

Parent-child (Teens) Conflicts

Research indicates that from a developmental perspective, moderate conflict with parents during adolescence is a healthy part of youth development. It is viewed as serving developmental functions such as autonomy and as providing an opportunity to revise and transform parent-adolescent expectations, roles and responsibilities so that parent-adolescent relationships remain developmentally appropriate.

Conflicts are also viewed as important in establishing and defining a value and a belief system contributing to adolescent identity development as they reflect, evaluate and construct who they are.

When families particularly from non-Western cultural groups migrate to Western settings with conflicting cultural values, parent-child conflicts are likely to increase due to parent/child acculturation discrepancy (when parents continue to maintain values, norms and behaviours from their culture of origin and minimally endorse the norms, values and behaviours of their host culture (separation) while their children have embraced the cultural attitudes and behaviours of the host country (integration or assimilation)).

Cross-cultural literature proposes that a large discrepancy between parents' and children's acculturation levels may put immigrant children at increased risk of unfavourable developmental outcomes due to the stress of living with the expectations and demands of one culture in the home and another one in socio-cultural settings of host countries.

Family functioning may be disrupted due to increased family conflict resulting from acculturation discrepancy and parents' use of unsupportive parenting practices.

It has also been suggested that children may fail to turn to their parents with problems and concerns, believing that their parents do not know the culture well enough to provide them with good advice or assistance or the parents themselves may feel ill-equipped to support their children in new socio-cultural settings. Either way, both the child and the parent's actions serve to increase the sense of alienation in the parent-child dyad.

Family conflict and parent-child alienation are conceptualised in research as the mediator in the relationship between acculturation and psychosocial well-being of migrant children

Acculturation discrepancy in this case therefore acts as a proxy that sets the stage for problem development. Extensive research with various groups of migrant children has documented migrant children's psychosocial problems associated with acculturation discrepancy among:

Asians; Latinos; and sub-Saharan Africans.

Renzaho et al.'s (2011) qualitative Australian study that drew on a sample of Sub-Saharan African parents and children (13-17 years) reported African migrants' parental child conflicts. These were associated with parents' strict parenting through boundary setting, on-going close scrutiny of children's behaviour in social-cultural settings, and, adopting a hierarchical approach to decision-making while discouraging autonomy over their children who no longer shared similar cultural values and practices. African parents reported feelings of guilt when expectations based on heritage cultural parenting orientation were not met by their children. The study documents intercultural conflict associated with African migrant children's autonomy. Once again, within the African's social-cultural settings, although emphasis is placed on obedience and/or compliance, autonomy for young children is also recognised but couched through cooperation to safeguard inter-relational harmony (Boakye-Boaten, 2010).

While acculturation stresses associated with migrant families' adaptation in their host countries is well documented, acculturation literature has paid little attention to positive acculturation. A New Zealand study focussing on both harmony and conflict in acculturating families offers insight to positive acculturation. Stuart et al., (2010) interviewed thirty-nine parents and adolescents (age 12-18) from Asian, Middle Eastern and African backgrounds who had settled in the country within 1-10 years. The interviews focussed on three major topics: how the family had changed or stayed the same during the process of cultural transmission; the areas of agreement and disagreement between parents and children; and current feelings concerning the family unit and aspirations for the future.

Findings indicated that some of the issues that emerged could be conceptualised within a normative universal developmental framework though immigration was hypothesised to have made the issues more salient. Of interest was the finding that parents and their adolescent children were in agreement regarding maintenance of ethnic traditions; religion; and ethnic identity. Another area of parent-adolescent agreement was that drinking, smoking and taking drugs was detrimental to individual and family health. Interviewed parents expressed inflexibility concerning restrictions they imposed on children in this regard and reinforced these values by modelling appropriate behaviour. In general, the parents acknowledged the peer and media pressure that their children were under to engage in these health risk behaviours, but they reported that their children agreed with them about refraining from such behaviours. The emphasis on education also emerged in this study as an area of agreement in the family. Areas of parent-adolescent disagreements concerned: privacy; trust and relationships. Parental restrictions on adolescents created tensions since the young people felt as though their parents intruded on their personal space and did not allow them sufficient privacy. A sense of anxiety and insecurity reported by interviewed adolescents arose from what they perceived as lack of parental trust and confidence in their ability to behave appropriately, though this was moderated by their association parents' emphasis on transparency, with protective motives. While young people linked the issue of privacy to trust, parents did not make the same connections viewing privacy as something that was condoned in the New Zealand culture but incongruent with their traditional family culture. From the parents' view, such behaviours were viewed as children being disrespectful. Parent-adolescent harmony was often maintained by young people keeping secrets from their parents of any information they deemed their parents would disapprove of. The desire for autonomy in this case was found to coexist with the desire for relatedness.

Other findings showed that although there were no parent-adolescent disagreements regarding ethnic backgrounds of friends, conflict arose around dating and intimate relationships, particularly for girls. Parental concerns revolved around the possibility of their children losing traditional cultural values and behaviours and consequently they were unwilling to allow their children the autonomy to make their own decisions about relationships. While some of the adolescents followed their parent's advice on dating, others expressed the need for autonomy when it came to dating and this stance was reported to have created parental-child tensions.

