

The Resilience of Illegal African Migrants in South Africa: A Relational Perspective

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This study explored resilience of illegal African migrants subjected to significant risks in their home country as well as in South Africa. This formed part of a larger international research project. Forty-four male and female migrants from Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe between the ages of 18 and 50 years were recruited through purposive sampling. Data, obtained through individual interviews, the Mmogo-method™ and focus group discussions, were thematically and visually analysed. The range of protective resources in the self (self-regulation, hope, optimism and autonomy) was expressed primarily in relation to other people. Relational context-bound interactions emerged in the definition of relationships, emotional closeness, transparency as well as the unconditional confirmation of migrants. Recommendations are made for social interventions and policy adjustments.

Historically, South Africa is a country that has attracted both semi-skilled and highly skilled migrants from other African countries. South Africa is regarded by many African migrants as ‘the land of milk and honey’ (Maduna, 1995). From the early 1970s, most Africans who migrated to South Africa sought employment in the mining and agricultural sectors (Whitehead & Hashim, 2005). The number of African migrants to South Africa continues to rise owing to the better economic opportunities compared to other African countries (McDonald 2000; Posel, 2003).

Migrants to South Africa can be divided into those who were forced to migrate to South Africa because of the civil unrest, political instability and economic hardships in their own countries, and those who decided voluntarily to come to South Africa to pursue their careers, education or to expand their personal boundaries (Cross, Gelderblom, Roux & Mafukidze, 2006; McDonald, 2000). For those in the first group, migrating to South Africa became a strategy to alleviate the significant risks associated with violence and poverty.

A further distinction between migrants to South Africa is their legality or illegality. Legal migrants have valid permits to stay in South Africa whereas illegal migrants enter South Africa at places other than official ports of entry (McDonald, 2000) and they do not have legal travel documents or remain in the country after their permits have expired (Cross et al., 2006). Somers (2008) describes illegal migrants as people who have “no real right to have rights” (p. 22) and they are thus regarded as a vulnerable group. Most studies on illegal migrants consequently focus on the general challenges they face (Klaaren & Ramji, 2001). The present study is distinct because it focuses on the resilience of illegal migrants post migration, despite the adversities and challenges they face in South Africa. Resilience in this study refers to both a process and an outcome (Theron & Theron, 2010). In terms of an outcome it seems as if illegal migrants ‘bounce back’ despite the risks and adversity they face both in the contexts that initially pushed them to migrate; as well as the new context to which they have migrated (Mawadza, 2008; Theron & Theron, 2010; Vulcetic, 2004). However, the

transactional processes involved in the resilience of illegal migrants is not clear and so forms the focus of this study.

Risks and Adversity Faced By Illegal Migrants

Migration is a phenomenon associated with many risks (Bloch 2010; Greeff & Holtzkamp, 2007; Mawadza, 2008), and this is even more true for illegal migration. Apart from the initial risks that force people to leave their home countries, many illegal migrants are subjected to abuse, theft and violence by legal authorities in South Africa (Crush & Williams, 2003; Palmary, 2002). They constantly fear deportation (Klaaren & Ramji, 2001; Madsen, 2004), and are often victims of exploitation by their employers (Bloch, 2010). Most of the illegal migrants working in the domestic and construction sectors are paid very low wages (Mawadza, 2008), leaving many with no choice but to become de-skilled by accepting menial jobs (Garcia & Duplat, 2007). Recently severe xenophobic attacks against migrants (and specifically illegal migrants) occurred in South Africa, which threatened them on various levels (Neocosmos, 2008).

However, despite the compound risks that illegal migrants are exposed to, many seem to cope and adapt in positive ways. Understanding positive adaptation is a focus located in the sphere of positive community psychology. Positive community psychology is based on socioecological theory which suggests that all people are open systems that continuously interact with others and the contexts in which they function (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). It also accords with the literature that regards resilience as context-bound transactions (Theron & Theron, 2010). Context in this study refers to political, economic, geographic, cultural, social and relational environments.

In terms of positive community psychology, illegal migrants, as a relational community, are a group of people who share commonalities in being pushed from their

home countries due to the political and economic context. They leave familiar geographical and cultural contexts; have shared goals of ensuring the survival of their families (social context); and are exposed to additional risks and adversity in their receiving communities (social and cultural contexts) in South Africa (geographical context). For the purpose of this study, the relational context is considered to consist of reciprocal interactions between migrants and other people (fellow-migrants, citizens or legal authorities) that are either nurturing or restraining (Kitching, 2010). Nurturing relationships are described as enabling relationships, while restraining interactions limit effective relationships.

