



IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE YOUTH AND FAMILIES

RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

Edited by
Mo Yee Lee



Immigrant and Refugee Youth and Families

The United States is known as a nation of immigrants. Over the years the composition of immigrants has significantly changed. From receiving immigrants from primarily Europe, the United States is now home to people from countries around the globe. One of the common challenges encountered by immigrant and refugee families and youth is to successfully resettle and integrate into the host country that is culturally different from their country of origin. Depending on the context of migration, families and youth oftentimes face additional challenges ranging from potential trauma prior to immigration, language, employment, education, healthcare accessibility, integration, discrimination, etc. This book focuses on different issues experienced by immigrant and refugee families and youth as well as programs implemented to serve these populations. These issues pertain to the individual at a personal level (attachment, trauma, bi-cultural self-efficacy, behavioral problems, and mental health), family (parenting, work-family conflict, problems such as domestic violence), community (risk factors such as racial discrimination and protective factors such as social capital), and policy (immigration policy and enforcement).

Part I of the book focuses on immigrant and refugee families and Part II focuses on immigrant and refugee youth. By increasing our awareness of issues pertinent to immigrant and refugee families and youth, we can better provide culturally respectful and sensitive services and policy to this population at a time when they are navigating between their host culture and home culture in addition to dealing with challenges encountered in resettlement.

The book is a significant new contribution to migration studies and social justice, and will be a great resource for academics, researchers, and advanced students of social work, public policy, law, and sociology. The chapters in this book were originally published in the *Journal of Ethnic & Cultural Diversity in Social Work*.

Mo Yee Lee is Professor at the College of Social Work, The Ohio State University. Her scholarship focuses on intervention research using a solution-focused, strengths-based, and systems perspective, as well as cross-cultural integrative practice with individuals and families. She is the editor of the *Journal of Ethnic & Cultural Diversity in Social Work*.



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Research and Practice

Edited by
Mo Yee Lee

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Notes on Contributors

Sylvia Acevedo, Gulf Coast Jewish Family and Community Services, Clearwater, Florida, USA.

Haji Adan, Refugee and Immigrant Self Empowerment, Syracuse, New York, USA.

Edward J. Alessi, School of Social Work, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey, USA.

Sachi Ando, Division for Global Education, Nara Institute of Science and Technology, Ikoma, Japan.

Jennifer L. Ballard-Kang, Kent School of Social Work, Louisville, Kentucky, USA.

David Becerra, School of Social Work, Arizona State University, Phoenix, Arizona, USA.

Joanna E. Bettmann, College of Social Work, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah, USA.

Beverly M. Black, School of Social Work, University of Texas at Arlington, Arlington, Texas, USA.

Aaron Burgess, Department of Social Work, University of North Alabama, Florence, Alabama, USA.

Jason Castillo, College of Social Work, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah, USA.

Shinwoo Choi, Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Social Work, University of North Florida, Jacksonville, Florida, USA.

Filomena Critelli, School of Social Work, University at Buffalo, The State University of New York, Buffalo, New York, USA.

Virginia Cronin, Department of Family Medicine, SUNY Upstate Medical University, Syracuse, New York, USA.

Ja'Dell Davis, Department of Sociology, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Madison, Wisconsin, USA.

Nattalie Gentles-Gibbs, School of Social Work, University of Southern Maine, Portland, Maine, USA.

Lance L. O. Gibbs, Department of Sociology and Race & Ethnic Studies, University of Southern Maine, Portland, Maine, USA.

Gladys Hernandez, Department of Sociology, California State University, Northridge, California, USA.

Margrit E. Kaufmann, Institute of Cultural Anthropology and European Ethnology, Goethe University, Frankfurt am Main, Germany.

Yeongbin Kim, School of Social Welfare, University at Albany, State University of New York, Albany, New York, USA.

Youn Kyoung Kim, School of Social Work, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, USA.

Mo Yee Lee, College of Social Work, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio, USA.

Cecilia Mengo, College of Social Work, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio, USA.

Diane B. Mitschke, School of Social Work, University of Texas at Arlington, Arlington, Texas, USA.

