



# An Interrogation into the Effects of International Parenting on the Social and Emotional Health of Adolescents in Three Rural Districts of Zimbabwe



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## ABSTRACT

The changing geopolitical environment, economic transformations and technological advancements have prompted the intensified movement of people in a great diversity of forms. Transnational parenting has emerged as a significant and intricate global occurrence within today's migration patterns. While scholarly and policy discussions on international parenting are increasing, there is a lack of firsthand narratives specifically addressing the situation in Zimbabwe. The purpose of the study was to interrogate the effects of international parenting on the social and emotional health of adolescents in three rural districts of Zimbabwe. The study used a qualitative methodology to record detailed field notes, interviews, and focus group discussions. Thematic analysis was used for analyzing qualitative data. The findings reveal that transnational parents use relatives, media technology, caregivers and remittances as a way of parenting away from home. These parents put an effort into maintaining family cohesion through frequent communication using technology and sporadic reunions. The evidence indicates that children experience both physical and emotional impacts due to the absence of parents. Their search reveals that some caregivers abuse children emotionally, physically and sexually. The study recommends the need for scholarly engagement on the subject to broaden the understanding of how transnational parenting impacts children's development. The research adds to academic knowledge by illustrating a comprehensive grasp of how transnational communication operates, highlighting the significance of balancing social agency and structural limitations. This is evident not just within the realm of the left-behind child but also in the challenges faced by migrant parents.

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## INTRODUCTION

Transnational parenting has arisen as a notable, complex worldwide trend in today's context of transnational migration. Migration studies, which centred on migrants as individuals who left their home nations and relocated to their destination countries, have received a lot of interest lately.<sup>1</sup> However, with the increasing importance of the diaspora, worries have escalated regarding aspects such as remittances

<sup>1</sup> Kristy Y Shih, "Transnational Families," *Encyclopedia of Family Studies*, 2016, 1–7.

and challenges linked to migration.<sup>2</sup> For example, matters like family separation and children being without parental supervision gained attention. As a result, the rise of telecommunications and transportation advancements led to the emergence of transnationalism, which tested the strictness of geographical borders within and across countries.<sup>3</sup> Since then, the blurring of national borders has enabled migrants and their families to engage with each other and conduct family activities across geographical limits.<sup>4</sup> As a result of this evolution, transnational families which are characterised as those whose members live apart for a significant portion of their lives but manage to maintain a sense of cohesiveness and family hood have become more prevalent across national boundaries.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, transnational parenting emerged as a concept encompassing both transnational mothering and fathering.<sup>6</sup> In other words, these represent different approaches to parenting carried out beyond one's native country's borders.

Contrary to popular assumption, the majority of government statistics on transnational movement indicate that mobility happens within global south nations rather than between the emerging nations in the global south and advanced nations in the north.<sup>7</sup> Due to relaxed border regulations, official data often underestimate migration between countries in the global south, particularly between neighbouring countries. In actuality, it is estimated that countries with adjacent borders account for over 80% of South-South transnational migration.<sup>8</sup> This illustrates the reality that a sizable portion of Transnational migrants in Africa primarily originate from neighbouring countries or other regional economic communities, including the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). The well-being of households, home communities, and entire economies have all been observed to be impacted in different ways by transnational migration in Africa.<sup>9</sup> Hence, while not always prominent in the past, transnational migration can bring positive impacts to the country of origin, such as increased remittances, knowledge transfer, and potential for future investments. For example, migrants sending money back home contributes to economic development and poverty alleviation.<sup>10</sup> Studies have shown that transnational migrants in Africa have played a significant role in alleviating poverty for their families left behind. Azam and Gubert claim that through boosting remittance incomes, facilitating access to finance for launching new firms, and through the use of the knowledge and abilities of the global migrant community, transnational migration has contributed to the decline of poverty in Africa.<sup>11</sup>

In many African countries, increased investment in healthcare and education has been made possible by transnational migration and remittances, apart from the evident financial advantages.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, it is crucial to recognize that the results of international migration have not always been favourable. There is evidence that has been extensively documented which shows dishonest employers or recruiters who have taken advantage of transnational migrants, and that it can be stressful for both the migrants and their relatives who remain behind to be separated from their families.<sup>13</sup> Likewise, it has been noted that extensive immigration poses significant challenges to the identity and autonomy of the host nation, resulting in societal unrest.<sup>14</sup> For instance, there have occasionally been instances of xenophobia in South Africa due to the growing number of foreign workers in that country. South African nationals have sometimes assaulted and murdered foreign workers, attributing to existing social and economic disparities. Perhaps the most obvious and widely accepted connection between transnational migration and development is the money that migrants send home, even though cross-border migration affects both

<sup>2</sup> Shih, "Transnational Families."

<sup>3</sup> J. Dreby, *Divided by Borders: Mexican Migrants And Their Children* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

<sup>4</sup> Dreby, *Divided by Borders: Mexican Migrants And Their Children*.

<sup>5</sup> D. Bryceson and U. Vuorela, "Transnational Families in The Twentieth Century," in *The Transnational Family: New European Frontiers and Global Networks*, ed. Deborah Bryceson and Ulla Vuorela (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2002), 3.

<sup>6</sup> Bryceson and Vuorela, "Transnational Families in The Twentieth Century."

<sup>7</sup> Dilip Ratha and William Shaw, *South-South Migration and Remittances* (World Bank Publications, 2007).

<sup>8</sup> Ratha and Shaw, *South-South Migration and Remittances*.

<sup>9</sup> Jean-Paul Azam and Flore Gubert, "Migrants' Remittances and the Household in Africa: A Review of Evidence," *Journal of African Economies* 15, no. suppl\_2 (2006): 426–62.

<sup>10</sup> Azam and Gubert, "Migrants' Remittances and the Household in Africa: A Review of Evidence."

<sup>11</sup> Azam and Gubert, "Migrants' Remittances and the Household in Africa: A Review of Evidence."

<sup>12</sup> Azam and Gubert, "Migrants' Remittances and the Household in Africa: A Review of Evidence."

<sup>13</sup> Azam and Gubert, "Migrants' Remittances and the Household in Africa: A Review of Evidence."

