BINDURA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE EDUCATION

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK

STRATEGIES ADDRESSING CHALLENGES OF PARENTAL MIGRATION ON CHILDREN'S WELFARE IN ZIMBABWE. A CASE STUDY OF MUREWA DISTRICT.

BY

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SUPERVISOR: MS. E. CHIGONDO

DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FUFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

OF BACHELOR OF SOCIAL WORK HONOURS DEGREE

JUNE 2025

APPROVAL FORM

I certify that I have supervised Tsuro Tinovimba. C for this research titled: **Strategies addressing challenges of parental migration on children's welfare. A case study of Murewa District** in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Bachelor of Social Work Honours Degree and recommended that it proceeds for examination.

Supervisor Name……………………………….Signature………………..Date……………….

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to every individual who contributed to the successful completion of the research project. The project would have not been successful without the support, encouragement and guidance from different individuals. I am profoundly grateful to my research supervisor Mrs. E. Chigondo, whose intellectual guidance, critical insights and unwavering support was instrumental throughout the project. I would like to appreciate every participant who contributed towards my research project through their willingness to share their personal experiences which made the research a success. I also appreciate the support both financially and emotionally from friends and family. Lastly all glory is to God Almighty for wisdom and perseverance that guided me throughout the project.

DEDICATION

I dedicate the research to all the left-behind children due to labor parental migration, whose silent struggles inspired this study. I also dedicate it to my parents, family and friends whose unwavering support and encouragement inspired me throughout the hard moments.

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MARKING GUIDE: UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH PROJECT

Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION	Possible Mark	Actual Mark
Abstract	10	
Background to the study- what is it that has made you choose this particular topic? Include objectives or purpose of the study	20	
Statement of the problem	10	
Research questions	15	
Assumptions	5	
Significance of the study	15	
Limitations of the study	5	
Delimitations of the study	5	
Definition of terms	10	

Summary	**5**	
Total	**100**	
Weighted Mark	**15**	

Comments………………………………………………………………………………………

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Chapter 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction- what do you want to write about in this chapter?	**5**	
Conceptual or theoretical framework	**10**	
Identification, interpretations and evaluation of relevant literature and citations	**40**	
Contextualisation of the literature to the problem	**10**	
Establishing gaps in knowledge and how the research will try to bridge these gaps	**10**	
Structuring and logical sequencing of ideas	**10**	
Discursive skills	**10**	
Summary	**5**	
Total	**100**	
Weighted Mark	**20**	

Comments………………………………………………………………………………………

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Chapter 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction	5	
Research design	10	
What instruments are you using to collect data?	30	
Population, sample and sampling techniques to be used in the study	25	
Procedures for collecting data	15	
Data presentation and analysis procedures	10	
Summary	5	
Total	100	
Weighted Mark	**25**	

Comments…………………………………………………………………………………

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Chapter 4 DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Introduction	5	
Data presentation	50	
Is there any attempt to link literature review with new findings	10	
How is the new knowledge trying to fill the gaps identified earlier	10	
Discursive and analytical skills	20	
Summary	5	
Total	100	

Weighted Mark	30	

Comments

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Chapter 5 SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction- focus of the chapter	5	
Summary of the whole project including constraints	25	
Conclusions- have you come up with answers to the problem under study	30	
Recommendations(should be based on findings) Be precise	30	
References	5	
Appendices i.e. copies of instruments used and any other relevant material	5	
Total	100	
Weighted mark	10	

Comments

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SUMMARY:-

Actual   **Total**

Chapter 1 _____

Chapter 2 _____

Chapter 3 _____

Chapter 4 _____

Chapter 5 _____

Total   _____   _____

ABSTRACT

The research project explored strategies addressing challenges faced by left-behind children as a result of parental labor migration in Murewa District, Zimbabwe. The research was motivated by the vulnerability of children left-behind by their parents in rural areas despite the fact that their parents migrated for better jobs to improve their well-being. The research was guided by certain objectives which include examining the challenges faced by left-behind children, to outline the effects of parental migration and to examine strategies implemented or proposed to mitigate the challenges. The research adopted the qualitative research approach using a case study so as to gain a more comprehensive in-depth insight into the lived experience of affected children. The research employed purposive sampling in the selection of 12 participants consisting of 10 children 1 teacher and 1 social worker. Research data was collected through in-depth interviews and key informant interviews. The analysis of data was conducted through thematic data analysis. The research findings revealed several challenges being faced by left-behind children including psychological distress, poor academic performance, poor caregiving and economic hardships. These challenges pave way for effects such as sexual abuse, prostitution, early marriage, school dropouts among others. The research recommends for policies and programs to mitigate and minimizes the effects of parental migration. Conclusively, although parental migration contributes to family economic status, its social effects affect the left-behind children and endanger their well-being.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

UNICEF   United Nations Children's Funds

ILO   International Labor Organization

IOM   International Organization for Migration

ZimStats   Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency

MPR   Migration Policy Report

LBC   Left-behind Children

CSO   Civil Society Organization

BEAM   Basic Education Assisted Module

WHO   World Health Organization

NGOs   Non-Governmental Organizations

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION OF THE STUDY

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Migration is on the rise and as a result millions of children are being left behind by their parents in the custody of guardians and some children are being left at a young age. Socio-economic hardships have been a push factor leading to parental migration across the globe. Murewa has been one of the affected areas where most parents are migrating to other countries and even cities so as to provide for their families. In the process of trying to make ends meet, mostly the effects of migration tend to affect the left behind children and these effects are being ignored thereby making children more vulnerable. The research explores the effects of parental migration as well as strategies to mitigate those challenges. It will be more focused with left behind children in Murewa District. The chapter consists of the introduction, background of the study, statement of the problem, aim, objectives, research questions, and significance of the study, limitations, delimitations and summary of the chapter.

1.1 Background of the study

Migration has become a greatest aspect which is affecting the daily lives of people, both voluntary and forced. The majority of parents are involved in migration with a goal of enhancing their lives not considering how it affects their children. Socio-political conditions, economic instability, violence and climate change are some of the causes influencing parental migration. These movements have tremendous effects on the rights and well-being of children, who are often the most vulnerable in migration. Globally, according to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), approximately 200 million children have been abandoned by their parents in their native country as a result of parental migration.

In the African continent migration is influenced by conflict, economic hardship, disasters and climate change, poverty, high unemployment rate among others. The African continent has witnessed both internal and international migration, with countries such as Libya, South Sudan, and Somalia. According to the International Organization for Migration (2022), approximately 40.6 million people migrated within Africa as a result of hunger, natural disasters, and conflicts and the majority of the migrants are labour migrants.

In Zimbabwe, migration is shaped by both internal displacement and migration, particularly to neighbouring countries such as South Africa, Botswana, and Zambia due to prolonged economic hardships which contributed to political instability. According to Migration Policy Report, (2017), Zimbabwe is one of the top countries in sub-Saharan Africa for outward migration, with over 2 million Zimbabweans living abroad, many of whom are parents leaving children behind. The economic and political instability of 2000 in Zimbabwe triggered the massive migration of citizen leaving their families behind, (Makina, 2012). Due to the need of alleviating poverty most of skilled and high educated professionals left Zimbabwe in search of well-paying jobs across the globe. According to the Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency (2022), approximately 800, 000 Zimbabweans emigrated all over the world. Migration from Zimbabwe increases rapidly with adults particularly parents relocating with or for their children's future (Musoni, 2020).

During parental migration, the majority of parents leave their children behind in the custody of either one parent or their immediate family members and some in the custody of friends whilst a few migrates with their children. Parents who had left their children tend to send some remittance which can be useful in meeting the basic needs of the children and those left in custody of their children. As indicated in Section 81 of Zimbabwe Constitution and National Orphan Care Policy, a child is anyone under the age of 18. A few numbers of children are left in the custody of relatives that provides conducive and nurturing households which helps to cushion the effects of parental migration whilst the majority are less fortunate and suffer from the impacts of parental absence (Filippa, 2011). Most of the left behind children often encounter mistreatments which include neglect, abuse and exploitation which affect their welfare.

The aspect of parental migration has left many children performing the roles and responsibilities of parents such as taking care of their siblings. Due to child headed families, these children's education suffers the most and some children will become school drop outs. The absence of both parents results in lack of parental guidance that leads to poor academic performance, drug addicts, child marriages, teen pregnancies child labour which affects the child's educational performance. Migration has affected the psychological aspect of left behind children, despite the parent's effort to provide through remittance sent home, it does not cover up for the children's psychological needs. Children often societal discrimination due to parental migration and lack of parental guidance, they also became victims of societal labelling which affects their mental health. Children

suffer from social stigma, stereotypes, and exclusion because of their family circumstances leading to feelings of shame and isolation (Humprey, 2019).

1.2 Statement of the problem.

Migration has become increasingly prevalent in Zimbabwe, particularly in Murewa District, with one or both parents leaving their children behind. It has posed threats towards the welfare of the left-behind children. Parental migration has disrupted the establishment of family structures, support systems as well as access of essential services such as education, healthcare, and child protection mechanism. The unavailability of these basic needs increases the vulnerability of children towards abuse, exploitation, teen pregnancy, child marriage, prostitution, as well as being involved in juvenile delinquency due to lack of parental guidance, supervision and support. Despite the efforts of existing strategies, the effects of migration remain posing threats to the children's welfare. The study aims to explore the challenges being faced by left behind children in the rural areas and how these challenges affect their welfare. It also tends to mitigate relevant strategies that can be implemented to decrease the vulnerability of the left-behind children in Murewa District.

1.3 Aim of the study

To explore the effects of parental migration and mitigate strategies that can be implemented to support the left-behind children in Murewa District.

1.4 Objectives

1. To identify challenges faced by left-behind children due to parental migration in Murewa district, Mashonaland East province, Zimbabwe.

2. To examine the effects of parental migration on the left-behind children in Murewa.

3. To examine strategies implemented to address challenges faced by left-behind children.

1.5 Research Questions

1. What are the challenges faced by left-behind children due to parental migration in Murewa District.

2. What are the effects of challenges faced by left-behind children in Murewa.

3. How does parental migration affect the psychological, educational and social well-being of left-behind children in Murewa.

4. What community, school or government –led strategies being implemented to support left-behind children in Murewa

5. What can be done to minimize or address the challenges being faced by left-behind children in Murewa.

Assumptions

1. Parental migration leads to significant emotional and psychological challenges among left-behind children in Murewa

2. Caregivers left in charge of children may lack adequate resources or parenting skills to meet the needs of children

3. Parental migration impacts children's educational performance and school attendance

1.5 Justification.

The research will be of great importance to government and Civil Society Organizations who work hand in glove with the children (child protection) to familiarize themselves with the challenges being faced by children with migrant parents. Familiarization with the challenges being faced by left-behind children helps to formulate policies and programs that are in the best interest of the child thereby safeguarding the well-being of the children left-behind.

Non-governmental organizations will also benefit from the study, especially those who work with children and families affected by migration. The study will provide important information that will help them in the designing and implementation of news programs. These interventions will be addressing the problem as per the clients point of view, thus they will be able to work with the people and not for the people. Non-governmental organizations could make use of the collected data to look for funding or resources that will help to support left-behind children.

Another organization that can benefit and obtain some information from the research is the Ministry of Women Affairs. The study will have an overview on the challenges being faced by female children which are as a result of parental migrations. It will help with the formation and

implementation of policies that protects the rights of a girl child which will reduce the aspects of abuse

The Ministry of Education will also obtain some relevant information by understanding the challenges that hinders children with migrant parents academically. The research will guide the ministry to develop or implement suggested strategies in order to reduce the effects of parental migration on left-behind children, thereby advocating for a safe environment for the children and enhance the quality of education. The Ministry of health and Child Care will as well benefit from the research by understanding the challenges faced by left-behind children in obtaining basic needs such as healthcare services.

