

South Sudanese family dynamics and parenting practices in Australia

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Abstract

Parenting involves a broad understanding of how best to support the physical, social, emotional, cultural and intellectual development of children, from infancy to adulthood. Cross-cultural studies on parenting underscore that beliefs, values and behaviours within every society play a vital role in parental discipline practices and principles in which children grow up. Since the late 1990s, there has been a great growth in the number of South Sudanese who have come to Australia through the Federal government's Humanitarian Program. However, only a little is known by the mainstream culture and settlement services in Australia about their parenting practices, experiences, culture, challenges and changes in their attitudes, beliefs, identity and general well-being. There is a significant gap in the current knowledge-based needed to promote and support the health and well-being of culturally diverse parents and their children, who are engaged in social integration processes in Australia. This paper explores the parenting beliefs and values South Sudanese have brought with them to Australia, and how they reconcile these within their new social and cultural environment; it examines the degree and meanings of change in their parenting practices, attitudes, and the impacts on individual, family and community well-being. The data collection involved in-depth interpersonal and interactive engagement with South Sudanese parents and young adults through individual interviews and focus group meetings.

Key words: family, parenting, culture, acculturation, challenges, changes

Introduction

South Sudanese-Australian families face an array of parenting challenges due to the dislocation and changes within the traditional family and parenting practices, including different culture, new environment, intergenerational gaps, language and cultural barriers (S. A. Deng & Marlowe, 2013; Milos, 2011). The new environment often dictates changes in gender roles, encompassed by the loss of social networks, support and challenges in understanding an unfamiliar new legal system. However, while there are increasing numbers of studies about South Sudanese migrants and resettlement-related challenges within their new environment, there has been less focus on examining changes and challenges in parenting experiences and practices, their impacts and how families may be supported in dealing with these.

The intention of this study is to increase cross-cultural knowledge about how these issues are experienced by South Sudanese and migrant families and increase awareness and understanding for policy makers and service providers that are working with or supporting them. The study explored: 1) the parenting beliefs and values South Sudanese have brought with them; 2) how they reconcile these within their new social and cultural environment; 3) the degree and meanings of change in parenting practices and attitudes, and 4) the impacts on individual, family and community wellbeing. To achieve these aims, participants were asked to narrate their parenting perspectives – especially relevant for exploring the cultural change in societies with strong oral communication traditions. Their voices are sometimes unheard due to the nature of their relocation experiences, language and cultural barriers among others' settlement issues and challenges.

This paper explores the link between changes brought about by acculturation and transformations in parenting practices. It highlights how South Sudanese parents and young people are coping with changes, and how they relate to both their heritage, cultural identity and their new environment. As Kuo (Kennedy) explains, because of worldwide migration and globalisation, it is imperative to understand broader social and cultural contexts in how migrants adapt and cope with acculturation experiences. This may help develop insights into the cultural ecology of parenting and its challenges in emerging communities undergoing transition, which is relevant given that Australia has continued to diversify in which one parenting practice or cultural understanding can no longer be used to define such multiplicity. Parenting has an extraordinary influence at international, national and regional levels. For instance, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child expects member states, including Australia, to comply with and implement this convention (LeBlanc, 1995). According to Victoria's State Department of Human Services – DHS, (2013), 'meeting children's needs and making sure that they are safe within the family is a shared responsibility between individuals, family, community and the government'. For instance, if an adult caring for a child does not meet their responsibilities, becomes abusive or exploits a position of power, then it is the Child Protection Services' responsibility to intervene (DHS, 2013).

Cross-cultural parenting in diverse contexts

The dominant understanding of parenting in Western contexts focuses on supporting children's overall wellbeing with attention to their physical, emotional and developmental

needs (McEvoy, et al., 2005). Although this may be the purpose of most parents across diverse cultures, there are variations in parenting styles for those who come from individualistic or collectivist societies (Triandis, Bontempo, Villareal, Asai, & Lucca, 1988). For instance, most South Sudanese come from collectivist societies where the emphasis is on the individuals' efforts to contribute to the wellbeing of the family and society. Equally, parents tend to promote values such as helpfulness and interdependence within the family, which differs from societies where some parents put a significant emphasis on individual independence and the pursuit of individual achievements (Darling & Steinberg, 1993).

