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CHILD UPBRINGING CHALLENGES AMONG IMMIGRANT FAMILIES IN FINLAND

Post Integration Perspective

ABSTRACT

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This paper provides an overview on the challenges in child upbringing faced by immigrant families in Finland. The paper outlines the difficulties faced by the parents in understanding the difference in the parenting styles they are familiar with and the Finnish one. In our paper we are discussing the general idea of parenting, culture difference, conflicts, power struggle and parenting models. It is a research-based study, and therefore the results are based on the participants in the interview. Results were extracted from analysed interviews conducted with professional and clients who are users of the child protection offices. Thus, this paper is not meant to discuss the child protection processes nor to discuss the child protection policies.

This study was indirectly able to give a better understanding for parents with immigrant background on the role of child protection office. At the same time, it provided a different angle and point of view for the professionals to help them understand the client's perspective of child protection social welfare services in Finland.

Keywords: Immigrant families, Parenting, child protection, acculturation conflict, adaptation, Finnish and Immigrant culture.

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1 INTRODUCTION

In the year 2015, more than 32,000 asylum seekers and immigrants arrived in Finland. The number was ten times more than the earlier arrivals (Ministry of Interior, 2020). Finland, as with all other European Union (EU) countries, based on its membership of the EU Convention of Human Rights, has an obligation to receive and safeguard immigrants from any place where these people have suffered inhumane acts and had to flee for the sake of their life.

In order to make sure that the entire process went well, Finland had to overhaul its own immigration legislations hence the Act on Treatment of Foreign Aliens and on Detention Units. This Act would give provisions on Finland's readiness for reception and integration of immigrants into the Finnish society (ibid). With the uprooting of people from their own known backgrounds due to different life situations (like war, employment, marriage, natural tragedies) to new countries, it affects their whole being including the way how family functions. Similarly, when immigrant families arrive in Finland, the way parenting roles are affected by the way of life in Finland, is very drastic. This study is specifically aimed at exploring how the "roles of parenting have been affected" and influenced the family politics after the immigrant families arrived and settled in their new home country, Finland.

In Finland human and fundamental rights are regarded core values of humanity and are well protected by the Finnish legislation. They are therefore built into the educational curriculum which is then rolled out in compulsory subjects like civic education, history and religious studies. From a very tender age, children are taught in school about human rights ranging from freedom of speech, equality, respect, discrimination so that they grow up to become active and responsible adults in society.

Furthermore, the rights are also part of the disciplined and the social and caring industry (Human rights Centre, 2021). Therefore, children become vocal and

express their displeasure when they feel their parents infringe their rights with any disciplinary action at an early stage in their life. This highlights especially in cases of spanking or when the parent is very harsh in their action against their children. Consequently, conflicts of acculturation arise between parents and children. These issues sometimes get out of control and child welfare services are called in to assist and speak on behalf of the child (Lastensuojelu, 2021).

2 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

2.1 Background

The idea of doing a research-based study on "being a parent and challenges that come with parenting as an immigrant in Finland" started when we were doing the orientation of the Child welfare and family work course in 2019. The teacher who was leading the introduction of the course to students shared with the class that she was engaged by Finnish Immigration Service to facilitate immigrants who had just arrived in Finland through the integration processes and expectations into the society in orientation sessions. As stated earlier on, after arrival immigrant families and immigrant in general go through an integration program that orients them about the culture of the country, learning the language and plan the continuity of their education or their working life development in their new host country.

During the orientation sessions that are part of the integration process in their new country, a sentence mentioned in the session got one parent's attention immediately. It was mentioned in the session that in Finland, there is no corporal punishment" (unknown immigrant man). This is due to different countries with different cultural backgrounds where "spanking or slapping of the child is a way of instilling values and morals" (Felio Degni et al, 2006). The ringing bell to this "unknown man" is assumingly wondering how raising children can be done with corporal punishment banned (InfoFinland, 2019). The unidentified migrant man in the integration orientation is just one of many immigrant parents present in the orientation starting to question this reality of raising children (in Finland) in line with their cultural values and at the same time upholding the Finnish law.

2.2 Research Questions

Having highlighted the background, we wish to express that the theme of the study is relevant and at the same time extremely sensitive. The sensitivity un-

derlined here in our study refers to and how immigrants have questioned the purpose of child welfare services and interference in the way immigrants raise their children in Finland. This results in them doubting their parenting styles. This brings then fear that they are being closely monitored on their parenting styles in the new country. Even so, we researched the theme to bring up possible new insights on post integration challenges of immigrant parents on raising their children and services to support immigrant families settle in smoothly. The study's intended results and findings will be shared with the life partner to bring new developments if necessary. The *research question is*;

What are the challenges in child upbringing faced by immigrant families in Finland? Post integration Perspective. (a) What are the reasons that may have influenced these challenges with the immigrant families? (b) What are the support systems in place to help immigrants on? (c) To give recommendations to professionals and participants and new insights on findings from the study if any. The "Post Integration Perspective" in our study focuses on a time after immigrants settled into society in the new home country. This is after they were given asylum and now live side by side with natives. The prefix "*post*" does not signify an end to migration but describes social negotiation processes that occur in the phase *after migration* has occurred (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2015).

2.3 Aim

As the integration program is mentioned in the background of the study (paragraph 2.1). This paper is not a study of the immigration and integration policy of Finland. It highlights some essential elements that may not have been addressed adequately in the integration process. Consequently, creating confusion and uncertainty of some sort especially relating to upbringing of children against the new culture in their new host country Finland. Additionally, these factors bring challenges to many immigrants but for relevance and clarity, the study focused more on some immigrants from some countries in Africa (e.g.,

Somalia, Nigeria) and the Near or Middle East (Iraq & Iran, Afghanistan). This was done to narrow down the scope of the study.

