

Experiences of Lockdown in a Foreign City

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A 30-year-old Nigerian small business owner (who did want to be named) owns a small hair accessories shop in Pritchard Street, Johannesburg. He also lives in the flats opposite his business. He currently lives with his wife and their two children, and shared his experiences of living in a flat where there is no sufficient space for the kids to play. He also talked of the dangers encountered in the streets around Pritchard.

“I came to South Africa in 2012 with some money to start a business.” He decided to start a business which specialises in hairpieces for African women. The reason he chose to come and venture into business in South Africa was that his friend talked highly of the country. The friend had been in South Africa for longer and also had dreams of starting a business with the intention to improve the economy of South Africa. The businessman said that on his arrival, he noticed lots of opportunities but also some challenges.

It was not easy being in South Africa far from his family back in Nigeria. At first, he experienced a lot of crime and xenophobic attacks, but he says that he kept faith even though the business was not doing well as he kept losing stock due to crime and xenophobia.

COVID-19 and the lockdown was the total downfall of the business as he lost every cent he had saved since the lockdown had come at short notice. Even though he and his family listened to the news that COVID-19 was spreading like wildfire, they were unprepared as a family to live without an income. They even had to stop paying rent. The solution was just to make ends meet for essentials, and later having to make arrangements with the landlord to pay up the outstanding rent.

He even said it was tough thinking about contracting the COVID-19 virus and dying in a foreign country now that the economy has been opened again. “I fear being buried without the presence of my other family members, and with only my wife, kids and friends. Being away from home in the times of the pandemic is very difficult”, he concluded.

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