

 ZIMBABWEAN TRAILING SPOUSES: A SOUTH AFRICAN EXPERIENCE

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ABSTRACT

The study explores the personal experiences of ten married Zimbabwean female trailing spouses in South Africa, who wish to work, but have found it difficult to find employment in South Africa. Before emigration they were dual career/dual earning couples. Most of the participants were self-expatriated and received little to no financial or other support when settling in. The findings suggest that the immigration laws in South Africa, lack of support from employers and the lack of social support from fellow Zimbabweans, make it difficult to adjust. The trailing spouses lose hope of finding meaningful employment.

Keywords: Trailing spouses; self-expatriation; nomadic protean careers

INTRODUCTION

Historically South Africa is the main recipient of Zimbabwean emigrants and many Zimbabweans who enter South Africa are often well educated with tertiary education qualifications (Moorhouse & Cunningham, 2010). Zimbabwe has seen a number of waves of emigration in recent times. Three waves stand out. After Zimbabwe's independence in 1980, the first wave of emigration was of former Rhodesians leaving Zimbabwe to live in South Africa and Australia. In the 1990s, after the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP), Zimbabwe saw another wave of emigration, this time young black and white Zimbabweans sought career options abroad. Most recently, the repercussions of the 2002 land reform programme undertaken by the Zimbabwean government brought about mass unemployment, hyperinflation and political instability which lead to the biggest wave of Zimbabweans leaving to find work in South Africa and other parts of the world. Polzer, (2008b), estimated that about 1.5 million Zimbabweans had crossed the border into South Africa since 2005.

A number of migration studies have been done regarding the Zimbabwean diaspora. McGregor and Primorac (2010) wrote on the experiences of Zimbabwean diaspora communities in South Africa and in Britain and Polzer (2008b) presented the South African government's response to Zimbabwean

migration. None of these studies have shed light on the experiences of Zimbabwean trailing spouses. Out of the diaspora, many women have become trailing spouses. In South Africa for example, trailing spouses are not allowed to work under the country's immigration laws, resulting in the trailing spouse phenomenon. The trailing spouse phenomenon is often a result of expatriate and international assignments for breadwinners. The breadwinner takes up a work assignment abroad and his or her partner follows him or her to the new location of employment as a trailing spouse.

To date, within the African context no research has been conducted on how these trailing spouses experience the trailing spouse phenomenon and their inability to work. This article aims to examine the perceptions, views and experiences of Zimbabwean trailing spouses living in South Africa who wish to work but find it difficult to get employment. After a review of the literature, we present the qualitative findings derived from the interviews of ten Zimbabwean trailing spouses. Thereafter an analysis and discussion of these trailing spouses' experiences are given.

TRAILING SPOUSES

International assignments are very common in today's dynamic world of work and the growing global village. According to the United Nations (2002), the number of migrating people between 1990 and 2000 was estimated to be in the region of 154 million to 175 million. These figures were estimated by The United Nations Population Division (UNPD, 2011) to be around the 214 million mark in 2010. The UNPD (2011) also states that a growing number of women migrants have joined the labour force; however it is inevitable that among the migrant populations there are significant numbers of trailing spouses. In most cases these trailing spouses are women.

The current literature on trailing spouses has been predominantly written from an organisational perspective with the focus being on assisting trailing spouses to settle in host countries as a way of ensuring successful expatriate assignments and ensuring responsive organisational development, (Harvey, 1998; Harvey, Napier, Moeller, & Williams 2010; McNulty, 2012). There has also been research on the problems that the trailing spouses are likely to experience and how these can be mitigated by support from the expatriates' employers (Harvey, 1998: Harvey, Napier, Moeller & Williams, 2010; McNulty 2012). These studies have looked at the trailing spouse in a supporting role, supporting her husband during expatriation. The dual career disruption, the possible reduced earnings for the couple and the implications of the trailing spouse phenomenon have also been researched (McKinnish, 2008).