The study also carried out interview on professionals who are working with this target on daily basis. This means they are directly involved with service users like in child welfare and child protection units. The purpose is to have more insights on what the professionals have learnt on the inter-relations between children and parents.

2.4 Context for Thesis

Like many other countries Finland has its own history language, culture, customs, religious and belief systems, and own political systems. When receiving immigrants, they also come with own identity from their countries which defines who they are. On entering Finland, all immigrants are put through a process to integrate them to their new host country which often arise acculturation conflicts between the immigrant parents and their children during parenting (Kiang et.al, 2017).

During the integration time, parents are given all sort of community information sessions. With all the information that they receive, parents find themselves in inconvenient situations or confused on how to raise their children. This is a gap that has developed which leaves parents powerless (ibid, 2017). Children are free and parents still want to raise their children the way they want as par their customs from back where they are from (countries of origin) but there is limitation now in the host country.

Therefore, these immigrant families find themselves entangled with child protection policies in Finland and the way they wish to bring up their children because they are not allowed to use any corporal punishment to their children as it is banned totally as opposed to their customs (Ellonen et.al, 2007).

Consequently, immigrants are then faced with other issues in all sections of the new life after their integration period is over (Berhanu 2017 and Steward et.al, 2008). Ebbeck and Dela Cerma (2007) do confirm that in the adaptation and integration processes of immigrants to a new country which becomes their host country, their value systems are directly challenged. These are the questions the study in intending to investigate.

2.5 Worklife Partner

Our working life partner, Helsinki Diakoniaslaitos Foundation and specifically Sylvesteri Child and Family Unit at Pitäjänmäki, has been in operation for over 20 years. The services are always extended to and for the whole family. This includes comprehensive assessment, intensive rehabilitation, and treatment (so basically functioning as child protection unit). The plans of action for treatment are drawn after careful assessment of service users. Multidisciplinary teams consisting of social workers, therapists, psychologists and psychiatrists then work hand in hand with service users following special needs. This flexible approach aims to have a fundamental change on the situations of children and family, like developing social skills, strengthening functional capacity in all sectors, and supporting education of children and young people who are faced with different challenges (Diaconess Foundation, 2021).

2.6 Participants in the Research

Immigrants are a large target group in Finland and it was very general for our research. We wanted to filter and minimize the target group in order to get a measurable result and that our research subject is equally relative to all the participants.

For these reasons, the target group was selected based on several criteria like country of origin, period of staying in Finland and age. The target group are people moved to Finland from Iraq, Somalia, Syria, Kenya and Morocco. Their

ages vary from between 27-45 years of age. They have resided in the host country Finland for a maximum of five years. Immigrants have been moving to Finland for a long time. In order to narrow down the target group, we have chosen the maximum period of being in Finland. Today some of these participants have lived in Finland for 6 years. The participants are also parents who have experienced and have been directly or indirectly service users of child welfare and protection services.

2.7 Legislation

The legislation relevant to immigration and promoting integration is the *Act on the Integration of Immigrants and Reception of Asylum Seekers (493/1999; and its amendments up to 324/2009 included)* and the work to develop this legislation are based on objectives set by the Finnish government and the European Union legislation and international conventions binding on Finland, including the European Convention on Human Rights, UN Convention against Torture, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (Integration, 2021).

It is important to note that then all immigrants, who will be residents in the different municipalities, are entitled to services. To all these services should be legislations that apply to those services like early childhood education and care, basic education, social welfare, healthcare and housing.

In relation to this study, both the parents who have a responsibility of raising their children and the children living under care of parents, fall under the Ministry of Social and Health's child and family department. The same is responsible for Family policy which was drawn up to make sure children have safe environments to grow and parents have the materials and psychological means to their children (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health Care, 2013).

3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND CONCEPTS

3.1 Literature Review

The subject being tackled here is parenting in relation to child upbringing. For the students to further understand, it is good to examine the main concepts to get a framework of the study. This is an integral part in a research process to gain understanding on what is and is not known. The review is a scholarly examination and research-based information and not assumptions previously done on the related subject of study (Dawidowiz, P. 2010, p.5).

According to Kiang, Glatz, & Buchanan, 2017, parenting among families from immigrant backgrounds is uniquely challenging and rewarding (Garcia Coll & Pachter, 2002). Above and beyond normative parenting demands, challenges for parents with a history of immigrant experiences include pressure to adapt to the mainstream environment while considering what heritage identity and values to retain and pass down to their children (Kiang, Glatz, & Buchanan, 2017).

Degni, F (et.al) in their report commented like this on parenting of immigrants (Somalis) who moved to Finland;

Somalis were asked to comment upon parenting experiences in Finland. They told us that the changes in parental practices were heavy and stressful. The women explained that childcare had become an individual matter and that they had to manage by themselves; a contrast to Somalia where they had help from female relatives and extended family members (Degni, F. ed.al, 2006 p.4–5)

3.2 Key Concepts

In this study, we wish to have a closer look on the following terms in order to have more focused and well-rounded approach to the subject. These include

immigrant families, parenting, both Finnish culture and parenting cultures in other countries, acculturation conflicts and adaptation and will be defined below.

3.2.1 Immigrant Families

The Immigrant family is defined as persons married to a migrant or a national, or having with them a relationship that, according to applicable law, produces effects equivalent to marriage, as well as their dependent children or other dependent persons who are recognized as members of the family by applicable legislation or applicable bilateral or multilateral agreements between the States concerned, including when they are not nationals of the State (IOM, 2021).

