Diasporans' Children's Experiences: Devising a Resilient Manoeuvring Pathway for Better Adjustment

Yasin Adam[1]

ABSTRACT

Zimbabwe, just like many nations the world over, has a long history of labour migration to Global North nations in search of better alternatives. Recent research has increasingly focused on the subject of parental migration and its effects on children left behind. This study examines the experiences of children whose parents have immigrated to the diaspora, the emphasis being on creating resilient pathways to support the children's transition in the face of cultural reconfiguration and family separation. The study seeks to shed light on the complex emotional, educational and social issues young children experience through an analysis of empirical data, child protection frameworks, and policy considerations. Additionally, the study explores the subtle tactics and systems of support necessary to foster resilience and adaptive coping in these children, employing a strengths-based methodology to emphasise the variety of avenues for enhancing their psychological health. The study also looks at how family dynamics, community involvement and educational support systems interact, highlighting the need for comprehensive interventions that reduce the possible negative consequences of parental migration. In conclusion, the study offers a framework for building a resilient manoeuvring pathway that includes school-based programmes, community engagement models, and individualised socio-emotional support. This approach seeks to help children develop a more flexible and self-assured adjustment process in the face of challenges arising from parental migration.

Keywords: diasporan children, adjustment, resilience, cultural identity, social integration, education

Introduction

Parental migration is the process by which biological parents or guardians move from their place of origin in quest of employment, to flee political persecution, or to pursue educational opportunities (Rupande, 2014). Rupande (2014) hypothesises that most migrants will attempt to enhance household earnings, as demonstrated by the cross-border traders from Zimbabwe to South Africa. Of note is that economic possibilities are a common motivator for migration, which has become a widespread global phenomenon. While migration offers new opportunities, parents who travel abroad in search of a better life for their families often raise questions about the welfare of those left behind, especially children. According to the child rights model, it is necessary to look into the rights of children whose parents migrate to other parts of the world. These children are being denied their fundamental rights as a result of a complex interplay of social, economic and psychological issues brought about by this phenomenon.

Jaure and Makura (2023) contend that labour migration trends in Africa and several developing nations have been sparked by globalisation and economic crises. In the developing world, adults who are also parents choose to relocate in search of work possibilities both domestically and abroad. The typical parenting

[1] Family Safeguarding Team (Department), Surrey County Council, United Kingdom

style and family structure have undergone tremendous change, resulting in family instability and reconfiguration. This, in turn, has further threatened family and child welfare, mostly in developing countries.

The United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (United Nations, 1989) provides a comprehensive international framework for the protection of children's rights. That being said, the absence of diasporic parents can have significant and far-reaching effects on the children who remain in their native countries. Under such conditions, the UNCRC's guarantees of family life, education, protection, health, participation and identity frequently encounter major challenges in terms of implementation. Physical parent absence, financial hardship, mental pain and a lack of support networks for left-behind children all impede the exercise of these rights.

Jaure and Makura (2023) estimate that 7.7 million of Zimbabwe's population of over 15 million are youngsters. Since children make up about half of Zimbabwe's population, it is imperative that future planning considers them. In preparation for their assumption of leadership responsibilities in the future, they require a conducive environment for their upbringing. A child, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (2023), is any person under the age of 18 years. This definition by age could indicate that they are unable to take care of their own needs, including the provision of food. A possibility exists, therefore, that the children's psychosocial functioning may suffer when the adult parent is absent from their lives.

To explore the wider effects of diaspora migration on children's lives, this study also examines how the caregivers and guardians of left-behind children restrict or undermine the children's rights. The study findings may help policymakers, advocacy organisations and communities to work toward developing effective interventions that protect and promote the rights and well-being of children left behind by migrant parents.

Through the utilisation of technology, data-driven research as well as innovative policy recommendations, the research study at hand identifies solutions for supporting left-behind children. The study conscientises the reader about the use of technology-assisted communication, digital learning tools and community-based interventions, thus exemplifying how innovation can bridge gaps in education, psychosocial support and family engagement. Through integrating the research findings into practical strategies, this work not only addresses child welfare challenges, but also promotes forward-thinking and sustainable solutions that enhance children's protection, development, rights and well-being in Zimbabwe.

Background and Literature Review

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2015), economic challenges are the primary cause of parental migration worldwide. In light of this, Shen and Zhang (2018) accurately depict migration as a two-edged sword with mixed results for non-migrant children in rural China, depending on the situation. Growing up without parental direction and nurturing, particularly in situations where the extended family is unable to play an active role, can be detrimental to the social well-being of left-behind children, even though they may enjoy monetary comfort. Harima (2021, in Jaure & Makura, 2023) asserts that in the developing world and countries such as India, adults who are also parents take the option to migrate to local and international destinations seeking employment opportunities. This process has significantly transformed, destabilised and reconfigured the traditional parenting and family structure. Following parental labour migration, key tenets that define parenting such as co-residence, care and guidance are sometimes delegated or neglected, resulting in unmet psychosocial needs for the left-behind learners. The parents are forced to perform parenting duties from a distance, which limits their ability to effectively interact with their children and carry out their care and guidance responsibilities. At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, some migrating parents were also incapacitated in terms of providing for the needs of left-behind children owing to challenges associated with the then-prevailing COVID-19 restrictions (Harima, 2021). In this vein, this study also looks at how the school can play an active role in becoming not only a centre of education, but also that of care and learner well-being.

