Socio-cultural determinants hindering research among social workers in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Research is done in Nigeria just as it is done in any other country. However, there are socio-cultural determinants that hinder social workers from actively carrying-out research in Nigeria. The importance of research cannot be overemphasized because, it is in searching that we know more and learn new things. Despite this established fact, social workers in Nigeria face hindrances in carrying-out research. Qualitative method was used in this study. Twenty (20) social workers with either a Bachelor of Science (BSc.), Post Graduate Diploma (PGD), Masters of Science (MSc.) or Doctor of Philosophy (PhD.) participated in the research. This study found out that factors such as poor funding, poor knowledge of research, poor mentorship and coaching on research, hard-to-reach population in data collection, patriarchy systems, cultural and religious belief, limited African literatures theories and books on research that are indigenous in nature, discouragements from the non-utilization of results from study in policy formulation and programmes just to mention a few hindered social work research in Nigeria. In conclusion, the study recommends that measures should be put in place to checkmate these indicated hindrances in a bid to preserve and improve upon knowledge which is what research stands for.

KEY TERMS: *Social work, research methods, socio-cultural, determinants*

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Current and previous volumes are available at:
https://africasocialwork.net/current-and-past-issues/

How to reference using ASWNet style:
Ramsey-Soroghaye B. N. and Ogbanga, M. (2022). Socio-cultural determinants hindering research among social workers in Nigeria. *African Journal of Social Work, 11(4),* 153-162.

INTRODUCTION

Professionally, social work is a helping profession charged with duties of rendering help and proffering relevant and evident solutions to identified social problems. One of the best methods of identifying these social problems is through research. Research simply term means to search. In searching, various methods are employed to ensure that the research process is scientific and verifiable. Social workers make use of research to enhance their skills and improve their social functioning. Again, it is also through research government makes adjustments to policies and programmes that are of benefit to the people. Regardless of the importance and uniqueness of research certain socio-cultural determinants act as hindrances to social work research in Nigeria. This study therefore intends to examine the socio-cultural determinants hindering research among social workers in Nigeria.

BACKGROUND

Meaning of research

Research includes investigations conducted to explore new facts, and its activities are significant in propelling the developmental process of any nation (Igiri et al., 2021). Oyesola (2010) views research as the application of the scientific method to attain or prove new and existing theories. He further explained that it is search, invention, discovery and establishment of new knowledge, facts, principles, theories and methods. It is also acknowledged as a systematic and objective search for knowledge, to establish theories and prove the truth of ideas, hypotheses and assumptions. The more we study about an existing phenomenon, the better we get in rendering solutions as social workers. Research is a thorough examination of circumstances, objects, or situations for the purpose of improving upon and adding to knowledge. Evidently, research is done in Nigeria just as it is done in any other country. However, there are major problems which are socially, culturally or economically inclined that pose great threat to carrying out proper research. The importance of research cannot be overemphasized, it is in searching we know more and learn new things. Research is a tool for enhancing human capital development (Chikwe, Ogidi & Nwachukwu, 2015). Research implies a careful examination of an object or situation for the purpose of effecting development and improvement. It is a way of acquiring dependable and useful information and data about a particular object of research as well as the analysis of the data collected in order to arrive at a valid conclusion (Emakoji & Otah, 2018).

Factors affecting research in Nigeria

Igiri et al., (2021) reported that there are factors such as motivation, gender, age, research knowledge and skills, academic rank, research orientation, collaboration, leadership, availability of resources, institutional missions, orientation, rewards, mentoring programs, and institutional research policy that affect research. Despite the unique importance of research, a significant number of problems hinder academic research especially as it relates to social work. Also, as important as research is to national growth, productivity and development, little investment and attention is given to it (Kumwenda et al., 2017). For instance, Nigeria's research sector lacks necessary facilities/equipments and materials needed for a meaningful research (Chikwe et al., 2015). Also, persistent strike actions embarked on by most tertiary institutions in Nigeria affects research in the country (Emakoji &Otah, 2018). Funding is a key player in properly conducting a research and it is at this point the hope of a potential researcher is dashed. A recent report revealed that a greater number of research studies carried out by academic staff in Nigeria are self-funded from their inadequate salaries (Ebikabowei et al., 2017). This phenomenon is not just a Nigerian problem as Saric Utzinger and Bonfoh (2018) rightly observed that in most African countries, research funding is low (Saric et al., 2018) and this affects academic research.

