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# Social Work Ethics and Values as a Mitigating Force in Migration: Lessons from Caribbean Child Lifers in the USA

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## Abstract

The role and importance of social work values and ethics in migration, promoting anti-oppressive and non-discriminatory practice within the host country and country of origin, is illuminated in this article. The argument for integrating a relational approach to migration systems, led by social work, develops from cases involving juvenile lifers/child lifers in the USA. The usual emphasis on Caribbean children left behind is shifted to those who accompanied their migrant parents and ended up in the USA penal system because of inadequate family support and transition mechanisms. The article seeks to answer the question: How can social work values and ethics mitigate the structural and systemic challenges for migrant children such that they transition successfully in their host countries? The analysis informs the

current social care systems expected to respond to the exodus of migrant children and families seeking economic improvement to high income countries. The complex realities of Caribbean migrants and what is required to avoid them ending up in the penal system or child protection system of their host countries is provided. Additionally, the broader question of the efficacy of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child as a practice framework is raised. The connections between deportation, crime, and violence, and more significantly, how intersecting structural issues in the host countries magnify these problems in countries of origin, are discussed. Policy makers, practitioners and educators focusing on migration work will find this research instructive.

Keywords: Juvenile, child lifers, child justice, transnational practice, Caribbean migration

## Introduction

There are many lessons to be learned from the migration experiences of Caribbean labor migrants of the post-World War II era, which could inform current immigration policies and practices. The current migration crisis across the globe illuminates the role of social work as a profession that is strategically poised to support migrants and engage in advocacy based on its fundamental principles and values. Migration continues to impact the global north with Haitians, Cubans and Mexicans for instance seeking refuge in the United States of America (USA). The more developed Caribbean countries such as Trinidad and Tobago are also being affected with an influx of Venezuelan migrants fleeing political upheaval (Amnesty International, 2020, International Organization for Migration, 2021).

Caribbean migration to the United Kingdom (UK), USA, and Canada has been common since the 1940s post war period when there was labor shortage in these countries. Caribbean citizens, mainly from Jamaica, Trinidad, and Tobago, were recruited by various employment agencies to engage in nursing, housekeeping services and other occupations which were in high demand by foreign companies and households. In the UK, this generation

was dubbed the Windrush Generation, a term which became popular in 2018 with the Windrush scandal, where there were deportation threats made by the UK government to Commonwealth citizens' children (BBC News, 2021). In the USA and the UK, criminal deportation rates of Caribbean migrants are alarming (Loop News, 2021, 2019), but efforts are being made to limit deportation where persons have been resident for exceptionally lengthy periods.

Earlier research focused on the impact of migration on children who were left behind in their country of origin (Crawford-Brown, 1999; Arnold, 2012; UNICEF, 2009) but little has been documented on the outcomes of those who accompanied or joined their parents. This under-explored topic presents an interesting area for migration studies. To date, there have been no documented studies which focused on child lifers and social work values, let alone those who were from the Caribbean. For this reason, particular interest is placed on children of Caribbean migrants who end up in the criminal justice system in host countries and how social work values and ethics could mitigate those challenges. Attempts to integrate children into a host country with limited resources, a diverse and competitive culture, hostile attitudes, and inadequate migrant support mechanisms has many challenges, as this article highlights. Specifically, it raises issues related to migrant children who landed in the penal system in the USA and explores the circumstances which led to their outcomes.

It is important to note that Caribbean territories such as Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago do not sentence child offenders to life imprisonment, but they may be detained for extended periods of time in juvenile detention facilities. The similarity in the treatment of child offenders in territories with varying positions on child rights cannot be overlooked here. Throughout the Caribbean, efforts are made to align practices with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) but despite such progressive steps to modernize their child welfare policies and to take a more transformative approach to child offenders through various legislation and protocols, oversight of juvenile offenders in detention and rehabilitation centres

remains the responsibility of the Ministry of National Security in Trinidad and Tobago and the Department of Correctional Services in Jamaica. Notably, Prisons Officers or Overseers have the 'duty to care' for these children, which is paradoxical. Such practices which are embedded in outdated laws and policies have severe implications for the application of safeguarding principles by personnel charged to punish children while at the same time ensuring their best interests as indicated by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. These legacies of colonialism in the Caribbean can be a hindrance to the UNCRC being more efficacious. This is further evidence of the systemic challenges of child protection systems grappling with how to treat children in conflict with the law and those in need of care and protection within a UNCRC framework. Finding the balance in child welfare and protection therefore remains a task for child protection and juvenile justice agencies in Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago.

