


# Exploring the Experiences of Deportation and Reintegration of Aging Deported Men in Trinidad and Tobago

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## Abstract

Older deported men in Trinidad and Tobago face unique challenges in reintegrating into life after deportation. This qualitative study examined the intersection of aging and deportation to identify factors that affect the reintegration experiences of aging deported men. Qualitative interviews were conducted with 16 deported men over the age of 50 and were analyzed using the constant comparison method. Findings show that reintegration was influenced by complex intrapersonal, subsistence, and social challenges. The findings in this study point to the need to expand social support networks available to aging deported men and provide greater opportunities for them to meet their economic and subsistence needs, and the need to strengthen strategies to reduce the stigma and discrimination associated with aging deported populations.

## Keywords

age discrimination/stereotypes, social work, quality of life, gerontology, deportation

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Over the past 20 years, the Caribbean has experienced an increase in the repatriation of deported men from metropolitan countries. “Deportation” is the “act of banishing a foreigner from a country, usually to their country of origin” (On Hing, 2006, p. 54) because they either hold an undocumented immigration status or were convicted of committing a felony. The Ministry of National Security, Trinidad and Tobago (2017) indicated that between January 2003 and December 2016, a total of 5,580 people were deported. Statistics show that of the 2,534 persons deported between 1993 and 2005, 91% were male and 45% of the persons deported were 36 years and older (Barnes & Seepersad, 2008). It follows then that individuals who were 36 years old when they were deported in 1993 would now have attained the minimal age of 62 years, and those who were deported in 2005 at an age of 36 would now be 48 years old. As such, the figures indicate that a significant number of deported men have had to cope with both the process of aging and the issues associated with deportation.

Deportees may face many challenges in adjusting to a new way of life when they are moved back to their birth countries. Griffin (2002) stated that deportees to the Caribbean are obliged to reintegrate into a place “with which they are vaguely familiar” (p. 291).

Although the literature exposes the challenges affecting younger deported men, there is silence on whether men’s reintegration experiences change as a result of aging. Older people are part of families and networks, and although some research has documented how inter-generational connections have been broken following migration (King & Vullnetari, 2006), there has not been any research which explores the intersectionality of aging in a context of forced migration and the ways in which aging intersects with deportation as an indicator of social integration.

Understanding these issues is important as the aging process itself brings particular opportunities, needs, and challenges. The main purpose of this qualitative study was to fill this conceptual gap by understanding the factors which influence aging deported men in their resettlement and reintegration, the challenges they encounter, and the sources of support received after their return. The central research question which guided this study

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was “What are the experiences of aging deported men during their reintegration into Trinidad and Tobago?”

## Literature Review

The reintegration experiences of aging deported men is multitextual as there have been many studies which focused on issues related to deportation and migration across a range of disciplines, including sociology, anthropology, law, and international relations. Thus, this literature review presents the findings of studies which focus on the intersections of aging and migration as well as literature which relates to the reintegration of deported men.

### *Aging and Migration*

King (2014) identifies three categories of research on aging and migration. The first category focuses on older people who are left behind by migration. This occurs when younger age cohorts migrate and their parents and grandparents remain in the home country. Research by Jones, Sharpe, and Sogren (2004) found that in Trinidad and Tobago, children separated from parents because of migration were often left in the care of aging parents. The second category involves individuals who migrate as older adults after retirement. According to De Souza (2009), some migrants have returned to the Caribbean because it was never their intention to stay permanently abroad, only intending to migrate for as long as it took for them to earn enough finances to live comfortably. The third category of research on aging and migration involves younger people who migrated and then aged abroad (Hunter, 2011). While some have voluntarily returned to their home country, a growing majority “age in place,” as they have become attached to children and grandchildren who have been born, and socialized in the adopted country.

