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Parenting in a New Environment: Implications for Raising Sub-Saharan African Children Within the Australian Child Protection Context

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Abstract

International migration shapes parenting styles for migrant groups, but in Australia very little is known about the interplay between sub-Saharan African migrant parenting practices and beliefs concerning child protection expectations in the host society. This study explores how sub-Saharan African migrant parents and caregivers navigate parenting between the cultures that have shaped their lives and parenting expectations within the new environment. Data were gathered from focus group discussions and one-on-one interviews. Major themes to emerge from the analysis included the importance of culture and a sense of the collectivity; of parenting styles in moulding good children; of family functioning and relationships; and of perceptions of parenting in the Australian context. Findings show how the participants introduce new dimensions and/or try to maintain a balance in childrearing practices framed by traditional collectivist cultures when they adopt, incorporate,

resist, or reject individualist dimensions as they deem necessary. The study demonstrates how participants navigate stressors when the dictates of social and school environments are different from those of their traditional family norms. It provides evidence for the implementation of culturally appropriate strategies for sub-Saharan African migrant families who come to the attention of the child protection system while settling in Australia.

Introduction

The number of international migrants increased from 155 million in 2000 to 258 million in 2017, and people of African descent made up about 13.95% (36 million) of that population (United Nations 2017). Figures for Oceania—Australia and New Zealand—also show a significant surge in the number of African migrants, especially people from sub-Saharan Africa (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS] 2016; Stats NZ 2018). The impact of migration on parenting and its flow-on effects on families and communities is becoming a global issue specifically in Western societies where government involvement in family life is active (Sawrikar 2016; Yankuzo 2014), and the rise in migration has prompted increasing attention to the parenting practices of migrant communities.

Australia has been referred to as a multicultural country (ABS 2016). Data from the 2016 Australian census indicate that there has been an increase in the diversity of sub-Saharan African migration to Australia, with migrants coming from diverse cultural backgrounds where they maintain and observe cultural practices that influence their identities (Kaur 2012; Rasmussen, Akinsulure-Smith, Chu and Keatley 2012). Upon settling in Australia, sub-Saharan African migrants are faced with a foreign society built on a child protection system that monitors how children are cared for and raised. The questions to be answered are: how do sub-Saharan African pre-migration parenting practices fit within the Australian society and in particular within the child protection context? How do sub-Saharan African migrant parents and caregivers negotiate cultural differences and conflicts as well as parenting expectations within the new cultural environment?

In Australia, child protection is institutionalised and governed by law (Australian Government 2014; "Children and Young Persons [Care and Protection] Act," 1998) and vulnerable children are said to be protected from harm through intervention, investigation, and prevention strategies (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2012). In some sub-Saharan African countries, however, while there are existing child protection laws, various factors overshadow the implementation of legal child protection

values and practices (Frank and Ehlers 2016). Political unrest, economic problems, poor legal frameworks, and cultural norms often take precedence (Lachman 1996; Ng'ondi 2015), and child protection is usually promoted through non-governmental organisations that do not have enforceable legal or political authority (Price-Robertson, Bromfield and Lamont 2014; Wessells and Edgerton 2008). From such backgrounds, some sub-Saharan African migrant families in Australia may become involved with child protection institutions during settlement (Sawrikar 2016). Given contextual differences in child protection practices, child protection professionals working with this cohort may face challenges in addressing cultural issues within the child protection framework (Raman and Hodes 2012; Rombo and Lutomia 2016).

A number of recent studies (Deng and Marlowe 2013; Rasmussen et al. 2012; Renzaho, Green, Mellor and Swinburn 2011a) have raised awareness of pre-migration parenting practices, cultural beliefs, norms, and the post migration adjustments of sub-Saharan African migrant families, but studies that examine the tensions that may arise between the parenting practices of such migrants and the Australian child protection system are scarce (Australian Institute of Family Studies 2016; McDonald, Higgins, Valentine and Lamont 2011). Broad child protection guidelines are in place to address culture related issues, but little is known about the extent to which the interventions in place meet the needs of sub-Saharan African migrant children. Thus, this study explores how sub-Saharan African migrant parents and caregivers navigate parenting between the cultures that have shaped their lives and parenting expectations within the new environment. The findings provide evidence to inform the development and implementation of culturally appropriate and effective early intervention strategies for those working with such migrant families within the Australia child protection system.