Neda Moinolmolki, Department of Social Sciences, College of Coastal Georgia, Brunswick, Georgia, USA.

Mitra Naseh, School of Social Work, Florida International University, Miami, Florida, USA.

Van Nguyen, College of Social Work, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah, USA.

Mamta U. Ojha, School of Social Justice, Health & Human Services 2626, University of Toledo, Toledo, Ohio, USA.

Moses Okumu, Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

Debra Olson-Morrison, Park University, Parkville, Missouri, USA.

Laura Otto, Institute of Cultural Anthropology and European Ethnology, Goethe University, Frankfurt am Main, Germany.

Hyejoon Park, Department of History, Philosophy, and Social Sciences, Pittsburg State University, Pittsburg, Kansas, USA.

Katelyn Pearson, School of Social Work, University of Texas at Arlington, Arlington, Texas, USA.

Raquel Perez González, School of Social Work, Arizona State University, Phoenix, Arizona, USA.

Francisca Porchas, Puente Human Rights Movement, Phoenix, Arizona, USA.

Miriam Potocky, School of Social Work, Florida International University, Miami, Florida, USA.

Kristen E. Ravi, School of Social Work, University of Texas at Arlington, Arlington, Texas, USA.

Frank Ridzi, Department of Anthropology, Criminology, and Sociology at Le Moyne College, Syracuse, New York, USA; The Central New York Community Foundation.

Oscar Rivera, Church World Service, Miami, Florida, USA.

Beth Sapiro, Department of Social Work and Child Advocacy, College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Montclair State University, Montclair, New Jersey, USA.

Eusebius Small, School of Social Work, University of Texas at Arlington, Arlington, Texas, USA.

Suzie Weng, School of Social Work, California State University at Long Beach, Long Beach, California, USA.

Asli Cennet Yalim, School of Social Work, The State University of New York, Buffalo, New York, USA; School of Social Work, University of Central Florida, Orlando, Florida, USA.

Introduction

Immigrant and refugee youth and families: research and practice

United States has been named as a nation of immigrants although the composition of immigrants has changed over the years from primarily immigrants from European countries to currently countries around the globe. The Displaced Persons Act of 1948 after World War II also allows refugees to come to the US. Based on statistics provided by U.S. Department of Homeland Security 2018 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics (2020a), since 2001, there were slightly over one million immigrants who were granted permanent resident status every year with the exception of 2003, 2004 and 2013 where slightly less than one million immigrants were granted permanent residency. Between 2001 and 2018, a total of 1,013,379 refugees have arrived in the US with the largest number of arrivals in 2016 (84,988) and lowest number of arrivals in 2018 (22,405) (U.S Department of Homeland Security, 2020b).

One of the common challenges encountered by immigrant and refugee families and youth is to successfully resettle and integrate into the host country, which is culturally different than their country of origin. Depending on the context of migration, families and youth usually face additional challenges ranging from language, employment, education, healthcare accessibility, integration, discrimination, etc. This special issue focuses on research that seek to understand different issues experienced by immigrant and refugees families and youth as well as programs that were implemented to effectively serve this populations.

Part I: immigrant and refugee families

Part I of the special issue includes seven articles that focus on diverse issues related to immigrant and refugee families. Understanding resettled refugee parents' experiences and opportunities for support is crucial for helping professionals to provide culturally competent and sensitive service to these families. "Parenting in Transition: Refugee Populations' Challenges in Navigating Parenting upon Resettlement" aims to study the needs of recently resettled refugee parents, specifically from Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Bhutan, and the obstacles that influence their parenting.

"Using Culturally-Appropriate, Trauma-Informed Support to Promote Bi-Cultural Self-Efficacy among Resettled Refugees" recognizes the pressure for resettled refugees to integrate successfully into the culture of their resettlement country within a relatively short period of time. Building on existing literature that demonstrates ethnic identity and participation in the ethnic culture of origin play a key role in supporting the mental health of resettled refugees, the author presents a model that draws on social-cognitive theory, trauma theory and models of second culture acquisition to reflect relationships between trauma, mental health and self-efficacy.

