ResearchOnline@JCU

JAMES COOK UNIVERSITY AUSTRALIA

This is the author-created version of the following work:

**Forget, Gilles, Correa-Velez, Ignacio, and Dee, Mike (2019)** ***Being a father in my new society: a qualitative study of the fathering experiences of men from refugee backgrounds resettled in Australia.*** **Journal of Refugee Studies, 32 (2) pp. 322-339.**

Access to this file is available from:

https://researchonline.jcu.edu.au/70944/

Published Version: © The Author(s) 2018. Published by Oxford University Press. All rights reserved. Accepted Version may be made open access in an Institutional Respository after a 24 month embargo.

Please refer to the original source for the final version of this work:

https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs%2Ffey029

## Title

Being a father in my new society: a qualitative study of the fathering experiences of men from refugee backgrounds resettled in Australia.

Gilles Forget*, Ignacio Correa-Velez* and Mike Dee**

* School of Public Health and Social Work, Queensland University of Technology

** School of Social Science, The University of Queensland

Accepted for publication in Journal of Refugee Studies (May 2018)

## Abstract

One of the forgotten actors of forced migration are the fathers from refugee backgrounds. Fatherhood is a foundational component of societies, and being a father impacts men's health and wellbeing and that of their family. This article investigates the lived experience of 19 men from refugee backgrounds resettling in Australia. It analyses the three main dimensions of fathering, fatherhood, the transition from manhood to fatherhood and father involvement and applies an intercultural approach to acculturation. This analysis identifies the main challenges faced by fathers from refugee backgrounds as they resettled in a new society with its values, beliefs and expectations towards fathering. The study's findings suggest pathways for a more socially inclusive society that supports fathers from refugee backgrounds.

## Keywords

Refugee, fathers, fathering, fatherhood, father involvement, social inclusion, acculturation, interculturalism

## Background

The movement of population between countries is increasing and the number of people displaced and forced to migrate is becoming critical (UNHCR, 2016). This situation presents one of the most significant challenges for modern societies as they learn to live together in diversity (Antonsich, 2016), and adapt to the social and cultural changes brought by this ethnic heterogeneity (Castles and Miller, 2009; Putnam, 2007). The resettlement of refugees in Australia as in other high-income economies has seen researchers explore the different facets of refugees' migration journey, the policies and practices supporting refugees, and the diverse ethnic communities which have formed the refugee population over times (Neumann et al., 2014). One of the forgotten actors of these studies are the fathers.

When examining fathering, Dermott (2008) and Shwalb and colleagues (2013) suggest three main dimensions to consider:

1) being a father – the biological or social relation between a particular man and a particular child;
2) fatherhood – the meaning associated with being a father through the cultural norms and values and the individual experience of being the father of a child;
3) fathering – the parenting practices that connect a man to a child.

Although these realities have been documented in high-income economies, the cross-cultural analysis of fathering is scarcer. In many Asian, Middle-Eastern and African societies, cultural traditions and social circumstances reinforce a strict father, an affectionate mother, and a father responsible for caring, protecting and providing for his family (Roopnarine, 2015; Shwalb et al., 2013). When looking at migrant families and particularly at men, migration with its acculturation processes brings changes and challenges to their fathering practices and to the relationships with their partners (United Nations, 2011).

There is a paucity of research on the migration journey and experiences of fathers from refugee backgrounds (Khawaja et al., 2008; Este & Tachble, 2009; Riggs et al., 2016), The research

available highlight the impact of the journey and settlement experiences at the individual, family and community level. At the individual level, one of the key challenges for resettled refugee fathers is the changes in gender roles (Marlowe, 2011; Osman et al, 2016; Khawaja and Milner, 2012). Fathering in high-income economies has gone through major changes over the last decades (Ball and Daly, 2012; Lamb, 2013). These changes have been triggered by the increasing participation of women in the workforce, women's claim for shared parenting, and the increased numbers of single-parents. The meaning and the enactment of fatherhood has evolved from being mainly the authority of the family and the provider for its needs, towards a nurturing (Lamb, 1997), intimate (Dermott, 2008) and multidimensional fathering (Dubeau et al., 2015), though these ideal constructs are far from being unequivocal (Kilkey et al., 2013). In Australia, those changes in demographics and relationships make men 'less likely to be married than in the past, getting older before fathering children, fathering fewer children in individual relationships, fathering children in more than one family and taking the role of *"social fathers"* to other men's children' (Smyth et al., 2013, p.365). As fathers responsible for their children behavior, resettlement in a new culture is likely to require adaptation of their parenting practices (Van Ee et al., 2013, Renzaho et al., 2011; Tingvold et al., 2012). The literature shows how tensions exist between an authoritarian model of parenting where the use of physical discipline is accepted and considered an appropriate parenting practice to a more authoritative parenting style characterised by the optimal combination of firm behavioural control, acceptance and psychological autonomy (Baumind, 2013) as promoted in western societies. On a family level, the loss of social networks (Lewig et al, 2010; Nsonwu et al, 2013, Riggs et al., 2016) caused by forced migration challenges fathers' settlement and brings new responsibilities. It also impacts their partner's settlement. On a community level, barriers to social inclusion (Este and Tachble, 2009; Stewart et al., 2015) namely, language difficulties, underemployment and unemployment, discrimination, and lack of environmental mastery and of the knowledge on how to navigate the system influences the fathers' capacity to enact their authority and be the breadwinner of the family.

In her study of the settlement process, Fernandez-Arias (2014) refers to the Council of Europe White Paper on interculturalism which presents interculturalism and its practical arm, the intercultural dialogue, as a response to the reflection on multiculturalism in Europe. Gérard Bouchard and Charles Taylor, co-Chairs of the Quebec Consultation Commission on Accommodation Practices Related to Cultural Differences, adopted this approach. For Taylor (Taylor 2012, p.419), this enables:

> To look more at the 'inter' story, and the hopes and fears that arise in connection with it. Of course, this story allows that the society will develop in ways which it wouldn't if only the native born were in charge. The hopes connected with that are that people coming from outside will contribute new ideas, new skills, new insights which will enrich our society.

