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Positive Parenting: Integrating Sudanese traditions and New Zealand styles of parenting. An Evaluation of Strategies with Kids – Information for Parents (SKIP)

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Pull the string, and it will follow wherever you wish. Push it and it will go nowhere at all. - Dwight D. Eisenhower.

Abstract

Positive parenting entails a wide understanding of supporting the physical, social, emotional as well as cultural and intellectual development of children. To better understand the fundamentals of positive parenting within the Sudanese community in New Zealand, it is essential to recognise and appreciate the traditional, cultural views of parents whilst also informing them of the different parenting practices and expectations in their new host country. The literature on positive parenting in a resettlement environment centres on empowering families to understand their parenting practices in their pre-settlement environments in order that they may adjust their parenting in their new settings. The New Zealand Ministry of Social Development *Strategies with Kids – Information for parents* (SKIP) is a community-based programme that aims to equip families with valuable principles of parenting to facilitate and promote a positive attitude around the role of parenting. This article reports on the experiences of, and evaluation by, Sudanese parents after having attended the SKIP positive parenting programme in Auckland, New Zealand. It discusses the different parenting approaches in Sudan and New Zealand and highlights the importance of providing appropriate and empowering interventions and resources for Sudanese parents living in New Zealand.

Introduction

Parenting is one of the most rewarding and challenging jobs there is…children do not come with a manual of instructions. Parents need support and encouragement in this valuable role.[1]

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[1] SKIP. New Zealand Ministry of Social Development Strategies with Kids – Information for Parents, "Conscious Parenting, A Resource for Supporters of Parents, Module One," 2004, http://www.skip.org.nz/documents/resources/research-and-training/training-module-conscious-parenting.pdf (accessed 3 September 2011).

Coming to a new country and culture may sound exciting and full of potential for a family that has lived in a refugee camp for years. It presents opportunities to resettle and create a new home. Upon arrival, refugee families start to grapple with a new system, attempting to navigate the complexities of a different social reality. Almost inevitably, children are very quickly absorbed into the educational system and catch up with the new culture much faster than their parents. As children learn the new language and develop understanding about the cultural system, they may begin to question or actively oppose the traditional cultural values and attitudes of their parents. Finding an effective balance in these contexts, beneficial to all age groups, is crucially important for the successful resettlement of refugee families.

Strategies with Kids – Information for Parents (SKIP) is a New Zealand Ministry of Social Development (MSD) positive parenting programme with a vision of ensuring that all children in New Zealand are parented in a manner that contributes to their positive development. The objectives of the strategy are to: (1) advance opportunities for the promotion of positive parenting within communities; (2) enhance the "consistency and application of knowledge about effective non-physical discipline" amongst agencies and organisations interacting and supporting parents, caregivers and children; and (3) advance the numbers of parents and caregivers who are confident, skilful and knowledgeable about utilising effective non-physical discipline.[2] The aims include helping parents and caregivers feel confident about managing their children's behaviours by establishing limits and boundaries as an integral aspect of loving and nurturing parent-child relationships. SKIP aims to support caregivers and parents in a positive environment using non-physical means of disciplining children. The resources were developed through a local initiative fund as a means for supporting community groups (e.g. the Sudanese community) and for promoting positive parenting. SKIP also works with national organisations to build and extend their capacity to support parents and caregivers.[3]

Navigating parenting in a different culture has been described as "one of the most pressing challenges faced by most African migrant and refugee

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[2] Gravitas Research and Strategy, "Strategies with Kids – Information for Parents (SKIP) Research Project," Prepared for Centre for Social Research and Evaluation Te Pokapū Rangahau Arotaki Hapori, February 2005, 1, http://www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/research/skip-research/ (accessed 3 September 2011).
[3] SKIP, 2004.

parents."[4] Exposure to a new culture can lead to immigrant parents losing confidence in their parenting approach and orientation especially when they leave behind the social structures that sustain their values, beliefs and strategies.[5] The issues facing Sudanese families in terms of parenting include: changes to family power structures; a perceived lack of respect by children; challenges to parents' disciplinary practices; changing roles for mothers and fathers; and a lack of support for solo parents. Parents acknowledge that moving to a new country and culture has often led to their children losing their mother tongues and cultural values. Families need social and other supports to avoid serious distress during this phase of readjusting to a new system. Common stressors include Sudanese solo parents having little or no support and most Sudanese refugees not speaking English, making it difficult to communicate with the mainstream service providers. The challenges of lacking a new language in addition to an absence of community elders in New Zealand, who would otherwise play a supportive role for parents in teaching basic parenting skills, are critical issues.

