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M MOYO; Phumuzani Mpofu

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International Review of Social Sciences Research
Volume 5 Issue 2 June 2025
DOI: https://doi.org/10.53378/irssr.353209

Understanding the lived experiences of children with diaspora parents in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe

[1]Mthokozisi Moyo & [2]Phumuzani Mpofu

Abstract

Migration has reshaped family structures globally, giving rise to transnational families in which parents migrate for economic, social, or political reasons, leaving children behind. In Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, the ongoing economic crisis has led to increased parental migration, creating challenges for children left behind. This study explored their emotional, social, and economic realities. It examines the psychosocial impacts of parental absence, including feelings of abandonment, emotional detachment, and exposure to negative peer influences. While remittances offer financial stability and access to education, they cannot replace parental emotional support, often resulting in behavioural and identity struggles. This study used a qualitative approach aimed at understanding and improving the real-life experiences of children, parents, and key stakeholders. Guided by a transformative perspective, which focuses on promoting social change and giving voice to marginalized groups, the research applied Participatory Action Learning and Action Research (PALAR) to actively involve participants in the learning and problem-solving process. Data were collected through interviews and focus groups. Findings reveal that while some children show resilience, others face emotional distress, financial instability, and lack of parental supervision. Digital communication helps but is insufficient for maintaining parent-child bonds. The study recommends interventions such as enhancing emotional connections through regular communication, providing parental counselling for diaspora parents, and encouraging quality visits. These findings contribute to the literature on the psychosocial effects of migration and offer policy recommendations to improve the well-being of left-behind children. The study highlights the importance of community support, educational policies, and transnational parenting strategies in fostering the holistic development of these children.

Keywords: *transnational families, parental migration, diaspora parenting, child well-being, emotional bonds, remittances, resilience*

Article History:

***Received**: April 7, 2025* ***Revised**: May 18, 2025*
***Accepted**: May 20, 2025* ***Published online**: June 4, 2025*

Suggested Citation:
Moyo, M. & Mpofu, P. (2025). Understanding the lived experiences of children with diaspora parents in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. *International Review of Social Sciences Research*, 5(2), 283-303. https://doi.org/10.53378/irssr.353209

About the authors:
[1]MSC Lecturer. Department of Psychology, Zimbabwe Open University.
[2]Corresponding author. PhD Post Doc. Department of Psychology, School of Community and Human Development, University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa. Email: mpofup89@gmail.com

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1. Introduction

The phenomenon of migration has profoundly shaped the global landscape, leading to the emergence of transnational families, wherein parents migrate to foreign countries for economic, political, or social reasons, often leaving children in their countries of origin. This dynamic has significant implications for the lived experiences of children who grow up in the absence of one or both parents. In Bulawayo, Zimbabwe's second-largest city, this issue is particularly pronounced due to decades of economic instability, political upheaval, and sociocultural transformations that have driven high rates of migration to neighbouring countries and beyond (Bennett, 2017). While extensive scholarship has explored the implications of migration for the parents themselves, far less attention has been paid to the children left behind, who must navigate the complexities of familial separation, shifting caregiving arrangements, and the socioemotional challenges of diaspora parenting.

Children with diaspora parents often experience a duality of belonging and estrangement, as their sense of family is shaped by transnational interactions, remittances, and long-distance relationships maintained through digital technologies (Madianou & Miller, 2013). These children are not only affected by the material realities of their parents' migration such as improved access to education or financial resources but also by psychosocial factors, including feelings of abandonment, social stigma, and the loss of direct parental guidance (Chingwe et al., 2025). In the context of Bulawayo, where extended families and communal child-rearing practices have historically played a central role, the migration of parents disrupts traditional caregiving structures, often leaving children to rely on alternative caregivers, such as grandparents or siblings, who may themselves be under significant socioeconomic pressure. "Parental factors impact students' self-concept and academic performance" (Caasi & Pentang, 2022, p. 202).