### *Reintegration Experiences of Deported Men*

For some Caribbean countries, the increasing numbers of persons deported also create remarkable pressures on existing social services and local economies. Zilberg (2004) and Nicholas and Peutz (2010) claimed that deportation results in a rupture between culture and nation, where the individual feels excluded from the national citizenship. Deportees often face high levels of stigma upon returning to their countries of origin (Zilberg, 2004) and are sometimes viewed by communities as failures and as criminals (Brotherton & Barrios, 2011). Anderson, Gibney, and Paoletti (2011) claim that the rejection of the deportee is also very traumatic.

Settlement into a “new” culture for migrants poses severe posttraumatic stress symptoms (Karunakara et al., 2004; Lindert, von Ehrenstein, Priebe, Mielck, & Brähler, 2009) including depression, loss of sleep, isolation, and hopelessness. Griffin (2002) argued that deportees are

sent to a place that rejects them which results in psychological scars. Boodram (2017) indicated that many of the deportees face challenges, such as difficulty in accessing jobs and food, and experience several health complications. This is supported by Chaudry et al. (2010) who explained that deportees endure economic hardships, homelessness, and food insecurity. Lonegan (2008) and Boodram (2017) noted that deportees lose their personal resources which they had spent much of their lifetime acquiring. Deportation has had negative effects on the family. Research shows that deportation results in separation from spouse and children, rejection by family members, an end to remittances and causes economic hardship for relatives of those deported (Hagan, Castro, & Rodriguez, 2010).

### *Social Support Provisions for Deported Men*

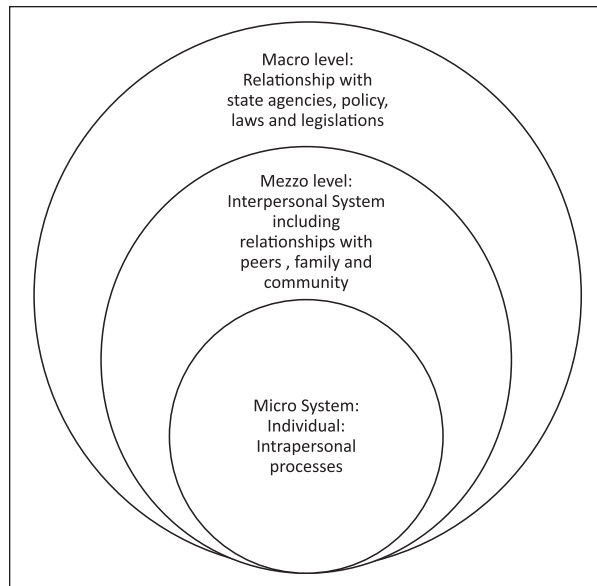
Despite the many challenges facing deportees, studies have found that the social support needed for deportees to reintegrate into society is insufficient and lacks coordination (Barnes & Seepersad, 2008; Gomes, 2011). There is only one agency in Trinidad and Tobago which provides coordinated services to deportees (Boodram, 2017). This agency, a nongovernmental organization (NGO) which receives subventions from the state, provides male deportees with temporary housing, counseling, and job assistance for 3 months. After that time, the deportee is expected to be better able to fend for himself. Also, by virtue of their Trinidad and Tobago citizenship, deportees are also eligible to access public health care, social welfare, and other services provided by the government through social welfare agencies.

## Theoretical Framework

This study utilized an ecological framework which has the potential to integrate a wide range of perspectives (Satariano, 2005) to understand the lived experiences of aging men’s experiences. As aging is a construct of complex individual and social dimensions, the ecological model seems to be most appropriate to frame this particular study.

Created by Bronfenbrenner (1979), and further developed by theorists including Green and Kreuter (2004), the ecological model exposes the connections among intrapersonal, social, and subsistence factors in framing people’s experiences. The ecological model posits that an individual’s well-being is a result of the dynamic interplay among these three factors (Gitterman & Germain, 2008). These domains may change over time and can be influenced by the particular life course of the individual.