Despite being signatories to the UNCRC, the fact that children are committed or sentenced for prolonged periods bringing an end to their natural childhood life can be deemed a life sentence for children (Scott, 2017). A recent case in Trinidad and Tobago, *The State vs A. Mitchell* (2021) demonstrates this well where two children, ages 12 and 14 at the time of detainment, were held in custody at a juvenile detention center for fifteen years without charge. They were eventually transferred to the adult prison and consequently charged and sentenced at the ages of 29 and 31 when they were convicted for murder, receiving 33 years and 27 years respectively (Ramdass, 2021). The way the case was tried and made accessible in an online platform during the COVID-19 pandemic, the disclosure of personal information of the convicted who were children at the time of the incident and the delay in the court process, all highlight the injustices done to these children now turned men. If we are to closely analyse this situation of children in conflict with the law in this case it does not look too far from child lifers in the USA who are not protected by the UNCRC, and as a signatory to the UNCRC this is a quite disturbing revelation. Such accounts raise issues of the efficacy of the UNCRC as an instrument to safeguard children,

particularly when the outcomes are so similar for child offenders whether their countries are signatories. The role of social work in promoting the welfare and agency of child offenders in the child justice system is also scrutinized along with its authority to be able to apply its values and ethics to remove structural and systemic barriers to child justice. Social work should be the main driver of the UNCRC and demonstration of will power, anti-oppressive practices and social justice is imperative.

A juvenile lifer is a person who is under the age of eighteen years who commits a crime that warrants a life sentence (Ogletree & Sarat, 2012). In the USA, a life sentence is warranted for the crime of homicide. For this discussion and to be consistent with the Caribbean definition of a child, juvenile lifers will be referred to as 'child lifers.' Under the US penal system, there are approximately 12,000 persons serving life sentences for crimes they committed as children. They serve sentences as Life Without Parole (LWOP), Life with Parole (LWP) and with Virtual Life Sentences (VLS) (The Sentencing Project, 2019). At the start of 2020 there were 1,465 Juvenile Lifers Without Parole (JLWOP) (Rovner, 2021). This is a significant decline compared to the last several decades (Nellis, 2021). In previous years, the USA led the world with a JLWOP population that exceeded 2500 prisoners. In the state of Pennsylvania, as of May 2022, 279 juvenile lifers were released from prison out of a population of 521 (Department of Corrections, 2022). Despite improvements, the matter remains concerning to child rights advocates as reversing LWOP remains at the discretion of the judge and jury with no parameters. The gains made in earlier trials are therefore facing institutional roadblocks and lawful justifications to re-impose LWOP on children (Williams, 2021; Jones v. Mississippi (2021). Nellis (2017) noted that there are also greater racial disparities when it comes to child lifers than any other area of the criminal justice system, where 78.6% of juveniles sentenced to LWOP were people of colour.

The plight of the Caribbean migrant child ending up in the US criminal justice system can be examined from the popular case of Lee Boyd Malvo, also known as 'the D.C. Sniper' (Fox News, 2015), as it demonstrates how

detrimental outcomes are for children who are maladjusted in their host countries. Malvo was a Jamaican migrant who accompanied his mother to the USA, was rejected by his peers, became vulnerable to grooming, and subsequently committed an offence which warranted multiple life sentences. This public case provides important lessons that should be learned to prevent such a tragedy from reoccurring and at the same time presents concerns about treating child offenders differently than adults as the USA continues to struggle to align with the UNCRC principles.

The ethical issues around child justice and labor migration related to Caribbean migrants are therefore examined. The study is useful for informing the emerging migration experiences and the impacts on countries of origin where, for example, the deportation of citizens has become a major social problem and the role of social work is ambiguous. It seeks answers to fundamental questions about the values and ethics of social work and its role and relevance in immigration and child welfare. Reference is made to Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago in particular, given their high rates of deportation (Leong, 2021) and the possibility of child lifers being included. A significant aspect is that both countries were also British colonies and today struggle to decolonise practices related to children in state care, including juvenile offenders. In this article, I make the distinction between migration social work and immigration social work, noting the transnational nature of the work beyond the host country.

## Literature Review

The literature on JLWOP as Caribbean migrants is non-existent and this article seeks to address that. Statistics on the number of Caribbean child lifers were not available at the time of conducting this research but the severity of the cases presented through a pilot study with this population raised concerns and warranted some attention. Research on juvenile lifers has gained much attention over the past few years. There is a volume of research which focuses on released lifers and their transition to society (Binswanger, 2011)

and another using life stories to show the consequences of incarcerating youth for life (Garbarino, 2018). The application of social work ethics and values to migration is yet to be explored from the perspective of migrants, such as those in this study in conflict with the law. However, literature which speaks to social work values and ethics, juvenile lifers, and welfare recipients of minority groups in the UK, USA, and Canada proved to be beneficial to this review as they highlight similar issues to JLWOP and illuminate the need for deeper analysis of social work values and ethics with migrants in general.

