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JAPA SYNDROME: EXAMINING THE FORCED MIGRATION AND EXPLOITATIVE LABOR EXPERIENCES OF NIGERIANS

Global Lessons on Forced Migration and Slavery

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1. Introduction

Japa Syndrome is a relatively new term that has emerged in discussions about modern slavery and human trafficking. This term refers to a specific phenomenon where individuals, often driven by economic desperation, are lured by promises of better employment opportunities and improved living conditions abroad, only to find themselves trapped in conditions that closely resemble slavery. The term "Japa" is derived from Nigerian slang meaning to escape or flee, which encapsulates the desperation and subsequent entrapment experienced by many Nigerian migrants who seek better opportunities abroad. Nigeria is a country with significant economic challenges, including high unemployment rates, widespread poverty, and political instability. These factors contribute to the high rates of migration as individuals seek better opportunities and livelihoods in other countries. However, this pursuit of a better life often leads to exploitation and severe human rights abuses. Nigerian migrants are particularly vulnerable to trafficking and forced labour due to their precarious socio-economic status and lack of legal protections when they migrate irregularly (Albert-Makyur & Mbanaso, 2022). The "Japa syndrome" refers to the mass exodus of young Nigerians, often professionals like radiographers and nurses, who are leaving the country in search of better economic opportunities abroad. This phenomenon is driven by factors like high poverty, unemployment, and economic hardship in Nigeria (Olawin, 2023). A retired university lecturer, Dr. Oladunni Akinyemi of Covenant University, explained that "the major problem of our people is too these migrants end up being exploited and trapped in conditions akin to slavery. They are often deceived with false promises of good jobs and living conditions, only to have their documents confiscated and be forced to work under exploitative conditions upon arrival. This deception and subsequent entrapment is a hallmark of human trafficking and modern slavery (Comparative Migration Studies, 2023). The search results highlight how the "Japa syndrome" is not just about migration, but the trafficking and enslavement of vulnerable Nigerians seeking a better life. Experts have described it as "modern slavery" that is difficult to stop due to the complex socioeconomic factors driving it (Ishaya, Paraskevadakis, Bury & Bryde, 2023). According to the Nigerian Medical Association, no fewer than 10,296 doctors trained in Nigeria were practicing in the UK as of December 2023, indicating a significant emigration of skilled professionals (Adebayo & Akinyemi, 2021). They further explain that the "Japa" trend spans various sectors in Nigeria, including health, information technology, banking, and education. The health

sector, in particular, faces a significant brain drain, with a patient-to-doctor ratio of approximately 8,000 to 1, well below the World Health Organization recommendation (Najib, Abdullah, Narresh & Juni, 2019). This exodus of skilled professionals has a detrimental impact on Nigeria's development and ability to provide essential services to its citizens. The significance of this study lies in its potential to provide a comprehensive understanding of Japa Syndrome, a critical but under-researched issue affecting Nigerian migrants. By exploring the specific manifestations of Japa Syndrome, this study aims to inform policymakers, researchers, and activists about the complexities of this issue and the urgent need for effective interventions. Understanding the mechanisms and impacts of Japa Syndrome is crucial for developing targeted policies and support systems to protect vulnerable populations from exploitation. This study explores "Japa Syndrome," providing insights into Nigerian migrants' experiences to enhance understanding of modern exploitation and inform strategies against it amidst global economic disparities.

Understanding the mechanisms of Japa Syndrome can aid in formulating policies that not only address the symptoms but also tackle the root causes of forced labour and exploitation. This study examines "Japa Syndrome" as a form of modern slavery, highlighting its exploitative mechanisms and impact. Tackling this issue requires addressing both the drivers of migration and the systems enabling exploitation.

Conceptual Discourse

Forced labour and modern slavery are pervasive global challenges that have been extensively documented in academic literature. The International Labour Organization (ILO) defines forced labour as work performed involuntarily and under the threat of penalty. This definition encompasses various forms of coercion, including physical violence, psychological manipulation, and economic exploitation (ILO, 2017). Forced labour is prevalent across multiple sectors such as agriculture, construction, domestic work, and manufacturing, affecting millions of individuals worldwide. Victims often face degrading and abusive conditions, highlighting the urgency for interventions to address this issue comprehensively.

