

UNIVERSITY OF GHANA

COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES



**RESILIENCE OF IRREGULAR MIGRATION OF GHANAIS ACROSS THE
SAHARA DESERT TO LIBYA**

BY

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**THIS DISSERTATION IS SUBMITTED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF GHANA, LEGON
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE AWARD OF MA
IN MIGRATION STUDIES DEGREE**

CENTRE FOR MIGRATION STUDIES

OCTOBER, 2020

DECLARATION

I, Akoto Bismark, hereby declare that this dissertation is the outcome of my research work. This dissertation was conducted at the Centre for Migration Studies, University of Ghana, Legon, under the supervision of Dr. Johnson Wilson Appiah Kubi. All references cited in this work have been duly acknowledged. I, therefore, declare that this thesis has neither in part nor entirely been presented elsewhere for an academic award.



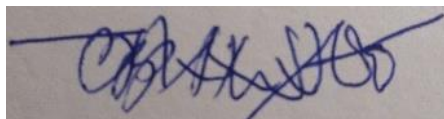
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ABSTRACT

Given the rising incidence of irregular migration around the world, this study explored the resilience of irregular migration of Ghanaians across the Sahara Desert to Libya. The objectives of the study were to (a) find out the factors motivating Ghanaians to migrate through the Sahara Desert to Libya (b) explore the sources of resilience in migrating through the Sahara Desert (c) investigate the challenges faced by Ghanaian irregular migrants in Libya and (d) explore the coping strategies of Ghanaian irregular migrants in Libya. A total of eighteen returned irregular migrants from Akontaanim, a farming community under the Dormaa Central Municipality in the Bono Region participated in the study and they constitute the point of saturation. A qualitative study was employed involving both in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, manually coded, and analyzed using thematic data analysis method. The findings of the study indicated that migrants were motivated to migrate irregularly due to economic, family/community influence as well as the difficulties in acquiring valid travelling documents. Also, findings from the study showed that irregular migrants on the Sahara Desert faced horrific challenges such as the unavailability of water and food, and armed robbery. The study found that participants possessed both internal sources of resilience (for instance spirituality, courage, and the mental conditioning to endure) as well as external sources of resilience (relying on fellow travellers as a source of resilience). Furthermore, the study found that participants faced many challenges as irregular migrants in Libya but they relied on both the problem-focused and emotional-focused coping strategies to deal with these challenges which included harassment and arbitrary arrest by security officials as well as the inability to access formal healthcare. Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that both the Government of Ghana in partnership with other International Organizations such as IOM intensify education on regular migration as well as the pitfalls of irregular migration.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is first and foremost dedicated to God Almighty for the knowledge, gift of life, and strength throughout my entire studies. This work is also dedicated to my parents, Mr. Freeman Agbovi and Mrs. Lydia Kudese for their unending dedication and encouragement throughout my studies. Thank you. I am grateful.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am exceedingly grateful to God who through His mercies and grace has seen me through this programme. My heartfelt gratitude goes to my supervisor, Dr. Johnson Wilson Appiah Kubi, I appreciate your careful and timely critique and comments which lead to the completion of this work. I am most grateful. God bless you richly.

I also wish to extend my deepest appreciation to Prof. Joseph Teye, Director at the Centre for Migration Studies (CMS), and Dr. Leander Kandilige, Postgraduate Course Co-ordinator/Examinations Officer also at the Centre for Migration Studies (CMS) for your timely support during my challenging times.

I am also especially grateful for the support of my brother Sampson Kofi Agbovi whose unflinching support aided me to complete my graduate studies.

I am also grateful to all 18 participants at Akontaanim who took the time to share with me their difficult irregular migration experiences. I am very much grateful.

Finally, I cannot forget the solid support and encouragement I received from two very good friends who have become like a family to me, Kate Audrey Butchard and Derrick Nii Quaye. Many thanks for being there for me during very challenging moments of my studies. Your acts of selfless devotion towards me will never go unrewarded by God. Merci.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
GIS	Ghana Immigration Service
GSS	Ghana Statistical Service
IDI	In-depth Interviews
IOM	International Organization for Migration
PAC	Passport Application Centre
UNDESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The rise in the migration of people is one of the most important social, cultural, and economic phenomena of this century (Stilwell et al., 2004). Whereas migration is accompanied by a remittance flow that improves the living standards of families and the general welfare in sending countries, receiving countries, on the other hand, benefit from the services of both cheap and highly skilled workers from sending countries (Castles, 2006). Despite these positive impacts, migration-related challenges such as migrant smuggling, human trafficking, and irregular migration have in recent years raised many concerns for nation-states (Koser, 2010). Globally, it was estimated that nearly 258 million international migrants lived around the world in 2017, an upward increase from 220 million in 2010 and 173 million in 2000 (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, 2017). Associated with this increasing global migration flows are the incidence of migrants migrating against country restrictions and laws thereby engaging in all forms of irregular migration.

Within the African continent, there are various forms of migration with their associated consequences. The ECOWAS region, for instance, is one of the continent's most diverse regions, with the ECOWAS protocol offering a promising example of regional integration. Although nearly 84 percent of the sub-regional movements are to other West African countries, in recent years, there has been a surge in the migration of ECOWAS nationals through irregular means (Benattia, Armitano, & Robinson, 2015; Devillard, Bacchi, & Noack, 2015). The recurrent political crisis in the sub-region coupled with the search for opportunities in Europe has been

fingered as some of the precipitating causes of this rising trend (Benattia et al., 2015). Additionally, Brian and Laczko (2014) opine that the perception by some migrants that Maghreb countries such as Libya offer an easy pathway to Europe also accounts for the increasing numbers.

The situation is not different in Ghana, as increasing numbers of its citizens continue to risk their lives in search of better opportunities abroad (Yayboke & Gallego, 2019). According to a study by Bob-Milliar (2012), the desire for better economic opportunities in Libya for instance has fueled the challenge of irregular migration from Ghana to Libya across the Sahara Desert. What is certain is that migrants are mostly faced with a lot of undesirable challenges in the desert before reaching Libya (Bob-Milliar, 2012). These journeys often end in disaster, resulting in the death of some migrants on the desert before reaching Libya (Tanle, 2012a). For migrants who are able to successfully surmount the difficulties in the desert, they are met again with a new set of challenges in their host country (Libya) due to their irregular status (Tanle, 2012a). They, therefore, need to employ certain coping strategies to circumvent these challenges which cut across legal, economic, and socio-cultural issues (Tanle, 2012a). Even though a lot has been done by local and international agencies such as Ghana Immigration Service (GIS) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) through education concerning the pitfalls of irregular migration, many Ghanaians continue to engage in the act with the hope of succeeding. Indeed, while some people are unable to continue their journey due to the precarious conditions in the desert, others are able to surmount the challenges. It is in consideration of this background that the study focuses on the motivating factors influencing irregular Ghanaian migrants to migrate through the Sahara Desert to Libya, their sources of resilience, the challenges they face

in Libya, and how they cope with these challenges and strive on both during their transitioning period and upon reaching their destination country.

1.2 Statement of Problem

While migration plays a critical role in many families' survival, particularly through the remittances sent back home (Julca, 2011), the irregular migration of people has been on the rise globally in recent years (Rajagopalan, 2015). This phenomenon is becoming prevalent in many West African countries including Ghana as many of her citizens continue to risk their lives through irregular means in search of greener pastures (United Nations Development Programme Africa, 2019). For instance, during the peak of the Libyan uprising in 2011, 18,455 irregular Ghanaian migrants were deported from the North African country, reflecting the scale of the irregularity of Ghanaian emigration into Libya (Bob-Milliar, 2012). With irregular migrants moving out in their numbers from Ghana and the sub-region, there is a likelihood of fatalities to also increase due to the dangers associated with such migration. For instance, according to IOM, in 2016, there were about 1,280 migrant deaths in North Africa, nearly twice the 672 fatalities recorded the preceding year. A report by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees also indicated that a total of 3,584 migrants were either pronounced dead or missing at sea between 2018 and 2019 (UNHCR, 2020). Ogu (2017) further accentuates that the number of casualties may be higher due to the unavailability of data on the fatalities in the Sahara Desert.

Despite the risk of dehydration, malnutrition, injuries, and even death in the desert, some Ghanaian irregular migrants narrow down the success or otherwise of their journey to Libya to luck and fate (Tanle, 2012a). Such perceptions also account for the reasons why despite their knowledge, risks associated, and the numerous media reports on the plight of irregular migrants, some people still embark on these perilous journeys.

Furthermore, due to the clandestine nature of their entry, several Ghanaian irregular migrants face a considerable challenge in accessing certain basic services such as basic healthcare and proper housing in Libya, rendering them vulnerable in the process (Tanle 2012a). As a result of this, the majority of irregular migrants are victims of exploitation, harassment, and arbitrary arrest. In addition, the constant threat of deportation and the inability to access basic healthcare poses a significant effect on their lives and general wellbeing (Waite, 2017; Lind, 2020; Tanle, 2012a).

Being a concern for both state and non-state actors, there have been various studies conducted on irregular migration around the world (see, for instance, Waller, 2006; Morehouse & Blomfield 2011; Barslund, Di Salvo & Ludolph 2019). Other studies have also focused on the challenges and coping strategies of irregular migrants at destination countries (Olukotun, Gondwe, & Mkandawire-Valhmu 2019; Waite, 2017). But, although there have been studies on the resilience of irregular migrants who migrate across dangerous territories (for instance, the desert) towards another country, most of the studies have focused on the South American context (Lemus-Way & Johansson, 2019; Lusk et al., 2019), with less focus on the African context even though the circumstances and sources of resilience on the two continents may be different (Press, 2017). In the South American case, for instance, migrants who move irregularly up north are sometimes accompanied by their family members and mostly seek help in neighbouring countries (Lemus-Way & Johansson, 2019). On the other hand, the Sahara Desert where African migrants spend many weeks is extremely inhabitable with very little coping strategies, hence there may be little co-dependence as compared with the South American case. This study, therefore, seeks to contribute to the existing knowledge regarding the resilience of irregular migrants in Africa,

specifically across the Sahara Desert to Libya as well as proffer solutions that could at least assuage the situation of loss of precious lives on the desert.

1.3 Objectives of the study

The study seeks to;

1. To find out the factors motivating Ghanaians to migrate through the Sahara Desert to Libya.
2. To explore the sources of resilience in migrating through the Sahara Desert.
3. To investigate the challenges faced by Ghanaian irregular migrants in Libya
4. To explore the coping strategies of Ghanaian irregular migrants in Libya.

1.4 Research Questions

Research questions guiding the study include;

1. What are the factors motivating Ghanaians to migrate through the Sahara Desert to Libya?
2. What are the sources of resilience in migrating through the Sahara Desert?
3. What are the challenges irregular migrants from Ghana face in Libya?
4. What are the coping mechanisms adopted by irregular migrants from Ghana in Libya?

1.5 Rationale of the Study

The increasing trend of irregular migration of Ghanaians despite the efforts of stakeholders to curtail the problem calls for continuous analysis of the situation to save lives. In the words of Laczko Frank, IOM Data Analysis Centre's Director, "the loss of lives should never be normalized nor tolerated as an assumed risk of irregular migration". To reduce the number of migrants who migrate irregularly, stakeholders need to consider newer policies that can curb this

rising phenomenon. These newer policies, however, can only translate into positive outcomes when there is enough information to guide policymakers. By exploring the motivating factors to migrate irregularly, the sources of resilience along the desert, challenges, and coping strategies employed by irregular migrants in Libya, policymakers will be much informed and develop a holistic understanding of the problem. This will enable them to develop workable strategies and policies aimed at reducing the numbers as well as advocate for a plausible compromise that supports humane treatment such as improved access to social services of irregular migrants whereas at the same time, there will be policies in place that deters irregular migration. This reasoning is informed by the fact that irregular migrants are first and foremost humans and need to be treated with an appreciable level of dignity and respect.

Furthermore, the study will contribute to research in the area of irregular migration studies. Due to the fewer studies undertaken within the area of the resilience of irregular migration, this study will be useful for both researchers and students to expand extant literature and to create insights on the subject matter.

1.6 Definition of Concepts

The study will use a number of concepts in this work. They include concepts such as resilience, migration, irregular migration, and a migrant which are explained below.

Resilience: This refers to a migrant's ability to make it through the Sahara Desert despite the existing dangers

Migration: This refers to the movement of people from one geographical location to another over long distances across international borders.

Irregular Migration: This refers to the movement of a person in breach of the rules of entry of a sovereign country or the expiry of their legal basis for entry and stay.

Irregular Migrant: This refers to a Ghanaian who travels from Ghana through the Sahara Desert to Libya.

1.7 Organization of the Study

The study is organized into five chapters. Chapter one provides a general background to the research, the problem statement, research questions, and objectives, as well as the rationale guiding the study. Chapter two delved into the related literature and theoretical frameworks that guided the study. Issues regarding methods of data collection such as the research design employed in the study, sources of data, sampling techniques, and data analysis were all detailed under chapter three. The fourth chapter was dedicated to discussing and analyzing the findings obtained from the field. Chapter five summarizes the findings of the study and offer recommendations.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

Admittedly, there is abundant literature on irregular migration. In ensuring that this study is placed in a proper context, some selected literature will be reviewed under the following sub-topics: resilience, irregular migration, motivating factors for the rise in irregular migration, route of irregular migration, the central Mediterranean route, the risks, challenges and sources of resilience of irregular migration, coping strategies of irregular migrants in destination countries, challenges of irregular migrants in host countries. The push-pull framework, as well as the coping theories, are later discussed in relation to the study.

2.2 Resilience

Research into human resilience began in the 1970s when researchers centered their attention on the psychology of at-risk children and how they achieved normal development despite exposure to significant adversity (Masten 2001). As a concept, several meanings have been ascribed to it (Sleijpen et al., 2013). Masten defines resilience as “a phenomenon characterized by good outcomes in spite of serious threats to adaptation or development” (Masten, 2001, p. 228). The author argues that for an individual to be considered resilient, the person must have experienced and overcame a demonstrable risk whether current or past. Connor & Davidson concur with this line of thought. To them, “resilience embodies the personal qualities that enable one to thrive in the face of adversity” (Connor & Davidson 2003, p.76). According to the authors, personal characteristics such as age, time, gender, culture, and the difference in life experience determines how individuals thrive in the face of difficulties. Although these definitions are acceptable, a more detailed one is proposed by Pooley and Cohen. They define resilience as “the potential to

exhibit resourcefulness by using available internal and external resources in response to different contextual and developmental challenges” (Pooley & Cohen 2010, p. 34). Connected to this study, the latter definition is considered more feasible and vivid since irregular migrants often encounter both internal and external challenges as they migrate thereby drawing upon their inner and environmental resources for survival.

Within the field of migration studies, the concept of resilience is gaining ground. According to a qualitative study by Schweitzer, Greenslade and Kagee (2007) concerning the coping strategies and resilience among Sudanese refugees living in Brisbane-Australia, it was found that broader social support and personal characteristics such as positive or negative coping reactions to stressful events affected their improved recovery after their traumatic experiences in their post-migration life. In another study, Ziaian, de Anstiss, Antoniou, Baghurst and Sawyer (2012) revealed how by living for a long time in a destination country, adolescent refugees develop an increased resilience despite their often-traumatic experience before and after their migration. However, in their study on the exploration of resilience among migrant women in Canada, Rashid and Gregory (2014) defined resilience as reflecting internal and external protective factors which help people to resist risk and improve adaptation, aligning with the assertion of Pooley and Cohen (2010). According to Rashid and Gregory, internal factors include sociability, positive temperament, and self-esteem while external factors include family ties and a supportive social environment.

In brevity, resilience in this study is conceptualized as the ability to migrate especially irregularly with the capacity to withstand the precarious living conditions to achieve a positive outcome.