<sup>14</sup> Azam and Gubert, "Migrants' Remittances and the Household in Africa: A Review of Evidence."

sending and receiving nations economically, socially, and culturally.<sup>15</sup> An estimated \$315 billion was remitted home by transnational migrants from developing nations in 2009. This money is three times what developing countries receive in formal development assistance.<sup>16</sup> The entire amount of remittances, which probably includes unrecorded transactions made through both official and informal routes, is considerably likely higher. Additionally, remittances have been shown to stabilise the finances of both households and the broader economic landscape.<sup>17</sup> Over time, remittances have surged during financial crises, natural calamities, and economic slumps as African transnational migrants increased their financial support to their families.<sup>18</sup> Notably, remittances have been effective in mitigating the adverse effects of economic upheavals on household well-being in Ghana.<sup>19</sup> Ethiopian households that received remittances made use of their cash balances to get through the drought without having to sell their cattle.<sup>20</sup> In a different instance, data from Mali indicates that a significant amount of remittances are put away for unanticipated events by transnational migrants who therefore serve as household insurance.<sup>21</sup>

Since 2000, Zimbabwe has seen a rise in transnational migrants amidst severe political, economic, and social challenges.<sup>22</sup> Present transnational migration trends involve more frequent visits back home and enhanced communication between migrants and their families, a departure from past migration patterns characterized by long absences, infrequent visits, and limited communication with family members back home.<sup>23</sup> In 2003, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) released a report indicating increased levels of mobility due to transnational migration which is sustained by underlying factors such as political unrest, unemployment, socioeconomic instability, and unequal resource distribution. The challenging socioeconomic landscape in Zimbabwe has fuelled a rise in transnational migration, causing the number of transnational families, parents who live abroad and children who remain in Zimbabwe to rise. Due to this situation, migrant parents are increasingly engaging in transnational parenting, which involves them doing their parental duties from a distance.<sup>24</sup> Despite overseeing their parental responsibilities from afar, these transnational parents frequently rely on caregivers to look after their children who are left behind.<sup>25</sup>

Like in other cases, the decision made by migrating Zimbabwean parents over whether or not to leave their kids behind is debated to be either a voluntary decision or a necessary evil.<sup>26</sup> Sometimes the choice to migrate is made in light of the dangers and hazards involved, but sometimes it is made because the children would have a better living back home through remittances.<sup>27</sup> Consequently, more and more Zimbabwean children are growing up with transnational parenting arrangements after one or both of their parents decide to leave them behind. There is increasing evidence that transnational migration has benefited some Zimbabwean households' social and economic growth, even though it is primarily perceived negatively because it causes a significant brain drain in the sending nations.<sup>28</sup> The majority of remittances must pass through unofficial channels due to bureaucratic border control processes, it has been difficult to gather accurate data on the effects of remittances from transnational Zimbabwean migrants. Nevertheless, as per Tevera, the annual volume of remittances to Zimbabwe, both formal and informal,

<sup>15</sup> D. Ratha, "Leveraging Remittances For Development," *Policy Brief* (Washington DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2007).

<sup>16</sup> Dilip Ratha, Sanket Mohapatra, and Ani Silwal, "Outlook for Remittance Flows 2010-11: Remittance Flows to Developing Countries Remained Resilient in 2009, Expected to Recover during 2010-11," 2010.

<sup>17</sup> World Bank, *Resilience Amidst Conflict, An Assessment Of Poverty In Nepal, 1995-96 And 2003-04* (Washington DC: World Bank, 2006).

<sup>18</sup> Sanket Mohapatra, George Joseph, and Dilip Ratha, "Remittances and Natural Disasters: Ex-Post Response and Contribution to Ex-Ante Preparedness," *Environment, Development and Sustainability* 14 (2012): 365–87.

<sup>19</sup> Peter Quartey, *Migrant Remittances and Household Welfare in Times of Macro-Volatility: The Case of Ghana* (Institute of Statistical, Social & Economic Research, University of Ghana, Legon, 2006).

<sup>20</sup> Mohapatra, Joseph, and Ratha, "Remittances and Natural Disasters: Ex-Post Response and Contribution to Ex-Ante Preparedness."

<sup>21</sup> Frédéric Ponsot and Bruno Obegi, "Etude de Capitalisation Des Initiatives et Mécanismes En Matière de Transferts de Fonds Au Mali," *Study Conducted for Centre d'Information et de Gestion Des Migrations (CIGEM), Mali*, 2010.

<sup>22</sup> L. Zanamwe and A. Devillard, *Migration In Zimbabwe: A Country Profile 2009* (Harare: International Organization For Migration And Zimbabwe National Statistical Agency (ZIMSTAT), 2010).

<sup>23</sup> Zanamwe and Devillard, *Migration In Zimbabwe: A Country Profile 2009*.

<sup>24</sup> Zanamwe and Devillard, *Migration In Zimbabwe: A Country Profile 2009*.

<sup>25</sup> J. Meyer and M. Brown, "Scientific Diasporas: A New Approach To The Brain Drain," *Management of Social Transformations – MOST Discussion Paper No. 41*, 1999.

<sup>26</sup> G. Becker, *A Treatise on The Family* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015).

<sup>27</sup> Zanamwe and Devillard, *Migration In Zimbabwe: A Country Profile 2009*.

<sup>28</sup> Zanamwe and Devillard, *Migration In Zimbabwe: A Country Profile 2009*.

may reach about USD 490 million.<sup>29</sup> A complex situation arises when parents migrate internationally and spend a significant amount of time apart, as the benefits received from remittances by family members in Zimbabwe can be countered by the drawbacks. This study therefore interrogates the effects of international parenting on the social and emotional health of adolescents in Bulilima, Mangwe and Matopo districts of Zimbabwe. The paper starts with the operationalisation of migration and transnational parenting. This is followed by an exploration of the study's theoretical framework and methodology, followed by the presentation of findings, conclusions and recommendations.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Migration and transnational parenting: conceptual positioning

