

Demography and Social Stratification of Refugees at the Oru Refugee Camp, Ogun State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Forced migration/refugee status is as old as man, ever increasing and literature is sparse when searching for references regarding demography among this very important population in Oru camp. This study set out to determine the demography and social stratification of refugees at Oru refugee camp, Nigeria. Subjects were adult (18-55yrs) males and females, 100 in two groups: local residents and refugees that just moved into camp within last 6months. A questionnaire was used to determine the demographic spread of inmates and their social standing prior to flight. The refugees' population comprised of Liberians, Sierra Leoneans, Sudanese, Congolese, Nigeriens, Rwandans and Senegalese in order of frequency of occurrence. War and famine are significant reason for displacement. Efforts should be geared towards good governance in Africa since failed governments often degenerate to warring and at best unrests because war and unrests are the main reasons for flight in the studied refugee camp.

Keywords: Refugee, Migration, Internally Displaced Persons [IDPs], Demography.

1. Introduction

Compulsory mass migrations have occurred throughout history and have molded the world we live in. The reasons why people leave their homes include civil strife, armed conflict, misery – hunger and malnutrition. Aside from the massive loss of lives, there is also destruction of physical, economic and social infrastructures, the collapse of civil societies, the breakdown of family units and the displacement of its people in unprecedented numbers (Gogalkrishna 2005).

The United Nations 1951 convention relating to the status of refugees and its 1967 protocol, define “refugee” as “a person who owing to well founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion is outside the country of his nationality and unable or unwilling to avail the protection of his country”.

The African Union (AU) Convention governing the specific aspects of refugee problems in Africa, 1969, has extended the definition above. Accordingly, “every person who owing to external aggression, occupation, foreign domination or events seriously disturbing public order in either part or whole of his country of origin or nationality is compelled to leave his place of habitual residence in order to seek refuge in another place outside his country of origin or nationality are refugees (OAU 1969)”. This definition has some important implications. Firstly, by moving away from the Geneva Convention well-founded fear of persecution standard, the AU convention explicitly gives credence to the fact that refugee exodus could be the result of factors of a more general nature, intrinsic, and of primary importance to that particular country in question, rather than to the individual subjective status or fears of the refugee.

Secondly, it expands the number of persons who could legitimately be termed as refugees by including those not protected by the provisions of the Geneva conventions, that is, those unable to prove an individual basis of well founded fear of persecution and yet have fled their countries and unwilling to return.

Thirdly, this omnibus gesture is thought to have resulted from the African notion and belief of being ones brother's keeper. Communities are closely hewn with households consisting of extended families and beneficiaries of both sexes in terms of economics, finance, emotion and security needs, if such a household is facing persecution all members of the family would have to move together. However, in the largely nuclear families of European communities with emphasis on individual rights rather than group right, individuals directly affected can flee leaving others behind since the state or nation state will cater for the needs of those left behind.

Fourthly, at the outset of League of Nations and evolution of United Nations, largely only Europe was in the front burner hence the decision made during pre and post World War I and II are largely European tailored. Thus, with the establishment of the organization for African unity (OAU) Africa union (AU) in 1969 decided to Africanise the refugee definition.

Internally displaced persons (IDPs) are essentially refugees within borders or territorial enclave and this group of people suffers the effect of migration. These two terms can be likened to the two sides of a coin – head or tail just being semantics. It is clear that the category one falls depends on the cause and course of displacement or forced migration (Kohn 1998 , Odiaka 2005).

This study therefore set out to determine the demographics of refugees at Oru refugee camp. It will make an assessment of the distribution of the refugees in Oru refugee camp and determine the extent of labour movement/shift consequent upon forced migration as well as determine the cause(s) of forced migration of the refugees.

2: SUBJECTS AND METHOD

2.1: **Background:** Following the massive influx of refugees into Nigeria in middle 1990s the federal government of Nigeria established a permanent camp for refugees at Oru, via Ijebu-Ode a town in Eastern part of Ogun State, in south western Nigeria. The location was a former teachers' training college with boarding facilities, playground, library, health centre, hand pump wells and pit latrines. These visitors are seen daily milling around and looking forlorn. Their nationalities and pre-displacement status usually constitute heated debates among passersby. To resolve the debates therefore, I decided to study the demography of the refugees because their settlement and acceptance will be facilitated when they are better known and understood.