2.3 Irregular Migration

Migration can be categorized into regular and irregular migration where the regularity or irregularity is often contingent upon the possession of appropriate travel documents or not. Irregular migration usually refers to “the cross-border flow of people who enter a country without that country’s legal permission to do so” (Vollmer, 2011, p. 2). According to Uehling, (2004, as cited in Koser, 2005), there are a variety of ways through which migrants slip into irregularity. This occurs when their entry is obtained without permission, either through a covert entry or by using falsified documents. The other means are obtaining legal entry but overstaying the visa duration given, the deliberate abuse of the asylum provisions, and being smuggled or trafficked. Concerning this study, migrant smuggling activities across the Sahara Desert to North Africa, specifically Libya, is the mode of migration of interest (De Haas, 2006).

De Haas (2008) is however of the view that immigration status is not static. For instance, a regular migrant who overstays his visa duration may slip into irregularity while an irregular migrant who entered a destination country without the requisite documentation or authorization may later gain a regular status by satisfying the regularization process. Although irregular migration can be traced back to many decades, the phenomenon of migrating clandestinely through unfamiliar paths such as the desert and across the Mediterranean has seen a sharp increase in recent years, becoming a major humanitarian concern due to the number of lives lost and the atrocities irregular migrants endure (Lutterbeck, 2006).

2.4 Motivating Factors for the Rise in Irregular Migration

When researching about the resilience of irregular migrants, the factors that influence irregular migration, in general, are worth reviewing. However, as accentuated by Mbaye (2014), although there is substantial literature on the drivers of migration in general, there is a paucity of studies

concerning the factors that drives irregular migration in particular. Nevertheless, several studies have shown that migration decisions for both regular and irregular migrants are often influenced by economic, social, and political considerations (Koser & McAuliffe, 2013; McAuliffe 2013).

The lack of economic opportunities in countries of origin and the desire of people to improve their standard of living are the dominant driving force behind irregular migration into Europe. This assertion is in consonance with a study by Tanle (2012b) on the irregular migration of Ghanaians to Europe through Libya. The study which employed the mixed-method research strategy in engaging 200 returned irregular migrants in the Nkoranza and Techiman Municipalities found that the main motive of irregular migration in those municipalities was economic. Although both municipalities are important agricultural hubs that attract migrants from surrounding regions, respondents had little or no skills and were not also attracted to those opportunities (Tanle, 2012b). Tanle attributed this to the removal of agricultural subsidies, difficulties in the acquisition of land, and the lack of a viable market for agricultural produce. This rendered respondents poor, hence migrating irregularly became an alternative source of livelihood. It is therefore not surprising that Egyptian youths for instance, typically see migration, whether regular or irregular as a means of escaping poverty, low incomes as well as unemployment (Browne, 2015). Nonetheless, the study by Tanle (2012b) offers a spotlight on irregular migration in Ghana, a huge relevance to my current study. The two municipalities of Nkoranza and Techiman are noted for irregular migration of their indigenes with which the findings of the study provide plausible reasons why people migrate irregularly.

In recent years, the intensification of border controls in the global north has also proven to be a trigger of irregular migration from the global south (Koser & McAuliffe, 2013). The limited opportunities for legal migration incentivize migrants to use irregular routes with the help of

smugglers to access European territories. In a study that employed the qualitative research technique in interviewing ninety-three participants (both at the individual and group level) concerning the causes of irregular migration from the Gambia, Suso (2019) found that the high cost and the overly rigorous process of accessing legal travel documents such as the acquisition of a visa significantly contributed in pushing migrants onto irregular routes. Aspiring migrants with low earnings who were unable to afford the high costs of visa fees or demonstrate sound financial standing were likely to resort to the backdoor. From the study, the majority of respondents alluded to their desire to migrate legally but due to the obstacles faced in acquiring legal documentation, did not. This shows that indeed the intensification of border control measures does not necessarily curb migration but rather has a direct link in opening up other routes, often irregular ones (Mbaye, 2014). For more distinction on this matter, Herbert (2016) elucidates that the increased surveillance and apprehension of migrants along the Spanish-Moroccan border led to a diversion of route by other migrants from the eastern Mediterranean route to the central Mediterranean corridor with the singular aim of reaching Europe. Similarly, the enhancement of border controls between Libya and Italy in 2009 shifted irregular migration flows to Greece mostly through Turkey (Cummings, Pacitto, Lauro, & Foresti, 2015).

As many people migrate within a society or community, the art of migrating becomes normalized or akin to a culture that shapes the migration behavior of people. De Haas (2011) captures this perfectly as according to him, ‘migration processes tend to become partly self-perpetuating, leading to the formation of migrant networks and migration systems’ (De Haas, 2011, p. 22). As these networks and migration systems become normalized, migrants find it easier to circumvent migration barriers. In a study conducted in Hyderabad, India, by Ali (2007), it was revealed that the social prestige and the perceived benefits associated with international

migration results in the pressure to migrate from family members which fall in line with the New Economics of Labour Migration, indicating that Migration is not an individual decision but a household strategy. As a result, ‘not migrating, or rather not wanting to migrate, is perceived as a deviant behavior’ (Ali, 2007, p. 51). Similar happenings have also been reported in the Gambia and Mexico, indicating the gradual norm of international migration in many societies (Suso, 2019; Kandel & Massey, 2002). The challenge herein is that, in a society where migration has become normative and leads to social prestige and status, the difficulties in acquiring travel documents or in affording regular migration will likely lead to a rise in irregular migration as migrants will find other means of migrating, often dangerous ones.

Another precipitating factor of irregular migration documented in literature is the political instability and the conflict situations of many migrant-sending countries such as Syria and North African states like Libya. In Libya for instance, the growing political and economic threat after the ousting of its leader, Muammar al-Gaddafi, has prompted many Libyans and other foreign nationals to migrate irregularly into Europe (Cummings et al., 2015). Although Libya has been a transit country for many decades, it is also the case that many irregular migrants abandoned their daring aim of reaching Europe via the Mediterranean Sea due to the stability of the Libyan economy and the availability of jobs (Attir, 2018). With violence and massive human rights abuses taking over the once-prosperous country after 2012, migrants are not only seeking personal security elsewhere but that the violence has limited the freedom to pursue economic activities in the country, hence the decision of many people to move upwards in an irregular manner not forgetting the exacerbation of smuggling and trafficking activities in the country and region due to the Arab Spring (Attir, 2018).

2.5 Routes of Irregular Migration from Africa

There are two main routes of irregular migration mainly utilized by sub-Saharan Africans. These are the Western and Central Mediterranean Routes. These routes have become a major passage for migrants moving from various parts of the continent into Europe due to the strategic position and the geographical proximity of transit countries like Libya and Algeria (Kohnert, 2007). Even though these routes offer somewhat easy access to Europe, some migrants, like participants in this study settle permanently in transit countries like Libya until they return home. This can be attributed to economic, socio-cultural, security, or even personal decisions (Kuschminder & Waidler, 2020). Despite mentioning two routes above, the study focuses on the Central Mediterranean Route which leads to Libya.

2.6 The Central Mediterranean Route

The Central Mediterranean Route is one of the most commonly used routes to reach Europe and a popular pathway among migrants from sub-Sahara Africa (Frontex, 2015). According to a report by Frontex, about 53,000 apprehensions were recorded along the Central Mediterranean route in the second quarter of 2014, representing nearly three-quarters of all irregular border-crossing apprehensions (Frontex, 2014). The high number of apprehensions and a general preference for this route is due to its better climatic conditions and the complex flow of migrants from sub-Saharan Africa and Middle Eastern countries such as Ghana, Nigeria, and Syria (Frontex, 2014).

Migrants using this route from sub-Saharan Africa need to converge at Niger specifically at Agadez due to its geostrategic location which normally involves travelling by land across many countries (De Haas, 2008). Whereas migrants from Ghana, Togo, and Benin typically head towards Gaya (located along the Benin-Niger Border) en route to Agadez, migrants from

Senegal, the Gambia, Mali, Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire, Sierra Leon, and Guinea make their way through Burkina Faso (IOM, 2015). From Agadez, migrants can either head towards Libya on the right path or towards Algeria on the left path (De Haas, 2008). The trans-Saharan route towards Libya from Agadez requires migrants to cross, amongst others, Dirkou, Tummo, and Sebha, which requires them to spend many days in very calamitous circumstances (IOM, 2015). Figure 1 below shows the route of irregular migration through the Central Mediterranean channel.

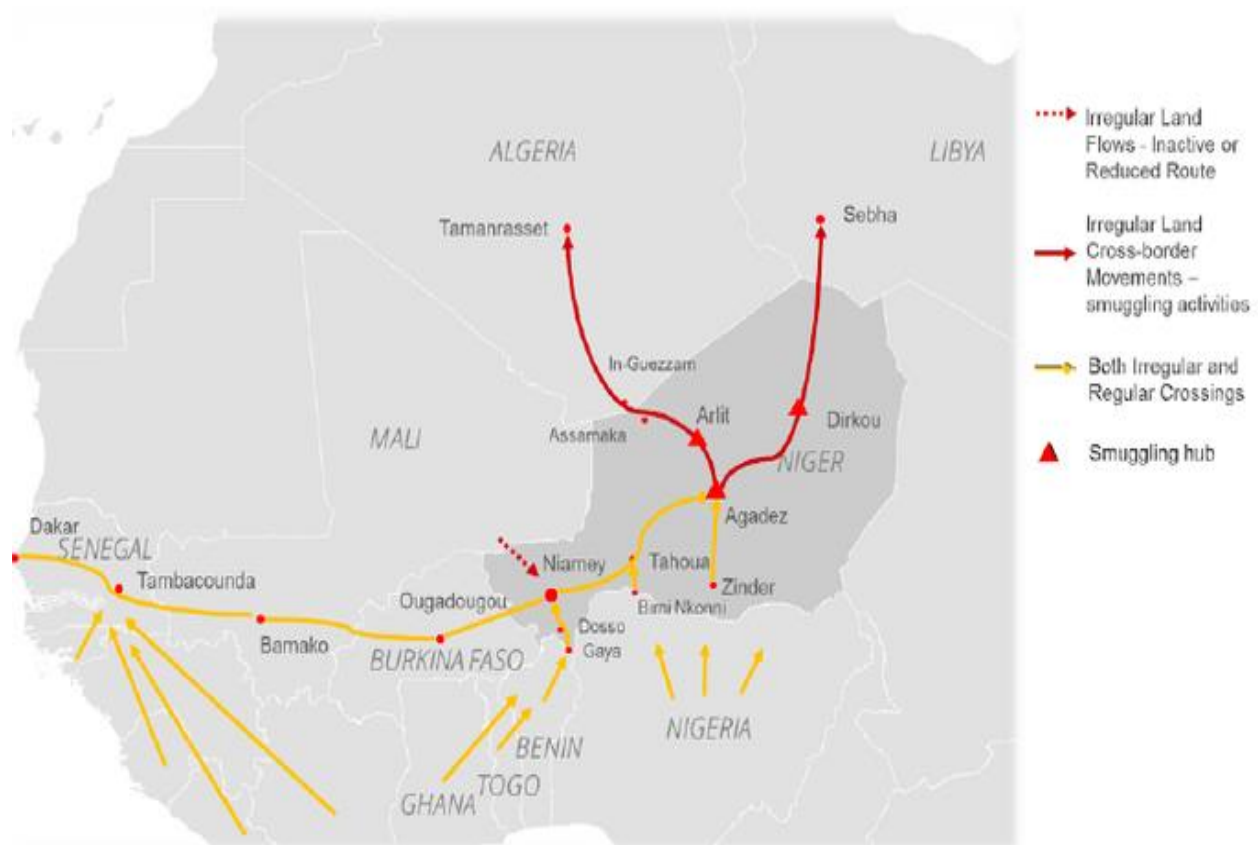


Figure 1 Route of Irregular Migration through the Central Mediterranean Channel

Source: IOM 2015

2.7 Risks, Challenges and Sources of Resilience of Irregular Migration

Migrating through irregular routes like the desert and other unfamiliar paths are not only challenging but they are life-threatening. Notwithstanding the precarious conditions therein, irregular migrants demonstrate unbreakable perseverance, willpower, persistence, and resilience that enables them to grapple unto their aim of reaching their destination regardless of the existing dangers. According to a study by Press (2017) regarding the dangerous migratory journey across the Sahara Desert to Europe, it was found that a successful journey across the aforementioned route required huge doses of resilience, faith, and personal fortitude. The qualitative study recruited sixty participants from three migrant reception centers in Italy and France. According to the study, irregular migrants going through the Sahara Desert are victims of sexual violence, robbery, and physical abuse. Amidst these difficulties, access to water and food is non-existent (Press, 2017). Despite these challenges, respondents negotiated their way through spirituality, and courage as returning home was not an option. For instance, a respondent from Senegal posited, “it hurts...you have to believe in God that you’ll survive”. It is this belief to make it to Libya and beyond that drive migrants on the Sahara Desert to press on regardless of the existing challenges.

De León (2013) draws on ethnographic and archaeological data on the Sonoran Desert to illustrate the widespread misery faced by many irregular migrants. The author argues that an examination of the accumulated artefacts on the desert provides an insight into the often-painful experiences of irregular migrants. Before the journey, migrants are often in possession of religious objects like prayer cards, first-aid equipment’s like pain relievers, and other items to counter dehydration such as salty foods and water indicating prior awareness of the dangers ahead of them. The findings of the study revealed dozens of abandoned worn-out foot wares,

sweat-stained clothes, bloodied socks as well as discarded bottles believed to hold water and other liquids for consumption abandoned along the desert (De León, 2013). According to the author, the worn-out foot wares did not only depict their possible inappropriateness for the desert terrain but their wearing away has the potential to cause massive injuries to the feet of migrants as they are forced to complete the journey barefoot. In addition, the empty bottles on the desert suggest that migrants had consumed all the liquids they carried without any means of refilling them which will likely result in their dehydration, further exposing the precarious nature of the journey.

Similarly, in a study to explore how irregular migrants navigate their way through the Sonoran Desert in the Southwestern part of the United States, De La Rosa (2018) posits that irregular migrants are survivors who utilize different types of strategies in order to escape extremely violent conditions during their journey. According to the study which relied on the accounts of sixteen respondents, the institutionalization of restrictive policies and programs by the U.S. government to curb unlawful or clandestine entry into the country have rather redirected migrants to use very treacherous routes in an attempt to gain entry. Similar to the findings of Press (2017), the availability of food or water on the Sonoran Desert is almost non-existent, a phenomenon that led to the death of many migrants due to dehydration, desert heat, and hunger. Also, migrants are usually apprehended by drug lords who require them to carry heavy loads of drugs during the entire period of the journey. In remaining resilient, respondents showed a high degree of endurance and relied on their already acquired strategies at temporary migrant shelters such as setting a tree on fire for external help in emergencies (Press, 2017).

Tanle (2012a) has further revealed that irregular migrants migrating to Libya via the Sahara Desert are likely to suffer from dehydration, hunger, and fatigue due to a long period of walking

with insufficient food and water. His study which was based on the accounts of 237 return migrants from Libya also found that some migrants fell ill and died in the desert while others drowned in the Mediterranean Sea, unfortunately (Tanle, 2012a).

Drawing lessons from Central America, Lemus-Way and Johansson (2019) investigated the source of the resilience of some irregular female migrants transitioning through Mexico towards the US. According to the authors, despite the stringent immigration control measures instituted by the US against immigration from its southern neighbours, the phenomenon persists due to the rising unemployment, violent attacks, and threats in affected countries. Ten participants from Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador were interviewed concerning how they successfully surmounted the challenges faced. The findings of this study showed that these migrants were possessors of both internal and external strengths. Specifically, participants identified endurance, courage, goal setting, and the reliance on metaphysical beliefs such as prayers and meditation as internal strengths that gave grounds to their resilience during their journey. For instance, despite their struggles, they relied firmly on the protection and guidance of a supernatural deity they had faith in. Regarding external strengths, reference was made to family and institutional support in the form of migrant shelters and the benevolence of some strangers along the way. The author concludes that a combination of these strengths indeed enabled the successful migration of participants.