1.6 Definition of key terms

1.6.1 Parental migration

It is the temporary or permanent relocation of parents away from their native country to a host country, often influenced by the urge of better financial opportunities and living conditions (Hernandez &Dreby, 2021). Migration involves the international relocation of one or both parents which will result in long-term or temporary separation of the family (Cortes, 2020).

1.6.2 Strategies

Refer to plans, policies, and interventions designed to address the challenges faced by migrant and displaced children, promoting their welfare and protection, (United Nations Children's Fund, 2020).

1.6.3 Children-

According to the Zimbabwean Constitution section 81, a child is any person below the age of 18. Any person below the age of 18years unless the, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier (United Nation Convention on the Rights of Children, 1989). According to WHO (2014), children are persons under the age of 18, unless the law of a particular country set legal age for adulthood, they are individuals in the early stages of physical, emotional, mental and social development requiring special protection and care.

1.7 Dissertation outline

Chapter 1- it will be focusing on the introduction of the research project consisting of the background of the study, the problem statement, research objectives, justification of the study, and definition of key concepts.

Chapter 2 it covers the theoretical framework of the study and the literature review of existing researches. It will be focusing on examining the findings of studies conducted by other researchers, identifying gaps in those researches.

Chapter 3 covers the research methodology that was used to carry out the project. It has a detailed explanation on the research design and methods used in data collection and analysis as well as data presentation.it consist of targeted population, area of study, sample size and sampling technique.

Chapter 4 it covered the concept of data analysis and discussion of the study findings. It also gives an analysis of the study linking it with chapter 2.

Chapter 5 it is a summary of the whole research, conclusion and recommendations based on the research findings.

1.8 Chapter summary

Chapter one covered the whole introduction which includes background of the study, problem statement, objectives, justification of the study and definition of the research key terms. The following chapter will explore on existing researches in line with the topic and provide a comprehensive literature review as well a theoretical framework.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter explores the theoretical aspects of the study making use of the ecological theory, enabling the researcher to interconnect ideas with actual results. It will also provide an overview on the strategies addressing challenges of parental migration on children's welfare in Zimbabwe. The chapter will also identify gaps within the existing literature. The researcher used a lot of contributions from different authors on the issue of parental migration, its effects and strategies or recommendations.

2.1 Theoretical framework

The researcher made use of the Ecological theory by UrieBronfenbrenner (1997). The theory is of the view that an individual's development is shaped by the interconnected environment, from immediate surroundings such as the family to the broader society. It posits that the interconnectedness of these systems influences a child's growth directly or indirectly. The theory further explains the influence of the micro, meso, exo,macrosystem and chronosystem on the child development. According to Suarez-Orozco (2015), child's well-being is shaped by interactions within and between the child's environments. Therefore the child's development is not only associated with the immediate family but rather the community at large, hence the societal point of view on migration affects or is associated with the positive and negative impacts on the left-behind children.

The ecological theory is more relevant to the study as it portrays its holistic approach towards the study. It does consider multiple aspects or factors that give room to explore issues associated to child's development or welfare, thereby making it comprehensive for the study to come up with relevant strategies tackling all angles. The theory allows multi-level interventions targeting the family, school, community as well as policy level, (Neal, 2013). However the theory focuses more on the environmental influence thereby overlooking the children's resilience. The theory is relevant to the study as it give a comprehensive analysis on the challenges of parental migration on children's welfare from all aspects which are associated with child development. Parental migration disrupts these systems by impacting the children's welfare directly through the separation of families and changes in community support and societal perceptions (Suarez-Orozco &Todorova, 2008).

2.2 Challenges faced by left-behind children

2.2.1 Emotional and psychological traumas

Children left behind by their migrant parents tend to face a challenge of emotional and psychological trauma, which arise from prolonged absence of either one or both parents. According to a research by Maposa and Sibanda (2012) which was conducted in rural areas of Masvingo Province, through in-depth interviews with the left-behind children's caregivers and the left-behind children, there are signs of emotional breakdown and depression among children under the age of 12. The study findings clearly indicate that children face a psychological trauma due to the absence of their parents. It is further supported by a research in Kenya by Kabiru et al. (2012) which pinpoints that parental migration increase levels of sadness, anxiety and emotional distress among left-behind children especially those that lack communication.

There is high prevalence of mental health among left-behind as compared to children living with both parents and it heightens the risk of depression and anxiety as well as ideas of suicide. Children left behind in the custody of their grandparents often lack emotional support and end up with behavioral problems such as low-esteem and aggression (Chirisa&Muchini, 2011). The study was conducted in peri urban Harare, using the ecological theory with the aim of assessing how parental migration affected children's well-being. The absence of parents disrupts the attachment process in children which can lead to unhealthy or failure to maintain healthy relationships later in life. Emotional distress is increased by communication breakdown between migrant parents and the left-behind children (Rambe, 2012).

However, Muzvidziwa (2015) criticized these studies for lacking follow-ups that indicates the coping mechanism of these children which is a result of nurturing caregivers. Mutopo (2011), notes that in some cases, emotional traumas have been enhanced by remittances which allows children to access basic needs and other expenses. Hence the challenge of psychological traumas are not uniform it differs with circumstances.

2.2.2 Economic instability

Economic instability has been one of the main challenges being faced by children with migrant parents especially parents who migrated to obtain income through informal jobs. Parental

migration is a livelihood strategy against poverty especially in African countries. Remittance from migrant parents alleviates poverty for the left-behind family, however these remittance are not always consistent and sufficient to cover up all the expenses. According to a research by Mutetwa and Chigonda (2020) focusing on the impacts of parental migration on left-behind children in Masvingo; discovered that remittance were not being sent regularly due to low-paying jobs especially for migrant parents in informal industries. Due to inconsistence of remittance sent for the left-behind children, left-behind experienced numerous negative effects such as poor nutrition affecting their health, absent from school due to non-payment of fees and child labor and change of behavior especially girls being involved in prostitution.

2.2.3 Disruption of education and poor performance

Children with migrant parents are facing a challenge academically, a research by Chinyoka (2014), indicates that the majority of children in Manicaland Province rural areas, teachers reported a higher rate of school drop outs of left-behind children especially girls. The absence of parents can lead to poor academic performance because of lack of supervision, motivation and emotional distress. Teachers indicated that children with migrant parents are most likely to be absent at school so as to assist their caregivers with domestic chores. Children tend to skip school during the rainy and harvest season because they will be helping with farming (subsistence farming). Children with migrant parents have higher rates of being absent from school and are more likely to drop out of school. Additionally, some guardians are too old to assist children with their school work thereby affecting the child's performance at school.

According to the ZIMVAC assessment by Ritcher (2016), children from households with migrant parents are more likely to repeat grades as well as performing poorly due to a number of factors such as lack of parental supervision and support. In some cases parental migration helps children to have access to better schools (private schools) but due to parental absents the children experience poor support and motivation to aim higher academically (Mudege& Zulu, 2010). On the other hand, Nhundu (2013) argues that the studies relied more on teachers and caregiver feedback and not standardized academic assessments. Chiweshe (2017) also criticized the application of human capital theory used in the research for being economically focused whilst ignoring the emotional aspects.

2.2.4 Poor caregiving and neglect

Another challenge faced by left-behind children due to parental migration is poor caregiving and neglect, (Ganga and Chinyoka, 2010). A research was done in Chimanimani District, children who were left in the custody of the elderly grandparents. The research outlined that caregivers often lacked physical and emotional capacity to meet the demands and developmental needs of children left in their custody. Poor caregiving can be increased by lack of support from the migrant parents towards the family members they left their children in custody off. According to a study by Mango (2021), left-behind children especially in the custody of elderly relatives experience malnutrition and poor hygienebecause of caregiver's limited knowledge.

Additionally, a research study by Chibanda (2019) in Mutoko rural areas highlighted that left-behind children especially ones left in the custody of grandparents often experience inconsistent caregiving and neglect. Poor caregiving is a result of lack of support through resources and poor physical fitness. Most grandparents feel emotionally distant due to their age or physically unfit totake proper care of the children therefore resulting in inadequate supervision and emotional support.

2.2.5 Social stigmatization and social isolation

According to the research by Sibanda and Chiumbi (2012), left-behind children often face a challenge of stigmatization and isolation. The research discovered that most children in Gweru whose parents have migrated were labeled as spoiled or foreign minded, especially when their parents have sent some remittances. A study by Mawere (2014) indicates that left-behind children in Chipinge experienced bullying and isolation from their peer groups. However,stigmatization of left-behind children varies from region and the socio-economic aspects being experienced in a certain region, (Mpofu, 2015).

2.3 Effects of parental migration on left-behind children.

2.3.1 School dropouts

Parental migration is associated with school dropouts due to lack of parental guidance and poor caregiving. In some cases high rate of school dropouts within left-behind children is as a result of parents unable to cater for their children financially. Parental migration is highly linked with

increased rate of school dropouts among left-behind children. Children with migrant parents are at a higher risk of becoming school dropouts due to lack of support, mental anguish and emotional stress (Carling &Schacher 2022). Most of the children especially girls dropped out of school so as to take care of their siblings, thus including working so that they can be able to take care of their siblings as well as their grandparents.

A research by Tawodzera and Themane (2019) shows that increased household responsibilities, lack of assistance on school work, as well as non-payment of school fees are the main reasons causing children in Harare to drop out of school. A study by Zirima (2019) in Mwenezi noted that left-behind children tend to assume adult responsibilities that include caring for younger siblings which ultimately affects their school attendance. The study also shows that inadequate remittances are also another aspect that hinders children from attending school. The combination of financial constraints and a burden of domestic responsibilities increase the risk of school drop outs among left-behind children.

2.3.2 Sexual abuse

Left-behind children are left in the custody or care of relatives and family friends which make them more exposed to sexual exploitation. According to Bauer (2019), girls left-behind by migrant parents are more vulnerable towards sexual exploitation and abuse. Additionally, girls experience sexual assault from their own fathers and close relatives. Research by Mkwananzi and Maposa (2021), clearly shows that girls are more affected by sexual abuse by their relatives who are supposed to be their caregivers and they are unable to expose them. The study found out that children are unable to seek justice for their selves due threatsand manipulation from their abusers.

2.3.3 Child marriages

Any marriage union with a person under the age of 18 is considered child marriage (Sibanda, 2011). Child marriage has become one of the trending issues in rural areas of Zimbabwe. Child marriage is caused by a lot of factors and parental migration is one of those factors. According to Huisman (2018), children left-behind by migrant parents particularly girls are more likely to be married off at a young age due to abuse and economic hardships. Most girls involved in child marriage are victims of abuse from their caregiver. The research by Gambir et al. (2024), explores the interconnectedness between parental migration and child marriage in Chiredzi district. The

research showed that parental migration is mostly caused by food insecurity and poverty. Most caregivers left in custody of children practice child marriage as a coping mechanism to get rid of food insecurity whilst most adolescent girls take marriage as a means of survival.