The intrapersonal conditions which shape an individual’s experiences include his or her psychological, emotional, and physical attributes, including the age of the individual (Graffam & Shinkfield, 2006). The socioeconomic status of an individual may affect levels of



**Figure 1.** Diagram illustrating the components of the ecological framework.

functioning across the life course and vary with age (House et al., 1990). As with intrapersonal conditions, the subsistence or socioeconomic status, family income, education, and occupational status of an individual may also fluctuate as he or she ages.

The final concept associated with the ecological model is concerned with social support networks available to an individual (Satariano, 2005). The social capital, or resources which an individual can leverage on to gain opportunities, can influence the quality and type of experiences of people who are aging (Graffam & Shinkfield, 2006). Thus, the ecological model draws on the individual's experiences on various levels, including the micro (intrapersonal), mezzo (family), and macro (social) levels. This can be seen in Figure 1. The ecological framework has been used to frame many studies which involved people who have been marginalized, including ex-offenders (Graffam & Shinkfield, 2006), trauma survivors (Harvey, 2007), and female survivors of domestic violence (Curry, Hassouneh-Phillips & Johnston-Silverberg, 2001).

## Method

This study used a phenomenological qualitative research design for collecting, organizing, and analyzing the experiences of deported fathers. Individuals selected to participate in this study were men who were deported to Trinidad and Tobago who attained the age of 50 years and over. Suitable candidates for the proposed study were located by using purposive snowball sampling, which involved the researcher placing posters in state-funded social service agencies and NGOs which offered social support to deported men. This was the most effective way of sourcing participants as the deportee population is one that is

“hidden” because of the stigma around deportation. However, in light of deportees’ social and material needs, many turn to state-sponsored social welfare agencies and NGOs to get financial and social support. The poster included a telephone contact, and interested persons were asked to call the number to volunteer to be a participant. Participants who called in claimed to have seen the poster at one or more of the agencies which provided services for displaced and homeless men including social welfare offices, family services, a deportee reintegration center, mental health clinics, and centers for retraining and unemployment. Persons who responded and satisfied the selection criteria were asked to refer other potential candidates, and these referrals were then contacted via telephone and invited to participate in the study. Sixteen participants met the criteria and were selected to participate in this study.

Data collection was done by conducting semistructured interviews using an interview guide. Each interview lasted approximately 90 min. All the interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed manually. Data analysis was conducted by using thematic analysis. First, the data were reviewed, and then initial codes were produced from the data. The patterns that emerged enabled naming and categorization of the data according to themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

## Informed Consent and Ethics

All the procedures, involving human participants, were performed in accordance with institutional ethical standards and the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and subsequent amendments. The researcher sought and received the institution's ethics committee approval. Informed consent was obtained from participants who were selected for the study.

## Findings

### Introducing the Participants of the Study

Table 1 represents a summary of the key attributes of the participants in this study. All the names have been altered to ensure confidentiality of the participants.

### Challenges Affecting Aging Deported Men

The participants cited various challenges they encountered in attempting to reintegrate and how these challenges intersected with aging. The theme of managing “unchartered territories” or negotiating new spaces emerged as a refrain in the data.

### Intrapersonal Challenges

**Health.** There was a general consensus from all participants that their ages and levels of health during detention and deportation affected their resettlement. Eleven of the sixteen participants were diagnosed with

**Table 1.** Summary of the Key Attributes of the Participants.

Participant	Age	Educational level/occupation prior to deportation	Immigration status in the United States prior to deportation	No. of years spent abroad	Age at time of deportation	Year deported
Mark	59	School leaving/landscaper	Permanent resident	37	52	2010
Rick	62	High school/store supervisor	Permanent resident		54	2011
Steve	67	Primary school completion/ laborer	Permanent resident	48	59	2009
John	56	University/investment banker	Permanent resident	32	44	2005
Paul	56	High school/cashier	Undocumented immigrant	35	45	2006
Peter	61	High school/manager	Permanent resident	38	57	2013
Sam	57	High school/construction	Permanent resident	20	49	2009
Larry	64	Primary school/unemployed	Permanent resident	30	56	2009
Smith	58	Primary school/laborer	Permanent resident	35	51	2010
Dan	56	High school/construction	Permanent resident	17	49	2010
Kern	57	High School/manager	Permanent resident	25	41	2001
Ken	64	High school/plumber	Undocumented immigrant	45	61	2014
Chris	54	High school/cook	Permanent resident	35	37	2000
Nigel	57	High school/cashier	Undocumented immigrant	41	43	2003
Mark	50	High school/electrician	Undocumented immigrant	18	32	1999
Andy	62	High school/musician	Permanent resident	40	46	2001