One hundred years after “migration” was first established as a topic of study by previous generations of scholars, “transnational migration” and the word “transnationalism” first appeared throughout the early 1990s, in the lexicon of migration studies.<sup>30</sup> While the term “migration” was first used to describe movements of individuals inside a nation, such as those from rural to urban areas or the other way around, international migration has tended to focus on more than just these types of movements.<sup>31</sup> Fouron and Glick-Schiller define transnational migration as the flow and settling of individuals across international boundaries where they simultaneously establish and sustain various networks of connections to their country of origin.<sup>32</sup> Arango contends that the significant advancements in the transportation sector are to blame for the recent great acceleration of transnational migration, which has resulted in migrants travelling farther and faster over shorter periods.<sup>33</sup> As a result, there is now a greater diversity than ever in the sources and destinations of migrants involved in transnational migration. Due to the evolving migration landscape, and communication technology breakthroughs, immigrants can now maintain regular contact with their relatives in their home countries. This phenomenon is called 'super-diversity' and has emerged in both countries that send migrants and those that receive immigrants.<sup>34</sup> This was predicated on the notion that, in the recent past, a growing number of "new, small and scattered, multiple-origin, transnationally connected, socio-economically differentiated and legally stratified immigrants" had come and established themselves in destination nations.<sup>35</sup> Studies on transnationalism have also argued that an increasing number of countries are experiencing significant immigration levels and emigration as a result of societies being increasingly integrated into global migratory networks.<sup>36</sup> This demonstrates how improvements in the accessibility and affordability of transport and communication costs have made patterns of global movement both more complex and easier.

Previously, migration routes were focused on specific bilateral pathways influenced by historical ties such as colonialism, as noted by Bakewell and de Haas.<sup>37</sup> However, in recent times, there seems to be a dispersal of migration towards fresh destinations, resulting in a more varied migration pattern.<sup>38</sup> The escalation in transnational migration levels, diversity, geographical reach, and intricacy is often attributed to the broader influence of globalization and specifically to advancements in transportation and communication technologies. These technological improvements have notably reduced communication costs and travel expenses over extended distances, effectively framing globalization as both a technological and political phenomenon.<sup>39</sup> As technology has advanced, migrant networks and cross-border relationships between migrant workers and their families back home have become more robust and

<sup>29</sup> Daniel Tevera, “Perspective on the Brain Drain,” *Migration from Zimbabwe: Numbers, Needs, and Policy Options*, 2008, 19–22.

<sup>30</sup> Peter Adey, *Mobility* (Routledge, 2017).

<sup>31</sup> Peggy Levitt and B. Nadya Jaworsky, “Transnational Migration Studies: Past Developments and Future Trends,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 33, no. 1 (August 1, 2007): 129–56, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.33.040406.131816>.

<sup>32</sup> Georges Fouron and Nina Glick Schiller, “All in the Family: Gender, Transnational Migration, and the Nation-state,” *Identities Global Studies in Culture and Power* 7, no. 4 (2001): 539–82.

<sup>33</sup> Joaquín Arango, “Explaining Migration: A Critical View,” *International Social Science Journal* 52, no. 165 (2000): 283–96.

<sup>34</sup> Steven Vertovec, “Super-Diversity and Its Implications,” in *Anthropology of Migration and Multiculturalism* (Routledge, 2013), 65–95.

<sup>35</sup> Vertovec, “Super-Diversity and Its Implications.”

<sup>36</sup> Ronald Skeldon, *Migration and Development: A Global Perspective* (Routledge, 2014).

<sup>37</sup> Oliver Bakewell and Hein De Haas, “African Migrations: Continuities, Discontinuities and Recent Transformations,” in *African Alternatives* (Brill, 2007), 95–117.

<sup>38</sup> Vertovec, “Super-Diversity and Its Implications.”

<sup>39</sup> M. Castells, *The Rise of The Network Society* (Oxford: Blackwells, 1996).

resource limitations on migration have decreased.<sup>40</sup> These links enable transnational migrants to communicate with their families in their home countries and simplify travel between their places of origin and their intended destinations. Furthermore, increased literacy and education levels, combined with improved mobile phone access to global information, the internet, and satellite television, seem to have heightened individuals' expectations and awareness of opportunities in new travel locations. Collectively, these factors have enhanced people's abilities, aspirations, and drive to engage in international migration.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

The study used the Attachment Theory and the Circulation of Care approach as the core of its analytical framework. Scharfe suggests that the Attachment Theory, a theory in social relations, incorporates key relationship concepts.<sup>41</sup> Essentially, the theory posits that attachment relationships, such as those between transnational parents and left-behind children, are inherent predispositions developed for mutual survival. Scharfe argues that transnational migrant parents should build attachment bonds with caregivers entrusted with their children to ensure their care, actively seeking and maintaining proximity to these individuals.<sup>42</sup> While initially designed for parent-child relationships, this theory can be applied to other familial connections as well.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, the theory states that people categorise these attachment relationships into a hierarchy as they grow older and form multiple attachment relationships, with infants typically developing a primary attachment with their primary carer.<sup>44</sup> Ultimately, the theory highlights the idea that attachment representations are durable once established, particularly in maturity, but they may alter in response to developmental shifts in carers or painful or prominent experiences in adulthood.

Attachment and attachment behaviours are survival strategies founded on biological predispositions.<sup>45</sup> Similarly, Bowlby suggests that babies use different behaviours, such as crying, vocalising, and following, to get close to their attachment figures and also employ specific behaviours, such as grinning and clinging to a caregiver to keep that proximity.<sup>46</sup> Once infants gain mobility and confidence in their capacity to seek care from their primary caregiver, this person is frequently seen by them as a haven from which to explore and venture out. They are inclined to return to the secure haven provided by the carer for consolation and assurance when needed. According to Lamb and Lewis, the theory goes on to suggest that babies have an innate tendency to seek out and become close to their caregivers.<sup>47</sup> Babies learn through these relationships if they are worthy of love and care and whether they can rely on their carers to take care of them. But as youngsters grow older, these perspectives transform into complex internal working models that shape their behaviour and personalities. In a similar vein, the scholars suggest that the theory concludes that children need to learn to accept lengthier parental separations and that early parent-infant separations have detrimental effects. Nonetheless, being separated from attachment figures upsets both children and adults, which forces them to exhibit a predictable series of behaviours like distress, despair, and detachment.

Additionally, the "Circulation of Care" concept served as the foundation for this study. The concept of "circulation of care," as defined by Baldassar and Merla, refers to the asymmetrical, reciprocal, and multidirectional care exchange that takes place across transnational family networks and varies throughout an individual's life. The sending and receiving countries are both influenced by the political, economic, cultural, and social context of relationships.<sup>48</sup> Despite the conventional belief that distance leads to fractured relationships, the "circulation of care" approach surpasses this notion to tackle disrupted

<sup>40</sup> T. Faist, *The Volume and Dynamics of International Migration And Transnational Social Migration* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2000).

