

The challenges faced and survival strategies adopted by Zimbabwean informal traders that live in Johannesburg inner-city, during the COVID-19-induced lockdown in South Africa.

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ABSTRACT

Globally, Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) has had unprecedented effects on various aspects of human life. Governments adopted several mitigatory strategies including national lockdown. However, this strategy brought its own challenges. South Africa developed and implemented various interventions, including feeding schemes and financial support through social grants. These interventions served as safety nets for vulnerable communities. However, they exclusively benefitted South African citizens. Hence, migrants living in South Africa remained vulnerable. Their plight was further exacerbated by their reliance on the proceeds from informal economy-related activities, including sewing and street vending, which the government did not classify as essential services. How migrants survived the challenges wrought by lockdown conditions remains unknown. Telephonic, one-on-one interviews were conducted with 15 participants; 13 (n=13) informal Zimbabwean migrant traders and two (n=2) key informants (social workers) from social services organisations operating within the Johannesburg inner-city. Data were analysed using thematic analysis. The findings show the various challenges faced by the participants, that is; 1. restrictions to movement, 2. loss of income and 3. failure to send remittances to their families in Zimbabwe. The participants adopted different survival strategies which included; 1. use of fake permits to navigate the city, 2. internal movements and adapting to new conditions, 3. securing social support from friends and relatives, 4. adjustment of their needs, and use of community ties and inhouse counselling. The paper recommends that interventions adopted by the South African Government and social service organisations to support migrants must recognise and enhance the migrants' strengths and resilience. Furthermore, support services must view migrants as a heterogeneously vulnerable population.

Keywords: migrants, informal trading, COVID-19-induced lockdown, South Africa, vulnerability, Zimbabweans

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Introduction

Migration is a global phenomenon that has been increasing over the past few years. The global estimated population of international migrants was 244 million in 2015, with internal migrants numbering 750 million (International Organization for Migration [IOM], 2017; *Wickramage et al., 2018*). These figures translated to about 1 billion migrants (internal and cross-border) in 2015. Most migrants move into cities, contributing to the swelling urban population (Bhagat, Reshmi, Sahoo, Roy & Govil, 2020).

The number of migrants has been surging constantly. The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN/DESA) estimated that in 2017, 258 million people were international migrants (UN/DESA, 2017). According to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, the population of international migrants in Africa increased from 15 million in 2000 to 25 million in 2017 (UNCTAD, 2018). This increase is attributable to the growth in the continent's working age population (25-64 years) of 123.7 million (33.3% of Africa's total population) in 1980 to 425.7 million (36.2%) in 2015 (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa [UNECA], 2016). In 2017, 53% of Africa's international migrants resided on the continent.

In 2018, Africa's top destination countries for migrants were South Africa, South Sudan, Côte d'Ivoire, the Central African Republic, Kenya and Chad (UNCTAD, 2018). Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire), Johannesburg (South Africa) and Nairobi (Kenya) were the migration hubs (City of Johannesburg [CoJ], 2019/20; UNCTAD, 2018).

Johannesburg is the most populous city in Gauteng Province (CoJ, 2019/20). Replicating Indian cities, internal and cross-border migration largely contributes to Johannesburg's swelling population (Bhagat et al., 2020; City of Johannesburg, Group

Strategy, Policy Coordination and Relations [CoJ, GSPCR], 2018; CoJ, 2019/20). Statistics South Africa [Stats SA] (2019) estimated that Gauteng Province, followed by the Western Cape Province received the highest number of internal and cross-border migrants between 2006 and 2011. Furthermore, migration contributed largely to the population of Johannesburg which doubled from 2.59 million people in 1996 to 4.9 million people in 2016 (CoJ, GSPCR, 2018).

Globally, the commonest reasons instigating human migration include; seeking economic opportunities, escaping from conflict and escalating violence in war-torn countries such as Syria and other countries in Central America (Brolan et al., 2017; UNECA, 2016). In India, migration is a livelihood strategy adopted by millions of people (Bhagat et al., 2020). In Africa, migration is also viewed as a livelihood strategy (Crush, 2017; Vanyoro, 2019).

Migration can be categorised into labour migration, forced migration, irregular migration and transit migration (UNECA, 2016). Labour migration refers to the movement of people from their country to another seeking employment (Taylor, 1999). Forced migration is the involuntary movement of people often instigated by several push factors that include fleeing from war or conflict (Halle & Wolfe, 2016). As irregular migration is politically contested, there is universally agreed definition. However, this form of migration generally refers to the movement of people who are considered illegal migrants. These are often undocumented migrants (Waller, 2006). Lastly, transit migration describes the movement of migrants on a temporary basis (Taylor, 1999).