Modern slavery is a broader term encompassing forced labour, human trafficking, debt bondage, and other exploitative practices where individuals are deprived of freedom and autonomy. The ILO estimates that there are approximately 24.9 million victims of forced labour globally, with 16 million exploited in the private economy, 4.8 million subjected to sexual exploitation, and 4 million in state-imposed forced labour (ILO, 2017). These figures underscore the systemic nature of exploitation and the need for targeted measures to combat modern slavery.

Several factors contribute to the persistence of forced labour and modern slavery. Economic inequality, poverty, and unemployment are primary drivers, creating vulnerabilities that make individuals susceptible to exploitation. Social marginalization, including discrimination and lack of access to legal protections, further exacerbates the risks for marginalized groups (Chioke, 2022). Additionally, globalization and the demand for cheap labour have intensified exploitative practices, with sophisticated systems often concealing these abuses within complex supply chains (Frank, 2021).

Terminologically, forced labour specifically refers to involuntary work performed under threat, while modern slavery serves as an umbrella term that includes a range of exploitative conditions infringing on human rights. Understanding these distinctions is essential for developing effective frameworks and policies to tackle these challenges. By

addressing the structural vulnerabilities and systemic drivers, it is possible to promote meaningful reforms and mitigate the prevalence of forced labour and modern slavery globally.

Human Trafficking and Migrant Exploitation

Human trafficking is a closely related but distinct issue from forced labour. The United Nations defines human trafficking as the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, or receipt of persons using threat, force, fraud, or coercion for exploitation. This exploitation can take many forms, including forced labour, sexual exploitation, and organ trafficking. Human trafficking is classified as a crime against humanity and a severe violation of human rights (Emerinwe, Scent & Chukwu, 2020), reflecting its extreme gravity and widespread impact.

As a crime against humanity, human trafficking involves large-scale attacks on civilians, including forced labour, sexual exploitation, and enslavement. This classification calls for international action, as outlined in instruments like the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, to prevent and punish those responsible.

Furthermore, human trafficking is a severe violation of human rights, stripping victims of their autonomy and subjecting them to abuse. It aligns with the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which emphasizes the protection of individuals' freedoms and security.

In conclusion, labelling human trafficking as both a crime against humanity and a severe violation of human rights underscores the need for global action, legal frameworks, and victim protection to address this issue effectively.

Research on human trafficking highlights that Various forms of exploitation, such as sexual, labor, and child exploitation, are severe human rights violations. Sexual exploitation involves coerced participation in prostitution or pornography (Emerinwe, Scent & Chukwu, 2020). Labour exploitation forces individuals to work in abusive conditions for little or no pay (Osiki, 2022).

Forced labour involves coercion through threats, while child exploitation traps minors in illegal work (Emerinwe, Scent & Chukwu, 2020). Organ trafficking is another form of exploitation, where individuals are trafficked for their organs (Osiki, 2022). Domestic servitude, often involving women and children, subjects' individuals to abusive working conditions (Emerinwe, Scent & Chukwu, 2020). Bonded labour and migrant exploitation further violate human rights by forcing individuals into servitude or unsafe working conditions (Osiki, 2022).

Migrants, especially those who migrate irregularly, are at a higher risk of being trafficked due to their vulnerable status and lack of legal protections. Traffickers often exploit the desperation and lack of opportunities of migrants, using deceptive recruitment practices to lure them into exploitative situations (Fabbri et al., 2023). In Nigeria, human trafficking is a significant issue, with many victims being trafficked to Europe, the Middle East, and other regions for forced labour and sexual exploitation (Ohonba & Agbontaen-Eghafona, 2019).

Origins of Japa Syndrome in Nigeria

The origins of Japa Syndrome can be traced back to a period marked by socio-political challenges, characterized by systemic inequalities, economic hardship, and political instability. The term "Japa" itself emerged from Nigerian urban youth culture, reflecting the ingenuity and resilience of marginalized communities facing daunting challenges. While the exact date of its inception remains unclear, the concept of fleeing or escaping from

adversity has deep historical roots in Nigerian society.

