

# Family Problems Faced by Individuals with Partners Working and Living Abroad: A Case of Chinhoyi Urban, Mashonaland West Province Zimbabwe

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## Abstract

This study sought to investigate the problems that individuals with partners working and living abroad face, with reference to Chinhoyi urban, Mashonaland West Province, Zimbabwe. A sample of 40 respondents consisting of 20 male and 20 females aged 20 to 60 years were conveniently and purposefully selected to participate in the study. The descriptive survey was used for systematic collection of data. The data was collected using structured questionnaires with open ended and closed questions as well as face to face interviews. A pilot study was carried out to ensure validity and reliability of the research instruments. The study findings revealed that 80% of the respondents agreed that because of economic hardship, their partners migrated with mutual consent of the couple. Although 65% indicated that they benefited finally from the migration, problems such as communication breakdown, infidelity, pressure exerted by relatives, unfulfilled conjugal rights, loneliness, jealousy, financial neglect, delinquency of children, insecurity of the relationship, discipline problems with children, lack of emotional support, loss of respect from the society and labeling as 'married single' were rampant. The study recommends that the government finds ways of improving the economy in order to curb migration, couples migrate together where possible or make sure they visit each other regularly, counselling structures to be established in order to reduce friction between the in-laws as well as to manage the children and these long distance relationships.

**Keywords:** migration, delinquency, partners, counselling

## 1. Introduction

Migration to neighbouring countries and outside Africa has been an ongoing activity in Zimbabwe. Since 2000 when individuals observed that the economy was going down, influx to Britain and other European community countries, Asia as well as neighbouring countries took toll. In 2005 there were 11.620 emigrants mainly to other African countries (IOM, 2009). The glossary on Migration(2004) defines migration as the movement of persons who leave their country of usual residence, to establish themselves either permanently or temporarily in another country. Some individuals voluntarily (job seekers) migrated while others moved involuntarily (asylum seekers). This migration ended up disintegrating the family unit since most of the migration could be illegal. The family is defined by Murdock cited by Haralambos and Holborn (1991:454) as "----a social group characterised by common residence, economic co-operation and reproduction. It includes adults of both sexes, at least two who maintain a socially approved sexual relationship, and one or more children, own or adopted, of the sexually co-habiting adults". The authors add that the family lives together, pools resources and works together and produces off-springs. The part where it is indicated that the family lives together and does everything together could be lacking in families whose members, especially the spouses, have relocated to other nations leaving the other part behind hence creating family strife. Marital problems have become a reality in every marriage. In Zimbabwe and the world over, the divorce rate has escalated at alarming levels. Wieland (1980) quoted a group of church leaders who met in East Africa to discuss marriage as a 'dying institution'. It was quoted by a local Daily newspaper (Target) saying that:

*Divorce cases are on the upswing. Daily newspapers are full of cases of family fights and even killings. Parents abandon young children because they cannot fend for them. in short, plenty is amiss in marriages---lack of communication, financial misunderstandings, physical violence and lack of moral commitment were identified as the main reasons for marriage breakdowns----*

The editor added in his

*'commentary' that 'days are gone when a couple got married and assumed they will remain so until death parted them. Today the traditional family unit is constantly under pressure. Old values have changed and the permanence of marriage can no longer be taken for granted---. What a pity the disease of the developed countries is catching on here in Africa'.*

Such a scenario seems to be the culture that has developed in couples living apart. In a country like Zimbabwe, one cannot think of marital problems without thinking of economic hardships and the resultant labour migration. Families are put under pressure as more and more people migrate in search for greener pastures. The myriad of these problems sometimes calls for professional help to reduce the impact on the family. Even if these services are available the fact that distance separates the two parties, implementation of remedies that could help the family would be rendered ineffective. In the Zimbabwean environment, it is not always easy for couples to seek professional help when faced with marital problems. They usually get informal help (advice) from relatives, friends and the church. Marital problems are at all times high. These problems many a time, lead to divorce.