While migration is credited for contributing to global economic development, migrants in urban areas are considered a vulnerable population encountering several challenges (Bhagat et al., 2020). Globally, migrants often engage in the so-called '3D jobs', which

are characterised as dirty, dangerous and demeaning. These '3D jobs' are often associated with low income, informality and precariousness. Migrants engaging in such jobs live in slums, where they experience poverty, poor health and food insecurity (Bhagat et al., 2020; Buheji et al., 2020; CoJ, 2019/20; Shah, Shah & Shah, 2020). Further, cross-border migrants are often marginalised, and not covered by government interventions; hence, they are left to fend for themselves (Bhagat et al., 2020; De Wet et al., 2008). In South Africa, migrants are not immune to the challenges confronting migrants elsewhere. In Johannesburg in particular, migrants are subjected to social exclusion, poverty, limited access to food, health-threatening living and working conditions, limited or no government protection and unemployment (CoJ, 2019/20; CoJ [GSPCR], 2018). Those who are employed are commonly in the informal sector where they work as domestic workers, office workers, security service providers, hawkers, casual workers in the construction sector, and cleaners (De Wet et al., 2008).

Globally, migrants have generally been classified as a vulnerable population (Bhagat et al., 2020). The vulnerability of migrants has been exacerbated by the restrictive lockdown conditions induced by the COVID-19 pandemic (IOM, 2020). On 31 December 2019, China announced a cluster of unexplained cases of pneumonia. A month later, the virus was finally named COVID-19 by the World Health Organization (WHO), which later declared it a public health emergency of an international magnitude (Shah et al., 2020). On 11 March 2020, COVID-19 was declared a pandemic (Shah et al., 2020).

China took drastic measures to stop the movement of people from the affected cities. However, the COVID-19 pandemic managed to spread to the rest of the world. For instance, India recorded its first COVID-19 case on 30 January 2020 (Bhagat et al., 2020). The country announced a 21-day nationwide lockdown (Bhagat et al., 2020). South Africa reported its first COVID-19 case on 5 March

2020 (IOM, 2020). After the first case, the South African government declared the COVID-19 pandemic a State of National Disaster (Staunton, Swanepoel & Labuschagine, 2020). The government announced a nationwide lockdown on 26 March 2020 (IOM, 2020).

Globally, national lockdowns disrupted economic supply chains and induced livelihood miseries, especially for people living in the cities (Byaro, 2020; Khaliq, Ali, Kamran & Qasrani, 2020). The lockdowns stifled economic activities as they sealed borders, stalled air and land transport systems, closed factories, shops, restaurants and other economic activities, except for essential services such as grocery stores, pharmacies and banks (Bhagat et al., 2020). Migrants were uniquely affected as millions of them lost their livelihoods and homes because they secure most of their income through the informal economic sector (Bhagat et al., 2020). When the lockdowns were implemented, many migrants experienced severe food insecurity (Bhagat et al., 2020; Choudhury, Koo, Li, Kishore, Balsari & Khanna, 2020). In the United States of America (USA), migrant workers had little to no safety equipment to protect themselves from COVID-19. Furthermore, they had no additional financial or material support to support them during this period marked by unprecedented suffering (Bhagat et al., 2020; Tharoor, 2020).

In most Asian countries, slum dwellers, who many of them are migrants, were the worst affected. Apart from losing their livelihoods, they became food insecure (Buheji et al., 2020). In India, large numbers of migrants, both indigenous and cross-border, migrated from the cities to their rural homes to evade the consequences of the COVID-19-induced national lockdown (Buheji et al., 2020). Resultantly, migrants in India immediately lost their shelter, food and wages (Bhagat et al., 2020).

In Southern Africa, most people survive on day-to-day incomes accumulated through the informal economy (Buheji et al., 2020).

The implementation of lockdowns had a devastating effect on those whose survival depended on the informal economy and precarious employment (Buheji et al., 2020). The lockdown mode left the poor, including migrants, more vulnerable than before. For example, street vendors and daily wage earners lost their means of survival (Buheji et al., 2020). In South Africa, an estimated 4, 500 Zimbabweans were stranded following the initial announcement of Level 5 of the national lockdown (IOM, 2020), as they could hardly go to work during the stringent Level 5 of the National Lockdown. Many Zimbabweans felt the brunt of the adverse socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, hence the need for social protection during their stay in South Africa. They could hardly meet their needs in terms of food security, shelter and access to health services (IOM, 2020). Zimbabwean migrants lost their livelihoods, which seriously impacted on the welfare of their dependents back home as they were no longer able to send them remittances (De Wet et al., 2008; Zanker & Moyo, 2020). This is further supported by Dalufeya (2020, p. 255), who states that:

“The documented and undocumented migrant workers from Zimbabwe working in South Africa are famous for sending food parcels through an informal courier service known in the local language as Malayitsha. These have all ceased to operate as borders between South Africa and Zimbabwe closed due to lockdowns, with serious consequences on the food security of remittance receiving households in Zimbabwe”.

