

Parent-child Engagement and Dissonance in Refugee Families Resettling in Brisbane, Australia¹

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Abstract: This Australian-based study examined demographic and psychosocial factors associated with refugee parents' communication with their children. Refugee parents ($n = 222$) from Ethiopia, Congo, and Myanmar took part in a survey. Logistic hierarchical analysis showed that parents with a higher level of acculturation were more engaged in meaningful and positive communication with their children. Parents' acculturative stress increased their perception of intergenerational dissonance. Refugee parents' employment status showed unexpected effects: unemployed parents reported interacting more, and more positively, with their children. Those who were confident in securing a job also interacted meaningfully with their children. Those in the workforce reported that their relationship and communication with children deteriorated.

Keywords: refugee family, parent-child communication, acculturation.

1. Introduction

Australia has had humanitarian immigration programs for refugees from war-torn countries since the Second World War (Jupp 2002). Starting with a large cohort of European “displaced persons” in the late 1940s / early 1950s, successive waves of refugees have included Vietnamese, Lebanese, Chileans, Ethiopians, Sudanese, Congolese, Afghanis, Iraqis, Bosnians, Burmese, and Syrians as the larger groups, with a host of smaller intakes from other countries (DoHA 2020, Jupp 2002, Neumann 2015). Since the 1990s, significant intakes of refugees from Africa, the Middle East and Asia have resettled in Australia “offshore”, through the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which gives the arrivals the right to “permanent protection” visas (DIBP 2014, DoHA 2020). In recent years, an increasingly higher proportion of the humanitarian intake consists of people who have substantial family and community links in Australia: a humanitarian version of family-reunion immigration. This shift away from the UNHCR-sponsored refugee program has been criticized; yet much more fraught is the process of asylum seeking in Australia, especially for people who arrive on boats: granting lasting protection this way (“on shore”) was virtually halted in 2013 (RCoA 2020).

Our study explores the experience of permanently resettled refugees, who tend to arrive in Australia as family groups; in many cases, these are large, one-parent families with dependent children (Hugo 2011). As a result of settling in a vastly different social environment, refugee families must acculturate, which often includes considerable change and disruption in gender and intergenerational relationships within the family (Renzaho, Green, Mellor & Swinburn 2011). This paper focuses on refugee families from Ethiopia, Myanmar, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (henceforth “Congo”) who have relocated to the

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Australian state of Queensland and now live (predominantly) within the metropolitan city of Brisbane.

Family communication has been investigated extensively within communication and family studies. However, there is a gap in the extant literature, as migrants and refugee families have been largely unexplored (Akkoor 2014: 232). A review of the family-communication literature indicates that although there are numerous instruments (mainly psychological scales) designed to measure parent-child communication, there is a dearth of instruments designed to target refugee families living in a cross-cultural context. While we know that parent-child communication can vary on a continuum from highly positive to highly dysfunctional in any family unit (Hynie, Guruge & Shakya 2013), a range of demographic and additional cross-cultural and adaptation-related factors are involved in determining the quantity and quality of communication between migrant/refugee parents and their children. Even though settlement and social-work professionals often find the intergenerational relationships in migrant and refugee families to be problematic, the issues are not fully understood, and more research is warranted. The present study draws upon demographic and psychosocial factors associated with refugee parents' communication with their children, focusing especially on educational and career aspirations that parents try to communicate to their children. This paper draws from a survey of refugee parents, focusing on data collected through the Refugee Parent-Child Relational Communication Scale (Khawaja, Hebbani, Obijiofor & Gallois 2017) – relating these data to the respondents' demographic characteristics and employment status, as well as their acculturative stress and life satisfaction.

