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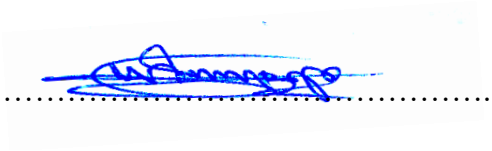
RESEARCH TOPIC: INTERVENTION STRATEGIES ON THE EXPERIENCES OF CHILDREN LEFT BEHIND BY MIGRANT PARENTS IN ZIMBABWE. A CASE OF BINDURA.

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE IN SOCIAL WORK OF THE BINDURA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE EDUCATION

JUNE 2026

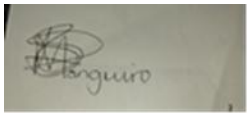
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I, the undersigned certify that I have read and recommended to Bindura University of Science Education for acceptance; a project entitled "**Intervention strategies on the experiences of children left behind by migrant parents in Zimbabwe A case of Bindura.**" submitted by B223817B in partial fulfilment of the requirements for Bachelors Honours Degree in Social Work.



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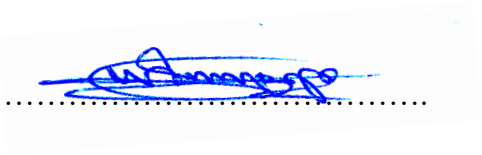
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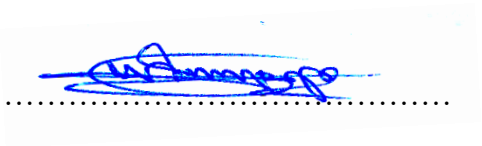
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First and foremost, I thank the Almighty God for giving me strength, good health, and the ability to complete this dissertation. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Mangwiro, for his patience, guidance, and encouragement throughout this research. His advice kept me on the right track. I am also very thankful to the staff and learners of Chipindura High school, Cornerstone Primary School and Chiwaridzo Secondary School for allowing me to collect data from their schools. Their cooperation made this study possible. My heartfelt thanks go to all the children, guardians, teachers, and community leaders who took part in this research. They welcomed me openly and shared their personal stories. Without them, this study would not have been possible. I also want to thank my family for their love, financial support, and understanding during the long months of this work. My friends also deserve special mention for their encouragement and for always being there when I needed a push.

DEDICATION

To my grandmother, for her love, prayers, and support throughout this journey.

ABSTRACT

Parental migration has become common in Zimbabwe, leaving many children in the care of relatives or guardians. This study explored the experiences of children left behind by migrant parents in Bindura and proposed intervention strategies to support them. The research was guided by four objectives that were to explore the lived experiences of left-behind children, to identify their coping mechanisms, to examine the role of guardians, teachers, and community members, and to propose practical interventions. A qualitative approach was used. Data were collected through focus group discussions with 10 children and semi-structured interviews with 5 guardians, 3 teachers, and 3 community workers from Bindura Urban ward 6. Findings were analyzed using thematic analysis and discussed within Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory. The study found that children coped by crying, praying, distracting themselves with activities, and talking to trusted family members. Guardians provided basic needs but struggled with age, poverty, and lack of training. Teachers noticed problems but had no formal system to track left-behind children. Community support was irregular and uncoordinated. Participants recommended school-based counselling, fee assistance, guardian training, and government policies that recognize children left behind as a specific vulnerable group. The study concludes that while migration brings financial benefits, it creates emotional gaps that current welfare systems in Bindura do not fill. Recommendations include training listening teachers, creating support groups, and registering left-behind children in each ward.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

ACRWC African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child

CLB Children Left Behind

CBO Community-Based Organization

DSD Department of Social Development

EST Ecological Systems Theory

FGD Focus Group Discussion

IOM International Organization for Migration

NGO Non-Governmental Organization

OECD Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

SADC Southern African Development Community

UK United Kingdom

UNCRC United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

UNESCO United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

LIST OF TABLES

Table 4.1 Demographic Profile of Child Participants (n=10)

Table 4.2 Demographic Profile of Adult Participants (n=11)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CONTENTS

APPROVAL FORM ii
RELEASE FORM iii
DECLARATION FORM iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS v
DEDICATION vi
ABSTRACT vii
LIST OF ACRONYMS viii
LIST OF TABLES ix
CONTENTS x
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND 1
1.1 Introduction 1
1.2. Background of the Study 1
1.3 Problem statement 3
1.4. Research Objectives 3
1.5 Research Questions 3
1.6 Assumptions 3
1.7 Significance of the Study, ... 4
1.8 Limitations of the study 4
1.9 Delimitations 5
1.10 Definition of terms 5
1.12 Dissertation outline 6
1.13 Chapter summary 7
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW 8
2.1 Introduction 8
2.2 Theoretical framework: Ecological systems theory (EST) 8
2.2.1 The significance of the systems theory 10
2.3 Empirical studies 11

2.3.1 Lived experiences of left behind children (positive and negative) 11
2.3.2 Coping mechanisms and experiences of left-behind children 12
2.3.3 The role of guardians, teachers, and community members 13
2.3.4 Intervention strategies for left-behind children 15
2.4 Legal frameworks. 16
2.5 Summary 18
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY 20
3.1 Introduction 20
3.2 Research Philosophy 20
3.3 Research Approach 21
3.4 Target Population 21
3.5 Sampling Techniques 22
3.6 Sample Size 23
3.7 Data Collection Methods 23
3.8 Data Collection Tools 24
3.9 Data Collection Procedure 24
3.10 Data Analysis 26
3.11 Ethical considerations 27
3.11.1 Informed Consent 27
3.11.2 Voluntary Participation and Right to Withdrawal 27
3.11.3 Confidentiality and Anonymity 28
3.11.4 Minimizing Harm 28
3.12. Trustworthiness of the study 28
3.12.1 Credibility 28
3.12.2 Transferability 29
3.12.3 Dependability 29
3.12.4 Confirmability 29
3.13 Limitations of the study 30
3.14 Delimitations 30

3.15 Chapter Summary 30
CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION, INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS 31
4.1 Introduction 31
4.2 Demographic Characteristics of Participants 31
4.3 Data presentation and analysis 33
4.3.1 Lived experiences of children left behind (positive and negative) 33
4.3.2 Coping mechanisms of children left behind. 34
4.3.2.1 34
4.4 Role of Guardians, Teachers, and Community Members 37
4.4.1 Guardians provide basic needs but struggle emotionally. 37
4.4.2 Teachers notice problems but have no system 38
4.4.3 Community members want to help but are not organized 39
4.5 Proposed Intervention Strategies 40
4.5.1 Counselling and emotional support programmes 40
4.5.2 School-based support and fee assistance 41
4.5.3 Community and government interventions 42
4.6 Chapter Summary 43
Chapter 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS 44
5.1 Introduction 44
5.2 Summary of Findings 44
5.2.1 Lived experiences of children 44
5.2.2 Coping Mechanisms of Children 44
5.2.3 Role of Guardians, Teachers, and Community Members 44
5.2.4 Intervention Strategies 45
5.3 Conclusions 45
5.4 Recommendations 45
5.4.1 For Schools 45
5.4.2 For the Government 45
5.4.3 For Guardians and Community 46

5.4.4 For Future Research 46
5.5 Proposed Intervention Model for Children Left Behind 46
5.6 Implications for social work 49
5.7 Limitations of the Study 49
5.8 Chapter Summary 49
REFERENCES 50
APPENDICES 56

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction

Migration is a growing worldwide phenomenon with profound social, economic, and psychological implications for families and communities. Many people in third world countries migrate in search of employment and better living conditions. They leave behind children in the care of relatives or guardians. This has given rise to vulnerable group of children commonly referred to as children left behind (CLB). The parents often provide financial support through remittances like Mukuru, Moneygram and Western Union. Family structure disruption and disturbance of children's emotional and social well-being have become areas of attention (UNICEF, 2017).

In Zimbabwe, labor migration is a livelihood strategy that dates back to the stone age and iron age communities. Many parents, particularly from towns such as Bindura, migrate to South Africa, Botswana, or other regions within Zimbabwe has become a destination for most parents from Bindura and some parents are even going as far as United Kingdom (UK). This has resulted in an increased population of children who grow in the absence of parental care or separate from one or both parents. Studies results show that children who grow under such circumstances often experience poor academic performance and psychosocial stress (Maphosa & Ndlovu, 2018). The existence of community-based support system for these children remains scarce and in areas where it is exists its coordination and its effectiveness is questionable.

The research seeks to explore the experiences of children left behind by migrant parents in Bindura and propose intervention strategies that can be implemented to ensure that these children live in a mentally stable state. With specific focus on Bindura, the research will ensure a better understanding of how migration affects CLB and to propose intervention strategies in addressing these challenges they face and ensure the well-being of these children.

1.2. Background of the Study

Labor migration has increased worldwide, causing many parents to move for work while their children stay behind. Money sent home (remittances) can help pay for food, school fees, uniforms and health care, but parental absence can reduce daily care and supervision. Studies show that LBC may have better access to material resources but also face emotional stress, behavior problems and

weaker school engagement when parents especially when mothers migrate (International Organization for Migration, 2020; Mazzucato & Cebotari, 2017).

In sub-Saharan Africa and the Southern African Development Community (SADC), research finds mixed results. Remittances often raise household income and may improve school attendance, but separation can cause feelings of abandonment, changes in discipline and less parental monitoring. The effects depend on who cares for the child, how often money is sent, and how long parents are away (Huijsmans, 2017; Yeoh, Huang, & Gonzalez, 2018).

In Zimbabwe, remittances are an important part of many household incomes and help cover daily needs and school costs (Mlambo, 2018). National and local studies show varied outcomes for CLB, some gain improved material support while others face more chores, inconsistent school attendance and emotional difficulties. These outcomes vary by whether the mother or father migrates, the resources of substitute caregivers, and the regularity of support from the migrant parent (Save the Children Zimbabwe, 2018; Tawodzera & Themane, 2019).

Bindura is a small city in Mashonaland Central where people depend on economic activities such as farming and mining. Many households there are affected by internal and cross-border migration. Local reports suggest remittances reach Bindura families and pay for school needs, but maternal absence often means less daily help with reading, homework and emotional support. Caregiving by grandparents, aunts, uncles or older siblings can help, but these arrangements vary in quality and capacity. Because Bindura has different livelihoods and services from larger cities, its children may face unique challenges that need local study.

There is limited research that links the lived experiences of CLB in Bindura with practical intervention ideas that can be implemented to address the experiences of these children. To design useful local responses, there is need for evidence about how remittances, caregiver arrangements and school support interact with children's emotional wellbeing and school performance. This study will fill that gap by documenting children's experiences and propose intervention options that local schools, caregivers and community groups can realistically use in an attempt to address the experiences of the CLB by migrant parents.

1.3 Problem statement

While migration is often viewed as a strategy for economic survival, it can also create social costs for families, particularly for children left behind. In Bindura, as in many parts of Zimbabwe, the absence of parents due to migration has exposed children to emotional neglect, low self-esteem, academic challenges, and inadequate care. Although several institutions, such as schools, churches, and social services, attempt to support these children, interventions are often fragmented and lack coordination. There is limited research on the experiences of CLB in Bindura that can be used to improve the lives children left behind by migrant parents.

1.4. Research Objectives

- To explore the lived experiences of children left behind by migrant parents.
- To identify the coping mechanisms on the experiences of children left behind by migrant parents in Bindura.
- To examine the role of guardians, teachers, and community members in supporting these children.
- To propose intervention strategies on the experiences of children left behind by migrant parents in Bindura.

1.5 Research Questions

1) What are the lived experiences and daily challenges of children left behind by migrant parents in Bindura?
2) How do guardians manage the needs of children left behind by migrant parents?
3) What coping mechanisms are used by children in the absence of their parents?
4) What support systems or intervention strategies can be developed to assist children left behind by migrant parents?