Pre- and Post-Migration Experiences

Culture plays a major part in childrearing and development. According to Akilapa and Simkiss (2012) culture is

> the social heritage of a group, organized community or society that develops ways of handling problems that, over time, are seen as the correct way to perceive, think, feel and act and are passed on to new members though immersion and teaching. (490)

Parenting and childrearing thus encompass a number of different aspects linked to culture such as beliefs, values, goals, and behaviours. The various cultural environments in which children are raised strongly influence their interactions within society (Welbourne and Dixon 2015). Cultural differences in childrearing shape children, who will in turn later shape their own children, perpetuating some cultural norms and values related to parenting through time (Raman and Hodes 2012). Hence, sub-Saharan African cultural identities influence various aspects of life including patterns of childrearing which may differ from host culture norms and expectations. Sub-Saharan African countries and their respective communities are, however, distinct and their cultural norms are specific to a people based on their kin and ethnic group (Idang 2015) and it would be misleading to argue that all sub-Saharan African cultures are the same. Nonetheless, what is evident within those cultures is that, pre-migration, sub-Saharan Africans have some connections—historical, social, economic, political, linguistic—and institutional similarities that allow for transferability on aspects pertaining to childrearing within the broader sub-Saharan African community (Ndofirepi and Shumba 2014).

Mostly sub-Saharan African communities raise their children within a collectivist worldview (Amos 2013; T'shaka 1995). These collectivist cultures value interdependence, tend to be more favourable towards promoting group harmony, entail an obligation to community members and an adherence to traditional values, coupled by an expectation that family and extended kin will fulfil their various roles within the group (Renzaho et al. 2011a). The family unit extends beyond the immediate family (Amos 2013) to an extended family system whereby grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, and kin contribute towards raising 'good children' and extend advice, nurturance, discipline, and even mentorship of parents and caregivers in their daily childrearing responsibilities (Deng and Marlowe 2013; Haagsman 2015). Within such an extended family system, mature older adults or community leaders are seen as custodians of tradition and 'elders' who are mainly wise and expert in decision-making (Amos 2013; Ndofirepi and Shumba 2014).

In contrast, child protection in Australia values parenting and childrearing within individualistic environments where relationships are more consultative and less hierarchically managed (Hofstede 2011). Individualistic cultures usually value independence, personal time, and some degree of freedom, as well as individual rights, self-determination, and self-sufficiency in pursuit of individual goals, interests, and achievements (Ferraro 2002). As children grow older, parent-child relationships allow individual accountability in decision making and

expect children to be more independent and to have their own lives, separate from, and not linked to, those of their parents or relatives at adulthood (Marcus and Gould 2000). Consequently, pre-migration parenting styles and practices of sub-Saharan African migrant families may be at odds with the mainstream parenting norms in Australia.

Upon settling in Australia, sub-Saharan African migrants undergo acculturation, and this may affect their childrearing practices. Acculturation refers to processes of cultural adjustments that occur due to prolonged contact between groups of people that are culturally different (Berry 1997). It was previously viewed as a one-way process where migrants abandoned their cultural beliefs and values and adopted those of their host country (Aronson and Brown 2013; Schwartz, Unger, Zamboanga and Szapocznik 2010). Research has shown, however, that acquiring the beliefs, values, and practices of the host country does not automatically imply that migrants discard those of their country of origin (Schwartz et al. 2010), and a number of conceptual models of acculturation have been adopted in order to explain the changes that take place when different groups of people and individuals are interacting (Berry 1980; Kramer 2012).

Kramer (2012), for example, developed the theory of dimensional accrual and dissociation by combining the ideas of Jean Gebser (1949, 1984) and Lewis Mumford (1934) to explain cultural diversity as a form of expression. Based on structures of consciousness, the theory posits three distinct life-world dimensions—the magic (one-dimensional idolic), mythic (two-dimensional symbolic), and perspectival (three-dimensional signalic) worlds—to suggest that acculturation is not a simple linear process. As people become aware of the various life-world dimensions, they become more detached from other phenomena in the world. None of the life-world orientations are displaced or overshadowed; rather, all three are present in more complex orientations (Kramer 2012; Kramer and Ikeda 1998).

Similarly, Berry (1997, 2003) proposed a bi-dimensional model of acculturation which leads to four possible cultural orientations: (i) integration—incorporating both heritage and host cultures; (ii) assimilation—letting go of heritage culture in order to accept the host culture; (iii) separation—maintaining the heritage culture while rejecting the host culture; and (iv) marginalisation—being unable to maintain or embrace either cultures. It is this theoretical foundation that has informed our study.

Renzaho et al. (2011a) found that sub-Saharan African migrants acculturate differently according to their migrations status, age of

migration, and educational attainment. Refugees and humanitarian entrants varied significantly, with 38% integrating, 34% experiencing marginalisation, 15% remaining traditional, and only 12% assimilating, compared with skilled migrants who had language proficiency and were highly educated, and hence favoured integration and assimilation. It is with these differences in mind that we investigated the post-migration parenting practices among sub-Saharan African migrants and how they negotiate cultural differences and conflicts within the Australian child protection context.

