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## Impact of Parental Migration on Student Academic Performance: A Case of Two Selected Peri Urban Schools in Marondera in Zimbabwe

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### **Abstract:**

*UNHCR (2008) pointed out that there were 15, 2 million refugees and 827 000 asylum seekers in countries like the U.S who now rely on immigrant labour. Parental migration has resulted in an increase in child headed families. Older children have increasingly been left in charge of the younger siblings and the households as a whole as one or both parents try their luck outside the country. The effects of migration is multifaceted as it includes limited parental love and care towards children and family members, children being involved in antisocial activities like prostitution because of lack of parental guidance and worse still the negative effects on academic performance has far reaching consequences. Convenience sampling was undertaken to select a sample of teachers and pupils whose parents are in Diaspora. The study adopted a descriptive survey design and the data gathering process was through interviews. Over and above the vulnerability of children who were left behind to child abuse, be it sexual, emotional, and psychological and neglect, the study revealed that children left behind lack guidance whose repercussion on education includes no supervised studying at home, lack of educational provisions like books, pens, and misuse of money by those pupils who receive a lot of cash from parents who are outside the country. The study therefore recommended that parental migration should be discouraged as much as possible, and if at all it has taken place then there is need to periodically return home to check on the welfare of the children.*

**Keywords:** Diaspora, Parental migration

### **1. Background**

Parental migration is a process whereby the biological parents or guardians leave their country of origin and move elsewhere in search of jobs, to escape political persecution or they will be pursuing some educational programmes Zinyama and Zinamwe (1999) pointed out that most migrants will be trying to supplement major household incomes as the case of Zimbabwe cross boarder traders to South Africa. In Zimbabwe, culturally males are supposed to look after the whole family providing all basic needs, hence male partners move to other countries in search of employment so that they earn money to look after their families, and at times the wife follows the husband outside the country leaving the children with guardians or on their own. According to UNHCR (2009) parental migration is as a result of economic hardships so people will move in search of greener pastures". This was the case in 2008 when Zimbabwe faced an economic meltdown resulting in acute food shortages and a hyper inflation. It should be appreciated that the main drivers of parental migration is caused by poverty and social strife. When people divorce, the other partner may find it best to go to another country to start a new life. Most cross boarders in Zimbabwe are as a result of poverty. Political turmoil has great influence on parental migration. This was evidenced in Zimbabwe 2008 elections. Owing to the above reasons, people have migrated from Africa to other continents. A case in point is Zimbabwe which has a big number of people who have migrated to other African and European countries. The issue of parents tracking to Diaspora without their children forms the backbone of this study as the results of this phenomenon has caused millions of children to be prone to all sorts of child abuse and their academic performance has negatively been affected. Zanawe (1999) submitted that the majority of parents remit money back home but sometimes guardians may convert the monies to their personal use or even starting their own business at the expense of children.

### **2. Statement of the Problem**

What is the impact of parental migration on academic performance of pupils left in the home countries?

### **3. Research Questions**

- What are the reasons for parents to migrate?

- What are the problems faced by pupils whose parents are in Diaspora?
- What can be done to mitigate problems faced by children whose parents are in Diaspora?

#### 4. Significance of the Study

The study may assist parents in Diaspora to be aware of the problems faced by their children as a result of their migration to other countries such that they may find ways of alleviating the problems. The children whose parents are out of the country may also benefit, since their parents will try to cushion the negative impact of migrating to other countries. Benefits of teachers may also accrue in the sense that, if they are aware of the problems that the children whose parents are in Diaspora face, they will be able to provide adequate advisory and counselling to these children. The community stands to benefit in that it will be able to appreciate the problems faced by children whose parents are in Diaspora, such that it may come up with programmes to alleviate these problems.

#### 5. Reasons for Parental Migration Globally

According to United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2005) parental migration is as a result of economic hardships. This point was highlighted in 2008 when Zimbabwe faced an economic decline which led to shortage of food and inflation rate was very high. Political turmoil has great influence on parental migration. Maunganidze *et al* (2002) posits that in South Africa, the number of refugees continue to swell as people run away from the troubled countries such as Somalia, Rwanda, Burundi, Liberia, Zimbabwe and many others. Dirwai *et al* (2002) explained that the educated Zimbabweans are going to the UK, USA and other European countries in search of employment or greener pastures.