3.2.2 Parenting

Ogbu (1981) calls attention to cultural differences in parenting by defining *child-rearing* as “the process by which parents transmit and children acquire the prior existing competencies required by their social, economic, political, and other future adult cultural tasks” (p. 418). Combs-Orme, Wilson, Cain, Page, and Kirby (2003) emphasized *context-based parenting*: parenting that, given a specific child’s age, developmental needs, special circumstances, culture, and immediate environment, is optimal for promoting healthy growth and development (Cain, Daphne S & Comes-Orme, T (2013).

Parenting is an issue that has been viewed with so many different angles by so many different studies and parenting styles are affected by context. Also, people often refer and link parenting and the way it is done to their cultural background and to the way they have been brought up by their parents. Their parents are their role model, they see themselves bringing up their kids the way they were brought up. Therefore, when people migrate or emigrate and settle in a new country, they question the whole parenting role that they knew or experienced. Especially if in some countries like Finland child protection and social welfare services have so much influence and power on how things are done.

This is especially coming to parenting and when children are at a risk in the situation.

There have been a lot of studies made about parenting and about its different models. We will discuss briefly the four most known types of parenting and their associated outcome on the child wellbeing.

Authoritative type: this type of parenting is warm and responsive. The parents have put clear rules for the child and set high expectations. Parents are at the same time supportive and value the independence of the child. This type of parenting is associated with different outcomes. It increases the academic performance, increase the self-esteem and develop the child social skills. Decrease chance of having mental illnesses.

Authoritarian type: this type of parenting unresponsive. The parents have put strict rules and they have high expectation and expect blind obedience from the child. This type of parenting is associated with negative outcomes. The child will have lower self-esteem, poorer social skills and possibility of developing mental illness. This reflects a lower academic performance and risk of drug or alcohol abuse.

Permissive type: This type is a warm and responsive types but with few or no rules put for the child. The parent is easy-going and merciful which reflect a difficulty on putting boundaries. This type of parenting is associated with impulsive behaviour, poorer social skills and problematic relationships.

Neglectful type: This type is cold and unresponsive. The parents have no rules for the child, and they are uninvolved and not concerned about the child. This is the most critical type as the associated outcome of this parenting type are criminal behaviour, drug or alcohol abuse and suicide.

It is important to mention that all four of the parenting types can be found all around the world. We cannot generalise the parenting type based on the cultural background of the people or the country where they are born or coming from.

3.2.3 Finnish Culture

Finnish people are most characterized by their love and close relationship to nature. It has traditionally been the source of livelihood but most importantly is it the place where we retreat to from the hassle and bustle of the modern world. Nature makes them happy; they are one of the happiest nations in the world. Sauna is also another unique feature of Finnish culture. Despite of the cool climate, Finnish people are warm, open and honest – even though they might tell you the exact opposite. Dry humour is in their nature (Visit Finland, 2021). Finns have an unshakeable belief in the social welfare system. Finnish culture, distinguished by a powerful belief in the ideal of the flexible, clever, ingenious individual who can find a way through difficult circumstances. This concept is known as *sisu*, which refers to courage, stamina and perseverance (Going Global, 2021).

Now in relation to our subject, the Finnish culture on raising children allows for independence at an early age. Children can differ on opinion with their parents, and it is very normal. Parents are just there as guardians for the children's well-being and to support in a balanced development. In Finland, punishing children physically (corporal punishment) is against the law. For example, children must not be hit or pulled by the hair.(Infofinland 2021).

Support for parenting in Finland starts before the child is born. Parents are supported by the child health centre (neuvola) during the whole pregnancy. The Mother is and monitored closely and both parents are offered support and advice when needed. This follow up continues after the child is born. The development stages of the child are monitored by the same centre and the parents are offered support and advice. Many different types of support are offered for families like home service could be provided. This is a practical help involving household work or childcare, so that the family's everyday life and bringing up children run more smoothly.

Finnish parents have different kind of flexibilities to be a full-time parent. Mothers have 105 days maternity leave. Fathers have 54 days paternity leave. Parents also have a 158 days parent leave that could be expanded by any of the parents. In addition, a parent can take care of the child till the child turns 3 years old or take a partial childcare leave that reflects more family time and less work time. This shows that, it is very important for the parent to be available in the children daily life like day care, school and hobbies. It gives a feeling for the child that he is supported by the parents.

3.2.4 Parenting culture in other countries

The immigrant culture theme indicates that immigrants from different countries and cultures of origin experienced commonalities in their journeys of immigration (American Psychological Association, 2021). Although people with immigrant background face similar challenges in terms of integration, all have still their own cultures which they were brought up with in their own respective native countries and within their families. It can also be affirmed that the way they think and do things, has been influenced by culture they were brought up in.

The Somali culture is influenced a lot by their religion, Islam. The large families, the man being the head of the family are some examples that can be pointed out. From other African cultures, have similar traits and hold on to their own cultures too. The family politics and everything around upbringing of children gets a lot of shape from a patriarchal setting. The power and decision-making are mostly done by men. Women are more linked to childbearing and home keeping (Felio Degni et.al 2006, p.16). Children, with immigrant background have an obligation to respect their parents and with helping in the family from a tender age especially with chores. Boys were expected to help their fathers in the farm and girls are expected to help their mothers (*ibid*).

In the middle eastern countries, parenting had a different view. Mostly the mother is the caretaker of the child as the father's role is to work and bring food

to the table. For example, in Africa, only Burkina Faso, Chad, Egypt, Guinea and Morocco offer a type of long-term parental leave, all unpaid.

In the Middle East, Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Kuwait offer unpaid parental leave – only for mothers. (International labour organization, 2014). Therefore, we noticed that the parents in these countries are not offered the chances to be a full-time parent as they have other responsibility to take care of.

