

**THE CHALLENGES OF USING FOCUS GROUP
DISCUSSION METHOD IN SOCIAL SCIENCES
RESEARCH: CASE STUDY OF LIBYAN
RETURNEES IN BENIN CITY (2016 – 2018)**

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Abstract

This study attempted to address the experiential challenges that may accompany the use of Focus Group Discussion method, using Libyan Returnees in Benin City, as a case study. The reason for choosing Libyan returnees for this study was informed by the characterisation of Benin City as a major hub for irregular migrants setting off from Nigeria to other countries. Qualitatively designed, the researcher conducted three focus group discussions in Benin City in the month of August 2019. Based on the data gathered from these group discussions, it was found that identifying and accessing Libyan returnees in Benin City for a focus group discussion was difficult because Libyan returnees do not have any form of identification that distinguished them from other Benin City inhabitants. Besides, there were some level of suspicion amongst members of the group as a result of their experiences in Libya and other locations outside the country, and that challenge could deflate the quality and amount of information. The paper recommended that there was need for the appropriate use of FGD method to investigate less sensitive topics that would encourage participants to freely express their views. Second, focus group discussion method should be deployed along with at least one other method of gathering data – questionnaire, interview or observation – for a research exercise, so as to mitigate the negative effects of non-response from participants on similar studies.

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Introduction

In recent years, the study of irregular migration has been an active field of research in international migration. This research interest on acts of irregular migration may have been influenced by the recent reports on the human cost of irregular migration from Africa and other continents to Euro-American States. For example, in December 2018, the International Organization for Migration's (IOM) Missing Migrants Project reports indicated that between 2014 and 2018 there were over 30,510 irregular migrant deaths globally, with over 14,795 (men, women and children) casualties on the Central Mediterranean route between North Africa and Italy alone (International Organisation for Migration, 2018). In November 2019, the IOM also reported that 2,614 irregular migrants lost their lives worldwide (International Organisation for Migration, 2019).

As the reports on the death rates from irregular migration continue, much of the debate has been driven by the quest to answer two preliminary questions: what are the factors that initiates international migration in Africa? And why do international migratory behaviour persist across time and space? As for the first question several studies on the push and pull factors have indicated that wage differentials, economic inequality or hardship and other elements have in different ways enabled acts of international migration (Hicks, 1932; Sjaastad, 1962; Stark & Bloom, 1985; Stark, 1991; Aronowitz, 2009). In much the same way, there are also those who contend in their studies that the existence of social networks and the process of cumulative causation in a given society may be responsible for the persistent nature of migrant flows (Gurak and Caces, 1992; Massey et al, 1993; Massey, 2012).

As these debates continue to dominate international migration studies, however, the arguments advanced in such studies should not blind researchers and readers to the fact that a number of such studies were conducted using social research tools and methods like content analysis, focus group discussion, observation, survey, interview, and written questionnaire. While these tools and methods are deployed by social researchers to study the phenomenon of international migration, there is a

significant lack of literature that seeks to unravel and analyse the experiential challenges researchers may face in conducting similar studies with focus group methodological designs, thus creating significant gaps in literature. The objective of this paper is to address the experiential challenges that may accompany the use of Focus Group Discussion method by social researchers especially in the study of Libyan Returnees in Benin City, Edo State. The choice of using Benin City as the location for this study was informed by the widespread claims that Benin City is perhaps a major hub for irregular migrants setting off from Nigeria to other countries. This paper is organized as follows. After this introduction, the second segment conceptualises the key concepts relevant to this study. The third, provides the dominant explanatory positions on the causes and persistence of migration flows in literature. The fourth section captures the methodological template for the study. The fifth section presents the empirical research findings. This is followed by the conclusion and recommendations for future researchers.

Conceptualizing research, migration and returnees

From a social scientific perspective, the term research literally means an activity that involves “acquiring knowledge and developing understanding, collecting facts and interpreting them to build up a picture of the world around us, and even within us” (Walliman, 2011:15). Furthermore, it is a scientific exercise that involves the search for information and knowledge on a particular topic, subject or being. In the words of an American sociologist Earl Babbie (1998), research is a systematic inquiry designed to describe, explain, predict and control the observed phenomenon. It is systematic because there are traditions that must be followed – in the form of scientific steps – in order to arrive at conclusions. The tools and techniques used to investigate and arrive at such conclusions are what scholars call research methods (Somekh & Lewin, 2005; Babbie, 2011; Walliman, 2011; Bryman, 2012).

