

ABSTRACT

“Coming out of the Shadows...Towards Social Justice”: Exploring the Experiences of Deported Men in Trinidad and Tobago Using Participatory Action Research

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Over the past twenty-five years there has been an increase in the number of criminal deportation to the Caribbean. The significant increase has resulted in the need for the Social Work profession to provide support to people who encounter challenges following their return to the country of their birth.

This participatory action research project explored the narratives of twelve men as they shared their experiences of being deported to Trinidad and Tobago. This study (1) explored how this group of men negotiate their return and make meaning of their deportation and (2) highlights how the research process created spaces which engaged the deported men in shaping solutions to address their immediate needs.

The findings provide an understanding of deportation from the perspectives of the men themselves and highlight their experiences as they try to maintain transnational families and negotiate living in a place they deem to be ‘strange’. The study also shows how the men used their participation in the learning circles as a way of healing and understanding how their lived experiences were influenced by social, political and economic structures.

This study contributes significantly to social work understanding of the complexity of issues facing deported men. The structural social work analysis of the men’s experiences shows how deportation constitutes a form of structural violence. The study also exposes the potential for social work research to connect deported men with social justice issues and provide spaces for the men themselves to take action towards meeting their needs and changing unfair systems.

Keywords: Cheryl-Ann Sarita Boodram; deportation; migration; participatory action research; structural social work; social justice