Methodology

The study was carried out in the Greater Western Sydney local government areas due to their strong demographic representation of sub-Saharan African migrant communities (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011, 2016). A diversified sample was required, and the study focused on both skilled migrants and refugee entrant families. Study participants were recruited using a snowballing sampling technique (Sedgwick 2013; Sheu, Wei, Chen, Yu and Tang 2009) as a method suitable to reach geographically dispersed families in a new spatial reorganisation of social relations (Massey 1994; Renzaho et al. 2011a). The method also helps alleviate any worries that hesitant community members may have as they can be referred to participate by people whom they trust (Sadler, Lee, Lim and Fullerton 2010). Data were collected using focus group discussions (FGDs) and semi structured one-on-one interviews (Stuckey 2014).

For a detailed description of the methodology of the study, including a defence of the snowball technique and an explanation of the ways in which data were verified and analysed, see Appendix 1; for the interview schedule, see Appendix 2.

Results

A total of 46 sub-Saharan African migrant parents and carers from Nigeria, DRC, Ethiopia, Ghana, Eritrea, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, and Zimbabwe participated in the study. The results showed that while most sub-Saharan African migrant parents tend to find ways of preserving their parenting cultural beliefs and values, those who arrived as refugees and humanitarian entrants faced more challenges around acculturation than those who arrived as skilled migrants. Four major themes emerged from the analysis: (i) culture and collectivity; (ii) parenting styles—moulding good children; (iii) family functioning and relationships; and (iv) host context—perceptions of Australian parenting.

Theme 1: Culture and Collectivity

During discussions, four sub-themes emerged: (i) the child within its cultural community; (ii) traditional values grounded in religion and culture; (iii) respect for and obedience to parents and community elders; and (iv) the importance of family and the duty to contribute towards family life.

The Child Within its Cultural Community. Most sub-Saharan African parents and caregivers interpreted children's action within their cultural frames. Parents stated that their parenting views were influenced by their own childhood experiences. They were guided by their traditional beliefs and values in defining good parenting and these beliefs influenced the values they intended to pass onto their own children. Children were perceived as a symbol of a 'blessed' union between husband and wife, and were expected to contribute to household tasks. Common areas of agreement among the participants included the expectation that their children would remain within the values and relationships of their ethnic community, be mentored by the community elders, and meet religious and cultural expectations relating to respect for, and obedience to, parents and community elders. They believed that being a child within their homes was not simply determined by age or maturity.

> *People have adjusted to the western legal age of 18 and that's probably when they finish high school and go to university. But from my cultural point of view, a child remains a child, even when they become a parent themselves.*

Traditional Values Grounded in Religion and Culture. Some parents stated that raising children involves an adherence to practices grounded in religion and culture. These parents also affirmed their religious beliefs as the basis for disciplinary measures. Such beliefs governed children's behaviours and parent's expectations, and some parents trained their children by explaining what God expects of them in order to be called 'good children'.

> *We do always, what God is saying ... what is written in the Bible is the law of our beliefs.*

Respect for and Obedience to Parents and Community Elders. Findings from this study suggest that etiquette within most sub-Saharan

African communities is governed by cultural expectations and traditions. There are specific physical (body gestures) and verbal mannerisms with which children address adults and elders in the community—mannerisms around how to greet and relate with adults; how to speak to parents, adults, and elders; and how to behave while in the presence of elders. Absolute obedience is highly valued with little room for negotiation. Parents expect a child simply to do what they are told.

> *A child should be seen, not heard. The community expects a good child not to speak back to its elders. A good child should be … subservient and non-argumentative.*
> *Yes, we do allow children to express their views. To say what they want to say. But it has to be limited. They cannot express beyond certain expectations. They can express themselves based on something that the parent knows is good for them.*

The Importance of Family and the Duty to Contribute Towards Family Life. Parents in our study believed that children are born in order to continue the family name. Children play vital roles within most sub-Saharan African homes and communities, and it is their responsibility to uphold the family name and status through positive community work, outstanding academic performances, and subsequently obtaining a good job. Additionally, children are expected to cater to their parents' needs as they grow old.

> *What it means to have a child is you are ensuring continuity of the community in general, of the family name in particular, and specifically the continuity of your own identity. So it's quite an issue to be childless in the community I come from, because people see it as a dead end to your identity. So there is a bit of pressure when there are complications in having a child.*

Theme 2: Parenting Styles—Moulding Good Children

A strong sub-theme that emerged from our data is that of 'child nurturance and community responsibility'. Parents stated that they generally aim to provide their children with better opportunities, envisaging their children will imbibe good values and grow up to be respectful community members who can contribute to society. Some parents mentioned how the general community, including the extended

family, helps to raise good children who respect elders and uphold cultural values. They leaned towards authoritative parenting style as a way of deterring bad behaviour in children by closely monitoring and supervising their children's behaviours in line with pre-migration beliefs and values.