The intercultural approach suggests the meeting of cultures comprises three steps: decentration, centration and negotiation (Cohen-Émerique, 1993; Fernandez-Arias, 2014). Decentration is the capacity to constitute one's own frame of reference and understand the collective perspective of its own culture. Centration is the attitude of being open to the other's frame of reference, to be curious about what makes sense and what the other values. Negotiation and mediation between these two perspectives is what will resolve conflicts erupting between two cultures or systems of beliefs and potentially results in the creolization of culture (Auerbach et al., 2008), a term borrowed from linguistics, which indicates the development of new words and/or verbal communications from the interaction of two cultural groups of different origins. As Kirmayer points out (2006), the metaphor of creolization seems particularly appropriate to acknowledge the creativity and the dynamic of the meeting of cultures, notwithstanding the relative position of each culture in the acculturation process.

In the intercultural approach, not every aspect of living in a new society implies negotiation. However, some may bring *"-cultural shock-"* or *"-challenges-"* as in each culture, some behaviors are valued and reinforced and others are restrained. These areas can generate lack of

understanding and often confrontation. Challenges reveal clashes between the migrants' culture and the host society's culture which can be illustrated by what one finds perplexing and strange in each other's behavior. Examples of such challenges can come from religious beliefs, attitudes towards fundamental principles, social constructs or interactions. The outcome of the negotiation and mediation around those cultural shocks should pave the way towards changes in both cultures and a more inclusive society (Cantle, 2016).

## Objectives of the current study

This paper aims to describe the acculturation challenges to fathering as experienced and expressed by 19 fathers from refugee backgrounds living in South-East Queensland, Australia. To reinforce the description of the challenges previously outlined, this study explores the migration journey of fathers from refugee backgrounds living in South-East Queensland from the moment they fled their homes to when they participated in this research. It identifies the challenges faced throughout this migration journey and more specifically investigates the meaning they associated with fatherhood according to their culture of origin and documents their transition to fatherhood and their fathering practices in Australia. This analysis will pave the way to identifying factors supporting the father involvement, social inclusion and health and wellbeing of fathers from refugee backgrounds.

## Methods

This qualitative study was conducted from November 2014 to March 2015 using semi-structured phenomenological interviews (Bevan, 2014) of fathers from refugee backgrounds living in South-East Queensland, Australia. To be included in the study, participants had to be 18 years of age and over; from a refugee background; have lived in Australia for more than one year; have at least one child aged 14 years or younger; and have a moderate to good level of English language

proficiency. Recruitment was done through the study team members' existing network and by promotion in the refugee network through the distribution of a flyer and a snowball procedure. Continuous recruitment activities took place during the months of October 2014 through to March 2015, except for the month of December due to summer holidays and provided contact details of 31 participants. After agreeing to the interview, some did not show up to the meeting point (n=8) or did not return the phone calls (n=2) and finally, two did not meet all the inclusion criteria which left a purposive sample of 19 participants. Each participating family received AU$50 in consideration for their time and to ensure that economic needs were not a barrier to participation. The interview guide for this study included four instruments: a socio-demographic index, a genogram ((McGoldrick, 2011; Mio et al., 1999), a migration journey chart and an interview guide. developed by the first author, reviewed by the co-authors and trialled before being applied to the study's participant. Each participant was contacted by telephone and a meeting was scheduled at a venue of their choice or at their home. All interviews were conducted by the first author (G.F.) at participants' homes or at community venues. Seventeen interviews were conducted in English and two in French (as this was the fathers preferred language and the interviewer's first language), each taking an average of 40 minutes. The interviews were recorded following informed consent from participants and fully transcribed. The two interviews in French were translated by the researcher and reviewed by a professional translator to ensure the meaning was retained. An interpretative phenomenological analysis (Braun and Clark, 2013; Goulding, 2005; Van Manen, 2014). was applied to the verbatim transcription. This analysis comprised three levels, codes, emergent themes and superordinate themes. The analysis was conducted by the first author using NVivo (QSR International PTY Ltd., version 11). The co-authors reviewed the interview schedule and the coding system and ensured continuous review of the analysis and the report. Pseudonyms derived from actual or ancient president of the participants' country of origin are used throughout the paper. The study received full ethical clearance from the Queensland University of Technology Human Research Ethics Committee.

## Demographic Data

Except for one participant who arrived in Australia as an asylum-seeker and was granted a protection visa, all lodged a visa application at various locations in Africa, the Middle East or South-East Asia and were granted an offshore refugee/humanitarian visa. Participants' ages ranged from 23 to 54 years, (median = 38 yrs.). All of them were married except for one participant who was living in a de-facto relationship with his Australian partner. Five fathers had all their children in their country of origin, seven were fathers prior to arriving in Australia and had more children after their resettlement, and seven became fathers in Australia. They had between one to eight children (median = 4). Fifteen participants came from Africa (eight different countries), three came from the Middle East, and one from Myanmar, South-East Asia. These fathers' time in Australia ranged from 2 to 15 years with a median of 6 years. All participants had at least a technical diploma and five had completed post-graduate studies. One participant was unemployed at the time of the interview, three were studying and not working and the other 15 were employed. Two of the participants who were working were also studying. While this study's sample does not aim to be representative of the Australian refugee population and appears to be highly educated, humanitarian migrants can be highly qualified and nearly half (8/19) of this sample have been in Australia for eight years and more which gave them time to enroll and complete studies.

## Study Limitations

The sample size of this research compares well with all other studies with fathers from refugee backgrounds. The main difference is that it includes individuals from various countries. This is a limitation as the number of representatives from each country is reduced. It can also be seen as an asset when common meanings emerged from a more diverse sample. In addition, all but one of the participants were working and/or studying. This is an important characteristic of this sample

as their experience of social inclusion can be very different from those who are chronically unemployed or facing greater levels of social inclusion (Correa-Velez, Spaaij, & Upham, 2012). In the selection criteria for the research, participants had to have moderate to good English proficiency. This criterion eliminated the necessity of using interpreters, which facilitated the realisation of the research as the principal researcher could conduct the research independently. On the other hand, this constrained the participation of refugees to those who already had English as their main language or who had learned sufficient English. Reaching refugees in a complex social environment is not easy. Though the networks of the researcher and supervisors were well established, getting people to agree to participate in research is always difficult, and more so when trying to reach vulnerable fathers (Long, 2008; Turcotte et al., 2015). A more continuous and pervasive strategy should have been actualised to overcome these barriers.