According to Jaji (2022), transnational migration brought about by the economic crisis that has plagued Africa since the turn of the 21st Century has further transformed the traditional African family, which had already transformed as a result of colonialism, Christianisation and Western education. As a result of this emigration, there is now a gap between the customs of traditional families and the arrangements required by migration. Jaji (2022) asserts that the cohabitation of spouses and their dependent children, along with the division of labour between genders and ages within the family unit, epitomise the traditional family configuration. However, this ideal is becoming more and more unattainable for many migrants and their non-migrant family members. The current study makes use of data from three studies. The first, conducted by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (2005), focuses on family gender roles and relationships among African migrants in Germany. The second is a 2014 study conducted in South Africa among Zimbabwean migrants (Jaji, 2022). The third is a 2021 study focusing on non-migrants in Zimbabwe (Jaji, 2021).

This current study significantly enriches the existing knowledge base by extending migration research beyond adult-centred perspectives. Earlier studies, such as the 2005 German research on African migrants, primarily examined family gender roles and relationships, while Jaji's 2022 study focused on Zimbabwean migrants' lived experiences. Jaji's 2021 Zimbabwean study, in turn, explored non-migrant families, offering a comparative lens on local dynamics. Together, these works

provide valuable insights into how migration reshapes adult identities, family structures, and gender relations. However, they left a gap in understanding the intergenerational consequences of migration. By focusing on children, the current study bridges this gap, connecting parental migration and diaspora conditions to children's subjective well-being and development. This shift highlights how migration not only transforms adult roles, but also profoundly influences children's emotional, social and familial experiences, thereby offering a more holistic view of the impact of migration.

According to Jaji (2022), refugees are flocking to South Africa from a host of unstable nations, including Somalia, Rwanda, Burundi, Liberia and Zimbabwe. As stated in Jaji (2022), educated Zimbabweans are relocating to the United Kingdom, the United States and European nations in search of work or better opportunities. Global literature on transnational migration demonstrates that social costs outweigh the economic advantages for the offspring of non-migrants.

In Zimbabwe, parental migration is a significant challenge which is being fuelled by both restricted options and harsh socio-economic conditions. Political instability, economic downturns and lack of employment opportunities have forced many parents to seek better opportunities elsewhere. This migration disrupts family structures, negatively impacting children's emotional well-being and development. The geographical separation also leads to a breakdown in communication and emotional bond between parents and children. As indicated by Filippa *et al*. (2013), children whose parents migrate to different parts of the world face a distinct set of difficulties that could jeopardise their basic rights. Parental absence caused by migration upsets family dynamics, presents financial difficulties, and affects children's emotional growth and well-being. To reduce these negative consequences and provide a more stable and caring environment for children, it is essential to examine the underlying causes of parental migration, enhance economic conditions, and initiate support programmes for families left behind.

Filippa *et al*. (2013) note that Zimbabwe's economy has been struggling since the year 2000. For instance, between 2000 and 2007, the GDP shrank by 46%. In July 2008, the annual inflation rate reached 231%, the second-highest inflation rate ever recorded globally (Filippa *et al*., 2013). Severe shortages of essential commodities made matters worse, driving out about 25% of the population. Although it is not easy to estimate precise numbers owing to the irregular and circular nature of Zimbabwean migration, a good indication can be extrapolated from the country's population indices. These showed a much lower growth rate than expected, based on the rate of natural increase between 2002 and 2008, as well as from border control data and household surveys. Klaaren's (2007) study, conducted in South Africa, indicates that there maybe up to three million Zimbabwean immigrants living in South Africa. Jaji (2021) states that families face financial difficulties due to parental migration. For many households in Zimbabwe, the remittances sent home by their migrant parents constitute a major source of income. However, due to the irregularity and unpredictability of these remittances,

families may experience financial instability, leading to disruption in accessing daily necessities, high-quality healthcare and education. Hardships arising from a poor performing economy make left-behind children more vulnerable, and raises the possibility of resorting to unhealthy coping strategies such as substance abuse or early labour market entry. Furthermore, the relocation of parents may cause children to feel abandoned and alone. Parental absence and the resultant lack of supervision often lead to emotional and psychological issues which may negatively impact the education and career opportunities of left-behind children. These adverse results perpetuate the cycle of poverty and limited opportunities, necessitating migration and further threatening the welfare of children left behind.