Mentoring is poorly practiced in the Nigerian research culture. Emakoji and Otah (2018) revealed that mentoring plays a vital role in sustainability and continuity in research and this aspect has been ignored. It is evident that active mentoring affords the opportunity for transfer of skills which protégés can apply in diverse professional circumstances, promotes productive use of knowledge, clarity of goals and roles, job satisfaction, career growth and success. Again, over the years Nigerians have been faced with worrisome and threatening issues of insecurity arising from terrorism, kidnapping, war and religious crises (Emakoji & Otah, 2018) and these forces seriously affect what research should be. Sadly, should these problems persist; Nigeria's academic research will lose its value and true position amongst other nations. Therefore, the need to curb these seen and unforeseen

determinants that hinder research would be pointed out with the aim of proffering possible solutions for better social work practice.

Importance of Indigenous Research (IR)

Chilisa et al., (2017) argued that African indigenous scholars, students, and non-indigenous researchers and scholars can benefit from exposure to the diversity of research paradigms ranging from the dominant Euro-Western paradigms to the historically marginalised indigenous research paradigms. Khupe and Keane (2017) have argued that research methods that conform to indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) are underused in our research despite the various calls for decolonised research methods. Indigenous research stems from the call to decolonise knowledge validation and representation. It is an invention that comes from an Afrocentric perspective (Khupe & Keane, 2017). Indigenous knowledge sees culture and language as acceptable and important to research (Lipka et al., 2013). For research to be relevant and even improve the quality of life of the people, it needs to be rooted in indigenous cultural values, and languages (Talen, 2013). Research done in Nigeria has its uniqueness with what is done outside Nigeria. It is this uniqueness such as language, values and cultural practices that must be considered when social workers carry-out research. Indigenous and non-indigenous researchers are encouraged to adopt multi-paradigmatic research perspectives (Johnson 2015).

This study adopts the Developmental research (DR) approach. This is because this research is relevant to social workers thus it has an intention of improving the lives of social workers and the larger society in the short/long (Chilisa, 2019). There are various studies today on search engines like Google, Google scholar, MEDLINE, PUBMED and so on. This shows that research is actually in place but very scare studies exist on social work research in Africa or Nigeria. Also, very few studies have talked on the problems of research therefore; this study intends to bridge that gap by examining the socio-cultural determinants hindering research among social workers in Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research through a phenomenological research design approach was used for this study. Social Phenomenology seeks to examine experiences from social workers perspective on research in Nigeria (Cleland, 2017). This study adopted a qualitative exploratory design as the research methodology and a semi-structured questionnaire approach to elicit data from participants through in-depth interviews (IDIs) for this study. Purposive sampling was used to select 20 willing social workers who had a bachelor, post-graduate diploma, masters or doctoral degree in social work. The inclusion criteria were alumni students of University of Nigeria Nsukka, University of Calabar and University of Ibadan who had a social work degree, who had conducted a research and were willing to take part in the study. Initially, 30 social workers were contacted and sent the consent form to sign and return as an acknowledgement to willingly participate in the study but only 20 persons responded. Study participants were sent consent form on the study and those who declined one-on-one interview due to the Corona Virus (COVID-19) factor resorted to WhatsApp interview. Saturation which involves getting data from participants until there is no new information (Palinkas et al., 2015).The steps of this qualitative research include data collection, data analysis, coding and drawing conclusions from the raw data. Ethical approval for this study was gotten from African Independent Ethics Committee (AIEC) with Reference No. EA0227. In analysis the data, the results from the study were transcribed verbatim into English by a grandaunt of Linguistics and Communication studies University of Calabar, Cross Rivers state. Six theme related to this study was gotten thereafter and where arranged thematically. Framework analysis will also be used to determine emerging themes and to identify relationships between themes and responses.