<sup>41</sup> E. Scharfe, *Attachment Theory* (University of Peterborough Press, 2017).

<sup>42</sup> Scharfe, *Attachment Theory*.

<sup>43</sup> Scharfe, *Attachment Theory*.

<sup>44</sup> K. Grossmann and K. E. Grossmann, *The Impact of Attachment To Mother And Father And Sensitive Support Of Exploration At An Early Age on Children's Psychosocial Development Through Young Adulthood* (University of Regensburg Press, 2009).

<sup>45</sup> Grossmann and Grossmann, *The Impact of Attachment To Mother And Father And Sensitive Support Of Exploration At An Early Age on Children's Psychosocial Development Through Young Adulthood*.

<sup>46</sup> John Bowlby, "Vol 1. Attachment and Loss" (London: Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1969).

<sup>47</sup> Michael E Lamb and Charlie Lewis, "The Development and Significance of Father-Child Relationships in Two-Parent Families," in *The Role of the Father in Child Development*, ed. M.E. Lamb, 4th ed., vol. 5 (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons Inc., 2010), 153.

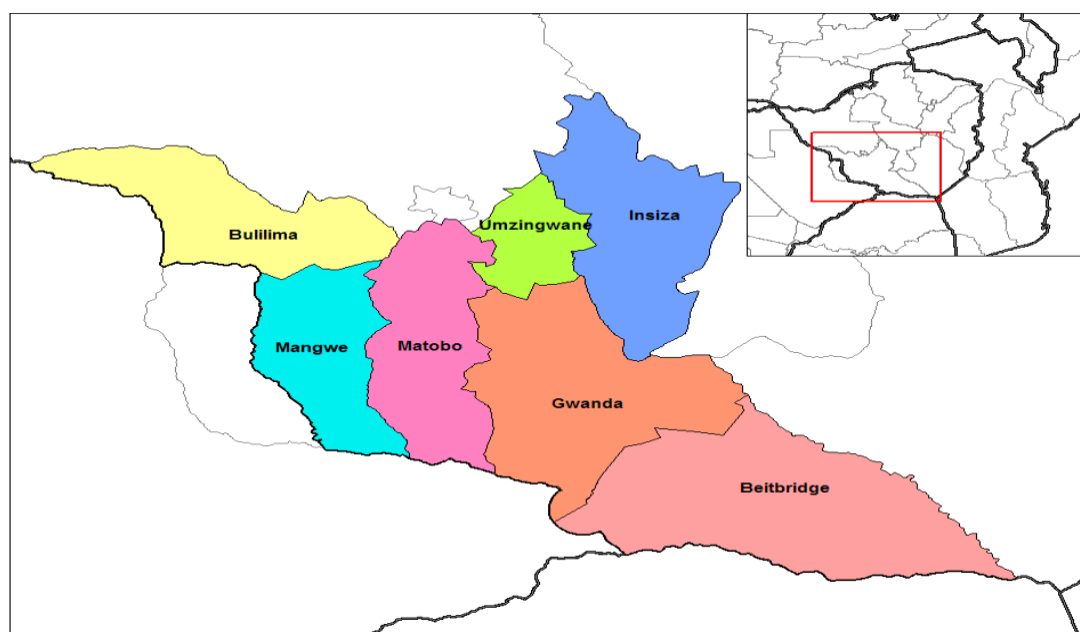
<sup>48</sup> L. Baldassar and L. Merla, *Transnational Families, Migration and The Circulation Of Care: Understanding Mobility And Absence In Family Life* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 25.



family bonds in international families caused by the separation of family members, specifically between parents and their children left behind, as observed in (transnational) migration.<sup>49</sup> Therefore, the approach defies the assumption that “child care delivery” is contingent upon physical proximity, which is interpreted as prohibiting the sharing of caring duties. This stigmatises international families and portrays them as inadequate, vulnerable, damaged, or fractured.<sup>50</sup> In reaction, the proposed approach suggests rethinking the concepts of “caregiving” and “co-presence” in a broader, more comprehensive manner. It also illustrates the various creative methods families use to address the care gap resulting from migration. This approach will assist in evaluating the efficacy of these care structures within present transnational parenting practices in the specific research location.

## METHODOLOGY

Three districts in the Matabeleland region were specifically chosen for the study. The districts of Mangwe (Ward 4), Bulilima (Ward 8), and Matopo (Ward 6) had the highest number of drowning cases. The Republic of Botswana forms the western boundary of the Mangwe District, eastward by the District of Matobo, and northward by the District of Bulilima. The three districts are located in the southwest of the country and border some areas of South Africa and Botswana.<sup>51</sup> The closeness to the frontiers of South Africa and Botswana has historically been noted as a major factor influencing the transnational mobility of the economically active population due to the prevailing political and economic challenges faced by the nation since 2000.<sup>52</sup> Unlike earlier times when male emigrants predominated, the current emigrant population from the area comprises a mix of genders, with women playing a significant role in the migration process. Additionally, poor climatic conditions in the region have also contributed to the increase in emigration. The districts of Mangwe, Bulilima, and Matopo are classified as agroecologically part of the Natural Region (NR) IV.



*Fig 1. Map showing Mangwe, Bulilima and Matopo Districts.  
Source: Researchers' construction*

<sup>49</sup> Baldassar and Merla, *Transnational Families, Migration and The Circulation Of Care: Understanding Mobility And Absence In Family Life*.

<sup>50</sup> Baldassar and Merla, *Transnational Families, Migration and The Circulation Of Care: Understanding Mobility And Absence In Family Life*.

<sup>51</sup> France Maphosa, *The Impact of Remittances from Zimbabweans Working in South Africa on Rural Livelihoods in the Southern Districts of Zimbabwe* (Forced Migration Studies Programme, University of the Witwatersrand Johannesburg, 2005).

<sup>52</sup> France Maphosa, “Remittances and Development: The Impact of Migration to South Africa on Rural Livelihoods in Southern Zimbabwe,” *Development Southern Africa* 24, no. 1 (2007): 123–36.