Legislative Framework in Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe's legal and legislative framework is intended to protect the welfare of all children, and includes provisions for the protection of children left behind by migrant parents. These legislative and policy tools include the Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment Act (No.20) of 2013, and the *Children's Act (Chapter 5:06*) (Government of Zimbabwe, 2002).

Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment Act (No.20) of 2013

Children's rights are protected by the Constitution which, under Section 81(1)(f), provides that "[e]very child has the right to education, health care services, nutrition and shelter". Emphasis is placed on children's right to a minimum standard of caregivers' care, as well as basic food, housing, medical attention and education. Adopted in 2013, the Constitution is a foundational legal instrument that protects the welfare and rights of children whose parents go abroad in pursuit of better opportunities. As set out in Section 81(1)–(3) of the Constitution, "every child has a right to equal treatment before the law, including the right to be heard; to a given name and family name; to the prompt provision of a birth certificate; to family or parental care or to appropriate care when removed from the family environment". The section, therefore, emphasises children's rights to a caring and supporting environment and enshrines several laws designed to preserve these rights. As is set out in Section 81(1)–(3) of the Constitution, the essential rights of children to enough food, housing, medical care and education are of paramount importance. Section 81 broadly protects the rights of the child and the principle of the best interests of the child.

Section 44 imposes on state and non-state actors, the duty to respect, protect, promote and fulfil the rights and freedoms set out in the 'Declaration of Rights'. Furthermore, regardless of the parent's whereabouts, Article 9 of the *African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child* (1990) states that parents, and where applicable, legal guardians, shall have a duty to provide guidance and direction in the exercise of children's rights, having regard for the evolving capacities and best interests of the child. The clauses in the Constitution and the Charter create a framework of laws aimed at safeguarding children's rights, welfare and development, including those affected by parental migration.

Regardless of their parent's immigration status, this legal framework ensures that the children's best interests and entitlement to care and protection are preserved.

Children's Act (Chapter 5:06)

The Children's Act (Chapter 5:06) also aims to protect the rights and welfare of children in Zimbabwe, including those whose parents go abroad in quest of better prospects. It offers a legal framework for considering the children's best interests when guardianship, maintenance and protection decisions are made. This legislation contains measures that directly support the protection and advancement of children's rights, and serves as a crucial legal framework in many other nations. It guarantees that decisions about the child's care, support and welfare, are made taking into consideration his or her emotional, physical and psychological requirements while the parents are away. This is important, given that parental migration can cause discord in the family, which may have an impact on the welfare of the child who is left behind.

The Children's Act also provides explicit definitions of issues pertaining to parental rights and obligations. These clauses specify parents' responsibilities towards their children, even in the case of parental relocation. Such responsibilities entail having regular communication with the child, taking care of their upbringing, and helping to sustain them financially. These rules lay the foundation for ensuring that these children receive regular support and care, and serve to reinforce the idea that parental relocation does not release parents from their responsibilities to their left-behind children.

Furthermore, the Act makes frequent reference to measures pertaining to the provision of social services and support networks for children who are at risk. In keeping with the tenets of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989), it creates a legal foundation for guaranteeing their welfare, security and access to support networks. These provisions can be expanded to include support services designed especially to meet the needs of children left behind in the event of parental relocation. The provision of emotional, psychological and educational assistance for children affected by parental relocation may involve counselling services, educational support programmes and community outreach projects.

It is important to continue developing and implementing extensive policies and services tailored to address the particular difficulties these children encounter. This is to guarantee that these children's rights are upheld and that supportive systems are in place to reduce the negative effects of parental migration on their well-being.

The Child Rights Model

This is a framework stipulated by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (1989), wherein children are not merely passive beneficiaries of care, but are viewed as active participants in society with inherent rights and dignity. Its foundation, which outlines children's civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, is legally binding (UNCRC, 1989). In line with the experiences of children whose parents are in the diaspora, this model is imperative in highlighting the gaps and intensity of the challenges children face in the absence of their parents.

The child rights model foregrounds the promotion and defence of children's rights in all spheres of their lives. Through the lens of the model, children are empowered to participate in decisions that affect them, their holistic development is encouraged, and they are protected from discrimination and exploitation as they are recognised as unique individuals with distinct rights.

The notion of non-discrimination is a fundamental component of the child rights model. Under the UNCRC (1989), every child is entitled to equal treatment, regardless of their colour, gender, socio-economic class, handicap, or any other attribute. The goal is to guarantee that children who are marginalised and at risk of harm get the same opportunities and safeguards as their counterparts.

The child rights model also re-enforces the right to participate, thus honouring children's capacity to speak their thoughts, be heard, and participate actively in choices that affect their lives. This includes involvement in matters pertaining to the family, education, healthcare, the judicial system and community activities. Children's opinions and needs can be better met when they are included in decision-making processes.