Nigeria's history has been shaped by challenges such as colonial exploitation, internal strife, and authoritarian regimes, which have collectively set the stage for the development of Japa Syndrome (Eze-Okubuiro, 2020). Throughout these periods of adversity, Nigerians have consistently demonstrated resilience and ingenuity, finding ways to overcome oppressive systems and secure survival and independence (Sekoni, Mall & Christofides, 2022). Consequently, Japa Syndrome can be interpreted as a modern expression of longstanding strategies employed to endure and adapt to hardship and oppression (Baridam, 2023).

Japa Syndrome, while related to the broader concepts of forced labour and human trafficking, has specific characteristics that distinguish it. It primarily involves Nigerian migrants who are deceived by false promises of better opportunities abroad. These individuals often find themselves in situations of severe exploitation, with their documents confiscated, their movements restricted, and their labour coerced. The deceptive recruitment and subsequent exploitation create a cycle of entrapment and abuse that is difficult to break.

Research on Japa Syndrome is limited, with most studies focusing on broader issues like forced labour and human trafficking. However, anecdotal evidence suggests it significantly affects Nigerian migrants. This study aims to fill this gap by examining the socio-economic, cultural, and psychological aspects of Japa Syndrome. It will provide evidence-based insights into its causes and impacts, offering targeted policy recommendations to address its effects on migrants and their communities. For instance, a report by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) highlights that many Nigerian migrants seeking to reach Europe through irregular means are subjected to severe exploitation and abuse along the journey, particularly in transit countries like Libya (IOM, 2017). This that many Nigerians are willing to subject themselves to various undignified means, be it through the sea or desserts just to cross over to a perceived better place.

Economic Implications of Japa Syndrome

Japa Syndrome has significant economic impacts on individuals, communities, and society. The migration of young people from educational institutions or jobs leads to a loss of human capital, undermining sustainable development and economic growth. This is particularly problematic in Nigeria, where youth are vital to economic advancement (Adeosun & Popogbe, 2021).

The migration of skilled youth depletes the labour market, hindering human capital development and productivity (Ugochi, Augustine & Enahoro, 2023). This loss weakens efforts to drive innovation and economic progress.

Japa Syndrome also perpetuates poverty and unemployment, especially among marginalized youth with limited opportunities. Many are forced into the informal sector, where work is unstable, poorly paid, and lacks social protections (Adegoke, 2023). This reinforces economic disadvantage and limits mobility.

The impact extends to families and communities. The migration of young breadwinners leads to household poverty and food insecurity, while also weakening social cohesion and community trust, impeding collective efforts for inclusive development.

In conclusion, Japa Syndrome contributes to the loss of skilled labour, prolonged poverty, and weakened communities. Addressing it requires policies that improve education, skills training, and formal employment for marginalized youth to mitigate these economic

challenges.

Legal and Ethical Considerations Surrounding the Issue

The prevalence of Japa Syndrome raises significant legal and ethical issues, particularly regarding human rights and social justice. While Nigeria has laws against human trafficking and forced labour, enforcement is weak, and perpetrators often escape punishment (Eze, 2022). Although exploitation primarily occurs outside Nigeria, the country must enhance its legal framework to address the challenges survivors face, including victim identification, protection, and justice access (Agbu & Agu, 2017).

To address the root causes of Japa Syndrome, Nigeria must tackle socio-economic inequalities, political instability, and barriers to education and employment. This requires policies that promote economic empowerment, expand education, and strengthen social safety nets, while fostering a culture of respect for human rights (Baridam, 2023).

The impact of Japa Syndrome is profound, affecting economic, social, legal, and ethical spheres. Understanding these factors can lead to more effective interventions that promote social justice and inclusive development (Seibicke & Michailidou, 2022).

Despite the recognition of Japa Syndrome as a major issue, research is lacking on its specific dynamics. Most studies on trafficking and forced labour do not address the unique cultural and social factors behind Japa Syndrome. This gap highlights the need for focused research to understand recruitment methods, exploitation forms, and impacts on victims (Kooffreh, 2023). This study aims to bridge this gap and contribute to better-targeted interventions.

2. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design, utilizing in-depth interviews and a structured questionnaire based on a four-point Likert scale to gather data. The qualitative approach is chosen to capture the nuanced experiences and perceptions of victims of Japa Syndrome, focusing on the impact of coercion, exploitation, and human rights abuses. The research design incorporates both qualitative and quantitative elements to ensure a comprehensive analysis. Qualitative research is well-suited for exploring complex social phenomena and understanding the perspectives of individuals who have experienced Japa Syndrome (Denny & Weckesser, 2022). The instruments adopted for data collection for this study were a structured questionnaire and semi-structured interviews with individuals who have experienced Japa Syndrome. The questionnaire was responded to on a four-point rating scale and scored thus: Strongly Agreed (SA)4, Agree (A)3, Disagree (D)2, and Strongly Disagree (SD)1 for positive items, while the negative items were scored in the reverse order.

The questionnaire was administered to 200 respondents across four countries: the UK, the USA, Canada, and South Africa aiming to quantify the extent of coercion, exploitation, and human rights abuses reported by respondents. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants, ensuring that the sample comprised individuals with firsthand experience of Japa Syndrome. The sample size consisted of 200 respondents, with 50 participants from each of the four countries. Interviews were conducted either in person or via secure online platforms, ensuring confidentiality and ethical considerations were maintained throughout the study. The data collected from the interviews and questionnaires were subjected to thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and themes related to coercion, exploitation, and human rights abuses. This method involves identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns or themes within the data (Lochmiller, 2021).

Mean and standard deviation were used to

answer the research questions. The reliability of the scale was established with the Cronbach Alpha Coefficient method, which seems to be satisfactory, that is .83. However, responses were coded, processed, and entered into the computer using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS).

3. Results

Table 1: Perception of Respondents on how coercion manifests in the experiences of victims of Japa Syndrome

S/N		$\bar{X}$	S.D	Remark
1	Victims of Japa Syndrome are frequently coerced into labour through threats of violence.	3.78	.412	Accepted
2	Employers often withhold wages to force compliance from workers in exploitative conditions.	3.49	.610	Accepted
3	Victims of Japa Syndrome are commonly manipulated through the confiscation of their legal documents.	3.61	.490	Accepted
4	Psychological manipulation is a significant method used to control victims of Japa Syndrome.	3.79	.484	Accepted
5	Debt bondage is a common tactic used to trap individuals in forced labour situations.	4.00	.000	Accepted
6	Victims of Japa Syndrome are often isolated from others to prevent them from seeking help.	3.44	.498	Accepted
Grand Mean ($\bar{X}$) & σ		**3.69**	**.416**	

Source: Researcher's Fieldwork, 2024

Data in Table 1 show the mean ratings and standard deviation on the perception of respondents regarding how coercion manifests in the experiences of victims of Japa Syndrome. The table indicates that respondents agree that various forms of coercion are prevalent among victims. Specifically, they agreed that victims are frequently coerced into labour through threats of violence (mean = 3.78, SD = 0.412), and that employers often withhold wages to force compliance from workers in exploitative conditions (mean = 3.49, SD = 0.610). Additionally, respondents believe that victims are commonly manipulated through the confiscation of their legal documents (mean = 3.61, SD = 0.490) and that psychological manipulation is a significant method used to control victims (mean = 3.79, SD = 0.484). Debt bondage is seen as a common tactic used to trap individuals in forced labour situations (mean = 4.00, SD = 0.000). Furthermore, it is agreed that victims are often isolated from others to prevent them from seeking help (mean = 3.44, SD = 0.498). The overall grand mean of 3.69 and a standard deviation of 0.416 imply that there is a consensus among respondents that coercion manifests in various significant ways in the experiences of victims of Japa Syndrome.

Table 2: Perception of Respondents on Types of Exploitation Faced by Victims of Japa Syndrome

S/N		$\bar{X}$	S.D	Remark
1	Victims of Japa Syndrome are forced to work excessively long hours without adequate compensation.	3.50	.511	Accepted
2	Many individuals experiencing Japa Syndrome are subjected to severe physical and psychological abuse.	3.84	.419	Accepted
3	Lack of basic necessities, such as food and proper housing, is common among victims of Japa Syndrome.	3.97	.157	Accepted
4	Sexual exploitation is a significant aspect of the abuse faced by victims of Japa Syndrome.	3.61	.489	Accepted
5	Victims of Japa Syndrome are often forced into criminal activities against their will.	3.93	.325	Accepted
6	Exploitation in Japa Syndrome involves treating individuals as commodities rather than human beings.	3.41	.493	Accepted
	Grand Mean ($\bar{X}$) & σ	3.71	.399	

