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“Bearing” the Brunt? Exploring how Rwandese migrant women in Cape Town manage domestic- and child-care labour demands in the first year postpartum.

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ABSTRACT

This research study aims to understand demands in the home postpartum, how they are managed and how labour is divided, as well as the significance of gendered support networks. The study identifies and explores the support strategies that Rwandese migrant women (with one to two children between the ages of 0 and 6 years old) in Cape Town adopt in order to manage domestic labour and child-care demands in the first year postpartum. It employs a qualitative research design and uses two semi-structured face-to-face interviews per participant. Participants were sought using a snowball sampling technique. The significance of this study is that it contributes to an empirical gap concerning migrant women in South Africa, with a focus on the Rwandese population, and their postpartum experiences as it relates to household and child-care labour. The study sheds light on a demographic group that prioritises communal support, highlighting how experiences of migration, child-rearing, social support and access to institutional assistance intersect. The study finds that participants found solace during their incredibly demanding postpartum journeys through the use of religion as a personal stronghold and through seeking refuge in the presence and support of other women. The study also finds that participants were aware and acceptant of the ways that household labour and child-care responsibilities were skewed towards them (versus their husbands) in the first year postpartum, and that participants perceived early motherhood as a ‘mixed bag’. Finally, the study finds that xenophobia functioned as the most apparent barrier to professional and humane medical treatment while the presence of free primary healthcare in South Africa was considered very important. Implications and recommendations for future research are provided.