It is understood that societal beliefs, values, principles, behaviours and perspective influence children's personalities (Harwood, Schoelmerich, Schulze, & Gonzalez, 1999; Ochocka & Janzen, 2008). More individualistically-oriented societies value autonomy, independence and the ability to get things done on one's own; children are encouraged to act autonomously and demonstrate initiative from an early age. In contrast, collectivist societies tend to place more emphasis on community responsibility, encouraging children to learn their responsibilities to their family and the wider community and act accordingly (Wise & Da Silva, 2007). Bornstein (1991, 2013) explains that parents and their children within different cultures' scaffold to become culturally competent members of the society based on differential values of individual autonomy versus interdependence. For example, that study found that European-American mothers used suggestions and indirect means to structure their children's behaviours, whereas Puerto Rican mothers used more direct means, of commands and physical restraints (Bornstein, 1991, 2013).

Cross-cultural research encapsulated that each cultural group holds different beliefs and engages at times in behaviours that may be normative in their culture, but not necessarily in another (Bornstein, 1991, 2013). As Bornstein states, every culture is characterised and distinguished from others by entrenched and widely acknowledged ideas about how one need to feel, think and act like a functioning member of that culture. This applies to parenting. Each cultural group has embodied parenting characteristics that influence how parents care for their offspring and regulate their daily activities. These tend to be communicated from one generation to another (Bornstein, 2013). Thus, discussing what exactly constitutes parenting can be infinite as childrearing varies from one culture and society to another.

Baumrind (1991, 1967) outlined three parenting styles: *authoritative*, *permissive* and *authoritarian*. In each style, there is a different approach to parenting, and this can affect children's upbringing and their future. For example, Baumrind describes the 'authoritative' parenting style as a technique used by parents who set up rules and guidelines that their children are expected to follow, and who tend to be more nurturing rather than punishing (Baumrind, 1967). Such parents want their children to be assertive, socially responsible, self-regulated, and cooperative. Parents mainly apply this style from individualistic societies. The 'permissive' parenting style is applied by parents who make few demands of their children and rarely discipline them. These parents are non-traditionalist and do not require mature behaviour of their children but allow great self-regulation. They often adopt the status of a friend rather than a parent (Baumrind, 1991, 1967). Finally, in the 'authoritarian' parenting style, children are expected to follow strict rules established by their parents: failure to follow these rules usually results in punishment. Such parents fail to explain the reasoning behind these rules but only demand: they are not responsive to their children's needs, but instead are obedience and status-oriented (Baumrind, 1991, 1967). Parents commonly apply this style from collectivist societies.

South Sudanese parenting practices: contexts and concepts

It is estimated that over 30,000 Sudanese have immigrated through Australia's Humanitarian Entry Program since the 1990s (DIAC, 2007). Most of this community, arriving between 2000 and 2006, are South Sudanese. Other families from the Nuba Mountains, Blue Nile and Darfur regions in Sudan have also resettled in Victoria, where this study is based. Following the creation of the new state of South Sudan in 2011, most Sudanese-Australians now identify as South Sudanese: they fled Sudan to escape from the risks and hardships created by over two decades of civil war (Jok, 2001). Like many other refugees, South Sudanese-Australians have experienced dramatic changes within families as a result of forced migration, displacement, torture, rape and various other forms of injustice (Marlowe, 2010; Miller & Rasco, 2004; Milner & Khawaja, 2010; Schweitzer, Melville, Steel, & Lacherez, 2006). They may have spent years in refugee camps before being resettled. However, the relocation experiences in a new country come with enormous changes and challenges to the composition and ongoing changes within family structures and the relationships that must be renegotiated in a new setting (S. A. Deng & Marlowe, 2013; Renzaho, Green, Mellor, & Swinburn, 2011).