Parents emphasised that raising their children was a collective responsibility. Children are assured care and protection through various community channels established to observe the child's successful development. Parents expressed concerns regarding a lack of communal relationship within their Australian settings as compared to their countries of origin.

> *There is a saying within my community that a child belongs to the community. The way I grew up as a child is that every person the age of my mother, every person the age of my father in the community was a parent. So in that sense, you wouldn't let a child do something that's untoward because the child is not your own. You might not take the exact actions that the actual parents would, but you would still take responsibility.*

Theme 3: Family Functioning and Relationships

Four sub-themes were identified: (i) family dynamics and expectations; (ii) loss of extended family support; (iii) difference in child behaviour; and (iv) gender roles.

Family Dynamics and Expectations. Most parents noted that sub-Saharan African families consist of family roles and established family dynamics. They emphasised that relocating to Australia meant that they lost the extended family and community support needed to raise children within culturally expected boundaries. Parents have tried making adjustments, however, by maintaining kin connections through community-based organisations like churches and associations that are culturally specific. Parents also related examples of how they use various ways to engage with their children, such as negotiating and reasoning. They maintained the view that the Australian laws give children power and control within the home environment and allow children to be assertive in their expectations of parents.

Most parents also expressed concerns around traditional family roles and dynamics being challenged. Prior to migration, the father is expected to be the breadwinner and final decision maker but, post-migration,

fathers expressed discontent based on their experiences regarding their role within the family in the Australian society. Some fathers felt that they had lost control over family matters and failed in their parenting role.

> *One of the problems we are facing is that the parent has become powerless in Australia. We don't have any power to control our families. Through our experiences in life, our best educators were our parents. Mum and Dad were the best. If I then expect the police to be the best educators of my child, I'm losing my culture and losing my credibility within the family.*

Loss of Extended Family Support. Parents stated that raising children traditionally involves input from extended family and community members.

> *[Being a child] in my community, extends a little further than just your biological offspring within the immediate family. It goes to children as belonging to the extended family. We have a collective culture.*

Parents also stated that raising children in Australia comes with ongoing struggles due to a lack of extended family support and inadequate understanding of the social systems.

> *Back home the family will be there, and extended family members will be there ... the church will be there, community, and religious leaders will be there. So those are the supports. But here, the difference is, even though you go to police, they would say that this is the right of the children. If you go to the community leaders, they would say this is just the law in this country.*

Difference in Child Behaviour. Parents in this study acknowledged the effect of culture and tradition on parent-child relationships. They also acknowledged the difference in behaviour observed between children raised within and outside their home country. Some parents believe they are not raising their children in a manner that is satisfactory, and seem to face challenges in establishing a balance between their parenting role and their relationship with their children

[Back home] because of the culture and tradition, children, they listen more to their parents. And at the same time also, they are very respectful. But here in this country, there is a lot of choice … They can't listen to the parents, they don't listen to the elders. And this is the biggest differences between back home, how we bring up children and what is here in Australia.

Gender Roles. While some fathers are trying to adjust to the shifts in gender roles, the general view remains that fathers who are seen attending to or assisting with household chores are contradicting cultural expectations.

In my culture some people say that I'm very soft. But it's not about being soft because even when I was back home I was the one cooking breakfast for my kids … So it's good that sometimes as a father to be there and help around the home. And sometimes also you have to understand that there is resistance even from the females themselves because sometimes they're considered some of the roles are their own designated role that you don't need to touch but we have to help each other as a family.

Theme 4: Host Context—Perceptions of Australian Parenting

Five sub-themes merged: (i) parenting in a new culture; (ii) children's rights; (iii) Australian mainstream families; (iv) inter-generational and inter-societal conflicts; and (v) connection with country of origin.

Parenting in a New Culture. Some parents noted that Australian laws and policies restrict them from raising their children in a manner they deem suitable. They expressed their views on Australian parenting based on their observations of Anglo-Australian children within the society and they perceived that, in mainstream Australian families, children were too independent and commanding. Some sub-Saharan African parents reiterated that institutional systems like schools and the police interfere with effective child parenting, thus leading to family disruptions and exposing children to a way of thinking contrary to their traditional family values and expectations.

I think most of us when we meet as a community we talk about children. We are expecting the government to leave

us to train our kids in our own culture. We have our ways. So if the government would allow us to raise our own children in the way we want based on our culture it would be good even for the Australian system as this will decrease the pressure on us as well. Because the effect of this pressure is it brings up all kinds of mental health issues which cause family breakdown. Parents cannot cope with the pressures when directed on how to raise their children by the government. As a parent, l know that my love will help me raise my child well. So allow me, let me train my child the way I want so that in the future he will grow up to be a better person in society.