From all this research, the assumption is that the trailing spouses' status is acknowledged by expatriates' employing organisations and the organisations try by all means possible to help with settling in and making the expatriate assignment viable for the family and the organisation. The trailing spouses investigated in this study self expatriated and therefore their expatriation needs were not met by their husbands' employers. Self-initiated expatriation occurs when an employee decides to emigrate for work and initiates his or her own expatriation by finding a position of employment in another country by him or herself.

The employers are therefore not involved in supporting the trailing spouse and in some cases it seems the employers are not officially aware that their expatriate employee has a family which he needs to expatriate. Whether the expatriation is self-initiated or initiated by an organisation, the costs can be enormous for both the family and the organisation. Vogel, Van Vuuren, and Millard (2008) state that the estimated costs of a failed expatriate assignment can range from US\$ 250 000 to US\$1 million. It is therefore imperative to find ways of ensuring that expatriate assignments are successful. Trailing spouses can be positively or negatively impacted by the expatriate assignment. It is therefore important to understand the issues that affect trailing spouses and develop mechanisms and processes that can help them in order to ensure successful expatriate assignments.

The Trailing Spouse Phenomenon

The earliest known use of the term 'trailing spouse' is attributed to Mary Bralove in an article titled "Problems of Two-career Families Start Forcing Businesses to Adapt" (Bralove, 1981). The term was used to describe partners of expatriates who relocated as a result of career prospects abroad. The trailing spouse is a person who gives up his or her job in order to follow a partner to a new location of employment. The phenomenon is most evident in dual career and dual earning couples (Harvey, Novicevic & Breland, 2009; Mäkelä, Käsälä & Suutari, 2011; Wallston & Berger, 1978). In the past, trailing spouses were most common in diplomatic and military communities (Suutari & Makela, 2007). In more recent times, global markets, global competitiveness, the ease of travel, the growth of multinational businesses, good communication systems and the increased borderless existence of transnational corporations have made it easier for private sector companies to send and receive employees on expatriate assignments. This has resulted in increased expatriate assignments globally (Wan, Hui & Tiang, 2002). Unfortunately, even in this diverse but integrated global village, employers sometimes seem oblivious to the needs of expatriate employees who along with their families have assumed a borderless often semi-nomadic existence in response to their career needs or in response to the organisations' workforce demands.

Research on trailing spouses has been done mainly in Europe and North America (Boyle, Cooke, Halfacree, & Smith, 2001; Copeland, 2002). In Singapore, Wan, Hui, and Tiang (2002) wrote on factors affecting Singaporeans accepting international assignments. They found that Singaporeans preferred to take international assignments in culturally similar host countries. Wan et al., (2002) suggest that the smaller the cultural divide between the host countries' culture and the expatriates' culture, the easier the adjustment for expatriates and the higher the probability of a successful expatriate assignment.

South African organisations have provided pre- and post-assignment social support for trailing spouses (Vogel et al., 2008). The social support provided includes cross-cultural training, helping with the trailing spouses' work permits, helping the trailing spouse find employment, and helping children settle into schools (Vogel et al., 2008). Further abroad in Europe and the Americas, there has also been research on the unemployment and the challenges of maintaining parallel careers faced by trailing spouses (Bryson & Hoge, 2005; Jacobs, 2008). Pierce and Delahaye (1996) found that help with job-seeking for the trailing spouse has not gained acceptance as a legitimate part of relocation packages. Pierce and Delahaye (1996) suggest that HR practitioners should show more concern for the trailing spouses' career prospects in order for expatriate assignments to be successful.

Female Trailing Spouses' Experiences

Labour mobility has also led to the globalisation of careers (Carr, Inkson & Thorn, 2005; Dickmann & Harris, 2005). On the whole, women tend to trail their husbands (Bender & Heywood, 2006). This is possibly due to the assumption that it is an easier choice for female spouses to take the role of a trailing spouse than for the male spouses, particularly among dual career couples (Mäkelä et al, 2011). Therefore, it is usually assumed that the female partner is the trailing spouse (Lineham, 2002). In line with this stereotyping, Lineham's (2002) research on women managers found that women expatriate managers were, in social settings, often assumed to be the trailing spouses when, in fact, their husbands were the trailing spouses.