Refugees' experiences of parenting in their new country are often typified by the alteration to various cultural family structures as well as disruptions to gender roles, norms and values.[6] The framework of this project highlights parents' needs regarding positive parenting while reinforcing the responsibility practitioners face to develop and deliver appropriate cultural interventions. Refugee families are faced with complex challenges in the process of acculturation, including adapting norms, customs, and understanding the rules of law.[7] This SKIP project offered a milieu in which parents could learn how to cope with stressful and challenging parenting and adaptation experiences, including social isolation, discrimination, unemployment, and most importantly, the issues of intergenerational conflict that result from attempts to adapt to a new culture.

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[4] Andre Renzaho and Sonia Vignjevic, "The Impact of a Parenting Intervention in Australia Among Migrants and Refugees from Liberia, Sierra Leone, Congo, and Burundi: Results from the African Migrant Parenting Program," *Journal of Family Studies* 17:1 (2011): 71.

[5] Joanna Ochocka and Rich Janzen, "Immigrant Parenting: A New Framework of Understanding," *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies* 6:1 (2008): 85-111.

[6] Jay Marlowe, "Walking the Line: Southern Sudanese Masculinities and Reconciling One's Past with the Present," *Ethnicities,* available online at http://etn.sagepub.com/content/early/recent, (2011): 1-18.

[7] Margaret Cunningham and John Cunningham, "Patterns of Symptomatology and Patterns of Torture and trauma experiences in resettled refugees," *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry,* 31:4 (1997): 555-565.

Background

The civil war in Southern Sudan resulted in the loss of two million lives and the displacement of four million others. As a direct result of this, Sudanese migrants have been settling in New Zealand under the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) mandated quota system, as 'Quota Refugees', since 1994. Quota Refugees may enter the country under the categories: (1) Women at Risk; (2) Protection; and (3) Medical/Disability.[8] Many have experienced traumas and stressful events. Over and above the traumas they have experienced which have resulted in them applying for refugee status, there are many other challenges facing refugees once they enter their new country of settlement, including: discrimination,[9] and the attendant disadvantages when seeking jobs,[10] racism,[11] depletion of cultural resources,[12] and cultural stress as a result of experiencing conflict between their own culture and that of the majority.[13]

In New Zealand, Sudanese refugees are resettled and scattered throughout the Auckland and Wellington (Hutt Valley) regions. Most participants who took part in this project were from Auckland and were solo mothers with an average number of four children. Between two to three married fathers and a few elders also attended. Many Sudanese come from family backgrounds in which support was traditionally provided by immediate and extended family members and relatives. Consequently, raising children as a refugee in the New Zealand context may be particularly challenging for parents who have lost that support. The question of parenting in a resettlement context has previously been explored in a study with Sudanese in Ontario where respondents noted their need for help around family law and child discipline. They also indicated that they

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[8] New Zealand Ministry of Health (MoH), "Refugees – Who They Are and Where They Come From," http://www.moh.govt.nz/moh.nsf/indexmh/refugeehealth-nz (accessed 3 September 2011).

[9] Jay Marlowe. "Beyond the Discourse of Trauma: Shifting the Focus on Sudanese Refugees." *Journal of Refugee Studies,* 23: 2 (2010): 183-98.

[10] Val Colic-Peisker and Farida Tilbury, "Refugees and Employment: The Effect of Visible Difference on Discrimination: Final Report," 2007, http://www.cscr.murdoch.edu.au/_docs/refugeesandemployment.pdf (accessed 2 September 2011).

[11] Ndungi Wa Mungai, "Young Sudanese Men Experiences of Racism in Melbourne", African Studies Association of Australasia and the Pacific 31st Annual Conference, *Building a Common Future – Africa and Australasia*, 26-28 November 2008.

[12] Dermot Ryan, Barbara Dooley, and Ciarán Benson, "Theoretical Perspectives on Post-Migration Adaptation and Psychological Well-Being among Refugees: Towards a Resource-Based Model," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 21:1 (2008): 1-18.

