A Qualitative Exploration of Post-Migration Family Dynamics and Intergenerational Relationships

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Abstract

Migration can be a very stressful event that post migration involves major changes in family dynamics and intergenerational relationships. With plenty of literature discussing the challenges in these areas, this article focuses on the ways migrants perceive, navigate, and manage changes to their family structure, roles, and relationships. This study in Australia employed a participatory action research framework and qualitative focus groups with 164 migrants from seven ethno-cultural groups and a range of visa pathways. The data were analyzed thematically and revealed two major topics: Changes in Family Structure and Reconstructing Intergenerational Relationships and Roles. While acknowledging the challenges, the results demonstrate migrants’ resilience and ability to manage post-migration changes across generations, genders, and cultures. Notably, the migrants’ lives are characterized not only by a desire for multiculturalism and acculturation but also by the challenges that are related to assimilation and marginalization. This research highlights the important role that migrant and resettlement services can play in supporting families and community-oriented approaches to resettlement support. This may include the implementation of cross-cultural and intergenerational strategies drawn on the strengths of migrant families and their capacity to adapt to new and sometimes hostile environments.

Keywords

family dynamics, intergenerational conflicts, family structure, refugees, migrants, Australia

Introduction

Australia is becoming increasingly known for its multicultural population that is characterized by a vast diversity of cultural, ethnic, religious, and linguistic groups. In addition to its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups (3% of the population), over 27% of Australians were born overseas and another 20% have at least one parent born overseas (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2014). Furthermore, net overseas migration contributes to over 60% of Australia’s total population growth. Australia has also committed to the resettlement of over 12,000 new refugees in addition to the current 13,500 new refugees who are arriving annually (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2014). Consequently, Australia has a broad range of visa schemes and a rapidly increasing overall intake of migrants. Australia, thus, provides a particularly rich case study of a migrant-receiving country that is undergoing a rapid transformation within the context of this dynamic environment.

The Australian government indicates that the political measures will create a “unified Australia,” with a single national identity (Smits, 2011). This is not to say that multiculturalism is not welcomed.

It does, however, mean that migrants are encouraged to adapt and integrate to “the Australian way of life” (Moran, 2016) while maintaining the culture and traditions from their country of origin (Bastian, 2012; Naidoo, 2007; Tisdell & Tisdell, 1998)—this indeed a conundrum. This process may present migrants with including language barriers (Saechao et al., 2012), limited employment (Creese & Wiebe, 2012), housing restrictions (Nygaard, 2011), prejudice, and discrimination as well as major changes in family dynamics (Jasinskaja-Lahti, Mähönen, & Ketokivi, 2012) and intergenerational relationships (Bastian, 2012; Borjas, 1999).

Managing these challenges involves complex reconstructions of migrant identities, familial structure, and familial values (Naidoo, 2007). Such reconstructions involve changes to migrants’ expectations of men and women, husbands and wives, and children and their peers brought about by

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engagement with their adoptive country’s social, cultural, religious, economic, and political structures (Shaw, 2010). According to Viner et al. (2012), national systems and structures force migrant families to first focus on finding housing, employment, and education opportunities and managing discrimination. As a result, Measham et al. (2014) explains that the well-being and cohesion of the family unit may only become a priority, once major settlement goals are achieved (McMichael, Gifford, & Correa-Velez, 2011). Galvin, Braithwaite, and Bylund (2015) notes that this leaves little room to review and/or reconstruct (if needed) the ways in which the family interacts and the roles and responsibilities of individual family members (Moskal, 2011). While many migrant families develop strategies for managing this change process (Renzaho, McCabe, & Sainsbury, 2011), others experience family breakdown (Herrman, Kaplan, & Szwarc, 2010) and intergenerational conflict (Phinney, Ong, & Madden, 2000) with lasting effects on all family members and their relationships (Hua, 2010).