3.2.5 Acculturation Conflicts

Acculturation broadly refers to the social change that occurs when two or more cultural groups come into contact, with cultural conflict as one predictable outcome of such change (Trimble, 2003). Acculturation processes can introduce diverse parenting challenges. (Kiang, Glatz, & Buchanan, 2017. p, 3). When coming to a new country, immigrant parents are met with new ways of parenting than they were used to prior to coming to Finland. Earlier on, it was stated that children are allowed to differ on opinion with their parents, but this has already been a challenge for many immigrant parents. A very strict family behaviour can start off a conflict between parents and their children (Lastensuojelu, 2021). On this note, Mieli 2021, states that attitudes towards the new host country become realistic everywhere with time: and immigrants see problems of life everywhere.

4 METHODOLOGY

Research methods are specific procedures for collecting and analysing data (Scribbr, 2021). Qualitative research seeks to answer questions through systematic procedures and by collecting evidence through data collection. Additionally, qualitative research seeks to understand given problems through the eyes of the local population it involves. Furthermore, obtaining culturally specific information like values, opinions, behaviours and social context of particular populations (Family Health International, 2005). Elements like culture, values, personal opinions all come up in research that is the reason we think qualitative research fits best to our research design

4.1 Qualitative Approach

In this research we are using the *Qualitative method* for our data collection because it fits well to this study. The qualitative method uses open ended questions, inductive style of interviewing to capture different actors. In this study we carried out interviews with the child welfare of HDL Sylvesteri (professionals) and random immigrant families who had some connection or receiving services from child welfare and protection. This tends to seek for meaning of phenomena to participants in context. A basic assumption of this approach is that what is real is socially constructed. It means how people interpret phenomena which differs from one to the next (Riger and Sigurvinsdottir, 2016, p. 33). This approach would help identify similar ideas that comes throughout the interviews and in connection with our subject of challenges and child welfare services rendered (*ibid*).

In order to get a better understanding of the subject in its totality, it is always good to engage relevant stakeholders who deal directly with such issues on daily basis. The outer world is brought into understanding matter due to a fruitful working collaboration between academic practice and social work field practice. An author notes that "working together in partnerships is fundamental to the

practice of social work. Academic practice partnerships create a culture of mutual engagement that links academic practice with that of social work practice" (Joubert, L., & Hocking, A. (2015). p. 352.)

4.2 Description of research methods and data acquisition

Our data acquisition process started when one of the researchers was doing his internship with the Intensive Care and Family Unit of HDL Sylvesteri in Helsinki. Families are provided with supporting services to help with challenges of child upbringing with their children. The study carried out interviews and listened to 3 professionals working with the above target group on daily basis in HDL Sylvesteri Helsinki. The purpose was to have more insights on what the workers have learnt on the challenges between immigrant families in their post integration in Finland.

Initially, we had wished to carry out interviews with the services users (both parents and children) of the Family Intensive Care Unit but due to the ethical reasons, our application was unsuccessful. We were asked by the Ethical Committee of HDL to make a new application which was inclusive but due to time factor and other elements, we decided not to make a new application. We needed to be flexible the good which is an advantage with qualitative research methods. We decided to do a *purposive sampling*, a deliberate selection of participants who were knowledgeable about the topic or had experience as per the objective of the study (Family Health International, 2005). In our case we had professionals from HDL Sylvesteri and random participants (immigrant parents) who have current and or previous connections with child welfare services.

From the professionals' side, six (6) were approached and agreed to give an interview. Only three (3) eventually managed to do the interviews due to very tight schedules at work. The interview questions (APPENDIX 1&2) were sent beforehand to all participants who agreed to take part in the interview. The interviews were semi structured (pre-mediated open-ended question were used) and using MS Teams application.

All participants were also furnished with a summary plus the consent letter in accordance with the procedures specified for the study (Family Health International, 2005). This is a good exercise that would inform the participants of the study voluntary nature of the study but also that they understand the risks and benefits of participating. It is beneficial to state to participants that “the study can be a voice of the unrepresented and unhindered (Riger and Sigurvinsdottir, 2016, p. 35). The interviews lasted about 45 minutes and were recorded through zoom and Teams portal to be rechecked in the analyzing process.

On the other hand, around 20 interview requests were sent to the participants, and we got 6 confirmations. Four participants out of the six who confirmed the interviews cancelled and the reason was that they were afraid to discuss such topic. The reason that they gave was the fear of getting into trouble with authorities and to avoid starting any conflicts with the public offices.

The data gathering through the interviews and note taking was done over a period of two months starting in the spring of 2021. After which the analysis and writing of the findings will be written and submitted in the Autumn of 2021. When presenting our manuscript, we were asked to try and conduct more interviews with the service users or used to be service users to have a wider data.

Acquiring the data was not as easy as we thought. Covid-19 pandemic and the restrictions added many challenges in terms of meeting the clients. Specially that our target group (service users) had some difficulties with the technical aspects. In 2 out of 3 interviews we had to conduct a training session on how to use the meeting portal. The same was done by us through a WhatsApp video call where we showed the participants how to login to the meeting and how to activate the video and audio options. This reflected a delay in moving forward with the interviews.

Another type of challenge was faced with the work life partner. There have been a lot of requirements which meant changes also in our questionnaires. To get more participants to be interviewed, we suggested using the work life partner's

clients. That suggestion did not work since the clients were young people. Therefore, we focused on the initial target group in conducting the interviews.

4.3 Data analysis

We have focused in analysing the gathered data from our interviews using the Thematic analysis. We wanted to gather as much information as we can and analyse the relation of that information with our topic. We were able to record the interviews which helped us a lot in the transcription process. Then we will be able to compare the recorded interviews in different stages with the diaries taken during the interview and made transcript from each recorded interview. We had 6 transcripts meaning (3) from professionals and (3) from service users.

