



**Exploring the Role of Information Communication Technologies
(ICTs) in a refugee population in Johannesburg, South Africa in
maintaining family relationships**

Research Psychology Masters Dissertation

By

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A research report submitted to the school of Human and Community Development, Faculty of Humanities, University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree requirements Masters of Arts by coursework and Research Report.

I have adhered to University policy regarding academic honesty and requirements in completing this dissertation.

Declaration

I, Miss Thembelihle Coka hereby declare that this study, which I submit for the Masters Research Psychology degree in the faculty of Humanities, School of Psychology, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. I have fully complied with the ethical standards ensuring no harm to my participants. I used pseudonym, ensuring confidentiality of my participants and the community studied for this research.

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Abstract

The purpose of this research study was to explore the role that Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) play in maintaining familial relationships in a refugee population in Johannesburg, South Africa. Previous international studies have shown that refugees who are separated from their families for a myriad of reasons often desire reuniting with their families back home. One medium that they rely on to maintain family connections is through the use of ICTs. Little research has been carried out in this area with refugees living in South Africa. This study was part of a larger research project exploring the use of ICTs in different types of African migrant families. It followed a qualitative research method, using a semi-structured interview schedule to collect data from the seven refugee participants who were originally from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and have been living in Johannesburg for more than two years and had access to mobile phones. The data was analysed using Thematic Analysis. The findings identified various factors that have motivated the participants from the DRC to flee from their country of origin namely: war, persecution, torture, political and economic freedom. Once in South Africa they also experience several challenges such as Human rights violation, language barrier, lack of formal employment and financial difficulties. The refugees long for their families back home and rely on mobile phones to communicate with them. Their preferred platforms of communication are WhatsApp and Facebook. They however experience challenges related to costs of data. These factors were discussed in the study.

Keywords: Refugees, Information Communication Technologies (ICTs), Displacement, DRC, South Africa

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List of abbreviations

DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
RSA	Republic of South Africa
SA	South Africa
FST	Family Systems Theory
ICTs	Information Communication Technologies

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the displacement of people world-wide reached approximately 60 million in year 2015 (Newman, 2017). The term “refugee” refers to individuals who involuntarily flee from their country of origin to another country due to a number of different factors including religion, persecutions, war and climate change. Refugees often find themselves with no place to stay but instead are forcibly displaced (Leung, 2015). One of the reasons for leaving their country of origin to maybe to seek welfare somewhere else (Hatton, 2016). According to Castelli (2018) there are approximately 244 million international migrants and refugees estimated to live in a country that is not theirs. In the South African context, there is an increasing number of refugees migrating yearly (Moyo & Zanker, 2020; Sebakwiye, 2020) and thus South Africa has become one of the host countries for refugees since 1994 (Landau, 2006).

South Africa has received approximately 270,000 legal documented refugees and asylum seekers, seeking refuge and safety (Mahlangu, 2016). A considerable amount of these refugees and asylum seekers are from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and the flights from the DRC began in the 1980-1990s with approximately 350,000 individuals travelling during the civil war (Steinberg, 2005). The war that took place in Katanga and Shaba Provinces resulted in millions of people being displaced (Zeender & Rothing, 2010). Refugees travelled from the DRC to South Africa due to war, political instability, unemployment and financial instability (Coghlan et al., 2006). They fled the DRC hoping to start over their lives for the betterment of their families. They travelled to different countries with some ending up in South Africa where they pinned their hopes on South Africa being the country where they would rebuild, regain strength and take charge of their lives (UNESCO, 2017).

According to the Constitution of Republic of South Africa everyone has equal rights to freedom of association and freedom of expression (Musingafi et al., 2012; O’Flaherty, 2012). The Refugee Act of 1988 guarantees freedom of movement, right to work, access to health care and services, expression of political, racial and religious views (Mahlangu, 2016; Rugunanan & Smit, 2011). However, the human rights mentioned above are often not applicable to refugees as they face challenges such as violence, xenophobia, lack of formal employment, a language barrier, loss of sense of belonging, family separation and lack of integration (Kriger, 2010; Neocosmos, 2010). Thus, the UNHCR highlights that refugees should have equal rights as the nationals of the host country with no discrimination and no violation of human rights (Cejas, 2007; Crush & Tawodzera, 2014). In order to provide a better context for this study, a brief overview of the history of DRC will be provided.

Brief History of the Democratic Republic of Congo

The Democratic Republic of Congo appears to have not had an effective government that controls the entire country since the 1880s-1980s (Gondola, 2002). The war that commenced in the DRC was complex and it was linked with the genocide in Rwanda, where millions of people had fled from Rwanda into Congo during the war (Emizet, 2000). The war in the DRC did not begin with the inhabitants but as a result of colonisation (Gondola, 2002). In the 1870s Henry Morton Stanley, a journalist, soldier, explorer and a politician who was famous for his exploration of central Africa, discovered Congo’s natural abundance of resources, riches, ivory and cobalt. His plan to take over and exploit Congo eventually succeeded (Eichstaedt, 2011). The people of Congo could not read or write so ultimately in 1898 they unknowingly sold their land and rights in exchange of beads. Stanley had promised them humanitarian rights in exchange; however, the aim was to take over their country (Deibert, 2013). He exploited Congo from rubber harvesting, which led to slavery, reign of terror and genocide. Slavery began with hard leather whip as an instrument of torture (Conrad,

2020). There was also colonial brutality, exemplified by the hand cutting of the hands of the Congolese who tried to retaliate and not follow the orders set by Stanley. There were approximately 10 million of people with no hands, having lost them due to failing to follow Stanley (Achebe, 2016).

This continued until Belgian Congo was established in 1908 and Stanley was stripped of his rights from the DRC populations. Thereafter, the lives of the Congolese improved. Although there was an improvement in the people's lives, gold and iron were discovered by the Belgians and these resources were extracted. They also colonised the minds of people of Congo through religion and education (Stanard, 2011). The people of Congo in the 1960s demanded their equal rights; after a while the Belgians pulled out leaving DRC a free country without a government (Nzongola-Ntalaja, 2002).

That is when the second wave of war commenced, this war was between various parties mainly: the third President (revolutionary and politician Laurent-Désiré Kabila), the government, rebels from Uganda and Rwanda and Congolese residents who were against the ruling party (Venugopalan, 2016; William, 2013). Zimbabwe, Namibia and Angola sent soldiers to protect the President of DR Congo from the brutal war fueled by the country's mineral wealth (Ayres, 2012; Laudati, 2013 & Williams, 2013). However, there were many deaths during this war. Approximately 3.9 million people died including the president Laurent-Désiré Kabila. Due to this, 3.4 million people were displaced (Mahlangu, 2016).

The following is the timeline of the DRC presidency since 1960-2019 when the people of DRC gained their rights and land back and the geographical map of the Central African Republic to show where countries are located from the DRC:

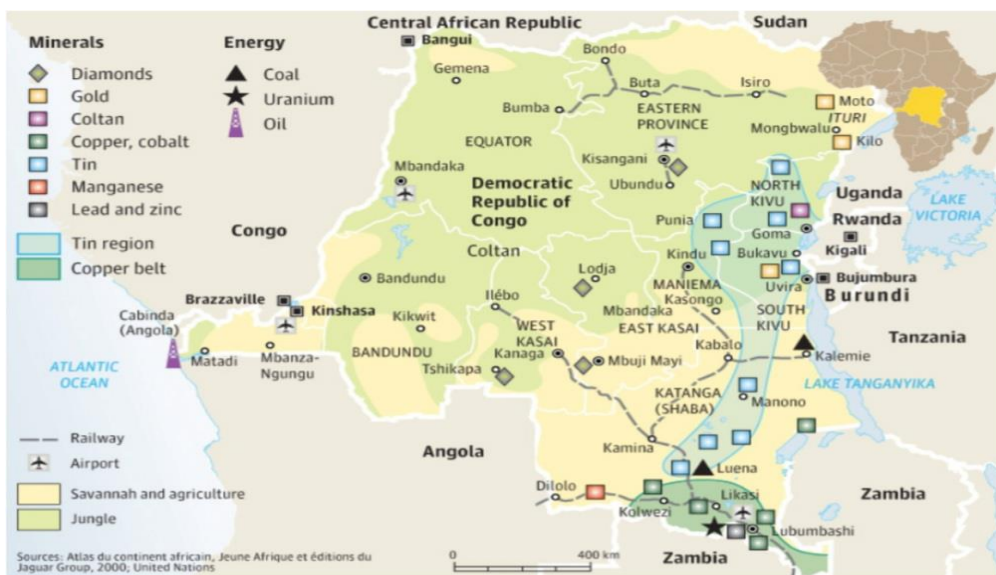
Figure 1

The list of heads of the DRC- Presidents

Rank	President	Time in the Office
1	Mobutu Sese Seko	31 years, 173 days
2	Joseph Kabila	18 years, 7 days
3	Joseph Kasa-Vubu	5 years, 146 days
4	Laurent- Désiré Kabila	3 years, 245 days
5	Felix Tshisekedi	1 year, 350 days

Figure 2

Geographical map of Central African Republic



<https://www.worldatlas.com/amp/maps/democratic-republic-of-the-congo>

The Use of Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) in Refugee Populations

Prior to the emergence of the most recent forms of communication, refugee populations have had to rely on other ways to maintain contact, which may have been unreliable or have taken a long time to reach their loved ones. Some of these methods include sending letters or messages through other people (Ahad & Lim, 2014; Kutscher & Kreb, 2016). Bacigalupe and

Lambe (2011), state that over the years a limited number of families have been able to maintain their family relationship abroad. However, ICTs have transformed over the years, there is a major difference in the refugee population experience since the emergence of the internet and digital communication media.

Nowadays, technology has become one of the main avenues that people who are away from each other use to communicate and potentially maintain relationships (Smets, 2018). It is vastly used by many people in all countries. Technological applications such as WhatsApp are used as an effective means of communication. WhatsApp was founded in 2009 and it includes features such as instant messages, voice calls, and video calling often used by young and old people as a convenient way of communicating (Ahad & Lim, 2014). Facebook which was launched in mid-2004 was initially used by the youth but now includes an older audience and is a media to exchange messages, upload photos and tag one another (Dogruer et al. 2011). It also allows organizations such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to reach others for help in terms of supporting and making contributions for refugee populations (Kwak et al., 2010).

Refugees are geographically separated by great distance from their families. They therefore rely on the use of ICTs, specifically mobile phones are used as way to keep in contact with their families back home (Shah et al., 2019; Nedelcu & Wyss, 2016). The use of mobile phones may enable refugee populations to maintain strong ties with their family (Alencar et al., 2019). They may also use them as coping mechanisms in a new society or an unfamiliar environment (Lelope, 2019). Furthermore, mobile phones can be used as a tool to integrate into a new society and connect with established members in order to get support to solve the various problems they may face (Bacishoga & Johnston, 2013).

Rationale for the Study

Different forms of communication technologies have recently received widespread attention in research examining families, refugees and migration (Belloni, 2020; Trilar et al., 2018) for example, refugees and migrants rely on smartphones and social media (such as WhatsApp and Facebook (as well as community churches) to navigate their way in host countries (Frouws et al., 2016) as well as maintaining communication with their families back home (Robertson et al., 2016). To date, minimal attention has been paid to the use of mobile phones and other Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) by refugee populations in maintaining their family relationships in the South African context. Migration is a global phenomenon; refugees are all over the world and often refugees do not have the opportunity to go back home due to lack of financial resources. They therefore rely solely on technology as a form of communication with their families staying behind. It is therefore important to get the sense of how communication technology is used by refugees who are displaced and separated from their families back home

The existing literature seems to focus more on immigrants and their use of ICTs (Alencar et al., 2019; Bacigalupe & Lambe, 2011; Bacigalupe, & Camara, 2012; Mabandla, 2019; Marchetti-Mercer, 2012; Marchetti-Mercer, 2019) and less literature on refugees and their use of ICTs in the South African context (Bacishonga & Johnston, 2013 & Lamba, & Krahn, 2003). In this study, the focus is on refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) who are now living in Johannesburg (South Africa) and how they use mobile phones to communicate and maintain relationships with their families left in their country of origin. It was hoped that gaining an in-depth understanding of their experiences related to the use of ICTs would help fill in the gap in the existing research.

The Research Questions

According to Graebner et al. (2012) research questions seek to explore and describe the phenomena being studied. These research questions may be open-ended or closed-ended questions. These questions help explain and shape the research study.

- **The following are the research questions that guided this study:**

1. What are the forms of communication that are used by refugees to keep in contact with their families back home?
2. How do these refugees use technologies to keep in touch and to perform caring roles?
3. How do refugees budget for data or airtime for the use of technologies to maintain contact with their families?

Aims and Objectives of the Study

The following are the aims and objective of the study:

The primary aim for this research study: was to explore the role of ICTs in maintaining familial relationships in a refugee population in Johannesburg.

- To explore the refugees experiences prior and post migration.

The objective of this research study: was to understand the use of ICTs and contributory factors that motivated refugees to flee their country of origin to South Africa.

Thesis Structure

Chapter one: This chapter provides the introduction section, which includes the brief history of the DRC, the research problem, the use of ICTs and the rationale for the study. The chapter includes the research questions, aim and objective of the study

Chapter two: This chapter consists of the literature review of this study, which aims to identify the gap in previous research conducted on the subject matter of the study. The theoretical framework underlying this study.

Chapter three: In the third chapter, the research methodology used for this study will be discussed., research design, background stories of participants, ethical considerations and reflexivity.

Chapter four: This chapter includes the data analysis of the study.

Chapter five: The findings and discussions of the research, which will be the contributory factors as to why the refugees remain in contact with their families back home. The motivations and experiences of refugees prior and post migration.

Chapter six: The conclusion, limitations and recommendations of the study will be summarised.

Conclusion

The above chapter introduced in the study, as well as providing insights and understanding of the role of ICTs in the lives of refugee population. The chapter outlined the research problem, the researcher's motivation for choosing this topic and how the entire study will be presented. The literature in the following chapter will provide further insight into the topic mainly in relation to previous research that has been conducted and the niche that this study occupies in that conversation.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

This chapter focuses on several areas of importance related to the role of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in refugee populations. It will offer definitions on different types of migration, refugee movements, migration theories and then focus on research exploring the specific experience of refugee population. The specific uses of ICTs regarding the maintenance of geographically distant relationships will also be explored. The phenomenon and challenges experienced by refugees in this context will also be discussed. Lastly, I will also give an overview of the theoretical framework used namely Family Systems Theory.

Different Types of Migration/ Immigration/Emigration

Migration

Migration refers to a “broad sense of movement of people from one country to another, in order to stay or seek asylum” (Merdi, 2019, p.7) searching for better living conditions for either themselves or their families (Crush et al., 2005 & Cummings et al., 2015). Migration is often a decision made by either an individual or family (Bohra-Mishra & Massey, 2011). A person who is considered a migrant is one who lives in a country that is not their country of origin and they do not have nationality and/or citizenship in the country they are living in (UNESCO, 2017). Approximately 244 million international migrants are estimated to be living in a country that is not theirs and 740 million migrants migrated internally in the past 5 years (Castelli, 2018). International migration is classified into two methods of migration: micro-level and macro-level migration (Carens, 2010; Peisker & Tilbury, 2003).

Migrants are driven by either pull or push factors or motivations (Rasool et al., 2012). Migration at times may stem from the need to seek better employment, education, security, religion, marital status, and better health systems, in developing countries where there are

sufficient resources. These are known as the pull factors. While those with means leave, the poorest people remain trapped in the country of origin or in the neighboring country (Castelli, 2018).

Migrants are often labeled as illegal aliens implying that they occupy a space that does not belong to them (Bosnia, 2017; De Grip et al., 2010). Bohra-Mishra and Massey (2011) argue that there are many people who believe that this movement of migrants brings unwanted diseases and crime in their country.

Immigration

Immigration on the other hand is when a human population enters a foreign country, often for permanent residency (Esses et al., 2005). This refers to both voluntary and involuntary movement of people to a new country with an intention of settling for a period of time (Martin & Zürcher, 2008). In the case of South Africa post-1994, we have seen immigration from other African countries such as Nigeria, Ghana, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Malawi due to several reasons such as lack of freedom of expression, job opportunities and civil unrest. These people immigrate mostly to provide for their families from the place of origin (Isike & Isike, 2012).

Emigration

Emigration refers to instances when an individual leaves the country of his or her birth for another. Emigration is often triggered by political, societal crises, a lack of employment, increase of violence, crime and an unfavourable labour market (Bhorat et al., 2002). Post-1994 we have seen a brain drain with highly skilled people leaving the country for economic and safety issues (Marchetti-Mercer, 2012a; b). This includes South Africans who emigrate with the hope of securing a better future, stability, employment and higher wages in better economically performing countries (Crush et al., 2005).