"Immigration Policies and Mental Health: Examining the Relationship between Immigration Enforcement and Depression, Anxiety, and Stress among Latino Immigrants" is a timely study that examines the impact of current immigration policies on mental health outcomes of adult Latino immigrants. The authors use *legal violence* as the theoretical

framework to examine the relationship between personal and family suffering as a result of anti-immigrant policies and enforcement strategies and depression, anxiety and stress among Latino immigrants. Authors also discuss implications for social work practice, advocacy and research.

Increasing number of immigrants from different countries and backgrounds are now residing and working in the United States. “Work-Family Conflict in a Comparative Context: Immigrant and Native workers in the US” examines the relationship between job demands-resources and work-family conflict among immigrant workers and native workers using a nationally representative database of wage and salaried workers in the United States. Results indicate that some of the factors predicting work-family conflict among immigrant and native workers are dissimilar, which have useful implications for social work professionals working with immigrant populations and work-family policies.

“Social Work Practice with West Indian Migrant Fathers” describes findings of a qualitative study that seeks to understand the impact of migration on West Indian men and women’s perceptions of father involvement and the role of social work practitioners in helping West Indian migrant fathers with challenges faced in fathering. Seventy-six West Indian immigrant men and women discussed father involvement via questionnaires and/or in-depth interviews. The authors also discuss implications for social work interventions that address interpersonal and environmental issues, which hamper optimal father involvement for these migrant men.

Women of immigrant and refugee status who experience domestic violence constitute an underserved population. Through an intersectional and trauma-informed lens, “Improving Access to Domestic Violence Services for Women of Immigrant and Refugee Status: A Trauma-Informed Perspective” explores service needs and paths to help-seeking of these women through in-depth interviews with 10 survivors and 15 service providers. Authors also discuss recommendations to improve service delivery and policies.

Racial discrimination is a potential challenge to immigrant populations and has showed to have negative consequences on health, mental health and individual’s well-being. “Effects of Asian Immigrants’ Group Membership in the Association between Perceived Racial Discrimination and Psychological Well-being” explores the effects of perceived racial discrimination on participants’ psychological well-being as well as moderating effects of group membership factors. Findings indicated that immigrants’ generational status was not a significant moderating factor although young adults (ages 18–24) and Vietnamese ethnicity showed the most vulnerability when they experienced racial discrimination. The authors discuss useful implications for policy and social work practice.

Part II: immigrant and refugee youth

This section includes six articles that seek to understand immigrant and refugee children and adolescents from different perspectives on diverse issues. “When Generalized Assumptions of Young Refugees Don’t Hold” adopts an intersectional way of reading ethnographic data collected in Malta on young refugees and suggests that an intersectional way of understanding allows professionals to understand the complexity of identity and differences in constructions of them. More importantly, it is important to recognize professionals’ own positioning, patterns and understandings so that we will not reproduce stereotyped constructions and understandings when working with refugee youth.

“The Relationship between Adolescent Refugees’ Attachment Patterns and Their Experiences of Trauma” focuses on examining the relationship between adolescent refugees’ traumatic experiences and their attachment styles. Findings suggest that refugees who are

securely attached have greater resilience in the face of traumatic events than refugees with insecure or disorganized attachment styles. Authors also discuss implications for treatment and future research.

Engaging in antisocial attitudes and aggression negatively impacts the mental and psychological health of immigrant children and adolescents. The third article “Anti-Social Attitude and Aggressive Behavior among Immigrant Youth: Moderating Effects of Relationships with Parents” examines the impact of parent–child relationship on behavioral problems among a sample consists mostly of Hispanic immigrant children. Findings indicated the impact of positive mother–child and father–child relationships in mitigating the negative impact of antisocial attitudes on aggressive behaviors in children.

Bhutanese refugees are a relatively new group of resettled refugees in the US since 2008. Bhutanese youths who have resettled within the United States have a unique socio-historical context as most were born or raised in refugee camps with minimal exposure to formal education. Instead of taking a deficits-based perspective and focusing on problems, “Correlates of Bhutanese Youth’s General Well-Being” seeks to understand factors that relate to the well-being of these youth. Findings of the study highlights the important role of familial social capital and ethnic identification in the general wellbeing of Bhutanese youth. The author also discusses the implications of study findings for practice and treatment.