Stages in thematic analysis of the interviews (Riger & Sigurvindsdottir 2016, 34-35)

Stage 1: Immersing oneself in the data.

The interviews were transcribed on an individual level. We both had the opportunity to review the interviews and analyse the findings. After we got well familiar with the data on hand we met and compared the findings.

Stage 2: Generating initial codes.

After we compared the data. We identified a list point that help responding to specific questions. The coding happened manually or on the word files from the interviews. These codes covered all the potential themes relative to our case study.

Stage 3: Searching for themes

After the material got checked and the coding part is ready. We gathered all the information and brought them together. We identified the themes and sub-themes suitable for our research.

Stage 4: Reviewing themes

After we identified the main themes, we reviewed and refined. The themes not relevant to the topic were removed to maintain a logical and consistent material.

Stage 5: Defining and naming themes

Once the thematic map got ready, we double-checked the process for the theme, and we identified the main idea of each theme where our focus is centralised.

Stage 6: Producing the report

Once themes and their relation to the topic are identified, we wrote the report which presents the analysis. This involved including the data extracted from the interview as well as discussions made during the study.

5 RESEARCH ETHICS

5.1 Ethical considerations

This study is extremely sensitive as we are falling under the same category ourselves. But we decided to handle and to work on the whole study with the utmost professionalism and from social work point of view. It is extremely easy to look at the subject from the empathetic side and to take sides with participants in their own stories. But we maintained a neutral side to study the subject from legislation and the legal side and how it reflects on the participants themselves.

Furthermore, it is important that before the implementation of the plan, to make sure that the confidentiality and privacy of participants is complying with the latest EU GDPR. This will be done when the consent letters are handed out to participants. The letters of consent have been translated to the client's mother tongue to make sure that the participants in the interview are fully aware of their rights and know what the purpose of the interview is.

Additionally, participants will be assured that after the thesis, all data will be destroyed.

5.2 Agreement with working life partner and permits

Diakonia University of Social Sciences students have a collaboration for this study with Child Protection Unit of Helsinki Diakonisalaitos. We have therefore signed an agreement with the life partner.

5.3 Research ethics

The people and professionals who will be interviewed will be notified that participation to the study is voluntary. But they will be also made aware that using their voice, might give this study the right tools that the study intends to shed light on as stated earlier on in the aims section.

6 RESULTS

This chapter presents the results of the exploration we had into the subject *Challenges of child Upbringing of immigrant parents in Finland: Post Integration Perspective*. The information received are from the viewpoints of and context of the participants that we interviewed. Trying to find answers to the challenges, the participants gave responses to three questions that follow which were then followed by the report and discussion of results below: 1. What are the challenges in child upbringing faced by immigrant families in Finland? (Problems after integration process), 2. What are reasons that may have influenced these challenges with most immigrant families? 3. What are the support systems in place to support immigrants overcome these challenges?

These results are discussed and presented in three sections following the interviews. First the professional views on their experiences in the child protection services and working with immigrant service users. Secondly, the parents' views especially settling in after integration processes finished and how their experiences as parents in the new host country, Finland.

After the request from our supervisor to conduct more interviews. We were able to conduct a third interview with one participant. We managed to interview three professionals and three participants for our thesis. We have used a coding system to quote our professionals and participants in order to secure confidentiality as promised. Professionals were named for quoting purpose as Po1, Po2 and Po3 and participants were named as Pr1, Pr2 and Pr3.

In the reporting of the findings, we have tried to be as truthful to the viewpoints of respondents as not to tarnish an honest result. Both of us undertaking this study, we are having an immigrant background, so we have always reminded ourselves to be careful on biasedness. Peel 2020, points out that the participants and researcher defice what is known and considered to be true through meaning from individual experiences. However, it is the researcher who is in-

volved in the data collection and analysis that operates as the prime filter and interpreter.

Our thematic analysis process, about 6 themes came from the coding that we did and are as follows: uncertainty and fear, confused understanding and purpose of child welfare services, adaptation struggles, acculturation conflicts, lack of trust in authorities, and lastly power struggle in families.

6.1 Uncertainty and fear

After the information sessions are given to the parents, they were left in uncertainty and fear of how their life would look like? How will they be able to raise their kids? How they will be able to adapt to the upbringing guidelines? When will the authorities has the right to interfere? What happens when the interfere? Will they take my kids away? How I can be a good parent? Am I a good parent as per the Finnish standards? Questions that were left unanswered and kept the parents wondering what the real role of child protection is.

“The matter took an awfully long time to be solved as police were involved. My son was not able to see his kids for 1,5 years. The personnel in the child protection were worried that my son would be violent also with the kids. After a lengthy process he was able to meet his kids under the supervision of the child protection. I didn’t understand why they are prohibiting my son from seeing his kids. It took me a while to understand the child protection point of view in this matter. They were concerned about the child interest and wellbeing and that is why they took this decision. They wouldn’t put the children at risk,” said Pr2

“Multicultural families normally come with own challenges and social status. So, through therapy, traumas are handled. If children and their welfare is at risk, the child welfare services come in to protect the child through right channels come closer” said Po1.

“It is true that the threshold is bigger for immigrants’ and newcomers’ children are taken into open care outside the home than for locals, but all processes are done following steps carefully without breaking the law” said Po2.

6.2 Confused understanding of purpose of child services

Some of the parents did not know the purpose of child services as this was very new to them. This might have been in the information that was in the orientation sessions. They were even surprised that some external office can have a saying on their family matters and can eventually interfere when needed.

“I didn’t understand what child protection is since we don’t have it in Irak. Once they took my child from school without me knowing how the issue even got developed” said Pr1.

“I didn’t know that child protection is powerful in Finland” said Pr2.

“It wasn’t clear when child protection can interfere with family issues.” said Pr3.