## **2. Marriage as an Institution**

In the old days, it was easy to define the concept of marriage as it referred to “ the partnership of a couple of the opposite sex who had publicly committed their lives together. This traditional view expects a man and a woman to leave their respective families of origin to start a new union through marriage and raise children of their own. People who live a different lifestyle to this are considered deviants” (kanyowa, 2003). However, there are new trends challenging the traditional view which is also taking toll in Zimbabwe. One wonders what effect it has on the union when a spouse leaves the family (partner and children). Dennis (1998) asserts that the prime necessity in marriage is companionship which the author defined as a close, durable, intimate and unique relationship with one member of the opposite sex. The companion, in the view of the researcher seems to be compromised when a partner is always absent.

It is also viewed by Goldenberg and Goldenberg (1990) that the absence of one parent more and more common, may have particularly damaging effect on the remaining parent as well as the children. For most people, intact marriages are assumed to involve two spouses sharing a single household. Currently in Zimbabwe with the growth of labour migration, unfriendly political and economic situation, it should not be surprising that an attractive job or career opportunity in another country, or peaceful environments in other countries may lead a spouse to move away from the family. Logistical arrangements are compromised as some of the remaining family members are left living in rented accommodation while some live with in-laws and some have their own houses. These arrangements imply that there would be need to maintain separate residence by the breadwinner who lives away from the family for longer periods which range from months to a number of years at a time. These were named ‘commuter marriages by Goldenberg (1993) and some could label the partners, ‘married singles’. It would be the aim of this study to find out if spouses living apart maintain their integrity as ‘married singles’ or ‘single parents’.

## **3. Theoretical Framework of Marriage**

Theory can be used to explain situations as they are in reality. This study looked at five(5) theories as they relate to marriage. Thus; the symbolic interaction theory, social exchange theory, structural functionalism theory, conflict theory and the family systems theory.

### **3.1 Symbolic Interaction Theory**

How people interact and their interpretation of the interactions is the concern of this theory. Thus the way individuals would define the other part’s actions through symbols(words, gestures and other non-verbal cues)-Strong et al (2001). In a marriage set up, for instance, one may feel that his/her partner really understands or misunderstands him/her, whether communication prevails or not, the communication is positive or negative, they live in harmony or disharmony with each other. Interactions make up a relationship. Farmer (1979) asserts that the family is made up of a web of interacting elements. Hence when these interacting elements are kilometers apart, as the case is with spouses with partners in the diaspora, adverse communications can result. Marriages and families are defined by the form of interactions that spouses and their off-springs (where there are children) make. Thus interactions can define a functional or dysfunctional(a loving, conflict –ridden, emotionally distant, high achiever family). The theory encourages competence in interpersonal relationships and it values individual happiness and fulfillment over stability, duty, responsibility and other familial values. Shvaneveldt (1981) in Strong et al (2001) observed that the welfare and happiness of marital partners are held above the belief that the union (family) should stay intact.

### **3.2 Social Exchange Theory**

This theory states that we measure actions and relationships on a cost-benefit basis. People maximize their rewards and minimize their costs by employing their resources to gain the most favourable outcome. The cost-benefit analysis is used in this theory to some degree in an attempt to explain actions and relationships using the equation Reward- Outcome (Strong et al, 2001). This theory can be used to explain the unconscious calculation, that a partner whose spouse is away makes of the benefits that the relationship brings. For example money, food and clothing. A partner may lack love and affection that is expected in the union and unconsciously or consciously weighs the costs and benefits of joining (if possible) the partner or staying behind. Some of the

rewards in this case may be love, companionship, status, power, fear, loneliness and so on. This study focused on the costs and rewards that come with marriages where a partner lives and works abroad. It is believed that individuals are most happy when they get what they feel they deserve in a relationship. A deprived partner may feel resentful or angry. The research aimed to find out if these partners left behind felt that way since this theory assumes that individuals are factual, calculating animals, weighing the costs and rewards of their relationships.