South Sudanese families bring with them cultural and specific social practices, where the context and understanding of family and parenting differ in key respects from attitudes towards parenting in Australia. In South Sudan, the concept of a 'family' is a larger entity as it includes extended families and distant relatives. The South Sudanese family structure is patriarchal. The father is the head of the family and breadwinner and has authority over his wife and children (F. Deng, 2009; James, 2010). Family members have well-defined roles and responsibilities based on their gender and age. Children are taught their distinctive roles within the family and society by their parents and relatives. The responsibilities of teaching children are divided between a father and mother, with the support of relatives, friends and neighbours: a young female is taught by her mother and a boy by his father. Females' activities include household chores while young males are encouraged to socialise with their peers and look after domestic animals (S. A. Deng & Marlowe, 2013; Wal, 2004). These practices are strongly influenced by their traditional norms and histories that are often orally passed from one generation to the next (James, 2010). In this hierarchical society, children are expected to respect their parents and elders (F. Deng, 2009). Deviation from these norms, regarding children's behaviour toward anyone older than themselves, is considered disrespectful.

Changes in South Sudanese families and parenting practices

The challenges faced by many South Sudanese and other migrant families centre on tensions relating to parenting practices, language and cultural barriers, and tensions between parents and their children (S. A. Deng & Marlowe, 2013). Parents often try to restrict the behaviour and attitudes of children to preserve traditional cultural values and control (S. A. Deng & Pienaar, 2011). Adaptation to the new environment induces changes regarding gender roles, social support and an unfamiliar legal framework (Renzaho, et al., 2011). Changes in gender roles within families can sometimes lead to feelings of status loss, particularly for men, although coming to a new society kept them closer to, and more involved with their children's upbringing (S. A. Deng & Marlowe, 2013). It can also lead to family tensions as

women may experience or seek new rights, roles and freedoms, which were either unavailable in the home country or imposed on them (Crosby, 2008).

Moreover, lack of language skills can create considerable intergenerational gaps as children pick up the new language and knowledge about their new environment more quickly than their parents (Khawaja & Milner, 2012). The impasse created when children familiarise themselves rapidly with the dominant cultures and start embracing some of the values that are in opposition to their parents' beliefs can lead to tension and conflict within the family or community. Consequently, children may find themselves trapped in the middle as they attempt to accommodate both their parents and the new culture (S. A. Deng & Pienaar, 2011; Khawaja & Milner, 2012). For the children of resettling families, this can create a profound sense of identity alterations and uncertainty in the midst of conflicting perspectives, loyalties and expectations (S. A. Deng & Marlowe, 2013). On top of this, some families must continue to cope with traumatic experiences, discrimination and unemployment within their new environment (Marlowe, 2010).

Acculturation is seen as the major contributor for the new migrant's challenges, which is defined as a process whereby individuals or groups from different cultures engage in a new, dominant culture and experience changes to their original culture (Berry et al., 2006, 1997). It also refers to behavioural and psychological changes that take place due to the meeting of different cultures, impacting on individual behaviour, identity, attitude and values. Such changes may result in acculturative stresses when individuals try to understand the characteristics of the new culture, or try to give up their original culture partially or entirely (Berry, 1997; Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006).

Berry et al. (2006) examined how migrant youth adapt and acculturate. Those researchers developed four distinct acculturation profiles: 1) integration, which is oriented toward both original heritage and new national culture; 2) ethnic, oriented toward original culture only; 3) national, mainly oriented toward new national culture only, and 4) diffuse, an orientation that is ambivalent or marginalised. These fall into psychological and socio-cultural adaptations. Their research suggests that migrants who adopt an integration strategy have the best psychological and socio-cultural outcomes. Those with diffuse profiles have the worst results while those with ethnic and national profiles fall between. Berry et al. (2006) stressed the significance of encouraging youth to preserve a sense of their heritage and cultural identity while establishing close ties with the wider society.