1.1 Intergenerational family relations

The literature on family relationships, mainly originating from developed countries, indicates that effective parenting includes intense engagement of parents with their children. Kwak (2003) notes that family represents a key unit of social organization. Given its central role in the socialization of children, parent-child relations are the most significant aspect of social interaction within the family unit. It has been well documented that family relations can be placed on a scale from positive/helpful to negative/dysfunctional. Positive relations with children are marked by mutual respect, close engagement with children through shared activities, openness to sharing problems, and opportunities for parents to advise their children. Negative family communication primarily implies relative neglect of children and various manifestations of communicative dissonance (Baumrind 1991; Hillaker, Brophy-Herb, Villarruel & Haas 2008).

The family communication literature indicates that positive intergenerational communication is marked by openness in discussing problems. Ritchie and Fitzpatrick (1990) found that different perceptions of family communication (open and critical vs. conforming to parental authority) are widespread between parents and children but also between mothers and fathers, and that these patterns may change as children mature. They suggest that families should not be classified along the dimensions of conversation/openness vs. authority/conformity (as “pluralistic”, “protective”, “consensual” and “*laissez-faire*”) without taking into account the widespread discrepancies in family members' perceptions of their communication patterns. This is an important theoretical and methodological consideration for family communication research, which we heeded in our interpretation of findings. Ritchie's (1997) US-based study found that family's socioeconomic background, represented through parents' levels of education and their workplace and housework experiences, significantly determine communication patterns in the family, while parents' communication pattern reflects their general ideological position towards openness vs. conformity.

Intergenerational relations within families are extremely complex, influenced by a range of factors such as the broader cultural environment that families find themselves in, the age gap between parents and children, the gender relations in the family and broader society, the education and employment status of parents, and their general satisfaction with life, among other factors (Dinh & Nguyen 2006; Hebbani, Obijiofor & Bristed 2009; Ritchie 1997; Shimoni, Este & Clark 2003). The usual factors and complexities involved in family communication and resulting relationships are exacerbated by the migration process and especially the acculturation issues involved in it. The negative influence of migration on family relationships is more likely to be present in forced displacement, subsequently affecting refugee families the most.

Migrants – especially refugees – who resettle in Western countries are likely to encounter a vastly different sociocultural environment. When families migrate or flee and find themselves in an unfamiliar host society with significantly different social norms and customs, acculturative factors are likely to impact on relationships of parents with their children (Hebbani *et al.* 2009). Berry (1980) quotes the classical definition of acculturation proposed by Redfield, Linton and Herskovits (1936: 149): “acculturation comprehends those phenomena which result when groups of individuals, having different cultures, come into continuous first-hand contact with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups”. Refugee parents not only adapt and acculturate to a new socio-spatial setting, but they also have to adjust to novel and often alien cultural practices of the host country (Cook & Waite 2015; Hebbani, Obijiofor & Bristed 2012; Hebbani, Colic-Peisker & McKinnon 2018; Berry 1997). Such adjustment may be difficult and can lead to acculturative stress, especially for those who migrate as adults, past their primary socialization age. In the same vein, an acculturation gap between parents and children may appear post-migration as children adapt and acculturate faster than adults (Berry, Kim, Minde & Mok 1987; Birman 2006; Dinh & Nguyen 2006; Hebbani *et al.* 2012).

Refugees who have been granted permanent protection in Australia come from countries affected by war and violence. They are, with rare exceptions, “visibly different” from the Australian majority population: in appearance, dress, religion and everyday practices. They come from non-English-speaking countries that are, in most cases, culturally distant to Australia. A considerable adjustment is necessary to the new circumstances, which can be difficult and stressful (Colic-Peisker 2009; Ward, Bochner & Furnham 2001). Australia’s refugee settlers have the poorest employment outcomes of all migrant categories, due to “cultural difference” and also mainstream reaction to the perceived difference (“racial” or “cultural”) in the form of prejudice and discrimination (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury 2007). The authority of refugee parents and their ability to be inspiring role models to their offspring may be threatened by unemployment or loss of occupational status, low income, lack of English-language proficiency, and lack of social capital: the afflictions that plague refugee resettlement in “Western” countries, including Australia (Correa-Velez, Barnett & Gifford 2013; McKay 2009; Morantz *et al.* 2012).