The Difference Between Migrants/Refugee/Asylum Seeker

Refugee

While migrants move from one country to another for the betterment of their lives (UNESCO, 2017) refugees run away from genocide, rape, fear, destroyed homes, persecution, war and violence prevalent in their countries of origin (Castelli, 2018; Dillon & Walsh, 2012; Landau, 2012; Toole, 2013). Refugees are referred to as displaced individuals who have been exposed to negative treatment repeatedly in their country of origin (Leung, 2010). They flee across borders, traveling in small or large populations seeking a place of safety (Fargues & Bonfanti, 2014). Refugees are often situated in camps where most of the people that flee from their home countries are mostly waiting for recognition and are usually provided with basic necessities and a temporary state (Turner, 2016). Refugee camps also known as temporary settlements, are run as non-governmental organisations (NGO's) and preferred accommodation for the forcibly, displaced refugees (Turner, 2016). Refugee camps are meant to be a temporary accommodation, however in practice they often tend to be occupied permanently (Bulley, 2014). They are perceived as a place of hope and new beginnings (Hailey, 2009). These refugee camps are often located in marginalized areas far from the cities (Mangold, 2011). South Africa is one of the largest countries that hosts refugees in the world, yet minimal jobs are provided for refugees (Bacishoga & Johnston, 2013). Refugees therefore have no choice but to settle in areas where income generating opportunities are readily available (Rugunanan & Smit, 2014). This results in refugees settling for employment in informal sectors and running informal businesses in informal sectors or areas which are not governed by refugee legislation (Crush & Skinner, 2017). Consequently, refugees run the risk of being exploited by employers.

Refugees often escape from their country of origin due to intolerable conditions, with few alternatives (Lamba & Kralm, 2003; Rugunanan & Smit, 2011). According to Rugunanan and Smit (2011, p.708) “the Refugees Act of 1998 guarantees freedom of movement and

provides for the right to work and to access public health care and education services”, including policies put in place regarding religion, race and political views (Mahlangu, 2016). This policy of freedom and expression greatly influences refugees’ decision to settle in South Africa. A study that was done in the refugee camps and townships in Gauteng and Western Cape shows that the refugee population in South Africa is exposed to violence and ill treatment (Matzopoulos et al., 2009). This was found to be due to the South African Refugee Act and the Constitution that fails to provide protection for the refugee population, due to the delay in applications for the asylums and the illegal dealings that occur at Home Affairs (McKnight, 2008). It is unfortunate that the majority of refugees flee to developing countries which are suffering from similar insecurities or problems they faced in their countries (Ratha & Shaw, 2007). Even though that is the case, refugees establish businesses and are likely to create job opportunities that have positive social impact and social change (William, 2006). Refugees often create opportunities for other newcomers, refugees who are not familiar with the host country, rather than giving jobs to locals and this enhances the newcomer’s level of confidence, hope and trust since it takes time for them to buffer in unfamiliar communities and uncertainties of the new country (Lelope, 2019).

Asylum Seeker

According to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) approximately 1.2 million refugees and asylum seekers were estimated to have moved to South Africa (SA) by the year 2016 (Ortiz, 2007). In 2009, South Africa was shown to be the destination for new asylum seekers which resulted in South Africa being the host country for numerous refugees (Gordon, 2016). The Department of Home Affairs (DHA) records that an asylum seeker, “is a person who has fled his or her country of origin, seeking recognition and protection as a refugee in the Republic of South Africa and whose application is still under consideration” (Smit, 2015, p. 39). In case of negative outcome on a person’s

application he or she is requested leave the host country or will be deported (Alfaro-Velcamp & Shaw, 2016).

It has been stipulated by the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa that everyone has equal rights to freedom of association and expression in South Africa (Musingafi et al., 2012). The right to freedom of expression refers to the ability to receive information and ideas and being able to express feelings and thoughts (O’Flaherty, 2012). In addition, a majority of the refugee population and the asylum seekers have lost their belongings crossing the borders to the host countries, which has made it difficult for them to acquire knowledge and skills and therefore experience loss of dignity (Cejas, 2007; Duponchel et al., 2010; Landau & Singh 2008).

Theories of Migration

According to Lee’s (1966) theory of migration, there are push and pull factors. Push factors are the reasons to move from a particular place, these may be caused by negative circumstances driving or pushing people to emigrate to a particular location (Benson & Osbaldiston, 2014 & O’reilly, 2015). On the other hand, pull factors are the reasons to move to a particular place, these are the positive circumstance that pull people to immigrate into a particular location (Benson & Osbaldiston, 2014; O’reilly, 2015). There is a process involved in migration, the destination, the intervening set of obstacles such as distance, physical barriers, environmental, cultural, economic political features (Amaral, 2018 & Van Hear, 2010). There are also intervening opportunities which diminish the attractiveness and opportunities of further places for a nearer opportunity (Amaral, 2018).

Push Factors

Push factors as mentioned above are those factors that force the individuals to move from their country of origin to another country (Landau, 2012). These factors may include

involuntary movements political pressure, torture, slavery, war, fewer job opportunities, environmental conditions, health, education and economical situations (Black, 2010; Dillon & Walsh, 2012; Krishnakumar & Indumathi, 2014). The following are relevant push factors that may influence migrants and refugees to leave their country of origin:

a. Lack of Security, Civil Unrest and Violence. Violent circumstances in one's country of origin may serve as push factors (Baez, 2011). The war that commenced in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in 1997 and 1988 provides a good example of why a large population of people fled from their country of origin to settle in a different country (Kennes & Larmer, 2016; Venugopalan, 2016). Citizens experienced torture, rape and forced displacement (Glass et al., 2012; Maedl, 2011). This affected the refugees psychologically and physically because some survivors still suffer from life-long injuries and emotional scars (Casey et al., 2011; Trenholm, 2013; Vinck et al., 2008). Considering the growing literature, several scholars argue that factors that perpetuate refugee movements and growth are political unrest, including civil wars and terrorism. There is growing evidence that supports the factors that perpetuated refugees to move from their country of origin (Leung, 2010; Ratha & Shaw, 2007).

b. Poverty. Poverty is defined as a state of not having enough basic needs and resources for survival such as food, shelter, water, security, health, education and so forth (Chambers, 2006; Spicker, 2007). Poverty is often another contributory factor for refugees to migrate to another country (Oucho, 2002). Poverty comes as a result of economic instability, unstable employment and low income (Hill et al., Romich et al., 2017). This may also include inequality, lack of social, political and economic needs (Smith et al., 2015). Thus, countries which are often involved in war tend to suffer from poverty (Sen, 2008). Countries like the DRC are fraught with economic instability resulting in poverty (Laudati, 2013). DRC refugees are vulnerable to poverty in their country of origin resulting in an inability to provide for their families (Mabika & Shapiro, 2012). This forces them to look for employment opportunities for

their families abroad (Idemudia et al. 2014 Smit & Rugunanan, 2014; Williams & Wyatt, 2013).

Pull Factors

Pull factors are those natural attraction factors which are desirable, and they lure the individual to migrate to another country (De Jong & Gardner, 2013; Dillon & Walsh, 2012; Stark, 2004). These may include voluntary movements that are more seasonal in nature, such as employment, resources or bringing families together (Krishnakumar & Indumathi, 2014; Pastore, 2015) nevertheless the movements made are either free or forced. Deshingkar and Grimm (2004) argue that voluntary and involuntary terms may be misleading; migratory decisions are taken in both stressful and non-stressful situations which differ in all kinds of social behaviours. These decisions may be made under situations of crisis and anxiety, the degrees of freedom in these circumstances are therefore both free and forced depending on people's circumstances (Moore & Shellman, 2004). The following are pull factors that influence migrants and refugees to leave their country of origin:

a. Political and Economic Freedom. Refugee movements may also be determined by political and economic factors (Melander & Öberg, 2007). The movements which are determined as political and economic are still evident to date, populations migrating from poor areas into richer areas (Botha & Bisschoff, 2012; Rasool et al., 2012). There are also individuals that move from underdeveloped countries to highly recognised countries experiencing growth and exchange of skills (Adepoju, 2006; Beine et al., 2001). Lamba and Krahn (2003) argue that migrants move to a new country together with their families in order to establish economy and security in their new country. However, refugees move to the new country individually (Bohra-Mishra & Massey, 2011; Rugunanan & Smit, 2011).

b. Education. Education is one of the key tools to ensure a brighter future and is often seen as a key to success (Siemens & Long, 2011). Access to education may increase the chances

for refugees to better their lives as well as their families (Spreen & Vally, 2012). It may open opportunities to employment; however, lack of good quality education may decrease socioeconomic opportunities (De Herdt et al., 2012). Education is also influenced by both teachers within the schools alongside with families, media and peer groups, these factors help in developing values and learning (Laurence, 2016). Refugees come from war affected areas where schooling systems are disrupted (Ndayishimiye & Nshongore Nziza, 2012). For example, the war and natural disaster in the DRC disrupted the education of many children and young adult's education (Koyame & Clark, 2002). In every year approximately 200 thousand students and learners dropped out in the first 3 months (Dryden-Peterson, 2009). The DRC government did not have enough budget for education as well as a budget to pay the teachers (Dryden-Peterson, 2010). Parents had financial difficulties; they could not afford school fees due to unemployment (De Herdt & Titeca, 2016). This resulted in refugee's inability to get proper education in their home countries. The refugees therefore had to settle for any opportunity to get income and reduced formal employment in their host countries.

Migration from DRC to South Africa

Since 1994 South Africa became the new democratic South Africa. South Africa is one of the countries that hosts many refugees from different countries. Migration from DRC to South Africa has thus far been inadequately processed and documented (Landau, 2006). South Africa has received over 270,000 legal documented refugees and asylum-seekers, seeking refuge and safety (Landau, 2006; Schouler-Ocak, 2020). The refugee population travel through different countries and when they arrive in the host country, they consider it to be their second home while in some cases a temporary one (Smit, 2015). Refugees that arrive in South Africa have been exposed to unbearable conditions such as war. Although the apartheid government did not force the Congolese and Mozambicans to leave their country by enforcing war, these conditions were unbearable for them (Schoumaker et al., 2010; Vause & Mangalu, 2010).

Refugees were compelled to leave their country of origin due to harsh conditions such as war and insecurity (Dillon et al., 2013; Landau, 2012; Steinberg, 2005). The civil war in DRC in Katanga and Shaba Provinces resulted in relocation of millions of people. Crossing the border resulted in arrest and deportation but they were willing to take the risk (Tegenbos, 2019; Zeender & Rothing, 2010). Previously, refugees were not welcomed in South Africa as they were perceived as illegal beings, occupying the space illegally within the borders (Smit & Rugunanan, 2014). This resulted in them facing poverty and resorting to working for low wages in informal settlements (Bhamjee & Klaaren, 2004). Gradually, refugees began to gain formal legal status, as most had received permanent residence status after 1994, in the early 2000s (Smit, 2015).

South Africa gives refugees the hope to rebuild, regain strength and take charge of their lives (Smit, 2015). For example, when the refugees arrived in South Africa the statistics of employment increased from 4% to 29%, even if their work is defined as unskilled. However, there are still factors hindering refugees' ability to succeed (Ratha et al., 2011). Hence, they are mostly found in departments such as street vending, cutting hair in both streets and salons and washing cars (Smit & Rugunanan, 2014 & Smit, 2015).

Challenges Experienced by DRC Refugees in South Africa

Xenophobia

Refugees have been confronted by challenges such as exclusion, conflicts, identity crisis, role changes, unemployment, being placed in marginal areas, cultural expectations and cultural shock (Akintola, 2017; Rugunanan & Smit, 2011; Zihindula, Meyer-Weitz). Unemployment and xenophobia in South Africa are said to be closely intertwined (Matsinhe, 2011 & Potgieter, 2018). There has been a rise of xenophobic attacks in post-apartheid South Africa on the refugee population for example in May 2008 when South Africa experienced a series of very horrific xenophobic attacks (Duncan, 2011; McConnell, 2009. Nyamnjoh (2010)

refers to xenophobia as a way of being identified by the individual's identity and ethnicity, perpetuated by the obsessive desire and tendencies to exclude individuals of who culturally belong to a specific ethnicity group. Approximately 62 people lost their lives in those xenophobic attacks, eight of them were left wounded and others were nowhere to be found (Kriger, 2010). Möser (2016) gives a common explanation which associates xenophobia with poverty. Many would argue, including Hayem (2013), that xenophobia is when people enact violence with a party that is considered as an outsider. Violence in xenophobic attacks is not planned by an individual but masses (Bordeau, 2009) who are underprivileged and are live in the peripheral areas (Amisi et al., 2011; Bordeau, 2009). Another contributing factor is power dynamics and gender inequalities. Women who migrated to South Africa with their partners are said to be dependent on their male partners. These men are believed to be gaining popularity with South African women who want them to be their companions (World Bank, 2018). Unequal distribution of resources is the foundation of oppressive systems that give birth to hostility and xenophobia (Neocosmos, 2010). The Immigration Act of 2002 (No.13) stipulates that xenophobia will be countered and prevented from the government and society at large (Adepoju, 2003). Unfortunately, the African refugee populations and foreign nationals in South Africa are, however, still experiencing xenophobic attacks (Misago, 2019). The African refugee population when resettling in South Africa seek protection, freedom, employment and support, only to be detained by the government officials and vulnerable to arrest (Kriger, 2010). These significant factors have impeded refugees' full integration in the host country; they lack trust towards South African nationals (Bacishoga & Johnston, 2013).

Refugees also face challenges such as understanding or speaking the local languages, are victims of crime, harassment (either sexually or physically), securing of jobs and affording basic necessities (Landau et al., 2005). Exposure to these challenges has been found to have a negative impact in the lives of refugees who resettled in Johannesburg, South Africa

(Rugunanan & Smit, 2011). However, considering the large number of refugees that fled to South Africa, it is necessary to gain a better understanding of the significant factors that perpetuated forced migration, their ability to adapt in the host country and their family's well-being (Jinnah, 2013). Instead of refugees and migrants living in fear they should be treated and understood in a political context (Neocosmos, 2010).

Employment: Living and Working Experiences of Refugees in South Africa

According to Settler and Mpofu (2017), South Africa has experienced an increased number of hostilities towards refugees and migrants. In the mid-19th century before colonial borders were drawn, South Africa became the host country and a force of attraction for refugees and migrants. These forces of attraction include the resources such as gold and diamonds, which resulted in job opportunities in the mining sectors (Zuberi & Sibanda, 2004). South Africa has a lot of resources and educated individuals, who are sought after to take advantage of these resources for the betterment of the individual and society at large. Instead of this, South Africans let go of these potential individuals and opportunities and when refugees and migrants take advantage of these resources, they are said to be taking the South African's jobs (Kalitanyi & Visser, 2010). According to Palmary (2002), there are strong perceptions amongst the South African population that migrants coming from other parts of Africa are a barrier for nationals, they are accused of being responsible for taking the jobs of SA nationals, increasing crime rates and bringing diseases to SA. Hostility towards refugees stems from certain core positions such as lack of job opportunities, unequal resource distributions and increased crime rate. This is evidenced by the many recent examples of xenophobic violence in recent years (Matunhu, 2011).

Refugees are issued documentation by the government which is supposed to allow them to work in SA (Kalitanyi, 2010). However, these documents remain unrecognized by the employers, hence the refugee population from African countries often seeks employment in

informal sectors (Bacishoga & Johnston, 2013). These African refugees are often deported and exploited by their employers (Gordon, 2010). However, there are refugees from DRC who resettle in urban settlements where resources are available such as income, education, employment and favourable climate (Neocosmos, 2010). Most of the forced migrants to South Africa from Africa are mostly young male and middle-class citizens who either have some tertiary education are seeking tertiary education or were unemployed in Africa (Dryden-Peterson, 2017). They however continue to experience prejudice and discrimination which limits them from exploring and fully accessing resources (Cejas, 2007; Crush & Tawodzera, 2014 & Duponchel et al., 2010).

The Psychological Experiences of Refugees

a. Traumatic Events. Refugees pay a high price by coming to South Africa as they cross many borders, often witness genocide and unfortunately when they arrive, they are victims of violence (Cejas, 2007). This is the age of mobility, yet so many of those that flee do not make it to their final destination. According to Idemudia et al. (2013) there is a trauma in being a refugee. This was evidenced in the large numbers of approximately 1.5 million people from Africa, India and Pakistan who were displaced and about 1 million of them died. The series of trauma experienced by refugees includes mental health problems, experiences of social displacement or culture shock which is followed by symptoms of paranoia, anxiety and depression (Casey et al., 2011; Trenholm, 2013; Vinck et al., 2008; Ward, 2001).

b. Family Separation. According to Miller et al., (2018), family separation results in negative psychological impact, it is significantly related to traumatic experiences and certain measurements of mental illness and bereavement. Unity of families may give resilience and support to succeed in life, yet refugees find themselves separated from their families due to violent experiences (Rousseau et al., 2001). Previous studies indicate that family separation is a major source of distress for refugees and their families (Sourander, 2003; McMichael &

Ahmed, 2003 & Mayo, 2018). Both parties fear that their family members may still be in harm's way. They experience feelings of helplessness, sadness and cultural disruption (Smit & Rugunanan, 2015). Refugees ultimately desire to reunite with their families postmigration (Baldassar et al., (2006).

c. Social Isolation. A division among individuals; South African nationals and the non-nationals has been witnessed. Legal documentation is often the cause of conflict among South Africans and non-South Africans (Amisi & Ballard, 2005). The present negative climate against non-South Africans in South Africa reflects this (Crush & Tawodzera, 2014). South Africans tend to focus a lot on these conflicts and dichotomies which are meant to keep control of migrants and refugee population, illustrated by the fences and borders (Atzili, 2007; Gordon, 2016).

