

The Psycho-Social Effects of Xenophobia on Immigrants Living in Townships in Johannesburg, Gauteng, South Africa

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ABSTRACT

Xenophobia is an expression of hatred and intolerance towards foreign nationals. In recent decades, there have been waves of xenophobic attacks perpetrated against foreign nationals in South Africa, resulting in vandalism of property, displacement and homelessness, loss of lives and disintegration of families; this study sought to explore the psychosocial effects of Xenophobia in Gauteng, South Africa. The qualitative study approach was employed, and semi-structured interviews were used to obtain information from participants. Fifteen participants recruited through snowball sampling took part in the study. The fifteen participants were 8 males (53%) and 7 females (47%), and they represented five countries, namely Malawi, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Zimbabwe, Somalia and Zambia. The mean age for the participants was 35.8 years. The interviews were audio-recorded and then transcribed to obtain textual data. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the qualitative data, and four salient themes alongside other subthemes emerged. The four major themes were 1) discrimination, 2) fear and uncertainty, 3) identity crisis and 4) Vulnerability due to lack of protection from police and law enforcement. Xenophobia has had a telling effect on the psychosocial well-being of the immigrants. The findings suggest that there is need for a multi-level and multi-sectoral stirred by the government to mediate a lasting solution to xenophobia and the related consequences. Further research at grassroots level is recommended to obtain contextually rich information so that contextually relevant interventions can be implemented.

Keywords: xenophobia, multiculturalism, psychosocial, intolerance, immigrants.

INTRODUCTION

Human beings are social species and as such, rely on social interaction for support, love, and survival (Eisenberger & Cole, 2012). Any interference with this interaction could bring about a crisis and is likely to impact their psychological states and functioning (Ainsworth, 2006). Increasing ethnic and racial diversity in societies is inevitable today because of migration. More countries are becoming multi-ethnic and are thereby faced with challenges in accommodating people from different races, languages, cultures, and religions (Yang & Ebaugh). With this background, many states are faced with problems of xenophobia and racism. South Africa is an example of a country that has become a hotbed for a series of xenophobic violence, with considerable psychosocial effects on the immigrants (HengAri, 2016).

According to Horn (2015), Europeans talk more about xenophobia while Americans talk more about racism. Results of the European Social Survey (2002-2003) for Western and Eastern Europe offer added robust evidence of ethnic exclusionism, a negative stance that opposes both immigration and diversity. Fifty-eight per cent of Europeans perceived immigrants as a collective threat to economic well-being and cultural identity and one in two Europeans displayed open resistance to immigrants. Nearly half of the people living in European societies opposed diversity, indicating that they would prefer a mono cultural society where a majority of the population shared the same culture. Twenty per cent of the population wanted to avoid all social interaction with immigrants and ethnic minorities residing in their countries, (Crush & Ramachandran, 2010). In as much as the European Union claims to be the leading example of democracy, it remains the most well-known immigrant receiver among the regions of the world (Jolly & Digusto, 2013).

Jolly and Digusto (2013) also report that Germany is almost similar to South Africa in terms of its xenophobic treatment of immigrants. Krumpal (2012) added that Germany is well known for its hatred towards non – nationals.

Xenophobia is not new to Africa and has threatened peace, security, and developmental projects within the region (Akinola, 2018). Akinola (2018) added that the hostility in Africa is directed towards fellow Africans as well as non-African nationals.

