Examining the Intersection of Immigrants' Integration/Acculturation and Child Welfare

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Principal Investigator: Dr. Mirna E. Carranza, School of Social Work

Research Assistants: Seung Yang and Elizabeth Grigg

McMaster University

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Dr. Mirna. E. Carranza

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Introduction

This collaborative inquiry between the School of Social Work at McMaster University, the Immigrant Working Centre (IWC), Children's Aid Society of Hamilton (CASH) and the Catholic Children's Aid Society of Hamilton (CCASH), considers how involvement with the child welfare system (CWS) plays a role in the integration and adaptation of those who have immigrated to Hamilton. The purpose of this project was to use multiple perspectives, not only to identify gaps in the child welfare and settlement sectors, but also to explore protective factors. These perspectives inform the recommendations, which identify ways to improve the system's capacity to both—prevent involvement and respond to families who have migrated. Eighty-three people participated in this study including: CASH/CCASH' child protection workers; settlement workers; members; who have resettled within 0-35 years; from the diverse communities in Hamilton and parents involved with the Child Welfare System. They spoke about their experiences, both challenges and successes, and shared suggestions for change at various practice and systemic levels. This project and recommendations are intended to be a guide forward and particularly timely, as local CWS agencies in Hamilton have adopted an anti-oppressive practice framework and the recent submission of Bill 89, Supporting Children, Youth and Families Act, 2017, is intended to strengthen services provided to children and young people, under the *Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017*.

Objective

This project focuses on the intersection of immigrants' acculturation processes and CWS involvement. This study received funding from *McMaster's First Scholar-in-Community Fellowship* The overarching goals of the project were:

i.   To facilitate a consultation process with community stakeholders (in both immigrant-serving and CWS) to examine the factors that contribute to immigrant families' encounters with CWS;

ii. To begin to clarify the intersection between immigrants' acculturation and involvement with CWS;

iii. To draw on findings of the research and community consultation to inform CWS practices and protocols that include the voices of racialized groups; and

iv. To collaboratively engage in Knowledge Mobilization Plan (KMP) activities demonstrating the value of community-academic partnerships in addressing pressing social, policy, and theoretical issues.

Background

Immigrants and refugees to Canada face multiple challenges during their settlement process, which may place them at higher risk for involvement in the CWS (Dettlaff & Earner, 2012). Hamilton is the third most popular destination for newcomers, with the immigrant and refugee population steadily increasing over the past 15 years (Hamilton Urban Core Community Health Centre, 2015). The number of permanent residents in Hamilton increased by 20% from 3,297 in 2011 to 3,947 in 2012 (Citizenship and Immigration Canada [CIC], 2013). In 2016, 4,190, approximately 3.8%, of the 110,015 admissions of permanent residency, lived in

Hamilton (CIC, 2017). The demographics of migrants to Hamilton are also changing. Of the

people who had immigrated 10 or more years ago, 68.6% came from European countries,

whereas current source countries are: 54.4% from Asia and the Pacific, 23.3 % from Africa and

the Middle East and 11.7% from European countries (CIC, 2015). Of these groups, 37%

identified as a visible minority (CIC, 2015). This increase and shifting demographics has put

pressure on services, including CWS, to better meet the needs of Hamilton residents.

Responding to the needs of newcomers requires a deeper understanding of how stressors

and vulnerabilities associated with immigrants' acculturation process increases vulnerability of

becoming involved with the CWS. While challenges associated with migration seem to

contribute to the disproportionate involvement of immigrants with CWS, systemic racial biases

may also play a role (Laverne et al., 2008) as racialized children are overrepresented in care

across the province (Contenta et al., 2014). In the United States, the correlation between

racialized populations and the CWS has been well documented (Baiden, Tarshis, Antwi-

Boasiako & de Dunnen, 2016). However, the relationships between poverty, race, immigration

and CWS involvement remains understudied in Canada (Baiden, Tarshis, Antwi-Boasiako & de

Dennen, 2016). This lack of knowledge is also reflected in practice. Members of the research

team for this project had, over many years, heard concerns from immigrant serving agencies that

CWS practices are not well suited to supporting cultural transitions to Canada. The team also

had discussions with child protection workers and heard their questions, struggles, and ideas on

how best to support immigrant families involved with CWS.

Context

Acculturation is a complex and multidimensional process (Koneru et al., 2007; Pérez,

2011) that includes psychological, attitudinal, and behavioural changes caused by interactions

between individuals from different cultures and the settlement society (Berry, 2006). Social psychology theorists view acculturation as a normative process of adaptation in an effort to manage the changes present in migration. From this perspective, the psychological acculturative changes and responses are related to stress and coping mechanisms (Kuo, 2014). The specifics of *what* exactly changes during acculturation have been difficult to ascertain (Schwartz et.al, 2014, p. 2). When assessing acculturative changes, acculturation theorists generally speak to the domains of: language use and other cultural behaviors, values and attitudes (Berry, Poortinga, Segall & Dansen, 2002), ethnic/heritage identity and national identity (Schwartz et. al., 2014). For example, the associated changes in diet, climate, dress code, language, day-to-day routines can negatively affect immigrants' self-esteem, identity, and sense of belonging, meaning-making processes, and mental health (Miller & Chandler, 2002; Thomas Gee et al, 2004). Racialized immigrants may face multiple oppressions such as racism, discrimination, and unequal access to services (Comas-Díaz & Greene, 2013; Lee & Hadeed, 2009), as well as exclusion from economic integration and advancement (Creese, 2005; Galabuzi, 2004). Klassen (2012) and Mayo (2010) identify that for racialized immigrants living in Hamilton, marginalization and oppression based on race and poverty remain two of the most prominent barriers.

