

# Fitting the Jigsaw: South Sudanese Family Dynamics and Parenting Practices in Australia

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines South Sudanese-Australian parenting practices in the resettlement context from the perspective of both parents and youth. It locates their experiences in the cultures, which inform their parenting, in the changes in their families, and in the challenges they face because of these changes. This thesis has created opportunities for South Sudanese participants to narrate their stories and perspectives, which are essential in exploring cultural changes in societies with strong oral communication traditions. The study seeks to develop a nuanced understanding of South Sudanese experiences of parenting and being parented in South Sudan, and how these differ to their parenting practices in Australia. Through increased cross-cultural knowledge, awareness and understanding, policymakers and service providers can offer improved family support.

The research uses qualitative methods that focus on the nature and meaning of these changes and challenges. It employs an interdisciplinary approach that integrates perspectives from sociology, psychology, refugee studies, and migration and family studies. It draws on both narrative and constructivist theoretical approaches to help construct and analyse the data, which were collected through interpersonal interactive engagement with 60 South Sudanese participants, both parents and young people, using individual interviews and focus group meetings.

The thesis reveals gaps in the current knowledge base used to promote and support the health and wellbeing of culturally diverse parents and their children, as both groups engage in the process of social integration. It shows the transitions and challenges faced by South Sudanese parents and their children, and how these can create significant pressures, resulting in intergenerational conflicts. These challenges are also exacerbated by changes in gender roles and power structures within the family, lack of social support and child protection issues. This study notes the significance of engaging South Sudanese proactively in resolving their settlement challenges through providing appropriate parenting support, using holistic family-, parent- and community-centred approaches.

## Declaration

I, **Santino Atem Deng**, declare that the PhD thesis entitled ***Fitting the Jigsaw: South Sudanese Family Dynamics and Parenting Practices in Australia*** is no more than 100,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work.

Signature

Date

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## List of Abbreviations

AACC - All Africa Conference of Churches

ABS - Australian Bureau of Statistics

CPA - Comprehensive Peace Agreement

CALD - Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities

DIAC – Department of Immigration and Citizenship (Australia)

IDP - Internally Displaced Person

IGAD - Intergovernmental Authority on Development

NGOs – Non-governmental organisations

SHP - Special Humanitarian Programme

SKIP - Strategies with Kids – Information for Parents

SPLA/M-IO - Sudan People's Liberation Army/Movement In Opposition

SPLM/A – Sudan People's Liberation Army/Movement

SPLM - Sudan People's Liberation Movement

SSARG - Southern Sudan Autonomous Regional Government

SSCAV - South Sudanese Community Association of Victoria (Australia)

SSLA - South Sudan Liberation Army

SSLM - South Sudan Liberation Movement

TGNU - Transitional Government of National Unity

UNCRC - United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

UNHCR – The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UN - United Nations

WCC – World Council of Churches

## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

This study was motivated and informed by my work experiences as a leader and professional counsellor with Sudanese/South Sudanese and other ethnic migrant communities in New Zealand and Australia. My work experiences and involvement in supporting these new settlers increased my interest in studying and understanding more about their parenting difficulties, their experiences, and their concerns as they went through the challenges of resettlement and integration. It was also shaped by my prior studies and my work experience in various government departments, and by my work over a number of years in social and mental health support services within the area of refugee resettlement/settlement in New Zealand. Through these experiences and my increasing interest in the area of parenting for the last sixteen years, I became aware of the South Sudanese community's growing concerns, as expressed particularly by parents and young people, that the challenges they face in resettlement are not being heard. Apparently many parents do not want to see their children departing from their traditional cultures. However, at the same time they are not certain how to manage their children, so that they continue to uphold some of the traditional values as they integrate into their new culture. Understanding the challenges facing families, parents and young people from these diverse cultural backgrounds is significant in the resettlement phase. However, very little is known in mainstream culture and settlement services in Australia about South Sudanese parenting practices, experiences, culture, challenges and the resulting changes in their attitudes, beliefs, identity and general wellbeing. There are significant gaps in the current knowledge base used to promote and support the health and wellbeing of culturally diverse parents and their children, as both groups engage in the process of social integration. This study was designed to help fill these gaps through providing greater insight into and understanding of how South Sudanese experience these changes and challenges.

Given the complexities of refugee experiences, this study employs an interdisciplinary approach that integrates perspectives from education, sociology and psychology, and the fields of refugee and migration and family studies. It combines narrative and constructivist approaches to help understand and construct the complex experiences of

South Sudanese, as discussed further in Chapter 4. In this introductory chapter, I provide a brief contextual account of past and present migration to Australia, and then briefly summarise South Sudanese pre-migration and post-migration experiences, the challenges members of this community have faced, and the resulting changes in gender roles and power structures within their families. Finally, I outline the contents of each chapter.

Throughout this study wherever the words “South Sudanese” are used they are to be understood as meaning “South Sudanese (including other Sudanese who identify with the South Sudanese community) living in Australia” unless the context makes clear that a more general interpretation is appropriate.

### **1.1 Past and present immigration to Australia**

The cultural and linguistic diversity of Australia has been reshaped and augmented by immigration through substantial population inflows over the past centuries. South Sudanese migration to Australia is to be located within this context.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders lived and flourished in Australia for at least 60,000 years, long before the first fleet of Europeans arrived (Department of Immigration and Border Protection, 2013). Australia’s cultural transformations started with the arrival and rise in the number of immigrants, firstly, from Great Britain (including Irish, Scottish, Welsh, Manx and Cornish) around the 1860s (Constantine, 2003), followed by other Europeans as well as Chinese, Pacific Islanders, Lebanese, Afghans, Indians and many others (Willard, 1967, Fozdar and Hartley, 2013). The numbers of British migrants, however, continued to dominate until the mid-20th century under the White Australian Policy of 1901, which allowed only White European settlers, supplemented by post-world War II migrations from other parts of Europe, Middle East, Asia and South America, and most recently by arrivals from Africa, including South Sudanese (Fozdar and Hartley, 2013).

The periods of 1920-1940 and 1947-1953 witnessed the arrival of refugees from Eastern and Central Europe, who were fleeing various Communist and Fascist regimes. This was followed by waves of immigrants from Hungary and Czechoslovakia after their

respective failed uprisings, and later by refugees from South and East Asia in the 1970s, such as Indo-Chinese ( from Vietnam, Laos and Kampuchea) resulting from the wars in that region (Fozdar and Hartley, 2013, Kunz, 1971). The flow of refugees from Latin America in the 1980s was a result of civil strikes, political turmoil, and military upheavals. In the 1990s, Australia resettled refugees from El Salvador and Yugoslavia (York, 2003). Beginning in the late 1990s, a significantly increasing number of refugees arrived from Africa and some Middle Eastern countries as a result of the civil wars, and the political and social upheaval, which plagued these regions (Fozdar and Hartley, 2013, Lejukole, 2009).

Most of these forced migrations resulted from internal and external armed conflicts, from human rights abuse as well as from natural and other man-made disasters, all of which forced people out of their home countries. Globally there are about 38.2 million Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) while 19.5 million people are officially recorded as refugees and 1.8 million are considered to be asylum seekers (UNHCR, 2016).

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) 1951 Convention, a 'refugee' is a person who:

*“Owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country” (Moussalli, 1992).*

Australia, as a member of the United Nations (UN) and the international community, has a shared obligation and responsibilities not only for protecting refugees but also for finding a solution to these humanitarian needs. Like other resettling countries, Australian immigration has two main resettlement components: migration for skilled and family migrants, and a humanitarian programme for refugees and others in refugee-related situations. Most South Sudanese came to Australia through the humanitarian programme. The Australian obligation is translated into settling refugees using two programmes. One is Onshore Protection/Asylum which offers protection to people already in Australia, especially those who are found to be refugees according to the UNHCR convention (Fozdar and Hartley, 2013, Murphy, 1994). The second component, the pathway by which most South Sudanese came to Australia, is the offshore resettlement programme, which allows refugees who are deemed legitimate

refugees to be processed overseas and then to come to Australia on protection and humanitarian visas. This programme is further divided into two categories: refugees and Special Humanitarian Programmes (SHP) (Murphy, 1994). The refugee category is for people who are considered for immediate protection. The criteria are that they may be subjected to persecution in their homeland, are now outside their home country and have been recommended by the UNHCR as being in need of resettlement. Refugees in this category are often identified and referred by the UNHCR to Australia and other resettling countries. This group may include refugees who would otherwise be eligible for SHP, people who are refugees because of an emergency, and women at risk.

The second grouping, the Special Humanitarian Programmes (SHP), is for refugees who are outside their country of origin, who are subject to great discrimination amounting to serious human rights violations, and who have some immediate family members in Australia who have already been granted protection visas (Murphy, 1994, Jenkinson et al., 2015). To be considered within this category for entry to Australia the refugee must be supported by a proposer who must be an Australian citizen/permanent resident or an eligible New Zealand citizen or through sponsorship by an organisation based in Australia. The determination of which refugees are to be resettled in Australia is normally based on UNHCR assessment and recommendations, based on resettlement needs, and on the views of individuals and organisation groups expressed through community consultation with immigration and border protection authorities in Australia. The decision is also based on the capacity of the sponsor to assist in proper resettlement. Although there are discussions to increase the number of refugees Australia should be taking, the current Australian intake remains at about 13,000 visas per annum. The Australian Government has announced in 2015 that it will accept 12,000 extra refugees affected by conflict in Syria and Iraq. This one-off intake of 12,000 refugees displaced by the conflict in Syria and Iraq is in addition to the above quota (Fozdar and Hartley, 2013).

Controversially, Australia has detention centres for asylum seekers who have attempted to come to Australia by boat and through other irregular and desperate attempts (Funston and Evans, 2016). This is despite the UNHCR's *Global Strategy – Beyond Detention 2014-2019*, which, according to Edward (2016, p. 3), has three main goals: ending the detention of child asylum-seekers altogether; ensuring that alternatives to

detention are available in law and implemented in practice, and where detention is necessary and unavoidable in individual cases, that the conditions of detention meet international standards.