Another reason why the parents could not understand the purpose of child protection. The information sessions were long and even with the presence of translator. It was a huge amount different nonrelated information shared at the same time which created a confusion and left them wondering what was all this information about and where it is used in practice?

“There was a lot of information about the strict laws, residence permit and importance of the renewal. Child protection services and rights” said Pr1.

“I wasn’t able to follow and fully understand the information shared there” said Pr2.

“What are the reasons for interference still unclear till the issue with their office occurred” said Pr3.

“In HDL child protection units are guided by the Child Act and Family Policy to carry out our work. But we try not to be authoritative. We use approaches that are not offensive. We also use measures like “kummityö” and other participatory approaches to help parents with their children for the sake of the child and betterment of their relationships” said Po3.

6.3 Adaptation Struggles

The families have gone through a lot before reaching Finland. There was war in their home countries. In most of the cases the father left the family for a while in order to secure a safe place for them through the asylum-seeking process. After a very long time of separation families have not adapted to the new norm in the new country. Existence of both parents and the reunion of the whole family could be an added challenge to adaptation into the new home country.

Adding to that the new habits and cultural changes that the child would face. The biggest challenge was the information shared in the school and how it was interpreted by the child.

“I haven’t been informed before they came to take my child. After my child was taken to a child house, they sent me a message to inform me. I could not understand at that point Finnish. I translated the message on google to understand that my child is with the child protection, and I am invited to a meeting the next day. They have informed me that my child has mistreated his teacher and she filed a report to the child protection since he was behaving in an aggressive way” said Pr1.

The parents struggle into adapting to the new way of dealing with the problems faced by their kids. Especially when the child opposes the parents and tells them that he will report them to the police.

“We come from a different cultural background. In Syyria family matters are handled between family members only. It was very confusing to see how the child protection interferes” said Pr2.

“All the necessary information might have been shared in the beginning, yet it is not clear what they got as it is not always spoken. But, in the beginning in drop-in centres, so much to receive bulk information of a new country to immigrants who had gone through a lot of traumatic situations and them finding themselves in a new country which too much according to my opinion. The information should be released in parts and different times to allow for better reception,” said Po2.

6.4 Acculturation Conflicts

The participant did understand the role played by the child protection when a child need helps or in a non-healthy environment. The necessity of reacting to the call and taking instant actions could have a positive impact on the children wellbeing.

“My child was taken to children’s home many times for bad behaviour. The case was handled by a full team of phycologist, social worker and child protection team. I thought that they are focusing on my child's actions and how to move forward. I was surprised by the importance and the amount of work this team is putting to solve my child’s problem. My understanding to what the child protection role was changed after this experience” said Pr1.

“Sometimes they have control on the kids. This is important for parents who have mental problems. Sometimes it gives power for children over parents. Sometimes it is positive approach and sometimes negative approach” said Pr3.

The professionals have realized that the parents are having a lot of confusion in separating their role as parents and understanding child protection and welfare services. The following quote is from the professional mentioning how one of his clients was describing his situation.

“I thought I am the parent, but it seems there are others who are co-parenting with me. I cannot stand that my children do not take my word, and now they are now talking so much back to me. It was not like that before we moved here. This is so frustrating, and it feels that I have no parenting authority over my own children anymore” said Po3.

“Child protection does not come in to replace parents but together with parents, come up with joint measures to help their children who have challenges with developmental challenges and interaction – so we protect the child’s interest” said Po1.

6.5 Lack of trust in authorities

When moving from their countries of origin, the immigrants already had gone through situations where they were left with no other way but loose trust in those with authority. One author notes that for refugees stress circumstances in their lives like traumas, negative long-term circumstances of their environments are some elements that can be blamed for their “no-trust” issues in an individual, group or institutions (NI ‘Raghallaigh, 2013 p.85). In the same way, immigrant parents do not know how to trust the word of authorities after the incidents that took place. They felt that there is a huge misunderstanding to what they have been informed and to what is happening in practice especially with child raising issues. One of the participants describing the problem she faced

“With one of my children, my child had a scar since his birth. I was asked to for a meeting from child protection, day care teacher, child information centre and social office. After that meeting I got shocked and still till this

moment affected by the way they asked me to join the meeting. I wasn't even informed what was the meeting about" said Pr3.

The main reason was that the communication between the day care and the parent was almost not existing due to language barriers. And due the participants cultural background the teacher reacted by informing the child protection.

"I felt that the issue was overreacted because of our background," said Pr3.

"It is true that service users struggle with what the mission of child welfare and services are and so we have a long way to fully understand it. It is our responsibility to inform about all processes of child protection. We also always involve the families so that our services are transparent. We already had a dialogue in HDL on strategies to lure service users, so we hope that we build trust and get have them more involved in all our processes" said Po1.

6.6 Power struggle in families

A power struggle between immigrant parents and their children plays out as soon as they settle into the new country of residence, Finland. It is self-evident from the interviews that many parents with an immigrant background, wish to raise their children with a sense of their cultural touch and identity. The parents find their roles and relationship with their children change and parenting ability is put under significant stress especially with parenting authority (Fleck and Fleck, 2013). There is a power struggle which parents seem not to tolerate as we see in the quote

Another type of power struggle is when the child and the parents interpret the information received from their own perspectives. Parents are having challenges in finding a way to deal with their children.

“It is difficult to address the kids in any subject when the child thinks that he / she are always right and that they are protected no matter what they do. I suggest that the info sessions should be given to the kids in order to empower the parents.” said Pr3.

“We have realised that it is difficult for parents to adjust so easily in the new setting and environment such that children learn the new language (Finnish) and settle in faster. They then become the translators for parents meaning a ‘switch of power’ from parent to child. This does not sit well for many immigrant parents when it happens.