The Role of Information Communication Technologies

Technology has become one of the dominant ways that many people separated from their families use to communicate and potentially maintain family relationships (Wei & Lo, 2006). Social media apps like WhatsApp and Facebook are among the most popular, especially in the refugee population. Access to mobile phones in order to access the platforms aforementioned plays a significant role in refugees' lives. Contributory factors such as affordability of mobile phones, social, environmental factors and personal factors can either enhance or hinder refugees' relationship with one another as this determines access to mobile phones and therefore social media platforms (Bisimwa et al., 2018).

ICTs and Transitional Families

Transnational families are defined as "the type of migrating population which has its disposal networks, activities and ways of life that reflects both their host countries and countries of origin", there is an attachment in both countries (Marchetti-Mercer, 2017, p.74). Transnational relationships are done so that both migrants and refugee population can maintain

their religion, traditions, reaffirm cultures and simultaneously establish a new place in the community (Bacigalupe & Camara, 2012; Baldassar & Merla, 2013; William, 2006). According to Benítez (2012), ICTs are incorporated into existing practices, they help strengthen cultural values, norms and a supportive system for transnational families. Transnational families have some sense of collective identity especially in social spaces and this nourishes emotional closeness (Benítez, 2012). Therefore, considering the geographical spaces or locations between families, be it biologically or kin, ICTs offer continuous interaction between the transnational families (Chamberlain & Leydesdorff, 2004).

ICTs and Refugees

Several authors such as Schofield et al., (2012) and Yoshida (2012) have stated that the refugee population prefer mobile phones; they are much portable than having to carry a computer which requires Wi-Fi or large physical maps for navigation which might get lost or wet when fleeing and travelling through borders. Ahad and Lim (2014) and Kutscher and Krieb (2016) argue that the earlier forms of communication were the use of mail, sending letters and packages which were less accommodative and time consuming, unlike current forms of communications that are accommodative for every individual and are also instantaneous in delivery. These include applications such as WhatsApp, Skype, Facebook and Google Maps. Walker et al., (2015) argue that once the refugees have resettled in the country of host, they still experience difficulty due to the displacements, well-being, dysfunctional families, loss of status and different languages. However, the use of ICTs helps those who feel like outsiders and those who have difficulty accessing the resources to keep in contact with their families until they resettle (Patil, 2019). ICTs may be a way in which displaced individuals form relationships with one another as a way of survival in a host country (William, 2006) or a method to keep in contact with families back home (AbuJarour & Krasnova, 2017).

Displacement creates the need for communication technologies, this allows for networking which includes maintaining relationships to overcome isolation (Smets, 2018). When the refugee population arrives in an unfamiliar host country, they try to look for a population they can resonate with through churches, community, clinics and employment (AbuJarour et al., 2019; Lim & Pham, 2016).

Smets (2018) also postulates that ICTs also increase the chances of community building, where the refugee population creates relationships with other fellow refugees. This therefore enables refugees to use ICTs as a way of improving interpersonal relationships and creating jobs for fellow refugees. It has been argued that ICTs promote social integration among the refugee population (Cachia et al., 2007). ICTs enhances social change, it enables involvement and participation within refugee communities in their host country (Bacishonga & Johnston, 2013). However African migrants may struggle to keep up with economic demands, especially Congolese and Zimbabweans who seek for employment to support their families, only to be detained by the government officials and are also vulnerable to arrest (Kriger, 2010). Thus, both the refugee population and migrants are potentially at risk to be exploited by their employers.

Forced migration may increase the vulnerability to ill health and ICTs may assist in this instance. Mobile phones have been used to campaign health awareness, promote HIV treatment regimes, healthy lifestyles and diabetes self-management (Walker et al., 2015). To a certain extent, counselling and psychological assistance are a vital tool as they reach out to migrant communities and assist them in managing traumatic experiences (Palmary, 2009). Having access to ICTs may play a role as a support system for refugees through their distress and trauma experienced during and after migration (Kidane & Stokmans, 2019; Shah et al., 2019). When one is in contact and has a strong relationship with their family members from back home, dealing with the negative treatment from the country becomes easier (Cuban, 2017).

ICTs and Family Relationships

ICTs are used by migrants and refugees as a way of keeping in touch with their families left behind (William, 2006). Mobile phones are vastly used to communicate with one another, be it internationally or locally (Lane et al., 2010). There has been some international and local research examining the use of ICTs and mobile phones by refugee populations (Leung, 2010; Urquhart et al., 2009; Ziaian, et al., 2012; Zuberi, 2004). It has been found that mobile phones are used by people who are left behind in the country of origin and those in host countries as a way of networking and keeping in contact (Kabongo & Okpara, 2014). Kim et al., (2007) argued that mobile phones show great positive effect of closeness, strong ties and support among the Koreans in their cross-section study. Through the consumption of social media, mobile phones may serve as a coping mechanism for the refugee population and the transition that occurs in families (Bacigalupe & Camara, 2012). The use of mobile phone with features of WhatsApp enables the migrants and refugees to keep in contact with their families, although buying data may be expensive. Thus, the value of ICTs for both families left in the country of origin is determined by investments and budgeting (William, 2006).

Refugees in South Africa and the Use of ICTs

In South Africa, ICTs and the use of mobile phones are arguably potentially useful tools, as they play a vital role since they are a feature of modern technology, are easily accessible and are a convenient way of offering services (Hyde-Clarke & Van Tonder, 2011). Refugees in South Africa are a vulnerable population, they are targets of exploitation, violence and discrimination (Amnisi, 2006; Gordon, 2010 & Vearey, 2012). In developing countries like South Africa, refugees have access to mobile phones but due to their menial jobs, airtime and data affordability is costly (Bacishonga & Johnston, 2013). Refugees also have difficulty in using data provided for their mobile phones and access to internet due to the lack of experience and technical skills (Bisimwa et al., 2018). Regarding prepaid plans, plans to assist refugees in

South Africa with this arrangement seem not to be useful because the refugees experience challenges with contracts due to lack of legal documentation (World Bank, 2012).

Affordability of the mobile phones depends on the functionality of the mobile phone and its usefulness (Leung, 2014). Environmental factors (such as policies, customs and social norms) and personal factors can also determine whether an individual will utilise or not utilise ICTs in the refugee community (Aker & Mbiti, 2010)

Mobile Phones, Affordability and ICTs

Refugees internationally and locally do not share equal resources nor can they maintain family relationships equally or in a similar manner (Leung, 2010). The refugee population makes use of cheap resources in order to sustain family relationships in their country of origin and in the host country (William, 2006). Those that can afford phone expenses to make calls can maintain their family relationships (Merdi, 2019). It appears as if refugees used mobile communication during the early period of settlement to identify the location, contact members that have migrated, contact English speaking members, to get assistance when they came across a problem and lastly to maintain social relationships (Bacishonga, & Johnston, 2013 & Bacishoga et al., 2016).

Family Systems Theory

Firstly, I will discuss the theoretical framework underlying this study. The theoretical framework that was employed for this study was Bowen's (1978) Family Systems Theory. This approach was originally known as the General Systems Theory (Titelman, 2012). It is characterised by communication patterns, systematic boundaries, familial subsystems and a significantly holistic view of the family. The Family Systems Theory places its primary emphasis on the exchange of behaviours, interaction and relationships between family members (Johnson & Ray, 2016). Bowen (1978) provides a conceptual foundation of family

systems and an understanding of family (Haefner, 2014). It is a “theory of human behaviour that views a family as an emotional unit and uses system thinking to describe family interactions in a family unit” (Jackson & Landers, 2020, p.342). FST describes the nature of family members as intensely connected emotionally, such that one family member’s thoughts, actions and feelings may affect the other’s emotionally (Titelman, 2014). That is, families may live together, share feelings emotions, react to others’ needs, expectations and support for each other.

This theory tries to move away from individual thinking to dual relationships and socialisation (Jackson & Landers, 2020). Where responsibilities are shared, one influences the other. There are also cultural aspects, these aspects may be learned from home or school through formal and informal learning (Erdem & Safi, 2018). Parents and families form part of the educative processes. Values, norms and the culture that one is taught enable participation in the society (Fingerman & Bermann, 2000). In FST responsibilities and meanings are shared, there is a mutual understanding and the strength or ability to adapt through difficult conditions is emphasised (Titelman, 2014). There are also expectations and roles in families, which assist in differentiating the role that one plays. Power structures, dynamics and boundaries guard these relationships.

Families are seen to function as emotional systems, where each family member plays a significant role (Keller, 2019). The role that a family member plays dictates the way families are supposed to interact and respond with one another. On the emotional level, families differ emotionally during the course of life. Unity within families enables balance, closeness and the ability to adapt under harsh circumstances.

Another key element to this approach is that an individual ought to be understood in relation to the family unit and not as an independent entity and that family members are emotionally interdependent and thus affect each other both positively and negatively (Haefner,

2014; Mabandla, 2019). Connectedness make the functioning of families interdependent and change in one person reciprocated by a change in another person's functioning (Titelman, 2012). Emotional interdependence presumably promotes the cohesiveness of a family's requirements such as providing shelter, protection and feed family members. Tension, however, may cause problems to the process of interdependence and teamwork (Fitzgerald et al., 2020). When a family member gets anxious, this may result in family members feeling anxious which results in stress. Thus, family members absorb the system of anxiety which may affect the human activities and may lead to work, family and various problems in other social aspects (Keller, 2019).

Family Systems Theory assists with understanding families that share cultural beliefs, behaviours and explores how they deal with situations in terms of crisis (Fingerman & Bermann, 2000). Families are shaped by relationships and connections that can either continue or discontinue over time and the care to maintain these bonds is determined by age (Baldock, 2000). This theoretical framework was deemed appropriate for this study given the emphasis on understanding the use of mobile phones in maintaining family relationships characterised by distance as in the case of refugee population groups. ICTs play a significant role in maintaining family relationships through mobile phones (Rudi et al., 2015). If the family is dependent on one individual in terms of their necessities, if that person finds themselves not in a position to perform such duties, the whole family is affected (Fitzgerald et al., 2020). Given the emphasis on the interconnectedness of the family, it therefore becomes imperative to understand the use of mobile phones in maintaining family relationships affected by distance as in the case of refugee population.

Conclusion

This literature chapter differentiated the different types of migration and offered reasons that may lead to refugees leaving their country of origin. It provided a framework of how refugees integrate themselves in South Africa and the challenges they face. The role of ICTs in maintaining relations with their family back home was explored together with the advantages and shortcomings attached to it. In the next chapter I will describe the research methodology used in this study.

CHAPTER THREE

Research Methodology

Introduction

In this chapter I will discuss the research methodology underpinning this study. A qualitative approach was used to collect and analyse the data. The case study design used to understand complex issues of real-life activities. The main principles of the Thematic Analysis that was used to identify the most significant themes will be outlined and how they were applied to the collected data. Finally, I will discuss the ethical considerations and some self-reflections on the research process.

Qualitative Study and Research Design

There are two highly recognised approaches for conducting research in the Social Sciences and the Humanities field namely quantitative and qualitative research methods (Choy, 2014). The qualitative research method involves more than one method of data collection namely, observations, interviews, focus groups and surveys (Webley, 2010). Observations involves recording what the researcher has seen, heard and detailed fieldnotes (Webley, 2010). Interviews are conducted by personally asking people questions in one-on-one conversations; these questions may be open-ended or closed-ended questions. Focus groups are defined as instances where the researcher asks questions in order to generate a discussion among a group of people. Weber (2010) refers to surveys which are characterised by distributing questionnaires with both closed and open-ended questions. Lastly, qualitative researcher can use secondary data to collect data from texts, images, audio and video recordings (Webley, 2010).

The chosen approach for this study was qualitative research method which focuses on descriptions rather than numbers (Maxwell, 2008). A researcher in a qualitative study is

considered as an instrument and this is because their role includes understanding the participants' ideas in an attempt to see the world through their lenses and experiences. This study primarily followed a case study design which places great emphasis on an inductive approach (Maxwell, 2012). Inductive research employs several examples and observations to arrive to a conclusion (Soiferman, 2010). The aim of using case studies is to describe in detail why and how things happen, allowing the researcher to contextualise between reality on what is planned and what occurred (Noor, 2008). Case study designs are intended to focus on the issue at hand, which enables the researcher to understand the complex issues of real-life activities and gain a holistic view of what is being studied (Yin, 2011). The case study design provided the frame for the present study which conforms to the rules described by Yin (2011) and Noor (2008) for each individual participant as far as this study is concerned.

In a qualitative study the world is perceived from the subjective reality of participants rather than an objective reality (Scotland, 2012). The researcher must ensure that the study is in a natural setting as much as possible and not manipulated in any way (Patton, 2005). In this regard, an interpretive paradigm was employed, where interviewed participants interpreted their reality through their own understanding and meaning (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). Some degree of objectivity in order to limit bias was considered (Keyton, 2006). This was done so that the reasoning and values of participants would not be clouded by my judgements. Throughout the collection of data I tried not to project my feelings and thoughts towards the participants. Instead, I tried to understand their values, culture and socioeconomic backgrounds without having to compare them to mine as a researcher nor did I guide or lead their responses to what I wanted to hear. Thus, in terms of viewing the realm of the individual consciousness as an ongoing process, the intersubjective shared meanings were considered.

Semi-structured interviews are often used in qualitative research in order to gather necessary data. They are predefined interviews but flexible enough to allow room for the

researcher to adjust the sequence of questions (Noor, 2008). The semi-structured interview guide includes both closed and open-ended questions. For this study semi-structured interviews were used to gather the data. Questions included in the interviews were often open-ended; this allowed participants to give more information such as feelings and attitudes, and this allowed me as a researcher to probe and elicit more information (Rubin & Rubin, 2011; Turner, 2010).

Population, Sample and Sampling

For the purpose of this study, I initially selected the refugee population that was most readily available. The type of sample strategy that was employed was purposive sampling; a non-probability sampling technique which involves available participants, is deliberate and less costly for the study (Etikan et al., 2016). Initially, I approached the CSVr (The Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation) a non-governmental organisation which accommodates the refugee population and assists refugees who have experienced trauma and violence. This Centre helps refugees through the process of healing and build sustainable peace in communities. Unfortunately, I could not gain permission to interview them as they are deemed a vulnerable population who required immediate counselling as they had not completely dealt with their traumatic experiences.

I therefore had to identify another refugee population in Johannesburg. I identified a group of refugees situated in the inner city of Johannesburg. In terms of the participants, there were eight people who took part to which five were male and three were female all ranging from 29 to 41 years of age. They had all been living in South Africa for more than a year. These participants all had access to mobile phones and potentially had access to some of the applications such as WhatsApp and Facebook (Mason, 2010). All these participants come from the same country, the DRC, yet from different communities within the country. These participants were deemed suitable for this study because they were all refugees that had left an African country to come to South Africa. In terms of the data collection process, I was also

guided by the principle of saturation, which means that when enough information is obtained through data collection process the researcher stops collecting data (Fusch & Ness, 2015 & Mason, 2010). To gain more willing participants, the participants I had recruited connected me with other potential participants who might have had similar experiences (Blanche et al., 2006 & Streeton et al., 2004). This process is referred to as snowball sampling which is a non-probability sampling technique where existing participants refer the researcher to other potential participants for the study (Noy, 2008).

The Refugee Population from DRC Living in the inner city of Johannesburg

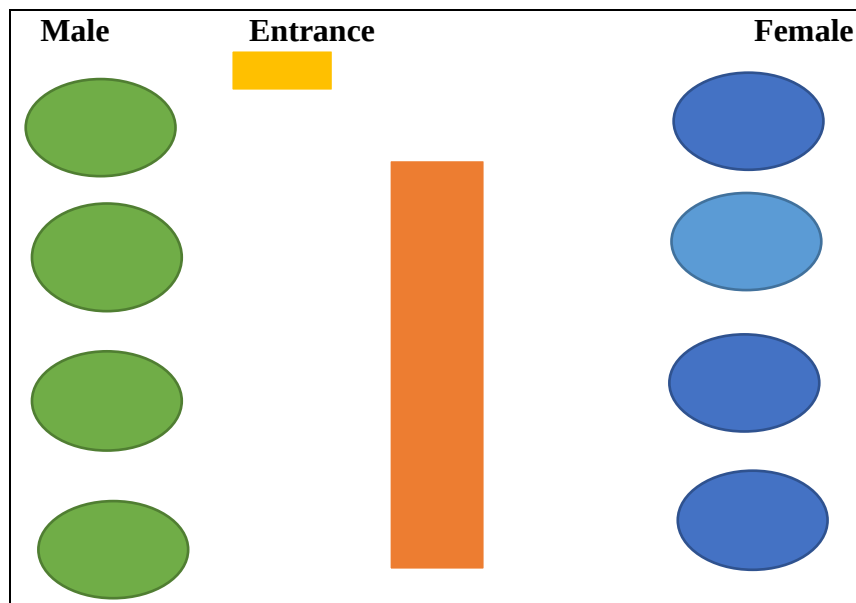
A large part of the refugee population from the DRC has resettled in the inner city of Johannesburg. This area of the city is notoriously known for being a dangerous area where illegal activities are most likely to occur. The salon where I collected data is situated near this area. There is a daily commotion of traffic, taxis, car guards, pedestrians and noise. It is an area populated by people who speak several foreign languages from other African countries. It was challenging to maneuver around this city, as it is also notorious for having sex workers, informal workers and it is very clustered and unfriendly. Foreign nationals are also often targeted in acts of xenophobia.