This study aims to explore the lived experiences of children with diaspora parents in Bulawayo, shedding light on their emotional, social, and cultural realities. Understanding their perspectives is crucial not only for addressing the unique challenges they face but also for developing targeted policies and interventions that support their holistic well-being. As Kilkey and Merla (2014) argue, the experiences of children left behind must be understood within the broader context of transnationalism, where local and global forces intersect to shape their identities and opportunities. This research also seeks to contribute to the growing body of

literature on the psychosocial impacts of migration on children, while situating the discussion within the specific sociocultural and economic context of Bulawayo.

By focusing on the voices of children themselves, this study aims to provide an in-depth, nuanced understanding of their lived realities, going beyond reductive narratives that often frame them solely as victims of migration. Instead, it explores their agency, resilience, and coping mechanisms in the face of familial separation, contributing to a more holistic understanding of how transnationalism impacts the youngest members of society. As such, this research not only fills a critical gap in the literature but also provides valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and caregivers working to support children in similar contexts globally.

2. Literature Review

The lived experiences of children with diaspora parents have increasingly become a topic of scholarly attention due to the growing prevalence of transnational families in a globalized world. Migration, driven by economic, political, and social factors, often results in familial separation, leaving children in their home countries while parents work abroad. This literature review examines scholarly studies on the psychosocial, emotional, and cultural impacts of such family structures, with a focus on Sub-Saharan Africa and Zimbabwe. Drawing on the latest research (2020 and beyond), it contextualizes these experiences within the framework of migration studies, transnationalism, and child development theories.

2.1. Transnationalism and Familial Structures

The concept of transnationalism underscores the interconnectedness of families across national borders, where migration does not sever familial ties but reconfigures them. Transnational families rely on "care at a distance," enabled by digital technologies, remittances, and occasional visits (Madianou, 2022). While these mechanisms allow parents to remain involved in their children's lives, scholars argue that the quality of such relationships is often compromised by the lack of physical proximity (Carling et al., 2021).

In Sub-Saharan Africa, transnational families have become increasingly common as migration patterns shift from regional movement to global destinations (Crush et al., 2020). This has reshaped traditional caregiving roles within extended families, often placing significant responsibilities on grandmothers, older siblings, or other relatives to care for

children left behind (Kilkey & Merla, 2014). Such shifts challenge traditional African kinship systems, where caregiving is communal but now faces strain due to socioeconomic pressures. In Bulawayo, the economic challenges resulting from Zimbabwe's prolonged crises have driven parents to seek better opportunities abroad, particularly in South Africa, Botswana, and the United Kingdom. These migrations, however, often leave children grappling with a sense of emotional loss and disrupted family dynamics (Filippa et al., 2013).

2.2. Psychosocial and Emotional Impact on Children

Children with diaspora parents frequently experience a range of psychosocial and emotional effects, including feelings of abandonment, anxiety, and loneliness. A growing body of literature emphasizes that the absence of physical parental presence may adversely affect children's emotional well-being, despite financial support provided through remittances. According to Chingwe et al. (2025), children in Zimbabwe with migrant parents often internalize their struggles, experiencing silent grief as they navigate the complexities of parental absence.

Research further highlights gendered differences in how children cope with such separations. Girls, for instance, may take on caregiving responsibilities within the household, which can limit their educational opportunities, while boys are often left to deal with behavioral expectations that emphasize emotional stoicism (Fauk et al., 2024). Such dynamics perpetuate traditional gender norms while exposing children to additional stress. Moreover, studies suggest that while some children demonstrate remarkable resilience, others develop behavioral and academic challenges. A longitudinal study by Raturi and Cebotari (2023) in Ghana revealed that children of migrant parents are more likely to exhibit lower academic performance and increased behavioral issues compared to their peers in non-migrant families. These findings align with research in Zimbabwe, which indicates that emotional trauma stemming from familial separation can lead to long-term developmental impacts (Chingwe et al., 2025).

