrating back to their home countries<sup>5</sup>.

The illegal migration among this group is often organized by their parents who raise funds through any means for them to travel aboard; some

even borrow money to aid their children to migrate. The most painful part of this is that some of the migrants pay traffickers to assist them cross the borders. The traffickers cajole them into various promising outcome of risky travels, which could be through the sea, air or land; sometimes with forged documents. Some even migrate by crossing the Mediterranean sea and the Sahara deserts to enable them enter the host countries. It was reported that about 15,000 people cross the desert, some die on the road, either because of illness, or because of violent beating at the border controls in the Sub-Saharan Africa<sup>6</sup>.

However, the existence and practice of this illegal migration among young adults continue to rise and worsen in developing countries, especially Nigeria, with its consequences such as HIV/AIDS, unwanted pregnancy and other reproductive and sexual risks, even death. The females among this group are more vulnerable because as migrants, they tend to engage in jobs in which work conditions could jeopardize their health status. Some of them could also engage in prostitution, leading to unprotected sex which could put them at risk of STIs and other infection<sup>7</sup>. This also make them vulnerable to unwanted pregnancy and unsafe abortion, which could destroy their reproductive life permanently, or cause death. In addition, the migrants' sexual right may be unduly violated through sexual coercion, rape and trafficking for sex; some may be exposed to other violent acts. According to the United Nations, young adults are individuals between the age of 10 and 24 years, with population estimate of 1.2 billion, which is about 16% of the world's population<sup>8</sup>. Young adults are predisposed to growth changes could have impact on their interactions and behaviours towards their future endeavours. Some young adults may manage this transition successfully while some may find it difficult to manage<sup>9</sup>.

Adolescence stage is described as a process of transformation, which takes place between childhood and adulthood, in which the emerging bodily changes tend towards various social and emotional activities. It is a time of discovery of self and formation of relationships within and outside immediate environment. The desire to be socially independent with high ambition to live a meaningful life and to explore opportunities towards achieving the purpose of existence is a major characteristic of

this stage of life<sup>10</sup>. However, young adults' needs and interests sometimes predispose them to participate in some risk taking behaviours, such as; having multiple sex partners, premarital sex, rape, early sex, and illegal migration. Young adults may respond to impulse rather than deep thinking and consider the temporary benefits they may enjoy rather than the unintended consequences of their decisions<sup>11</sup>.

In Nigeria, many young adults migrate for anti-social activities such as drug peddling, internet fraud, human trafficking and prostitution and many more. The saddening part of this is that most of these young adults are supposed to be in school, but they are being lured by their parents or peer groups to migrate for a better life. This group occupies more than half of the migrants with population estimate of 5%.<sup>12</sup> Sexual and reproductive health is a significant public health issue in developing countries. Young adults' sexual and reproductive life is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being in all matters relating to reproductive system<sup>13</sup>.

In recent time, illegal migration has become common among Edo state indigenes, most especially in the Benin metropolis; which seems to be the centre for illegal migration and child trafficking in Edo state<sup>14</sup>. Recently, most Nigerian young adults that returned from Libya were mainly from Edo state. Many had died in Libya due to undue suffering. Many Nigerian youths were exposed to physical and sexual slavery. Many young ladies returned with pregnancy and children without fathers. Many of them and even their children could have been infected with HIV and other STIs. The unintended consequences on their future reproductive health and life could be better imagined. The young adults male migrants are not different as some of them could have been sexually brutalized, possibly forced or coerced to engage in sodomy and homosexual practices during their illegal sojourn in foreignland<sup>14</sup>.

This study examined the reproductive and sexual health implications of illegal migration among young adults, especially young adults in Benin metropolis, Edo state, Nigeria. This was with a view to better understanding the magnitude, reasons for and proffer solutions to this anti-social movement.

## **Research questions**

1. What are the causes of illegal migration among young adults in Benin metropolis?
2. What are the sexual and reproductive health implications of illegal migration among young adults in Benin metropolis?.

## **Methods**

### **Research design**

It is an analytical cross-sectional study design using quantitative research method. Since it is a quantitative research method, it adopted a semi-structured questionnaire in eliciting responses.