In a similar vein, Lusk, Terrazas, Caro, Chaparro, and Puga Antúnez (2019) investigated the source of resilience among Central American migrants making dangerous journeys towards the US. According to the study, the alarming rate and negative effects of gang violence, corruption, and femicide are enough reasons that push migrants up north (Lusk et al., 2019). The study reveals that migrants drew on deep reservoirs of faith, family, and personal fortitude in reaching

the Mexico-U.S. border. In situations of difficulties, less religious participants conceded to engaging in a series of religious activities for solace. It was also revealed that the possibility of a prosperous and violent-free life of dependents of migrants contributed to the resilience of migrants despite the adversities (Lusk et al., 2019).

Khawaja, White, Schweitzer, and Greenslade (2008) used a qualitative research method to investigate the pre-migration, transit, and post-migration difficulties and strengths of 23 Sudanese refugees residing in Australia. The study revealed that throughout the three stages of migration, participants were able to surmount their challenges through the huge reliance on spiritual beliefs (prayers), social networks, and the imagined possible good tidings in the future. Aside from drawing inspiration and strength from religious activities (internal source of resilience), religion impacted in both social and material importance to participants during the transition period (external source of resilience). Although participants were exposed to substantial violence and harassment in transit camps, a number of them received various kinds of assistance from religious groups which aided in their resilience (Khawaja et al., 2008). This assertion aligns with a study by Ginesini (2008) which posited that spirituality plays a dual role in the lives of refugees as it is of both community and social importance from which inner strength and resilience are achieved.

2.8 Challenges of Irregular Migrants in Host Countries

Life as an irregular migrant is fraught with many challenges and uncertainties as they strive in harsh and adverse circumstances to survive and to succeed. After overcoming many hurdles during their pre-migration and transit journeys, many irregular migrants are met with numerous socio-cultural and legal challenges at their destination countries concerning health, employment, accommodation, and a breach of immigration laws regarding entry (Welch & Schuster, 2005;

Prestileo, Di Lorenzo, & Corrao, 2015). These challenges, arising from their irregular status, are some of the realities that push irregular migrants to the peripherals in their destination countries, ultimately rendering them vulnerable (Cavazos-Rehg et al., 2007). Despite these varying degree of difficulties, research about these challenges are few. Without the full appreciation of these challenges, it may be difficult for international organizations, policymakers, and respective governments to provide the appropriate assistance irregular migrants may need.

Migration is usually beneficial for migrants who plan and migrate through regular channels. This is because, all things being equal, they are able to draw on a wide range of rights and privileges. But can that be said about irregular or undocumented migrants? Access to employment and fair working condition is a fundamental right of which irregular migrants are deprived of. In a study that employed the qualitative research method to interview 30 failed asylum seekers in the United Kingdom, Waite (2017) found that, unlike regular migrants, failed asylum seekers were unfairly shortchanged in the labour market. From the study, they were among the severely exploited, underpaid, and worked under inhumane conditions such as excessive working hours without compensation. By hiring them, employers are able to circumvent employment protections and obligations (Bloch, 2010). This is because failed asylum seekers who refuse to leave slip into irregularity and are not only denied the right to work but they find themselves in another country with a very little support system as highlighted by Waite (2017). For instance, irregular migrants are not only often harassed by security personnel's but they have very limited access to justice as they risk being detained and deported should they make any official complaints to authorities since their continuous presence in itself violates immigration laws (Bloch, 2010; Tanle, 2012a; Tanle, 2012b). It is this socio-legal precarity of failed asylum seekers or irregular migrants that gives the impetus for their excessive exploitation. The study

further indicated that the fear of slipping into destitution and the risk of homelessness were some of the reasons that kept respondents in exploitative jobs.

Similarly, in a study conducted by Bloch (2013) concerning the labour market experiences and strategies of seventy-five undocumented migrants living in the United Kingdom, it was again revealed that undocumented migrants were predominantly found in the lower echelons of the labour market with very exploitative working conditions, resulting in very dire health implications. According to the author, “many of those interviewed were acutely aware of the differential treatment with regards to the working conditions and pay between themselves and those with regular status and because of their status, they felt powerless to contest this inequity” (Bloch, 2013, p. 227). Although these exploitative working conditions involving undocumented migrants are found in many destination countries, there are usually some few exceptions like the account of one respondent from Turkey who enjoyed frequent promotions and somewhat average wages (Bloch, 2013). As a strategy, many respondents relied on social networks or the use of falsified documents to land job opportunities.

In an ethnographic study on the access to housing by undocumented migrants in the UK and Sweden, Lind (2020) found that undocumented migrants have very limited access to housing services in the aforementioned countries which is due to the enactments of national policies and practices. In the UK for instance, the legislation barring landlords from renting apartments to undocumented migrants significantly limits the housing options available to them (Lind, 2020). The result of such hostile legislation is the reliance on dilapidated apartments which are usually overcrowded, its resultant effect being the frequent outbreak of diseases such as pneumonia and respiratory tract infections (Lind, 2020; Molnarova et al., 2015). Similarly, a qualitative study by Tanle (2012a) concerning the experiences of irregular Ghanaian migrants in Libya also revealed

that due to the irregular status of migrants they were not only victims of frequent harassment and exploitation or experienced difficulties in accessing healthcare, but also, they were occupants of poor housing facilities which exposed them to the harsh weather conditions in the country. Due to the often-precarious working, housing, and other legal challenges examined above, many irregular migrants are not only likely to record a deterioration in their health and living conditions but at the same time, they have limited access to public healthcare.

According to a study by Poduval et al (2015) concerning the experiences of 16 undocumented migrants in accessing healthcare in the United Kingdom, it was revealed that although asylum seekers or irregular migrants were entitled to free primary healthcare, in practice, their inability to provide valid documentation or identification deprived them of this essential service. As a result, many respondents alluded to delaying early treatment and only reported to health facilities when they were severely unwell as that is when they were sure to receive treatment under the accident and emergency services (Poduval et al., 2015). Other respondents usually sought treatment from private or not-for-profit clinics who according to them were accommodating and supportive. A limitation of this review is in relation to its location. Since the respondents were recruited from London, the experiences of other undocumented migrants living outside the city were not captured. Nonetheless, this study is relevant because it highlights some of the challenges both male and female irregular migrants encounter in accessing healthcare at destination countries.

Another study by Schoevers, Loeffen, van den Muijsenbergh, and Lagro-Janssen (2010) also highlighted significant barriers encountered by some 100 female undocumented immigrants in accessing healthcare in the Netherlands. Using a mixed-method research design, the study found that irregular migrants faced two fundamental challenges in accessing healthcare: (a) institutional

challenges and (b) personal challenges. Concerning institutional challenges, many participants were refused care and subsequently turned away due to their inability to provide valid documentation which resonates with the findings of Poduval et al (2015). This creates a sense of shame, alienation, and isolation. The study further indicated that the lack of information and financial challenges constituted a significant barrier in irregular migrants' access to healthcare. Whereas some respondents had very limited knowledge about their primary healthcare entitlement, the majority of them did not consider seeking healthcare services due to their inability to pay (Schoevers et al., 2010). Notwithstanding the important attribute of documenting the obstacles irregular migrants face, especially those who ordinarily refrain from seeking care, this review is limited by the fact that all interviews were not recorded hence some of the information by respondents might be lost or not properly captured.

In a study to understand the barriers to mental healthcare among irregular migrants in fourteen European countries, Straßmayr et al., (2012) argue that the combination of personal and institutional challenges accounts for the inaccessibility of healthcare by migrants. The study which was based on the assessments of 25 experts finds that in seven countries including Sweden and the Czech Republic, irregular migrants did not have any legal entitlement to mental healthcare except for emergency services. This leaves irregular migrants with no option other than to delay and only seek care when they are severely ill as reported by other studies (Poduval et al 2015). Having ratified international human rights treaties such as the right to healthcare, the denial of legal access to primary mental health care of undocumented migrants in destination countries such as Sweden is not only an injustice but a breach of the right to health under international law (Biswas, Toebe, Hjern, Ascher & Norredam, 2012). Furthermore, the authors found that even in countries such as the Netherland and the United Kingdom where irregular

migrants have a reasonable entitlement to primary healthcare, they were met with various degrees of administrative obstacles such as a request for resident documents or permanent address as highlighted in the preceding reviews (Poduval et al., 2015; Schoevers et al., 2010). Other challenges identified included irregular migrants' limited knowledge about healthcare entitlements and the lack of awareness of these entitlements by health professions in countries like Portugal, Belgium, and Ireland (Straßmayr et al., 2012). Owing to the increasing politicization and controversies surrounding immigration issues in Europe, some of the experts or interviewees might have some political or subjective views concerning the extension of healthcare provision to irregular migrants which might have affected their responses. Another limitation is the non-inclusion of irregular migrants in the study hence some of their lived experiences may not be reported. Notwithstanding these challenges, the research is relevant because it proffers the many practical challenges irregular migrants encounter among a wide range of destination countries.

As a result of the challenges discussed above, it is therefore not surprising that a study conducted by Wahlberg, Källestål, Lundgren, and Essén (2014) concerning the causes of death among undocumented migrants in Sweden between 1997 to 2010 listed suicide and other forms of cardiovascular diseases as the major causes of deaths of undocumented migrants as compared to their Swedish counterparts. The inequity in health and social welfare benefits between irregular migrants and their Swedish colleagues were identified as a primary cause of the vast differences recorded (Wahlberg et al., 2014). This conclusion was arrived at due to the precarious living conditions of undocumented migrants, some of which have been extensively discussed above.

2.9 Coping Strategies of Irregular Migrants in Destination Countries

According to a study by Welch and Schuster (2005), aside from the socio-economic challenges faced by irregular migrants, several migrant-receiving countries implement harsh policies such as immigration detention or deportation to deter others. This is because irregular migrants are mostly not in possession of legal documentation which contravenes certain aspects of immigration law such as the rules of entry. In the absence of proper support services, irregular migrants remain resolute by developing and relying on certain coping strategies. These strategies serve as a buffer on the impact of the adverse stressors arising from their irregularity on their psychological and physical well being.

According to a qualitative study by Olukotun et al., (2019) on the lived experiences and coping strategies of undocumented African women in the United States, it was revealed that the uncertainties of being an irregular migrant such as detainment and deportation rendered many respondents economically vulnerable, exploited and isolated. These negative experiences resulted in several health-related issues including depression and a constant state of fear, ultimately having a significant impact on their daily activities (Olukotun et al., 2019). As a coping strategy, participants elucidated that they found relief from a few trusted social networks (friends and family) with whom they shared their plight. This finding corroborates the assertion that social network groups are a major source of survival for irregular migrants as they face a lower risk of detection once they rely on their close relations (Cvajner & Sciortino, 2010). Also, religion was another important coping strategy for respondents as it gave them hope and strength to persevere amid their difficulties and uncertainties. A limitation pointed out in this review however was that a number of the women interviewed were from the Midwestern part of the United States. As a result, the study might not have identified the more complex perspectives

that define the lives of irregular African women residing in other parts of the United States. Also, since the study was on the experiences of women, the study lacked the experiences of men which could have given the study a broader perspective.

Using the qualitative research technique, Lavie-Ajayi and Slonim-Nevo (2017) investigated the sources of strengths, resilience, and coping strategies of eight Sudanese men who were asylum seekers in Israel. The study reveals that support from family and friends, participation in social and political advocacy, the use of both cognitive and behavioural coping mechanisms contributed to their resilience and continuous survival. According to some participants, within the midst of difficulties in their destination countries such as unemployment and the inaccessibility of healthcare, they were determined to take action regardless of the number of times they failed. This inspiration and resilience to survive were drawn from the number of times they surmounted challenges during their transitioning to Israel (Lavie-Ajayi and Slonim-Nevo, 2017). Even though this study was able to show some coping strategies adopted by asylum seekers, the study was limited by the fact that all respondents were males. This is because the inclusion of females may bring to bear certain gender-specific challenges and their related coping strategies which men may not share. An important distinction, however, is that unlike other studies that suggest religiosity as a coping strategy of asylum seekers or refugees (Khawaja et al., 2008; Olukotun et al., 2019), the findings of this study did not reveal the same.

Kam, Pérez Torres and Steuber Fazio (2018) uses qualitative research method to investigate the individual and family-level coping strategies of undocumented Mexican youths in the United States. According to the authors, the family setting is an important institution that aids in the coping and resilience of young children of irregular status. Thirty Mexican high school students living in the U.S. were interviewed. Similar to the findings of Olukotun et al. (2019), the results

of this study showed that the fear of detainment or deportation characterized some of the challenges faced by participants. In addition, others lamented the limited opportunities available to them as compared to their peers with proper documentation. To cope with these challenges, participants engaged in individual coping strategies such as diversion, where they shifted their attention and focus to other activities like sports and entertainment. Also, families of participants offered both emotional and informational support which helped cope with the obstacles of being undocumented. A limitation of this study was that the challenges faced by undocumented youths may differ from those that are experienced by adults.

Similarly, Ni Raghallaigh and Gilligan (2010) uses qualitative research method to investigate the coping strategies of unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors in Ireland. The study relied on both participant observation and an in-depth interview with 32 participants from countries within Africa, Asia, and Europe. According to the study, some respondents posited that in coping with their situation, they resorted to the use of distraction where they focused on involving themselves in other activities such as spending time with friends or involving themselves in educational activities with the singular aim of taking their minds off their difficult past and present predicaments which foster anxiety and loneliness (Ni Raghallaigh and Gilligan, 2010). This particular coping strategy falls in line with the findings obtained by the study of Kam, Pérez Torres and Steuber Fazio (2018) where some undocumented Mexican youths in the U.S. relied on diversion (shifting focus unto other activities) as a coping mechanism. Other coping strategies identified by respondents included adapting to some aspects of Irish culture and way of life, being optimistic about future opportunities, and being independent. However, a slight distinction in the findings of this study as compared to others (Olukotun et al., 2019), is that, although religiosity or faith was not explicitly part of the coping strategies of respondents in this study, it

played a key role in their coping efforts. This is because almost all respondents alluded to the fact that their strong religious background from their origin countries motivated them towards their coping strategies which aided in their stay in Ireland.

Biswas, Kristiansen, Krasnik and Norredam (2011) investigates the alternative health-seeking strategies by undocumented migrants in Denmark. Using the qualitative research technique, ten respondents from Bangladesh, India, and Nepal were recruited for the study. According to the study, the extent to which irregular migrants may go in accessing healthcare is dependent on the kind of experiences they receive at health facilities. Due to the legal and administrative bottlenecks often faced by irregular migrants (Straßmayr et al., 2012; Schoevers et al., 2010), respondents resorted to the use of the health insurance card or documents belonging to friends and the reliance on the prescriptions given by their networks back home (Biswas et al., 2011). Another form of coping strategy pointed out by respondents included self-medication where they usually rely on an old prescription given them or to an acquaintance although such medications may affect their convalescence (Biswas et al., 2011). This finding is consistent with a study by Kvamme and Ytrehus (2015) which also identified self-medication as an important coping strategy among undocumented migrant women living in Norway.

In Nigeria, Eborika and Oyefara (2016) uses qualitative research method to explore migration patterns and the coping strategies of irregular migrants at their destination countries. The study relied on the accounts of 38 participants through an in-depth interview. Findings from the study reveal that to cope with their irregularity, some participants relied on their friends and acquaintances who either provided them accommodation or employment information, most of which were menial jobs with very bad working conditions. Others also alluded to engaging in

illegal acts such as falsification of important details like names and nationality on official documents to avoid being easily recognized by immigration officials.

