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Experiences of Parenting among Burmese Refugee Mothers in a Facilitated Playgroup

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Introduction



Previous research has found:

- Parenting in an unfamiliar culture can be one of the more significant challenges experienced by refugee families (Lewig, Arney, & Salveron, 2010; Renzaho, & Vignjevic, 2011)
- Parenting Orientations are significantly challenged (Tingvold et al., 2012)
 - Parenting values, beliefs, goals can represent a significant source of conflict for refugee parents
 - Value discrepancy found to be related to intergenerational conflict between parent and child
- Parenting Practices are significantly challenged (Lewig et al. 2010)
 - Differences between collectivist and individualist approaches to parenting
 - Lack of social support
 - Differences in discipline approaches between home and host country
- Role of facilitated playgroup in providing support for refugee mothers (Dolan, & Sherlock 2010; Jackson, 2006)
 - Facilitated playgroup recently found to promote wellbeing and support for refugee families
 - However, lack of research specifically examining how facilitated playgroup supports refugee mothers

Introduction



Common Gaps:

- Lack of research exploring the experiences of refugee parenting from specific cultural groups, such as Burma (controversially known as Myanmar)
- Limited qualitative inquiry
- Limited research exploring the role of facilitated playgroup in establishing support for refugee families, specifically in the context of parenting

Therefore the primary aim of my study was: To qualitatively explore experiences of parenting amongst Burmese refugee mothers in a facilitated playgroup context

Research Design



Methodology....

A social constructionist epistemology will be used, which places emphasis on culture and context (Liamputtong, 2009). Within this, an interpretive phenomenological approach was adopted, which importantly focus on how respondents interpret and attribute meaning to their everyday experiences of parenting.

Participants...

The present study adopted a purposive sampling strategy involving:

- 9 Burmese refugee mothers attending a facilitated playgroup
- 2 Playgroup Staff
- 1 external stakeholder

Research Design



Procedures....

Focus groups and semi-structured interviews were conducted on Burmese refugee women, and playgroup staff currently involved in the It Takes a Village Program managed by Save the Children Organisation.

Participants were asked a range of questions regarding their experiences of parenting in a new cultural context.

In addition, participants were asked to describe their experiences of parenting, and role facilitated playgroup had in assisting refugee mothers with parenting in Western Australia

Interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed Verbatim

Analysis....

Transcriptions were analysed using Thematic Content Analysis, whereby common themes regarding experiences of parenting were extracted.

Findings



Themes relating to parenting orientations were:

- **Interdependent Childrearing Goals**
 - Sub themes: Family obligation expectations
 - Focus on children becoming well adjusted members of social group
 - Respect for Elders and Authority figures
- **Value of Family**

Themes relating to parenting practices were:

- **Collective childrearing**
 - Subthemes: Disrupted kinship system
 - Isolation and loneliness
- **Parenting in transition**
 - approaches to discipline
- **Intergenerational tensions**
 - Growing independence of child
 - Parent/child communication challenges

Themes relating to the role of Facilitated Playgroup were:

- **Benefits to Mothers**
 - Sub themes: Enhancement of parenting skills
 - Opportunities for social networking
 - wellbeing
 - Learning opportunities

Findings (Parenting Orientations)



Interdependent Childrearing Goals

When discussing parenting orientations, most Burmese refugee mothers discussed childrearing goals relating to interdependence whereby appropriate social behavior, familial obligations and respect for elders were endorsed.

For example, one mother said:

I always tell my children to talk respectfully to older people. I say if you respect your elders and are caring to them, they will always help you in return

Value of Family

In addition, all respondents spoke about the role and important value of family in the context of parenting

One mother said:

My children are told that if the family is healthy (both mentally and physically), then you do not need to be afraid

Findings (Parenting Practices)



Collective Childrearing

A common theme was the differences in parenting practices noted between home and host country, particularly in the context of collective childrearing. Mothers found parenting particularly difficult in the absence of their extended kinship system, reporting feelings of loneliness and isolation.

One mother disclosed:

At home, I have in-laws and family that help me with parenting, but here I have no one, and this is very hard. I find parenting hard because I have no help from family, and I also feel lonely because I miss my family

Parenting in Transition

In addition, approaches to discipline and discrepancies between home and host country were also commonly discussed by mothers. In particular, mothers found controlling their children particularly difficult in a country that doesn't endorse power assertion or physical punishment as a means of behavioral management.

For example:

In Australia I am not allowed to smack and sometimes the children will talk back, and I don't feel like I have any control over the children. I cannot properly punish my children here, and so I cannot control my children.

Intergenerational Tensions

Finally, mothers spoke about the difficulties associated with the growing independence and rapid language acquisition of their older children, and the impact this has had on their intergenerational relations.

Findings (Role of Playgroup)



Benefits to Mothers

Most Burmese mothers spoke about how playgroup has assisted them with parenting skills and importantly establishing social supports. Mothers said that they enjoyed coming to playgroup because of the support and friendships they were able to build, and available learning opportunities .

For example, one mother said:

In Australia I have my family here, I have my mum, my cousin here and family, and playgroup is my second family

Conclusions



Overall the research was successful, in particular for its contributions toward:

- Further understanding the experiences of parenting amongst Burmese refugee mothers (not black or white , but based on ongoing negotiations)
- Further understanding the role of facilitated playgroup in establishing supports for refugee mothers in Western Australia
- Giving voice to some of WA's refugee families and unique experiences of parenting

Possible limitations include:

Although the interpreters were asked to relay responses verbatim, there is no way of knowing whether exact responses from the mothers were passed on

Future research should be aimed at exploring experiences of parenting amongst different ethnic groups to better understand their unique experiences. Furthermore, additional research involving both mothers and fathers would be of use to highlight the different experiences of refugee parenting in the context of gender.

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