diseases or conditions which require long-term health care. These conditions included diabetes, heart disease, arthritis, and hypertension. Steve explained that he was often sick and unable to work. Steve, Larry, and Rick claimed that they were unable to get medical insurance because of the high cost of insurance of their age. This constituted a structural barrier to their health and well-being, as the cost prevented them from accessing insurance. Steve said,

They look at me as weak and frail. No company is willing to insure me cheaply. My health is deteriorating and I know I am getting old.

Mark claimed that aging presented new challenges to his health and that the cost of medicine was a barrier to him accessing medication.

Steve, Dan, and Rick explained that living with chronic disease such as diabetes and hypertension became a new experience to them, one which they were never prepared to deal with, as they always thought they would receive social security benefits upon their retirement. However, their age was a central determinant in acquiring medical insurance and protection.

### *Psychological Challenges*

All participants in this study explained that they were faced with various psychological challenges such as feelings of rejection, posttraumatic symptoms, and being “banished” from a country they regarded as their own. Both Paul and John claimed that they were now going through challenges which they never expected as they felt even more rejected as they aged.

Five participants in this study experienced posttraumatic symptoms and ambiguous loss. Sam, John, Paul, and Peter claimed that feelings of rejection, loneliness, and depression worsened for them as they got older. Larry commented on how he feels shame and described experiencing symptoms consistent with posttraumatic stress, including bedwetting. He claims his aging has exacerbated the problems he encounter, and he feels himself experiencing more episodes of depression as he gets older.

### *Emotional Challenges*

All participants shared that they experience emotional challenges, which have worsened as they get older. Fourteen participants disclosed feelings of sadness due to the separation from family members. The participants who experienced separation from children expressed emotional pain, as access to them through telephone conversations was very expensive. Two participants stated that the biggest challenge facing them was leaving children abroad and not knowing if they would ever see them again. All the participants explained that as they become older, they are faced with even more emotional pain as the finality of not seeing their loved ones becomes a greater reality.

All participants voiced that stigma and discrimination were main challenges when they returned. As older men, however, the participants felt that they were stigmatized and labeled as people who returned to drain the country's social services.

As previously mentioned, many participants migrated at early ages and spent a large percentage of their lives abroad. As a result, many arrived in Trinidad with no real knowledge about how to live in the country.

### *Subsistence Conditions*

As they told of their experiences following their deportation, the participants focused on how they were experiencing serious economic hardship. They described their experiences and feelings about not being able to provide economic support to family members left in the departing country and the severe economic hardships including unemployment and homelessness.

**Employment.** The findings showed that all aging deported men considered that accessing employment was key to successful reintegration; however, accessing suitable employment as older men presented unique challenges. At the time of this study, nine of the 16 participants were temporarily employed in jobs that were low-paying and which demanded physical exertion, such as laborers and porters. Two persons were employed as security officers, and five persons were unemployed. The participants claimed that as they aged, they encountered structural barriers to employment such as age discrimination, diminished conditions of work, and lack of employment protection and rights. Rick explained his challenges in seeking meaningful employment:

When I turned 60, I earned a living as a laborer. My boss said he cannot pay me the same amount as before because my work slowed down. Then he said in this country people retire at 60. Eventually he let me go because he said it made more sense to hire someone who was younger.

