

**COMMUNICATION EXPERIENCES OF DISTANT PARENTED
ADOLESCENT GIRLS WITH THEIR MIGRANT PARENTS IN
CHIREDZI SOUTH CONSTITUENCY OF ZIMBABWE:
CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to explore the communication experiences of distant parented adolescent girls in Chiredzi South Constituency of Zimbabwe; focusing on the challenges and opportunities. Qualitative methods of data collection, analysis, and interpretation were used. The study employed a purposive sampling approach to select the twenty-five (25) distant parented adolescent girls who participated in both the focus group discussions and in-depth individual interviews from five secondary schools. Data were collected and recorded verbatim. A thematic analysis was used to present and analyze the data. Some of the findings were that communication with their migrant parents is erratic, they are being mobile phone parented and communication is limited in the presence of guardians or caregivers. Based on the findings, the study recommends that migrant parents should maintain constant and consistent communication with their adolescent girls whom they have left behind.

Keywords: Parenting, Distant Parenting, Diaspora orphans, Migration, Parental migration, The Left behind Children, Distant Parented Adolescent Girls

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The economic meltdown in Zimbabwe has pushed a phenomenal number of parents to migrate outside the country in search of the so-called 'greener pastures'. This exodus of many parents into the neighboring countries in search of employment inversely led to untold catastrophes for the adolescent children who are left behind. In Chiredzi South Constituency, most people migrate to neighboring South Africa or Mozambique due to their proximity. Many parents leave behind their children. One of the reasons for leaving their children behind is because they utilize informal crossing routes which are often dangerous. In doing so, they risk getting arrested and deported or even shot by border security officers. This makes it difficult for them to travel along with their children and worse off, frequent traveling between the two countries will not be easy. In addition to this, quite a sizeable number of undocumented migrants migrate to South Africa immediately after the festive season. This is during the middle of the rainy season. During that time, the Limpopo River which borders Zimbabwe and South Africa will normally be full and dangerous to cross (Crush, Chikanda, & Tawodzera, 2012; Scheen, 2011).

The Limpopo River is also infested with crocodiles which exacerbate the dangers of crossing this river at the informal crossing points. Even using a boat, some might be overloaded leading to high risks of capsizing (Ndebele, 2022). Several cases have been reported of people who are swept away and some mauled by crocodiles hence the justification of leaving behind their children and them bearing the brunt of illegally crossing the border (Ncube, 2021). Furthermore, the type of accommodation they may have might restrict them to take their families along. Most of them live in shacks or 'mikhukhu' which are not very convenient and safe enough to live with the whole family.

Thus, parental migration results in the children left behind going through a plethora of challenges. One of which is communication which is the focus of this study. The relationship between the migrant parents and their left behind children should necessarily be sustained by reliable and frequent communication channels. Thus, connectedness between the migrant parents and the left behind children remains an important area of concern. Studies have shown that Information and Communication Technologies play a pivotal role in migrant families as it bridges the gap between migrant parents and the left behind children. This is important for the well-being of the children left behind (Pearce et al., 2013). However, long term separation with their migrant parents and lack of, or poor communication may affect their attachment to their parents and their emotional wellbeing. Studies have found that high frequency of parent child communication can enhance the quality of life of the left behind children (Wang et al., 2015).

Adolescence is a stage where children develop from childhood to adulthood and experience massive biological, psychological, and social transformations (Allen & Waterman, 2019). The adolescent girls due to their age group and gender, need close, reliable monitoring and constant communication with the parents for a healthy development (Cleveland, 2018). The researchers have noted that distant parenting is rampant in Chiredzi South Constituency of Zimbabwe hence, the need to explore the efficiency of communication channels and strategies between the migrant parents and their left behind children.