Key Factors affecting acculturation

The immigration processes can be saturated with stressors including uncertainty, concerns for safety, and economic struggle. Combined, pre-migration trauma and post-migration stress have negative impacts on health, psychosocial well-being and mental health during integration (Bankston, 2014).

Trauma and fear. Trauma is known to have significant effects on acculturation (Carranza, 2008), community organization (Carranza, 2007), and parent-child relationships even

after families have settled for some time in their new country (Wasik, 2006; Weingarten, 2004). The often-negative impact of migration on mental health is well-known (Siriwardhana & Stewart, 2014; Virupaksha, Kumar & Nirmala, 2014) when trauma was experienced before or during migration (Siriwardhana & Stewart, 2014; Siriwardhana, Ali, Roberts, & Stewart, 2014). These effects are transmitted across generations, affecting family members who were not even present at the time of the trauma (Carranza, 2011; Weingarten, 2004). Fear associated with trauma is a significant mediating factor, especially for refugees who are trying to reconstruct their lives, access their rights, and make sense of their past within a social context where fear of foreign 'others' persists (Riaño-Alcala, 2008; Robben & Suarez-Orózco, 2000). Trauma is thought to lower satisfaction and engagement, increasing stress and impairing the ability to perform parenting functions. These outcomes increase risk factors for neglect and physical discipline (Berz & Taft, 2008; Schweitzer, Melville, Steel & Lacherez, 2006). Together, these factors may increase a family's emotional and mental health vulnerability and trigger involvement with CWS.

Gender relations and intimate partner violence. Immigration affects men and women differently (Pessar & Mahler, 2003; Suarez-Orózco & Qin, 2006). Women face unique challenges as they leave behind the support networks that sustain their everyday lives (Ahmad et al., 2009; Carranza, 2008; Cho, 2012). Immigrant women tend to join the workforce much more quickly than men, thus threatening traditional gender hierarchies (Erez et al., 2009). This, combined with systemic oppressions and feelings of marginalization may contribute to marital discord and lead immigrant men to abusive and self-destructive behaviours (Bui & Morash, 2008; Firestone, Harris & Vega, 2003; Guruge et al., 2009). Working immigrant women may continue to bear the primary responsibilities for household tasks in order to maintain traditional

gender roles (Menjívar & Salcido, 2002) and compensate for the loss of support from their

extended family (Ahmad et al., 2009). Some immigrant women, however, may expect their

husbands to contribute more equally to household chores – a change in gender expectations that

can also contribute to tensions in the marital dyad and abusive behaviours (Zentgraf, 2002).

Hyman et al. (2008) argued that the difficulties in negotiating such gender roles and

responsibilities may cause women to feel resentful toward their partners, so conflict may arise in

spousal relationships. Excessive adult conflict and partner violence can be seen as risk factors for

children, as it impacts their mental health, behaviours, self-regulation, and can cause early

childhood trauma (Greeson, Kennedy, Bybee, Beeble, & Adams, 2014). Therefore, shifting

gender relations and resulting acculturative stressors, have the potential to create the conditions

for conflict and violence to occur, increasing the potential for involvement with CWS.

Intergenerational tensions. Kwak (2003) noted that during acculturation, families are

learning individually and together how to navigate the culture of the host society, while

maintaining practices and values from the country of origin. It is common for parents, to

maintain and transmit cultural traditions and values as a foundation for their family's

development (Kwak, 2003). As the younger generation is socialized to the host country

differently, and is often more distant from the country of origin, this can cause friction when

navigating the host society and establishing new identities (Kwak, 2003). Intergenerational

challenges among immigrant families are particularly common with children entering puberty

and adolescence (Su, Lee & Vang, 2005; Umaña-Taylor & Bacama, 2004); developmental

factors and feeling caught between the norms and expectations of the settlement country and

those of their family and culture (Carranza, 2012; Giles-Sims & Lockheart, 2004) may lead

children to challenge the familial culture (Johnson, 2007) and values (Bacallao & Smokowski,

2005; Tyyska, 2008). Parents may lack the supports to resolve tensions and as acculturation increases the potential for "caregiver-teen conflict", there may be a higher risk for emotional maltreatment, family breakdown and CWS involvement.