**Housing.** There were also structural barriers to acquiring housing, as owning a home requires the applicant to put a downpayment on a house and to have job security. None of the men interviewed were able to secure permanent housing. At the time of this study, four participants were renting one-bedroom apartments, nine were living in a homeless shelter, and three were living with their relatives. They claimed that opportunities for getting housing worsened as they aged. Relatives, for instance, did not want to take on the burden of caring for an older person. Peter said this was because the relatives “did not want to take responsibility for someone who they assume will get sick and die or to have to financially support someone through retirement.”

**Meeting physiological needs.** All the participants in this study claimed that as they aged, they encountered greater difficulties in meeting their daily needs such as paying for food, purchasing clothing, and paying for services such as water and lights. This situation is also compounded by an inability to qualify for public assistance or national old age pension schemes because of the number of years they lived abroad. According to Dan,

As I got older, I developed special needs which became too expensive. Living with diabetes is hard and expensive. I cannot afford the food I need to eat and I realize eating healthy is expensive in this country.

Ken claimed that he attempted to get the national old age pension and was told by the welfare officer that the number of years he lived abroad was a barrier to accessing this grant.

### *Sources of Support for Reintegration*

Participants disclosed that there were some support systems which assisted them in their efforts to reintegrate into life in Trinidad and Tobago. The nature of support included emotional, social, or financial support, and the connections to particular institutions.

### *Psychological and Emotional Support*

The participants revealed that they received limited financial, psychological, and emotional support from three sources: relatives who reside abroad, state-funded welfare program, and nongovernmental agencies. For John, his continued support from his wife abroad was instrumental in meeting his material, emotional, and psychological needs. Financial support, from relatives abroad and locally, was cited as a major element of reintegration by 10 participants. Paul, who described himself as “somewhat” reintegrated, received financial support from relatives in the United States. In his case, his relatives were able to pay his rent and cover minor expenses while he pursued skills training. For Dan, his relatives in Trinidad supplied a small “amount of cash which helped me [him] to land on the ground.”

### *Support From Social Service Agencies and Civil Society*

Support for the reintegration of aging deported men came from a combination of state-funded social welfare agencies, faith-based organizations, and NGOs. Seven participants explained that they received assistance from faith-based organizations which provided meals and temporary housing to them. They claimed that the support from faith-based organizations was sporadic, and they were often forced to convert to the religion of the organization.

There were NGOs which supported the material and housing needs of the men. One NGO, for instance, offered housing for a period of 6 weeks. The men viewed this as helpful but not sufficient given their long-term needs. Four of the participants cited their major support came from the NGO which receives state subventions to support deportee reintegration. The support included meeting them at the airport, providing housing, and sourcing employment for them. This support, however, only lasted 3 months, as the NGO’s policies stipulate a cap on the duration of services to its clients.

All the men stated that they could also turn to government-funded welfare programs. The most frequently used government welfare provision accessed by deportees was the social welfare grant for “old age” pension.

The participants in this study viewed the old age pension to be insufficient to meet their needs, and explained there were many barriers to access, including the stipulation that recipients must reside in Trinidad and Tobago for a period of 5 years before qualifying for the pension and the need to present a valid national identification card as proof of citizenship. Many deportees are not in possession of a valid identification document.

## Discussion

This study is therefore the first to provide an insight into the experiences of aging deported men. By applying the ecological model to understand the experiences of reintegration of the participants, the study showed that the process of aging presented challenges to them in their ability to achieve a “fit” between their individual needs and the environment.

### *Intrapersonal Conditions Affecting Aging Deported Men's Experiences of Reintegration*

The reintegration experiences were extremely severe for aging male deportees and proved to be a major stressful life event. Consistent with the findings of Coutin (2015), and Lindert et al. (2009), this study's findings reported psychological and emotional trauma, permanent loss, and experiences of social exclusion. These experiences are tied to the rejection, stigmatization, and discrimination that deported men claim affect their reintegration. Several studies have reported similar findings (Brotherton & Barrios, 2011; Nicholas & Peutz, 2010). The findings in this study supported literature (Lonegan, 2008) which indicated that the loss of the opportunity to ever return to their adopted country was perhaps the greatest loss expressed by deportees. The medicalization of aging in Trinidad and Tobago, and challenges in securing medical insurance also reduced the deported men's access to proper health care.

