LEFT BEHIND: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF ZIMBABWEAN ADOLESCENTS AFFECTED BY PARENTAL MIGRATION

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Abstract.
As a result of the Zimbabwean socio-economic and political crisis many Zimbabwean parents have out-migrated, joining the diaspora in many countries leaving their children behind in the home country (Zanamwe & Devillard, 2010). Qualitative research, in the form of in-depth semi-structured interviews which were thematically analysed, was carried out with seventeen adolescents whose parents work outside Zimbabwe. Their stories, presented in this paper, give us a better idea of how these adolescents view their situation and cope with the challenges they face in their home countries. The experiences of these young Zimbabweans do not appear to be unique as they are mirrored in similar studies carried out in other parts of the world, such as Latin America and countries affected by significant out-migration. Suggestions on how the findings of the study could benefit these adolescents and directions for further research in this field conclude this study.

Keywords: *adolescence, coping, diaspora, migration, separation, Zimbabwe*

INTRODUCTION.

Since 2000, Zimbabwe has been plagued by economic woes. The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) declined by 46 per cent between 2000 and 2007, with a rate of annual inflation reaching 231 million per cent in July 2008, the second highest rate of inflation ever recorded in the world (Hanke & Kwok, 2009; Zanamwe & Devillard, 2010) compounded by acute shortages of all commodities, causing approximately one quarter of its population to migrate (Zanamwe & Devillard, 2010). Although it is difficult to estimate exact numbers, due to the characteristics of Zimbabwean migration which are mainly irregular and circular, Zanamwe and Devillard (2010) point out that a good indication can be extrapolated from the population indices for the country, which

showed a much lower growth rate than expected based on the rate of natural increase between 2002 and 2008, and from border control data and household surveys. A document prepared by the University of the Witwatersrand (2007) suggests that, in South Africa alone, Zimbabwean immigrants could number as many as three million.

The adoption of the US dollar in 2009 has done little to alleviate the situation as the socioeconomic environment continues to be unsettled and not conducive to repatriation or a decrease in the number of those seeking work outside the country. An International Organization for Migration (2003) Position Paper on HIV/AIDS and migration cites unbalanced distribution of resources, unemployment, socio-economic instability and political unrest as underlying factors which sustain mobility. A number of initiatives and incentives have been offered to encourage the return of skilled personnel who have joined the Zimbabwean diaspora. However, in Zimbabwe like in other countries, most of these initiatives have not been successful due principally to budgetary constraints and problems with bureaucratic systems (Meyer & Brown, 1999). In addition, Zimbabwe is failing to attract much needed Foreign Direct Investment due to the prohibitive legal framework currently in place and many investors are also concerned about the country's economic empowerment policies which require foreign companies to hand over control of a minimum of 51 per cent of their operations to Zimbabwean nationals (New Zimbabwe, 2012).

Deciding whether to leave their offspring in the home country can be a voluntary or unavoidable choice for migrating parents. At times, this choice is made because the remittances of migrant parents provide the children with a better lifestyle. In other cases, it is due to the risks and dangers of travel (Becker, 1991; Funkhouser, 1995; Stark, 1995). For example, one of the participants of this study told the interviewer that she could not join her mother in the United States of America, nor could her mother return on a visit, due to immigration restrictions. Another told the interviewer that her parents were building a house in Zimbabwe and intended returning in the future. For those who resort to illegal routes, the situation is even more complex. Zanamwe and Devillard (2010) report that those who use these routes are often subjected to many forms of abuse, including extortion, abandonment, theft, physical violence, rape and sexual abuse. Consequently, many children are left in Zimbabwe without one or both parents.

The prevalence of children of migrant parents left in the home country affects many developing countries and may become more widespread due to the world-wide financial crisis and migratory labour trends. The total number of international migrants was expected to reach 214 million in 2010 and the International Labour Office (2010) reported that international migrants account for 3.1 per cent of the world population, further citing the probability of an increase in future migration flows due to processes of urbanization, globalization and the impact of climate change. Africa has always been viewed as the continent with the most mobile populations, with an estimated 17.1 million migrants or 3 per cent of the total African population in 2005 (Zanamwe & Devillard, 2010). In Zimbabwe, there is no clear indication of the number of children left in the home country by migrant parents, making it difficult to assess the extent of the problem. Looking at the figures in other countries affected by out-migration, however, can provide some indication of the incidence in Zimbabwe. Bryant (2005) estimates that, in Thailand, some half a million children up to the age of fourteen are left behind and approximately one million in Indonesia. Estimated numbers of children left in their

home countries, provided by UNICEF (2007), are staggering: one million in Sri Lanka, nine million in the Philippines, 31 per cent of 0-14 year olds are left behind by one parent and 5.4 per cent by both parents in Moldova, and in 2002, 13 per cent of Mexicans and 22 per cent of Salvadoran immigrants living in the United States of America had left children in their home countries.