### **3.3 Structural Functionalism Theory**

The structural functionalism theory explains how society and family works and how families relate to the larger society and to their own members. The family is viewed in three aspects:

- what functions the family serves for the society
- what functional requirements are performed by family members for the family
- what needs the family meets for its individuals

This theory favours social stability, believes that the family must be intact in order to fulfill its functions. It also focuses on which family function is vital. The family (parents), for instance, are supposed to socialize the children, but it seems much socialization has been taken away by school, peers and the media.

### **3.4 Conflict Theory**

The conflict theory assumes that individuals in a marriage and family are in conflict with each other. Power is often used to resolve the conflict. There are four(4) important sources of power thus legitimacy, money, physical coercion and love. The theorists agree that love and affection are important elements in marriages, but they believe that conflict and power are also fundamental. In a marriage or relationship, there are individuals with different personalities, ideas, values, tastes and goals, hence conflict is inevitable. Conflict is inherent in a relationship when we observe that different backgrounds raise conflict. Our economic status as children may serve to shape our feelings. In marriages men mostly win in conflicts as they believe they are the head of the household. They also have greater economic power as they tend to earn more in some cases. Dependency therefore gives the superior much power over the inferior partner. Communication, bargaining and negotiations become of importance in their case. Strong et al (2001) state that the theory highlights aspects such as self-interest, egotism and competition as dominant. In support of this assertion, we can analyse the view that people have rebellious and independent natures with some selfish impulses within them some which the individuals are blind to.

### **3.5 Family Systems Theory**

The theory views the family as a structure of related parts or subsystems. Each part carries out certain functions. The parts being the spousal sub-system, the parent/child sub-system, the parental sub-system(husband and wife) relating to each other as parents and the personal sub-system (the individual and his/her relationships). The sub-systems have to maintain the boundaries(rules governing the relationships). Minuchin(1981) in Strong et al (2001) states that for the family to function well, these sub-systems must be kept separate. Husbands and wives, for instance, should not let their conflict spill over into the parent/child sub-system. Thus a partner may turn to the child for affection that is ordinarily supposed to be received from a spouse. When boundaries of the separate sub-systems blur, as in incest, the family becomes dysfunctional. As indicated in symbolic interaction theory, interaction is also important in family systems theory. A family consists of more than simply its members. Marriage is more than a husband and wife, it includes their pattern of interactions. It is determined by how the spouses act in relation to each other over time-Lederer and Jackson (1968). In Virginia Satir's (1988) view, the family system is compared to a hanging mobile whose pieces, regardless of size and shape can be grouped together and balanced by changing the relative distances between the parts. The family members, like the parts of a mobile, require certain distances between one another to maintain their balance. Any change in the family mobile---such as a child leaving the family, distance the mother from the father---affects the stability of the mobile. Such disequilibrium often manifests itself in emotional turmoil and stress. The family may try to restore the original equilibrium by forcing its 'errant' member to return to his/her former position, or it may adapt to create a new equilibrium with its members in changed relations to one another.

## **4. Functions of the Family**

The family has expected functions regardless of its form. Thus it should:

- provide the secure, mentally healthy environment that is essential for the well-being of each individual family member. The need for belonging and the emotional needs should be fulfilled.
- enhance the competence of each family member to cope with life's stresses, both inside and outside the home. The home has to be a haven from outside pressure. There should be acceptance to build confidence in the individual. This would be carried over into the school, job and all other activities.
- socialize children, thus it must provide role models with whom children can identify with. It should help shape a system of goals and values. Through a family, children learn behaviour patterns that are acceptable to society.

The following functions were also stated by Adams(2001):

- socialization
- regulation of sexual activity
- social placement (social identity, race ethnicity, religion and social class)
- material and emotional security(physical protection, emotional support and financial assistance)

#### **4.1 Socialization**

The family is the basic unit in society with unique functions in transmitting cultural and moral values to the younger generations. Ferree(1990) states that teaching children how to fit into his/her particular culture is one of the families' most important tasks. Children are said to be helpless and dependent for years following birth and they must learn how to talk and walk, how to take care of themselves, how to act, love, how to touch and be touched. However, Guidubaldi, (1980) purports that the increasing lack of parental commitment to childrearing may be one of the most significant societal changes in our lifetimes. Increasing number of working mothers have resulted in placing many infants, toddlers and small children under the care of non-family members such as neighbours, friends or paid caregivers reducing the family's role in child rearing. Farmer (1979) states that it is undeniable that the institutional functions of the family have declined in importance except for the reproductive and socializing ones which have been and still are central.