Although the impact of post-migration challenges on migrants in the Australian context is well documented across a range of perspectives (Abdelkerim & Grace, 2012; Bastian, 2012; Borjas, 1999; Naidoo, 2007; Watkins, Razee, & Richters, 2012), relatively little is known about how families navigate and manage these challenges (Renzaho et al., 2011). Given the importance of the family unit in supporting the social, cultural, economic, and political goals of developing a unified Australia (Smits, 2011), a better understanding of how migrants in Australia, and particularly Greater Western Sydney, are navigating post-migration family dynamics and intergenerational relationships is required. Such a focus highlights the resilience and resourcefulness of migrant families that are missed in research that focuses primarily on how families navigate and manage these challenges (Renzaho et al., 2011). Given the importance of the family unit in supporting the social, cultural, economic, and political goals of developing a united Australia (Smits, 2011), a better understanding of how migrants in Australia, and particularly Greater Western Sydney, are navigating post-migration family dynamics and intergenerational relationships is required. Such a focus highlights the resilience and resourcefulness of migrant families that are missed in research that focuses primarily on how families navigate and manage these challenges (Renzaho et al., 2011).

Greater Western Sydney was the key area of focus in this study as more than 50% of its approximately 800,000 people are migrants or their descendants. Furthermore, Greater Western Sydney has been found to have pockets of cultural concentration, which allows migrants to stay connected to key aspects of their culture such as their ethnicity, community, language, and religion (Ho, 2012). Within this context, it is likely that migrants living in Greater Western Sydney have a range of strategies for addressing post-migration family dynamics and intergenerational relationships. Collecting information about these strategies was done with the goal of developing culturally relevant, yet flexible and adaptable, family and community-oriented resettlement support policies, practices, and services.

**Theoretical Framework**

To make sense of the participants’ narratives of their post-migration transition, we mapped out their experiences within the broader theoretical understandings of the acculturation theory. In claiming acculturation theory as the theoretical lens for this study, we remain aware of the following: (a) the acculturation theory is complex and dynamic, incorporating a broad range of perspectives, analyses, and strategies; and (b) the limitations of some of the acculturation theory’s orientations. It goes beyond the focus of this article to discuss these limitations (e.g., Ngo, 2008; Schwartz, Unger, Zamboanga, & Szapocznik, 2010). Instead, we contend that while there are many strands of the acculturation theory, there remains identifiable common thinking that underpins these numerous areas of contention and debate that allow us to draw on acculturation theory as a theoretical lens.

The focal point of the acculturation theory is the processes through which migrants acculturate into the host societies. Of concern is how immigrant populations navigate (potentially) competing values, norms, and beliefs of different cultures (culture of origin and receiving culture). In this way, the process of acculturation is distinct from that of “assimilation” and when “applied to individuals, acculturation refers to changes that take place as a result of contact with culturally dissimilar people, groups, and social influences” (Gibson, 2001, cited in Schwartz et al., 2010, p. 237). Berry (2005) sees this as a “dual process of cultural and psychological change” (p. 698). At the center of the acculturation theory, therefore, is an “understanding [of the] interactions between immigrants and the dominant culture” (Ngo, 2008, pp. 1-6).

The utility of acculturation as a theoretical framework for us is twofold. First, it allows us to focus on the individual (i.e., migrant) rather than the group level (i.e., origin vs. receiving culture) changes. One could argue this as a limitation in focus that neglects the dynamics of the interaction between dominant (host) cultures and migrant cultures including systems of oppression and power relations. Nevertheless, for us, this is an important focus for two reasons: we can center the experiences and voices of migrant groups as counter-narratives to the “problem”-centered dominant/mainstream narratives that focus on the “deficits” of migrants. Furthermore, such a focus exposes the nuances of the post-migration acculturation processes.

Second, acculturation theory allows us to focus on what Berry (Arizpe, 2015) calls processes of “double engagements.” This refers to how “migrants engage in keeping, maintaining and expressing their heritage culture while at the same time, participating in the larger society” (see also Berry, 2013, pp. 1122-1135). In doing so, the acculturation theory facilitates our deconstruction of post-migration processes as complex negotiations and contested acculturation processes. This exposes the agency, resilience, and resourcefulness of migrants in post-migration acculturation. Schwartz et al. (2010) point out the following:

> Within the constraints imposed by demographic and contextual factors, individuals are able to purposefully decide which
cultural elements they wish to acquire or retain and which elements they wish to discard or reject. (p. 239)

This theoretical lens, therefore, provides a framework for the development of research strategies, which allow migrants not only to discuss the challenges that they face but also to articulate the strategies that they use to navigate acculturative transitions.

