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ECONOMIC EXPERIENCE OF MIGRANT WOMEN RESIDING IN GAUTENG, SOUTH AFRICA: A SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOOD PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the correlation between poverty and the economic experiences of undocumented migrant women residing in a community in Gauteng province, South Africa. Through using a qualitative methodology, we present evidence from interviews and a focus group conducted with 20 women who relate their experiences. Adopting a sustainable livelihood perspective, this article presents the biographical profiles of the women and discusses three themes: social capital influences, tapping into human capital skills, and access to financial capital. This article contributes to debates on promoting gender justice and sustainable livelihoods as a prerequisite for poverty alleviation in Africa.

Keywords: economic experiences, migrant women, sustainable livelihoods, undocumented.

INTRODUCTION

The World Economic Forum (2020) asserts that migration is an ancient phenomenon that has social, cultural and economic implications for both migrants and host countries for several generations. In contemporary times, one key feature of economic globalisation is the fluid movement of both skilled and unskilled labourers across and within national borders (Chingono, 2015). McAuliffe, Khadria and Bauloz (2019) projected the number of migrants as 272 million, translating to approximately 3.5% of the global population in the World Migration Report. The preceding proponents also indicated that the World Migration Report of 2020 also revealed that transitional economies such as those of India, Mexico and China have the highest number of migrants employed in the formal work sector and living in countries of the Global

North. According to Pokroy (2019), the Green Paper on International Migration of 2019 revealed an increase in the number of immigrants from 2.5% in 2005 to about 7.2% in 2019. Masabo (2016) estimated that 1.86 million migrants from Zimbabwe, Swaziland, Lesotho, Somalia and Mozambique live in South Africa. Thomas, Young and Ellingen (2011) contend that factors such as gender-based violence, lack of access to education, poverty, and political and economic instability are key factors that contribute to the feminisation of migration in Africa. Empirical evidence presented by Zarar, Bukhsh and Khaskheli (2017) revealed that undocumented female migrants struggle to secure jobs in the formal work sector and are more likely to become informal traders in the second economy. Furthermore, these researchers argue that female migrants bear the brunt of a triple burden, namely gender, race and class discrimination as a result of their undocumented status. Sharmani (2010) argues that discourses such as distinct forms of local and global consciousness, the process of financial flow across countries, modes of labour production, and transnational family networks are key phenomena worth taking into account when examining the feminisation of migration.

This article aims to contribute to this discourse by showing how and why 20 women from Mozambique and Zimbabwe migrated to South Africa to engage in livelihood activities to sustain their families. The analysis presents their biographical profiles and deliberates on three key themes: social capital influences, tapping into human capital skills, and access to financial capital; it also locates this discourse within the broader African socio-political and economic landscape. The paper contributes to the debates on promoting gender justice and sustainable livelihoods as a prerequisite to dealing with the feminisation of poverty in Africa.

UNDOCUMENTED MIGRANTS WHO ARE SINGLE MOTHERS RESIDING IN SOUTH AFRICA

Berman and Marshall (2011:108) define a migrant as “any person moving and/or resettling across an international border”. Thulstrup (2015:352) defines the condition of an undocumented migrant as involving “the absence of legal documents such as a passport, valid visa, work or study permit that allows a person access into their country of choice”.

According to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Report (2017), female migrants constituted 44.4% of the total migrant population in South Africa. Statistics South Africa (2018) identified that 8% of the approximately 13 million people residing in Gauteng province in South Africa consisted of immigrants from the *Southern African Development Community (SADC)* countries (Mbiyozo, 2018; Mokoena, 2017; Warria, Nel & Triegaardt 2014). Researchers such as Butler (2017) and Batuo, Mlambo and Asongu (2018) state that the migration of single mothers to South Africa from Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland, Mozambique and Zimbabwe can be attributed to economic stagnation, high levels of unemployment and political instability, which have led to decreased foreign investment in these countries. This is exacerbated by climate change, such as frequent droughts and devastating floods (Butler, 2017). Such natural and structural challenges have contributed to a weak economy, the collapse of leadership in government, followed by civil strife and political unrest in these SADC countries (Aisen & Veiga, 2013).