Although international migration is mostly regarded negatively as the loss of skilled workers by developing countries, growing evidence shows that it has positive effects on social and economic development. In these countries, the remittances from the diaspora have become a rising source of external funding (World Bank, 2003). Zanamwe and Devillard (2010) state that, in 2008, recorded remittances to developing countries amounted to USD 328 billion and point out that this figure would be as much as 50 per cent higher if it included those sent through informal or unrecorded channels. They further point out that, in Zimbabwe, it is difficult to obtain accurate information of the contribution of remittances from the diaspora, as due to the economic situation, most are transferred through informal channels. In spite of this, Tevera (2008) estimates that official and informal remittances to Zimbabwe may amount to as much as USD 490 million every year.

Parental absence due to migration is also a double-edged sword. On the one hand, remittances from external earnings augment the family's spending power, resulting in increased educational outlay, a decrease in child labour and improved living conditions (Lachaud, 1999; Kandel & Kao, 2001; Lu & Treiman, 2006); on the other hand, the children left behind may have to deal with age-inappropriate responsibilities, such as fulfilling roles previously held by the migrant parent, feelings of anxiety, loneliness and other psychological problems which may result in compromised academic achievement and a spectrum of other behavioural and developmental issues. Dreby (2011) reports that children left behind, in spite of missing their parent(s) may be advantaged because their environments and caring systems are better in the home countries. A Honduran trans-national family study by Schmalzbauer (2004) highlights feelings of adolescents left behind, finding that those who do not migrate are spared the stress of having to adapt to new cultures, but experience heightened levels of stress, depression and conflicting feelings resulting from separation. These findings are mirrored in similar studies carried out in other parts of the world (UNICEF/UNDP, 2007; UNICEF, 2007).

The diversity of experiences of children affected by parental migration can be viewed in terms of systemic and relational factors. For example, a study carried out by Dunn, Cheng, O'Connor and Bridges (2004) on children's relationships with non-resident fathers highlights the importance of the association between children's relationships with non-resident fathers and their adjustment. Firstly, more frequent and regular contact between children and their fathers is associated with fewer adjustment problems in children, even in the case of communication that is not face-to-face. Secondly, children's relationships with their non-resident fathers are closely associated with children's relations with their mothers. The more affectionate, supportive and companionable the father-child relationship is perceived by the child, the more positive the relationship with the mother, whilst conflictual relationships with the non-resident father appear significantly correlated with conflictual relationships with other family members. Thirdly, the researchers consider developmental issues, specifically the link between children's relationships with non-resident fathers and adjustment. They hypothesise that difficult or unaffectionate relationships between children and non-

resident fathers would be associated with high levels of adjustment problems. As well as confirming this hypothesis, regressions analysis also highlights the significance of the quantity and quality of interactions, finding that positive relationships between children and non-resident fathers are associated over time with more frequent and regular contact, in turn predictors of better adjustment. Although this study was not carried out in the context of parental migration, it still shows the importance of family dynamics and contact when families are divided.

Studies have also recognised that migration affects more than just the individual but has a significant effect also on the families who suffer strain, have to reorganise and are disrupted by the experience (Willis & Yeoh, 2000; Yeoh, Huang & Lam, 2005). Literature on family separation stresses the diversity of experiences and there are several theoretical and conceptual frameworks developed globally to study the effects of migration on the well-being of migrants' family members who remain in the country of origin. For example, the New Economics of Migration Model (NEM) proposes explanations for the increase in out-migration by connecting the economics of migration to the intergenerational stress within the family, caused by interpersonal income comparisons within reference groups. These comparisons can give rise to feelings of deprivation resulting in a decision to migrate in order to attain a state of relative satisfaction. NEM describes how families without migrant relatives witness the economic gains and benefits which families who do have migrants receive from their remittances, which often acts as a catalyst for out-migration (Stark & Bloom, 1985).

Suarez-Orozco (2002) found that separation creates challenges to family relations and child development, that a relationship between separation and depressive symptoms exists, and that although painful, separation is significantly affected by circumstances and context. Farrell and Barnes (1993) tested various hypotheses regarding the effects of cohesion and adaptability on family members' psychosocial functioning and perceptions of family relationships. Using depression, anxiety, identity diffusion, individuation, self-esteem, deviance, school misconduct and grades, marital agreement and parent-child communication as variables, they concluded that family cohesion has a direct linear relationship to positive outcomes and better functioning of all family members. That is, a family which is more cohesive and characterised by good parent-children communication and marital consensus will result in better psychological functioning, quality of relationships and behaviour of its members, including adolescent children. Some studies (Collins, 1991; Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1992; Aguilera-Guzman, Garcia & Garcia, 2004; Schmalzbauer, 2004) found that familial separation can profoundly influence the roles, support structures and responsibilities of members of transnational families, resulting in psychological and emotional stress. For example, adolescents find it stressful to assume roles previously provided by migrant parents as these responsibilities are normally in addition to previous ones, like *other-mother* roles for girls who have become nurturing figures to younger siblings.