The experiences and coping mechanisms of female trailing spouses have also been studied (Bryson & Hoge, 2000). Bryson and Hoge (2000) did not go into the details of how these coping mechanisms were developed, however they found that eight out of ten trailing spouses felt lost and spent most of their time shopping or performing charity work. In another study, several trailing spouses admitted to working illegally and risking their career prospects just to find some purpose to their daily lives (Jacobs, 2008). In the same study, many of the trailing spouses expressed that they felt like they

had become second class citizens in their own homes and they were no longer living their lives but, rather living the lives of their husbands (Jacobs, 2008).

Trailing Spouses, Work and South African Immigration Laws

The main author is a trailing spouse, she has been a trailing spouse in a number of countries, and her observations are that South Africa has not been an easy place to settle in and get employment. This paper is part of a broader study on trailing spouse identities. In the broader study she used Critical Moments Reflective Methodology (CMRM) to illustrate her reflective journey as a trailing spouse. In this paper researcher reflexivity is limited and she only makes limited commentary in the discussion paragraph.

In South Africa, the immigration laws play an important role in delimiting whether or not a trailing spouse can seek employment and perform work. Although there are regulatory provisions under which trailing spouses can obtain permission to work, Section 11(2) of The Immigration Act No. 13 of 2002 clearly prohibits accompanying or trailing spouses from seeking employment and working. Therefore, a combination of restrictive, often-misunderstood immigration laws, and possible unrealistic expectations of easy integration on the part of expatriates, results in trailing spouses finding it difficult to settle in, find employment, and make sense of their new experiences and status.

The rights and status of accompanying spouses or life partners in South Africa differ depending on the main applicant's permit. Three categories stand out. In the first category, the accompanying family is given temporary residence on relatives' permits for the purpose of accompanying the work permit holder. In the second category, family members are deemed to be independent and need to qualify for entry and work permits in their own right. The third category is directed at children attending school, who must obtain study permits over and above the temporary visitor's permit until they acquire permanent resident status.

There are exceptional circumstances under which trailing spouses can seek employment and work, however from this research it was established that the work permits are difficult to obtain and are often not understood by prospective employers. Trailing spouses are therefore forced to take career breaks or even sacrifice their careers and career aspirations in order to make the expatriate assignment viable for the families. Based on the above discussion, we therefore aim to give some insight into the perceptions, views and experiences of Zimbabwean female trailing spouses in South Africa.

SAMPLE

Ten trailing spouses of Zimbabwean origin were interviewed. All had come to South Africa on accompanying spouse visas. The trailing spouses who participated in this study fell within the first category of accompanying family members, covered under Section 11 of the South African Immigration Act of 2002. They have leave to remain in South Africa as temporary residents until they qualify to apply for permanent residence. Some have applied for work permits under the Immigration regulations of 27 June 2005 and therefore have relative's permits or independent work permits. Two of the participants have been granted permanent residency. The rest are still on accompanying spouse visas.

Not all of the participants were first time emigrants, nor were they all emigrating from Zimbabwe as their last country of residence. However, those who were emigrating from Zimbabwe emigrated at the peak of the most recent economic instability in Zimbabwe. Table 1 shows demographic and personal details of the participants.

METHODS

This study is part of a broader study which used a Glaserian classical grounded theory research design. However, for this paper, we brought in aspects of economics of migration which makes the theoretical behavioural assumption that individuals migrate because it is to their benefit to do so in terms of income and psychological satisfaction (Borjas 1998). But can this be said for trailing spouses? The aim was to obtain detailed descriptions and an understanding of the trailing spouses' experiences; therefore we conducted exploratory in-depth interviews. We conducted one to one interviews with the trailing spouses. We asked the participants to tell me about their trailing spouse experiences in South Africa, the ups and downs and the challenges that they have faced. We recorded the interviews, transcribed them into text form and analysed them using Atlas.ti.