Sobantu and Warria (2013) and Bloch and McKay (2016) argue that in the post-1994 period pull factors such as the new democracy, aspirations for freedom, and political and economic stability attracted a lot of foreign nationals to migrate to South Africa. The International Organisation for Migration (2016) adds that most migrants came to the province of Gauteng to look for better jobs in the formal economy and to start businesses in the informal economy. However, we must note that national poverty reduction strategies have been weakly aligned to strategies for transformative action, economic growth and poverty reduction (Raniga, 2021). This weakness includes failing to consider migrants and their potentially productive contributions to South Africa's economy. Mambi (2018) reports that restrictive labour law policies that have remained biased toward migrants and the lack of institutional mechanisms to facilitate access to job opportunities in the formal work sector reinforce exclusionary practices in South Africa. Such structural factors have a ripple effect on access to state resources and social protection cash transfers, contributing to migrant single mothers having to sustain their households.

Pumariega and Rothe (2010) argue that a critical characteristic of female migrants is the essential support system and multiple social capital relations that they nurture both in the home country and the host country. Matsai and Raniga (2021) and Hungwe (2013) found that Zimbabwean single mothers tapped into faith-based organisations and family networks to secure jobs and accommodation in South Africa. Raniga (2019) suggests that we take into account these qualitative indicators linked to the feminisation of migration and survival strategies. In an attempt to contribute to this debate, this article seeks to provide an empirically based understanding of undocumented single mothers' economic experiences, social capital networks and tapping into human capital skills that these women perceive as being significant in their pursuit of sustainable livelihood activities. The central premise is that by accessing kin and non-kin networks, working in the informal economy and tapping into human capital skills, migrant women can survive, cope and more effectively seek a better life in South Africa.

These social capital associations also facilitated economic benefits such as grocery clubs, savings clubs and money-lending schemes. A further challenge experienced by the foreign African mothers was that they could not register their children to attend school because of their undocumented status. Consequently, they worked long hours while engaging in multiple income-generating strategies to survive (Acharya & Schnabl, 2010). This affects them psychosocially and increases their economic stresses in their quest to sustain their livelihoods (Matsai & Raniga, 2021).

THE SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOOD APPROACH IN THE CONTEXT OF THIS STUDY

The sustainable livelihood approach provides an innovative strategy for social workers seeking to reduce income insecurity in single-mother households (Raniga, & Ringson, 2021). In South Africa, the developmental social welfare approach encourages female-headed families to engage in livelihood activities to improve their social and economic profile and sustain their households (Lombard, 2018; Raniga, 2018). Writers such as Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) and Nel (2015) have discussed the integration of five significant assets necessary to sustain livelihoods in poor households. The first asset is human capital, which includes work

experience, skills, knowledge and creative capabilities. The absence of formal education and skills training has compelled migrant women to rely on implicit entrepreneurial skills learnt through trading activities in their home countries (Mabudusha, 2014).

The second asset is natural capital, which refers to resources such as access to land, water, electricity, agriculture and minerals. The third asset is physical capital, which includes access to food, livestock, jewellery, household appliances, equipment and technological devices. The fourth asset is financial capital, which relates to access to money earned through working in the formal or informal economy, investments, savings in the bank and/or the receipt of cash transfers from the state. The fifth asset is social capital which refers to transnational family networks and social relations based on non-kin or voluntary associations. Markley (2011) states that interpersonal relationships between migrant women are not one-dimensional but take on multiple forms of mutual reciprocity and support within their home country and in the host country. Bourdieu (1976) argues that there is a close connection between these forms of capital and that access to financial capital can influence social capital networks that facilitate one's habitus and human capital development.