2.3. Role of Digital Technology in Parenting and Connection

Digital technologies have emerged as crucial tools for maintaining parent-child relationships in transnational families. Platforms such as WhatsApp, Zoom, and social media allow for regular communication, reducing the emotional distance created by physical

separation (Madianou, 2022). However, digital communication is not without its limitations. Scholars argue that virtual interactions often lack the depth and intimacy required to foster strong emotional bonds (Carling et al., 2021).

In Bulawayo, where access to technology is often limited by economic constraints, the digital divide further exacerbates the disconnect between migrant parents and their children. According to Crush et al. (2015), unequal access to technology in Southern Africa means that many children only receive intermittent communication from their parents, leaving gaps in their emotional support systems. Despite these challenges, some studies have identified positive outcomes associated with digital parenting. For example, Castro and Ponte (2021) highlight how digital platforms enable parents to provide real-time guidance, support academic endeavors, and celebrate milestones, albeit remotely. These findings suggest that while imperfect, digital communication can play a critical role in mitigating the emotional toll of separation.

2.4. Economic and Educational Outcomes

The economic benefits of parental migration are often framed as a silver lining for children left behind. Remittances sent by diaspora parents can significantly improve access to education, healthcare, and basic needs (Arlini et al., 2019). In Zimbabwe, where public services have been strained by economic crises, remittances are often lifelines for families. However, the narrative of remittances as a panacea has been critiqued by scholars who argue that financial support does not replace the emotional and social contributions of parental presence (Filippa et al., 2013). Moreover, children in transnational families may face societal stigma, with peers or community members framing them as neglected or privileged, depending on their economic circumstances. This duality can complicate their sense of identity and belonging, particularly in urban contexts like Bulawayo, where social hierarchies are pronounced.

2.5. Resilience and Coping Mechanisms

Despite the challenges, children of diaspora parents often display remarkable resilience. Research highlights the role of extended family networks, peer relationships, and cultural values in fostering coping mechanisms (Kilkey & Merla, 2014). In Zimbabwe, communal child-rearing practices continue to provide a safety net for children, although these systems are increasingly under strain. Studies also point to the agency of children in navigating

their circumstances. A study by Chingwe et al. (2025) found that children left behind often develop strong adaptive skills, including independence, problem-solving, and emotional regulation, as they adjust to their parents' absence. However, the sustainability of these coping strategies depends on the availability of supportive caregivers and social networks.

The literature reviewed underscores the multidimensional nature of the lived experiences of children with diaspora parents. While migration often offers economic opportunities for families, it also introduces significant emotional and social challenges for children left behind. The experiences of these children are shaped by intersecting factors, including gender, socioeconomic status, cultural norms, and access to technology. Future research should adopt intersectional and localized approaches to understand these dynamics more comprehensively. In the context of Bulawayo, addressing the specific challenges faced by children with diaspora parents requires collaborative efforts among policymakers, educators, and social workers to create supportive environments that promote their holistic well-being.

2.6. Cultural Context

In the past, grandchildren were often cared for by their grandparents, with uncles and aunts also playing supportive roles in their upbringing. However, the advent of HIV/AIDS has significantly reduced the likelihood of children having surviving grandparents, making it increasingly difficult for families to rely on this traditional support system (UNICEF, 2003; Foster, 2000). Similarly, uncles and aunts have not been spared by the impact of the epidemic. In addition to these challenges, moral decay in society has further eroded trust in extended family members. Aunts and uncles can no longer always be trusted to provide safe and nurturing environments for children (Madhavan, 2004). As a result, the once-revered principle that "it takes a village to raise a child" is no longer widely applicable. Consequently, children of parents living in the diaspora are often left without adequate care or supervision (Ansell & Young, 2004).

2.7. Legal Context

According to Section 19 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe (2013), the state has a mandate to ensure that children are protected from maltreatment, neglect, abuse, and degradation. However, when parents migrate in search of better economic opportunities often

referred to as "greener pastures" this protection is compromised. Zimbabwe faces significant challenges in implementing this constitutional obligation, as it is one of the countries most affected by parental migration.