7 DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

This chapter focuses is a summary on how the research questions was handled in relation to the aim, framework, and analysis of the study. It gives and outline of the main findings, limitations and lastly the recommendations.

The study explored *Challenges of child Upbringing of immigrant parents in Finland: Post Integration Perspective*. We interviewed 6 respondents (3) professionals from Child Protection and (3) random immigrant parents who had some experiences with child protection services. For us to get to address the subject of the thesis well, we used three questions to go more deeper into the challenges of child upbringing of immigrant parents in Finland, reasons for those challenges that immigrant parents face, and lastly the support systems that are in place for these parents.

7.1 Implications of results

The findings of the research found out that immigrants who have relocated to Finland, have been given a lot of information in the very beginning of their coming into Finland while some were still reception centres. The information is deemed important for their settlement in the new home country. Just as one professional said, when they were in the orientation sessions, these immigrants *“were still in a state of emotional storm*. The families (parents, children) were processing all the changes and experiences of having been uprooted from their home countries and getting to suddenly be in an unknown place with a totally new country and in a reception centre which is packed with immigrants. Imagine this state, and you are getting new information every day, it is not feasible”. On many occasions, they dispute strongly that it is the first time they come across such

Other issues that sprang up were the adaptation and acculturation issues. It was revealed that parents and children relationships encountered strained levels as they settle into the new society, new culture and life rolls out. Parents tend to adapt very slowly as compared to the children who get acculturated very

fast. As was stated earlier on, immigrant parents are very strict and when children learn that they can raise their voice of opinion, it moves the parents thus causing a power struggle.

Language has become a problem the study revealed especially for the parents at all levels. This becomes a stumbling block in the sense that when it comes to sharing feelings, emotions and challenges that parent go through daily, it becomes very difficult. Additionally, certain phenomena are also understood and interpreted differently so mental issues and how they could be handled may curb support.

When coming to the parenting itself, our study points out that the Western culture allows for independence of opinion of their children in a very tender age. This goes also to institutions in society like schools who have a permissive stance and allowing children to express their opinion even if it differs with that of their parents. This is as per the UN Childrens Rights Convention and the ratification of the same in almost all if not all Western countries including Finland.

Lastly, child welfare services and professionals and the whole purpose have been misunderstood from the very beginning. Finland is a welfare state and Finns have embraced the idea. In this system, the state has power and authority to interfere in all family matters irrespective of background. This is especially when it comes to a threat of the welfare and rights of children. Our study confirmed from the professional point of view that these services always try to use participatory and inclusive methods when dealing with service users. They go all out to carry out their mission as per the Family and Children policy and Child Welfare Act (STM, 2021).

Our studies have a correlation with OECD (2020) who hold the idea that immigration to a country with different parenting norms and the subsequent changes in family structures, dynamics and roles present significant challenges for families. Fleck & Fleck (2013) also confirms that there are disparities between immigrant parents and their children in the cultural and psychological changes that take place in the acculturation process. Therefore, support services from the

social welfare are important to harness the families and their challenges in the new context.

7.2 Limitations and professional development

We as students have been working on this thesis for one and half years through discussions and reflections with supervisors, work life partners and extensive scholarly reviews and studies of raising children in Finland and challenges immigrant parents encounter post integration. Although the subject has been studied before in other contexts, it arouses more interest during the orientation of the child and family welfare course. The researchers having a foreign background themselves, we had a big quest on how to deal with such a sensitive issue without taking sides and biased.

In order to fulfil this study, we were strengthened by taking part in the social services courses and especially the research methodology course. Additionally, we also went through the social ethics and values of how to do research and paying respect to other researchers by acknowledging their work whenever we are citing them.

Moreover, working with respondents was a big eye opener for us because without them we could not have had this report. In this study, the researchers became the students and respondents were the informants. For them to trust and open to us with their life stories and experiences was great motivation. One cannot defer from not mentioning the support and motivation from the work life partner who were ready to share with us their professional perspective on the subject. It was though difficult to remain neutral, but the social services ethics and values obliged us to maintain confidentiality and dignity of our respondents.

Having highlighted developments, it would be fit to say we did find limitations too. From our results we found out that there were a lot of negative views about social welfare and child protection services. There were a lot of comments from the parents and professionals about children. But it would have been very good to have had some children respondents to hear what their perceptions are

about the challenges they have encountered considering the subject that we have dealt with.

Our respondents' number was small (see APPENDIX 4) thus it would be unfair to generalise the results. However, it would be a grave mistake from anyone to dismiss the results especially considering the other previous scholarly work that was referenced agree on the findings found.

7.3 Recommendations

Our recommendations are that more inductive research be done to confirm the findings of our study. Like previous studies also pointed out, these people go through a lot of life experiences especially when there are sudden situations that include forced uprooting. Post integration life opens a lot of new realities for immigrants in general and especially for immigrant families who through acculturation process which affect the mental, physical and psychological as well as their cultural identities in the new host country. Of course, it needs even will from the immigrant families to embrace the new way of dealing with issues including parenting in the new society.

8 CONCLUSION

During conducting the interviews, experiences faced by the professionals and the participants were mentioned. The problems and challenges were addressed from each party's point of view. After listening and analysing the interviews conducted, it was clear that there has been an issue in delivering the correct message. The participants had a feeling that they did not get the time needed to get all the information and to fully understand the reason this information is shared. The real reason behind the lack in giving the information could be related to three reasons as per the participants. The lack in number of professionals who are entitled to give the training and that was due to the considerable number of people who needed the same training at the same time. The situation where the information was shared and not knowing the importance of the information shared. And third the language barrier that was not solved by the presence of an interpreter.