Migration on the other hand is about the movement of people from one place to another. According to the International Organisation for Migration the term migration is used to describe “the movement of persons away from their place of usual residence either across an international

border or within a state” (International Organisation for Migration, 2019:135). It could also be legal (regular) or illegal (irregular) in nature. Legal (regular) migration refers to any movement or “migration that occurs in compliance with the laws of the country of origin, transit and destination” (International Organisation for Migration, 2019:173). On the flip side, the term illegal (irregular) migration is perceived globally as the movement of persons that takes place outside the laws, regulations, or international agreements governing the entry into or exit from the State of origin, transit or destination (International Organisation for Migration, 2019:114). Here, it should be noted that while the focus of this paper is on irregular migration across national boundaries, it does not amount to an artificial disassociation of irregular from regular migration, because both phenomenon have been found to be reciprocally interrelated (Allasino et al., 2004). For example, studies have found that a number of irregular migrants today enter destination countries legally, but subsequently overstay their visas, or engage in prohibited acts, through which their status becomes irregular. Such studies have also found scenarios whereby migrants entering or residing in a country illegally can acquire legal residency through obtaining legitimate jobs, marriage or regularization of their status (De Haas, 2008).

Furthermore, acts of migration could also be described as international in nature. By this we mean “the movement of persons away from their place of usual residence and across an international border to a country of which they are not nationals” (International Organisation for Migration, 2019:111). Drawing from the above definition, the term 'Libyan returnees' as used in this paper refers to a group of persons known to have been involved in irregular migration, and their return facilitated by IOM and Nigerian government. In the context of international migration, any act of return migration could be defined as “the movement of persons to their country of origin after having moved away from their place of habitual residence and crossed an international border” (International Organisation for Migration, 2019:184).

Why people migrate?

A look at migration literatures shows that there are a number of theoretical templates crafted by scholars to explain the causes and persistence of acts of

international migration. However, these varieties of theoretical models can be grouped into two broad categories. The first category would include theoretical models that explain the causes of international migration in economic, political and social terms. The second category include theoretical approaches that attempts to explain why international migration flows persist across time and space

Explanations on the causes of international migration

Much of the explanations on the causes of international migration is dominated by economic narratives in literature. Economic explanations of human migration in literatures pre-date the modern era of migration studies and can be traced to the Neo-Classical times and beyond. From a broad perspective, neo-classical scholars in their studies assume that: First; wage differentials in different societies or countries are the main explanatory variables of human migration flows. Second, migrants are perceived to be rational beings who engage in cost-benefit calculations before migration (Hicks, 1932; Lewis, 1954; Sjaastad, 1962; Harris & Todaro, 1970). These widely held perceptions are found to have influenced scholarly explanations of human migration in literature for decades. In the famous classic work of Sir John Hicks, he argued that migration is fueled primarily by wage differentials in different countries. In his view, the “differences in net economic advantages, chiefly differences in wages, are the main causes of migration” (Hicks, 1932:76). In a similar manner, Larry Sjaastad argued in his work “that migration is a search for opportunities in higher-paying occupations” (Sjaastad, 1962:82-83). He went further to argue that there is need to situate the phenomenon of human migration in an investment context by stating that “migration cannot be viewed in isolation; complementary investments in the human agent are probably as important (or more important) than the migration process itself” (Sjaastad, 1962:92-93).