Study design and analysis

This study used semi-structured interviews, which involved interpersonal and interactive engagement with South Sudanese-Australians through individual interviews and focus group meetings as part of the author's PhD thesis. Interaction with participants allows researchers to become immersed in the day-to-day lives of the people being studied and to gather evidence and stories (Creswell, 1998; Riessman, 2008). Participants in the research were recruited from the general South Sudanese community, including sub-communities, social groups and other organisations working with South Sudanese-Australians throughout Victoria. 21 individual participants were interviewed, comprising 15 parents and six youth with roughly equal gender representation. Four group meetings were held, which involved participants in four separate meetings composed of: 1) 10 females; 2) males; 3) mixed group (male and female parents) and 4) youth meetings. These meetings were audio-recorded with the

participants' permission, in conformity with National Human Research Ethics standards for recruitment and conduct. The interviews were conducted at convenient times and places which each participant chose (their homes, community centres and university premises). Each individual interview took roughly 60-90 minutes, and focus group meetings lasted 90-180 minutes.

The information for participants and participant consent forms were translated into Arabic and Dinka languages. As the researcher was from the same cultural background as the participants, this also aided in gaining instant access to South Sudanese communities and their everyday routines. Although being an 'insider' is often connected with a suggestion of bias and over-involvement, which obviously narrow the researchers' independence, these potential problems were overcome through maintaining research professionalism, ethical integrity, and ongoing support from my supervisors.

Transcription and analysis of data are essential in narrative research. After each interview and focus group, the author listened to the audio-recordings, transcribed the discussion, went through the notes taken during each interview and focus group, and wrote notes of emergent themes. As Riessman (1993) explained, researchers ought to start by getting the whole interview's words and selected features such as crying, laughter and long pauses noted on the paper correctly. This process allows the portions of the transcription selected for analysis to emerge or change as a result of the researchers' close attention to the entire transcription, which exemplifies the dialogical nature of narrative interviews (Riessman, 1993). The results were analysed using coded thematic analysis based on emerging themes. This process assists in identifying patterns within the data by grouping segments of the participants' texts into themes (Boyatzis, 1998).

Results

Participants' comments (below) highlighted the experiences of South Sudanese parents and young people. They highlighted their tradition and culture of parenting practices, values and beliefs that they brought with them to their new environment, their transitional experiences and attitudes, and the impact of parental changes and their coping strategies.

South Sudanese family structure and cultural beliefs

A family in the South Sudanese context is made up of a father, mother, children and extended family members (grandparents, nieces, nephews, cousins, and in-laws). South Sudanese come from a patriarchal family structure where a father is a breadwinner and holds primary leadership and moral authority over his family. Such structures are subject to dynamic change, particularly for those who have emigrated to Western countries. The following comment encapsulated this structure.

*The way we define family is different from other cultures. For example, in the Western context, the family is defined in a very narrow context. South Sudanese family include extended family members (**Participant 2 - male**).*

The roles of fathers have some significant implications within the new environment. For instance, many South Sudanese fathers feel that they are not fulfilling the obligations of being

breadwinners for their families due to lack of capital, employment or jobs to meet their societal obligations. They stated that they have lost being heads of their families, unlike in South Sudan; the new environment has given their wives and children more liberties above them. Through these experiences, many South Sudanese men felt they have lost their manhood and culturally condemned by the authorities or overthrown from their traditional roles as head of the family (Losoncz, 2012, 2013).

Most South Sudanese cultural beliefs and expectations are born of respect; something children must have toward their parents and all those who are older than themselves. For parents to feel proud that they have raised good children, their children must be seen doing good things within the community and society, including following societal norms on what is allowed and not. One participant explained these expectations:

Bring them up to be good citizens and respectful in the society. South Sudanese take pride to make sure that they brought up children who will make them proud and be seen that their parents have done a good job (Participant 2 - male).

These gender roles within the family are affected by acculturation. Acculturation is found to have caused more stress on adolescents (Sanders, Cann, & Markie-Dadds, 2003). These can be attributed to the sudden change in gender roles whereby young South Sudanese learn about their new culture in the Australian context.