**Research Design**

This article presents data from a portion of a larger study that explored migrants’ post-migration settlement trajectories as related to changes in economics, employment, collective values, family dynamics, prejudice and discrimination, and community and social support. A participatory action research (PAR) framework (Chevalier & Buckles, 2013) was used to engage migrants in community-based consultative focus groups. This approach involved the integration of representatives from each migrant community in every stage of the research process (Maiter, Simich, Jacobson, & Wise, 2008; Zandee et al., 2015). The project, therefore, employed qualitative methods (specifically, focus groups) so that the migrants’ lived experiences and voices were central to the development of the research and data collection (Elo et al., 2014). This acknowledges that migrants from a range of backgrounds and visa pathways are experts and knowers (Olesen, 2011) whose experiences are central to the development of relevant family and community-oriented settlement services (Krueger & Casey, 2014).

**Recruitment**

We purposively recruited participants from Burma, Bangladesh, India, Afghanistan, Iraq, Nepal, and African backgrounds in line with the population groups that have been identified by the Australian government as growing quickly and with few target resettlement (Coale & Hoover, 2015). To ensure that a broad range of participants were included, African participants were purposively recruited from across the continent. Furthermore, some Indian participants were members of existing multicultural community groups and organizations and encouraged other South East Asians to join them in the focus groups. Consequently, the Indian groups included a mixture of migrants from India and Pakistan (Renzaho & Dhingra, 2016). The PAR process and participant recruitment was achieved via the Migrant Review Panel (MRP), a group of migrant community stakeholders from the Greater Western Sydney region that included migrant community leaders, resettlement service providers, migrant community organizations, and migrant-focused researchers and advocates.

**Sample**

Fourteen community-based consultative focus groups were conducted with 164 migrants with each group consisting of 12 to 13 persons across different groups. This included 96 females (58.5%) and 68 males (41.5%). The youngest participant was 18 years of age and the eldest was 80. In all, 47% entered Australia on refugee/humanitarian visas, 16% on family or partner visas, and 37% on skilled, study, or a mixture of visas.

**Data Collection**

The focus group discussions explored a broad range of concepts: (a) gender role, (b) the role of children, (c) constructions of childhood, (d) intergenerational conflicts, (e) changes to family structures (and how these were managed), (f) family support structures, and (g) post-migration connectivity across generations.

Multiple focus groups were held with each community, some being gender exclusive and others being of mixed gender. This helped to facilitate a broader discussion for those who were more comfortable with single-gender groups as well as the opportunity for participants in mixed gender groups to engage, discuss, and respond to potentially gender-specific ideas and experiences. Focus groups took between 2 to 2½ hr to complete—more time than the 60 to 90 min that was initially predicted. This is reflective of not only the use of interpreters in some of the focus groups but also the time taken for participants to discuss and explain central aspects of their families and relationships. This involved the sharing of in-depth stories and anecdotes to highlight and contextualize important aspects of their acculturation journeys.

Before commencing with the focus groups, participants were provided with the Participant Information Sheet and signed a consent form. Due to low literacy in English for some groups (e.g., Burmese, Afghani, Iraqi, and Nepalese humanitarian visa groups), the Participant Information Sheet was read to the participants and verbal consent was taken. These participants were also provided with translated versions of the project information, consent forms, and socio-demographic questionnaire. With the help of professional interpreters, participants completed the socio-demographic questionnaire and engaged in the focus group. The focus groups were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and translated, wherever appropriate, by professional translators. The majority of the focus groups were held in the office space that was made available to the research team by a partner organization. At the end of the focus group, each participant received a $25 gift voucher as compensation for their time. Ethical approval for the project was provided by the anonymized Human Research Ethics Committee.

**Qualitative Data Analysis**

Thematic analysis was applied to identify major topics and substantive categories within participants’ accounts of their post-migration experiences. In line with the research objectives, emergent and substantive categories were identified. Analysis focused on topical responses and coding, particularly
for word repetition, direct and emotional statements, and discourse markers like intensifiers, connectives, and evaluative clauses. Coding was done independently by D.A. and R.F. who discussed their coding before reaching a consensus on the final themes that were then reviewed by T.D. and V.M.