“Staying Close to Home: The Significance of Relationships for Immigrant-origin Local College Students” is a qualitative inquiry that seeks to understand the process for college students from immigrant backgrounds to navigate existing and new obligations to family, community and school when entering college, which is an important transition in life. Findings suggest that supportive relationships with family, peers and mentors are key to helping students transition to college while maintaining existing ties, although some students also felt torn between their own needs and those of their families.

“Karen Refugee Youths’ Satisfaction with a Teen Dating Violence Prevention Program” is a pilot study that uses a mixed-method approach to examine the satisfaction of *Safe Dates*, an evidenced-based teen dating violence program, among Karen refugee youth. Findings indicated that the youth were satisfied with the program without any cultural adaptations although they have also provided helpful suggestions to further adapt teen dating violence prevention programs for Karen youth in view of their unique sociocultural context.

Practice corner

This special issue also includes two articles from the *Practice Corner*. “Dietary Adaptation of Immigrant Families and Children” raises our awareness to unique challenges immigrant families and children experienced around food. Retention of dietary tradition may become difficult when personal, psychological and social processes are involved. The author suggests that culturally competent social workers should be aware of the extent to which dietary adaptation influences optimal wellbeing of immigrant families and children.

“Creating Welcoming Communities for LGBTQ Migrants: Living Room-Style Chats for Service Providers” addresses the importance of increasing service providers’ knowledge of and attitudes about LGBTQ migrant population as a way to enhance their capacity to effectively serve these clients. The authors describe a training for service providers in the form of a “living room-style chat” and provide recommendations for replicating these living room-style chats in other communities.

This Special Issue is part of an integral effort of social work community to increase our awareness of issues pertinent to immigrant and refugee families and youth so that we can provide culturally respectfully and sensitive services and policy to this population at a time when they are navigating between their host culture and home culture in addition to dealing with challenges encountered in resettlement. Adopting a stance of cultural humility, I hope the articles in this special issue will help us to continue our dialogue around serving immigrant and refugee families and youth in a way that is informed, effective and culturally respectful.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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Part 1

Immigrant and Refugee Families



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Parenting in transition: refugee populations' challenges in navigating parenting upon resettlement

Neda Moinolmolki, Frank Ridzi, Virginia Cronin, and Haji Adan

ABSTRACT

With the exception of the last three fiscal years, there has been a consistent influx of refugees being resettled to the U.S. during the last 20 years from Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Bhutan. Although there is existing literature examining the obstacles that recently resettled refugee families face, the ways in which these obstacles influence parenting has not been widely studied. For organizations to best serve these populations, a solid understanding of newly resettled refugee parents' experiences and opportunities for support is crucial. The purpose of this current study was to determine the needs of newly resettled refugee parents, specifically from Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Bhutan, and the obstacles that influence their parenting in a Mid-Atlantic region of the U.S.

Along with the rising rates of conflict, persecution, and violence worldwide, there has been a significant increase in the number of refugees being resettled into developed nations. The United States (U.S.) has admitted refugees since the wake of World War II, with the enactment of the Displaced Persons Act of 1948. A preponderance of these recently resettled refugees have hailed from Asia or Africa. This is a stark contrast from earlier cohorts of refugees stemming from European descent (Rong & Preissle, 2009). This shift has presented challenges for local communities, schools, and social services in supporting the navigation of parenting and acculturation for newly resettled refugee parents (Brenner & Kia-Keating, 2016; Sarr & Mosselson, 2010). Although there is existing literature examining the obstacles that recently resettled refugee families face, the ways in which these obstacles influence parenting has not been widely studied. For organizations to best serve these populations, a solid understanding of newly resettled refugee parents' experiences and opportunities for support is crucial. The purpose of this current

study was to determine the needs of newly resettled refugee parents, specifically from Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Bhutan, and the obstacles that influence their parenting in a Mid-Atlantic region of the U.S.