### Social Work and Migration

In Britain, more than four out of ten British children who are imprisoned are from Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds. Many of these children have learning difficulties, mental health problems, have witnessed or experienced some form of trauma or have drug problems (Scott, 2017). Although not legally considered life sentences in the UK, critics have argued that they are indeed life sentences, given the sentences they receive authorizes their detention for the rest of their natural life (Scott, 2017) as in the case of JLWOP. This data is significant given Britain's immigration history with the Caribbean. Caribbean children are vulnerable to engaging in anti-social behaviours and exploitation as migrant workers face challenges of discrimination, poor working conditions, little social protection, and vulnerability to exploitation (ILO, n.d.).

There is a racialized dimension to child welfare systems internationally, which can also be linked to migration. African Canadian children were reported to be overrepresented in the Ontario child welfare system with culturally inappropriate services and supports, poorer outcomes for Black Children, systemic racism, and structural inequities (Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies, 2016). Forty-one percent of African Canadians below 15 years of age live below the poverty line, and they are more likely to enter the child welfare system. (Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies, 2016;



Fallon et al., 2013). Child welfare and juvenile justice are interrelated areas, where children in the prison system are more likely to have experienced the care or welfare system. Such experiences have been widely studied (Soothill et al., 2009; Taylor, 2003).

Based on data presented earlier, migrant children are vulnerable to becoming enmeshed in this system where economic and social conditions are not satisfactory. Bywaters et al. (2017) focused on socio-cultural and ethnic factors which contribute to inequities leading to children as recipients of child protection services. Zettler et al. (2018) also focused on the gender and racial/ethnic differences of juveniles in residential placement and found that minority groups such as Blacks and Hispanics were significantly affected by adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), which also varied according to gender. This is also true for Caribbean countries such as Trinidad and Tobago and Jamaica, where children from low socio-economic backgrounds are overrepresented in the child justice and child protection systems (Children Authority of Trinidad and Tobago, 2012; CAPRI, 2021).

### Social Work Values and Ethics

The Global Social Work Statement of Ethical Principles (GSWSEP) was adopted by social work bodies across the globe in 2018 after a rigorous and complex process of contesting values and principles (Sewpaul & Henrickson, 2019). The agreed principles, which also provide the basis for this article, include promoting human rights, equity, social justice, participation, treating persons as whole persons, ethical use of technology and social media and professional integrity (International Association of Schools of Social Work, 2018). Decolonizing social work values and practice has been at the center of social work debates (Riley-Richardson, 2021; Williams, 2021) in the Caribbean and this has also been echoed by other global social work bodies through the established GSWSEP. This process of decolonization, which is central to the development of postmodern social work practice, requires a critical reflection and analysis of social issues such as migration, juvenile

justice, and child welfare/protection, given the colonial influence. Care ethics (Held, 2006; Noddings, 2012) and development ethics (Goulet, 2006) provide a balance to managerialism and paternalism as the dominant approaches to social work practice. Their principles advance the relational aspects of social work and the essence of working with vulnerable and marginalized groups and are consistent with the Global Social Work Statement of Ethical Principles.

In the Caribbean, social workers are primarily employed by the state or private agencies which are state funded and as such are charged with advancing the prevailing ideologies, despite claims and public outcries of oppressive practices. Despite several improvements in recent times, there is an ongoing struggle to uphold fundamental principles and values due to the limitations of social work being primarily state based and the ambiguous nature of the role of social work in the Caribbean. To mitigate this, social work organisations continue to promote their role and demonstrate relevance as seen during the COVID-19 pandemic (Williams & Forde, 2020), but the extent to which decisions are inclusive of social work expertise remains questionable.

Labor migration has also played a significant role in Caribbean social work, with trained social workers being recruited by employment agencies in the UK, USA, and Canada over the last 20 years, leading to a reduction in the availability of skilled and experienced social workers. Social workers in private practice provide a solution to promoting anti-oppressive practice but require skill and competence to navigate the demands that come with reliance on external funding and accountability.