RESULTS

Research is important for continuity and consistency in learning. Findings from this study have yielded good results in social work research. All the study respondents indicated fair knowledge of research. Funds, power supply, mentoring, language barriers, motivation were some hindrances to conducting research. Qualitative and quantitative researches were the two types of research known to the study participants. While indigenous research

has received a massive wake-up call, majority of the study participants were of the view that research is the same everywhere. However, six themes were gotten from the qualitative data and are discussed below:

Knowledge of research

Interestingly, responses from our study show that all the study respondents have an idea on what research is. Research according to this study finding if properly utilized can help any country's policy formulation and interventions in most cases. "Research is an intentional investigation of a subject matter with the aim of establishing existing facts and developing new ideas" (IDI participant; M.Sc., Social work, University of Ibadan). In responding to what research is, an Assistant Lecturer from the University of Calabar revealed thus:

> *Research is searching for more knowledge on a particular event or phenomenon in the society. It involves finding answers or explanation to why things happen and also to clear ones doubt about certain happenings in the society* (IDI participant; Assistant Lecturer University of Calabar; MSc Social work).

New findings, new discoveries, new knowledge and information are what research entails according to a participant. She avowed that:

> *Research basically to me as a scholar means new findings, new discoveries, knowledge, and information. It is actually a useful tool for learning; with research you are updated. Research can be in different forms and any material can be used for research but the most important thing is the authenticity of the source of information. Research from credible bodies is really useful for learning because it boosts our knowledge and gives us more information on any area of interest"* (IDI participant; MSc Social work University of Nigeria, Nsukka).

An Assistant Lecturer of the University of Calabar stated that:

> *"Research is a useful tool for learning because without research scholars cannot have accurate information about things that occur or happen in the society. Research is important and useful because it aids communication amongst people and builds networks. More so, without research, we cannot make decisions that will influence social policies that will be beneficial to the citizens. We may also not be able to tackle and resolve social problems in the society if we do not conduct research to know why such problems exist"* (IDI participant; Assistant Lecturer University of Calabar; MSc Social work).

Another participant mentioned that:

> *"Research is getting information to enable you make changes in policies especially in a country where it is used. Research means searching to know more, searching to get information. I think research is a very useful instrument for learning. Personally, I have gained, learned and gathered a lot of information from research"* (IDI participant; Lecturer I University of Nigeria, Nsukka; MSc Social work).

On types of research, quantitative and qualitative types of studies were the most conducted. Participants of the In-depth Interviews when asked the types of researches they knew opined thus:

> *"I have conducted certain types of researches like quantitative and qualitative studies with the use of questionnaires, surveys and interviews"* (IDI participant; MSc Social work University of Nigeria, Nsukka).

Another participant stated thus:

> *"I have conducted a qualitative research and have served as a research assistant in a quantitative research"* (IDI participant; Assistant Lecturer University of Calabar; MSc Social work).

Similarities/dissimilarities of research in Nigeria and research in Diaspora

Arguments on whether Nigeria research is the same as any other research in other countries engineered the need for this sub-theme. This study intends to know if there are any similarities and dissimilarities of research in Nigeria and in Diasporas. According to a respondent, there is no disparity between the type of research done in Nigeria and outside Nigeria. Research is research everywhere but the only little difference is that our pattern of research in Nigeria is faced with challenges (IDI participant; Lecturer I, University of Nigeria, Nsukka; MSc. Social work). Other Participants revealed thus:

> *"From my little experience on the similarities and dissimilarities of research between Nigeria and Diasporas I would say 'Yes' and 'No'. Because the foundation of research, types of research are the same. It is applicable everywhere. Although, the methodologies can change depending on the area of the study but I believe the people in Diaspora are more open to advance type of research. When I talk about advance research, I am looking at the scientific aspect, they have funding for research and even grants but in Nigeria there are limitations to research"* (IDI participant; MSc. Social work University of Nigeria, Nsukka).