1.6 Assumptions.

According to Maxwell, (2019) research assumptions are propositions accepted as true without direct evidence for the purposes of the inquiry, they connect theory, methods, and the researcher's perspective and should be stated and examined because they affect validity and inferences. The researcher assumes that parental migration has a great influence on the wellness of children,

Baldassar & Merla, (2020) academic performance and household conditions. The absence parental care cannot be replaced by money rather the money remittances only improve material conditions in a household. Care givers play a significant role in the well-being of CLB by migrant parents but however cannot meet all the requirements of these children. The experiences of children left behind vary with gender and age of the child, duration and patterns of parental absence as well as the socio-economic status of the house hold. CLB by migrant parents develop some coping mechanisms in response to the experiences they face. The researcher also assumes that the participants will provide honest and reliable answers.

1.7 Significance of the Study,

This study is important to social work, government, and the local community because it will generate practical, local evidence that social workers can use to improve assessment, casework and group-based supports for children left behind, inform training materials and screening tools for psychosocial needs, and guide community outreach to strengthen substitute caregivers and school-based support (Huijsmans, 2017; Baldassar, 2020). It will help government agencies target policy and program responses by identifying where remittances, child protection, and education supports are most needed, suggesting measurable indicators for monitoring and low-cost interventions that ministries can pilot and scale (International Organization for Migration, 2020; Mazzucato & Cebotari, 2017). It will also equip Bindura communities with practical actions such as caregiver training, peer and mentorship schemes, and community child protection committees to better manage remittances for child welfare, improve daily supervision and school engagement, and establish local referral pathways for children in distress (Save the Children Zimbabwe, 2018; Yeoh, Huang, & Gonzalez, 2018; Tawodzera & Themane, 2019).

1.8 Limitations of the study

The research will have several limitations which include a sample size that might not be representable enough to draw conclusions for the whole of Zimbabwe. The findings of the research are subject to biased due to memory or social desirability as they rely on self-reported data. Locating and recruiting the desired population maybe difficult due to lack of record specifically for Bindura Urban Ward 6. Discussing parental absence with children may be sensitive to them and may lead to discomfort and biased responses. The population may also give response that are too positive especially on the issues of remittance use by the guardians.

1.9 Delimitations

The research will specifically focus on Bindura urban ward 6 only and this will limit the generalizability of the outcomes of the research. A qualitative methodology approach will be implemented by the researcher which may not be applicable to all the population and even further complicating the research methodology.

1.10 Definition of terms

Children left behind (CLB)- Children left behind refer to minors whose parent(s) have migrated for work and who remain in the care of a relative or guardian (Ye et al., 2023). In this study, children left behind were aged between 10 and 17 years.

Migrant parents- Migrant parents are mothers or fathers who have left their place of residence to work in another country or another part of Zimbabwe, leaving their children under the care of others (International Organization for Migration, 2019).

Lived experiences- Lived experiences are the personal, day to day feelings, emotions, routines, and challenges that individuals go through in a particular situation (Crotty, 2020). In this study, lived experiences refer to what children felt and did while their parents were away.

Coping mechanisms- Coping mechanisms are the strategies and behaviors that individuals use to manage stress, emotional pain, or difficult situations (Chen & Zhang, 2022). In this research, coping mechanisms included crying, praying, distraction, and talking to trusted people.

Guardians- Guardians are relatives or caregivers who take responsibility for a child when the biological parent is absent (Ncube & Mavhunga, 2024). In this study, guardians included grandparents, aunts, uncles, and older siblings.

Intervention strategies- Intervention strategies are practical programmes or actions designed to address a problem and improve a situation (Gomba, 2023). In this study, intervention strategies included school counselling, fee assistance, guardian training, and government recognition of left behind children.

Ecological Systems Theory (EST)- Ecological Systems Theory is Bronfenbrenner's framework that explains child development through five interconnected environmental systems: microsystem,

mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem (Ettekal & Mahoney, 2017). This theory guided the analysis of how parental migration affects children's lives.

1.12 Dissertation outline

Chapter 1

This chapter introduces the study by putting the migration issue as an issue of bot global and international attention with social, economic and consequences. The chapter highlight the context of Bindura where migration has resulted in a vulnerable population of children left behind. It also further presents the background of the study, the statement of the problem, aim of the research, the objectives as well as the research questions. It also outlines the assumptions guiding the research. It also further outlines the importance of the study to the profession of social work and the development of policies. Limitations and the delimitations that shape the scope of this study are mentioned in this chapter.

Chapter 2

This chapter will provide the literature review. It will examine global perspectives on children left behind, focusing on emotional, academic, and social impacts. Regional evidence from sub-Saharan Africa and the SADC will be discussed and will show mixed outcomes of remittances and caregiving. The Zimbabwean context will be explored in detail, emphasizing remittances, caregiver arrangements, and psychosocial outcomes. This chapter will also introduce theoretical frameworks from social policy, child welfare, and gender studies, and identify research gaps, particularly the lack of localized evidence in Bindura.

Chapter 3

This chapter will outline the research methodology. It will explain the qualitative method design used that will be used capture both the depth aspects of the problem. The study area, Bindura Urban ward 6 target population will be described, along with the population and sampling strategies involving children, guardians, teachers, and community members. Data collection methods such as interview and questionnaires. The chapter will also explain data analysis approaches and emphasize ethical considerations, especially the sensitivity of discussing parental absence with children.

Chapter 4

The findings of this research are presented in this chapter. The first theme presents the lived experiences of children left behind. The chapter explores the lived experiences of the children left behind by migrant parents. It pays specific attention to their emotions, academic performance as well as social problems. The role of guardians and caregivers is analyzed in this chapter bringing out their strength and their weakness in an attempt to meet the needs of the children left behind by migrant parents. An examination of the coping mechanisms developed by these children during the absence of parents is also done in this chapter. The chapter also further examines the support offered by schools, churches and community organizations. Through the guidance of the theoretical frameworks, and interpretation of the findings is also done in cognizance of the reviewed literature and therefore giving a better understanding of the relationship between the issue of remittances, caregiving, and the well-being of the children left behind.

Chapter 5

This chapter is a conclusion of the research. It also gives the study recommendations that are based on the findings. It will provide a summary of the major findings of the research highlighting the dual effects of migration that is material gains through remittances versus psychological impacts due to parental absence. The chapter also proposed intervention strategies which involves school-based social support, caregiver training, community child protection committees as well as peer mentorship programmes. In addition, an outline of policy implications that are meant to pave a way for the government as well as non-governmental organizations in an attempt to address the needs of children left behind by migrant parents. The conclusion of the chapter consists of suggestions of areas for further research in other provinces.

1.13 Chapter summary

This chapter have outlined the major facets of the research. The problem statement was articulated to form the basis of the research. Other major elements of the research which included the research questions. The chapter also clearly demarcated the boundaries of the research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter a critical analysis of existing literature regarding the intervention strategies and experiences of children left behind by migrant parents was done. The first objective of this study was to understand the lived experiences of these children. It explores the Ecological Systems theory and lays a foundation for the study of the experiences of children left behind by migrant parents. Further analysis of the empirical studies of the text that is in line with the study objectives was also done. The Chapter also explored the, global regional and the local contexts of the existing coping mechanisms, support systems and the intervention strategies as well. The chapter also further utilized the recent academic literature from the year 2016 to 2026. Highlights on the difficulties around the trans national migration on the parenting issues and the socio-economic effects on the children left behind. The research gap was reviewed from this text especially for Bindura and the necessity was justified through this.

2.2 Theoretical framework: Ecological systems theory (EST)

The primary theoretical framework anchoring this study is the Ecological Systems Theory (EST), developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner. This framework posits that a child's development is influenced by several nested systems of the environment, ranging from the immediate settings of family and school to the broad cultural and economic context (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; updated in synthesis by Guy-Evans, 2020). The theory is divided into the microsystem (immediate environment), mesosystem (connections between microsystems), ecosystem (indirect environments like a parent's workplace abroad), macrosystem (cultural values and laws), and chronosystem (dimension of time). In the context of this study, EST allows for an exploration of how the physical absence of a parent in the microsystem, due to migration forces in the macrosystem, reverberates across all levels of a child's life in Bindura.

Many studies have used the Ecological Systems Theory to examine the challenges experienced by children left behind by migrant parents. Examples include the study by Wang (2021) in his study on the effects of parental absence on the academic performance of children in rural China and he found out that the gap was being covered by the guardians and the teachers within the mesosphere

of the children. In the African context, Mpofu (2022) used the EST in his study on the resilience of children in migration- intensive regions of South Africa. He argued that the flow of remittances from the families abroad create a distinct environment for development. This therefore shows that the EST is a very useful tool when it comes to the study of the experiences of children left behind by migrant parents.

The strength of the Ecological Systems Theory lies in its holistic approach and its rejection of one-dimensional explanations for child development. By recognizing that a child in Bindura is not just an isolated individual but a participant in various interconnected systems, the theory facilitates a comprehensive analysis of both risks and protective factors (Ettekal & Mahoney, 2017). It accounts for the influence of external factors, such as the Zimbabwean economic climate, which forces parental migration, while simultaneously looking at the immediate support provided by local teachers. However, a notable weakness of EST is its tendency to underemphasize the individual agency and biological temperament of the child, potentially viewing them as a passive recipient of environmental influences (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2013). Additionally, the complexity of the nested systems can sometimes make it difficult for researchers to isolate the most significant variable affecting the child's experience.

This research was anchored on the EST because of its alignment with it, which seek to examine the roles of guardians, teachers, and the community at large not just merely the child. The EST framework provides a sequenced way of pointing out how intervention strategies can be applied at certain different level which include strengthening the mesosystem, or the macrosystem that is government policy on migration.

While each and every child's personal traits are important, the socioeconomic truth of migration in Bindura is an environmental phenomenon that necessitates a system-based analysis. Through the use of the EST, the study can go beyond merely describing the child's sadness to identifying the systemic breaks that need repair through targeted and tailored interventions. As a result, the EST informs the research by guiding the process from multiple stakeholders surrounding the environment of the child. The framework also emphasizes the inclusion of the guardians that is the microsystem and the teachers that is the mesosystem, to have a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of the children left behind by migrant parents. The EST also further allows the

researcher to examine how the chronosystem, the period spend by parents whilst away from the children and how it impacts the success of the coping mechanisms. Through grounding this research in the EST framework, it ensures that the proposed interventions strategies in the objectives are tailored to function within the social environment of Bindura.

2.2.1 The significance of the systems theory

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory assists us to comprehensively understand child development by looking at the different environments that affect a child. Researchers have used this theory in child welfare and migration research prior, the researcher used it in this study to show that when parents migrate. It affects the whole environment around the child not the family only. Migration studies done before made use of this ecological framework to explain how the children's lives are shaped by what happens at home, at school, in the community where the live. Through policies, Ungar (2017) says that resilience does not come from inside a person only rather it also depends on the environment around them. This is in line with what this study believes. Children left behind in Bindura do not feel the effects of migration by themselves, but within connected relationships and systems through which they survive in.

The theory explains how close relationships especially with guardians affect a child's emotions and behaviour on the microsystem level. As shown in the earlier parts of this study, the care from those who act as substitute guardians decides whether migration becomes a burden or a benefit for the child left behind by migrant parents. The ecological lens creates the foundation for Objective 1 and it is to find how children left behind cope. The coping ways are crafted by the day to day experiences of the children.

On the mesosystem level, the connection that exists between home and school is very crucial. The children are affected when whether the guardians and the teachers work together or they do not work together. Betancourt et al (2020) show that support from institutions can either reduce or increase the stress caused by migration and it depends on how well the different systems cooperate. This directly supports Objective 2, which looks at the roles of guardians, teachers, and community members. The theory also allows the study to look not only at each person's separate role but also at how they interact with each other.

The exosystem and macrosystem levels assists in explaining the bigger forces that trigger migration of parents. The decisions of the parents to migrate is largely shaped by the government policies, the labour migration patterns as well as the economic challenges prevailing in that particular country or region. Children are heavily affected despite the fact that they have limited control over these migration drivers. Rigg and Salamanca (2019), postulates that we are supposed to take into consideration the labour patterns that prevail in the regions that send many migrants so that we have a better understanding of what will happen to the children. The migration issue in Zimbabwe has reached the extent where by it is now normal for families to accept that they have been separated. Therefore, the EST assist us in better creating the intervention strategies in objective 3.