## Findings

The migration journey of people who are forced to migrate is still relatively circumscribed in the literature even though the immigration journey is a powerful life-changing event (Benezer and Zetter, 2015). The displacement and settlement path are not the same for every refugee. In this sample, men from Middle East countries had a very different route than participants from Africa and South-East Asia countries. Participants from the Middle East did not move from one country to another and their journey was shorter than for other participants. But for all men of this study, the migration journey covers a same timeline, the pre-arrival and the post-arrival stages, a timeline covering the moment participants fled their home to the time of the interview.

*The migration journey*

The main themes from the pre-arrival narratives of this research were synthesized as *the Flight, the Wait,* and *the Hope*. For most of the participants, this journey was not planned, either mentally, or physically, it was sudden. Fathers shared stories of running away from war, 'I did not go into exile for the purpose of migrating to Australia. I literally fled my country to save the life I live. I was

uprooted, I had to run' (Samuel, 40 y/o, Liberia, 2 children, 12 years in Australia), or Jean-Pierre (50 y/o, Burundi, 4 children, 6 years in Australia) who had to 'move around because one of my first children was killed'. After fleeing from their home, these men waited for the result of the application for their resettlement. This time is characterized by the participants as the *"limbo"*, which illustrates the wait they must go through for the decision on their application and the impossibility of planning anything throughout this period as John describes:

> When you apply for settlement, it takes a lot of time. For me it took five years before the interview, and from there it took me another two years, which is seven years before I received my visa. All through that period, I lived another seven years putting everything on hold in hoping that tomorrow I'm going, tomorrow I'm going, tomorrow I'm going, so it blocked everything, mind and everything. I could not do anything because I knew I was coming to Australia. It was hard. You know, you could not do business, you could not do anything, and you are just there. You put everything on hold, until everything is finalized. (John, 43 y/o, Congo, 3 children, 5 years in Australia)

When they recalled the situation in their country of origin or the life in the refugee camp where they could not fully engage in society, all participants agreed that being resettled in another country was their hope. However, settling in Australia was a major challenge as they had limited knowledge of Australian society and had no social connections in the country: 'We do not know anything about Australia. First time I travel from Iraq to another country. So, we came here we found out everything is different. First journey, for us we did not know anything.' (Fayed, 38 y/o, Iraq, 3 children, 7 years in Australia)

Five main themes describe the post-arrival stage: the *New Beginning* they all foresee; the *Learning* they must go through; *Bridging cultures* and adapting to their new society; the *Future* they foresee; and the *Home* they want to have.

Fathers all recalled coming with minimal possessions, living in temporary accommodation, and a minimal knowledge of the language and where they resettled, but that did not mean that they were without strengths as James indicated.

> I think what we brought with us, I brought the children with me, and my wife. I brought also my culture with me, language, I speak my language in my house with my children, with my wife, I think we brought also our culture, our way of life we always lived in our house. (James, 54 y/o, South Sudan, 5 children, 11 years in Australia)

While they mostly had positive views of Australian society, the adjustments they had to make were not all easy. They struggled with a lifestyle that focused heavily on work and study at the expense of family and community life. Nonetheless, settlement allowed them the opportunity to plan their future, something they did not have the luxury of doing while they were forcibly displaced. They relied mainly on their own ethnic community and church to build bridges with the host society's culture. In general, they appreciated their actual situation but mentioned recurrent periods of homesickness.

For fathers, the flight from war and social unrest can be an even more dramatic event as they may experience the loss of a child. The flight can also mean fathers leaving children behind while seeking a safer place. Being a father in a refugee camp also brings a different perspective as Kongõ points out, "There is no education for our kids" (Kongõ, 44 y/o, Congo, 8 children, 5 years in Australia). Fathers in refugee camps see their social situation as degrading which causes them worries about the future they will be able to provide for their children. When one father learned he was called for an interview, he told the committee he was a father and listed the names of his children left back home hoping they could come and join him soon. For those who were fathers and came with their family, resettlement was an even greater challenge as all members of the families were to experience acculturation in their own way (Ellis et al., 2010; Poppitt and Frey, 2007). For those who became fathers in Australia, this challenge was more seen as how they

could transmit their culture of origin values and beliefs and support at the same time their children integration in their new culture.

*The challenges to fatherhood*

The intercultural approach was applied to analyse the three dimensions of fathering: fatherhood, the transition to fatherhood, and father involvement. For each of these dimensions, the main themes from the fathers' shared stories are identified as well as their perceptions of the challenges they experienced as fathers.

Although participants came from different countries and continents, there was a strong consensus around three main themes associated to fatherhood: *customs, being the backbone of the family, and community modelling.* Customs, traditions, elders, and their own fathers all contributed to the transmission of the meaning of fatherhood as being mainly the breadwinner and the authority, the one that all family members obeyed and looked to for making decisions. This meaning focused more on men's status within the family structure than on the relationships they build with their children. As such, culture reinforced that the father is the one who controls and is responsible for the family.

> I see the father as the pillar in the family, he is the backbone of the family, he is the man who sets the rules, he is the man that keeps the family going. Without the father figure, there are many things that go wrong in the family. (Robert, 35 y/o, Liberia, 2 children, 12 years in Australia)

For some, this vision is reinforced by their faith because they believe that becoming a father is the will of God, 'Children are a blessing of God. Children are very important; they are more precious than the precious' (Frederic, 40-50 y/o, Congo, 8 children, 3 years in Australia).