We take from these experiences a good example and a new perspective for the professionals on how to deal with multicultural parenting challenges in the future. Our research was helpful for the professional to understand the point of view of people from different cultural background and to develop communication methods with them. At the same time, our research made a difference on how the service users explain the actions taken by child protection services and the reason behind it. We were able to give an unfamiliar and positive perspective on the child protection role and the importance of it. It was clear that the service users identified the positive role played by the child protection towards the child's wellbeing. The same was mentioned clearly from there side "it took me a while to understand the child protection point of view in this matter. They were concerned about the child interest and wellbeing and that is why they took this decision. They wouldn't put the children at risk," Said Pr2. Another participant also highlighted how his experience changed the way he thinks about child protection, "After this experience my view to the child protection has changed. I understood that sometimes there is a third party who informs them about a

problem. I understood also that when they get notified, they need to take actions directly to secure the child's safety" said Pr3.

Parenting is a very difficult thing and linked to the person identity and background. It is a sensitive topic for most of the people since it reflects the way they were raised and the parenting image of their own parents. To strengthen the importance of the topic of our research we refer to a study by made Väestöliitto (2018) where conflicts in parenting are studied and highlighted in immigrant families

"Matters that are accepted and valued, and ways of upbringing of a child vary in different countries and cultures."

We hope that the work done would be an asset to develop tools and understanding on how to support immigrant families in the children upbringing process in Finland. The results from this research could be used as a base for the organisations and the third sector also to develop tools that support the immigrant families understanding how the systems works and integrate in the society. It is important to take into consideration while developing these tools to include people with immigrant background. They can be a role model. They could be invited to participate as speakers to share their experience on the topic and how they coped and dealt with the different aspects of parenting. They could also facilitate peer support groups for this target group. Another tool is to create support programs like being a mentor or being a support family (kummiperhe) for the parents taking part in the program. We also give the professionals and the public the right to use our research for more investigation on the topic if needed.

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APPENDIX 1: Interview Questions

For Professionals**(1). Age**

25 -29 30 - 34 35-39 40 - 44 45 - 49 50 - 54

(2). Gender

man woman Other

(3). How long have you been working with Sylvesteri /HDL children's home?

less than 1 year 1 -2 years 2-5 years over 5years

(4). Have you had any encounters at work with immigrant families?

Yes No

(5). In HDL Sylvesteri, you have service users with immigrant background. What is the percentage of service users with immigrant background?

(6). Below are mentioned challenges that immigrant families face. What are the challenges you encountered with families with immigrant background ?

integration related, new cultures clashing, Acculturation, Adaptation, Other?

(7). Which of the above do you think is the most challenging to immigrant families? Why do you think most of the immigrant families are facing these challenges)?

(8). The immigrant families when arriving to Finland go through and have gone through the integration process to familiarise them of what they are expected of in their new home country of residence. Do you think the information immigrants receive in the integration

process gives them all what they need to know as new resident and can now live in Finland following the information after the process?

Yes (). If yes, please explain more

No (). If no, explain more

(9). What work methods / theories of approach are used in working with service users in Sylvesteri?

(10). How do you involve families of service users in your work?

(11). How can these issues raised above be solved? How to educate immigrant clients about or on integration processes, family and child policies in Finland?

12. Is there anything that you wish to add on what you have said above?

APPENDIX 2: Questionnaire for participants

For Service Users/ Mainly Parents**(1). Age**

() 25 -29 () 30 - 34 () 35-39 () 40 - 44 () 45 - 49 () 50 - 54

(2). Gender

man () woman () Other ()

(3). How long have you been living in Finland?

() less than 1 year () 1 -2 years () 2-5 years () over 5years and more

(4) When arriving in Finland did you go through integration offered by the Social Department and MIGRI?

Yes () No ()

(5) What did the information include?

Social and Welfare State policies ()
 Education (for children) ()
 Child rearing and family values ()
 Finnish Cultural Aspects ()
 integration for parents ()
 Other ()

(6). What is your general take on the above information that is shared in the process? Is it inclusive of everything immigrants need to know?

Yes ()

No ()

(7). Is there something in the information that maybe you think was left out? If yes, what?

Yes ()

No ()

(8). How do you view child rearing and the societal expectations (on Child raising) in Finland in relation to your own background and or culture?

(9) Different peoples have different child raising methods. Are there any frictions between your understanding of child raising in general in Finland?

Yes ()

No ()

(10). Is there any difficult situation in child raising, that you are having or may have had, and child welfare and protection had to come on board? If yes, can you explain more

Yes ()

No ()

(11). How was the above (10) issue handled? And were you involved all the way?

(12). How did you like child protection services if you or your descendant have had to receive services from them? Or your child?

(13) Capital punishment is totally banned in Finland. What is your view on capital punishment? To children? Personally and Culturally?

(14) How can parenting or child raising be done in a constructive and effective way?

(15) From the issues that were raised above, what is the best issue according to you?

(16). Anything more that struck your mind?

APPENDIX 3: Time Framework

Stage	Task	Time
Thesis Plan and Proposal	Reading literature reviews, searching for worklife partner, thesis permits	September 2020
Thesis Manuscript	Creating a project, collecting data, Approval from Worklife Partner, Conducting Interviews, Analysing data, reflecting on previous research and updating manuscript	February – April 2021
	Presentation	May 2021
Preliminary thesis	Editing the text, sending it to the work life partner	August 2021
	Presentation	September 2021
Maturity Test		September 2021
Final thesis	Editing the thesis	September 2021
Graduation	Applying for Diploma	October 2021

APPENDIX 4: Respondents

Partici- pant	Gender	Age	Service users	Professional	
1	Male	35-39	x		
2	Female	40-44	x		
3	Female	55-59	x		
4	Female	45-49		x	Social Worker
5	Male	41-44		x	Social Worker
6	Female	35-39		x	Social Worker