Xenophobia was like a wildfire that started in Alexandra, South Africa in May 2008, and rapidly spread across the country (McConnell, 2009). In the days and months that followed, about 70 migrants were killed and tens of thousands were ejected from their homes and communities by South African nationals. Amid this wave of xenophobic attacks, foreign-owned businesses were destroyed, amounting to over R1.5 billion in damages (McConnell, 2009). The eruption of xenophobia in South Africa has partly been attributed to lack of responsive migration policies. In addition to this, a South African Migration Project (SAMP) 2006 study revealed that South African nationals are “particularly intolerant of non-nationals, and especially African non-nationals”(McConnell, 2009). Whilst xenophobia has been described as a global phenomenon, closely associated with globalization, it has been noted that it is very common in countries undergoing transition. According to Neocosmos (2006), this is because xenophobia is a problem of post-coloniality, one which is associated with the politics of the dominant groups in the period following independence. This is to do with a feeling of superiority but is also, perhaps, part of a ‘scapegoating’ process as described by Harris (2002), where he mentioned that unfulfilled expectations of a new democracy result in the foreigner coming to embody unemployment, poverty, and deprivation.

Xenophobia has been an ongoing problem in South Africa after the influx of immigrants into the country from neighbouring African states in search of greener pastures. This sudden increase in the number of immigrants has been viewed as a threat by citizens as they found themselves competing for jobs and many other resources. In many parts of the country, immigrants have been displaced, and many were left without options but to go back to their countries of origin (Smit & Rugunanan, 2015). There have been recurrent incidences witnessed again in 2015 and 2016, with the recent attacks being recorded in April 2022 where a Zimbabwean was allegedly beaten and burnt to death in Diepsloot township in Johannesburg. These events can have psychosocial and social effects on immigrants. Exploring the psychosocial effects of these xenophobic attacks on immigrants is crucial at this point.

Objectives of the study

The research undertakes to:

1. To gain an understanding on the immigrants’ sense of safety in South Africa.
2. To explore the effects of immigration on one’s identity and security.
3. To gain an understanding into the immigrants’ need to remain in South Africa.
4. To establish if xenophobia affects male and female immigrants differently.
5. To provide relevant conclusions and recommendations for stakeholders involved in addressing xenophobia and its effects on immigrants.

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter describes the methodology that was used to collect data, focusing on the research approach, design, sampling strategy as well as the research instruments used. There will also be a discussion on the research procedure followed, and ethical considerations.

Research design

The research is qualitative in nature and the researcher adopted a phenomenological design using in-depth interviews. Phenomenology is seeking after a meaning that is perhaps hidden by the phenomena's mode of appearing. In that case, the proper way of seeking meaning was the interpretation of a text obtained from interview transcripts. How things appear or are covered up must be explicitly studied. The phenomena always present themselves in a manner that is at the same time self-concealing. This nature of understanding this phenomenon essentially offers primacy to developing theory from basic observation or interviews in explaining phenomena (Madill et al., 2000). Apart from that, this research approach was mainly, biographic and suggested that participants, in their own words, express their experiences. Furthermore, this approach required a flexible, serene, and primarily fluid but non-judgmental atmosphere to enable participants to say it as they see or feel. Therefore, the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as a theory and data gathering method was most appropriate (Smith & Osborn, 2015).

Population

The population was made up of immigrants between the ages of 18 and older, living in Johannesburg. 18 years and above are adults and could make sense of the phenomena. Potential participants did not only need to know about a study in order to participate. They needed to be interested or see value in participating (Kristensen & Ravn, 2015). Potential participants also needed to be able to trust that the study was credible. This age group was comprised of adults who could make conscious decisions and would give a clear account of their expectations versus their lived experience. Children under 18 on the other hand became immigrants because of their parents' or guardians' decisions and choices. The researcher also took the school calendar into consideration. Because participants needed to be available to participate and data collection was to be done during a period when most schools were writing end-of-term examinations, getting students to commit to interviews was going to be a challenge as they were busy with studies. (Ellard-Gray et al., 2015). To compare how xenophobia affects different genders, the sample comprised of 8 men and 7 women selected through snowball sampling where participants were asked to recommend individuals who would act as future participants.