As the backbone of the family, the father has both responsibilities and privileges. As most fathers shared, the father's main responsibility is to be the *"breadwinner"*. It also implies that the father has social responsibilities and is the representative of the family at social events such as, funerals,

marriages, or going to the school to follow-up on the children's behaviors. This responsibility also gives him the privilege of making decisions for the family and having his decisions followed by all family members (wife and children). As stated by Fayed, in his culture of origin, the father's authority is not to be challenged, 'The definition of the father, father means someone who controls the home, who takes care of all the family, you cannot say no to him' (Fayed, 38 y/o, Iraq, 3 children, 7 years in Australia). James reinforces this as he describes fatherhood in these terms:

> You are the overall, you are the head of the family, you are the security of the family, you are the basket of the family. It means you are economically somebody who should take care of the running of the family, in the African sense, it means nobody is above you. When a visitor comes, the first person to be approached is the father. (James, 54 y/o, South Sudan, 5 children, 11 years in Australia)

This definition of fatherhood has implications for the definition of motherhood. As Jean-Pierre (50 y/o, Burundi, 4 children, 6 years in Australia) mentions, 'The woman, she will go straight home to make sure the children are looked after, to make sure she makes food for the father'. Some fathers also outline that in their country of origin, there are very strict rules governing women and mothers; they are only allowed to stay home with their children.

The participants' migration journey makes this vision of fatherhood a challenge as unemployment or underemployment can impair their capacity to be breadwinner. This can also affect their health and wellbeing as Joseph mentions:

> I am not in perfect health because morally I do not have a job, I do not have money. I cannot buy what I want. I cannot travel. Since the last seven years I have been here. I am stuck here. I cannot even travel. I try to be on top of that, but it still affects me. (Joseph, 48 y/o, Chad, 5 children, 8 years in Australia)

In their country of origin, when men had questions concerning fatherhood, most fathers would go to the elders. They could also ask their parents, brothers or friends. In Australia, if they needed support and if they wanted to talk about fatherhood, they had to rely on support services, which

is something they are not used to in their country of origin. As one participant mentions: 'Mainly because our society is not a society where there are services for men and all this, it is not there' (Omar, 29 y/o, South Sudan, 4 children, 13 years in Australia). That is why men's ethnic community made up for these services in the host country and helped them with their concerns as Jean-Pierre describes:

> I would look at what is our experience as fathers, and then look for a consensus. This is our strengths, this is our weaknesses, this is what we want and then, we can share this information with other community members and probably we would come up, if we share the same views, we could see what kind of solutions we can find. (Jean-Pierre, 50 y/o, Burundi, 4 children, 6 years in Australia)

This meaning of fatherhood is challenged in two ways, changes in gender roles and changes in parental responsibilities. As participants mentioned, seeing oneself as the provider and the authority brings specific responsibilities to fathers and to mothers, but, as they resettle in Australia, the new society's vision of gender roles challenges this, as mothers gain status. For example, families receive an allowance from the government to meet the needs of their children as they resettle. As one of the participant mentioned, this allowance is paid to the mother which transforms the roles of father and mother as mothers become also breadwinner.

> In my culture, the father does the business to find the money. The mother does not do anything, she cleans the house and takes care of the children. The father got the money, the father gives it to the wife. The mother has no authority in the family. Just the father. (...) For Burmese refugee in Brisbane, even though they do not have a job, they can depend on Centrelink (The Federal Australian statutory *government* body that administers income support) and Centrelink pays every fortnight $400 or something like that. The wife gets all the money. So, you know it is totally different. (Part Tho, 35 y/o, Myanmar, 3 children, 6 years in Australia)

The same thing applies to women joining the workforce as the necessity of two incomes to be economically independent also drives this renewed vision of gender roles (Trask, 2000).

> What comes with having her own money is independence, and since she is financially independent, she no longer relies on her husband to provide for the home, rather she can pay some bills, she can do whatever she wants to do, that rule of a father is neutralized. It is totally changed. (Edward, 43 y/o, Liberia, 5 children, 5 years in Australia)

Another challenge outlined by fathers from refugee backgrounds is the transition to a vision of specific responsibilities to one of shared responsibility. As their wife's perception of gender roles evolves, they are also expected to revisit their participation in the domestic and child rearing responsibilities. For Jean-Pierre, this means:

> You learn you are in a new culture and we must learn the other society beliefs regarding a man and a woman. So, we learn and what we have seen is we have changed. I have changed. Because I must adapt, I have changed. I help my wife do things I would never have done in my country. I look after the children in the morning, I tell them to get ready. I take them to school. I check their homework. So, you become more responsible here than there. You get closer to your children. (Jean-Pierre, 50 y/o, Burundi, 4 children, 6 years in Australia)

*The challenges to the transition from manhood to fatherhood*

The transition to fatherhood is an important moment in a man's life. Genesoni and Tallandini (2009) highlight three factors in the transition to fatherhood: the image of one's self, the creation of a family, and the adjustment to a new culture. In a similar way, the three themes highlighted by the participants' narratives on the transition to fatherhood are: *a meaningful life, a triadic connection, and community respect.*

Becoming a father induces a sense of responsibility (Iwata, 2014) while the social construction of fatherhood in western countries outlines cultural doubts and uncertainties on fatherhood (Gregory et al., 2011).The sense of responsibility makes fathers them more aware of their own health and wellbeing as they must now plan not only for their own future but of that of their children's future, and of their family. As one participant shares, fatherhood changes his decision-making and even changed the way he looked at life in general: 'Before, I do not care about my life, I am alone. But now, if I want something, I think there are children, behind me there are children, I think differently now' (Fayed, 38 y/o, Iraq, 3 children, 7 years in Australia). Fathers must be more careful and stop doing some of the activities they did when they were single. It changes many things as Ezra (39 y/o, Iraq, 3 children, 15 years in Australia) mentions, 'It changed a lot, it even changes our mind, our thinking, our thoughts.' Being a father is also a role that is added to the role of being a man, a worker, a citizen. This new role has its challenges with the important responsibilities it conveys, but it also brings its rewards as Robert explains, 'Being there for them even if I did not have money, the fact I was there during that time made me feel happy, I think it is something that is very important; the fatherly role.' (Robert, 35 y/o, Liberia, 2 children, 12 years in Australia)

For those who lived this transition in Australia, they mentioned how different this experience was as in their country of origin where childbirth is considered a *"woman thing"*. Assisting with the birth of the child not only reinforces the relationship with the spouse but it also helps the bonding between the father and the child: 'When my girl was born, I was in the hospital, I am the first person to see my daughter, I am very happy.' (Ahmad, 23 y/o, Afghanistan, 1 child, 2 years in Australia) The man's participation in the birth of his child is also a necessity because of the lack of family support. As Omar (29 y/o, South Sudan, 4 children, 13 years in Australia) said, he was the only person who could look after his wife. There was no aunt, mother or grandmother who could look after *"the ladies stuff"*.