During the lockdown period, various governments worldwide developed and implemented different strategies to support the vulnerable migrants. In Portugal, migrants and asylum seekers were temporarily given full citizenship rights, which granted them full access to the country's healthcare (Bhagat et al., 2020; The Week, 2020). In Thailand, migrants were entitled to COVID-19 screening and treatment, regardless of their legal status.

Additionally, documented migrant workers were covered by the Migrant Health Insurance Scheme or the Social Security Fund (Bhagat et al., 2020). Those who were registered under the Social Security Fund were also entitled to benefits for loss of income due to the government's order to suspend employment in certain sectors (Bhagat et al., 2020).

In Asian countries such as India and Nepal, migrants who did not have access to basic needs received some government support (Bhagat et al., 2020; Buheji et al., 2020; Poudel & Subedi, 2020; Web, 2020). However, owing to lack of documentation, some of the migrants did not have access to the support. Similarly, undocumented migrants in South Africa hardly benefited from the safety nets provided by the government.

From the 7th of May 2020, the government of South Africa gradually established socio-economic mechanisms to alleviate the economic challenges imposed by the COVID-19-induced lockdowns (IOM, 2020). While these mechanisms were meant to support various vulnerable demographics in the country, migrants were side-lined and discriminated by the local citizens (IOM, 2020). The discrimination of migrants in South Africa contradicts the government's claim to protect the rights of all residents of the Republic of South Africa (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa [1996] as amended). It is against this backdrop that this study explores the challenges faced and survival strategies adopted by Zimbabwean informal traders that live in Johannesburg inner-city during the COVID-19-induced lockdown in South Africa. The study adopted a definition of informal trading used in Tshuma and Jari (2013, p.250), thus; economic activities undertaken by entrepreneurs who buy and sell legal goods, and services within the space deemed to be public property within the informal sector.

Research methodology

This qualitative study adopted an exploratory case study design. The study population comprised all migrant Zimbabwean informal traders and social service organisations catering to the needs of migrants living in Johannesburg inner-city, South Africa. The study sample comprised 13 (n=13) informal traders and 2 (n=2) key informants from two social service organisations. The sample was selected using purposive and snowball sampling strategies. The first participant for this study was recruited through the researchers' network. The sample increased through the chain referral approach necessitated by the initial participants. Data were collected using in-depth one-on-one interviews. Owing to the restrictions imposed by COVID-19, telephonic interviews were used to gather data. The participants verbally consented to the interviews being audio-recorded for later transcription. Sampling continued until the attainment of data saturation, which was achieved on the 9th participant. Four more participants were recruited after data saturation had occurred to ensure that all new data were included. Data were analysed using the thematic analysis technique as described by Braun and Clarke (2014).

The informal traders' ages ranged between 26 and 40 years refer to Table 1 for demographic profiles of the participants. In an attempt to attain gender balance, the study recruited 6 male and 7 female Zimbabwean migrants conducting business in inner-city Johannesburg. Four of the traders sold fast foods; two were selling second-hand clothing, while two were runners buying goods for clients in Zimbabwe. The other two were selling mobile phones and compact discs while one worked as a trolley assistant at a local bus terminus. The 13th participant was a tutor in academia. These jobs kept them afloat, allowing them to eke out a living in South Africa. The sample also included two social workers working for social services organisations in Johannesburg inner-city. These organisations provided financial support, skills development, management and social support to subscribing members.

Table 1: Demographic profile of the participants

Informal traders				
Name	Age	Sex	Goods/services sold	
Latty	35	Male	Compact discs (CDs)	
Mai Nhamo	40	Female	Vegetables and fruits	
Tindo	26	Female	Braai'd meat outside the pub	
Thabani	28	Male	Second-hand clothes	
Peter	33	Male	Second-hand clothes	
Miriam	35	Female	Vegetables and fruits	
Sizo	30	Male	Mobile phones	
Skhumbuzo	26	Male	Tutoring	
Sphesihle	35	Female	Working as food caravan attendant	
Muzi	28	Male	Working as a bus terminus customer assistant	
Mai Two	30	Female	Working as a runner	
Patience	32	Female	Working as a runner	
Faith	28	Female	Vegetables and fruits	
Key informants				
Name	Age	Sex	Job description	Organizations
Ngoni	30	Male	Social worker	Social service organizations dealing with migrants
Melusi	37	Male	Social worker	

Findings

The data analysis process yielded two main themes bordering on the challenges faced by Zimbabwean migrants residing in Johannesburg, South Africa, and the survival strategies they adopted during the COVID-19-induced national lockdown. In discussing the themes, as presented in Table 2, the relevant quotes were solicited from the participants as presented in Table 2.