### Migration and the Rights-Based Approach

Migration social work is a limited area of practice in the Caribbean, with social workers working with deportees and having little scope for proactive work with migrants. The literature in this area is therefore scant for the Caribbean region. The area of migration in social work has been criticized for

being under theorized (Shier et al., 2011), thus not getting the attention it ought to. Migration social work can be a useful approach to mitigating the issues highlighted in this article given its natural enmeshment with migrants, families, and networks (Williams & Graham, 2014).

The UNCRC is the main organizing framework for child rights and safeguarding children in Africa, Europe, and the Caribbean, although much is still needed to address the structural barriers that lead children to incarceration in these countries. Authors have highlighted the role of coercion by superpowers, which led to the ratification of the UNCRC and the resultant bandwagon effect, despite criticisms of its efficacy and representation of the experiences of diverse cultures (Mbise, 2017). The alignment of domestic laws and policies to the UNCRC also remains deficient in some territories, which means that the UNCRC has no bearing in court for a child (Children's Rights Alliance for England, 2022). This is also reflected in Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago where the age of criminal responsibility remains at 12 and 7 respectively (Office of the Children's Advocate, 2011; Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago, 2021).

Social work has its roots in immigration, dating back to the 1900s with USA social work pioneer, Jane Addams, who advocated for African Americans to not only achieve citizenship rights, but also that such rights must pervade all aspects of social and economic life (Scott, 2007). Adopting a rights-based approach to immigration will ensure that states make provisions for the execution of universal and internationally agreed upon rights. They can be more powerful. It is also empowering, such that migrants will receive the services where they can participate in decision making and be in better control of their outcomes (UNCRC, Article 12). Rights-based approaches remove reliance on personal values which often infiltrate professional relationships and offset the balance of power between the worker and the service user (Ife, 2012; Kosher et al., 2016). Service users are not seen as dependent and charity cases but as active participants and rights holders in the change process. A rights-based approach in social work as it relates to immigration and child justice matters will also be more empowering for

social workers as agents of the state who will identify and address root causes of problems and facilitate the empowerment of service users to claim their rights and hold duty bearers more accountable, thus taking a more structural approach. Applying a rights-based approach facilitates a universal framework for practice, which is borderless and interdisciplinary (Kosher et al., 2016), such that service users including labor migrants will access services to which they are entitled to promote their well-being and that of their children.

## Methodology

The study employed qualitative methods, using two cases which were extracted as secondary data, recommended by a group of JLOWP of Caribbean descent and documentary reviews. Male subjects were selected due to their overrepresentation in the penal system. One case is from public records and the other from a JLOWP's project he completed while incarcerated. These were suggested as suitable cases which represented the realities of the group of JLOWP as they provided useful information for analysis and advocacy. Upon agreement by the group, the subject in Case 1, called MP, was contacted, and notified that the case was being examined to explore gaps in the social services system for juveniles, which he expressed overwhelming appreciation, support, and approval for by submitting a release form and letter to the researchers. Although he just turned 18 years at the time of the crime, his encounters with law enforcement began when he was around 15 years. when he arrived in the USA. Case 2, called Gabriel, was shared by a JLOWP who documented the life of the subject at his request, before Gabriel died in prison.

Other sources of data included documentary analysis on JLOWP, official websites, social media posts of JLOWP and local media houses in Trinidad and Tobago and Jamaica. Although secondary data was used, the ethical guidelines regarding researching human subjects were adhered to,

based on the Social Research Association Research Ethics Guidelines (SRA, 2021). Consideration was also given to the sensitive nature of the cases.

The case study is especially useful for developing a comprehensive understanding of migrant child lifers in a real-life context, particularly in a context where the boundaries are not clear (Yin, 2014). Case study uses the logic of analytic induction to illustrate an issue, in this case, child lifers of Caribbean migrants. It is useful for connecting the micro level issues such as individual challenges to the macro of structures and processes. It is also useful in defining the boundaries and unique characteristics of the presented case and significant in that it was selected by other affected persons as a true representation of their realities. Thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke, 2006 was used to analyze the cases, establishing common patterns and codes which specifically focused on structural, systemic, transitional factors and personal coping mechanisms related to their migration experience as children. This article seeks to answer the main question, how can social work values and ethics mitigate the structural and systemic challenges for migrant children such that they transition successfully in their host countries? The research questions included,

1. What lessons can be learnt from the experiences of child lifers to inform the new patterns of migration such that children are not adversely affected?
2. With the ongoing migration to high income countries, what structural mechanisms are required to ensure that children's welfare is prioritised such that they avoid penal systems and how could social work mitigate the challenges?
3. What is required for host countries to support positive decision making of migrant children as they navigate the realities of childhood, cultural difference and peer to peer and adult-child relationships?