With the exception of the last three fiscal years, there has been a consistent influx of refugees being resettled to the U.S. during the last 20 years from Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Bhutan. From 2000–2016, prior to the Trump Travel Ban, there had been a continual rate of Somali refugees resettled within the U.S (U.S. Department of State, 2018). Moreover, since 2007, over 92,000 Bhutanese refugees were resettled within the U.S and are still being resettled at slower rates (U.S. Department of State, 2018). Meanwhile, refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo have been consecutively resettled to the U.S. since 2002. In fact, the Democratic Republic of Congo was the top origin country of refugee resettlement during the 2018 fiscal year (U.S. Department of State, 2018). Although refugee admission caps are lowering, many local resettlement regions are struggling to support the adjustment of parenting for these resettled refugee populations.

Somali, Congolese, and Bhutanese refugee populations were targeted for this study due to the challenges identified by local service organizations, such as acculturational and familial conflicts as well as children's susceptibility to drugs and alcohol. Many of the service providers felt helpless in how to appropriately address these needs. The ultimate objective of this study was to examine the experiences, challenges, and opportunities for support of newly resettled Somali, Congolese, and Bhutanese refugee parents in hopes of determining opportunities for effective and sustainable intervention programs.

Prior to delving into the literature on immigration, acculturation and parenting, it is important to highlight the historical routes of resettlement of these three populations. Despite the fact that they all are refugees, they have distinct pathways to relocation within the U.S. Somali refugees are a product of a civil war that started in 1991 with the collapse of the state. Due to the violence from the war, many Somalis were forcibly displaced either inside or outside the country. Many fled to temporary refugee camps, where they resided for years, before being safely resettled into permanent locations, such as the U.S (Hammond, 2014). On the other hand, Bhutanese refugees were predominantly Lhotshampa, Nepali origin Bhutanese, who had experienced years of oppression and marginalization before being formally exiled during the ethnic cleansing movement of King Jigme Singye Wangchuk in the early 1990s. Many Lhotshampas were relocated temporarily in eastern Nepal refugee camps in the 1990s, before being permanently resettled into developed nations (Kharat, 2001). Lastly, refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo had fled the escalating violence and unrest since the ending of their civil war in 2003. Today, approximately 4.5 million individuals have been displaced internally; a small percentage of whom eventually have been relocated in the U.S (UNHCR, 2019).

Parenthood and migration are two major transitions that pose significant challenges for refugees resettled within the U.S. Not only do refugee parents share many similar issues with local parents, they are also influenced by previous traumatic experiences in addition to being confronted with new cultural, social, and economic contexts. Aligned with the “triple trauma” model of migration (Michultka, 2009), refugee parents are confronted with pre-migration, during migration, and post migration traumas. Common pre-migration and during migration traumas of refugees include torture, forced labor, starvation, separation from family members, as well as years of residency in refugee camps (Osman, Flacking, Schon, & Klingberg-Allvin, 2017). Such experiences, along with migration to new societal contexts, are often challenging. During post-migration, many refugee parents experience isolation, poverty, discrimination, and mental health disorders (Deng & Marlowe, 2013; Osman et al., 2017). Due to their pre-migration traumas, upon resettlement many refugee parents are at a higher risk for experiencing Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (Fazel, Wheeler, & Danesh, 2005). This, plus the loss of social support networks upon resettlement, places refugee parents in unfavorable circumstances for parenting. In addition, many refugee parents enter a country in which they have no prior knowledge of the host country’s school system as well as normative parenting practices and rights (Deng & Marlowe, 2013). They are often confronted with barriers toward participating in their children’s schooling due to variable contextual factors, such as unwelcoming school environments, culturally insensitive staff, and the lack of qualified interpreters (Osman, Klingberg-Allvin, Flacking, & Schon, 2016). In fact, reports of suspicions from teachers about parents’ disciplinary practices and threats of reporting them to CPS have ignited fears within some refugee parent populations and have led them to be less involved in their children’s schooling (Osman et al., 2016).