Study Goal

This study is part of a larger international research project conducted in 2009 on African migrants who migrated to South Africa, France and the United Kingdom. The initial research project focused on the experiences of African migrants by examining how familial intergenerational relationships were shaped by migration. From the data analysis of the larger study it became clear that the migrants dealt adaptively with the risks and challenges associated with migration, including xenophobic attacks. However, the transactional processes associated with their resilient behaviour remains unclear. The following broad question therefore guided this study: What are the transactional, context-bound processes that enable illegal migrants in South Africa, faced with compounded risks and adversities, to adapt in resilient ways? It is hoped that the findings of this study will both contribute to an understanding of the adaptive processes as they are informed by relational context-bound interactions, and contribute to the theory on resilience.

Research Design and Method

A qualitative design was used in the original research project. Qualitative designs provide opportunities for exploring

participants' contextually embedded experiences (Klunklin & Greenwood, 2006). The experiences of migrants from various African countries were accessed in a natural setting so that greater insight could be gained into their experiences (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). A phenomenological research design was used to explore the lived experiences of the illegal migrants about migration. The phenomenological approach was considered suitable for the present study as it enabled the researchers to describe commonalities in the participants' experience of the migration phenomenon (Creswell, 2007).

Research context and participants

The initial research was conducted after the serious xenophobic attacks in South Africa in 2008. In February 2009, a secondary analysis was conducted, and this produced a further topic for investigation (Burns & Grove, 2005), namely, the strengths that enable the positive adaptation of illegal migrants in South Africa despite the adversity and risks. African migrants from various southern African countries and currently residing illegally in South Africa were purposively recruited. A sample of 44 participants between the ages of 18 and 50 years were selected. The participants included men and women from countries such as Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe.

Procedure

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the university's Ethics Committee. For the data gathering events, rapport was established by entering the community of migrants with a person familiar to the migrants. Researchers who knew some of the migrants told them about the research project and asked them if they would be willing to establish contact with other illegal migrants. They agreed, and separate meetings were arranged to explain the aim of the research and to request the migrants' participation. A discussion was also held prior to data collection to assure the

migrants that this study was for research purposes only. They were informed that their participation was voluntary and they could withdraw from the study at any stage. They were also assured that any information provided by them would be treated confidentially.

The original data were collected from 24 Malawian migrants using the Mmogo-methodTM (described below) followed by focus group discussions. These migrants were living in different communities of Gauteng Province in South Africa at the time of the study. They meet once a month in a park in the capital of Gauteng and close to public transport.

In-depth interviews were conducted in Rustenburg in the North West Province. Twenty participants from Mozambique and Zimbabwe participated. Each interview lasted between 30 and 45 minutes using open-ended questions. The questions included: Please tell us about your experiences of being migrants in South Africa. Why did you decide to migrate to South Africa? What were the challenges that you had to deal with en route to South Africa as well as being here in South Africa? How do you deal with these challenges?

English was used as medium of communication as all participants were able to express themselves comfortably in this language. All data were captured using audiotapes and visual presentations were photographed. Data were gathered through applying the Mmogo-methodTM, focus group discussions and in-depth personal interviews.

The Mmogo-methodTM. This is a visual projective technique used to obtain insight into the lived experiences of participants. The Mmogo-methodTM is based on symbolic interaction and depicts participants' relationships in different contexts through visual constructions (Blumer, 1969; Roos, 2008; Roos, 2011a). The Mmogo-methodTM was applied since it enabled the researchers to gain an understanding of the implicit and

often unconscious meanings of the migrants' transactional processes inherit in their resilience. Furthermore, the Mmogo-method™ is regarded as a collaborative and participatory research method which is appropriate to research vulnerable communities.

Procedure. Twenty-four migrants from Malawi participated in the Mmogo-method™. The participants were divided into two groups of twelve each to optimise interactions. Participants were then presented with malleable clay, dried grass stalks, colourful beads and round material cloths. They were asked to construct visual images of their experiences using the materials and the following open-ended request: "Please make a visual representation of your experiences as migrants here in South Africa".

After completing their visual representations, each participant was asked to explain the relevance of their images to the research questions, after which the whole group was asked to verify, add or contribute to the discussion using their own experiences. The group spontaneously engaged in focus group discussions where all the visual representations were discussed and shared. The Mmogo-method™ procedure and the focus group discussions lasted for approximately three hours.