Similarly, a study by Zirima (2017), on psychological effects of parental migration on left-behind children in Mwenezi, indicates that children left-behind especially girls are more vulnerable to abuse which include child marriages. The lack of parental protection creates a very harmful environment where child marriage occurs and it is normalized due to different cultural beliefs. A research by Filippa et al. (2013) in Harare on the experiences of Zimbabwean adolescents affected by parental migration, highlighted the responsibilities of left-behind children and the financial constrains they encounter which indirectly and increase child marriage as a perceived solution towards financial difficulties. Furthermore in the research conducted by Chakombera and Mabika (2018), child marriage is practiced as a coping mechanism against poverty among children left-behind by migrant parents.

2.3.4 Alcohol and substance abuse

Parental migration has affected most of the teenage children resulting into alcohol and substance use. Lack of parental supervision has created a lot of opportunities for children to engage in substance use such as alcohol, marijuana,"dombo" among others particularly boys. The use of alcohol and substance affects the performance of children academically and it results in delinquent behaviors (Rudatsikira et al. 2009). According to research by Samir (2012), children left-behind by migrant parents are vulnerable to drug and substance use because of lack of parental supervision as well as social isolation and peer influence. The research shows that children between the age of 15 and 17 were into drug and substance use which resulted in poor performance and criminal activities.

 A case study by Ndlovu and Tigere (2018) in Gweru rural district showed that left-behind children are involved in behavior problems including substance abuse due to lack of parental control. The use of drug and substances is used as a coping mechanism of stress and trauma among teenagers with migrant parents. According to a research by Rupande (2014) in Marondera, due to lack of parental guidance, left-behind children misuse their remittance pursuing drugs. Parental migration leads to emotional distress due to separation or family dysfunctional associated with lack of proper

supervision which results in creating an environment conducive for drug and substance experiments among the left-behind children specifically boys (Gregory, 2023).

2.3.5 Prostitution

Most of girl children left-behind by migrant parents is involved in prostitution. Prostitution is caused by lack of parental guidance as well as lack of financial support. Research by Maposa and Mkwananzi (2021) indicates that, girls from the age of 13 are vulnerable to sexual exploitation in rural areas of Matabeleland Province due to poverty, peer influence and the need to provide for the young siblings. Children left behind by migrant parents are more vulnerable to sexual engagement and moral decay at a young age. Children especially adolescent girls lack supervision which gave them access to be sexually engaged in exchange for materialistic things and money (Chigondo, 2021).

2.3.6 Child labor

Left-behind children are at higher risk of being into child labor, which affects their maximum potential at school and their childhood development, thereby affecting their physical and mental well-being (ILO, 2020). According to Gonese (2014), left-behind children are at high risk of child labor, they are forced to work on farms, street vendors, and piece jobs. In addition, the study in Nigeria by Fayomi (2022), approximately 70,8% of left-behind children of migrant parents are involved in child labor, most children practice street vendor, agriculture and domestic work. Hence some children are victims of child labor because they are forced to do so in exchange for food and shelter from those left in their custody.

2.4 Existing strategies addressing challenges faced by left-behind children.

2.4.1 Family reunification

As migration continues to be a central aspect of global movement, the challenges faced by children with migrant parents, such as emotional distress, social isolation, educational challenges, and economic insecurity have gained increasing attention. Scholars, practitioners, and policymakers have developed various strategies to mitigate these challenges and support the welfare of these

children such as family reintegration and reunification programs. These programs aim to reunite children with their migrant parents or improve the conditions of communication between them. According to Dreby (2010), family reunification is a key strategy that has been implemented by governments and non-governmental organizations to address the emotional and psychological impacts of parental absence. Efforts include visa facilitation, special migrant status for children, and family reunification policies that reduce the time spent apart. In some cases, organizations such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM) have advocated for programs that allow children to migrate to be with their parents or for regular visits between children and their migrant parents to maintain emotional bonds.

2.4.2 Communication channels

Communication channels between migrant parents and children as another strategy being implemented to help children left by parents. Communication is essential in maintaining the emotional connection between migrant parents and their children. Several strategies have been developed to strengthen communication through technological and organizational interventions. Digital communication of mobile technology and the internet, many migrant parents and children have turned to video calls, social media, and other digital platforms to stay connected. Gonzalez et al. (2009) found that regular video calls and social media interactions can significantly reduce feelings of isolation and abandonment for children left behind. Technologies such as Skype and WhatsApp have been vital in maintaining emotional bonds through communication despite the distance between the people.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have also introduced initiatives that support migrant parents and their children in staying in touch. Programs that offer subsidized phone calls, internet access, or digital literacy courses help parents and children to maintain communication despite financial and technological barriers. Vega (2012) noted that in countries with high rates of migration, such programs have helped families cope with the emotional toll of separation by allowing for more frequent and meaningful interaction. Regular communication significantly reduces anxiety and emotional distress in children. However, the effectiveness of these programs is often contingent on the availability of resources (e.g., phones, internet access) and the parents' ability to prioritize and maintain communication. While digital communication helps, it cannot fully replace the presence and guidance of a parent.

2.4.3 Educational programs

Educational strategies have been implemented to address the challenges children of migrant parents face in school, particularly those related to academic performance, language barriers, and social integration. One of the most significant barriers faced by children with migrant parents is language proficiency. Tienda& Fuentes (2007) highlight that schools in many countries have adopted bilingual education programs and provided additional language support to help children adapt academically. These programs aim to reduce language barriers that might otherwise hinder their academic achievement and social integration. Schools have also developed social integration programs aimed at helping children from migrant families feel more included. These programs focus on building peer relationships, promoting inclusivity, and supporting children's emotional and social development.

2.4.5 Psychosocial support

In response to the emotional and psychological challenges faced by left-behind children, various social welfare and psychosocial support programs have been implemented to provide children with the necessary resources to cope with the difficulties of parental absence. The government and other non-governmental organizations have implemented psychological counseling programs for children. These programs aim to provide emotional support and help children deal with feelings of abandonment, anxiety, or depression. Berryman et al. (2014) note that psychological services tailored to the specific experiences of migrant children can be highly effective in helping them process complex emotions and adjust to their circumstances.

2.5 Gaps in literature

Studies on the effects of parental migration are mainly focused with caregivers and teachers perspectives rather than the children who are experiencing these challenges associated with the separation with parents. Left-behind children's experiences and feelings are crucial in order to understand what's hindering their welfare. Researches are limited by lack of longitudinal studies which are important to understand the long-term impacts of parental migration on the development

and well-being of left-behind children(Hernandez et al., 2012). Researches are not mainly focused on mental health and psychological impacts of parental migration on children's welfare such as anxiety and feelings of abandonment (UNICEF,2010).

Existing researches do not differentiate their findings in terms of gender and age as well as experiences according to different caregivers. The researchers also lack the evaluation on the role played by the child's surrounding environment in supporting left-behind children. According to Crush and Tevera (2010), studies lack comparative aspects such as rural verses urban effects of parental migration on children's welfare. Taking note that experiences and challenges faced by left-behind children in rural areas differs from those in urban areas. Technology is an aspect that can be a useful and important strategy that can be implemented to maintain a relationship between migrant parents and left-behind children; however there are few studies that have explored the topic (Graham &Gemi, 2020).

2.6 Chapter summary

This chapter provides a comprehensive framework that explained the impacts of parental migration on left-behind children. This chapter reviewed challenges faced by left-behind children due to migration such as social stigmatization, lack of caregiver support and psychological problems. It also focused on the effects of parental migration towards left-behind children that includes child marriages, teen pregnancies, prostitution, sexual abuse, child labor, school dropouts. Additionally the chapter also reviewed the strategies being implemented to support left-behind children as well as identifying gaps within existing strategies. The next chapter will focus mainly on research methodology which includes research design, study population, targeted population, sample size and technique, data collection ethical issues, feasibility delimitations and limitations.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.

3.0 Introduction

The chapter would focus on research methodologies used in the study. It explains how the research was done, who were the targeted population as well as the sample size and technique. The chapter would also explain the methods employed for data collection and data collection instruments. Furthermore it explores the measures undertaken to ensure reliability and validity of the study. It also explains the ethical considerations which were observed, limitations and delimitations of the study.

3.1 Research design

A research design is a blueprint that specifies the methods and procedures employed for data collection and analysis in a study (Gupta, 2011). The research utilized a descriptive research design. The researcher focused on case study as the research design. A case study can be defined as a strategy for doing a research that involves practical investigation of a particular phenomenon (Gray, 2009). The case study was done in Murewa district with an aim to come up with strategies that can be implemented to reduce challenges of parental migration. The researcher made use of the qualitative research approach. The case study helped in identifying the challenges being faced by left-behind children as well as effects associated with these challenges.

3.2 Study population

3.2.1 Study area

The research was conducted in Murewa district which is located in Mashonaland East Province of Zimbabwe. It is a predominant rural area which is approximately 80 kilometers northeast of Harare, the capital city of Zimbabwe. The district is mainly characterized by communal farming. Agriculture and horticulture are the main sources of livelihood especially maize and vegetables. Murewa district is mainly known for its cultural heritage which includes traditional practices and the presence of one of the historical cave. It is also an area that is surrounded by mountains and it experience subtropical climate with a distinct rainy season. Murewa district has a population of approximately 210,000 people with a relatively youthful demographic structure with a widespread migration of working age to urban areas and abroad leaving children in the custody of extended families, (Zimbabwe National Census, 2022).Murewa District was purposively selected as the study area due to its high prevalence of parental labor migration. It is largely rural hence making it a relevant setting for the study.

3.2.2 Target population

Target population is essential to the research study. Korb (2012) pinpoints that target population are a group of people in which the researcher draws a conclusion about the research; they are individuals who share common characteristics. According to the Zimbabwe statistics approximately 13% of children ranging from 0-17 have at least one or both biological parents who have migrated. Murewa district has approximately about 210,000 people as per recorded in the census of 2022, assuming an average of 3 children per family. Approximately 51,360 children

leave in Murewa District, therefore applying the national percentage; approximately 6,420 children, 2,500 males and 3,920 females have one or both parents who have migrated. The number of migrant parents ranges between 3000 and 6000.

The study targets children who have their parents relocated or migrated to other countries to betterment their living status or condition. This group was deliberately selected because they are directly affected by parental migration and suffering the devastating consequences of parental migration, therefore they are the most appropriate and credible source for the research. The selected key informants also possess the firsthand information and experience in associating and working with left-behind children. The targeted population aligns with the study aim of identifying realistic experience-based strategies to mitigate existing challenges.

3.3 Sample

3.3.1 Sample size

A sample consists of a subset of individuals selected from target population representing the population being studied (Coghlan&Barnnick, 2014). Sample size is the number of observations selected from a population for inclusion in statistical sample (Creswell, 2014). The sample size consists of 12 participants which are approximately 0,005% of the targeted population. The sample size constituted of 10 respondents that is children between the age of 7 to 17 both boys and girls with either one or both parents who have migrated. It also included key informants who comprised of 1 teacher, 1 social worker who are taking care of the children. Key informants were important in the study as they provide an insight about the study because they have a profound experience in working as well as day to day interactions with the respondents thus children left-behind by migrant parents.

3.3.2 Sampling technique

3.3.2.1 Purposive sampling

A sampling technique is a systematic and deliberate approach used in the selection of a representative group of people from a targeted population with an aim of collecting accurate data that reflects the characteristics of the targeted population (Kothari, 2013). A non-probability sampling is the most effective method ideal for the research study. It specializes on focusing on

detailed and context-rich insights of the experience rather than generalized findings from a large. Purposive sampling enables the researcher to focus on comprehensive detailed information including experiences of children from different age groups and caregiving arrangements which enhances the depth of data collected. The method ensured reduced sampling bias and increases the precision of the study. It was also appropriate in the selection of key informants as it enables deliberate selection of individuals who possess expert knowledge about left-behind children.