Vulnerability is multifaceted and is very complex, therefore there is a need for training, of households, school-based support and community-based programmes to offer an ecological approach rather than haphazard help and this will ensure that the intervention strategies delivered work on the different levels of vulnerability. This therefore strengthen the argument for the designing of intervention strategies that are integrated for Bindura. The framework is also of great significance when it comes to qualitative research that was used in this research by the researcher. The researcher can have a comprehensive understanding of how the interactions work within and across different systems through exploring the experiences of children left behind by migrant parents. The EST framework clearly gives the reason why the method is the most appropriate and why it was chosen. In short, the Ecological Systems theory by Bronfenbrenner gives us a better way in analysing the children left behind's experiences in Bindura. The theory also further assists us to move beyond blaming the children rather the system as a whole and this therefore makes the contribution of the theory more practical and more significance.

2.3 Empirical studies

2.3.1 Lived experiences of left behind children (positive and negative)

Literature shows that children left behind by migrant parents have both positive and negative lived experiences. On the negative side, they often feel lonely, sad, and miss their parents deeply, especially at night or during school events. Asis and Ruiz-Marave (2021) described this as ambiguous loss – the parent is physically absent but still emotionally present. On the positive side,

some children benefit from regular remittances, which improve their access to food, school fees, and healthcare. Others learn to become more responsible and independent because they must help with household chores. However, the emotional costs often outweigh the material benefits. These mixed experiences affect the children's daily lives and well-being.

2.3.2 Coping mechanisms and experiences of left-behind children

Globally, the coping mechanisms of children left behind by migrant parents are characterized by a duality of increased material resilience and emotional vulnerability. In Asian countries with high migration rates, such as the Philippines and Vietnam, research indicates that children often develop accelerated maturity as a coping mechanism, taking on household responsibilities prematurely (Graham & Jordan, 2016). For example, a longitudinal study in the Philippines by Asis and Ruiz-Marave (2021) found that while remittances improved children's physical health, many utilized avoidant coping, such as withdrawing from social activities to process the ambiguous loss of parental presence. These global findings suggest that children's primary coping strategy is often a silent internal adjustment to a new family structure, which may mask underlying psychological distress.

At the regional particularly in Sub Saharan Africa, the extended family strongly holds the coping mechanisms due to the structure of the family system in that region. However, these traditional family structures are being heavily strained by the economic hardships as well as westernization of the culture. According to Mazzucato and Cebotari, (2017), they argued that the children in states like Ghana and Ethiopia strongly depend on the coping mechanisms from the church through youth groups and these have replaced the moral support from the parents. Another study by Chae (2023) in Malawi also shows that religious coping strategies are used by many children in finding comfort and guidance. On the other hand, the regional literature shows us that the absence of parental care has led to increased maladaptive behaviours such as early sexual activities and the use of substances among adolescents. This therefore shows that the absence of parental can affects the regional coping mechanisms.

In the country of Zimbabwe, the issue of the diaspora orphans has led to a generation of children coping with the issue of parental absence in the economy that is harsh. Studies that were done prior in Bulawayo, and Gweru shoes that digital intimacy which include frequent WhatsApp messaging

and calls are being used by children to ensure their connection with the parents both emotionally and psychologically (Dube & Magunje, 2022). Children in Bindura may experience unique challenges due to the nature of the town that is dominated by academic institutions and mining activities. The remittances they get provide access to technology In Bindura town that is more dominated by mining activities as well as academic institutions and the absence of parents creates a vacuum of supervision. In addition, studies carried out by Zhou and Muponda (2023) on comparable peri-urban communities in Zimbabwe shows concluded that children form peer groups as an attempt to cope the issue of parental absence, however without monitoring these peer groups may turn into dangerous zones where negative

With regard to the unique coping mechanisms of the children in Bindura as compared to those in larger cities a research gap exists. A lot of studies that were carried out in Zimbabwe generalized the experiences of children left behind by migrant parents without specifically looking at a town and its uniqueness. For example, Bindura is a provincial town of the Mashonaland Central, has got a lot of mining activities and academic institutions that are dominant like Bindura University of Science Education. This therefore mean that the coping mechanisms of the children and their perspectives. This study is therefore aimed at addressing the gap through creating a localized analysis of the psychosocial mechanisms used by the children to manage their survival ever day in Bindura.

2.3.3 The role of guardians, teachers, and community members

Globally, the care triad, consisting of the home, the school, and the community, is recognized as the essential safety net for left-behind children. In Latin American contexts, particularly in Mexico, teachers are often the first to identify migration-related trauma in students, serving as surrogate emotional anchors (López & Zúñiga, 2018). International literature emphasizes that when teachers are trained in trauma-informed pedagogy, they can significantly mitigate the negative academic impacts of parental migration. However, a global constraint is that teachers often feel overwhelmed and under-resourced to handle the complex emotional needs of these children, leading to a support fatigue that can result in the neglect of the child's emotional well-being (OECD, 2024).

In southern Africa, guardians play a significant role especially the grandmothers of children left behind who are the main characters in the African aspect of migration. Research prove that although the grandparents of the children left behind thrive to bring stability they often face a heavy challenge of failing to discipline the adolescents due to generational gap fueled by the remittance money they receive from parents abroad (Mberengwa, 2021). In southern Africa they have created community-based organizations (CBOs) and clubs-based schools, have become the call of the day vital in the mesosystem to give guidance that the elderly cannot provide (Smit, 2020). These researches prove that although the community can be willing to help, the prevalence of lack of coordination among the school, the guardians and the teachers make the process complicated and its effectiveness be very limited and the challenges faced by these children remain unnoticed.

At the local level in Zimbabwe the role of teachers and the first-hand protectors at schools for the children left behind has been increasingly scrutinized. As noted by Mapuranga (2022), in numerous schools in Zimbabwe teachers often view children of left behind migrants as indiscipline or poorly raised and spoiled due to their regular access to foreign currency. In the community of Bindura that is dominated by a mixture of informal economy and artisanal miners and some form of formal employment, the church leaders and the elders play a significant role of closely monitor children although its informal and unstructured. Ncube and Mavhunga (2024), in their literature postulates that although guardians in Zimbabwe are resilient, they tend to lack the financial literacy as well as the ability to manage the diversified and multifaceted needs of the children of the migrant parents.

One critical gap that is identified from these themes is the absence of the literature that has real world evidence on how these different group of people work in Bindura specifically. The literature available is studied more often on teachers and guardians as separate individuals and these has failed to pinpoint how these groups communicate to create a nuanced support plan for the children left behind by migrant parents. In addition, there is insufficient information pertaining to how to how medium-sized towns like Bindura often organize themselves to assist children left behind since these kinds of cities lack the prevalence of NGOs which are found in larger cities. This study will therefore investigate and fill in these missing links through providing a more comprehensive picture of the support systems in Bindura.

2.3.4 Intervention strategies for left-behind children

At the global level, the intervention strategies towards children left behind by migrant parents have moved to transnational social protection and digital mental health upkeep. In countries like China, the governments applied the rural children left behind protection system that is designed to assist the children left behind in rural China. The programme mandates the local authorities to keep a record of the children whose parents have migrated and assign each and every child a village protector (Ye et al., 2023). In West Africa, they established school-based intervention strategies that include narrative therapy groups where by children share their experiences with the other peers concerning the absence of their parents (UNESCO, 2025). All the efforts at the global level highlight the significance of formalizing the upkeep of children left behind rather than solely depending on the extended family to take care of them.

In the region of Africa, in Ethiopia and Kenya non-governmental organizations have pioneered transnational parenting workshops that use mobile technology to prepare migrant parents on how to remain emotionally attached to their children whilst physically away from them (Haile & Tessema, 2021). The intervention strategies are more focused on economic empowerment for the guardians and psychosocial workshops specifically for the children. In addition, regional policy debates have increasingly called for education that take into consideration the remittance dependent households so that they get flexible school fees payment plans (African Union, 2022). However, many most of these intervention strategies remain project based and lack the national scaling that is of great significance to reach the broader population especially those in rural areas and remote districts.

In Zimbabwe, many intervention strategies have been primarily led by non-governmental organizations through the establishment of the child protection committees in remote areas. In peri urban and Urban areas like Bindura, the intervention strategies are limitedly visible and vividly limited to general social welfare and not specifically targeting migration issue (Chirisa & Manyani, 2020). Other local scholars like Gomba (2023), suggest that the perfect intervention strategy for Zimbabwean children is the integration of the life skills and resilience training into the national school curriculum. The gap remains practical and lacking low cost intervention models that can be

implemented by the local communities in Bindura without waiting for the support from the NGOs or the government policy changes.

The research gap identified in this section relates to the evidence-based foundation of the proposed intervention strategies. The existing literature recommends interventions grounded in broad psychological theories rather than in the actual needs and perspectives expressed by children in Bindura. Additionally, there is limited research assessing the practicality of digital parenting programmes or school-based support groups within the technological and cultural realities of a Zimbabwean provincial town. Therefore, this study seeks to develop intervention strategies that are not only theoretically relevant but also practical, sustainable, and suitable for the Bindura context.

2.4 Legal frameworks.

When one takes a look at the laws and policies that are meant to safeguard and protect the children left behind by migrant parents, a big challenge arises. According to research by Chirisa and Munyani (2020) and Ncube and Mavhunga (2024), they argue that laws exist but they do not guarantee that the children are safeguarded and protected by them. In this section, more examination in the implementation of these laws will be carried out to check what these laws guarantee.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children (UNCRC, the legal framework upon which Zimbabwe ratified it in the year 1990 acts as the primary legal framework for many states. The UNCRC consists of different articles which include article 9 which specifically focuses on the observation of the rights of children on parental care. It also consists of article 10 which specifically focuses on preservation of family ties across the nation's boundaries. Graham and Jordan (2016) and Ye at al (2023) argue that the success of these international legal frame works depends on the commitment of each state.

This is where the greatest issue arises. The UNCRC presume that countries are capable of handling issues of child protection. Mpofu (2022) argues that resource limitations in less economically developed countries especially nations like Zimbabwe, that capacity remains a dream that went into jeopardy. As another crippling issue, the convention was not specifically designed for the

children left behind by migrant parents. As observed by Asis and Ruiz-Marave (2021) this leaves a gap of conceptualization where by migration is regarded as a domestic issue and the unique situations of international migration are left without consideration although the parents remain both emotionally and economically available and physically absent for certain periods.

At the regional level, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) act as a more contextualized relevant framework. Signatories include nations like Zimbabwe. This piece of legal frameworks considers the extended family which is of great significance in the African context and is a protective structure for children (African Union, 1990). Mazzucato and Cebotari (2017) further supports that its connection to kinship makes the African Charter of great significance when it comes to children left behind in Zimbabwe. However, implementation remains a challenge. The vulnerabilities of children left behind by migrant parents is acknowledged by the African Union Migration Policy Framework for Africa (2018-2027) and it further states that member states should develop policies on migration that takes child protection into consideration (African Union, 2018). Mberengwa (2021) asserts that although these regional and international instruments sorely work at the will of the country and there are no mechanisms to ensure accountability of states.

At the national level the Zimbabwe's constitution and legislative framework presents a more difficult scenario. In the sections number 19 and 81 of the constitution of Zimbabwe, children's rights to parental care, protection and social security are a guaranteed (Government of Zimbabwe, 2013). This makes more sense on paper but in implementation it is hindered by limitations.

Mapuranga (2022) and Ncube and Mavhunga (2024) demonstrated in the Children's Act (Chapter 5:06) that it predates the contemporary migration context. It only recognizes Parental absence solely in terms of death, abandonment or incapacity not on the migration of the parent or parents. This therefore creates what Gomba (2023) describes as a category of misfit: children whose parents work abroad do not fit into existing legal categories of children in need of care. In addition, while the National Social Protection Policy (2021) pinpoint vulnerable children as of great priority, there is no consideration or even recognition of children left behind by migrant parents as a group that requires attention when it comes to issues of children (Ministry of Public Service, Labor and Social Welfare, 2021). According to the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission (2022) the absence of

robust migration policies further creates this gap and further leaving the children left behind in the middle of nowhere as the child protection systems fail to meet.