Sampling strategy

The researcher used the snowball sampling technique to recruit 15 participants for the study. Snowball sampling is a sampling method used by qualitative researchers to generate a pool of participants for a study through referrals made by individuals who share a particular characteristic of research interest with the target population (Cohen & Arieli, 2011). Snowball sampling is also called chain sampling or chain referral sampling. In snowball sampling, a participant from an initial sample group was asked by the researcher to recommend individuals to act as future participants. The prompting for recommendations took the form of an informal question, such as "Who are your best friends?" The subjects who were recommended by these individuals and agreed to participate in the research were then considered participants (Frey, 2018).

Because of the issue of xenophobia, most immigrants preferred not to be identified for fear of victimisation, so under normal circumstances, many could not come forward to participate in the study. The researcher, therefore, opted for snowball sampling because a participant was likely to refer fellow immigrants that they knew would be willing to participate in the study, making recruitment easy (Riggle et al., 2005). This technique provided anonymity as the participants were recruited solely based on their required unique characteristics and their names were kept private. The Interpretive phenomenological analysis approach was primarily concerned with quality of data not quantity (Smith, 2011).

Phenomenological studies require small sample sizes. It was the quality, rather than the quantity of data that mattered and permitted insightful analyses to be developed. The right number of participants varied

according to the researcher's aims, the level and context of the research, and the time and resources available to the researcher (Larkin & Thompson, 2012). It focused on getting detailed accounts of participants' experiences rather than having more participants, so the researcher collected data from 15 participants. The sample size also allowed the researcher to conduct a detailed analysis of each case and make a meaningful comparison between the different cases. These provided sufficient information for the development of meaningful points of similarity and differences between participants. The number was not so big that the researcher would be overwhelmed by the amount of data generated (Smith, 2009). The sample size was also determined by the amount of time required to carry out the data analysis. A successful analysis requires time, reflection, and dialogue so a large sample would overwhelm the less experienced researcher. Transcription required a considerable amount of time and because the interviews were around 60 minutes long, the researcher needed roughly 7 hours to transcribe a detailed 60-minute interview (Rivituso, 2014; Smith, 2009).

Data collection

Data collection was done using semi-structured interviews comprising open-ended questions in order to allow the participants to create constructive narratives of their experiences. Smith (2009) was quoted in Good all (2014) as saying that in-depth semi-structured interviews are known as 'a conversation with a purpose', they facilitate the elicitation of stories, thoughts, and feelings about a phenomenon, and they allow participants to tell their stories and to speak freely and reflectively, to express their concerns at some length. The interviews were done via WhatsApp. These interviews were done with immigrants living in Johannesburg South Africa. WhatsApp is an easily accessible and relatively affordable way to communicate.

Interviews were done at the convenience of the participants and in a comfortable place for both participant and researcher. Participants may prefer private settings so WhatsApp calling made it possible for them to take calls in private. Again, the safety of the researcher was maintained as no travelling to the townships for face-to-face interviews was required. One-to-one interviews were easily managed, allowing a rapport to be developed and giving participants the space to think, speak and be heard. They were therefore well-suited to the in-depth and personal discussion. Interviewing allowed the researcher and participant to engage in a dialogue whereby initial questions were modified along the way in the light of participants' responses, and the investigator could enquire about any other interesting areas which arose (Smith, 2009). Phenomenology is seeking a meaning which is perhaps hidden by the entity's mode of appearing. In this research, the proper model for seeking meaning was the interpretation of a text. Therefore, getting the participants to talk about their experiences helped in getting a better understanding of an issue or phenomenon.

Research procedure

Permission to conduct research was sought from Great Zimbabwe University ethics committee. A total of 15 immigrants were interviewed via WhatsApp voice calls during the daytime and at the convenience of the participants. All interviews were recorded on a digital recorder. The questions asked during the interview comprised a set of semi-structured questions aimed at eliciting responses on the experiences. The researcher facilitated a comfortable interaction with the participant which in turn, enabled them to provide a detailed account of the experience under investigation. Questions were prepared so that they were open and expansive; the participants were encouraged to talk at length. Verbal input from the interviewer was minimal. The interviews were approximately 45-60 minutes long.