It is estimated that over 30,000 Sudanese have migrated to Australia through the Federal Government's Special Humanitarian Programmes since the 1990s (DIAC, 2007), although the first few Sudanese are believed to have arrived in the mid-1980s. While most of the community members who entered Australia between 2000 and 2006 were then called Sudanese, since the independence of South Sudan in July 2011, the majority, predominately Dinka and Nuer, now identify themselves as South Sudanese. Other refugee families from the Nuba Mountains, Blue Nile and Darfur regions in Sudan, which were excluded from the boundaries of the new Republic in 2011, have also resettled in Victoria, where this study is based. Large numbers of them are also believed to have moved from other Australian States and Territories to Victoria. However, it is very difficult to obtain the exact number of South Sudanese in Australia and, in particular, in Victoria. One reason for this is that many South Sudanese still identify themselves as Sudanese or simply as 'African', whether on government census forms or other identifying documents. Some databases have placed the number of Sudanese who arrived since the 1990s at approximately 30,000 (DIAC, 2007). For example, in 2007 (now a decade ago), the Department of Social Services' Settlement Database (SDB) estimated the numbers of Sudanese settlers arriving since the 1996 financial year at more than 20,000. In addition to settlers born in Sudan, SDB figures indicate that a significant number of settlers born in Egypt or Kenya are ethnically Sudanese, the majority of whom are children born to South Sudanese parents in refugee camps in surrounding countries. These entrants are not shown in the database, and thus the number may well have exceeded 20,000 (Department-of-Social-Services, 2017).

As economic wars, armed conflict and natural disasters continue to increase, the international movements of people to new environments in a new country, where the setting, culture, language, health and different living conditions present many challenges for migrant families, also increase (Renzaho, 2016, Kamara and Renzaho, 2016). As a result, the cultural and linguistic diversity of Australia has been reshaped and augmented by immigration. According to the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) and the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS, 2013), in 2011 about

27 percent of the Australian population was born overseas. Upon arriving in their new country, South Sudanese and other new migrants start grappling with the difficulties of learning about their new environment, the social and legal systems and the often multifaceted and different societal realities. Their young ones enrol in schools where they quickly become absorbed into their new system and culture as they rapidly acquaint themselves with the host culture, leaving their parents behind. Parenting issues start occurring when young migrants begin to question, oppose or simply drift away from their parents' traditional values (Deng and Pienaar, 2011). These challenges are discussed in detail later in this thesis.

## 1.2 Pre- and post-migration experiences and challenges for families

Refugees who move to a new country have challenges relating to the maintenance and promotion of their psychosocial fitness or wellbeing, continuation of their cultural traditions, fiscal support, and establishing senses of solidarity and belonging (McMichael et al., 2011, Montgomery, 2005). Like many other refugees, South Sudanese have experienced dramatic changes within their families, resulting from forced migration, displacement, torture and various other forms of injustice (Schweitzer et al., 2006, Miller and Rasco, 2004, Milner and Khawaja, 2010, Marlowe, 2010c). They may have spent years in refugee camps before being resettled in Australia. Relocation experiences in a new country come with enormous changes and challenges to the composition and dynamics of family structures and relationships that have to be re-negotiated within their new setting (Deng and Marlowe, 2013, Renzaho et al., 2010). Some families continue having to cope with traumatic experiences, discrimination and unemployment in their new environment (Marlowe, 2010c, Schweitzer et al., 2006). A study by the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) in the United States (Cook et al., 2003, Dierkhising et al., 2013) has identified three phases of the refugee experience: pre-flight, flight, and resettlement. The pre-flight phase is the period before the refugees' escape from their country of origin, coinciding with political violence or war. Before escaping, refugees may have experienced social violence and increasing chaos at community and societal levels, limited access to schools, thus disrupting their education and social development, and threats to the safety of their family members. The flight phase can be described as associated with great uncertainty about the future

as refugees mostly need simply to survive their displacement from homes and their transitional placement (Cook et al., 2003, Dierkhising et al., 2013). Many sacrificed all they have just to meet their daily needs.

As discussed earlier, the resettlement phase of the refugee experience refers to the adaptation to the new values and beliefs prevailing in a host country. It is also in this phase that refugees adjust to their new family patterns and roles, particularly refugee children who often struggle to adjust to their old and new cultures in diaspora (Cook et al., 2003, Dierkhising et al., 2013). A substantial predictor of adolescent refugees' psychological well-being is the post-migration experiences, which cover both difficulties and the extent of social support. The typical items comprising post-migration difficulties include concerns about other family members living outside the host country, difficulties in getting jobs and adjusting to the cultural life of their new country (Schweitzer et al., 2006). The psychological effect of pre-migration trauma is coupled with loss, cultural shock and stressors associated with adapting to a new country, which can result in many refugee adolescents becoming more prone to mental health problems and difficulties in adjusting as they find themselves between cultures.

According to Kasic (2004), most immigrants to the Western nations flee from their countries owing to political instability, tribal antagonism, and secession-related activities. These are the factors that are most often described by refugees. Research has shown that as refugee families try to adjust to their new cultures, they are faced with various difficulties, which often cause considerable distress within the families and commonly centre around acculturative stress (Schweitzer et al., 2006, Milner and Khawaja, 2010). This distress is broadly and inversely linked to the families' physical and psychological wellbeing (Berry and Kim, 1988, Kasic, 2002). Adding to those pressures, immigrant families can suffer reduced fiscal resources and social status, loss of their primary traditions and cultures, and from other various broad resettlement difficulties (McMichael et al., 2011).

South Sudanese families bring with them specific culturally-based social practices, where the context and understanding of family and parenting values differ in key respects to their new environment, for example in attitudes towards parenting. Migrants who have been separated from their families suffer significant challenges as they try to re-establish their new identity to adjust to their new setting. Various resettlement

demands occasioned by forced migration may cause tensions which have adverse consequences on the refugees' psychosocial status (McMichael et al., 2011). However, it is important to point out that refugees are not homogenous in how they experience pre- and post-migration challenges: some may not have any noticeable issues, while others struggle to overcome their past and present challenges.

South Sudanese who have resettled in Australia and New Zealand report rapid changes in the composition of their households, which they mainly attribute to resettlement-related changes in marital status, separation, interpersonal and social conflicts, and children graduating into independence (Deng and Marlowe, 2013, Deng and Pienaar, 2011). The conflict caused by changes within families may often result in children separating from their parents. Such separations impact adversely on the children's development as the family is always pivotal in their day-to-day lives; it is significant in giving them the support that they need and also affords them a sense of belonging, guidance, and common understandings of their surrounding world (McMichael et al., 2011, Murray, 2010).

Despite pre- and post-migration challenges, South Sudanese and other refugees who might have experienced trauma also display resilience and strengths, some of which are specifically grounded in cultural beliefs, practices and identity formations (Grossman, 2013). Research has indicated that not all adversity has negative consequences (Masten et al., 1990), and this can strengthen some refugees who have successfully endured inhumane and cruel conditions. This response is called "adversity-activated development" (Papadopoulos, 2007) and is a good example of possible positive effects from trauma through the emergence of positive characteristics and resources which refugees may not have had before such adversity. The focus here is on the refugee as an individual who will deal with suffering in unique and varied ways and, as a result, will show various psychological needs and reactions. Each person has a different psychological immune system which establishes their response to traumatising events (Alayarian, 2007, Papadopoulos, 2007), and these individual 'immune systems' are in turn mediated by a range of social, cultural and institutional factors and contexts. While some psychosocial factors in some contexts can increase the vulnerability of an individual affected by trauma and stressors, they can also act as a protective factor (again depending on context), helping develop resilience and defending the victim from

the negative mental health consequences of exposure to violence. As a result, victims can emerge relatively intact (Masten et al., 1990, Papadopoulos, 2007, Grossman, 2013).

### 1.3 Changes in parenting practices and power structures within the family

The challenges faced by many South Sudanese and other migrant families in their new environment often centre on tensions relating to parenting practices, language and cultural barriers, and in particular, tensions between parents and their children (Deng and Marlowe, 2013, McMichael et al., 2011). Parents often try to restrict the behaviour and attitudes of their children in order to preserve their traditional cultural values (Deng and Pienaar, 2011). Adapting to a new environment often induces changes in gender roles, social support and difficulties in understanding an unfamiliar legal framework (Renzaho et al., 2010). Changes in gender roles within families can lead to feelings of status loss, particularly for men, although coming to a new society often brings them closer to their children as they become more involved in their care (Deng and Marlowe, 2013). It can also lead to significant tensions as women learn about their new rights and freedoms, which were either unavailable in their culture of origin or imposed on them by the loss of their husbands as a result of war and displacement (Crosby, 2008).

These challenges, changes and tensions within South Sudanese and other new settlers can flare into domestic violence, which is often dangerous and escalating, as domestic violence among migrants is also hard to understand for those outside a culture (Cole et al., 2013). It remains the most elusive topic in research as it involves a myriad of issues related to cultural or traditional norms: what is seen as family violence in one culture may be seen differently in another, especially among married couples (Sokoloff and Dupont, 2005, O'Connor and Colucci, 2015, Uba, 2003). As families migrate and integrate or sometimes assimilate into their host cultures, some aspects of their traditions are lost, and these loss may also cause disruptions that can lead to domestic violence (Dunlavy, 2010).

There has been no substantial contemporary research into the level of family violence among South Sudanese (Gustafson and Iluebbey, 2013). It is commonly understood that

most of the domestic violence within migrant community's centres on gender roles, cultural norms, language, social isolation, lack of family support and the impact or implications of their new legal status (Sokoloff and Dupont, 2005, Hebbani et al., 2012). Generally, studies have shown that immigrant women are the most affected by the domestic violence and abuse (Vaughan et al., 2015, Brownridge and Halli, 2002), although it is not only an issue in immigrant communities. Domestic violence continues to increase throughout Australia and around the world across all social, cultural, ethnic groups and classes (Alexander, 2015). Notwithstanding, as discussed in Chapter Five, South Sudan is a male-dominated society and as a result, women are what Dr John Garang (Former President of Southern Sudan and First Vice President of Sudan) stated during the Comprehensive Peace Agreement signing in 2005, Nairobi, "Women are the poorest of the poor and the most marginalised of the marginalised" (Deng, 2005b). This is because most young women, particularly in the rural areas, are forced into early marriage and are deprived of education. As discussed in the subsequent chapters, decades of civil war had left South Sudan without schools, and most of the women's deprivations stemmed from forced migration and illiteracy.