Results

Two major themes emerged from the data that shed light on how these migrants perceived, navigated, and managed Changes in Family Structure as well as how they Reconstructed Intergenerational Relationships and Roles. These major themes and their subthemes are presented in a tabular format to highlight migrants’ experiences, pre and post migration, and the strategies that they use to address these issues or concerns.

Changes in Family Structure

For the participants in our sample, their migration narratives entailed moving from collectivist cultures (where familial, kinship, and community relationships are centered and valued) to an individualistic society, motivated by either war or a quest for a better life and security. As a consequence, changes in these migrants’ family structure and/or functioning were inevitable. For these migrants, some of the significant changes in the family structure included experiencing a shift from more “traditional” gender roles with clear gender-specific duties (i.e., male breadwinner and female homemaker) to more “fluid” gender roles and role reversals. Such role reversals not only bring economic independence for women but also “new” expectations for men who are now expected to contribute with unpaid household labor.

Not surprisingly, therefore, the four subthemes yielded in this theme were as follows: Changing Family Roles, Traditional Gender Roles, Role of Children, and Family Support. Tables 1 and 2 provide a summary of migrant experiences and strategies.

Changing family roles. It is clear from the exemplar data excerpts in Table 2 that the changes in family functioning go beyond the simple male breadwinner–female homemaker shift. It includes changes regarding decision making, child dependence, and gendered division of housework (e.g., due to the loss of [extended] family support). For example, data on changing family roles expose how the decision-making power was initially vested in men in the home country but has changed ever since post-migration.

Traditional gender roles. Similarly, the data show the beliefs that are held about traditional gender roles and expose the gender biases of such systems, where, for example, the decision-making power may also be inadvertently given to men. Post migration, the families have experienced equality and equity within the genders and women are given opportunities to contribute in the decision making.

Role of children. In contrast, the data regarding the role of children are about the changes in children’s behavior as they adapt to their changing socio-cultural environment (i.e., what the participants/parents consider “acceptable and unacceptable” behavior or conduct). For example, there are cultural expectations about respect (toward elders), “proper” communication with elders, and so on. In post-migration changes, the children were seen as losing those fundamental values of their cultural expectations, which was blamed on their struggle with trying to fit into the new society or their trying to reconcile two widely diverse cultures.

Family support. Finally, it is evident from the data that the loss of support from the extended family (such as grandparents, aunts and uncles, etc.)—previously available to them, prior to migration—also contributed to post-migration changes in family structure and functioning. Such support, which included help with child care and other household chores, was significant especially because it was unpaid. The Table 1 also explained some of the benefits of family support and the struggle that migrants go through in its absence. In the absence of family support, the stress of running a home becomes very intense.

Reconstructing Intergenerational Relationships

In tandem with other research on post-migration challenges experienced by families when they migrate to new countries, our research also found that changes in family structure and functioning had a significant impact on intergenerational relationships as first generation migrants and subsequent generations acculturate at different rates and extents. When this happens, it becomes necessary to reconstruct these intergenerational relationships. Rather than focus on the challenges that families experience with these changes, this article focuses on the ways in which families reconstruct the relationships. This theme yielded four subthemes: changing parent–child relationships, parents’ perception of children’s behavior, intergenerational connections, and intergenerational conflicts.

Changing parent–child relationships. The data reveal that the post-migration changes in parent–child relationships are an outcome of incongruences between cultures (cultures of origin as collectivist, and host cultures as individualistic) as well as different acculturation trajectories between the parents and their children. For example, adherence to child rights and child protection as well as independence and self-reliance in individualistic societies like Australia result in conflicting understandings of the notion of childhood (what it means to be a child, how a child behaves, and how a child should be reared). These conflicts have both broader societal (socio-legal) and micro-familial implications (as seen in the strained intergenerational relationship between migrant parents and their children). The participants talked about some
of the ways that Australians are geared toward self-fulfillment and independence, which has created tension for them in their role as parents (see also Renzaho et al., 2011). Participants said that they have tried to re-orient their perceptions of “childhood” not only to include “respecting” their children as having inalienable rights but also, in some cases, to accept that their children are now more educated and informed about Australian society, culture, and language than them. As such, migrant parents have had to learn to “accommodate” their children’s cross-cultural perceptions when child rearing.