Parents are critical in shaping the adolescent individuals expectations and roles of maturing individuals. They provide appropriate opportunities, resources, support and feedback to promote maturity and ability to cope with life challenges. However, in Chiredzi South Constituency of Zimbabwe, due to economic meltdown bedeviling the nation, parents are forced to seek employment far from their homes, leaving behind their children. These distant parented children go through a barrage of challenges as they live in homes with absent parents. In this regard, there is need for regular communication with their parents. Studies have shown that reliable and regular communication between the migrant parents and their children left behind yield positive results such as greater life satisfaction, school satisfaction and happiness (Su at al., 2013). In addition to that, the researchers observe that the presence of parents in the home play a significant role in the development of children. Thus, this study sought to explore communication experiences of distant parented adolescent girls with their migrant parents in Chiredzi South Constituency of Zimbabwe.

2.0 THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

Urie Bronfenbrenner's (2004) bio ecological systems theory was used to inform this study. According to Bronfenbrenner's (2004) bio ecological systems theory, there is interdependence between organisms and their environment, with every part as important to ensure the survival

of all the systems (Laff & Ruiz, 2019). The theory looks at a child's development within the context of the system of relationships that form his/her environment. The complex layers of the child's environment aid development. They result in change, growth and development. The changes in any one layer may ripple throughout other layers. The immediate environment which is the family (father and mother included) constitute the system where the child has direct contact with and is at the center. The interactions between the factors in the child's landscape fuel and steer his/her development. The theory propose that there should be constant and mutual interactions between the child and her environment. In this regard, communication between the parents and their children is vital because it makes them realise their presence in their lives. Thus, for the distant parented adolescent girls, there is the absence of constant interaction with the immediate environment which is the family due to migration and this hinders her smooth development. In the case of distant parented adolescent girls, the constant interactions are however replaced by cell phones, guardians, caregivers or elder siblings. Communication that can contribute to the girls' development is not adequate though. The left behind adolescent girls long for physical interaction with their migrant parents (Aguilar, 2020).

The bio-ecological systems theory states that interactions between a developing individual and the environment are important. Family interactions are key to the child's development. Communication bridges the gap between the distant parented adolescent girl and the migrant parent. Lack of communication with the migrant parents lead to the left behind adolescent girls experience stressful life. The family, is thus the heart of the social system and the absence of which makes it difficult for them to explore other parts of the environment resulting in an unhealthy development. Thus, in the microsystem the migrant parents interact with the distant parented adolescent girls through mobile phones in order to maintain connections and be emotionally connected as a family. However, for the distant parented adolescent girls whose parents' communicate erratically, family ties are loosely connected and the children's well-being and well fare is affected. Thus, the whole ecological system of the distant parented adolescent girl is affected.

3.0 EMPIRICAL STUDIES

This part reviews literature on communication channels by distant parented adolescent girls. This is guided by the objectives of the study which are converted into sub-headings.

3.1 Communication with the distant parented adolescents

Communication between the migrant parents and their left behind children is vital. A number of studies conducted in China have showed that communication during parental migration has a dual effect on the left behind adolescents (Su et al., 2013; Shen et al., 2015, Wang et al. 2019). A study by Su et al. (2013) found that parent-child communication influence the development of children. The left behind adolescents who are in constant communication with their migrant parents live a quality life, school satisfaction and happiness as a result of parent-child communication. Thus, adolescents left behind do not feel the gap between them and their migrant parents much, as long as there is who some reliable form of communication. A similar study by Shen et al. (2015) in China revealed that adolescents are who left behind have better living conditions because of communicating with their parents. They indicated that communication with the parents is frequent and instant. The family ties are maintained despite the distance created by migration.

On the other hand communication with the adolescents who are left behind enables the migrant parents to continue parenting from afar. Cuaton and Teguihanon (2019) found that deprivation of parent-child communication negatively impact on their psychological development. Continued communication is essential for the distant parented adolescents. Where communication with parents is poor, it affects the children negatively. Migrant parents rely on other forms of communication with their left behind children in order to have their presence felt in their lives. A study by Aguilar (2020) in the Philippines on technology-mediated parenting of the left behind adolescents found that migrant parents rely heavily on the communication mediated through technology as is the case with Skype, Facebook and messenger for parenting. Technology is used as a way of maintaining family connections and addressing certain problems that adolescents face in the absence of the parent/s. Communication channels and opportunities that are facilitated through technology have contributed immensely in maintaining the intimacy between the migrant parent and the adolescents who are left behind. Thus, the use of modern technology is considered to be the most efficient way of communication. However, despite the consistency and frequency of communicating, the adolescents thought that there were areas and times when they preferred a face to face communication with the parents, especially the mothers and them being adolescent girls.