#### 6. Reasons for Parental Migration in Zimbabwe

Zimbabwean people are highly migratory and their movement which are mainly rural to urban, urban to urban or country to country is viewed as a need to improve their quality of life. Historically, the introduction of cash economy, and imposition of taxes by settler colonizers forced local men to sell their labour in the emerging urban and mining areas both within and outside Zimbabwe. This became the birth of a migratory labour system characterised by split of families, a social paralysis with far reaching and pervasive implications on the life of men in Zimbabwe today (Mhloyi 1998). Madzinga (2002) highlighted that over the years, Zimbabwe has seen many of its inhabitants migrating to South Africa, Botswana, UK and USA as a result of the excessive depreciation of the Zimbabwean dollar. Oberai and Singh (1983) highlighted that the educated have a higher propensity to migrate because they can earn relatively high incomes in urban areas as well as other countries. Madzingiro (2002) suggested that there is tendency by migrants to leave wives and children in rural areas that is the place of origin.

#### 7. Problems Faced By Pupils Whose Parents Are in Diaspora

James Elder of UNICEF (2007) submitted that when parents leave their children behind particularly in difficulty time where there is need to cushion families poverty, it increases the offsprings vulnerability to negative societal ills like sexual, emotional, psychological or physical abuse. In Zimbabwe Betty Makoni (2007) of the Girl Child Network pointed out that the absence of parents has negative psychological effects on children as evidenced by loss of concentration at school, especially in older children who have the additional responsibility of heading the family. Craford-Brown and Rattray (2002) pointed out that children whose parents are in Diaspora assume adult-like responsibilities prematurely such as managing large amount of money that their parents send or looking after younger siblings. Pottiger (2005) is of the opinion that school work has also been found to be affected negatively possibly as a result of the emotional turmoil arising from the separation from parents. Some children left behind by the migrating parents lose focus on their school work because they will be anticipating that soon they will be joining their parents, a fact which may never come to be realised. Even when children are left in the care of relatives and friends, the separation from parent may cause psychological damage that is manifested in deviant acting out behaviour or poor self esteem and depression (Pottinger, 2005). UNICEF, (2008) pointed out that children left behind by migrating parents lack emotional support and have difficult overcoming parental separation, both socially and as individuals.

#### 8. Methodology

A descriptive research design was adopted and convenience sampling method was used since the researcher wanted only to deal with the children whose parents had migrated to other countries and the teachers of these children so as to be able to solicit information pertaining to their academic performance

#### 9. Findings and Discussions

##### 9.1. Demographic Profile of Parents in Diaspora

Percentage of distribution of people living in Diaspora

	Number	Percentage
Children with father in Diaspora	5	50
Children with mother in Diaspora	2	20
Children with both parents in Diaspora	3	30

Table 1

The table above represents the percentage of both male and female who left the country to live in other countries. Males have bigger percentage (80%) possibly because they are breadwinners in most families. Due to economic hardships, political conditions, search for employment and education, males are being forced to go to Diaspora. However, the percentage is low on females (50%) because they are always left behind to take care of children. Only a few men due to gender roles and culture would want their wives to join them in Diaspora. Some will go there for education and search for employment. The above fact was supported by Zinamwe (1990) when he said, it is due to gender roles assigned to each sex that regard males as breadwinners and females as home makers. Migration has a negative impact on children’s academic performance since they miss parental guidance and love which are the pillars of psychosocial support for the children.

9.2. Age Distribution of Children Whose Parents are in Diaspora

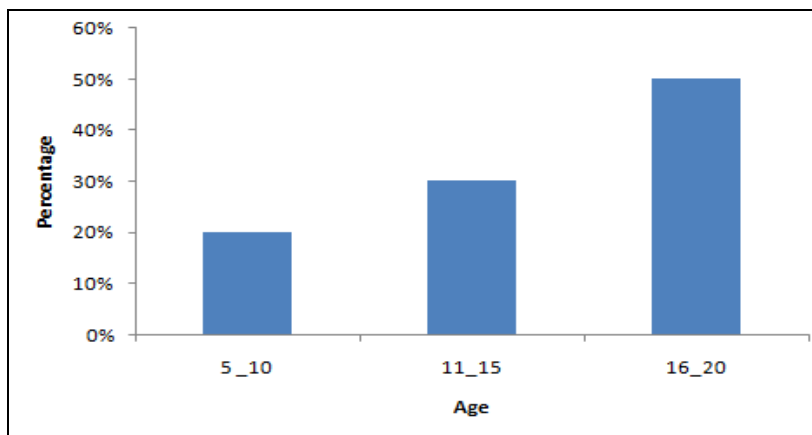


Figure 1

Twenty percent of the sample are of the age range of 5-10 years and this percentage compared to the percentages of other age ranges seem to reflect that most parents are not willing to leave their children when they are very young and the percentages of children of the age range 11-15 and 16-20 years are 30 and 50 respectively. The trend which is shown by these percentages is indicating that the higher the age of the child the more willing parents are likely to leave the child and migrate to another country for financial or educational reasons.