Studies by Brummer (2002), Leclerc-Madlala (2005) and Thomas, Haour-Knipe and Aggleton (2010) found that separation from a spouse can lead to extra-marital relations which expose the marital pair to health risks, such as HIV/AIDS, and that multiple and concurrent partners tend to be culturally legitimised in southern Africa. This, combined with the intensification of population mobility of the past two decades, has placed both the mobile partner and the community of origin's health and well-being at risk, compounding stress and concomitant negative feelings of exposed adolescents.

According to AVERT (2012), an international HIV and AIDS charity based in the United Kingdom, safe sex and HIV prevention campaigns in Zimbabwe have been spearheaded by the NAC, non-governmental, religious and academic organizations. However, shortages of funding and reported breakdowns of drug delivery have hampered the work of these organizations, although it appears that since 2010 the situation has improved considerably. The Zimbabwe National AIDS Strategic Plan 2006-2010 proposes the promotion of consistent male and female condom use, including in long-term relationships, and the support of sexually active young people to avoid multiple partners and provide access to condoms. This plan, however, does not view long-term relationships as being a protective factor (Frazer, Ruark, Gorgens, James, Milanzi, Colvin, Ibbetson, Mpofu & Nzima, 2010).

Silver (2006) reviewed studies carried out on Latin-American families affected by out-migration, highlighting emergent themes, such as depression, abandonment and rejection, conflicting feelings, role changes and role additions, lack of social support, and the importance of communication. These themes provide a useful insight into the phenomenon but little research has been carried out in Africa, especially in Zimbabwe on families affected by out-migration.

With regard to how adolescents experience familial separation, research carried out in other countries affected by out-migration and family separation would point to the fact that the traditional structure of Zimbabwean families, which stresses the importance of the extended unit, has probably been negatively affected by the migration of key role players, leaving adolescents without mentor roles and support structures. The Zimbabwean media has highlighted the plight of children whose parents have out-migrated, whose caring arrangements are unsuitable and make them vulnerable to child abuse (Shaw, 2008), but has contributed little to providing details of how the lives of these children have been reshaped and affected by parental absence and how they are coping with their individual circumstances.

Adolescence (approximately 11 to 21 years) is a period that carries enormous physical, emotional, psychological and social transformations (Marcell, 2007) hence the absence of parents or carers during this time may be especially stressful, resulting in the use of coping and defence mechanisms. Defence mechanisms and coping mechanisms are closely related terms that refer to psychological devices that individuals use to deal with adversity. Although they appear to be similar, there are several differences between the two. For instance, it is generally agreed that coping is flexible, reality-oriented and purposeful (Parker & Endler, 1996), whilst defences tend to be rigid and distort reality (Haan, 1965). Furthermore, according to Cramer (1998), defence mechanisms involve primarily unconscious automatic processes, whereas coping mechanisms typically involve conscious, effortful strategies that emphasize cognition.

The concept of the defence mechanism was originally introduced by Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) and was later elaborated by other psychodynamically oriented theorists, like his daughter, Anna Freud (1895-1982), according to the Encyclopedia of Children and Adolescence (1998). A defence mechanism is an unconsciously motivated and acquired "enduring pattern of protective behaviour that functions to provide a defence against the awareness of that which is anxiety-producing" (Reber & Reber, 2001: 179). It prevents us from being overwhelmed by traumas or perceived threats and can be useful to come to terms with such situations, giving us time to find ways of coping.

However, as it generally involves some degree of distortion of reality and self-deception, in the long term a defence mechanism is regarded by some as something that could give rise to functional problems (Gross, 1993).

The use of a particular defence mechanism is affected by the cognitive level of development of a child (Cramer, 1998). Empirical evidence points to the notion of a developmental hierarchy of defence mechanisms ranging from immature to mature. As normal mental and emotional development proceed through childhood, adolescence, and late adolescence, more mature, complex, and adaptive defences emerge. Thus, it may be postulated that an adolescent's level of development will affect the use of defences, with the more cognitively complex ones, such as suppression, being adopted by the more mature youngsters, whilst denial or repression may be employed by the less mature ones (Vaillant, 1993; Porcerelli, Thomas, Hibbard, and Cogan, 1998). For the purpose of the current research, the categories of defence mechanisms proposed by Gross (1993), as detailed in the methodology section, were used for the thematic analysis of the interviews carried out with the Zimbabwean adolescents.