In other countries children left behind by migrant parent are of attention. Looking into what other countries have done and are doing can help us to identify what is missing in the Zimbabwean context as well as allowing us to develop a robust framework meant to assist these children. In China they developed a system called Rural Left-Behind Children Protection System and is designed to ensure that all the children whose parents have migrated for work are accurately recorded by the China's local government. Those children recorded are then given to village protectors who are obligated to frequently check them regularly (Ye et al., 2023). The Philippines all send and have send many workers to different countries to work. They have developed several programmes that are meant to support these children left behind by migrant parents. The programmes that were initiated by Philippines include school-based counselling support (International Organization for Migration, 2025). However, these programmes are not as perfect as they are required to be but they reflect the government's efforts in recognition of these children and can pass more laws to protect these children. Italy has what is known as Law No 47/2017 also called the Zampa Law. That law provides a strong protection on children left behind by migrant parents and even those that are separated from their parents. The law also further goes on to allow the international laws like the UNCRC to be used in courts and judges can use these laws to assist in the protection of these children (Nwachukwu, 2025). The United Kingdom (UK) has a slightly different approach when it comes to children left behind by migrant parents, it put into action the European Convention on the Human rights through the Human Rights Act of 1998, however they did not include the UNCRC in their domestic laws.

2.5 Summary

This chapter has provided a comprehensive review of the literature concerning children left behind by migrant parents, framed within the Ecological Systems Theory. The review established that while migration brings financial benefits, it often causes significant socio-emotional disruptions in the child's microsystem. By evaluating studies from global to local levels, it became evident that coping mechanisms are complex and that support systems, comprising guardians and teachers, are vital yet often uncoordinated. The identification of gaps in localized data, stakeholder synergy, and practical intervention models justifies the current study in Bindura. These insights provide the

necessary academic foundation to proceed to the next chapter, which will detail the research methodology used to gather empirical evidence from the stakeholders in Bindura.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter the methodology of the research was presented on the experiences of children left behind by migrant parents in Bindura. The study had four objectives, namely to explore the lived experiences of children left behind, to identify their coping mechanisms, to examine the role of guardians, teachers, and community members and to propose intervention strategies. The following were also described that are research approach, targeted population, sampling techniques used, methods used to collect data, tools used to collect data, the sample size, the procedures taken in collecting data and research philosophy. In ensuring the protection of all participants especially children who took part in the research, ethical consideration was put into practice by the researcher.

3.2 Research Philosophy

Saunders et al., (2019) defines research philosophy as the set of beliefs and assumptions about how knowledge is developed and understood. It paves way for how a researcher perceives the world and determines the choices that the researcher will use in their entire research. Lincoln and Lynham (2020) argues that research philosophy lays the foundation upon which the entire research is built providing room for choosing the best ways on interpreting the findings. Interpretivist philosophy was used in this research. Interpretivism holds that reality is socially constructed and that people's experiences, perceptions, and meanings matter (Crotty, 2020). Unlike positivism, which seeks objective facts, interpretivism acknowledges that individuals make sense of their world through their own subjective experiences (Kivunja, 2018).

Interpretivist philosophy was the most appropriate for this research because of the nature of the research which demanded an understanding of the lived experiences of children left behind by migrant parents in Bindura. The study was aimed at capturing the views of guardians, community members and even the social workers. The research was not aimed at measuring the objective facts rather to gain an understanding of how the participants understood and made meaning of their situations. Alharahsheh and Pius, (2020) also concurs that interpretivism gives researchers room to capture the complexities of the human experiences and this was the core of the research.

3.3 Research Approach

Creswell & Creswell, (2018) defines research approach as the entire guideline to ensure that data collection and data analysis is done well. It is the one that decides either the research is quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods. According to Aspers and Corte (2019), a qualitative research approach focuses on understanding social phenomena through the meanings that people assign to them. This study used a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research aims to get an understanding of people's experiences, feelings, and perspectives in detail (Mohajan, 2018). Flick, (2020) also further argues that it heavily relies on the depth understanding of the complex behaviors of humans and does not deal with numbers or statistics.

The research adopted this research approach because it was aimed at exploring the lived experiences by children left behind by migrant parents during parental absence. It also further aims to understand how the community, teachers and even the social workers supported these children. This went in line with the objectives of the research which were aimed at deep understanding not statistics or numbers. Nyumba et al. (2018) notes that qualitative research is very essential when carrying out a research to vulnerable populations like children as it gives room for those that vulnerable population to share their stories in detail from the horse mouth. This therefore made this an essential one for use in this research of children left behind by migrant parent.

3.4 Target Population

Taherdoost, (2021) defines a target population as a collection of people that shares distinct features required by a researcher. It is the group from which the participants are drawn from. Majid (2018), states that when one clearly defines target population it ensures that their findings from the research are highly accurate according to the study. The target population of the research consisted of children left behind by migrant parents in Bindura, guardians, teachers, community members who also interact with these children. The guardians consisted of uncles aunts and older siblings who were left in charge of these children left behind by migrant parents. The teachers were chosen from selected schools within Bindura Urban ward 6. The community members consisted of social workers, church leaders and members of the community who were versed with the issue of children left behind by migrant parents. The children consisted of those from the age of 10 to 17 and who had at least one parent who had migrated either internally or outside the country. This population

was chosen because it represented the children's different levels social life and this was essential to the research.

3.5 Sampling Techniques

Etikan & Bala, (2017) defines sampling technique as the method used to select participants from the target population. The sampling technique determines how representative or information-rich the sample will be. According to Campbell et al. (2020), the choice of sampling technique must align with the research approach and objectives. This research adopted purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique in which participants are deliberately selected because they have specific knowledge, experiences, or characteristics relevant to the research (Palinkas et al., 2020). This is one of the methods that are popularly used in qualitative research to make sure that participants can provide rich and detailed information (Patton, 2018).

Purposive sampling was applied by selecting children who had at least one parent who had migrated internally or beyond the border. These children were selected as they had a clear experience of parental absence and shared their experiences (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

On guardians, the researcher used purposive sampling by selecting parents who were the immediate caregivers of a child left behind by migrant parents. The researcher chose guardians as they had a direct responsibility for the day to day care of those children and they could open up to the experiences they had as well as the support they gave to the children (Birt et al., 2021). For teachers, purposive sampling was applied by selecting those from schools in Ward 6 where left-behind children were enrolled. Teachers were chosen because they observed children's academic and emotional well-being and could provide insights on school-based support (Palinkas et al., 2020). For community members, purposive sampling was applied by selecting those who had a role in supporting families and children in the community. Community members were chosen because they represented the broader social environment and could speak to community-level responses to left-behind children (Etikan & Bala, 2017). This approach ensured that the study captured multiple perspectives within the child's ecological system, from the immediate family to the school and community.

3.6 Sample Size

Sim et al., (2018), defines a sample as a representation of the population being studied. The determination of the representative population. Vasileiou et al., (2018) argues that in qualitative research the sample size is determined by the purpose and richness of the research and it is not decided by statistical formulas. According to Hennink and Kaiser (2022), the sample sizes used in qualitative research must be large enough to ensure that data saturation is reached. The sample size of the study consisted of 10 children left behind by migrant parents, 5 guardians, 3 teachers and 3 community members and this brought the total number to 21. The sample size of the research was justified as Guest et al., (2020) argues that for a research to reach saturation about 20 to 40 participants are required. In further justifying the sample size multi stakeholder made triangulation possible. The study also consisted of key informants like teachers, community care workers which made it easier for data beyond individual experience to be gathered Moser & Korstjens, (2018). This therefore made data saturation to be reached quickly and this made interviews to obtain the same themes that were obtained and no emerging themes Hennink & Kaiser, (2022).

3.7 Data Collection Methods

Data collection methods are the specific ways a researcher gathers information from participants (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). The choice of methods depends on the research approach and objectives. Busetto et al. (2020) argue that qualitative methods must allow participants to express themselves freely in their own words. This study used two main methods: semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions.

Semi-structured interviews were used with guardians, teachers, and community workers. This method allowed the researcher to follow a prepared guide while remaining flexible to explore new ideas that came up during the conversation (Kallio et al., 2018). Each interview lasted between 30 and 45 minutes. All interviews were audio-recorded with permission and later transcribed word for word.

Focus group discussions were used with the children. A focus group is a small group discussion guided by a moderator where participants talk about a shared topic (O Nyumba et al., 2018). The 10 children were divided into two groups of five each. Each focus group lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. The discussions were conducted in child-friendly language and held in safe, private

locations such as a school room. They were audio-recorded with guardian consent and child assent (Abebe, 2019).

During all sessions, the researcher also used a notebook and pen to record body language and facial expressions. A cellphone was used for audio recording after obtaining permission (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018). Recording allowed the researcher to stay focused on the conversation and to transcribe accurately later (Kallio et al., 2018).

3.8 Data Collection Tools

Data collection tools refer to the instruments used to gather information from participants (Taherdoost, 2021). According to Holloway and Galvin (2020), these tools must be carefully designed to capture the information needed to answer the research questions. In this study the researcher adopted semi structured interview guides and focus group discussions as main data collection tools. DeJonckheere & Vaughn, (2019) defines interview guide as a group of open-ended questions that control the conversation while giving room for flexibility. A focus group is a small group discussion guided by a moderator where participants talk about a shared topic (O Nyumba et al., 2018). The 10 children were divided into two groups of five each. The guide contained open-ended questions about their experiences, coping mechanisms, and support from adults. Each focus group lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. The researcher developed different interview guides and focus group guide for each group of the participants. The interview guides mainly covered background information and the questions. Questions were created according to age of the participants. The researcher also created consent and assent forms. The researcher obtained consent from the parents first or the guardian available and this was followed by a child assent form. Each group of participants had different consent forms.

3.9 Data Collection Procedure

The data collection procedure describes the step-by-step process followed to gather data from participants (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). A clear procedure ensures consistency and transparency in the research process (Busetto et al., 2020). The researcher took the following steps during their data collection process:

Step 1: Obtaining Ethical Approval

The researcher obtained ethical approval from Bindura University of Science Education. They also sought permission from the Provincial Administration of Bindura as well as from the Ministry of Primary and Education in Bindura

Step 2: Building Rapport and Gaining Access

The researcher visited Bindura Urban ward 6 to introduce the study to community leaders, school heads, and local child protection committees. This helped to build trust and gain access to participants (Moser & Korstjens, 2018).

Step 3: Participant Recruitment

Purposive sampling was used to identify and recruit participants. Guardians and children were identified with the help of community leaders and teachers. Teachers were recruited through school heads. Community members were identified through local child protection committees. Each potential participant was approached individually, given information about the study, and invited to participate.

Step 4: Obtaining Consent and Assent

Adult participants were asked to sign a written consent form. For children, parental or guardian consent was obtained first, followed by the child's assent. Children were told that they could withdraw at any time and that their decision would not affect their school or family relationships (Abebe, 2019).

Step 5: Conducting Focus Group Discussions.

The researcher conducted two focus group discussions with children. Each group had five children. The sessions were held in safe, private locations chosen by the children's guardians. Before each session, the researcher reminded the children that participation was voluntary and they could leave at any time. The researcher guided the discussion using the focus group guide, while they were also taking notes on body language and group dynamics. Each session lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. The discussions were audio-recorded with permission (O Nyumba et al., 2018). Children were encouraged to speak freely and respect each other's views.

Step 6: Conducting Interviews

Interviews were scheduled at times and locations convenient for participants. For children, interviews were conducted in a quiet, safe location which included private rooms at school or at homes with a guardian nearby. For adults, interviews were conducted at homes. Each interview began with a brief reminder of the study's purpose and the participant's rights. The researcher used the interview guide to ask questions while remaining flexible to follow new ideas (Kallio et al., 2018).

Step 7: Recording and Transcribing

Interviews were audio-recorded using a cellphone recorder. The researcher also took notes in a notebook to capture observations, body language, and reflections. After each interview, the recording was transcribed verbatim. Transcripts were stored securely on a password-protected laptop computer.

