

Developing social capital as a single refugee mother in a new country: narratives of creating life



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Dr Julian Grant, Dr Pauline Guerin, Ms Catherine Cole
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The study

Aim- to explore the factors that shape capacity to parent within families with a humanitarian entry background and where the primary caregivers are women who are raising their children without a partner

Specifically-

- The factors that shape mothers' capacity to raise children
- how these factors shape mothers' capacity to raise children
- how mothers' manage these factors



Source: Australian Government Department of Immigration and Citizenship-Success Story-2012

Data

1. Case study with mothers who are refugees to Australia and raising a child or children without a formal marital partner

- Total of 10 families with maternal age range from 18 - 37 years, with between 2 and 8 children
- Time spent in refugee camps ranged from 4 - 19 years
- Time spent in Australia ranged from 1 – 6 years
- 6 families had 10 home visits, 1 family had 7 home visits and 1 family had 6 home visits 2 families had 2 home visits

2. Participatory action-research focus groups

- 12 groups held across 4 different venues,
- Number of participant mothers for each group ranged from 3-9.
- Participants determined topics for group discussion. Guest speakers from Centrelink, Housing SA, and Shine SA. Other discussions led by the research team at participant request on relationships, being a mother in Australia, and communication based discipline

3. Fortnightly team discussions to analyse data iteratively and to determine directions.

Loneliness and sadness

'Parenting life is difficult being a single girl. Raising a child by yourself is very difficult; no room for other activities; my social life is cut off' (K CS)

'In Sudanese culture single mums do not mingle with marry women that makes me sad...I have to be on my own' (C CS P2)

Mum is very sad – no support from her mother. She's isolated because of children issues. Not being able to get support to look after the kids is increasing her isolation. Mum says she is not educated; cannot read or write, is worried about her children's future (S CS P1)

Financial Capital

-the capacity to purchase resources

'What I receive from Centrelink is not enough to pay for childcare for my children. I have a lot of responsibilities in Africa. My sister died and all her children are my responsibility. I am very worried about those left behind children, sometimes they sleep without food and in darkness' (S CS P1).

Washing machine not working – mum not working – had no petrol to get children to school events today – bought food items from salvation army (M CS P1)

'Teachers always ask students to pay \$2.00, \$4.00, for activities' (L C P1)

Fridge was empty (8 children) *'I can't leave them here on their own to go to the Sunday market' (S CS P1)*

Human Capital

-the capacity to provide an environment conducive to educational success

Maternal struggle for schooling for self:

'I wake up at 5am to get the 6 children ready for school, the bus picks them up by 8.25 before I get the bus to school. I am always late. The teacher doesn't understand my problem' (T CS P1)

Mum looks stressed up due to not being able secure a 'family day care' for her child - still looking!! Mum wants to return to school (Y CS)

Maternal priority of schooling for her children:

'My dreams for my daughter are for education, to get work, and earn a good living to make her happy; she will live long' (L CS P2)

Mum assist children with homework and prepares for next days school; cleaning lunch kit, ironing uniform and packing lunch kit', (M CS P1)

Connections and connecting

Connections were made to community through school, children's school, and church groups. These require financial and human capital.

Additional approach to developing capital was trying to find a husband

This was problematic for most participants:

'I have bars on the windows and lock the doors but still they come like bees to honey. They just want 'you know' and centre link money' (F 10)

'even here in Australia [African] men beat women but women do not call police; beat her so much 'till she can't move-can't call police because of culture' (C CS P2)

Three year old draws image of 2 adults fighting. I ask, who are these? *'My dad and my other dad'*. Why are they fighting? *'My other dad doesn't like me'*. Where is the dad that doesn't like you? *'At his house; but he comes here to see his daughter-my little sister'*. (Q CS P1)

'I stay strong for my children' (LCS P2)



Source: UN High Commission for Refugees