Another participant stated that:

> *"Research is the same all the over the globe but may differ in methods. The most important thing is to observe the ethics of research. I don't know how research is carried out in Diaspora but I feel that with the level of development over there, they may have more advanced method of conducting research especially with the use of electronics such as distributing their questionnaire online as compared to us here going to the study area to distribute it by hand. There could also be a difference in the method of analysing data, most people here find it difficult to use SPSS and Nvivo because they are not taught properly but I am sure over there they will guide researchers on how to do so and make sure they are perfect in it"* (IDI participant; Assistant Lecturer, University of Calabar; MSc. Social work).

Problems affecting social research

Sadly, despite the knowledge of what research is, especially from a social work perspective, there are preventable factors acting as determinants that hinder research in Nigeria. Funds, power supply, mentoring, language barriers, motivation, just to mention a few are hindrances to conducting research. A participant said that during her B.Sc. days, she didn't find anyone to mentor and coach her on what research truly is. Her project was more of a trial and error pattern not until she started her MSc. programme before she knew more on research, so she thinks that this kind of scenario affects research (IDI participant; Social Welfare Officer BSc. Social work, University of Calabar). However, the various problems affecting research are revealed thus:

> *"There issues of power, lack of funds and even when you have finances it's not sustainable, there are data issues and it constraints one from carrying out concrete research. Again, people are not really open to give you information because the system in general is problematic and in the past, people who carried out research previously must have been not-sincere so it gave root to people not to open up especially when they are not sure of confidentiality. These are some problems that hinder research in Nigeria"* (IDI participant; MSc Social work University of Nigeria, Nsukka).

Another participant stated that:

> *"I think lack of motivation. Motivation in this sense means that some research just ends up on the shelves, you have limited time. Limited time per say is that the school curriculum does not give you enough time and even the environment some even when carrying-out the research, sometimes there are deadlines and you are doing all things in a hurry and sometimes people know a research is not good enough but they just have to meet up deadlines and sometimes the supervisor doesn't share the same opinion as the student and cannot properly guide the student in the area of research he/she is conducting"* (IDI participant; MSc Social work University of Nigeria, Nsukka).

Another participant said that:

> *"Lack of competence in data analyses, difficulty in using internet facilities, money is also a problem because in diaspora they award grants for researchers to enable them go to the field and get all the materials and information they need which is hardly the case here. Some people may get the grant here in Nigeria but end up not going to the field, they use the money for their personal problem due to greed and then do arm chair research, fabricating data just to meet up. Some good researchers are also not encouraged because there is no money to go to the field and get quality data, some have to travel out of town and make commitments in the communities with the little money they have, such occurrence may deter one from further research. Also, the time given for research is not enough so the result is a work that is shabbily done that lacks merit all in a bid to meet deadline"* (IDI participant; Assistant Lecturer, University of Calabar; MSc. Social work).

A participant mentioned that:

> *"There is difficulty is carrying-out research here. We lack the funds to conduct research unlike outside the country where millions are given to people to conduct research. Also, language barrier affects research. There are about 350 ethnic groups with different languages and you know at times it might be difficult to conduct research in such a scenario. Another problem is the government; they do not utilize the information gotten from a research so it appears that those of us in the educational sector are just writing for our promotion and not for any intervention because government does not use our findings"* (IDI participant; Lecturer I University of Nigeria, Nsukka; MSc. Social work).

Again, a participant identified that:

> *"There is poor knowledge of what research is and this affects participation in research. There is the issue of hard-to-reach population and this affects social research. Again, most social researches that deal with human respondents are faced with any challenges such as the respondents asking for financial obligations and refusal to give detailed information about a particular study even when they have the capacity to provide relevant information"* (IDI participant; PGD in Social work, University of Nigeria, Nsukka).

Additionally, a participant revealed that:

> *"Hindrances such as tribalism, cultural and religious beliefs hinder social research. During one of my field works in a rural part of Nigeria, some female respondents refused to fill out their questionnaire because their husbands were not around to fill their questionnaire and this was not too good for the study. I think the patriarchal system operational in Nigeria hinders research"* (IDI participant; PhD in Social work, University of Nigeria, Nsukka).