**Parents’ perceptions of children’s behavior.** The data also indicate a series of behavioral expectations of children as

| Theme | Subtheme | Migrant experiences | Migrant strategies |
|-------|----------|---------------------|-------------------|
| Changes in family structure | Changing family roles | “My father, he supports my sister, brother and my mother, so we are dependent in my country…” (Bangladeshi Group 2) | “Here I feel everyone is sharing, husband and wife. Actually, it is about the sharing. The situation demands it. In our country, when you do your job, you do a good job, you can also have servants, house help. Here you have to pay more than your salary to [get] house help.” (Bangladeshi Group 2) |
| | | “He decided, and we respected the decision of the head of the family, based on a consultation…” (Afghani Men’s Group) | “…But here, individually, everyone works, everyone financially supports themselves…” (Afghani Men’s Group) |
| | Traditional gender roles | “Yeah, it’s not because we want maybe to put the women lower than men; it’s something which has been established, hundreds of years old. Men were in charge of jobs like construction job, back home, you never see women in construction site. You never see men cleaning, you never see men in the kitchen, that’s the jobs for female(s).…” (Afghan Group 2) | “But here, as we say, its half because we don’t have extended families, we don’t have your brothers, your sisters who kind of come in. So, you have to do it not because you want to but because there’s no choice…” (Afghan Group 2) |
| | Role of children | “Yes, most of the time because it’s the mother that is out, the father is looking after the kids, most of the time but there are exceptions everywhere, like if I’m away for work and my husband is picking up the kids and giving them lunch or doing whatever I used to do with them in that time, doing my duties; I’ll have a peace of mind. I’ll be working properly in my place of work and when I come home I see everything is done. So, I mean I will be thankful to him as well, I will be happy with my children. And when he’s out for work, I will try to give him the same comfort when he comes back…” (Indian Group 1) | “Yeah, I think regarding this independence of the youth, we must look at it from their perceptive also. Because when a child comes here at an age of five or six, it is different for that boy or girl and when they come here at 13 or 14 or 17, 18, it’s entirely different for them. So, if we go into this discussion it will take a long time because it’s a long discussion but I think when the youth they try to bridge the gap between them and the generation, the people, the living style, their discussions, their language and everything and they’re dressing up and their likes and dislikes so many things because they have to bridge it, because they have to live with those people—their class fellows, their school fellows, their university fellows and everybody has not got the same strength to I mean to tolerate that change in their life.” (Indian Group 1) |
| | Family support | “They are so much busy into their personal own type of life that they won’t get time to come and check with me and talk with me or go to the kitchen or help me with the kitchen; so she’s always will be grooming her hair or being on mobile for so long, and sometimes I get so nervous that I just want to go and cut the hair…” (Iraqi Women’s Group) | “Yeah, I think regarding this independence of the youth, we must look at it from their perceptive also. Because when a child comes here at an age of five or six, it is different for that boy or girl and when they come here at 13 or 14 or 17, 18, it’s entirely different for them. So, if we go into this discussion it will take a long time because it’s a long discussion but I think when the youth they try to bridge the gap between them and the generation, the people, the living style, their discussions, their language and everything and they’re dressing up and their likes and dislikes so many things because they have to bridge it, because they have to live with those people—their class fellows, their school fellows, their university fellows and everybody has not got the same strength to I mean to tolerate that change in their life.” (Indian Group 1) |
| | | “They don’t want to do things around the house, it is the woman that gets up first in the morning, sees that the lunch is packed, that the food is ready…” (Indian Group 1) | “…I went to the hospital for my second baby, I had cleaned my whole house, cooked for seven/eight/ten days so that when I came back from hospital I don’t have to cook again…” (Bangladeshi Group 2) |
| | | “She said in Iraq, all her children obey her or listen to her, obey her orders sometimes, and when she ask them to study, they come and study. And she said sometimes they study till 2:00 a.m. in the morning. But in Australia they don’t listen to her, they don’t care about the studying and only the want to play or they want to use technology like mobiles, computer, games. And they are…she said this is big different between Iraq and Australia.” (Iraqi Women’s Group) | “Here, we got this carer type of support by our children, so for example, if we needed support, the carer provides that support for us.” (Afghan Men’s Group) |
| | | “But here, individually, everyone works, everyone financially supports themselves…” (Afghani Men’s Group) | “Here, we got this carer type of support by our children, so for example, if we needed support, the carer provides that support for us.” (Afghan Men’s Group) |