Transcription of the interview recordings was done verbatim as Halcomb and Davidson (2006) recommend. For ease of analysis in the transcription protocol, the participants were given pseudo names and they were given a detailed briefing on the purpose of the research and the estimated duration of the discussions. Participants were given a list of topics to be covered in the interview ahead of time to minimise anxiety

during the interviews as they would know what to expect. This was sent out a week before together with the consent forms to be signed and returned.

Pre-test

A set of interview questions were sent to the 3 immigrants that were not part of the study before time and participants were asked to go through them and check if they understood what information was being sought. Feedback was gathered from the participants on whether the interview questions were clear and appropriate to the research to collect the needed information that will meet the objectives of the research.

Data analysis and interpretation

Data analysis was done using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a method of data analysis used to identify, analyse and interpret patterns of meaning called ‘themes’ across a qualitative dataset that addresses a research question.

Ethical considerations

Permission to conduct research was obtained from Great Zimbabwe University and an ethical clearance letter. Informed consent was obtained from the participants before the start of the interview. At the beginning of the interviews, all participants were reminded of the issue of consent and promised confidentiality.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The research questions aimed to explore the effects of xenophobia on immigrants. The interviews were used to elicit some in-depth understanding of the experiences of immigrants in South Africa, with reference to xenophobia. The study particularly focused on the psychosocial effects of xenophobia.

RESULT

The researcher used an inductive approach to determine common themes. The results were presented as unstructured to enable the researcher to better identify emergent themes that are not apparent when using structured data, enabling a more inductive approach that allows for the participant’s voice to come through more clearly (Cresswell & Poth, 2018). Four salient themes related to the psychosocial effects of xenophobia emerged from the thematic analysis of qualitative data with several other subthemes. The four themes to emerge were 1) discrimination, 2) fear and uncertainty, 3) identity crisis, and 4) Vulnerability due to lack of protection from police and law enforcement.

Table Showing themes and subthemes obtained from interview transcripts.

Major Theme	Sub-theme
Discrimination	● Disadvantaged access to services and resources.
	● Differential treatment.
Fear and uncertainty	● Perceived threat of physical victimization.
	● Insecurity on immigrants’ residency in South Africa.
Identity Crisis	● Intolerance towards diversity
Vulnerability due to lack of protection from police and law enforcement.	

Discrimination

Disadvantaged access to health services

The participants expressed that they were at a disadvantage compared to the locals in terms of access to services. The participants were of the view that immigrants are deliberately discriminated against when it comes to accessing medical services. Participant 12 had this to say about their experience with access to health services.

“My wife had to go back home to give birth as she could not get registered for maternity at a local clinic because she didn’t have a passport”.

In addition, participant 3 also shared their experience during the pandemic.

“I went to Germiston hospital with Covid last year. That is when I realised that these people don’t like us. I was admitted in the morning, struggling to breathe, that was around 8 in the morning. By 1 pm I still didn’t get any oxygen. On two occasions a nurse would come with an oxygen tank, and I would think they have come to help me only to realise they had given me empty tanks. They would just put the mask on my face and walk away. No one came to check on me and see if I was recovering”.

Participant 1 also shared their experience with regards to access of medical services as an immigrant.

“... in 2000, my daughter was sick and then I went to a local clinic at night. Then they told me that they could not help my child and they gave me a reason that they simply didn’t know how to help. I know this was just an excuse to discriminate against me as a foreigner. If it was a South African, they would have been treated differently”.

Access to economic opportunities

This is what participant 8 had to say regarding access to economic opportunities for immigrants:

“Yaa, I just wanna, there is an issue that I would like to raise. The issues of opportunities for us outsiders are limited, so we are now starting our own businesses because getting employment this side is getting very hard. So, you come and start a business then you employ the local so we are creating employment for them, but they don’t see it. The other issue is, if you want credit or a business loan you may not get it so it’s affecting us”.