Similar to the findings of Eborika and Oyefara (2016), Engbersen and Broeders (2009) in their study on the effect of immigration control on the coping strategies of irregular migrants found out that as the reality of exclusion from the labour market and a share in public services catches up with irregular migrants, they typically indulge in criminal activities such as falsification of documents, shoplifting, petty theft as well as operating within the informal sector with little security as a means of survival. With the regular routes into the labour market cut off as a result of restrictive labour policies in many host countries, irregular migrants continuously seek alternative ways of securing employment. It is this desire to survive regardless of their irregularity that gives rise to the “black or informal market” where legal documents can be easily acquired to clandestinely regain access to the labour market (Engbersen and Broeders, 2009). Engbersen, Van San, and Leerkes (2006) further buttress this assertion that the non-participation of irregular migrants in the labour market due to exclusionary policies such as employer sanctions and the strict requirement of documents from irregular migrants has a direct implication on crime rate among irregular migrants as they become very dependent on the informal sector, theft, possession of false documents and the use of other unconventional means of survival. To investigate the veracity of the aforementioned linkage within the Netherlands, Leerkes (2009) asserts the possibility of the aforementioned assertion. According to his study, while the rise in illegal activity in the Netherlands is due to many factors, including the frequent reclassification of migrants and a relaxed border regime that facilitates excessive irregular entries, the study reiterated the assertion that excluding migrants from opportunities inside the country led largely to their participation in criminal activities.

2.10 Theoretical Perspectives

This study is founded on two theories, the push-pull theory, and the coping theory. These theories were selected to explore the resilience of migrants where also coping strategies are employed as a key to adaptation and therefore, were also investigated pertaining to irregular Ghanaian migrants who migrate across the Sahara Desert to Libya. These theories offered the researcher a broader and grounded understanding of the phenomenon under study.

2.10.1 The Push-Pull Framework

The framework, developed by Lee (1966), tries to make clearer the reasons motivating people to move from one place to the other. According to Lee (1966), the decision to migrate depends not only on factors related to the area of origin or destination. He posits that intervening obstacles such as immigration laws and psychological cost as well as personal factors that include the migrant's economic status and personality cannot be overlooked. Whereas the negative factors at the origin such as low earnings and rising unemployment would motivate migrants to move out, the positive factors at the destination such as higher wages, employment opportunities, or better welfare systems would attract migrants to move in. So in essence, since the push-pull factors are the influences that encourage people to move, migration occurs if these push-pull factors are strong enough to overcome the obstacles of moving. Although the framework is criticized as being silent on allocating weights to the different drivers of migration by De Haas (2008), it is considered useful. Migrating across the desert requires much more energy beyond the mere difficulties or opportunities at both origin and destination countries. The ability to overcome obstacles such as the psychological cost and personality trait of migrants is of great importance. For instance, whereas the optimist would most likely embark on the journey, the pessimist may abandon the journey. Also, even though external factors play a part in the resilience of migrants,

internal resources (including one's mentality to strive on) are also dependent factors in braving through the journey. The framework thus helps the researcher to consider not only demographic but also economic, personal, and other variables in exploring the drivers of migration.

2.10.2 The Coping Theory

The coping theory, developed by Richard Lazarus defines coping as “ongoing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/ or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person” (Lazarus, 1993, p. 237). Lazarus further elaborates that coping has to do with the insight and abilities that enable people to manage and face the challenges of life. According to the theory, there are at least two major functions of coping which are problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping.

The problem-focused approach involves changes in the relationship between the affected person and the environment by acting on the environment or on oneself (Lazarus, 1993). As espoused by Folkman and Lazarus (1985), this approach is usually seen as an adaptive model of coping that involves certain actions or behaviour to overcome the problem causing distress. Concerning this study, problem-focused coping concerns how irregular migrants use their external coping resources to manage or address the challenges they encounter during their tumultuous journey through the Sahara Desert or in destination countries.

In addition, the emotional-focused coping involves shifting the emotional sense or relational meaning of what is happening, which mitigates the anxiety or stress even though the underlying circumstances of the problem have not changed (Lazarus, 1993). This type of coping strategy can be likened to the reliance on religious activities by migrants or developing a positive attitude amid an ongoing difficulty. In view of the fact that irregular migrants employ strategies to overcome the undesirable challenges they face during their migration or in destination countries,

the theory enabled the researcher to identify the different coping resources that helped to lessen these challenges.

2.11 Summary and concluding remarks

The two theories were chosen for the study as they complemented each other in understanding the motivations, resilience, and coping strategies among irregular migrants. Since irregular migrants adopt certain coping strategies to survive in their movement and in destination countries, the coping theory offered the researcher the opportunity to explore the various coping strategies adopted by irregular Ghanaian migrants. On the other hand, the push-pull framework was used to examine how the three-tier factors of pull, push and intervening obstacles influenced the migration decisions of migrants, especially concerning whether or not to use regular or irregular routes.

The reviewed literature pointed to several factors that encourage people to migrate irregularly. The identified factors include but are not limited to lack of economic opportunities, the intensification of border controls, and the culture of migration in certain communities. Whereas irregular migrants faced challenges such as dehydration, sexual violence, and robbery on the desert, they are met with a new set of challenges at the destination countries which includes inaccessibility of healthcare, limited access to housing facilities and the labour market among others, rendering many of them in a sorry state. Moreover, from the literature, there was a certain degree of resemblance in the sources of resilience in the desert and the coping strategies adopted at destination countries. For instance, goal setting, the support of friends and families as well as the metaphysical belief in the form of prayers and meditation were some of the identifiable ones. This shows how coping strategies and resilience are somewhat related (Rice and Liu, 2016). As aforementioned in the problem statement, most of the resiliency studies were conducted in South

America, so it will be worthwhile to gain the perspective on the Sahara Desert in Africa to compare the sources of resilience on the two continents.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the processes and techniques used in the data collection and analysis. Also, the section addresses the research design, sources of data, a brief description of the study area, and the sampling techniques used in selecting participants. Finally, the ethical considerations of the study are clearly explained.

3.2 Research design

For this study, the qualitative research method was used (Creswell & Poth, 2016). This method is deemed appropriate due to its strengths and characteristics. According to Rahman (2017), qualitative research is effective at gaining a holistic understanding of people's lived experiences within specific settings. Teye (2012) agrees with this line of thought. According to Teye, by using methods such as participant observations, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions, qualitative research generates a piece of comprehensive information about respondents' experiences, opinions, feelings, convictions, and behaviours (Teye, 2012). Of relevance to this study, both in-depth interviews and focus group discussions were used to allow the researcher to examine the lived experiences, perspectives, resilience, challenges, coping strategies as well as the contested views of respondents.

Despite its suitability, qualitative research methods are criticized as being subjective and not good for generalization as compared to quantitative methods which involve the application of statistical techniques to analyze quantifiable data, hence useful for generalization and prediction. Even so, quantitative methods are also considered rigid and not good for explaining behaviours

and perceptions (Teye, 2012). This shows that using either qualitative or quantitative methods in any research has its advantages and disadvantages, hence the purpose and aims of the study determines which methods to use. However, as aforementioned, since lived experiences of people are best elicited using the interpretivist paradigm of research, the qualitative research method was deemed appropriate for the study (Kivunja, C., & Kuyini, A. B., 2017).

3.3 Profile of Study Area

This study was conducted at Akontaanim, a farming community at Dormaa Ahenkro, the Municipal capital of Dormaa Central in the Bono Region of Ghana. Official figures from the 2010 Population and Housing Census Report of Ghana indicated that the Dormaa Municipal had a total population of 159,789 of which 49 percent were males and 51 percent were females. The Municipality shares boundaries with Jaman South Municipal to the north, Dormaa East District to the east, the Asunafo North Municipal to the south-east, and La Cote d'Ivoire to the north-west (Ghana Districts, 2006). Akontaanim was suitable for the study because anecdotal evidence suggests that as a livelihood strategy, the active labour force within the community usually migrate irregularly in search of greener pastures.

MAP OF DORMAA CENTRAL MUNICIPALITY

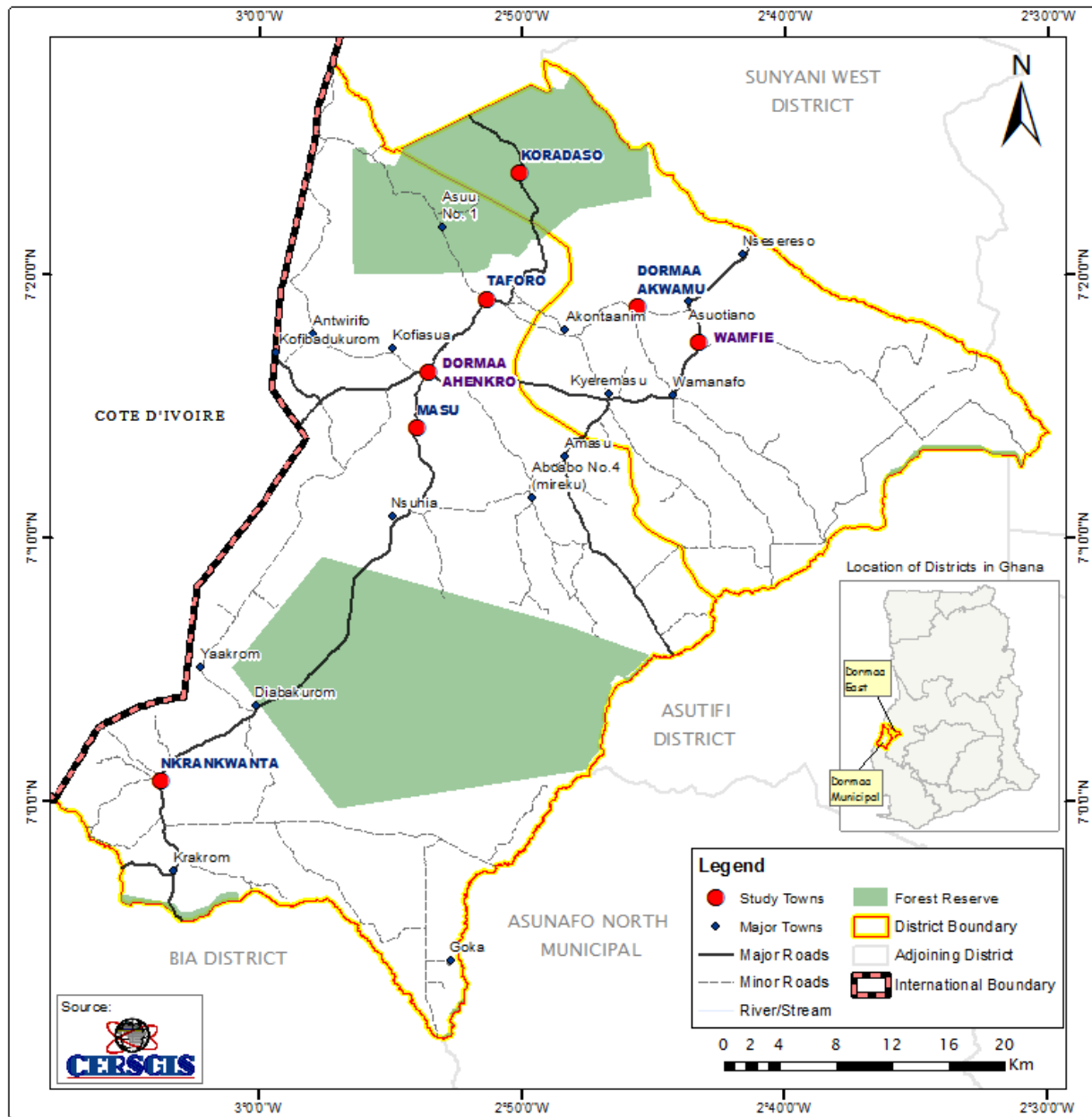


Figure 2 Map of Study Area

Source: Narh, 2013

3.4 Target Population

The target population of the study included all Akontaanim inhabitants who were at least 18 years old and above and who have at least once migrated through the Sahara Desert to Libya but are currently residing at Akontaanim.

3.5 Sampling Technique and Sample Size

The study employed the purposive sampling technique. According to Tongco (2007), the purposive sampling technique refers to the calculated choice of an informant due to the unique attributes and qualities of the person. Furthermore, employing this sampling technique is based on the researcher's judgment as to who will provide the right information to answer the study's research questions (Etikan & Bala, 2017). Respondents were purposely selected through the help of a key informant, specifically the assemblyman of the area. All the participants recruited through the help of the informant were part of a returnee association in the community (The Libya Boys Association). With the help of my informant, respondents voluntarily took part in the study due to the trust and respect accorded to him. This technique was deemed appropriate due to the sensitivity of the topic under discussion and the difficulty in recruiting respondents. A total of 18 respondents were recruited for the study. The basis for choosing 18 respondents was backed by the studies of many scholars (See Marshall, Tobin, Marshall, Gooch, and Hobday 2013; Boddy, 2016; Dworkin, 2012). They posit that in qualitative research, a sample size between 15 and 30 is needed to achieve saturation point and inspire confidence in data collection. In this study, I reached saturation after interviewing the 18th participant. The researcher engaged 7 participants in an in-depth interview while the remaining 11 participants participated in three separate focus group discussions. The participants were all males. This is because even with the help of my informant, I was not able to reach the only female who is part of the Libya Boys

Association since she was out of town during my entire stay at the community. However, this is not strange because prior studies have also reported that the majority of irregular migrants are males (De Genova, 2002; Tanle, 2012a).

3.6 Sources of Data

Data for the study were gathered from both primary and secondary sources. The primary data were gathered through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with irregular migrants who have returned home. Information from published works such as journal articles, research reports, and other internet sources was reviewed, serving as a secondary data source that complimented the primary data.

3.7 Methods of Data Collection

Fieldwork for this study was undertaken between 20th September to 29th September 2020. Both in-depth and focus group interviews were conducted with participants using two separate interview guides developed by the researcher. Questions from both interview guides offered participants the opportunity to provide essential information while the researcher probed their responses when necessary. Refer to Appendix B and C (In-depth and Focus Group discussion interview guide). Both Appendixes had a series of questions related to pre-migration conditions, challenges on the desert, sources of resilience, challenges in Libya and coping strategies adopted by migrants. This was done to understand the issue under study from the perspective of respondents. Those who were interviewed in-depth were excluded from participating in the focused group discussions. The interview guide was developed in English but all the interviews were conducted in Twi, a language understood by both the researcher and his participants. Besides voluntarily participating in the study, respondents were more importantly assured of their anonymity and confidentiality regarding their person or the information provided. Before

that, each of the respondents was first reached, thoroughly explaining the purpose of the study to them, after which a suitable interview time, date, and location was agreed upon. As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, the researcher ensured the adherence of some safety precautions in the conduct of the interviews. Before each interview, participants were encouraged to show up in a face mask but very few participants adhered to this safety protocol. Sensing the possible spread of the virus especially during focus group discussions, the researcher ensured a reasonable distance between participants. Due to the socially distanced sitting arrangement of respondents, the researcher had to move his recorder nearer to each participant whenever they were speaking in order to clearly capture the experience of participants. It is worth mentioning that each in-depth interview which was recorded with the kind permission from respondents lasted for an average of 45 minutes with the focus group discussions lasting for an average of 1 hour, 30 minutes.

3.8 Data Handling and Analysis

First, the recorded data were transcribed and kept safely on a password-protected computer. Although there were little difficulties regarding interviews conducted in Twi due to the frequent use of proverbs by respondents, the researcher nevertheless found similar words that clarified those words to prevent any data loss. After transcription, the data was manually coded and analyzed using the thematic data analysis method with the objective of the study serving as a guide (Attride-Stirling 2001). Using this method was deemed appropriate since it was useful in identifying themes and patterns of meaning across the data set (Braun & Clark, 2006). In achieving all the above, the six procedures in analyzing qualitative procedures as documented by Braun and Clark (2006) was followed. The first step was concerning familiarizing myself with the data. The second step was to generate initial codes with the third being the search for themes.

The researcher subsequently reviewed the themes, defined and named the themes before finally reporting the findings.