Atlas.ti was useful in making sense, uncovering, systematising and analysing the trailing spouses' experiences hidden in the unstructured data gathered during the interviews. Using Atlas.ti, we categorised the data into codes and themes that described and explained the experiences of the trailing spouses. We developed code families and for this paper the experiences code family provided the avenues for the findings below.

TABLE 1
Biographic details of participants

| Participant | Age | Last permanent job | First permanent exit from Zimbabwe | Trailing experiences | Entry in SA | Qualifications held | Current employment |
|-------------|-----|------------------------------|------------------------------------|--|-------------|---|---------------------------|
| A | 36 | Administrative Assistant | 2008 | No SA only | 2008 | B. Com Business Administration and B. Com Honours Logistics (UNISA) | Not employed |
| B | 35 | Provincial Nutritionist | 2010 | No SA only | 2010 | BSc Nutrition (UZ) | Not employed |
| C | 34 | Customer Assistant (UK) | 2001 UK | UK 2001 SA 2006 Ethiopia 2008 SA 2010 | 2006 | BSc Politics and Administration (UZ) and MSc African Studies (University of Edinburgh) | Not employed |
| D | 39 | Customs Officer (Zimbabwe) | 2001 Sweden | Sweden 2001 SA 2005 | 2005 | Masters in Real Estate Management(KTH Stockholm) | Part-time lecturer |
| E | 36 | Personal Assistant | 2008 | No SA only | 2008 | Diploma in Secretarial Studies (Harare Polytechnic) | Part-time Nursery Teacher |
| F | 49 | Programme Officer (Zimbabwe) | 1995 Botswana Sweden | Botswana 1995 Sweden 2003 SA 2005 | 2005 | BA (UZ) and Postgraduate Certificate in Education (UZ) | Unemployed |
| G | 42 | High School Teacher | 2000 | SA only | 2000 | BA (UZ); Postgraduate certificate in Education (UZ) and Postgraduate Diploma in Management PDM(HR) (Wits) | Unemployed |
| H | 36 | High School Teacher | 2008 | SA only | 2008 | BA (UZ) | Kumon tutor |
| I | 38 | High School Teacher | 2008 | SA only | 2008 | BA (UZ); Postgraduate Diploma in Education (UZ); Masters in Sociology of Education (UZ); Honours in Inclusive Education (UNISA) | Temporary teacher |
| J | 59 | Consulting Dietician | 1993 Kenya | Kenya 1995 USA 1993 and SA 2012 | | Diploma in Nursing (UK); BSc Nutrition and Food Sciences and MSc Public Health (Dietetics and Nutrition) (University of New York) | Not employed. |

FINDINGS

Three broad categories of findings came out of the data. A number of outcomes were extrapolated from the findings. The broad findings are:

- there was lack of support of any kind from their husbands' employers,
- the trailing spouses failed to realise their personal and career expectations,
- there was lack of support from fellow Zimbabwean expatriates,
- the trailing spouses were over optimistic about their employment expectations,
- language and cultural integration were more difficult than expected.

Lack of support from husbands' employers

Nine of the ten participants indicated that their husbands had self-initiated their expatriation. As a result of the self expatriation, the nine participants said that they received no support from the organisations that employed their husbands. They further indicated that this situation was probably because their husbands did not negotiate employment packages that would see to the needs of their wives and families. The participants further expressed that their husbands do not fully understand the need for support and that settling of an unemployed person. The participants said that their husbands could not see that there are settling in challenges which require mitigation and support.

Eight of the ten husbands of the participants managed to secure top executive positions. The other two participants' husbands hold middle management positions. Participants C, D, I and J mentioned that they were aware that European expatriates had negotiated employment and settling in packages for their wives. The participants also expressed concern that their husbands' pension packages would not make provision for them when the time came for them to retire.