This region is marked by low rainfall totals, poor agricultural soils, high crop production failure rates, and chronic droughts.<sup>53</sup> Because of this, the agricultural pursuits that form the backbone of the aforementioned towns are not very successful. Many households in the area have experienced severe livelihood compromises over time, which has forced them to consider migration as a strategy for diversifying their sources of income.<sup>54</sup>

The study adopted a case study qualitative approach. A case study was used given its capacity to enable researchers to generate in-depth information on a particular issue of interest.<sup>55</sup> Focus group talks, in-depth interviews, and key informants were used in the data collection process. A total of 6 focus groups comprised of 6 to 8 people who were purposively selected from different sites. Each focus group discussion took approximately 2-3 hours and was conducted in sites preferred by the participants. The researchers also conducted 45 in-depth interviews (15 from each selected case in each District) taking into consideration the gender, age and wealth status factors. Both male and female guardians were deliberately selected to explore the gender perspective on the subject. In-depth interviews were used because the tool allows researchers to probe participants as they engage on the subject. The researchers also engaged key 18 informants (6 from each selected case) who included traditional leaders, council representatives, Non-governmental field staff, the Ministry of Social Welfare and educational offices. Given the qualitative nature of the collected information, data was analysed using the themes approach. This method was chosen because it aids in the understanding of the components of a phenomenon that participants discuss often or in-depth as well as potential connections between those components. Pseudonyms rather than the individuals' true names were utilised to preserve their anonymity. The interviews were captured on audio and verbatim transcriptions were done with the participants' express permission.

## PRESENTATION OF STUDY FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Drivers of migration in the study areas

One of the research questions aimed at establishing the determinants of emigration to South Africa in the three respective areas. The results of the focus groups and in-depth interviews showed that a combination of push and pull factors was driving the migration of residents from Matopo, Bulilima, and Mangwe to South Africa. It originated from the understanding that migration represented the family's best chance of survival and future opportunities, particularly for the children. Nobuhle said,

*We migrate because of our desire to give our children a better future. These kids need food, clothes, fees and care in general. If you remain here in this community, how will you support them? To me, migration is meant for survival. Remember companies closed during the economic structural programmes, a challenge that was made more difficult by the Fast-Track Land Reform programme that destroyed employment opportunities in the commercial agricultural sector.*

This finding confirms Hadebe who opined that, although there may be a multitude of reasons behind Zimbabweans leaving their country, it is irrefutable that the main culprits who first introduced the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) in Zimbabwe in 1991.<sup>56</sup> Zimbabwe used to be a country that both sent and received migrants, but with ESAP, the majority of the flows were outbound.<sup>57</sup>

Participants indicated that the Matabeleland region has poor agro-ecological characteristics making farming a challenging livelihood option. The conversations revealed that one of the main reasons driving the economically engaged to seek out survival opportunities in South Africa and Botswana was climate change and variability. For the majority of people living in this region of Zimbabwe, migration in

<sup>53</sup> Alexio Mbereko, Moses J Chimbari, and Samson Mukaratirwa, "The Political Ecology of Stakeholder-Driven Climate Change Adaptation: Case Study from Ntalale Ward, Gwanda District, in Zimbabwe," *Jambá: Journal of Disaster Risk Studies* 10, no. 1 (2018): 1–10.

<sup>54</sup> Maphosa, "Remittances and Development: The Impact of Migration to South Africa on Rural Livelihoods in Southern Zimbabwe."

<sup>55</sup> R., K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design And Methods*, 4th ed. (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 2009).

<sup>56</sup> Samukele Hadebe, "Neoliberal Capitalism and Migration in the Global South: A Case of Post-ESAP Zimbabwe to South Africa Migration," in *Migration in Southern Africa. IMISCOE Research Series.*, ed. P., Rugunanan and N. Xulu-Gama (Springer, Cham, 2022), 39–53, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-92114-9\\_4](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-92114-9_4).

<sup>57</sup> Brian Raftopoulos, "The Labour Movement and the Emergence of Opposition Politics in Zimbabwe," *Labour, Capital and Society/Travail, Capital et Société*, 2000, 256–86; International Organization for Migration, *Global Appeal 2024* (Geneva: IOM, 2024); Hadebe, "Neoliberal Capitalism and Migration in the Global South: A Case of Post-ESAP Zimbabwe to South Africa Migration."

search of work appears to be their only alternative due to the lack of agricultural revenue and the scarcity of employment prospects. Producing crops, in particular, is not an economically feasible alternative in agriculture. Drought has destroyed the cattle, which were once the backbone of the local economy and are no longer a viable source of revenue for households. The primary motivations cited for moving to South Africa were economic, yet other people conjectured that the economic difficulties were a result of failing political policies.

Dladla hinted that:

*Our children can't make it here. This area is drought prone which makes farming a waste of time. We used to be told that our region is good for cattle ranching but in the last twenty years, I do not think so. For your information, most households here lost cattle in the last two or so decades. There are no employment prospects in this area. Nothing at all and youths can't stand that.*

Further discussions also revealed that chronic rural poverty, unemployment and livelihood struggles were also contributing to migration to South Africa. Participants made suggestions that those who are economically active are being forced to leave the nation in quest of better employment opportunities. This is consistent with research by Maphosa, which showed that harvests are typically very low and crop income is negligible due to the challenging economic conditions.<sup>58</sup> The ongoing drought has severely decreased the number of cattle.<sup>59</sup> The study's conclusions are also supported by several academics who contend that political mayhem is the primary driver of widespread migration out of Zimbabwe, which has led to social unrest and economic instability, resulting in ruined livelihoods for many households (Hobane, 1995; Madebwe and Madebwe, 2017; Munyoka, 2020; Hadebe, 2022).<sup>60</sup>

Ncube alluded that:

*Our people leave this country because of the problem of marginalization and systematic exclusion. South Africa is our only hope. Here we are doomed. There is nothing that you can do in this country as long as you are from Matabeleland. Companies operating in this region employ people from Harare and there is nothing we can do about it. Even if there is some talk about devolution, I don't see our kids having any prospects in this country.*

In one focus group discussion, participants revealed that South Africa was a historical destination for the economically active way before independence. There was some stigmatization of those who could not make it to South Africa. Most of the economically active were emigrating to mines where there was a huge demand for labour. Further interrogations also indicated that the 1980s *Gukurahundi-sponsored* state-sponsored violence drove people into South Africa and other surrounding countries.