The family was found to be a major source of support. Study participants expressed their love for and happiness with their families and remarked that these feelings were strengthened and reaffirmed, rather than undermined, by the transition to New Zealand. The growth and change experienced during the acculturation process seemed to increase the family's capacity to function as a supportive unit. The authors concluded that even though cross-cultural transition posed different challenges for parents and children, families were found capable of accommodating both change and continuity and to act as a major sources of support and embeddedness for their members. These African migrant families were found to have experienced family conflict that could be viewed as normative as well as family conflict associated with intergenerational discrepancy. The finding that there was consonant acculturation between parents and children has implications of shifting the focus from intergenerational conflict towards paying attention to areas of intergenerational mutual agreement. Of importance was the finding in the study that even when intergenerational tensions occurred, they did not necessarily lead to greater family conflicts and over-all, migrant families were found to have experienced positive feelings.

It would suffice to conclude that acculturation of migrant families and their children is a challenging process, particularly non-Western migrant children, settling in Western countries, often leading to parental/child-teenage conflicts but there are protective cultural practices, identifications and values embedded in migrant children's families that facilitates resolution of these conflicts. Also, that in light of the fact that the influence of migrant families' heritage culture in orientating migrant children's behaviour has been found to continue post migration, there is need to contextualise their behaviour within their heritage cultural framework and also take into consideration contextual variables in migration settings that impact on the expression of these children's behaviours.

On the balance of probability, it can be theorised that there would be less African parental-child conflict associated with parental discouragement of a child's autonomy, but with time and/or with erosion of cultural values or systems and networks that support nurturing desired developmental outcomes for children within an African cultural child-rearing framework, there would be an increase in intergenerational conflict associated with assertion of autonomy by children. (Masheti, PhD Manuscript).

What Helps to moderate acculturation stress – Resilience Literature

Peer relationships have been associated with protective processes resulting from the opportunities offered by these relationships to create and maintain strong emotional bonds, and reciprocal exchanges of mutual encouragement and realistic feedback about appropriate behaviour.

Immigrant youth have been shown to prefer ethnic to native-born peers, for the former are perceived as providing a continuation of family values, whereas native peers can provide a contradiction (Titzmann & Silbereisen, 2009). Mixing and having a strong attachment with their ethnic peers, was found to have assisted migrant youth to cope with acculturation stress.

Availability of ethnic support networks is indicated in acculturation literature as moderating the effects of acculturation stress and/or aiding migrant youth to cope with this stress.

Studies indicate that greater ethnic diversity in the classroom is associated with lower levels of peer victimisation and high self-worth.

Studies have connected resilience of migrant families and youth to support from their own ethnic communities. Migrant families have been found to utilise their own ethnic community networks to help them cope and adjust to their new way of life in their countries of residence.

Irish study of unaccompanied asylum-seeking youth, among them sub-Saharan Africans, found that they maintained continuity in a changing context by engaging in activities in the newly created African diasporic networks. The development of bicultural competencies among Somali migrant youth in the US has also been found to have facilitated them to form relationships, which allowed them to draw support

from their own ethnic community (parents and co-ethnic peers), as well as the host community (teachers, counsellors, and mainstream peers). In the case of migrant adolescents in particular, at this time of increased biological, social, cognitive and emotional changes, there is a benefit of seeking guidance from a non-parent adult who may be perceived as unthreatening to adolescents' sense of autonomy.

Resilience studies have also demonstrated a link between religion and resilience of migrant children. Raghallaigh and Gilligan's (2010) Irish study which qualitatively explored coping strategies of unaccompanied asylum-seeking youth (14-19yrs) found that all their coping strategies involved religious faith as a common element. In a small qualitative study of unaccompanied Sudanese boys (aged 16–18 years), attribution of adverse events to God's will was found to have contributed to fairly good psychosocial functioning (Goodman, 2004). Among Bosnian adolescents resettled in Austria and Croatia, religious commitment (assessed as a composite of frequency of participation in religious activities and degree of subjective personal belief) was associated with low anxiety and depressive symptoms (Sujoldzic et al., 2006).

Nguyen Gillham (2007) studies of Palestinian youth in occupied territories reported that practices such as making life as normal as possible at home, school and in the neighbourhood while experiencing boredom, grief and loss all helped to establish structure and stability in the context of political instability. The Palestinian concept of *samud* – a determination to exist through being steadfast and rooted to the land – was found to be at the heart of resilience. Going to school signified individual and collective acts of defiance against the Israeli Defence force and settler violence, and this was reported to be key in fostering endurance and the will to negotiate daily survival. This work sheds light on the ways in which 'the construct of resilience goes beyond an individualistic interpretation and resilience is (re)constituted as a

wider collective and social representation of what it means to endure' (Nguyen Gilham, 2007 p. 292). The implication therefore is that conceptualisation of resilience is not 'a one size fits all'. In the context of building the resilience of children particularly migrant youth dealing with acculturation stress, cultivating their resilience involves examining the adaptive processes embedded in their day-to-day activities and practices in the social and cultural (Irish/home countries/Transnational/Diasporic) structures and networks.

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