2.2: **Sampling:** Two study groups were used, the Oru community and the refugee camp.

The nominal list of the population revealed a total of 4,200; three thousand are adults above 18 years of age. Out of these, only three hundred moved in within the last six months. The list consists of all nationalities one after the other showing lists of families as well as that of unaccompanied young children. Housing is on household basis and singles as well as unaccompanied are housed in dormitories depending on the sex. Only those refugees that came in within the last six months were studied because those that have stayed longer might have adjusted to the environment. Simple random sampling method was used to employing use of ballot papers for the study population (300) out of which 100 were sampled (ie 200 'no' and 100 'yes'), the ballot box was taken to their residences as identified from above. Controls were drawn from the host community of Oru made up of a population of about fifty thousand (50,000) people by multistage sampling and of same size as the subjects. From the five wards in the town, one was chosen for study by random sampling (1 'Yes', 4 'No') and within the ward odd numbered houses on each street were approached for sampling. Each ward had differing number of streets but the sampled one had in each house, a male and a female were studied by simply finding out the total number of eligible adults and writing out 'NO' for all but one 'YES'. This was continued until the total numbers of samples (100) were obtained.

2.3: **Ethical consideration:** Ethical clearance was obtained from appropriate authorities; written and oral consent were obtained from subjects. Subjects were adults (18-55 years) males and females, 100 in each group that cut across all the groups of refugees – Liberians, Sierra Leoneans, Sudanese, Congolese and Nigerians in the camp. These were initially contacted through their representatives and the camp commandant.

2.4: **Data collection, sample collection and analysis:** Questionnaire on demography and refugee status was administered by the investigator (interviewer administered).

Statistical analysis was by Microsoft Excel software package.

2.5: **Limitation of study:** The study would be best suited for displaced persons and refugees in flight or refugees just arriving at the camp. The subjects here are camp based and had to be limited to periods not more than six months stay in the camp.

3. RESULT

56% of the local resident population is between the 30-39 years age range with only one in the 50-59 years age range. The vast majority (79%) of the refugee population are under 40 years of age and 95% of them being under 50 years of age. 86% of the studied refugee population was displaced by war, 10% by famine and none voluntarily or for economic reason. Almost all the refugees (95%) are willing to return to their home country at the earliest opportunity. 42% of local residents attended secondary school, 31% attended only primary school and 13% had tertiary education while 14% never had any formal education. 63% of the refugees had secondary education, 18% and 17% had tertiary and primary education respectively while 2% never had any formal education. Farming is the predominant occupation of both populations. Others are occupations like clergy, banking, football, athletics, catering, painting and nursing. Barbering included hairdressing and beautician. There are more males in both studied populations but the ratio of males/females is larger in the refugee population.

4. DISCUSSION

The studied populations are comparable since the respondents are from the same locality while the difference is only in the circumstances warranting each population's presence, nationalities and their life experience.

The refugees' population comprised of Liberians, Sierra Leoneans, Sudanese, Congolese, Nigerians, Rwandans and Senegalese in order of frequency of occurrence while the local residents are made up of Nigerians with only two Ghanaians (fig.1).

Educationally, the refugees reportedly have attained a higher level of education. 63% of refugees vs 42% of local residents completed secondary education. Similarly, 18% of refugees and 13% of local residents

completed tertiary education (figs 2 &3).

The occupations of the studied populations are of particular interest because of the similarities and the plurality of the occupation (fig4). The occupations under others include engineering, athletics, banking, catering, painting, football, clergy, accounting and banking.

The age distribution of the two populations is similar (Table 4). It is however disturbing that 79% of the refugee population are active adults between 20-39years, and 95% between 20-49years (UNICED 1997, WHO Bulletin 1995). This shows how devastating the effect of forced migration can be on the community. Looking at the mean age of the refugee population, 32.9, one can imagine the colossal loss to their home nations. These people are in the prime of their productive age, full of energy and skills and ideas just disadvantaged because of the displacement across borders. Some of the special skills of these refugees can be lost if the host community is not ideal for such skills in terms of raw materials or demand or both.