Section 81 of the same Constitution outlines the rights of children, including the right to parental or family care. When parents are living abroad, these rights are at risk of being violated. In Zimbabwe, parents and guardians are legally responsible for providing their children with basic needs such as food, shelter, education, and healthcare. They must also ensure the child's protection from harm, support their evolving capacities, and guarantee school attendance. However, when children are left behind while their parents live abroad, the consistent fulfilment of these responsibilities is not always guaranteed.

2.8. Theoretical Framework

This study adopted the attachment theory by John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth (1991). The theory contributed the concept of the attachment figure as a secure base from which an infant can explore the world (Bretherton, 2013). This theory is useful as it examines the emotional and psychological impact of parental separation due to migration on the children left behind. It helped investigates how physical absence of parents may affect attachment styles and emotional security. It also helped interpret behaviours like emotional withdrawal, resilience, or anxiety**.** According to this theory, the most important person children usually attach to is the mother. With the advent of diaspora parents, children in Bulawayo are left with guardians who may not be friendly to the children that might make them grow with attachment problems.

Another theory appropriate for this study is the family systems theory. This theory conceptualizes the family as an emotional unit, emphasizing how individual behavior is shaped by the interactions and roles within the broader family system (Hayden & Hastings, 2021). It offers a holistic framework that highlights the interactive and bidirectional nature of relationships within families, particularly those with adolescents (Gavazzi & Lim, 2023). In diaspora contexts, typical family roles and structures are often disrupted. For instance, some children may assume parental responsibilities at a young age when left to care for younger siblings. Family systems theory is therefore especially useful in examining how children in Bulawayo adapt to living in grandparents or sibling-headed households. The migration of parents often results in shifting family roles and altered communication patterns. As a result,

extended family members or other caretakers frequently compensate for the absence of biological parents.

3. Methodology

This study employed a transformative paradigm, which was deemed appropriate due to its emphasis on addressing social injustice and promoting the empowerment of marginalized groups (Mertens, 2007). The transformative paradigm is particularly effective in confronting inequality by utilizing culturally responsive and inclusive methodologies. A qualitative approach was adopted for its strength in providing in-depth insights and supporting both internal and external generalization of findings (Maxwell, 2021). Although data collection was conducted in Bulawayo, the findings are considered applicable to broader Zimbabwean contexts both rural and urban.

To develop an inclusive framework, the study adopted the Participatory Action Learning and Action Research (PALAR) design. PALAR is a dynamic, collaborative, and inclusive methodology suited to tackling complex societal issues and fostering sustainable change within professional, organizational, and community contexts (Wood, 2019). Grounded in the principle that "nothing about us without us is for us," PALAR emphasizes meaningful stakeholder participation. Accordingly, the model was co-developed with a diverse group of stakeholders, including five young adults raised by diaspora parents, eight diaspora parents, five grandparents, two police officers, five teachers, two psychologists, two religious leaders, and two social workers. Each group contributed valuable perspectives and experiential knowledge on the phenomenon of parenting from the diaspora.

Data collection involved one-on-one interviews with professionals and focus group discussions with parents and young adults. Individual interviews enabled in-depth exploration and clarification of participants' views (Saarijärvi & Bratt, 2021), while focus groups facilitated rich discussions, revealing insights that might not emerge in individual settings (Marques et al., 2021). Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data, with themes emerging inductively from participants' narratives. Credibility was enhanced through the triangulation of data across the diverse participant groups.

Ethical considerations were central to the research process. Approval to conduct the study was obtained from the relevant university ethics board. The study upheld ethical standards by ensuring informed consent and assent, where caregivers and stakeholders

provided written consent, and children gave assent after understanding their voluntary participation. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained through coding and secure data storage, protecting participants' privacy. Child-friendly practices were implemented to create a comfortable environment, allowing children to share experiences freely and withdraw without consequences.