Many factors influence the acculturation that follows migration: type of family or household, size and cohesiveness of the migrant community, socioeconomic background and type of job (or lack of one), age, education, language proficiency and “cultural distance” between the original and new cultural contexts. These acculturative challenges have an impact on the parents’ relationship with their children. Problematic intergenerational relationships in the migrant/refugee family can significantly negatively impact on the social mobility and general life chances of the second migrant generation: the children of the migrant/refugee family. The lack of social mobility for the second generation of migrant and refugee families can, in turn, become a multifaceted problem for the wider society (Portes & Zhou 1993, Haller *et al.* 2011).

1.2 Family communication in the context of migration

Past studies have shown that various factors facilitate or hinder migrant and refugee family relations. Demographic and psychosocial factors influence refugee parents' probability of engaging in positive and helpful communication within their immediate family unit. In their Canada-based study of refugee family relationships, Hynie and colleagues (2013) found that children's age did not impact on family conflict. In their study of refugee youth aged 16-24, they found that a role reversal within the family, where youth took on parental roles, usually because of the children's better command of the host country's language; however, these changes did not necessarily lead to conflict. In another Canadian study of engagement of refugee fathers, Shimoni, Este and Clark (2003) found that family stressors included underemployment or unemployment and the (gender) role reversal which occurs when mothers find paid work outside the home while unemployed fathers face social isolation and loss of self-esteem. Betancourt and colleagues (2014) found that fathers' loss of status affected their relationship with their children and the role that they played in their children's lives. In terms of education, studies have found that a mother's education and occupation predicted the quality of the home environment and parent-child relations more than father's (Dinh & Nguyen 2006, Menaghan & Parcel 1991, Ritchie 1997). Dinh and Nguyen (2006) found that children whose mothers had higher levels of education were better supported through mother-child relationships; this may be because educational level is generally positively correlated with socioeconomic status, which in turn may reduce financial strain and other life stresses.

It has been shown that the differential speed of acculturation of parents and children into the Australian (host country's) way of life – where children learn English and acculturate faster than their parents – often causes discrepancies in values and behavioural expectations between generations and can lead to a devaluation of parental authority (Koh & Walker 2013; Morantz, Rousseau & Heymann 2012; Ng, He & Loong 2004; Valtonen 2004). Those who are adapting well to their new country may be more engaged with their children, while those who are relatively unsettled may have an ineffective relationship. Vu and Rook (2013) found that better acculturated Vietnamese young adults, especially women, were more likely to report being criticized by, and having arguments with, their parents, due to differences in the speed of acculturation between parents and children. Dysfunctional family communication in the context of dissonant acculturation is likely to exacerbate the problems both refugee adults and their children experience in the process of adjustment to a new social context (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury 2008; Hebbani *et al.* 2009; 2010). Much literature and anecdotal evidence from settlement-service providers indicates that acculturative stress is likely to disturb family relationships post-migration (Fox 1991; Hebbani *et al.* 2009, 2010; Luita 2012; Meschke & Juang 2014; MYAN 2011). Some studies emphasize the central importance of close intergenerational engagement and communication as factors that can moderate the acculturation gap and prevent it from causing conflict within the family (Hynie *et al.* 2013, Michel & Peng 2012).

Our study explored parents' perceptions of their communication with children, focusing on parents from refugee backgrounds resettled in Australia from Congo, Myanmar, and Ethiopia. The analysis in this paper focuses on a newly developed Refugee Parent Communication and Relational Scale (Khawaja *et al.* 2017), which was used to identify the relational and communication patterns employed by refugee parents.

It was hypothesized that socio-demographic and psychosocial factors would increase the probability of parents from refugee backgrounds either engaging in constructive or dissonant communication with their children. Sociodemographic (English proficiency, education, employment, and longer duration of stay in Australia) and psychosocial factors (high acculturation, low acculturative stress, and high life satisfaction) that indicate some stability

in the relocated county increase the probability of parents engaging in positive and constructive communication with their children. Alternatively, sociodemographic (limited English proficiency and education, unemployment, and shorter duration of stay in Australia) and psychosocial factors (low acculturation, high acculturative stress, and low life satisfaction) indicate limited stability in the new country, increasing the parents' perception of having dissonant or dysfunctional communication with their children. Due to limited research in the area and the exploratory nature of the study, no direction was specified for gender, age, or country of origin.