5. CONCLUSION

Efforts should be geared towards good governance in Africa since failed governments often degenerate to warring and at best unrests. There is need for sincerity on the part of the government while tolerance and endurance is to be exhibited by the populace so that there will be tranquility in the nations concerned. Nations should have emergency and disaster response/management organizations if refugee generation is to be reduced.

We should all be concerned about the plight of the ‘unsecured population on the move’ with no specific place above in mind. Like Dr Deng, all hands should be on deck to assist the displaced within borders as well (Deng 1996).

NB; At the time of this publication, this camp has been closed by the Nigerian government.

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Illustrations

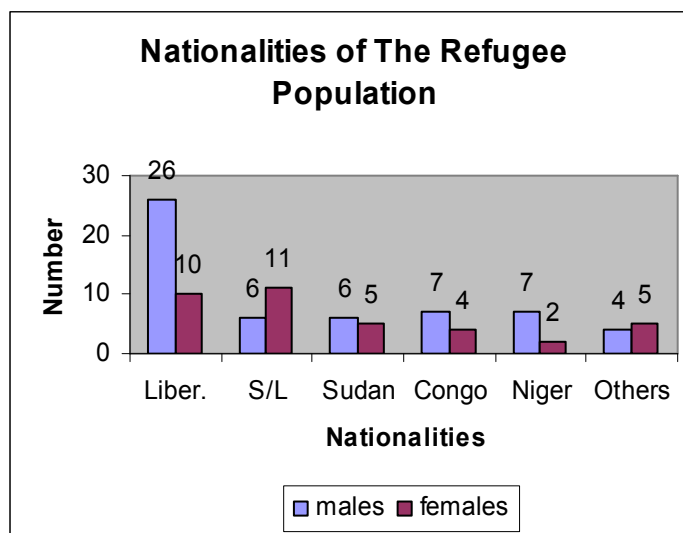


Figure 1: The distribution of the refugee population by countries of origin. Others here included Rwanda, Senegal, while Liber and S/L represent Liberia and Sierra Leone respectively. Liberian refugees are in the majority (28%), followed by Sierra Leonean refugees (18%) while Rwandans and Senegalese are in the minority.

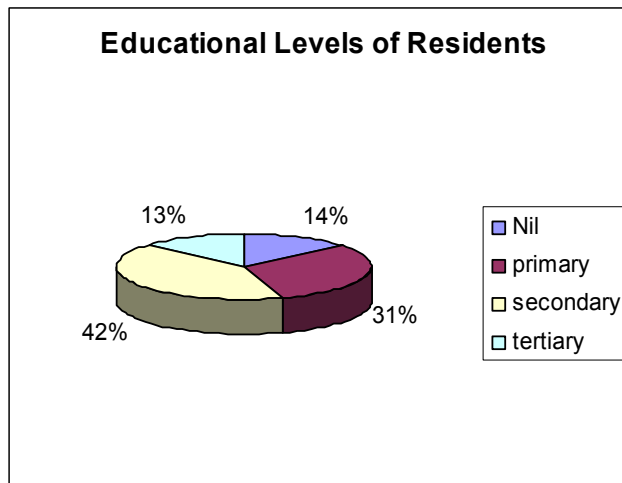


Figure 2: The educational levels of the local residents.

42% of local residents attended secondary school, 31% attended only primary school and 13% had tertiary education while 14% never had any formal education.

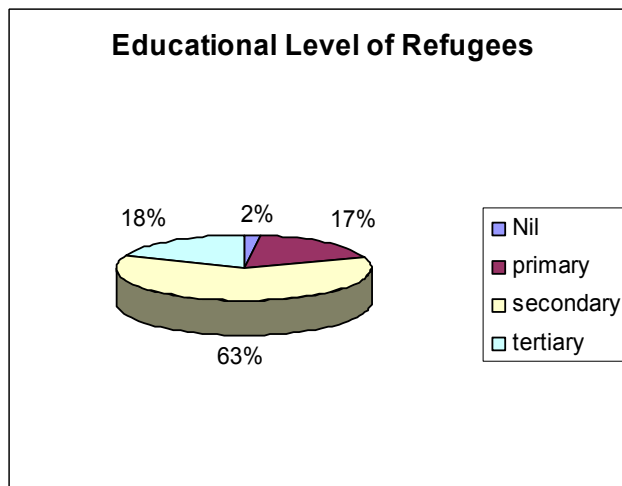


Figure 3: The educational levels of the refugees.