### **The Impact of remittances on the well-being of left-behind children**

Participants of the study were also asked questions that aimed at proving how children who are left behind benefit more from remittances. The purpose of the question was to ascertain how remittances impact child development indicators as well as protection-related issues. Based on the anecdotes shared during the focus group discussion, the genesis of discussions with participants had differing perspectives with reference to how remittances can enhance the lives of underprivileged children. Remittances are payments made home by migrants mostly in the form of cash or goods such as clothes, groceries and other household implements. In one focus group discussion with children, it emanated that remittances play a central role

<sup>58</sup> Cosmas Maphosa and Almon Shumba, "Educators' Disciplinary Capabilities after the Banning of Corporal Punishment in South African Schools," *South African Journal of Education* 30, no. 3 (2010).

<sup>59</sup> Douglas Nyathi and Joram Ndlovu, "Livelihood Diversification and Household Food Security in Selected Agrarian Settings of Western Zimbabwe," in *Sustainable Agriculture and Food Security* (Springer, 2022), 349–59.

<sup>60</sup> Crescentia Madebwe and Victor Madebwe, "Contextual Background to the Rapid Increase in Migration from Zimbabwe since 1990," *Inkanyiso: Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 9, no. 1 (2017): 27–36; Elvis Munyoka, "Causes of Irregular Migration of People from Zimbabwe to South Africa in the Post-Mugabe Regime," *African Research Journal of Education and Social Sciences* 7, no. 3 (2020): 34–45; Hadebe, "Neoliberal Capitalism and Migration in the Global South: A Case of Post-ESAP Zimbabwe to South Africa Migration"; P A Hobane, *Amacimbi: The Gathering, Processing, Consumption, and Trade of Edible Caterpillars in Bulilimangwe District* (Centre for Applied Social Sciences, University of Zimbabwe, 1995).



in keeping them at school and in covering their educational needs. In one discussion, it emanated that remittances are used to pay school fees, buy food and emolument debts.

According to Senzo:

*We learn at a private school in Bulawayo and come back home when schools close. My parents work in South Africa and they have made us proud in terms of providing us with our needs. Very few people afford private schools of late but our parents have managed because of the income they get in South Africa. I am sure you saw that our homestead is amongst the few with a private borehole, solar system and a remarkable number of cattle. In terms of food, we get groceries every month through cross-border transporters (Omalayitsha). And when we are around here, we just focus on our school work because we have a helper who does household chores and also a herd boy who looks after dad's cattle, sheep and goats.*

In a related narrative, Thabo indicated that his parents do send remittances back home for their upkeep. Thabo insinuated that had it not been for remittances there is no doubt that they could be out of school. He further indicated that:

*Our mum visits us twice or thrice and dad usually comes once a year. We don't have any challenges at school, my school fees are always paid on time, and my parents also send us pocket money for our other necessities such as airtime and snacks. During the farming season, they send money to hire a tractor for ploughing our fields. We all have time to do our schoolwork without disturbances even during school holidays. We don't fetch water from the community borehole like other children do. As you can see we have a solarized borehole at our home. We get all that we want from our parents.*

Discussions emerged indicating that children left behind experience the greatest economic consequences of parental relocation. The livelihoods and methods by which the children who are left behind and their families either improve or worsen following the familial rapture due to parental migration. The progression or regression of the left behind children's means and livelihoods is congruent with the migrant parents' ability to secure employment and remit earnings with regular intensity. Although a few reported positive economic implications of parental migration a substantial indicated that they were not receiving any or enough remittances from their migrant parents.

Most participants stated that they are aware of money sent to them by their migrated parents. It emanated from the participants that families with high remittance intensity, or those in which migrant parents contributed financial remittances with greater frequency felt a greater positive impact of the remittances. A substantial number of participants indicated that remittances were no longer enough to enable them to meet their basic needs. Probes revealed that the situation of such households was terrible during the Covid-19 period where they could go for months without getting anything.

Nosizi posited that:

*During COVID-19, we suffered a lot because my dad had no salary at all. We struggled with fees, food and everything you can think of. I remember at one point we had to ask for donations from our pastor. And after COVID-19, things haven't improved as remittances have remained erratic and insignificant. My dad lost his job and it's been a struggle on our part. What is happening of late is that our mother takes up part-time work from other people in the area so we can survive.*

Study participants said that the majority of children who were left behind without remittances were flagged in poverty. It emanated that apart from dropping out of school, some of the children were already engaged in menial jobs for survival purposes. It emanated from the study findings that left behind children without economic support in the form of remittances from their migrant parents go through a lot of hardships and existential challenges. Children stated that they are sometimes forced out of school due to a lack of money after their parental migration.

According to Lisa,

*My mother is based in Johannesburg South Africa. She last came here before COVID-19 and I have lived just like an orphan. My situation is a painful one because I don't even know my father. I am just told that he was from Nigeria and no one knows where he is right now. I live with my grandmother who has a chronic illness and I have since dropped out of school. My grandmother depends on rain-fed farming and we don't have draught power. So, I had to drop out of school and assist my granny through informal labour so we could survive. I work at a local home as a domestic worker. When I get paid, I give Granny the money to buy food for the family. My mother doesn't send anything for us and I just got wind that she is now married to someone there in Johannesburg.*

Further engagements also revealed that some caregivers were abusing remittances by introducing some children to drug and substance abuse. One key informant indicated that cases of children with parents in South Africa involved in drug and substance abuse as well as selling sex were on the increase.

### **Parenting strategies adopted by diaspora parents in caring for the left behind children**

One of the primary goals of this research was to determine the parenting approaches used by international families to compensate for the care that their children who are left behind receive. We asked participants questions that aimed at unravelling different strategies and approaches used for parenting left-behind children. It came out of the deliberations that transnational parents employed varying strategies for parenting their children in the three respective study areas. Rojas-de Gracia and Alarcón-Urbistondo note that parents who travel extensively plan several forms of care for their children who are left behind and these strategies are determined by several demographic factors such as the educational levels of the parent and their status in a given community.<sup>61</sup> The discussion led to the conclusion that the members of the extended family look after the children who are left behind. Extended families consist of several generations, such as grandparents, in-laws, aunts, uncles, cousins, and biological parents and their children (Vogts 2020). In-depth interviews and focus groups revealed that over and above the nuclear family, the extended family plays a vital role in fostering social cohesion and support in the context of transnational parenting. Specifically, the extended family was used by those outside the country because it offers a multigenerational, wherein grandparents play a cardinal role in child care and elderly care, alleviating the burden of the working parents.