#### **4.2 Sexual Relationship**

Marriages were expected to share romance, sexual fulfillment and emotional growth-Strong et al(2001). Thus marriages provide a source of intimate relationships. In a relationship, emotional expression flows with spontaneous joy from the kind of love the two lovers affirm for one another. American Sociologist, Kingsley Davis argues that modern marriages are mainly a 'vehicle of sexual gratification and companionship. Outside this sphere it has no significance that would give it stability,' 'if it continues, marriage does not somehow involve the partners in common activities---apart from sexual intercourse it cannot hope to produce a satisfactory companionship or attain any stability.' Westlake(1992) states that physical intimacy is an ingredient in happy marriages, but it is not the most important part. A meaningful marriage is believed to be based on an intimacy of the minds.

#### **4.3 Common Conflict Areas in Marriage**

Farmer(1979) assets that when asked, most couples categorise themselves as happily married, which is the socially acceptable answer. Many such marriages are happy in the negative sense that overt conflict is kept under control and there are common interests such as children, status or a profession. For instance, in real life, individuals in positions of leadership like men of the color (Reverends and pastors), and others in leadership positions where divorce can be detrimental to their reputation might stay married in order to protect their status. The author adds that the usual marital adjustment measurement scales classify as 'successful' those marriages in which a couple engages in little open conflict, have similar interests and fair degree of agreement on major issues, share some of their leisure time and have an affection for one another. Strong et al (2001) states that every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way, marital conflict still tends to center around certain issues, especially communication, children, sex, money, personality differences, how to spend leisure time, in-laws, infidelity and housekeeping. Kanyowa(2003) also adds that in Zimbabwe, the cultural transformation taking place has led to more women working thus affecting the spouses' traditional roles and where there is poor communication or no communication to openly discuss the domestic and marital roles the relationship is likely to be fraught with tension and conflict that may lead to separation or divorce. Mwamwenda(1996) also alludes to the sources of conflict as in-law problems, alcohol addiction, career versus marriage, jealousy, infidelity, religious values, child bearing, work addiction and sex. The author went on to say that finances can also cause marital discord leading to unhappiness in the home. Some husbands tend to give their non-working wives little money for housekeeping while they spend most of it on drinking, gambling or girlfriends. Where both partners work, arguments may be over whether they pool their incomes together or manage them independently, who manages the finances and who pays for what bills. These could have been reasons for some partners migrating to other countries to get some 'freedom'. Mwamwenda (1996) also mentions that sex which can be taken as a source of conflict by partners may be used as a weapon to get to each other when partners are dissatisfied and this in turn makes it even less likely for hope of sexual reconciliation.

#### **4.4 Communication**

Westlake (1992) asserts that talking provides the most meaningful way of expressing marital love. Communication leads to understanding. Thus understanding to acceptance, acceptance to adjustment in marriage. Partners who do not or cannot communicate at all have little opportunity to improve or even maintain their relationship. It is believed that the level of marital satisfaction increases with the time couples spend talking to each other. In real life communication distinguishes man from animals. Unlike animals who are limited to a few short instinctive impulses, the ability of humans allows them to exchange an infinite number of signals with each other. The basic radio language of receiver and sender makes humans relational- the ability to transmit and

receive all kinds of personal data. Kanyowa(2003) states that the changes that have taken place in the society leading to families living apart, with some members as far as abroad, have brought a lack of guidance from the older generation. Conversely couples are faced with issues never faced by their parents and they find it hard to get advice from them. The lack of guidance therefore can lead to frustrations and disharmony when the couple face problems in the relationship. The study sought to establish if these areas of conflict or any other also affect relationships where the partners are living apart because of labour or other forms of migration.