Step 8: Data Storage

All data, including audio recordings, transcripts, and consent forms, were stored securely and on a password-protected laptop computer. Only the researcher and supervisor had access to the data. Audio recordings were deleted after transcription was completed and verified.

3.10 Data Analysis

Data analysis refers to the process of organizing, examining, and interpreting data to identify patterns and meanings (Braun & Clarke, 2022). In qualitative research, analysis is an iterative process that involves moving back and forth between the data and emerging themes (Miles et al., 2020). According to Nowell et al. (2018), systematic analysis is essential for ensuring that findings are credible and trustworthy. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data of this research. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2022). It is widely used in qualitative research because it is flexible and accessible while still producing rigorous findings (Maguire & Delahunt, 2018). Thematic analysis was conducted following the six-step framework developed by Braun and Clarke (2022).

- The researcher made himself familiar with the data by repeatedly listening to the audios recorded as well as reading the transcripts.

- The researcher generated codes by coding features that were of interest systematically throughout the data group.
- The researcher grouped the data and searched for potential themes in the data based on patterns and relationships.
- Themes were reviewed in this step and the researcher checked them against the codes to ensure accuracy.
- Themes were then named, defined and refined and the data was presented in chapter 4 with some direct quotations from the participants.

This process was guided by the study's theoretical framework, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory. This helped to organize themes according to the different levels of the child's environment (Kivunja, 2018).

3.11 Ethical considerations

Resnik, (2020) defines ethical principles as the guidelines that protect the participants from harm during the research. This study adhered to established ethical guidelines for research involving vulnerable populations, particularly children (Abebe, 2019).

3.11.1 Informed Consent

Informed consent means participants are fully informed about the study before agreeing to take part (Manti & Licari, 2018). The adult participants were requested to sign consent forms and this was done after the researcher had explained the intentions of the study, the procedures that were involved were also explained by the researcher as well as the risks that were associated with the research. The researcher also obtained parental or guardian consent to carry out the research on the children. The consent was followed by child's assent. These two-step process ensured that both the guardian and the child agreed to participate in the research process (Graham et al., 2018).

3.11.2 Voluntary Participation and Right to Withdrawal

Voluntary participation means no one was forced to take part in the study (Manti & Licari, 2018). All participants were informed that their involvement was entirely voluntary. They were also told that they could withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without any negative

consequences. This right to withdrawal was respected throughout the data collection process (Resnik, 2020).

3.11.3 Confidentiality and Anonymity

Confidentiality means that participants' identities are protected and their information is not shared with unauthorized persons (Saunders et al., 2019). Participants were assured that their names were not to appear in any reports. Pseudonyms were used to protect their identities. All data, including audio recordings and transcripts, were stored securely on a password-protected computer (Abebe, 2019).

3.11.4 Minimizing Harm

Minimizing harm means protecting participants from physical, emotional, or psychological distress during research (Graham et al., 2018). Interviews were conducted in safe, neutral locations chosen by participants. Questions were phrased sensitively, particularly when the researcher was discussing parental absence with children. The researcher also constantly monitored participants for signs of distress and paused and stopped interviews when necessary. A referral pathway was established with local social workers for participants who needed support (Manti & Licari, 2018).

3.12. Trustworthiness of the study

Feasibility refers to whether a study can be practically carried out and whether its findings are credible and dependable (Cypress, 2018). This section explains how the researcher ensured that the study was feasible and trustworthy. Trustworthiness is the overarching standard for quality in qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This study followed the four criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba which are credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

3.12.1 Credibility

Credibility refers to how confident the researcher is in the truth of the study's findings. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), credibility is the qualitative equivalent of internal validity in quantitative research and addresses whether the findings accurately represent the participants' experiences and perspectives. In ensuring credibility, the researcher employed several established strategies. First, triangulation was used by gathering data from multiple stakeholder groups, including children, guardians, teachers, and community members (Cypress, 2018). Second, member checking was conducted by returning to some participants to share summaries of their

interviews and confirm that their views had been correctly understood (Birt et al., 2021). Third, the researcher engaged in prolonged engagement with the community in Bindura to build trust and gain a deeper understanding of the context (Nowell et al., 2018).

3.12.2 Transferability

Transferability refers to the degree to which the study's findings can be applied to other contexts, settings, or groups of people (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In qualitative research, this is the equivalent of external validity in quantitative research. The researcher ensured transferability by providing thick description of the research context. This included detailed information about the participants, the Bindura urban ward 6 setting, and the specific experiences of children left behind by migrant parents (Nowell et al., 2018). These rich, contextual details allow readers to assess whether the findings might be relevant or applicable to similar situations or populations they are familiar with. The researcher also engaged with theory to help frame the problem and connect the findings to existing knowledge.

3.12.3 Dependability

Dependability is the qualitative equivalent of reliability in quantitative research (Cypress, 2018). It refers to the consistency and stability of the research findings over time and demonstrates that the research process was logical, traceable, and well-documented. To achieve dependability, the researcher maintained a comprehensive audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This trail included raw data (such as interview transcripts), records of data analysis (coding notes), and logs of key decisions made throughout the research process. This transparent record-keeping allows another researcher to follow the same procedures and understand how conclusions were reached (Nowell et al., 2018).

3.12.4 Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the degree to which the research findings are shaped by the participants' responses and not by the researcher's own biases or motivations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It is the qualitative equivalent of objectivity in quantitative research. The researcher ensured confirmability by keeping a reflexive journal throughout the study (Cypress, 2018). In this journal, the researcher recorded personal thoughts, assumptions, and potential biases that could influence the research process. This practice helps to separate the researcher's preconceptions from the data and ensures

that the findings are grounded in the participants' own voices (Nowell et al., 2018). The use of direct quotations in the findings chapter further demonstrates that the conclusions are derived directly from the data.

3.13 Limitations of the study

The research had several limitations which included the sample size that was not representable enough to draw conclusions for the whole of Zimbabwe. The findings of the research were subject to biased due to memory or social desirability as they relied on self-reported data. Locating and recruiting the desired population was difficult due to lack of record specifically for Bindura Urban ward 6. Discussing parental absence with children was sensitive to them and led to discomfort and biased responses. The population also gave response that were too positive especially on the issues of remittance use by the guardians.

3.14 Delimitations

The research was specifically focused on Bindura urban ward 6 only and this limited the generalizability of the outcomes of the research. A qualitative approach was implemented by the researcher which might not be applicable to all the population and even further complicating the research methodology.

3.15 Chapter Summary

This chapter described the research methodology used in this study. An interpretivist philosophy and qualitative approach were adopted to explore the experiences of children left behind by migrant parents in Bindura Urban ward 6. The target population consisted of children, guardians, teachers, and community members. Purposive sampling was used to select 21 participants. This included 10 children, 5 guardians, 3 teachers, and 3 community members. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with guardians, teachers, and community members. Focus group discussions were conducted with the 10 children, divided into two groups of five each. Interview guides and a focus group guide were used as data collection tools. Interview guides were designed for each group of participants. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. The data collection procedure followed a systematic process that prioritized ethical considerations. Particular attention was given to the protection of child participants. The next chapter presents the findings of the study.

CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION, INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents what the researcher found from talking to children left behind by migrant parents in Bindura, their guardians, teachers, and community workers. The researcher collected data through focus group discussions with 10 children and semi-structured interviews with 5 guardians, 3 teachers, and 3 community workers. The findings were organized around the four research objectives: the lived experiences, coping mechanisms of children, the role of support systems, and intervention strategies. For each sub-theme, the researcher first presented what participants said in their own words, then interpreted what those words mean, then analyzed them using their own voice as a researcher, and finally discuss how they connect to existing literature and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory.

4.2 Demographic Characteristics of Participants

In total, 21 people took part in the research. Ten were children between 10 and 17 years old. Among them, six had mothers who worked away from home, three had fathers who worked away, and two had both parents away. The time the parents had been away ranged from one year to six years. Eight children lived with extended family that are grandmothers, aunts, uncles, or older siblings, while two lived with the parent who stayed behind.

Table 4.1: Demographic Profile of Child Participants (n=10).

Pseudonym	Age	Parent who migrated	Lives with/ caregiver
Child 1	14	Mother	Grand mother
Child 2	12	Father	Mother
Child 3	16	Both parents	Aunt
Child 4	13	Mother	Father
Child 5	15	Father	Grand parents
Child 6	11	Mother	Aunt
Child 7	17	Father	Mother
Child 8	10	Mother	Grand mother
Child 9	13	Both parents	Uncle

Child 10	15	Mother	Older sister

Table 4.1 shows that among the 10 children, six had mothers who migrated, three had fathers who migrated, and two had both parents away. The most common caregivers were grandmothers and aunts, followed by mothers who stayed behind, grandparents, uncles, and an older sister. The children's ages ranged from 10 to 17 years.

Five guardians took part in the research. They were three grandmothers, one aunt, one uncle, and one older sister. Their ages were between 22 and 72 years. Three teachers from primary and secondary schools in Bindura Urban ward 6 also took part. They had been teaching for five to eighteen years. Three community workers also joined a social worker from the Department of Social Welfare, a community health worker, and a church leader. All names in this chapter are fake to protect people's identity.

Participant	**Relationship or role**	**Age range/ experience**	**Key characteristic**
Guardian 1	Grand mother	70+	Financial struggle, elderly
Guardian 2	Aunt	30-40	Has own children, limited resources.
Guardian 3	Grand father	70+	Age, transport difficulties.
Guardian 4	Old sister	22-25	Balancing work and care
Guardian 5	Uncle	40-50	Discipline, financial strain.
Teacher 1	Primary school teacher	5 years' experience.	Female, encourages learners
Teacher 2	Secondary school teacher	12 years' experience	Male, use sports for coping.
Teacher 3	Secondary school teacher	8 years' experience	Female, give extra time.
Worker 1	Social worker	10 years' experience	Child protection, referrals
Worker 2	Community health worker	6 years	Home visits, nutrition

Worker 3	Church leader	15 years	Spiritual support, food aid

Table 4.2 shows the background of the five guardians, three teachers, and three community workers who took part in the study. Among the guardians, grandmothers and grandfathers were the most common caregivers. Their main challenges were old age, lack of money, and transport problems. Younger guardians like the older sister and aunt struggled to balance work and care. Teachers had between five and eighteen years of experience, and they used different methods to support children, such as encouragement and sports. Community workers included a social worker, a health worker, and a church leader. They pointed to lack of resources, staff shortages, and limited training as barriers to helping children left behind.

4.3 Data presentation and analysis

In this section, the three research objectives are used as the main themes to present and analyze the data. Under each objective, sub-themes were developed from the participants' responses. Each sub-theme is presented using direct quotes from participants, followed by interpretation, analysis, and discussion. The findings are also linked to existing literature and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

4.3.1 Lived experiences of children left behind (positive and negative)

Children described their daily lives as a mix of sadness and small comforts. On the negative side, many felt lonely and missed their parents, especially at night or during school events. Some felt different from their peers who had both parents at home.

Child 1 said: *"When I miss my mother, I usually sit alone and think about her. Sometimes I cry, especially at night."*

Child 3 said: *"School is difficult because I don't have someone pushing me. I just try to study on my own."*

On the positive side, some children found comfort in prayer, in talking to relatives, or in the material support they received. Remittances helped pay for school fees, uniforms, and food. A few children felt proud that their parents were working hard for the family.

Child 1 also said: *"What gives me comfort is praying and when my mother calls me."*

Child 5 said: *"My grandparents support me fully. Teachers are supportive. Church also helps."*

These experiences show that children left behind carry a heavy emotional burden, but they also have sources of strength. The researcher noted that the absence of a parent affects almost every part of a child's day. From studying alone to doing chores without help. Many children find ways to cope and even feel a sense of pride or responsibility.

4.3.2 Coping mechanisms of children left behind.

Under this objective, three sub-themes emerged. The first sub-theme looks at how children cope by crying and praying alone. The second sub-theme examines how children use activities like sports, music, and television to distract themselves. The third sub-theme explores how a few children talk to a trusted person such as a grandmother, sister, or friend.