Communication with parents help in the development of adolescents. In the Indonesian study, Umami and Turnip (2019) showed that communication from significant others acts as a protective factor for the adolescents to cope more effectively with their emotional and behavioural problems. It was further revealed that adolescents who engaged in frequent communication with migrant parents were happier and displayed higher scores for life satisfaction when compared to those who experience infrequent communication with their parents. Such communication has a shared impact on the problems that the adolescents encounter. Absence of communication leads to loneliness.

Nazridod et al. (2019) found that migrant parents regularly communicate with their left behind adolescents through various online internet platforms such as viber. Communication between migrant parents and their children is sustained but the regularity of the calls varies; they can be once or twice per week. Some left behind adolescent girls indicated that they did not have mobile phones to enable them to communicate with migrant parents. The study pointed out that cell phones are the most common means of communication between the migrant parents and their children. A study done in Nigeria by Owusu (2013) revealed that technology enables migrant parents to be in touch with the left behind adolescents in form of mobile phones and internet as they found these methods reliable. Furthermore, he indicated that some parents send telephone and mail gifts to the adolescents who are left behind. This makes the parents to remain in constant touch and attached with their left behind adolescents with the help of the increase in technological advancement in this Fourth Industrialisation (4IR) era.

Technology mediated communication help migrant parents to keep close relationships with their distant parented children. In Ghana, a study by Poeze (2019) on transnational fathering revealed that more than three quarters of migrant fathers try to nurture intimate relationships and fatherly love through frequent long distance communication. The study further indicated that intimate communication is facilitated through online communication using webcam, sharing videos, photos as well as messaging, all of which give the fathers a presence in their adolescent's lives. Filippa et al. (2013) also found that the global communication technology

has alleviated the distress of separation as it allows easy communication among the family members. Filippa et al. (2013) further found that technology overcomes international borders and makes the painful experiences less painful; especially on the adolescents who rely heavily on the means of keeping in touch. Thus, these adolescents who are left behind and in constant communication with the parents do not feel much on any gap of separation due to the use of cell phones. Communication reduces the gap which is created by parental migration. It has also made a way for distant parents to redefine their parental role in the upbringing of their adolescent children. The study noted that through mobile phones, migrant parents know their left behind adolescents' schooling and general wellbeing. Some writers call this practice 'Cell phone parenting' (Makondo & Tabane, 2023).

Kufakurinani et al. (2014) found that mobile phones have the capacity to reconstitute effective parental roles although they sometimes give the expectations of the visits or gifts that may or may not be met. They also indicate that in Zimbabwe not all the families depend on phones, especially those families which moved across the regional borders during the crisis period as they could not afford the charges. A study by Madziva (2015) on transnational parenthood and forced migration in Zimbabwe revealed that access to communication technologies can be a problem for those families which do not have the resources. Migrant parent's text messages and use whatsapp and relatives communicate often any suspicious behaviour of the adolescents left behind under the guise of collective responsibility.

4.0 METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLING PROCEDURE

The study is qualitative and it sought to understand the subjective experiences of the participants (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). The study sought to explore the communication experiences of distant parented adolescent girls in Chiredzi South Constituency of Zimbabwe; focusing on the challenges and opportunities. Thus, the qualitative approach enabled the researcher to capture an in-depth understanding of the situation by talking directly with the participants in their original setting (Creswell, 2013). The study adopted the phenomenological research design to address the research problem. The phenomenology research design allows the participant's perception of the meaning of an event to come out, and not the event external to the person (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). This study sought to understand the perceptions, perspectives and understandings (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005) on how the distant parented adolescent girls communicated with their migrant parents. Creswell (2013) explains that the phenomenological design involves collecting data from participants all of whom have had direct experience with the phenomenon under study. In this study, only the distant parented adolescent girls were targeted. This was achieved by using the purposive sampling method to select the participants who had the required characteristics from the 5 secondary schools from Chiredzi South Constituency of Zimbabwe. Thus twenty-five (25) distant parented adolescent girls were selected who have their parents in diaspora. The study focused on girls aged between 12-21 years of age from whom to collect data. These had rich information about the information the researcher is looking for.