Focus group discussions. Focus group discussions were used to obtain more information following the Mmogo-method™ process. Creswell (2007) describes focus group as a method which provides valuable information on how people respond in a situation where they are exposed to views and experiences of others. The focus group discussions motivated the participants to provide additional information as they shared the same experience of being illegal migrants in South Africa.

In-depth interviews. In-depth interviews were used in addition to the Mmogo-method™ and focus group discussions to

ensure the integrity of the findings. Twenty migrants from Zimbabwe and Mozambique were interviewed. In-depth interviews are often helpful in accessing individuals' perceptions, opinions, facts and forecasts, and their reaction to initial findings and potential solutions (Seidman, 1998).

Data Analysis

Secondary data analysis of the data of the larger international research project was conducted in order to discover dimensions that had not been explored in the primary study (Burns & Grove, 2005; Heaton, 1998). Existing data are used to pursue a research topic not covered in the original research, by re-interpretations of the data and the generation of new questions (Corti & Bishop, 2005). Ackerstrom, Jacobsson and Wasterfors (2004) maintain that new analytical tools can highlight parts of the data that were ignored in the original analysis.

The current researchers had to familiarise themselves with the existing data before conducting the analysis. Thematic content and visual analysis were used in the present study.

Analysis of textual data. The in-depth interviews and focus group discussions were audio-recorded, transcribed and analysed using thematic content analysis. Thematic content analysis is a coherent way of organising the research data in relation to the specific research question (Tuckett, 2005). In this study several important topics were identified in relation to the narrated experiences of illegal migrants in South Africa. The topics identified were organised into main and sub-themes. These themes were defined, illustrated and integrated with quotes and presentations.

Visual data analysis. The visual data obtained by the visual representations of the Mmogo-method™ were analysed according to the recommendations of Roos (2008):
Step 1: Ask participants about each object that was made to determine the literal meaning of each object.

- Step 2: Determine the relationships between the different objects in the visual presentations.
- Step 3: Apply the visual presentations to the specific research question that was asked to provide insight into the phenomenon on migration experiences being studied.
- Step 4: Explore the cultural meanings that are manifested in the symbolic use of objects.

Trustworthiness

Crystallisation was used to ensure that multiple perspectives of the resilience of illegal migrants were obtained (Tobin & Begley, 2004). In this study three data collection methods were used, namely focus group discussions, in-depth interviews and the Mmogo-methodTM. Using a variety of methods of collection and analysis facilitated richer and more valid interpretations (Tuckett, 2005). Dependability was demonstrated through an audit trail and reflexivity. The secondary data analysis was documented

thoroughly and a personal journal was kept in which reflections about the data analysis process were recorded. Thick descriptions of the data was reflected through the inclusion of visual images of the lived experiences of the illegal migrants.

The following sections provide a context for firstly, the vulnerability of illegal migrants' relational position in the context of migration; and secondly, the dynamic relational context-bound transactions.

Vulnerability in Relation to Authoritative People

It transpired that police and migrants officials, who have the legal authority to control migrants, may misuse their power to the disadvantage of the illegal migrants. The participants reported that legal authorities receive bribes; they exploit and abuse illegal migrants; and they endorse fear to the extent that illegal migrants sometimes prefer not to report crimes against them.

Bribery. Some illegal migrants bribed police officers as a means of entering South

Table 1
Themes and subthemes of the positive adaptation of illegal immigrants

Main themes	Subthemes
Vulnerability in relation to authoritative people	Bribery Exploitation
Protective resources in the self in relation to others	Regulation of self to benefit of family Hope and optimism for better future for family Autonomy to support family
Relational context-bound interactions	Relational context embedded in cultural context Definition of relationships Emotional closeness Transparency in relationships Relational context embedded in existential context Confirmation of illegal migrants

Africa. According to one of the participants, “I came here to South Africa by bus, but I had to give police money for me to be here. I was paying throughout my journey. It was expensive for me but that was the only way I could reach to South Africa”.

On arriving in South Africa, bribery continued as a means of remaining in the country. Most of the illegal migrants tried to be ‘invisible’ to avoid detection and deportation. If they were caught, some bribed officers to secure their stay in South Africa:

I need a job. Something to secure me from the police, not to be taken home. I need papers, for me to live here in South Africa. Some of the Home Affairs officers who are corrupt ask us to pay huge amounts of money we cannot afford. They take advantage because they know we do not have papers.