3.4 Data collection.

Data collection constitutes of a systematic and well-structured process of gathering and measuring data from different sources in order to answer the research questions and analyze the study outcomes (Creswell, 2014). On data collection the researcher was guided by certain characteristics which guided on which data to collect, how to effectively collect the relevant data and where to collect the data.

3.4.1 Data collection techniques

Data collection techniques refer to primary data collection methods. According to Canals (2017), data collection methods are tools used to gather information and data which is relevant to generate solutions to the problem being investigated. Data collection techniques must be able to extract information from the participants as well as answering the research questions and meeting the study objectives.

3.4.1.1 In-depth interviews

 The research consisted of children between the age of 12 and 17, both enrolled at school and school dropouts. The study focused on 12 participants comprising of respondents and key informants (social worker and teacher). The researcher made use of in-depth interviews with selected respondents, which is a tool characterized with thorough exploration and probing as pinpointed by Coghlan and Brannick, (2014). The interviews ranged from 20 to 30 minutes per person. The technique enhanced attentive listening to the responses of participants, experiences and emotions which paved way for a deeper understanding and imagination of their perspectives. Unstructured interviews are a qualitative data collection method that allows researchers to engage in open-ended conversations with participants to explore their perspectives, experiences, and

insights regarding the research topic (Smith, 2015). The researcher employed unstructured interviews which offered flexibility and spontaneity, allowing for in-depth exploration of participants' responses and the emergence of new themes and ideas during the interview process.

3.4.1.2 Key informant interviews

Key informant interviews were employed during the research; they consisted of one on one dialogue with individuals. According to Kumar (1989), key informant interview is a technique used to gather high quality qualitative data from individuals with specific knowledge about the pressing issue being researched. It allowed the researcher to gather information on the contextual data on the experiences of left-behind children. In addition key informant interviews allowed the researcher to obtain firsthand information from people with a great and longtime knowledgebase about children with migrant parents. Therefore, the researcher managed to interview social development officers and teachers for in-depth exploration. It facilitated rapport-building which enhanced answer elaboration.

3.4.2 Data collection tools

3.4.2.1 In-depth interview guide

The researcher employed in-depth interview guide for a comprehensive data collection. The in-depth interview guide consisted of both open and closed ended questions which made it easier to explore on participant's lived experiences and feelings. In-depth interview guide helps to probe with clients and ideal when collecting data on sensitive topics.

3.4.2.2 Key informant interview guide

The researcher interviewed 2 key informants using the key informant interview guide which constituted of open-end questions and close-end questions to gather relevant data from the teachers and social workers in Murewa District. The interviews ranged from 10 to 15 minutes. The key informant interview guide consisted of questions that allowed key-informants to give detailed explanations on their insight about the challenges being faced by left-behind children and strategies that can be implemented to mitigate these challenges.

3.4.3 Data collection procedures

The researcher appealed for permission to conduct an academic research from the ministry of Public Labor and Social Development at the head office in Harare. The researcher was granted the permission to undergo the study.

3.5 Findings

3.5.1 Presentation and analysis of findings

The collected data was presented in themes translated to English as well as direct quotation from the participants. The researcher also made use of narrative format in the presentation of data. The researcher presented the demographic data in form of a table which made it easy to analyze. The researcher analyzed the data by using the thematic content analysis method. She familiarized herself with the data by rereading and listening to the audios recorded during the interviews which enhanced her understanding on the participant's responses. The researcher also codes the important information or data from the interviews.

3.6 Ethical issues

It is important to always uphold ethical conducts during a research study. They are important in safeguarding or protecting both the researcher and participants from misconceptions and potential harm. The researcher adhered to the following ethical principles:

3.6.1 Informed Consent

The participants were given the honor to agree in order to participate in the research project. The researcher shared or provided a comprehensive overview of the research procedures to both the respondents and key informants. The participants were also assured that they were not being forced to participate and they were free to withdraw from participating whenever they want. The process includes explaining the whole procedure, the importance of their responses, the outcomes, the benefits and potential risks involved. The researcher explained the whole procedure using the vernacular language for better understanding. During the research, the researcher asked for permission from the caregivers or guardians of the children who participated in the gathering of data. She also had an opportunity to explain what the purpose of the research. The aspect of

informed consent involves individual explicit agreement to participate in a research after being informed about the study's potential risks and benefits (Sandu,2021).

3.6.2 Voluntary Participation

The participants who took part in the research project volunteered to be part of the study. The researcher did not use force, manipulation or deceit for the participants to cooperate or be part of the study. The researcher conducted the whole research with those participants who volunteered to be part of the study.

3.6.3 Confidentiality and Anonymity

Confidentiality is one of the most crucial parts when engaging with individuals as a social worker, the researcher upholds the principle of confidentiality by assuring all participants that their identities were not going to be exposed. Confidentiality minimized potential risks towards the participants. The researcher conducted one on one individual interview so as to foster confidentiality throughout the research. Confidentiality plays an important role in protecting sensitive information from unauthorized access, safeguarding privacy, trust and security at both professional and personal level (Raines and Cox, 2021). The researcher did not use the real identities of the people who participated in the data collection. Anonymity gave the participants confidence and built trust which enabled the participants to respond freely to the research questions.

3.7 Feasibility

Several factors contributed towards the execution and success of the study on the effects of parental migration on the children's welfare. The researcher obtained a research letter from the university which was very important in obtaining permission to conduct the research from the school and the community at large. The recommendation letter was used to formally seek permission from the school authorities and local community leaders which was important in gaining access to the participants. School authorities and community leaders were supportive and helped in identifying participants with the required characteristics. Although the research was self-funded, the researcher managed the cost as she is a resident in Murewa district, thus the cost were manageable, she also used local transport to travel around which was affordable.

3.8 Delimitations

The research was conducted in Murewa, thus being limited to Murewa District only. The researcher chose the area as it had high prevalence of parental migration which increased the number of left-behind children. It had accessible schools and community members who were willing to participate. However the research is only limited within Murewa district and the findings may not represent the experiences of left-behind children in other regions of Zimbabwe. The research focused on children ranging from the age of 7 to 17 with at least one or both parents who have migrated. The study was done using qualitative methods, thus interviews and focus groups thereby limiting the ability to generalize data across broader population. The time frame of the research was limited and it hindered the ability to observe long-term behavior or emotional changes in the children.

3.9 Limitations

The research involved a small number of participants because of lack of enough resources and limited time, which limited the generalization of the collected data. The researcher made some efforts to select participants from diverse backgrounds different location and different characteristics; this improved the quality of data collected. Most of the participants failed to understand the meaning of questions being asked, for better data collection the research interpreted and used the vernacular language to deal with language barrier. The presence of key informants during the interviews hindered the respondents from providing accurate data. The researcher addressed the limitation by conducting interviews individually which ensured confidentiality and accurate data.

3.10 Chapter Summary

The chapter explored the research's methodology used by the researcher during data collection. The researcher utilized a qualitative research approach for data collection and the data collection tools employed included in-depth interviews, key informant interviews and focus discussions. The researcher also used the purposive sampling in identifying and selecting participants. Additionally,

the chapter also discussed ethical issues that were observed during the course of the research project.

CHAPTER 4: DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.0 Introduction

The chapter is characterized with research presentation and analysis of the study findings on the strategies addressing challenges faced by left-behind children due to parental migration which is a case study of Murewa district. The research findings mainly focused on addressing the research objectives, thus identifying challenges being faced by left-behind children, the effects of the challenges and effectiveness of existing strategies addressing the challenges. The chapter will explore the demographic profile of the participants, discussion of the findings and conclusion.

4.1 Demographic profile of respondents

The research sample comprised of 12 participants with different characteristics from different backgrounds but sharing a common aspect of parental migration. It also focused on both gender

so as to have deeper understanding according to gender and age as well as parental migration status. The bellow demographic table shows the biographic details of study respondents.

Table 4.1: Participant distribution table

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS	AGE	MIGRATION STATUS	LEVEL OF EDUCATION
1	10	Both	Primary level
2	11-13	One parent	primary
1	16	both	Ordinary level
1	17	One parent	Advanced level
5	15-17	both	Dropped out of school

Source: researcher

Table 4.1 indicating demographic characteristics of left-behind children who contributed in the data collection procedure. It shows children from the age of 10 to 17 who are victims of parental migration and are facing the devastating consequences of parental absence. It also consists of social workers and teachers from Murewa District who were interviewed. Their voluntary participation enriched the researcher with comprehensive information for the study.

Table 4.1.2 Demographic characteristics for key participants

Age	gender	occupation	Years of experience
35	female	*Social worker*	*10*
55	male	*teacher*	*25*

Source: researcher

Table 4.1.2 indicating demographic characteristics of key informants that played a part in coming up with comprehensive strategies and an insight on challenges faced by left-behind children. It consists of 2 key informants, 1 female social worker and one male teacher with more than 10years of experience.

4.2 Presentation and analysis

The research had 12 participants who took part in the data collection. The study comprised of 12respondents both boys and girls between the age of 7 to 17 with one or both migrant parents. It also consisted of 2 key informants who are familiar in working with left-behind children, thus teachers and social workers. All the 10 children confessed or explained that it is very painful to be away from their parents because they tend to miss them. The children who are still going to school outlined that their parents delay to pay fees. The delay of fees payment affects their academic life. Majority of the children claims to perform house chores before going to school, most of the left-behind children are left in the custody of their grandparents who are above the age of 60. During the interview, the majority of the children especially those between the ages of 10 to 12 claim to access basic needs such as food, shelter, health services and education.

During the interviews, 2 children dropped out of school as a result of none- payment of fees and most of their parents migrated to South Africa. One child dropped because of pregnancy, 1 was married off by her guardians and 3 dropped because of responsibilities. There were 5 children out of school and 5 children still at school.

4.3 Challenges of parental migration

Parental migration is associated with a lot of challenges which affect the left-behind children's welfare. These challenges include emotional and psychological traumas, disruption of education and poor academic performance, poor caregiving and neglect as well as social stigma and isolation.

4.3.1 Psychological traumas

The research findings indicate that emotional stress has been a challenge faced by left-behind children especially those who are still at school. The findings clearly show signs of psychological and emotional distress through feeling of abandonment and loneliness, anxiety and behavioral change.

Another respondent said:

"My parents relocated to South Africa and I was left in the custody of my grandparents at the age of 11months. My parents moved from South Africa to Australia and I have never went there and they have not visited me for the past five years and know I feel like I'm not their child because they do not care about me, I miss them so much and they keep on promising me that they are going to visit. Sometimes I can just start crying and feel so lonely, I wish if my parents could just come and visit or even make arrangements so that I can live with them in Australia. (female respondent 9 years).

Key informant stated that

"Left-behind children often suffer from parental separation and it affects their social life as they will be avoiding being in groups. These children often get angry and irritated easily and have developed anger issues. As their teacher I have noticed that most of the children who have migrant parents are over clingy, whereby they always want to be around you and seeking for love and attention. The lower grades are the most affected, you can actually tell that a child is feeling abandoned and lonely and they do not know how to copy in these situations. I have been a teacher for ten years and I have taught children from grade three to seven. I can say these children from grade five and below are the most that shows signs of abandonment. I once was asked by a student if her mom cares about her. In events such as consultation and end of term top ten you can notice that a child is not happy and admires other children with their parents." (teacher).