My fieldwork took place inside a salon. The salon is owned by a man from the DRC, who tends to hire African people who fled from DRC and are struggling financially in South Africa. The interior of the building comprises of two sections, the right side is occupied by males (the barbers) and the left side by the females (eyebrow specialists and hairdressers). The interior of the building (salon), the architecture is a mirrored version, with green walls and brown painted floors, with a natural aura, with clients walking in and out. I carried out my interviews in the middle part of the salon with two chairs, with soothing African music playing

in the background but often too loud to attract clients and entertain them. The rooms were fairly small, furnished with chairs, mirrors, washbasins and hair equipment.

Diagram 1

The representation of the participants salon's interior



Participants Demographic Overview

The overview of the demographic of participants in the study are represented in T1. The table below provides pseudonyms, gender, age that represents the participants, including their occupation, the number of years they have been in South Africa and whether they owned a mobile phone.

Table 1

The demographics of the participants

Participants	Gender	Age	Identification or country of origin	Occupation	Length of stay in SA	Own a mobile phone	Location in SA
Chris (P1)	Male	41	Congolese-DRC	Barber	19	Yes	JHB
Ray (P2)	Male	38	Congolese-DRC	Client	21	Yes	JHB
Boris (P3)	Male	32	Congolese-DRC	Barber	12	Yes	JHB
Nelson (P4)	Male	32	Congolese-DRC	Barber	14	Yes	JHB
Luce (P5)	Female	39	Congolese-DRC	Hairdresser	15	Yes	JHB
Samuel (P6)	Male	34	Congolese-DRC	Eyelashes specialist	10	Yes	JHB
Jaiden (P7)	Female	30	Congolese-DRC	Works at the clothing shop	6	Yes	JHB
Pseudonyms have been provided as per agreement with consent of the participants.							

Background stories of participants

Participant 1: Chris. He was born and raised in the DRC and fled in 2001 due to unbearable conditions and lack of employment. He has been in South Africa for 19 years. He had to use different buses as his mode of transport to get to South Africa and had to pass through Zambia and Zimbabwe before reaching South Africa. He is married to his childhood girlfriend who later followed to him to South Africa in 2004 and they have one child together. His mother tongue is French, but he tries to speak English even though sometimes he finds it difficult. However, he felt that he had to learn it since it is a common language in South Africa. He works at a hair salon as a barber, where he has been working since he came to South Africa. His parents passed on when he was very young, and he grew up with siblings and other family members. It took him a while to be integrated in South Africa, but he finds South Africa to be safer and less violent than in DRC, even though he was once a victim of crime. Working as a barber at the salon enables him to provide for his family but since he does not earn much, he finds it hard to prioritise his family back home in DRC. To communicate with his family, he

uses his wife's mobile phone and sometimes he uses one of his colleague's mobile phones as he considers his colleagues as his family.

Participant 2: Ray. Ray is a regular client where Chris works. He is originally from the DRC and he fled when he was doing his first year at medical school at 19 in 1999. He was at University of Lubumbashi which is one of the largest universities in the DRC. He fled from DRC because he felt the country was left in the hands of people who were part of the rebels. He mentions that surviving as a student was very difficult and one was fortunate if you received a little support from home. He left his mother, biological brother, cousins and nephews in the DRC. His father passed way when he was seven years old and his mother passed away in 2016.

Ray had a friend who was living in Lusaka, Zambia who visited the DRC often. After seeing how they used to live his friend pitied him and suggested that they go to South Africa where they might have a better future there since they were very young. His friend was doing law but unfortunately he later passed on. When they arrived in South Africa it was difficult for them to get access to bursaries. A Catholic priest from the church near the University of the Witwatersrand tried to assist them, but it was not enough. Raye had to work and study which was not easy, and he ended up working full time as a security guard earning a very small salary and he dropped out of the University without pursuing his medical degree. With the little that he was earning he managed to register for some courses at UNISA in 2006, as someone had advised him to study so that he will have a better life in SA. He is now an entrepreneur; has a fleet of cars and Uber and he is also working with a friend of his who is also Congolese. He also owns properties in South Africa, two standalone flats and one flat. His friend is a quantity surveyor, they always had a plan of owning a construction company and they own a construction company in the metro.

Ray found himself a South African partner and is currently applying for citizenship. He has four children, two girls and two boys all born in South Africa. He has a good relationship

with his in laws, whenever he visits them in Port Elizabeth all the children including his and the in-laws' gather around him to hotspot because he usually has a lot of data. Internet connection is not much of a problem for him, he gets to communicate with his family in DRC. He has a large family back home in the DRC because his father was in a polygamous marriage. Instead of making calls to his family in DRC, he prefers using WhatsApp because it is cheaper unlike making calls which cost R15 per minute.

Participant 3: Boris. Boris is a 32-year-old man from DRC and has been in South Africa since 2008. He is an IT engineer and a barber at the salon. He felt he was forced to leave the place he knew his entire life. He fled from the DRC in 2006 because of the war and associated security reasons. He had not planned his journey neither did he know where he was going. He left his mother and siblings back in the DRC. He could not think of anyone else to leave with him because his mother was old, and she would have not been able to survive the journey and his younger siblings would have not survived the journey either. He felt like his family would manage to take care of themselves in DRC while he could not. His mother was not against him leaving, instead she supported him, she felt that he was young so he would be able to raise money for her to see better doctors. However, he felt sad that he might not see his family again. He mentioned that, often people do not make it to their destination because of the war, he mentioned "they die like chickens". He also mentioned that one survives by the Grace of God. He recalls how when he had to run in Uganda to reach where he thought he might be safe, he had to pass dead bodies lying on the ground shot dead.

He travelled from one country to another including Uganda and Tanzania and he eventually settled in South Africa. When he arrived in South Africa, he felt displaced which made it difficult for him to communicate with his family, he did not have his family's contact details and no one to ask for their contact details. He was only able to contact them later after a year because he encountered one of his family members, and he was then able to let them

know that he was alive. While he was settling in South Africa, he met people who could also speak French and he referred to them as “brothers”. He associated himself with them and only then did he have courage to face and eventually adapt to the unfamiliar new world. After contacting his family members, he started using normal calls to communicate with them and when WhatsApp was introduced it became his favourite platform to communicate with his family. Although he mentioned that his family back home is poor and need money to own smart cell phones, they have resorted to asking neighbours to share their cell phone with them. Thus, the families in the DRC make appointments with the neighbours when they want make contact with their families in South Africa through video calls and voice calls. This however, causes inconvenience for both parties.

Participant 4: Nelson. Nelson is a 32-year-old man who has been a barber for 12 years. He has been in South Africa for 14 years. He has three children and they are all in South Africa. When he left the DRC there were so many things that took place there which he could not tolerate such as the violence that took place there. He mentions experiencing political, familial, religious and financial problems. There are three members of his family who fled from DRC before him and he followed later. He left his father and mother because they were very old. There was no way that they could have fled because he was not using “normal transport”. He travelled using trucks which took him to different destinations. Leaving the DRC was challenging but he felt he had no choice but look for a place where he would be able to survive. He had no desired destination in mind, until he found himself in South Africa. When he arrived in South Africa, he felt lost as he knew no one.

However, he had his cell phone, which is one of the ways he used to communicate with his family back home and he uses WhatsApp often. Back home they often face challenges such as load shedding and internet connection so if calls are not going through, he leaves a message on WhatsApp. One of the features he admires about the use of WhatsApp is that they can send

photos and use voice recordings. Although he values face to face interactions, he prefers using WhatsApp because it allows him to stay connected with his family. He is working as a barber, but he finds it very challenging to take care of both his family back home and his family in South Africa. His main priority is his family in South Africa.

Participant 5: Luce. Luce is a 39-year-old woman from the DRC. She comes from a family of seven children. She comes from a disadvantaged background and her father died when she was 15 years old. Her brothers left home to look for jobs running away from the military as they did not want to be forced to become soldiers. She left her old mother back home, who was not healthy. Her and her family could not afford to take her to the hospital and take care of her. When she stopped hearing from her brothers that left before her, she decided to leave home with her three-year-old daughter without informing her mother. She did not want to leave her daughter behind because she felt like she would become her mother's responsibility. She felt like she would be a burden to her mother who was sickly and aging very fast. She took her daughter and left everything behind, she just took a little bit of food. Luce felt like she was putting her daughter at risk but did not want her to grow up and experience a life similar to hers.

Luce only told one of her sisters about her decision to leave. Her sister did not support her decision but let her leave. Her sister thought that she was putting her life in danger. Her pastor also made her aware of the consequences of leaving but he also gave her strength to travel safe through her journey. Later she heard that soldiers raided her village and there was a civil war that wiped off most of the community. She heard this from other members from the DRC that she found in Uganda when they were fleeing. Along the journey, her daughter was severely injured and suffered from starvation.

After travelling through so many countries she finally settled in South Africa. She came across so many challenges, including a language barrier and being a victim of crime. She slept

on the streets the first night she arrived. The street was not far from Johannesburg Central Business District (CBD). The following morning, they woke up and looked for help. Fortunately, they were assisted by a pastor. They later got temporary documents and she found a job at the salon to support her daughter and herself. Unlike back home where she used to help little children with their homework and learning, she had thought that South Africa would give her the same opportunities. Unfortunately, it did not, so she had to start from the bottom. She later tried to use Facebook to find her brother who was already in South Africa and fortunately they were reunited. She stays with him now in Johannesburg and her brother works at the salon as a barber as well.

Luce could not remember the last time she spoke to her family back home nor shared a dinner with them, it has been over 19 years. It was only after many years that she found a way to communicate with her one sister that she had left back home. Her sister was now working for a particular family in Zimbabwe which was kind enough to assist her sister find Luce. Luce does not earn a good salary which makes it hard for her to visit her sister in Zimbabwe nor can her sister come and visit Johannesburg. WhatsApp has made their lives bearable and it enables them to save money on phone calls as well.

Participant 6: Samuel. Samuel is a 34-year-old man originally from the DRC and who works as an eyebrow extension specialist. He is married to a woman from the DRC. They have been in South Africa for 10 years and they have three children, two boys and one girl. Him and his wife share almost identical experiences and reasons as to why they fled from the DRC. As Samuel was fleeing from the DRC on his way to Uganda, he describes several distressing incidents involving refugees.

Back home he left his mother, father, younger brother, aunt and sister. Unfortunately, many of them were killed by the military who wanted Samuel to join the army. His parents had declared that they do not know Samuel's whereabouts to the military when they initially came

to look for him. His family was killed for this response. Fortunately, his aunt and brother had gone to town at the time of the attack and are his only remaining relatives. When his aunt and younger brother came back home, they found their family dead. He was devastated when he heard that his family was dead. It was two years after arriving in South Africa when he heard this news. He was able to reach his family back home through a mobile phone that he had bought. His family thought that he had not made it out of DRC, they thought he was dead because of his silence.

Arriving into South Africa was not his final planned destination. Using a phone was initially the last thing on his mind, although he knew it would help him, but he did not know how to do so since he was in a foreign country. He received assistance in one of the clinics. He recognised it was a clinic because of the red cross sign which was familiar to the one from home. He felt like most people did not care for one another because when he asked for help, they would send him anywhere just to get rid of him, worse he did not understand the local languages. It was difficult to navigate the new country, he could just imagine if he chose to leave the DRC with his family, his mother would have not survived all of that. It took him a very long time to sort out his life, the clinic referred him to a community centre where he met people who had similar experiences. They helped him get his way around and get necessary documents which was not easy, but with patience things worked out. He then looked for a job because life was and is still fast in Johannesburg and one needs money to survive. After experiencing challenges while looking for a job he eventually found one at the salon and he has been working for eight years.

He eventually managed to get himself a mobile phone with not many features just for making calls. Later he heard of the social media platforms. He initially downloaded as many applications as possible but that finished his data quickly. He then minimised them and considered using WhatsApp rather, with other platforms such as Instagram and Facebook but

that made him feel like it would expose his identity to the government. It was only after three years when he connected with one of his community members from back home and they assisted him to get in touch with his family. Samuel and his family kept communicating through this individual and sometimes it would be challenging since this individual would not be around the family. Samuel thought of going home, fetch his family and bring them to South Africa but he was too scared. He tried to save money so that one day he would bring them to South Africa. Later he found out that the military had taken his little brother to make him a soldier. Till today he regrets leaving him behind, he felt like he should have protected him. The one person that he is currently in contact with the most is his aunt. He calls her through video call twice a week and sometimes hearing her voice evokes emotions of guilt.

Participant 7: Jaiden. Jaiden is a 30-year-old woman originally from the DRC. She has been in South Africa for six years. She works at a clothing shop in Johannesburg during the day and later at her husband's place of work, a hair salon. She helps where he needs assistance with the clients at the salon. She has been married for four years and they have three children. Back home she has a large family and six siblings, two older brothers and four sisters. Her mother is still alive, but her father passed away. Her two brothers fled to South Africa before her. They ran away from the violence and the army that wanted to make soldiers out of them. She followed later because she wanted a better life for herself. She did not worry about her mother because she knew her mother would be taken care of since her sisters were home. Her plan included sending money for them when she got better opportunities. One of her brothers made it safely to South Africa but the other one died. She feels like it is unfortunate that her brother living in South Africa cannot go back to the DRC because of safety reasons. He would rather buy food and clothes for their family and send it back home and sometimes buy from the clothing shop she works for. Her brother does not like talking to people about where he comes from because his friend was tortured for talking to people about his life. In the

meantime, back in DRC he was declared dead by his family since the military had been looking for him.

When she arrived in South Africa her brother made her life much easier for her because he had already adjusted to South Africa. He seemed like he was doing well for himself and he even bought her a cell phone. Before she got married, she stayed with him. She gets to visit her family in the DRC once a year. When she visited them in her village, she bought them two phones so that they can talk to her when they needed to do so. She taught them how to use it but because it is a poor village with no electricity, they have to travel to town to charge the battery of the cellphone and it costs them an amount of R20 when converting to Congolese Franc. They call each other three times a week. She also sends them money when they have made enough that month.

Jaiden mentions that she prefers face to face interactions, so even though she talks to her family via cell phone she would prefer talking to her family members face to face. She likes video calling via WhatsApp and that has made a huge difference. She feels like one of her sisters is very good at hiding her feelings from her so that she does not worry. Phone calls make it easy to hide these kinds of emotions. Other than that, she appreciates being able to see them laugh and they show her what they get up to and dance for her. They will even describe what they would want her to buy for them. She also likes receiving pictures from them.

Data Collection

The potential participants were recruited through a key informant from the DRC who happens to be a researcher and a postgraduate student from the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa and studies migration populations. The face-to-face semi-structured interviews took place every Wednesday and Friday, between 10am and 3pm. The participants that I interviewed were over the age of eighteen and originally from the DRC. Six participants were able to speak English and two were struggling but the key

informant translated between both parties (Rieger, 2007). An attempt was made to balance the numbers of females and males, however that was impossible due to the xenophobic attacks that just had occurred. The participants feared for their lives, especially females.

Following the interviews, it was decided that one of them did not meet the criteria of a refugee namely being forced to leave the country of origin. Although this made the sample size smaller, it was felt that seven interviews were sufficient for the purpose of this study as saturation had been achieved.

I began the collection in late September 2019. This proved to be challenging because of the xenophobic attacks which had occurred early September that year. I first handed out the information sheet to each participant and let them fill in the consent form. This gave them the relevant information regarding the study and provided the opportunity to ask questions regarding the study and any issue around confidentiality (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). After agreeing to participate I asked them questions using a semi-structured format and elaborated where necessary. They would therefore respond to the questions asked, providing their experiences as a refugee in South Africa and experiences of using mobile phones with featured applications such as WhatsApp. The interviews took approximately 60 minutes, and this accumulated to an average of 50 hours spent immersed in the interviews (Jeffrey & Troman, 2004).

During the fieldwork, I took brief notes, mostly keywords of the conversations I had with the participants but relied mostly on audio recordings which formed the basis of the data collection (Blommaert & Jie, 2010). The interviews I held with the participants assisted me to gather the data and relate it back to the research questions by identifying the main themes (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). I kept track of the collected data by keeping detailed fieldnotes on a journal and recordings on a secured laptop which I later transcribed (Tessier, 2012). The journal also became a way to analyse the data and conceptualised the major themes that were discussed.

The journal consisted of the step-by-step precession of each meeting and summaries of what took place (Newbury, 2001). I found that participants were generally keen to participate in this study. I found that many of the participants, felt they could talk freely about their experiences using information communication technologies (ICTs). However, it was difficult for them to talk about the difficult experiences namely the reasons for leaving DRC, trauma of journey to South Africa and difficulties when they arrived into South Africa.