Table 1: Migrant Experiences and Strategies Around Changes in Family Structure.
| Theme | Subtheme | Migrant experiences | Migrant strategies |
|-------|----------|---------------------|-------------------|
| Reconstructing intergenerational relationships | Changing parent-child relationships | “Sorry, in Syria, they were more respectful to their parents. In Australia, they don’t care, and sometimes they don’t respect me or my thoughts or their father’s thoughts. At the same time, sometimes I will be talking to them about something, they leave me talking and go away…” (Iraqi Women’s Group) | “So those who are, when they are children, it’s OK. When they above 18, 20, they know more than what the parents know. They study in schools, and they are better in education. So, parents can’t say that you have to go in their ways. So, they have to listen to their kids also.” (Nepalese Men’s Group) |
| | Parents’ perception of children’s behavior | “And there’s a barrier here, when they learn these things and they come back home, we do discipline our children but the law will tell you can’t even discipline them here…” (African Group 2) | “But in Australia, the worst thing is the law beside them and all the time we have to be careful on how we handle them.” (Iraqi Women’s Group) |
| Intergenerational connection | | “In our culture, the father is the head of the family and we have everyone of the family has to listen to him, either sons, daughter, or the wife. But when coming here, it was quite difficult in the beginning. But we found that the children, they go to school, they learn more, they know about the country’s rules, the English, and they are better than the fathers now. They are educated, they know everything, so sometimes we have to depend on them. So, after that we tried to do, we give them the power in the family to go for marketing or doing anything. So, whenever they do some mistakes, we just advise them. And after that, when they are giving the power, where they are being given that, they are being given all the powers that they are being asked to do the work, they have heard that the parents are depending on them, so they started that they had to look after the parents because they are more educated, they know more about the country’s rules and people around. So, now it is not like that. It was very difficult in the beginning. The father thought that he has no respect in the family, he loses everything. Now the children also started respecting them when they started respecting the children. So, it’s OK, no problem.” (Nepalese Men’s Group) | “Even for them, it’s not easy, they are struggling with two cultures, so we think it’s easier for the kids but it’s not easy for—they have people also. They think that, this is the value that parents gave it to us, but this is the value of our country, so which one will we choose? Between that, it’s still confused. They are suffering, I think, the most, than us in our culture.” (Afghani Women’s Group) |
| Intergenerational conflict | | “Another one thing is you don’t see your kids much, like if a parent is working, like 9 hours, 10 hours or 12 hours, they don’t see their kids anymore. By the time, they come back home, the kids are asleep, and early in the next morning, you’re gone again. So, you only see your kids on the weekend. So, they don’t have that connection with their kids anymore, you can’t spend time with them like in the old tradition…” (Burmesse Women’s Group) | “But still I have seen, one of my friend was Aboriginal and she still with her family, she is 18 because her family dynamic says to her that you are not going out, you are with us, we are sharing our culture. We are sharing our things, we are sharing our money. So, I think it’s more of like family dynamics rather than its individual. If your family dynamics, if your parents are not good together, they are fighting with each other, they are abusing you, so the child is definitely…” (Indian Group 1) |
| | | “Lots of times, like before we used to go like together to see like friends, like I mean relatives and stuff, but now only like mum and dad go and visit them.” (Iraqi Young Women’s Group) | “I have my cousins, they are for my age as well, that’s why I’m like still connected. Because I am benefiting from them as well. So, I’m practicing my English language, sometimes I’m like just like asking them some questions about work, or something related.” (Iraqi Young Women’s Group) |
| | | “They don’t listen at all and when they speak to us, they don’t speak in our language; they speak English and sometimes, blindly we have to accept whatever they want, they say… they argue, and I think that maybe my generation or I myself don’t much understand about that particular topic, maybe my son knows about it because he speaks English and he argues in English. Mostly, I don’t understand and I accept.” (Afghani Men’s Group) | “It’s OK, it was quite difficult in the beginning, there was big conflicts in his [father’s] status. They lived in a refugee camp, they understood the problems, the sufferings. When they came here, there was problems, once there was a problem at the initial stage. Now, the fathers and mothers of today now realize that we are in Australia, not in Bhutan or Nepal. We should all obey the law of the land and the other cultures. So, they started work to learn. The parents, they started compromising, and now it’s not that like the beginning, it’s getting change. Changing, Changes are come, with the children and the parents both…” (Nepalese Men’s Group) |
| | | “And there’s a barrier here, when they learn these things and they come back home, we do discipline our children but the law in court you can’t even discipline them here.” (African Group 2) | “My experience, I have two kids… both are teen age but still whatever I say I counseling them they always listen, they never argue why. And they approach, you know. They listening because when I’m counseling them, I always give them in front of them who are bad or good. It’s your life, if you choose bad [bad will] happen, if you choose good it would be happen. Now god give you brain, use your brain which is suitable for you. Now both thinking, I give them five minutes, after I ask them now what tell me which one you choose, always they choose the good one.” (Bangldeshi Group 1) |
informed by the culture and traditions of their countries of origin. For example, parents expect children not to address an older person by their first name (something that is completely acceptable in Australian society). Instead, the polite and respectable behavior would be to say “Aunty X” or “Uncle X” (even where there are no kinship ties). However, as their children acculturate into Australian culture, this seemingly insignificant cultural practice disappears and is replaced by Australian practices, which parents gradually accept overtime. Even so, parents have seen the influence of acculturation on their children as the major source of dispute in their family. To maintain family peace and balance, parents have made an effort to acculturate to Australian expectations, which has led to mutual respect and the establishment of common ground between parents and children. This manifested in allowing children to take part in family decision making, marital partner selection, and independent living.