[13] Kathrin Stoll and Phyllis Johnson, "Determinants of the Psychosocial Adjustment of Southern Sudanese Men," *Journal of Refugee Studies,* 20:4 (2007): 621-640.

would have liked information about parenting practices and expectations in their country of resettlement, before and after they arrived, suggesting that there is a vital need for a continuous service in this area of family well-being.[14] Furthermore, it has been suggested that the programmes that are offered to refugees as they attempt to adapt to their new environment can seriously impact on their ability to resettle.[15]

This project was developed around a partnership between the Auckland Sudanese community, SKIP and the Ministry of Social Development (MSD). There were three co-facilitators, all leaders within the Auckland Sudanese community. Sudanese people speak many languages and the co-facilitators were translating and interpreting the sessions throughout the programme. The training was based on the SKIP positive parenting programme as well as exploring, understanding and incorporating the parenting principals and strategies embraced by Sudanese parents. The underlying philosophy was centred on the understanding that respect for both the New Zealand and the Sudanese cultures would create an integration of ideas and styles of parenting skills for the purposes of enhancing positive parenting strategies. The SKIP programme acknowledges that parenting styles are fashioned by cultural influences and recognises the importance of incorporating the strengths from diverse cultures.[16]

Before the SKIP project was designed, the three facilitators consulted with Auckland Sudanese community members and parents to identify what parenting issues they were experiencing. One of the primary issues that emerged was the struggle parents experienced in the management and guidance of their children in the New Zealand context. The difference between traditional Sudanese parenting and parenting as it is promoted, accepted and litigated in New Zealand, was identified as a major stressor amongst parents as they were trying to adjust to their new ways of life. Parents were also finding that they may well be breaching local legislation in their use of traditional disciplinary methods. Another challenge underlying the parenting stressors was associated with language

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[14] Laura Simich, "The Study of Sudanese Settlement in Ontario – Final Report," 2004, http://atwork.settlement.org/downloads/atwork/Study_of_Sudanese_Settlement_in_Ontario.pdf (accessed 4 September 2011).

[15] Kate Murray, "Sudanese Perspectives on Resettlement in Australia," *Journal of Pacific Rim Psychology,* 4:1 (2010): 30-43.

[16] Elizabeth Clements, "SKIP: What it is and Why it Works," Summary Report of Review, 2009, http://www.skip.org.nz/documents/resources/research-and-training/skip-what-it-is-and-why-it-works.pdf (accessed 6 September 2011).

difficulties. At the time of the SKIP positive parenting intervention, the lead author, a member and leader within the Sudanese and wider refugee/migrant community, was working as a community link worker and an intern counsellor with Refugees as Survivors New Zealand.

Amongst many other attributes, positive parenting centres on supporting and encouraging children's moral, emotional and physical development. Discipline, as a form of guidance, provides opportunities for children to develop an internal locus of control, thereby learning to take responsibility for themselves and their actions, and adopting values that are acceptable within the family and society at large. Positive parenting includes praising children for what they have done well, stopping them from doing things that are inappropriate,[17] and helping them understand why certain behaviour is unacceptable. According to Berry,[18] the concept of parents being loving and setting boundaries to teach and guide their children constitutes nurturing them.

On the other hand, the use of force to cause pain, but not injury, for correcting or controlling a person,[19] is viewed as a negative form of disciplining. Corporal punishment used by parents as a mode of discouraging bad behaviours can sometime rise to full physical abuse,[20] and in spite of increasing consensus between the social and medical sciences that the risk for substantial harm to children whose parents use corporal punishment, outweighs any benefits, it still persists as a form of disciplining.[21] The SKIP intervention sought to understand the barriers and the enablers for Sudanese parents in their adaptations to parenting in the New Zealand context, while addressing the issues of positive and negative parenting practices.

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[17] George Holden, "Perspectives on the Effects of Corporal Punishment: Comment on Gershoff," *Psychological Bulletin,* 128:4 (2002): 590-595.

[18] John Berry, *Cross-cultural Psychology: Research and Applications* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

[19] Murray Straus and Julie Stewart, "Corporal Punishment by American Parents: National Data on Prevalence, Chronicity, Severity, and Duration, in Relation to Child and Family Characteristics," *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review,* 2:2 (1999): 55-70.