3.9 Ethical Consideration

Before all interviews were carried out, the researcher sought an informed consent from all respondents, adhering to the utmost ethical standards throughout the study. Furthermore, the study was not only voluntary but the anonymity of all respondents was ensured by excluding their names as well as not revealing their identity to any third party. Additionally, all published works used in this study were duly cited and acknowledged.

3.10 Limitations of the Study

Since all participants in this study were males, the study may have not captured the nuanced experiences of females.

Also, since the interviews with all participants were carried out in Twi and later translated into English, it is possible to have lost some data in the process, but the researcher ensured that this was minimized.

CHAPTER FOUR

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter is divided into three main sections. In the first session, demographic information is discussed. The demographic information includes information on the ages of respondents, their educational background, marital status, and employment status. The second section which is the analysis of the study's objectives begins with the first objective which is the motivation to migrate irregularly followed by the challenges faced on the Sahara Desert and participants' sources of resilience on the Sahara Desert. The second section is concluded by identifying the challenges participants faced in their host country and the coping strategies they employed to overcome the identified challenges. Subsequently, the third section discusses the findings of the study.

4.2 Demographic Characteristics of Irregular Migrants

This section focuses on the age, marital status, educational status, and the duration of stay in the host country of returned irregular migrants. This information was useful in putting the study into perspective.

4.2.1 Age of Irregular Migrants

Regarding the ages of returned irregular migrants, the study found that they were between 22 and 48 years of age, with 44.5% between the ages of 35 and 41 years of age. 33.3% of the returned irregular migrants were between the ages of 21 and 31 years, with only 22.2% ranging between 41 and 49 years of age. The age distribution of participants above indicates that many of the returned irregular migrants migrated out of the country in their youthful years.

4.2.2 Educational background

The level of education for the participants was generally low. Out of the 18 participants interviewed, only 5.5% had acquired Senior High School education. 89% of the participants completed Junior High School with one 5.5% dropping out of Junior High School 1 (JHS 1).

4.2.3 Marital Status

Many of the participants interviewed (89%) were married while 11% of them were not married. Participants who were married posited that they purposely migrated to acquire wealth to cater for their families.

4.2.4 Employment Status

61% of participants interviewed were farmers while 11% were masons with 5.5% being drivers. However, 5.5% of the participants worked both as masons and farmers while another 5.5% worked as plumbers. The remaining 11% were unemployed.

4.3 Motivating Factors for Migrating Irregularly

The reasons for the irregular migration of respondents captured in this study were varied. These were economic, family, or community influence as well as the difficulties in the acquisition of valid travel documents.

4.3.1 Economic Reasons

The inability of many participants to make enough money from their occupation in Ghana, the unfortunate incidence of broken homes, as well as the perceived economic prospects elsewhere informed the decision of participants to migrate out of the country. This, according to respondents, was to enable them to take care of their families back home amongst others. Accordingly, a 29 year old male respondent disclosed:

“You see here in Ghana, there is work but you seem not to make enough money from the work you do but when you travel, at least you can make something there that is why I decided to travel.”

The comment of this respondent was based on his two failed attempts to make a decent living from being an apprentice. According to him, life was still difficult hence his decision to migrate. Along this line of thought, other respondents, too, confirmed their inability to make enough money from their occupation. Below is the experience of another respondent:

“I was a farmer but things were not getting better so with the little I got from farming, I decided to invest it in this journey with the hope of getting more, but the problems you face is enormous”
(Male, 22 years old).

For other respondents, they migrated to raise money to support their family:

“Since my parents were divorced, it was difficult for my unemployed mother to take care of we the children so she decided I undergo apprenticeship but it did not materialize. So I travelled to Gabon and later to Nigeria and upon my return, I was able to support my divorced sister to undergo apprenticeship. I tried to settle home once more but I was not making enough money so I decided to travel once again, this time to Libya so I could make more money to support the family” *(Male, 38 years old).*

Here is a case of a young determined man willing to go full length to support his family. The story of this young man shows how a broken home can also contribute to the migration of people. However, of importance is the recurring mantra of not making enough money at home which has been posited by preceding respondents.

4.3.2 Family/ Community Influence

Another factor that led to the irregular migration of respondents was the family or community influence. Whereas some were encouraged to follow the footsteps of successful returnees in the community, other participants explained that they were supported by their families to embark on this dreadful journey. The narration below is an example of a young man who was ably supported by his family to migrate to Libya:

“I was the only eldest male child of my mother so things were not easy. We didn’t have a good place to sleep and sometimes what to eat was even a problem so since I was the young man in the family, they raised some money for me in order to travel to Libya. This was after we had sold some cocoa. They told me Libya was flourishing and other people were taking advantage of it so I should also go and try my luck if I can change the fortunes of the family. This is because a lot of our community boys from Libya were putting up houses for their families” (Male, 35 years old).

As shown above, the respondent’s narrative reveals how apart from the encouragement provided by many households, some go the extra mile to fund the journey of the most promising family member with the hope of reaping future benefits.

Other participants who were either influenced by their friends or the success of returnees in the community also had this to say:

“I was influenced by my friend to travel. This is because despite all my hard work in this country, I made little money. At the time, a bag of maize was 50 cedi’s so making 10 million (1,000 cedis) from harvesting maize required a lot of hard work. Even though I am a human being, I used to even sleep in the forest just to work more but despite all the hard work, I was not

able to take care of my family. My friend who had been to Libya on three occasions told me that if I was working this hard in Libya, my situation would change. This motivated me to also travel” (Male, 41 years old).

“I decided to travel because of the economic hardships I was facing in this country since some brothers and friends who left were able to erect buildings for themselves, their wives and children. It was for this reason that I also decided to migrate, so that when I am fortunate I would be able to erect one of such buildings for myself and family to live in” (Male, 28 years old).

“I heard it from my friends who had travelled across the desert and had returned. They told me the journey through the desert was not easy but if I get to Libya, I will get work to do and I will get a lot of money. That motivated me to also go and try my luck” (Male, 29 years old).

4.3.3 Difficulties in Acquiring Valid Travel Documents

Apart from the economic and family/community influence, the difficulties in acquiring valid travel documents was another factor which led to the irregular migration of participants. Some of the respondents disclosed that acquiring an important travel document like a Ghanaian passport was very difficult due to the frustrations involved. A 41 year old man revealed:

“I remember I once worked on acquiring a passport for over six months. I had 20 million [2,000 new Ghana cedi's] at the time. I spent 9 million [900 new Ghana cedi's] travelling to Sunyani [City in Ghana] every now and then just to follow up on the passport but to no avail so I used my Ghana ID card to travel through the desert. Acquisition of travelling documents in this country is difficult. It makes we the poor people suffer because acquiring the right travelling documents is not easy”.

The account of the respondent above reveals the administrative bottlenecks which sometimes stifles the desire to acquire proper travel documents in order to migrate in a regular, safe way.

Another respondent corroborated the assertion above by saying:

It is difficult. Even with here, if you want to make a passport, you have to go to Sunyani [City in Ghana]. The least number of times you will go there [Passport Application Centre] is four times. When you consider this, you realize you are wasting your time... (Male, 26 years old).

Consequentially, participants revealed that they had to procure falsified documents [passports] before embarking on the journey since they were required to show an identification document at a point in their journey. A participant shared a similar experience in the narration below:

As a foreigner, they [Libyan authorities] always looked out for your passport. The only advantage was that they were only concerned with the picture in the passport and the country of origin. If you are not in possession of one, you could be arrested so before embarking on the journey, we acquired a falsified passport which helped us there (Male, 30 years old).

The findings further revealed that aside the frustrations involved in acquiring a valid passport, respondents were of the view that since they could not satisfy the numerous requirements needed in acquiring a VISA, they had to migrate irregularly. The narration by a 37 year old male puts this into perspective:

...I know the right procedure of migrating. But for instance, if I am acquiring a Spanish VISA, the embassy will require my account number, this and that, but maybe I will not meet those requirements. That is why I decided to migrate with the little resources I had. If I had money, I know the right way is through immigration and once you do that you are free but because of lack of financial backing, we resort to irregular migration.

Another respondent had this to say:

None of us ever think of securing a VISA because it is quite difficult to do so, and so once we realized there was a desert we could go by and even get involved in some connection [unauthorized migration across the Mediterranean] to Europe, we preferred that... (Male, 22 years old]

4.4 Challenges faced by Irregular Migrants on the Sahara Desert

In appreciating migrants' sources of resilience, a brief discussion of the challenges they faced on the Sahara Desert en route to Libya were explored. The study found that irregular migrants faced challenges related to the unavailability of shelter from the harsh and extreme weather conditions on the desert, armed robbery and the unavailability of water and food. Other challenges revealed by participants included vehicular accident, illness/ lack of access to healthcare and death.

4.4.1 Unavailability of Water and Food

The difficulty involved in finding water on the desert exposed migrants to long hours of thirst and even death. For instance, due to the fear of exhausting the little water they carried, migrants were forced to mix their water with potentially harmful chemicals like petrol to make it difficult to drink. A male respondent aged 41 years attested to this experience:

There are a lot of challenges on the desert but we are not able to say everything. Sometimes, we returnees do not tell the full story. At a point in my journey, we had to mix our water with petrol to make it difficult to drink. We were reluctant to drink but by necessity we just take little drops to quench our thirst since it was really hot there. We went during the hot season so we really suffered. One person even died as a result.

Another participant who spent many hours without water had this to say:

... from Agadez, we were required to rest at Dirkou which was part of the desert but our water got finished on the way... We got very thirsty as we spent a whole day without water to drink so when we came close to Dirkou, we were really tired but fortunately, we arrived without any casualties even though we were very weak and tired (Male, 35 years old).

From the narration above, the respondent exposes how the unfortunate experience of water shortage with this team rendered them fatigued and dehydrated, albeit no recorded casualties. Furthermore, due to the possible water shortages and the unavailability of water on the desert, migrants were forced to rely on people they knew for extra water as life becomes very difficult without it on the journey. As there is a reduction in solidarity and heightened independence because of the scarcity of water as the quote below ended, it exposes a contradiction with travelling with people you know when a participant showed the sense of brotherhood reduces. A 26 year old male revealed:

...you have no way of getting water when your water gets finished. That is why it is advisable to travel along with six or more people you know so that if your water gets finished, you know you can get some from a brother you already know. If you do not travel with someone whom you already know, it is difficult to get some water from others. In the journey, you do not know if it will take you two days or three days to get there so you do not want to share your water. On the desert, there is not so much brotherhood so whatever happens to you, you deal with it yourself

Due to the possible experience narrated above, sometimes the driver who is basically in charge of the journey had to assume the responsibility of managing the water of migrants due to its scarcity especially when there is no possibility of finding water on the way. A respondent had this to say:

Even the water, we are the owners of it but we don't have the right to drink it on our own. The driver is the sole person with the right to give you the water to drink. And even that, he pours for each person a very small amount not to quench your thirst but just to survive. He does that so that we don't run out of water on the desert. If you try to pour the water on your own, he will hit you with a stick he carries along. If you are disobedient, you will be disciplined by the driver (Male, 29 years old).

One of the participants who experienced hunger during their journey also revealed:

We also got hungry at a point. Because of the delays we encountered, our food and water got finished along the journey. As a result of this, we drove on for three days with no rest until we reached Qatrun as the unavailability of food meant that we couldn't accommodate any further delays. At Qatrun however, we got some bread and water (Male, 35 years old).

Sadly, despite being dehydrated as a result of many hours or even days without water or food, irregular migrants are sometimes required to support their journey when the need arises which can be in the form of walking for long distances on the desert resulting in severe stress (Tanle, 2012a). According to the narration of a participant, a fellow Nigerian migrant lost her life on the desert due to a similar occurrence explained above:

"As we kept moving, we reached a hilly place so we had to get down and push our car to enable it climb the hill. As we kept pushing, we realized that some of our compatriots were weak. One Nigerian lady collapsed and died not long after. I am sure she had an underlying illness and so when she was dehydrated for long, she gave up. We covered her head with her dress and buried her on the desert...." (Male, 38 years old)

4.4.2 Unavailability of Shelter in the Harsh Desert Weather Conditions

Another challenge highlighted by respondents was their exposure to the extreme climatic conditions on the desert which was detrimental to their health. From the data gathered, it was difficult to escape this challenge as migrants were bound to encounter this difficulty regardless of the time they travelled [For example during the cold or hot season] especially with no shelter available. A participant who witnessed the death of a fellow migrant due to the very cold nature of the desert at some periods revealed:

“The little I can say is there are a lot of challenges on the desert. Some travel during hot periods while others travel in the cold days. In all of these periods, there are challenges. I traveled during the cold period. The number of passengers was a lot. We were 32 and due to the way we were arranged, the cold could not get to us a lot. But when we encountered a problem where our car got spoilt and so had to get down from the desert, we felt the cold so much such that one of us lost his life on the desert. He was not attacked by any illness but died due to the cold. The person was suffering a bit from rheumatism. The person was suffering so much such that he became anemic and died on the desert” (Male, 27 years old).

Also, a 29 year old male narrated his experience regarding the extreme exposure to the sun on the desert after the tyre of their vehicle got burst:

“Apart from that incident, the tyre of our vehicle got burst on the desert. Our driver told us to wait for him [as he goes in search for a solution]. We had to sit under the scorching sun. I believe you know how hot the place can be. We waited for a very long time till we started to give up because we thought our driver will not return and we would die. ...there was a man called Alhaji who even cried because he thought our driver will not return” (Male, 29 years old).

4.4.3 Vehicle Accident

From the accounts of some respondents, vehicular accident in transit was a common predicament on the desert resulting in untold hardships such as life-threatening injuries and even death. Sadly, victims in such horrific situations receive little treatment resulting in severe pains throughout the journey which is if only they were fortunate to be alive. Commenting on the issue, some respondents lamented:

“With regards to our trip or team, nobody died but someone got injured. He was a Nigerian in the second car. We reached a place which was full of gravels. He fell off the car and he had a severe cut on his ear which was almost falling off. We don’t know what really happened. His ear was dangling and he was crying. We cleaned the blood oozing from his ear and the driver applied a plaster unto it. He cried for most part of the journey. We could not do much as there wasn’t anything on the desert we could lay hold unto; no medicine, nothing, even common water you will not get some to drink nor some to even bath” (Male, 29 years old).

“... there were huge sand hills at some parts of the desert so instead of our driver to move straight, he tried swerve them which resulted in an accident. Our car summersaulted three times rendering one person crippled and another dead. Because we were all strangers from different places, we could not trace the family of the deceased person. After we had moved a little, we dug the sand with our hands and buried him” (Male, 36 years old).

A 41 year old male who was personally affected by one of the numerous accidents on the desert had this to say:

“Our vehicle got involved in an accident and summersaulted on the desert. Two people died instantly as a result while others sustained injuries. Even I was also affected such that for about

three months, I had to sleep belly wise because I was not able to turn around. I can say my situation was better because some of our brothers had to return home since they were deformed”.

4.4.4 Illness/ Lack of Access to Healthcare

Some of the participants asserted that in the event of illness on the desert, they could not offer any meaningful help to the affected person. Their narration shows how the absence of healthcare vis-à-vis the dangers on the desert puts the lives of migrants in the balance which could even lead to death. A participant who encountered one of such horrific moments had this to say:

“We saw him. There was no help we could offer him. When the car got spoilt and we saw that he was becoming anemic, we went to open the Hilux, which is the Toyota pickup. We opened the bonnet so that the heat from the engine will help him but it could not help. We carried him unto the bonnet so that the heat could help him but he lost his life. He was even traveling with his brother. With the desert being made up of sand, we dug a hole with our hand and placed him in it” (Male, 27 years old).

Another participant whose vigilance and diligence saved the life of a fellow migrant explained:

“Although nobody died in my team, one passenger on board fell off our vehicle and collapsed as a result. This was after our vehicle hit a pothole on the desert. He was not responding to our calls so my team members thought he was dead. They decided to leave him behind so we could continue the journey but I insisted he was not dead because when I placed my hand around his ears, I felt he had life. He moved a little after I applied a very hot ointment unto his eyes. This showed he was alive so we therefore carried him along and continued the journey” (Male, 37 years old).