5.0 DATA COLLECTION METHOD

Focus group discussions and individual interviews were conducted by the researchers within the schools of the distant parented adolescent girls. The purpose of the interview was clarified to the participants before the interviews were done. This was done to allow some participants

who were above 18 years old to complete the consent forms. Those who were below the age of 18 years, had the principals of the schools or the Chairpersons of the School Development Committees signing the consent forms for them. Participants were assured that the information collected would remain anonymous. The interview questions and the FGD questions asked allowed the researcher to get firsthand information about their challenges. Data were analyzed thematically whereby the collected data was categorized into emerging themes. Participants were tape recorded and quoted verbatim. This was later transcribed into written statements.

6.0 FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

From the data collected, a number of themes emerged from both the in-depth individual interviews and the FGDs. Because these were common themes from both sources of data, they were presented and discussed together.

6.1 Keeping parents abreast

One of the themes which emerged for this study is that the participants revealed that communication with migrant parents is vital. They reported that it maintains family ties with the distant parents. The participants conceded that communication was done mostly through the cell phones. They reported that they can use WhatsApp and sms messages or make video calls. These channels keep their parents well informed about their welfare in Zimbabwe. The participants said that the cell phone bridged the gap between them and their parents. One participant had this to say:

In a weeks' time, the Form four (4) students are going on a trip to the Great Zimbabwe Monuments. I have already informed my parents about it; they promised to send me money as soon as they get paid. I hope I will meet the deadline. They told me to expect it from the delivery van which will come this weekend. I am excited about it. I have never been to any trip since grade one. This is my chance now.

Participants reported that their parents are up to date with what is happening to their children who are left behind but who use technology. The participants revealed that there is a need for communication in order to close the geographical and social gap created by migration. This need was also noted by Wang et al., (2019) who posit that parent-child communication is important even for the development of the left behind children. The absence of communication to such children from their parents affects them psychologically. It is through WhatsApp, sms or video call that the participants find it easy to make their parents know how they are doing. Thus, cellphones become vital tools of communication for the distant parented adolescent girls with the migrant parents. However, the participants also revealed that they do not share everything with their parents; they are scared of being victimised by the bullies and some guardians. They also report that they conceal some of the abuses caused by the guardians because they do not want to create a rift between their parents and their (abusive) relatives.

6.2 Mobile phone parented

It also emerged from the study that the participants receive mobile phone parenting as their parents call to instruct them on what to do, instill discipline or advise them. The participants said that their parents enquire about their welfare through mobile phones. They found the cell

phones to be user friendly as parents can monitor their whereabouts. With the mobile phones, the left behind children feel the presence of their parents. The following is a report by one of the participants:

I had a problem yesterday with my younger siblings. They refused to carry out some household duties that they are supposed to do. I then called my mother to report the situation. My mother called and shouted at them and they later on complied. I could tell from her tone that she was fuming. I think if she were present I think she would beat them up.

Another participant shared the same sentiments of the use of cell phones in parenting. Accordingly she reported:

My parents called yesterday evening. They were just enquiring on how we are doing. I told them that we were ok. They were grateful to hear that. I could tell that there was a sigh of relief from them because they were hearing a lot of stories about some people who are terrorising our community.

In sharing her experiences on how cell phones are used to parent them, one participant pointed out that the parents also use the cell phones to give advice. She shared:

My younger sister who is in grade seven (7) has just started her menstrual periods. I had no idea on how to help her. I had to call my mother and ask her what I should do. With me when I started she was there so I did not experience any hustles. What my mummy told her was helpful because from there on she is not complaining about anything.

Distant parented children experience mobile phone parenting. The findings indicated that this has become the easiest way for distant parents to reach up to their distant children. Aguilar, (2020); Filippa et al. (2013); Kufakurinani et al. (2014) and Nazridod (2021) indicate that migrant parents rely on technology (cell phones in particular) to parent their left behind children. They also mentioned that they use cell phones to nurture close relationships with their children. Thus cell phones enable easy communication for parenting purposes such as administer discipline, give advice and solve problems.