On the contrary, Bourdieu (1976) does warn that not all social networks and relationships would facilitate one's human skills development, financial capital enhancement and physical capital accumulation. Instead, the cultural capital or the social status of families in society depends on access to basic education and advanced access to higher education, leading to human capital aspirations. This is a cyclical process that advances the growth and development of household members. Bourdieu (1976) argued further that cultural, financial, and social capital contribute to symbolic capital.

The *sustainable livelihood approach (SLA)* shares a conceptual synergy with the social development paradigm as a key poverty-reduction strategy in communities. Patel (2015:242) aptly states that in contemporary South Africa, SLA has been advocated as a means of improving the livelihood outcomes of female-headed households through "increasing income, reducing vulnerability, strengthening social networks, improving access to human capacity development and resources for a more sustainable household". The SLA is underpinned by principles of people-centredness, social justice and human rights. The approach is aligned to the pillars of social development, namely building authentic partnerships, economic self-reliance, a rights-based approach, holism, and dynamism. Nel (2015) argued that households adjust to their physical, social, economic and natural environments by focusing on these livelihood capitals designed to protect the household from shocks during times of crisis, such as migrating from one's home country to a host country of choice.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research context

A descriptive study was conducted in the Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality in a predominantly low-income community 40 km north of Johannesburg, South Africa, called Tembisa. The Ekurhuleni region constitutes one of the largest conglomerations of low-income residential areas in one of the most densely populated provinces in South Africa, namely Gauteng. Moreover, the community of Tembisa is inhabited by many undocumented foreign

national women from Mozambique and Zimbabwe. Similar to other low-income communities in South Africa, Tembisa is characterised by high poverty levels, little or no access to productive employment and inadequate access to health, recreational and social work services. In this present study, an undocumented migrant single mother is defined as a woman from Zimbabwe or Mozambique who cares for minor children and is in charge of making decisions regarding the material, financial, social and physical resources needed for sustaining the household. Oppression, vulnerability to poverty and socio-economic inequality place these migrant African single mothers at greater risk of mental health problems as a result of their undocumented status and lack of access to jobs. A core objective of this study was to examine the complex correlation between poverty and related economic experiences of migrant single mothers in their pursuit of livelihood activities to sustain livelihoods while residing in the community of Tembisa.

Our participants

Using a qualitative methodology, the researchers were guided by a three-pronged process of active engagement, continuous planning, and implementation of field visits to Tembisa from June 2018 to August 2019 (Rubin & Babbie, 2017). The active engagement phase consisted of a literature search on poverty, gender relations and sustaining livelihoods. The implementation of field visits involved several meetings with the leadership of the area regarding the purpose of the research and the ideological position of the researchers. The sustainable livelihood approach guided the study, and the researchers took note of the women's access to assets and their social networks as part of their migration experiences in South Africa.

The researchers employed non-probability snowball sampling to select the undocumented single mothers. We networked with women's clubs, social workers from the Department of Social Development and non-governmental organisations. Terre Blanche, Durrheim and Painter (2006) state that snowball sampling entails recruiting participants from places where they are easily accessible and where subsequent referrals are made. The criteria for inclusion in the sample were as follows:

- They were women of African origin who had been residing in South Africa for at least two years;
- The women were willing to engage in a discussion of how they survived in a foreign country and sustained their livelihoods;
- The women had no legal documents and were considered illegal migrants;
- They were heads of their households;
- The women were responsible for the care of the children;
- They were willing to participate in a group discussion and share their life experiences.

Initially three women from their respective communities were interviewed. These women referred the researchers to other undocumented women who were single mothers based on the criteria for selection. The advantage of this sampling method was that it allowed the researchers to contact the existing support networks of these women in Tembisa (Marlow, 2011). The

researchers were committed to understanding each woman's unique migration experiences and their motivations to come to South Africa (Sharmani, 2010).