Transitional challenges and changes within South Sudanese families

Moving to a new country may be exciting and full of expectations, but after settling into a new environment, new settlers often encounter a cultural shock due to strain and anxiety resulting from contact with a new culture and mostly feelings of confusion and loss of familiar cultural clues and social rules (Berry, 1997; Winkelman, 1994). As a result, transitioning into a new culture and setting can be quite overwhelming for them. According to Khawaja and Milner (2012) many South Sudanese were exposed to traumatic events during their refugee flight and possible psychological distresses compounded by their aversive transit experiences (Khawaja & Milner, 2012; Khawaja, White, Schweitzer, & Greenslade, 2008). Participants in this study spoke of finding some of their parenting practices and values unrecognised, outlawed or unacceptable in their new environment. Some experienced a sense of alienation or being labelled as having brought into their new country some alien and intolerable values.

We often get blamed that it is because of bad African cultures, but that is not the case; we are just confused and shocked by the new ways of doing things (Women's Focus meeting – Participant 3).

Some participants spoke of the impact of transitional challenges and of changes as a result of their new environment's culture, rules, and lack of social support, which they used to enjoy from family members and relatives in their country of origin. The result of this study is consistent with other studies conducted on refugee settlement and transitional experiences (Khawaja & Milner, 2012; Khawaja, et al., 2008; Losoncz, 2013; Marlowe, 2010; Ochocka & Janzen, 2008; Renzaho, et al., 2011). Participants stressed that these new changes have clashed with their traditions as parents try to enforce their traditional parenting practices, while their children have already learned about their rights in their adopted country.

*There are big changes in parenting. For example, there are rules here for children to follow from childhood to adulthood. Unlike in South Sudan, the family here is not supported by their relatives, but by the associations and service providers. These conflicting changes clashed with our tradition as parents try to say that it was done this way, but the children are learning about their new ways (in their new society). The other change is that, many families who came here used to have big networks of support, but after coming here, they find themselves alone with no support, and this made it much harder (**Participant 5 - female**).*

Parents acknowledged that they cannot discipline their children in the same way. Consequentially, most experienced a profound sense of loss and powerlessness as their children no longer listen to them, and that they also have no voice in disciplining their children due to authority interference (Losoncz, 2012).

*Here as parents, we face a lot of challenges. Parenting practices have changed a lot here. For example, a child has a right to say anything, even not listening to his/her parent...you can't force your child to listen to you. Also, the influence outside the home is the most difficult thing ... As parents, you try to talk to your child but how she/he might react (response) can be quite different ... particularly on how children are listening to their parents (**Participant 11 - male**).*

Schweitzer et al. (2007) noted South Sudanese and other migrants face a number of challenges while trying to make sense of their new environment and system of laws, everyday life and social set-up places, which placed pressure on them to gain knowledge about the new social norms and culture as well as skills required for effective functioning. The authors went on to emphasise that these challenges increase psychological distress (Schweitzer, Greenslade, & Kagee, 2007).

Culturally, South Sudanese parents expect their children to remain home until marriage, but in Australia, they believe that children are mostly being encouraged to leave homes when they reach 18 years. Most of the parents interviewed in this study insisted that they want their children to remain at home as part of helping them to have a prosperous future and therefore expected their new system to listen to their concerns and perspectives and stop encouraging them to leave home.

*We are appealing to those who teach our children not to listen to their parents and other adults, to understand the implication regarding our culture and try not to impose such differing values in our children. We do not want our children to be encouraged to leave home when some are not even ready to live on their own ... it will not help them (**Women's Focus group - Participant 1**).*

Speaking of expecting the authorities to understand the implications of their culture, South Sudanese parents reiterated the significance of making sure that their children had a good future as it is culturally required. Traditionally, they expect their children to listen, obey and respect their parents and elders. However, the demands of the new environment challenged these cultural expectations. Hebbani (2012) stated that coming to a new culture with rigid and traditional gender roles, refugees often faced acculturation challenges because of resistance from within their family and sometimes exclusion from the host community. As young South Sudanese try to acculturate and adapt to their new culture, it conflicted with

their parents' traditional expectations, beliefs and values. This participant is frustrated that some of their children are not making good use of their new freedom and opportunities:

In Australia, the security, health and education are good. There are many other good things in this country, but some of our children are only picking up bad things from the good ones, for example, drinking and so forth. Education here is really good, although some of our children are not; many misused these opportunities. Though Australia is a free country, we thought freedom comes with responsibilities (Men's Focus meeting-Participant 5).

In addition to these tensions, South Sudanese families also suffered societal status' and integration loss of their primary traditions and cultures (McMichael, Gifford, & Correa-Velez, 2011; Renzaho, et al., 2011), as they reported hasty changes in the composition of their households. They attribute the resettlement-related changes to interpersonal and social conflicts, and children graduating into an autonomous living, and the separation of parents. Settlement challenges within the South Sudanese community leave some children in the care of one parent as a result of separation. Such separations have adverse impacts on the children's development as parents and family cohesion are significantly pivotal in their day-to-day lives (McMichael et al., 2011). Parents reiterated that a handful of their children had become noncompliant: they often refused to help with household chores, which challenged their traditions of assigning children tasks according to their gender roles within the family. Young people and their parents continue to argue over these deviations, leaving parent-children relations much sourer and replete with tensions, although developmental aspects linked to adolescence add to the tensions and are taken as usual components of the lives of families (Berry & Kim, 1988; Manderson, Kelaher, Woelz-Stirling, Kaplan, & Greene, 2002). Even then, the development-related transition of the young people into their early years of adulthood and adolescence failed to explain every tension adequately.

Traditionally, South Sudanese see parenting and disciplining of children as a collective responsibility that involves all the members of the community. However, such collective disciplining is not excused by the laws in their new environment, particularly for any adult to discipline anybody else's child in public. According to South Sudanese culture, any adult in the community is allowed to discipline a child whom she or he found misbehaving in public.

The good thing about our traditional parenting is that any adult who found a child misbehaving (on the street) will discipline that child ... their parent will not say anything. This is in contrast to the way it is in Australia, where you are not allowed to discipline somebody else's child as you may be told that it is none of your business. This was done positively in our culture because anything a child can do without their (parent) is corrected (by adults) (Participant 5 - female).

Like many other new settlers, South Sudanese are faced with many settlement issues and challenges. According to Shakespeare-Finch and Wickham (2012), settlement hindrances also included racism and racial discrimination, employment difficulties and inadequate or inappropriate support that made it harder for the new migrants. Racism and discrimination are a contributing factor to their challenges and children's behaviours, as many South Sudanese participants reported their children being picked on and bullied on a daily basis at schools and other public places because of their skin colour. Being picked on for that reason is one that new settlers often face in their new environment (Deng & Marlowe, 2013), and this aggravated their settlement challenges. Young people who attend school after they are

resettled in their new country are the first to experience these. Dunn et al (2004) argued that those who believed in racial hierarchy, and separatism are a minority and largely the same people who self-identify as being prejudiced and that the cultural intolerance, denial of Anglo privilege and narrow constructions of nations have a much stronger hold (p.409). The authors went on to state that the narrow understandings of what constitutes a nation are in tension with equal widely-held liberal dispositions toward cultural diversity and dynamism (Dunn, Forrest, Burnley, & McDonald, 2004). Because of fear of being picked on and bullied, many parents are worried about their children's safety and psychological consequences it will have on them.

The impact of parenting changes and youth's identity

South Sudanese parents are concerned about household disintegration as a result of changes in their families; children's lack of respect towards them as well as authority having a limited understanding about their culture.