      Economic exclusion. Economic resources have significant effects on parenting practices, as parenting is shaped by economic resources (Chaze, 2009), especially among immigrant parents (Cabrera et al., 2006). Conger, Conger & Martin (2010) found that lower socio-economic status has a direct relationship to lower quality parent-child relationships, family relationships and child development. Racialized immigrants are significantly more likely to experience barriers to employment, education and economic instability (Viruell-Fuentes, et al., 2012) due to labour market segmentation, organized around race and gender (Bauder, 2003). Poverty, disproportionally impacts immigrant and refugee families. Recent immigrants, considered those who have re-settled in Canada in the past 1-10 years, are three times more likely to be affected by poverty than their Canadian-born counterparts. One third of recent immigrant families living in Canada are living in extreme poverty (Beiser, Puente-Durana & Hou, 2015). The population of those living in low income neighborhoods are comprised of 35.6% immigrants and 40.8% racialized people (CIC, 2011). While poverty alone is not a child protection concern, factors considered in neglect are often reflective of the outcomes of economic struggles such as: inadequate housing, food insecurity, and improper supervision due to a lack of child care (Schumaker, 2012).

Research Study and Process

This research received ethical clearance from McMaster University. It was led by the Principal Investigator, Dr. Mirna Carranza in partnership with the Project Steering Committee, comprised of members from CASH, CCASH and the IWC. The project applied principles of community-based participatory research (CBPR) (Israel et al., 2003) including: addressing power imbalances between the researcher and the participants, and viewing research as a process that can further the social agendas and resilience of disempowered groups (Ungar, 2003).

Methodology

For this project, a qualitative research design with a mix of group consultations, focus groups, and individual in-depth interviews were used. These methods privilege the voices of those affected, minimize power relationships, and help to examine issues from the perspective of participants (Carter & Little, 2007). The methodology also allows for an in-depth analysis of the participants' lived experiences and their socially constructed realities (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Qualitative research attempts to understand and describe the personal meanings associated with events and can include both individual understandings as well as suggestions for social changes (Halmi, 1996). For these reasons, qualitative research is ideal to describe how child welfare involvement influences integration and adaptation by exploring the experiences of newcomers, community members, settlement service providers and child welfare workers.

Recruitment. The participants' recruitment was completed with support of the project's partners and through the pre-existing networks of the Principal Investigator in the Hamilton community. Community presentations were delivered at various community gatherings, posters and flyers were circulated through service provider's networks, and hard copies were placed at areas typically accessed by potential participants. Interested parties were asked to contact the

Principal Investigator, Dr. Mirna Carranza, to discuss participation and scheduling. Other recruitment methods used were: snowball sampling, where respondents were asked to refer other potential participants (Atkinson & Flint, 2001), and purposive sampling to identify those with lived experience or situated knowledge (Tongco, 2007).

Data gathering. Focus groups with settlement workers and members of the immigrant community in Hamilton; and in-depth individual interviews with child protection workers from both CCASH and CASH, settlement workers and parents who had been involved with the CWS in their settlement and/or integration trajectory were carried out. Interviews and focus groups occurred from January 2016 to January 2017.

Participants. In total, 83 people participated, including 11 child welfare workers from both agencies, 16 settlement workers and 53 members of diverse immigrant communities (i.e., community leaders, concerned parents, and members from the general community), and three parents who had been involved with CSW previously. Countries of origin were: Afghanistan, Romania, Kuwait, India, Pakistan, Eritrea, Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Chad, Burma, Jordan, Somalia, Guatemala, China, Poland, Kurdistan, El Salvador, and Colombia. The interview guide was developed in consultation with the study's partners. With the permission of the participants focus groups and individual interviews were audio recorded and transcribed.

Data analysis. After the interviews and focus groups were transcribed, thematic analysis was used to analyze the information. The process of analysis was: (1) the transcripts were reviewed to become familiar with the data; (2) generate initial codes and note patterns; (3) begin analysis of the codes and organize them into overarching themes. (4) The themes were reviewed, to ensure they were meaningful and distinct (5) finally, the themes and potential subthemes were named, defined and clarified if necessary (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

<center>**Findings**</center>

The responses of the participants are woven together in the following section to reflect the multiple vantage points included in this project. Each narrative represents a piece of the whole story, of where CWS involvement intersects with the acculturative process. From these multiple perspectives, the following themes emerged, all of which reflect the complexities of the relationship between CWS, settlement workers, immigrant families and communities.

To protect the anonymity of the participants identifying information has been removed. Both settlement and CWS are referred to as 'workers' and specific countries of origin are not named in quotes. The quotes in this report remain unedited for grammar or speech patterns, to preserve the integrity of participant's contributions. Using participant 'voice' attempts to connect the context and experience of social interactions and prompt social action. Further, by not editing the quotes, social justice orientation is preserved by maintaining authenticity and accuracy when representing the lived realities of participants.

White Middle Class Standards and Risk of Racist Ideology

Many workers explained how CWS standards were rooted in white, middle class ideologies of parenting and much of the work was focused on enforcing such. Risks, as understood through a child protection lens, were deviations from these standards which many workers perceived as inherently racist. Assessing these risks required workers to navigate the complexities associated with protecting children and meeting standards, while policing race. One worker commented, "From our work it's complicated because you work with every family in the same way, so on the surface it seems like it's not racist but at the same time you are not taking into consideration like any different background or cultural difference and things like that. It

probably [isn't] racist but sort of backwards". This, "Cookie cutter approach", as one worker labelled it, outlines how CWS workers engage with families to ensure the safety of children. One of the key tasks is to enforce protection, safety and adherence to standards, which according to workers required families to assimilate into "acceptable" parenting. One worker referred to these standards as a "box" and working with families was intended to help them "fit in". Whiteness was understood as, "The dominant, invisible expectation imposed on all people. However, only certain bodies, which are white and marked white[1], can fill those expectations. No matter how hard they try, racialized bodies, marked as coloured, can't fit these expectation". Another worker commented, "They are just starting from a different place". Despite criticisms, some workers felt "There is a reason behind it, but it's still trying to impose these values onto families and I feel that it isn't always fair and it takes away their autonomy as a family to raise their children [….]. "It's always a struggle imposing these white middle class values".