## Conceptual Framework

The data collected was analysed through intersectionality and anti-oppressive frameworks. Intersectionality offers a theory, a method, and an activist agenda to change the lives/circumstances of those who are marginalized within the broader society. The general aim of this framework is that of capturing the complex ways in which social (e.g., race, class, gender, sexuality for instance) and institutional structures of power influence the issues of social identities, marginality, privilege, and oppression within a given context (Choo & Ferree 2010; Collins, 2000; McCall, 2005). A key benefit of this type of framework is that of the ways in which the attention to oppressive structures captures divergent forms of discrimination, structural conditions (employment, environmental and political factors that impact existing vulnerabilities), the intricacies of that nexus, and the collective impact on individuals/groups/societies. This theory is therefore useful for illuminating discriminatory practices which resulted in children and families being negatively impacted by the juvenile/child justice systems in the USA and the Caribbean.

Anti-oppressive social work theory and practice as posited by Dominelli (2002) and Allan et al. (2003) provides useful ideas about how service users could be empowered to challenge and transcend oppressive systems and structures and recognise oppression and privilege. Anti-oppressive practice focuses on structural inequalities and places the blame that service users internalize on the structures and systems themselves (Mullaly, 2002). The power relations between structures and individuals are broken down in anti-oppressive practice. Anti-oppressive theory and practice therefore facilitates ethical practice where social workers can challenge inequalities and disadvantages and respond to the complexity of the experience of oppression (Burke & Harrison, 2003).

## Case Studies

### MP

The case involves a Jamaican migrant child who immigrated to the United States in 1986 at a time when drug related gang warfare was prevalent among Caribbean nationals and Black Americans. MP was arrested in 1988 on drug related charges, which were subsequently dismissed. In 1993, he was arrested again for resisting arrest and disorderly conduct. This too was dropped as it was proven that he was attempting to stop two women from fighting. On both occasions, neither he nor his parents were aware of his rights to consular notification. On one occasion, when MP asked the officers to contact his mother, he was ridiculed by them calling him a 'Mama's boy.' He was also denied the right to contact his attorney who represented him in a previous matter. MP was eventually arrested for murder in 1995 and remains incarcerated with claims of being targeted by the police because of his nationality. MP also alleged that he did not understand police practices and customs or the criminal proceedings, and he was unable to express himself due to speaking his native language, 'Jamaican patois,' which at times needed interpretation. This case is significant as it sheds light on the treatment meted out to migrants who were labelled dangerous and notorious for engaging in criminal activities and racial treatment of a migrant child. (McPherson v. US, 2008).

### Gabriel

Gabriel was the son of a migrant mother who left her Caribbean home country to travel to the U.S. for employment as a domestic worker. He was raised by his grandmother and father until the age of 8 (1980) when his mother took him to the USA. He was enrolled in school and grew up bullied and teased because of his accent. This led to several disciplinary issues.

Subsequently, his education was affected adversely, and he was placed in a special education programme.

Gabriel and his mother lived below the poverty line. As his mother worked long hours, Gabriel was often left to fend for himself once released from school. Eventually this led to his becoming integrated in “street life,” where he was soon exploited by drug dealers and hired as a courier. In 1988, he was arrested for possession of drugs and intent to deliver. Sentenced to two years, he was sent to a juvenile detention centre where he experienced abuse at the hands of the staff. Upon completing his time there, he returned to society and picked up where he left off, this time as a drug dealer.

In 1990 he was arrested and charged with first degree murder and sentenced to life imprisonment in a drug related shooting. During his incarceration, Gabriel's behavior deteriorated, forcing constant long-term decisions to be rendered by administrative personnel to contain him within the Restricted Housing Unit (Isolation). While there, he was placed on psychiatric medications for what was then diagnosed as a long-term mental illness. In 1998, Gabriel was left unconscious and unresponsive due to a head injury following a seizure resulting from a bad reaction to medication. Upon waking in the hospital, he could no longer remember his name, or intimate details about his life: He was reduced to a child-like state. In 2000, still suffering from the initial effects of the medication, the conditions and reality of his confinement pushed Gabriel to a breaking point, and he committed suicide by cutting his wrist (Brome, 2017).

## Findings

Thematic analysis reveals four main structural challenges which need to be addressed to improve the experiences and outcomes of migrant children such as MP and Gabriel. Critical reflection, an intersectional analysis of these factors and an application of anti-oppressive and anti-discriminatory practices will reveal further information and present useful solutions. The areas are discussed below.