[20] Steven Wilson, "Child Physical Abuse: The Relevance of Language and Social Interaction Research," *Research on Language and Social Interaction Special Issue: Language and Social Interaction at the Century's Turn,* 32:1&2 (1999): 173-184.

[21] Elizabeth Gershof, "More Harm Than Good: A Summary of Scientific Research on the Intended and Unintended Effects of Corporal Punishment on Children," *Law and Contemporary Problems,* 73:2 (2010): 31-57.

Aims, objectives and design of the Project

The aims and objectives of the project were to deliver 18 workshops (4-5 hours per session) on positive parenting for parents of children aged under five years, together with other parents in the community, struggling with parenting adolescents. The underpinning primary focus was to sustain the Sudanese cultures through positive parenting in New Zealand. According to SKIP's vision, parenting in New Zealand involves children being raised in a positive way that involves parents nurturing and loving them as well as setting boundaries to guide and teach them.[22] Although there might be differences over how Sudanese raise their children, the Sudanese parents who were consulted prior to the SKIP intervention articulated their beliefs in positive parenting and the stated SKIP vision remained the same for this particular project.

The goals of the programme included:

- giving parents the opportunity to share their experiences of parenting in New Zealand and to learn from each other the values of parenting styles that they brought with them;
- providing the right tools and information necessary to enable parents to acquire knowledge, support and skills to raise their children in their new environment.
- improving understanding of New Zealand laws concerning children;
- providing opportunities for younger parents to learn from more experienced parents and establishing some balance between the two cultures (Sudanese and New Zealand);
- creating a community in which parents adopted and integrated a mutually acceptable (Sudanese and New Zealand) approach to positive parenting;
- enhancing integration and settlement of Sudanese in New Zealand

The project also aimed to contribute to the Ministry of Social Development's generic objectives for SKIP – increasing opportunities for communities to promote positive parenting and advancing the consistency and application of knowledge about effective non-physical discipline within organisations working with parents, caregivers and children.

The training was family and parent-centred, encouraging participants to identify what they wanted to cover in the workshops, while the trainers provided the facilitation and the resources they required to enhance their

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[22] SKIP, 2004.

involvement and learning. As an example, parents identified that they wanted to learn about New Zealand laws, how to discipline children while maintaining their Sudanese culture, and acquire knowledge about the rights of children and the responsibilities of parents. They also expressed interest in acquiring practical knowledge of 'child development' and, for some, how they could manage children as a solo parent in their new environment.

The project was designed primarily to create an environment where parents could start talking and building trust amongst each other as they shared their parenting issues. The focus was on talking and sharing. Such workshops helped participants to understand that parenting challenges were not individual experiences but rather, were common amongst their peers. Parents were encouraged to learn from each other, creating supportive social networks where necessary. This collaborative approach recognises that many Sudanese came from a culture where reliance is placed on extended family members for support, and developing and maintaining something similar amongst themselves in New Zealand was potentially beneficial. According to Wahlbeck,[23] the existence of a strong ethnic community, especially in terms of their associations and informal networks amongst members is vital for better resettlement into a new culture.

All the participants were of South Sudanese origin. Three-quarters of them were women aged between 23 and 50 years old. Although the attendance varied throughout the training, 33 participants (adults) attended most of the workshops/training over a six-month period. Three-quarters of the participants were solo mothers and widows. Most spoke very little English. Thirteen children (ages 4-11) of the participants were also involved in an informal conversation focus group to discuss their experiences of parenting in New Zealand in addition to what they had learnt from their parents about Sudanese cultures.

Results
Challenges for Parents
Throughout the workshops, a common theme identified was how to respond to the challenge associated with children asking for material belongings which they see in the possession of other children. The lack of jobs, challenges related to solo parenting and finances, meant that many

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[23] Östen Wahlbeck, "Community Work and Exile Politics: Kurdish Refugee Associations in London," *Journal of Refugee Studies,* 11:3 (1998): 215-230.

parents struggled to provide even the basic daily needs, let alone providing the material belongings that their children wanted to acquire.

Parents reported that since children had acquired knowledge about their rights, they were often ignored by their children when they attempted to discipline them. Some had had the experience of their children calling the police to complain about their parenting. Parents believed that children were taught at school how to call the police, but struggled with this concept, especially when children used it to manipulate their parents at home. A major challenge for parents was coping with their children's growing familiarity and absorption of the dominant culture and their adoption of values opposite to those traditionally held by their parents. This frequently led to conflicts and struggles between parents and children, fueled by identity confusion, as they all manoeuvred to adjust to the new environment.