Research Instrument

As mentioned above I used semi-structured interviews to gather data. I had seventeen basic questions but also expanded on specific topics as needed. The semi-structured interviews followed on the following aspects:

- a) the individual's background and demographic details
- b) individual's reason for leaving home
- c) how was their arrival in South Africa
- d) the relationship with their families back home
- e) the use of Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) and
- f) affordability.

By asking open-ended questions and having the flexibility inherent to the semi-structured interview allowed me to gather the necessary data (Harrell & Bradley, 2009).

Data Analysis

The semi-structured interviews that I had recorded and documented were analysed using the Thematic Analysis method developed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The process of analysis can be described as follows; firstly, familiarising oneself with the data. The transcribed data must be read, re-read and the most prominent ideas noted (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As I had to transcribe the interviews myself this was the first phase of the process of data analysis. I listened to the entire recording more than once thoroughly writing the notes down so that I would be familiar with the data that was collected from the field (Marchetti-Mercer, 2019). Therefore, it can be said that the process of analysing the data began while I was in the field and it was ongoing throughout the fieldwork.

Secondly, it is important to generate initial codes for the data which can be either through the use of software or done manually (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I used the entire transcribed document which I had typed on my laptop to produce initial codes. I produced these codes by identifying different and similar codes and other interesting features from the participants' responses. This enabled me to code and identify a long list of potential themes, the following are some examples; insecurity, war, economic difficulty, financial responsibilities, unstable political environment, family relationships, sadness and reality, leaving the elderly behind, unplanned journey, trauma, post migration, challenges experienced since arriving in South Africa, lack of support for refugees, no sense of belonging, difficulty integrating, feeling like strangers, taking time to integrate, experiencing exploitation, vulnerability to crime, discrimination, lack of opportunities, lack of resources, giving up on dreams, affordances, disillusionment and so forth.

Thirdly, one must search for themes focusing on broader level. This involves sorting the various codes into potential themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). At this stage, I already had a

long list different code. I continued to use a system of highlighters to group similar codes together from each participant's responses to form potential themes. While other codes were discarded, others formed subsets of codes. The potential codes were selected to form themes. At the end I had a collection of four themes and thirteen sub-themes. The themes are as follows:

Theme One-*Motivation for Leaving The Country Of Origin* included the subthemes *Lack Of Security, Unstable Political Situation, Economic Difficulties and Financial Responsibilities*.

Theme Two, *Experiences En-Route South Africa* subthemes include *Relationship With Families Left Back Home, Sadness And Reality Of Family Separation Especially Elderly, Leaving Home as an Individual*.

Theme Three, *Experiences When Arriving In South Africa* and this includes *Challenges Experienced Since Arriving In South Africa and Mixed Experiences and Disillusionment Of South African Life*.

Lastly, Theme Four was called *Perceptions and Attitudes Towards The Use Of ICTs*. The sub-themes in this theme were: *The Important Uses Of Mobile Phones, WhatsApp As A Favourable Platform, Challenges Around the Use Of Phones Or Internet and Cell Phone Sharing Both For Refugees and Families Back Home*.

According to Braun and Clarke (2006) a researcher is required to review themes, checking themes to see if they work in relation to the coded extracts. At this stage I refined the themes. Some of the themes needed to be broken down into smaller components. The data that I gathered from the refugee population fitted in the potential themes. Through visualising the relationship between the themes, I realised that the themes reflect the meaning of the data as a whole.

The fifth step includes defining and naming themes, this step includes refining of specifics of each theme. Generating definite definitions, naming each theme and the overall

narrative shared with all the data gathered is an important step in Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I therefore analysed each theme, made sure that the names were concise, and they could give the reader some sense of what the theme is about. Each theme consisted of subthemes such as the ones mentioned earlier. This process included analysing each individual's narrative. After a continuous revision I was able to describe each theme in a couple of sentences.

Lastly, the researcher is required to produce a final report and this involved the writing up of this thesis. This included selecting examples that will provide participants' responses, excerpts, quotes, narratives relating to the analysed data, back to the research question and existing literature (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Therefore, the different themes were discussed in detail with excerpts and quotes as examples which were collected from the participants during the interviews.

I benefited from using Thematic Analysis because it helped with categorising the themes systematically which is required of the qualitative method (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Vaismoradi et al., 2016). This allowed for an understanding of how these participants responded to the influence of Information Communication Technologies (ICTs), and how they maintain and sustain their family relationships.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in qualitative studies refers to “the degree of confidence in the data, interpretation and methods used to ensure the quality of the study” (Connelly, 2016, p.1). Guba's (1985) model of trustworthiness includes the four domains of trustworthiness namely; credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011).

Credibility

Credibility is the extent to which the data presented by the researcher is truthful (Lincon & Guba, 1985). The face-to-face interviews were conducted in a natural setting at the salon

during their regular working hours, and the data was not manipulated in any way. Credibility was achieved by ensuring that I relied on my field notes and recordings to transcribe the data. I showed that the transcription of the data is credible by including quotes from the data gathered from the participants (Anney, 2014; Thomas & Magilvy, 2011 & Tuckett, 2005). I also made sure that there was a peer debriefing by discussing any developments and information gathered in the field for this study with my supervisor and other members of the research team of which I was part of.

Transferability

Transferability is a degree to which this study is applicable to another researcher's study (Lincon & Guba, 1985). The naturalistic role is to provide a rich description of data that is relatable to other context related to this study. To enhance transferability, I gave a clear detailed description of the participants, the setting, recruitment strategies and methods employed for this study (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). This study will therefore enable other researchers to apply it in other contexts or developed even further.

Dependability

Dependability refers to the consistency and accuracy of the research findings in the qualitative study (Lincon & Guba, 1985). If credibility is established then the study may be argued to have a basis of dependability (Lincon & Guba, 1985). The meetings with the participants were recorded, field notes were descriptively detailed, methods guiding the study were clearly articulated and transcription was done as I went along with data collection.

Confirmability

Confirmability is established when the data gathered from the participants is accurately reflected in the findings (Lincon & Guba, 1985). I triangulated meaning through exploring the impact that ICTs have had on the refugee population and use of ICTs in relating with their

families. In relating to this research work, there are other studies that have been previously looked at, this validation was therefore expanded further in the study analysis (Alencar et al., 2019; Kondova, & Ribbens, 2019; Lamba and Kralm, 2003; Palmary, 2009; Rasool et al., 2012). I reduced the chances of bias by using different sources of information to explore a similar problem presented by the participants to help strengthen the integrity of the findings presented by the study. By ensuring that I am open minded to the study and not clouded by personal judgements, I made sure to take colleagues and supervisor's opinions into consideration and read journal articles related to this study. All these efforts ensured that the findings and interpretations collaborate with the reflections in the journals kept through the process.

Ethical Considerations

This study is part of a bigger research project that focuses on migration, the use of ICTs and family relationships on African migrants in South Africa. I however had to gain ethics approval for my own research through the Department of Psychology and the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg Non-Medical Ethics Committee. I submitted a participation information sheet, audio and interview consent forms to the university's ethics committee. This study was seen to have minimal risks as I was studying a low risk of refugee population from the DRC who have resettled in Johannesburg and have experience in using ICTs. However, although the sample was considered low risk, counselling services at the University were offered to potential participants should they need to. Before conducting interviews, I gained necessary permission from the participants involved in the form of signed consent.

This study follows the *APA American Psychological Association's Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct* (Sales & Folkman, 2000) as follows.

1. *Do no harm*: Miller and Salkind (2007), state that ethical considerations determine between what is right or wrong in the study, for the purpose of making moral

judgements. As a researcher, issues of ethics and safety are of great importance and should always remain at the forefront throughout the research process. Therefore, I took regard of the participants' safety, ensuring that no one would be harmed. It was my duty to ensure that the participants were treated with respect and a great deal of professionalism. This included taking breaks when the participants were tired or may have felt emotionally drained. I was careful with my questions and listened respectfully when difficult emotional material was discussed. Participants were given the option to go to the Emthonjeni Centre at the University of the Witwatersrand for further counselling if necessary.

2. *Be open and honest regarding the study:* The refugee participants were aware of the true nature of the study and what was being investigated. The trustworthiness of the data relied on keeping in mind these aspects of the ethical considerations. This means that I was also careful with recorded data gathered from the semi-structured interviews and keeping the notes.
3. *Obtain consent and necessary permission:* Each participant was given an information sheet explaining the purpose of the study as well as a written consent form prior to any data collection for the ethics (Coka, 2017). Both explained the nature of the research project in detail. These included the following issues, namely that their participation is voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time with no repercussions. When gaining informed consent of the participants, I engaged in ongoing discussions with participants regarding the study in order to ensure that informed consent was fully understood and ongoing (Coka, 2017). I discussed all these issues with my supervisor. I kept participants anonymous by using pseudonyms (false names) to protect their identity and dignity unless requested otherwise by them (Coka, 2017). Pseudonyms

were used for all participants and the translator also signed the consent form to ensure confidentiality with regard to the data collected for the study.

4. *Protect, respect and persevere the study's records*: I was also cognisant of the differences in terms of culture, religion, socio-economic status, decision making and choices of the individuals. The information gathered through recordings and daily notes were used for academic purpose only. Only my supervisor and I had access to the data collected for the study and it was password protected in a computer. In the instance of those who could not speak English properly the key informant translated to both the participant and the researcher.

Thus, I was therefore mindful of the required ethical considerations and steps.

Reflexivity

Finding the refugee population was initially challenging. As mentioned earlier I initially wanted to focus on the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSV) refugee population. CSV is an “independent non-governmental organisation established in 1989 in South Africa that seeks to understand and prevent violence, heal and bring peace among refugee populations from the DRC and other African countries” (Cock, 1992, p. 1). I could not get consent from the CSV as they considered their clients to be too vulnerable, as they all had a distressing experience prior to arriving in South Africa. These included being tortured, physical violence, poverty, lack of resources and unemployment. This means that they did not trust anyone, especially anyone from South Africa apart from the CSV staff with whom they have built a rapport.

Fortunately, I found another refugee population to work with from the DRC. They were keen to participate and share their experiences although it was also difficult to talk about more challenging experiences namely the reasons for leaving DRC, the trauma of journey to South

Africa and difficulties when they arrived into South Africa and the xenophobic attack that had taken place at the time of the interviews.

I was provided with transportation to do my interviews however, I feared for my own safety given the tension that prevailed in that community following the xenophobic attacks. However, during the fieldwork I experienced acceptance and kindness after rapport was established during the interview sessions (Miller, 2007). This made me feel welcomed and I was at ease.

Reflecting on the participants' experiences since they arrived in South Africa. I have come to realise how fortunate I am as a South African Black postgraduate student. The privilege to benefit from good quality education, financial assistance and good job opportunities compared to the refugee participants who reported lack of resources, lack of financial assistance, lack of access to good education and experience bouts of unemployment and employment in low-level jobs to an extent that these participants are forced to give up on their dreams and let go of their qualifications. For example, one of my participants reported to have been forced to give up on his medical degree because he lacked funding and could not find accommodation when he arrived in South Africa whereas he was hoping for a better life. The other participants reported to have experienced downward social mobility, back home one participant used to teach children and that helped her earn a living unlike here in South Africa, she settled for working in a salon in South Africa because that is the only job that was available for her. However, this is not to say that South Africans in general do not experience similar incidents. These participants perceive themselves as a burden to the South African educational and employment system.

Conclusion

The goal for this chapter was to discuss and outline the research methods used to answer the research questions. The most salient aspects of the research methodology used were discussed. In the next chapter, I will discuss the findings that were generated from the Thematic Analysis in more detail.

CHAPTER FOUR

Findings

In this chapter the themes identified during the process of data analysis are discussed in detail. The themes are discussed with excerpts and quotes collected from the participants during the interviews. The initial themes that were identified are divided into five sections, the first covers the motivation for the participants to flee from their country of origin. Secondly, their experiences when they were en-route to South Africa. Thirdly, the psychological impact of family separation. Fourthly their experiences on arrival in South Africa. Lastly, the perceptions and attitudes towards the use of ICTs (Information Communications Technologies) are highlighted. Secondary themes were also identified and grouped under main overarching themes.

Motivation for Leaving the Country of Origin

Lack of Security

Significant push factors were identified that had led participants to flee from their country of origin. For most participants these were linked with physical insecurities from the original country which brought about fear as expressed by Nelson “...*it wasn't right the time I left home, there were so many things that took place there, so I could not tolerate the violence there*”.

The persisting violence seemed to be a contributory factor for participants to flee from their country of origin as well as hoping for a better life elsewhere. For example, Jaiden saw that the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) was not progressing nor was the war coming to an end, she fled from DRC because of the violence and seeking for a better future “....*my bother ran to South Africa before me running away from the violence.... I followed later because I wanted a better life for myself*”.

The security situation was experienced as increasingly worsening, which led to many interviewed participants feeling unsafe in their own country, for example Boris shared his reasons for leaving the DRC “.... *it was not by choice nor a good reason... actually, I flee from it because of certain reasons and insecurity that was happening there, that place*”.

Similar sentiments were shared by Luce, “.... *my brothers left home to look for jobs and running away from the rebels, from becoming soldiers*”. This points to the fact that the military would force young boys to train soldiers out of them, “...*they were collecting young guys and boys to be taken to the ribbon side in 2003 in Kasenga without anyone’s consent...once they come here, young boys like our age, they take you by force. You want or you don’t want, they will make you*”-Chris.

Boris also shared, “*once they take you, they going to form you to be a soldier like the rebels...they will give you ganja to be strong, to be integrated in what they are doing, so young boys will be running and go to the part where there are no those things*”.

Whilst young boys were the main target, in some cases, the entire family was a target of violence. For example, Samuel notes “...*my other family was butchered and killed because the military wanted me to become a younger soldier*”. Similarly Boris expressed his remorse for leaving his family behind, “...*it is not a good thing to or wish for it to happen in your life because when you are leaving your family behind you don’t know what will happen or will you ever see them again*”.

Unstable Political Situation

As the political crisis in DRC intensified, participants felt they had no control over their lives and the dire situation in their country. They felt that their communities were managed by the government whom they felt did not care about the people of DRC “...*It was a political*

decision then because the conditions were just not good, you know when you have your back against the wall anything that comes your way you will definitely take time” - Ray.

This sense of instability was further illustrated by Nelson, “...*there were political problems, family problems, religious problems and economics problem”.*

The political instability of the country also affected the educational system, and it became harder for students to attain and receive education. Ray for example reported that, “...*during that time life was not so easy especially for the young studentto survive in the university, just it was a very difficult time so. You will be lucky when, when you and your family will maybe give you like one US dollars”.*

Economic Difficulties and Financial Responsibilities

Participants referred to financial difficulties as motivations for leaving the country over and above the physical violence and political crisis that took place in DRC. Participants felt financial pressure and sought independence. They fled from their country of origin due to economic difficulties and the impact it had on having to provide for their families left back home. For example, Chris mentioned that, “...*as a man you have to fight, for looking for a job..... I was sitting not doing anything in 2003 and I was not involved”.* Boris also shared that, “...*I left my whole family behind back home, I left them back and I wasn’t taking care of them because my mom was old and my sister”.*

Experiences when en-route to South Africa

Leaving Family Members Behind

Most of the participants left their country of origin as individuals as it would have been difficult to navigate through the journey with their families. For example, Boris mentioned that, “.... *You never know what is going to happen on your way, that time it was like everybody has to fly on their own”.* Elderly parents were not able to join the participants because of difficulties inherent to the journey and deteriorating health, “...*mother is the one that was alive,*

but she was old and not healthy” (Luce) and Boris shared “...I left my mother behind because she was old, and she would have not survived along the way because she was not well”.

Nelson also shared “....my father and mother because they are already very old, they are very old. So, no way to run the way I ran because it wasn't a normal transport”.

Precarious Nature of Journey

There was often no time for planning for the journey neither was there time to gather enough resources to sustain them through the journey as described by Luce, “...I grabbed my daughter with nothing I left her clothes and just took a little bit of food”. She felt that her daughter would have been a burden to those who were left behind, and her mother was not well. Taking her daughter along had not been easy, as her daughter suffered from hunger and injuries during the journey, “.... was severely injured from running into different countries and she got so....so sick from hunger but she survived”.

At the same time South Africa had not necessarily been the planned destination when they fled from the DRC. However, the various countries they passed along the way had their own difficult conditions which forced them not to settle there and continue moving. “.... the time when I left, I passed by Uganda, then I went to Tanzania and then those countries alone that I found myself in South Africa” -Boris. Similarly, Chris recalls, “...from there I took a bus and came to S.A... after I had fled from three other counties, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and arrived in South Africa”.

Experiences of Violence

Whilst violence had often been a push factor, it unfortunately often followed participants along the way. Luce for an example mentions, “...I heard after I left that the soldiers raided my village and there was a civil war that wiped off most of the community, heard from other members from Congo that I found in Uganda”.

Participants reported to have witnessed genocides, en-route with people dying and not making it to their final destinations which increased the feelings of anxiety for both themselves and families left back in the country of origin. Boris for example expressed, “...*because of that situation of war, people are dying like chickens*”. He also mentioned, “*you are running. You see a body of person lying down. You see a person running, you get shot down and you continue running*”. Similarly, Jaiden stated, “...*because one of his friends was tortured for talking to people about his life, back home he was declared dead*”.