The stressors of parenthood for refugees tend to be compounded with the experiences of acculturation within a new country. Acculturation is the process that takes place, typically after immigration, as a result of contact between two cultures. It consists of the way that individuals actively modify their attitudes, values, and behaviors based upon new cultural experiences. Parents and children’s responses to contrasting cultures generally fall into four categories: Marginalization (individuals who distance themselves from both cultures), separation (individuals who maintain their home culture and resist the new culture), assimilation (individuals who distance themselves from the home culture), and integration (individuals who synthesize both cultures) (Berry, 2007). Research has found that as immigrants undergo acculturation, their behaviors and parenting practices change (Ochocka & Janzen, 2008). Often, immigrant children acculturate differently and become Americanized more rapidly than their parents. This leads to a clash between migrant parents and their children, known as cultural dissonance (Deng &

Marlowe, 2013; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Renzaho, Green, Mellor, & Swinburn, 2011). Cultural dissonance is often associated with decreases in parental authority and control, as well as increases in distancing between children and parents (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). Breakdowns of communication between parents and children are common, leading to increased parental fears of children's independence as well as their own powerlessness (Boyle & Ali, 2010; Filio, Pöntinen, & Molsa, 2006; Hwang, 2006). Furthermore, during acculturation, shifts in parenting style are common, especially if parents have authoritarian parenting styles, due to the frequent questioning that occurs by their children and the new host environment. In fact, studies with various immigrant populations have found that as parental exposure to western cultures increases, their parenting styles become less authoritarian and more permissive (Ochocka & Janzen, 2008). Although there has been much literature exploring the relationships between acculturation and parenting on immigrant populations, there has been limited literature exploring these domains in recently resettled refugees from Bhutan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Somalia.

The current study utilizes Ochocka and Janzen's Orienting framework of Immigrant Parenting (2008) to help lay the foundation for understanding immigrant parenting during resettlement. This theory is one that is often used within the literature on immigrant parenting. The theory considers the multiple contexts of immigrant parents, including their previous cultural background and new environment, as well as changes over time. The purpose of this theory is to better understand the fluid nature of immigrant parenting, since many of our previous parenting theories visualize parenting as a static concept. According to Ochocka and Janzen, the process of adapting to a new country as well as a new way of parenting is explained by dynamic processes affected by previous cultural parenting styles as well as host country context.

Ochocka and Janzen's theory highlights six important components within the framework that affect parenting and immigrant parents' transitions: *cultural parenting orientation*, *parenting styles*, *host country context*, *modifications of orientation and styles*, *parenting contribution*, and *parenting support*. The *cultural parenting orientation* is centered on the cultural beliefs and family values that parents have as well as the expectations they have of their children which are shaped by their religion and culture. The second component, *parenting styles*, describes how parents interact with their children in relation to their cultural parenting orientation. In the next component, *host country context*, parents start to explore the similarities and differences between their cultural parenting orientation and the parenting norms of their host country. The fourth component addressed in this theory is the *modifications of orientations*, which describes how parents adjust and modify their parenting to the new country. The fifth component, *parenting contribution*, consists of the process of making adjustments to the host country. Then,

lastly, the *parenting support component* consists of the support that parents need in order to adjust to the new country.

Parenting support is fundamental in helping to facilitate the process of integration between immigrants and local populations. Although there is a wide array of evidenced-based parenting programs, most of them are not culturally sensitive to the particular needs of recently resettled refugee populations such as the Somali, Congolese, and Bhutanese. To be able to provide adequate parenting supports for these newly resettled refugee parents, it is imperative to explore how their experiences of being a parent in the host country affects their parenting, and the resources necessary to help promote healthy parenting. Since the literature on the specific needs of recently resettled refugee parents within the U.S. is limited, a deeper understanding of the subject is needed in order to provide appropriate insight for the development of culturally sensitive parenting programs.

Methodology

This research project was undertaken jointly between service providers and local academic researchers. A lead service provider was the originator of the research objectives, and all aspects of the research process were conducted in coordination with each other. The study employed a qualitative approach using focus group discussions.