Trailing Spouse's Career Pursuits

Expatriation seemed to signal the beginning of the end of trailing spouses' career pursuits. The realisation and acceptance that the participants had to give up their jobs and possible educational and career pursuits was also a main feature in the trailing spouse experience. The participants also expressed that not being able to secure formal employment often made them feel a sense of exclusion from a significant part of a work based social life.

Not all the trailing spouses were willing to join their husbands in South Africa. Participant B stated that she was the bread winner and that she was not willing to leave her job because she knew she would struggle to get similar employment in South Africa. Participant A said she was very happy in her job and enjoyed her work but 5 years living apart from her husband caused family problems and she therefore made a decision to leave her work and join her husband in order to save her marriage. During the research it became apparent that 'family reasons or problems' was a euphemism for marital issues associated with husband and wives living apart.

Lack of support from Fellow Zimbabwean Expatriates

All the participants felt that the Zimbabwean community in South Africa is disjointed there are no organisations or formal groups that the trailing spouses can approach for practical support such as looking for schools for children and social activities for the children and the trailing spouses. One participant suggested that "it is important for our children to learn Shona and Ndebele." She further stated that Zimbabweans do not draw on their own resources like the Indians and the Chinese do to preserve their languages and their cultures.

In terms of assimilating into South African social settings, the trailing spouses want to learn the local languages but because there are few points of interaction with South Africans they are unable to learn the languages. One participant said “I speak my Zulu I am a bit reluctant because sometimes for you to learn a language, you have to interact with the people but you are in an environment where you are alienated it’s a quiet closed environment you and your kids. So you never learn you never get exposed to the languages.”

Employment Expectations of trailing spouses

Most of the participants held the expectation that securing employment in South Africa would not be too difficult, due to the skills shortage in the country. After posing the question on whether or not they thought that they would get employment, some of the responses were “I was thinking things would be easy”, another said “I was looking forward to launching my career in South Africa after studies in abroad” and a third said “although I had a Masters degree I thought doing an honours degree in South Africa would help me to get a job, so I did an honours degree in finance at UCT.” Only two of the participants expressed that they felt that they could experience possible problems with getting jobs. As a result of the participants experiencing difficulty in securing employment, some of them took on menial jobs, others worked part-time illegally and the majority gave up looking for work and have had a third and a fourth child. Most of them have resigned themselves to being stay at home mothers. One participant said that she had three children, a thirteen year old, a nine year old and a two year old. She stated that “the two year old was, I just didn’t know what else to do with myself. I like having a baby. In a way it’s kind of shooting yourself in the foot because now you don’t have the pension, you don’t have the money and you don’t have a job you don’t have anything, but yeah in a way you have someone to care for. Just something to do as a human being.”

Many of the participants felt that when they obtain permanent residency status they will be able to obtain work. However the two participants who have permanent residency have said the change in immigration status did not translate into any positive change or outlook on their employability and employment prospects. Participant G indicated that she had opportunities to work in a large South Africa corporation. She has been told that despite having permanent residency, she could not be offered a permanent post because she was not a previously disadvantaged individual (PDI). Participant D indicated that she went to many interviews and has been told on three occasions that she could not proceed through the selection process because she was not an AA candidate. An AA candidate is an affirmative action candidate. Affirmative action in South Africa is actually legislated under Chapter 3 of the Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998. The affirmative action measures stipulated under section 15 of the said Act that employers are required to first consider South Africans from previously disadvantaged designated groups for employment in order to fulfil employment equity in all occupational categories and levels in the work place.

Participant A obtained a scholarship from the Department of Transport when she was studying for her honours degree. The department had promised her employment upon completion of her degree. However when it became apparent that she was not a South African, they withdrew the employment offer and provided no explanation for their decision.

Where explanations for unsuccessful job applications were provided, the participants said they were rejected for jobs because they are not South Africans. As a result, these trailing spouses have experienced long lapses of unemployment, which ultimately influence the way prospective employers may view their employability.