The Psychological Impact of Family Separation

Participants experienced different levels of negative emotions when they got separated from their families. In some instances, there was a sense of sadness about perhaps not being able to see them again. For example, Boris mentions “...*when you’re leaving your family you don’t know when you will ever see them again*”.

Upon arrival in South Africa Boris also reported to have experienced a complete isolation from their family members. “.... *It was difficult for me to communicate with the family, no number, no contact to find someone*”. Luce mentioned missing the communal aspects of sharing a meal with the family, “...*I cannot remember when last did I speak to the whole family neither share dinner with them and it’s been 19 years now*”.

Participants also described missing and longing for their home, “*home sweet home but it’s not easy for them to come here to meet with my family back home*”-Nelson. There was also a sense of worry thinking that their families did not know what had happened to them, “.... *because my family that was left, they couldn’t reach me they thought that I died along the way*”-Samuel. At the same time, Luce felt a sense of guilt as her family had not supported her decision to leave, she expressed “.... *My sisters did not support my decision for leaving home, especially with my daughter, all they were thinking about was danger*”.

Challenging Experiences When Arriving in South Africa

Loss of Support Networks

All the participants mentioned having experienced a number of challenges when they arrived in South Africa. Many often found themselves at a loss with no orientation to formal networks. For example, Nelson said, “.... *I felt lost, I was in a new country. I didn't know anyone*”. Often participants spent several years before they could get in touch with families. Arriving in South Africa, religious institutions and health institutions were a form of support “...*Catholic church in Wits University and he took me there he wanted me to get assistance when I was just three to four months old in South Africa*” -Ray. Similarly, Jaiden shared, “.... *they helped me every way around and get necessary documents which was not easy, but patience is virtue...You will not believe it, but I went to one of the nearest clinics to find help cause the sign of the clinic looked familiar*”.

Participants were lucky to recognise familiar and international symbols such as church cross signs and clinic signs. These fortunately also became a resource at time and helped connect them to possible support networks, “...*when I saw the church sign*”-Luce. It was interesting to find that they were referred to fellow Congolese to give them a support network. For example, Jaiden shared “...*the clinic referred me to a community center when they have common people to me*”.

A particular challenge experienced in some instances was the loss of their documents along the journey and when they got to South Africa, they experienced difficulty in securing new documents, “...*You don't have the green ID then even the poor of the poorest jobs like security, you are not going to get a job in security. It is very difficult for the newcomers*” -Ray. Luce shared similar sentiments, “.... *It took a very long time before we got temporary documents. It was hard to survive*”.

Poor Job Opportunities

Arriving in South Africa seemed to offer them limited employment opportunities. This often led them to informal job opportunities such as street vendors and working in salons. In fact, the majority of the participants were employed at the salon owned by Charles from the DRC. Before Charles hired them, they recalled the challenges they had experienced in looking for employment. For example, they often had to resort to settling for any kind of jobs. *“...I walked in every salon asking for any kind of jobs but with no luck... It was hard to survive because I could not get a job to support my daughter”-Luce.*

Similarly, Jaiden recalls, *“I looked for a job everywhere, life is fast here and you need money to survive. I first found it by the salon down from here, the boss was horrible to me. She had the mentality of slavery. But I soon had a job here and I have been here for 8 years”.*

Luce also mentioned that, feels that they are not treated equally with South African nationals, *“.... if home was good maybe I would have been a teacher now, there are not many opportunities for us here in South Africa. I used to help little children with their homework and learning, I had thought that South Africa will give me the same privileges, unfortunately here I was nothing”.*

Therefore, even having academic qualifications did not necessarily help them, *“...unfortunately here I was nothing. I had to start from the bottom”-Luce.* Even when it came to studies, participants encountered difficulties. For example, Ray shared, *“.... You cannot have access to bursaries in South Africa, those are stuff that are reserved to South Africans”.* This often led to participants giving up on their dreams in order to survive, *“.... never materialized and that dream and there were no real, I'm not living normal life...but I've never worked back home I was just a normal student”-Ray.* This often led to feelings of disillusionment, *“...thought things would be just easy like the way that we were being told” and “...might have a better life”.*

Financial Challenges

The challenges they encountered in obtaining work often resulted in them experiencing financial challenges, “... *financially you know I don't have a nice job*”-Nelson. This was made worse because they faced pressure to provide for their families back home, Boris mentioned “...*I may not lie, due to the income that I have its difficult for me to provide since I also don't have enough on my side and can't provide for them that side*”. Chris also mentioned difficulties in this respect, “.... *I provide money for them, only when they ask for good money*”.

Lack of Sense of Belonging

Participants reflected having experienced challenges, such as no sense of belonging when arriving in South Africa, the lack of emotional and social support from South African nationals, “.... *once you arrive you do not have a family. You start over, a new life again*”-Chris. Being away from home was also experienced as stressful. For example, Luce “...*it was hard to survive because I could not get a job to support my daughter, I felt like we were someone else's responsibility*”.

Therefore, finding the barber shop owner Charles who assisted the newcomers in creating jobs for them helped them achieved a sense of belonging, “... *I found some people who could speak the same language with me, that I associated myself with them. Like brothers, like a friend, like a family*”-Boris.

Language Difficulties

Participants were all French speakers and they reported feeling alienated when arriving in South Africa; not being able to speak any local language made it extremely difficult, “...*did not know how to communicate with anyone and they did not understand my language*”- Luce.

Samuel shared similar sentiments, “...*as didn't know my language. It was difficult to navigate the place*”. This seemed to be an accumulating factor to feelings of distress and

desperation as it impacted their integration, “...*I found myself with different people in a foreign country*”- Boris.

Lack of Safety Linked to Crime and Xenophobia

Most participants reported feeling vulnerable once arriving in South Africa. In some instances, this feeling was linked to crime in South Africa. For example, having a cellphone seemed to make them more vulnerable to crime. When the police raided Luce’s place of residence, they took her cellphone and said to her “...*these are the very same cell phones you use to sell illegal stuff*”. Boris shared, “...*they took it in the streets, something they steal it*”. When Luce arrived in SA, she describes a man taking advantage of her, “.... *he hit me, and my daughter started crying, thanks to the man he stopped but he took all the little that we had*”. She also mentioned feeling discriminated against and being a target of xenophobic attacks, “....*my phone was taken away during the xenophobic attack*”. In one instance Ray mentioned that despite the crime he felt safer in SA than in the DRC because of the violence perpetrated by the military in the DRC, “.....*you’re home...you’re get safe, to see a soldier is nothing*”.

Perceptions and Attitudes Towards the Use of ICTs

The Importance of Using Mobile Phones

All participants reported that having mobile phones has been very helpful. They reported to be using mobile phones in a dual way, to assist them in integrating into a new society and to stay in touch with their families back home. For example, Chris “...*when I integrate to the country, a phone, start looking for other friends to add some number of members the brothers*”.

Boris also shared, “...*communication is the most important thing in life, if you cannot find someone, or see someone at least if you can talk to the person and hears your voice the person can be happy*”. Ray emphasized the importance use of mobile phones as opposed to old ways of communicating such as writing letters, “...*If we have an urgent message now you*

just dial someone and then the message goes across. It is no more the time when you have to send letters through the post office and wait for weeks and months for you to get the feedback". Samuel also added "...you're mostly getting in touch with people who are far away than those who are close.... I've never wrote a letter to my parents so I feel like I would not relate much to that concept".

Not only did mobile phones enable them to be in contact with their families but it is also a way to keep them abreast of the current affairs "...You are aware of what's happening across the world" Ray.

Cell Phone Sharing

An interesting phenomenon that was evident was the existence of cellphone sharing in both the participants and their families back home. Participants also reported to share mobile phones with their spouses and colleagues in the host country to contact their family members back home. This was common especially in cases where their belongings had been stolen in the host country. For example, Chris expressed "...I share it with my wife all the time".

They also support each other by sharing their mobile phones with fellow refugees in their presence, "...I share my cell phone with anyone next to me at work and someone who is closer to me"-Boris. Arrangements are also made between the people in the host countries and the ones in DRC so that they can get hold of each other when need be. The participants reported that their families have resorted to asking neighbours to assist them with using their mobile phones so that they are able to reach for their family member that fled, in cases where they own normal phones are not available to use to contact the person in question "... they go our neighbours if we want to call them via WhatsApp and on urgent bases"-Boris. Although sometimes this was experienced as inconvenient, especially if the neighbours were not available and they had to make appointments to ensure the communication took place.

WhatsApp as a Favourite Platform for Communication

Participants reported using a number of mobile phone services such as normal voice calls, mobile internet voice calls and video calls. However, the majority of the participants preferred to use WhatsApp as it has features such as video calls, audio recording, voice calls, sending, receiving of images and data, as well as having immediacy and an affordable rate. For example, Ray shared “...WhatsApp came it was a much better way because it is much cheaper. You can call them using voice calls for such a long time...We always communicate via WhatsApp or by a normal call”. These favorable features allowed participants and their families to keep in contact, “....we always communicate via WhatsApp...we always use a voice recorder and there WhatsApp calls, the family will send videos to see what is going on that side”-Nelson.

The fact that WhatsApp offers immediate communication was also an advantage, “... I can call at any time of the day or night every week” (Ray). Even if one cannot be with the other person physically, participants mentioned being able to reach and see their loved ones through video calls which was experienced very positively, “.... you can video call and look at the person. You see the smile on the person” (Boris) or “...you talk to a person face to face, video calling via WhatsApp has made a huge difference”-Jaiden.

The Importance of using Facebook

Social media was also an effective way of staying in touch with families back home. For example, “...I did register with my real name in Facebook because I was hoping that someone will recognise me and show my family”-Jaiden. Equally, Luce used Facebook to look for her brother who left DRC when he was young, “...I searched for him and found him on Facebook. I had so much joy when we finally met, I now stay with him”.

Consequently, in situations where certain countries were considering shutting down social media platforms this was experienced as problematic. Luce recalls a situation with her sister who is now living in Zimbabwe, when the government wanted to shut down social

media, she then felt that would have taken away the opportunity for her to stay in touch with her loved ones. Luce, “.... *they wanted to shut down the social media platforms and that scared me because that meant I will be able to contact my sister ever again*”.

Challenges Around the Use of ICTs

There was however a sense that often people were able to hide unpleasant situations through the use of ICTs for example Jaiden expressed, “... *though cause a person can't say they are okay when they are sick*”. Samuel shared the same sentiments, “...*when you're physically present when a person you get to engage in more meaningful conversation and see them laugh and get to know exactly how they feel because a phone can be very deceiving*”.

There appeared to also be financial challenges linked to the use of ICTs. In terms of their families back home, participants mentioned that they had financial limitations. They share that people living in DRC do not have access to good technology, there is poverty and lack of access to resources “...*the people that, I am reaching are still poor and some don't have the smart phone*”-Boris.

The families back home also have problems with electricity according to Nelson, “...*sometimes there is even a problem for electricity, maybe the phone is off*”. He also added that not only does load shedding occur back home, but it occurs as well in South Africa, “...*You can find those think of load shedding. Even here in South Africa. Are not three but three or four months later. We got that problem of load shedding*”.

In terms of their own challenges, participants reported to have challenges with costs related to data, they need money in order for them to get data and they do not make enough from the salon to sustain all their needs, “.... *buy data, depending on how much I make on that day in the salon*”-Boris. When they do not have enough data, this makes communication with family difficult, participants mentioned buying data is cheaper than buying airtime. Ray explained this “...*in Congo DRC the tele-communication is very expensive for the country,*

calling Congo for one minute it'll cost you about R15 you have a minute. So, when WhatsApp came it was a much better way because it is much cheaper. You can call them using voice calls for such a long time”.

Often participants had to prioritise their immediate families’ expenses before thinking of buying data or providing for their families back home, “.... *before I even buy data, I have to know that I pay rent for my kids... So, I cannot be providing for someone who is far. Before I provide for the one who is near to me*”-Nelson.

Because of financial limitations visits are virtually impossible, making their dependence on technology even heavier, “.... *Although we would think of going to visit her or her come this side we cannot because we can afford the journey*”-Luce.

Conclusion

The goal of this chapter was to present the findings using the excerpts and quotes collected from the participants during the interviews.

CHAPTER FIVE

Introduction

This chapter will provide a discussion of the findings, analysed from the previous chapter in relation to the relevant literature discussed earlier. Little attention has been paid to the use of mobile phones by refugee populations from African countries in maintaining their family relationships in instances where the families are separated by distance. The use of ICTs was the core focus of the study exploring how participants use mobile phones to maintain relationships with their families back home. However, this research study also aimed to offer insight into the experiences of refugees from the DRC who are now living in South Africa. The following research questions were posed at the beginning of the research study:

- What are the forms of communication that are used by refugees to keep contact with their families back home?
- How do refugees use technologies to keep in touch and to perform caring roles?
- How do refugees budget for data or airtime for the use of technologies to maintain contact with their families?

The responses of the participants highlighted the fact that mobile phones were the favoured forms of communication especially on a platform such as WhatsApp which offers immediate and visual communication through WhatsApp video calling. In some instances, social media applications such as Facebook were also expressed as useful. The expense of data both by participants and their family members back home was highlighted as an impediment to communication especially in light of the many financial challenges that refugees experience in South Africa. All the participants had been living in South Africa for more than two years at the time of the interview. Their length of stay in South Africa had enabled participants to adapt,

develop survival strategies and understand how the system works in South Africa compared to their country of origin.

In analysing the findings of this research study, a number of prominent themes were identified, highlighting the peculiar experiences of refugees coming from the DRC and presently living in South Africa. In the past few decades people from the DRC have been fleeing in large numbers due to human rights violations, persecution, war and mutiny. Refugees from the DRC comprise largely of individuals from rural areas who are predominantly young males. Another group that makes up a great proportion of refugees are members of the middle-class population. Steinberg (2005) mentions that flights of refugees from the DRC and Mozambique initially began with approximately 350,000 individuals during the civil war. Kennes and Larmer (2016) and Venugopalan (2016), postulate that there was a war that began in the late 19th century in the Democratic Republic of Congo between various factions namely: the government, President Laurent- Désiré Kabila, rebels from Rwanda and Uganda and the Congolese residents. All these groups were fighting against the ruling party. Kabila was an important person in this war, he was a Congolese revolutionary and politician who served as the third president in DRC. He was said to be protected by the Zimbabwean, Namibian and Angolan soldiers from the brutal war that had occurred (Ayres, 2012; Laudati, 2013 & Williams, 2013). The brutal war resulted in internal and external displacement of the Congolese population; this is evident in the findings by Mahlangu (2016); approximately 3.9 million of DRC population died including President Kabila and approximately 3.4 million were displaced.

When participants were asked for the reasons they left the DRC, the majority highlighted various motivating factors. Specific push factors included insecurity, political, financial pressure, and war. As the violence worsened between the DRC, Rwanda and Uganda the participants fled from their homes as they felt they had no choice but to flee from the DRC.

Boris mentioned that, *“It was not by choice nor a good reason... actually, I flee from it because of certain reasons and insecurity that was happening there, that place”*. The violence in the DRC destroyed their livelihoods and their humanitarian situation was challenging and complex.

The majority of the participants mentioned feeling unsafe in their own country because of the intolerable violence that was constantly taking place in the DRC. They felt they were forced to leave their country of origin to seek protection and safety in other countries, as they were young and often the target of violence. Nelson for example expressed his fear, *“it wasn’t right the time I left home, there were so many things that took place there, so I could not tolerate the violence there”*. There were a group of military soldiers referred to as rebels, who were collecting young boys to recruit them as child soldiers. Chris for example shared that, *“they were collecting young guys and boys to be taken to the ribbon side.... in 2003 in Kasenga without anyone’s consent...once they come here, young boys like our age, they take you by force. You want or you don’t want, they will make you”*.

They intended to collect these young boys and groom them to become soldiers just like them. They would take them by force from their families and their families would not know of their whereabouts. If the military soldiers were successful in abducting these young boys, they would force these young boys smoke ganja as part of their initiation and to make them *“strong”* while their families were left behind and suffering from loss and pain. Boris illustrated this process as follows, *“once they take you, they going to form you to be a soldier like the rebels...they will give you ganja to be strong, to be integrated in what they are doing, so young boys will be running and go to the part where there are no those things”*.

The participants and their family members realised that the violence would not come to an end any time soon in the DRC and this motivated the participants to flee from the DRC at a

young age because they did not want to part of military force nor the brutality they were causing on the Congolese peoples' lives. These findings are in line with the existing literature that recorded different episodes that forced refugees to flee from their country origin. These are for example war, persecution, harsh conditions and insecurity during the civil war in the 1980s to the late 1990s (Black, 2010; Dillon & Walsh, 2012; Krishnakumar & Indumathi, 2014). They also resonate with the views of Ratha and Shaw (2007), Leung (2010) and Landau (2012) who argue that migration is caused by push factors that are intolerable to individuals, which cause refugees and migrants to flee and seek for a better life and safety.

The findings also indicate that war also caused brutality and death among the families that the participants left behind in the DRC. Whilst some of the participants managed to flee on their own from the DRC, their families who were left behind continued to suffer physically, emotionally and inhuman conditions. When the military and/or rebels could not find these young boys in their home, they would torture and kill their families instead. This often occurred after some interrogation where most families would deny their knowledge of their children's whereabouts. These families were therefore a target and vulnerable to these harsh treatments. Samuel illustrated that, *"my other family was butchered and killed because the military wanted me to become a younger soldier"*.