The change associated with resettlement may cause some men to feel that their authority has been threatened, and they become frustrated as a result, especially if they also become unemployed and cannot provide for the family financially (Sokoloff and Dupont, 2005, Deng and Marlowe, 2013). This may lead to violent behaviour to regain power and control; those needs are considered to be the major cause of wife abuse (Gage and Hutchinson, 2006, Vaughan et al., 2015). "Family" defines the power structures of marriage which influence the decisions made by the couple to ensure that the family offers security, predictability and comfort, while compensating for changing conditions in the environment. In other words, the power structures within the family buffer the family system from the effects of the new environment. However, these structures and relationships may be adversely affected by the experiences of migration, which disrupt family and cultural systems, and thereby challenge their sense of identity and belonging (Bishop, 2011, Deng and Marlowe, 2013). This can lead to family dysfunction, social withdrawal and neglect of parental roles. Research has shown there are some components of the family setting that are linked to partner abuse. Resource theory, for example, says that the use of violence by a family member depends on the resources he or she controls (Brownridge and Halli, 2002). Where men lack resources

such as education or employment, they are more likely to exhibit violent behaviour (Flake and Forste, 2006, Srinivasan and Bedi, 2007).

As already highlighted, it is important to note cultural implications. For instance, the pervasive factors that keep immigrant women in abusive relationships are sometimes connected to their traditions or cultural norms regarding the role of women, religious obligations and the fear of being victimised as single mothers in communities where single mothers suffer stigmatisation (Ammar and Orloff, 2006, Sokoloff and Dupont, 2005). Too often, refugees, in general, are discussed as a monolithic group, although some scholars have attempted to dispel this notion. They point out that cultural differences and backgrounds are important, especially when they relate to cultural norms about domestic violence (Uba, 2003).

#### 1.4 Chapter outlines

This study comprises ten chapters, each attempting to explore South Sudanese family dynamics and parenting practices in Australia. Through engaged interactions with South Sudanese participants (parents and young people) this study is intended to enable the development of a nuanced understanding of South Sudanese experiences of being parented in South Sudan and how that differs to their parenting practices in Australia. The following are the main research questions. What parenting practices, beliefs, and values do South Sudanese families bring with them into the Australian resettlement context? How are these parenting values mediated by the new social and cultural environment they encounter following resettlement? What changes in parenting practices and attitudes do South Sudanese families experience? What are the impacts of these changes regarding individual, family and community well-being? The study created opportunities for South Sudanese participants to narrate their stories and perspectives, which are especially relevant for exploring cultural change in societies with strong oral communication traditions. Their voices are sometimes unnoticed because of their refugee status, and because of language and cultural barriers. Their narratives will increase cross-cultural knowledge about how immigrant families experience these issues, and will increase awareness and understanding not only for policymakers and service providers who are working with or supporting them, but also

among the South Sudanese themselves since they will have the opportunity to understand each others experiences of being a parent in Australia.

## **Chapter Two - The people of South Sudan: historical context and their experiences of war and forced migration**

This chapter presents a brief historical background on the people of South Sudan and their experiences of war and forced migration, looking at the unrest since 1955 to the present-day independent South Sudan. It also looks at past and present immigration to Australia. This chapter is significant for understanding the South Sudanese historical context behind the forced migration which has significantly influenced contemporary South Sudanese family and parenting experiences in Australia.

## **Chapter Three – An ecological framework of parenting: concepts of parenting in different contexts**

This chapter reviews the academic literature on the ecological framework of parenting and the concept of raising children in diverse contexts. Parenting is the central theme of this thesis and the reason for which the data was collected. This chapter examines the current knowledge and understanding of parenting in cross-cultural contexts. As Kalor and Soriano (2000) stated, to understand parenting, not only is it important to consider the characteristics of individual parents, but it is also necessary to include the influences of the wider social and cultural framework. Understanding parenting cannot be based only on the characteristics of individual parents and the adults who care for the children, but also on other influential factors - language, different cultural approaches, government policies of assimilation and multiculturalism to name a few. The chapter explores the pre- and post-migration experiences and the challenges faced by refugees, as the structures of their families are configured and reconfigured by these experiences. Nuclear family members, for example, are sometimes lost during the refugee flight.

Another contributing factor for the newly-arrived migrants is the impact of acculturation, in which groups of individuals from different cultures experience at first-hand the related changes to the original cultural patterns of either or both groups. Such encounters typically influence the new settlers' ethnic identity, attitudes and values.

## **Chapter Four - Methodology: constructing meaning from the narratives of South Sudanese parenting practices**

This chapter shows how the research was designed and the data analysed to construct meaning from the narratives of South Sudanese traditional parenting practices, transitional experiences, their impacts and the coping strategies within the families. It is divided into four parts. Part One covers research design with a focus on a theoretical framework, methodology and method applied in conjunction with narrative and constructivist theories. The use of the narrative methodology in exploring individuals, groups, and cultures has been employed by many researchers as a primary method of making sense of people's experiences (Riessman, 2008). Narrative research, according to Lieblich et al. (1998), refers to any study that generates or analyses narrative materials. From an everyday perspective, people are often storytellers by nature, and the stories they narrate provide coherence and continuity to one's experiences and play a central role in communication with one another. Part Two discusses the initial engagement by the researcher as an insider with South Sudanese participants in this study, establishing rapport, recruitment of the participants for this study, and conducting interviews and focus group meetings. Part Three discusses data analysis and locating the research using grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) through the initial coding, writing notes, refining data, focused coding, theoretical sampling and arranging categories into concepts and theory. Part Four considers the research rigor and the trustworthiness of this study. It also looks at ethical considerations and their limitations given the participants' demographics.

## **Chapter Five - Delineating Traditional South Sudanese family structure, parenting practices and customary law**

This chapter analyses the South Sudanese narratives about parenting in terms of how they define family and children's upbringing, traditional beliefs and values, and marriage arrangements, as well the responsibilities of parents and other family members. It presents a cross-cultural study of the parenting values that the South Sudanese migrants have brought with them to Australia. A cross-cultural study supports the concept that different groups of people possess different beliefs and engage in different behaviours that may be normative in their culture, but not in another (Bornstein, 2012). Bornstein stated that every culture is characterised and distinguished

from another by widely recognised ideas about how one needs to feel, think and act as a functioning member of that given culture.

## **Chapter Six - South Sudanese transitional parenting practices, beliefs and attitudes since settling in Australia**

This chapter discusses how transitional changes are experienced and their impact on South Sudanese families, particularly on their parenting practices, beliefs and attitudes, since settling in Australia. It shows how adapting to the new environment induces changes within the family, such as in gender roles and social support, changes made more difficult by an unfamiliar legal setting. The chapter looks at the impact of transitioning to new parenting practices as affected by the legal, social and cultural environments; by intergenerational changes between parents and children; by identity restructuring; and by adapting to new services and support. Participants in this study talked about the difficulties of understanding their new social and service provisions. As well they expressed concerns about their children not listening to them or respecting their authority, and abandoning their original culture as they adapt to the new one. Their concerns centred on autonomy and freedom, household chores, selection of suitable friends, schoolwork and care of younger siblings. Participants highlighted that most of their challenges were also aggravated by the lack of social support and networks, which many families used to enjoy from their relatives, friends and neighbours before they were displaced from South Sudan and as they transited through countries of refuge before coming to Australia. These transitions have led in some cases to family breakdowns, to arguments as well as to separation or divorce, and to children leaving home. They felt that their difficulties were made greater by racism and discrimination, which are displayed not only by the average Australian but also by law enforcement agencies, including police and child protection agencies.

## **Chapter Seven - The impacts of parental changes within South Sudanese families and community**

This chapter builds on the previous chapters to discuss how the changes in traditional South Sudanese parenting practices impact on and interact with the challenges of transition as they struggle to adjust to their new environment. It underlines parents' concerns about children losing their culture and the lack of respect shown toward

parents and other adults. These changes have profound impacts on them. Participants reported a sense of distress and powerlessness as they feel neither listened to nor acknowledged by the authorities who, they believe, listen to their children more than to themselves. It explores participants' apprehensions about their children's freedom and independence, which many parents believe have encouraged their young ones to seek more liberty, to leave home and eventually to abandon their culture, parents and schools altogether. The chapter considers the impact of role reversal within the family, of changes in gender roles and changes relating to cultural values and beliefs, and the consequences of disparities which participants believe have led to social erosion and family breakdown.

The changes in gender roles and power structures within the family, particularly in the areas of women's and children's rights, have led to some discontent among South Sudanese men as they reported a loss of status and of their role as head and breadwinner for their families. Contrariwise, women have expressed concern about doing double labour within and outside the households and demanded that men should help, especially in raising their children. The South Sudanese participants underlined that they were finding it challenging to follow their traditional gender roles in Australia, because there is a lack of extended family members to provide social and other support. This chapter explores the impacts resulting from lack of parenting support for some families, which has created a significant obstacle to their integration into their new environment. It underlines the lack of language support for parents, which is also compounding the challenges of parenting. Although there are serious difficulties in accessing appropriate resources as a result of language and cultural barriers, exacerbated by unfamiliarity with the new services available, this chapter also shows that South Sudanese have some coping strategies and tools to meet the challenges and change arising from their settlement in Australia.