2. Method

This paper draws from a larger project conducted in Brisbane, Australia, in the period 2013-2015. The interdisciplinary research team consisted of five chief investigators from three Australian universities who all participated in data collection, alongside a research assistant and several bilingual assistants from the three national groups in point. The data collection, assisted by interpreters where needed, consisted of a face-to-face administered survey and follow-up in-depth interviews with refugee parents from Congo, Myanmar, and Ethiopia. In this paper, we focus on the survey data analysis.

A total of 222 participants took part in the survey; they were from Myanmar (51%), Congo (31%) and Ethiopia (18%). Our sample was gender-balanced, with 50% male and 50% female participants. The age of participants ranged from 21 to 61, and the mean age was 42 years ($SD = 9$). The average length of stay in Australia for all participants was 6.6 years. Of these, 39% had been in Australia for three years or less; 25% had been in Australia between four and six years; 36% had been in Australia for more than six years. At the group level, those from Ethiopia had the longest average residence in Australia (ten years), while participants from Congo had an average length of stay of six years, and participants from Myanmar had been in Australia for four years on average. Thirty-two per cent of the survey participants were employed; 67.6% were not employed. Thirty-four percent were studying, while others were retired, stay-at-home parents or unemployed. Education levels varied; most (69%) had some schooling, while a minority had vocational (18%) or university education (7%). A few (5%) had no formal education at all, while data were missing for 1% of the participants.

The survey collected quantitative and some qualitative data. The survey questionnaire battery employed in this study consisted of the following five sections:

1. *Demographic and socioeconomic information*: Introductory questions asked about the participant's age, gender, ethnicity, family composition, country of origin, duration of stay in Australia, education level, English-language proficiency, employment status and type of employment in Australia. Three items ("how confident are you of being able to secure your ideal job in the future?", "I know what I need to do to improve my work prospects", and "I am currently working towards improving my work situation prospects") measured job improvement.
2. *Acculturation and resilience* were measured through the acculturation and resilience subscales of the Adult Acculturation and Resiliency Scale (AARS) (Khawaja, Moisuc & Ramirez 2014). The AARS was developed using a culturally and linguistically diverse population in Australia. It is a 27-item scale with three factors: resilience, acculturation, and spirituality. The acculturation factor measures respondents' successful management of the new cultural environment, integration into the new society and positive development of adaptation (e.g., "I am ok with accepting both Australian and my own cultural values"). The resilience factor measures a respondent's ability to use personal

and interpersonal strengths and skills to solve problems, cope with new situations, and learn new ways to communicate in the adopted country (e.g., “I am able to cope with new situations”). Higher scores on these two factors indicate higher levels of acculturation and resilience. The two-item spirituality factor was excluded from the current study. A few items (such as “I can manage my two worlds”) were excluded, as they were considered too abstract and inappropriate for a refugee population with vastly varying levels of education. Finally, 23 items were included in the present study’s questionnaire. The acculturation factor demonstrates good internal consistency ($\alpha = .83$) and test/retest reliability ($r = .65$). The resilience subscale has been shown to have good internal consistency ($\alpha = .80$) and test/retest reliability ($r = .89$) (Khawaja et al. 2014),

