

Chapter 8

Role of the Media on Migrants' Vulnerability to Health Hazards

Olayinka Susan Ogundoyin

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2063-6247>

Bowen University, Iwo, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

Health is an important aspect of human existence. Good health depends on a variety of factors like physical, biological, economic, and environmental factors. These factors have a contributory effect on the total well-being of a person positively or negatively. One of the negative effects is migration. Illegal migration has helped in the spread of communicable and non-communicable diseases. Many migrants are unaware of the health implication of migration because they are not equipped with necessary information for informed decision. This information can only be made available through the media. There has been a paucity of literature on migration and health. This chapter sought to examine how the media has helped to disseminate information that encourage or discourage people to migrate. It was recommended that the media work in concert with government and non-governmental organizations to provide information that would show case the health challenges migrants face. It also recommended that testimonies of survivors should be reported in a way that would discourage potential migrants.

INTRODUCTION

Migration is an essential part of human life. Human beings migrate for many reasons, part of which is either for economic reasons or a better standard of living. Irrespective of what the reason is, migrants need to be healthy in order to be functional in their host countries. Migration is recognized to be the social determinant of health; it makes individual easily vulnerable socially, physically and mentally. Health is an essential factor for the successful running, governance and sustainable development of a given nation. In the case of migration, little attention is paid to the health status of the migrants especially when the migration is illegal. When migration is legal, migrants are exposed to many opportunities which include access to work, education, basic facilities (like water, gas, electricity etc.), insurance and health

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-8960-1.ch008

facilities. While these opportunities are not accessible to illegal immigrants which could subject them to many harsh conditions. However, female illegal immigrants survive on prostitution in order to earn a living and take care of their loved ones back at home; some are even turned to sex slaves. This sexual activity is a way of transmitting communicable diseases from the migrants to the slave masters and vice versa. Gushulak and MacPherson (2006) note that there is a relationship between disease, illness, travel and migration. They opine that these four elements have historical source that has always influenced modern medical activities. These activities focus more on the recognition, identification and management of illnesses, diseases or other health related issues in illegal immigrants. Therefore, the media needs to play the role of educating the general public about the importance of not getting themselves involved in illegal migration. There is also the need for potential immigrants to know the dangers of illegal migration since they can contract many communicable diseases because of their tendency to live and interact together in an overcrowded environment during the course of their movements. This is essentially the function of the media through appropriate sensitization of the populace. Undocumented migrants are more susceptible to poor health outcomes due to limiting policies on access to health services (Arcury, Grzywacz, Sidebottom & Wiggins, 2013; Panikkar, Woodin, Brugge, Hyatt, & Gute, 2014 and Reid & Schenker, 2016). These illegal migrants are at a disadvantage because they work tirelessly to make a living for themselves. Whenever there is a need to seek for healthcare services, they refrain from doing so because of fear of arrest, detention or even deportation (Moyce & Schenker, 2018). The mass media have been effective in carrying out their duties in terms of informing the public about the plight of illegal immigrants, government's prompt intervention and the alarming migratory flow experienced at specific periods (Piotrowski, 2010). For example, many media outlets in sub-Saharan Africa are flooded with stories of migrants travelling through the Mediterranean Sea and the Sahara Desert with statistics of death tolls of both old and young people including children and infants. Testimonies of repatriated migrants together with their unpleasant experiences are broadcast in order to discourage prospective migrants from embarking on such tortuous and dangerous journeys. However, adequate scholarly attention has not been paid to the health implication of being an illegal immigrant on the individual, family and host country. Also, knowledge about issues concerning migration health is key to enabling communities to maintain good health and high level of patients' safety for the entire population. It is, therefore, imperative to place emphasis on the importance of the media in educating and enlightening the entire public about migrants' vulnerability to health hazards and how to forestall the spread of communicable diseases which can be contracted through exposure to infected persons, effect of climate change and the dangers illegal migration can cause in terms of not getting access to adequate health care as may be needed because of their illegal status.

Operational Definition of Terms

- **Migrants:** People who move from one place to another for greater opportunities.
- **Illegal/Irregular Migrants:** Those who do not have the legal permit or authorization to travel, reside or work in a given country other than their country of origin.
- **Hazards:** Problems, challenges or dangers.
- **Climate Change:** The difference in the weather condition an individual is used to. It might be either one of the two extremes of temperature (cold and hot climate) or both which can cause health hazards. It could also mean environmental pollution (air, water, food, etc.).
- **Vulnerability:** The predisposition or susceptibility of a person to dangers.

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