Table 2 : Summary of themes and sub-themes

Themes	Challenges owing to the COVID-19-induced national lockdown in South Africa	Survival strategies adopted during the lockdown period
Sub-themes	(i) Restrictions to movement	(i) Use of fake permits to enable movement (ii) Internal movements and adapting to new conditions
	(ii) Loss of income	(iii) Securing social support (iv) Adjustment of needs during the lockdown period
	(iii) Failure to send remittances to their families in Zimbabwe	(v) Use of community ties and in-house counseling

Table 2 above illustrates the challenges faced and the survival strategies adopted by the participants. For each challenge they faced, the participants adopted respective survival strategies as presented in the table. The study presents both the challenges and the survival strategies in detail below.

Challenges owing to the COVID-19-induced national lockdown in South Africa

Strict lockdown regulations prohibited movement and instigated the closure of various economic sectors, plunging participants into varying survival challenges. Most participants resorted to intra-urban movement as a way of participating in the informal economy and thus eke out a living. Apparently, the enforcement of lockdown regulations severely interrupted their livelihoods.

(i) Restrictions to movement

Latty survived on selling compact discs (CDs) in inner-city Johannesburg. He was concerned about his upkeep during the

lockdown period. His business did not only require him to be mobile but also relied on a big client base. Thus, the lockdown-induced restrictions to movement impeded his business. He reported thus:

“I don't know how I will survive. The next couple of months will be a nightmare for me because I have exhausted all the means to provide for my family. I cannot sell anything while seated in the house. I need to go out there and sell my wares or else my family will die” (Latty, 04 July 2020).

Similarly, Miriam, who survived on vending at a taxi rank in the Central Business District (CBD) of Johannesburg, intimated that she had struggled to make ends meet since her arrival in South Africa in 2015. Since 2018, vending had been her main source of income. However, the country's adoption of a national lockdown as a strategy that sought to curb the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic hit his vending business hard. He had this to say:

“Since 2015, I had been here in South Africa. It's been hard because I hardly had an [constant] income. I had been doing small menial jobs, but in 2018, I started selling at Bree Taxi Rank. Since the lockdown began, I haven't been able to sell anything. We are barred from going out there, and there is no one to sell to as no one is allowed to move around” (Miriam, 04 July 2020).

Other participants expressed concerns similar to what Mariam reported above. Movement restrictions impeded the participants' mobility as they were unable to go out to and sell their wares as usual. Tindo had not adequately prepared for this immediate stoppage; she did not anticipate such a complete halt to business.

She said;

“The clubs are closed; obviously, no one is allowed to go there. It's worse for us as we sell to numerous people in and around the clubs [pubs], including those passing by those places. We have been making money actually. However, when all the people were told not to move around, obviously all our customers vanished. There was no one to sell to. The whole business stopped, without warning” (Tindo, 05 July 2020).

The restrictions to movement adversely affected the participants' businesses. Resultantly, they lost their constant income. The adverse consequences of these restrictions are illustrated below;

(ii) Loss of income

Most participants reportedly experienced severe loss of income due to lockdown-related restrictions that stalled human movement and business transactions, particularly those requiring physical interaction. This severely impinged on their daily upkeep because they could hardly afford to pay their usual bills and meet various needs. Sphesihle, a food caravan attendant reportedly lost her income when the lockdown started. This changed her life such that, she could barely meet her daily expenses, as she reported:

“When the lockdown started, our caravan lost business; thus, we automatically lost our income. I could no longer afford the basic needs” (Sphesihle, 04 July 2020).

The loss of income experienced by the participants also adversely affected their children. Peter demonstrates how the lockdown disrupted his business; thus, being physically on the streets and selling the second-hand clothes was rendered impractical. This

disrupted his usual income and his ability to provide for his children waned. He intimated that:

“Our business requires us to be on the street every day. We are only able to sell to the customers who come and compare clothes; thus, we always get all our clothes sold most days. This has always been the way I accumulated the income to take care of my kids. Nonetheless, the lockdown poses a different challenge. I can't sell and there is no money for me and my children” (Peter, 05 July 2020).

Similarly, Thabani, who was selling second-hand clothes, felt the negative impact brought by restrictions to human movement. For Thabani, the loss of income meant inability to pay for his needs, particularly rentals, food and toiletries.

“I tried to sell my second-hand clothes within the flat where I stay. I have the second-hand clothes at home, but there are no customers to buy them. For the past three months, I have been struggling to pay for my rent, food, toiletries and other needs. It's just very hard” (Thabani, 04 July 2020).