Defining and measuring "coping" is a contentious issue that has given rise to a number of different approaches to the categorization of coping mechanisms (Compas, Connor-Smith, Saltzman, Thomsen & Wadsworth, 2001). For the purpose of the current research, Grasha's (1983: 162) conceptualization of coping mechanisms as "conscious ways of trying to adapt to stress and anxiety in a positive and constructive way by using thoughts and behaviours oriented towards searching for information, problem-solving, seeking help from others, recognising our true feelings and establishing goals and objectives" will be deemed to apply.

An overview of relevant literature shows a variety of categories of coping, such as "problem solving, information seeking, cognitive restructuring, seeking understanding, catastrophising, emotional release or ventilation, physical activities, acceptance, distraction, distancing, avoidance, self criticism, blaming others, seeking support and the use of religion" (Compas et al, 2001: 92), but for the purpose of data analysis in the current research, coping mechanisms will be categorized according to the eight mechanisms described by Grasha (1983: 163) and detailed in the methodology section.

Compass and Epping (1993) say that individuals learn problem-solving skills during pre and primary school years and then progress to learn emotion-focussed coping in late childhood and early adolescence as they become more aware of emotional states and the ability to regulate such states. Both developmental and personal factors will, therefore, affect which coping mechanisms will emerge from the thematic analysis of the interviews carried out with the Zimbabwean adolescents. The aim of the current research was to identify and record those mechanisms used by Zimbabwean adolescents in an effort to cope with parental absence, as a means to gain greater insight on how these youngsters manage their situation.

METHOD.
The direction of the current research was guided by the question: *"How do Zimbabwean adolescents affected by parental migration experience and cope with parental absence?"* A qualitative approach was utilised for this study as the most suitable to gain insight and understanding into the lives and experiences of Zimbabwean adolescents who are affected by parental migration and to generate as

much rich information as possible. The starting point was the need to acquire a better understanding of their world and perceptions of it as, according to Loxton (2004), it is of fundamental importance to incorporate the child's point of view into caring systems, social policies and professional practice. The aim of the study was to explore the way in which Zimbabwean adolescents affected by parental migration experience parental absence by identifying themes and any coping or defence mechanisms that may be employed to deal with their unique living circumstances.

After obtaining permission from the relevant Ministry, several secondary schools in Harare were invited to participate. An explanatory letter was given to the Headmaster/mistress, requesting assistance in identifying adolescents whose parent(s) is/are part of the Zimbabwean diaspora. Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on the criteria of being an adolescent; having one or both parents in the Zimbabwean diaspora; and receipt of a signed consent form from a parent or guardian. The final sample consisted of seventeen adolescents ranging in ages from 12 to 21 years, four males and thirteen females. The gender composition of this sample was solely due to the purposive sampling method employed. Caretaking arrangements of the participants are as follows: the four boys live with their mothers; four of the girls live with extended family (grandparents, aunts, uncles), one with her mother, and one with her father; seven of the girls have been placed into boarding school but live with extended family during school holidays.

This paper will only share the stories of eight out of the seventeen adolescents who participated in the study, selected on the basis that the data obtained from these interviews represents a composite synthesis of the issues observed in all seventeen narratives. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were carried out, recorded and transcribed by the first author, who is a registered Clinical Psychologist and School Counsellor. Participants were briefed as to the purpose of the study, anonymity (participants' names are pseudonyms) and privacy were ensured, and participants were given an option to withdraw at any point. Introductory questions followed to obtain background information, and the participants were then asked to speak about their situation. Gently probing and clarifying questions to elicit more information punctuated the interviews. Follow-up counselling by the researcher or other counsellors at each of the participating schools was offered, if needed, to ensure that the adolescents interviewed did not have to deal on their own with any emotional issues that the interviewer might have unintentionally aroused.

The interviews were thematically analysed using the steps proposed by Terre Blanche, Durrheim and Painter (2006): familiarisation and immersion; inducing themes; coding; elaboration; and interpretation and checking. Although the categories were left deliberately open at the outset, in order to let the data speak for itself, the themes cited by Silver (2006) that emerged in the context of parental migration in Latin America, guided the thematic analysis. These are: depression; abandonment and rejection; conflicting feelings; role changes and role additions; lack of social support; and the importance of communication.

With regard to defence mechanisms, the data analysis was guided by the categorization proposed by Gross (1993), namely: repression; displacement; denial; rationalization; reaction-formation; sublimation; identification; projection; regression; and isolation. Coping mechanisms were thematically analysed using the eight

mechanisms described by Grasha (1983), as follows: objectivity; logical analysis; concentration; empathy; playfulness; tolerance of ambiguity; suppression; and substitution of thoughts and emotions. In addition to these themes, two more themes cited by Compas et al (2001) were used: seeking support; and physical activities, as these were considered especially relevant to the current research in view of the developmental stage of adolescence.