#### **4.5 Effects on Children**

These spousal relations and the effects on development of children in the absence of one parent is the concern of this study. Battistella and Conaco (1998) in her study gave the impression that migration is not necessarily disruptive of or the development of the children left behind, particularly if it is the mother who remains in the home. The effects depend mostly on the extent of involvement of the extended family in complementing the gaps resulting from parental absence. Gorer(1955) noted that the separation of home and work had profound effects on day to day family life. It broke up the close and frequent interactions of husbands and wives, parents and children. The long absence of the principal breadwinner had had its effects on the internal authority structure of the family. Children suffer physical and emotional neglect depending on their ages. As pointed by Goldenberg and Goldenberg (1993) the absence of one parent, more and more common, may have particularly damaging effect on the remaining parent as well as the children.

#### **4.6 HIV/AIDS, Labour Migration and Marriage**

George and Robert(2004) argue that increased labour migration and population mobility has also increased the risk to HIV and AIDS. That prevalence of HIV and AIDS in Mexico is claimed to be traced to the return of the agricultural labourers from the United States of America. Crafts (2006) notes that in Southern Africa where the epidemic is particularly severe, it is caused by male migration from neighbouring countries to work on mines in South Africa. In this regard both males and females in Zimbabwe have been on record in terms of migrating to South Africa and Botswana in search of greener pastures. The Herald, a Zimbabwean national daily paper dated 25 November 2009 cited a Harare city official stating that 'Harare was hard hit by flight of nursing staff to Australia, United Kingdom, New Zealand, South Africa, Botswana--- at the height of economic difficulties.' On their return home problems related to HIV and AIDS are obviously inevitable. The married spouses are usually at the receiving end. Jackson(2002) strongly puts this point across when the author says, 'The bitter truth is that marriage is the relationship through which the majority of women in Southern Africa become infected. A majority of cross boarder female traders of Zimbabwe who go to neighbouring countries such as South Africa have double tragedy as they could infect and be infected by a legal spouse or a casual partner/lover as they spend months on ends away from home trying to fend for their families. This becomes the hazard of long distance relationships. Crafts (2006) notes that sex exploitation of female migrants whether in transit or their destination, human trafficking or forced movement, are also other problems faced in South Africa. It seems in Zimbabwe most are forced by economic hardships to migrate hence being separated from their families.

The main goal of this study was to establish the family problems faced by individuals with partners working and living abroad. It is against this background that the study sought to answer the following research questions:

- What is the nature of the problems encountered by individuals whose spouses/partners have migrated to other countries?
- To what extent are the problems of each spouse/partner similar?
- How do the distanced couples/individuals manage marital/family issues?
- To what extent has the separation benefited the family?

### **5. Methodology**

The study adopted the descriptive survey design to solicit information from the selected participants. This method was chosen in order to allow the researcher to study relationships and events as they happen in the lives of the individuals with partners working and living abroad. The information on the subjects was gathered, attitudes on aspects of behaviour that are difficult to observe were directly observed. Also the data was collected using interviews and questionnaires taking into consideration the literacy rate of the respondents. Those who were not fluent in their reading were interviewed whereas the affluent responded to questionnaires. The population consisted of Chinhoyi residence, both female and male partners of individuals working and living abroad.

#### **5.1 Sample**

The sample comprised of forty(40), twenty(20) female and twenty(20) males with partners working and living abroad. The age groups of the subjects ranged from 20 -60 years and above, of which the 20-29 year range had only 5%(2) female, the 30-39 year range consisting of 15(38%) 7 male and 8 females, 40-49year range with 14(35%) 4 male and 10 female, 50-59year range having 6(15%) male subjects, while the 60 years and older with

3(8%) male subjects. The statistic of the subjects indicates that both male and female partners have left home to find greener pastures and the alarming part is the 50-60years and above who have been left behind by their partners. The convenient and purposive sampling methods were used. This involved choosing the nearest individuals to serve as respondents. The subjects were conveniently selected because they were known to have partners working and living abroad and were available at the time of the study whereas purposive sampling meant that the subjects were likely to be knowledgeable and informative about the phenomena.