Differential treatment

Immigrants participating in this study felt that they were socially excluded and found themselves on the peripherals of society. The participants expressed that they felt they were being treated differently and pushed out of mainstream society. Human beings are social animals, and it is a traumatising experience to feel excluded and isolated. Participant 1 had this to say.

“No, it is just the same treatment throughout if you are a foreigner, you are a foreigner. Whether you are a child, old, male or female, if they don’t want you around them, they don’t want you around them”.

Participant 2 also responded to the treatment he receives from locals by saying the following.

South Africans hate us. They treat us like objects. We feel as if we are not complete humans. They exclude us in everything and label us with bad names”.

Participant 13 echoed the same sentiments on differential treatment when she was asked to share her

experience on the matter by saying the following.

“Ehh...xenophobia, we saw it after we got to Joburg...eh, because you just see that we are being treated differently. Eeeh, you are being treated (stutters) as a second-class citizen”.

Fear and uncertainty

The recurrent waves of xenophobic attacks in South Africa have instilled a sense of fear in many immigrants. Many participants reported living on the edge and always wary of any disturbance that they feel can stir violence against immigrants. The immigrants are also worried about the uncertainty of their stay in South Africa. The fear and uncertainty themes are unpacked through two subthemes namely perceived threat of physical victimisation, and insecurity regarding immigrants' residency in South Africa. Participant 6 had this to say.

“And there are times you are not sure if you're going to make it out alive in the township. If you're going to sleep, or when you come back home, are you still going to be alive to make it to the next day! Especially with the dudula that just started now. Then can necklace you. You know it's scary, but I was so fortunate, so far nothing has happened until now. It's happening to people I know, and it traumatises you, you know, mentally you live in here, you don't know what to expect”.

Perceived threat of physical victimisation.

The participants, particularly those residing in high-density suburbs have been gripped by fear as they continue to witness sporadic incidences of xenophobia-induced victimisation of immigrants. The participants said that this has left many of them emotionally scarred and traumatised. Although many of the participants have not actually physically witnessed the xenophobia-inspired brutal killings, destruction of immigrants' properties, and looting of businesses belonging to immigrants, the horrific scenes of callous killings of immigrants have been awash on different media platforms. This has had a lasting effect on the psychological well-being of the victims. This was expressed by participant 12.

“I fear for my life and my family every day because these attacks come unannounced, and you do not know who hates you and who genuinely loves you. They are good at pretending. True colours will only come out when attacks start”.

Participant 6 also shared the same sentiment of feeling threatened and had this to say.

“They are a bit rude, you know they make us scared to go outside, to go and work, they think we are taking their jobs”.

On being asked whether they feel safe in the high-density suburb where they are staying, the responses of some foreign nationals were as follows: Participant 7 highlighted this,

“Not at all, but I do not have a choice. I cannot afford to live in the suburbs. The rentals are too much for us and we don't get paid enough to pay such high rentals”.

Participant 9 recalled her experience as follows.

“In 2015, our shop was burnt down, and we had to start afresh. It was tough and scary but where do we run to, there is no peace in Somalia and South Africa is also a troubled nation, but we have to survive”.

Insecurity on immigrants' residency in South Africa.

The study participants reported feeling insecure about how the government intends to resolve the issue of

residency of foreign nationals, particularly those from Zimbabwe, other African nationals, and the Asian community. For instance, many Zimbabweans have been sitting on a discretionary special dispensation permit for several years. However, xenophobic sentiments echoed by locals have pressured the government into issuing a proclamation that the permits will not be extended beyond 2023. This has sent shivers down the spine of many Zimbabwean immigrants who have been using these special dispensation permits. Participant 3 had this to say.

“It is traumatising. We don’t know exactly what the South African government is planning to do with our special dispensation permits that are going to expire soon. We don’t know where we are going to be next year. We cannot even plan anything because we don’t know where we are going to be. If things change back home, I will definitely go back without thinking twice”.

With the situation back in Zimbabwe, participant 11 expressed uncertainty about the future.