### **Study population**

According to the Edo State Task-Force on Human Trafficking, since the last past 9 months, Edo State had received about 4,038 returnees.<sup>55</sup> This number include adult males and females, including adolescents.

### **Study area**

Edo state lies between longitude 5 degrees East and 6.45 degrees East, and latitudes 6.1 degrees North and 7.30 degrees North with total land mass of 19,281.93 square kilometres. The state has a Growth Rate of 2.83% per annum with population density of about 168 persons per square kilometres. Currently the population of Edo state is projected to be over 8,000,000. The 2006 census puts the population of Edo state at 3,218,332; made up of 1,640,461 males and 1,577,871 females. The State is bounded by Delta State to the Southern part, Kogi State to the Northern part, Ondo State to the Eastern part and the River Niger along the Eastern border. The State has tropical climate with distinct dry and rainy seasons, with temperature range from 27 to 44 degrees Centigrade and annual rainfall of 150cm. The State comprise more of flat lands with tropical rain forest in the South and guinea savannah in the North. Edo state is made up of four major ethnic groups; Bini, Esan, Owan and Etsako. Oredo LGA has its administrative headquarter at Benin City. It has an area of 249km<sup>2</sup>, density of 1,970km<sup>2</sup> and a population of 374,515 at the 2006 Census with

population projection of 490,600<sup>56</sup>. The total number of male and female is 188,895 (50.4%) and 185,620 (49.6%) respectively. The area is located between latitude 6.35°N and longitude 5.3°E. There are about 17 public health facilities and 27 private health facilities in the area<sup>56</sup>. The local government area (LGA)? is characterized by evergreen vegetation typical of a lowland rainforest belt. Due to its geographical location, Oredo Local Government Area (LGA) experiences a tropical climate with two major seasons; wet and dry. Annual rainfall ranges from 2,300 - 2,700mm, concentrated in two peaks; July and September usually separated by a dry spell in August. Average annual temperature ranges from 20-25°C with a mean monthly humidity range of 60- 95%. Egor Local Government Area has its administrative headquarter at Uselu. It has an area of 93km<sup>2</sup>, density of 4,794km<sup>2</sup> and a population of 340,287 at the 2006 census with projected population of 445,800. The total number of male and female is 168,925 and 171,362 respectively<sup>57</sup>. The area is located within latitude 6.47 and 7.15°N of the equator and longitude 5.49 and 6.14°E<sup>56</sup>. The two LGA are mainly inhabited by the Bini people of Nigeria with the major occupation being farming, followed by trading, arts and crafts, brewing, cottage industry, and rubber processing. Literacy rate in the two LGA are high, but the percentage of maternal health care utilization is very low<sup>57</sup>.

### Sample size

The sample size for the study was determined using the Cochran formula (1977)<sup>58</sup> Where  $n = Z^2PQ/d^2$   
Where:

$n$  = Minimum Sample Size.

$Z$  = standard normal deviate set at 1.96 (at 95% confidence interval).

$p$  = prevalence rate of a particular characteristics of the target population.

=72% (global estimate according to the 2016 UN Office Global Report on Trafficking)<sup>59</sup>  $72/100 = 0.72$   
 $q = 1 - p = 1 - 0.72 = 0.28$

$d$  = Degree of precision set at  $0.05^2 = 0.0025$   $n = (3.8416 \times 0.72 \times 0.28) / 0.0025$

$n = 0.77446656 / 0.0025 = 309.786624 \approx 310$   $n = 310$

Minimum calculated sample size for the study = 310

To make room for non-response, 10% non-response rate was added to the minimum sample size, utilizing the formula for non-response rate.

$n_r = n / 1 - nr$

$n$  = Minimum sample size = 310  $n_{rr}$  = Non-response rate = 10% = 0.1  $n_f$  = Final Minimum sample size  $n_f = 310 / (1 - 0.1)$

$n_f = 344$ .

### Sample technique

In selecting the returnees, a purposive sampling technique was used. In the instance where a respondent is negligent/reluctant in participating, a convenience sampling technique was adopted.