Authors such as Crush and Williams (2003), Madsen (2004), and Palmay (2002) confirm that police bribery has become a crucial tactic for illegal migrants to ensure their stay in South Africa.

The vulnerability of the illegal migrants was also evident in their hesitance to report instances where they were victims of crimes. One of the participants narrated his traumatic experience: “One day I was walking alone during the night. The robbers attacked me. They took my cell phone and a watch. I could not go to the police because I know I do not have protection, since I do not have papers”.

Exploitation. The findings revealed that the illegal migrants may also be exploited by employers. Many of them performed hard labour tasks for very low wages or no wages at all: “Some of the people here in South Africa, they take advantage of our situation. They give us little money because we are foreigners. Because we do not have papers, ID, so they just give us any amount they feel like giving”. Another participant reported, “I worked as a gardener for a week but the person refused to pay me for the job I had

done. I went to report the case to the police and they told me that I will only get my money when I go back to my country since I was illegal”. Illegal migrants have limited legal rights to ensure their protection. Many illegal migrants are victims of exploitation and also become de-skilled by accepting very low paying jobs (Bloch, 2010; Garcia & Duplat, 2007; Mawadza, 2008).

Although the illegal migrants in the study faced many challenges, they seemed to cope with the challenges in an adaptive manner. Their strategies are discussed below. *Protective Resources in the Self in Relation to Others*

Protective resources that migrants use to cope with the risks and challenges of residing illegally in South Africa included self-regulation, hope and optimism, and autonomy. Significantly, all these personal traits are described in terms of their relationships with other people.

Regulation of self to benefit of family. Self-regulation was displayed in the ability of the illegal migrants to control themselves and not to retaliate to insults from South African citizens. For instance, although some local people called them names such as *makwerekwere*, which means foreigners, or said negative things about them, they did not retaliate. They remained focused on their goal of finding work so that they could provide for their families. These strategies are illustrated in the following extracts: “If they call us bad names we just ignore them because we know what we came here for. We did not come here to fight, so we just ignore them”. The migrants thus regulated their behaviour by ignoring the temptation to engage in fights and instead focus on their goals: “Myself personally, I just ignore them if they want to fight me. I am here to look for money, so if I fight with people it would mean that I would be derailed from my mission to find money”. The hardships of life in their countries of origin helped the migrants resist all forms of provocation: “Basically what pushed us from

home is economic crises back home. We are here to look for employment and look after our families. We did not come here to fight”.

Self-regulation is an important asset that helps illegal migrants to adapt positively to provocative situations. They apply self-regulatory skills by focussing on their future and long-term goals. Self-regulation helps illegal migrants avoid distractions that could divert them from the task at hand, which is to earn money for their families (Ommundsen, Haugen & Lund, 2005). Any deviation from this task would mean that not only they, but also their families back home, would bear the consequences. The illegal migrants in the study believed that if they did not control their anger, they would lose sight of their purpose in migrating to South Africa. Self-regulation enabled the participants to control their anger, and so promoted their ability to cope. This finding is supported in the literature (Narayanan, 2008; Ommundsen et al., 2005).

Hope and optimism for better future for family. Hope in this sense refers to the migrants’ strong belief in the future. Most of the participants believed they would acquire wealth and prosperity – not only for themselves, but also for their families in their

countries of origin – and that they would return home with the fruits of their efforts in South Africa. They described wealth as owning cars and cattle and having money. In respect of the visual representation below (Figure 1), the particular participant explained that he was enduring the hardships because he believed in a better future. “This is a car. I want to buy a car. Back home I cannot afford to buy a car because they are expensive and I am poor. But here if I get a good job I will be able to buy a car. The car will help me in terms of transport to and from my home country”.

Being hopeful for the migrants meant looking forward to a better future. The migrants in the study were motivated to remain optimistic about their future in South Africa. Thinking about buying cows (Figure 2) indicates that they were also planning for the future. It also suggests that they did not want to remain permanently in South Africa but that they wanted to return to their countries of origin one day: “This is I and a cow. I came to South Africa to work and get money. If I have enough money I want to buy cows. In Malawi, cows help us in many ways. We use them for ploughing and to get milk. With cows I know my family back home will have food”.



Figure 1: A visual representation of a car symbolising wealth



Figure 2: A visual representation of a herdsman

Many of the illegal migrants did not have their families with them in South Africa. Some were very optimistic about bringing their families to South Africa if they could obtain legal documents. Most of them said that they missed their children and wives: "It is not easy to be without your family. I really hope I will get a job which gives me more money so that I can apply for the legal documents and bring my family here in South Africa".