Data-Collection Process

One face-to-face semi-structured interview was conducted individually with 15 women and one focus group session was conducted with five undocumented single mothers. Throughout the interview and focus group, the researchers were mindful of being empathic listeners, while providing debriefing and support in a safe environment where the women could interact casually during the interview process (Rubie & Babbie, 2017). The advantage of commencing with the interview session was that it allowed the researchers to discuss the purpose and objectives of the study and seek the women's consent to participate in the focus group session. Each woman's narrative shared during the interviews and focus group provided insight into their survival experiences and the economic challenges that profoundly impacted on their quality of life in South Africa. The average duration of the interviews was 1.5 hours, and the focus group session lasted an hour. The following questions were used as a guide in the interview process:

- What were your motivations for coming to South Africa?
- What assets helped you to sustain your household?
- How did you survive financially?
- What support networks helped you cope when adjusting to life in South Africa?

Ethical Considerations

An ethical clearance letter was received from the Research and Ethics Committee at the higher education institution. All the women signed informed consent forms during the interviews and the focus group. Because of the sensitivity of this study and the women's undocumented status, the majority of them did not want to sign the consent forms. However, once the researchers assured them that no names would be used to report the findings and that pseudonyms would be adopted to protect their respective identities, all the women gave their written and verbal permission to tape-record the interview and the focus group session. Member checking, a method to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, was applied in this study. The researchers kept detailed field notes and had multiple meetings to peer review the transcripts and field notes to reduce subjectivity and biases on the part of the researchers (Rubie & Babbie, 2017).

Data Analysis

In the data-analysis phase, the researchers were guided by de Vos, Schwanen, Van Acker, and Witlox's (2013) thematic analysis, which entailed categorising, ordering, manipulating and summarising the data to answer the research questions. The researchers used this approach to move back and forth between the raw data and the transcripts to gain more insight into the emergent themes for the final research report. The data were thematically and critically analysed in relation to the literature on the feminisation of migration and sustainable livelihood theory. Marlow (2011) states that moving from data capturing to immersing oneself into, conceptualising and theorising the data is the most tedious yet distinctive aspect of qualitative research. The researchers were engaged more closely in learning about how the interplay of the various forms of capitals and

migration experiences profoundly impacted on household sustainability. This article, therefore, does not claim to provide a comprehensive analysis of the linkages and processes that sustain undocumented single-mother families across different countries. Instead, it seeks to draw attention to women's economic experiences in their quest to sustain livelihoods and shed some light on some of the key challenges they faced in their adjustment to life in South Africa.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The empirical findings presented emerged from the analysis of one semi-structured interview and one focus group session held with undocumented single mothers as well as from the consensus discussion between the researchers on the analysed data. Fifteen of the single mothers participated in the semi-structured interview and five mothers participated in one focus group session.

The discussion of the findings will be presented in two sections:

- A biographical profile of the participants; and
- A discussion of three closely connected themes, namely the influences of social capital, tapping into human capital skills, and access to financial capital.

Table 1: The biographical profile of the participants

Pseudonym	Age	Nationality	Employment	Number of children	Education level	Marital status
Nyasha	38	Zimbabwean	Child-minder	2	Grade 11	Divorcee
Althina	49	Mozambique	Street vendor	2	Grade 4	Single
Rhifumo	38	Mozambique	Street vendor	2	Grade 10	Single
Rose	34	Mozambique	Street vendor	3	Grade 5	Divorcee
Bridget	32	Mozambique	Street vendor	3	Grade 7	Single
Joy	37	Mozambique	Street vendor	4	Grade 2	Single
Nancy	43	Zimbabwean	Street vendor	5	Grade 8	Widow
Mufumi	29	Mozambique	Employee at a salon	2	Grade 10	Single
Gift	31	Mozambique	Street vendor	1	Grade 6	Single
Adia	26	Mozambique	Employee at salon	2	Grade 7	Separated
Julia	34	Mozambique	Street vendor	3	Grade 6	Single
Nkhensani	44	Mozambique	Sells second-hand	4	Grade 10	Widow
Ivania	37	Mozambique	Hair stylist	2	Grade 5	Single
Latifa	38	Mozambique	Street vendor	3	Grade 4	Single
Nkateko	30	Mozambique	Street vendor	1	Grade 5	Single
Dorsha	36	Mozambique	Street vendor	2	Grade 9	Single
Ashali	27	Mozambique	Street vendor	1	Grade 8	Single
Precious	48	Zimbabwean	Street vendor	5	Grade 7	Widow
Joy	24	Mozambique	Street vendor	1	Grade 12	Single
Jenifer	48	Zimbabwean	Street vendor	4	Grade 12	Widow