3. *Acculturative stress* was measured by seven items extracted from the Multidimensional Acculturative Stress Scale (MASS) (Jibeen & Khalid 2010). The 24-item scale measures the stressors experienced by immigrants. The scale comprises five factors: discrimination, threat to identity, lack of opportunities for occupation and financial mobility, language barrier, and homesickness (e.g., “I am constantly reminded that I am different”). The internal consistency for the subscales, as measured by Cronbach alpha coefficients, ranges from .66 to .86. Concurrent validity has been shown to be satisfactory, as the scale correlates positively with the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12) (Minhas & Mubbashar 1996) and negatively with the Psychological Wellbeing Scale (Ryff & Singer 1996). The items selected for the present study covered the migrants’ experiences of discrimination, feelings of disappointment and not fitting in with the host society, and potentially increased burden of managing relationships within the family.
4. *Refugee Parent-Child Relational Communication Scale*: A 20-item scale was developed to measure refugee parents’ perception of their communication with their children (Khawaja et al. 2017). Some items were adopted or adapted from Richie and Fitzpatrick (1990) and Ritchie (1997). The new scale has three factors: engagement, hope/aspirations and dissonance. Engagement measures the parent-child positive communication and relationship, including time spent together, common interests, and mutual respect (e.g., “my children often talk to me about their friends”). Hope/aspirations measures parents’ communication with their children about educational and employment goals (e.g., “I tell my children that success in education will help them to have a good life”). Dissonance measures parents’ dysfunctional communication with their children (e.g., “My children think I am old-fashioned”). Higher scores indicate a high level of the specified communication. The internal consistency for factors 1, 2, and 3 was satisfactory at .75, .77, and .63 respectively.
5. *Satisfaction with Life Scale*: Consistent with the ideas proposed by Diener, Emmons, Larsen, and Griffin (1985), a scale comprising seven items was developed. One item (“I am satisfied with my life”) was taken from Diener and colleagues’ scale. Considering the previous studies on refugees and migrants, six other items that measured participants’ satisfaction in various spheres of life were generated: “my health is good”, “I am satisfied with my financial situation”, “Australia is a good country to live in”, “I live in harmonious family /household”, “I have a supportive community”, and “I have good Australian friends / work colleagues / neighbors”).

We met with bilingual assistants to review the battery measures. Community leaders from the respective refugee communities also took part in this exercise and, alongside a bilingual assistant, helped the research team adapt the measures to make them more user-friendly and culturally appropriate. Once the English master version was created, the battery underwent back-translation into Congolese (French and Swahili), Ethiopian (Amharic), and Burmese (Karen and Mizo) to secure accuracy and consistency across languages (Brislin 1970).

Ethics clearance was obtained from the universities. Our industry partner, Access Community Services, Ltd. (henceforth “Access”) circulated information about our study among the local refugee families from Myanmar, Congo, and Ethiopia. Parents from these refugee communities who had been in Australia for at least one year and had at least one child above the age of eight years were invited to participate in the study. The one-year requirement was used because the first year of settlement in a new country is often unsettled and includes many changes and challenges. During the first year, permanently protected refugees in Australia attend English-language classes and receive intensive settlement support. We expected high quality and reliable data from parents, who had achieved some post-migration stability by having a chance to look for a job and becoming at least minimally acquainted with their new social environment, neighborhoods, children’s schools and Australian education system. The condition of having at least one child over eight years was needed as these children were considered mature enough to have conversations with their parents about their lives, schooling, friends, and hopes for the future.

Before embarking on the data collection, the research team conducted a training workshop, where the project aims and research instruments and procedures were explained to bilingual assistants who were inducted into the questionnaire-based survey data collection procedures – including gaining consent, offering language assistance and offering assistance with completing the battery. Data were collected at venues such as Access offices, in the suburbs where participants lived, and at community or church gatherings. At these data-collection sessions, researchers – with the help of bilingual assistants – explained the aims of the study and helped participants understand the consent form. It was pointed out that participants were free to participate and could withdraw at any time. Confidentiality was explained and written consent obtained. The battery was available in English and the participant’s native language. Participants completed the battery individually, but those who were not literate in English or their native language were assisted by the bilingual assistants with interpretation, reading, or translation (as and when needed). Participants complete the battery in 20 to 40 minutes and were offered a \$20 gift card as a modest compensation for their time. The survey data were collected 2013-14.

