

Social and Cultural Stressors on Migrant Parent-Child Relationships

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Study 1:

Challenges of parenting in immigrant communities (in collaboration with the Metropolitan Immigrant Settlement Association)

Study 2:

- Parent-teen conflict in immigrant communities (with Barbara Cottrell. Funded by Dept. of Justice Canada)



2006 Populations

- Population of Canada: 32,576,000
- Population of Nova Scotia: 938,000
- Population of Halifax: 385,000
- Immigrant Population: 27,410

Focus Group Participants

Eastern Europe

Africa

West Central Asia

Middle East

South East Asia

Southern Asia

Central and South America

Tensions

Parent-Child

Parent-Community

Parent-System

Parent-Child Tensions

Cultural construction of childhood/ adolescence

“....the society outside is saying he’s big enough to take care of themselves. At home I think nobody tells you that the child is big enough to care for themselves because you, even if they are 40, 45 they are still your kids. When they come they are still under your authority, that kind of thing”.

“It’s contrary to our culture for the seventeen year olds to be going off on their own. What’s happening is they’re getting part time jobs and friends who let them come and stay with them. And they want to go, and now their mother wants them to stay home and there’s a lot of conflict over this. And the children use this to control her”

“Children in Yugoslavia rarely work. Parents take the responsibility and children are not expected to venture into adult life too early. Children are eased into independence and there is no need to leave the parental home. Except perhaps for economic reasons”

“Here children reach a certain age and the parent’s expectation is that children leave home but we Latinos...In our country, there is familial unity. The grandparents die in our homes”

Parent-Child Tensions

Confidence

“When they use manipulative behaviour and put your dignity down.... Here I don't have any support and when my daughter say you are not a good mother I think oh what is my mistake, what am I doing wrong? It turns abusive because she uses that to manipulate me and make me feel bad because I really don't know if I'm being a bad mother. Because we're here in Canada and I really don't know if here things go that way and maybe I am wrong. But if I go back to my culture, I know I'm not wrong, but here in Canada, maybe I am ”

“It’s very frustrating when the children start to argue in English. They are not allowed to settle arguments in English. For me, settling an argument is an emotional reaction that needs to come from the gut. It is also a reminder of the disconnection from our home country”

“Sometimes I use some of the English expressions even though the main language I use with my kids is Arabic so that because I’m in control, if it’s in Arabic, I’m in control. If it’s in English then he will just catch my accent or some of my expression and say, “Oh mom, please!!””

Parent-Community Tensions

Social Isolation

“ I think better also the feeling we have that it takes a village to raise a child. At home, I think, as a parent although you have responsibility but you have a lot of backups; you have your relatives, you have the whole village you know is watching. But when you come here as a parent, the whole village is watching for wrong things, you know? If the child needs only you all the time then that kind of individualism which they see and so that’s why probably you tend to be more closer to your child because nobody’s caring for that child”.

“The whole community. If someone see, an uncle or neighbour, see my son or my daughter outside smoking he might give him advice. It depends on the neighbour’s approach. It can be disciplinary, it can be religious, it can be anything. You know he will not just watch and say I have nothing to do or say he will come to his parents and tell. He does something”

“People around you pretend they are not seeing you, they don't know what you doing, they pretend that way. But they are watching you. It's only when it comes to crisis, maybe in your house, your child is crying they don't know why the child is crying, like if it happens a couple of times, they don't know, the best they can do they will call police. This is child is crying all the time but we don't really know what's happening. That's all they can do. But when it's like come in a matter of helping us in our own culture, every parent is a parent for every child. It's quite different here. The only time they will intervene when they think they want you to be locked up. That's the time”.

Parent-State Tensions

Child protection/child rights

“The biggest challenge is the interference of the government in the way we bring up our kids. You have limited time, or you have limited chances to do what you actually want to do with your child. Because from school they teach them, the teachers teach them what they think are their rights. Because I can imagine when my boy was in the fourth class he came home one day and told me, “My teacher said if you leave me in the house or you spank me I should dial 911. And if I want something, you don’t give it to me, I will tell them and they will get me another mother because you’re not a good mother”.”

“I agree that the abuse is absolutely out of the question. Parents should not be dealing with their children in that way. But not cooperating with teachers and teachers at school, the education system being a totally different message that if you parent is doing something to you, you come to us and we will protect you, is absolutely separating, separating the parents from their kids and taking away the children”.

“The regulations, the law, and still I don’t know many of the things. And it was also fear. How far can they push, how far can they go? What will be the consequences? Will they take my child away from me? I mean, will I loose my child? Will I be considered irresponsible mother? So all of those questions, all of that fear, all of the unknown it’s what really my struggle has been and the challenges”