### Political and Economic Constraints

Gabriel's and MP's families lacked access to vital economic, legal, and political resources that could have provided a means to elevate their condition. Economic push factors included the inability to meet basic needs in the country of origin, leading parents to resort to desperate measures that involved putting their children at risk of harm. Right to representation by a representative from their country's embassy/consulate was not respected and the lack of knowledge of rights and supporting legislation worsened the situation in both cases. There is no repository of knowledge for how to best utilize and exercise the rights and privileges within the host country so much of what inmates learnt was from associates, fellow countrymen or some other singular source. Structured and systematic representation is key in the justice system and migrants are at a greater disadvantage in the absence of this. No "civics" course was provided at the time unless that individual was applying for citizenship.

### Social Security and Support

As there was a lack of support within education and social systems to facilitate successful integration of vulnerable migrants, Gabriel was unable to navigate the education system successfully and he dropped out of high school. He reported experiencing racial discrimination and marginalization, both among his peers and with authority figures. His mother's employment situation did not help. Low wages required working longer hours and although this helped improve their economic situation, it was at the expense of adequate supervision and support to facilitate more effective parenting practices in the host country.

### Employment Policies

The hiring practices applied by international recruitment agencies at the time did not consider the needs of children who accompanied their parents as seen in Gabriel's case where he was often left unsupervised. It was also a

more feasible practice for parents to migrate to work and save and then have their children join them or support them from a distance. In the Caribbean, the latter is known as the 'barrel child' as the parent who left typically sends home barrels of clothing and other goods to support the family back home. The fear and uncertainty about the outcomes for children was one reason many parents left their children behind in their country of origin (Crawford-Brown, 1999).

### Mental Health

Gabriel was diagnosed by an institutional psychiatrist as suffering from mental health issues and the minimal treatment options available for the incarcerated exacerbated the deterioration of his mental health. The previously existing behavioural issues were the result of a slowly developing mental health problem that was undiagnosed and therefore never treated. The subsequent isolation within the prison's restricted housing unit further aggravated those untreated mental health issues, which amplified the need to display "male bravado." He felt that this was a requirement to prevent being taken advantage of by his peers.

### Discussion

These cases highlight the political-social-economic forces which influence social institutions such as families and the connection between the private, interpersonal, intrapsychic, public, and structural issues. The aim is to help provide an alternative perspective on Caribbean labor migrants and the impact on children when transition support is limited. Based on current trends, international migrants will continue to rise in response to job losses, violence, displacement, civil unrest, natural disasters, and states not meeting their fundamental responsibilities to their citizens (Kerwin, 2020). It is anticipated that there will be increased xenophobia, marginalization of the poor and broadened economic gaps to name a few challenges of the future of migration and work (Kerwin, 2020). As argued by Sewpaul and

Henrickson (2019), as the world becomes increasingly globalized, social workers must consider moral relativism and ensure that culture is not used as a guise for human rights violations. In this regard, there is a critical role for social workers as human rights advocates and promoters of anti-oppressive and anti-discriminatory practice. Social work is committed to promoting the principles outlined in the GSWSEP and is poised to add value to migration practices and policies. Social workers must be ready to respond to the increasing injustices and marginalization of persons seeking improved living conditions and to operationalize the ethical principles in prevention and restorative work in their territories. They must promote successful transition, challenge policies which reflect oppressive practices and minimise the value of labor migrants and their children, promote the human rights of migrants and continue to create a balance between formal hierarchies and relational practice. These concepts are expanded in the recommendations section of this article.

As indicated earlier, the deportation of convicted Caribbean nationals to their countries of origin has been a focus of migration social work (Barnes & Seepersad, 2008; Loop News, 2021; The Gleaner, 2021). This bears significance for local authorities that must respond to the needs of deportees who are sometimes found to be foreigners in their homeland. Such experiences are often the result of poor transition to a host country. Boodram (2018) provided a publication on deportation in Trinidad and Tobago which highlighted the challenges of reintegration and the need for social support to buffer negative outcomes. The economic burden to a country is therefore increased if effective reintegration policies are not implemented, which bears greater significance for migration social work.

Between 1996 and 2015, approximately 53 000 persons were deported to Jamaica as Involuntary Returned Migrants (Ministry of National Security, 2019). Important to highlight here is the possibility of an escalating crime situation where males are overrepresented in deportation statistics, often returning to their countries of origin with criminal records (Ministry of National Security, 2019), making them more vulnerable to integrate into gangs

and other illegal activities where there are limited alternatives and they feel that their manhood is compromised (Chevannes, 2001; Gayle, 2017; Levy, 2012). It is also reasonable to infer that migrants who are arrested in developed countries such as the US may be 'criminally educated' and are likely to return to their home countries with sophisticated knowledge and skill sets that may pose a challenge to the local criminal justice system. Social work can provide useful solutions to these challenges where social work agencies and probation departments develop communication and networking systems to provide follow up services with deportees and help establish support systems where family ties are non-existent.