Cultural Issues

Participant A and G are of Ndebele origin. They felt that the cultural gap or cultural distance between Zimbabweans of Ndebele origin and South Africans of Zulu and Ndebele origin would be

relatively small because the Zimbabwean Ndebele tribal group was once part of the Zulu kingdom under Shaka Zulu in KwaZulu Natal.

South Africa is also close to Zimbabwe geographically and the expectation among the participants was that the cultural gap would be small and assimilation would be easy. However, all the participants have found it very difficult to assimilate into the South African way of life. Tung (1998, p.141) in her discussion on the performance of expatriates argued that the greater “the cultural gap between the home and host country culture (large cultural distance), the greater the problem of adjustment.” The trailing spouses who have lived in more than one foreign country however, expressed that they found that the greater the cultural distance the less likely they were expected to integrate into the host communities, and as a result they built their own networks to help them cope and settle in. These participants also said in environments where there was a large cultural gap, expatriates and their families were often seen as novelties.

Where the cultural gap is perceived to be small, like between South Africans and Zimbabwean, the participants expressed that they expected settling in to be easy. They expected that the perceived familiarity of the cultures would make South Africa easier to live in. However, they found this to be untrue, and therefore they expressed that for them, the perceived small cultural gap harboured subtle cultural nuances which made it difficult to integrate and settle in.

Language issues

Because of these subtle differences in language and culture, the trailing spouses feel that they are viewed as imitators, cultural frauds and even corrupters of South African languages and culture. They also have said that South Africans tend “to see us as threats, we are viewed with contempt and suspicion, when we try to integrate.” Another said “I am Ndebele speaking, but then you find some words in Zulu, if you use them in Ndebele they become vulgar. So now you are in a catch twenty-two you do not want to offend people you are not sure that the Ndebele that you are speaking is going to be understood.” Another said South Africans say that these foreigners, “they come here taking our jobs our husbands, they try to imitate us.” A third said I have often openly been told “Go back and remove Mugabe because I do not speak the local languages.”

Most of the trailing spouses in this study live in in the North of Johannesburg’s suburbs behind high walls and in gated communities. Their interactions with South Africans are confined to shopping malls and petrol stations. Shop attendants and assistants almost always expect that black people speak the main local languages and almost always address black customers in the local languages. When one responds in English the participants stated that they noticed negative changes in behaviour by the assistants and sometimes altercations and confrontations ensued. Sometimes the shop assistants may insist on speaking in their local languages and often this results in a breakdown in communication.

Almost all of the trailing spouses want to learn the local languages, some have expressed that they always want to be identified as foreigners, and by not speaking any of the local languages they retain their foreigner identities. They do not want to be seen as imitators. Participant A lives in the inner city and is a Ndebele first language speaker. She says she pretends to be South African. She has learnt to speak Zulu, Swati, Sotho and Xhosa fluently. Sometimes she even talks about Zimbabweans as if she were not a Zimbabwean. Participant A said “so they will be talking as my friends not knowing that I am also a *grigamba* I will just be responding oh what what. If maybe I am speaking to a Zulu person then I play along.” This game of pretence she says helps her to gauge the attitude of South Africans towards Zimbabweans. Often it is hostile and Participant A also said “they will be talking in my presence not knowing that I am also a *grigamba* they will be says hey these *grigambas* they come here taking our jobs our husbands.” *Grigamba* is a derogatory name similar to *makwerekwere* used to refer to foreigners.

The participants also stated that amongst most of the younger people in Zimbabwe who have travelled and who are less driven by ethnicity, derogatory terms like *makwerekweres* do not offend

them. Sometimes the trailing spouses even refer to themselves as *makwerekweres*. They further reiterated that it does not bother them that they are foreigners and that they want to be identified as foreigners.

The outcomes from the research centred on the hardships associated with failure to settle in, lack of social support, the limited employability of the trailing spouses and the failures of the trailing spouses to realise their personal and career expectations. Some of the apparent outcomes that were extrapolated from the findings are discussed below.