Participants and recruitment strategy

Purposive sampling of Congolese, Somali and Bhutani parents within the local community was employed. The inclusion criteria for this study were recently resettled refugees (within the last 10 years) from Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, or Bhutan above the age of 17 who had at least one child. Contact was made through the local lead service association and interested parties were invited to participate. The lead service organization agreed to assemble participants, provide focus group locations and food, facilitate interpretation and translation, gather demographic data (such as age, gender, language group or country of origin), and, in effect, served as the conduit between research leaders and the refugee community. Outreach was strategically engaged to help ensure balanced recruitment, specifically in regard to gender. The study included three focus groups, distinct to each country of origin, totaling in 24 participants. The focus groups ranged in size from approximately 7 to 10, and were diverse in regard to age and gender. Focus group composition is described in greater detail in Table A1 (see Appendix A). Research leaders interviewed/moderated participants in each group, while a community leader conduit observed interactions. The focus group discussions ranged from 45 minutes to approximately 2 hours.

Consent and data collection

The consent forms were translated according to each language group by professional translators from the local lead service agency. These translators received Multicultural Association of Medical Interpreters (MAMI) training and assisted with interpretation of the consent form for each participant, answering any questions the participant had, and inviting the participants to sign the consent form before the study commenced. Upon consent, participants in this study completed a brief demographic survey prior to meeting in a focus group. Demographic information was collected to delineate age, gender, language group and/or country of origin, in order to ensure that diverse perspectives were assessed (e.g., young, old, female, male).

Pre-designed, open-ended thematic discussion prompts (see Appendix B) were constructed to facilitate the focus groups in order to encourage free form discussions. Each focus group session was tape recorded using a digital recording device for further transcription. Professional translators were involved in the facilitation of the focus group sessions. These native translators attended to the dynamics of interactions (both verbal and physical) between participants during the interview sessions in order to encourage open discussion and facilitate topics that participants may have found difficult or embarrassing. Moreover, focus groups were made up of separate, specific ethnic groups in hopes of encouraging/facilitating more open communication. The service agency and the researchers believed that subjects would feel less self-conscious and better able to express themselves if they shared a common culture and language.

Data analysis

Data analysis was proceeded in three steps derived from Grounded Theory (Strauss, 1987) and Content Analysis (Creswell, 2009). First, transcripts were analyzed inductively using “open coding”, an approach that develops patterns and themes within the data related to the central research question. Then, the categories were established and codes were assigned, which were supported with transcript data in the form of quotes designated by two coders. A draft coding scheme was discussed and developed by the entire research team and then reapplied to the data. The research team discussed issues of reflexivity in line with Maxwell’s model qualitative research design (Maxwell, 2005); attention was paid to helping to minimize the researchers’ prior biases associated with their experiences, areas of interest, beliefs and expectations. To help address issues of subjectivity, assumptions and biases, two independent coders worked on transcripts and compared their codes to reach consistency. Lastly, axial coding was implemented to examine relationships within and between categories to draw conclusions demonstrated

by the data. Data analysis and management was done using NVivo qualitative analysis software (QSR International, 2015).

Results

Participants reported on the multiple challenges they face as parents within the U.S. and the necessary resources for improved parenting. The challenges of parenting within the new country consisted of *limited financial and cultural resources*, *cultural dissonance*, and *shifts in power dynamics/helplessness in parenting*. Meanwhile, the resources for improved parenting included *better communication*, and *respect*, as well as *informational and educational resources*.

Challenges

Limited financial and cultural resources

Participants described their difficulty in developing community resources for their ethnic groups. During focus groups, all ethnic groups addressed their challenges in obtaining secure and adequately compensating occupations and vocational training in order to provide for their families and communities. As one male Somali parent described it, “You can’t even buy a little thing, clothes for your kids and yourself ... or save a little bit of money for later on, like if you die you can leave this amount of money for your kids.” All three ethnic groups expressed their desires to establish cultural community groups in order to contribute to their local community and beyond; however, due to the lack of social and financial resources, this was very challenging. As one Bhutanese father had described it,

...the community center was trying to give vocational training ... but teachers are all volunteers. They are trying but, due to the shortage of the fund[s], they were not able to learn more. If the community had the fund[ing] and the resources, and continued to be giving this kind of training to us, this could help us to potentially work outside of the market.

Many of the subjects felt as though their vocational opportunities were limited to specific stereotypical low-end jobs, such as farming and house-keeping, which they considered as their “market”.