6.3 Limited communication with parents

Some participants report that they have some communication challenges with their distant parents. They highlighted that they have limited communication with them especially when their care givers are present and this is a source of stress. In the presence of their care givers (guardians) they don't have the freedom to express themselves as they wanted. This adversely affects them emotionally too. They fail to say what they would have loved to say. They are not afforded the privacy that they require, therefore they become psychologically traumatised. On this note, a participant had this to say;

Sometimes there are certain issues that I wish to tell my mother because I feel that they are important. I cannot do so when my aunt and her family are there listening to our

conversation. I have burning issues but I cannot air them. It's so frustrating, you know. You are left helpless. I also sense that they are not happy at all with our conversation.

On the same issue, another participant uttered similar sentiments when she said:

I am not able to speak freely with my parents when they call me. I see that my grandmother is sort of jealous. She listens attentively so I do not say anything negative on her part. When I see that some issues are sensitive I end up being quiet. Sometimes they want to enquire whether I got my pocket money and it is such issues that I fail to respond to appropriately if she is present because normally, she is the one who takes my pocket money.

The difficulties in the efforts of the left behind children's efforts to communicate with their migrant parents are a thorn in the flesh. According to Wang et al. (2019), they result in great total difficulties among the distant parented children. In other words they further complicate the situation of being distant parented. Similarly, the findings of this study are that from the participants' voices it is clear that they cannot talk freely to their parents when they call in the presence of the caregivers/guardians. A study by Nazridod (2021) found that the caregivers' presence makes it difficult for the distant parented children to talk openly about the challenges that the adolescents encounter since part of the challenges are the caregivers themselves. Thus, they are scared to mention it for fear of victimisation. A problem shared is a problem solved. However, for them it means that it affects them a lot and, worse still, they do not see their parents regularly. This pain is exacerbated by the fact that the children cannot say what they want to say to their biological parents in the presents of their care givers. Lobos et al. (2019) also observes that the left behind adolescents experience limited communication opportunities with their parents since at time a call from their parents comes in in the presence of their caregivers.

6.4 Delayed communication with some migrant parents

Another theme which emerged from this study is that some parents delay communicating with their distant children. The left behind adolescent girls viewed this as a serious concern. They reported that this was the reason why they were psychologically unwell. They reiterate that the delay aggravates their situation of being distant parented as they miss their parents a lot. They reported that it makes them think that they are abandoned. One participant said:

It has been almost a month now without my parents calling me. I wonder what is happening or what they are thinking about me. I have a lot of things that I need to share with them. Could it be that they are punishing me? But I have not done anything wrong. Whom should I ask? Maybe things are not well with them that side. I am anxious and I am failing to focus on my schoolwork now.

On the same note another participant shared similar sentiments when he said:

The days are flying. I am anticipating a phone call from my parents. It has been long since I heard from them.

Frequent communication between the migrant parented or the distant parented children and their parents is crucial. It leads to better psychological resilience among the adolescents who are left behind (Zhou et al. 2021). Frequent communication closes the physical distance that exist between the distant parented adolescent girl and the migrant parent. Nazridod (2021) also noted that frequent communication reduces the feeling of distance between the children and the parents. In other words, both the distant parent and the distant parented adolescent would not realise any geographical distance between them and would even feel connected (Cauton & Teguihanon, 2019). Frequent reduces both physical and emotional distance that exist between the distant parented child and the migrant parent.