### 5.2 Instruments

A questionnaire and an interview guide were used to collect data. The give and return method was used in order to realize 100% return rate of the questionnaire. The interview was carried out after explaining to the interviewees how sensitive the issues would be. The interviews occurred in an atmosphere like that of a counselling room where the client would get a moment to vent out the bottled up issues and this helped to solicit the actual issues at hand.

### 5.3 Research Procedures

Using the convenient and purposive sampling subjects were selected. The snowballing procedure also assisted in identifying the next subject since those who had absent partners seemed to know each other. Snowballing is a method that can be used to obtain knowledge through previous acquaintances, so in this study recommendations to find people with specific range of skills that have been determined as being useful were utilized.

### 5.4 Ethical Considerations

Taking into consideration the sensitivity of the issue investigated, the researcher observed the principle of non-maleficence whereby the subjects' welfare would be promoted in that they had a platform to offload their emotions through the expression of the painful material in the unconscious whereas the principle of beneficence was catered for when the subjects felt good about themselves after talking about their issues and also knowing that they were not alone in the predicament. Respect for the dignity, worth, potential, uniqueness and privacy of each subject was observed. They were informed that they would not be judged for their contributions and were being considered as unique beings with the potential to effect positive change in their lives. The subjects were assured of confidentiality of individual communications, unless they wished to share their information in a focus group discussion and that the information they provided were for this study. Through informed consent, the subjects who participated did so willingly.

**Table 4.1: Background of Respondents**

<b>Variables</b>				
<b>Age groups</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>
20-29 years	0	2	2	5
20-39 years	7	8	15	38
40-49 years	4	10	14	35
50-59 years	6	0	6	15
60< years	3	0	3	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Type of Union</b>		<b>Frequency</b>		<b>Percentage %</b>
Customary		15		38
Civil		25		62
<b>Total</b>		<b>40</b>		<b>100</b>
<b>Number of Children</b>		<b>Respondents</b>		<b>Percentage</b>
None		2		5
One(1)		5		12
Two(2)		14		35
Three(3)		15		37
Four(4)		2		5
Five(5)		1		3
Six(6)		1		3
<b>Total</b>		<b>40</b>		<b>100</b>

## 6. Results

As indicated by the bio-data of the subjects, the age range of migrant partners were from 20 to 60 years and above. The highest frequency of such partners fell within the 30-39year range which constituted 38% followed by the 40-49 year range that's has 35%. The 30-39year range, especially in the case of female migrant spouses,

is the child bearing period and this means the crucial time when spouse/partners desire each other's company most. The unions of the respondents and their spouses/partners ranged from 1 year to 30 years and above, with the highest migration among those who had been in the union 6 -10 years and 11-15 years constituting 15% while those who were in the union from 16 -20years and 21-25 years comprising 20% each. Laterally the total of those who have been in the union for 6 to 25 years constitute 70% which is quite a high percentage.

In the 1970s it was common for men to migrate in search of labour within the Southern Africa. As alluded by Crush, Williams and Peberdy (2005) by 1970, there were over 260,000 male labour migrants on the South African mines. Migrants came from as far north as Tanzania. Other mining centers in Zambia, Zimbabwe, Namibia and Tanzania also became magnets for labour migrants from other countries. The other major employer of migrants in South Africa, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Swaziland, Mauritius and Tanzania were commercial farms and plantations. Migrants also worked in the colonial period in urban centres in construction, domestic service and industry. These days the migration pattern has changed with females joining the migration train as indicated in the respondents' bio-data in Table 1. Labour migrations seem to have been common from time immemorial (especially for males) and justifies the reason for the 50-60 years and above age range for the partners who left for greener pastures. From the findings, 80% were economic migrants, while 10% moved due to marital discourse and the other 10% just migrated to get a feel of new environment or as asylum seekers. Among them 80% mutually agreed to the migration in the hope of changing their lifestyle.