To ensure that the research was trustworthy and credible, the guidelines proposed by Stiles (1993) were followed, such as disclosure of preconceptions to the supervisors of the study, arising from the first author's own experience as the daughter of a migrant; expectations and theoretical orientations that may impact on the research; explicitly stating the social and cultural context; considering the researcher's internal processes; engaging with the material and the cycle between interpretation and observation. Data, investigator, theoretical and methodological triangulation was also utilised. As the participants were minors, the research adhered to strict ethical principles, proposed by Terre Blanche et al (2006), namely autonomy and respect for the dignity of persons, non-maleficence, beneficence and justice.

The study has some limitations. The size and composition of the sample, although adequate for a qualitative study, means that findings cannot be generalised to the entire population of Zimbabwean adolescents affected by parental migration as it would not be representative. The single interview format is perhaps not entirely reflective of the full range of experiences of the adolescents and, although the interviewer endeavoured to remain neutral, the possibility of a familiarity effect on some of the interviews does exist as some of the participants may have felt more comfortable speaking to the interviewer having had previous interactions with her in her role of School Counsellor in one of the participating schools. From the data obtained, however, it appears that this last consideration may not have been a significant one as the interviews evidenced themes with commonality across the sample.

ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEW DATA.
Themes relating to parental migration.
Mary, a twelve year old girl, came to see the interviewer. She was crying and her slumped posture made her look too small for senior school. She sat on the edge of a chair, hugging her knees. *"I don't know what to do",* she said, *"I need to talk to someone and there really isn't anyone! I feel so lonely!"* Mary is the reason why we embarked on this study – she was left behind in the care of her grandmother, and her reaction made us realise that she was one of many in the school who felt they lacked advice and support because their parents had out-migrated, leaving them behind. The first author, who conducted the interviews, felt inadequate, knowing little about their situation and soon realised that very little information and few support structures exist in Zimbabwe to help these adolescents.

The first interview of this study was, consequently, with Mary. Her mother, *"an office assistant at her home in Ireland"*, has been working there for three years. Mary has not seen her since she left. Mary considers Ireland as her mother's home, not her own, showing that she feels excluded and possibly rejected by this environment, feelings consistent with Silver's (2006) study. Mary has a half-brother and three half-sisters who live with their father in the border town of Mutare, some 300 kilometres away. She lives with her grandmother who *"is too emotional but good to me"*. She becomes a little

tearful when asked about her mother, stating, *"When I have problems, I don't have anyone to tell them to, so for me that is the hardest thing! Some things I can talk to her on the phone but some things you need your mother there to be able to talk"*. Mary's mother calls her *"almost every day"* but at times she is not able to call her as *"she goes to work for 24 hours"*. Mary misses her mother a lot and says, *"What else is there to do? I just cry, I cry it out then after that I go to sleep"*. As a clinical psychologist, I could not help but notice that Mary seemed quite depressed, and not merely sad.

Tarisai is a cheerful seventeen year old who has one year left of school. She is confident and involved in many school activities and her teachers have high hopes for her final examinations. She asked if she could take part in the study as her mother works in America. *"My mom and dad are divorced"*, she related. *"My real father lives in Zimbabwe but I barely see him. I haven't seen him in three years. He calls sometimes, like for my birthday. My mother lives in America, she works in a school. I have not seen her in seven years"*. The composition of her family has changed and, being left in Zimbabwe, she feels distant and rather marginalised by this. She relates, *"I have a step-father who my mother is married to now, I haven't seen him yet, I have only spoken to him on the phone. He works in America but I am not sure what he does"*. Her sparkly eyes cloud over; she quickly collects herself but the sadness remains. Tarisai boards in the school hostel during term time and lives with her maternal grandmother during the holidays. Although she is well cared for, the relationship is not easy. She explained: *"[My grandmother] is quite difficult, especially when I want to go out with my friends, because when I ask her she says, 'No, why do you need to go out at night? We never used to do that!'"* Communication problems characterise this relationship. Tarisai feels she cannot talk to her grandmother because *"she is practically from a different generation than me so I can't tell her some of the things I would want to tell my mother. She doesn't understand!"* Four girls reported similar problems, for example, fourteen year old Chiedza, whose father, a doctor, works in Botswana. Her mother and younger brothers joined him about a year ago while she was placed in boarding school as they feel the education in Zimbabwe is better than where they are. She explains that the generation gap means that girls who live with older relatives are subjected to rigid codes of discipline which are relaxed only when the migrant parent visits. She says that *"many girls have problems after they are visited or receive gifts from their parents, such as clothes or cellular phones, as the grandparents feel that they have been spoilt and compensate for this by confiscating the gifts"*. Chiedza concurred with Tarisai, stating that *"going out is also a problem"*.