Had it not been the vigilance of the respondent above, an innocent soul would have perished due to the unavailability of a health post along the desert because such a facility would have been the first point of call in such a dicey situation. Due to the absence of such a critical facility, migrants resort to self medication which may be effective or not:

“Yes, someone got ill along the journey, but the driver gave him medicine so he was moved from the back of the car where we were into the car. The way he was ill, we were afraid. We thought... so when we reached Qatrun, they didn't permit him to continue the journey. They sent him somewhere. I do not know where he was taken to” (Male, 29 years old)

4.4.5 Armed Robbery

Robbery attacks was identified as one of the major challenges associated with migration across the Sahara Desert. Although migrants were briefed about the presence of such unscrupulous groups, some of the participants confirmed being at the mercy of these armed robbers. A participant disclosed his encounter with one of these armed groups:

“Shortly after we were made to hide our monies, we met three people from no where with guns. They ordered us to bring our money. We were told that the armed robbers they talked about a short while ago were the ones we have met so everybody should cooperate and keep quiet. We were ordered to strip completely naked in turns as they searched our bags, pockets and other belongings. They took whatever they desired including our belts, footwear amongst others” (Male, 36 years old).

Another participant narrated how some four Nigerian ladies were possibly raped by one of these armed groups:

“...after traveling on the desert for two days, we were met by some armed robbers and the other car I earlier talked about was with us. There were four Nigerians in that car. When they gave some warning shots, the cars parked and we got down. We were all stripped totally naked, both men and women. We were told to move about 15 meters away from the car and they searched our clothes. After the search, the armed robbers took all the four ladies. The ladies followed them to the other side of a mound and we do not know what happened behind there. It happened in the afternoon. We could not leave the ladies behind even after spending over an hour behind the mound. They returned crying and when asked what had happened, they could say nothing. The driver asked us to continue the journey and so we did. We did not meet any robbers anymore” (Male, 26 years old).

Despite the presence of armed robbers on the desert, a 37 year old male disclosed that his team never met such groups:

“We are sometimes robbed by armed robbers on the desert but personally, my team did not experience any robbery case. However, we met another team from Niger who told us to hand all our monies and other valuables like our passports to our driver due to armed robbers on the route. We thought they wanted to unlawfully take hold of our particulars so we decided not to hand them to the driver. We told them that if we would be robbed of our belongings by the armed robbers, so be it but we declared by God’s grace, we will not meet those people. True to our words, we never had an encounter with any armed robber”.

4.5 Sources of Resilience of Irregular Migrants on the Sahara Desert

In order to deal with the challenges faced by irregular migrants on the Sahara Desert, they relied on certain sources of resilience. From the study, it was found that irregular migrants relied on both internal and external sources of resilience which included goal setting, courage, spirituality,

hope of a prosperous life in destination country, mental conditioning to endure and fellow travelers serving as a source of resilience.

4.5.1 Internal Source of Resilience

It was found from the study that some respondents relied on internal sources that kept them resilient to ameliorate the effect of their challenges on the desert. These internal sources of resilience unlike the external sources are inborn or can be developed by individuals thus migrants could readily rely on them when they faced enhanced risk and needed to adapt on the desert at crucial moments. The internal sources of resilience highlighted includes goal setting, courage, spirituality, hope of a prosperous life in destination country and the mental conditioning to endurance.

4.5.1.1 Spirituality

In this study, it was found that irregular migrants relied on metaphysical beliefs such as prayers and meditation while others kept faith in black magic or charms. According to some participants, this normally happens when circumstances becomes particularly difficult:

“We never stopped praying on the desert, we did that everyday. We always committed ourselves to God for protection. Before we sleep each night, we normally beseeched God about our ongoing experiences and how challenging things had become. We always prayed for protection and guidance to endure. We did all that because things became increasingly difficult such that God needed to intervene. Senior, the desert is a scary place. We always placed God at the center” (Male, 37 years old)

“I mostly meditated on the desert but sometimes when things become very tough, we rely on each other to petition their God, whether Christians or Muslims”. (Male, 38 years old)

“Do you see the small Bible I am holding? [pulls out a small New Testament Bible from his side pocket]. I wrapped a rubber around it and hid it in my “gari”. So anytime things became difficult, I took it out and start meditating on some scriptures with my friend who also resides in this town. We kept doing that till we got to Qatrun”. (Male, 48 years old)

A respondent revealed an instance where the charm of a fellow migrant did not work in a crucial time:

“Hahaha we encountered a similar incident. One guy told his friend, ‘we did not bring anything o, we are solely dependent on God so what’s this talisman that you have tied around your waist?’ Shortly after, we were under attack and this guy started reciting some incantations but it never worked. He got angry, threw it away and started relying on God like us”. (Male, 38 years old)

According to this 40 year old male, the numerous challenges on the desert meant everyone had to rely on some form of spirituality, even for the non religious:

“With the challenges on the desert, everyone automatically becomes a Christian. Even if you have not been to church before, you learn to pray. Once you are there, everything is between you and your God so everyone prays”.

4.5.1.2 Mental Conditioning to Endure

The findings of the study revealed that some of the respondents developed and also psyched themselves towards a strong sense of endurance through the numerous challenges the were faced with. According to them, even in the face of death, they could not do much to salvage the situation but just endure since it was not possible to turn back once on the desert. Two participants had this to say:

“I drew strength from the fact that once I was on the desert, there was no turning back because getting to the desert costed a lot of money. The desert is just like being on the high sea, after take off, you cannot get out. So once on the desert, you have to endure whatever comes your way aside death. We had already risked our lives so if you are destined to die, you will, but if it is God’s will for you to sail through, you will. I faced a lot of struggles” (Male, 36 years old).

“Once the challenges start happening, there is no way out. You just need to endure for God to help you safely to the destination. If you don’t develop that endurance, it may not end well for you” (Male, 48 years old).

A participant who was ready to face anything on the desert even including death due to the hardships he experienced back home explained:

“Anytime I remembered the hardships back home while on the desert, I psyched myself to reach my destination by all means. I was ready to face even death because returning to the hardships back home was not an option so I had to strive and keep moving” (Male, 35 years old).

4.5.1.3 Courage

The study found that in order for some few participants to surmount the challenges on the desert, they had to be courageous at some point in time which proved to be helpful:

“I had to be courageous because I remembered that I am not from a good home and that is why I was on the desert. ...I used to search around refuse dumps in search of used bottles to sell just to bring money to my mother. ...I realized I was not from a good home so I had to force and achieve something. Anytime I remembered the situation back home, I was motivated to press on regardless of the situation. A lot of people returned at Agadez, they could not even start the

journey. Some people returned back to the station and joined the trucks loaded with onion back home. A lot returned. But I told myself I will go regardless” (Male, 29 years old).

“I believe it is as a result of courage and a decision to go till the end and you have to pray to God to see you through to the end. There is no one to assist you or carry you through aside God and the fact that you are travelling with a Ghanaian, else you would not get any assistance from brothers from other nationalities and some people went to the extent of drinking their own urine because they had run out of water”. (Male, 42 years old)

A 35 year old male revealed that he sourced his courage from a fellow migrant who was in his team:

“I remember one guy in my team kept motivating us to be courageous. It really helped us”.

4.5.1.4 Hope of a Prosperous Life in Destination Country

From the interviews conducted, it was found that the hope of a prosperous life in Libya and its resultant ability to take care of the family back home was enough motivation for irregular migrants on the Sahara Desert to endure the pain and struggles they encountered. A participant had this to say about how some connection men motivated him with the economic prospects of Libya:

“Since the connection men kept telling us Libya was really flourishing and we would in no time make a lot of money once we arrive, despite the pain and challenges in the car, our goal was to get there. We held on to the assurance that we had almost made it in life and God helped us too. We therefore lived like one family and depended on each other in difficult times like sharing milk with our weak brothers knowing we had almost arrived. Since we were all hopeful, we were encouraged to help each other make it” (Male, 35 years old).

Another participant explained:

“I was sure if I reached Libya, I would be able to make it and help my family back home. I am the only son of my parents. All the others are females you see? So fine, if they all marry and leave my mother, who would take care of her? That is why I also decided that should I strive and make it to Libya, I would be able to make my mother happy. This also contributed to my resilience...” (Male, 29 years old)

For this participant, not only was he concerned about the economic prospects in Libya but he had hopes of braving the Mediterranean to Italy. He narrated:

“Despite the challenges on the desert, all I was thinking about was the economic prospects in Libya as well as the opportunity to cross Libya into Italy so that I can cater for the family back home. For me, reaching Italy via the sea was my main aim of migrating to Libya” (Male, 36 years old).

A 42 year old male also narrated how he recovered from giving up just by seeing a light of a Libyan city from afar:

“...where I had gotten to and when the thoughts of giving up came, I saw the lights of the city and was glad because of the joyful stories I had heard of Libya and it also gave me hope that I was very close to my destination, I had a great sense of joy that I had also embarked on this journey and had been successful”.

4.5.2 External Source of Resilience

Findings from the data collected revealed that some respondents had an external source of resilience specifically the reliance on a fellow traveler which served as a protection to ameliorate the effect of their challenges on the desert. According to Rashid and Gregory (2014, p. 199),

‘external protective factors includes family bonds, a welcoming social environment and relationships, and other possibilities for meaningful engagements’. These external protective factors were in play for the returnees during their migration according to the data gathered.

4.5.2.1 Fellow Travellers as a Source of Resilience

Participants use of their external resources such as relying on other fellow travellers reinforced their ability to cope on the desert. Some of them attributed their resilience to the presence and timely encouragements given by other migrants who had prior experience on the desert. A participant revealed:

“There was a brother amongst us who had gone on this journey before and he told us he faced a similar situation and in his case, he spent over 4 days waiting. There was no food coming, just drinking water yet he survived so when this happened, he encouraged us to endure and be tough-skinned since he had experienced a similar situation. It was not easy at all yet we endured through it all with faith” (Male, 28 years old).

Other migrants who drew similar encouragements from fellow migrants with prior experience also revealed:

“We met people who have been there [Libya] a number of times and so when you sat by them during the journey, they normally encourage you about how quickly we will make money once we arrive and this encouraged us to be steadfast. It was really helpful” (Male, 22 years old).

“What really helped me was the fact that the person I was moving with had been there before. He was the main person I was relying on regarding where to pass and what to do. Even when the driver gets lost on the way or the driver is away, he made sure I did not go anywhere...” (Male, 36 years old)

A 27 year old male narrated a sad incidence where a fellow migrant lost his brother on the desert. This brought untold pain to the bereaved migrant but with the support and encouragement offered by the remaining migrants, the affected fellow was able to make it through the desert:

“It affected him. We had to advise him to let it go because if he holds on to the pain, he will face the same consequence his brother did. If you are both traveling together and one dies, it is very painful. Even though we are not from the same family as both of them were, one spirit I realized on the desert was even if as Ghanaians I meet someone from Ashanti or Greater Accra, I see all of us as one. It creates a deep kind of love between you and also develops compassion between you so when this happened, I saw it as a tragedy that has happened to my little brother. We therefore spoke to him that he should let it all go and that if he thinks too much about it, it might not help him. “With the desert, there is no helper except God so one should leave everything and look to him. Where you are, you are in between life and death and God is your only savior”. We advised him and it gave him encouragement little by little”

Another participant who returned the encouragement he received during his difficult time on the desert also had this to say:

“After one person died in my team, I started to fear but one guy motivated me that everything will be alright and that I just needed to keep praying and have faith that no one on board will die again. True to his words no one died again. I also offered the same guy some encouragement when things became difficult for him just before we left for Tripoli. He was even crying so I also offered some motivation and he became strong again” (Male, 38 years old)

4.6 Challenges Faced by Irregular Migrants at Destination Countries

Challenges irregular migrants faced in Libya were also explored. The study found that irregular migrants faced challenges related to harassments and arbitrary arrests by security officials, the inability to access healthcare, poor accommodation as well as exploitation and the difficulty in seeking justice.

4.6.1 Inability to Access Formal Healthcare

Since irregular migrants are usually not in possession of valid travelling documents, they are mostly reluctant to access formal healthcare when they fall sick or get injured due to the fear of been arrested. This was one of the major predicament of some respondents in this study. The excerpt below captures the experience of a participant:

“I was not in possession of any legal document I could access a hospital with. At the hospital, they would require the ‘Kaama’[resident permit] document I talked about of which I did not have. This prevented me” (Male, 36 years old).

A 22 year old respondent also had this to say:

“...because our documents were fake, we never went to the hospital; it would not even cross your mind to visit the hospital”.

Another participant elucidated that aside the fear of being arrested, being diagnosed of malaria in Libya could be misinterpreted as a deadly disease since the disease was alien to them:

“...for the Libyan hospitals, we risk being arrested or even given wrong injection. And also, they are not familiar with malaria, so if you report to the hospital with malaria, they may think you have a deadly disease. Some of our people got arrested and imprisoned after visiting the hospital” (Male, 29 years old).

Despite the inability of irregular migrants to access Libyan hospitals, they could receive care should they go in the company of a Libyan or their landlord [employer]. Some participants had this to say:

“Because we lacked legal documents, going to the hospital was difficult unless to the pharmacy. In the instance where we got injured at work, we had to be accompanied by our landlord to the hospital in order to access healthcare or risked being arrested” (Male, 38 years old).

“Aside the pharmacy, your landlord could go and get you some drugs from the hospital. A brother had an eye problem and he was working for a man who worked with the president and in that instance an ambulance came for my brother to the military hospital where he was given drugs and he is presently in Italy” (Male, 22 years old).

4.6.2 Settlement for Poor Accommodation

Another major challenge participants faced during their stay in Libya was that although the option to rent an apartment existed, it was almost a necessity to reside in uncompleted houses due to the mobility of their work and other factors, exposing them to thieves and extreme weather conditions as indicated below:

“Since we are mostly masons, we normally work on uncompleted buildings. Once we get to site, we quickly work on one room where we will lodge till we are done with the entire work. Such rooms have no ceiling or anything that is needed for a decent apartment. We just lay our carpet in such rooms and lodge there. By the time we are done with that project, we mostly get another job offer and the same strategy is applied so I never rented an apartment in Libya during my entire 6 year stay. ... since these uncompleted buildings have no doors or windows, we are sometimes attacked by armed robbers because they perceive us to have money since we are

workers. As a result, we normally hide our money in a hole we dig and cover it with sand until we are moving from that place” (Male, 36 years old).

“...when I begin to state the challenges I faced, ...it is a lot. I stayed in a house without windows or a door. It is like a house that has been roofed but not plastered and with no windows or a door. We talk about how cold it is there so you can imagine a room without windows or a door. You always feel so much cold.” (Male, 26 years old).

Another participant delved deeper into why they ended up in uncompleted buildings, citing mobility and security concerns. This is what he had to say:

“As a mason, renting an apartment is not your priority especially when the site is far away from the available apartment. You can be arrested while returning from work so the safest bet is lodging in one of the uncompleted buildings at the site. If you are lucky and faithful, your employer can link you up with his friend so you just move to the new location and the same strategy is applied” (Male, 48 years old).

Even though this was their reality, some landlords helped in making their stay as well as their excessive exposure to the cold weather bearable:

“We normally work on uncompleted buildings at new sites which are at the outskirts of the towns so we are forced to live there since it makes sense to live closer to where you work. While there, the landlord will give you a blanket. We are able to decorate the rooms with television and sound systems like we do in Ghana. Even when it is in the cold season, the landlord will provide you with a heavy blanket as well as electricity. Sometimes you feel comfortable there than in Ghana but it is not so perfect like living in a well built house in Ghana...” (Male, 35 years old).