### *Subsistence Conditions*

The study's findings paint a picture of returning without any finances to start their “new” life. Several authors have commented that major challenges to the reintegration of deportees resulted from the difficulty or sometimes impossibility of acquiring assets owned in the removal country (Coutin, 2015; Griffin, 2009).

The lack of finances prevented aging deportees from accessing suitable housing or materials for survival. The data in this study overwhelmingly described the barriers to employment including cultural perceptions of aging and the resulting stigma and discrimination based on both the deportation status of the men and aging.

Social exclusion also affected aging deported men as they attempted to reintegrate into society. This finding supports the work of Chaudry et al. (2010) and Zilberg

(2004) which explain how deported men experience rejection from both the removal country and their home country.

### *Sources of Support*

Aging deported men drew on social networks for support in reintegrating into society, which is consistent with the ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The extent of deportees' social network embeddedness often determined what sources of support were available to them and what they could have drawn from to reduce the challenges to reintegration. Social networks varied according to the individual's connections to relatives and NGOs.

### *Limitations of the Study*

There were a few limitations present in this study. First, the interviews relied on the disclosures from the participants. Participants may have failed to disclose vital pieces of information because of the “taboo” surrounding criminal convictions. This limitation was minimized by interviewing more than one participant who had experienced the phenomenon.

Two additional specific threats to the study involved the validity of this study and researcher bias and reactivity and the idea of objectivity as an impossibility (Merriam, 2009). To limit these threats, the researcher identified personal biases and perspectives around the research topic and allowed a colleague to perform respondent validation or member checking. In addition, the researcher adopted skills in reflexivity on practice, thereby providing the opportunity for reflecting and clarifying information shared. This allowed the researcher to interpret the participants' responses accurately.

### *Recommendations*

The findings in this study suggest that there is a need for more extensive exploration of the issues affecting the reintegration of aging deportees be undertaken. Even though this study explored the phenomenon, a wider study should be conducted to provide information on the experiences of a larger body of aging deported men.

This study also points to a critical need for a coordinated approach in providing support to aging deportees and the provisions of these services for a period longer than 3 months. NGOs can also examine sustainable ways of helping deportees reintegrate, such as providing Skype services with family members left abroad, support in accessing identification documents, retraining, and counseling. In so doing, the extent of ecological embeddedness of deportees can be significantly increased.

There is a need for social work interventions including group support, counseling services, and programs to promote mechanisms to strengthen the families across borders

and locally. In this regard, these services should focus on helping the aging deportee in role adjustments and maintaining transnational connections with families left abroad.

The provision of livelihood assistance to support the employability and employment of aging deportees should be created to provide assistance to individuals to undergo training in market-driven skills, entrepreneurial knowledge, and support for persons with a desire to engage in a business that is feasible.

## Conclusion

This study explored the experiences of aging men and their reintegration to Trinidad and Tobago following deportation. The findings revealed there were many intrapersonal and structural barriers which presented challenges to the men's attempt to reintegrate and meet their personal, psychosocial, and economic needs. These include economic challenges, gaining employment and housing, and stigma and discrimination based on both their age and status as a deportee. The sources of support which aided in their reintegration included support from social networks and social capital which comprised of support from NGOs and to relatives. The extent to which these support systems aided in reintegration seemed limited, as their provisions were not sufficient to promote long-term, sustainable return.

The use of the ecological model to guide this study was helpful, as it was able to determine multiple points of intervention which could address the challenges facing aging deported men. The understanding gained from the findings in this study showed the need for the development of policies and mechanisms that will be able to better serve the needs of this special population. From a policy perspective, efforts should be made for social service providers to develop their understanding of the unique conditions which aging deportees encounter as they attempt to reintegrate into society and their particular needs for reintegration. Services should be more collaborative and cohesive so that provisions are made effectively and efficiently to deportees.

## Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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