Source: Researcher's Fieldwork, 2024

Table 2 presents the mean ratings and standard deviation on the perception of respondents regarding the types of exploitation encountered by victims of Japa Syndrome. The results show that respondents concur that various forms of exploitation are widespread among victims. Specifically, they agree that victims are compelled to work excessively long hours without proper compensation (mean = 3.50, SD = 0.511) and that many individuals suffering from Japa Syndrome endure severe physical and psychological abuse (mean = 3.84, SD = 0.419). Respondents also believe that victims commonly lack necessities, such as food and adequate housing (mean = 3.97, SD = 0.157), and that sexual exploitation is a significant aspect of the abuse they face (mean = 3.61, SD = 0.489). Additionally, it is noted that victims are frequently forced into criminal activities against their will (mean = 3.93, SD = 0.325), and that exploitation involves treating individuals as commodities rather than human beings (mean = 3.41, SD = 0.493). The overall grand mean of 3.71 and a standard deviation of 0.399 suggest a general agreement among respondents that victims of Japa Syndrome face various significant forms of exploitation.

Table 3: Perception of Respondents on the human rights abuses endured by victims of Japa Syndrome

S/N		$\bar{X}$	S.D	Remark
1	Victims of Japa Syndrome experience severe violations of their basic human rights.	3.99	.100	Accepted
2	The restriction of movement is a common human rights abuse faced by victims of Japa Syndrome.	4.00	.000	Accepted
3	Physical abuse is frequently reported among victims of Japa Syndrome.	3.28	.751	Accepted
4	Psychological abuse and intimidation are prevalent among victims of Japa Syndrome.	3.14	.343	Accepted
5	Denial of medical care is a significant issue for those suffering from Japa Syndrome.	3.08	.323	Accepted
6	Forced marriages are one of the human rights abuses experienced by victims of Japa Syndrome.	3.10	.307	Accepted
7	Sexual abuse is a prevalent form of exploitation faced by victims of Japa Syndrome.	3.45	0.451	Accepted
	Grand Mean ($\bar{X}$) & σ	3.43	0.33	

Source: Researchers' Fieldwork, 2024

Table 3 presents the findings on the perception of respondents regarding the human rights abuses endured by victims of Japa Syndrome. The table indicates that respondents agree on the prevalence of various human rights abuses among victims. Specifically, they agreed that victims experience severe violations of their basic human rights (mean = 3.99, SD = 0.100), and that the restriction of movement is a common human rights abuse faced by victims (mean = 4.00, SD = 0.000). Additionally, respondents reported that physical abuse is frequently encountered by victims (mean = 3.28, SD = 0.751), and that psychological abuse and intimidation are prevalent (mean = 3.14, SD = 0.343). Denial of medical care is also identified as a significant issue (mean = 3.08, SD = 0.323), and forced marriages are noted as one of the human rights abuses experienced (mean = 3.10, SD = 0.307). Furthermore, sexual abuse is recognized as a prevalent form of exploitation faced by victims (mean = 3.45, SD = 0.451). The overall grand mean of 3.43 and a standard deviation of 0.304 suggest a consensus among respondents that victims of Japa Syndrome endure various significant human rights abuses.

Table 4 Respondents' Perception of the Economic Implications of Japa Syndrome

S/N		$\bar{X}$	S.D	Remark
1	Japa Syndrome significantly contributes to the loss of young, skilled labour in Nigeria.	4.00	.000	Accepted
2	The prevalence of Japa Syndrome exacerbates poverty levels in Nigerian communities.	3.94	.238	Accepted
3	Japa Syndrome has a detrimental impact on Nigeria's economic development and growth.	4.00	.000	Accepted
4	The outflow of labor due to Japa Syndrome reduces the potential for domestic economic advancement in Nigeria.	3.47	.500	Accepted
5	Families and communities of Japa Syndrome victims in Nigeria face increased economic hardships due to loss of income.	3.40	.491	Accepted
6	Addressing Japa Syndrome is essential for improving Nigeria's overall economic stability and growth prospects.	4.00	.000	Accepted
Grand Mean ($\bar{X}$) & σ		3.80	.205	