Becoming a father changes your social status and the way the community looks at you. For most of the fathers, their ethnic community in Australia was pleased with the fact they had become fathers.

> Where we come from, if you do not have a family, really, you are not considered in the society. Especially at my age, if I did not have a family, then I would be regarded as someone who does not know what he is doing. Even here people from my community like it, because it is a sign of respect, a sign of responsibility. (John, 43 y/o, Congo, 3 children, 5 years in Australia)

Because of their forced migration, fathers from refugee backgrounds have left behind family and friends. For those who became fathers in Australia, this means that they would not have had the opportunity to discuss the transition to fatherhood directly with the elders or with their parents or to ask questions about fatherhood as they would have done in their country of origin. On the other hand, this transition in life is also an opportunity to connect with other fathers, as shown by other studies (Matthey et al., 2009; Turcotte et al., 2015). It also gives them a new topic of discussion with members of the community, how to behave with their children.

Fathers outlined two challenges in becoming a father in a new society, providing for the family and managing time. Because being a provider is the core of fatherhood as they see it, the transition brings stress to men from refugee backgrounds as they must be able to provide for their family and they worry because 'The bills just keep rolling in, thinking the car needs fuel and then the kids need nappies, milk and formula' (Benjamin, 26 y/o, South Sudan, 2 children, 7 years in Australia). Another source of tension for men from refugee backgrounds during the transition to fatherhood is time management, work and family balance. While this is not necessarily related to acculturation, it is a greater source of tension, because of the fathers' goal to succeed and the necessity to provide economically and socially.

*The challenges to father involvement*

Fathers' values and beliefs influence and guide their fathering practices. Father involvement is then viewed as the way fathers envision their role and how they put it in practice (Morgan, 2004). The main themes relevant to father involvement are: *the available father, the decision-maker, and the mentor.*

The available father refers to the accessibility of fathers to their children, an availability which is restricted by the main responsibility of providing for the family, especially for those who came with their family and have many children. Fathers stated that they had more time to dedicate to their children on weekends as nearly all of them were working or working and studying during the week. They used this time to go out, take their children to special places, and share time with friends who also had children. Weekends are also a time for both parents to be together with their children as stated by Robert:

> During the weekend, we spend time together as a family with the kids, it is very important to us. We would do the cleaning around the house. In the morning, we make breakfast and discuss as a family. Sometimes we may just go out to the park, go out with the kids you know to a restaurant and eat there, or to a movie and watch together as a family. (Robert, 35 y/o, Liberia, 2 children, 12 years in Australia)

For those whose children were older, fathers took the time to talk to their children, by having daily or regular family reunions. This was a time to ask what the children did, what the children learned in school, a time to 'listen to them, what is their future, what are their plans.' (James, 54 y/o, South Sudan, 5 children, 11 years in Australia)

As they saw themselves as the backbone of the family and customs and traditions gave them the authority over all family members, father involvement had much to do with decision-making. As involved fathers, participants associated decision-making with the raising of children. As the authority of the family, they ensured that their children were well-behaved, disciplined, and

respectful of traditions. This is very important as the children's behaviors are considered by their ethnic community as a reflection of the father's own behaviors.

Being a mentor is very important for those fathers as it conveys two dimensions. Mentoring is teaching their children to behave and become respectable citizens as well as making sure that children learn their cultural heritage. Many fathers stressed the importance of guiding their children, showing them how to behave, 'guiding them in the decision-making process' (Samuel, 40 y/o, Liberia, 2 children, 12 years in Australia). They saw themselves as role models and as such, they must set the example:

> My role as a father, I don't know how to explain, it is to be a leader for them, for the kids, I need to be a good leader, to behave myself first before I ask them to behave because the kids are just following what you are doing. Trying to behave myself, I do not say abusive words in front of him. I try to be a model for my children.
>
> (Ezra, 39 y/o, Iraq, 3 children, 15 years in Australia)

The transmission of cultural heritage includes spiritual guidance, cultural and language transmission. For many fathers, ensuring that their children have a religious education is important. 'First there is the prayer. I pray for my family; I bring them to church.' (Frederic, 40-50 y/o, Congo, 8 children, 3 years in Australia) and 'Every Sunday, the children should go to church. In the Bible, they show men how to live their daily life, they teach me in the Bible how to love and be patient and everything.' (Part Tho, 35 y/o, Burma, 3 children, 6 years in Australia) Sunday school was also a way for fathers to have children learn the home country language and read their religious books.

Fathers identified two main challenges to their involvement as father, the laws of the land and children's emancipation. Fathers tend to replicate what they themselves learned from their fathers: 'My father was a disciplinarian, he wanted strict discipline in the house. I grew up that way. I tend to administer the same level, not the same, but a similar discipline in my house and restrictions and control.' (Robert, 35 y/o, Liberia, 2 children, 12 years in Australia) In this context,

one of the important things for fathers from refugee backgrounds is to understand the laws of the land, especially on what constitutes child abuse. Fathers must adjust to society's expectations and transition from an authoritarian parenting style to an authoritative way of parenting (Baumind, 2013). This causes many concerns for fathers who were raised in an environment where authority was enforced physically as Samuel describes:

> In my country of origin, parents must be tough, must be really tough. The mentality is you have to be tough to be seen as a good parent. You must be a disciplinarian, you must be able to discipline your kids and it is a cultural thing, because if you do not discipline your children, no one will discipline them for you. (...) Some of the discipline measure would be slapping. (Samuel, 40 y/o, Liberia, 2 children, 12 years in Australia).

At the same time, Samuel agrees with the laws in place in Australia and how it consider child abuse but, he also said 'what constitutes child abuse here would mean nothing in my country of origin.' So, the real challenge for some of these fathers is to familiarize themselves with the laws of their new society.