Rugare argued that:

*I have been away for the past fifteen years and my kids are under the care of my uncle. He has managed to raise my kids in my absence and I am happy. What is important is sending money to meet their needs. This is basically what should remain a priority to you if you are parenting from a distance.*

In the contemporary landscape, the extended family serves as a vital cornerstone of social cohesion and support, complementing the dynamics of nuclear families. In today's world, the extended family balances the dynamics of nuclear families and acts as a crucial pillar of societal cohesiveness and support. The extended family is an essential component of social support and cohesion in today's environment, enhancing the dynamics of nuclear families.

In one focus group discussion, it emanated that some parents are now using their elderly children to care for their siblings.

Sihle pointed out that:

*I am currently the household head in the absence of my parents who are based in KwaZulu Natal in South Africa. We grew up under the custody of my father's relatives. Unfortunately, things didn't go as planned. Instead of caring for us, our auntie started abusing us. You won't believe that she be sent money for our upkeep and squander it. At*

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<sup>61</sup> María Mercedes Rojas-de Gracia and Pilar Alarcón-Urbistondo, "Toward a Gender Understanding of the Influence of the Couple on Family Vacation Decisions," *Tourism Management Perspectives* 20 (October 2016): 290–98, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2016.09.008>.

*one point I was taken out of class for unpaid fees. We also at one point went for days without food, knowing that our parents had sent her money to buy us food. My parents were so irritated by this that they decided I should assume charge of the family. I am thus the head of the household at the moment. We are in a different circumstance than our pals who stay with aunts and sometimes even grandmothers because we are on our own. And now that we are living alone, I can tell you that things are going well because I buy my siblings food and pay their tuition on time. Without my parents, I have had to learn how to be responsible for myself. One perk is that, in contrast to some of my pals, I attend church and do not drink.*

A noteworthy parenting tactic employed by the absent parents involved paying visits to their offspring's residences. Participants of the study indicated that visits especially during holidays were also critical in ensuring that parents and children communicate all the time. A few children who were left behind reported that their immigrant parents came to see them once a year, usually around December, others reported that theirs paid them more than one annual visit (in December, over the Easter and August holidays). Some opined that their parents were coming after three or so years. Mandla postulated that:

*Some of the children in this area go for several years without seeing their parents. It is a very sad development given its implications on the emotional development of these children. It frustrates them so much. Some don't even put an effort into sending them money so that they visit them during school holidays. Kids are just left in the hands of strangers or grandmothers who in most instances will be incapacitated by their chronic illnesses. It's too much burden for the aged ones to look after the kids of those outside the country.*

After a few follow-up questions concerning the migrant parents' visitation frequency were asked of the participants, it became clear that some migrant parents' inability to return home frequently was due to problems with obtaining travel documents and stable employment in their destination countries. Some respondents related stories of how following their brief trips home, their parents discovered that their employment had been offered to other job searchers. As a result, some people now make deliberate, short trips home.

Deliberations with participants also revealed that parenting through information communication technology was becoming the most common strategy used by diaspora parents. It emanated that communication using WhatsApp, Facebook, SMS and other Social media platforms has a significant impact on how children who are left behind develop. The important finding of the study was that transnational parents adopted communication as an emotional strategy in caring for their left-behind children in the study area. Probes revealed that children who were left behind did not notice the distance between them and their absent parents, as long as there existed a trustworthy means of communication. Awande who is a caregiver noted that:

*I have been looking after these four children for the last three years. What keeps them happy is the communication that their parents do. Their parents communicate frequently with them and me. The oldest of the children is a 14-year-old boy and has his mobile phone. Their parents bought me a phone to use to communicate with their youngest children. They phone and talk to the children regularly, encouraging them in their studies."*

Although technology was playing a role in facilitating parenting from afar, some participants insinuated that some discussions needed some face-to-face engagement with their parents. Some participants however pinpointed that some parents were poorly communicating with their left behind children: something that affected children negatively.

Hlabano posited that:

*Most of these diaspora parents think that parenting is about sending money home. For them, monthly groceries and addressing children's needs are a priority. Parenting involves monitoring the behaviour of the child, ensuring that the child's behaviour is within the*

*societal expectations. How will you do that in your absence? We have also seen some using local pastors to parent from afar. Pastors are a symbol of righteousness and some parents have encouraged their children to go to church so that it assists them in their transnational parenting*

Remittances were seen as a new form of parenting. One key informant indicated that most parents thought that sending remittances back home was the best way of parenting from afar.

### **The Emotional implications of parental migration on left-behind children**

One challenge that geographic distance poses for transnational families is that of emotional strain. Children, from the time they are babies, get devoted to the person who provides them with opportunities for playtime with others, attention, and pleasurable intense social interaction especially if that person is cooperative, sensitive, and responsive. In a majority of instances, it is their parents that children become attached to. Children feel the need to express and control feelings about these important people, as they give them warmth. 'Warmth' is hard to define, and is certainly not a simple single trait. In most definitions it involves parents being deeply committed to the child's welfare; responsive to his or her needs and actions; willing to become involved in joint activity with the child, especially activity that stems from the child's interests; enthusiastic about the child's achievements and virtues, and sympathetic and helpful about his or her difficulties and failures; and sensitive to the child's emotional needs. The kids that were left behind were interrogated on "if the migration of their parents has affected their emotional well-being" to better understand the emotional effects of parental migration. The analysis showed that many of the children indicated that they felt lonely and helpless following their parental migration. Participants also revealed that the absence of their parents has also led to feelings of loneliness and helplessness due to parental.

Ntando and Amukela stated that:

*"I stay with my aunt's family as both my parents are working in South Africa. Whereas my aunt and her family have somehow been good to me, I feel I am a burden to them. No one cared as much as my parents did about how my day at school went or how I was doing. I long for my parents' nurturing attention,"* says Ntando.

*"With my parents living in a faraway country, I feel so lonely and helpless. Every time I see my friend with his father, a teacher at our school, it brings up memories of my own dad, and I long for my parents' departure to South Africa. My peers who live with their parents make me envious. I have always wanted to bring my parents back from South Africa using some sort of magic that is hidden. I wish they were here to support me every time I encounter difficulties. Life doesn't seem worthwhile with them so far away,"* says Amukela.