Some differences are cultural, as in the case of Wadzanai, a tall, sporty, fourteen year old Shona girl whose grandparents still abide by their culture's rules that, for example, adolescents cannot talk openly to grandparents or adults and that they should adhere to a certain dress code. She describes this by saying, *"We don't talk openly [to our grandparents]. [My grandmother] would start saying I am just a spoilt child and I would get into trouble"*. She exclaims, *"The way I dress is not good enough for my grandparents! I am not allowed to wear trousers and when I go shopping with them I can't choose what I want!"* She explained that this was especially difficult to accept because *"with my parents I can buy what I want and I don't have to wear dresses!"*

The theme of communication also emerged from the interview with Tarisai. Although she speaks to her mother in America on the telephone, these calls are often about practical things, like *"school fees and stuff"*, which are pressing at the time, at the

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expense of talking about what she would really like to share with her. The internet, now available in Zimbabwe to those who can afford it, has brought them somewhat closer. Tarisai explained: *"Before I went onto Facebook, she never used to know how grown up I've become. When I put my pictures up, she looked at them and she was like, 'My God! I had no idea you had grown this big!'"* Internet and telephone communications, although important, do not appear to sufficiently compensate for parental absence. Wadzanai concurs, reporting frustration at being unable to speak to her mother without being overheard by other members of the family. *"I can't talk to my mom over the phone! Because my grandfather, he is there and listening to my conversation, somehow! I also feel my grandparents don't want me to tell my mom some things so sometimes I can't really say anything"*, she narrated. The importance that these adolescents place on communication as a means of maintaining ties in trans-national families is not exclusively Zimbabwean but echoed in studies carried out elsewhere (Schmalzbauer, 2004; Silver, 2006).

Compounding the stress of her situation, Tarisai has had to take on additional roles and responsibilities. When she had to choose her school subjects for her final year, the normal practice at the private school she attends, her grandmother had gone to England. She recounted: *"There was no one to come with me! I had to go there by myself and try to convince the teachers I can do the subjects – by myself! – which was pretty hard"*. Silver (2006) notes that role changes and additions are common themes emerging from interviews with adolescents who are left in their home countries. Fourteen year old soccer captain Sarah has a *"really, really old cousin"* who complains that she does not help enough. She told me, *"As soon as you get home you have to help her with this and that before you can just sit down and do your homework. If you go and do your homework before you help her out, she comes screaming"*. As a result, she does not get sufficient time to complete her schoolwork during the day and has to resort to drastic measures in order to cope with her workload. She explains, *"Sometimes I won't even sleep or I'll go to sleep really late because I am trying to finish my homework so I don't get into trouble at school!"*

Peter is in his final year at school. His father is a university lecturer in South Africa. He is a handsome young man with impeccable manners, calling me *m'am*, a respectful term. Since his father left, over a year ago, he has had to take on the role of mentor to his two younger brothers. He told me, *"I talk to them about life and issues of life"*. He has also assumed other responsibilities from his absent father, like assisting his mother with the day to day running of the household and being there for her emotionally. He explains, *"I give [my mother] support whenever she needs support, in terms of guidance about finances and transport"*. Peter also attends to the necessary repairs and maintenance of the house. These additional roles can be stressful, as Silver (2006) found. Peter said, *"The biggest problem has been time management because when I get home from school, I do my books [study] but I know that there are things that need to be attended to"*. The four boys interviewed report missing their father, each in their own way, with the common theme of lack of support and guidance. *"I used to talk to my dad every day"*, said Peter, *"so I miss him very much. Many challenges come up without him: someone to talk to, someone to guide me, someone to just have a chat with!"* Joseph, eighteen years old, concurred, saying, *"You need a male figure to tell you what to do, especially when you are growing up, someone to advise you on how to handle all the things and all the stuff!"*

Tsungai's mother, a doctor, works in Australia. She is a big girl for her age but shy and softly spoken, in contrast to her physical appearance. Her mother has been working away from home for the past six years. She is the only one who still lives at home with her father, who is unable to obtain employment. Her mother's youngest sister, the *mai nini*, lives with them and cares for the house, even though she is still at school. The family's financial situation has improved greatly since her mother started working in Australia. Her remittances have allowed the family to purchase two minibuses that are used for commercial purposes and provide good income and a comfortable living for the family. Tsungai last saw her mother a year ago. She says that life is *"kind of hard when there is a situation – like there is a fight at school with your friends or something is happening – and I would like to talk to her about it because she would tell me what to do, but I can't because she's not there"*.