The above responses from the participants confirm that left-behind children suffer from emotional and psychological traumas which hinder their well-being. One can note that these traumas contribute to change of behavior and low self-esteem thereby affecting the children's confidence. Parental absence increases the sense of neglect and abandonment among left-behind children and the feeling can be increased when there is no good communication between migrant parents and their left-behind children. The research findings are similar to UNICEF,(2017)which states that long term separation from parents increases the risk of psychological disorders including depression and anxiety. These children are more likely to experience loneliness and feel abandoned which further on leads to maladjustment and behavioral problems. The findings are further supported by Kabiru et al. (2012), parental migration increases the level of sadness, emotional stress and anxiety among left-behind children particularly where there is no communication.

4.3.2 Disruption of education

One of the most mentioned challenge during interviews was the disruption of education and poor academic performance among left-behind children. This aspect was discussed by both key informants and respondents, with the same goal proving that parental migration contributes to a challenge that affects the education of left-behind children.

First respondent:

"I was staying with my parents in Gweru and I was doing my grade 5, so my parents decided to migrate to South Africa. My dad was the first to migrate and I was living with my mom, after seven months my mother followed and I was left in the custody of my grandmother who is aged 70. Unfortunately I transferred from where I was learning because my grandmother lives here in Murewa. I was enrolled in a grade lower than the one from my previous school. Ever since my parents migrated my academic performance has been poor because I'm unable to concentrate I will be think of my parents and my grandmother is old she cannot assist me with my homework. I'm afraid of attending school because most of the time I would have unfinished homework and I'm afraid of being beaten by my teacher. Every day I have to travel for about 15 kilometers to school which is something I was not used to when my parents were around."(Female respondent 7years)

Another respondent:

"Since my mother relocated to America life has changed totally for me and my siblings. After my father passed on who was the breadwinner of the family, my mother decided to relocate to enhance our living standards. We were left with my grandmother who is around 55 years; my grandmother is old but can still manage with some of the house chores. As the older child every day I wake up at around 4am so that can prepare for school. I have to make sure that all my 3 siblings are ready for school before me. During rainy season I have to go to the fields before going to school, sometimes I skip school because I will be tired and most of the times I will be late. I fail to concentrate because I will be tired and exhausted; some of my teachers assume that I'm being disrespectful. I used to perform well from my primary level throughout to secondary level. I was not a brilliant student but rather an average student because I managed to pass all my seven subjects. Since my mother relocated my performance at school has changed and it's affecting me.

She makes sure that our fees are paid in time, we have all the necessities but because of my daily routine all the efforts are in vain."(Male respondent 16years)

Another key informant mentioned:

"In my teaching experience, I have discovered that most of the children who pay less attention in class most of them approximately 80% have either one or both migrant parents. Most of these children came late at school or they are already exhausted. Their school attendance is very poor; they do not participate at all in class about 20% of these children end up dropping out of school."(teacher)

Analyzing the findings or responses of participants, parental migration affects the academics of left-behind children. Either they drop out of school or their performance change from better to worse. Their challenge differs from who they have been left in custody of as well as their age. The performance of these children is affected because they lack guidance and considering that some are left in the custody of elderly people who are computer illiteracy or not digitalized. The nowadays educational system has improved and upgrade hence children must be assisted. Logically how can a child who wakes up very early perform well or even concentrate during school hours whilst tired and they also have to travel long distance before reaching school, thus affecting their performance at school. Left-behind children face academic issues due to neglect or failure of school fees payment which results in them being sent back home thereby missing school and is behind academically.

Similarly Chinyoka (2014), argued that children from rural areas with migrant parents has the highest percentage of school drop outs especially girls and parental migration leads to poor academic performance due to lack of support and emotional distress. Although parents sent remittance they do not constantly result in better academic performance, lack of parental motivation and involvement remain a barrier towards successful education outcomes for left-behind children, (Chimhowu et al. 2010).

4.3.3 Poor caregiving

Another challenge that is being faced by left-behind children is poor caregiving from their guardians especially those in the rural areas. Respondents mentioned that they go to school hungry

and sometimes without doing their homework. Key informant mentioned that children's hygiene is very poor and most of them are always sick as a result of caregivers who do not take good care of them.

Respondent mentioned:

"I stay with my aunt, my mother is in Mozambique. I am a primary school student at Kambarami. I travel every day from home to school sometimes my aunt gives me bus fee and someday I have to walk to and from school. My aunt's children learn at Murewa primary which is some few meters away from home. My school is very far away from home so I wake up very early to prepare for myself before going to school. My aunt hates a person who will wakes up asking for food to eat or carry to school, so here and there I might eat once or twice a day. I usually skip school when I have not done my homework because my teacher will punish me, my aunt always makes excuses that she is busy and no one will assist me with my homework. My aunt usually says that I'm a lazy child if I tell her that I'm not feeling well. Sometimes I do attend school whilst not feeling well. My mother makes sure that she sends money every month for her to purchase things that I need but she uses the money for her business. Last holiday my mother sends money for my clothes but she never purchased any clothes for me and it is very painful I no longer want to stay with her anymore."(10 year old male participant)

Key informant mentioned:

"I have noticed that approximately 60% of the children I teach have migrant parents across boarders and overseas. Most of them were left in the care of grandparents above the age of 60. At that age most elderly people are battling different diseases and some suffer from mental illness such as dementia. Majority of my students show signs of poor guidance and care, they come to school untied with dirty uniforms, hungry and exhausted. This clearly shows that their guardians are not taking proper care of them. If you have a conversation with them they complain about the unavailability of washing powder or their grandparents not feeling well. I have discovered that migrant parents are not supporting caregivers and they are either old enough to be going to work or the available resources are scarce." (teacher).

The above responses indicate that poor caregiving is a challenge being faced by left-behind children especially those at primary level. Caregivers are failing to meet basic needs of left-behind

children by failure to provide food, proper hygiene, clothing and access to health services. Left-behind children play a role in taking care of their elderly guardians. Poor caregiving results in lack of protection and emotional support thereby increasing vulnerability of children and exploitation. Similarly, according to a study by Ganga and Chinyoka (2010), caregivers often lack physical and emotional capacity to meet the demands and developmental needs of children left in their custody.

4.4 Effects of parental migration

Effects of parental migration are consequences of challenges faced by left-behind children with either one or both parents across the borders. During the interviews, participants highlighted both positive and negative effects of parental migration. These effects include child labor, sexual abuse, early marriages, teen pregnancy, alcohol and substance abuse, school drop outs among others.

4.4.1 Child labor

During the interviews with the participants, child labor was mentioned as one of the negative consequence affecting left-behind children. The respondents shared their experiences which include child labor. They mentioned that before attending school they have to perform household chores, during the holidays they claim to work in the streets and doing piece jobs.

Respondent 1

"Since my parents went to Mozambique, I started living with my aunt here in Murewa. My aunt is a divorcee and she has 3 children and I am the older one. During school days I wake up early so that I can prepare and do house chores before going to school. Normally, I wake up go and fetch water that will be used during the day, I also make sure that either I clean the whole house expert her bedroom or I wash dishes before leaving the house to school. Sometimes when I came back early from school I prepare dinner and wash dishes that my aunt had used during the day. Some of the days I do my chores in the evening before going to sleep so that I won't be late to school and minimize the pressure for the next day. I once complained to my aunt because the work was too much for me and in her response she was training me as a girl child I must not be lazy."

Respondent 2

"I stay with my grandmother who is old and cannot perform some of the required task. Every day I help my grandmother with household chores and we are only 2 so if I do not perform these tasks no one else will do it. Mostly during the holidays I work in other peoples fields either harvesting or weeding the fields so as to have money and take care of my grandmother. Sometimes I get paid with money or grain. Since my mother travelled, she does not send any money so I have to work for us to earn a living. During the weekends, I sell vegetables and fruits depending with the season. I do sell these door to door in the nearby township." (male participant)

Key informant:

"I am a grade 7 teacher, in all my years of teaching experience I have discovered that majority of the left-behind children are left in custody of their grandparents and they are old enough that they are unable to perform all the house chores without seeking for help. Most of the children they have to assist their guardians with house chores. Apart from performing house chores before coming to school some even skip class, their attendance is very poor and it affects them academically. Most of these children are always late to school and you can notice that they are tired and if you ask them they are late their responds are always similar; I was helping my grandmother to do one or two tasks. As a resident in Murewa I have encountered 3 of my students selling "mazhanje, nzimbe ne tsubvu" during the holidays. If you ask them why they are working they will tell you that they need money to buy new clothes and food." (Teacher)

From the above responses from participants, child labor seems to be a common negative aspect of parental migration affecting left-behind children. The aspect of child labor affects their well-being and academic performance due to excessive work such as working in the fields and performing all domestic chores. Due to child labor, children have dropped out of school to work in the streets selling. The ILO (2020) pinpoints that left-behind children due to parental migration are more vulnerable to child labor which deprives their childhood and potential affecting their physical and mental growth.

4.4.2 Child marriage.

Another negative effect of parental migration towards left-behind children which was mentioned during the research is child marriage. Child marriage is increasing especially among the left-behind children and is influenced by different aspects such as child labor, lack of fees and beliefs.

Respondent 1:

I got married at the age of fifteen that was last year and I'm turning sixteen this year November. When I was staying with my parents everything seemed fine and I had no absolute plan of being someone's wife at an early age. The problem started when my parents decided to relocate to South Africa to look for jobs. They left me in the custody of my grandmother ' amai vababa'. My grandmother affiliates at white garment church 'Johani Marange'. I started going with her to church after she had made it clear that once am staying with her I have to attend the same church as her. One of the men at the church who is now my husband asked for my hand in marriage from my grandmother and she agreed. My grandmother used to say it's a worst of money to educate a girl child. My marriage took place without my parent's opinion and they were not aware of the whole situation till they visited back from South Africa but it was already late I was already someone's wife and pregnant. (female participant)

Respondent 2:

"My mother migrated to Botswana when I was doing my grade seven and I started staying with my aunt. My parents divorced when I was two years old so I was living with my mother alone and I have no siblings. My aunt was nice to me and took good care of me before her first child was impregnated. After that incident with her first child everything changed, she started ill-treating me. I started eating once per day that is in the evening, every day before attending school I was supposed to perform the entire house chore. The situation escalated daily till I was at secondary, I started dating when I was in form 2. The took care of me providing me with food as well as taking me to school (he was a driver). I compared the situation at home and I decided to elope because it was better to be married than living with my wicked aunt. The situation I was facing forced me to be married and starting a new life." (15 year female participant)

Key informant:

"I have attended a lot of case of child marriage here in Murewa. Since I was transferred here in Murewa as a child protection officer, I have noticed that child marriage cases seem to increase daily. There will be no passing day without confronted with a child marriage from the community. Most of the cases came from the rural parts of Murewa. One of the cases I attended to recently is of a child who was married off by her grandmother, during the assessment I discovered that the

main reason that she married off her granddaughter was just because her father was failing to send remittances." (Male social worker)

The research findings clearly highlights that child marriage among left-behind children is influenced by different aspects depending on the circumstances being faced by the children. These factors vary from child to child. Issues such as child labor, emotional abuse and cultural or religious beliefs have a great impact on child marriages. Most of the respondents opted for marriage because they felt that it was a good idea to get rid of their problems. Most of the children that are involved in child marriage are between the age of 14 and 17. Lack parental supervision and exposure is also another element that is associated with early marriages.

Comparable to a study by Huiman (2018), left-behind children of parental migrating specifically girls are more likely to be married off or experience child marriages due to abuse and economic hardships. Lack of parental protection and supervision increases the vulnerability of a girl child towards child marriage.