The “new economics of migration” perspective argues that the assumption that wage differentials and rationality of individuals as the major factors that shape migrants' decisions to move to another country is insufficient to explain the modern pattern of international migration flows (Stark & Bloom, 1985). Hence they postulate that the decision to migrate is

collectively made by migrants and their relatives – typically family members or households. It is assumed that such collective decision(s) are often taken to minimize risks and to loosen constraints manifestly present in the migrant's household and country of origin (Stark & Bloom, 1985; Katz & Stark, 1986; Stark, 1991). Researchers subscribing to this approach also assume that 'cost' and 'returns' are shared in a manner similar to a mutual beneficial contractual arrangement between migrants and members of their families or households (Sjaastad, 1962; Stark & Bloom, 1985; Massey et al, 1993). That is to say migrants are strategically encouraged and supported (the cost) by their households to travel to a foreign country where “earnings are either negatively correlated, statistically independent, or not highly positively correlated with earnings in their home country” (Stark & Bloom, 1985:175; Massey et al, 1993:436). They concluded by saying that the existing pattern of migrant-to-family remittances should be seen as returns for the roles played by migrant relatives in the migration process (Sjaastad, 1962).

Another theoretical perspective which also dominates a portion of international migration discussed is the push and pull theory. Scholars who subscribe to this approach assume that the root causes of migration – regular or irregular – could be found in a wide range of factors which includes: unstable political, social, and economic conditions in the home countries of migrants. Issues of rapid population growth, low employment opportunities, mass poverty, wide spread internal conflict resulting in huge threat to human security, corrupt political regimes, lack of basic public goods (water, electricity, good roads etc.) and oppressive government with a history of serious human rights violations among others are also perceived by scholars as part of the causes of migration (Aronowitz, 2009). In their views, the above factors (push) are the major reasons why people migrate from their country of origin to countries where there are attractions or promises (pull) of a better future. These promises (pull) could take the form of stable political, social, and economic conditions, increased job opportunities, high demand for migrant workers, better wage pay and standard of living in destination countries. That is to say the recent levels of unemployment, unstable economy, internal conflict, corrupt and oppressive government, lack of basic public goods among others are the primary push

factors of migration from Africa to more stable countries in Europe and American states where there are enormous pull factors.

Explanations on why international migration flows persist

In contemplating why international migration flows persist, it is useful to look at the phenomenon from the network theory of migration perspective. From a broad perspective, the network theory of migration assumes that migration is fueled by the existence of social networks that provides intending and non-intending migrants the necessary information and resources to migrate (Gurak and Caces, 1992; Massey et al, 1993; Massey, 2012). Migrants network as traditionally understood, “are sets of interpersonal ties that connect migrants, former migrants, and non-migrants in origin and destination zones through ties of kinship, friendship, and shared community origin” (Massey et al, 1993:448).

Furthermore, there is a widespread consensus that, such interpersonal ties – kingship, friendship, and collective identity - described as social networks (or networks of reciprocal obligations) increases the likelihood of international migration because they help reduce the costs and risks of movement and increase the expected net returns to migration (Gurak and Caces, 1992; Massey et al, 1993; Massey, 2012). Contemporary studies have also identified religious networks as part of the key elements that influence migration decisions in societies today (Cummings et al, 2015). Hence, they concluded with the claim that such increase in international movement would increase the number of people with diaspora ties. And the broad social networks would logically fuel the reproduction of acts of international migration from sending areas over time (Massey et al, 1987; Massey et al, 1993).

Another approach, which scholars have used in explaining the perpetuation of international migration is 'the cumulative causation theory of migration.' The philosophy of this theory is based on the thinking that causation is cumulative because every act of migration is assumed to have significant effects on the social context within which subsequent migration decisions are made, particularly in ways that may trigger additional movement from the same community (Massey et al, 1993). Clearly, this approach suggest that migrants are rational beings who pay great attention

to socioeconomic changes in their community. It also suggests that every recorded act of international migration in a given community, would logically encourage through different ways other people without prior migration experience to migrate (Massey et al, 1993). For instance, in the work of Massey and his colleagues, they collectively claimed that as the prevalence of migration growth increases within a community, it engenders changes in values and cultural perceptions in ways that increase the probability of future migration. These changes could be understood from two levels: individual and community. At the individual level, it is believed that international migration experiences change migrant's tastes for consumer goods and motivations (Massey et al, 1993). In their views, after migrating, migrants acquire stronger cognitive map of social mobility and a taste for consumer goods and styles of life which may be difficult to attain through local labor. They also suggest in their discussion that once an individual gained migratory experience, such a person is very likely to migrate again, and the odds of taking an additional trip rise with the number of trips already taken (Massey et al, 1993).