To ensure trustworthiness, the study addressed four key criteria. Credibility was enhanced through prolonged engagement with participants and data triangulation, ensuring accurate and reliable findings. Transferability was supported by providing rich, thick descriptions of the research context and participants' experiences, allowing readers to assess the applicability of findings to similar settings. Dependability was ensured through an audit trail documenting the research process, promoting transparency and consistency. Confirmability was maintained by practicing reflexivity to minimize researcher bias, ensuring that findings accurately reflect participants' perspectives.

4. Findings and Discussions

The data collected were analyzed thematically, guided by research questions that aimed to explore the lived experiences of children with diaspora parents in Bulawayo, as well as the strategies that can be employed to support them. The emerging themes were derived directly from participants' responses and were organized according to the specific research questions they addressed.

Theme 1: Lived Experiences of Children with Diaspora Parents in Bulawayo

Table 1

Lived experiences of children with diaspora parents in Bulawayo

Theme	Findings from Study	Confirmation/ Extension/ Challenge to Literature	Bulawayo-Specific Insights
Stable Financial Support	Regular remittances improve children's standard of living (school fees, healthcare, gadgets, clothing)	Confirms Adams & Cuecuecha, 2013) on remittance benefits	In Bulawayo, access to premium schools, gadgets, and status symbols highlights urban consumption patterns
Financial Instability	Inconsistent remittances cause stress, disrupt education	Confirms Sarmiento-Saggar et al. (2017) on remittance volatility	Urban cost of living in Bulawayo magnifies these disruptions, creating educational setbacks

Stable financial support. Many diaspora parents send remittances that significantly enhance their children's standard of living by improving access to education, healthcare, and other essential resources. This aligns with findings by Adams and Cuecuecha (2013), who report that households receiving remittances benefit from improved food security, better housing, and increased access to healthcare services. While these material gains are undoubtedly positive, attachment theory raises concerns about the emotional and psychological well-being of children in such arrangements. This theory emphasizes the importance of strong emotional bonds between children and their primary caregivers, especially the mother. In the absence of direct parental care, children may form attachments with substitute caregivers whom they do not fully trust. Consequently, the limited interaction with biological parents often restricted to remote communication can compromise the development of secure attachments. Miller and Lang (2022) argue that fundamental human motivation is the need to perceive the world as a safe and trustworthy place. When biological parents are absent, the child's environment may feel less secure, potentially hindering emotional development and well-being. From the interviews, participants remarked:

> *"It has an advantage that every month end we receive money for living expenses."* ***CP3***
>
> *"There is always financial stability, getting almost all basic needs such as food and schools fees. Even affording attending better schools and having extra lessons."* ***CP2***
>
> *"I have privileges that other children do not, like owning an expensive smartphone" I wear nice clothes and have pocket money"* ***CP1***
>
> *'Children with diaspora parents are well resourced, school fees are paid in time"* ***SP2***

Financial instability. Inconsistent remittances can be analyzed through the lens of attachment theory, which posits that secure emotional and psychological bond often formed through reliable, responsive caregiving are crucial for stability and well-being. In the context of transnational families, where a family member migrates and sends remittances home, the financial support functions not just as economic aid but also as a symbolic extension of care and attachment.

When remittances are inconsistent, especially due to factors like global economic downturns as highlighted by Sarmiento-Saggar et al. (2017), this disrupts not only the

household's financial stability but also the perceived reliability and emotional connection with the migrant parents. For children left behind, irregular financial support can mirror patterns of insecure attachment, potentially leading to anxiety, stress, and a sense of abandonment. These emotional consequences reflect the psychological strain caused by disrupted or unpredictable caregiving roles. Thus, through an attachment theory lens, remittance instability undermines not just economic security but also emotional bonds within transnational family structures, contributing to psychosocial stress and relational strain. This is what participants said during interviews:

> *"There was a time when I could not collect my O'level results because of the tuition fees I owed. "**CP5***
> *"I could go to school without jersey. My counseling guidance teacher came to my rescue and bought one for me." **CP2***
> *"We have instances where parents delay sending school fees resulting children being excluded from lessons" **SP2***