*If you go hard on your own children, you lose them, although you're fighting for their benefit, which they do not understand. When we try to discipline our kids, it is against the laws of this country, but when we don't discipline them, they end up on the streets and we get blamed for their behaviours. Children have to learn respect from their parents (at home) so that they can respect other outsiders. The government needs to sit down with parents to understand South Sudanese cultures as well as work with them to find ways on how to help these children ... the law is encouraging young people to do bad things (**Participant 6 - male**).*

Many South Sudanese parents are pessimistic about their children's future as they believe they have lost control over them as a result of these dynamic changes, and the behaviours that they displayed. As a consequence, there is a deep sense of loss and powerlessness due to fear of the authorities' intervention in their family affairs. Lonsonz (2012) found that many South Sudanese parents' concerns centred on the loss of their regulatory powers over their children since coming to Australia as a result of freedom given to them by the authorities whom they believed to have undermined their powers.

In making sure that this study covered both parents and youth experiences, views and perspectives, young South Sudanese were also asked to discuss their identity and parenting or being parented. Youth participants were born in Sudan/South Sudan or in transit countries or/of refuge. They identified themselves as either South Sudanese or South Sudanese-Australian: they believe that they are South Sudanese by origin but also Australian by citizenship, and therefore would like to adopt both their new and original cultures. Identity is a significant part of South Sudanese culture as it identifies individuals as to their origin. According to Deng, F.M (1995: 1-2), identity is defined as "the way others define individuals and group by race, ethnicity, religion, language, and culture."

Youth participants also spoke of the differences they have seen between various cultures, especially regarding values such as respect and freedom. Some have mixed feelings when it comes to their new freedoms: they still identify strongly with their South Sudanese cultures as they continue to participate in their community activities, but others are losing both their culture and mother tongues.

To be honest, I think mine is half, mostly I still followed my cultural values, but I have forgotten my language, which is the only problem I have. However, I am now trying to relearn it (Youth Focus meeting – Participant 4).

Although some young people spoke of following what their parents tell them to do, as they are their guardians, others also acknowledged the difficulties growing up in differing cultures, where conflicting values often spark tension and struggle with their parents.

It has been very difficult growing up between the two cultures (South Sudanese and Australian), but I balance these two cultures by maintaining both cultures and being South Sudanese-Australian ... through integrating both cultures (youth-Participant 4 -female).

Some believed that they did not abandon or forgotten their tradition as it is important for them to pass onto their children or the next generation. However, they spoke of not being given freedom by their parents to make their choices and decisions over things that they wanted to do. They emphasised the importance of being allowed and given the freedom to choose things such as the type of friends, study and schools to attend rather than being dictated by their parents.

South Sudanese coping strategies

Many South Sudanese parents spoke of getting support from their community leaders, church, elders and members. However, they suggested that one way of finding some solutions to some of their parenting and family challenges could be through recognising the roles of community leaders and elders through empowering them to help in resolving certain issues at their levels. As these tensions are created by misunderstandings within the family due to cultural changes, they believed that this might help reduce the rate of family disintegration, divorce or separation as well as preventing young people from leaving home and ending up drinking or committing crimes and obviously landing in jail.

We want our community leadership and elders to be recognised and empowered to try to resolve some of the family and community issues (Women’s Focus meeting – Participant 6).

Instead of expecting outsider intervention only in resolving these challenges, participants also pointed to other shortcomings in their parenting practices due to a lack of teaching children certain values at an early age. Some participants blamed parents for failing to give more attention to their children’s needs. During the mixed group discussion, men and women traded blame on what role parents must play.

Discussion

Apparently, understanding parenting issues is multifaceted, particularly regarding new migrants who come from collectivist to individualistic cultures where they are confronted by different social realities (Ochocka & Janzen, 2008). Coming to a new country and culture can be quite challenging. Barry and Hallett (2004) stated that part of these challenges relate to the realities and difficulties associated with acculturation connected to parenting issues, where

different perspectives on parenting are manifested and experienced by the new migrants. These difficulties may include language barriers, experiences of trauma, different cultural perspectives and lack of traditional family supports.