4.3.2.1 Crying and praying alone

Many children said they cry when they miss their parent. They usually cry at night or when they are alone. Some children also pray to feel better. A few children said they hide their crying so others do not see them.

Child 1, a 14-year-old girl whose mother left three years ago, said: "*When I miss my mother, I usually sit alone and think about her. Sometimes I cry, especially at night. What gives me comfort is praying."*

Child 4, a 13-year-old boy whose mother left one year ago, said: "*When I miss her, I cry and pray*."

Child 8, a 10-year-old girl whose mother left one year ago, said: "*I cry when I miss her. Prayer helps me.*"

These children are using private, inner ways to deal with their sadness. Crying at night means they feel safe to show feelings when no one is watching. Praying gives them hope that someone is listening. What stands out is that most children did not cry in front of others. They kept their sadness hidden. This suggests they do not want to be seen as weak or different from other children. Praying is a free resource, it does not cost money or need an adult. But relying only on prayer and crying means they have no professional help. If their sadness stays inside for too long, it could turn

into depression. Bronfenbrenner's theory says a child's development is shaped by the people closest to them. Here, the closest people the parent is missing, so the child turns inward instead of reaching out.

These findings concur with what Asis and Ruiz-Marave (2021) found in the Philippines: children of migrant parents often cry alone and keep their pain inside. Similarly, a study by Gao and Li (2019) in rural China found that children left behind used prayer and silent crying as main coping tools. However, the researchers study shows that even when children pray, they still feel lonely. That means prayer helps but does not fix the problem. In Bindura, where there are few counsellors, children fall back on religion because nothing else is available.

4.3.2.2 Distracting the mind through activities

Some children tried not to think about their parent by keeping busy. They played football, listened to music, played games, or watched television. They did these things on purpose to forget their sadness.

Child 2, a 12-year-old boy whose father left two years ago, said: "*When I miss my father, I play football with my friends so that I don't think too much*."

Child 3, a 16-year-old boy whose both parents left four years ago, said: "*When I miss them, I listen to music and stay alone. Music gives me comfort*."

Child 6, an 11-year-old girl whose mother left two years ago, said: "*When I miss her, I play games.*"

Child 9, a 13-year-old boy whose both parents left three years ago, said: "*I watch TV to forget*."

These children are using distraction as a shield. They fill their minds with noise so they do not have to feel the empty space left by their parent. Playing football or games also gives them a reason to be with friends, which stops them from sitting alone.

Distraction is a short-term fix. It works while the game or music is on, but when it stops, the missing feeling comes back. Notice that none of the children said they talked to someone about their feelings. They chose activities that did not need words. This shows they may not have words for their pain, or they have no one who will listen. In Ecological Systems Theory, the microsystem (family and friends) is not strong enough to carry the child's weight, so the child creates his own small system of distraction. But this system is weak because it depends on the child alone.

This concurs with what Graham and Jordan (2016) wrote about children in Southeast Asia. Those children also used sports and television to avoid thinking about their absent parents. A more recent study by Chen and Zhang (2022) in China found that children left behind who used distraction often had better school results than those who just cried, because they stayed busy. My data shows the same Child 2 and Child 5 said they focus on school to keep going. However, distraction does not remove the pain. It only postpones it. In Bindura, where there are no youth counsellors, distraction becomes the only choice.

4.3.2.3 Talking to a trusted person

A few children said they talked to someone when they felt sad. They chose grandmothers, mothers who stayed behind, friends, or sisters. They did not talk to everyone – only to people they trusted.

Child 1 said: "*When I feel sad or stressed, I talk to my grandmother because she understands me, and sometimes I talk to my friend at school.*"

Child 5, a 15-year-old boy whose father left five years ago, said: "*I talk to my friends when I feel stressed."*

Child 10, a 15-year-old girl whose mother left four years ago, said: "*I talk to my sister when I miss her. When I feel sad, she comforts me*."

These children have found at least one person who listens. That person is usually a woman, grandmother, mother, sister, which means girls and older female relatives carry most of the emotional support work. Friends are also important, especially for older children.

Talking helps because it takes the weight off the child's chest. But notice that only three out of ten children mentioned talking. The other seven kept quiet. That means most children are still carrying their sadness alone. Also, none of the children said they talked to a teacher or a counsellor. They stayed inside the family or friendship circle. This shows that schools and community groups are not yet safe spaces for children to open up about migration. In Bronfenbrenner's model, the mesosystem (link between home and school) is broken. The child has a good link to grandmother or sister, but there is no link from that person to the teacher or social worker.

These findings are familiar with what Smit (2020) found in South Africa: children left behind mostly relied on grandmothers and friends, not professionals. My study adds that even when

children talk, they only talk about surface things, not deep fears. A study by Maluleke and Makhubele (2021) in rural Limpopo found that children who talked to someone at least once a week had lower anxiety. My data shows that children who talk do feel better, but they are the minority. In Bindura, the community needs to train more adults, neighbors, church volunteers, older youth, to become safe listeners.

4.4 Role of Guardians, Teachers, and Community Members

The findings in this section showed that guardians, teachers and community members all tried to help children left behind, but their efforts were not coordinated. Guardians provided basic needs but struggled with age, poverty and lack of training. Teachers noticed problems but had no formal system to track children. Community members gave irregular help that came and went. The researcher noted that the weak link between home, school and community left children with no consistent support

4.4.1 Guardians provide basic needs but struggle emotionally.

Guardians said they gave children food, shelter, school fees, and uniforms. They also tried to advise children and guide them. But many guardians said they struggled because they were old, poor, or had their own children to look after.

Guardian 1, a grandmother in Chipindura, said: "*I provide food when I can, guidance, discipline, and emotional comfort. I also try to make sure she attends school every day. My biggest challenge is money because I am old and no longer working*."

Guardian 4, an older sister in Mupandenyama, said: "*I cook, supervise homework, buy necessities, and try to guide him like a parent though I am still learning myself. The biggest challenge is balancing work, my own life, and parenting responsibilities*."

Guardian 5, an uncle in Chiwaridzo, said: "*We provide accommodation, meals, school support, clothing, and family belonging. Challenges include finances, discipline, and making the child feel equal with our own children*."

Guardians are trying their best with what they have. They are not bad people. But they are tired and stretched thin. A grandmother in her seventies cannot run to school when a child misbehaves. An older sister who is only 22 cannot replace a mother's authority.

These guardians are filling a gap that was left by the migrant parent. They are doing it without training and without extra money. The government does not send them grants. The school does not give them special help. They are alone. This shows a failure of the exosystem, the policies and services that are supposed to help families. In Bindura, there is no subsidy for grandparents raising grandchildren. There is no home-based counselling for young guardians. So, they keep struggling until they break.

These findings match with what Ncube and Mavhunga (2024) wrote about guardians in Zimbabwe: they are resilient but lack financial literacy and psychological tools. A study by Banda and Chirwa (2020) in Malawi found that grandparents who cared for children left behind often had high blood pressure and depression because of stress. My data shows the same stress, but none of the guardians had access to a social worker or a support group. This is a policy gap. The government must create a small grant for kinship careers in Bindura.

4.4.2 Teachers notice problems but have no system

Teachers said they saw children who were sad, angry, or withdrawn. They tried to encourage them and give extra help. But they had no formal way to track which children were left behind. Large classes and busy schedules made it hard to give individual attention.

Teacher 1, a female primary school teacher in Chipindura, said: "*We try to support them through guidance and counseling, extra attention from teachers, and checking on learners who suddenly change behavior. There is no formal written system specifically for children left behind by migrant parents."*

Teacher 2, a male high school teacher in Chipindura, said: "*We support them through teacher guidance, career talks, and involving them in sports or clubs. There is no dedicated monitoring system, but class teachers usually know learners' backgrounds*."

Teacher 3, a female secondary school teacher near Bindura, said: *"We support them by encouraging them, giving extra time for missed work, and speaking with guardians where possible. Identification is mostly informal. Because we know many families in the community, teachers usually know which children stay without parents.*"

Teachers are not ignoring these children. They want to help. But they are doing it without a system. They rely on memory and kindness. That works for one or two children, but not for many.

The problem here is not the teachers. It is the school system. There is no register of children with migrant parents. No training for teachers on how to handle migration-related trauma. No counsellor on site. So, the teacher becomes a mother, father, social worker, and teacher all at once. That is not sustainable. In Ecological Systems Theory, the mesosystem (home-school connection) is supposed to work both ways. But here, the teacher knows the child's situation but cannot act because the school has no resources. The guardian knows the child is struggling but cannot help with homework. The two systems are not talking to each other properly.

This aligns with Mapuranga (2022), who found that Zimbabwean teachers often feel overwhelmed and under-resourced when dealing with children of diaspora parents. A study by Akinsulure-Smith and O'Hara (2021) in the United States found that schools with a designated "migrant child liaison" had better outcomes. My study shows that Bindura schools have no such liaison. Until the Ministry of Education creates a simple monitoring form and one hour of teacher training, these children will keep falling through the cracks.

4.4.3 Community members want to help but are not organized

Some children and guardians received help from churches and neighbors. A church leader gave food or clothes. A neighbor watched over a child when the guardian was at work. But this help was not regular. It came and went.

Community worker 3, a church leader, said: "*Our church provides spiritual guidance, counseling, youth mentorship, food assistance when possible, and emotional support. Limitations include limited finances, lack of trained counselors, and some families being unwilling to share their problems.*"

Community worker 1, a social worker, said: "*We collaborate with schools through referrals and welfare reports. Major limitations include staff shortages, transport challenges, limited funding, and high numbers of vulnerable children.*"

Community worker 2, a community health worker, said: "*My role is to identify vulnerable children during home visits, educate caregivers on child health, and refer serious welfare concerns. Limitations include lack of transport, shortage of medicines or support resources, and too many households to cover."*

Help, exists, but it is like rain in a dry season so it comes a little and then stops. A church can give food once a month, but that does not pay school fees. A health worker can visit, but she cannot come every week.

The community has goodwill, but goodwill is not a system. No one is coordinating the church, the health worker, the school, and the social worker. So, a child might get food from a church but no counselling. Or counselling from a teacher but no fees. The different parts of the child's macrosystem (culture, policies, economy) are not working together. In Bindura, the economy forces parents to migrate, but the social services have not caught up. The result is fragmented, unpredictable help.

This matches what Chirisa and Manyani (2020) wrote about Zimbabwean child protection: interventions are often project-based and not scaled. A study by Okoth and Omondi (2022) in Kenya found that communities with a "child protection committee" that met monthly had fewer cases of neglect. My data shows that Bindura Ward 6 does not have such a committee. The social worker is overworked, the health worker has no car, and the church has no counsellor. Until they meet together and share a simple plan, the help will stay random.

4.5 Proposed Intervention Strategies

The findings in this section showed that children, guardians, teachers and community workers agreed on what is needed. Children wanted counselling and support groups at school. Guardians asked for fee assistance and training. Teachers recommended a simple system to identify left-behind children. Community workers called for government policies that recognize these children as a special group. The researcher observed that no single intervention will work alone – actions are needed at school, at home and in government.

4.5.1 Counselling and emotional support programmes

Many children and adults said that schools and communities should offer counselling. Children wanted someone to talk to regularly, not just when there was a problem.

Child 1 said: "*Schools should provide counselling*."

Child 4 said: "*I would suggest counselling programs*."

Child 8 said: "*I would suggest support groups."*

Teacher 1 said: "*I would recommend school-based counselling programmes and mentorship clubs where learners can openly discuss their feelings.*"

Both children and adults agree that talking helps. But currently, there is no counsellor in any of these schools. Children are asking for something that does not exist.

The need for counselling is clear. But in Bindura, there is only one government social worker for several wards. Schools have no budget for counsellors. This means that if children want to talk, they must rely on a teacher who is already overloaded. That is not fair. A simple solution would be to train one teacher per school as a "listening teacher", not a professional counsellor, but someone who has one hour a day to sit with children. That costs nothing but time. The government could also allow faith-based organizations to run free youth counselling once a week.