“Things are still very bad in Zimbabwe. I would like to stay a little longer here in South Africa. But tomorrow is uncertain. We do not know if the South African government will extent out permits or not. We live a life of guessing about our future”.

Identity crisis

Many participants reported being confronted with a situation whereby they needed to dissociate themselves from their national categorisation in an effort to be seen as local. Participant 5 had this to say.

“I have lots of friends and I am integrated into the community very well. I always give them discount so I can say they like me. But at times I feel that I am acting or behaving in a way that makes me to be accepted. I have always liked my own culture but now I feel I have two cultures”.

Participant 4 also shared their experience about their use of language as an immigrant and how their use of language was easily used to identify them.

“I speak Venda although I am not fluent, I can greet and say they basics. If you don’t know their languages, you are in trouble. They accuse you of forcing them to speak the white man’s language. Sometime ago I was almost a victim of xenophobia while I was in a queue to get into a taxi. The driver asked us where we were going and I could not respond in any local language, I responded in English instead. Everyone started accusing me of not caring and that it was a choice to not learn local languages. That forced me to make an extra effort to learn Venda. Now my challenge is they sometimes mix 2 or 3 languages in one conversation and expect you to understand. I have become another different person, sacrificing my own identity to become a South African”.

The researcher asked immigrants how they felt about xenophobia and all issues related to being a foreigner in South Africa. Participant 10 had this to say:

“I am learning Zulu and Sotho. I did Zulu as a module in my first year so I can communicate well using Zulu. This thing of forcing myself to behave like a South African in order to be accepted is hurting us. I have my own culture but now I don’t even know whether to call myself Congolese or South African”.

Intolerance towards diversity.

According to the participants, there is hatred towards immigrants driven by a culture of intolerance of cultural diversity. Participants were of the view that the indigenous people expect foreign nationals to be assimilated into their culture for them to be able to treat them as their equals. Participant 5 shared their experience as follows.

“They do not like any other language that does not belong to South Africa. Even amongst themselves, a Zulu person finds it difficult to accept a Xhosa person, a Pedi person may not be accepted by a Sotho. It goes like that. They cannot tolerate anything that is not of their own” .

Participant 8 also had this to say about locals’ intolerance of foreign nationals.

“In the community it is very hard, the moment that they know that you are an outsider, ahh, the way they speak to you, they don’t give you respect as a human being. They don’t. they don’t care. They can talk hurtful words, they can dehumanize you while you are obviously, sometimes they speak in their language like, (pauses) so that you don’t know but other people when they translate what they are saying you can see and feel that they, they try treat us bad, very, very bad”.

Vulnerability due to lack of protection from police and law enforcement.

The participants felt that the arm of the law does not extend long enough to bring to book the perpetrators of xenophobic attacks. In some cases, the law is applied selectively and always leaves the immigrants vulnerable and exposed. The immigrants have no confidence in the law enforcement which they regard to favour the locals. Participant 7 had this to say;

“All of them are like that. The police are not protecting us at all. When they are called, they only arrive when the worst has happened already. They just put on uniforms and walk around to show their presence. They do not have control of the people. You see police being attacked with stones, there is nothing like that in our country. They are meant to uphold the law, but these ones are useless and ineffective. You can even be attacked in front of the police station. Perpetrators are rarely arrested”.

Participant 15 also shared how she felt after the 2022 xenophobic attacks that killed a foreign national.

“After the incident of Elvis Nyathi, I spent most of my time indoors. I no longer felt safe to walk in Tembisa. All I could see were people plotting to attack me. We watched the news with my kids the day Elvis was killed, my children had lots of questions for me which I could not answer. I imagined what was going through my children’s heads knowing that this happened because Elvis was a foreigner and them knowing that they are also foreigners”.

