

# PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

## EMPLOYMENT COUNSELLING

**How to overcome  
the fear of the  
unknown**



**employment & labour**

Department:  
Employment and Labour  
**REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

# INTRODUCTION

- Labour migration is an exciting opportunity to experience new environments and cultures, but it can also cause significant anxiety and fear of the unknown.
- **Definition:** Fear of the unknown is a fear caused by a perceived lack of information, intolerance of uncertainty, incapable of coping with an uncertain situation, lack of adaptation to unfamiliarity – this causes a person to have negative feelings in response ambiguity or uncertainty.



# Causes



- Fear can be caused by a number of traumatic negative experiences stemming from childhood, adolescence, or in early adulthood.
- For example, phobias can stem from a learned history and copy-cat learning from parents and peers.
- Lack of control and a need for predictability.
- Having parents who are anxious may have an effect on how a person copes with anxiety in their later life.



# Symptoms

- A fear of the unknown triggers physiological and psychological symptom experiences of intense feelings of distress, phobias, anxiety and depression.
- Symptoms occur suddenly and without warning and can vary from one person to another.
- Genetics, brain chemistry and a number of biological physical changes play a role in response to ‘potential’ or ‘real’ fear provoking stimuli.



# Symptoms (continued...)

The syndrome of symptoms is widespread and include:

- Changes in brain activity
- Release of insulin
- Release of cortisol
- Release of growth hormones, e.g. hot flushes
- Increase in heart rate and sweaty palms, needles, trembles, etc.
- Increase in blood pressure, release of adrenaline and feelings of dizziness, faint or lightheaded and chills
- Trouble breathing, chest tightness/ pains and feelings of choking.
- Upset stomach, dry mouth, headaches, ringing sound in the ears, desire to go to the toilet
- Feelings of disorientation and confusion



# Symptoms (continued...)

- Other symptoms may include sudden behaviour changes, e.g. intolerance of uncertainty, avoidance to participate in daily life activities, anticipation to a threatening situation, and panic, difficulty making plans or decisions and flight or fight reactions.
- Unfortunately, this may come at a personal cost as the situation may deteriorate, until a sustainable solution is achieved – further after-care support or referral to psychologist



# Management

- 1. Conduct own research:** Research and learn about the destination country, city, work site, culture, customs, traditions, and day-to-day life can help to provide some insights into what to expect, what is normal or not and eventually help one to take some control and reduce anxiety.
- 2. Connect with people:** Connecting and familiarizing with people from the destination, who have already migrated for work in the same country or location can offer helpful insights and guidance about the place, culture, and work and eventually alleviate fears of the unknown.
- 3. Focus on the positives:** It is advisable to focus on the positive aspects of labour migration, such as the opportunity to explore, work in a new environment, and earn a living. Visualise a plan to achieve personal and career goals and avoid dwelling on the things that are beyond your control and limit your focus on the things you can control.

(continued...)



- 4. Keep in touch with family and friends:** Keeping regular contact with family and friends is essential for not feeling isolated and further reducing worries and anxiety. Telling them about one's experiences, both good and bad, can also help to manage some of the unknowns.
- 5. Stay safe and comply with regulations:** Research local laws and regulations and adhere to them. Ensuring safety by following regulations can provide a certain level of comfort, confidence and reduce anxiety.
- 6. Seek professional help:** In the case when feelings of anxiety persist, as it can allow for more personalized and in-depth support through counselling to develop coping strategies, cognitive-behavioural therapy, mindfulness (or refer further in case beyond one's scope of competency).

## References

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# Thank You...



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