The other possible reason is that at this stage parents tend to have confidence that their children are grown up to take care themselves. Leaving children with guardians and other relatives has affected the general up keeping of the children regardless of Diaspora parents remitting funds back home. The monies may be diverted for other purposes at the expense of the child’s welfare and at the same time the academic performance of the child may be suffering.

9.3. Reason for Parental Migration

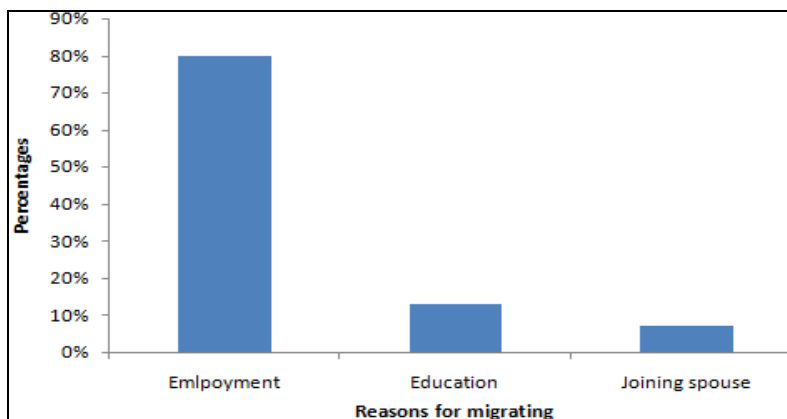


Figure 2

The graph shows reasons for parental migration. The research shows that most migrants have gone out of the country in search for employment. The percentage is 80%. The migrants for education only constitute 13% whereas those who will be joining their spouse have a percentage of 7%. All these people have the common goal that is to improve their standards of living within their families.

The situation has a negative impact on children’s performance in school. This was supported by Zinamwe (1999) when he said causes of migration one as a result of searching for better way of life in terms of education, health recreation and refuge. More o, the research

findings do agree with what Oberai and Singh (1983) who argues that the educated have a higher propensity to migrate because they can earn relatively high incomes in urban areas as well as other countries. Thus higher educational levels mean higher aspiration and broader horizon. This will eventually force parents to migrate leaving children with relatives. The long absence many have negative impact on children’s performance in school.

9.4. Emotional Behaviours Shown by Children with Parents in Diaspora

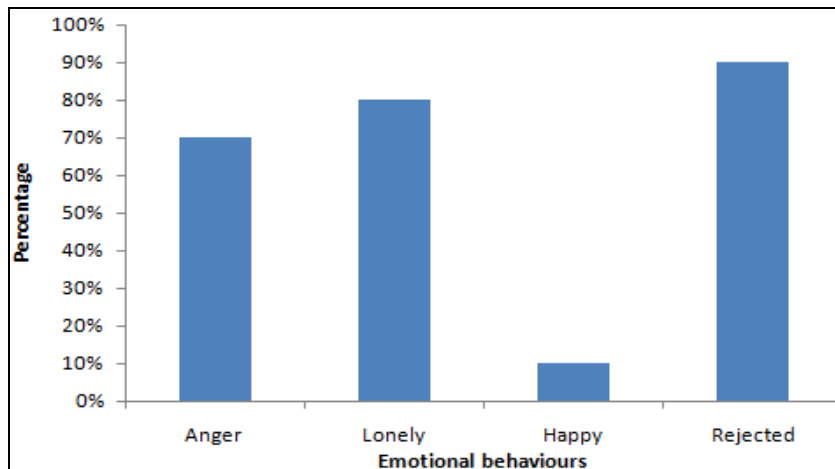


Figure 3

The majority of the respondents 90% pointed out that they feel rejected by their parents who went away and some of them have been away for more than five years. One respondent who is eighteen years old told the researcher that money cannot replace the love and guidance he expects from his parents. Show (2008) supported these findings by submitting that most children whose parents are in Diaspora suffer from anxiety, loneliness and helplessness. A close analysis of the table above indicates that the children who are left behind by the migrating parents feel lonely and angry and only one respondent indicated that he was happy despite the fact that his parents are in the Diaspora. The researcher probed the happy boy further and learnt that the source of happiness was that his parents are always sending a lot of money to him and he uses it to buy whatever he wants. These results were collaborated by Craford-Brown and Rattray (2002) who pointed out that children whose parents are in Diaspora assume adult-like responsibilities prematurely such as managing large amount of money that their parents send or looking after younger siblings. Ninety percent of the respondents feel negative emotions as a result of the parents who migrated to other countries and inevitably this will also cascade negatively in affecting their academic performance. This finding is in sync with what was reiterated by Betty Makoni in 2007 who submitted that the absence of parents has negative psychological effects on children as evidenced by loss of concentration at school, especially in older children who have the additional responsibility of heading the family.