When assessing immigrant families, one worker identified that there are more "perceived risks…verses actual risks, I would say? Um and there is more... And some of that perception comes from the fact that they don't fit... they don't have money often and they don't fit certain middle-class standard that the agency is based on". "Difference" and stereotypes, were interpreted as risk factors, because of what one worker saw as, "What is happening in the world, seeping in". Referencing the current political climate, which promotes discrimination of immigrants based on stereotypes and racist imagery, as influencing workers' biases. Another worker stated, "And look at all the things we are reading about the attacks. I think people are afraid". Some workers talked about the image of immigrants and their parenting practices as

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[1] The idea of being marked white is referencing the visual representation of race, specifically how race is socially constructed, negotiated and allots privilege. These markings of race shape how people see and interact with the world and how they are perceived (Jackson & Heckmann, 2002). Carranza (2016) calls this, the 'colonial grid'.

dangerous or threatening. For example, the assumption that Middle Eastern families use a belt to discipline their children prompted numerous reports from community and service providers. One worker indicated that in these situations, existing assumptions of culture and ethnicity, shaped assessments and often reinforced stereotypes, which contributed to over reporting.

      Construction of parenting in Canada ("here") vs. parenting in countries of origin ("there"). When workers spoke about parenting practices that were on the spectrum of protection concerns, the theme of 'difference' became a focus. Legislation and policy were identified as rooted in a colonial ideology[2], and reinforced notions of 'difference' between the white, Canadian standard and the "other" parenting practices. The data signaled to significant ideological division as permeating protocols of care. There were implicit and explicit comments demarcating practices "here" [Canada] and from the "there" [family's country of origin], which took shape in commentaries defining acceptable, or Canadian, and unacceptable parenting practices. These definitions, presented as opposing, and were largely attributed as the reason why immigrant families came to the attention of CWS. As one worker identified, "It's always a comparison, like me [referring to themselves as a Canadian] versus you". One worker provided an example that, "In [their country of origin] it is acceptable to leave the children with an older sibling, here they need to be supervised and cannot be playing in the streets". Another worker stated, "The expectations of what you can and cannot do to raise your children vary by province and country and some of these other practices are not acceptable". The notion of 'difference' was understood as something that could be resolved and that parents just need to learn and be provided with information to meet expectations of Canadian parenting. A worker remarked that,

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[2] Colonial ideology in this context refers to the shared beliefs, values and knowledge that govern the assimilation efforts of a hierarchal power, for this purpose CWS, to assimilate a population to its way of thinking and seeing the world (Tordoff, 1997).

"They need more education and to understand". Additionally, when "The family comes from [country of origin], they understand the risks different to what it is [in Canada]" and they "Have no idea that wasn't allowed [referencing spanking]". The perception was that parents were unaware of what was acceptable and what was not until CASH/CCASH was there to intervene. One worker spoke about communicating parenting expectations and commented that, "Instead of being able to have a conversation we just have to know to give them their options".

A common example of why families come to the attention of CWS was the stereotype that immigrant families, particularly from the Global South[3], utilize physical discipline and have different standards of supervision that currently are not acceptable in Canada. In many of the worker's narratives, physical discipline and lack of supervision were tied to how parenting operates in their country of origin- but needed to be changed in Canada. For example, some workers explicitly stated, "It's just how they do things. What works there does not work here". Others commented, "It worked for them there and helped them survive". Some families and workers spoke to the use of physical discipline for order and structure in immigrant families, to maintain the dynamics and practices of the country of origin. Inadequate supervision was also defined as a practice of the Global South, with one worker attributing this to the close-knit relationships in the country of origin, where neighbors and community would collectively watch children. In Canada, according to this worker, families were more isolated, lacked that same community support, and struggled to supervise their children according to protection standards. Other workers attributed this to survival, in that children were left unattended so parents could, "Do what they needed to do to live". What was missing from the grand narrative was that there

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[3] The Global South refers to the current structure of globalization maintenance of the systemic oppression of specific countries, notably in Latin America, Asia and Africa, through intentional underdevelopment. This term was coined in the 1970's and is the successor to "Third World" and "Underdeveloped" countries (Dirlick, 2007)

are Canadian born parents who also use physical discipline and fail to meet supervision standards, and this phenomenon is not limited to those from Global South. This was seen in the consistent use of the imagery of the division between "there" and "here".