**Intergenerational connection.** Prior to migration, the notion of “close family” for these participants encompassed “extended” family including grandparents, uncles, aunts, and other relatives and, in some cases, even non-kin relations. This system of family created a strong bond across several generations. However, post-migration, migrants struggled to maintain these relationships, especially given the influence of varying trajectories across generations acculturation. The intergenerational connection, post migration, became highly dependent on the strength of the nuclear family ties and continued efforts to pass on the importance and intensive integration of generations at every opportunity. Although intergenerational relationships were hard to sustain, migrants were able to maintain long-term intragenerational ties with blood relatives and non-kin family, both in Australia and overseas; so, while varying acculturation trajectories may fuel an intergenerational disconnect, it may not be a barrier to intragenerational connections throughout the diaspora and within the migrants’ country of origin where cultural environments, like Australia, are constantly changing.

**Intergenerational conflicts.** Notwithstanding the challenges of varying acculturation trajectories (the proof of many conflicts), migrant families were able to develop strategies in handling intergenerational conflicts through learning, making compromises, accepting some cultural changes, adapting to new social expectations, and recognizing that migrant children were not inherently at fault for differences in cultural value sets and behaviors, for example. Originally, these strategies helped migrants to improve their post-migration family balance. Parents often used corporal punishment or shouting to discipline their children; however, in line with Australian social and judicial expectations, parents have taken on a more discursive style of parenting with the consequences of their children’s behavior being left to the child to manage. This reduced conflict as a behavior modification was no longer an external exercise and the responsibility of parents. As such, parents began to act as counselors and mentors, instead of behavior managers. The results of such an approach (e.g., the child doing the right thing) was the same as more formal punishment frameworks but different in that the discursive mentorship reduced the intergenerational conflict and increased mutual respect and the intergenerational connection.

**Discussion**

In line with the aims of the article, the data highlight the resilience and adaptability of migrants in Australia. This is demonstrated by the migrants’ ability to reframe and reconstruct the challenges they face to develop strategies to maintain family connectedness and intergenerational relationships. These findings do not overlook the stresses that migrants can experience when they have been dislocated from their country of origin, are adapting to a new culture, and are learning new rules and roles (Kim & Gudykunst, 2005; Ramelli, Florack, Kosic, & Rohmann, 2013).

The voices of the migrants, within this research, indicate that their experiences support the development and importance of strengths-based/focused models of resettlement (see Hutchinson & Dorsett, 2012). Most notably, this research builds on increasing the acknowledgment that migrants and their families are important and integral participants in their adoptive countries (Fix, Zimmermann, & Passel, 2001). Although it is often presumed that only those migrants who arrive as skilled workers or on student visas contribute to Australian society, the humanitarian visa entrants within our study demonstrate that their ability to adapt to new and challenging environments is a skill that other migrants and non-migrants can draw on to manage in continuously changing socio-cultural environments.