According to Statistics South Africa (2019), most migrants in South Africa are from Mozambique and Zimbabwe. It is evident from Table 1 that 16 of the participants were from Mozambique and the remaining four were from Zimbabwe. Three of the 20 participants were widows; two were divorcees, while the remaining 15 women were single and resided with their minor children. The age distribution shows that four mothers were between 24 and 29 years old; 11 were between 30 and 39, and five were between 40 and 49 (N=20). The mean age was 36.

All the women acknowledged that their undocumented status made them more nervous and vulnerable to being caught by the police as well as being victims of xenophobic attacks by the locals (Raniga, 2019). They were acutely aware that their illegal status meant that the authorities could deport them. All the women stated that they intended to go to the Department of Home Affairs to get their asylum-seeker permits. However, they did not have the money to pay to obtain these work permit documents. The women also revealed that they were aware that their undocumented status hindered them from securing productive employment in the formal work sector and accessing educational and social services for their children. The Immigration Act 13 of 2002 (RSA, 2002) and the South African Refugees Act (RSA, 1998: Section 108) are foundational pieces of legislation that enshrine the commitment of the South African government to ensure the protection, welfare and wellbeing of migrants in the country. However, Gardner, Johnson and Wiehe (2015) argues that despite the state's legislative commitment to upholding the rights of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants, the tedious and costly processes put in place by the Department of Home Affairs tend to criminalise undocumented migrants (Gardener *et al.*, 2015). Betts and Collier (2017) add that the unnecessary bureaucracy imposed by the South African Department of Home Affairs is at the core of human insecurity experienced by many foreign nationals and represents a severe weakness in implementing the refugee protection mandate.

Instead, the rights of undocumented migrants do not include the right to stay or work in South Africa, which makes them vulnerable to arrest, to being detained and/or being deported once their undocumented illegal status is known (Landau, Ramjathan-Keogh & Singh, 2005).

In terms of their livelihood activities, Table 1 shows that participants Ivania, Mufumi and Adia were employed on contract as hairstylists, and Nkensani sold second-hand clothing as her livelihood activity. The remaining 16 participants worked as informal traders, selling fruit and vegetables in their respective communities.

In terms of the participants' educational levels, nine of the participants had a secondary education, while 11 of them had only primary school education. It is not surprising that the majority of the undocumented foreign national single mothers did not complete their schooling and had low literacy levels, as poor access to education for females is deeply embedded in gender discrimination and male hegemony (Raniga, 2021). According to Härkönen (2018), these low literacy levels imply those single mothers have little or no access to secure jobs in the formal economy. Clearly, undocumented single mothers working in the informal sector are at the lowest end of the socio-economic spectrum, which is linked to their low literacy levels (Matsai & Raniga 2021).

The following discussion highlights three critical themes that emerged from the data analysis: social capital influences, tapping into human capital skills, and access to financial capital.

Social capital influences

One of the findings of this study was that making decisions about migrating to South Africa was based on consistent communication with relatives who had migrated and had been living in South Africa for at least a year. The women revealed that while their family members with secure jobs in South Africa had a considerable say in the process, in their own case they were the sole decision-makers. Other non-kin relations such as friends and extended relatives also contributed to their motivation and decision to migrate based on mutual trust, shouldering child-care responsibilities and gaining access to information and institutional mechanisms that would enable their movement. This corroborates the finding by Markley (2011), who revealed that social capital involving reciprocity and trusting relationships with friends and family is important to migrant women in constructing and maintaining their livelihoods in the host country. Authors, Sharmani (2010) and Landau and Duponchel (2011), agree that an essential characteristic of migrants and their way of life is the nurturing of multiple social relations and cross-border connections both in the home and the host countries.