## **Chapter Eight - South Sudanese strategies for coping with the impact of change in their families and parenting practices in Australia**

This chapter explores parents' strategies for coping with the changes in their families and parenting practices in Australia. It talks about the challenges the South Sudanese face during settlement, and highlights the positive role of the community and the church or spiritual leaders in helping to integrate South Sudanese and Australian parenting

practices and in empowering families and the community to address some of these challenges. It discusses the need to take responsibility and recognise one's own flaws as well as to embrace the changes in the new environment. It also looks at the significance of parents as role models in shaping their children's behaviour, and considers how respect, culture and language form a significant part of an individual's identity within society. This chapter underlines the importance of parents and the community taking some responsibility in addressing some of the challenges as participants identified deficiencies at family and community levels when trying to find solutions to these challenges. There are finally recommendations for empowering parents, families and the community to address these settlement challenges, and the chapter ends by examining the significance and meanings of the role of parents as role models for their children, primary caregivers and teachers.

## **Chapter Nine - South Sudanese youth identity: perspectives on parenting and cultures**

This chapter presents perspectives revealed by young South Sudanese participants on their complex cultural identities and on parenting and being parented in Australia. It considers the impact of forced migration experiences, intergenerational conflict, the balance between parental control versus young people's freedom and independence, and discusses the place for mutual support and respect in confronting the challenges of resettlement and acculturation. The psychological impacts of pre-migration trauma, coupled with loss, cultural shock and the stressors associated with adapting to a new country, result in many young people in migrant communities becoming more prone to mental health issues. They experience difficulties in acculturating as they struggle to find the balance between their cultures of origin and their resettlement environment. At the same time, they are expected by their parents to hold onto most of their original culture. The youths present their experiences and perspectives regarding the difficulties they are facing while adjusting not only to their new environment but also to generational changes. They share how they have been and still are adjusting, negotiating and juggling between their new and original South Sudanese cultures.

## **Chapter Ten – Conclusion: refitting and completing the jigsaw**

This chapter provides a final summary and commentary as it brings together the pieces of the puzzle explored through all the other chapters. It offers suggestions, based on the comments from the South Sudanese participants, on how best they can be supported to overcome their parenting challenges in order to improve the experience of settlement and integration. In the concluding remarks it emphasises the importance of understanding South Sudanese culture and the challenges of resettlement to ensure that agencies provide appropriate parenting, social and emotional support. It also emphasises the significance of a parent-, family- and community-centred approach with a focus on empowerment as a way of achieving better integration for the new settlers, and most importantly, the need for consultation with the community as well as collaboration among the service providers who support migrant communities.

## CHAPTER TWO

### The people of South Sudan: historical context and their experiences of war and forced migration

#### Introduction

The civil war that started in the 1950s, while Sudan was still under Anglo-Egyptian and British colonial rule, ended in 1972, but eleven years later another protracted conflict broke out, which ended in 2005 (Collins, 2008). The 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) eventually gave the South Sudanese an opportunity to decide their fate and led to the independence of South Sudan in July 2011. The decades of protracted and destructive civil wars have displaced and dispersed South Sudanese across the borders of what was then Sudan into neighbouring countries and as far as Australia, New Zealand and elsewhere. However, since independence, South Sudan enjoyed just over two years of relative stability before another war broke out in December 2013, as a result of political differences within the ruling party, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM).

This chapter presents a brief historical background on the people of South Sudan and their experiences of war and forced migration from 1955 to the present-day independent South Sudan. The chapter enhances understanding of the background and experiences, which led to the resettlement of South Sudanese in Australia. It provides a contextual understanding of how South Sudanese traditional parenting practices and forced migration might have contributed to some of their settlement challenges. This chapter is significant as it establishes an understanding of what led to the forced migration of many South Sudanese and how their families and parenting practices are impacted by their experiences, as discussed throughout the subsequent chapters.

#### 2.1 A brief South Sudanese historical background

##### 2.1.1 The people of South Sudan

Before its split on 9 July 2011, Sudan was geographically the largest country in Africa, with over 40 million people, consisting of more than 500 tribes that speak roughly 145 different languages and dialects (Johnson, 2011, Collins, 2008, Jok, 2001). It was diverse in both ethnicity and culture because of its historical heritage which divided the country into two parts: Southern and North Sudan. Whereas Southern Sudan to the present day is inhabited by diverse ethnic tribes that identify themselves as African, most in the North identify as Arabs, although many are obviously of African descent (F.Deng, 1995, Johnson, 2011). The Southern Sudanese speak many languages; those most commonly spoken are the *lingua franca*, which is also known as Juba Arabic, tribal languages or dialects and English. The main religion practiced in North Sudan is Islam while Christianity predominates in the South: there are also other, minor religions or traditional practices and beliefs (F.Deng, 2001, Seligman and Seligman, 1965).

The indigenous people of South Sudan are composed of 64 tribes, which are broadly categorised into the *Nilotic*, *Nilo-Hamitic*, and *Sudanic* groups. The Nilotic people are natives of the Nile Valley, mostly speak the Nilotic language and comprise a large sub-group or tribes of the Nilo-Saharan language mainly spoken in South Sudan, Kenya, Northern Tanzania, Uganda and South-western Ethiopia (Lejukole, 2009). The majority of the Nilotic groups in Australia include Dinka (Jieng), the largest in South Sudan, followed by Nuer (Naath), Shullok (Collo), Acholi and lesser tribes. Nilotic groups form the largest population group of South Sudan (in the north of the country) and are believed to have originated historically from one area and thence dispersed across South Sudan and neighbouring countries (Madut-Kuendit, 2011). They are also believed to be the largest group, second only to Bantu, in the African Great Lakes region. The terms 'Nilotic or Nilote' have been used in the past for ethnic sub-classification, mainly by Arabs in North Sudan (Lejukole, 2009). Although the term 'Nilotic' is derived from the 'Nile Valley', today the term is used to distinguish a group that is categorised mostly based on their ethnic or linguistic connection.

The second group in South Sudan are Nilo-Hamites, found mainly in the central and eastern parts of the Equatorial and Upper Nile regions of South Sudan (the east and west of the country). This group is composed of Bari speakers, Otuho (Lotuko) and a few others. Unlike the Nilotic people, who rear and farm animals, this group depends mostly on subsistence farming (Lejukole, 2009).

The third group of people in South Sudan are Sudanic: this group mainly lives in the East-Western Equatorial and Western Bahr El Gazal regions and is comprised of Azande, Balanda, Ma'di, Muru and a few others (Tucker, 1967). Like the Nilo-Hamites, the Sudanic group are also subsistence farmers. However, although these three groups are known as the indigenous people of South Sudan, there are also other groups that may have immigrated to South Sudan before or after its independence in 2011. There are challenges in identifying the other groups in South Sudan, since the country slipped into internal conflict two years after its independence, and the first national census, which had been planned for 2015, was called off.

Figure 2.1 below shows the map of South Sudan after it became independent from Sudan in 2011.

**Figure 2.1: Map of South Sudan (Worldatlas, 2017)**



South Sudanese are world-renowned for their distinctive height and for their hospitality, among other attributes (F. Deng, 1972). In South Sudan, many of the tribes live in semi-independent homesteads, villages inhabited by close and extended family members. These tribes are structured into kinships, clans and villages administered by a king (for the Shilluk) or chiefs (Madut-Kuendit, 2011). Most of these groups, especially those who live in the rural areas, used to practice traditional beliefs or animist religions before Christianity arrived and, despite the advent of Christianity, many continue to do so (Jok, 2011). Some communities also believe in the power of spirits; for instance, the Dinka

believe in a supreme God (Nhialic) in the sky, and fortune-tellers, diviners, rainmakers and spear-masters are still highly revered (Madut-Kuendit, 2011).

South Sudanese culture organises the division of labour according to gender, age, and social status within the family and community (F. Deng, 2009). In simple terms, men are commonly breadwinners and protectors of their families, while women are homemakers. These different roles are further discussed in Chapter 5. To be accepted as an adult, each South Sudanese tribe has certain procedures for initiating young men and women into adulthood (Madut-Kuendit, 2011). Among the Nilotic group (for example, Dinka and Nuer) the removal of lower teeth, forehead markings (mostly young men and sometimes women) and wearing of special beads, which apply to both men and women are common, and part of being initiated into adulthood includes getting married and forming a family (Madut-Kuendit, 2011). Culturally marriage is considered to be a major milestone among South Sudanese, and this process involves immediate and extended family members, including maternal relatives in most tribes (F. Deng, 2009). South Sudanese customary laws are discussed at length in Chapter 5.

### 2.1.2 Sudan's history of unrest from 1955 to the present-day South Sudan

Three main factors have influenced the politics of present-day South Sudan and the whole of Sudan generally. Firstly, the role of Anglo-Egyptian Sudan and the impact of its favouritism towards the Arab elite in the North against the African (Southern) Sudanese (Alier, 1973). Secondly, The rise of Islamisation in the country and its disproportionate use by the Arab elite in the North to serve their goal of making Sudan an Islamic state by imposing Shari'a laws on the Christian majority in the south (Warburg, 1990, Alier, 1992). And thirdly, the rise of armed struggle in Southern Sudan, first by the Anya Nya Movement (1955-1972) followed by the South Sudan Liberation Army (SSLA) and finally by the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A), which fought for about 21 years (between 1983-2005), leading to South Sudan becoming an independent state in 2011 (Arop, 2006).

As a result of these events, South Sudan endured decades of civil unrest, from 1956 until 2005, before it became independent. In 2005 a Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) was reached between the two warring parties, the National Congress Party (based in the North) and the SPLM/A, based in South Sudan (L. Deng, 2005b). The

agreement ended the bloody civil war in Sudan, which had claimed over two million lives, leaving many disabled, widowed, orphaned and traumatised, while many others were internally displaced or forced into refugee camps in neighbouring countries and more distant lands. The CPA did not fully end the hostilities, however, and civilians continue to suffer at the hands of armed militias, fuelled by political wrangling between South and North Sudan.