The importance of research and critically reflexive practice is highlighted as data informs policies and practice. Social workers are therefore required to be data focused even as they balance the relational aspects of their work. The value of research is evident in the legal outcomes of child lifers. Evidence relating to child offenders has been quite instructive over the last few years, resulting in novel approaches being adopted to treat this population. Development psychology and adolescent neuropsychology provide some answers and support alternative treatment for child offenders who are deemed less culpable than adults (Romer, 2010; Johnson & Tabriz, 2011; Casey & Caudle, 2013). Research on adolescent brain development and child rights advocacy has been instrumental in influencing the courts in the USA to reverse sentencing and abandon JLWOP (Shepherd, 2005; Hernandez et al., 2020). While not an absolute solution to the problem of JLWOP, the decisions allowed some state courts to alter course as indicated earlier. Some states revamped their laws pertaining to JLWOP and imposed minimum terms to life sentences on many of their juveniles in custody. Doing so has allowed the release of many who have spent decades in prison for a crime they committed as children.

Caribbean authors Barry Chevannes (2001) and Christine Barrow (1996) have argued about the importance of understanding how Caribbean male identity is constructed and the role of family socialization. Gabriel's case demonstrated how his mental health was affected by the stigma and

discrimination he was subjected to and how he responded among his peers. This also highlights the relationship between stigma and discrimination and mental health care in the Caribbean as well as migrants' receptiveness to receiving such help. Migration social workers in the host countries and countries of origin should be proactive in this area, promoting mental health screening and migrant stress management programmes.

Understanding of Caribbean migration and its impact on children and families is expanded from the viewpoint of child lifers who migrated with or joined their parents later (Crawford-Brown, 1999; UNICEF, 2009). Migration to developed countries will continue if poorer countries are unable to improve the economic and social conditions to support sustainable livelihoods, which makes social work more relevant. The recent exodus of migrants to the US, UK, and Canada evidence this and embracing social work values and ethics in migration work can provide useful solutions to the accompanying challenges.

## Recommendations

As previously noted, our societies are characterized by migration and social work continues to play a critical role in safeguarding child migrants and their families. To improve the outlook therefore requires that social workers become more integrated in migration work, gain the political will to engage authorities and advocate on behalf of migrants. Strengthening practices through a relational approach can reduce the negative experiences for migrant children and families such as those presented in this study. Social workers should be equipped and competent to advocate for this group by informing social policies, conducting social research, and providing direct services particularly around transition support. Understanding fundamental human rights and avoiding stigma, discrimination, marginalization, and oppression of migrants is therefore critical. Migration social work should be prioritized in both the Caribbean and North countries where there are significant pull factors for economic and political migrants. The USA, for

example, accounts for one fifth of the world's migrants, with a recent influx from Latin American and African countries and strengthening services to support immigrants should be a priority where housing, education, health care and employment systems are concerned.

Social workers function as front-line workers in implementing social policies and therefore play a critical role in facilitating the inclusion of migrants such that their experiences of engagement and integration within society are dignified. Central to improving the services to migrants is that social workers engage in critically reflexive research as front-line workers who understand the experiences of migrants and the impacts of cultural diversity. Conducting research to inform migration policies is a powerful demonstration of the application of social work ethics and values in migration work.

The recommendations imply that migration social work will become more transnational, requiring greater collaboration between countries. This also bears more significance for the global standards of social work being adopted where such arrangements are made among professional bodies. Areas for advancing social inclusion values and ethical standards in migration social work are grouped under political will, transitional support mechanisms and culturally sensitive child justice/child welfare (see Table 1).

Areas for advancing values to support social inclusion and ethical standards in Migration Social Work	Country of Origin	Host Country
Strengthen Political Will	♦	♦
Transitional Support Mechanisms	♦	♦
Culturally Sensitive Child Justice/Child Welfare		♦
Research and Development	♦	♦

**Table1:** Areas for strengthening Migration Social Work with Caribbean Migrants

## Migration Social Work in Country of Origin and Host Country

### Strengthening the Political Will of Social Work

Applying the values and ethics of social work to influence systems requires having the capacity and political will to do so. Critical to this process is being knowledgeable about the relevant international treaties such as the Vienna Convention, which facilitates advocacy for migrants such as in the provision of consular rights (Article 36). They should also participate in policy development and support migrants' understanding of fundamental human rights and avoiding stigma, discrimination, marginalization, and oppression of migrants as it relates to employment and immigration policies and practices. This should be complemented by education, counselling, and support systems in both the host country and country of origin. Migration social workers should ensure that information cards or computer applications should be provided to economic migrants, which include all relevant contact information and consular services. This should include key information on what to do if arrested for a crime in foreign territory, feeling targeted or experiencing xenophobia, and explain their rights as a foreign national in the host country.