*What is the study setting precisely? And how was the recruitment done?*

### Instrument for data collection

**Semi-Structured Questionnaire:** A semi-structured questionnaire was used to interview a sample of 344 returnees in Benin metropolis. This technique was chosen because it could be used for both the literate and the illiterate. Pidgin English interpretation was conducted for illiterates who could not read.

### Data collection

A one-time- survey method was adopted for the study as the questionnaire was administered on a face-to-face basis.

### Data analysis

Data from the questionnaires was analysed using both the univariate and bivariate method of data analysis. For the univariate, the study made use of simple frequencies, percentage, charts, and graphs where necessary, using the statistical package for the social sciences. (SPSS) version 22.0. Face validity was used to access the authenticity of the questionnaire. A copy of the questionnaire was given to a migration expert who has done much study on international migration, illegal migration and human trafficking who made valuable contributions and corrections in areas needed in the question.

**Study validity and reliability**

The data collection was carried out with English language and Pidgin. To reduce the impact of extraneous variables in the study and increase on internal validity, the use of purposive sampling techniques was utilized. The same questions were asked all respondents so as to prevent bias. In this study, efforts to enhance external validity included the random selection of the respondents. The researcher was directly involved in data collection, cross checking, data processing and data analysis. Cronbach’s Alpha test was applied to measure the reliability. Each filled questionnaire was rechecked for appropriateness and content clarity.

**Ethical and cultural considerations**

The ethical issues most considered when conducting research include the voluntary nature of the participation, the reduction of risks for the participants while maximizing benefits on the study participant, obtaining informed consent; ensuring confidentiality and privacy of participants, and institutional ethical issues, which include obtaining authority to conduct research and scientific honesty. In this study confidentiality and privacy of personal information shared by the study respondents with the researcher was maintained during the entire study period. After each interview, the completed questionnaires were separated from the consent forms and safely kept to avoid unauthorized access to the information. All the data collected were processed without names or other kind of information that are recognizable. Ethical clearance was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of University of Benin, Benin City.

**Results**

**Table 1:** Socio-demographic characteristics

Socio-demographics	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Age (years)</b>		
17-19	86	25.0
≥20	258	75.0
<b>Sex</b>		
Male	156	45.3
Female	188	54.7
<b>Educational qualification</b>		
No formal education	55	16.0
Primary school leaving certificate	219	63.7
SSCE	51	14.8
Tertiary		

<b>Religion</b>		
Christianity	231	67.2
Islam	69	20.1
African Traditional Religion and other religions	44	12.8
<b>Position of respondents in the family</b>		
First	63	18.3
Second	55	16.0
Third	88	25.6
Fourth	87	25.3
More than fourth	51	14.8
<b>Father’s occupation</b>		
Public servant	27	7.8
Private organization	16	4.7
Business/Entrepreneurs	301	87.5
<b>Mother’s occupation</b>		
Business/Entrepreneurs	311	90.4
NGO	22	6.4
No job	11	3.2
<b>Ethnicity</b>		
Beni	218	63.4
Ishan	57	16.6
Afemai	11	3.2
Yoruba	11	3.2
Igbo	23	6.7
Others	24	7.0

**Table 2:** Causes of illegal migration among young adults in Benin metropolis

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Cause of illegal migration</b>	14	4.2
Education	313	94.0
Socio-economic reasons	6	1.8
Business		
<b>How many times have you travelled?</b>		
Once	317	92.2
Twice	13	3.8
Thrice	14	4.1
<b>How did you travel?</b>		
Land	320	93.0
Sea	21	6.1
Air	3	0.9
<b>When did your return?</b>		
0-6 months ago	303	88.1
7 months -1year ago	41	11.9
<b>Why did you return?</b>		
Financial challenges	164	47.7
Political reasons	14	4.1
Health challenge	47	13.7
Criminal offence	26	7.6
Lack of valid entry documents	93	27.0