FINDINGS AND LITERATURE

In this study, it was found that immigrants in South Africa often face dehumanising and discriminatory treatment at the hands of locals. Participants reported being mistreated in hospitals and other healthcare centres. It is purported that this discriminatory practice is rooted in xenophobia, whereby people from a defined country have a negative disposition towards foreign nationals. This has a negative impact on the psychological well-being of immigrants who are made to feel less important and inferior. In New Zealand, while neoliberal agendas have actively promoted capturing diversity, literature reveals that immigrants, refugees and ethnic minorities have been portrayed in the media in a dehumanising manner (Lee & Cain, 2019). This mirrors the situation in South Africa and the findings from this study.

According to the findings of this study, immigrants are generally at a disadvantage in trying to secure loans and accessing certain resources. Without business loans and financial aid, the immigrants are at an elevated risk of impoverished livelihoods (Jacobsen, 2014). According to this study, immigrants struggle to start businesses or to improve their livelihoods because of limited opportunities for funding. Although there may be economic challenges for all people living in South Africa, the immigrants face steeper challenges because economic opportunities are scarcely presented to them (Dumba & Chirisa, 2010).

The social exclusion that the participants in this study reported experiencing, has also been reported in other related studies. In this study, the participants observed that, as immigrants, they are treated differently from the rest of society. Immigrants are not gainfully integrated into the wider communities where they live (Olwig, 2013). They exist as separate sub-groups. This is also evident in other countries and settings where migrant communities are alienated from the mainstream community. They are not involved or consulted on community developmental issues, and their voices are not heard (Muganda et al., 2013). Nevertheless, the immigrants are still expected to adhere to decisions and resolutions taken without them being involved in the consultations in the first place. who are prevented from making contributions The immigrants are socially excluded and are relegated to being passive members of the community on decisions that affect their own lives (Danso, 2002; Everett, 2009).

The migrants experience fear and uncertainty in their daily lives. This was a prominent theme that emerged in the interviews. The migrants live in constant fear of being attacked and victimised. The attacks come without warning and often lives are lost, with a trail of destruction on immigrants' properties. Migrants are left without shelter and in South Africa, this has often resulted in migrants being crammed into refugee camps where hygiene is compromised resulting in a high risk of transmission of diseases (Hlatshwayo & Vally, 2014). These are traumatic experiences that immigrants in South Africa often go through. In related studies, there are also reports of being put into crammed refugee camps (Elias et al., 2021).

The study reveals immigrants experience anxiety caused by uncertainties emanating from slow and inconsistent documentation procedures. Participants in this study reiterated how the South African government often lacks the tenacity to deal with immigration issues decisively. This puts the migrants on the edge, creating uncertainties and anxious moments. In the United Kingdom and Turkey, refugees document the fear and uncertainty they experience and how this has impacted upon their everyday lives (Biehl, 2015; Stewart & Mulvey, 2014).

Identity crisis emerged as one of the central themes in this study. For immigrants to be accommodated and accepted in the community, they find themselves in a situation whereby they need to 'swap' their own identity in terms of beliefs, language, and values for the local way of living. Compared to other regions of the world, South Africa appears to be one of the countries that expects immigrants, particularly those from fellow African countries, to adopt 'South African culture' as a pre-condition for integration into their society. To a certain extent, there is also some evidence of some xenophobic-driven cultural intolerance that has been documented in the United States of America (USA), Western Europe and other regions of the world (Betz, 2003; Finzsch, & Schirmer, 2002).

On the issue of the impact of xenophobia on gender, four out of the fifteen participants mentioned that xenophobia does not discriminate. This they said because they believed that the perpetrators do not care whether one is a female or male, as long as one is a foreigner, they are vulnerable and will be attacked. The other eleven participants believed that xenophobia affects males and females differently sighting that men are generally viewed as strong and therefore are seen as a threat to the locals in society. Some added on to say because some local women prefer to marry a foreign man than local men this could be the reason why men are mostly attacked. A few females cited the emotional burden of caring for a family in a foreign land as a woman during the xenophobic outbreaks. Another reason why females may be attacked was pointed out as jealousy, many migrant women are hardworking and are able to take care of their families and educate themselves. This was in line with the findings of Sigsworth, Ngwane & Pino (2008) in their research carried out in South Africa on the natured gender of xenophobia.