The types of marriages for the respondents include the customary and the civil marriages, with civil marriages consisting 62% of the sample while customary covering 38%. In both marriages lobola is common and this binds the woman to the man's family as indicated by Mvududu et al (2002:16) that "---lobola means different things in different contexts-----it signifies the transfer of the woman's reproductive and productive rights to the man's group----." It could be, as was indicated in the findings that some partners stayed in the union in order to honour the traditional practice that tied the union (lobola). It was shown by the responses that those who had 1-3 children in the union consisted of 73% and they were prepared to accept the partner back regardless of the long stay away from home and the risk of HIV and AIDS.

It was also indicated in the findings that most (73%) migrant partners had professions that ranged from teaching, nursing, accounting, management to pharmacy. This could mean that they would be occupying decent jobs wherever they migrated to, could be able to relocate their families if they were legal migrants and could be able to support their families left behind.

Family problems faced by individuals with partners working and living abroad were presented as extracted from the respondents' responses that answered the research questions of the study.

**Research question 1:** *What is the nature of the problems encountered by individuals whose spouses/partners ?*

Responses indicated that the problems faced by individuals with spouses/partners living and working abroad include problems such as communication breakdown, infidelity, pressure exerted by relatives, unfulfilled conjugal rights, loneliness, jealousy, financial neglect, delinquency of children, insecurity of the relationship, discipline problems with children, lack of emotional support, loss of respect from the society and labeling as 'married single'. In some cases the wives and family members of migrants (internal and cross border) maybe left behind to retain access to land and housing in home areas, as well as to pursue traditional household activities. This increases the labour load of the home household, and, as remittances may be intermittent can place households in a precarious position, and encourage unsafe sexual behaviour. On the other hand, regular remittances may provide inputs to the household, which could be impossible with illegal immigrants who have no way of sending the little they have managed to gather for the family back home.

In an interview with a female spouse left behind by her husband who migrated to South Africa during the 2007-8 period, she said;

*"A few months after my husband left for South Africa to search for greener pastures, he frequently phoned to find out how we were managing and he would send the little that he could for our sustenance. As time went by, he would phone after two or more weeks and gradually stopped phoning. When friends and neighbours asked about him, I just told them he was alright and was phoning us in order to save my status"*

In such a scenario, the spouse/partner, especially the female, had to carry the burden of child rearing, containing delinquency of children and labeling by society as "married single". Most indicated that when their spouses/partners became 'silent' their kins took it on them and emotionally abused them by sometimes forcing them out of the home (if they were left in the extended family household). If they were left in their own homes, relatives would give them the burden of taking care of their children so as to make sure they are not engaged in extra marital affairs (especially females left behind). A female subject interviewed indicated that her in-law demanded that she vacates the house that she built when her husband had gone to the United Kingdom although her son never contributed anything.

In the survey, 60% alluded that their partners/spouses communicated through the phone (land or cell), 25% would

phone as well as visit the family left behind and 15% indicated that their partners/spouses emailed or phoned to find out how they were doing. On the frequency of the communication, 43% said that their partners/spouses communicated weekly, 35% daily, 15% rarely and 7% communicated monthly. When asked about the quality of communication which were rated as good, satisfactory, excellent and poor, 30% were good, 27% excellent, satisfactory 23% and 20% indicated that their communication was poor. Thus poor in that it was full of blaming, quarrels, double bind messages and other dysfunctional forms of communication.

On the problem of infidelity, 28% of males indicated they were having extra-marital affairs in order to cover up for the gap left by the partner/spouse, whereas just 10% females agreed to having extra-marital affairs. Among the subjects, 95% indicated that they had the desire for intimacy and longed for companionship, which is correctly the reason for marriage, 11% dated as a copying skill while 72% engaged in diversional activities such as working extra hours, joining social clubs and involving themselves in extra church activities and playing games that take away their energy(re-energizing other psyche-Jung). On enquiry of the status of their marriages or partnership, 70% indicated that the relationship was tied by financial support they got from the partner/spouse abroad, while 30% said their relationship was dysfunctional, 37% responded to have secure relationships and 63% reported to have insecure relationships with their spouses/partners. Overallly 30% indicated that their unions were no longer functional. They always felt that the other partner/spouse could be co-habiting with another person wherever they are.