Culture, tradition and parenting
Participants were asked to discuss how cultures and traditions were connected to, or underpinned, their parenting styles. Dialogue about the definition of Sudanese cultures, how to use positive words when communicating with children, and how to strike a balance between New Zealand and Sudanese parenting styles were explored and discussed.

Some participants asserted that culture was all about whatever they do in their daily living, which could be anything as basic as dancing, crying or how they celebrate cultural events. Some explained that generosity was part of their culture too. For instance, if individuals invited people to their houses, they needed to provide gracious hospitality. Culture was described as something people are born with, as well as something inherited from parents. Important values are passed from one generation to the next. Parents are always expected to act diligently as role models to show their children what their culture means as well as its importance for them.

Some participants described what they recognised to be the differences between their own and the host cultures, especially in terms of disciplining children. They reported that in New Zealand, parents are not allowed to discipline their children physically in the same way they used to do in Sudan otherwise the New Zealand government agency tasked with the care and protection of children in New Zealand, the Child Youth and Family Services (CYFS), could intervene and take their children away from them and put them into foster care. They also compared what

they think was similar between their own and New Zealand traditions, customs and culture, especially in terms of treating children with respect and not harming them. For instance, in Sudan, if parents are harsh to their children, the grandparents or other relatives will intervene and are entitled to take the child from the parents to live with them. By contrast, in New Zealand the state (CYFS) takes on that role by placing children under state care if there is evidence of physical and emotional abuse. Participants acknowledged that punishing children physically should not be regarded as part of their culture nor used as an excuse or be condoned as justification for abusing children.

Children's voices
Parents were shown a DVD resource from SKIP called "Pacific Children's Voices", [24] a collection of interviews with young children in which they were asked their opinions on important family-related topics such as: "Things we like to do together"; "This is how we like to be spoken to", and "Who is your family?" The parents in the group were very keen to understand what their own children's thoughts were about their experiences of family, parenting and culture. In a separate room and in an informal conversational focus group setting with the co-facilitators, children aged 4-11 years old were consulted about how they 'like' and 'do not like' to be spoken to by their parents as well as what they had learnt from their parents about their Sudanese cultures. The session was made child-friendly in allowing them to discuss freely without being coerced into answering any of the questions. This consultation with the children was done once, and the main aim of the session was to give children opportunities to feed back their opinions and views anonymously as part of a children's group.

What they 'do not like': Children reported that they do not like getting growled at (getting into trouble) or being hit; when their parents would not let them go somewhere for fun; getting blamed for things they have not done correctly; when their parents tell them that they are bad children; when they shout or yell at them; when parents buy them things they do not like; when they embarrass them in front of their friends; when they treat them like babies; when they give them too much responsibility, and when they do not listen to them.

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[24] SKIP, "Pacific Children's Voices," DVD Transcript, http://www.skip.org.nz/resources/dvds/transcription-of-pacific-childrens-voices.html (accessed 6 September 2011).

<u>What they 'like'</u>: They reported that they liked it when their parents take them out to meet other children and have fun or attend birthday parties; take them places they want to see (e.g. family trips); give them options to choose what they want to buy and what they like ('give us power of choice'); help them with their homework; and make them feel special sometimes.

<u>What they learnt from their parents about the Sudanese cultures</u>: Children reported that they learnt how to respect those who are older than themselves; respect their own and other cultures; speak predominantly their mother tongues when at home; focus on schools tasks and studies; look after and be proud of themselves, despite being different from the primary culture; and learnt how to be proud of their own culture.

Parents' reflections on children's voices
The facilitators explained the outcome of the consultation with the children to the parents selecting the general themes of what the children had said, as reported above. Parents were astonished by what their children had to say. During the discussion, some parents suggested that they needed to spend more time with their children, building relationships through bridging the gaps in the areas their children identified and highlighted. They also stressed the importance of listening to their children. Some parents acknowledged that their children told them that they are being asked at school to talk about things they have done during the weekend (to share with the class), such as recreational activities. Since these expectations over activities were often not being met or fulfilled, they reported that this was prompting children to question the reason why their parents were not meeting such, in their eyes, 'basic necessities'. Previous research in Australia has explored the benefits of social experiences for refugee children, providing opportunities for children to feel connected to and confident in, their new communities.[25] However, parents also emphasised the importance of having good dialogues with children through continuing to explain to them why they do not have what other parents have, or by educating them about how they came to New Zealand. The general consensus was that, if children knew about their historical origins and journey to New Zealand, it might provide them with insight into why their parents were not able to afford much beyond the daily essentials, and might help to reduce their expectations and demands.