4.6.3 Exploitation and Difficulty in Seeking Justice

For a number of respondents, owing to their irregular status, they were victims of occasional exploitation by their employers or indigenes of Libya who either refused to pay them or made only part payment for their services. Sadly, these irregular migrants could not pursue this injustice at the law court due to their irregular status. A case in point is the plight of a 36 year old male respondent who was not only exploited by his employer but also had to pay a fine due to a lie perpetrated by his employer:

“While at work with my other compatriots from Libya and Egypt, a little portion of the sand I was working with high up the building unfortunately poured on my Libyan friend. This brought a little scuffle between us. My Libyan friend threw a hammer at the Egyptian and in retaliation, I also threw something at the Libyan which injured his cheek. The man I was working for reported that I had stabbed my Libyan friend with a knife so I was picked up by the police. At the police station, I was told I cannot battle out a case with a Libyan citizen as he already has 50 percent of the law on his side. I was subsequently put behind bars as I was accused of being responsible for the injury of the Libyan citizen. I later found out that the man I was working for was hesitant to pay me, reason why he orchestrated the lie about the knife just so I could be put behind bars. I was later ordered to pay a fine of 2,600 dinars or risked being imprisoned. My brother and his other friends raised that money which led to my release”.

Another participant had this to say:

“Life as an immigrant is different from being home... We were not paid sometimes for the services we rendered and there was little we could do. After realizing we have wasted our energy, we just look up to God. They saw us as slaves so if they were not touched to pay us, we did not have anyone to petition to. Because of our irregular status as well, there was little the

Ghana embassy could do since we lacked legal documents to pursue such bad treatments in law so we just had to move on” (Male, 41 years old).

A participant who was made to work for free for about 180 days also narrated his ordeal:

“What my brother said is true. Personally I was once arrested at Sabha and sent into a guard[Prison]. I was made to work without pay for about six months until my brother was able to raise the money they required. That was when I gained my freedom” (Male, 48 years old).

4.6.4 Harassments, Arbitrary Arrest and the Incessant Anxiety of Apprehension

Another challenge many irregular migrants faced at their destination was the regular harassment and arbitrary arrests they had to endure which resulted in their incessant anxiety of apprehension especially when they saw security officials. The challenges above was because participants did not have the requisite documents that warranted their stay in the country. A 29 year old man shared his plight:

“...one day on our way home, we met a police checkpoint. We decided to cross the checkpoint on foot before boarding a vehicle because if we picked a vehicle before the checkpoint, we risked being arrested by the officials on the basis of not being in possession of any legal documentation... The security officials noticed us as we crossed the checkpoint on foot so they traced our vehicle, pulled out guns and ordered us to stop... As soon as I got out, one security official held me from the back and hit my head with the back of his gun. I was soaked in blood and they picked me up. At that point, I knew I was finished... I started to feel dizzy and so I was not responding to their questions. They were confused at that point, they did not know where to take me so they sent me to a children’s park and they asked me if I can go home if they left me. I

told them I do not know. So they stopped a taxi and delivered my address to him and he sent me home”.

Another participant narrated how the frequent harassments by security personnel makes them panic anytime they see them:

“The security is very tight. They [security personnel] normally station at the roundabouts or around the traffic lights checking documents of immigrants especially black people. If you are not able to produce the ‘pataaka’ [another form of resident permit], you will most likely be arrested and detained... This makes us jittery anytime we see a police car. We usually take to our heels” (Male, 37 years old).

Even though many irregular migrants faced the challenge of harassments and arbitrary arrest, a participant indicated he was fortunate in that regard:

“Not at all, I did not have any problems with them [security officials] at all. Even at a point, some people we were working with were arrested from our camp but I was spared together with my master. ...I think I was just fortunate... I had a clean conscience while travelling and I was liked in certain areas and so people thought I had some form of protection or charm but I believe it was by the grace of God” (Male, 22 years old)

4.7 Coping Strategies of Irregular Migrants at Destination Countries

In order to deal with the challenges faced by irregular migrants at their destination country, they adopted some coping strategies. From the study, it was found that respondents relied on both problem-focused and emotional-focused coping strategies which included self medication/ reliance on quack doctors, support from family and friends, pseudonymization for survival, religion and spirituality and distraction.

4.7.1 Problem-focused Coping Strategies

Data from the study showed that some participants relied on problem-focused coping strategies to solve their challenges by being proactive in bringing a change. Some of the problem-focused coping strategies identified included self medication/ the reliance on quack doctors, support from friends and family and pseudonymization.

4.7.1.1 Self Medication/ Reliance on Unqualified Health Personnel

The findings of the study revealed that due to the inability of some of the respondents to access formal healthcare in Libya, they resorted to self medication or sought medical care from unqualified health personnel's. The narration that follows reveals how a respondent sought medical care from a 'Nigerian health professional' [possibly a quack professional]:

“Yes, I felt ill at a point but I never visited a hospital facility in Libya. I usually sought healthcare from a fellow Nigerian irregular migrant who had a fair idea about medicine and practiced as a health professional. He was the one we usually visited when we were ill. He mixes the drugs for us. Whether you get healed or not, you are required to keep to your daily schedules unless you die” (Male, 36 years old).

A participant who resorted on self medication due to his inability to visit the hospital explained:

“Since I could not go to the hospital, I used to send a brother to buy drugs from the pharmacy for me. There were no issues with that one so all I did was to send a brother and I would take the drug and continue with my duties the following day...” (Male, 28 years old)

Another respondent who explained that he resorted to self medication unless emergency situations due to the dilapidated state of Libyan hospitals also had this to say:

“Even Libyans themselves do not patronize their hospitals, how much more a foreigner? They usually complain of the dilapidated state of their hospitals so they normally seek healthcare in Tunisia. Therefore, we rely on drugs from pharmacy shops... If it is not a case of an emergency, we do not visit the hospital” (Male, 37 years old)

4.7.1.2 Support from Family and Friends

The data gathered also found that some respondents sought and received support from friends and family members back home when they faced some challenges in Libya. A participant who received support from both his friends in Libya and his wife in Ghana narrated:

“...I began suffering from one sickness to the other and that is what made me return. I began having some serious rashes all over my head to the extent that I shaved to the scalp of my head and was put on medication and yet there was no progress so I called my wife and asked her to go intercede in prayers for me, which she did and by the grace of God it went away. ...I got encouraged by friends and I got support and encouragement from my wife. She even got a pastor for me who usually called and prayed with me often and my brothers in Libya also advised me that the challenge has come but it would not stay for long. This helped me to remain steadfast” (Male, 28 years old)

Another participant explained how the timely help of his friend saved him from a challenge:

“I remember my friend was pivotal in helping me out of a challenge I encountered. I was selling cassettes and drugs like “Adom Koo Capsules” at the time. I was at the market to sell one day when I was apprehended. Someone gave me a hint that before confronting me at the market, they had searched for me at where I was staying so going back home became difficult because they wanted to arrest me at all cost. I called my friend in another town and narrated my ordeal. He

was so helpful. Through him, I was picked up with all my belongings to his place. While at his place, he provided everything including the emotional support I needed until I returned when the initial case died out” (Male, 41 years old).

Another participant explained how the cordial relationship between himself and his friends helped while in Libya:

“I usually spent time with my friends on Fridays talking about a lot of things so I normally returned on Saturday evening encouraged. They also did visit me sometimes. We were there for each other” (Male, 48 years old).

4.7.1.3 Pseudonymization for Survival

From the data gathered, it was revealed that the preferential treatment given to Muslim immigrants by Libyans influenced some respondents to pick up Muslim names and traditions with the hope of receiving some favours from their employers or indigenes. The narrations below given by two respondents confirms the assertion made above:

“Due to the cordial relationship Libyans have with their fellow Muslims, I once told my landlord I was called Ibrahim but I am not a Muslim. Therefore, he usually invited me over to the mosque on Fridays but I always found an excuse. I knew once he knew I was a Muslim, I would receive favours from him especially linking me to job opportunities” (Male, 38 years old).

“Once you identified yourself as a Muslim, they had a special kind of love for you unlike any other person so I identified myself as Abdul Raman and even practiced as a Muslim for a year just for the benefits that came with it. I was never out of job as some Libyans liked my name so they always vouched for me as a good person which helped me secure a lot of job opportunities. A lot of Ghanaians like me picked Islamic names for survival” (Male, 41 years old).

Another participant shared the experience which made him adopt a Muslim name for survival:

“...I remember a bus driver once confronted me just because I had a rosary around my neck on the bus but was very receptive to Yusif my Muslim friend. ...when we alighted, the driver took the lorry fare from me without taking that of my brother. This made me adopt a Muslim name afterwards so I can be in their good books. But during the Ramadan, I revert back to my Christian name...” (Male, 37 years old).

4.7.2 Emotional-focused Coping strategies

The data from the study revealed that some participants used emotional-focused coping strategies in mitigating the stresses associated with their challenges in Libya. This coping strategies served as a buffer or only mitigated their stresses since their challenges persisted. The emotional-focused coping strategies adopted by participants in this study included religion and spirituality as well as distraction.

4.7.2.1 Religion and Spirituality

During their traumatic experiences in Libya, many participants took solace in spirituality and religion as a coping mechanism. Some of the respondents in this study explained the role religion and spirituality played in their lives in dealing with their challenges in Libya:

“Prayer was my daily habit because just going out to buy bread can land you in trouble with the police. Nobody can say they stepped out without saying a word of prayer. We did say a lot of prayers” (Male, 35 years old)

“There were instances where it becomes difficult to get a job and you have to fast and pray for God to open a way for you. The only thing you could do at those times was to pray for God to open a way because calling home to seek spiritual intervention from a fetish priest was not an

option since it would not work. Personally, I prayed and fasted a lot in those times; sometimes from 6am to 12 noon with the hope of securing employment” (Male, 22 years old).

“The challenges never ceased and we did not cease praying, we prayed till our situation became better” (Male, 28 years old).

4.7.2.2 Distraction

From the study, it was found that some participants relied on the use of distraction where they engaged in several activities such as playing games with friends, listening to gospel music and watching Ghanaian movies in an effort to temporarily forget about their challenges. A 26 year old male participant had this to say:

“We did not work on Fridays so we will go to music and video shops to get C.Ds. Also, television and D.V.D was very affordable so we got some. We even at a point could get Ghanaian movies which we watched when we closed from work to entertain ourselves till we would fall asleep. We also purchased Ghanaian music and will play it with our small woofers. We listened to it while working and this served as an escape from our worries”

Another participant who had to involve himself in conversations and jokes with the singular aim of forgetting his worries revealed:

“Since business was good at where I was, my sudden relocation to my friend’s place in another town due to the challenge I encountered brought so much stress because I lost everything. I even lost weight in one week. I was always getting worried about my loss so I started thinking of ways to forget about it. I was initially an introvert but I had to open up by involving myself in the jokes and conversations at the house just to forget my past” (Male, 41 years old).

4.8 Discussion of Findings

This dissertation explores the sources of resilience associated with irregular migration across the Sahara Desert to Libya, the motivation to migrate irregularly as well as the challenges and coping strategies adopted by successful migrants at their destination. Resilience in the context of this study is the ability to migrate irregularly with the ability to withstand the precarious living conditions on the Sahara Desert to achieve a positive outcome. Based on this definition, respondents drew their resilience from internal resources such as [spirituality, mental conditioning to endure, courage and the hope of a prosperous life in Libya] or external factors such as [relying on fellow travellers as a source of resilience]. Irregular migration from Ghana to Libya is a common phenomenon among the indigenes of Dormaa Ahenkro, specifically Akontaanim in the Bono Region of Ghana. From the results, the reasons participants ascribed to their irregular migration were three; namely economic factors, the difficulties in acquiring valid travelling documents and family or community influence which has been alluded by other scholars. According to a study by Tanle (2012b), the main reason for the irregular migration of people from Nkoranza and Techiman Municipalities was economic. The findings of this study corroborated the assertion made by Tanle above. This is possible in the context of this study since the study area of the current research is in the same region as the two study areas from which Tanle collected his data hence there is some commonality regarding the site and occupation or economic level of respondents in both studies. For instance, in the study by Tanle, the main occupation of respondents was subsistence agriculture which is reflected in the current study where majority of the respondents' interviewed were farmers who amongst other factors cited the difficulties in making enough money from their occupation as a major factor for their migration which falls in line with the assumptions of the push pull theory. Furthermore, the current study found that the difficulties in acquiring valid travelling documents also contributed

to the irregular migration of Dormaa Ahenkro indigenes. This finding is in consonance with a study by Suso (2019) which revealed that the difficulties and the overly rigorous process in acquiring valid travelling documents pushes migrants onto irregular routes. From the current study, many participants bemoaned the cumbersome processes and the rigorous nature in acquiring essential travelling documents like VISA and a travelling passport. Due to their low economic standing, lack of education coupled with the likely frustrations that lied ahead of them, respondents were of the view that the irregular route presented them a less stressful means of also migrating since they will most likely be unable to satisfy the requirements of embassies and other recognized institutions. This prompts the need to facilitate the quick processing of important documents like passports which has the propensity to enhance regular migration. As highlighted by Ali (2007), the social prestige and the perceived benefit of migration have the tendency to fuel the rate of migration. The current study found this assertion to be valid as some participants alluded to the influence from their friends and family in their decision to migrate irregularly. In all cases, the influence came at the back of the success stories or lifestyle of returnees, leading to the perpetration of the phenomenon. This was so because most returnees do not mostly reveal or share the negative side of life in Libya to their peers (for example, frequent exploitation and harassments of irregular migrants). As such, their often-one-sided accounts and lavish lifestyles back home influences many others to also migrate irregularly.

Additionally, the unavailability of food and water, vehicle accident, illness/ lack of access to healthcare, the unavailability of shelter from harsh desert conditions, and armed robbery were some of the challenges irregular migrants faced on the Sahara Desert. A study by Press (2017) found that the unfortunate incidence of armed robbery characterized migration across the Sahara Desert. Some of the participants in this study indicated that the presence of armed robbers on the

desert posed significant danger to their lives and that of others. Knowing very well that irregular migrants are very vulnerable on the desert, these armed groups mostly attacked migrants in search of money or other valuables. However, bearing in mind the likely dangers that lied ahead of them, most migrants were mostly prepared against any eventualities from these criminals by hiding their valuables mainly money in their anus as some respondents confessed which in itself has grave health implications. Similarly, a report by IOM (2020) identified dehydration/starvation, vehicle accident, exposure to the sun and the lack of healthcare as some of the main causes of death on the Sahara Desert. This study corroborated the findings above as respondents' own narrations indicated the death of some colleagues who either had underlying illness or could not simply access proper medical care after encountering the extremely harsh conditions on the desert. Although many participants bemoaned the unavailability of water on the Sahara Desert, three respondents revealed that they met some shallow wells where they refilled their containers. However, according to the accounts of these three respondents, the wells on the desert are very few hence migrants are only lucky when the driver of their team uses a stretch that has one of these wells. This is possible since there is not any single route on the Sahara Desert, but more importantly, it shows how scarce water can be on the desert. Similarly, even though the Sahara Desert predominantly lacks shelter against the harsh desert condition, a respondent revealed the presence of a "ghetto" (uncompleted building) at a new site along the desert where migrants who are severely hurt or sick were sent at a fee. Such a place also aids migrants to be resilient as they get back on their feet and join a new team moving towards Libya. It is worth pointing out however that as findings of this study reveals the difficulty in accessing food or water on the Sahara Desert, irregular migrants transiting through the Sonoran Desert in the Southwestern part

of the United States of America also experienced similar challenges as posited by De La Rosa (2018).