Another participant opined thus:

> *"One thing I will say is that in Nigeria, in fact African, research is very limited. We have limited African literatures theories and books on research that are indigenous in nature and this discourages the use findings of the study in policy formulation and programmes"* (IDI participant; Social Welfare Officer. BSc., Social Work, University of Calabar).

Knowledge of what social work entails

This research is a social work study involving only social workers however; we taught it necessary to find out if the study respondents actually knew what social work is and not necessarily just having degrees in the profession. A respondent mentioned that "social workers are helping professionals that work in myriad settings to provide psychosocial helps to individuals, couples, families, groups, organisations and communities" (IDI participant; M Sc. Social work, University of Ibadan).Other participants stated thus:

> *"Social workers are people who help in the enhancement of the lives of persons. They help in identifying the strength and weaknesses of persons to improve general well-being of a person, group of persons such as the aged, abused and impaired"* (IDI participant; MSc., Social work, University of Nigeria, Nsukka).

Additionally:

> *"Social workers are professionals trained to help individuals who as a result of social problems cannot function well in the society. They exist in the society to resolve the social problems of people and to enhance their social functioning. They are found in various settings of the society such as schools, hospitals, ministries, prisons, NGOs, courts where they render selfless service to humanity"* (IDI participant; Assistant Lecturer University of Calabar; MSc Social work).

Importance of research to social work profession

The importance of research to social work practice cannot be overstated. It is in searching we know more and solve more problems, thus, making the society function properly. Respondents stated that "Social workers carry out systematic investigations of systems and societies to aid the development of policies and practical interventions for people" (IDI participant; M.Sc. Social work, University of Ibadan). Another participant said that "social work requires research. It helps you know what theory, model or perspective is best to understand a particular problem." (IDI participant; M.Sc. Social work University of Nigeria, Nsukka). Other participants stated thus:

> *"Actually, social workers take part in research. This is the avenue through which they discover or unravel solutions to the social problems of people and also influence the implementation of policies that can help to curb the problem"* (IDI participant; Assistant Lecturer, University of Calabar; MSc., Social work).

Additionally, a participant revealed that:

> *"Research relates to what social workers do because during assessment which is one of the case work processes in social work, the social worker makes effort to find out the what, why, where, how and when of a situation affecting the client. With the information gathered, it is easy to find a lasting solution to the problem at hand. More so, it is through asking, interrogation and communication that a fact is established, and this is part of research and a method used by social workers to elicit valid information from their clients"* (IDI participant; Assistant Lecturer University of Calabar; MSc., Social work).

Additionally:

> *"Social workers are change-agents, we conduct research and the essence of research is to bring change in a society where things are not going well or where there is decay. For example, let's use our educational system. The essence of research is to find out why the problem is here and what causes the problem and the effect of the problem and at the end proffer solution to the problems or make policies that will bring a change to the problem. As social workers who are change-agents, we are also here to make policies, we are here to find-out people's problems and we also go a long way in proffering interventions that bring that problem to an end. Social workers also advocate"* (IDI participant; Lecturer I University of Nigeria, Nsukka; MSc., Social work).

Possible solutions in promoting social work research

It is not enough to know what research is, measures to curb these factors hindering research must be actively carried-out to improve research in Nigeria. According to a participant; "*funding and favourable policies will go a long way in promoting and improving social research in Nigeria*" (IDI participant; MSc., Social work, University of Ibadan).

Another participant stated that:

"Social work profession can be encouraged through research by ensuring that there are competent professionals in the area of research to serve as mentors. Institutions should organise workshop and seminars (on-the-job-training) to enable social workers enhance and improve their knowledge base about research. Research grants should be awarded to social workers to enable them carry out ground breaking research on existing and emerging social problems in the society" (IDI participant; Assistant Lecturer University of Calabar; MSc Social work).