3. Results

Hierarchical logistic regression was conducted to examine whether socio-demographic and psychosocial factors affected the probability of parents engaging in constructive/positive communication with their children or, alternatively, perceiving to have dissonant or dysfunctional communication in its many aspects covered by our Refugee Parent-Child Relational Communication Scale. Tests were run to check the linearity of logit and multicollinearity. The data met the assumptions for logistic regression (Field 2005).

3.1 Factors associated with parents’ perceptions of engagement and helpful communication with their children

The scores on the factor “engagement” were converted into a binary variable using a median split. This dependent variable (DV) “engagement” therefore had two discrete categories: high engagement (1) versus low engagement (0). Two models were tested. In the first model, socio-demographic variables were entered as the independent variables (IV). Binary IVs were

“gender” with male (1) and female (0); “education” with tertiary education (1) and no tertiary education (0), and “employment status” with employed (1) and unemployed (0). “Country” had three levels: Ethiopia, Congo, and Myanmar. Ethiopia was used as a reference category; dummy variables were used to identify Congo and Myanmar. The other independent variables (age, English proficiency, and duration of stay) were continuous variables. In the second model – after entering the socio-demographic variables – acculturation, acculturation stress, parents’ future job improvements and life satisfaction were entered as IVs.

Two binary logistic regression models were specified in an incremental way; see Table 1. As seen in Table 1, Model 1 was significant ($X^2(8) = 19.58, p = .01$) and Nagelkerke R^2 was .150. Gender (female/ mother) and employment (unemployed) status were significant predictors of intergenerational communication. The second model was also significant ($X^2(12) = 56.71, p = .001$) and the Nagelkerke R^2 increased to .390. With the addition of the psychosocial variables, gender was no longer significant. It is interesting to note that the odds of being engaged with the children decreased by 72% with each unit increase on employment ($\text{Exp}(B) = 0.278$). The odds of being engaged with children increased by 39.7% with each unit increase in scores on the acculturation scale ($\text{Exp}(B) = 1.397$). Finally, the odds of being engaged in positive communication with children increased by 21.2% with each unit increase on scores on the life-satisfaction scale ($\text{Exp}(B) = 1.212$). This means that, after controlling for demographics, employed parents were less engaged in positive communication with their children than unemployed ones. Acculturation and life satisfaction were associated with more positive communication.

Table 1: Factors associated with parents’ perceptions of positive engagement with their children.

Independent Variable	Model 1			Model 2		
	Exp(B)	95% C.I for EXP (B)		Exp(B)	95% C.I for EXP (B)	
		Lower	Upper		Lower	Upper
Constant	0.813			0.000		
Gender	0.477	0.234	0.973*	0.490	0.216	1.114
Age	1.003	0.961	1.046	0.992	0.943	1.044
Ethiopia						
Congo	0.820	0.286	2.348	1.362	0.407	4.557
Myanmar	0.455	0.158	1.308	0.845	0.255	2.805
Length of stay	1.026	0.945	1.114	1.033	0.923	1.157
English proficiency	1.315	0.981	1.764	1.190	0.852	1.661
Tertiary education	0.683	0.281	1.660	0.652	0.230	1.851
Employed status	0.271	0.117	0.629	0.278	0.107	0.722**
Acculturation				1.397	1.186	1.646**
Acculturative stress				1.020	0.916	1.135
Future job improvements				1.029	0.818	1.294
Life satisfaction				1.212	1.021	1.439**

Note: *= $p < .05$; **= $p < .01$; Country (Ethiopia) and gender (female) were reference categories.

3.2 Factors associated with parents' perceptions of dissonant communication with their children

The scores on the factor “dissonance” were converted into a binary variable, using a median split. This dependent variable (DV) had two discrete categories: high (1) versus low (0). Two models were tested. In the first model, the socio-demographic variables were entered as the independent variables (IV). “Gender” with male (1) and female (0), “education” with tertiary education (1) and no tertiary education (0), and “employment status” with employed (1) and not employed (0) were binary. “Country” had three levels: Ethiopia, Congo, and Myanmar. Ethiopia was used as a reference category; dummy variables were used to identify Congo and Myanmar. The other IVs (age, English proficiency, and duration of stay) were continuous variables. In the second model – after entering the socio-demographic variables – acculturation, acculturative stress, job improvements and life satisfaction were entered as IVs.