**Research Question2:** *To what extent are the problems of each spouse similar?*

Research question2 was meant to find out how similar the partners problems could be similar. It was unfortunate that only the available spouses/partners gave their opinion or explained issues as they were presented in communication with their partners/spouses. Most of the subjects, 65% indicated that they lacked emotional support from their spouses/partners. The available partners explained that their partners/spouses complained that the respondents were not being sensitive to their status in the foreign lands where they could not get the privileges of citizens by demanding too much from them, whereas the individuals left behind indicated that their migrated partners were not sensitive enough to imagine how much loneliness, pressure from their relatives and burden of 'single' parenting meant. Both parties were indicated to suspect infidelity from each other, as indicated by the 56% response on how much they thought each of them thought about the other. A female subject explained how frequently her spouse would phone on their landline and demand to talk to the children, in an attempt to find out where the spouse is at the time. Those who were left behind indicated that they would phone on odd hours so as to establish if their partners had company of the opposite sex. To some greater extent the spouses/partners showed they had similar problems due to separation caused by migration.

**Research Question 3:** *How do the distanced couples/partners manage marital/family issues?*

In this research question the research sought to establish how the distanced partners/spouses manage their marital and family issues. From the responses, the indication is that some use material support to keep the family in touch(60%), some visit, phone and send money home. It was alluded that some individual left in custody of children and having no financial support from their partners found it difficult to manage the family alone. Children left behind faced risks of abuse of all kinds, psychosocial problems and their psychosocial well-being was greatly impacted by feelings of abandonment, low self esteem resulting from mockery in the community and school(when nothing is sent home), anger, depression, material obsession and violence.

**Research Question 4:** *To what extent has the separation benefited the family?*

The subjects indicated that to some extent they benefited from the separation. Some 80% said they received financial and material support from their partners, 10% got both financial and emotional support, while 5% indicated that they benefited from the absence of the abusive partner by attaining independence. some subjects (42%) indicated that they were now able to enroll their children in good schools or boarding schools due to the availability of funds sent from abroad. Some alluded to being saved from the burden of fending for both extended families with their meager earnings at home(male subjects) as the partner would cover that responsibility.

## 7. Discussion

The result show that most migrants went to South Africa, followed by Botswana. Some migrated to the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand and China. The study revealed that 80% of the couples agreed to have one of them migrate while only 20% made individual decisions. As indicated in the results, in most unions in the study, their cost benefit analysis showed to be money, recognition and status versus a continuing personal connection with the spouse and children. Goode(1982) in Strong et al(2001) states that marriage will be stable when the family is economically functional and thus an important unit of social organisation or any situation where marriage tends to be primarily an economic arrangement. In most of the situations, the union has pivoted on financial benefits alone, which is not enough. In a marriage, there also should be healthy communication, emotional support, trust and conjugal rights have to be fulfilled, which seem to be lacking in most of the unions



of individuals with partners working and living abroad. It was shown that a significant number of partners were turning to infidelity as a means of escapism in which men took a greater percentage. The results also showed that the unions are unstable and may end up in breakdown or break-ups due to ineffective communication patterns, lack of support, pressure from in-laws, unfulfilled desires for intimacy, loneliness, delinquency of children, infidelity, fear of HIV and AIDS, insecurity in marriage, inability to manage the children, reduced exchange of affection and poverty.

## 8. Conclusions and Recommendations

The study concludes that most Zimbabweans whose partners migrated to South Africa, Botswana, the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand and China mostly for economic reasons have a myriad of family problems although some mutually agreed to the migration. Some are benefiting while others are not and they are suffering in silence in order to keep their statuses in the community. As it is in the African culture, female partners cannot move on when lobola was paid to their family and the male partner has not yet dissolved the union. Thus the female suffers silently, even when it means contracting HIV when the partner returns.

Therefore the study recommends that:

- families need to try their best to stay together
- there should be provisions of family counselling services which are both accessible and affordable to assist spouses who have issues nagging them
- support groups for individuals with partners working and living abroad to help each other deal with family problems
- the government to improve the economy so as to prevent massive migration to other countries for economic reasons

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