The stories above demonstrate how parental migration affects the children who stay behind emotionally, which manifests themselves in emotional loneliness and helplessness. A few of the children said they miss their parents' attention, feel lonely because of it, and frequently struggle to go to sleep because of their memories. Seeing other children with parents frequently brings up memories of their own family which were split up by migration. The study has shown that parents who migrate often leave their children feeling alone and powerless. This was shown to be largely the case for children whose parents were immigrants. The current findings are in line with those of Parrenas (quoted by Yeoh and Lam), who explain how children's emotional well-being is impacted by migration.<sup>62</sup> The findings are also confirmed by Zhao et al who argue that children who experience parental migration, become lonelier and more

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<sup>62</sup> Theodora Lam et al., "Securing a Better Living Environment for Left-behind Children: Implications and Challenges for Policies," *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal* 22, no. 3 (2013): 421-45.



reserved.<sup>63</sup> Similar opinions are expressed by Fan et al., Cassidy and Shaver, and Zhao et al. on the possibility of emotional distress for children of any age resulting from prolonged carer absence.<sup>64</sup>

## Summary

Despite the positive impact of parental migration globally through remittances, migration has its share of challenges, particularly on child development and rights. Migrant parents usually leave children in the care of hired caregivers or extended family members to care and nurture for their children. Proper care is not guaranteed with some of the caregivers left with children. This may expose children to physical, emotional, and sexual abuse by people who are meant to care for them. The fulfilment of children's rights, such as the right to education, the right to be well-cared for, and the protection from abuse, neglect, and violence by their parents or other caregivers, is further harmed by migration. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) highlights inadequate education and child labour as closely linked to parental migration. When children are not cared for, they may employ some agency to try and cope with the difficult situations they are facing.<sup>65</sup> Some of the coping strategies they employ may have a negative bearing on their rights for instance. Because it is difficult for families to migrate together due to strict migration rules in migrant-receiving nations, transnational parenting appears to be common in the three study areas. Due to a lack of scholarly and policy attention, there is a dearth of anecdotal evidence regarding the precise incidence of this social phenomenon. The significance of carers in the lives of Left-Behind Children (LBC)s cannot be overstated, since parental relocation is an unavoidable trend soon. After all, the study comes to the crucial conclusion that carers fill the care deficit gap that migrating parents leave behind. The emotional, psychological, and social requirements of LBC may be somewhat met by the positions that are available to them. Remittances play a big part in the international parenting system, but reunions and ongoing communication are also crucial to maintaining positive parent-child relationships. The rationale behind this is that LB children may profit from remittances while also experiencing the psychological, emotional, and social hardships associated with living apart from their parents. Generally, the study's contention and conclusion are that transnational parenting care arrangements' carer and remittance availability fall short of meeting the emotional, psychological, and social needs and developmental stages of Left Behind Adolescents (LBAs). Migrant parents should take advantage of their LBC's emotional, psychological, and social therapy in person by getting together frequently.

## Policy Implications

The study's conclusions highlight the urgent need for academics to conduct more research on international parenting. The main emphasis should be on the challenges faced by international migrant parents who are trying to provide for their children abroad, stay in continuous contact with them, and effectively care for their children who are left behind. Scholarly involvement is also required regarding gender norms around parenting responsibilities for children who are left behind. In a similar vein, it is imperative to investigate how family relationships might be preserved when gendered roles are renegotiated or reconfigured in international parental care agreements. Understanding transnational families' experiences and the cultural dynamics that arise from spending extended periods in two distinct environments is equally crucial. Children need to be involved in discussions and policies related to migration. Due to their vulnerability, children impacted by migration require special social protection initiatives that cater to their requirements. The goals of policy and programme interventions should be to stop the negative effects of migration on children who are left behind while optimising the advantages of remittances. Governments, non-governmental organisations, and civil society organisations (CSOs) should provide courses aimed at carers

<sup>63</sup> Chenyue Zhao et al., "Impact of Parental Migration on Psychosocial Well-Being of Children Left behind: A Qualitative Study in Rural China," *International Journal for Equity in Health* 17, no. 1 (December 15, 2018): 80, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12939-018-0795-z>.

<sup>64</sup> C Cindy Fan, Mingjie Sun, and Siqi Zheng, "Migration and Split Households: A Comparison of Sole, Couple, and Family Migrants in Beijing, China," *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 43, no. 9 (September 1, 2011): 2164–85, <https://doi.org/10.1068/a44128>; Jude Cassidy and Phillip R Shaver, *Handbook of Attachment: Theory, Research, and Clinical Applications* (Rough Guides, 1999); Zhao et al., "Impact of Parental Migration on Psychosocial Well-Being of Children Left behind: A Qualitative Study in Rural China."

<sup>65</sup> UNICEF, *The Impact Of Transnational Migration: Children Left Behind In Selected Countries Of Latin America And The Caribbean* (New York, 2007).

that address their understanding of the challenges that children who are left behind encounter to enhance the care arrangements for these children. The Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education which is responsible for the training of teachers should equip teachers with skills to deal with left-behind children in transnational families. The Government should review the selection criteria used in Social Protection Programs such as the Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM) in targeting beneficiaries, for example, to include children left behind in transnational families who live in poverty. Governments, child-focused organisations, Zimbabwean civil society, and the SADC bloc as a whole must work collaboratively to advance the well-being and rights of children affected by migration about, among other things, their care arrangements and coping mechanisms. There is a need to revamp the existing Child Protection Committee Structures in the rural areas so that they can mainstream the child rights-based approach, gender issues and migration.

## CONCLUSION

The paper has examined the impact of transnational parenting and its long-term effects on children's cultural identity development in Zimbabwe. These parents put an effort into maintaining family cohesion through frequent communication using technology and sporadic reunions. The understanding of how children raised in transnational families navigate their dual cultural identities and sense of belonging could provide valuable insights into the aspect of transnational parenting. The evidence showed that these children are physically and emotionally affected by the absence of their parents. The search revealed that some caregivers abuse children emotionally, physically and sexually. Left behind adolescent children receive little or no emotional nurturance from their caregivers and often experience a sense of abandonment and isolation by their parents, which can even affect their performance at school. The paper concludes that it is cardinal to deeply understand how transnational communication is practised and requires attention to the interplay of social agency and structural constraints not only in the context of the left-behind child but also in terms of the circumstances surrounding the migrant parent's position.

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