Tsungai feels her father cares but that *"he wouldn't know how to talk about it and he sometimes finds it hard to talk about things"*. When I ask for clarification, she explains, *"like the situation where you don't know how your mom and dad are, if he is being faithful. He told us he has not been faithful and now he has HIV"*. I try to reassure her but she becomes heated and emotional and interrupts, by saying, *"But I don't know if my mom knows! I am so scared there will be problems between them when my mom comes home!"* She told me that her father used to *"take care of things but now it's like he doesn't care and also he is not taking care of himself as he should"*. Tsungai is conflicted, anxious and apprehensive, stating: *"I miss my mom a lot but I worry what will happen if she comes!"* Extra-marital relations with multiple partners, especially in the context of mobile populations and divided partnership, are a widespread problem which seems to negatively affect the lives of adolescents, like Tsungai, who may fear the breakdown of the family unit. Compounding these stressful feelings is the awareness that, in Zimbabwe, anti-retroviral drugs are not easily available, with less than one sixth of those needing them being able to obtain them (Pembrey, 2009).

Conflicting feelings are also experienced in other contexts. These feelings arise from understanding the reasons behind the need for parental absence yet desiring the presence of the absent parent. Eight of the seventeen adolescents interviewed discussed the economic benefits obtained from having parents working in the diaspora, which make up for their absence from home. Joseph asserted, *"If he [my father] works outside the country then the funding in the family will be more stable, we can get a better living out of it"*. The financial situation of the country has been foremost in the lives of many Zimbabweans since the economic crisis, heightening awareness of the need for financial stability. Furthermore, little or no social security is available, making it imperative for a family to provide for its members through their own labour.

Tarisai is aware of the positive impact that her mother's remittances make on her education, allowing her to attend an exclusive private school. She says, *"My mother is working so hard to get my school fees and put me through school so that I can have a life that she probably never had – a better life"*. Some of the adolescents seem to feel that their parents are sacrificing their own happiness in order to afford them a better quality of life. As a result, they feel compelled to excel academically in order to make the sacrifice worthwhile. This creates a stressful situation for the adolescent. Tarisai's words illustrate this: *"It's like pressure. I feel so pressured to do more than I can, so I work hard at everything I do"*.

Elder (2007) of UNICEF, states that when parents leave their children behind, it increases their vulnerability. Sexual abuse and harassment is a theme that emerged from the interview with Wadzanai whose relationship with the grandparents she lives with is difficult. She became extremely agitated, spewing out words that hint at inappropriate behaviour on the part of her grandfather, saying: *"I feel, especially with my granddad, I just don't feel safe in a way and I haven't quite told anyone"*. She described his *"hugs"* as *"too much!"* and elaborated, saying, *"No one has ever hugged me like that, ever! I feel I shouldn't get hugs like that!"* Of the seventeen adolescents interviewed, she came across as most negative, unhappy, very angry and frustrated.

Use of defence and coping mechanisms.
How do these adolescents cope with their circumstances, which are evidently experienced as stressful in spite of their material needs being well catered for? To reduce the resultant anxiety and protect the self, defence and coping mechanisms are employed. For example, Joseph and Tsungai appear to rationalise the absence of their parents by providing reasons that, according to them, justify their situation. *"I think it is something my father wanted to do, something to help the family",* explains Joseph. Rationalisation entails finding an acceptable excuse for something which is really quite unacceptable, a "cover story" which preserves your self-image or that of someone close to you, and justifying your own and others' actions to yourself – and believing it (Gross, 1993) (like Joseph is doing here). Tsungai comments, *"At least [my mother] is in a safe place!"*

Some of the adolescents interviewed appeared to resort to the use of denial by refusing to acknowledge certain aspects of reality because they are so painful or distressing (Gross, 1993). Mary used denial by not acknowledging that she misses her parents, stating that she is *"used to it"* and that their absence affords her *"a bit of space … freedom"*, contradicting her own statements, such as: *"You feel really sad"* and *"You really miss your parents too much!"*

A coping mechanism used extensively by the participants is "seeking support", defined as "the ability to identify and make use of an appropriate support system in order to deal with those aspects of a situation that present a challenge" (Compas, et al, 2001: 92). The adolescents interviewed turn to their friends to provide them with the support they need. *"My friends are closer to me, they are more family than the people at home … they sort of help me cope",* said Tarisai. This theme emerged in fourteen interviews. Chiedza said that *"friends comfort you"*. It appears that those who seek the support of friends experience their situation in much more positive terms than those who report not having anyone to talk to, like Wadzanai.