Hope and optimism about achieving future goals helps illegal migrants maintain their strength and focus on what makes life worth living (Sheldon & King, 2001). Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) suggest that hope and the ability to be positive about the future helps people adapt positively to challenging circumstances. In this study hope was clearly revealed in the visual representations on the wealth the participants still hope to acquire despite being illegal migrants.

Autonomy to support family. In this study, autonomy meant being independent and self-reliant. Most of the migrants said that they wanted to earn their own income and did not want to rely on donations from social welfare and the church. They said that they had to be self-reliant as they had an obligation to look after their families in their countries of origin: "I personally am not interested in getting free food; it makes me feel like a destitute. They say it is better to give a man a 'hook than a fish'. So I prefer to work than to beg". Another participant remarked: "Yah, in terms of being given food I am not interested because I am not here for food. I am here to look for money and support my family. So if someone gives me food it is obvious my family gains nothing". Despite their status as illegal migrants, they wanted to maintain their self-esteem and pride.

Autonomy is regarded as a dimension of well-being and increases self-esteem (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005). In the present

study, the participants' striving for autonomy was expressed as a drive to be independent and to maintain their dignity and pride despite their illegal status. Cicchetti, Rogosch, Lynch and Holt (1993) confirmed that autonomy improves self-esteem and helps people adapt positively to challenging situations.

Relational Context-Bound Interactions

The relational context in which the migrants from the same ethnicity functioned facilitated their resilience. The themes that emerged include the relational context embedded in the cultural context (definition of relationships; emotional closeness; and transparency in relationships), as well as in the existential context (confirmation of illegal migrants).

Relational context embedded in cultural context. The relational context in which the illegal migrants function is embedded within a shared cultural context. This means that migrants are from the same country, race and culture and share similar values and beliefs. The cultural values that underpin people's relational context contribute to feelings of belonging, mutual concern and shared values with members of a particular group, which in turn contribute to their ability to deal with the challenges they face (Perkins & Long, 2002; Saegert & Winkel, 2004).

Definition of relationships. The relationship between the illegal migrants is one of equality. Illegal migrants care for each other and accept each other; and the relationship is regarded as nurturing (Kitching, 2010; Vorster, 2011). The availability of such relationships helps people to deal with risk. In this regard, a participant from Malawi reported: "We meet together once a week as Malawians. Everybody cares for everyone here".

The emotional closeness between the migrants allows for the sharing of resources and the expression of care. For example, a Mozambique participant said: "We as Mozambicans, we understand each other

better than other people will understand us. We are now closer because of the shared bond of Mozambique that other people do not have”.

Emotional closeness. This refers to the reciprocity in the distance between the migrants, which is specifically related to ethnicity (Vorster, 2011). The illegal migrants' emotional closeness was noted in the sharing of resources. A participant illustrated this by saying: “If someone comes from Malawi without accommodation we help him. We cannot let our brother sleeping outside. The fact that we come from the same country we just trust each other. Sometimes three to four people can share a room. We also share ideas on how best to support our families back home”. Another participant from Mozambique confirmed: “We also assist each other financially... by borrowing each other money”.

In support of this finding, Altinyelken (2009) stated that the availability of tangible help and receiving support from significant others contribute to positive adaptation. This emotional closeness is founded on a familiarity and a sameness that fulfils an important function in people's positive adaptation. Kivett (1990) and Greef and Holtzkamp (2007) describe communality, communication and strong social ties as important communal strengths that support people to deal with adversities.

Transparency in relationships. Illegal migrants become more transparent to each other, which is noted in the unconditional trust they have for each other. A Malawian participant reported: “We have a burial society we contribute to every month; in the event of death we use the money to transport the body to be buried at home”. Also, many of the migrants in the study could not regularly visit their countries of origin as they risked deportation if they were caught without legal documents while trying to cross the South African border. They assisted each other in sending remittances in the form of

money and groceries to their families. One of the participants said: “Next week there is a guy going home. I am going to give him R2 000 [\$250] and groceries to give my family. I know they are going to receive the goods. We trust each other here”. The safety and trust that the illegal migrants experienced in relation to their compatriots helps them provide for their families in their countries of origin. Through their interdependency, illegal migrants have developed strong emotional bonds that encourage them to adapt to the unfavourable conditions they have to deal with in South Africa.