Feelings of abandonment, loneliness. Applying attachment theory to this context, the absence of one or both parents disrupts the formation of secure emotional bonds that are typically established during early childhood. According to attachment theory, children need consistent emotional availability and responsiveness from caregivers to develop a secure attachment style. When parents are absent despite financial support through remittances children may experience insecure attachment, manifesting as loneliness, emotional distress, and difficulty forming close relationships, as highlighted by Feng et al. (2017). This disruption in attachment can hinder emotional development and affect the child's ability to trust and connect with others later in life.

This is what participants said:

> *"No matter what material things I get, there is always a need for the mother in my life. At times I feel lonely missing my mother**" CP7***
> *I felt that my parents' being away did not help me*
> *"Whenever, I visited Zimbabwe my son did not want me to leave him, I could feel the gap that was there, my absence affected him negatively. He developed some anger issues" **PP1***
> *"During the first days it was not easy whenever I called my children would start crying and I could feel that gap of mother's love. Eventually both of my children*

> *developed a psychological problem to the extent that they were referred to psychologist who revealed that they felt neglected"* ***PP2***
>
> *"They developed anger issues: even though I provided almost everything that they needed but anger persists"* ***PP3***
>
> *"Even when they try to embrace you, you can feel that they are angry with you for abandoning them."* ***PP6***

Lack of parental supervision and exposure to vuzu (juvenile delinquent) parties. From a family systems theory perspective, the absence of diaspora parents disrupts the family unit's structure and equilibrium, shifting caregiving responsibilities to extended relatives who may lack the same authority or emotional bond. This shift weakens traditional parental subsystems, leading to reduced supervision and inconsistent discipline, as highlighted by Matsa (2020). In an attempt to maintain their role, absent parents may overcompensate materially yet fail to meet their children's emotional needs. This imbalance fosters emotional cutoff and triangulation, where children seek connection and identity through peer groups, often leading to negative influences. The emotional void and lack of stability contribute to behavioral issues and risky coping mechanisms, as children struggle to adapt within a fragmented and poorly regulated family system. This is what participants said:

> *"Due to lack of strict parental guidance these children engage in all sorts of ill behaviours: some of them they have cash and accommodation which makes it easy for them to organise vuzu parties. In these parties they abuse drugs and alcohol and practice unprotected sex"* ***SP1***
>
> *"I attended a vuzu party organised by friend, this party was strictly for teenagers and all types of beer that you could imagine was served"* ***CP5***
>
> *"They get smart phones which they often misuse. There are times we had to confiscate devices (phones) because they take nude pictures and send them around"* ***SP2***
>
> *"I discovered that my house was being used as a brothel because of too much freedom. We need to identify good trustworthy people whom we can leave our children with and those who can strictly supervise them without abusing their money" PP**2***

Emotional and physical abuse. From the perspective of attachment theory, the findings highlight the detrimental impact of disrupted caregiver-child bonds on the emotional and behavioral development of left-behind children. Attachment theory posits that secure

attachment to a consistent and responsive caregiver is essential for healthy psychological growth. When children are separated from their primary caregivers due to migration and instead face emotional or physical abuse or neglect from alternate caregivers, their sense of security is compromised. As Wen and Lin (2012) noted, this disruption contributes to increased physical neglect, inattention, and conduct problems, reflecting the adverse outcomes of insecure or disorganized attachment relationships. This is what participants said:

> *My uncle's wife was abusing me, she made me clean utensils while her children watching television and whenever I made some mistakes, she was hurling insults saying bad things about my mother.**" CP4***
>
> *"When I called by children, they could not openly share their emotions to me, only to discover during my visit that the relative physical abusing my kids-beating them." **PP3***
>
> *"Even though that I was sending money, my children were made to walk long distances to church instead of taking a taxi." **PP1***

Theme: 2 Interventions to Support Children with Diaspora Parents

Table 2
Suggested interventions to support children with diaspora parents drawn from excepts