At the community level, they argue that migration becomes deeply ingrained into the social fabric of people's behaviors, and values associated with migration become part of the community's values. For young men, and in many settings young women as well, migration becomes a rite of passage, and those who resist the temptation to elevate their status through acts of international migration are often perceived as lazy, unenterprising, and undesirable (Massey et al, 1993). Eventually, knowledge about foreign locations and jobs becomes widely diffused, and values, sentiments, and behaviors characteristic of the core society spread widely within the sending region (Massey et al., 1993).

While the narratives given above are found to be useful in explaining in part the causes and persistence of international migration flows, however, it may be obvious to conclude that international migration is a complex phenomenon.

Methodology

Focus group discussion

In its simplest form, a focus group discussion method is an informal

discussion among a group of selected persons about a topic of interest to a researcher (Wilkinson, 2004). It could also be described as “collective conversation”, among deferent individuals invited by a researcher to discuss specific topics (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2013:12). Such groups are often arranged to enable a researcher (or group of researchers) to gain an understanding of the specific issues of discussion from the perspective of different participants of the group (Liamputtong, 2011; Bryman, 2012). It is also important to note that focus groups provide researchers with direct access to the language and concepts participants use to structure their experiences and to think and talk about a specific topic (Smithson, 2008). Clearly the description of a focus group(s) sketched so far rest on two major assumptions: first, in every focus group there are “more than one participant per data collection session” (Wilkinson, 2004:271). Second, a focus group is a group that has a moderator/facilitator (the researcher or interviewer), asking questions about a particular topic under research (Smithson, 2008; Bryman, 2012).

Methodologically, there are variations in the literature on the actual size range for a standard focus group. While some studies recommend six to ten participants, others suggest using as low as three and as much as 15 participants in studies (Pugsley, 1996; Morgan, 1997; Bloor et al, 2001; Babbie, 2011; Bryman, 2012). In much the same way, contemporary studies have found that the size range of any focus group discussion is influenced by certain factors which include: the research topic, the level of knowledge and experiences of participants on the issue of discuss, and discussed – this will determine participant's contribution to the group discussion. In addition, how well the researcher (or facilitator) can control the group discussion also determine the size of a group (Vaughn et al, 1996; Redmond & Curtis, 2009).

Structural Steps in Conducting FGD

1. Identification and accessing of potential participants
2. Choose a location for the Focus Group Discussion
3. Orientation of Research Assistants
4. Registration and Orientation of participants (here the informed consent form must be administered to all prospective participants)
5. Recording instruments

- (a) Writing materials (pen/pencil and notepads)
- (b) Electronic audio recorder (this can only be used when all participants approve)
6. Focus Group Discussion with participants
7. Collation and Transcribing of recorded responses from participants
8. Reporting the research findings

This study adopts the Focus Group Discussion Method (FGD) as the primary method of enquiry for this research exercise. In this study, the FGD method is used as a qualitative approach with the aim of gaining an understanding of the experiential challenge(s) that may arise from this research method. Libyan returnees in Benin City were used as a case study. Three focus group discussions were conducted on the 3rd and 4th of August 2019 at Uwelu in Egor Local Government Area in Benin City. It is also important to note that the structuring of the group sessions was done in line with the methodological principles of segmentation and homogeneity – the reason for this choice is to permit free-flowing discussions among research participants. The first group was exclusive to five (5) female Libyan returnees. The second group was exclusive to eight (8) male Libyan returnees. Both groups were engaged in discussions on the 3rd of August 2019. On the 4th of August, the researcher conducted a mixed (5 females and 8 males totalling 13 of them) group discussion. It should be noted also, that the participants used in this study were all within the age range of 19 to 38 years.

Type of focus group discussion

This study adopts and utilises the single focus group method. In this type of focus group method, the dominant feature lies in the interactive discussion of a particular topic by a collection of all participants with the research facilitators as one group in one place and time (Morgan, 1996; Nyumba et al, 2018).