(iii) Failure to send remittances to their families in Zimbabwe.

Owing to the economic quandary in Zimbabwe, most participants reiterated the need to send remittances to their families back home, something that was feasible prior to the lockdown. However, the participants' loss of income affected the remittances leading to food insecurities among many families in Zimbabwe, who mostly rely on diaspora remittances. A participant said:

“I'm the only one responsible for bringing income to the family. I look after four people back home [Zimbabwe]. The fact that I'm not working right now means disaster as

my dependants are still looking up to me. Sending money home when I can't sustain myself here is just impossible” (Miriam, 04 July 2020).

In the following quotation Latty was also overwhelmed by the difficult economic situation exacerbated by the strict lockdown regulations prohibiting the free movement of non-essential service providers. Hence, fending for his family in Zimbabwe became a mammoth task. The prolonged national lockdown rendered it impossible for many migrants to meet their financial obligations. Latty indicated that:

“I must pay rent and provide food for my family. My extended family in Zimbabwe also looks up to me. The incapacitation precipitated by the COVID-19 pandemic is worrying. Our families are confronted by a double threat of disease and hunger. Most households in Zimbabwe are food insecure and rely on what we regularly send them from here. The borders are closed, making it almost impossible to send the little that we get” (Latty, 04 July 2020).

Ngoni, a key informant, provided supportive information, reiterating what Latty had reported: thus, being overwhelmed and conceding defeat. Ngoni reported that most of the migrants that sought psychological support from their organisation grappled with feelings of helplessness, particularly in the context of supporting their families in Zimbabwe, He reported:

“There was hope in the first week of the lockdown. Most migrants hoped that the lockdown was going to be short-lived. Some of them had sent some money and groceries to Zimbabwe after it had been rumoured that a national lockdown was imminent. After a month or so, we started

receiving calls from clients seeking not only financial support, but psychological support as well. They were really stressing as their voices carried undertones of helplessness. They hardly afforded sending money or groceries home, paying their own rent, or buying food for their children they stayed with. One would tell that the migrants were unequivocally desperate” (Ngoni, 06 August 2020).

During lockdown most participants could not afford their regular needs, resulting in uncertainty being characteristic of their livelihoods. Owing to uncertainty, most participants had negative psychological outcomes such as depression and stress. One participant intimated that:

“This lockdown affected me financially. This has been compounded by the mental health issues emanating from this phenomenon. When you can't cater for your family, which you were used to sending money or groceries and are solely dependent on you, it cannot spare your mental health and physical well-being. That is when depression hits you. Such things are stressful. So, I think this thing affected me both financially and psychologically” (Sizo, 10 August 2020).

In spite of facing a myriad of challenges, the participants demonstrated resilience as we present in the next section.

Survival strategies adopted during the lockdown period

The national lockdown infused by the fear of the spread of the COVID-19 epidemic saw many people losing their jobs, making it difficult for them to sustain normal lifestyles. The migrants who participated in this study adopted several survival strategies. For

instance, they resorted to the use of fake permits, internal movements (that is, movements within the participants' flats) and adapting to the 'new normal' that necessitates the use of savings, the securing of social support, adjustment of needs, use of family and community ties and seeking counselling services.

(i) Use of fake permits to enable movement

Most Zimbabwean migrants living in South Africa flouted lockdown regulations. Given that people were required to stay at home and barred from conducting such business activities as vending, some of them were clandestinely accessing hidden markets to order goods for resale. One of the participants confessed that:

“Well, we never really stopped our businesses with my other friends. We order and resell our goods secretly. It is really risky, but we also keep fake lockdown permits so that when the situation gets too tricky, we show them to the police. It's really difficult, but that's what I have to do to survive. I still need to pay rentals and feed my children” (Faith, 11 August 2020).

The secretive purchasing of goods for resale was commonly reported by most participants. Participants shared the various versions of how they embarked on the secret, illegal trade. Mai Nhamo said:

“The police were not thoroughly checking things in taxis; they just checked if taxis were carrying the recommended number of people and they released them. So, I used taxis, and in Hillbrow where I buy, they already know me; hence, they simply sell the wares to me” (Mai Nhamo, 05 July

2020).

Some of the participants also had secretive markets. Such innovative marketing skills kept their businesses going simultaneously avoiding being caught by the police. Faith demonstrated that she employed many tactics to sustain her clandestine business operations. These included collaborating with those operating similar illicit businesses. She would adopt secretive marketing strategies, which included disguising herself as a mere idler. Faith had this to say:

“I go to Pakistani shops near my selling spot. As they are also operating illegally, I keep my goods inside and I sit on a small chair outside their shop. When people are passing by, I just whisper to them, “pshhhh tomatoes, onions, veggie.” If the police pass by, they mistake me for an old lady basking in the sun. I often dress like an old lady so they won't even take a second look at me” (Faith, 11 August 2020).