Previous studies have also suggested that acculturation is a leading source of stress for new migrants as they struggle to adjust to a new environment. This is because children start picking up their new language and culture quickly at schools after they start interacting with their peers from the host community, but their parents, at home, probably still hold onto their original cultures (Richman, 1998). This situation is contrasted to when parents continue to embrace their ancestral cultures, with a strong emphasis and belief that they do not want to see their children departing from it (Fisher, 2007) and create intergenerational conflicts as adolescents struggle to negotiate a workable synthesis between their original and new cultures (S. A. Deng & Marlowe, 2013). Kwak (2003) stated that the universal developmental aspect of family dynamics is a source of intergenerational disagreements and conflict between parents and children. Mostly, in the pursuit of psychological and behavioural independence, adolescents start to seek their self-concept and autonomous identity (Kwak, 2003). Berry (1997) described these developmental and adaptation challenges as a result of changes that take place in individual or groups in response to environmental demands occur upon settling into the new environment, which could be for a short or extended period, and mainly negative or disruptive.

After coming to Australia, most parents see their children leaving their cultural values, leaving many of them culturally shocked. Participants in this study emphasised that South Sudanese parenting aimed at nurturing children to be successful and respectful members of the community and society. It is also about teaching them certain cultural values and identities, a task that is achieved through teaching or instructing them as well as making sure that children are connected with their community members so that they learn from them. Culturally, parents are often held accountable for ensuring that their children are taught about societal values and beliefs, which are often passed on from one generation to the next orally through verbal narration and storytelling. These traditional values are challenged and aggravated by the lack of information about their new system. Renhazo et al. (2010) emphasised the importance of not only focusing on helping migrants to understand the expectations of their new environment, but the significance for the service providers and policy-makers to have some knowledge and awareness of the diversity of the new settlers' parenting constructs and dominant paradigms of the host society, and not to see this in a narrative of 'one-size fits all'. The authors believed that learning and understanding the dimensions associated with raising children is a two-way process, and that the host society stands to learn from the migrant parenting approaches as well (Renzaho, et al., 2011, p.238).

As the tensions and misunderstanding between parents, their children and authorities continue to flare up during the transition process, South Sudanese parents continue to argue that their traditional parenting practices work for them, which was the reason they became who they are today and therefore do not understand why some important aspects of their parenting practices are not accepted in their new environment (Lewig, Arney, Salveron, & Barredo, 2010). That study suggested (at p.330) there is a need for the laws around child protection and parenting to include educational and early intervention programs or parenting groups to address some of the underlying issues facing the new settlers.

South Sudanese parents emphasised that they have no voice in their new environment, mostly when it comes to their children's upbringing and therefore appeal to the authorities to not

only respect their culture but to take their concerns considering their perspectives as well. Parents are also concerned that their children suffered discrimination at school, and this is causing more stress. Shakespeare-Finch and Wickham (2010) stated that the settlement difficulties related primarily to driving laws and laws regulating the discipline of children as major concerns. Unfamiliarity with the new laws regarding children plus fear of losing children and culture play some significant roles in these concerns that many South Sudanese expressed in this and the previous study (Shakespeare-Finch & Wickham, 2010). Participants emphasised the significance of education about child protection laws as well as positive parenting programs to help in reconciling the differences between their traditional parenting and a new setting.

Obviously, parenting practices differ from one society to another, and some scholars argue that parents should be assisted through setting up appropriate parenting goals and be encouraged to interact with their children in ways that positively organise their emotional and behavioural functioning (S. A. Deng & Pienaar, 2011; Dix, 1992). Research has also revealed the significance of addressing these changes and challenges through dialogue and collaboration with migrant families, about what is or not negotiable concerning parenting practices in their new country (S. A. Deng & Pienaar, 2011). Milos (2011) suggested the need for better discourse between the community and the host society concerning family laws in an attempt to create frameworks for discussing parenting practices within the resettlement context. Others have suggested the need to address resettlement challenges by better education about the law regarding parenting, and what are appropriate strategies for disciplining children (S. A. Deng & Pienaar, 2011; Williams, 2010).

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