Children's Rights. Most parents acknowledged various child rights that are upheld within the home and community such as the right to life, education, and freedom from cruel and inhumane treatment. They were, however, of the view that children should be made aware of some of the responsibilities that are associated with rights.

The challenges I can see are that children are raised based on having rights but not really told of their responsibilities. This is one concern we have always. Because every right comes with responsibilities, and if you don't teach the child responsibilities and he only gets told this is your right, well they also need to understand that there are responsibilities. And this always contrasts with parent's values. When the parents come and tell the child you need to do this, the child can have an option and say I have right to say "NO!" The child has a large number of rights in our culture. ... but he has also the biggest responsibility on respecting family values .... The most of good family is the family where you have a child who is displaying the value of that family.

Australian Mainstream Families. Most parents considered that mainstream Australian parenting styles are influenced by nuclear and individualistic characteristics. In contrast to mainstream family structures, most sub-Saharan African parenting styles are influenced by their collective cultures.

Our definition of family reflects our view as a culture that the community comes first. By keeping identity, children

having to identify with more than one father, as their father, or with more than one mother as their mother, we are trying to make sure that the diversity is there, but it is within the collective identity. So you wouldn't want a family that is totally different from the rest of the community. In our culture you need that identity, whether it is for your clan or for your tribe or for your extended family to be maintained. And there has to be evident effort that that is happening.

Inter-Generational and Inter-Societal Conflicts. Some parents believe their children live in two societies. They observed a contrast between what children learn within the Australian society and what they are taught at home. Most parents stated that within the home environment, children are raised based on their cultural values which have been passed down through generations, but when they are exposed to the Australian society, especially within the education system, they are taught principles of independence and self-awareness. This led some parents to express concern that their children seem not to respect traditional parental authority.

When we come here we find that the children are confronted by two societies. So they have their family, their parents, and they have the school and the school [teaches] things that are different to what the family is teaching to them. Because here at school the children say OK, if your parents say this, you report to us. The school teaches them you can say no. But in our culture, the child must respect his parents, and doesn't have a right to say no. In our culture, when parents do something wrong, the child has the right to report to another parent, an aunt, uncle or another relative. This is how we as parents and adults understand that there is a problem and we try to solve it. But here, it's the police who step in. This is wrong, because they don't respect the authority of the parents within the family.
I remember that is in my community. It was on the eve of New Year, and one family they went to the shop and brought a present to their daughter. And then in the morning when this young girl opened the present, the dress that they bought was not her favourite colour. The child complained to the parents. From where I come from children should not complain. They should just accept whatever they get. But

here children have a choice. So the parents tried to convince this young girl, and she completely refused. Until they all went back to the shop and exchanged the dress for the favourite colour. After this the child was happy and everyone was happy.

Connection with Country of Origin. Most parents acknowledged that raising their children in Australia has been a challenge. They believed that maintaining their cultural beliefs whilst making the effort to 'fit' into the Australian society had consequences for their children. The effects were also observed when children visited their native country.

When children visit back home, they relate to their family and peers based on what the Australian society teaches them. The community back home then looks at them as Australian because [they are] different. If they are not part of that community then it means they are part of the Australian community. This is very challenging for them because in Australia they are also being looked at as different.

Discussion

This study explored how sub-Saharan African migrant parents and caregivers navigate parenting between the cultures that have shaped their lives and parenting expectations within the new environment. Consistent with acculturation theory, our findings suggest that some sub-Saharan African migrant values were maintained, in other cases, new dimensions were introduced and in others, the host values were rejected or resisted.

Sub-Saharan African migrant parents maintained some values and beliefs that shape childrearing practices. These values and beliefs included: (i) parents' definition of children within their cultural context, traditional values grounded in religion, and culture; (ii) adherence to values of respect for, and obedience towards, elders within the community; (iii) adherence to the value of family and the expectations of children's contribution towards family life; and (iv) practices of authoritarian parenting style while monitoring and regulating children's behaviours. While our study is not representative of all sub-Saharan African migrant communities in Australia, and while some cultures and communities sampled have limited representation, our findings are consistent with studies conducted with similar sub-Saharan African migrant communities in other western countries, including New Zealand

(Deng and Marlowe, 2013), the United States of America (Rasmussen et al. 2012), and Canada (Ochocka and Janzen 2008).

Values and beliefs around childrearing practices that were resisted and not incorporated were closely associated with migration related challenges. Deng and Marlowe (2013) also observed that migrant populations are often faced with stressful negotiations upon living in different societies to their homeland. The participants highlighted challenges they faced around raising their children in Australia, particularly on matters of respect for parents or elders, inter-societal conflicts, and child disciplinary measures. Parents face challenges in raising their children because their parenting styles differ from the Australian mainstream expectations.