This finding supports what Gomba (2023) proposed for Zimbabwe: resilience training should be part of the school curriculum. But the data from the study shows that children want more than training, they want a person. A study by Sithole and Dube (2021) in Bulawayo found that peer support groups reduced depression scores by 30% after six months. Bindura could start with two pilot support groups in two schools and measure the results. The children themselves are asking for it.

4.5.2 School-based support and fee assistance

Guardians and teachers said that school fees, uniforms, and stationery were big problems. When fees were not paid, children were sent home, which made them feel ashamed and angry.

Guardian 3, a grandfather in Chipindura, said: "*If support delays, he worries about school needs and asks many questions. He fears being sent home for fees. School fee support, transport support, and regular communication from parents would help*."

Guardian 5 said: "*More income support, counseling, and school material assistance would help.*"

Teacher 3 said: "*Schools should have feeding programmes, counseling support, and after-school study groups*."

Money is not the only problem, but it is a big one. When a child is sent home because fees are late, the child feels different from others. That shame adds to the sadness of missing a parent.

Schools are using fee collection as a tool, but for children left behind, that tool breaks the child's spirit. The government should allow schools to have a "hardship fund" – a small pool of money from donations or the district that can cover fees for two or three children per school. That would stop the shame. Also, feeding programmes keep children in school. A hungry child cannot learn. Bindura has many farms and mines. The local council could ask mining companies to sponsor one meal per day for vulnerable children.

This agrees with what the African Union (2022) recommended: migration-sensitive education policies that allow flexible fee payment plans. A study by Tawodzera and Themane (2019) in Zimbabwe found that school feeding programmes increased attendance by 40% among children left behind. My data shows the same need. In Bindura, where many guardians are elderly farmers, even small fees are heavy. A sliding scale for fees, lower for children with migrant parents would help.

4.5.3 Community and government interventions

Community workers and guardians said that government should do more. They wanted regular visits from social workers, training for guardians, and policies that recognize children left behind as a special group.

Social worker (Participant 1) said: "Policy gaps include lack of specific frameworks addressing children left behind by migrant parents and weak coordination among service providers. Sustainable strategies include stronger case management systems, school-based counseling, caregiver support training, and coordinated government-community interventions."

Community health worker (Participant 2) said: "*Long-term strategies should include regular welfare screening in schools, caregiver health education, nutrition support, and stronger referral systems.*"

Guardian 1 (grandmother) said: "*Government and organizations should support grandparents caring for children through food aid, school fees, and social welfare visits*."

Everyone agrees that the government is absent. The policies exist on paper, but they do not reach Bindura. Grandparents do not see a social worker. Schools do not get special funds. The gap between what the law says and what happens on the ground is huge.

This is the biggest finding of the study. Children left behind by migrant parents in Bindura are invisible to the system. The Children's Act was written for orphans, not for children with living parents who work abroad. These children fall into a policy crack. They are not poor enough for some aid, but not stable enough to manage alone. The government must create a simple definition: "a child left behind by a migrant parent" and then train one social worker per district to focus only on these children. That would cost little but would save many children from dropping out of school or falling into depression.

This finding connects directly to the work of Ye et al. (2023) in China, where the government created a database of children left behind and assigned a village protector. Zimbabwe does not have that. A study by Mhlanga and Ndlovu (2020) in Zimbabwe recommended a national registry of children affected by migration. My data shows that Bindura Ward 6 does not even have a list. Without a list, no help can be planned. The first step is for the social welfare department to work with schools and churches to count these children. Then the second step is a small budget for school fees and a monthly check-in by a trained volunteer.

4.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented, interpreted, analyzed, and discussed the findings from 21 participants in Bindura. Children left behind used crying, prayer, distraction, and talking to close family to cope. Guardians provided basic needs but were old, poor, or untrained. Teachers noticed problems but had no formal system to help. Community members gave irregular support. Proposed interventions included school-based counselling, fee assistance, feeding programmes, and government policies that recognize children left behind as a special group. The findings were discussed using Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory and compared to recent literature from Africa, Asia, and Zimbabwe. The next chapter will give conclusions and recommendations.

Chapter 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter is a summary of the research findings on children left behind by migrant parents in Bindura. It also gives conclusions based on the research objectives and offers recommendations for policy, practice, and future research. The chapter ends with a short summary.

5.2 Summary of Findings

The study had four objectives. The first was to explore the lived experiences of children left behind. The second one was to identify coping mechanisms of children left behind. The third was to examine the role of guardians, teachers, and community members in supporting these children. The last one was to propose intervention strategies.

5.2.1 Lived experiences of children

The study found that children left behind feel lonely and sad. They miss their parents, especially at night and during school events. Many hide their feelings because they have no one to talk to.

5.2.2 Coping Mechanisms of Children

The findings showed that children used different ways to cope with parental absence. Some children cried alone, especially at night. Others prayed or listened to music. A few used sports or television to distract themselves. Only a small number of children talked to someone they trusted, such as a grandmother, friend, or sister. Most children kept their feelings inside. This matches what Asis and Ruiz-Marave (2021) found in the Philippines – children often internalize their sadness.

5.2.3 Role of Guardians, Teachers, and Community Members

Guardians provided food, shelter, and school fees, but many struggled because they were old, poor, or had their own children to look after. Teachers noticed that children were sad or withdrawn, but they had no formal system to track these children. They helped informally through encouragement and extra attention. Community members such as church leaders and neighbors gave occasional help, but it was not regular. Social workers were understaffed and could not reach every family. These findings agree with Ncube and Mavhunga (2024) who found that guardians in Zimbabwe lack financial and psychological tools.

5.2.4 Intervention Strategies

Children and adults suggested several interventions. Children wanted counselling and support groups at school. Guardians asked for school fee assistance and training on how to care for children left behind. Teachers recommended peer mentorship programmes and better communication between home and school. Community workers called for government policies that recognize children left behind as a special group. This supports what Ye et al. (2023) found in China, where the government created a database and assigned village protectors.

5.3 Conclusions

The study concludes that children left behind in Bindura feel lonely and sad, but they hide these feelings because there are no safe spaces to talk. Guardians lack resources and training. Teachers and community members want to help but have no clear system. The first objective was met. Children experience both negative feelings (sadness, loneliness) and positive aspects (comfort from prayer, remittances). The second objective was met. Children cope through crying, prayer, and distraction, but mostly alone. The third objective was met. Guardians, teachers, and community members are not coordinated. The fourth objective was met. Participants suggested counselling, fee help, guardian training, and government action. Migration brings money but also emotional gaps that current systems in Bindura do not fill.

5.4 Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made.

5.4.1 For Schools

Schools should introduce simple counselling services. This could be done by training one teacher as a listening teacher who spends one hour a day talking to children. Schools should also create peer support groups where children can share their feelings. This was suggested by Teacher 1 and Child 1.

5.4.2 For the Government

The government should recognize children left behind by migrant parents as a specific vulnerable group. A simple registration system in each ward could help track these children. The Department

of Social Welfare should train one officer per district to focus only on these children. This follows the example of China mentioned by Ye et al. (2023).

5.4.3 For Guardians and Community

Community members should form small support groups where guardians can share advice and resources. Churches and local organizations can help with food and school fees when possible. Neighbors can watch over children when guardians are away. This came from the suggestions of guardians and the church leader.

5.4.4 For Future Research

Future research should cover other wards in Bindura to see if the findings are similar. A quantitative study could measure how many children are affected. Another study could compare Bindura with a rural area or with a larger city like Harare.

5.5 Proposed Intervention Model for Children Left Behind

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher developed an Integrated Ecological Support Model (IESM) for children left behind by migrant parents in Bindura. The model is grounded in Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory and includes five levels: Microsystem, Mesosystem, Exosystem, Macrosystem, and Chronosystem. Each level describes the current problems and the interventions suggested by participants.

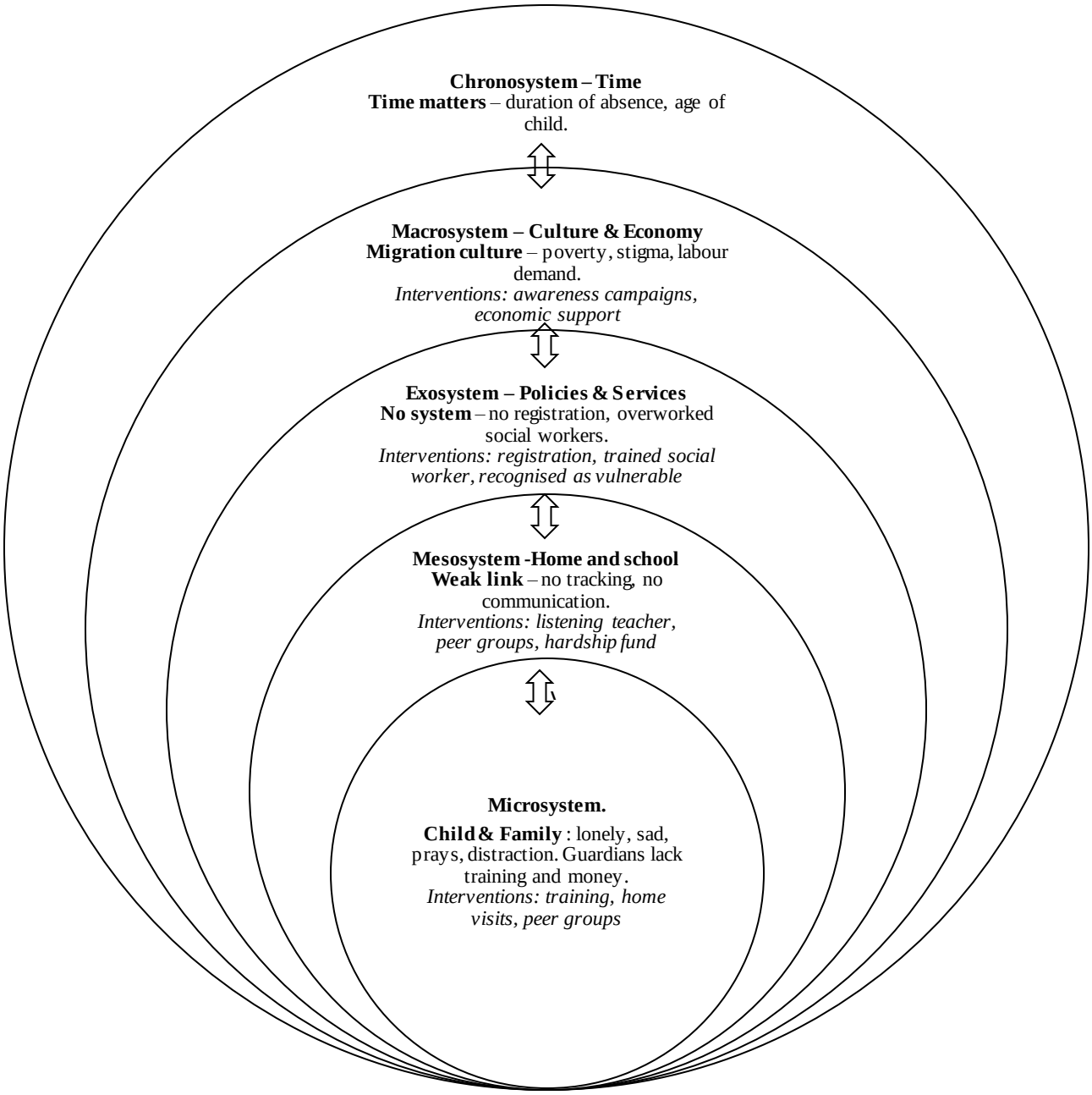


Figure 5.1: Integrated Ecological Support Model (IESM) for Children Left Behind in Bindura, Zimbabwe

Microsystem (child and immediate family)

At this level, children experience loneliness, sadness, and hidden emotional pain. They cope through crying, prayer, distraction, and talking to grandmothers or siblings. Guardians provide basic needs but lack training and money. Interventions at this level include guardian training

(financial literacy, child psychology), home visits by volunteers, and peer support groups for guardians.