The present-day South Sudan comprises the territory and peoples inhabiting the region shown in Figure 2.1. Although it is part of Sub-Saharan Africa, geographically and historically South Sudan has never been a fully-integrated part of Sudan because of political and religious differences and because the South Sudanese have been marginalised by consecutive Islamic governments in North Sudan. The South Sudan region comprises the East Sudanian Savanna, which was incorporated into Sudan because of the southward expansion of the Ottoman Khedivate of Egypt in the 19th Century, and it subsequently remained part of Mahdist Sudan, Anglo-Egyptian Sudan and the Republic of Sudan, 1885 (F.Deng, 2001, Deng, 1995, Arop, 2006). As a consequence, in 1955, one year before Sudan became independent, the first Sudanese civil war erupted. This was championed mainly by marginalised Southern Sudanese, with the aims of achieving representation and more regional autonomy in the southern part of the country (Young, 2003). For about 17 years, the Sudanese government fought the Anya Nya rebel army that was led by Southern Sudanese. In 1971, former Army Lt. Gen Joseph Lagu gathered all the guerrilla members under his South Sudan Liberation Movement (SSLM) and for the first time the separatist movement had a unified command to fulfil the objective of secession to form the independent state of South Sudan. It was also the first organisation that could claim to speak for, and negotiate on behalf of, the entire South Sudanese population (Arop, 2006).

Mediation chaired by the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) eventually led to the Addis Ababa Agreement in 1972 (Stevens, 1976, Alier, 1992). The WCC is a worldwide inter-church organisation, while the AACC is an ecumenical fellowship that represents millions of African Christians, and both organisations have similar aims, to address issues confronting the world's and Africa's Christians respectively (AFRICA, 1972, Pratt, 2012). The Addis Ababa Agreement set up the Southern Sudan Autonomous Regional Government (SSARG),

which lasted until 1983, when the then President of Sudan, Gaafar Nimeiry, abolished the SSARG, thus abrogating the Addis Ababa Agreement and declared Shari'a (Islamic) Laws were to apply to the whole nation of Sudan, creating an Islamic state. This affected the non-Muslim majority in the Southern Sudan region and in turn led to the second Sudanese civil war, which was carried out by the SPLM/A under the leadership of Dr John Garang until the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005 (Arop, 2006); (Warburg, 1990, Alier, 1992, Cahill, 2016).

However, the SPLM/A faced many challenges during the struggle for South Sudanese autonomy, including factional splits within its rank and file, often along ethnic lines, which were directly sponsored by the Khartoum (Sudan) government. The most notable of these factional splits was the SPLM/A-Nasir in 1991, led by Dr Riek Machar (Akol, 2003, Arop, 2006). Many South Sudanese died as a result of this in-fighting in addition to those killed by their common enemy, whom they were fighting in the north of the country. This second civil war lasted for about 22 years until the signing of the CPA in Nairobi, Kenya, in 2005. It is regarded as the longest civil war in Africa (Deng, 2005b, Arop, 2006). The CPA was mediated by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and its partners, a consortium of donor countries, leading to the establishment of an autonomous government of Southern Sudan (Deng, 2005b). This agreement lasted until 2011, when South Sudan declared independence after an internationally-supervised referendum had been conducted (LeRiche and Arnold, 2013). The referendum, which took place in Southern Sudan from 9-15 January 2011, was on whether the region should remain as part of the larger Sudan or become an independent state, and it was one of the major milestones in the CPA between the Khartoum government and the SPLM/A. The referendum was held both in Southern Sudan and in the Southern Sudanese diaspora. A simultaneous referendum was also supposed to be held in the Abyei area on whether to become part of South or North Sudan, but this was postponed due to disputes over border demarcation and residency rights, governing who would be qualified to vote in the referendum (Johnson and Protocol, 2011).

So South Sudan's path to independence from Sudan was marked by historical conflict and protracted civil war lasting more than four decades (Arop, 2006). Much of this conflict has been defined along ethnic and religious lines that had been mostly characterised as the Arab-Muslim North versus the black Christians/animists in

Southern Sudan (Deng, 1995, Johnson, 2011). The marginalisation of the Southern Sudanese has been well documented, particularly noting the fact that power was consolidated in North Sudan, resulting in systematic oppression of the Southern Sudanese. Although the fighting has been conceptualised on ethnic and religious lines, numerous historians have also noted that understanding this conflict requires an analysis of the rich natural resources in South Sudan, with a particular emphasis on oil (Johnson, 2011, Jok, 2001).

One of the preconditions to the referendum was a census, which was meant to define how wealth and political power would be divided between the two regions. The census was also to be the basis of a voter-registration process for the national elections in 2010, and which would in turn set the stage for the referendum (Brosché, 2008). The census was delayed three times, mainly due to disagreements between northern and southern Sudan over what they were obliged to do according to the CPA, arising from funding difficulties and the enormous logistical challenges given that South Sudan had been completely neglected by successive governments in North Sudan. The unmapped minefields remaining from the war hindered the mobility of people, noting that more than 5 million South Sudanese are nomadic. Over two million internally displaced persons from the South remained in refugee camps around Khartoum (Brosché, 2008) and many others remained in Ethiopia, Uganda and Kenya and as far afield as Australia, North America and Europe. A further complication resulted from the conflict in Darfur to the west, where civilians who had fled attacks refused to take part in the census because of fears that the government would use the results against them (Flint and De Waal, 2008). Darfuri rebel groups also disapproved and boycotted the planned census, and threatened to attack any census centre in the areas under their control or influence.

Another obstacle resulted from the unfortunate sudden death of SPLM/A leader, Dr Garang, in a plane crash, which dampened people's hope for the future and slowed the momentum towards achieving the dream of a "New Sudan", devoid of any shade of marginalisation and injustice (Deng, 2005a). As Chairman of the SPLM, Commander in Chief for the SPLA and First Vice President of Sudan, Dr Garang had been a significant symbol of hopes for liberty and justice for most Sudanese, particularly for the Southern Sudanese. His untimely death led to significant confusion, and many people thought it might mean an end to the peace accord (the CPA). His death was immediately followed

by spontaneous riots across the country, leading to many deaths and the destruction of property in Khartoum (Deng, 2005b).

The other outstanding dispute which remained unresolved between South Sudan and Sudan was the sharing of the oil revenues: it was estimated that over 80% of the oil in Sudan came from South Sudan (Themnér and Wallensteen, 2013). This represented an incredible economic potential for one of the most deprived regions in Africa. However, despite all these obstacles and disputes, the issues around the census, which was the most contested milestone in the CPA, were resolved. According to the 2010 Sudan census that followed, the population of South Sudan was estimated at almost 9 million (Sudan, 2016), but this estimate is also still contested as many South Sudanese believed the Khartoum government had manipulated the census for political purposes, to show the population of South Sudan was smaller in comparison to past census data. Today, some experts and the government of South Sudan are projecting that the current population of South Sudan might be around 12 million, arguing that many South Sudanese have returned home from refugee camps or neighbouring countries or the earlier diaspora after the census in 2010 and independence in 2011. The actual population could be higher still. It was also obvious that during the census some areas were inaccessible as many South Sudanese live in rural or remote parts of the country which made it impossible either for them to take part in the census or for the census takers to collect reliable data.

After protracted wrangling, which almost derailed the CPA, South Sudanese were then allowed to vote in a referendum held over six days (from 9–15 January 2011) to decide whether they would like to remain as part of one Sudan or break away and form their own country (LeRiche and Arnold, 2013). The dream of becoming an independent state became a reality in July 2011, after the result of the referendum showed that 98.83% of South Sudanese voted for independence. This led to an official declaration of independence at midnight on 9 July 2011, when the Republic of South Sudan was formed. In the same month, the Republic of South Sudan became the 193<sup>rd</sup> member state of the United Nations and 54<sup>th</sup> member state of the African Union (LeRiche and Arnold, 2013, Young, 2012).

Another referendum was supposed to take place simultaneously in Abyei, South Kordofan and Blue Nile. People from these regions had fought alongside Southern

Sudanese during the 22 years of civil war. Disappointingly, it did not take place due to disputes and further conflict (L. Deng, 2005a). The Popular Consultations in South Kordofan and Blue Nile were part of the protocols in the CPA, but there was no clear reference to referenda and/or independence, which raises concerns about the future of these regions (Totten, 2016). As a result, in June 2011, armed conflict again erupted between the forces of Sudan's government and the SPLA (Southern Sudan Army) in Abyei. This was later followed by an agreement for both the SPLA and the government of Sudan to pull out from Abyei, and in the same year, several international panellists, including the United Nations, made a proposal to employ over 4,000 Ethiopian soldiers in the area to serve as peacekeepers.

As the disagreement continued between the Republic of South Sudan and Sudan over who should take part in the referendum, the frustrated residents of Abyei (mainly composed of ethnic Ngok-Dinka) opted to join South Sudan in an unofficial referendum, voting 99.9% in favour (Brereton and Ayuko, 2016). Sudan and the international community did not recognise the referendum and, to date, Abyei remains a disputed area between Abyei residents (Ngok-Dinka) and the Misseriya as well as between the respective governments of South Sudan and Sudan. Here and elsewhere, the border between the two Sudans, the largest border in Africa, remains unmarked, leading to regular confrontations between them.

The dispute around the Abyei referendum concerns an Arabic-speaking tribe called Misseriya. They are a nomadic community who are non-residents of the area, but who threaten war if they are not allowed to decide whether Abyei should belong to South or North Sudan. The ethnic Ngok-Dinka and the government of South Sudan argue that only settled inhabitants of the area should be allowed to take part in deciding this issue, but the Misseriya nomads and the government of Sudan insist that seasonal non-residents should also take part. The ethnic Ngok-Dinka are the indigenous people of Abyei and the area belonged to them, and they see no reason why the non-residents, who only come from North Sudan during the dry season to graze their animals, should be allowed to decide the fate of their ancestral land. Their ultimate fear of allowing the Misseriya to take part in deciding the destiny of this area was obvious, as the Misseriya do not want the area to be part of South Sudan. The Misseriya fear that they will no longer be allowed to graze their animals in the area if the people of Abyei opt to join

South Sudan. Therefore, they feel it is better for Abyei to remain part of North Sudan to their benefit and to ensure the survival of their animals (Cahill, 2016).