As found from this study as well as other studies by Lemus-Way and Johansson (2019) and Lusk et al., (2019), both irregular migrants on the Sahara Desert and as well as those transitioning through Mexico towards the US shared similar sources of resilience. It was found that in both contexts, migrants ascribed their source of resilience to spirituality, endurance, courage, and the hope of a prosperous life at their destination country. Relative to this study, the fear of poverty back home as well as the possibility of the accumulation of wealth in Libya propelled respondents to press on despite the existential dangers and challenges on the desert. However, it is worthy of note that there was a similarity in the external source of resilience of migrant both on the Sahara Desert and their counterparts who transition through Mexico to the US. Although from this study, almost all respondents did not migrate with a member of their family as documented in the study of Lemus-Way and Johansson (2019), some participants in this study nonetheless relied on their fellow colleagues to make it through the Sahara Desert. This shows a reasonable level of co-dependence on the Sahara Desert (African case) vis-à-vis the South American case (Lemus-Way & Johansson, 2019).

From this study, it was evident that participants faced multiple challenges emanating from their irregularity in Libya which included settlement for poor accommodation, exploitation and difficulty in seeking justice, harassments and arbitrary arrest as well as the inability to access healthcare leading to the incessant anxiety of apprehension. The difficulties with access to healthcare was a major challenge respondents faced at their host country which is consistent with the findings of studies by Poduval et al., (2015), Schorvers (2010) and Tanle (2012a). In this regard, participants from this study explained that they feared being diagnosed of malaria, a

parasitic disease which is alien to the Libyan society. Since a blood examination is always carried out before patients receives care in Libya, testing positive for malaria meant migrants were thought to be in the position of possibly spreading a deadly disease in the country, a development which could land them in trouble (for instance deportation). Further evidence from the study showed that being an irregular migrant without valid documents in Libya also contributed to respondents' inability to access healthcare for fear of being arrested and the possible deportation or incarceration that could follow. As such, they avoided seeking formal healthcare altogether unless they were in the company of a Libyan who would vouch for them. Due to this challenge, participants of this study resorted to some alternative health seeking strategies such as the reliance on self medication and the services of potentially unqualified health personnel's which ties in with the findings of Biswas et al., (2011) and Tanle (2012a). Relying mainly on such alternative health seeking strategies poses grave health implications particularly death since irregular migrants could be misdiagnosed or offered dangerous concoctions as drugs by unlicensed health professionals.

Also, Tanle (2012a) and Lind (2020) found that many undocumented migrants in Libya and elsewhere were occupants of poor housing facilities. Evidence from this study affirmed the finding above. Participants revealed that due to the mobile nature of their work (mostly masons) and the fear of being apprehended by security officials on their way home, living in uncompleted buildings with no windows or doors became necessary, a situation which exposed them to armed robbery and the extreme weather conditions in Libya. However, it is the case that some irregular migrants were able to rent an apartment due to the nature of their work as well. A 29 year old respondent who worked as a plumber explained: *yes, we were able to rent an apartment... Some of the apartments were good, others too not so good. But it all depends on your ability to pay.*

...someone will only be concerned with only where he will lay his head but someone will want more than that. ...also, others do not rent an apartment because of the nature of their work like masons. They are mobile. But for our work, we had to rent an apartment.

Unfortunately, exploitation and the difficulty in seeking justice constitute a common predicament of irregular migrants in Libya (Tanle, 2012a). This was found to be true in this study as some participants revealed that they were sometimes not paid for the services they rendered. Some Libyan employers are empowered to normally resort to this unfair treatment since they are informed about the existing difficulties in seeking justice especially against an indigene if one is an undocumented migrant. Such unfair treatments can cause untold trauma for many irregular migrants who can even be detained, deported or incarcerated should they seek for justice from appropriate institutions as their continuous stay in the country in itself is in breach of immigration laws. Bearing in mind the personal or family economic loss that comes with unplanned deportation or incarceration, irregular migrants are forced to endure such unfair treatments in silence (Bloch, 2010). Notwithstanding the unfair treatment perpetrated by most Libyans against irregular migrants, to some extent, some of them were hospitable and caring. A case in point is the account of a 35 year old respondent who revealed that they were sometimes provided with some essentials like electricity or heavy blanket for protection from the vagaries of the cold during winter season. Also, some of the respondents alluded to being escorted to the hospital by their landlords which were all glimpses of care and hospitality.

Another issue which was frequently discussed by participants was the targeted harassments and arbitrary arrest of irregular migrants in Libya. They explained that since they were not in possession of any requisite legal travelling document, they were victims of security brutalities anytime they were apprehended. Such experiences relegate irregular migrants to the peripheral in

their host countries. For some participants of this study, seeing any security official was a very stressful moment since they had their fate hanging in the balance (for instance, they could be harassed, arrested, or serve prison sentence for breach of immigration laws). As a result, others took to their heels upon seeing any security official in Libya. A similar finding was reported by Tanle (2012a) and Tanle (2012b). These studies revealed that irregular migrants in Libya were victims of frequent harassments and arrests by security personnel due to their inability to provide valid travelling documents.

In this study, it was found that in the face of the challenges discussed above, participants resorted to several coping strategies for survival. Respondents relied on both problem-focused coping strategies (self medication, support from family and friends and pseudonymization for survival) and emotional-focused coping strategies (religion and spirituality as well distraction).

Several studies have found that in times of difficulty in their destination country, irregular migrants often rely on religion or spirituality, diversion, and encouragement from friends and family as coping strategies (Olukotun et al., 2019; Lavie-Ajayi & Slonim-Nevo, 2017; Kam, Pérez Torres & Steuber Fazio, 2018; Ni Raghallaigh & Gilligan, 2010). Evidence from this study revealed that a significant coping strategy (emotional-focused) embraced by respondents to contend with their problems was the dependence on religion or spirituality. For some respondents, the reliance on a metaphysical being through prayers and fasting served as a crucial source of hope and strength to persevere amidst their uncertainties. Also, it served as a way for respondents to receive personal victories like recovery in the midst of their struggles such as illness as well as offering a change in the relational meaning of the challenges they were faced with even though their actual circumstances were still the same. From the findings of this study, when respondents could not gain any support from their friends or through any other means

during challenges times such as illness and unemployment, their focus was shifted to prayers and fasting (emotional-focused coping strategy). This confirms the assertion by Lazarus (1993) that emotional-focused coping strategies serves as the best choice especially when nothing useful can be done to change the present situation of people. Just like participants in this study, the findings of Olukotun et al., (2019) reveals how some undocumented African women in the US relied on prayers and fasting as a coping strategy, showing the crucial role that religion or spirituality plays in the lives of some irregular migrants. Another emotional-focused coping technique embraced by some respondents in this study was distraction. Some respondents adopted distraction with the hope of shifting their attention off their ongoing challenges. As a result, they engaged and entertained themselves with card games, gospel music and Ghanaian movies. Engaging in these activities served as an avenue for respondents to temporarily forget about the challenges and sorrows they were entwining in. This finding is in agreement with the studies by Kam, Pérez Torres and Steuber Fazio (2018) and Ni Raghallaigh and Gilligan (2010) who found that distraction or in other cases diversion played a key role in the successful coping of undocumented migrants.

Furthermore, participants in this study relied on the support from their family and friends as a means to cope with their challenges in Libya. This finding confirms the works by Lavie-Ajayi and Slonim-Nevo (2017) as well as Kam, Pérez Torres and Steuber Fazio (2018) which reveals that assistance from family and friends serves as a crucial support for irregular migrants in distress or facing challenges. Indeed, family and friends offer both emotional and informational support to irregular migrants. A case in point is when a 28 year old participant in this study who received support and encouragement from his friends in Libya and his wife back home during his challenging period of illness. Such support from close relations are not only reassuring, but

toughens up migrants to press on against all odds. More importantly, the current study found a novel finding in the form of pseudonymization for survival. This is where participants adopted Islamic names in Libya with the singular aim of winning favours from indigenes. Due to how Libyans easily got along with their fellow Muslim brothers, many participants in this study capitalized on the opportunities that came with being a Muslim. As such, more studies need to be conducted on this aspect of coping strategy by migrants to develop it further.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the summary of the findings of this study, conclusions as well as the recommendations offered. This is to proffer policies that can help in promoting safe, orderly and regular migration.

5.2 Summary of Main Findings

The present study examined the resilience of irregular migration across the Sahara Desert to Libya. Relying on the qualitative research techniques specifically both the in-depth interview and focus group discussion, various factors were identified as the motivating forces accounting for irregular migration from Ghana. These factors were (a) economic (b) family/community influence and (c) the difficulties in acquiring valid travelling documents. The study found that the difficulties in making enough money from their employment back home vis-à-vis the success stories of successful returnees and the difficulties in acquiring valid travelling documents formed the interwoven desire of respondents to migrate irregularly.

Also, it was found that irregular migrants travelling across the Sahara Desert encountered dreadful challenges. These challenges included the unavailability of water and food, the unavailability of shelter from the harsh desert conditions, vehicle accidents, illness/ lack of access to healthcare, and armed robbery resulting in the death of some migrants on the desert.

Due to the challenges enumerated above, the findings of this study revealed that many irregular migrants on the Sahara Desert were possessors of both internal and external source of resilience

which helped them in making it through the desert. The internal sources of resilience identified were spirituality, the mental conditioning to endure the harsh challenges on the desert, courage and the hope of a prosperous life at their destination (Libya). For the external sources of resilience, migrants explained that they relied on their fellow travellers when the challenges on the desert became unbearable.

Findings from this study also revealed that since respondents did not migrate with the requisite travelling documents, they were survivors of many challenges at their host country (Libya). This included the inability to access healthcare, settlement for poor accommodation due to the nature of their work, exploitation, and the difficulty in seeking justice, harassments and arbitrary arrests leading to the incessant anxiety of apprehension.

However, it was revealed that respondents employed both the problem-focused and emotional-focused coping strategies to cope with the above-mentioned challenges. The problem-focused coping strategies employed by respondents included self medication/ the reliance on unqualified health professionals, support from family and friends and pseudonymization for survival while the emotional-focused coping strategies included religion and spirituality, and distraction.

5.3 Conclusions of the Study

The literature reviewed and the findings of this study points to the reality that the desire to migrate irregularly is largely due to economic reasons, specifically poverty largely due to low income and the expected economic benefits in Libya which is in consonance with the push-pull theory. Also, irregular migrants faced stressful and dreadful challenges on the Sahara Desert en route to Libya due to the unavailability of basic necessities of life such as healthcare, food and water leading to the loss of many lives. Even though migrants were possessors of both internal and external sources of resilience which aided some of them to make it across the desert, the

continuous unaccounted loss of lives on the Sahara Desert prompts the need for irregular migration from Ghana to be taken seriously in order to curb this rising humanitarian challenge. As posited by IOM (2020), although more people die while crossing the Sahara Desert as compared to the Mediterranean Sea, only 1,898 deaths have been officially documented on the Sahara Desert since 2014 due to lack of data.

Furthermore, the fact that these irregular migrants after making it through the desert are again met with a new set of challenges at their destination due to their irregular status is an extremely worrying development. Even though many migrants in this study elucidated that they employed both the problem-focused and emotional-focused coping strategy (Lazarus, 1993) to deal with their challenges and difficulties in Libya, it did not leave out the fact that such challenges could potentially have a negative impact on their lives such as the development of psycho-social problems amongst others. It is thus impossible to leave unaddressed the primary causes of irregular migration as well as address the hazardous challenges irregular migrants face in Libya.

5.4 Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are advanced:

First, findings from the study indicated that irregular migrants who are mostly in their youthful ages leave the country due to low income, especially from their farming activities. However, it is worthy of note that there have been many programmes by both past and current governments to support the youth in farming activities like the Planting for Food and Job initiative. Based on this, it is recommended that the government of Ghana extend its agricultural support programmes to many hinterlands to benefit a lot of people. But more importantly, the government should ensure that the crops of these farmers are bought at reasonable prices as well as introduce other

economic programmes that has the ability to create reasonable paying employment opportunities to encourage the youth to remain and work towards national development.

Also, the study found that acquiring valid travelling documents to migrate was difficult. Since migrating in a safe and orderly manner require the possession of valid travelling documents, it is recommended that the government speeds up its process of opening additional Passport Application Centers (PAC) across the country to lesson the cumbersome and frustrating experiences applicants go through in acquiring valid travelling documents. Also, the Government of Ghana should institute measures in ensuring efficiency at all centers.

Additionally, the study revealed that the family and community influence fuels the irregular migration of respondents since successful returnees from whom they take inspiration did not migrate through the regular channel. Also, even though some of the respondents knew about the requirements of migrating in a regular way, they were reluctant to follow due process. In view of this, it is recommended that the government of Ghana with the help of international organizations such as IOM intensifies education on regular migration as well as the pitfalls of irregular migration. This should be targeted to communities, schools, churches and other equally important social settings.

Moreover, respondents revealed that they could not seek help from Ghana's Embassy in Libya during their challenging times. This brought untold hardships to irregular Ghanaian migrants in Libya. Due to this, it is recommended that the government of Ghana through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration equips Ghana's embassy in Libya to be able to offer some support, and or counselling for Ghanaians irregular migrants in Libya as well as facilitate the return of those who wish to return home. This will help in lessening the plight of our

countrymen in distress. Addressing these challenges would help prevent many avoidable deaths and challenges of irregular migrants.

Lastly, it is recommended that other researchers consider the inclusion of some females into the samples of their studies even though this study fell short of it due to the unavailability of the only known female returnee at Akontaanim.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: INFORMED CONSENT

UNIVERSITY OF GHANA



CENTRE FOR MIGRATION STUDIES

INFORMED CONSENT

Dear Respondent,

My name is Bismark Akoto and I am an MA student at University of Ghana’s Centre for Migration Studies. As part of the requirement for the award of an MA Degree, I am conducting a research on “**Resilience of Irregular Migration of Ghanaians across the Sahara Desert to Libya**”.

I would be grateful if you would spend some time with me. Any information provided for this study would be treated with the utmost confidentiality and anonymity. Participation in this research is voluntary and responses are for academic purposes only.

Signature of Respondent

Date

.....

.....

Thank you for your acceptance to partake in this research.

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE (IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW)

UNIVERSITY OF GHANA



CENTRE FOR MIGRATION STUDIES

INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. Background Information

Can you please tell me about yourself? Probe for:

Age

Marital Status

Level of education

Employment status etc

2. Pre-migration Conditions

Can you please share with me why you decided to migrate through the Sahara Desert?

Probe for:

Work engaged in before travelling

Conditions in the community before travelling

Factors that influenced the decision to migrate.

Perception of the Sahara Desert prior to migration

Source of finance and reasons behind the choice of route etc

3. Challenges on the desert

Can you share with me some of the challenges you encountered in the desert? Probe for:

Access to food, water, shelter, robbery incidents, inadequate resources (money) etc

Did you witness any death?

What dangerous thing happened to someone aside death and how did it affect the person's journey?

Did the loss of life or any dangerous thing that happened to someone affect you emotionally?

4. Sources of Resilience

Can you please share with me what kept you going on the desert?

Why did you choose the source of resilience above?

Do you have any knowledge of what kept other migrants going?

Were these other motivations a shared one? As in, did many other people share in the same source of resilience?

5. Challenges at the Destination country.

Can you share with me some of the challenges you encountered at your destination country and how they affected you? Probe for:

Access to healthcare, housing, employment, harassment by security officials, safety etc.

6. Coping Strategies Adopted by Irregular Migrants.

Can you please share with me the strategies you employed to deal with the challenges encountered?

Thank you very much for your time. I really appreciate your time.

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW GUIDE (FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION)

UNIVERSITY OF GHANA



CENTRE FOR MIGRATION STUDIES

INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. I would humbly ask everyone to introduce himself. Can you tell us your names?

Probe for Age, marital Status, level of education, name of the country migrated to etc

2. Can you please share with us why you decided to migrate through the Sahara Desert? Probe for source of finance, reasons behind choice of route etc
3. Can you share with us some of the challenges you encountered in the desert? Probe for access to food, water, shelter, robbery incidents, inadequate resources (money) etc
4. Can you please share with us what kept you going on the desert?
5. Can you please share with us some of the challenges you encountered at your destination country and how they affected you? Probe for access to healthcare, housing, employment, harassment by security officials, safety etc
6. Can you please share with us the strategies you employed to deal with the challenges encountered?