Theme	Findings from Study	Confirmation/Extension/Challenge to Literature	Bulawayo-Specific Insights
Strengthening Emotional Connection	Regular digital communication recommended	Confirms Costa (2024) on ICT-mediated parenting	Bulawayo's urban connectivity facilitates but does not guarantee emotional closeness
Professional Counseling	Need for diaspora parenting guidance & school-based counseling	Confirms Salami et al. (2017) on parental counseling benefits	Bulawayo has existing but underutilised counseling infrastructure needing stronger linkage with diaspora families
Quality Visits Over Material Gifts	Focus on meaningful bonding during visits	Confirms Carling et al. (2021) on emotional over material support	Bulawayo's materialistic urban culture necessitates deliberate emotional engagement during parental visits
Community Youth Centres	Reviving youth centres as safe spaces	Extends Chi et al. (2024) by localising youth centre benefits to urban Zimbabwe	Addresses Bulawayo's idle youth population susceptible to delinquency due to lack of structured recreational spaces

Strengthening emotional connection despite distance. Even though they are physically absent, diaspora parents can take steps to maintain strong emotional bonds with their children through regular communication and personalised check-ins rather than just

sending money. Costa (2024) research revealed that digital platforms such as WhatsApp, Zoom, and video calls help diaspora parents maintain emotional closeness with their children. Frequent and meaningful communication plays a crucial role in preserving parent-child emotional bonds. Participants said during interviews:

> *Diaspora parents should reach out to their kids more often and they should provide means of communication such as smart phones and data."* ***CP4***
>
> *"We need to buy them smart phones so that we able to do video calls at least once a week"* ***PP2***

Professional counseling. Diaspora parents are encouraged to seek advice on how to maintain healthy long-distance parenting. At the same time school-based counselors can assist some children exhibiting illicit behaviour. This is confirmed by Salami et al. (2017) that parental counseling helps parents recognise and address the emotional needs of their children; can guide parents on how to provide reassurance and emotional security despite being physically absent and regular counseling sessions improve parent-child communication, reducing feelings of neglect.

> *"Parents should be taught how to speak to their children to make them understand why they migrated to another country, that it was for the betterment of their lives".* ***SP2, PP2***
>
> *"School based and community counselors can assist children with behavioural challenges, even police nowadays are offering counseling sessions instead of just arresting offenders. These counselors can provide reports directly to the diaspora parents****." SP1****, SP4***

Quality visits. Instead of just bringing gifts, parents should create meaningful memories with their children when they visit. Carling et al. (2021) concur that when visiting home, migrant parents should focus on bonding activities instead of solely offering material gifts. Shared experiences like storytelling, play, and time spent together strengthen emotional ties between parents and children. Children value meaningful interactions and conversations more than financial support.

> *I would advise that once in two years the diaspora parents should plan a visit that would coincide with boarding schools' visit. This will boost the psychological well-being of the children when they see their paternal parents during those visits"* ***CP1, CP2, CP5.PP2***

Community youth centres. Resuscitation of community youth centres was one of the key strategies which was suggested by participants. Community centres can provide emotional support, positive socialization, and structured activities that mitigate risky behaviors. A study by Chi et al. (2024) found that perceived social support significantly and negatively predicted deviant behavior among youth. The research highlighted those interpersonal needs mediated this association, suggesting that emotional support structures, like those provided by community centres, can reduce deviant behaviors. From the interviews, participants remarked:

> *"It is high time Bulawayo City Council in collaboration with residents' associations resuscitate community youth centres that can cut on idle time for these youths"* ***SP2, PP3, PP5***

While previous research has explored the impacts of parental migration on Zimbabwean children, this study offers novel insights into how these dynamics uniquely manifest in Bulawayo's urban environment:

The commercialized urban lifestyle magnifies both the advantages (financial support) and disadvantages (emotional neglect, risky behaviors) of diaspora parenting.