The child rights model's emphasis on the child's best interests is worth noting. Its principles, such as participation, protection, provision and non-discrimination, require that the growth and well-being of children take precedence over all other considerations. The model ensures that children's rights are effectively and efficiently upheld and promoted by addressing their physical, emotional, social and cognitive needs.

The model also addresses systemic problems that impede the full implementation of children's rights. It demands resource allocation, legislative and regulatory changes and other measures to ensure an environment that is supportive of children's development. It highlights the necessity of all-encompassing child protection mechanisms, easy access to high-quality healthcare and education, and social services that are tailored to the individual needs of children. In addition, the model acknowledges children as duty bearers and rights holders. It highlights the importance of upholding, defending and respecting children's rights by individuals, groups and governments for the effective realisation of children's rights.

Beyond national borders, the child rights model offers a standard framework for addressing children's rights around the world, encouraging teamwork and international cooperation. This is of particular importance in cases where children are uprooted, exploited, abused or impacted by violence. In defending the advancement of children's rights, the model fortifies the alliance between states, civil society groups and international organisations.

Finally, by acknowledging children as rights holders and engaged members of society, the child rights model serves a critical role in defending children's rights. It guarantees children's holistic development and fosters a sense of empowerment by encouraging non-discrimination, involvement, best interests and accountability. The model is a vital tool for tackling systemic problems, encouraging global collaboration and establishing a supportive atmosphere where children's rights are upheld, safeguarded and realised.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research paradigm, described by Creswell (2014) as a non-numerical scientific method for the understanding of human experiences and phenomena. The method lays emphasis on the collection and analysis of non-numerical data for purposes of adequately exploring complex social issues, hence its suitability for this study. The current study, conducted in Harare's Glen Norah community in 2023, focused on residents and childcare providers for children of whose parents and relatives had migrated in pursuit of better opportunities. Glen Norah, a high-density suburb traditionally affected by migration, has a high prevalence of child-headed households, a signifier of parental and relative migration. The study sample consisted of minors, adolescents, guardians, caregivers and social workers. To gather data, the study employed face-to-face in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with study participants. Key informant interviews with social workers were also conducted. The data gathered was then subjected to thematic content analysis. Through these methods , the study explored caregiving arrangements, emotional well-being, coping strategies and community perceptions. The aim was to capture lived experiences, highlighting both vulnerabilities and resilience, and revealing the broader social consequences of parental absence. Throughout the research procedure, ethical principles, including informed consent, confidentiality, preventing harm and maintaining anonymity, were considered and upheld.

Results of the Study

Upon data analysis, various negative effects of parental migration were highlighted and the following major themes were identified:

Emotional Distress

The study revealed that the children's mental well-being had been significantly affected by their parents' relocation. Emotional pain and a deep sense of longing can manifest in various forms, frequently causing mood swings and feelings of abandonment. During a key informant interview, a social worker stated:

> Children frequently feel a variety of negative emotions when their parents depart, including despair, abandonment and loneliness. They yearn for their absent parents' support and presence.

During an in-depth interview at her caregiver's house, one child had this to say:

> Ever since my mother left for the UK, she seems to be no longer concerned about me because we hardly interact like we used to do when she was here.

Literature has adequately highlighted the psychological and emotional impact of parental migration on left-behind children. For instance, in their examination of the emotional health of such children, Jaure and Makura (2023) found that these children suffered from higher-than-average levels of anxiety and despair, and feelings of abandonment. These results highlight the significant psychological effects of parental migration on children's mental health and emotional stability, which, in turn, negatively impacts their rights to safety and well-being. As is the case with the current study, this constitutes a substantive infringement of children's rights, as clearly articulated in the child rights paradigm and the Constitution of Zimbabwe (2013). Further, parental migration-related emotional anguish can seriously violate the provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (United Nations, 1989), which highlights children's universal right to protection, provisions and opportunities that support their well-being and development. As already alluded to, the violation of these essential rights leaves children struggling with emotions of abandonment, loneliness and worry, thus creating a perceptible sense of emotional deprivation. Furthermore, this kind of anguish might have a negative effect on the children's physical and mental health, which goes against the UNCRC's (1989) guarantee of their right to holistic well-being. Children's right to growth and participation may be compromised by emotional distress which can restrict their ability to reach their full potential and engage fully in society.

The child rights model emphasises the important role played by communities and governments to ensure that children are shielded from emotional abuse of any kind. The goal of the model is to provide a loving atmosphere that supports the realisation of children's rights. This includes attending to the emotional well-being of children whose parents have migrated.