Zagel and Hübgen (2018) stated that these transnational social networks significantly influenced the life situation and coping strategies of migrant women who are single mothers caring for minor children. During the interviews, 12 women stated that they had consulted relatives and friends who were already living in South Africa and who supported them with tangible resources such as access to transport money, place of accommodation, food security and sharing information on work options (Hofmann, 2014).

Maphosa (2012) maintains that such experiences resonate with the idea of social capital and the network theory of migration, which posits that migrants assist each other through teaching and learning the local language and sharing the connections they developed with South Africans. Participant Ashali who worked as an informal trader, shared her sentiments:

My family are very supportive with regard to assisting me with the children. Sometimes I come home late, and my sister will be guarding the children for me but financially, no because we are all struggling.

Joy from Mozambique shared that:

The only people I have as my friends are these ladies that also sell here. We come early and leave late, and most of us are here the whole week.

In addition, Nancy from Zimbabwe mentioned:

I was worried about my children because politics in Zimbabwe was churning with violence. I'd heard from my social contacts in South Africa that there was peace, and I could earn a living with my entrepreneurial skills.

It is evident from the sentiments shared by these women that their kin and friendship networks helped them to cope as undocumented migrant single mothers. They could share their problems and support each other with childcare responsibilities. These psychosocial safety nets have helped undocumented migrant women adjust to South Africa's life.

However, it is essential to note that eight of the women in this study shared that they were not so fortunate and did not have supportive relationships to count on during their transition to South Africa. The findings highlight mixed experiences from the participants.

Rhifumo stated that:

In instances where the networks are lacking, the children tend to suffer the most.

Alida said:

The father of my child does not even talk to me, and although he has two sisters in South Africa, they all avoid me because they assume that I will ask for money to take care of my child. My child lacks the emotional support of a father figure, but unfortunately, there is nothing that I can do but to accept the reality of things.

These sentiments were echoed by Nancy, who had one of her five children pass away:

When my daughter Ruvimbo passed away, I thought the people from my late husband would come and pay their respect and assist me with burial arrangements. But none of them came. My children and even myself needed emotional support, and it was tough to accept the treatment we got in South Africa.

Nkateto from Mozambique, who was a victim of domestic violence and ran away from the father of her daughter, shared the following experience:

I wish the family from the side of my child's father could be more supportive, but instead, they judge me and chastise me for taking their blood from them. They blame me for the breakdown that happened between my child's father and me and, as they say, for destroying their relationship with my child. There have made it clear that they don't want anything to do with me and that I am on my own and should never reach out to them for anything. Even when my child was sick, I could not get through to them, and although challenging, I have come to accept it, and now, I only live for my child... nothing else matters.

Nkhensani is a 44-year-old second-hand clothes seller from Mozambique:

I came after my husband had come to this side. I came two years after he did. My hope was that he'd connect me to his social contacts in terms of jobs and livelihood. Life became even tougher for us after my husband passed away, leaving me with four kids and sadly, in all my time in South Africa, I never got proper documentation, so the prospects of formal employment are alien to me.

The stories shared by these women imply that strained family relationships encountered in their home countries tend to follow them during their transition to the new country. These negative social experiences caused a great deal of psychological stress and tension for the women. Another interesting finding was that many women indicated that they did not go to church as the stigma of being an undocumented migrant single mother seems to follow them. The participants felt that instead of getting emotional and spiritual stability, they were judged by church members and excluded from many of the church activities. Gift, a 31-year-old informal trader from Mozambique pointed out that church members treated her differently ever since

she got pregnant and gave birth to her child. She complained that the married ladies in the church judged her and made her feel unwanted. Muthuki (2013) argues that such negative encounters that migrant women are subjected to reflect the breakdown of social cohesion and social solidarity in South Africa. They reflect the existing contradictions and inescapable structural poverty challenges in broader society.