Two binary logistic regression models were specified in an incremental way; see Table 2. As seen in Table 2, Model 1 was non-significant. However, Model 2 was significant ($X^2(12) = 28.839, p = .004$), and Nagelkerke R^2 increased from .072 to .208. After considering the demographic variables, acculturation stress, life satisfaction, and future job improvements were significantly related to parents' perceptions of problematic communication with their children. The odds of experiencing dissonant communication with children increased by 14% with every unit increase in acculturative stress ($\text{Exp}(B) = 1.140$). Acculturative stress was correlated with parents' perceptions of strained communication with their children. Similarly, the odds of experiencing negative communication with children increased 19% with each unit increase in life satisfaction. Finally, the odds of experiencing dissonance decreased 26% with each unit increase in future job improvement ($\text{Exp}(B) = .735$). Therefore, an improvement in the future job situation was likely to be associated with a decrease in dysfunctional communication in the family.

Table 2: Factors associated with parents' perceptions of dissonant communication.

Independent Variable	Model 1			Model 2		
	Exp(B)	95% C.I for EXP(B)		Exp(B)	95% C.I for EXP(B)	
		Lower	Upper		Lower	Upper
Constant	0.650			0.301		
Gender	0.820	0.423	1.591	0.884	0.436	1.790
Age	1.000	0.961	1.040	1.002	0.961	1.046
Ethiopia						
Congo	2.235	0.821	6.089	2.021	0.698	5.851
Myanmar	1.140	0.432	3.011	0.913	0.323	2.576
Length of stay	1.001	0.926	1.083	0.993	0.913	1.079
English proficiency	1.064	0.814	1.390	1.106	0.830	1.474
Tertiary education	1.684	0.724	3.916	2.379	0.952	5.945
Employed status	0.792	0.378	1.659	0.649	0.294	1.437
Acculturation				0.963	0.861	1.077
Acculturative stress				1.140	1.030	1.261**
Future job improvements				0.735	0.602	0.898**
Life satisfaction				1.190	1.019	1.389**

Note: *= $p < .05$; **= $p < .01$; Country (Ethiopia) and gender (female) were reference categories.

4. Discussion and conclusion

This paper has explored the role of demographic, socio-demographic, acculturative, and life-satisfaction factors in refugee parents' communications with their children. Given that we could not observe or measure family relationships and intergenerational communication directly and could not survey children in resettled refugee families, we had to rely on the parents' perceptions of communication with their children. It is possible that their responses were influenced by social desirability bias, so their survey responses may reflect a rose-tinted version of family relations. Despite assurances of confidentiality, social desirability may have been strengthened by the group setting in which the survey data were collected face-to-face.

Our hypotheses were partially supported. Acculturation and life satisfaction were positively correlated with constructive and positive intergenerational communication. Acculturative stress and employment reduced the positive communication and increased the dysfunctional intergenerational communication. Life satisfaction was also related with intergenerational dissonance.

Most parents reported spending significant amounts of free time with their children; they also reported that their children were comfortable sharing problems with them. In line with cross-cultural research on families, mothers appeared to be more engaged with their children than fathers, while those who were employed (more often fathers) were comparatively less engaged with children. Our data also showed that parents' level of acculturation enhanced positive intergenerational communication: those who perceived themselves as being more acculturated reported more positive communication with their children. Similarly, those who reported higher life satisfaction reported more positive communication with their children. However, parents' other demographic characteristics – such as age, country of origin, length of stay, English proficiency, education, and confidence about future prospects – were not playing a role in determining communication with children.