Social Challenges

This study further observed that the children's social adjustment had been severely impacted by their parents' absence. These children found it difficult to make friends, and also experienced feelings of loneliness. This potentially hinders' their ability to develop socially and build support networks — a direct violation of the child rights model and Zimbabwe's Constitution. During a focus group discussion at a guardian's place of residence, one guardian noted:

> Ever since my brother went to Australia, his child has been having trouble sustaining social connections. The absence of his parents has caused him to feel alone and stigmatised at school, which is making it difficult for him to make friends with school mates.

During a one-on-one interview, the aforementioned child shared:

> My companions don't always get why my mom isn't around and it pains me when they make fun of me and when I see them having quality time with their parents. I really feel excluded.

Through the lens of the child rights model, the social barriers created by the migration of parents can seriously violate children's rights. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (United Nations, 1989), Zimbabwe's Constitution (2013), and the Children's Act (5:06), emphasise that children have the right to grow up in a family setting that best supports their well-being. This fundamental right is frequently violated by parental relocation, which results in social isolation, restricted access to family assistance and a lack of parental guidance. In addition, children may find it more difficult to access quality healthcare and education, and a decent standard of life, which is a serious violation of their rights as outlined in the UNCRC (1989). These children may not reach their full developmental potential, which may compromise their rights to active participation and establishment of social connections and support networks. Additionally, this state of affairs might have a disproportionately negative effect on marginalised and discriminated groups such as children living with disabilities.

To guarantee the protection and advancement of these children's fundamental rights, it is imperative that societal challenges be addressed. This is in line with the fundamental principles of the UNCRC (1989), which emphasise the right to family unity, support and inclusivity. It also puts pressure on local communities and governments to establish supportive environments, policies and protective mechanisms that uphold the rights of these children.

Academic Challenges

This study also revealed that lack of parental support and supervision negatively impacts left-behind children's academic performance and motivation. Through a focus group discussion conducted at one of the caregiver's house, one guardian highlighted:

> Since my sister and her husband migrated to the UK last year (2022), the academic performance of their daughter has decreased a lot, and when I try to offer her guidance and support, she does not pay attention like she used to do when her parents were here. I am greatly worried.

During an in-depth interview at her caregiver's house, another child had this to say:

> Without my mother to assist me with my schoolwork, I find it difficult to concentrate on my studies. My grades have been declining, and I miss her support.

This brings to light the fact that the migration of parents greatly impacts the academic performance of children who are left behind. Despite the guardians' and caregivers' support, the absence of parental guidance and support has led to decreased motivation and poor educational outcomes.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989) outlines the child rights model, which states that the scholastic difficulties faced by children left behind as a result of parental migration may constitute a breach of the children's rights (Kufakurinani *et al*., 2014). The UNCRC (1989) emphasises the right to education, stressing that every child has the right to a high-quality, inclusive and easily accessible educational experience. This fundamental right is frequently violated by parental relocation, which often results in various scholastic difficulties, including falling grades, a decline in academic motivation and failure to complete studies. As already alluded to, when a parent moves away, it might affect the child's ability to get educational support, monitoring and direction, which can hinder academic success. Furthermore, these difficulties can exacerbate social isolation and emotional distress, which could further violate their right to meaningful participation and holistic development. Moreover, difficulties in school might have a direct effect on a child's future prospects, thereby reducing their chances of making a smooth transition into adulthood. The children's ability to reach their full potential and acquire skills needed for a successful future is hampered if these obstacles to their academic success are not addressed.

A Heightened Sense of Responsibility

This study also found that despite being under caregivers' care, left-behind children tend to feel a heightened sense of responsibility for both theirs and their siblings' well-being, which exerts considerable pressure on them. During an in-depth interview, one child had this to say:

> Our aunt takes good care of us, yet I feel obligated to look after my siblings. There is a lot of pressure, and I wish our parents were here to make things what they used to be. I am in Form 2, and I feel anxious at times when I go to school, leaving my seven-year-old sibling behind. I worry about what will happen to her when I am not around.

Coupled with this heightened sense of responsibility are intense feelings of anxiety and insecurity, owing to the prevalence of abuse nationally. Jaji's 2022 study noted that parental migration has resulted in psychological difficulties, including anxiety, uncertainty and feelings of vulnerability. Children frequently voice worries about the security and welfare of their immigrant parents, exacerbating their feelings of worry and sorrow.

The rights of every child to be protected from mental and physical injury, the freedom to voice one's opinions, and a living standard appropriate for their physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development, are all emphasised in

the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989), as well as Section 81 (1) of the Zimbabwean Constitution (2013). Shouldering caregiver responsibilities is detrimental to the emotional, social and academic development of left-behind children.

Children shouldering caregiver responsibilities worry about their sibling's safety — related to children's rights to protection, physical and mental health, and a stable and safe home environment. This anxiety greatly affects children's right to voice their problems and have them addressed. These conditions may jeopardise children's rights, especially those related to safety, provision, caregiving and the ability to enjoy a childhood free from excessive stress and anxiety. Under the child rights paradigm, addressing these issues is essential to protecting children's rights.