In addition to financial resources, participants from all three focus groups described their frustration with their limited cultural resources and competency within their children’s school settings. Many of the refugees felt as though they lacked the adequate cultural resources to navigate the school system. Many relied on their children or other formerly resettled refugee parents as sources of information. Oftentimes the information they received was inaccurate or misleading. For example, parents complained that their

children tend to lie about their school performance and adjustment. As one Somali mother elaborated,

...children go to school and skip a class and their parents don't know. They simply think their child went to school but later when they get a call from the school district it is in English. They receive a call, the message is still not clear to them. The child is smart enough to deliver that message inaccurately.

Moreover, many parents report unrealistic fears of their children being separated from them or taken away by Child Protective Services (CPS), due to their lack of cultural knowledge about appropriate disciplinary actions. Much of these fears stemmed from other parents' stories as well as their children's threats to report them to school personnel. As described by one Somali mother,

Like if you try to discipline your children.... he goes ahead and tells his teacher and the teacher will report it to CPS and the CPS will come and they will be like you can't take care of your kids, we will take them away...

In addition to their reported sense of limited adequate cultural understanding of how to navigate the school system, Somali parents in particular complained about the school's lack of cultural competency and respect for their religion. Many felt as though their religious background, values, and boundaries were not respected within the school system, despite the fact that the schools tried to publicize that they embrace diversity. As one Somali mother described her frustration,

The school system does not respect the religion. The religion barrier, on the paper they say we respect every religion and all that, but physically when teachers are teaching the kids she is [*sic*] not respecting the religion; they don't see what is allowable in our religion and what is acceptable or a topic to talk about; how to talk about the topic. She does[*sic*] not look at the kid's religion and they do not try to defend it and they just cut them off from their religion and their relationship between their kid.

Somali parents complained that teachers taught all the children in the school the same, as though their children were from the same cultural background as the other American children. Parents wished that the school teachers could take the time to learn a little more about their families' cultural background and become more culturally competent in their interactions with refugee children.

Cultural dissonance

Due to the lack of cultural competency of the school system as well as the influence that the mainstream school culture has on their children's development, many of the parents faced cultural dissonance – a clash between cultural values – during their parenting transition. Oftentimes parents

reported that teachers would teach their children concepts in school that are in conflict with their own cultural morals. As one Somali father explained it, “The problem here is that the kids, when they come here they are told things in school, that would bring problems between the parent and the child.” Most of the dissonance stems from the culturally different perspectives of children’s rights and acceptable parental disciplinary actions, in addition to the lack of communication between teachers and parents. Many of the parents highlighted their struggle with the newly found freedom of their children. As one Congolese father elaborated,

Here it is different, children can do whatever he [sic] wants. For us it is shameful to see children insult the parents, but here they do... They do every single day and nobody can discipline them.... Instead of communicating with the parents and asking them what they did wrong, teachers just talk to children and then she [sic] goes and reports it to CPS.

Many of these parents inevitably end up feeling lost in how to appropriately discipline their children.

Shifts in power dynamics/helplessness in parenting

Cultural dissonance, along with the dynamic shifts that take place during resettlement, put parents at risk for feeling helpless in parenting. One of the major challenges that parents faced upon resettlement were the shifts in parent-child power dynamics. Upon resettlement, children typically tend to adapt to the culture, language, and system more rapidly, inevitably placing the children in positions of power within the family system. Often children manipulate and misuse this power in order to maintain their status, such as threatening to report parents to CPS. These threats ultimately lead parents to feel powerless in parenting. As one Somali father explains,

Whenever the child does something wrong at school, they report it to us, and what do they want us to do with it? If you stop me from disciplining my child in the beginning, then whenever he does something wrong at school you are reporting it to me. Then, if I discipline him again, then he is going to report it to you, and then it is back and forth.

Without accurate knowledge of the effective and appropriate disciplinary strategies, many parents resorted to laissez-faire parenting styles. Such approaches placed children at risk for negative environmental influences. As one Somali mother further articulated, “And one main problem I have seen myself, the kids are going into drugs, porn, and that kind of stuff; they are seeing that because it is everywhere.”

In addition to shifts in power dynamics between children and parents, the Congolese population in particular reported on shifts in gender norms. As articulated by one Congolese father, “when you come to America, three have power. You mess with those three (women, children, and dogs), you are in