Where significant differences in parenting practices are observed, various migrant communities are often at a disadvantage during their involvement with service providers and in their day to day living with the greater Australian mainstream society (Križ and Skivenes 2010). Such disadvantages are the result of ongoing stereotypes which are influenced via media outlets and subsequently adversely affect targeted communities, including sub-Saharan African migrant people. The key issue is that the media, informed by individualistic values where childrearing is interpreted from independence and legal framework, tends to conceive childrearing practices governed by collectivist tendencies as inferior, oppressive, and breaching the right of the child (Sanson et al. 1998). Undoubtedly, parenting encompasses a number of different socio-political and cultural aspects, shaped within beliefs, values, goals, and behaviours prevalent in the macro system that influence how a child should be raised (Australian Human Rights Commission 2010). In turn, the micro-system is influenced by the political climate and policies of multiculturalism that help facilitate migrants' cultural adaptation (Harris 2016). Even though sub-Saharan African migrant parents raise their children with the objective of bringing up well-mannered children and good citizens, the rampant media reports of gang and crime related matters reinforce negative perceptions of how sub-Saharan African migrant children are parented (MacDonald 2017). These stereotypes may influence how child protection professionals relate to, and engage, sub-Saharan African families that come to the attention of the child protection system (Phillips 2011).

Another challenge faced by sub-Saharan African migrant parents is that family dynamics within sub-Saharan African homes are affected due to changing gender roles, with woman in some homes taking up full-time employment and subsequently becoming breadwinners. Sub-Saharan

African migrant parents expressed that the challenges they encountered were due to culture shock and a lack of extended family support while raising children in Australia. These challenges act as stressors that may impact family functioning within sub-Saharan African homes in the Greater Western Sydney area. While attempting to understand the 'Australian' way of living, sub-Saharan African migrant parents continue to raise their children in unfamiliar social settings. They have a desire to see their children flourish and 'fit in' while also preserving and respecting their cultural values (Rasmussen et al. 2012).

Values and beliefs around how children are disciplined are at the core of sub-Saharan African family functioning. Over time, western countries like Australia have put legal measures to regulate disciplinary practices which give leeway for various institutions like schools, day-care centres, and child protection organisations to monitor and report on disciplinary methods that are deemed abusive (Bernard and Gupta 2008; Rasmussen et al. 2012). Our participants highlighted that children are being taught different ways at school and these ways conflict with sub-Saharan African parenting styles. Differences in discipline and expectations between the school setting and the home setting, for example, may increase the chances of sub-Saharan African families coming to the attention of the child protection system due to children rejecting home discipline and reporting their parents to their teachers (Rasmussen et al. 2012; Rombo and Lutomia 2016). Consequently, the participants believed they have lost control of their children.

Some of the participants' anxieties are exacerbated by the fact that most of them come from countries were government's involvement with its citizens is centred on corruption, injustice, and human rights violations. Subsequently, Australian government regulations around parental discipline of children are likely to be foreign, misunderstood, and held with suspicion by sub-Saharan African migrant parents (Australian Government 2014; McDonald et al. 2011). If sub-Saharan African migrant parents regard Australian government interventions with wary, this may affect how they engage with service providers like schools and health services, thereby impacting educational and health outcomes for sub-Saharan African migrant children (Rasmussen et al. 2012).

Family migration research (Lewig, Arney and Salveron 2010; Renzaho et al. 2011a) suggest that migrant children tend to integrate much quicker into host societies than their parents, who often remain attached to traditional beliefs and values around parenting. Sub-Saharan African children's exposure to the school environment, and other social settings that raise awareness and encourage independence, appear to foster

attitudes that lead to conflicts between children and parents within the home environment (Renzaho et al. 2011a; Renzaho, McCabe and Sainsbury 2011b). These challenges may cause anxiety for parents who already feel they no longer have any authority over their children. Our study highlights that sub-Saharan African migrant parents were concerned that the Australian mainstream society gives power to the children, and existing institutional rules and policies adversely affect their parenting roles. For these reasons, our study participants generally maintained a negative view about some organisations—the police, schools—and constantly expressed fears around raising children under their watchful eye. Although our study found that some sub-Saharan African migrant parents reported a loss of parental control, there was evidence to suggest that some parents remain consistent in their parenting roles and employed discipline measures—time out, withholding privileges, grounding, and naughty corner [among others]—that were familiar to mainstream parenting expectations (Rombo and Lutomia 2016; Salami, Hirani, Meherali, Amodu and Chambers 2017).