Another interesting finding is that an increase in parents' acculturative stress increased their perceptions of communication problems in the parent-child relationship, probably due to intergenerational acculturative dissonance well-established in the literature and discussed in the introductory section of this paper. It is plausible to argue that parents' acculturative stress exacerbates parenting difficulties in a new cultural milieu. In their study of immigrant Chinese families in Canada, Costigan and Dokis found that (2016: 1253) “acculturation differences may be associated with more intense conflict because different levels of acculturation may signify less proficiency in English on the part of parents and less proficiency in Chinese on the part of children”. The finding that communicative dissonance in the family is associated with acculturative stress calls for further investigation.

Those participants who felt comfortable about their future job prospects were less likely to identify an acculturative dissonance *vis-à-vis* their children; conversely, those who were confident about their own future job prospects were more likely to report a decrease in dissonance. It seems that these parents were anticipating a positive work experience and were relating well with their children. Contrary to expectations, the findings seem to suggest that employment negatively affected parents' relationship with children. It is possible that, after entering the workforce, parents become busier and tend to spend more time away from their children, which may be associated with deterioration in communication. It is interesting to note that an increase in life satisfaction did not rule out a perception of acculturative dissonance. Closer examination of the items on this scale indicated that it consisted of satisfaction with finances, health, neighbourhood, and community, which may have coincided with a range of experiences. This may mean that life satisfaction was interpreted in a specific way, which needs further investigation. Unsurprisingly, when parents and children were on a similar acculturation trajectory, the result seemed to be more harmonious communication within the family unit.

4.1 Implications for policy and practice

Prior to arrival in Australia, UNHCR-sponsored, permanently protected refugees are given a general cultural orientation to life in Australia through the Australian Cultural Orientation (AUSCO) Programme. Our findings indicate that these orientation sessions could include more family-oriented cross-cultural information about differences in parenting styles and methods. A pre-warning about the likelihood of different acculturation rates between generations could also better prepare refugee parents for their family life and inevitable changes in the dynamic of the family unit during their settling in to their new life in Australia.

Successful settlement and family harmony are crucial for life satisfaction among migrants and refugees resettled in Australia and elsewhere. The factors that can contribute to life satisfaction, such as being employed in an appropriate job (where income and job status correspond to one's skills and expectations), need to be addressed by the government-funded settlement program, as this in turn impacts on positive engagement and constructive communication with the second migrant generation. Refugee families may harbour various traumas that can negatively impact on family life and communication, and this may be helped by making counselling for parents easily available as their children progress through successive stages of childhood, adolescence, and corresponding stages of schooling.

4.2 Limitations and future directions

Our findings are based on a relatively small sample of respondents from specific refugee groups and, therefore, they cannot easily be generalised to wider refugee populations in Australia or comparable countries. In addition, as in any study of minority populations, language and cultural barriers may have affected data collection, although we addressed this difficulty pre-emptively by using bilingual assistants and rigorously back-translating the survey battery into community languages. Given the topic and the self-reporting involved in data collection, it is likely that a degree of social-desirability bias crept into responses, in spite of our efforts to secure anonymity and reassure the participants about confidentiality. Another important limitation is that we only gathered information from one family member: a parent. In consequence, it is possible that our data contain a parental bias and present a somewhat rosy picture of intergenerational communication.

Future research should employ a longitudinal study to capture changing familial relations and acculturation dissonance over time. Future studies should also compare refugee and non-refugee families. Further, studies that include both parents and their children may be helpful in gaining a holistic insight into communication within the family unit exposed to migration and refugee experience. Exploring dynamics and changes in parental gender relations following migration would be an excellent complement to this investigation into intergenerational engagement and communication.

Despite the limitations detailed above, our findings are an innovative contribution to the understanding of intergenerational communication dynamics in the refugee family. In this research project, we have developed and applied the Refugee Parent-Child Relational Communication Scale to measure intergenerational communication and explore its determinants in refugee populations. This instrument may be applied in further research into intergenerational communication issues in migrant and refugee families: the issue that are often observed by settlement professionals and practitioners, but not explored in depth in psychological, sociological, or communication studies literature.

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