The idea of difference was communicated by parents and community members, with knowledge of CWS, from the perspective of surveillance and regulation. One community member identified that CWS had a regulatory function, linking their role with families as enforcing, "No physical punishment" without explanation as to why. One parent commented that working with CWS was a consistent application of the rules, with little discussion of the contributing factors. Further, expectations of parenting were communicated from a place of, "Do not do this", with no alternatives provided and the requirement that change was immediate. Parents and workers identified the need to communicate other disciplinary strategies and appropriate supervision and requirements, for successful adaptation of parenting strategies. Further, to be flexible in understanding timelines for changes, as one worker commented, "All of a sudden you land at the airport, you can't change everything all of a sudden**".**

Positionality and struggles. Several worker's spoke to how their positionality, in terms of not only the worker/client relationship, but their race, ethnicity, country of origin and education impacted how they viewed working with immigrant families. In speaking about race, "I come in with the position of power and privilege because of my identity and role". Further, this privilege goes largely unexamined as, "I haven't made room and time to negotiate and navigate my whiteness". One worker attributed this to a "Cookie cutter" approach to working with families, where enforcing whiteness is a part of the role. This approach also reinforced the "Middle class mentality", and caused discomfort with workers with their own access to privilege and the power associated with CWS. In speaking about their own immigration background, one

worker spoke about having empathy and understanding from a personal perspective why families come to the attention of CWS. When speaking about white, middle class standards one worker wondered, "I struggle sometimes in coming in and telling families it has to happen this way, because we decided this is good parenting". Another worker commented, "Just because it's our way doesn't make it the right way".

Many workers identified that their work, as rooted in colonial ideology, conflicted with their social justice values. Other workers had determined that their critical education and consciousness was conflictual with the legislative requirements, policies, procedures and practices structuring the work of CWS. For example, "There is a lot of stuff that is challenging about the agency, when you are learning from an Anti-Oppressive Practice [AOP], because you don't often learn how to reconcile these two frameworks". After speaking with a parent about physical discipline, one worker spoke about having to shift her own perspective, to operate within the CWS's mandate. She identified, "It was challenging for me because I felt a little hypocritical because I can see their point of view. So, I've had to sort of do a lot of reframing and reformulating in my own head just to get comfortable with the practice". These tensions very much played a role in how workers operated within their collective workplace culture and how they performed their role. In speaking about the day-to-day realties and the collective mentality at CWS, on worker found that, "Given the demands of the work uhm given the demands of the you know, it's you know you gotta get this done, you gotta get that done, let's meet the standards, uhm there's not really room for like reflection, or let's really talk about this. I think that supervision is focused on let's review your cases because the standard says that we have to review this every sixty days". While there was a systems level incorporation of AOP, this was not filtering into front-line practice. Without agency supported practices, workers found strategic

ways to align their work with the social justice principles and move away from the "Cookie cutter" approach. One of the main strategies used by workers was to place the experiences of people in context and view them situationally. Workers also spoke about re-framing their cases, by presenting the strengths of the family first as a way of off-setting the protection concerns, when consulting with co-workers and supervisors.

Workers identified the concept of "Moral courage" in resisting systemic encroachments on their values. This moral courage meant being flexible in their work with service users, so not approaching protection concerns from a disciplinary or authoritarian position, but an engagement approach. However, reporting on this internally, workers felt was a complicated terrain, depending on one's supervisor and support for flexible approaches with families. One example was about co-sleeping, where a worker was open to the importance of this practice for bonding, but also discussed the potential physical dangers. Workers spoke to the importance of sharing these types of engagement for a more creative and collaborative environment, and to push the system to change. Moral courage was also related to being able to engage with their supervisors openly and challenge them when necessary, on practice and policy matters. It is about "Being able to advocate for clients to be unique and in need of tailored responses on an agency level; and realizing that they place themselves at risk when doing so".

Factors Mediating Cultural Transitioning & Acculturation: Child Protection Concerns

The next emerging theme reflects how acculturation is experienced, and how this intersects with CWS protection standards. Both participants and workers spoke about the significant stressors related to acculturation, from their different perspectives. For participants, these were discussed as a part of their lived reality during their transition to Canada. From a CWS perspective, these same stressors created the conditions for protection concerns to arise.

Economic integration. The struggles associated with economic integration were identified by many parents, community members, and some workers as the central barrier in resettlement. Similarly, many CWS workers identified protection concerns resulting from experiences of poverty. Many families commented that when coming to Canada, "It's an on-going process of finding a job", "a home", "securing food" all of which requires language skills and a stable income, with very little assistance and in the absence of support networks. One of the outcomes of this is that, at times they had no one to watch the children for short periods of time, or the financial means to pay day care. This lack of supervision was identified as one of the primary ways that families came to the attention of CWS. Parents spoke about CWS workers not understanding the financial struggle implicit with migration. There were times where people ran out of money for food and could not make rent, which is connected to neglect. Workers' spoke of the outcomes of poverty, such as not maintained housing, lower income housing and overcrowding, as putting the children at risk. Families expressed, and workers identified, that they were under scrutiny for experiencing poverty. As one worker observed, "Poverty plays a huge role" in why families are involved with child welfare.