Another tension resulting from the changes in fathers' involvement is child emancipation. In Australia, as defined by the Family Law Act, child emancipation is the formal legal process by which adolescents are released from the control, authority and custody of their parents. Not only do the laws of the land affirm the child emancipation but also outline a challenge to their own culture:

> And when they get 18, they can move away from their father, they cannot stay with you. We do not have that in our culture. When I was under 20, I was living with my mom. And I would listen. I was still young and I would listen. That is what we have in our culture, we cannot leave and go away and say no. We have to respect. (Salva, 34 y/o, South Sudan, 5 children, 7 years in Australia)

These fathers consider that, children should live with their parents until they are ready to marry. This belief is shared by the extended family who would ostracise children who choose to move away on their own before they are considered ready. This situation reinforces the perception among some of those men that the Australian society fosters more individualism than family values: 'We believe in family meanwhile Australia does not, they do believe in being independent, individual.' (John, 43 y/o, Congo, 3 children, 5 years in Australia). Emancipation at what is considered a young age by the fathers also means access to the others' culture, to the 'bad things, drugs and things' (Ezra, 39 y/o, Iraq, 3 children, 15 years in Australia) available in their new society. Child emancipation is also reinforced by the children's own experience of the acculturation process (Ellis et al., 2010; Wilson and Renzaho, 2014). Participants are adapting to the Australian culture, which they come to know through their own lived experience at school and elsewhere, and at the same time are trying to keep their parents' culture. This can cause conflicts:

> The child perhaps wants to wear a miniskirt and the mother will say "You will not wear a miniskirt when you are living in my house!" and the child will say "I will wear this or that" and it will turn out to be a conflict between the mother and the child. (Joseph, 48 y/o, Chad, 5 children, 8 years in Australia)

## Discussion

An important aspect of the description of the forced migration journey and settlement outcomes for fathers is how they can become socially included in their new society. A study of refugee men living in South-East Queensland (Correa-Velez et al., 2012) highlights the barriers to social inclusion: lack of acknowledgement of overseas work experience, financial difficulties constraining refugees from completing studies, overall economic situation, incidents of discrimination, housing issues, and exclusion from health services. This is particularly important for fathers who came with their family and see their main role as provider and authority. For those

who became fathers in Australia, they also need to be part of the workforce, know how to manage their environment, and solve the issues related to having a family.

The key barriers mentioned by fathers in the current study were: the lack of acknowledgement of overseas work experience, experiences of discrimination and housing issues. Participants not only mentioned the high cost of housing, they also commented on the rules governing rental property and how different it was from their home country's ways, as they are inspected regularly by rental agents and can get expelled easily. Findings of this study also outline the importance of financial literacy. Participants commented on the difficulty they had managing their finances, with the cost of living being so different from their country of origin.

The intercultural analysis of fathering revealed that, for these fathers, challenges to the understanding of gender roles led to different ways of envisioning parental responsibilities. Challenges also included time management, parental guidance, and the relationship they have with their children. As Charon (2010, p.60) points out, 'It is through symbols that individuals are socialized, coming to share the rules, ideas, and values of the group as well as coming to learn their roles in relation to everyone else.' The challenge originating from the redefinition of gender roles has been identified in other studies conducted with refugee men and women (Este and Tachble, 2009; Khawaja et al., 2008; Khawaja and Milner, 2012; Osman et al, 2016; Stewart et al, 2015). Studies also mention the struggle with the parental practices of the host society (Lewig et al., 2010; Nsonwu et al.,2013), child emancipation (Renzaho et al., 2011) and the meaning associated with fatherhood (Marlowe, 2011). None of these studies however have investigated the transition from manhood to fatherhood. Our research has shown these challenges are experienced by all fathers with differences between those who were fathers before resettling in Australia and those who became fathers in Australia. According to the intercultural approach, these challenges bring about a negotiation process between cultures and changes which ease the adaptation and facilitate the social inclusion of fathers from refugee backgrounds. The changes identified mirror the changes most fathers must go through to adapt to the new ways of

being a father. Fathers must revisit the meaning of fatherhood to embrace a more multidimensional and nurturing fatherhood. The change the acculturation process brings is moving from a vision of gender-specific responsibilities to one of shared, negotiated and equitable responsibilities, not only because mothers are providing, but also, as men in this study shared, because mothers also expect fathers to participate in the domestic and nurturing responsibilities. Men's transition to fatherhood experienced in Australia encourages bonding with their child as they participate in childbirth, a situation often unthinkable in their society of origin. Resettlement in a new society also means being the one to support mothers throughout childbirth as their traditional network is not available. Finally, some fathers from refugee backgrounds must envision raising their children in a different manner to be respectful of the laws of the land and view the emancipation of their children in a different way, not only because of the host society's vision but also to acknowledge their children own acculturation process.

Australia and other countries have recognized the contribution of fathers for men's, family and children's health and wellbeing for many years (Allen et al., 2012; Martin and Redshaw, 2011; Matthey et al., 2009). Being a father in a new society implies new connections with service providers. However, service providers also need to know how their own culture shapes delivery and childbirth services as well as access to other services (Yelland et al., 2014). Settlement service providers should play a vital role in supporting men from refugee backgrounds to better cope with their fathering and acculturation challenges. Policies and programs that foster and reinforce father involvement are crucial to support this transition (Fletcher, 2016; Lero et al., 2006). Of relevance are policies that support parental leave to facilitate father and child bonding; judicial, financial and health literacy programs, information about the laws of the land; and support for the development of authoritative parental skills.

## Conclusion

The response of participants in this study outlines challenges lived by fathers from refugee backgrounds in their views on fatherhood as they become fathers, and in their involvement as fathers. Exploring fatherhood with men from refugee backgrounds reveals a great paradox of paternity, each man has or had a father, and many become one in his own way, but no one really talks about transnational families. Investigation of the published research in Australia and internationally shows a growing interest and at the same time a relative concealment of fathering. Communicating their stories in social, community, regional, and national media is one way of making fathers more *"visible"*. This is even more essential as fathers from refugee backgrounds acknowledge the importance of being a father for their social status and the way the community looks at them. Research on fathering practices, support programs and health promotion activities in Australia and elsewhere demonstrate the importance of working with fathers to identify meanings and ways to better support them. It also shows the relative lack of services for fathers. It is then important to raise the awareness of fathers' challenges, so they know there is support available and appropriate systems that address the structural and cultural barriers influencing their help seeking and social inclusion.

