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Understanding illness and treatment-seeking behaviour among Congolese migrants in Johannesburg

Lakika, Dostin Mulopo

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ABSTRACT

South Africa has received different categories of migrants from the African continent and beyond. Among these migrants some left their home countries because of violence. In the host country (South Africa), they face challenges of integration and present some health problems.

Much research has been done, exploring challenges faced by migrants in accessing documentation, employment and healthcare in South Africa. However the implications of these challenges to their health have not been studied. In addition, less attention has been given to understanding the extent to which the traumatic experiences lived either in the country of origin or in the receiving country may have on the health of migrants.

This study focused on Congolese migrants living in Johannesburg who were affected by political violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and currently live under harsh socio-economic conditions in South Africa, and present some health problems. The aim of this report is to explore whether the traumatic events this group of migrants experienced in the DRC or the harsh living conditions in South Africa shape the perception or understanding of their illnesses. The study also aimed at examining the help-seeking behaviour used by Congolese migrants in response to their health problems.

Data collected have shown that both pre-migration and post-migration experiences were contributive to health decline of Congolese migrants who participated in this study. Participants used alternative ways of help-seeking behaviour depending on what they believed to be the causes of their illnesses. This case study brought a holistic and complex understanding of suffering from the views of participants. This holistic and complex understanding included physical, emotional, cultural and spiritual meaning of pain which was beyond biomedical approach of illness.