DISCUSSION

Quite a good number of findings have been identified in this study especially as it relates to the socio-cultural determinants hindering academic research among social workers in Nigeria. However, before we delve into these factors hindering research especially among social workers in Nigeria, other important findings in this study will be discussed. Research is an important tool for learning because research carried-out by credible bodies boost knowledge and gives proper information on any area of interest. Research means searching for more knowledge on a particular event or phenomenon in the society and with research you are updated. This finding is in tandem with that of Oyesola (2010). Oyesola (2010) views research as the application of the scientific method to attain or prove new and exciting theories. Findings of this study revealed that to conduct a research is to search for more knowledge on a particular event or phenomenon in the society. It involves finding answers or explanation to why things happen and also to clear ones doubt about certain happenings in the society. This finding supports that of Kapoor et al., (2018) who opined that research is ued to get information and obtain positive feedback. This study also found out that research is a useful tool for learning because without research scholars cannot have accurate information about things that occur or happen in the society. Research is important and useful because it aids communication amongst people and builds networks. This finding also agrees with that of Çaparlar and Dönmez (2016). Çaparlar and Dönmez (2016) in their study revealed that research is conducted for the purpose of contributing towards science by the systematic collection, interpretation and evaluation of data and that, too, in a planned manner.

Finding from this study showed that there is no disparity on the type of research done in Nigeria and the type of research done outside Nigeria. According to our findings, research is research everywhere but the only differences are the types of challenges peculiar to our country Nigeria and it goes a long way in affecting the whole process of research. This could be the reason why Egbetokun et al., (2022) opined that Nigeria has a very large research system, with nearly 200 universities that employed more than 60,000 academic staff at the end of 2019. This study also revealed that the foundation of research and types of research are the same as it is applicable everywhere. However, this study points to the fact that although methodologies vary depending on the area of the study but research is same everywhere in the world. Quantitative and qualitative researches were the two types of research revealed in this study. This could alsp be the reason why Antwi and Hamza (2015) made an attempt to discuss quantitative and qualitative research methodologies in his study.

Again, the identified socio-cultural determinants affecting research in Nigeria are: locality, poor power supply, lack of funds, lack of data, lack of openness to research by potential participants/respondents in giving ample information, lack of motivation, limited time for carrying-out research most school curriculum does not give enough time when carrying-out the research, lack of competence in data analyses, difficulty in using internet facilities, lack of grants for researchers, fabrication of data, language barriers, poor knowledge of what research is, issues of hard-to-reach population, tribalism, cultural and religious beliefs and limited African literatures theories and books on research that are indigenous in nature. Consequently, our findings corroborates with that of Igiri et al., (2021). They reported that factors such as motivation, gender, age, research knowledge/skills, academic rank, research orientation, collaboration, leadership, availability of resources, institutional missions, orientation, rewards, mentoring programs, and institutional research policy affect research. Also, Bezuidenhout and Chakauya (2018) in their study revealed that funding and data sharing are two-fold factors affecting research. Amadi (2003) identified illiteracy, attitude of government, individuals and significant others towards research findings, secrecy of information, scarcity of records as problems of research in Nigeria.

Social work profession is a research-centred profession that finds out people's problems and possible solutions to these problems. This study revealed that social workers are problem solvers. They exist in the society to resolve the social problems of people and to enhance their social functioning. Social workers are found in settings such as: schools, hospitals, ministries, prisons, NGOs, courts where they render selfless service to humanity. Social

workers take part in research as it is through research that they discover or unravel solutions to the social problems of people and also influence implementation of policies that can help to curb these identified problems.

CONCLUSION

Research relates to what social workers do and the information gathered from our research as social workers will go a long way in problem solving and policy formulation if findings are utilized by government and other related bodies. Therefore, factors such as lack of proper knowledge on research, poor mentorship/coaching on research methods, none awareness on who social worker are, lack of funds, hindrances with data collection such as hard-to-reach population, patriarchy systems, tribalism and cultural/religious belief, limited African literatures theories and books on research that are indigenous in nature, discouragements from the non-utilization of results from study in policy formulation and programmes just to mention a few hindering social work research must be curbed. This study recommends that measures should be put in place to checkmate these indicated hindrances in a bid to preserve knowledge and improve upon knowledge which is what research stands for.

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