Intergenerational tensions. Several participants strongly noted intergenerational tensions. Often the result of children acculturating faster than their parents. Language acquisition was identified as causing additional stress in some families. Some participants reported, "the kids learn the language sooner than their parents and they become controlling". Other participant stated, that at times, children even vocalize their new knowledge and language acquisition, "I know more than you, you have to listen". One parent commented, "She was born here; she learns the culture and the things from here. She is refusing the way and the things I learnt from my family". Workers also spoke to the problems that this causes, as in these cases the process of re-

establishing the family in the new country can sometimes be viewed as negative and generate excessive conflict. The findings signal that acculturative changes cause pressures that destabilize the family unit, while individual changes are negotiated in the context of the family.

Gender tension. Gender tension and intimate partner violence (IPV) were also themes related to reasons for involvement. Community members noted that in Canada there is an expectation that there is, "No fighting in front of the children", without a clear understanding of the reasons behind it. One worker spoke about a case she was involved in claiming it was "Not normal domestic violence", rather it related to immigration stressors. Some workers viewed gender conflict and tension as arising from the stresses of acculturation. Others attributed it to the adjustment to the adjustment phases and in culturally based gender norms. One worker recounted that men often commented, "Oh, I can't do anything. I don't even talk to my wife now coz we are here in Canada. She have all the rights". Another observation was that there were many, "Domestic violence situations, um, and I think there is a cultural component there". There was a lack of information regarding how culture was operationalized in narratives of IPV. This finding shares a similar divisive ideology, as appropriate supervision, where what is acceptable "there" is not acceptable "here", as in the discussion of supervision concerns and physical discipline.

Trauma. Finally, trauma was one of the factor's workers believed to be impacting families and prompting involvement with CWS. As an example, "Somebody who has experienced a lot of trauma, um, if they haven't processed that properly, you know, they'll never be able to gain the skills we want them to, right?". Workers also identified pre-migration trauma as contributing to mental health issues, which in turn impacted parenting. According to one worker, many of the people they worked with "Have some kind of mental illness, like anxiety or depression" that goes unresolved. Mental health and trauma were presented as barriers to

participating in services and the ability to make the appropriate changes required by CWS. One worker recalled a story of a woman who had, "Mental health issues and her children were taken and she was so helpless. And again, it was so difficult for her even to be treated or to be seen because when she went to the psychiatrist she didn't want to go; she was like acting out, like because she was not well". In speaking about trauma and mental health, many settlement and CWS workers spoke to the high degree in which it impacted their work. They also expressed a lack of knowledge on how to deal with trauma directly and only having the tools to deal with the protection concerns. In working with families, it was important to, "Acknowledge these families have such severe trauma" only, and maintain focus on correcting the impact on parenting practices. Meaning, trauma was acknowledged on a surface level, but never explicitly addressed (e.g. through therapeutic counselling or trauma related interventions etc.).

Many of the families and community members perceived CWS's focus to be on the child and not the parents. There was an opportunity identified on the part of workers to assists parents, particularly in navigated Canadian systems, but a lack of organizational support or mandate to do so. When asked about dealing with trauma, one participant who had been involved with CWS stated, "I didn't know any of these services existed". Some parents and families spoke briefly about violence in their countries of origin and some of the difficulties that it has created in adjusting to Canada. However, these experiences of pre-migration trauma were intertwined with their immediate integration needs, such as: housing, employment, food security and language acquisition. One participant commented, "And then we come here, we have to learn English, we have to know our way around. We worry about family left behind. Some may have food on the table, some may not".

Interface of CWS and the factors affecting acculturation.

This theme highlights some of the barriers encountered by immigrant families and communities in understanding the role of and working with CWS. A lack of knowledge and understanding, around experiences of immigration and acculturation, brings to light this is a significant barrier creating gaps in service and influencing work with families

      "Sanctioned ignorance": Lack of knowledge of immigration processes. Workers noted that there is a relatively uniform approach to working with families. As a result, there is a lack of knowledge of the immigration and acculturation processes. Many workers noted since they do not support families with their immigration process, it's not required to know about the policy and regulations, which may be impacting families. Some felt that if they had knowledge and they were able to support families through this process, this would reduce stress and assist in making involvement more positive. Further, Canadian born workers referenced, "Not knowing" about the acculturation process, from navigating the medical system, learning new neighborhoods to intergenerational conflict and changes in the family systems as one of the reasons they struggled when working with immigrant families. Thus, when safety concerns arose, workers' stated that their interpretation was often from a protection lens, as opposed to understanding the complexities of the settlement process. Some felt as though service users were required to, "Teach them" about these processes. This lack of knowledge was attributed largely to restraints of working within the organization model to meet child protection standards, the demands of the jobs (e.g. paperwork and high caseloads), and working in isolation from co-workers and other services providers. Other workers named this "sanctioned ignorance" meaning acculturation, or the immigration process, was not considered an important part of the collective organizational knowledge. This lack of knowledge was never interrogated, or discussed as

important to effective work with families. As one worker referenced, "Colonial CWS", wherein no knowledge about the "Other" is necessary to go fourth and enforce new Canadian standards. Some workers felt this was an ongoing "ethical dilemma" in their work.