### Transitional Support Mechanisms

Although the end to JLWOP is promising, incarceration of vulnerable children and youth remain a concern for Caribbean migrant children if they are not adequately prepared and supported for the transition. Social workers should lead on transitional programmes to ensure successful reintegration of formerly incarcerated migrant youth. They should provide meaningful opportunities to help families provide support to a child lifer for instance, and work to mitigate any obstacles to this restorative process. Additional services that would help are robust restorative justice programmes in schools and communities, community violence prevention programmes, family and parenting support interventions and improved access to medical and mental health care. The programme should include a strong mental health component, particularly as arriving in an unfamiliar environment

with its associated stressors can exacerbate pre-existing mental health symptoms.

Integrating information about emigration readiness into training programmes where the possibility of working overseas is high will be useful in reducing the vulnerabilities of migrants who may be exposed to exploitation and oppression. Social workers should ensure that children and young people and their families are prepared to recognise and deal with issues of racism and discrimination, whether real or perceived, through psycho-educational programmes. Advocacy on a broad scale is required to address institutional discrimination and oppression such that migrant workers are not unfairly treated and stereotyped either as service users or potential service users. Migration social workers can also advocate for citizens to be screened for mental health issues prior to departing their home country. These are certainly familiar grounds for social workers but the argument here is that greater focus should be placed on strengthening these practices to support successful transition to the host country.

## Migration Social Work in the Host Country

### *Culturally Sensitive Child Justice and Child Welfare*

Caribbean social workers employed in foreign countries such as the USA are assets to the penal system where they can demonstrate more culturally sensitive practice with children of Caribbean migrants and help reduce institutional discrimination, misunderstandings, and stereotypes. With advancements in technology, remote consultations can become more available in practice as well. As it relates to overseas employment, hiring practices for foreign nationals which are family-centred with a win-win approach is necessary so that children and families are not lost to the benefit of building the host country. Social workers in the host countries can oversee this process. Through interdisciplinary practice, social workers can take the lead in guiding immigration processes where children are concerned. They can also provide user-friendly reference guides on how to engage children in the court



system using child-friendly approaches, such that they can demonstrate their agency even in the absence of the application of child rights.

## Conclusion

This study illuminates the realities of some Caribbean migrants who chose to have their children accompany them. Many lessons are learnt from the USA and its juvenile justice system and how parents who left their countries of origin in search of improving their economic conditions were impacted. The lessons provided here are instructive and can be used to guide Migration Social Work training and rights-based practice. The findings will provide useful insights into the structural and systemic barriers to children's progress and what anti-oppressive and anti-discriminatory approaches look like when dealing with children and families engaged in economic migration. Revelations of how race, ethnicity, class, and gender intersect are provided, highlighting deeper understandings of the complex realities of children of Caribbean migrants and what is required to avoid them ending up in the penal systems of their host countries.

Social work values and ethics help to mitigate dehumanizing experiences of migrants and maintain a human rights focus. Strengthening this approach in migration work requires political will, transnational collaboration in the field and cultural competence/sensitivity. With forecasts being made that migration will continue to rise, the author takes a realistic view of the situation but does not minimise the role of the state in improving conditions for citizens to live comfortably in their home countries. A call is therefore made for more attention to be paid to this field of social work, both in academia and practice.

Further research could examine the collective experiences of child lifers to gain deeper insights into the structures which have contributed to their outcomes and how social work values and ethics have been challenged in the juvenile justice system. This can be complemented by another study of how migrant children evaded the penal system and how social work

values and ethics can promote such positive deviance in challenging situations. More research is also needed to examine the efficacy of the UNCRC in child justice matters across jurisdictions and how social work values and ethics can mitigate the challenges where child rights do not exist or are not respected. If social work takes a more assertive role in migration, we can prevent migrant children from becoming victims of hostile environments or victimizing others by contributing to the development of more supportive transitions. In this way, migrant children do not need to resort to their own survival strategies and self-protection mechanisms, which as this article demonstrates, can be devastating for them.

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