The participants indicated that law enforcement officers posed a major challenge to their secretive markets. When they were caught by police officers enforcing lockdown regulations, the participants reportedly resorted to bribing the police to evade the consequences associated with flouting lockdown regulations. That way, they would proceed with their businesses. It was reported that:

“I was once caught. I think someone tipped the police about my strategy. It's definitely my competitors who were jealous that I was continuing with my business. So, one day the police came directly to me and confiscated my stuff. I had to bribe the officers to get my goods back. I paid them R100” (Latty, 04 July 2020).

(ii) Internal movements and adapting to new conditions

In response to the lockdown conditions and the challenges accompanying it, the participants developed new survival skills to embrace the new normal. Some participants resorted to online services such as marketing of their commodities and others searched for business opportunities to maintain their livelihoods. That is, the participants strove to have a constant income that would enable them to pay their rentals and buy food. When asked to describe how he spent his weekdays during the lockdown period, Skhumbuzo, who traded as an informal tutor, said that;

“I am now tutoring only five students out of an original group of about 10-20 students that I used to tutor; they used to come here physically at my place of residence from different institutions. Some were Grade 12 students while others were university students. Now, you just have to figure things out and life goes on like that” (Skhumbuzo, 10 August 2020).

As reflected in Skhumbuzo's account above, the participants adapted to their current circumstance that is restrictions imposed by the COVID-19-induced lockdown, by treating it as any other challenge they would have faced in normal times. To that end, he had this to say:

“You just figure out things but and life goes on”
(Skhumbuzo, 10 August 2020).

This enabled them to remain in control and find ways of curbing their loss of income and manage to maintain their livelihoods;

“Now that I cannot cook and sell food in the caravan, I have resorted to looking for piece jobs around the flats [where she stays]. I wash for people and iron their laundry for little money. However, that enables me to buy mealie meal and relish on a weekly basis. Sometimes I baby-sit for a price” (Sphesihle, 11 August 2020).

Mai Nhamo concurred with Sphesihle on the usefulness of working for others in the flats in order to maintain their livelihood during the lockdown period. However Mai Nhamo reported that many vegetable and fruits vendors that she worked with were forced to leave taxi rank where they conducted their business, so they start working for people in the flats. She said:

“Many of us [vendors] actually tell each other if there is any small job we have heard about. We now wash some people's clothes for some money. In my flat, some of my neighbours worked online; hence, they did not stop getting an income, so they needed my help” (Mai Nhamo, 05 July 2020).

Other participants could not independently manage to maintain their own income; so, they had to resort to other options such as securing psycho-social support from friends and relatives, findings to demonstrate this are presented below.

(iii) Securing social support

In South Africa, the national lockdown bound people together and a spirit of ubuntu was displayed among friends and relatives. Some participants secured psycho-social support to cushion themselves against the harsh economic challenges marked by the erosion of income and job losses stimulated by the stringent lockdown restrictions. To support this theme, one participant said:

“The conditions were so hard that I had to move in with my friend. So, I had to move in with X, but we both lost our jobs [referring to the forced stop in their runner business]. Fortunately, [her] husband was working. So, he just decided to cater for me” (Patience, 04 July 2020).

The spirit of giving and helping was evoked among the participants

during the national lockdown. After a job loss or income generating schemes, the migrants who participated in this study came together, borrowing each other money and sharing the little resources they had, just to survive. Thabani supported this finding by saying:

“Sometimes you borrow money from friends just to cover up certain stuff. So, basically, we rendered each other financial support through just borrowing each other money. You ought to return the money in order to get continued support from friends who had the resources. So, basically that was how we coped through the first two months of the lockdown (Thabani, 04 July 2020).

More so, from the interviews, it was apparent that in as much as some landlords needed their rentals, a number of them (landlords) understood that the situation confronting people the world over was beyond anyone's control, as such, they agreed to negotiate the rentals. Muzi elaborated this finding, thus:

“Some landlords understood the situation to the extent that they reduced rentals by half. So, it was a benefit. My landlord reduced rentals by 50%. That was a welcome arrangement” (Muzi, 11 August 2020).

Mai Nhamo reported having received food donations from her family members who also lived in South Africa; thus, the spirit of togetherness was spread among migrants in South Africa. She elaborated:

“I received donations from family members, such as aunties and sekurus [uncles] I do have extended family members here in South Africa” (Mai Nhamo, 05 July 2020).