Tapping into human capital skills

Human capital emerged as a significant theme that the migrant women spoke about in sustaining their livelihoods in South Africa. Human capital encompasses an individual's life skills, education and work experience that helps to maintain a better livelihood (Ployhart & Moliterno, 2011). Zagel and Hübgen (2018) assert that the human capital skills of migrant women are fundamental in the production of livelihood strategies and the stability of a household.

As evident in Table 1, all the women had low educational levels, which hindered their prospects of entering the formal economy. They were restricted to either settling for low-paying jobs or working as informal traders in the informal economy. For most women, the absence of formal training and skills compelled them to rely on the entrepreneurial skills they had nurtured in their own home countries to engage in trading activities in South Africa (Mabudusha, 2014). One mother, Ivania, who shared her motivation to migrate to South Africa, commented:

I'd heard from my social contacts in South Africa that there was peace, and I could earn a living with my entrepreneurial skills.

This corroborates what Zarar, Bukhsh and Khaskheli, (2017) had to say, namely that female migrants are more likely to be self-employed than non-migrant women. In a qualitative study conducted in KwaZulu-Natal, Raniga (2019) found that foreign national women can secure contracts as domestic workers as they accept lower remuneration rates than the locals. The participants Mufumi, Adia, Ivania and Nyasha confirmed in the interviews that it was not easy for undocumented migrants to secure employment in the formal labour market and that they were forced to engage in childminding and work in hair salons to provide for the basic needs of their children. Evidently, these four women who managed to secure employment in the formal work sector were subject to a gender-stratified labour market whereby they found themselves reproducing gender segregation in the labour market.

Nyasha, Ivania and Adia shared their sentiments:

Although labour intensive, being a childminder here allows me to send money back home to take care of my siblings and pay school fees for my firstborn as I currently stay with my second child.

Life became very tough after the death of my children's father; with no education or qualification and documents allowing me to live in South Africa legally, I had no choice but to become a street vendor to take care of my five children.

The money that I get from the salon is enough for my children and me, and it is better than the poverty in Maputo. People here are friendly, and things are cheap and affordable.

Those women who worked as informal traders acknowledged that even though they had limited human capital skills, they were able to contribute significantly as sole income earners to household sustainability (Mabudusha, 2014). They had demonstrated considerable resourcefulness, creativity and flexibility in diversifying their livelihood activities and maximising their human capability skills. The related theme of access to financial capital is explored further in the following section.

Access to financial capital

The undocumented migrant single mothers in the interview and the focus group talked about the monthly financial hardships that they experienced in their home countries, which served as a key motivating factor for migrating to South Africa. This finding corroborates the evidence presented by Abd Ghani, Ibrahim, Abd Aziz and Mahfar (2015), who found that migrants who are single mothers primarily migrate for economic reasons. Some of the women from Mozambique commented:

I left because of financial reasons. Even if you sell, you don't make money on that side.
(Bridget)

I came because back home, life was not easy, as the economy was not doing well, there were no jobs, and there was no future there if you were born poor. It was evident that we would die because of poverty. (Rose)

Back in Maputo, life is not easy; we live in poverty, and jobs are few. Even at the farms now, there is not a lot of work. (Althina)

Structural humanist theorists argue that a combination of social, cultural, economic and or political factors is the key to understanding the feminisation of migration (Fleury, 2016; Mayda, 2010). What was notable in this study was that an additional driver for the women included their agency or free will, as they all made conscious decisions to migrate on their terms in search of better livelihoods (Kurekova, 2011). Given the intersectional injustices that migrant single mothers face, such as economic insecurity, food insecurity and social discrimination based on their undocumented status, the efforts made by the women to tap into multiple sources of income to maintain their households is worth noting. Such an examination of these migrant single mothers' experiences may help social workers to move beyond a pathological focus and instead embrace a sustainable livelihood approach to reducing the economic insecurity of single-mother households (Raniga, Boecker & Mthembu, 2019).