**Acknowledgements**

This research was supported by the National Health and Medical Research Council, ID No. APP1074650

**References**

**ALLEN, S., DALY, K.,** and **BALL, J.** (2012). 'Fathers Make a Difference in Their Children's Lives: A Review of the Research Evidence'. In J. Ball and K. Daly (eds), *Father Involvement in Canada: Diversity, Renewal, and Transformation*. Vancouver: UBC Press, pp. 50-88.

**ANTONSICH, M.** (2016) 'Interculturalism versus multiculturalism – The Cantle-Modood debate'. *Ethnicities* **16**(3): 470-471.

**AUERBACH, C. F., SILVERSTEIN, L. B., ZLOTNICK-WOLDENBERG, C., PEGUERO, A.,** and **TACHER-ROSSE, S.** (2008). 'Acculturation via Creolization: Constructing Latino American Fathering Identities'. In S. S. Chuang & R. P. Moreno (eds), *On New Shores: Understanding Immigrant Fathers in North America*. Lanham: Lexington Books, pp. 197-215.

**BALL, J.**, and **DALY, K.** (2012) *Father Involvement in Canada: Diversity, Renewal and Transformation.* Vancouver: UBC Press.

**BAUMIND, D.** (2013) 'Authoritative Parenting Revisited: History and Current Status'. In: Larzelere A, Sheffield M and Harrist WA (eds) *Authoritative Parenting: Synthesizing Nurturance and Discipline for Optimal Child Development.* Washington: American Psychological Association, pp.11-34.

**BENEZER, G.**, and **ZETTER, R.** (2015) 'Searching for Directions: Conceptual and Methodological Challenges in Researching Refugee Journeys'. *Journal of Refugees Studies* **28**(3): 297-318.

**BEVAN, M. T.** (2014) 'A Method of Phenomenological Interviewing'. *Qualitative Health Research* **24**(1): 136-144.

**BOUCHARD, G.** (2011) 'What is Interculturalism?' *McGill Law Journal* **56**(2): 395-468.

**BRAUN, V.** and **CLARKE, V.** (2013) *Successful Qualitative Research: A Practical Guide for Beginners*. SAGE, London.

**CANTLE, T.** (2016) 'Interculturalism: Learning to Live in Diversity'. *Ethnicities* **16**(3): 471-479.

**CASTLES, S.** and **MILLER, M. J.** (2009) *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World.* (4th ed.). Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.

**CHARON, J. M.** (2010). *Symbolic Interactionism: An Introduction, An Interpretation, An Integration* (10th ed.). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

**CHIRKOV, V.** (2009). 'Summary of the criticism and of the potential ways to improve acculturation psychology'. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* **33**(2): 177-180.

**COHEN-ÉMERIQUE, M.** (1993) 'L'Approche Interculturelle dans le processus d'aide'. *Santé Mentale au Québec* **18**(1): 71-92.

**CORREA-VELEZ, I.**, **SPAAIJ, R.** and **UPHAM, S.** (2012) "We Are Not Here to Claim Better Services Than Any Other" Social Exclusion among Men from Refugee Backgrounds in Urban and Regional Australia'. *Journal of Refugee Studies* **26**(2): 163-187.

**DERMOTT, E.** (2008) *Intimate Fatherhood: A Sociological Analysis*. Abingdon: Routledge.

**DUBEAU, D.**, **DEVAULT, A.** and **PAQUETTE, D.** (2015) 'Father Involvement: A Multifaceted concept'. In: Devault A, Forget G and Dubeau D. (eds.) *Fathering: Promoting Positive Father Involvement* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, pp. 47-70.

**ESTE, D. C.** and **TACHBLE, A.** (2009) 'Fatherhood in the Canadian Context: Perceptions and Experience of Sudanese Refugee Men'. *Sex Roles* **60**(7-8): 456-466.

**FERNANDEZ-ARIAS, P.** (2014) 'Resettlement as an identity-building process'. In: McConvillle C (ed.), *Hopeful Places: Migration and belonging in an unpredictable area* Concord: Court Publishing, pp. 21-41.

**FLETCHER, R. (2016)** 'The state of fatherhood research in Australia'. *Fatherhood Research symposium*, University of Newcastle. Available at https://www.newcastle.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/291027/Fatherhood-Symposium-Report.pdf (accessed 10 October 2016).

**GENESONI, L.** and **TALLANDINI, M. A.** (2009) 'Men's Psychological Transition to Fatherhood: An Analysis of the Literature, 1989-2008'. *Birth* **36**(4): 305-317.

**GOULDING, C.** (2005) 'Grounded theory, ethnography and phenomenology: A comparative analysis of three qualitative strategies for marketing research'. *European Journal of Marketing* **39**(3-4): 294-308.

**KHAWAJA, N. G**. and **MILNER, K.** (2012) 'Acculturation Stress in South Sudanese Refugees: Impact on Marital Relationships'. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* **36**(5): 624-636.

**KHAWAJA, N.G., WHITE, K. M., SCHWEITZER, R., et al.** (2008) 'Difficulties and Coping Strategies of Sudanese Refugees: A Qualitative Approach'. *Transcultural Psychiatry* **45**(3): 489-512.

**KILKEY, M., PERRONS, D.** and **PLOMIEN, A.** (2013) *Gender Migration and Domestic Work: Masculinities, Male Labour and Fathering in the U.K. and USA.* Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.

**KIRMAYER, L. J.** (2006) 'Culture and Psychotherapy in a Creolizing World'. *Transcultural Psychiatry* **43**(2): 163-168.

**LAMB, M. E.** (1997) *The Role of Fathers in child Development.* (3rd Ed.). New-York: Wiley & Sons.

**LAMB, M. E.** (2013) 'The Changing Faces of Fatherhood and Father-Child Relationships: From fatherhood as Status to Father as Dad'. In: Fine M.A. and Fincham F.D. (eds.) *Handbook of Family Theories: A Content-Based Approach* London: Taylor & Francis, pp. 87-102.