**Table 3a:** Reproductive and sexual health implications of irregular Migration among young adults

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Is it true that most Nigerians are faced with unethical challenges on their land route journey?</b>		
Yes	303	88.1
No	41	11.9
<b>If yes, what type of challenges do they face?</b>	127	41.9
Sexual harassment	57	18.8
Armed robbery	34	11.2
Slavery	27	8.9
Health challenges	51	16.8
Financial difficulties	7	2.3
Torture		
<b>Do you know anyone with such experience while traveling land route?</b>		
Yes	155	45.1
No	189	54.9
<b>Have you been a victim of such experience?</b>		
Yes	98	28.5
No	246	71.5
<b>Do you think illegal migrants are sexually abused while travelling abroad or at point of destination?</b>		
Yes	279	81.1
No	65	18.9
<b>If yes, what are the likely outcomes?</b>		
Unwanted pregnancy	199	71.3
STDs	21	7.5
Mental health disorders	59	21.1
<b>Are illegal immigrants (especially young adults) likely to contact STIs/STDs?</b>		
Yes	291	84.6
No	53	15.4

**Table 3b:** Reproductive and sexual health implications of irregular migration among young adults

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Is the probability of young adults contracting STIs/STDs high?</b>		
Yes	302	87.8
No	42	12.2

<b>Are illegal migrants likely to engage in abortion?</b>		
Yes	280	81.4
No	64	18.6
<b>Do you know a young adult that have had the above challenge?</b>		
Yes	144	41.9
No	200	58.1
<b>If yes, what was their experience?</b>		
Death	48	33.3
Disability	6	4.2
Mental health deterioration	63	43.8
Physical injuries	27	18.8
<b>Will you advice any young adults to engage in illegal migration?</b>		
Yes	26	7.6
No	318	92.4

## Discussion

### Socio-demographic characteristics

Respondents in this research were young adults with 25% of them less than or equal to 19 years of age. Previous research has shown that children and adolescents were always viewed as tied migrants following their migrating parents. More recently however, there has been a growing recognition of the independent migration, both internal and external, of children and adolescents<sup>63-65</sup>. Previous research has shown that the propensity to migrate is highest among young adults and decreases with age, as a result of the combined effect of cultural norms, traditions and economic opportunities<sup>66,67</sup>. A study in Ghana found that the probability of being a migrant rises until a person turns 36 years old and then it begins to decrease<sup>68</sup>. The age range in this study support these claims that the propensity to travel is higher in younger age group. Female respondents were more than the male respondents showing that female have higher tendency to migrate irrespective of the route. Women account for an increasing proportion of migrants<sup>69</sup>. In Africa, there are 101 female migrants under the age of 20 for every 100 male migrants<sup>70</sup>. This figure is confirmed by in-country studies, such as those conducted in Ethiopia<sup>71</sup> and Nigeria<sup>70</sup> which showed that women

migrate to various parts of their country over and above their male counterparts; or the study in Mali<sup>71</sup>, which showed that an increasing number of women migrate for work-related issues.

There is limited gender-disaggregated data on African migrants. Nonetheless, there is evidence of some distinct female-dominated migrant flows<sup>69</sup>. Research has shown that women migrate as much as men, and statistics indicate that the global proportions of male and female migration are almost equal. Men and women experience migration differently, and gender and its intersections with other social aspects has a complex interaction with migration, producing varying positionalities for migrant women<sup>74</sup>. The findings of this research however agreed with the report of International Organization for Migration where it was reported that females represent an increasing component of the immigrant population in Nigeria<sup>75</sup>. Female migrants are also a highly diverse and heterogeneous group with individuals migrating for varying reasons and situated differently based on their socioeconomic and legal status, and other social factors such as age, (dis)ability, race, ethnicity, educational level, religious and cultural beliefs<sup>76</sup>.