Source: Researcher's Fieldwork, 2024

Data in Table 4 present the mean ratings and standard deviation on the perception of respondents regarding the economic implications of Japa Syndrome. The table shows that respondents agree on the significant economic impact of Japa Syndrome. They believe that Japa Syndrome significantly contributes to the loss of young, skilled labour in Nigeria (mean = 4.00, SD = 0.000), and exacerbates poverty levels in Nigerian communities (mean = 3.94, SD = 0.238). Respondents also agree that Japa Syndrome has a detrimental impact on Nigeria's economic development and growth (mean = 4.00, SD = 0.000), and that the outflow of labour reduces the potential for domestic economic advancement in Nigeria (mean = 3.47, SD = 0.500). Additionally, it is noted that families and communities of Japa Syndrome victims face increased economic hardships due to loss of income (mean = 3.40, SD = 0.491). Addressing Japa Syndrome is deemed essential for improving Nigeria's overall economic stability and growth prospects (mean = 4.00, SD = 0.000). The overall grand mean of 3.80 and a standard deviation of 0.205 suggest a consensus among respondents on the significant economic implications of Japa Syndrome in Nigeria.

Discussion

The findings of the study revealed that various forms of coercion are prevalent in the experiences of victims of Japa Syndrome. Respondents agreed that victims are often coerced into labour through threats of violence and that employers frequently withhold wages to force compliance. Victims are also commonly manipulated through the confiscation of their legal documents and subjected to psychological manipulation. Debt bondage is a common tactic used to trap

individuals in forced labour situations. Additionally, victims are often isolated from others to prevent them from seeking help. These findings are in line with Mitchell & Raghavan (2019), who emphasized that coercive tactics are frequently employed to control and exploit individuals in vulnerable positions.

The study also highlighted the types of exploitation faced by victims of Japa Syndrome. Respondents agreed that victims are compelled to work excessively long hours without adequate compensation and endure severe physical and psychological abuse. Victims commonly lack basic necessities such as food and proper housing, and sexual exploitation is a significant aspect of the abuse they face. Furthermore, victims are often forced into criminal activities against their will and are treated as commodities rather than human beings. These findings align with the research of Łyżwa (2020), which documented similar forms of exploitation and abuse among victims of labor trafficking and forced labour.

Regarding human rights abuses, the study found that respondents agreed on the prevalence of severe violations of basic human rights among victims of Japa Syndrome. Victims frequently experience severe human rights violations, and restriction of movement is a common abuse. Physical abuse is frequently reported, along with psychological abuse and intimidation. Denial of medical care and forced marriages are also significant issues. These findings are supported by Jovanović (2020), who highlighted the extensive human rights abuses suffered by individuals trapped in exploitative situations and the importance of addressing these issues for successful social interventions.

Finally, the study examined the economic implications of Japa Syndrome. Respondents agreed that Japa Syndrome significantly contributes to the loss of young, skilled labour in Nigeria and exacerbates poverty levels in communities. The syndrome negatively impacts Nigeria's economic development and growth, as the outflow of labour reduces the potential for domestic economic advancement. Families and communities of victims face increased economic hardships due to the loss of income. Addressing Japa Syndrome is critical for improving Nigeria's overall economic stability and growth prospects. These findings align with the views of Shah and Lerche (2020), who discussed the economic ramifications of labour exploitation and the need for comprehensive solutions to improve economic stability and growth.

A significant gap identified in this study is the identification of the perpetrators responsible for the inhuman activities associated with Japa Syndrome. These perpetrators include criminal syndicates, human traffickers, unscrupulous recruiters, employers in exploitative foreign labour markets, and corrupt officials who facilitate the exploitation of migrants. Human traffickers often prey on vulnerable young people, promising them opportunities abroad, only to subject them to forced labour, sexual exploitation, and physical abuse. Employers in foreign countries, particularly in the Middle East and Europe, may exploit migrant workers by offering minimal wages, subjecting them to harsh working conditions, or engaging in modern-day slavery. Additionally, corrupt officials may facilitate the exploitation by issuing fraudulent travel documents or turning a blind eye to trafficking activities. The lack of accountability for these actors is a critical issue, as it complicates efforts to prevent and address Japa Syndrome effectively. Addressing this gap is essential for ensuring justice for victims and preventing further abuses. These findings on exploitation, coercion, human rights abuses, and economic consequences are consistent with existing research by Emerinwe, Scent & Chukwu (2020), Maiwada & Abubakar (2019) and Hansen (2020), emphasizing the need for targeted efforts to identify and hold these

perpetrators accountable.