Mesosystem (connections between home and school)

This level is where the link between guardians and teachers should work, but in Bindura it is broken. Teachers do not have a formal system to identify left-behind children. Guardians struggle to communicate with schools. Interventions at this level include introducing a listening teacher at each school, creating peer support groups for children, and establishing a hardship fund for school fees.

Exosystem (policies and services that affect the child indirectly)

The government and social welfare services are part of this level. Currently, there is no registration system for left-behind children. Social workers are overworked and cannot reach every family. Interventions at this level include creating a ward-based registration system, training one social worker per district to focus only on these children, and recognizing left-behind children as a specific vulnerable group in policies.

Macrosystem (cultural and economic environment)

This level includes the migration culture, poverty, and labor demand that push parents to leave. Stigma around migration also exists. Interventions at this level include community awareness campaigns to reduce stigma and economic support for families so that migration becomes a choice, not a necessity.

Chronosystem (time)

The duration of parental absence and the age of the child affect outcomes. A child left behind for five years has different needs than one left behind for one year. Interventions should be tailored to the length of separation.

How the model works

The model uses two-way arrows. A struggling child (microsystem) should be noticed by the teacher (mesosystem), who can report to a social worker (exosystem). The social worker can then advocate for policy change (macrosystem). Conversely, when the government creates a registration

system, that helps schools identify children, which helps guardians get support. The model is practical for Bindura because it uses existing structures (schools, churches, social workers) and adds only low-cost changes.

5.6 Implications for social work

This study has some implications for social work practice. Social workers need to see children left behind as a different kind of vulnerable group. They fall between normal child protection and orphan policies. Another thing, social workers should help guardians and teachers talk more to each other. That link is weak now. Guardians also lack training – social workers can arrange simple trainings on money management and how to understand child feelings. At the bigger level, social workers must push government to create a registration system for these children in every ward. Lastly, social work training should include the issue of migration and family separation, so new social workers know what to expect.

5.7 Limitations of the Study

This study had limitations. The sample was small (21 participants) and only from one ward in Bindura. The findings cannot be generalized to all of Zimbabwe. The data relied on self-reports, which may have been affected by memory or social desirability. Some participants may have given answers they thought the researcher wanted to hear. Despite these limitations, the study provides useful insights into the experiences of children left behind in Bindura.

5.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter summarized the main findings on coping mechanisms, support roles, and intervention strategies. It concluded that children left behind in Bindura cope alone most of the time, that support systems are weak and uncoordinated, and that practical interventions are needed at school, community, and government levels. Recommendations were given for schools, government, guardians, and future researchers. The study contributes to understanding how migration affects children in a medium-sized Zimbabwean town and suggests ways to improve their well-being.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Semi-Structured Interview Guide for Children Left Behind

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this interview. I am conducting a study on intervention strategies on the experiences of children left behind by migrant parents in Bindura. Your contribution is of great significance and none of your answers is neither right or wrong. You may skip any question or stop the interview at any time. Your answers will be kept private and used only for research.

Section A: Background Information

1. How old are you?
2. Which parent migrated?
3. How long has your parent been away?
4. Who do you currently live with?

Section B: Coping Mechanisms and experiences

Objective: To identify the lived experiences and coping mechanisms on the experiences of children left behind by migrant parents in Bindura.

5. When you miss your parent, what do you usually do?
6. Who do you talk to when you feel sad or stressed?
7. What helps you manage your schoolwork while your parent is away?
8. Have you developed any ways of handling responsibilities at home? Please explain.
9. What gives you strength or comfort during difficult times?
10. Probe: Is it a person, activity, belief, or something else?

Section C: Role of Guardians, Teachers, and Community

Objective 2: To examine the role of guardians, teachers, and community members in supporting these children.

11. How does your guardian support you at home?

12. Do your teachers know that your parent is away? If yes, how do they support you?

13. Are there community members, church groups, or organizations that assist you?

14. In what ways do adults around you help you deal with challenges?

Section D: Proposed Interventions

Objective 3: To propose intervention strategies on the experiences of children left behind by migrant parents in Bindura.

15. What kind of support would make your life easier?

16. What should schools do to better support children whose parents have migrated?

17. What should the community or government improve?

18. If you could suggest one programme to help children like you, what would it be?

Appendix 2: Interview Guide for Guardians/Caregivers

Thank you for joining this interview. I would like to hear your role on the children left behind by migrant parents in Bindura, the coping mechanisms, and how support services could be improved for children. Be to speak and express your views. Everything you say will remain confidential and used only for this research. You may choose to withdraw from the interview at any given time.

Section A: Background Information

1. What is your relationship to the child?

2. How long have you been caring for the child?

3. How often does the migrant parent communicate or send financial support?

Section B: Children's lived experiences and Coping Mechanisms

Objective: To identify the lived experiences and coping mechanisms on the experiences of children left behind by migrant parents in Bindura.

4. How does the child usually cope with the absence of the parent?
5. Have you observed any strategies the child uses to deal with emotional stress?
6. How does the child respond when communication with the migrant parent is delayed?

Section C: Role of Guardians and Community

Objective 2: To examine the role of guardians, teachers, and community members in supporting these children

7. What specific support do you provide to the child emotionally and academically?
8. How do teachers contribute to supporting the child?
9. Are there community members or organizations that assist you in caregiving?
10. What challenges do you face in fulfilling your caregiving role?

Section D: Proposed Intervention Strategies

Objective 3: To propose intervention strategies on the experiences of children left behind by migrant parents in Bindura.

11. What additional support would help you care for the child more effectively?
12. What should schools improve to better support children of migrant parents?
13. What policies or programmes should be introduced in Bindura?

Appendix 3: Interview Guide for Teachers

Section A: Lived experiences and coping mechanisms observed

Objective: To identify the lived experiences and coping mechanisms on the experiences of children left behind by migrant parents in Bindura.

1. How do learners with migrant parents generally cope in the school environment?
2. Are there noticeable behavioural or emotional patterns?
3. How do these learners manage academic pressure?

Section B: Role of Teachers and School

Objective 2: To examine the role of guardians, teachers, and community members in supporting these children

4. What specific support do teachers provide to such learners?
5. Does the school have systems to identify and monitor these children?
6. How do teachers communicate with guardians regarding learner wellbeing?
7. What challenges do teachers face in supporting them?

Section C: Proposed Interventions

Objective 3: To propose intervention strategies on the experiences of children left behind by migrant parents in Bindura.

8. What structured programmes should schools introduce?
9. Should schools collaborate with NGOs or social services?
10. What long-term strategies would improve support for these learners?

Appendix 4: Interview guide for community leaders and social workers

Section A: Lived experiences, coping and vulnerability trends

Objective: To identify the lived experiences and coping mechanisms on the experiences of children left behind by migrant parents in Bindura.

1. What coping patterns are common among children left behind in Bindura?
2. What risks or vulnerabilities have you observed?

Section B: Role of Community and Organizations

Objective 2: To examine the role of guardians, teachers, and community members in supporting these children

3. What role does your organization play in supporting such children?

4. How do you collaborate with schools and families?

5. What limitations affect your support efforts?

Section C: Intervention Strategies

6. What programmes currently exist to support these children?

7. How effective are these interventions?

8. What policy gaps need to be addressed?

9. What sustainable strategies would you recommend?

Appendix 5: Guardian/Caregiver Informed Consent Form

Title of the Study: Intervention strategies on the experiences of children left behind by migrant parents in Zimbabwe: A case of Bindura

Researcher: Walter Ndavambi, Department of Social Work, Bindura University of Science Education

Contact: 071 3207 963/ 078 0573434

Supervisor: Doc Mangwiro

Contact: +263 773128702 /mpatievongai13@gmail.com

Purpose of the Study

You are being invited to allow your child to participate in a research study that examines the experiences of children left behind by migrant parents and the intervention strategies that may support their well-being in Bindura.

Procedures

If you agree, your child will be asked to your child will be asked to take part in a focus group discussion. Participation will take approximately 30 minutes.

Voluntary Participation

Participation is voluntary. You may withdraw your child at any time without penalty.

Risks and Benefits

There are minimal risks. Some questions may cause emotional discomfort. The study may help improve future support services.

Confidentiality

All information will be kept confidential and used for academic purposes only.

Consent

I have read and understood the information above and voluntarily consent for my child to participate.

Guardian Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix 6: Child Assent Form (Aged 10–17)

Title of the Study: Intervention strategies on the experiences of children left behind by migrant parents in Zimbabwe: A case of Bindura

Researcher: Walter Ndavambi, Department of Social Work, Bindura University of Science Education

Contact: 071 3207 963/ 078 0573434

Supervisor: Doc Mangwiro

Contact: +263 773128702 /Mpatievongai13@gmail.com

What is this study about?

This study wants to understand how children experience life when their parents live and work away from home.

What will you do?

You will answer questions about school, home, and your feelings.

Do you have to take part?

No. Taking part is your choice. You may stop at any time.

Privacy

Your answers will be kept private.

Agreement

I understand the study and agree to take part.

Child Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix 7: Consent Form for Adult Participants (Teachers, NGOs, Social Workers)

Title of the Study: Intervention strategies on the experiences of children left behind by migrant parents in Zimbabwe: A case of Bindura

Researcher: Walter Ndavambi, Department of Social Work, Bindura University of Science Education

Contact: +26371 3207 963/ +26378 0573434

Supervisor: Dr Mangwiro

Contact: +263 773128702 /Mpatievongai13@gmail.com

Purpose of the Study

This study explores intervention strategies for children left behind by migrant parents in Bindura.

Participation

You will take part in an interview lasting approximately 30–45 minutes.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time.

Confidentiality

Information will be anonymized and used for academic purposes only.

Consent

I have read and understood the information above and agree to participate.

Participant Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix 8: Letter from Bindura University of Science Education To Conduct The Research

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK

P. Bag 1020
BINDURA, Zimbabwe

Tel: 263 - 71 - 7531-6, 7621-4

Fax: 263 - 71 - 7534

BINDURA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE EDUCATION

TO WHOM IT MAY
CONCERN

RE: REQUEST TO UNDERTAKE RESEARCH PROJECT IN YOUR ORGANISATION

This serves to introduce the bearer, NDAVAMBI WALTER, Student Registration Number B223817B, who is a HBSc Social Work student at Bindura University of Science Education and is carrying out a research project in your area/institution.

May you please assist the student in accessing data relevant to the study, and, where possible, conduct interviews as part of a data collection process.

Yours faithfully

Ms. E.E. CHIGONDO
CHAIRPERSON

BINDURA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE EDUCATION
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK
CHAIRPERSON
16 MAR 2026
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCE & HUMANITIES
PRIVATE BAG 1020, BINDURA, ZIMBABWE

Appendix 9: Approval letter from ministry of primary and secondary education

All communications should be addressed to the
Secretary for Primary and
Secondary Education
Telephone: +263 242 794 509
Toll Free: 317

Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education
68 Kwame Nkrumah Avenue
Queen Lockey House
P O Box 121
Causeway, Harare

Ref : C/426/3
01 MAY 2026
Ndavambi Walter
Bindura

RE: PERMISSION TO CARRY OUT A RESEARCH IN MASHONALAND WEST PROVINCE: BINDURA DISTRICT: CHIWARIDZO SECONDARY, CHIPINDURA HIGH AND CONERSTONE PRIMARY SCHOOLS.

Reference is made to your application to carry a research from the above-mentioned schools on the research title:

"INTERVENTION STRATEGIES ON THE EXPERIENCES OF CHILDREN LEFT BEHIND BY MIGRANT PARENTS IN BINDURA"

Permission is hereby granted. However, you are required to liaise with the Chief Director Education Services for Mashonaland West Province who is responsible for the schools you want to involve in your research. You should ensure that your research work does not disrupt the normal operations of the school. Where students are involved, parental consent is required.

You are also required to provide a copy of your final report to the Secretary for Primary and Secondary Education

Musingarimi H pp

ACTING DEPUTY DIRECTOR INNOVATION AND DEVELOPMENT FOR SECRETARY FOR PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

01 MAY

https://www.mopse.co.zw/ https://www.linkedin.com/compan
@MoPSEZhttps://www.facebook.com/MoPSEducationGovtZimbabwe y/ministrysecondary-of-education-