Vulnerability due to lack of protection from police and law enforcement is a topical issue among immigrants in South Africa. Most people in the study felt that the police were not doing enough to protect the immigrant community. Literature notes that similar patterns have been observed in the USA and Kenya, among urban immigrants (Campbell, 2006; Ridgley, 2008). In some instances, law enforcement agents have been accused

of selective application of the law.

FINDINGS AND THEORY

To a greater extent, the findings of this study can be conceptualised within the theory of relative deprivation. It can be observed that the locals attribute the malfunctioning of the economy, scarcity of jobs, inadequate resources, and other social, political and economic vices to the presence of migrants. Under the theory of relative deprivation, individuals take exception to their unpleasant situation or circumstances and try to make another person responsible for that. The target of scapegoating often feels unfairly treated and discriminated against. The theory of relative deprivation has widely been used to explain the occurrence of xenophobia in South Africa, and also in other contexts (Claassen, 2017).

However, some critics of the theory have argued that there are some people who own these desired resources and still participate in these movements such as xenophobia. These has led to augmentation of the view that some of these movements are not necessarily driven by lack of resources, poverty and material lack. They may be fuelled by purely the hatred of foreigners.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study was important in unpacking several psychosocial effects of xenophobia. However, there are some methodological considerations that could have improved the study.

One of the methodological weaknesses of the study relates to the sample size used. A much bigger sample could have potentially yielded more in-depth information about the psychosocial effects of xenophobia. Due to time factors and other logistical constraints, the researcher ended up having 15 participants. It is possible that at 15 participants, saturation had not been reached, and more themes could have emerged from the interviews.

Another potential limitation of the study is that the study was conducted in only one province, Gauteng province. South Africa is a multi-ethnic country and there is a possibility that the Pedi's or Venda who predominantly occupy the northern parts of the country, may have a different disposition towards immigrants when compared to Xhosas and Zulus who occupy the eastern and southern parts of the country. The results obtained in Gauteng might not be necessarily representative or reflective of other ethnic groupings, in terms of their disposition towards immigrants.

To enhance the trustworthiness (credibility) of the findings, the researcher could have performed respondent validation. This is the process of going back to the participants to check if the analysis of the results is an accurate reflection of what the participants wanted to convey. Due to time limitations and excuses given against a follow-up interview by the majority of the participants, the researcher was not able to do respondent validation.

CONCLUSIONS

The study reveals a growing concern about the psychosocial effects of xenophobia on migrant communities. Migrants feel marginalised, socially, and economically excluded, fear and uncertainty, loss of identity, and vulnerable. As explained by the theory of relative deprivation applied in this study, immigrants are of the view that they are treated as a scapegoat by locals for their own frustrations over political and socio-economic challenges that the government is presumably failing to address. The research could be just the tip of the iceberg on the multi-faceted challenges that xenophobia is causing for the legion of foreign nationals in the country. The government, civic organisation groups, and policy makers are urged to make a

review of existing legislative frameworks on immigrants, against the bemoaning problems the migrant communities are coming up against in their daily lives. It is quite apparent that the migrant communities are faced with debilitating circumstances with profound effects on their psychosocial well-being. More research is also needed to provide further enlightenment on this topical issue so that evidence-informed intervention strategies can be developed and supported.

FURTHER RESEARCH

There is a need to take research on xenophobia to the grassroots levels to identify precipitating factors from the lowest levels of the community. Most of the work published on xenophobia has not penetrated to the community level (Nyamnjoh, 2006). Research has been concentrated at a national level, and some important details may be missed as one tries to focus on generalisations instead of context-specific information. There is a need for research at grassroots levels in order to generate solutions that respond to particular settings and contexts.

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