Research design and sample size

The sampling technique utilised in this study is purposive. That is to say, the participants in this research exercise were selected based on their

knowledge and life experiences as irregular migrants who had travelled through land borders from Nigeria to Libya and were returned to Benin city between 2016 and 2018. The sample size of this study is thirteen (13) participants (5 females and 8 males). It is also important to note that the participants were drawn from Ikpoba-Okha, Oredo and Egor Local government areas respectively. Please see table 1 for the study participants' biographic information.

Table 1. A biographic information of the research participants

Gender	No. of Participants	Participants Level of Education			Professional Skills		LGA		
		Tertiary	Secondary	Primary Education	Skilled	Unskilled	Ikpoba-Okha	Oredo	Egor
Male	8	1	1	6	1	7	2	2	4
Female	5	2	1	2	0	5	1	3	1
Total	13	3	2	8	1	12	3	5	5

Source: Focus group field research

Method of data collection

The main methods of primary data collection for this study include audio recording, note taking and participant observation. The reason for adopting these methods of data collection was informed by the fact that when the identified methods are mixed on the field for the purpose of collecting raw data, there is a chance that their weaknesses – if used independently – could be minimised.

Challenges of FGD method, using Libyan returnees in Benin City as case study

The challenges of FGD research method using the Libyan returnees as case study are presented in relation to the structural steps of FGD Method;

Identifying and accessing potential participants (Libyan Returnees)

In a study of this nature one would think that identifying Libyan returnees in Benin City would be an easy task, however, this is not the case because we live in an age where Libyan returnees do not have any form of identification that distinguish them from other Benin City inhabitants. Hence it was difficult for the researcher to identify genuine Libyan returnees for this study. The challenge of accessing Libyan returnees was also an issue for the researcher. For example, the researcher wrote series of letters to agencies like the Edo State Taskforce on Trafficking in Persons, International Migration Organisation (IMO), National Agency for Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) and the Nigerian Immigration Service (NIS) all in Benin City with the request to access Libyan returnees but could not obtain their approval. The researcher had to rely on a contact person – an informant who had a Libyan returnee as a friend – to access respondents. It was through this informant the researcher was able to access a number of genuine Libyan returnees that were used for this study.

Choosing a location for focus group discussion

It is imperative that the location of a FGD should be convenient for a group discussion preferably within the natural habitat of participants because it would give participants a sense of belonging and help reduce nervousness among members during discussions (Krueger & Casey, 2000; Liamputtong, 2011). And if this is done, there is a likelihood that the response rate and participation of members of any FGD would certainly be high. While this claim may be true in some studies, the researcher experienced a dilemma as to how to choose a location for this study. For example, while a number of the participants lived in the same neighbourhood, others were from different parts of Benin City thereby making it difficult for the researcher and prospective participants to pick a location that would be favourable to everyone involved. This was because a number of the prospective participants were hesitant to move from their abode to another for the research exercise. But after series of phone calls were made to prospective FGD participants they all decided that the residence of a member of the FGD should be used for the discussion. For the researcher, the decision to choose a location for this type of study was totally out of the researchers' control.

Therefore, the researcher was left with no choice but to accept the location chosen by prospective participants even if it was not so convenient for the researcher. To ensure that the chosen location would be convenient for the study, and the safety of the research team was not put at risk, the researcher had to visit the chosen location, few days before the day of the research exercise.

Registration and orientation of participants

At this point, the researcher was faced with the challenge of what could be termed a 'no-show' on the part of prospective participants earlier booked for the research exercise. For example, from a total of thirty-five (35) prospective participants (14 females and 21 males) that were earlier contacted and recruited for the exercise, only thirteen (5 females and 8 males) were present on the day of research. Because of this, the researcher was forced to delay the commencement of the research exercise – after he had sought the approval of those present – in order to wait for late comers. Though the researcher never thought the rate of no-show of prospective participants would be this huge, however, to avoid the embarrassment of having fewer number of participants (lesser than the required number to conduct a FGD study) the researcher had to over-recruit prospective participants with the intention of having a considerable number of participants for the exercise even if there were no-shows.