South Sudan also continues to suffer from political struggles, which have returned the country back into a disastrous conflict that many South Sudanese call 'a senseless war'. The infighting started on 15 December 2013 when the government of South Sudan announced it had thwarted an attempted coup d'état by a faction of the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) loyal to a former Vice President of South Sudan, Dr Riek Machar, who had been removed from his post earlier that year by the current president of South Sudan, Salva Kiir Mayardit (Young, 2015). Unfortunately, the fighting, which erupted at the Presidential Guard Headquarters, spread quickly across Juba, the capital of South Sudan, and into other states across the country, where government forces (SPLA) started fighting amongst themselves.

In order to gain a proper estimate of the population of South Sudan, the government of South Sudanese was planning to conduct its first census in 2013 before the general election in 2015, but this was abandoned when the current political and humanitarian crises in the country started in December 2013. However, according to an agreement reached in August 2015 between the government of South Sudan and the South Sudan rebel groups, Sudan People's Liberation Army/Movement In Opposition (SPLA/M-IO) (Young, 2015), a Transitional Government of National Unity (TGNU) will be formed within a 30 month interim period to redraft the constitution and conduct the national census before the national general election.

As a consequence of the fighting, thousands of people are believed to have died while thousands of others were injured throughout the areas most affected, which include Juba (where the fighting began), Jonglei, Upper Nile and the Unity States. More than a million others are reported to have been displaced internally and still others are believed to be in catastrophic humanitarian need. Thousands crossed the borders as refugees to neighbouring countries - North Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda. There were reports of major massacres of civilians and destruction of infrastructure by the rebel forces in the most affected areas of Bor, Malakal, Bentiu as well as in other cities and areas across the Greater Upper Nile region (Young, 2015).

The senseless war only ended after the government of South Sudan and SPLA/M-IO signed an agreement in August 2015 to form a Transitional Government of National Unity (TGNU). The peace agreement, which the parties to the conflict believe was imposed on them by the IGAD and a consortium of regional and international bodies, was effectively delayed for a few months. This delay was caused by some disputes about the agreement, and the rebel leaders also dragged out the process by putting forward pre-conditions before coming to Juba. The TGNU was finally formed in early April 2016, but since then the country has remained fragile: some breakaway groups from SPLM-IO remain in the bush, posing potential security issues in some parts of the country that threaten the current peace.

South Sudan's main export and source of income is oil, but this vital commodity has been affected by the conflict, together with an ongoing dispute with Sudan over the pipeline and the lower international oil prices. The South Sudanese economy remains fragile as the country does not have a robust private sector as developed countries do, to generate income from taxes. As a result, the government cannot deliver needed services as well as feed those who were internally displaced by the conflict and who as IDPs can no longer support themselves by their customary subsistence farming.

## Conclusion

This chapter conceptualised the study through providing a brief historical background of South Sudan and the experiences of war which forced many South Sudanese from their homeland. It highlighted Sudan's history of unrest from 1955 to the present day as well as past and present conflicts within South Sudan and with neighbouring Sudan, which continue to displace or force many civilians to become refugees. For instance, the three civil wars have exacerbated the country's poor infrastructure and slowed the development of the nascent nation. The impacts of poor health services, inadequate infrastructure, limited access to basic resources and shelter, and an unstable political climate (internally and externally) have created a complex environment in which to address the multi-dimensional facets of poverty. There are serious issues related to geopolitical tensions, internal politics and governance, finding meaningful representation across the country's rich ethnic diversity, and the effective use of the natural resources. The limited infrastructure means that health services, sanitation, access to clean drinking water and other basic necessities and services are either limited

or non-existent. The ongoing disputes regarding some areas along the border between the two Sudanese nations continue to cause tensions as well as regarding any development in South Sudan. The threat of infighting and the conflict that just ended (after the formation of TGNU) has set the country back in terms of peace and development, and has led many South Sudanese to seek refuge regionally and internationally. The conflict in South Sudan has affected most South Sudanese-Australians, who have immediate family members there. It has also reminded them of their own forced migration or traumatic refugee journeys before coming to Australia. The significance of providing these contextual accounts is to establish an understanding of what has led to the forced migration of many South Sudanese and the subsequent impact on their families and parenting practices, which are discussed in the following chapters.

## CHAPTER THREE

### An ecological framework of parenting: concepts of parenting in different contexts

#### Introduction

Cross-cultural parenting is complex, and made more so for the South Sudanese given the historical context discussed in Chapter 2, and the changing gender roles and power structures within the family that have emerged as a result of their pre- and post-migration experiences, as presented in the introduction.

This chapter provides a review of previous studies on parenting and the concept of child rearing in a diverse context. Parenting is the central theme of this thesis, and this chapter examines the current knowledge and understanding of parenting in cross-cultural contexts. As Kalor and Soriano (2000, p.3) stated, to understand parenting, not only is it important to consider the characteristics of individual parents, but it is also necessary to include the influence of the wider social and cultural context. Bronfenbrenner (1986) emphasised the social ecology of parenting and outlined four concepts of child development. Indeed, understanding parenting not only needs to be based on the characteristics of individual parents but also on the influences of how and why parents raise their children as well as other factors such as language and different cultural approaches. It is also understood that globally there are differences in parenting styles based on a given culture or cultural background, and on socioeconomic and other factors (Hoff et al., 2002).

This chapter in reviewing the literature highlights other factors that have influenced parenting practices, for example government policies around multiculturalism, as well as the psychological characteristics of adults caring for a child. Government policies or the laws of a given country often affect those who come from societies where parenting practices are unregulated or which have less government involvement in family affairs. As for many other refugees, South Sudanese family structures are shaped by their original culture, and that influence continued even after they met other cultures during

the pre-settlement period, so that the changes caused by outside factors are often associated with various challenges. Although many studies measure intergenerational differences of family values and relations, most have based their analyses on the adolescents' perceptions of their parents' views to assess intergenerational disagreement; only a few have essentially examined the views of both adolescents and their parents (Kwak, 2003).

There has been increasing research and knowledge about South Sudanese resettlement challenges and issues in Australia (Milner and Khawaja, 2010, Milos, 2011, Schweitzer et al., 2006) but only a little is known about their parenting practices and the impact of their experiences within their families. Renzaho et al. (2011) investigated the general resettlement and parenting challenges faced by new settlers from Arabic-speaking communities, but there has been no specific, in-depth study to understand how and to what extent South Sudanese families experience these changes. Since parenting practices differ from one society to another, some scholars propose that parents should be assisted in setting appropriate parenting goals and be encouraged to interact more with their children in ways that positively organise their emotional and behavioural functioning (Deng and Pienaar, 2011, Dix, 1992, Gamble and Weil, 2010).

As discussed throughout this thesis, changes in gender roles, even complete role-reversal, and changes in power structures create family tensions as women, whose rights might have been suppressed in the country and culture of origin, start to learn about their rights and to push the boundaries for their liberties, while children too push for their independence (Poppitt and Frey, 2007). Thus, men become discontented and try to reassert control as heads of their families - something sanctioned in their original culture but which may now lead to separation or family disintegration (Nilsson et al., 2008). Most refugees who arrive in Australia designate themselves as 'families' but their understanding of what makes a family may not be the same as what Australian authorities consider a family to be - that is, a couple (married or in de-facto relationship) or a single person with dependent children. As discussed in later chapters, South Sudanese and many other refugee family structures do not necessarily fit within this definition, which may create challenges for them and for the authorities.

The other significant challenge for the new immigrant relating to parenting practices that is dealt with in this chapter is the impact of acculturation, the process in which

groups of individuals from different cultures meet and their first-hand experiences bring accompanying changes in the original patterns of culture of either or both groups (Berry, 1997). The main impacts are mainly through the behavioural and psychological changes that take place due to encounters between the original and new cultures, and these dynamic changes typically influence the new settlers' ethnic identity, attitudes and values (Berry, 1997, Miller and Kerlow-Myers, 2009).

In addition to acculturation there is the political climate, in which new settlers may be used as scapegoats - prime or easy targets for the mass media and politicians who might be aiming to score political points about refugees' settlement through using antagonistic language, such as which refugees are bad or who is better at integrating or adjusting to the Australian way of life. Research has underlined a range of factors that need to be considered when discussing refugee settlement, factors such as the level of support given to them, how effective that support is, and how accepted they feel in their new environment. These factors and others such as employment that are relevant to making those newly-arrived feel part and parcel of their new society are discussed through this thesis, and particularly in Chapter 10.

### 3.1 Parenting in a cross-cultural context

Parenting involves a broad understanding of how best to support the physical, social, emotional, cultural and intellectual development of children, from infancy to adulthood. Cross-cultural studies on parenting underscore that beliefs, values and behaviours in every society play a vital role in parental discipline, practices and the principles in which children grow up (Bornstein et al., 2011, Zubrick et al., 2008, Tingvold et al., 2012). Australia has continued to diversify, so one parenting practice or cultural understanding may no longer be useful to define such a multicultural or diverse society. However, cross-cultural research on parenting in Australia has been narrowly focused on the majorities and mainstream cultures or those who have been in the country longer (Kolar and Soriano, 2000a) with less emphasis on the newly-arrived or emerging communities, such as the South Sudanese and other ethnic groups. For instance, previous studies focused on Anglo, Greek, Lebanese and Vietnamese groups as well as

on Australian-born, Asian and indigenous populations (Papps et al., 1995, Kolar and Soriano, 2000a, Zubrick et al., 2008).

According to Zubrick et al. (2008) Australian families are smaller and the traditional household tasks, in which mothers care for their children and fathers are breadwinners, have changed over the past few years as women increasingly enter into paid employment. These women are believed to have been encouraged into the labour market as a result of significant demand for skills, and for part-time and casual work (Zubrick et al., 2008). These changes have both substantial advantages and substantial disadvantages within families and particularly in the area of marriage, separation and divorce. The changes have led to a high number of solo parents (Zubrick et al., 2008).