7.0 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

7.1 Keeping parents abreast

It emerged from this study that some distant parented adolescent girls keep their migrant parents well informed about their welfare through constant communication through the cell phones. It is through communication by cell phone that the distant parented adolescent girls engage their migrant parents and tell them about what is happening. The findings of the study are that the cell phones plays a critical role of bridging the gap between the migrant parents and their distant parented adolescent girls. They enabled the girls to furnish their migrant parents with the details of their wellbeing. Filippa et al., (2013), as well as Kufakurinani et al. (2014) established that cell phones make communication between the migrant parents and the adolescent children who are left behind easy. Some writers call it ‘cell phone parenting’. The distant parented adolescent girls view technology mediated communication between them and the migrant parents as vital because that is the only way their migrant parents may get knowledge of how they are doing. Fillipa et al. (2013) further observes that through cell phone communication, the migrant parents know about their adolescent children’s schooling and general well-being. This shows the importance of communication between the migrant parents and their left behind children. Owusu (2013) noted that many parents remain in constant touch with their left behind adolescent children with the help of technological advancement. Thus, the distant parented adolescent girls found technology to be useful in bridging the gap between them and their migrant parents.

However, it appears that although communication with the migrant parents through whatsapp is important in keeping the migrant parent well informed about their left behind adolescent children, not all the children are satisfied with the arrangement. They find it to be an unsatisfactory way of keeping in touch with their migrant parents. It does not provide them with the necessary emotional connection which they get if the parents were physically available. Thus, children need the physical presence of their parents. Aguilera (2020) showed that the left behind adolescents long for face-to-face communication with their parents. They are not satisfied with the current way of communication. Thus, most distant parented adolescent girls value the physical presence of their parents than communicating with them through phones. It is thus critical for the migrant parents to find time to visit their left behind adolescent girls so that they have face to face interactions which they long for and are important for their development. Kufakurinani, Pasura and McGregor (2014) call these children, ‘diaspora orphans’. This is because these children go through a wide range of emotional and practical challenges in the absence of their parents.

The study also showed that communication between the distant parented adolescent girl and their parents is not reliable nor constant. Mutual interactions through the cellphones are not existent. Some participants reported that communication that can contribute to their development is not adequate. The left behind adolescent girls long for physical interaction with their migrant parents (Aguilar, 2020).

7.2 Mobile phone parented

The distant parented adolescent girls' migrant parents use cellphones and other means of communication to communicate with their children. This makes them able to execute parental roles such as instilling discipline despite poor monitoring due to the physical distance between them. Some participants highlighted that their migrant parents try to use cell phones to execute disciplinary measures on their left behind children. Shen et al. (2015) found that communication between the migrant parents and their left behind adolescent enables the parents to continue parenting from afar. Communication through the gadgets such as cellphones facilitates the institution of parental roles to their left behind adolescent girls. Aguilar (2020), Umami and Turnip (2019) show that migrant parents make use of technology to address certain problems faced by their left behind adolescents. Although migrant parents try to execute disciplinary measures through the cellphones, the researchers observe that it is difficult for them to monitor whether their instructions are taken or followed as given.

Poeze (2019) noted that migrant fathers nurture intimate relationships and fatherly love through frequent cell calls. Communication gives the migrant fathers some form of emotional presence in their left behind adolescent girls' lives. They try to make up for his physical absence which has a bearing on the distant parented adolescent girls' future relationships. Low levels of interaction between the father and the adolescent girl may result in promiscuity at a young age (Neilson, 2013). Frequent communication between the distant parented adolescent girl and the migrant father fosters attachment between the migrant father and the distant parented adolescent girl. This is the basis for stable future relationships. The findings of this study are that communication between migrant parents and their distant parented adolescent girls is important for their development as the parents may try to maintain constant monitoring of their left behind adolescent girls and make up for their physical absence. Thus, there is a need for the connection between the parents and their children through communication as it fosters emotional development of personhood.

7.3 Limited communication

Some of the distant parented adolescent girls reported that they are dissatisfied with how they communicate with their migrant parents. The findings show that in the presence of caregivers or guardians, they fail to freely express themselves because the environment is not conducive enough for them to do so. Thus, they fail to communicate effectively with the migrant parent because of the presence of the caregivers and their families since some of the issues they may want to talk about, relate to how they are treated by the caregivers. Thus, they may choose to shelve it since it may create some tension between them and the caregivers. This implies that the girls need privacy when talking to their migrant parents. Nazridod (2021) found that the caregivers' presence makes it difficult for the adolescent children to freely and openly talk about the sadness they endure due to their parents' absence. This has the potential to emotionally disconnect them to their biological migrant parents. Freud, cited in McManus

(2017) theorized that expressing one's concerns is therapeutic and liberating. Freud, calls it talking therapy (McManus, 2017).