**LEWIG, K., ARNEY, F.** and **SALVERON, M.** (2010) 'Challenges to parenting in a new culture: Implications for child and family welfare'. *Evaluation and Program Planning* **33**(3): 324-332.

**LERO, D., ASHBOURNE, L. M.** and **WHITEHEAD, D. L.** (2006) *Inventory of Policies and Policy Areas Influencing Father Involvement.* Guelph: Father Involvement Research Alliance.

**LONG, D.** (2008). *All Dads Matter: Towards an Inclusive Vision for Father Involvement Initiatives in Canada.* Father Initiative Research Alliance, Guelph, Canada, retrieved from the Father Involvement Research Alliance website, http://www.fira.ca/cms/documents/176/April7.Long.PDF

**MARLOWE, J. M.** (2011) "Walking the line": Southern Sudanese masculinities and reconciling one's past with the present'. *Ethnicities* **12**(1): 50-66.

**MARTIN, C. R.**, and **REDSHAW, M.** (2010). 'Fathers in the Twenty-First Century: Essential Role or Accessory?' *Journal of Reproductive and Infant Psychology* **28**(2): 113-115.

**MATTHEY, S., REAY, R.** and **FLETCHER, R.** (2009) 'Service Strategies for Engaging Fathers in the Perinatal Period – What Have We Learned So Far?'. *International Journal of Mental Health Promotion* **11**(2): 29-41.

**NEUMANN, K., GIFFORD, S. M., LEMS, A. et al.** (2014) 'Refugee Settlement in Australia: Policy, Scholarship and the Production of Knowledge'. 1952 – 2013. *Journal of Intercultural Studies* **35**(1): 1-17.

**NSONWU, M. B., BUSCH-ARMENDARIZ, N., COOK-HEFFRON, L. et al.** (2013) 'Marital and Familial Strengths and Needs: Refugees Speak Out'. *Journal of Ethnic & Cultural Diversity in Social Work* **22**(2): 129-144.

**OSMAN, F., KLINGBERG-ALLVIN, M., FLACKING, R., et al.** (2016) 'Parenthood in transition – Somali-born parents' experiences of and needs for parenting support programs'. *BMC International Health and Human Rights* **16**(7): 11p.

**POPPITT, G.** and **FREY, R.** (2007) 'Sudanese Adolescent Refugees: Acculturation and Acculturative Stress'. *Australian Journal of Guidance & Counselling* **17**(2), 160-181.

**PUTNAM, R. D.** (2007) '*E Pluribus Unum:* Diversity and Community in the Twenty-first Century: The 2006 Johan Skytte Prize Lecture'. *Scandinavian Political Studies* **30**(2): 137-174.

**RENZAHO, A. M. N., GREEN, J., MELLOR, D., et al.** (2011) 'Parenting, family functioning and lifestyle in a new culture: the case of African migrants in Melbourne, Victoria, Australia'. *Child & Family Social Work* **16**(2): 228-240.

**RIGGS, E., YELLAND, J., SZWARC, J., et al.** (2016). 'Fatherhood in a New Country: A Qualitative Study Exploring the Experiences of Afghan Men and Implications for Health Services'. *Birth* **43**(1): 86-92.

**ROOPNARINE, J. L.** (2015). *Fathers across Cultures: The Importance, Roles, and Diverse Practices of Dads.* Santa Barbara: Praeger.

**RUDMIN, F. W.** (2009). 'Constructs, measurements and models of acculturation and acculturative stress'. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* **33**(2): 106-123.

**SCHWARTZ, S. J., UNGER, J. B., ZAMBOANGA, B. L., et al.** (2010). 'Rethinking the Concept of Acculturation'. *American Psychology* **65**(4): 237-251.

**SHWALB, D. W., SHWALB, B. J.** and **LAMB, M. E.** (eds) (2013). *Fathers in Cultural Context.* New York & London: Routledge.

**SMYTH, B. M., BAXTER, J. A., FLETCHER, R. J., et al.** (2013) 'Fathers in Australia: A Contemporary Snapshot'. In: Shwalb DW, Shwalb BJ and Lamb ME (eds), *Fathers in Cultural Context.* New York & London: Routledge, pp. 362-382.

**STEWART, M., DENNIS, C. L., KARIWO, M., et al.** (2015) 'Challenges Faced by Refugee New Parents from Africa in Canada'. *Journal of Immigrant Minority Health* **17**(4): 1146-1156.

**TAYLOR, C.** (2012) 'Interculturalism or Multiculturalism?'. *Philosophy and Social Criticism* **38**(4-5): 413-423.

**TINGVOLD, L., HAUFF, E., ALLEN, J., et al.** (2012). 'Seeking balance between the past and the present: Vietnamese refugee parenting practices and adolescent well-being'. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* **36**(4), 563-574.

**TRASK, S. B.** (2010.) *Globalization and Families: Accelerated Systemic Social Changes.* New York: Springer.

**TURCOTTE, G., FORGET, G., OUELLET, F., et al.** (2015). 'An Outreach and Support Program for Socio-economically Vulnerable Fathers'. In: Devault A. Forget G. and Dubeau D. (eds) *Fathering: Promoting Positive Father Involvement.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, pp. 187-212.

**UNITED NATIONS** (2011*). Men in Families and Family Policy in a Changing World*, New-York: Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

**UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES** (2016). *Figures at a glance*, Available at http://www.unhcr.org/en-au/figures-at-a-glance.html (accessed 2 December 2016).

**VAN EE, E., SLEIJPEN, M., KLEBER, R. J., et al.** (2013). 'Father-Involvement in a Refugee Sample: Relations between Posttraumatic Stress and Caregiving'. *Family Process,* **52**(4): 723-735.

**VAN MANEN, M.** (2014) *Phenomenology of Practice: Meanings Giving Methods in Phenomenological Research and Writing*. California: Left Coast Press.

**YELLAND, J, RIGGS, E, WAHIDI, S, et al.** (2014). 'How do Australian maternity and early childhood health services identify and respond to the settlement experience and social context of refugee background families?' *BMC Pregnancy Childbirth.* **14**(1): 348- 360.

**June 2017**