
around parenting, child behaviour, and raising children in different countries;

- Some children using threats to contact police and child protection agencies if their parents attempt to discipline them, with parents fearing their children and 'their rights'
- Some children seeing removal from their parents' care as a means to freedom from discipline;
- Unequal rates of adaptation and learning of new systems and language between parents and children, resulting in children having greater knowledge and power in negotiating and manipulating new systems.

For some families, problems of intergenerational conflict have caused such distress and family breakdown that parents have expressed regret and guilt for having brought their children to Australia.

Rights and Responsibilities

An overarching theme in discussion with resettled refugees about the challenges and problems they are encountering as families in resettlement, is the issue of 'rights'. Resettling refugees describe significant confusion and some conflict over rights and the challenge of integrating rights with notions of community and family responsibilities. Pre arrival and settlement orientation appears to provide little cohesive or holistic guidance on the issue of rights. Many services, including law enforcement agencies, appear to

operate within an inconsistent and inequitable paradigm of 'rights'. In fact, findings from our current research highlight a complex pattern of misunderstandings and misappropriations of the meaning of rights for men, women and children in Australia, both by resettling refugees and by the services with which they interact. Individuals and services struggle with how to conceptualize meanings of rights across generations, genders, and cultures. These factors all contribute to the challenges and risks facing families in resettlement in Australia.

Recommendations

- Acknowledgement by UNHCR and resettlement countries that refugee families have particular needs and may require services to support family resilience; UNHCR develop guidelines for the needs of families in resettlement, in conjunction with resettled refugee communities and countries of resettlement.
- Resettlement countries explore the meanings and practices of 'rights' within their communities; and incorporate explicit and comprehensive information about these rights in their pre-departure & on-arrival orientation programs.
- Settlement support services be funded to develop programs to support refugee family resilience and prevent family breakdown.
- Child, family and legal services in resettlement countries be supported to develop knowledge and programs to meet the special



Australian Refugee
Rights Alliance

REFUGEE FAMILIES AT RISK IN RESETTLEMENT

Resettlement to Australia is an opportunity for refugees to rebuild their lives in safety. However, resettlement is not easy, and one of the many challenges facing resettling refugees is adapting to new social systems and changing family roles and dynamics. While many are able to meet these challenges and settle well, family conflict and separation have been identified as significant problems by many resettled refugees participating in research with the Centre for Refugee Research at the University of New South Wales.

Refugees and service providers in both regional and metropolitan areas of Australia have highlighted several particular areas of concern, including intergenerational conflict, intimate partner and family violence, and contentious interactions between refugee families and child protection agencies. An overarching issue is the impact of misconceptions and misunderstandings around notions of rights and responsibilities in the new community, particularly the rights of women and children.

Issues of family conflict, violence and

separation arise as amongst the most pressing and painful for refugee families and communities. They are exacerbated by other challenges faced in resettlement, such as access to suitable housing and employment and the stresses of learning and adapting to new physical and social systems. Conversely, family conflict and breakdown contributes to the social, financial, housing and emotional pressures on resettling refugee families and has adverse effects on physical and mental health, education and employment. It negatively impacts refugee communities and the broader community.

Despite a strong commitment from many settlement services to supporting resettled refugee families, they report they are frequently at a loss to address the complex family problems being experienced by many of their clients. However, services addressing family conflict and violence in the broader community frequently lack the specialized knowledge and

resources to respond to the special needs and circumstances of refugee families.

Intimate Partner / Family Violence

While domestic violence affects all populations in all countries, refugee research participants report that domestic and family violence is a widespread problem among refugee families. They discussed a number of factors contributing to this violence:

- The continuing impact of pre arrival experiences;
- The experiences of culture shock and the stresses of adjusting to new ways of living in the absence of their previous social and family support structures;
- Changed family roles, dynamics and power relations; in particular due to changed perceptions and experiences of roles and rights for children and women;
- Refugee men perceiving women's rights as destabilising for the family; and in some cases trying to assert their authority through violence;
- Non-reporting of family violence because it is perceived to be a private issue or because the consequences of reporting may include individual or community shame and family separation.
- Settlement challenges such as overcrowded housing and lack of employment, particularly for males. Some of the reported consequences

of family violence include family separation; increased risks for refugee women, children and men; community shame and blaming of refugee women in some cases where family violence is reported or acted on; and the involvement of police and child protection systems when violence occurs, impacting on both families and communities.

Child Protection

Refugee participants acknowledged the important role of police and child safety services in protecting children exposed to violence or other danger. Many, however, described how they feel powerless and frustrated by their local child protection system. They report that many in their communities feel they are targeted by child protection agencies for attention, and that preconceived notions relating to their ethnic and refugee backgrounds (including the notion that they need to be taught how to "parent") influenced service provider actions and decisions.

I think it is the perception that, this person is from ____: oh, he is not good for the kids, he does not love his wife. From the child protection services, they think, that family don't love their kids and oh yeah, the kids are being abused. Resettled refugee

Participants described a view within communities that attitudes and practices within some child safety agencies pay insufficient regard to the needs and rights of parents, and

are damaging their families and communities. They report the need for both refugee communities and child safety agencies to develop better understanding and knowledge. Many participants reported they feel they have lost control in their families, but that intervention by child safety authorities does not always lead to good outcomes for the children. Particular issues raised by research participants include:

- Differing expectations and norms around parenting and raising children in different countries;
- The breakdown of family and community support networks during the refugee journey;
- Uncertainty about rights as parents in Australia, and feelings of powerlessness, especially in the absence of previous family support structures and networks;
- Uncertainty and misunderstandings regarding child protection services and laws;
- Perceived overrepresentation of refugee families in child protection systems;
- Lack of culturally appropriate practice by some child protection workers such as removal of children without appropriate assessment, consultation and language support;
- Fear of child protection agencies among refugee communities, leading to a culture of non-reporting and avoidance of help-seeking;
- Negative perceptions of child protection agencies exacerbating

misunderstandings around the rights of parents and children in Australia.

Intergenerational Conflict

Like many migrant communities, refugee participants described the many challenges they and their children face in being between two cultures, and in managing and adapting to the differences between bringing up children in their countries of origin and in Australia.

To raise the kids here we think is good but it is going to be a culture thing between us and the kids too. Resettled refugee

Differing social norms and expectations can be challenging for families, with many of the research participants reporting conflict between children and parents over apparently different moral and social standards or behaviour. They report that for some families this can lead to a breakdown in family discipline and inter-generational conflict. Many described how some parents feel disappointed to see their child take advantage of their 'rights' in Australia without taking responsibility, and feel unsupported by a system that they see gives all the rights to children without supporting them as parents in their efforts to help their children develop as adults, understand their responsibilities, and make the most of the opportunities they have in Australia.

Areas of concern identified by participants include:

- Differing expectations and norms
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