7.4 The migrant parents and their left behind adolescents need some privacy, taking into cognisance

The fact that they have been living away from their parents for quite some time; so, they have a lot to 'offload'. In addition, the adolescent children are at a critical stage of development and they may have some issues that they may want to share with their biological parents. Failure to do so has some detrimental effects to their emotional wellbeing. Umami and Turnip (2019) argue that it may lead to some emotional challenges which may interfere with the children's social and academic life. The effect of which are the low scores in life satisfaction and loneliness. According to the bio-ecological systems theory, communication between the parents and their children influences the child's development which yields some positive developmental effects (Guy – Evans, 2020). Thus, migrant parents have to maintain constant communication relationships with their distant parented adolescent girls in order for them to develop properly.

7.5 Erratic or delayed communication

The findings of the study also showed that some migrant parents' communication is erratic and this becomes a problem to their left behind adolescent girls who may have urgent issues to relay. Delay in communication complicated their situations. If migrant parents take a long time before they communicate with their left behind children, their distant parented adolescent girl is subjected to some psychological stress which also impact negatively on her academic performance. She is not sure why her parents are quiet. Wang et al. (2019) found that poor communication between the migrant parents and the left behind adolescents leads to health problems which include emotional challenges, conduct disorders, loneliness, depression and anxiety. Some of the left behind adolescent girls end up thinking that they are abandoned by their parents. This is why they are sometimes called the 'diaspora orphans' (Kufakurinani, Pasura & McGregor, 2014). This delay may lead to some wayward behaviour. Thus, migrant parents should frequently communicate with their distant parented adolescent girls in order to close the social gap created by their migration and to foster proper development.

Frequent communication has been found to yield positive results as the left behind adolescents who frequently communicate with their parents are found to be happier, healthier and had strike higher levels of life satisfaction than those whose parents do not communicate frequently (Umami & Turnip, 2019). Thus, good communication eases the pressure which comes with being distant parented. It helps to maintain family ties and relationships between the migrant parent and the distant parented adolescent child. Infrequent communication with parents worsens the situation of the left behind adolescents since they are already grappling with the frustrations caused by the absence of their biological parents. They cannot relay their needs and problems in the shortest possible time. For the distant parented adolescent girls whose parents' communicate erratically, family ties are loosely connected and the children become psychologically affected. Thus, the whole ecological system of the distant parented adolescent girl is disturbed.

Delay in communication may make the life of the distant parented adolescent girl miserable and unbearable as she may be in dire need of some resources from her parents. Madziva (2015) noted that some migrant fathers are reluctant to maintain constant communication with their left behind adolescents. They fear it may trigger expectations of remittances. This finding may help to explain why in this study the communication between the parents and their left behind adolescents takes a long time. However, the consequences of such behaviour have some negative consequences to the left behind adolescent girls. The researchers opine that there should be regular or constant communication of the migrant parents and their left behind adolescent children so that the young girl does not become desperate and behave in an awkward manner. The majority of the distant parented adolescent girls interviewed in this study, reported that they communicate with their migrant parents through cell phones. The fact that some girls report their frustration or are dissatisfied with the amount of contact that they receive from their parents confirms that communication can, to some extent, close the gap of the negative effects of the parental absence due to migration.

8.0 CONCLUSIONS

Communication with the migrant parents does not go without its own challenges. The study concludes that delayed and erratic communication by migrant parents results in them getting stressed. The study further indicates that in some instances the environment in which they are to answer the phone calls from the parents, are not conducive. They long for privacy when conversing with their migrant parents. The presence of guardians and/or caregivers poses as a threat to their privacy. This leads to emotional harm if they fail to communicate their concerns to the migrant parents.

9.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- Migrant parents should maintain constant and consistent communication with their distant parented adolescent girls. This may offset the geographical gap that has been created by migration. It also helps in their development since they will feel that they are not abandoned.
- Migrant parents should find time to visit their left behind adolescent girls so that they have face to face interactions which they long for. This will make them feel loved and cared for.

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