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[25] Lorna Hallahan and Carol Irizarry, "Fun Days Out: Normalising Social Experiences for Refugee Children," *Journal of Family Studies,* 14:1 (2008): 124-130.

Discussion - *Three basic parenting styles*
With the aim of developing conscious parenting and enabling parents to self-assess, three basic parenting styles were discussed during the introductory session: authoritarian, permissive and authoritative.

The authoritarian style is characterised by strict rules and rigid enforcement, requiring an unquestioning obedience and respect for parents as authority, while using a harsh method of disciplining and inevitable penalties.[26] Some Sudanese parents were becoming authoritarian as they tried to enforce cultural values to make their children respect them. This is because, in Sudanese cultures, children must listen to their parents and other adults, especially when they are being given instructions and orders. If they do not obey, there are always consequences and punishments.[27] As a consequence, authoritarian Sudanese parents try to nurture their children in good faith, but the rigidity may lead children to be rebellious against them, since they are well informed about their rights in the wider New Zealand context. The other disadvantage is the fact that authoritarian parents sometimes make children passive, since they do the thinking for them. This has the potential to frustrate children as they strive for independence, depriving them of the opportunity to learn how to become competent adults. They may feel vulnerable in their lack of self-confidence and their self-belief that they are not trustworthy or capable. [28]

Permissive parents, on the other hand, lack boundaries as they generally back down to avoid conflict if they feel that their children are upset or do the thinking for them in an attempt to rescue or try to improve their relationship with them.[29] Some Sudanese parents might fall into such a category as well, since they try to show their children love, and expect them to be happy. As a consequence, children may have limited opportunities to learn about tolerating frustration and become insecure and overly dependent on their parents. They may be slower in developing their own problem-solving skills and ability, because the parenting style obstructs and hampers their learning ability.[30]

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[26] SKIP, 2004.
[27] Andre Renzaho, Marita McCabe and Willow Sainsbury, "Parenting, Role Reversals and the Preservation of Cultural Values among Arabic Speaking Migrant Families in Melbourne, Australia," *International Journal of Intercultural Relations,* 35:4 (2011): 416-424.
[28] SKIP, 2004.
[29] SKIP, 2004.
[30] SKIP, 2004.

Finally, the authoritative style, which many parents were quite receptive towards, is characterised by drawing up and maintaining clear guidelines and rules, whilst allowing children more freedom, subject to clear standards of behaviour. [31] Authoritative parents listen to their children's views, provide reasons for disciplining and use praise. This style of parenting is underpinned by mutual respect, which flows between parents and their children and has the potential to foster a healthy relationship. Children have opportunities to become self-motivated, respectful of others, develop a robust self-esteem, communicate effectively, and develop an internal locus of control. [32]

According to SKIP's vision, there is no one way of parenting, although authoritative is acknowledged as a preferable and healthy parenting style. There are many other factors, rationales and explanations as to why parents may choose to use certain styles of parenting. As mentioned earlier, most Sudanese parents in New Zealand who are solo parents lack the support and assistance they used to enjoy from immediate and extended family members in Sudan. As a result, if they feel like they are losing control, some Sudanese parents might unconsciously favour either an authoritarian or a permissive parenting style as they cope with managing parenting amidst cultural adaptation challenges.