As stated by Rupande (2014), this calls for the enactment of laws and the establishment of neighbourhood-based programmes and support systems to reduce the negative effects of parental migration on children's welfare. The goal of the child rights model is to provide a loving and caring environment which is conducive to the upholding of children's rights.

Pathways for Better Adjustment

In a bid to ensure the welfare of children left behind by parents who migrate in search of better opportunities, this study highlights possible pathways to address the outlined challenges.

Ways to Address Emotional Distress

Emotional distress is one of the challenges confronting children whose parents have migrated, as this study has highlighted. The provision of community-based activities and services is crucial in mitigating this challenge. A study conducted by Shen and Zhang (2018) in rural China showed that peer support groups, mentorship programmes and counselling services can be vehicles through which children can express their feelings and get support. For example, mentorship programmes that pair children with wholesome adult role models can reduce emotions of abandonment by offering encouragement and emotional support.

Raising awareness of the emotional effects of parental migration on children can be achieved through implementing educational programmes in schools and communities, as highlighted later in this study. These initiatives can reduce stigma and establish a supportive environment while promoting empathy and understanding, which can help children handle life's obstacles. In line with Jaji's (2021) study, technology-assisted communication can play a vital part in this regard, hence the importance of regular communication via digital technology. For instance, feelings of loneliness and desertion can be addressed by maintaining a sense of connection through video chats, online chatting and virtual family get-togethers. However, study-based modifications are required to ensure that video chats, online chatting and virtual family get-togethers achieve their intended

results. This is particularly important as studies show that these methods can engender conflicting feelings of belonging and abandonment that intermittent intercontinental interactions and financial security cannot fully resolve (Madianou & Miller, 2013). Additionally, studies are also required to address shortcomings that Carling *et al*. (2021) contend accrue from ICT-facilitated interactions and their lack of physical proximity that undermines relationship strength and quality. As is stipulated by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), governments and other pertinent authorities need to enact laws to support the welfare of children whose parents migrate and leave them behind. These could include the provision of accommodation for mental health treatment and school-based support networks, as well as extended family support. Governments may institutionalise safeguards for young children's emotional well-being by incorporating these provisions into the legal system.

Emotional distress among left-behind children requires drawing on comparative evidence from different contexts to understand both successes and limitations. Shen and Zhang's (2018) study in rural China shows that peer support groups, mentorship programmes, and counselling services can help children express emotions and reduce feelings of abandonment. However, its weakness lies in being context-specific to rural China, where cultural norms and community structures differ significantly from African settings, limiting generalisability. Jaji's (2021) research in Zimbabwe highlights the role of technology-assisted communication, such as video calls and online chats, in reducing loneliness. Yet, this study is largely qualitative and raises questions about scalability, particularly in areas with limited digital infrastructure.

Comparing these findings with European contexts, the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (2005) emphasises structured psychosocial services and community integration programmes for migrant families in Germany. While effective, these approaches rely on strong welfare systems and institutional support that may not be replicable in Zimbabwe or other resource-constrained countries. The contrast reveals that while mentorship and counselling are universally beneficial, their implementation must be adapted to local realities. For example, Zimbabwean communities may rely more on extended family networks and faith-based organisations to provide emotional support, whereas European models depend on formalised state services.

By comparing across contexts, it becomes clear that interventions must be tailored: China's peer-based approaches highlight the value of informal networks, Germany's welfare-driven model demonstrates the impact of institutional support, and Zimbabwe's reliance on technology shows the potential of digital tools despite infrastructural challenges. Recognising these strengths and weaknesses ensures that strategies to address emotional distress are both evidence-based and contextually relevant, safeguarding children's rights under the UNCRC (1989) and the Constitution of Zimbabwe (2013).

Ways to Mitigate Children's Heightened Sense of Responsibility

Interventions need to be put in place to help left-behind children care for their siblings, and address anxieties about potential threats facing their siblings during their absence. The child rights paradigm, particularly as expressed in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (United Nations, 1989), as well as the Children's Act (5:06), should be taken into consideration while developing these policies. Through community engagement and locally-based resources, such as the Department of Social Development, child-centred social clubs and libraries, these initiatives can ensure children's welfare while providing them with both practical and emotional support in their duties as caregivers. Comprehensive caregiver support programmes that offer guidance and resources to guardians and other caregivers are also important. Through training programmes, participation in social support groups and access to community resources, the children's burden can be reduced and their ability to provide appropriate care and support can be enhanced.