The current understanding from a parent's viewpoint, a viewpoint supported by research, is that the chief significance of parenting is providing care for and overseeing the social and other development of children as the future generation (Kolar and Soriano, 2000a). According to Grant and Guerin (2014), parents are the first people through whom children experience the world, and what happens in early life has the potential to influence their lives, health and the ability to succeed. Thus, as parenting continues to evolve and become increasingly demanding, parents are faced with the multifaceted challenges of their roles in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. A century ago, parents were mostly expected to focus on the physical and moral aspects of their children's welfare, but today's parents are also expected to pay more attention to the development of their children's social responsibilities, emotions and intellectual wellbeing in addition to other needs and requirements (Kolar and Soriano, 2000a, Grant and Guerin, 2014). For instance, parents' responsibility for providing what care they can for their children is significant in modelling not only their physical, social and emotional wellbeing but also their economic needs: research has shown the misfortunes or disadvantages which start in early childhood may accumulate into adult life (Grant and Guerin, 2014).

There is increasing evidence that parenting behaviour has a substantial impact on achieving child behavioural developmental outcomes, an emphasis supported by longitudinal studies and ecological design that test multilevel effects of contexts outside the family (Zubrick et al. 2008, p.4). Zubrick and colleagues argued that while parental behaviours are linked to their children's future, as indicated by longitudinal studies on samples of children followed up over time, studies from genetically informative designs

or from data that were contextually enriched have suggested biological, environmental and community connections are also relevant. Although many of these effects are yet to be fully understood, the current evidence has compelled many agencies to implement programs that seek to support better parenting behaviours. However, although government agencies are responsible for developing policies, providing funding and delivering the services needed by families, there needs to be an assessment of the impacts of these services' deliveries for affected families and children (Zubrick et al., 2008), particularly for those who come from other ethnic cultures with different understandings and concepts of parenting.

Although research has shown an association between parenting and quality child developmental and behavioural outcomes, if there is a lack of attachment or no positive parent-child relationship, any discrepancy in disciplining practices and less adequate supervision of or involvement with children increases the likelihood of subsequent behavioural and emotional problems (Zubrick et al., 2008). Zubrick and colleagues cautioned that there are complexities in this field of inquiry, mostly concerning what is regarded as 'optimal parenting' since childrearing varies not only with the age and competencies of the child but with different cultures. The authors argued that parenting behaviours that may be appropriate and effective for younger children may not apply later as they develop competence in terms of self-regulation, communication, comprehension, introspection and autonomy. These justify changes in parenting approaches and strategies to meet those competencies.

Zubrick et al. (2008) introduced three dimensions of parenting. *Parental warmth* refers to the level of interaction between parents and their children and is mostly characterised by affectionate behaviour, including positive regard, enjoyment and involvement in their lives and responding to their needs. They linked parental warmth with the child's developmental outcomes and attributed its lack from parents during infancy as sometimes contributing to a child's aggressive behaviour during the preschool period (Zubrick et al., 2008, Papps et al., 1995).

Zubrick's second dimension is *parental response*. How parents respond to their children's behaviour is seen as more significant in parenting. For instance, when parents respond to their children's behaviour in a hostile manner, such as with anger, irritability or when they physically discipline them or impart a high level of criticism or negativity

and thus became emotionally and negatively charged toward them, this increases the likelihood of later developmental 'conduct-related' behavioural problems.

The final dimension is *consistency*, which is the most significant part of good parenting and child development and is often reflected in how firmly and consistently parents behave during their interactions with their children (Zubrick et al., 2008). Consistency is significant in every aspect of our lives but is particularly paramount in setting clear developmentally appropriate boundaries as well as setting parental expectations of children while they are growing into an adult world. Consistency is part of being warm and how parents react and respond to both children's behaviours and needs. Previous Australian studies have linked inconsistency to hostile parenting, which results in elevated rates of delinquency amongst minors and (particularly) adolescents, problems with focusing and somatic complaints (Zubrick et al., 2008, Silburn et al., 1996).

It is also understood that societal beliefs, values, principles, behaviours and perspectives influence children's personalities (Harwood et al., 1999, Ochocka and Janzen, 2008).

Bornstein (1991) explained that parents and their children within the structures of different cultures become culturally competent members of their society based on differential values of individual autonomy versus interdependence. For example, Bornstein's study found that European-American mothers used suggestions and indirect means to structure their children's behaviours, whereas Puerto Rican mothers used more direct means of commands and physical restraints.

Indeed, there are many variations in parenting styles and concepts. For instance, most South Sudanese come from a collectivist society where much emphasis is placed on an individual's efforts to contribute to the wellbeing of the family and society. They promote values such as helpfulness and interdependence within the family, which differ from societies where parents put a significant emphasis on individual independence and the pursuit of individual achievements (Darling and Steinberg, 1993, Bornstein, 1991). Kolar and Soriano (2000, p. 58) reached the following conclusion.

*Responses to parenting difficulties need to be multi-layered. There is a need to recognise that parenting is situated within a broader social and cultural context and is subject to the influences of a multitude of complex variables. It follows therefore, that any attempt to support families and parenting must necessarily be*

*multi-layered, incorporating both the social influences and the way individual parents fulfil their child-rearing responsibilities. Without an integrated approach, policies such as those aimed specifically at families can be undermined by the influence of broader societal changes.*

Although Kolar and Soriano's (2000) research was not studying South Sudanese, the quote above highlights the potential for negative support outcomes when there is lack of understanding of the parents' culture and failure to provide holistic support for families. These issues are discussed later in this chapter. This quote resonates with comments from some of the South Sudanese participants. Kolar and Soriano went on to emphasise that the apparent level of similarity between the attitudes and behaviours of the Anglo, Vietnamese and Torres Strait Islander families they studied would suggest that there might be an 'Australian' style of parenting. However, the authors also pointed that to give any weight to such a suggestion may necessitate appraisals of the parenting practices among Vietnamese parents living in Australia and those still in Vietnam; although the level of congruence between the Anglo, Vietnamese and Torres Strait Islander samples is indicative of the fact that parenting is a universal activity.

This and other cross-cultural research supports the concept that each cultural group possesses different beliefs and engages at times in behaviours that may be more normative in their own culture than in the other (Bornstein, 1991). As Bornstein (2012) states, every culture is characterised and distinguished from others by entrenched and widely recognised ideas about how one needs to feel, think and act as a functioning member of that culture. This applies to parenting, in which each cultural group has embodied parenting characteristics that influence how parents care for their offspring and regulate their daily activities. These seem to be communicated from one generation to another (Bornstein, 2012). Cross-cultural parenting encompasses beliefs, values, goals and behaviours, and each of these can be influenced by parents' and children's personalities and the societal system they are being brought up in (Rosenthal, 1996, Bornstein et al., 2011). To Bornstein et al. (2011), culture helps shape and construct parenting as well as maintain and help in transmitting concepts, by influencing parental cognition. Due to these variations, discussing what exactly constitutes parenting can be infinite as childrearing differs from one culture and society to another. As highlighted above, cross-cultural parenting research has also made an association between

childrearing aspects such as parenting goals, disciplinary practices, and beliefs about children's development and the characteristics of 'individualistic' and 'collectivist' societies (Harwood et al., 1999).

### 3.2 Parenting styles: similarities and differences

Diverse parenting goals have roots in developmental temperament, and researchers in this area have endeavoured to determine the patterns of attitudes and behaviours in which parents typically differ (Maccoby and Martin, 1983). However, the keenness to define diverse parenting styles has been mostly prognostic as researchers pursued patterns of parental behaviour which could predict childhood outcomes (Maccoby and Martin, 1983). Baumrind (1991) expanded this discussion through categorising parenting into four different styles: *Authoritarian*, *Authoritative*, *Permissive* and *Indulgent*.

Authoritarian parenting styles apply when children are expected to follow the strict rules established by their parents, and failure to follow such rules usually results in punishment. Such parents fail to explain the reasoning behind these rules: they have high demands but are not responsive to their children's emotional needs. These parents are obedience- and status-oriented, and expect their orders to be obeyed without explanation.

The second style is authoritative parenting, which differs from authoritarian parenting. This second type of parent sets rules and guidelines that their children are expected to follow. Such parents are more democratic and responsive to their children and are willing to listen to their questions, and when the children fail to meet the expectations, they are more nurturing and forgiving than punitive. Such parents monitor and impart clear standards for their children's conduct. They are assertive, but less intrusive and restrictive. Their disciplinary methods are supportive, rather than punitive, as they expect their children to be assertive, socially responsible, self-regulated and cooperative.

Baumrind's (1991) third parenting style is permissive; parents who apply this style make few demands of their children as they rarely discipline them because they have low

expectations of maturity and self-control. Permissive parents are more responsive than demanding. They are non-traditionalists and lenient; they do not require mature behaviour but allow much self-regulation and avoid confrontation. They are generally nurturing and communicative with their children, but often take on the status of a friend more than that of a parent.

Baumrind's fourth parenting style is indulgent, which is almost the same as the permissive parenting style except that the indulgent parents are characterised by making few demands, have low responsiveness and provide little communication. While these parents meet the child's basic needs, they are mostly detached from their children's lives. In extreme circumstances, they may even reject or neglect the needs of their children.

Looking closely at these parenting styles, there are both positive and negative aspects for each in child development outcomes. For instance, authoritarian parenting can create children who are obedient and proficient, but they rank lower in happiness, social competence, and self-esteem. Permissive parenting often results in children who rank low in happiness and self-regulation. These children are more prone to experience problems with authority and may perform poorly in school (Baumrind, 1991). However, the indulgent parenting style ranked the lowest across all life domains, as children nurtured under this style lack self-control, have low self-esteem and are less competent than their peers. The most preferred of all are authoritative parenting styles, which result in children who are happy, capable and successful (Baumrind, 1991).