The Zimbabwean migrants interviewed for this study denied having received any cash transfer from social service

organisations or the government. However, a key informant, Melusi, reported that his and a few other organisations had provided monetary assistance to the Zimbabwean migrants stranded in Johannesburg inner-city. He had this to say:

“We were asked by a prominent organisation to provide some monetary assistance to migrants. It sponsored us and we issued out a total of about R500 to each qualifying household” (Melusi, 06 August 2020).

(iv) Adjustment of needs during the lockdown period

The COVID-19 induced lockdown imposed many restrictions to people which made their adjustments to the way of life inevitable. The participants in the study reported having adjusted their needs to suit the current economic constraints they were experiencing. Below is what one participant said:

“This lockdown period taught me that some things in life are luxuries and as such, one has to focus on the most important things that one needs as a woman. Things like toiletries and an expensive hairdo became unnecessary, so was expensive makeup and clothing. So, I can save the little that I have until I secure a job again” (Mai Two, 30 July 2020).

Furthermore, some participants resorted to sharing expenses with those close to them. This was a measure adopted by participants to minimise the expenses incurred on daily and monthly bases. A *participant commented that:*

“We resolved to stay in a one bedroomed flat. We have one bedroom and one big sitting room where I have to sleep. I have abandoned my principles of having my own space which is not shared. The current situation forced me to look for someone to share my flat with so I could be able to meet

my expenses” (Mai Nhamo, 05 July 2020).

Cutting down on expenses, including accommodation and food, was reported by most participants. The following is what a participant had to say:

“Well, we just had to reduce our consumption of meat. So, instead of eating two pieces, we now eat one piece of meat. We had to stick to the basic things, such as pap (soft porridge) and rice. All this is because of lockdown.” (Patience, 30 July 2020).

(v) Use of community ties and inhouse counselling

In an attempt to compensate for their failure to send remittances home, some participants appealed to their families and communities back in Zimbabwe to ask for money and goods that they were going to pay back as the lockdown eased. It was commented that:

“With all the expectations, I ended up asking my friend's mother to help. I borrowed US\$100 [currently equivalent to R1640] at least to help my family get some groceries for a month. I will pay her back as soon as we resume our business in earnest” (Miriam, 04 July 2020).

Latty appealed for assistance from the shop owner in the village where his grandmother lived. He reportedly concluded a deal where the shop owner would provide his family with the basic needs until the situation normalised: Latty had this to say:

“I approached a guy who owns one of the shops near our home. He is very helpful. I asked if he could allow my granny to get essential food stuffs like maize meal, sugar and cooking oil. He understood, though I now have to pay at an increased cost. However, the strategy helps” (Latty, 04 July 2020).

Some of the major challenges faced by the participants included depression and stress propagated by their failure to provide for their families back home. As a survival strategy, they appealed to their own family members to provide psycho-social support as reported by Faith below:

“It was much of that psychological support that I needed. I had to keep in touch with my aunts and we always reflected on the challenges. My family needed my support, but I could not be there to financially support them at home in Zimbabwe” (Faith, 11 August 2020).

The use of family members for psychological support was also echoed by Muzi, who intimated thus:

“Admittedly, they were very supportive, emotionally. I have good brothers; we discuss the challenges of this lockdown and they make me feel better” (Sizo, 10 August 2020).

It appears the psychological support was helpful as it allowed the participants to remain stable and to be able to develop new survival skills and make plans to financially support their families.

Discussion

This study explored the challenges faced and survival strategies adopted by informal Zimbabwean migrant traders living in Johannesburg inner-city during the COVID-19-induced lockdown in South Africa. The study unravels the manner in which the COVID-19-induced lockdown in South Africa increased the vulnerability of the migrants. The study also showcases the resilience and creativity demonstrated by informal Zimbabwean migrant traders during the COVID-19-induced lockdown.

The challenges faced by the cross-border migrants in host countries are not new. Research shows that cross-border migrants face a

myriad of socio-economic and psychological challenges such as the deterioration in mental health, unemployment, xenophobic violence, compromised access to health services, food and housing (Crush & Tawodzera, 2014; Idemudia & Boehnke, 2020; Moyo, 2020). However, the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent lockdown did not only expose how disaster may worsen the vulnerability of migrants, but it also reflected the resilience and innovativeness in their quest for survival.

Informality and being migrants are the two main axes of analysis this paper brought forth. Both axes are often independently and strongly associated with social, psychological, and economic vulnerabilities (Cantens, 2012; Choudhury et al., 2020; Idemudia & Boehnke, 2020). Nonetheless, the findings from this paper suggest that the vulnerabilities are amplified when being a migrant and informality intersect. This was evidenced by the experiences of informal trader Zimbabwean migrants in the Johannesburg inner-city during the COVID-19-induced lockdown.

