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Belonging and family relationships: the experiences of migrants in Olievenhoutbosch

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Abstract

Many people from other African countries migrate to South Africa, leaving their families in their countries of origin in search for opportunities to support them financially. When entering this country, however, these migrants are more frequently faced with discrimination and exclusions from various social and economic opportunities. With belonging being regarded as an integral part of migrants' settlement to a country, the question is raised regarding how this is navigated, and whether a sense of belonging can be experienced. Some argue that migrants' relationships and sustained connections with their families 'back home' help them mitigate these challenging conditions. This study endeavours to contribute to the body of knowledge by using an ecosystemic perspective to explore African migrants' experiences of belonging in a South African community, and the role that their families in their countries of origin may play. The participants consisted of working-class African migrants, and the data obtained was analysed using thematic analysis. The findings of this study reveal that a general sense of belonging is not experienced by African migrants in Olievenhoutbosch, although some spaces of belonging related to their national, cultural or religious identities are evident. Relationships with their families in their countries of origin are actively maintained with the help of Information Communication Technologies through regular contact and attempts at upholding familial obligations mostly with remittances. Lastly, the study reveals that migrants long for their families and countries of origin and this contributes to their sense of not belonging to the host community.

Keywords: Belonging, family relationships, South African migration, Ecosystemic perspective