Another major challenge the researcher faced on the field, was that which emanated from the level of education of the FGD members. This became obvious when the researcher tried to register and educate the research participants of the nature of the research exercise, their rights, including their freedom to participate or withdraw from the research process at any given time, and to seek their approval in all issues related to their participation by signing an informed consent form. The researcher found out that a number of participants were illiterates, so they did not know anything about FGD nor do they know what an informed consent form was. For example, among the thirteen participants that took part in the discussion only 3 had tertiary education, 2 had secondary education and the other 8 had just primary education. To enable the participants to understand all the research questions and issues discussed, the researcher had to read

out and explain the content of the informed consent form. Furthermore, the researcher also had to interpret questions and moderate sessions in Pidgin English – a simplified means of local communication in Nigeria. But after these were done, the researcher was able to carry the participants along as the research exercise progressed.

Focus Group Discussion Session(s): During the FGD, the researcher was also faced with two major challenges which are captured in the sub headings below.

Participant's refusal to respond to sensitive questions: The issue of participant's refusal to respond to sensitive questions was found to be a challenge in the application of FGD in the study of Libyan returnees. It was observed that when the question “what were your major experiences in Niger, Chad and across the desert on your way to Libya?” was asked, a handful of participants outrightly refused to discuss their experiences on their way to Libya. For example, the very first participant that responded to the question expressly stated and warned that the researcher/moderator should note that some of them may not want to talk about such on the grounds that such discussion would remind them of their pains and traumatising experiences on their way to Libya. Furthermore, those who showed the willingness to discuss their experiences, tactically gave responses that were superficial and not specific. For example, a participant responded by simply saying that his experience could only be described as “hell and it is a serious issue”. Another participant responded by saying that so many things happened on his way to Libya, that he cannot really explain them. In specific terms he said “people do die ... it is only who go that can explain, if you go and you are lucky to return then you can explain”. Yet he couldn't explain his experiences. When the researcher tried to tease out responses from other members of the group one of the participants summarised by saying “they are all short of words”. With these responses, the researcher considered it best to stop any further probe on the particular issue of discussion.

Suspicion among members of the group: Given the nature of FGD method where participants from different backgrounds come together to discuss their experiences on the issue under study, in this study it was observed that a number of participants during the discussion sessions (including the first two sessions that were exclusive to female and male participants) at some point spoke freely only when they have confidence in fellow participants. For example, when the topics on prostitution, sex slaves and other related forms of sexual abuses on the way and in Libya was raised by a female participant during the mixed group discussion, it was observed that her eye contact with her fellow group members sent signals that probably made her to stop the discussion abruptly. And when the researcher tried to encourage her to talk more on the issue, she declined by saying “I do not have anything to say on this topic sir”. But she was the one who initiated the topic of discussion. Perhaps she was suspicious that her fellow participants in the group particularly the males, may stigmatise her in the future. In actual sense, the researcher/moderator may not be able to ensure that their disclosures will remain totally confidential because after the group discussions the researcher may not be able to determine what other members of the group would do with disclosures from the group interaction. For the researcher, this was a huge challenge because of the fact that non-response from member(s) of the group would deflate the quality and amount of information gotten from the group discussion. To reduce such incidences of non-response among participants, the researcher repeatedly explained and assured participants that their participation and responses would not be used against them in any way and that it would be treated with the highest confidentiality. But this did not do much because their minds were already made up on not to divulge private or sensitive information.

Transcribing notes and recorded (Audio) responses from participants: After every FGD, the next step for a researcher is to transcribe notes and recorded (audio recordings) responses from the group discussions (Bryman, 2012). During this research exercise, the researcher had difficulties with transcribing notes and recorded responses from the three FGD sessions. It is time-consuming simply because on every session, the researcher had to take account of *the participant that was* talking in the

session, and what was said. This was particularly difficult for the researcher, because at some point participant's voices became difficult for the researcher to easily distinguish. This was further compounded by the participant's attitude of sometimes talking over each other, which made transcription more difficult for the researcher. In order to be able to do justice to this problem of transcription, the researcher deliberately took time to listen carefully to the recorded responses over and over again to ensure that there were no missing bits in the final transcribed document.