This study found that the livelihoods of Zimbabwean migrants were adversely affected by the lockdown imposed by the South African government. Restriction to movement, coupled with the forced isolation of all non-essential personnel, brought most economic activities, whether informal or formal, to a halt (Nyabunze & Siavhundu, 2020). Many Zimbabwean migrants, particularly those who were undocumented and involved in precarious work, lost their sources of income (Moyo, 2020; Prince, 2020). For the informal traders in the retail business, access to the suppliers and end customers was disrupted; resulting in loss of income and that exacerbated the poverty and hunger they were already vulnerable to. Most migrants could not send remittances anymore. Dalufeya (2020, p. 255) states that “the lockdown in migrants receiving countries, such as Botswana, Namibia and South Africa, has destabilised not only the migrants in the informal sector, but also the flow of remittances to recipient

countries.” In this case, Zimbabwe is no exception.

Undoubtedly, Zimbabwean migrants have been facing poverty and hunger prior to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic (Moyo, 2020; Rutherford, 2020). Most of them were undocumented and had no stable income, no savings or health benefits (Crush & Tawodzera, 2014; Rutherford, 2020). However, the COVID-19 lockdown significantly exacerbated their vulnerability due to limited movements. Therefore, this paper highlights the manner in which COVID-19 amplified this vulnerability.

This paper also brings to the fore, the fortitude and resilience demonstrated by informal trader Zimbabwean migrants during the COVID-19-induced lockdown. While measures were adopted to ensure the provision of safety nets against the economic shocks instigated by COVID-19 for the local citizens (Moyo, 2020; Zanker & Moyo, 2020); cross-border migrants were side-lined from these programmes, forcing Zimbabwean migrants, in some instances, to engage in illegal but necessary strategies meant to feed their families in South Africa and back home in Zimbabwe.

The findings of the study show that some of the informal trader Zimbabwean migrants resorted to any kind of work necessary to sustain themselves and their families. Precisely, such informal Zimbabwean traders resorted to providing domestic services such as cleaning and washing in return for a small fee. Many migrants, particularly Zimbabweans, are already noted for precariously surviving through domestic work in South Africa (Jinnah, 2020; Vanyoro, 2019; Zack et al., 2019). However, in the context of the COVID-19-induced lockdown, the informal trader Zimbabweans turned to domestic work as an immediate survival strategy to access food, toiletries and rentals; that was indicative of their resilience and creativity.

In addition, Zimbabwean migrants had to adjust their needs and adapt to the new conditions dictated by the COVID-19 lockdown. Luxuries had to be struck off budgets as the migrants had to accommodate only the daily necessities. The findings also show that Zimbabwean migrants had no choice, but to adapt to the new conditions created by the lockdown restrictions. Thus, they had to embrace the new normal for survival. Community ties were another survival strategy adopted by most Zimbabwean migrants living in Johannesburg. Contacts were made with their significant others who resided in other communities within the Johannesburg and other metropolitan areas. Clearly, social support systems became one of the vital survival strategies Zimbabwean migrants used during the lockdown period in South Africa. Stress and depression posed significant mental health challenges experienced by Zimbabwean migrants. In response to this mental health hazard, the migrants resorted to in-house counselling services.

This paper found that informal trader Zimbabwean migrants demonstrated resilience and innovation in the face of adversity. Despite the increased vulnerability brought about by the COVID-19-induced lockdown, Zimbabwean migrants adopted cunning and meticulous strategies to earn a living in spite of the restrictions. This paper reiterates that some Zimbabwean migrants were able to establish mutually beneficial, though at times illegal, relations with law enforcement officers. The migrants bribed local police officials to allow them to conduct their informal business, albeit the lockdown restrictions. Furthermore, these migrants also resorted to the utilisation of fake selling permits to deceive local police officials into allowing them to carry on with their daily business.

Conclusion and recommendations

The vulnerability of Zimbabwean migrants is two-fold; being a

migrant and informality. Therefore, analysing the plight of Zimbabwean informal traders in South Africa along the axis of migrant status and informality fosters an understanding of the increased vulnerability confronting Zimbabwean migrants during the COVID-19-induced lockdown. However, this paper unmasked the resilient nature of Zimbabwean migrants despite the padlocking of their livelihoods as a result of the COVID-19-induced lockdown. This is a marked departure from much of the literature on migrants in South Africa, which focuses on migrants as homogeneously and passively vulnerable. This paper avers that migrants, though vulnerable, are also resilient and innovative as they can thrive in the face of many adversities. Interventions meant to support migrants, as provided by social service organisations and the government must recognise and enhance the migrants' strengths and resilience. This will dignify migrants and also ease the process of finding sustainable solutions.

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