"Logical analysis" defined as "carefully and systematically analysing our problems in order to find explanations and to make plans to solve them, based on the realities of the situation" (Grasha, 1983: 163) is also used. In order to cope with parental absence, Chiedza explains, *"You just act like your guardians are your parents and if you need to talk to them you talk to them or when my mom calls I'll talk to her, or when my dad calls"*. Chiedza is realistic about her situation, has thought about her circumstances and found practical ways of dealing with her problems. Tarisai uses logical analysis to deal with negative emotions and frustrations. She tells me, *"When I really need to tell [my mother] something but I can't and wish she was here, sometimes I write a letter which I probably never send, but I just write it at that moment, just to feel better in that*

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moment". She has not distorted or blocked out the reality of her situation and has come up with a creative solution that helps her to cope.

It appears that the use of defence mechanisms as a means to deal with parental absence due to migration, is not extensive and it is generally limited to the use of three such mechanisms, namely denial, rationalisation and sublimation. Defence mechanisms are only considered maladaptive if they become rigid and entrenched ways of dealing with life's challenges; otherwise they serve the purpose of providing a useful defence against stress-producing situations. The adolescents interviewed seem to use defence mechanisms purely as ways of making parental absence more tolerable and perhaps to afford them some time to become accustomed to it. Of the ten coping mechanisms selected to direct the analysis phase of the study, only two emerged from the seventeen interviews, namely: seeking support and logical analysis. Coping mechanisms are considered positive and constructive ways of dealing with stress and anxiety and, as such, their use should be supported and encouraged.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.
The thematic analysis carried out on the interviews conducted with seventeen Zimbabwean adolescents whose parents have joined the Zimbabwean diaspora highlights the fact that their experiences of parental absence due to out-migration are not limited to the Zimbabwean context, but are shared by other adolescents in similar circumstances in other parts of the world. This is evidenced by the fact that the themes identified in this study, are reflected in relevant literature on studies carried out in other parts of the world, namely a depressed mood and depressive symptoms; role changes and additions; abandonment and rejection; conflicting feelings; a lack of social support; the importance of communication; and material gains.

 A depressed mood and depressive symptoms, observed during the interviews with Zimbabwean adolescents, were also noted by Suarez-Orozco, Todorova and Louie (2002) who found a link between depressive symptoms and separation. Silver (2006), having reviewed a number of studies of families affected by migration, also reported a significant link between stressful life events and depression. Role changes and additions, arising from the process of family restructuring, emerged from the interviews conducted, highlighting that often these changes are experienced as stressful. This is in line with the findings of Collins (1991), Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila (1992), Schmalzbauer (2004), and Aguilera-Guzman, Garcia and Garcia (2004) and Silver (2006) who report that familial separation dramatically alters roles, responsibilities and support structures with resultant psychological and emotional stress. The emerging themes from the studies reviewed by Silver (2006) parallel those arising from the thematic analysis of the interviews with Zimbabwean adolescents, namely abandonment and rejection; conflicting feelings; a lack of social support; and the importance of communication. In particular, Zimbabwean adolescents appear to attach a great deal of importance to the frequency and quality of child-parent interactions, reflected in the article by Dunn, Cheng, O'Connor and Bridges (2004) on non-resident fathers. Awareness of the material gains to the family unit left in the home country resulting from out-migration feature rather prominently in the interviews with the Zimbabwean adolescents. This is in line with the New Economics of Migration Theory discussed by Stark and Bloom (1985). The vulnerability to sexual abuse of adolescents left in their home countries emerged from one of the interviews, in line with what Shaw (2008) reported. It appears, therefore, that the themes emerging from a thematic

analysis of interviews carried out with Zimbabwean adolescents are not country specific but rather echo those that emerge from studies carried out in other countries affected by out-migration.

The use of diverse ways of coping was also observed. The Zimbabwean adolescents interviewed appear predominantly to utilise rationalization, denial, sublimation, seeking support and logical analysis as strategies to cope with their circumstances. Identifying successful ways of coping could have a significant impact on the development of interventions to assist in maximising and supporting adolescents left in their home countries by migrant parents.

In Zimbabwe, a dearth of information makes the need to carry out more qualitative and quantitative studies imperative. Due to the fact that only a small number of adolescents could be interviewed during the course of this study, it is recommended that future studies should target a larger sample of the population in order to obtain a more inclusive range of experiences from a broad range of socio-economic contexts. Sexual abuse of adolescents affected by parental migration should be investigated further. Existing support structures, such as Childline, should be explored to ensure that adolescents who are negatively affected by parental out-migration are reached.

Sensitising parents on how to prepare their family for migration, giving support and guidance to caregivers and enlisting the help of educational establishments could result in improved adjustment for adolescents, particularly in the initial phases of adaptation. It is hoped that this study will increase awareness of the plight of these young people, encourage others to contribute to the existing body of knowledge and facilitate the development of interventions to assist these adolescents.

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