The study showed that majority of the immigrants were secondary school certificate holders. This is contrary to reports that individuals who are more educated tend to be more mobile; they seek work that matches their higher skills and expectations, and which pays returns on education costs incurred<sup>68</sup>. In this study, majority of the returnees were third born followed closely by fourth. The finding of this study is in contrast with a study where majority of the returnees are first born because it is the first born child that usually holds household responsibilities, for instance economically helping their families<sup>60</sup>. The study also showed that majority of the respondents were Benis and their residential local government area were Egor, Oredo, and Ikpoba Okha, Ovia-North East, Owan East and Akoko-Edo. Previous study on migrants in Edo state revealed that majority of the respondents were Binis and are in habitate in a few local area namely; Oredo, Ovia, Orhionwon and Uhumwode<sup>14</sup>. Another report also showed that majority of the young adult migrants who travelled to Libya from Edo state were from Benin city<sup>62</sup>. The Benin by ethnic group according to Alenkhe

encompasses all ethnic groups that migrated from Benin and include Esan, Etsako, Igara etc<sup>14</sup>.

### ***Causes of illegal migration among young adults***

This study showed that 313(94.0%) migrate for socio-economic reasons, 317(92.2%) had travelled once, 320(93.0%) travelled by land, 303(88.1%) returned 0-6 months ago of which 164(47.7%) returned due to financial challenges. Several reasons for illegal migration among the young adults studied were identified. The research showed that majority of irregular migrants were doing so for socio-economic reasons in search of greener pastures. Similar findings were reported in other studies where the young adults migrate because of socio-economic reasons<sup>61,60</sup>.

Globally and regionally, there is the prosperous region and the lagging region but people are generally more attracted to the prosperous area<sup>78</sup>. It was said that before people migrate, they compare the desirability of their place based on its social, economic, political or environmental condition, to the value of living in another location. They also consider the advantages and disadvantages of staying versus moving. In most cases, destination areas of migrants give opportunity to enjoy a better living condition<sup>79</sup>. This is because provision of services such as electricity, piped water and public amenities makes destination areas attractive to migrants.

The migrants in the report by Popoola gave reasons for leaving their home country for Nigeria; 40% indicated that they left for Nigeria because of poverty, 22% poor access to land, 20%; they could get employment opportunities, while 18% did because of poor income they receive in their home countries<sup>78</sup>. All the reasons given still reflect the fact that the migrants crossed the border for Nigeria because of bad economic conditions in their countries of origin. Joshua and Makama in their publication on rise of illegal migration among Nigerians reported causes of migration from Nigeria to include poverty, overpopulation, family reunification, wars and asylum<sup>78</sup>. International Organization for Migration reported that emigration from Nigeria is mainly driven by economic factors, while internal displacement also occurs from conflict-affected areas, in particular the north-west

region under the threat of Boko Haram<sup>81</sup>. Majority of respondents in this study travelled using the land route. This agreed with previous studies as majority of the migrants have been reported to have travelled by land<sup>60</sup>. It was said that other means of transportation, namely air and sea are costly and need paperwork, including passport, visa and ticket<sup>60</sup>. Therefore, land is the major means of transportation for irregular immigrants due to low cost and simplicity in logistics involved. The study also showed that majority of the respondents had returned about 0 - 6 months before with financial challenges being the utmost reason for most of them. This means that despite migrating through land, the financial challenges were still enormous, and became a factor for most of the irregular migrants to return

### ***Reproductive and sexual health implication of irregular migration***

This study showed that 303 (88.1%) of respondents said yes that it is true that most Nigerians are faced with unethical challenges on their land route journey, 127 (41.9%) were said to face sexual harassment with 189 (54.9%) experiencing the challenge while traveling on land route, 98 (28.5%) have been a victim of such experience, 279 (81.1%) thought that illegal migrants were sexually abused while traveling abroad or at point of destination, 199 (71.3%) thought the likely outcome of such harassment is unwanted pregnancy and 291 (84.6%) thought that illegal migrants are likely to contact STIs/STDs. The research further showed that 302(87.8%) said yes to high probability of young adults contracting STIs/STDs, 280 (81.4%) said illegal migrants are likely to engage in abortion, 144 (41.9%) knew a young adult who had the challenge, 63 (43.8%) of them were said to have experienced mental health deterioration and 318 (92.4%) will not advice any young adult to engage in illegal traveling.

Most Nigerians are faced with unethical challenges on their land route journey during migration. Migrants face several challenges including the risk of death at various points in the journey, in particular in the desert where they face harsh conditions and dehydration during the sea journey across the Mediterranean<sup>81</sup>. The journeys are often fatal, with migrants perishing not only in the Mediterranean but also in the Sahara, and the numbers of deaths along the way are increasing<sup>82</sup>.