These inhuman conditions were linked to political crisis, which appeared to be another contributory factor for the refugee participants to flee from the DRC. Majority of the participants reported that the political crisis to have intensified then, they felt they had no control over their lives and that they were being led by the government that did not care about their lives. Ray shared, *"it was a political decision then because the conditions were just not good, you know when you have your back against the wall anything that comes your way you will definitely take time"*. Similarly, Nelson further illustrated that, *"there were political problems, family problems, religious problems and economics problems"*. These findings

reflect Rasool et al. (2012) who argue that the movements of refugee populations are also determined by political crises; resulting in them migrating from poor areas to richer areas or more developed countries.

The political instability and transition in the DRC also made it harder for those who were pursuing their education to attain and receive an adequate education. Education is a key that may ensure a brighter and successful future (Siemens & Long, 2011). However, in the DRC, the schooling system was disrupted due to war and violence that was taking place. The government did not have enough budget to support the education stem and to pay the teachers' salaries, this led to approximately 200 thousand of students and learners dropping out (De Herdt & Titeca, 2016). Ray mentioned that, *"I was such a young man who dreamt of finishing my medical course and working.... finishing my medical course and work in my country, it has never even crossed my mind one day that I would be going out of the country"*. When people are not educated, this may lead to poverty, lack of employment and the inability to provide for their families (Adepoju, 2006; Beine et al., 2001). This is evident in Ray's experience, *"during that time life was not so easy especially for the young student ...to survive in the university, just it was a very difficult time so. You will be lucky when, when you and your family will maybe give you like one US dollars"*.

Parents also seemed to experience financial difficulties and they could not afford school fees due to them being unemployed. Consequently, some of the participants could not cope well with schooling in the DRC, to an extent that they fled from the DRC in attempts to obtain their education elsewhere. They unfortunately faced challenges in their host countries such as lack of funding, accommodation, and menial jobs.

While violence and politics have been strong motivating push factors, findings of this study revealed that economic challenges may also have played an important role in

participants' decisions to flee from the DRC. The economic system problems included not receiving necessities such as food, water, shelter etc. which led to political unrest and an economic crisis. The lack of employment was a concern for many of the participants, which contributed to their inability to provide for their families and sustain their lives despite the DRC's large mineral resources. Economic problems remained a significant push factor for the participants to flee so that they could establish and find financial stability in their host country. Chris mentioned that, *"as a man you have to fight, for looking for a job...I was sitting not doing anything in 2003 and I was not involved"*. This supports Lamba and Krahn's (2003) argument that refugees and migrants move to a new country seeking stability and for economic reasons.

Participants fled from the DRC seeking financial independence but were burdened with the additional pressure to take care of their families left behind in the DRC. *"I may not lie, due to the income that I have its difficult for me to provide since I also don't have enough on my side and can't provide for them that side"*- Boris. However, when they arrived in South Africa, they encountered challenges in obtaining work and when they found work, they were not paid enough money to sustain their lives and families and this often resulted in them experiencing financial challenges. Nelson shared, *"financially you know I don't have a nice job"*. What is therefore significant is that ultimately, violence, political instability and economic systems were the most significant push factors and these factors continue to shape their interpretation and understanding of the DRC.

Participants were also asked to share their experiences of the process of fleeing. The majority of the participants reported that South Africa was not the destination they had in mind when they fled from the DRC. Boris explained, *"when I arrived, South Africa was not part of my intentions but it was while I was on my way, running away...that is how I found myself with different people in a foreign country"*. All they wanted was to find a place of safety, a place where they would not face challenges similar to the DRC's. Through their journey, they had to

pass through neighbouring countries namely Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Tanzania to get to South Africa. The majority of the participants experienced challenges when having to individually travel on their own through these different countries. Boris said, *“you never know what is going to happen on your way, that time it was like everybody has to fly on their own”*. He further explained that *“the time when I left, I passed by Uganda, then I went to Tanzania and then those countries alone that I found myself in South Africa”*. Similarly, Chris passed more than two African countries to reach to South Africa, *“after I had fled from three other counties, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and arrived in South Africa”*. Whilst travelling through different countries which had their own challenges, participants reported that they could not settle in these African countries due to difficult conditions. Boris described one of these harsh conditions when he was passing Uganda, *“you’re running. You see a body of a person lying down.... you see a person running, you get shot down and you continue running”*. Their unplanned journey led them to South Africa where they finally settled. This is evident in Rugunanan and Smit (2011) and Fargues and Bonfanti (2014) where refugees either travel in small or large populations seeking for a place of safety and option to settle in a country where desired opportunities are somewhat available. These findings also reflect the findings Cejas (2007) that refugees take risks and make sacrifices to reach their country of host and seek for safety.

In one instance, one female participants Luce left with her daughter because she felt that her daughter would have been a burden to her family and she also did not want her to grow up in war-torn country. She shared that, *“I grabbed my daughter with nothing, I left her clothes and just took a little bit of food”* (Luce). There was often no time for participants to plan nor gather the resources required to sustain them through the journey. Luce also mentioned that it was hard for her daughter to survive the journey, *“my daughter was severely injured from running into different countries and she got so....so sick from hunger but she survived because*

when we got to Uganda, we joined the asylums for a while figuring out a way forward that is where she was assisted”.

Research has shown that family separation experienced by refugees differs from regular migration by virtue of the involuntary, hasty and traumatic nature involved in fleeing one's country (Rousseau et al., 2001). Families provide a sense of resilience and support for one to succeed in life (Miller et al., 2018). However, the majority of the participants' families left back home were often exposed to brutal experiences. A number of participants reported that they had left their own families due to difficulties they would have encountered when travelling with the elderly family members. Nelson for example mentioned that, *“my father and mother because they are already very old, they are very old. So, no way to run the way I ran because it wasn't a normal transport”*. This led to often having to leave elderly members with deteriorating health. Luce explained that, *“mother is the one that was alive, but she was old and not healthy”*. Similarly, to Boris *“I left my mother behind because she was old, and she would have not survived along the way because she was not well”*.

None of the participants had relatives upon their arrival in South Africa except for Luce who later located her brother through using Facebook. Three of the participants also later got married in South Africa, two with women from the DRC and one with a woman from South Africa. They therefore created new families for themselves in South Africa.

Consequently, the majority of the participants reported having experienced different levels of negative emotions when they were separated from their families. They felt sadness, as expressed by Boris. He shared that due to having been separated from his family he experienced great despair, *“when you're leaving your family you don't know when you will ever see them again”*. The participants thought they would never get a chance to reunite with their families and felt a great sense of hopelessness. Samuel expressed, *“because my family*

that was left, they couldn't reach me they thought that I died along the way". These findings reflect the argument by Rousseau et al., (2001) that separation from family may destroy hope, lead to episodes associated with having to relive painful experiences and lack of news from their family result in feeling mixed emotions which include feelings of worry. These mixed emotions were caused by the fact that, often when people from the DRC flee, they do not reach their final destination alive; they either die along the way or completely lose contact with their families back home. *"My sisters did not support my decision for leaving home, especially with my daughter, all they were thinking about was danger"* (Luce). This is also reflected by Smit and Rugunanan (2015) and Thela et al., (2017) who argue that family separation may be a cause of major distress for refugee's sadness. It causes cultural disruption, feelings of helplessness in their families and the fear that their families may still be in harm's way.

In addition, what was concerning was the number of years after arriving in South Africa that it often took for them to be reunited with their families. *"I cannot remember when last I spoke to the whole family neither share dinner with them and it's been 19 years now"* (Luce). Lastly, majority of the participants reported that they desired reuniting with their families when they arrived in South Africa, *"home sweet home but it's not easy for them to come here to meet with my family back home"* (Nelson). However, despite the separation, participants reported still experiencing strong feelings towards their families back home.

The majority of the participants reported to have also suffered from traumatic experiences along the journey. They witnessed death and people not making it to their destination. Boris for example shared his experience, *"because of that situation of war, people are dying like chickens"*. This increased feelings of anxiety for participants, as they had left the DRC because of the violence but this seemed to have followed them along the way. *"I heard after I left that the soldiers raided my village and there was a civil war that wiped off most of the community, heard from other members from Congo that I found in Uganda"*- Luce. These findings reflect

Idemudia et al. (2013), Ward (2001) and Casey et al. (2011) that a series of trauma and experiences of traumatic events caused by violence results in mental health problems, symptoms of anxiety, paranoia and depression.

The majority of the participants reported to have had high expectations upon arrival in South Africa. They believed that South Africa would be an oasis from physical violence, insecurities and economic difficulties. They hoped that resettling in South Africa will give them opportunities to start over and live a better life. However, they soon seemed to experience a sense of disillusionment. Participants reported that being a refugee in South Africa made them feel stateless, they had to find ways to survive and resettle for opportunities. For example, Luce mentioned that, *“I had thought that South Africa will give me the same privileges, unfortunately here I was nothing. I had to start from the bottom”*. Despite having the necessary skills, they find it hard to secure good employment and education. For example, Ray mentioned that he had been studying medicine when he left the DRC and he was told by his acquaintance that South Africa would be a better country for him and his studies considering the situation in DRC. Ray illustrated this when he said, *“thought things would be just easy like the way that we were being told”* and *“...might have a better life”*. Unfortunately, he had to give up on his dreams because he could not get funding to pursue his studies and felt like funding was reserved for South African nationals. Instead, he started seeking for jobs in order for him to survive.

The findings also revealed that when participants arrived in South Africa, they experienced a lack of acceptance, they lacked assistance and often found themselves in an unfamiliar position where they knew no one. This resulted in difficulty integrating and they often felt like strangers in their host country, *“I found myself with different people in a foreign country”* -Boris. They also reported some level of frustration due to not knowing English as they mentioned how they struggled with receiving emotional support, social support due to inability of communicating the local languages with South Africans since they are all French

speakers. Luce shared, *“I did not know how to communicate with anyone, and they did not understand my language”*. They consequently experienced alienation and they mentioned that the people they came across asking help could not understand their language, they say anything to them just to get rid of them. This brought great feelings of distress and desperation while others felt like strangers. These findings are in line with Bicishoga and Johnson (2013) who argue that the language barrier may also hinder refugees from creating relationships outside their group, thus inhibit integration. Their arrival in Johannesburg posed its own challenges as it is a very busy city with a high crime rate coupled with the fact that the majority of South Africans do not trust foreigners (Adam & Moodley, 2015; Mario Matsinhe, 2011; Potgieter, 2018). Therefore, it is not surprising that participants felt alienated or experienced a feeling of not belonging.

The resettlement process seemed to take time in South Africa and often the lack of formal legal documentation made life even more difficult for the participants. Many lost their necessary and important documents along the journey travelling through various countries. This therefore made their stay in the host country difficult. Ray mentioned that if you do not have an identity document in South Africa one's life becomes very challenging, *“you don't have the green ID than even the poor of the poorest jobs like security, you are not going to get a job in security. It is very difficult for the newcomers”*. Similarly, Luce shared, *“It took a very long time before we got temporary documents...it was hard to survive because I could not get a job to support my daughter, I felt like we were someone else's responsibility”*. These findings resonate with Landau and Singh (2008) and Duponchel et al. (2010) who are the belief that refugees lose their belongings, including identity documents crossing various countries and this makes it difficult for them acquire jobs and knowledge once they resettled in the host country, in this case in South Africa.

The loss of documentation led to challenges such as not being able to secure employment. This was made more difficult by the fact that acquiring new documents is hard and takes time. This often led to the participants being exploited by their employers. For an example Jaiden before she worked for her current employer as an eyelash specialist, she first worked for someone else who treated her badly, *“I first found it by the salon down from here, the boss was horrible to me. She had the mentality of slavery. But I soon had a job here and I’ve been here for 8 years it been good”*. These findings support Bacishoga and Johnston (2013) argument that the refugee population struggle to receive employment because they remain unrecognized. Gordon (2010) supports this and states that refugees are often exploited and settle for jobs located in informal sectors. Hence, the majority of the participants settled for any job that they could find in order to survive. The majority of the interviewed participants worked in a salon. Consequently, refugees are found in departments such as street vending, they become barbers both on the streets and in salons in order to earn a living (Smit & Rugunanan, 2014 & Smit, 2015). These poor paying jobs and fewer employment opportunities result to participants facing challenges and pressure to provide for their families while having financial problems themselves.

Another interesting finding to highlight was the fact that the owner of the barber shop where the data collection took place had worked to establish a business for himself and in so doing had provided jobs for other newcomers coming from African countries. Charles owns the salon and he only hires newcomers from the African countries who are struggling financially such as refugees since they are highly unrecognised, and struggle to find jobs. This trend is also evident in the findings of Lelope (2016) and William (2006) where refugees give jobs to other refugees who are unfamiliar with the host country as compared to giving jobs to local nationals. This leads to the creation of job opportunities, a positive social impact and providing social change and assistance for fellow refugees. Therefore, this helps in enhancing

the newcomer's level of confidence, hope and trust since it takes time for them to resettle in a host country. This was seen also in how participants viewed their relationship with other fellow refugees. For example Chris explained his relationship with other fellow male Congolese, *"when I integrate to the country, a phone, start looking for other friends to add some number of members the brothers"*.

Religious institutions and health institutions also seemed to provide some source of support to refugee populations who sought help upon their arrival in South Africa. For example, when Ray arrived in South Africa with his late friend, he was assisted by the priest to look for accommodation and funding since he wanted to pursue his medical course, a *"Catholic church in Wits University and he took me there he wanted me to get assistance when I was just three to four months old in South Africa"*. There are few refugees who were assisted by clinics to find accommodation and organised the necessary documentation for them, *"you will not believe it, but I went to one of the nearest clinics to find help cause the sign of the clinic looked familiar"* (Jaiden). These institutions also try and connect them with fellow refugees who speak similar languages, and this helped newcomers to build a sense of community and belonging. *"I found some people who could speak the same language with me, that I associated myself with them"*-Boris. However, Bacishonga and Johnston (2013) argue that although health institutions are of help, the refugee population struggles to get health care facilities due to staff members being unwilling to help.

Despite fleeing from a war-torn country and hoping for a safer future, participants were often taken aback by the violence they encountered in South Africa. There are instances where participants reported to have been mugged and hit upon arrival because a stranger wanted to take their belongings. Luce shared, *"he hit me, and my daughter started crying, thanks to the man he stopped but he took all the little that we had"*. The majority of the participants reported to be feeling vulnerable to crime in SA, participants fled from the DRC from violence, but they

still do not feel safe in their host country. They also reported being discriminated against, their human rights are violated, and they are being harassed by the South African nationals. Therefore, despite the policies and the Constitution, rights put in place to protect the foreign nationals' rights, they remain the first targets when violence commences. This is also evident in Assembly (1996, p.4) and Landau (2006) in the Constitution of South Africa, Chapter Two, Section 9 that everyone has equal rights to protection, freedom may not be discriminated against anyone. There is a misconception that foreign nationals are responsible for taking peoples jobs and this perpetuates the rate of crime in South Africa as they are being forced to leave South Africa through these xenophobic attacks. These misconceptions stem from unequal distribution of resources, lack of job opportunities for South Africans as well (Neocosmos, 2010). Ray, however, feels like South Africa has its challenges but it is better than the violence in the DRC. He expressed how he feels about the situation in South Africa, *"you're home...you're get safe, to see a soldier is nothing"* and further added that, *"a gun shooting but it is not like home"*.

Findings also reflected the importance of family integration and the importance of reconnection. Participants left their families back the in the DRC however recreated new families after they arrived in South Africa. They built their own safe community space in the working in salon often finding life partners. ICT remained the primary form of reconnecting with families back in the DRC.

In addition to this, technology seemed to play a very important part in the lives of the participants, and they shared their experiences in the following ways. Firstly, they indicated that they all had access to mobile phones. They highlighted the value that mobile phones play in their lives since they are physically and geographically separated from their families. Boris explains the significance of having a mobile phone, *"communication is the most important thing in life, if you cannot find someone, or see someone at least if you can talk to the person*

and hears your voice the person can be happy". These findings reflect the views of Chamberlain and Leydesdorff (2004) that the use of mobile phones and ICTs offers a continuous interaction between families separated by geographical spaces and location. Secondly, mobile phones also enabled participants to be updated about events in the outside world. Prior to the advent of mobile communication, they would have had to use hand-written to send letters through post offices and these letters would take time to be delivered and read, but now communication with the mobile phones is instant. As a result, they find mobile phones convenient and a significant part of their lives. Ray also emphasised the important use of mobile phones, *"If we have an urgent message now you just dial someone and then the message goes across. It is no more the time when you have to send letters through the post office and wait for weeks and months for you to get the feedback"*.

Participants indicated that they were more likely to use mobile phones to interact with their families in order to avoid feeling alienated since they did not receive formal orientation in South Africa upon arrival nor had families in the country. They had to integrate into a new society. Their frequent interaction with their families back home may provide a sense of care and security among the refugee population although it may limit their chances of integration outside their group. These findings reflect Bisiwa et al., (2018) that mobile phones may attempt to bring families closer together to reflect culture, sense of belonging and they experience no cultural and language barrier which they are likely to experience in South Africa.