4.4.4 Drug and substance use

Drug and substance use has also been mentioned as one of the negative effects of challenges faced by left-behind children. It was mentioned that majority of male children are involved in drug and substance use. Some of the interviewed male participants agreed to have been involved in drug and substance use at an early stage.

Respondent 1:

"I used to live with my parents before my mother migrated to South Africa. Since then, I was left in care of my father. My mother went abroad to look for a job that will help us as a family to have a better lifestyle. A year later, my father followed and I was left with my uncle and that is when the whole situation changed. My parents send money every month but unfortunately, my uncle uses the money to take care of his needs. He does not buy food or clothes for me. I decided to drop out of school and work to take of myself. I got a job in nearby farms, and the work there was too much. The farm owner paid individuals according to the task you have to perform daily. Due to pressure and the need to be paid well, I stated taking drugs. My fellow colleagues introduced me to the use of "mbanje", they claimed that it boost your energy you and work at a faster speed. Now I am

addicted to marijuana, crystal meth (mutoriro) and 'kambwa', during our off days we celebrate by drinking and smoking." (male participant 16years)

Respondent 2:

"My parents are in Canada, it's been 3 years since they relocated to Canada. My siblings and I were left in the custody of a housemaid. I started drinking beer two years after my parents migrated and I was doing form 3 by then. I started drinking occasionally till now I drink and smoke almost daily. If I don't smoke, I will not be able to concentrate in class and sometimes I skip school to go and party with my friends. My drug and substance use was because of pressure from my friends and I also wanted to be part of them, most of the time I was feeling pressured and lonely."

Key informant:

"In terms of drug and substance use most teenagers especially boys are actively participants. I once had a case of a child who was involved in delinquent behavior. The child was16 years old, he was staying with his grandparents. When I was conducting the case management process, I discovered that this boy' parents were out of the country and they did sent a lot of money for him, he was spoiled. His grandparents were unable to control and confront him till his behavior was out of proportion. He was also sent out of school because of his behavior he set the deputy headmaster's office on fire. The use of drugs affected his well-being. The use of drugs is also affecting the girl child. In this scenario this female child was involved in drugs because she dropped out of school due to none payment of fees, she ends up being a sex worker so as to earn a living that was how she started consuming drugs and smoking"

Drugs and substance use is more common among children with migrant parents. These children are more vulnerable to drug and substance use because most of them lack parental control, emotional stress and depression as well as peer influence. Most of these left-behind teenagers are now drug addicts and are suffering from its devastating consequences. The use of drugs affects their health, education and social interactions with others and they often use it as a coping mechanism to get rid of stress. According to Gregory (2023), parental migration increase emotional distress due to family separation or family dysfunctional associated with lack proper

supervision and guidance that creates an environment conducive for experiments and drug and substance use.

4.4.5 Prostitution

The research findings highlighted prostitution as another negative effect of parental migration. During data collection some of the girls especially in secondary school admitted to have been involved with different men in exchange with money and other materialistic things.

First respondent:

"I started staying with my aunt here in Murewa after my mother migrated to Malawi. I'm currently doing my form 5 at Kambarami high. After my mum relocated she anticipated to be employed as soon as she moves to Malawi, however things did not go as she had imagined and planned. She was unable to send money back home for some time and my aunt was taking care of me. My aunt paid my fees for 2 terms without complaining, until she told that it's high time I start to fend for myself because she was tired of taking care of me that time everything changed, I even asked where I was supposed to get a job whilst I'm a student. At that time my aunt was a street vendor at Murewa growth point but she was also a sex worker. She introduced me to her line of business as well as linking me up with different man. At first I was against it but I had no choice than to cooperate so that I can be able to afford all the things I need. That was how I involved in being a sex worker. It's not something I'm proud of and if there is another way I can take care of myself I will stop it because that's not what I dreamt of. The circumstances lead me to be in this state, my mother was unable to provide for me and at school a lot of things were needed including books and fees so I had no choice other than to join my aunt."(female participant)

Key informant

"As a 5 year experienced social worker, I have observed a serious and devastating trend among left-behind children especially girls. Most of left-behind female children especially adolescents are ending up involved in prostitution, some of them it's not by choice but being influenced by circumstances. Parents leave their children in the custody of relatives, maids or friends. Some of these people they are either struggling to provide for their families or they are not willing to provide for these children and support them emotionally and materially. I once had a case of a 15

year old girl whose parents had relocated to Namibia and she was left with her grandmother who could barely afford a daily meal. The girl resolved the problem by accepting grocery from a businessman in their township in exchange with sex. The girl highlighted that she was in need of sanitary pads, food and clothes and that was the only way she found some help." (social worker)

Children are being left in custody of relatives and friends who are unable to provide and protect them. Most of the children are being deprived of basic needs only because their migrant parents are failing to send money back home. Some children are into prostitution because they are lacking support and advice from their guardians, whilst some into prostitution as a result of bad circumstances. Parents should be mindful of who they give custody of their children as well as communicating regularly to avoid such trends. Similarly, left-behind children are more vulnerable to sexual engagement and moral decay at a young age especially adolescent girls, they lack supervision thereby granting them access to be sexually engaged in exchange of materialistic things an money (Chigondo, 2021). It is notable that left-behind children who are involved in prostitution lack proper parental care and supervision, hence lack of financial support and increased responsibilities increase their vulnerability of making bad decisions.

4.4.6 Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse is another common negative effect of parental migration which is being faced by left-behind children. Left-behind children are being left in the custody of male relatives who takes advantage of the children and abuse them. It is an aspect commonly experienced by girls but however some boys are also victims of sexual abuse.

Male respondent mentioned that:

"Before my parents migrated we were staying here in Murewa, the situation at home was very bad and it seemed as if it was changing daily, so my parents decided to move from Zimbabwe to UK. We were staying as a family and we had a maid whom we were left with by my parents. Our maid was very nice and my parents trusted her to the extent of leaving us with her. Currently I'm staying with our maid and my two male siblings. After 2 years our maid's behavior towards me changed absolutely, she started admiring me and passing compliments which were inappropriate for me. One day during the holiday, she invited me to watch a movie with her and it contained explicit content, she asked me to cooperate and do as per the movie. Since that faithful day I have been

sleeping with our maid at first I didn't enjoy it but now I'm used to it and I have never shared it with my parents. She also threatened to maltreat us if I tell anyone." (17 year male participant)

Female respondent stated that:

"I am a day scholar student at Chemapango Secondary. Before my mother relocated to Botswana, we were staying with my grandmother and my uncle. My mother decided to relocate so that she can earn more money for us to have a better life. I was left in custody of my grandmother and my uncle. My uncle was a drunkard, so most of the times he could come home late and drunk. My uncle raped me when I was 14 and threatened me not to tell my grandmother, but rather I gathered the courage and told her about the whole incident. My grandmother also threatened me not tell anyone about the incident."

Key informant mentioned:

"I have observed that the majority of left-behind children are facing devastating consequences of parental migration. Most of these children are victims of sexual abuse and the majorities are afraid to report their abusers. Some children are cautioned not to report because they are being abused by their relatives. This is done to maintain family relations but in the process, the children suffer in silence. I once attended to a case of child marriage and in the process I discovered that the child decided to get married so as to get rid of the abuse she was tolerating from his uncle. Surprisingly the children are also being abused by their own fathers. It is of great importance for migrant parents to live their children in the custody of trusted people as well as communicating with their children regularly. Sexual abuse is more common to girls than boys. Maybe 1% of left-behind boys experience sexual abuse but they do not share or report because of certain beliefs and stereotypes".(social worker).

The above findings demonstrate that some left-behind children by migrant parents are victims and survivors of sexual abuse. These children lack protection are being exploited by those people whom they are trusting for protection. Children who are being abused have normalized being victims of abuse because they cannot seek for help, they are afraid of facing consequences of their actions and be neglected. The majority of children who are being abused especially in rural areas, they are being sexually harassed by immediate and close relatives including their fathers and brothers. These findings are similar to the findings by Mkwananzi and Maposa, (2021), girls are

more affected by sexual abuse from their relatives whom are given custody of left-behind children and they are unable to seek for help or justice because of threats and manipulation from their abusers.

4.5 Existing strategies addressing challenges faced by left-behind children due to migration.

Migration has impacted the lives of left-behind children differently with positive and negative effects. It is a phenomenon which keeps on rising because of the economic hardships especially in Zimbabwe. After a thorough analysis on the challenges being faced by left-behind children and the effects of these challenges, some strategies were implemented to reduce and address these trending challenges.

4.5.1 Family reunification

Family reunification was highlighted as one of the strategies or interventions that can be implemented to address challenges being faced such as neglect. Most of the participants during the research project mentioned the importance of reunifying with their parents or even visitation from time to time.

Participant 1:

"Since my parents relocated to South Africa they have never visited and it's now close to 5 years. I miss my parents so much and I wish if they can just visit me or even organize for me to be with them. Since they have relocated I feel like they no longer love me or care for me. My aunt does not help me with my homework and my performance at school is deteriorating, I wish to go and stay with my mother because she used to help me with my school work and everything was fine."

Key informant mentioned that:

"Prolonged separation from parents affects the mental state of left-behind children. Their concentration at school is very poor as a result of emotional stress. Parents should consider relocating with their children instead of leaving relatives in custody of their children. Living as a family reduces cases of sexual abuse, child headed families, drug and substance abuse because children will be under parental supervision which is currently lacking from them. The government

should also consider implementing policies that help parents to migrate with their children to the host country".

The above information shows that family reunification is an intervention that addresses challenges being faced by left-behind children. Parental migration is associated with psychological and emotional challenges affecting left-behind children. Family reunification is a critique strategy that promotes emotional justice and child protection. These findings are further supported by Madziva and Chinouya (2022), migration is associated with emotional disconnection on migrant parents while children experience abandonment, anger and psychological traumas. Further argues that family reunification must be prioritized by countries, the host and native country to implement flexible visa policies and programs that allows parents to live together with their children.

Additionally, UNICEF (2021), supports family reunification; family separation due to parental migration exposes left-behind children to numerous risks including all forms of abuse, poor academic performance and emotional traumas. It emphasizes on reunification through flexible documentation process. Jordan & Graham (2020), emphasizes that family reunification assures children of sense of security and belonging. Migration policies should also prioritize best interest of children as family unity is essential towards children's emotional and academic success.

4.5.2 Community sensitization and Peer engagement Programs

Left-behind children often struggle to deal or copy with social stigmatization, isolation and behavioral changes. Social stigmatization is a phenomenon that makes these children feel abandoned and neglected. Some children mentioned that they are often made a mockery by their peers and other community members.

Respondent mentioned

"My mother died when I was 5years old and my father was taking care of me. After 2 years since my mother passed on, my father decided to relocate to South Africa looking for a well-paying job that can carter of our needs. My father left me in the custody of my grandmother here in Murewa. First 2 years after the migration he used to send some money for our needs, the problem started when he stopped sending us money. My grandmother and I are suffering; we barely afford to provide for ourselves. My friends at school always make fun of my uniform and clothes. They even

gave me a nickname Simba which is the name of a mentally unstable person in our community. I spend most of my time alone and I do not have friends because everyone in my class laughs at me." (male participant).

Key informant said:

In my experience working with left-behind children I have noticed that most of these children lack self-esteem and confidence. Those children with migrant parents that do not cater for their needs by sending money they show signs of withdrawn and they avoid associating with others. Most of these students are affected by what people say about them; it is common for school children to give other students nicknames. It actually increases psychological traumas and isolation. I have made it more of a habit to make sure that other children avoid calling or isolating themselves from left-behind children. I also teach them how stigmatization affects the well-being of others. (primary teacher).