Relational context embedded in existential context. Illegal migrants shared an existential context through the collective practice of spirituality. They regarded this existential context as important for effective relationships. A participant expressed this sentiment as follows: “We go to church to pray every Sunday. It is very important for us to go and pray to God. Back home we go to church so there is no reason for us not to continue praying. We pray so that God may continue to guide us”. Worshipping together gave the migrants a feeling of comfort and contributed to the strong emotional bond between them.

Spirituality is regarded as an important facilitator of positive adaptation. Hall (2004) suggests that spirituality enhances the general wellbeing of illegal migrants by engaging in spiritual activities and spiritual friendship. Roos (2011b) reports that older African people cope with challenges by practising spiritual activities collectively. This is in line with Mbiti (1969) who notes that African people apply religion in all their life domains. It is evident in this study that spirituality and communal worship helps illegal African migrants to deal with risks in a resilient manner.

Confirmation of illegal migrants. This refers to the message that migrants receive from each other that they are accepted for who they are, irrespective of their religious

affiliation. In their collective spiritual meetings the migrants focus on the similarities between them rather than on denominational differences. Migrants encouraged each other to have fellowship meetings once a week, and, although participants were often from different denominations, they came together on Sundays to worship together: “We are from different religion[s] such as, Roman Catholic, Presbyterian, Anglican and Methodist. We all meet here. As a community we just meet together in one area to pray. We are all Christians”.

Discussion

Despite the asymmetrical power relationships between illegal migrants and authorities, employers and local citizens, as well as abusive control mechanisms used by the legal officials to endorse the submissive position of illegal migrants, the migrants adapted positively. The transactional processes involved in the migrants’ resilience included both protective resources within the self as well as relational context-bound interactions. However, both intrapersonal and relational resources are relationally oriented. The protective resources of resilient illegal migrants, which include regulation of the self, hope, optimism and autonomy, are described in relation to significant others. From this perspective the protective resources in the self are possible because they are part of relationships. This relational world-view is illustrated by the relational interactions which emerged on two contextual levels, namely the cultural and the existential. In terms of the cultural context, which is underpinned by shared values and beliefs, it seems as if illegal migrants define their relationship with fellow migrants as one of equality; they confirmed each other; provided care for each other; expressed empathy and emotional closeness; and felt safe enough to become transparent (Vorster, 2011). These are all aspects that nurture relationships and which are crucial for illegal migrants who

constantly have to deal with uncertainty and limited resources. In these nurturing relationships illegal migrants are included in the sheltering power (Hernández, 2002; Kitching, 2010) of a relational community which is similar to the community at home.

Limitations and Recommendations

Due to the xenophobic attacks, it was not easy to gain access to illegal migrants because of their suspicions about the nature of the research and their fear of deportation. The research was consequently limited to a few participants who were willing to take part in the study.

It is recommended that policy makers review immigration policies in respect of illegal migrants who can add value to the South African economy. Finding intervention strategies for legalising especially skilled illegal migrants rather than deporting them is essential. Policies are also needed to protect the human rights of illegal migrants – such policies would reduce the exploitation of such migrants by employers and South African citizens. Controlling the corruption of some police and Home Affairs officials would also help reduce the number of illegal migrants. A conducive environment for skilled illegal migrants would help them maximise their potential, thereby benefiting the South African economy. The findings indicate strategies that illegal migrants apply to cope with the risks and adversity they face on both a sociopolitical and interpersonal level.

Conclusion

Illegal migration in South Africa is likely to continue or even increase. Understanding how these migrants adapt positively to the risks and challenges they face is therefore crucial to the health and wellbeing of the population. Nurturing relationships provide a buffer to violent sociopolitical and uncertain cultural contexts. In contexts of significant risk, the relational context, embedded in cultural and existential contexts, provide opportunities to belong, to

share, to extend, and to be human because people are able to relate. In a threatening external context, the relational context promotes resilience.

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Shingairai Chigeza is a registered research psychologist with the Health Professional Council of South Africa. After completing her MA in Research Psychology in 2008, she proceeded to do her internship in research at the School of Psycho-Social Behavioural sciences at North-West University. It was during this time that she got involved in interdisciplinary research projects with topics related to community psychology. She is currently registered for her PhD studies and the focus of her research is the positive adaption of illegal migrants, migrants' experiences of acculturation as well as xenophobia in South Africa. Shinga is committed to promote the wellbeing of African migrants by proposing intervention strategies that may improve the lives of migrants in South Africa. To date she has published one article in

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