Social Support

Immigration from one country to another often results in expatriates losing the social support that they had from their networks of friends and family, which manifested in the hardships associated with distance relationships, namely the inability to interact with family members at will, the loss of family support, in the forms of “help with child care”; “people to share life experiences with”; “a shoulder to cry on” and in one case a participant said she has lost “financial help from her siblings”. One participant stated that “we have learnt to cope on our own and this has made the nucleus family closer but it has also made some marital problems look bigger than they actually are because we are too confined to our own devices and subjective views when it comes to solving our problems.”

Altered Financial Situation

While in Zimbabwe, all the trailing spouses were employed and therefore were dual career couples. Upon emigrating the couples' financial situations became altered. These trailing spouses now rely on the income of their husbands. Many of the trailing spouses indicated that their husbands do all the budgeting and that they have an idea of what their husbands earn but they do not know the exact salaries. Although the single income is more than the dual incomes, the trailing spouses have limited access to the financial pot. As dual earning couples the husbands may have brought in 70% of the earnings and the wife 30% for example, but now the skew is 100% to nothing and access to this income is very limited.

Further, the altered financial situation is exacerbated by the fact that the trailing spouses are not allowed to open transactional bank accounts in South Africa because they do not have independent sources of income. The husband is not recognised as a source of income. The trailing spouses are only allowed to open non-resident accounts which do not have bank cards and therefore cannot be used for day to day financial transactions. The irony though is that the children of the trailing spouse can open transactional accounts. The only way a trailing spouse can have access to transactional banking service is to be added on as a signatory to the husband's account. Unfortunately Zimbabwean couples do not have a culture of joint accounts banking. In fact none of the trailing spouses in this study had joint accounts with their husbands and only one was added as a signatory on her husband's account.

All of the participants had bank accounts prior to coming to South Africa. Not being able to manage their own finances through their own personal bank accounts has resulted in many of them expressing a lack of self-worth. Furthermore, when the trailing spouses were employed, they could provide financial assistance to their siblings, parents and grandparents. There is a cultural expectation amongst Zimbabweans that older siblings care for younger siblings and parents. Without stable incomes these financial responsibilities and expectations cannot be met. It was further mentioned that most of the trailing spouses' parents were now retired and do not have viable pensions as a result of the economic problems in Zimbabwe. The trailing spouses do not have access to their family finances and also do not have access to banking facilities. All the participants lamented their inability to send remittances to their families and most expressed the fear that their parents were aging and that they were not providing their parents with the necessary support that they needed on a day to day basis.

The participants also expressed that when one moves abroad there is a perception that one gains affluence so extended family members expect remittances. Participant D said “when your family receives nothing from you, then the perception becomes that you have forgotten or are deliberately neglecting your family back home”.

The altered financial situation also brings about another problem, a perception of gender inequality within the marriage. The participants felt that they are no longer equal partners in the marriages but rather subordinate wives. In their own words they said “you become like a servant,” “you become a dependent,” “you become an object, like a handbag to be moved and removed at another’s fancy” “I am just a house wife,” and “I am just like a child, no a baby.”

Psychological Experiences of Trailing Spouses

All the participants stated that they have lost their self-esteem and that they had very little confidence in themselves. Many of them were concerned that even if they found work, they were afraid that they would be lost in the work place and that they would make uncharacteristic mistakes which may indicate a lack of confidence and even transitory incompetence.

Some of the participants expressed that they have no sense of achievement. One participant said it is like “you have reached the end of the road but your journey is not yet over and you know that the bridge required to continue with the journey is this thing, the work permit.” Another said that there was no point in her getting an education, she said, “I even wanted to burn them (her educational certificate) to kind of burn them I didn’t want to hear anyone who said I am studying.” A third said “I cannot even drive my children to school so what am I good for.” This participant did not have a driver’s licence when she came to South Africa, and it is close to impossible to get a South African driver’s licence if one is an accompanying spouse on a temporary residence visa.