Mitigating children's heightened sense of responsibility in the context of parental migration requires evidence-based strategies that build on lessons from prior scholarship. Shen and Zhang (2018) demonstrate that parental migration in rural China produces a "double-edged sword" effect, where children gain resilience but also face emotional strain. Their findings highlight the importance of psychosocial support structures to balance these outcomes. Similarly, Jaji's (2022) study of Zimbabwean migrants in South Africa shows that left-behind children often assume adult-like caregiving roles, which can lead to anxiety and disrupted childhoods. These insights align with the child rights paradigm articulated in the UNCRC (United Nations, 1989) and Zimbabwe's Children's Act (5:06), underscoring the need for protective policies that safeguard children's development.

Comparative evidence from the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (2005) in Germany reveals that migrant families often experience shifts in gender roles and caregiving responsibilities, suggesting that community-based interventions, such as social clubs and libraries, can provide children with safe spaces for emotional and educational support. Jaji (2022) further illustrates how refugee influxes strain family structures, reinforcing the necessity of comprehensive caregiver training and support programmes to reduce children's burdens.

Building on these studies, new strategies should therefore integrate legislative safeguards with community-driven initiatives. Training guardians, strengthening social support networks, and ensuring access to locally-based resources can reduce exploitation risks while enhancing children's well-being. This approach resonates with Education 5.0's emphasis on evidence-based and context-sensitive solutions, ensuring that interventions are not only theoretically sound but practically tested across diverse migration contexts.

Possible Ways to Address Social Challenges

This study has highlighted that left-behind children tend to encounter social challenges in the form of limited access to familial and emotional support networks. This calls for the establishment of pathway strategies such as community-based support networks, which can offer crucial social ties. These networks may include peers, mentors and reliable adults who provide the children with direction and emotional support. By encouraging a sense of community and belonging, such networks can reduce the impact of the social isolation that these children go through. This is inspired by the United Nations Children's Fund's [UNICEF] *Operational Guidelines on Community-based Mental Health and Psychosocial Support* (UNICEF, 2018) which extols the virtues of community interventions as a safeguard for mental health. This is corroborated by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR] (2024) which contends that quality community-based support leads to better psychological and physical outcomes, especially in cases where primary caregivers are unavailable.

Addressing the social challenges faced by children left behind due to parental migration requires a nuanced and evidence-based approach that draws on comparative scholarship and contextual realities. These children often experience diminished access to familial and emotional support networks, which can lead to social isolation, stigma, and a heightened sense of responsibility within their households. Shen and Zhang (2018), in their study of rural China, illustrate how parental migration creates a paradoxical situation — while children may develop resilience and independence, they simultaneously suffer from reduced emotional support and weakened social ties. This finding underscores the importance of interventions that strengthen community-based support networks, ensuring that children are not left to navigate these challenges alone.

Jaji's (2022) research on Zimbabwean migrants in South Africa provides further evidence of the social burdens placed on left-behind children. The study highlights how children often assume adult-like caregiving roles, which not only disrupts their childhood but also limits their opportunities for social interaction and development. This resonates with the Zimbabwean context, where extended family structures are expected to absorb the responsibilities of caregiving, yet often lack the resources or emotional capacity to fully support children. By comparing these findings with Shen and Zhang's (2018) work, it becomes clear that while cultural contexts differ, the social consequences of parental migration share common threads. Both studies point to the need for structured interventions that provide children with safe spaces to interact, express themselves, and receive guidance from peers and mentors.

The Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (2005) study in Germany adds another dimension by showing how migration reshapes family roles and relationships. In that context, children of migrants often experienced shifts in caregiving responsibilities and social integration challenges. Community-based

initiatives, such as extracurricular activities and child-centred clubs, were found to be effective in fostering belonging and reducing isolation. These lessons are highly relevant to Zimbabwe, where similar initiatives could be adapted to local realities. For instance, school-based programmes that incorporate peer support groups, counselling services, and extracurricular activities can provide children with structured opportunities to build social ties and enhance emotional well-being.

Technology also emerges as a critical tool in bridging the social divide created by migration. While Shen and Zhang (2018) note the importance of maintaining communication between parents and children, the Zimbabwean context requires deliberate strategies to ensure that digital platforms are accessible and safe. Social media, messaging applications, and video calls can help sustain familial bonds, but they must be complemented by digital literacy programmes that protect children from online risks. This dual approach ensures that technology serves as a supportive mechanism rather than a source of vulnerability.

Policy frameworks play a pivotal role in addressing these challenges. Jaji (2021), in her study of non-migrants in Zimbabwe, emphasises the importance of legislative safeguards that prioritise children's welfare. This aligns with the child rights paradigm articulated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and Section 81(1) of the Zimbabwean Constitution (2013), which stress the necessity of protecting children's rights to safety, development, and family support. Governments can craft policies that provide psychosocial services, strengthen extended family support systems, and establish cross-border networks to ensure that migrant parents remain engaged in their children's lives. Education 5.0's emphasis on evidence-based research requires that these strategies be continuously evaluated and adapted. For example, while peer support groups have proven effective in China, their replication in Zimbabwe must consider cultural dynamics and resource limitations. Similarly, community-based initiatives that succeeded in Germany may need modification to fit Zimbabwe's extended family structures and socio-economic realities. By comparing and contrasting these contexts, scholars and practitioners can refine interventions to ensure they are both effective and sustainable.