Language barriers. These were also identified by workers as impacting their involvement with families. One worker noted, "Often we're wondering whether or not, they really understood what we were saying". Using a translator is a requirement but, "But often our documentation is in English, so there is little we have, actually, to provide families until you send it to an interpreter to translate everything but you often don't have that right off the bat". One consistent message was that not having a translator increased family and worker stress and potentially prolonged CWS involvement with families. Some workers also felt that barriers preventing communication indicated, "A lack of regard and respect for people's dignity". According to another worker, "We fall short in our own abilities when we cannot communicate" and "thinking that they needed more than what we could do, in terms of providing education and their language preference or ensuring an interpreter was present if they felt that would be beneficial. I think would've prevented a lot of cases".

Contradictory perceptions: CWS's vs. communities'. Another significant theme in the findings was the perception that immigrant communities feared interactions with CWS. In particular, the discrepancy in perspectives between CASH/CCASH workers, settlement workers and community members to the degree to which immigrant families were aware of CWS and what their role is. Workers believed that knowledge of CWS amongst immigrant community and families was, "Fear based", rooted in a misconception that involvement automatically means having their children taken away. This knowledge and fear, according to both CWS and settlement workers, was often shared informally amongst community members by someone who

had a negative encounter with CSW. One worker recounted a story where a parent told other community members, "There was NO issue but CAS still took my children". CWS, due to confidentiality cannot clarify, and so the stories get perpetuated. Further, other child welfare workers noted, "Families are just scared of CASH/CCASH, and having their children apprehended so they just say, "Yes, yes, yes". One worker commented, "I don't know where they get it but they just hear that CAS means taking your children". Overall, the majority of workers perceived that in immigrant communities, people believed that CWS's role was to apprehend children. Workers believed that this myth was perpetuated by people in the communities who had knowledge of, or who have had bad experiences. For a number of workers these stories perpetuated inaccuracy of CWS's role and perpetuated fear.

Lack of information. Conversely, very few parents or community members identified having any knowledge or fear of CWS, or the myths surrounding apprehensions. Some community members thought CWS was focused on education, financial support, food security, health, and children's well-being. When asked if people were aware of CWS and their role, some participants identified that they were somehow related to regulating parenting, especially in communicating the message that, "There is no hitting or punishment in Canada". Other participants spoke generally about the differences in parenting in Canada and their country of origin, for example not leaving your children alone and supervision levels. The widespread fear, as identified by workers, was not present in the narratives of community members. Only a few participants identified a previous awareness of CWS, adding, "Even like long time before [I was involved with child welfare], even I was scared – as soon as someone would report they would take away my child". Some parents who had direct involvement, commented that after the initial assessment and the process was clarified, their experiences were positive. CWS provided support

in navigating some of the systems, supported them in appointment and resolving the protection concerns. In reflecting on her experience, one parent identified that the whole family benefitted as involvement with CWS helped she and her partner gain greater understanding in both their relationship and parenting.

Conclusion

The findings suggest that limited knowledge of immigration and acculturation processes was found to be detrimental to the working relationships between CWS and families. The embedded expectation that immigrant families are to "teach" workers about such processes places further responsibility and stress on them. Thus, sustaining what workers titled as, 'sanctioned ignorance' hence perpetuating privilege. In some ways, implicit in this expectation is the need to for families to prove their struggle. It may also point to a problematic gap in academic curriculum within educational institutions. As participants suggested; there is a requirement to "know" Canadian ways, but no expectation for workers to understand the immigration journey, reinforcing the unequal power relationship.

The findings also indicate the need for family oriented interventions. The participants echoed their sentiments about how individual processes are negotiated in the context of the family (e.g., children acquiring the language much faster than the parents and showing off). As it stands now, CWS focuses on a piece of an entire system. Such individualistic notions may be foreign to those arriving from a collective culture thus heightening their challenges with CWS. Centering the family has the potential to increase engagement, improve outcomes and prevent future involvement.

Finally, what underpinned many of the stories was that the intersection between CWS and immigrants' integration was in some ways, assimilation. The following recommendations are reflective of what was identified by participants as what is needed to improve the relationship between immigrant families, communities, and CWS. These recommendations speak to fostering a more collaborative relationship with parents in direct service work. This approach would minimize the "us" vs. "them" and the "here" and "there" ideologies, present in CWS, which support the underlying assimilative strategies as experienced by families. Finally, involving families to reduce the power imbalance by privileging their voices, has the potential to increase the responsiveness of services.

Recommendations

1. **Training for CWS Workers**: It was suggested by participants to, "Try to understand that case before you apply the procedure". There is a need to work with families through the lens of acculturation, understanding that some of the mediating factors are a part of the complexities of migration. Training on immigration dynamics and the newcomer process, would assist workers to approach cases holistically and to understand families and acculturation more broadly. As one worker commented, "I feel like they always have to teach me". From family's perspective, this would reduce their responsibility of teaching their worker about some of the specifics of their situation. Many participants identified that CWS is a part of a larger system and increased training would place workers in an ideal position to assist in system navigation. This has the potential to mediate some integration related stress, thus minimizing child protection concerns and contribute to the

overall successful adaptation. Ideally, several workers stated the need for an immigration or a refugee team to provide specialized support.