Over 2,000 Nigerian illegal migrants were said to be drowned in Mediterranean sea in 2018<sup>82</sup>. Research by Alenkhe affirmed that most irregular migrant are faced with deadly challenges and life-threatening experiences that often deter them from traveling the same route when they are deported or returned<sup>14</sup>. This also agreed with the study done by Ayman Zohry, whose finding is in accordance with those conducted in Europe which showed that majority of the returnees would not wish to migrate to Europe without the needed documents. They are often exposed to ill-treatment by officers of destination countries and transitory cities, thus exposing the migrant to bad experiences<sup>61</sup>.

Some of the challenges faced by irregular migrants in this study are financial difficulties, armed robbery attack, slavery, health challenges, torture with majority of them facing sexual harassment. The sexual harassment made them prone to STIs/STDs, mental health disorders and majority of them unwanted pregnancies. Those with unwanted pregnancy have the possibility of abortion causing mental health deterioration, physical injuries, disabilities and even death. According to Black *et al*<sup>83</sup>, the mediterranean route which connects West and East Africa to Niger and Libya before entering Italy is by far the deadliest in absolute term, and one along which has the highest levels of violence against women. Migrants through this route are vulnerable to numerous perils including physical and sexual violence<sup>84</sup>. Vanessa *et al*<sup>84</sup> reported that women often become pregnant as they are on the move but frequently have to deal with the pregnancy alone.

Sexual and reproductive health of irregular migrants were said to be poor according to a study on accessing adolescent sexual and reproductive health services in South Africa<sup>85</sup>. According to another report, risks faced by irregular immigrants include: exploitation' higher risk of trafficking' forced sexual labour and sexual assault leading to adverse reproductive and sexual health consequences' gender-based discrimination that is sometimes exacerbated by racial and ethnic prejudices' and predisposition to a range of human rights abuses<sup>76</sup>. Evidence has suggested that prevention and treatment of HIV among migrant populations remains a low priority for the majority of EU member states<sup>86</sup>. According to the Vanguard news as reported by Benjamin Njoku, "girls are sexually



exploited in the process of trying to travel via route from Libya to Europe where girls are being threatened to sleep with many men or boys”<sup>62</sup>. The research therefore showed that the reproductive and sexual need of irregular migrants is largely unmet with possibility of contracting STIs/STDs, high pregnancy risks and hence abortion and other forms of mental stress.

## Conclusion

This study has provided information on the reproductive and sexual health implications of illegal migration among young adults in Benin metropolis. From the study, majority of the respondent were sexually abused which resulted in unwanted pregnancies, when travelling through illegal route. The research showed that majority of irregular migrants were doing so for socio-economic reasons in search of greener pasture. From the study, majority of the respondents were females who migrate illegally. Most of the respondents were faced by unethical challenges why travelling through route like sexual harassment and robbery when they travel through route. The study revealed that returnees are likely to contact STD/STIs including HIV/AIDs. Studies have shown that migrants are vulnerable to STIs/STDs. The study also asserted that most returnees engage in abortion especially among the young adults, this may have some adverse effects on their reproductive and sexual health later in the future.

## Recommendations

1. There is need to enlighten the young adults who want to migrate illegally of the implication of the illegal migration on their reproductive and sexual health.
2. There should be campaigns by non-governmental organizations to the general public against illegal migration/trafficking, stressing the negative effects such as the risks to which victims are exposed along the routes. The risks they face working as street prostitutes, risks of HIV/AIDS and other health hazards. Parents who tend to pressurize their children to be trafficked/migrate illegally should be special targets of such campaigns.
3. The government should set up more skill acquisition centres where the young adults

(male and female) can acquire various occupational skills. At the end of such training, they should be empowered and with financial support, become self-employed.

4. The government should take positive steps to provide employment opportunities for the youth, and create an enabling environment for the private sector to invest and increase employment opportunities.
5. The young adult should be educated on how they can directly have access to travel without needing to go through traffickers.

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