Family functioning
Parental outcomes from this SKIP project underscore the need for a platform from which to gain useful insights into how social and parenting programmes may be supportive and beneficial to, not only refugee, but all families. Considering that this programme had not previously been offered to Sudanese refugee parents, their involvement in this project was crucial in facilitating an approach in which parents themselves identified the range of stress factors associated with their parenting roles and provided insight into what was needed to support their resilience. The inclusion of the voices of the children provided broader insight for both parents and facilitators. Based on the outcome of the workshop sessions, it appeared that those Sudanese community members who participated co-created a support structure and an environment that would place valuable parenting support within their reach. Howard and Hodes noted that parenting programmes are concerned, ultimately, with family dynamics, as they enable parents to understand how they may access information, support personnel and agencies, social resources and

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[31] SKIP, 2004.
[32] SKIP, 2004.

extensive encouragement.[33]

According to Fontes,[34] parenting programmes (such as SKIP) empower parents to create environments in which children may develop in all aspects of their lives. The education and interactions participants experience in parenting training workshop environments encourages self-sufficiency. Potential growth extends to the development of cultural connectedness, social support and community participation as well as improved self-esteem. The SKIP positive parenting project with Sudanese parents was directed primarily at the parents but had the potential to enhance the well-being of parents, children and the wider community. Parents were equipped with skills and knowledge and supported through their community and agency connections.

Parental programmes within the psycho-social framework
Parenting programmes such as SKIP can have positive outcomes for families, empowering parents to differentiate and understand their relationships with their children in supporting them morally, emotionally and physically within a new culture. There is potential for positive outcomes for such parenting programmes as the objectives for helping parents to improve their approach to handling behavioural manifestations of their children towards a change in culture, is appropriately designed. This is because it may help parents not only to create a safe atmosphere where their children can grow holistically, but it also helps them to readjust and address other emotional and behavioural needs.[35] Fantino and Colak further point out that effective parenting involves the use of a wide range of styles.[36] As a result of this particular training the Sudanese parents were encouraged to balance their traditional parenting with an understanding of the various parenting styles within a New Zealand context. Rather than focusing only on the parenting styles they brought with them, they also acquired other skills needed to fulfil the primary

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[33] Matthew Howard and Matthew Hodes, "Psychopathology, Adversity, and Service Utilization of Young Refugees," *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry* 39:3 (2000): 269-396.

[34] Lisa Fontes, "Ethics in Family Violence Research: Cross-Cultural Issues," *Family Relations* 47:1 (1998): 53-62.

[35] Jonathan Smith, Paul Flowers and Mike Osborn., "Phenomenological Analysis and Psychology of Parenting and Family: Gaining Social Competencies", in Lucy Yardley, ed. *Material Discourses of Health and Illness* (London: Routledge, 2002), 68-91.

[36] Ana Marie Fantino and Alice Colak, "Refugee Children in Canada: Searching for Identity," *Child Welfare* 80:5 (Sept/Oct 2001): 587-596.

purpose of parenting in their new environment; approaches that met the requirements of government agencies but at the same time supported the family relationship challenges both children and parents may experience.

The key issues that emerged from this parenting programme were strengthened by the wider themes of perceptiveness, responsiveness and flexibility. Within this perceptive framework, parents learn to adjust their own behaviours. They should connect with their children so that their responsive ability will enable them not only to express warmth and affection, but also exhibit sensitivity to their children's behaviour.

Finally, SKIP positive parenting calls for flexibility in line with adapting to various situations in different ways depending on what could be demanding in the behavioural dimensions of children. The outcomes of this project with Sudanese parents suggest that programmes delivered from a supportive community-based collective approach facilitate a process whereby parents can create an environment and adapt their parenting styles and children's behaviour in a positive way. However, further research in this area will be necessary to explore, determine and expand understanding on how such community-based initiatives or parenting projects can help refugee and migrant families in New Zealand.

What else has contributed to the success of this project?

According to Forsyth, leadership is the process in which individuals guide others in their pursuits, often by organising, directing, coordinating, supporting and motivating their efforts.[37] It has been acknowledged, however, that leadership amongst any migrant group can be challenging, in particular for refugees,[38] as the ability to build trust and develop and sustain motivation recognised as important leadership attributes. The facilitators of this parenting group were members of the community and were well known to participants as 'helpers', resulting in an early atmosphere of trust and acceptance. Leadership and influence within the community contributed to the success of this project.

The lead author's professional background as a counsellor, particularly his utilisation of communication skills and his adoption of an empathic and respectful approach in interacting with and facilitating the group, can be considered as contributing positively to the project. In addition, his

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[37] Donelson R. Forsyth, *An Introduction to Group Dynamics,* 4th ed. (Belmont: Thomson Wadsworth, 2006).