The above findings chows that left-behind children are often stigmatized through abandonment and neglect; it results in low self-esteem. Social workers must work together with teachers and raise awareness about the impacts of parental migration on left-behind children. Sensitization of community members and school children helps to address challenges of stigmatization and isolation. According to UNICEF (2018), the establishment of Child Protection Committees in rural areas helped in reducing social stigmatization and enhanced reintegration of vulnerable children. Bhangaye (2016) highlighted that school-based programs reduce bullying and help children to socialize through therapy and community based programs. Peer engagement and education promotes behavioral stability and inclusion among left-behind children thereby addressing a challenge of social stigmatization being faced by left-behind children.

4.5.3 Strengthening Caregiving support system.

Migration cannot be prevented because of poverty being faced by a lot of Zimbabwe. It is a phenomenon practiced by both people with academic qualifications and those in informal industries. Key informant mentioned the importance of supporting people who are given the custody of children by migrant parents.

Key informant mentioned that:

"Most of parents are migrating because of the economic hardship in Zimbabwe; there is no point in preventing them to relocate. 90% of left-behind children are left in the custody of their grandparents in rural areas; the majorities are physically unstable, they lack resources, knowledge and emotional capacity to effectively raise these children. Most of the parents don't consider the physical fitness and how they are going to help their children because caregiving goes beyond cooking and providing shelter. In my opinion caregivers must be trained on how to effectively raise left-behind children. Here in Murewa there is an organization (Caritas) which offers programs of positive parenting to address issues of abuse mostly in girls. However the program does not target caregivers of left-behind children but rather focus on helping vulnerable children. It will be wise to have such programs mainly focusing on left-behind children's caregivers." (Social development officer)

Participant 2:

"As a child headed family we would want support with public assistance and education. I dropped out of school so that I can work and provide for my siblings because since my father migrated he is failing to support us by sending money. I have been selected by Social development to be part of those people who are receiving grain; the program has helped us although I have to work to cater for other basic needs. In terms of health, I was once assisted by this department with AMTO. I wish if the department of Social development can assist me and my siblings with school fees; I want to return back to school through the BEAM program. I know that once I'm registered under BEAM, I will be able to complete my education without disturbance." (female participant,15)

The above findings clearly demonstrate that caregiver support is an important strategy that can be implemented to address challenges being faced by left-behind children. Assisting caregivers with resources reduces stress and aggression that leads in the maltreatment of left-behind children. Most caregivers ill-treat children left in their custody because their parents will be failing to assist them with financial resources to help them take care of their children. Providing assistance to child headed families also reduce the burden of taking care of other children and child labor. Chitukutuku and Mavungu, (2018) emphasized the importance of assisting caregivers because they often suffer from financial support and emotional burdens; capacity building interventions such as material support and training are important. This is further supported by a study by Mupambwa

and Makuwa (2022), engaging with caregivers helps to provide emotional support and guidance on the needs of left-behind children. Training caregivers on modern parenting, children rights and emotional care reduce the impact of parental migration on left-behind children.

4.5.4 Psychosocial support

Provision of psychosocial support was another strategy mentioned during interviews with key participants. Counseling is one of the best interventions especially for children who are victims of abuse, drug users and those suffering from depression.

Key participant:

"Working with left-behind children, I have experienced negative effects associated with prolonged separation from parents. Migration affects the left-behind children psychologically which results in behavior change as well as making drastic decision which affects their development. Unfortunately some of these children have experienced numerous forms of abuse from their caregivers including emotional abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse and depression. Signs of depression are very common among the left-behind children. Most of these children have endured a lot of pain and traumas; hence it is important to offer psychosocial support in order to provide them with care and protection. Counseling offers resilience and enables children to develop coping mechanisms. Children can learn to express their needs and emotions through therapy and group counseling. Group counseling helps these children to feel less lonely and develop a sense of belonging. Through counseling, left-behind children overcome their challenges and stand up for themselves when facing abuse and it also enhances their academic performance." (Social Worker)

Another key participant said:

"I have come across different cases of children suffering from the effects of parental migration. Most of these children have resolved their challenges by eloping, involved in drug and substance abuse as well as prostitution. They are struggling to develop coping mechanisms and adjust from the absence of their parents. Teenagers have turned to drug and substance use to relieve

themselves from stress of parental separation. It is important to offer counseling sessions for these children especially in schools. Left-behind children's rate of early marriage and drug and substance use demonstrates the need for professional intervention. Counseling assists these children by providing an environment where they can share their challenges and share ideas on how to overcome those challenges without endangering their well-being. Teachers should observe changes in children and offer early interventions through counseling to avoid devastating consequences." (teacher)

Based on the research findings, provision of psychosocial support to the left-behind children is important and is one of the most effective strategies that can be implemented to address challenges being faced by left-behind children due to migration. It helps mitigate behavioral, emotional and social challenges as well as help left-behind children to adjust to parental migration. Psychosocial interventions including school counseling programs, peer support programs are essential in promoting mental well-being and coping mechanisms of left-behind children

These findings are similar to a study by Ncube and Dube (2021), left-behind children especially in rural areas experience emotional distress, behavioral change and social withdrawal. When left-behind children are offered psychosocial support, they display better emotional regulation, improve academically as well as reduced feelings of abandonment. Psychosocial support remains a crucial strategy in addressing challenges being faced by left-behind children thereby reducing impacts such as drug and substance use, early marriages and poor academic performance. Psychosocial support especially counseling is not optional but rather an aspect of paramount importance in safeguarding the well-being of left-behind children; both formal and informal counseling helps in mitigating the impacts of parental migration (Munyati and Mufune, 2022).

4.5.5 Communication

Migration affects the bond between children and their parents; it can only be rectified through regular communication between migrant parents and left-behind children. Respondents outlined the importance of communicating with their parents.

Respondent mentioned:

"My mother relocated to Botswana in 2019, since the day she moved to Botswana we communicate almost daily. I use my aunt's cellphone to communicate with my mother. Sometimes we fail to communicate due to network problems. We use calls, whastapp and video calls for communication. She even helps me with my homework over the phone. I enjoy chatting with my mother because I'm able to tell her what I need and some of the challenges I have been facing at school. I'm grateful that my mother is out of the country and provides for me. Sometimes I even forget that my mother is so far away because I see her face daily or thrice per week." (10 year old female participant)

Key informant said:

"I have observed the importance of consistent communication between left-behind children and migrant parents. It promotes mental stability and general well-being for left-behind children. Communication between parents and their children act as reassurance for the children that they are not abandoned and their parents care so much about them. Communication actually gives hope and motivation to the left-behind children and it is important towards their performance. Through regular communication, parents are able to reprimand bad behavior and provide parental support. Some parents assume that providing financial assistance for their children is enough and underestimates the importance of maintaining emotional bond."

The findings highlight the importance of communication between migrant parents and let-behind children. Communication helps in reducing emotional stress and feelings of neglect. It helps strengthen and maintain family bond and effective caregiving. Children who always communicate with their parents show no signs of stress and depression. Some children learn hygiene tips from their parents through regular communication especially girls. However in as much as communication is important some caregivers restrict the regular use of cellphones; in rural areas network is a hindrance towards effective communication.

According to a study by Save the Children (2016), communication is a form of ongoing contact which promotes remote parenting and it's important for emotional stability. Migrant parents should communicate with their children regularly through calls, messages and video calls. Similarly, a study in South Africa by Van der Heijden et al. (2019), recommend the effective use of digital

platforms to improve parent-child communication, emphasizing it as a low cost psychological intervention; communication mitigates feelings of abandonment in left-behind children.

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

The chapter presents a summary, conclusions and recommendations from the research findings. It will draw conclusions based on the data obtained in chapter 4 and offer recommendations that will help in addressing the challenges being faced by left-behind children in Murewa. The chapter also offers a comprehensive conclusion of the research.

5.1 Summary

The research explored on the challenges being faced by left-behind children due to parental migration, effects associated with the challenges and strategies addressing these challenges. The research was motivated by the increasing trend of labor parental migration which increases the vulnerability of left-behind children through emotional neglect, disruption of education, social instability among others. The research was a case study of Murewa District which is an area experiencing high rates of parental migration. The research adopted a qualitative case study approach which employed in-depth interviews and key informant interviews to collect relevant data from 20 participants thus the respondents (children left-behind) and key informant (teacher and social worker). In-depth and key informant interview allowed an exploration on lived experiences of children affected by parental migration. The research adopted the ecological theory to understand the impacts of the environment on the well-being of left-behind children.

5.1.1 Challenges faced by left-behind children

The research reviewed the profound and devastating negative effects of parental migration on left-behind children in Murewa. According to the collected research findings, children left-behind by migrant parents often experience severe psychological, emotional, economic, educational

challenges especially those from rural areas. Most of the children reported feelings of loneliness, abandonment, sadness and neglect since their parents migrated. On the other hand key informants shared an insight on left-behind children's behavioral change such as withdrawal, aggression and lack of concentration which is as a result of emotional void from parental absents.

The emotional void was increased by irregular communication between left-behind children and their migrant parents. Children struggle to perform well academically due to emotional stress and lack of motivation and support from their caregivers. Some encounter economic hardships due to irregular and insufficient remittances leading to unmet basic needs thereby increasing the void. Additionally poor parenting by guardians due to lack of resources, training, health status and physical fitness increased abuse, neglect and unmet psychosocial needs therefore increasing the vulnerability of left-behind children.

5.1.2 Effects of parental migration.

According to the research findings, parental migration has led to severe negative effects rather than positive effects on the welfare of left-behind children. Due to the parental absence, some children lack supervision and protection which increases their vulnerability to sexual abuse in most scenarios their guardians tend to be perpetrators. Research findings highlights prostitution practiced by left-behind children as a coping mechanism or survival strategy among children especially in adolescents to address their economic constrains. The emotional challenge faced by left-behind children has resulted in a drastic drug and substance use such as marijuana to cope with stress, peer pressure and loneliness and others to manage their jobs. Child marriage was another effect which is associated with parental absence; young girls are being married off at an early stage either for cultural beliefs or as a means to mitigate abuse and financial constraints.

The emotional void caused by parental absence increase the phenomenon of child labour. Left-behind children are forced to partake or engage in farming, domestic chores, rank marshaling, street vending or any form of child labor to help with household income and taking care of siblings at the expense of their development, safety and healthcare. Findings also indicate an increased rate of school dropouts due to parental migration being caused by either lac of financial support or burdened by responsibilities. Thus parental migration creates a cycle of vulnerability that has long-

term consequences on children's physical, emotional and social well-being on the left-behind children.

5.1.3 Strategies addressing challenges of parental migration.

Findings clearly indicate the importance of implementing strategies to mitigate the challenges being faced by left-behind children. Family reunification emerged as the most crucial and anticipated strategy by most of the left-behind children whereby efforts should be made to reunite children with their migrant parents either periodically or permanently. Family reunification fosters emotional stability for left-behind children reducing psychological distress. Community sensitization and peer engagement programs can also be effective in addressing these challenges by raising awareness about the vulnerability of left-behind children and promoting positive peer influence further reducing stigma, exploitation and harmful behaviors.

According to the findings, strengthening caregiving support system through training and provision of resources ensures a safe environment for the child that promotes an emotionally stable environment. Psychosocial support also was highlighted as an essential strategy addressing challenges being faced by left-behind children through offering counseling services, school based therapy to improve children's mental health, reduce trauma and help cope with abandonment and anxiety. Lastly improved communication between the migrants and left-behind children through the use of technological gadgets such as cell-phones helps children to develop emotional bonds with their parents, reduce feelings of neglect, assistance with school work among others.