Given that the context of family is where many of the participants draw strength and manage change, engaging with these families and their communities will assist Australia in developing a unified and socially cohesive cultural environment (Cheong, Edwards, Goulbourne, & Solomos, 2007). While these type of models are well established in Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States—countries with much longer migration histories—Australia is slowly developing such services. In the United States, for instance, the Catholic Family Center (CFC) resettlement program focuses on community/family empowerment in resettling migrants. The program engages with the most marginalized of migrants who are often from a collectivist culture, with their faith and cultural belief being central to their identity and integration pathways. As such, the CFC program involves working with local service providers and ethnic and religious communities to meet the needs of the newly arrived migrants/refugees in a holistic and culturally appropriate manner, to ensure their successful integration, to foster their independence, and to promote self-sufficiency. In Australia, one of the few migrant integration services that focuses on family and community
other than the individual is the Community Migrant Resource Centre (CMRC). The service focuses on providing specialized support to the newly arrived migrants, refugees, and humanitarian entrants. The CMRC works on building a community capacity framework that will encourage individuals and multicultural communities to identify and address their own issues collectively as well as provide settlement services to assist new arrivals to build self-resilience and integrate within the local community. Its family support initiatives address some of the social and cultural challenges faced by new entrants in Australia and build a more cohesive community to help migrants to easily navigate through the individualistic Australian culture.

Given the role of the family in identity, resettlement services that aim to engage with family units are more likely to be successful than strategies aimed at individuals. This may be because the family assists migrants in the maintenance of their culture, ethnic affiliations, sense of community, language, and religion. While some perceive sustaining such elements to be detrimental to assimilation (Reynolds, 2008), they are important elements in terms of supporting migrants’ development of multicultural identities in line with the society in which they live and the family that they may have arrived with (Cai, 2003). This is not to simplify the relationship between culture, family, and migration trajectories but instead speaks to the need for more research on acculturative pathways of migrant families as a unit versus acculturation as individuals. In doing so, we can develop a better sense of how collectivist units acculturate. This approach to researching acculturation may provide a more holistic picture of the migrant family in Australia, their strengths and, of course, the challenges they face and overcome. This will help in creating more engaging and inclusive family programs or strategies through resettlement services and policies that are focused not only on a person-centered service model but perhaps more importantly on community and family-centered service models.

Limitations
A few limitations are associated with this study and its trustworthiness: notably, the majority of the participants were humanitarian entrants to Australia—the perspectives of other migrants were not captured and represented. Although this research demonstrates the resilience of some of Australia’s most marginalized migrants, future research which includes the voices of migrants from other visa pathways is needed to provide a more trustworthy understanding of migrants’ experiences with regard to changes in family dynamics and cross-generational relationships. The second issue relates to the reliance on interpreters to assist in discussions between English-only speaking focus group facilitators and non-English speaking participants. This may have resulted in translations that have not been interpreted as intended by participants and the diverging of conversations away from the participants’ meaning. The potential translation errors were minimized by engaging professional interpreters who had experience in qualitative cross-cultural research transcription and translation. This allowed for the transcripts to be translated into English and back into the participants’ mother tongue to ensure the accuracy of the translation. Even so, providing the transcripts to participants may have ensured the conformability and dependability of the data.

Conclusion
The data re-affirm that there is often a significant change in the family dynamics and intergenerational relationships as experienced by migrants from humanitarian backgrounds. Our study also re-affirms that despite the changes, these migrants have demonstrated resilience through the development of a series of strategies that help them navigate through challenges and maintain family connections and intergenerational relationships. The data also reiterate that the children of migrants acculturated and integrated faster and easier into Australia’s individualistic culture than their parents. However, through mutual understanding and compromise, the dynamic within the families and the strength of intergenerational connections were maintained. This research highlights the importance of reinforcing the need to acknowledge migrants’ resilience and strengths and to move away from deficit-focused discourses of acculturation. There is also, equally, the need for services and policies that are designed to support migrant families to reinforce migrants’ ability to adapt to a new cultural environment within familiar, safe, and accepting contexts.

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