Our research established that in observing and maintaining their cultural beliefs and practices that govern childrearing, sub-Saharan African migrant parents residing in the Greater Western Sydney area appeared to indirectly express their resistance towards policies and practices that were contrary to their cultural beliefs while simultaneously adjusting to a host environment that is defined by insecurity and vulnerability. Levitt (2004) emphasises that there is no need to have expectations on people residing in the diaspora to assimilate or completely integrate into the host society as people change and often shift attitudes depending on the context. While settling in host nations, migrants tend to reposition their identity of origin within their new context, which is a significant gesture towards understanding their losses and challenges (La Barbera 2015). In particular, sub-Saharan migrant families in Australia participate and engage in Australian socio-cultural, political, and economic activities, and also create spaces within their various communities as platforms to discuss experiences and reinforce specific cultural practices that form their identities (Merla 2015; Salami et al. 2017). Sub-Saharan African migrant parents participate in culturally specific gatherings like church attendance, sub-Saharan African community meetings, and the establishment of community structures like homeland specific organisations, including the appointment of sub-Saharan African community leaders and elders (Marlowe, Harris and Lyons 2014).

Implications

This research highlights that sub-Saharan African migrant parents continue to uphold their cultural beliefs and values while raising their children in Australia. If this is the position, will cultural traits erode over time or do cultural practices adapt within each context? We argue that culture is influenced by society and is responsive to the environment in which it is practised. Migration studies have established that when the process of migration begins, change is inevitable in host societies and so often traditional systems and policy frameworks are challenged (Levitt 2004; Mazzucato and Schans 2011). Sub-Saharan African migrants are thus active participants within social and legal processes in host nations.

It is important to emphasise that child protection professionals working with sub-Saharan African families need to understand sub-Saharan African migrant family backgrounds before engaging with them, as those that migrated for employment and educational reasons will face dissimilar challenges to those who were displaced from their country of origin. Child protection service providers should be aware of and sensitive to practices which embrace sub-Saharan African childrearing practices in order to obtain better outcomes for sub-Saharan African migrant children who come to the attention of the Australian child protection system.

Appendix 1: Methodology

While the snowball sampling technique has been criticised because participants know each other, have similar traits, and may lead to the data collected being biased (Leung 2015), this study mitigated bias by drawing on four methods to select participants and to analyse data (Naderifar, Goli and Ghaljaie 2017; Penrod, Preston, Cain and Starks 2003):

(i) a precise definition of the study population which implemented specific inclusion and exclusion criteria—the definition determined the sampling frame;
(ii) a sample size guided by emerging themes, data saturation and a defined study setting—this assisted to establish a reliable and adequate sample;
(iii) the utilisation of participants knowledge and lived experiences—gaining entry and access to the targeted communities assisted with the quality and validity of the research; and

(iv) ongoing monitoring of data collection—this assisted in determining when new themes emerged and when recruitment modifications became essential to obtain a more diverse sample.

At the first instance, eligible participants were identified through community structures such as community health centres, migrant resource centres, and some local sub-Saharan African churches. Identified families were asked to recommend other participants within the same area that met the inclusion criteria, and the process continued until the desired number of focus group members and interviews was reached (Sedgwick 2013; Sheu et al. 2009). The study was approved by the Western Sydney University Human Research Ethics Committee (Reference: H11825).

Data Collection and Procedures

Focus groups are particularly useful when exploring multiple topics as they stimulate discussions through a diversity of ideas and spontaneity. Such groups enable verification—a process of corroboration—and a platform to explore differences in participants' responses (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe and Neville 2014). Additionally, one-on-one interviews were useful as the most suitable method for collecting data from geographically dispersed populations, and for discussing a sensitive and personal topic such as parenting practices (Lambert and Loiselle 2008; Macdonald 2006). One-on-one interviews allowed participants privacy to share their particular experiences and the flexibility to venture into salient matters (Lawton et al. 2016).

Focus groups were complemented by one-on-one interviews as part of the triangulation process (Carter et al. 2014). In order to increase the validity of the procedures and results, our study used two specific methods of triangulation—data triangulation and within-method triangulation (Bekhet and Zauszniewski 2012; Flick 2004). Data triangulation involved the use of different sources of information, at various times, in different places, and from varying participants while within-method triangulation involved the use of more than one qualitative methods to collect data, and in this case, the use of focus groups and interviews (Hargis, Cavanaugh, Kamali and Soto 2014)

In their analyses of focus groups, Guest, Namey and McKenna (2017, 18) found that "more than 80% of all themes were discoverable within two to three focus groups and 90% of themes could be discovered within three to six focus groups." Guest et al. (2017) were also able to identify

the most prevalent themes within only three focus groups. A few years earlier, Coenen, Stamm, Stucki and Cieza (2012) had found that data saturation was reached after conducting five focus groups and eight individual one-on-interviews. The benefits of one-on-one interviews are underscored by Galvin's study (2015), which found that the likelihood of discovering a theme among six individual participants is greater than 99% if the issue is similar among 55% of the broader study population.