Bulawayo's limited but accessible digital infrastructure presents both a challenge and an opportunity for maintaining parent-child bonds.

The urban phenomenon of vuzu parties emerges as a critical risk factor linked to parental absence, a dynamic less visible in rural settings.

The erosion of traditional caregiving norms in urban Bulawayo households intensifies child vulnerability, calling for tailored community and policy interventions.

Thus, this study extends existing knowledge by contextualizing diaspora parenting within the socio-economic and cultural realities of urban Zimbabwe, with Bulawayo as a focal point. This study fills a critical gap by contextualising the lived experiences of children with diaspora parents within the urban dynamics of Bulawayo, offering nuanced insights into how international migration intersects with urban youth culture, economic instability, and weakened social support structures.

5. Conclusion

The study revealed that children with diaspora parents in Bulawayo experience both positive and negative effects from parental absence. While remittances often provide financial

stability, access to better education, and improved living conditions, their inconsistency can lead to financial hardship. Emotionally, parental absence contributes to feelings of abandonment, loneliness, and psychological distress, which may manifest as behavioural problems such as delinquency and substance abuse. The lack of direct parental supervision also increases vulnerability to negative peer influence and, in some cases, emotional or physical abuse from caregivers.

To address these challenges, several interventions were recommended. Strengthening emotional bonds through regular digital communication can help maintain parental relationships. Professional counselling for both children and parents is crucial to address emotional and behavioural issues. Meaningful parental visits that prioritize quality time over material gifts can further reinforce these bonds. Additionally, community-based support systems such as youth centres can offer mentorship, structured activities, and positive engagement to reduce exposure to risky behaviours. A holistic, collaborative approach involving parents, caregivers, schools, and community stakeholders is essential. By implementing these strategies, the well-being of children with diaspora parents can be enhanced, ensuring that the material benefits of migration are balanced by strong emotional and social support.

The findings underscore the urgent need for policy frameworks that recognize and support the psychosocial well-being of left-behind children. Policies should mandate the integration of psychosocial support services in schools and communities, including access to counseling and child protection mechanisms. There is also a need for collaboration between diaspora organizations, social welfare agencies, and local authorities to develop targeted support programs for families affected by migration. Additionally, policies that facilitate affordable and reliable communication technologies for transnational families could help bridge emotional gaps caused by physical separation.

Schools play a critical role in supporting children with diaspora parents. The findings suggest that schools should adopt inclusive psychosocial support programs, including peer support groups, life skills education, and teacher training on handling the unique needs of left-behind children. Schools can also serve as key partners in community engagement efforts, facilitating collaborations with NGOs and mental health professionals to provide holistic support. Early identification and intervention for behavioral and emotional issues among these children are crucial in preventing long-term academic and social problems.

While this study provides valuable insights into the experiences of children with diaspora parents in Bulawayo, there remains a need for broader and longitudinal research. Future studies should explore the long-term psychological and social outcomes of parental migration on children, considering variables such as age, gender, caregiver type, and duration of separation. Comparative studies between urban and rural contexts could also reveal important nuances in how migration impacts children differently. Furthermore, research into the effectiveness of proposed interventions, such as community youth centers and digital communication strategies, would provide evidence-based recommendations for policymakers and practitioners.

Addressing the challenges faced by children with diaspora parents requires a holistic and collaborative approach involving parents, caregivers, schools, communities, and policymakers. By implementing these strategies, the well-being of these children can be significantly improved, ensuring that the economic benefits of migration are complemented by robust emotional and social support systems.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This work was not supported by any funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement

This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines set by Zimbabwe Open University. The conduct of this study has been approved and given relative clearance(s) by Zimbabwe Open University.

AI Declaration

The authors declare the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in writing this paper. In particular, the authors used ChatGPT for language editing. The authors take full responsibility in ensuring proper review and editing of contents generated using AI.

ORCID

Mthokozisi Moyo -https://orcid.org/0009-0009-4331-7749

Phumuzani Mpofu – https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5671-9263

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