The financial burden of conducting FGD: Deploying FGD method as a social science research method is quite expensive. This is because it involves a lot of logistical issues that require funding. For example, the researcher spent a significant amount of money on phone calls made to prospective FGD participants while trying to schedule the FGD sessions. In much the same way, huge funds were also spent on buying portable audio-recorder machine along with an audio bag kit which were used by the researcher to capture the discussions of participants for this study. In addition, the researcher also spent funds on entertaining (refreshment) participants after the discussions. On this issue of entertainment, the researcher was faced with a dilemma as regards to the specific nature of what should be given as refreshment. This was difficult for the researcher because there are no books on the rules and regulations guiding social researchers on the limit and on what should be given as refreshment or incentives to participants after a FGD. Therefore, the researcher had to rely on personal opinion and decision as to what were given as refreshment to the research participants.

Given the fact that a number of participants for this study were not inhabitants of the location where the FGD's took place, however, the researcher had to make financial refunds after the discussions to each participant who had spent their monies on transporting themselves to the research location. In addition, the poor state of electricity generation and supply in Benin City was also a source of challenge to the researcher at the point of transcription. In specific terms, the researcher was left with the option of incurring huge financial cost of fuelling a power generating set in lieu of public power supply to transcribe the recorded discussions. While the last two challenges identified are not such that could be avoided, however, it could be argued that on ethical grounds we must (however reluctantly)

accept the fact that the use of FGD method in studies requires a lot of money, a chunk of which are spent on incentives for participants and the purchase of audio-recording machine and kits.

Conclusion and recommendations

This study has examined the experiential challenges that may accompany the use of FGD method by social researchers especially in the study of Libyan Returnees in Benin City, Edo State. The empirical findings of this paper suggest that there are some challenges in applying FGD method in the study of Libyan returnees in Benin City, Edo State. For example, contrary to scholarly claims that FGD method will eventually enable a researcher (or group of researchers) gain a good understanding of the specific issues of discuss from the perspective of different participants of the group, it was found that FGD method may not be a suitable methodological design for social scientist investigating certain sensitive issues or phenomenon like prostitution, sex slaves and other related forms of sexual abuses that may have taken place in the lives of Libyan returnees. This is because of a number of factors. Among the critical factors are suspicion among members of the group and perhaps the inability of the researcher/moderator to ensure that participant's disclosures during the group discussions would remain confidential.

Furthermore, deploying FGD method as a social science research method of gathering data is quite expensive compared to some other research methods like content analysis and questionnaire which do not require refreshment for participants or respondents after a research exercise. The researcher also learnt that accessing and identifying irregular migrants like Libyan returnees with the aim of recruiting such persons for a FGD research in Benin City is quite challenging as well, because of psychological trauma, and likely social stigmatisation.

But despite the practical challenges that accompany the authors' application of FGD method in the study of Libyan returnees in Benin City, FGD method remains a vital methodological design in the social sciences. As a result, this paper recommends the following: first there is need for the appropriate application of FGD method to investigate less sensitive topics that would encourage participants to freely express their views during focus

group discussions. As Krueger and Casey (2000) rightly notes, FGD method should not be used when seeking sensitive information that cannot be discussed in a group. This thinking is perhaps influenced by the fact that in a study of this nature, the researcher/moderator are often not be able to ensure that participants disclosures will remain confidential because after the group discussions the researcher may not be able to determine what other members of the group would do with disclosures from the group interaction. Thus creating an atmosphere of suspicion among members of the FGD.

Second, focus group discussion method should be deployed along with at least one other method of gathering data – questionnaire, interview or observation – for a research exercise. If this is done, the negative effects of non-response from participants on similar studies could be minimised. The challenge of identifying and accessing Libyan returnees for similar studies, could also be avoided if social researchers adopt a culture of engaging research informants in the study of Libyan returnees.

Finally, FGD methods should be used for studies that require small samples to arrive at a research finding. If this is done, the challenges of no-show, transcription of recorded discussion and the financial burden of conducting FGD on social researchers will reduce substantially.

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