2. **Integration of Anti-Oppressive and social justice principles**: According to workers, there needed to be a culture shift within the child welfare system. Using the theories and skills AOP was believed to increase equity, mobilize resistance to racism, and improve the work with families. However, "It is difficult to integrate the learnings of AOP into the work with CAS as it is built on white middle class values". Drawing on suggestions of workers identifying outdated policy, "Take a step back and look at what policies we have in place and realize you know where do we need to make some changes and what do we need to add, what do we need to adjust, to give the agency and workers direction, where there is currently isn't any". This speaks to the needs for both increased knowledge and awareness and a much-needed paradigm shift in CWS.

3. **Translators:** One consistent message by workers and families, was the struggle to communicate. Workers identified an opportunity for prevention, if communication was improved. Families felt that their engagements would be less stressful and more meaningful if communication were improved. CWS agencies must develop policies and procedures specifying when to use translators, confidentiality and the roles and responsibilities of translators. This would increase the potential for collaborative working relationships, and for services users to be treated with dignity.

4. **Increased community engagement**: There needs to be a concerted effort to include and value family's voices. One worker commented, "Often newcomers are left out of the conversation which is hard because they are the ones that deal with the consequences".

This would provide a knowledge exchange opportunity, where workers could learn about the immigration process and understand needs associated with immigration. Secondly, when service users are meaningfully engaged it has the potential to reduce and improve service use.

    a. To understand more fully why employees and community workers believe that CWS creates a sense of fear in immigrant communities. To understand this misperception, one of the recommendations is for CWS to increase their positive visibility in immigrant communities. As suggested by community members and families, doing prevention type work through education and collaborations, would raise the profile and, lower stigma.

    b. Service collaboration: Increased connections between all agencies serving newcomers. Workers suggested increased collaborations with settlement offices, doctors, clinics, shelters and places that may support newcomers to Canada, to increase knowledge mobilization on the role of CWS. Building community capacity to respond and assist in knowledge building around the expectations of CWS. This would reduce stigma and confusion on what involvement entails.

5. Development of Family Interventions and Programming: Acculturation encompasses the entire family system, as such there is a need to include and/or increase interventions and subsequent programming with the entire family. Currently, interventions are individual focused, inclusion of the family would increase change opportunities and sustainability.

Contributions to Current Research

This research contributes to the literature in three ways. First, it clarifies the connection between the vulnerabilities created by acculturation and the perception of child protection concerns in immigrant families. This begins to unpack the connection between poverty, race, immigration and CWS, requiring much attention. There is a dearth in the Canadian literature concerning this connection and therefore requires more analysis, especially given the current global increase of migration. Secondly, it provides a snapshot view of how the implementation of AOP and social justice, as identified in both the CASH/CCASH Organization Goals and Guiding Beliefs, is translating into frontline services. While AOP and Social Justice commitments are articulated at the organizational level, the findings suggest that structural barriers exist in actualizing these goals and is felt both—at the front-line level and by families. Finally, it speaks to how academically trained social workers perceive their ability to apply their education in the field. As one worker noted, her education and work at CWS could not be more different. This research speaks to the need for an increase in collaboration and knowledge exchange between social work education and CWS. This would increase preparation of social workers entering the field to reduce the struggles encountered in translating theoretical knowledge into practice.

New Contributions to Knowledge

The research methodology of this study, included exploring the phenomena of immigrant family's engagement with CWS from multiple vantage points. Participants' stories provided key insights into the relationship between CWS and immigrant families. What was revealed was some of the outcomes associated with acculturation, under child protection standards, were being interpreted as threats to the safety and well-being of children. In regulating these processes, CWS

required changes (e.g., the ways parents parented their children) which lead to re-shaping acculturation outcomes. Underpinning workers' narratives, was a general belief that parenting practices were significantly different in countries other than Canada. Canadian expectations of parenting were operationalized in the demarcation of difference, of acceptable parenting "here" and unacceptable practices "there". The findings also signal that such perception of differences was informed by myths and stereotypes of how families function in the Global South (e.g., discussions of excessive physical discipline and IPV). However, there was a lack of concrete examples that these parenting practices, for example lack of supervision and excessive physical discipline, is tied to the Global South. The underlying contradiction is that all but one participant's country of origin in this study (Somalia), are signatories and have ratified the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRC). Meaning that signatories have the same requirements to protect children as Canada, however, the implementation varies in Global South and North. For the North, the CRC's mandate of "Best interest of the Child" and other articles, are interpreted as intended to be a focus on the individual, as opposed to family and community- as in many countries in the Global South. In the Global South, the CRC is interpreted and intended to be a holistic approach, inclusive of familial connections. In Canada, however, the ideology of difference between Canadian families and newcomers seemed to be at the core.

While the above has been discussed in the literature in the United States, and to a lesser extent in Canada, this research brings to light how this narrative is employed in frontline practices and to some extent, remains un-interrogated. These narratives, at times, prompted families to feel misunderstood and "Othered". Secondly, this study identified a conflictual perception of how immigrant communities learn about and understand the role of CWS. The belief that immigrant communities fear CWS, which motivates them to comply with the requests

of their workers, might have been so at one point, and/or is present in specific segments of the community, but it was not present in the narratives of families and community that participated in this study. From the community and family perspective, there was limited understanding surrounding the role of CWS.

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