This, therefore, shows that addressing the social challenges of left-behind children demands a comprehensive approach that integrates community-based networks, school programmes, technology-enabled communication and robust policy frameworks. Evidence from China, South Africa, Germany and Zimbabwe demonstrates that while contexts differ, the underlying issues of isolation, stigma, and disrupted childhoods are universal. By grounding interventions in scholarship and adapting them to local realities, communities can create supportive environments that safeguard children's rights and foster their social and emotional development. This approach not only responds to immediate challenges but also aligns with Education 5.0's vision of research-driven and context-sensitive

solutions that empower children to thrive despite the complexities of parental migration.

Possible Ways to Address Academic Challenges

Upholding the rights of children whose parents relocate requires resolving the academic challenges which the left-behind children face, such as reduced supervision, poor academic performance, emotional stress and limited resources as documented in Shen and Zhang's (2018) study on migrant families. Within the context of the child rights paradigm and the Children's Act (5:06), customised interventions such as school-based assistance programmes, cross-border education communication, policy and advocacy, are crucial for safeguarding children's rights. School-based assistance programmes are key because they involve peer support groups, counselling services, and extracurricular activities that foster social interaction and resilience. They also include awareness campaigns to reduce stigma, promote empathy among teachers and students, and connect children with community resources, ensuring their rights to protection, participation and development are safeguarded. Creating support programmes in schools to provide both academic and emotional assistance is of utmost importance in reducing the negative effects of parental migration on academic achievement by offering mentorship, counselling and tutoring.

Evidence from Shen and Zhang (2018) shows that left-behind children in China struggle academically due to emotional stress and reduced supervision, while Jaji (2022) highlights similar challenges in Zimbabwean contexts. In Germany, the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (2005) found that school-based support and extracurricular activities improved social integration and academic outcomes. These studies demonstrate that flexible educational plans, counselling and mentorship programmes are effective in mitigating academic gaps. Building on this evidence, integrating technology for online tutoring and cross-border educational resources can further enhance learning opportunities, aligning with emphasis on research-driven and context-sensitive interventions.

Collaboration between social workers, parents, the community, educators, administrators and the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education is necessary to foster an inclusive and supportive classroom environment. To ensure that left-behind children receive quality education, it may be necessary to implement flexible educational plans and activities. These include personalised learning schedules, remedial support and extracurricular activities tailored to the left-behind children's caregiving responsibilities. These adjustments help reduce stress, prevent dropout, and uphold their right to education. Thus, through accommodating unique circumstances, schools foster resilience, emotional well-being and equal opportunities for academic success among left-behind children. When it comes to offering specialised interventions to help these children with their academic difficulties, schools can be crucial. Ensuring that these children receive the educational help they require to succeed in their studies can be achieved by putting in place focused support programmes like academic counselling,

mentorship programmes and tutoring services. Creating adaptable educational support systems can aid in considering the special needs of children whose parents migrate. This can involve individualised lesson plans, special access to extra materials and specialised academic help to address any areas of difficulty brought about by a lack of parental supervision.

Maintaining academic support and engagement can be aided through the use of technology to make educational contact between parents who are living overseas and their children, easier. The academic gap created by parental migration can be closed through online tutoring, video conferences for educational discussions, and the utilisation of educational materials from the host nation. Migrant parents, schools, or NGOs can transmit textbooks, curricula and learning tools online, enabling left-behind children to benefit from updated, diverse and globally relevant educational content. Regardless of the challenges posed by parental migration, the child rights model's emphasis on the provision of comprehensive support mechanisms within educational systems and local communities is meant to foster a safe and nurturing environment that values and promotes each child's development and well-being.

Conclusion

The key insights from the literature review highlight the growing issue of parents' migration in search of better opportunities for them and their families. Despite this positive intention, children left behind face a myriad of challenges which hinder their development, as highlighted in this research. Outlined in this research are possible strategies and pathways to address the challenges. These include the establishment of support systems, such as mentorship programmes, academic support programmes and awareness campaigns in local communities and schools. The creation of networks of support and policies targeted at reducing the negative effects of parental migration on children's academic performance, is also important. The establishment of laws, neighbourhood-based programmes and various support systems, is crucial, as articulated in the child rights model.

The implementation of these strategies can go a long way in ensuring that children fully develop to their greatest potential. It is advisable for future research to focus on how parental migration is negatively impacting children living with disabilities, and its overall impact on the family system.

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