Our study included five focus groups (N=40), varying from 6 to 11 participants aged between 26–78 years old; and six one-on-one interviews involving four males and two female participants aged between 38–52 years. The participants included skilled migrants from Zimbabwe, Ghana, and Nigeria, and refugees and humanitarian entrants from Ethiopia, South Sudan, Sierra Leone, Eritrea, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Mixed gender groups were the preferred option for the focus groups as mixed gender groups tend to improve the quality of the discussion and its outcome (O Nyumba, Wilson, Derrick and Mukherjee 2018). The participants arrived via various visa streams and have been residing in Australia for periods between 3 to 20 years.

The focus groups schedule and interview guide (Appendix 2) were informed by a robust systematic review by a peer reviewer, and by considering the Australian and the United Nations Children's Fund child protection systems (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2012; United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund 2009). The tools were also workshopped in meetings with the Migrant Review Panel—a de facto, community-owned, steering committee that had oversight of the implementation of the research. The study was conducted in English and participation took place in community-based venues, including migrant resources centres and churches. Data collection varied between one and a half to three hours, depending on what the participants had to say. All sessions were audio recorded with notetaking being essential for recording issues that required further clarification and follow-up. Prior to data analysis all the audio files were transcribed verbatim.

Informed consent was obtained from all participants. For focus groups participants who did not fully comprehend the English language, bi-lingual workers were used (Lynn, Roona and Ruth 2011). All one-on-one interview participants were proficient in the English language. Information about the study was provided to target communities and church leaders prior to obtaining consent, and participating communities were engaged in discussion about the research through meetings within their local community gatherings. These gatherings offered an arena to

ask questions and provide clarity of the study expectations (Alaei, Pourshams, Altaha, Goglani and Jafari 2013). Eligible individuals who consented to participate were asked to sign the consent forms. Those who could not write were allowed to sign their consent forms with the letter 'X' or use their initials where appropriate. Participants were assured privacy and confidentiality, and the use of pseudonyms (Mendes, Snow and Baidawi 2014).

Data Synthesis and Analysis

Thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006) formed the basis for understanding the data captured from the participants. Thematic analysis aims to establish recurring themes that can lead to the development of a conceptual framework. In analysing the data, we developed a data coding system and categories using the NVIVO 11 Pro Software (Alyahmady and Al Abri 2013; Bazeley and Jackson 2013). These were developed through reading each transcript word-for-word, which assisted in summarising participant encounters. Once summarised, the data were merged to form a broader view of the collective experience of participants. All transcribed materials were imported into NVIVO prior to data analysis.

The synthesising process involved highlighting key phrases used by the participants with researcher comments written in NVIVO memos in order to record immediate thoughts to remarks made (Alyahmady and Al Abri 2013; Bazeley and Jackson 2013). In order to maintain transparency and minimise bias, themes were guided by the participants' direct words through constant reference to the original data (Ritchie and Lewis 2003). Once the recurring themes became clear we developed concepts that were linked to the themes and which helped explain the data while constantly referring to participants' words in order to preserve and report accurate beliefs, values, attitudes, practices, and migration experiences of the participants. At all times, it remained important to understand what the participants were describing as this assisted in challenging researcher assumptions and biases at the various stages of data analysis, thus adding rigour to the research. This process allowed for a situation where participant descriptions were retained at the same time as we investigated connections between data collected, known theories, and established literature, thereby enhancing the validity of our findings.

Appendix 2: Interview Guide and Focus Group Schedule

Based on your cultural background, what is your understanding of:

a. *A child? [Probe: Who is responsible for child upbringing in your community?]*
b. *Parent [Probe: How is a 'parent' defined in your community?]*
c. *Family? [Probe: What constitutes a family within your community?]*

1. What cultural aspects of childrearing practices are essential to uphold? [Probe: what is a 'good' parent in child upbringing at the Family level? At the Community level?]
2. How has relocation to Australia impacted on your family, particularly around childrearing? [Probe: what are the cultural challenges faced when raising children within the Australian community? How do you deal with these challenges?]
3. How do your cultural expectations of raising children compare with the Australian way of raising children? [Probe: How do you know this?]
4. How are children disciplined in your community? [Probe: What is the expected disciplinary routine of children within your community? Whose role is it to discipline children?]
5. What are some of the Governmental expectations on childrearing practices you aware of? [Probe: How did/ do you know about this?]
6. What is your understanding of Child's Rights? [Probe: What governs Child Rights (within your community)? Based on your understanding of children's rights, what constitutes child abuse within your community? What is Neglect? Violence? Exploitation? Harm? Suffering? Inadequate Care?]
7. What is your understanding of Child Protection? [Probe: Can you please tell me how child protection is practised within your community? What community structures are in place for the protection of children? How effective are these community structure?]
8. Is there anything you would like to add or discuss?

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