Thirdly, mobile phones also seemed to assist in integrating participants with other fellow refugees in South Africa. Chris illustrated that when he first arrived in South Africa, he made use of a mobile phone to integrate with fellow refugees in South Africa, *"when I integrate to the country, a phone, start looking for other friends to add some number of members the brothers"*. Participants therefore used mobile phones to create informal networks, to share general information and create relationships with fellow Congolese refugees. This helped them

with community building and frequent interaction with other fellow refugees helped establish trust for one another.

Fourthly, findings indicated that the most popular platform that participants prefer to use with their mobile phones is WhatsApp. This platform requires internet or data in order for it to function (Frouws et al., 2016). WhatsApp offers immediate communication, Ray shared, *“I can call at any time of the day or night every week”*. Similarly, Nelson shared, *“we always communicate via WhatsApp...we always use a voice recorder and there WhatsApp calls, the family will send videos to see what is going on that side”*. This means that they minimise making normal telephone calls and would rather use WhatsApp data in order to reduce costs. Ray added that, *“WhatsApp came it was a much better way because it is much cheaper. You can call them using voice calls for such a long time...Congo DRC the tele-communication is very expensive for the country, calling Congo for one minute it'll cost you about R15 you have a minute...so when WhatsApp came it was a much better way because it is much cheaper”*. These results concur with William (2006) and Merdi (2019) that refugees try to make use of reasonable rates and affordable resources in order to sustain relationships with their families in their country of origin.

Fifth, participants indicated that staying in touch with their families and the convenience of using WhatsApp helps strengthen their familial relationships and that is essential for their survival. Using this platform enables them to see their families through their mobile phones, it makes them feel closer to their families and this is evident in the study by Kim et al. (2007). While others perceive face-to-face interactions positively because they feel it is more personal and it is not easy for people to hide their current situations. Jaiden shared WhatsApp to be, *“helpful but what is more helpful is when you talk to a person face to face, video calling via WhatsApp has made a huge difference though cause a person can't say they are okay when they are sick”*. One of the limitations of the usage of technology is that one

cannot physically touch people and the people can thus hide the difficult situations they would be going through.

Another interesting phenomenon that emerged was the existence of mobile phone sharing in both the refugee participants and their families back home. In South Africa, the participants have had instances where they have lost their phones due to xenophobic attacks and their phones being stolen. Chris for example was mugged and they took his phone, *“I had a cellphone, I lose it...after they took it in the streets, something they steal it”*. Participants therefore resort to sharing their phones with their colleagues when they are at work to contact their immediate families or families in the DRC during the day. He further added that, *“I share my cell phone with anyone next to me at work and someone who is closer to me”*. This shows the sense of support and the rapport they have built with one another over the years. When they arrive home, they share their phones with their partners to stay in touch with their families. Chris for an example said that, *“I share it with my wife all the time”*. While they wait to replace their stolen mobile phones.

Back home in the DRC, families also seemed to make arrangements with their neighbours to use their mobile phones so that their families in SA would be able to contact them. This often happens in cases where the participant's families in the DRC are still struggling with poverty and lack of resources. Boris explained that, *“they go our neighbours if we want to call them via WhatsApp and on urgent basis”*. Sharing of mobile phones with their neighbours also enables communications with their families in SA when there is an urgent reason. This may sometimes be inconvenient because participants would want to get hold of their families and the neighbour would not be available at that point in time.

Lastly, social media also plays a vital role in assisting refugee participants connecting with their families and even in some instances getting in touch with them after a long period of

time. A few participants reported to have initially explored all the social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, WhatsApp etc. as a way of hoping and getting in touch with their families. Jaiden shared that, *“I did register with my real name on Facebook because I was hoping that someone will recognise me and show my family”*. However, they felt these platforms cost a lot of data. They therefore resorted to using one platform (WhatsApp) which also allows them privacy and affordability except for one participant who was able to locate her brother who left the DCR before her through the use of Facebook. When she successfully located her brother, they met, and this enabled her to find suitable accommodation and a better job in the salon since her brother had already created relationships with fellow Congolese in South Africa. *“I searched for him and found him on Facebook. I had so much joy when we finally met, I now stay with him”* -Luce.

Findings however indicated that there are also challenges related to the use of mobile phones. There appeared to be financial challenges linked to the use of ICTs. Participants’ challenges with costs related to data, since they do not make enough money to provide for their immediate families residing in South Africa and their families in the DRC. Others financially prioritise their immediate families in South Africa over their families in the DRC. Nelson shares, *“before I even buy data, I have to know that I pay rent for my kids... So, I cannot be providing for someone who is far. Before I provide for the one who is near to me”*.

Money is also needed to purchase data in order to stay connected to WhatsApp on regular basis. Participants buy data depending on how much they make at the salon. These findings resonate with Bisiwa et al., (2018) who state that affordability has an influence in the usefulness of mobile phones among the refugee population it can sometimes inhibit meaningful use of mobile phones. Participants’ financial limitations and political situations not improving also make it impossible for them to visit their families in the DRC. They cannot afford the journey, and this therefore enables them to heavily rely on the use of ICTs. *“Although we would think*

of going to visit her or for her to come this side we cannot because we can afford the journey”- Luce. Moreover, although mobile phones are effective and efficient, connectivity is sometimes unreliable. Some families in the DRC do not have access to good technology, there is poverty and lack of access to resources. For example, Boris’ family in the DRC, “the people that, I am reaching are still poor and some don’t have the smart phone”.

There was also an example of where Zimbabwe once considering shutting down social media platforms and this was experienced as problematic by a participant. This occurred mainly during the protest in Zimbabwe, when the fuel prices increased. The Zimbabwean population was despaired, anxious and was struggling to secure employment (Madenga, 2020). Luce recalls the situation with her sister living in Zimbabwe, when government from Zimbabwe wanted to shut down social media, she then felt that would have taken away the opportunity for her to stay in touch with her loved ones. Luce, “.... *they wanted to shut down the social media platforms and that scared me because that meant I will be able to contact my sister ever again*”. This highlights the important role that social media may have played in the lives of some of the participants.

Conclusion

The findings of this study highlighted that participants fled from their country of origin due to various reasons such as war, lack of resources, financial and political challenges. They have encountered numerous challenges prior to migration and post their migration. They left their country of origin as individuals and this led to family separation, which is something that they experienced as distressing. Consequently, they rely on mobile phones to keep in touch with their families in the DRC and overcome the sense of alienation they experience in South Africa.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

This study explored the experiences of a small group of refugees from the DRC and the ways in which they maintain relationships with their families. The history of the DRC highlights a country with a number of political and security challenges which has led to conditions of social dysfunction and a lack of protection for the Congolese population. According to the present findings, there are a number of strong push factors that have caused displacement of the refugee population, namely: war and a dire political and economic situation.

It is evident when reviewing the participants' stories that the imbalance of both political and economic structures also affected the educational system in the DRC. This resulted in individuals being unable to attain good quality education and gain formal employment when they became older. Individuals who wanted to pursue their education in South Africa were unable to do so because of the lack of legal documentation. This barred them from gaining access and registering in South African universities. Similarly, individuals who acquired their knowledge and skills in the DRC were also unable to secure formal employment in South Africa.

This study also found that the participants tended to travel on their own with insufficient resources or no resources at all and left their families behind in the DRC. Travelling through different countries in order to reach South Africa had its own challenges. Leaving their families behind, they struggled to secure financial stability making it difficult to adhere to the normative expectations which are to provide for their families back in the DRC.

Findings also showed that the participants experienced numerous challenges after arriving in South Africa, including overriding concerns of safety. Participants were also

confronted with xenophobia and hostility. The participants experienced difficulty in accessing legal documentation as without the requisite documentation, they still remain un-recognised and therefore potentially exploited in South Africa. They also experienced social exclusion and difficulty communicating and understanding the local languages of South Africa. For these reasons they struggled to develop a sense of belonging. Although the refugee policy in South Africa encourages resettlement, they still received little support if at all, as little is done to orient refugees into South Africa upon their arrival. It is clear that refugees still experience discrimination. They are targets of violence even though they flee from their country of origin due to violence.

Undoubtedly, the traumatic experiences were associated with human rights violation, pre-migration and post-migration. The experiences of fleeing from the DRC continued to have a negative impact on the participants' psychological state of well-being. Despite these traumatic experiences, the findings indicate that they develop coping mechanisms and survival strategies which enable them to deal with the hardships of their daily lives. The example provided by the owner of the salon of providing a space of employment for other fellow Congolese and also a place where they could feel as if they belong shows the participants' ability and willingness to engage in work albeit informal. This enabled them to provide themselves with basic needs; as well as develop social networks for psychological and social support. This created a sense of hope as they still struggle to integrate with South African society.

The framework of this study emphasised the importance of unity and interdependent relationships within families. Interpersonal connectedness with family provides a sense of belonging, well-being and these are deemed critical for family relationships. It is evident in the findings that mobile phones proved to be a vital tool promoting the well-being of the refugee participants. Mobile phones also offered efficient ways of engaging and keeping the

participants and their families in touch despite the challenges. Maintaining contact with their families back home helps strengthen their familial bonds and helps overcome isolation. Mobile phones also enable participants to create relationships and build communities with fellow Congolese living in South Africa; this reduces the feeling of alienation. They rely heavily on the use of mobile phones and prefer using WhatsApp as it is immediate, and costs related to data are less on this app. However, due to the menial jobs that the participants do, they do not earn enough money to buy large amounts of data. They find it challenging to buy data regularly and connectivity in both South Africa and DRC may be somewhat of a challenge, but participants find way to overcome these challenges in order to stay in touch with their community, near and far.

Limitations

A number of limitations inherent to this study must however be highlighted. Considering the sample size and the fact that all the participants worked in one specific site, these findings may not be the overall experience of the refugee population from the DRC resettled in Johannesburg, South Africa. This study may limit the potential to generalise these findings to the larger refugee community. However, these findings may provide the scope for further research. In the beginning of the interviews, participants were hesitant of sharing their experiences, understandably in light of the xenophobic attacks that had just occurred and the fact that I was South African. However, the presence and familiarity with the translator put their worries at ease. Language barrier was also a limitation to the study as participants were all French speakers and not fully proficient in English. This may have made it difficult for them to express themselves adequately.

Recommendations

While a number of interesting findings were highlighted in this study future studies may include a larger sample size and perhaps incorporate a longitudinal study including other qualitative methods such as ethnography. Future research may also employ quantitative methods with a control group and compare findings of the mobile phone usage within the larger refugee population in Johannesburg.

Participants from other African countries should also be included in future studies as refugees are not only from the DRC and there is knowledge to be potentially gained from other participants' experiences.

Future research may also investigate the impact of Covid-19 within the refugee population, specifically how it has affected family relationships in Johannesburg and the ones left in the country of origin and the role that ICTs play in that. In future studies it may be useful to consider investigating the experiences of female refugees as well as the younger generation from the DRC and see how they maintain relationships with their families in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

It would be useful to investigate in-depth, the relationship between social integration, language barrier and the role of mobile phones in that dynamic. Studies could be conducted to find out if the language barrier between South African nationals and non-nationals results in lack of integration of the two groups. Another important factor could be to investigate if the use of mobile phones impacts refugees' willingness and ability to learn South African languages as this study revealed that although they have been in the country for a number of years and therefore could have possibly learnt the languages they have not.

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APPENDIX A



PSYCHOLOGY THE SCHOOL OF HUMAN AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT (SHCD)



Participant Information Sheet

EXPLORING THE ROLE OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES (ICTS) IN A REFUGEE POPULATION IN JOHANNESBURG-SOUTH AFRICA IN MAINTAINING FAMILY RELATIONSHIP.

My name is Thembelihle Coka and I am a Masters student in School of Human and Community Development, attends at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. As part of my studies, I have to undertake a research project and I am Exploring the Role of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT's) in refugee population in Johannesburg- South Africa in maintaining family relationships.

The purpose of this research project is to explore how the various technologies now available to people (in my case I will focus mainly on cellular phones with the new smartphone applications), have impacted upon family relationships and relationships of care. I also wish to look at issues of access to mobile technology and internet.

If you consent to participate in this study, the interviewer (me) will ask you to do the following:

1. To take part in an interview regarding your experiences of using mobile technology to stay in touch with your family as well as maintain family relationships. This should last approximately 60-90 minutes. It is necessary for me to record the interview in order to remember as much detail as possible.
2. To provide her with some biographical information especially regarding your family of origin.

No risks, discomforts, or inconveniences should arise as a result of your participation in this study. If however, any of the questions cause you any discomfort, you may discontinue your participation. There is no penalty if you withdraw from the study.

It is not likely that you will benefit directly from participation in this study, but the research should help us learn more about how African families separated by internal and external migration maintain family connections.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. Anonymity will be maintained by means of a code number that will be connected to the different participants.

The interviews will be transcribed by a person who will not be privy to the identity of the interviewee(s), and thereafter the recordings will be destroyed. The transcripts will however be kept in electronic form for the period of time required by the University of the Witwatersrand. Information that can identify you individually will not be released to anyone outside the study. I will, however, use the information collected for my dissertation and publishing and/or presentations in academic contexts.

If you do choose to participate, please can you fill out the consent form attached and give them back to me.

IDENTIFICATION & CONTACT DETAILS OF SUPERVISOR

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact my supervisor:

If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the ethical procedures of this study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), telephone +27(0) 11 717 1408, email hrec-medical.researchoffice@wits.ac.za

Prof. Maria Marchetti-Mercer

School of Human and Community Development

University of the Witwatersrand

Johannesburg

011 7174518

maria.marchetti-mercerc@wits.ac.za

Yours sincerely,

Coka Thembelihle, lihlecoka79@gmail.com, 0719934451

I have read, understand and received a copy of the above consent and desire of my own free will to participate in this study. I am aware and agree that this information provided will be used solely for academic purpose.

Signature :.....

Date:.....

APPENDIX B



Psychology
School of Human & Community
Development
University of the Witwatersrand
Private Bag 3, Wits, 2050
Tel: 011 717 4503 Fax: 011 717 4559



(Those who have flee (Refugees/Asylum seekers)

Participant Consent Form

I, _____ (full name) agree to participate in the following research project, **“Exploring the Role of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in a refugee population in Johannesburg-South Africa in maintaining family relationship”**.

I agree that the interview be audio recorded.

The research has been explained to me and I understand what my participation will involve.

I understand that:

- Participation is strictly voluntary.
- I do not have to answer all the questions should I choose not to.
- I am free to withdraw from the study at any time.
- My name and any identifying information will be changed in the reporting of the study in order for me to remain anonymous.
- Voice recordings and transcripts of interviews will be stored on a password protected computer.
- The researcher(s) may use anonymous quotes in the research report.
- The research will be presented at a local/international conference and published in a journal and/or book chapter.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX C



Psychology
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Interview schedule for those who have left (refugees)

1. Can you please tell me about yourself, who are you and where do you come from?
2. Please give me a bit of background on your family. Did you leave elderly parents/ children behind? If so, who takes care of them?
3. Please describe when you left your original home and how did you arrive at this decision?
4. What was the most difficult part about this decision?
5. Did you include your family left behind in the decision-making?
6. How did you feel when you left and when you arrived at your new destination?
7. What technologies do you use in order to keep in touch and maintain ties with your family left behind?
8. Do you have access to the internet/ data?
9. How do you use these technologies in order to keep in touch and also to make sure you still take care of each other?
10. What do you find difficult/ what do you find useful about using these technologies?
11. Do you find you have to make financial provision in order to make use of these technologies? Do you find that other financial demands e.g., rent food transport education take priority?
12. Do you find that having access to cellular phones and other types of technologies has made a difference in how you stay in touch as opposed to the time when these were not available?
13. Are there any other ways in which you keep in contact with your family?
14. How do you make use of the technology in the place where you live? Do you share phones with people in the same community?
15. Do you find the use of cellular phones (or other technology) inferior to/superior to/ interlinked with, with patterns of care which would usually take place face to face?
16. Do you provide financial care to your family members left behind?
17. Are there times when you find contact through technology as an intrusion, a distraction, or a barrier to taking care of those left behind?

Ethical clearance form

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (SCHOOL OF HUMAN & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT)

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

PROTOCOL NUMBER: MPSYC/19/007 IH

PROJECT TITLE:

Exploring the Role of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in a refugee population in Johannesburg-South Africa in maintaining family relationship

INVESTIGATORS

Coka Thembelihle

DEPARTMENT

Psychology

DATE CONSIDERED

16/07/19

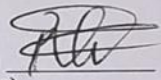
DECISION OF COMMITTEE*

Approved

This ethical clearance is valid for 2 years and may be renewed upon application

DATE: 16 July 2019

CHAIRPERSON
(Dr Peace Kiguwa)



cc Supervisor:

Prof. Maria Marchetti-Mercer
Psychology

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR (S)

To be completed in duplicate and **one** copy returned to the Secretary, Room 100015, 10th floor, Senate House, University.

I/we fully understand the conditions under which I am/we are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I/we guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure be contemplated from the research procedure, as approved, I/we undertake to submit a revised protocol to the Committee.

This ethical clearance will expire on 31 December 2021

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER IN ALL ENQUIRIES