Most also felt because they were not working, their husbands were embarrassed to introduce them to their work colleagues. The participants said we often do not dress up and we cannot always afford to groom ourselves. We feel we do not look the part of top executives’ wives; therefore our husbands are uncomfortable to present us to their colleagues.

Many expressed that they have been depressed and have been on antidepressants, one admitted that she has even been suicidal. Another said that she has resigned her problems to God and everything happens for a reason. She said “if this life is God’s wish then who am I to fight it.”

Could these feeling be expressions of the so called trailing spouse syndrome? Johana (2006), summarises the trailing spouse syndrome as the lack of educational and cultural opportunities highly educated or skilled spouse may suffer as a result of a lack of employment opportunities. The lack of employment may result in the trailing spouses developing stress, experiencing discontentment and boredom, withdrawal from social life, a sense of personal disorientation in the direction of their lives, a lack of personal aspirations, and a general loss of personal goals (Johana 2006).

DISCUSSION

The issues that the participants expressed were very personal and touched on the essence of the self and how work is indeed central to an adult’s identity. Through their small networks some of the participants have taken on menial jobs which paid low wages. They took on these jobs not for the financial rewards but just to have reason to wake up in the morning with some kind of work related purpose. Some of the trailing spouses who hold masters degrees are now pursuing honours degrees with the hope that a local qualification would help them secure employment.

The trailing spouses have found themselves in a space where they have had to deal with integration and personal issues that they were not prepared for with little to no support from the

Zimbabwean communities in South Africa and their husbands' employers. Coming to South Africa has had economic benefits despite the trailing spouses' altered financial situations. Although there is substantially a lot more money for the household there is often a lot less money at the trailing spouse's disposal.

The assumption that people migrate because it is in their benefit to do so in terms of psychological or income satisfaction does not directly hold true for the trailing spouses in this research. Rather it seems they emigrate for family reasons, their marriages and the need to keep the family together.

There also seems to be an interesting phenomenon emerging from serial emigration, 'nomadic protean careers'. Four out of the ten participants have lived in more than one foreign country and the participants were certain that South Africa is not going to be their last place of emigration. In fact participant D's husband was considering a job offer in another country and participant C's husband was looking for employment options further abroad. It therefore seems that the trailing spouses were suggesting that as families, they are accepting and adopting borderless career options for the breadwinner based on his professional development in support of the families' economic requirements.

The experience of Zimbabwean trailing spouses in South Africa is a relatively new area of research and little to no literature is available for comparison purposes. It is hoped that this study and future studies on African expatriates and trailing spouses will help to develop literature in this area and thus make a contribution to understanding the dynamics of expatriate assignments for individuals, organisations and the trailing spouses. There is need to understand the unique nature of self expatriated families and their needs which are no different to the needs of organisation expatriated families.

Finally, South Africa has a unique combination of problems that make it difficult for foreign nationals to obtain employment. There is a need to redress apartheid era employment inequalities within the context of globalisation and the current economic slowdown. The Immigration Act restricts what foreign nationals can and cannot do in terms of employment. Indeed allowing everyone who comes into South Africa to work is not a reasonable solution. South Africa has to protect its own local labour. However it may be necessary to verify trailing spouses' qualifications before entry into South Africa and possibly extend job seeker's permits to them if they meet set scarce skills requirements.

As mentioned earlier, this paper is part of a broader study which looks at the, identities, identity work, and identity maintenance processes that trailing spouses of Zimbabwean origins living in South Africa take on. This paper has looked at the personal experiences of the trailing spouses, how they settled into South Africa, the difficulties that came with living in South Africa, and their employment expectations upon arrival to South Africa. It has also looked at the practical and social support that these trailing spouses have received. The altered financial positions of the trailing spouses and how this has affected their roles in the family have also been discussed. Future research perhaps can look at how countries on the African continent can harness the skills and expertise that trailing spouses have to offer, and find solutions to the difficult experiences associated with being a trailing spouse.

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