[38] Esther Doron, "Working with Lebanese Refugees in a Community Resilience Model," *Community Development Journal* 40:2 (2005): 182-191.

knowledge of, and flexibility within the Sudanese culture created an environment in which participants could focus on the primary topic. These factors enabled participants to successfully contribute and interact and to hold positions as co-constructers of knowledge, information and solutions. Their abilities as parents were acknowledged, and the facilitators were there to help them talk about their issues and to share ideas on parenting and experiences. This, in turn, empowered them to take control of their challenges. Furthermore, when working with Sudanese clients, what is important is not the qualification (although they value education), but rather the level of skill with which a facilitator can engage, communicate and build trust with them. Nevertheless, since the group members were mostly orientated according to their culture, where people go to leaders for advice or get their issues resolved by them, this training was designed uniquely to suit this cultural norm. In addition, it was facilitated in a manner that participants could understand, with the co-leaders demonstrating both their cultural and systems knowledge.

Since power was shared among facilitators and participants, they felt empowered to make meaningful decisions towards achieving shared goals. Traditionally, parenting issues are very secret in Sudanese cultures and rarely discussed with anybody who is not a relative or family member. This is to avoid the shame of being labelled as 'bad parents' who do not know how to look after their children. It took courage and a great deal of trust to circumnavigate these attitudes to parenting and to encourage them to share the difficulties they were experiencing with their children, in a group of other parents, without fear and anxiety. Focus groups have been identified as a culturally appropriate and individually and collectively strengthening means of engaging with refugees as they transition into a new environment.[39] The group format in the delivery of the SKIP programme enabled the parents to share their concerns and their knowledge, perhaps not as easily accomplished with individual parents in more traditional Western-based counselling approaches.

Overall impact of the project
Members of the Auckland Sudanese community recognise the importance of the transition of children from childhood to adulthood. This is because many refugee Sudanese families find it difficult to navigate their way through any turbulence during the adolescent years, as the journey is much more difficult when language, cultural differences and contrasting

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[39] Nombasa Williams, "Establishing the Boundaries and Building Bridges: Research Methods into the Ecology of the Refugee Parenting Experience," *Qualitative Studies,* 1:2 (2010): 91-114.

social expectations place additional pressures on relationships within the family. This positive parenting programme was relevant as it recognised the strengths and resilience Sudanese parents have, and therefore, helped strengthen those, instead of replacing them, integrating and blending them within the New Zealand cultural context. Importantly, during the workshops, all participants were engaged in sharing what they were facing within their families, as ways of learning positive discipline for dealing with their children. Most parents attested that they learnt a wide range of ideas from the SKIP positive parenting programme training and their participation contributed to the advancement of understanding the benefits of delivering the programme in the refugee community.

Conclusion

Positive parenting is a process of integrating skills and knowledge within the psycho-social frameworks of managing the behavioural changes and adjustments of both parents and their children. Within the milieu of the refugee experience of parenting in a foreign culture, the idea of positive parenting can have layers of challenge for parents trying to navigate parenting expectations within a new culture while maintaining their traditional cultural parenting styles. A previous study has highlighted the need to provide information and education as part of early intervention programmes as refugees begin their adjustment in a new country,[40] rather than waiting until they are overwhelmed by the realities of parenting in a new culture.

Parents who attended the SKIP workshops were grateful to have had the opportunity to participate. They articulated that they had been yearning for programmes that unite them with others in similar situations and give them the chance to share their difficulties and concerns and to learn some new parenting skills. Most of them reported that they will never be the same again since they were transformed by the skills they have acquired from the workshops' training. They reported that they were determined to continue practising what they had learnt and to share their learning with other parents in the community as positive ways of bringing up their children. They appreciated the engagement and the relationships formed between participants during the workshop meetings, particularly the understanding they had gained through exchanges and sharing with each other. It was important for them since it brought them out of their isolation and into interaction with one another. As the programme was a

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[40] Kerry Lewig, Fiona Arney and Mary Salveron, "Challenges to Parenting in a New Culture: Implications for Child and Family Welfare," *Evaluation and Program Planning,* 33 (2010): 324-332.

Sudanese community project, it was unique in terms of the workshops being co-facilitated by qualified community leaders in languages the participants understood. They were able to share their parenting problems, frustration, cultural shock, and experiences freely and learn from one another. For this reason, it was strongly recommended by the parents that such a programme be repeated in the near future, as they perceived it to be of benefit to the community at large.

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