63% of the refugees had secondary education, 18% and 17% had tertiary and primary education respectively while 2% never had any formal education.

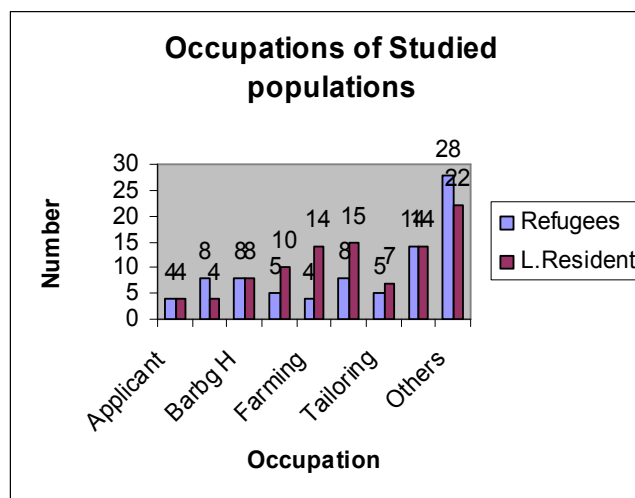


Figure 4: The histogram showing the occupations of the studied populations.

Farming is the predominant occupation of both populations. Included in others here are occupations like clergy, banking, footballing, athletics, catering, painting and nursing. Barbing included hairdressing and beautician.

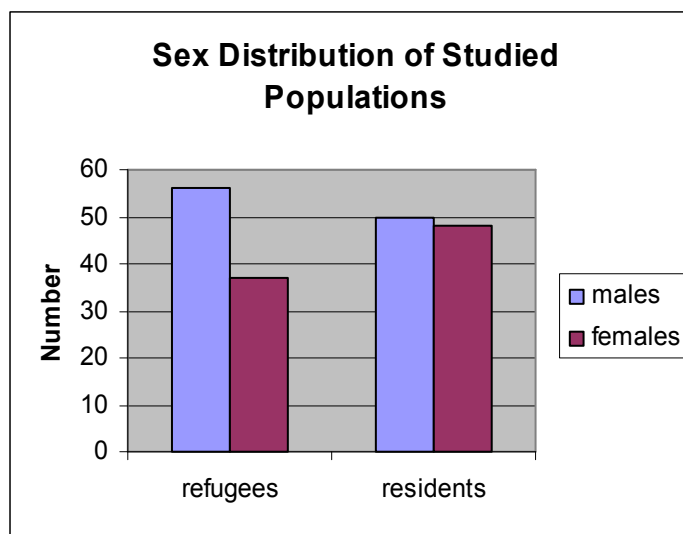


Figure 5: The sex distribution of studied populations

There are more males in both studied populations but the ratio of males/females is larger in the refugee population.

Table 1: The Age distribution of the local Oru resident population.

Age	Frequency	Cum. Frequency	Percentage
10-19	0	0	0
20-29	27	27	28
30-39	56	83	57
40-49	14	97	14
50-59	1	98	1

56% of the local resident population is between the 30-39years age range with only one in the 50-59years age range.

Table 2: The age distribution of the refugee population at Oru.

Age	Frequency	Cum. Frequency	Percentage
10-19	1	1	1
20-29	33	34	36
30-39	40	74	43
40-49	15	89	16
50-59	4	93	4

This table shows that the vast majority (79%) of the refugee population are under 40years of age and 95% of them being under 50years of age.

Table 3: The reason/cause of displacement of the refugees

Reason for flight	Frequency	Percentage
War	80	86
Famine	9	10
Drought	1	1
Persecution	2	2
Genocide	1	1
Economics/voluntary	0	0

This table shows that 86% of the studied refugee population was displaced by war, 10% by famine and none voluntarily or for economic reason.

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