5.2 Conclusions

5.2.1 Strengthened communication restores emotional void caused by parental migration.

Conclusively, maintaining regular and meaningful communication between the left-behind children and migrant parents helps to mitigate emotional and psychological distress among children. Meaningful communication between migrant parents and left-behind children reduces feelings of abandonment, neglect, anxiety and depression. Children experiencing psychological

distress often lacked consistent communication whilst those with frequent communication do not show signs of depression or anxiety. It therefore highlights the importance of enabling affordable and accessible communication channels. Stakeholders must facilitate digital literacy in rural areas to bridge the emotional void associated with prolonged parental separation.

5.2.2 Family reunification restores stability and reduces vulnerability

Since poverty has been the drive factor of parental labor migration, family reunification helps to mitigate challenges being faced by left-behind children. Migrant parents must schedule for regular visits to their home country to see their children or migrate with their children to minimize their vulnerability. Family reunification plays a pivotal role in restoring the family structure, emotional bonding and meeting psychosocial needs of the children. Parental visits minimize children's vulnerability and enhance their emotional well-being as well as academic performance.

5.2.3 Enhance child protection and reduce exploitation

Left-behind children are greatly being affected by their environment thus the school and community; hence community sensitization helps to reduce their vulnerability. Community awareness and peer engagement helps to reduce effects such as child abuse, sexual exploitation and drug and substance use by building a comprehensive collective responsibility. Sensitization fosters a more protective environment encouraging key informants to monitor and respond to child welfare trending issues.

5.2.4 Improve quality care

Most of the challenges being faced by left-behind children are as a result of poor parenting or caregiving system. Poor caregiving is being fostered by lack of resources, health status and physical fitness, offering support and positive parenting will help in reducing cases of child labor, child marriages, prostitution, poor performance and neglect among left-behind children. Offering economic assistance, parenting training and emotional support contributes directly towards the welfare of left-behind children.

5.3 Recommendations

According to the research findings presented in chapter four, the researcher deemed it fit to recommend the following measures to address or reduce challenges being faced by left-behind children in Murewa District due to labor parental migration.

5.2.1 Policy/ program recommendations

- Based on the data findings, it is highly recommendable to establish or implement programs that help children to communicate frequently with their parents. Schools must have communication centers especially in primary schools to minimize psychological problems being faced by children. Children must also be educated to be computer literate, thereby assist them academically and not rely on their caregivers for educational assistance. It is recommendable for the policy makers to implement policies that mainly focus on left-behind children other than vulnerable children.

- There is need for support programs in schools especially at primary level. It is highly recommended that schools in rural areas implement feeding schemes for children. Most of left-behind children in rural areas report to have been hungry and exhausted as they reach at school. School feeding programs will help address the challenge of hunger.

- Implementation of programs that specializes with assisting children who have dropped out of school, child headed families and drug and substance use; with necessary resources to help them is therefore highly recommended.

5.2.2 Stakeholder/ partner recommendation

- According to the research findings, highly recommend for partners or stakeholders thus NGOs to integrate life skills and entrepreneurship into school curricula for teen children. Beyond the academic aspect, left behind children must be equipped with skills especially adolescents to build resilience and prepares children for economic hardships.

- Stakeholders must establish child protection centers in Murewa District especially in rural parts of Murewa with well trained volunteers and supervised by the district Social Development Office. These centers will help in identifying vulnerable children and

providing immediate support as well as linking them with relevant service providers. This helps for accessible help and reduce burden on over stretched formal systems.

- Based on the research findings, it is highly recommendable to facilitate comprehensive psychosocial support groups for both left-behind children and caregivers. The majority of left-behind children often experience emotional stress, anxiety and loneliness due to various factors, therefore advocating for a better life style and child welfare. It will provide emotional support and builds capacity for mental health.

5.2.3 Social work based recommendations

- Considering the research findings, it is therefore recommendable for the department of Social Development to establish or schedule for home visits mostly in the rural parts of Murewa. Home visits will assist in minimizing effects such as sexual abuse and exploitation. They can also train community child workers and assist in identifying vulnerable left-behind children.
- It is highly recommendable for social workers to facilitate awareness programs in communities and schools targeting the environment of left-behind children. Awareness programs will help in mitigating some of the challenges being faced by left-behind children. Lastly social workers must establish community based programs which provide emotional support, educational support and financial support to both caregivers and left-behind children.

5.3 Area for future study

The research focused on general challenges faced by left-behind children and it did not specify the challenges according to gender. Future studies can explore on how boys and girls are differently affected by parental migration. Psychosocial support was discussed as a strategy but there was limited analysis on existing mental health services for left-behind children. It can be of great importance to explore on the availability and accessibility of these services in a rural setting.

5.4 Conclusion

To sum up, parental migration is associated with devastating challenges which greatly impact the welfare of left-behind children. They reflect severe consequences of child marriage, drug and

substance use, child labor among others. In addressing these challenges it requires a collaborative, comprehensive and multi- faceted approach which involve the engagement of the government, NGOs, social workers and active participation of left-behind children a case of Murewa District.

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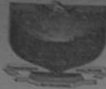Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency. (2022).*Labour Force and Child Labour Survey 2022 Report.* Harare: ZIMSTAT.

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APPENDIX 1: LETTER FROM BINDURA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE EDUCATION TO CONDUCT THE RESEARCH.

Approved on the usual
conditions of 30/05/2025

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK

P. Bag 1020
BINDURA, Zimbabwe
Tel: 263 - 71 - 7531-6, 7621-4
Fax: 263 - 71 - 7534

BINDURA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE EDUCATION

Date: 30 MAY 2025
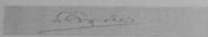
TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

RE: REQUEST TO UNDERTAKE RESEARCH PROJECT IN YOUR ORGANISATION
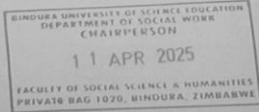
This serves to introduce the bearer, TINOVIMBA TSURU, Student Registration Number B200435, who is a BSc Social Work student at Bindura University of Science Education and is carrying out a research project in your area/institution.

May you please assist the student to access data relevant to the study, and where possible, conduct interviews as part of a data collection process.

Yours faithfully

BINDURA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE EDUCATION
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK
CHAIRPERSON
1 1 APR 2025
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCE & HUMANITIES
PRIVATE BAG 1020, BINDURA, ZIMBABWE

_____
E.E. CHIGONDO
CHAIRPERSON

APPENDIX 2: APPROVAL LETTER FROM MINISRTY OF PUBLIC SERVICE LABOR AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT.

APPENDIX 3: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Consent for participation in the research titled: Strategies addressing challenges of parental migration on children's welfare. Acase study of Murewa District.

All participants' information will be kept confidential and the results will be strictly utilized for academic purposes only. All the information discussed will not be disclosed to anyone. The research study will use pseudo names for protecting participant's identities. It is voluntary to participate in the research study and whenever you feel uncomfortable you are allowed to withdraw without consequences.

Consent: If you agreed to conditions of the study and willing to take part in the study, may you put your signature below.

Participant's Signature………………………….Date……………………

Researcher's signature………………………………Date……………………

APPENDIX 4: IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW GUIDE

My name is TsuroTinovimba C, a student at Bindura University of Science Education, where I'm currently studying towards a Bachelor of Science Honours Degree in Social Work. As part of my academics, I'm conducting a study on the topic: Strategies addressing challenges of parental migration on children's welfare. A case study of Murewa District. All participant information will be kept confidential and the results will only be utilized for academic purposes.

Biographic Information of respondents

Participant age………………………….

Gender…………………………………….

Level of education………………………..

Parental migration status……………………

Section A

To identify challenges faced by children due to parental migration

1. How does it feel being away from your parents?
2. How often do you communicate with your parents and what do you use for your communication?
3. Who takes care of you in the absence of your parents and how is the relationship between you and your caregiver?
4. How often your parents do visit you?
5. How is your performance at school and are you attending school regularly, if not what are the reasons?
6. Are you able to access basic needs?
7. Have you faced stigma or discrimination from other people because your parents migrated?
8. Do you receive financial support from your parents, if not how does affect you?

Section B

The effects of parental migration on left behind children

1. Have you ever felt isolated or lonely since your parent/ parents left?
2. Have you ever been a victim of abuse or exposed to violence and neglect?
3. Have you ever been in conflict with law, if yes what do you think caused it?

Section C

To examine the existing strategies and programs addressing welfare of left behind children

1. Are you aware of any programs or support services available to help children left behind by migrant parents?
2. Have you accessed any services from any organization that support left behind children, if yes to extent did they assist you?
3. Do these programs provide enough support for your specific needs?
4. Have you noticed any positive changes after participating in these programs?

THANK YOU!

APPENDIX 5: KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW GUIDE

My name is TsuroTinovimba C, a student at Bindura University of Science Education, where I'm currently studying towards a Bachelor of Science Honours Degree in Social Work. As part of my academics, I'm conducting a study on the topic: Strategies addressing challenges of parental migration on children's welfare. A case study of Murewa District. All participant information will be kept confidential and the results will only be utilized for academic purposes

Biographic Information of key informants (social workers)

Age………………………….

Gender……………………………….

Occupation……………………………..

Years of experience……………………….

SECTION A

To identify challenges faced by children due to parental migration

1. What are the most common challenges faced by children with one or both migrant parents?
2. How does parental migration affect the social life of left behind children?
3. Are there any signs of trauma, anxiety or depression that can be noticed from these children and how do they manifest?

Section B

The effects of parental migration on left behind children

1. What is the approximate percentage of left behind children facing abuse, juvenile delinquency, child headed families and child marriage?
2. What impact does parental migration affects the child's sense of identity and social cohesion?

3. Is there significant difference between boys and girls coping mechanism of parental absence?

<u>Section C</u>

<u>To examine the existing strategies and programs addressing welfare of left behind children</u>

1. Which programs are being implemented to support left-behind children and how are they effective?

2. Are there any challenges that you have encountered in the implementation of these programs?

3. How are the children's needs assessed and addressed within existing programs?

4. How do you ensure the concerns of left behind children are taken into consideration when designing interventions?

5. How do existing strategies address the mental health of left behind children?

THANK YOU

APPENDIX 6: KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW GUIDE

Biographic Information of key informants (teachers)

Age………………………….

Gender…………………………………….

Occupation……………………………..

Years of experience……………………….

Section A

To identify challenges faced by children due to parental migration

1.   Have you noticed behavior change since the parents migrated?

2.   How does the child interact with other children at school?

3.   Has the child's attendance change and how does the child concentrate in class?

4.   Is there learning difficulties or homework incompletion since the parents migrated?

5.   Who was left in the custody of child and is the caregiver supportive?

6.   What are some of the challenges being faced by left behind children?

Section B

The effects of parental migration on left behind children

1.   Have you noticed signs of aggression and social withdrawal from the child?

2.   Are there learning difficulties that have emerged since the parents migrated?

3.   Have you noticed signs of neglect?

4.   Do you think the child has access to basic needs?

5.   Do you communicate with the child's caregiver?

Section C

To examine the existing strategies and programs addressing welfare of left behind children

1. Is there school programs specifically designed for left behind children?
2. How do you support left behind children?
3. Is there access to counseling or any mental services for the left behind children?
4. How effective are these intervention in enhancing the child's academic performance?
5. What strategies or programs do you think should be implemented or improved to ensure better support of left behind children?

THANK YOU.