Implications for Policies and Interventions

To combat Japa Syndrome, it is essential to implement comprehensive policies and interventions, with a particular emphasis on international agreements. Strengthening legal frameworks through bilateral and multilateral agreements can help protect Nigerian migrants abroad and hold perpetrators accountable. International cooperation and collaboration are vital to addressing the cross-border nature of Japa Syndrome, as trafficking and exploitation often occur across multiple countries. Agreements such as the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime and regional frameworks like the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Protocol on Free Movement can provide a foundation for coordinated efforts to prevent and address Japa Syndrome. Furthermore, international partnerships can enhance the enforcement of human rights protections, provide avenues for victim support, and promote legal accountability in countries where exploitation occurs (Ng et al., 2018).

Legal frameworks should be designed to ensure that victims of Japa Syndrome are protected and have access to justice. This includes criminalizing all forms of forced labour and providing support services for victims, such as legal aid, medical care, and psychological support (Shekhar, 2023). Additionally, efforts should be made to raise awareness about the issue, both among potential victims and the general public. This can be achieved through education campaigns and training programs for law enforcement and other relevant stakeholders.

Support services for victims are essential to help them recover and reintegrate into society. This includes providing safe housing, medical care, and vocational training. NGOs and support organizations play a crucial role in offering these services and advocating for the rights of victims (Njoku, 2019).

International cooperation is also vital to address the cross-border nature of Japa Syndrome. This includes working with other countries to improve migration policies, enhance border controls, and facilitate the repatriation of victims. Collaborative efforts are needed to tackle the root causes of forced labour, such as poverty and lack of economic opportunities, which drive individuals to seek employment abroad under exploitative conditions (Natter, 2022).

Conclusion

This study provides qualitative insights into the manifestations of Japa Syndrome as a form of compulsory or forced slavery. The findings of the study reveal that Japa Syndrome manifests through various forms of coercion, exploitation, and human rights abuses, significantly impacting the victims and the broader economic landscape of Nigeria. Respondents agreed that coercive tactics such as threats of violence, withholding wages, confiscation of legal documents, psychological manipulation, debt bondage, and isolation are prevalent. Victims are exploited through excessive working hours, severe physical and psychological abuse, deprivation of basic necessities, sexual exploitation, forced criminal activities, and dehumanizing treatment. Human rights abuses include severe violations of basic rights, restriction of movement, physical and psychological abuse, denial of medical care, and forced marriages. The economic implications of Japa Syndrome are profound, leading to a loss of skilled labour, exacerbation of poverty, and detrimental impacts on Nigeria's economic development and growth.

Based on the study findings, thus the following recommendations:

1. Enhance and enforce legal measures to

protect victims of Japa Syndrome. This includes criminalizing all forms of forced labour and providing victims with access to legal aid, medical care, and psychological support. Strengthening the legal framework will ensure that perpetrators are held accountable and victims receive the justice and protection they deserve.

2. Implement educational campaigns and training programs to raise awareness about Japa Syndrome. These initiatives should target potential victims, the general public, and law enforcement agencies. By educating people about the risks and signs of trafficking and exploitation, communities can become more vigilant and proactive in preventing such abuses.

3. Establish and fund support services for victims of Japa Syndrome, including safe housing, medical care, and vocational training. NGOs and support organizations should play a key role in offering these services and advocating for the rights of victims. Comprehensive support will help victims recover, reintegrate into society, and break the cycle of exploitation.

4. Foster international cooperation and economic policies to address the root causes of Japa Syndrome. Collaborative efforts with other countries are essential to improve migration policies, enhance border controls, and facilitate the safe repatriation of victims. Additionally, implementing policies aimed at creating job opportunities and promoting economic development within Nigeria can reduce the economic pressures that contribute to the prevalence of Japa Syndrome. Providing financial and social support to families and communities affected by Japa Syndrome can alleviate economic hardships and reduce dependency on risky labour migration.

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