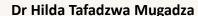# PARENTING IN A NEW ENVIRONMENT

Implications for raising children of African heritage within the Australian child protection context

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Archaic
—CONSULTING GROUP—
Culturally Competent Specialists in Child Protection

Acknowledgement of Country

Archaic Consulting Group acknowledges Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and recognises the continuing connection to lands, waters and communities. We pay our respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures; and to Elders past and present.

Overview

- The impact of migration on parenting and its flow-on effects on families and communities

- Migrants come from diverse cultural backgrounds where they maintain and observe cultural practices that influence their identities

- Despite COVID-19, data from the 2021 Australian census indicate that there continues to be an increase in the diversity of sub-Saharan African migration to Australia

- 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?

Culture and Child Protection

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 [and their families].

Archaic professionals work in child protection environments that explore how sub-Saharan African migrant parents and caregivers navigate parenting between the cultures that have shaped their lives and parenting expectations within the new [Australian] environment.

Archaic endeavors to provide evidence to inform the development and implementation of culturally appropriate and effective early intervention strategies for professionals working with migrant families within the Australia child protection system.

Pre- and Post-Migration Experiences

- Culture plays a major part in childrearing and development. Culture can be defined as:

  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. (Akilapa and Simkiss 2021, pg. 490)

- Parenting and childrearing encompasses 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.

- It would be misleading to argue that all sub-Saharan African cultures are the same. Sub-Saharan African countries and their respective communities are distinct and their cultural norms are specific to a people based on their kin and ethnic group (Idang 2015)

- What is evident within sub-Saharan African cultures is that, premigration, 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).

- Consequently, pre-migration parenting styles and practices of sub-Saharan African migrant families may be at odds with the mainstream parenting norms in Australia.

Mostly, sub-Saharan African communities raise their children within a collectivist worldview

COLLECTIVISM

- 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).

INDIVIDUALISM

- 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).

Acculturation

Upon settling in Australia, sub-Saharan African migrants undergo acculturation, and this may affect their childrearing practices.

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Acculturation refers to processes of cultural adjustments that occur due to prolonged contact between groups of people that are culturally different
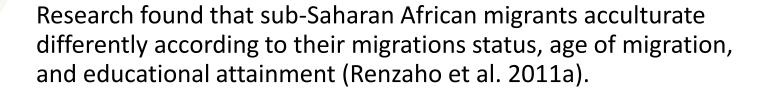
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Research has shown, however, that acquiring the beliefs, values, and practices of the host country does not automatically imply that migrants discard those of their country of origin (Schwartz et al. 2010), and a number of conceptual models of acculturation 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).

➤

When engaging parents and caregivers of African heritage, at Archaic we focus on Berry's (1997, 2003) 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.

Acculturation – cont:

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

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 child protection professionals should take time to understand the post-migration parenting practices among sub-Saharan African migrants and how parents and caregivers are negotiating cultural differences and conflicts within Australia.

What are sub-Saharan African migrant parents and caregivers saying?

- Most sub-Saharan African parents and caregivers interpret children's actions within their cultural frames. Parents are saying that their parenting views are influenced by their own childhood experiences. They are guided by their traditional beliefs and values in defining good parenting and these beliefs influence the values they intend to pass onto their own children.

- Common areas of agreement among parents and caregivers include the expectation that their children should 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 believe that being a child within their homes is 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" **– sub-Saharan African migrant parent**

What are sub-Saharan African migrant parents and caregivers saying? – cont:

- Respect for and obedience to parents and community elders is important. 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 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" **– sub-Saharan African migrant parent**

- Parents emphasised on the Importance of family and the duty to contribute towards family life.

  "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" **– sub-Saharan African migrant parent**

What are sub-Saharan African migrant parents and caregivers saying? – cont:

- 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.

  "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" **– sub-Saharan African migrant parent**

- 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 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.

What are sub-Saharan African migrant parents and caregivers saying? – cont:

- 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 feel that they have lost control over family matters and have 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" – sub-Saharan African migrant parent

- 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" – sub-Saharan African migrant parent

- Parents and caregivers acknowledge the effect of culture and tradition on parent-child relationships. They also acknowledge 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

What are sub-Saharan African migrant parents and caregivers saying? – cont:

"[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" — **sub-Saharan African migrant parent**

- 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, I 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" — **sub-Saharan African migrant parent**

What are sub-Saharan African migrant parents and caregivers saying? – cont:

- Most parents acknowledge 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" **– sub-Saharan African migrant parent**

- Most parents consider mainstream Australian parenting styles as 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" **– sub-Saharan African migrant parent**

Some challenges experienced by sub-Saharan African migrant parents and caregivers

- Minority communities are at a disadvantage when engaging service providers due to significant differences in culture and practices. These challenges act as stressors that may impact family functioning

- Ongoing stereotypes influenced via media outlets and mainstream communities often affect targeted communities, including sub-Saharan African migrant people. 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.

- Changing family dynamics and gender roles, with woman in some homes taking up full-time employment and subsequently becoming breadwinners.

- Culture shock and a lack of extended family support while raising children in Australia.

- Parents and caregivers 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

- Parents and caregivers highlighted that children are being taught different ways at school and these ways conflict with their 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

- Parent 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. If sub-Saharan African migrant parents regard Australian government interventions with wary, this may affect how they engage with service providers, thereby impacting outcomes for sub-Saharan African migrant children'

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?

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).

Child protection professionals need to be aware that sub-Saharan African migrants are active participants within social and legal processes in host nations.

What's next???

- Most parents believe that maintaining their cultural beliefs whilst making the effort to 'fit' into the Australian society has consequences for their children. The effects are also observed when children visit 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" – sub-Saharan African migrant parent*

1. We need to hear from children and young people of African heritage.

2. What are they experiencing within society and at home?

3. Are they understood or misunderstood?

4. How do they view their culture and what are their beliefs?

5. Who are they? How do they identify?

6. Do they belong? Where do they belong?

7. Etc...

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Our Services

Consultancy

Our consultancy involves and is not limited to the following services:

- Cultural Brokerage
- Complex Case Consultations
- Group Supervision
- Family Finding

Assessments

Archaic offers insight through comprehesive assessments that capture target community post-migration parenting practices and experiences. We are best suited to complete the following assessments:

- Parenting Capacity Assessments
- Relative Kinship Carer Assessments
- Guardianship Assessments
- Permanency Assessments
- Carer Reviews

Training

Our Training regime focuses on research -based practice and current social trends. We offer two types of training:

- Professional Training
- Relative/Kinship Carer Training (which incorporates Carer Support on a needs basis)

Family Group Conferencing

Although traditionally referred to by different names within various African settings, Family Group Conferencing (FGC) is an engagement process that may be beneficial to migrant families where cultural considerations are observed

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