9.5. Performance Distribution of Children Whose Parents are in Diaspora

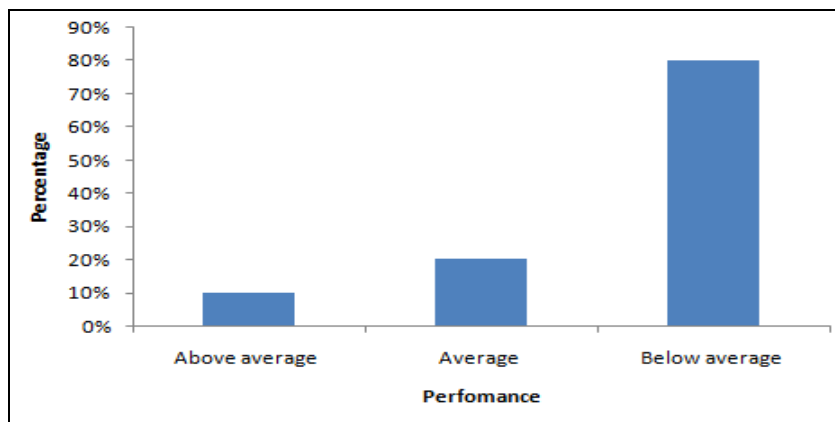


Figure 4

The graph above shows how children living with guardians perform in school. Only 10% of the respondents are performing above average but 20% and 80% of the respondents perform averagely and below average respectively. Betty Makoni (2001) of the Girl Child Network pointed out that the absence of parents has negative psychological effects on children evidenced by a loss of concentration at school, especially evident in older children who have the additional responsibility of heading the family. Possibly the

performance of these children is in line with how they are being treated by their guardians. In most cases, children who are treated well, and who receive support in terms of academic work and homework supervision perform well but those who are ill-treated usually perform poorly in school. However, it can be noted that the results show that 80% of children whose parents are in Diaspora perform poorly and hence having parents in Diaspora has a negative impact on academic performance of children and possibly on social issues since parental guidance will be absent. The above results were collaborated by Pottiger (2005) is of the opinion that school work has also been found to be affected negatively possibly as a result of the emotional turmoil arising from the separation from parents.

#### 9.6. Response from the Teachers Who Teach Children Whose Parents Are in Diaspora

Five teachers, two females and three males were interviewed on the performance of children whose parents are in Diaspora, and the responses were that 80% of the respondents pointed out that the academic performance of children whose parents are in Diaspora was on average below average and yet most of them have great potential to excel. The main reason why these students fail to perform well in class was lack of supervision of homework and the guardians did not visit the school on consultation days. Some teachers submitted that some of the children whose parents are in Diaspora were known for spending money on drugs and girlfriends. Craford-Brown and Rattray (2002) pointed out that children whose parents are in Diaspora assume adult-like responsibilities prematurely such as managing large amount of money that their parents send or looking after younger siblings. The teachers pointed out that due to lack of parental guidance, the children with parents in Diaspora may fail to relate to others well. Some children whose parents are in Diaspora were reported to be bullies and some were observed to be very aloof, shunning mixing with others of the same age group

#### 10. Possible Solutions to Minimize Pupils Problems

Provision of counselling and advisory services adopting a person centred approach to children left behind by migrating parents is one of the recommended ways of assisting these children. Adopting unconditional positive regard, and empathising with their problems may go a long way in alleviating their problems since many of them crave for warmth and love which is lacking in their lives.

#### 11. Conclusion

From the research carried, most parents have migrated so as to improve their families' living standards though most children feel lonely and rejected. Furthermore, the outcome of the research has also shown that they migrate to further their employment basis. Due to all these factors children will be left with no option but to remain staying with relatives and friends (guardians). Parental migration largely has a negative impact on children's academic performance.

#### 12. Recommendations

- Migrating parents should migrate together with their children if it is possible, since leaving children behind deprives the children with parental love and guidance.
- The migrating parents should return home from time to time to check on the progress their children are making at school and also assess their social development.
- Parents in Diaspora should not send too much money to the young children since that money is likely to be misused by the children, which may include risky behaviours like prostitution
- Parents who migrate should liaise with the teachers of their children who may assist in monitoring the children at school.
- Communication lines should remain open between the parents in Diaspora and the guardians so that the parents will be in touch with activities of their children.

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