Sending money to family back home is one of the important ways Zimbabweans in South Africa share economic resources and burdens and provide access to other prospects such as education, social status and prestige (Sharmani, 2010). The women shared that this remittance money is primarily used for survival and living expenses. Fitshane (2020) aptly stated that the limited prospects and access to employment in the formal work sector and stringent labour regulations force many undocumented migrant women to establish businesses and trades in the informal economy.

The twelve women in this study who worked as street vendors stated that operating their businesses in an unstable economic climate in South Africa, with little access to a donor or

private funding, presented dire challenges. They spoke about the lack of access to South African social protection grants and no access to banking facilities and loans because of their undocumented status. To deal with these challenges, many women initiated and/or joined savings clubs such as stokvels in the Tembisa community. This community-based monthly financial savings support helped them sustain their businesses and save for times of crisis (Kaseke, 2017). Rakodi (2014) provides empirical support for this finding as he argues that migrant women use multiple sources of financial capital to help them meet their household needs.

Jenifer said:

With other ladies, we do stokvel because we know each other and our income here isn't enough. It's easier to remind each other and we trust each other.

A mother of two Mozambican-born children, Adia, stated that these forms of indigenous savings systems helped her enormously when she had been hospitalised and she was able to pay her children's school fees and rent on time. She commented:

I appreciated being part of the stokvel, and the money saved helped me to start a catering business in South Africa.

Latifa, a street vendor, said:

I cook chicken dust in the street... to get extra income, and this works well for my family and me because that additional income makes a lot of a difference in the household.

Nancy, a street vendor from Zimbabwe, said:

I sell second-hand clothes to make ends meet, business is dependent on many factors like the weather and the type of clothes that I get, but I can honestly tell you that selling clothes has really assisted my family and me and even clothed us as a family.

The findings revealed that all women in this study were sole income earners in their households. The voices of the women above provide evidence that despite their financial struggles, they had made conscious efforts to become economically productive and to maintain their livelihoods.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Drawing from the experiences of undocumented migrant women from Mozambique and Zimbabwe, this paper reconsiders the relationship of migration and sustainable livelihood to inform current social work research and practice in promoting gender justice and mitigating the feminisation of poverty in Africa. The voices of 20 migrant women in this qualitative study conducted in a predominantly impoverished community called Tembisa have shown that their economic experiences were profoundly linked to structural poverty and their undocumented status. The findings reveal that those women who operated businesses and were traders in the informal economy were able to sustain their livelihoods

The findings of this study corroborate Munk's (2022) arguments based on the political-economy migration theory that political problems and economic instability in their home

countries were key motivators for the women to migrate to South Africa in search of more sustainable livelihoods. The failure to link the feminisation of migration and sustainable livelihoods has been more pronounced in cases of international migration than in studies of feminisation of migration within nation states in Africa (Munk, Nikolka & Poutvaara, 2022).

However, the nexus of migration and the feminisation of poverty over the past decade has been given prominence in contemporary South Africa (Raniga, 2019; Schiller & Faist 2009; Sörensen, Pinquart & Duberstein. 2002; Spaan, van Naerssen & Hillmann. 2005). The study employed the sustainable livelihoods approach to illustrate the migrant women's experience as dynamically influenced through the interconnection of their transnational social capital networks, drawing on human development skills and access to financial capital.

Consequently, the social work profession is challenged in contemporary times to address the complexity of detecting and responding appropriately to the needs of undocumented migrant women. This calls for social workers' commitment to raising awareness about migrants' legislative rights, facilitating their documentary status and their access to health, education and social services. Fundamentally, that there is close cooperation and collaboration between the South African Departments of Home Affairs, Social Development, and Health to enhance multidisciplinary transformative intervention programmes to protect migrant women. There is a need for advocacy and conscious lobbying by civil society organisations to promote access to funding for those women who work as traders in the informal economy as well as for better access to labour law protection for women who work in the formal economy.

The authors suggests that further qualitative research be conducted with migrant women who reside in South Africa and who have migrated from countries beyond the SADC region.

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