Although Baumrind's parenting styles reflect Western understanding and concepts of parenting, these styles are reflected in both individualist and collectivist societies despite cultural differences in childrearing. As discussed throughout the subsequent chapters, South Sudanese participants highlighted some of Baumrind's (1991) parenting styles within the context of what good and bad parenting means according to their cultural understanding and concepts. In the same way there are common understandings of parenting with the focus on supporting children's overall well-being with meticulous attention to their physical, emotional and developmental needs (McEvoy et al., 2005). It is understood that more individualistic-oriented societies valued autonomy, independence and the ability to get things done on one's own, and the children in those societies are encouraged to act autonomously and demonstrate initiative as early as possible. In contrast, collectivist societies seem to place more emphasis on community

responsibility by encouraging children to learn their responsibilities from their family and the wider community, and act accordingly (Triandis et al., 1988, Wise and Da Silva, 2007). The other main similarity in parenting goals includes health and survival of the children as well as teaching them necessary survival skills, together with encouraging the qualities and values that are considered valuable within a given culture and society (Kolar and Soriano, 2000a).

However, LeVine (1988) asked, How do parents of a given culture define 'the requirements of childcare during the first years of life, and how do they perceive the obstacles to be overcome in fulfilling those needs'? To LeVine, cultural perspectives assumed that parents are guided by culture-specific models of interpersonal relations, and that independence is considered common in individualist societies, while interdependence applies more widely in communal cultures. However, LeVine recognised that this concept has failed to show how future goals, along with other parental aims within a given culture, work with the parents' perception of their children's adaptive problems in their early life. The other noteworthy difference in parenting goals concerns physical punishment. In Australia and most other Western cultures, this practice is considered to have a negative impact on children later in life, but in other cultures (including South Sudanese) it is seen as an important component of improving children's behaviour for a better future (Kolar and Soriano, 2000a, Deng and Marlowe, 2013).

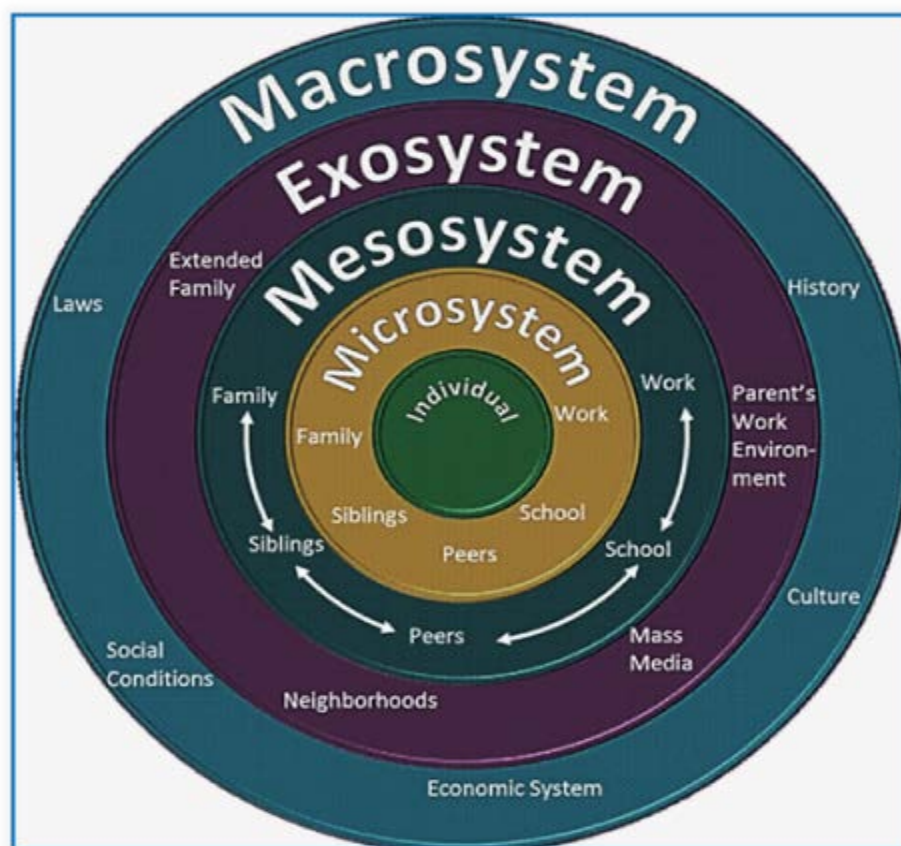
Later chapters in this thesis discuss in greater detail the changes in traditional forms of discipline for South Sudanese children resulting from a new environment with different child protection policies. This has led to many refugees experiencing a sense of loss and powerlessness (Levi, 2014). Research into parental discipline indicates that parental responses to their children's misbehaviour depend on the nature of the rules or standards the children have violated, as parents have a large repertoire of disciplinary strategies (Kolar and Soriano, 2000a, Zubrick et al., 2008). In some situations, they employ power assertive techniques such as unexplained commands and punishments, whereas at other times they may use more cognitively-oriented strategies such as reasoning and explanations (Grusec and Goodnow, 1994). As discussed in Baumrind's (1991) parenting styles, this suggests that parental responses to transgressions are not

consistent and the choice of disciplinary strategy depends on the nature of the situation or wrongdoing (Grusec and Goodnow, 1994).

### 3.3 Social ecology of parenting

As research has shown, developmental expectations often influence the way in which adults interact with children, although adults' and children's interactions are multi-determined (Kolar and Soriano, 2000b). Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1986) social ecology model highlights how a child's development is affected by his or her social domain or social relationship with the surrounding world, divided into microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem as depicted in Figure 3.3 below.

**Figure 3.3: Bronfenbrenner's social ecology model (1977, 1986)**



Bronfenbrenner defined the microsystem as when a child or individual begins to have contact with family and siblings at home as well as with peers at school or work. The microsystem is considered the most influential as it involves direct contact with people,

which influences how others also interact with an individual in return and is mostly associated with home for the younger child (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Second is the mesosystem, which consists of an individual's microsystem interactions with family, siblings, peers, school and work. The mesosystem is the most immediate environment for a child and involves more microsystem interconnections with the surrounding world and in particular with family members and locally outside the home, which potentially affects a child's development and life. The exosystem describes the child's contact with the wider community, including extended family members, neighbours, parent's work environment as well as social or mass media. The child is still affected by other people's decisions, such as their parents and school, as to whether or not they are an active participant. The final circle in Bronfenbrenner's social ecology model is the macrosystem, which involves a child's extensive contact and interaction with the wider world. Although it may not be direct, a child's development is clearly affected, both positively and negatively, by considerations such as culture and tradition, history, laws and socioeconomic conditions (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, Bronfenbrenner, 1986). However, there are concerns about the misuse of Bronfenbrenner's theory: it has been revised and evolved over the years (Tudge et al., 2009). As Tudge pointed out:

*Even in the 1970s the theory was not about contextual influences on development but on context-individual interactions, and from 1994 the theory was clear that proximal processes were the 'engines of development' and that they were adjusted by both the context and the individuals engaged in those proximal processes.*

Bronfenbrenner's (1977) social ecology model is also mainly based on Western understanding of child development, particularly their interactions at an early age through to adult life. Nevertheless, this model is universal and it is widely understood that parents have a substantial role to play in their children's development and lives while growing up in a given environment and culture. Grant and Guerin (2014) pointed out that the ecological model has enabled researchers and policymakers to recognise that an individual's capacity to parent is shaped not only by their intrapersonal factors such as knowledge, beliefs and attitudes but also by interpersonal features, including formal and social networks. Children's social interactions and contacts with their

families, and with the laws and regulations of institutions and organisations, have great impact and influence on an individual, and on how they perceive their surrounding world. Despite scientific research on the diversity of parenting, governments legislate according to the parenting practices they consider appropriate.

### 3.4 Role of culture and language in parenting approaches

As part of the wider understanding of parenting in cross-cultural contexts, culture and language play vital roles in parenting. Culture is a part of any community and people: it refers to the way individuals make sense of how they perceive life and its challenges, including language and learnt characters, as directed or influenced by a given history or socioeconomic system (Copping et al., 2010, Lakoff and Bucholtz, 2004, Darling and Steinberg, 1993). Culture is essential in every aspect of life as it symbolises the way individuals make meaning of life, values, and attitudes in the society (Potocky-Tripodi, 2002).

As discussed earlier, various aspects of parenting vary both across and within cultural groups. Recent research has identified social class and childrearing experiences as key sources of variation in parenting practices within cultural groups. Harkness et al. (1992) coined the term ‘parental ethnotheories’ to help explain differences in parenting across cultural groups. To them, ethnotheories are collective beliefs held by a cultural group about children’s development and behaviour, and include expectations about the cognitive, social and emotional development of children (Harkness and Super, 1992, Rosenthal and Roer Strier, 2001). The term is derived from parents’ cultural experiences within their community or reference group and reflects cultural beliefs about children’s development and the characteristics of children who are valued by the society in which they are being raised (Harkness and Super, 1992).

According to Harwood et al. (1999) researchers concur that parents have goals which are consistent with the goals and expectations held by the culture with which they are affiliated. Culturally-embedded beliefs, aspirations and expectations are thought to give shape to the childrearing practices and other elements in the environmental context of the developing child. Some examples of childrearing practices that are influenced by

ethnotheories include the physical and social setting experienced by the child, such as the number of people in a household, gender expectations and the child-care arrangements; whether a child is looked after by a member of the extended family or by an unrelated carer in a group care setting (Harkness and Super, 1992, Rosenthal, 1996, Rosenthal and Roer Strier, 2001, Edwards et al., 2006).

Such understandings can be linked to Bronfenbrenner's (1977) social ecology model and to a discussion by Bornstein et al. (2011, 2013) about the role different cultures play in parenting practices. Hence, the basic care establishments are also influenced by culture and cultural customs: for example, sleeping arrangements - whether parents or siblings share their beds with other children or not. It also includes the time parents spend in close physical contact with their children by carrying or holding them, and soothing them with close physical contact: these are both likely to reflect the habits and customs of the parents' culture (Wise and Da Silva, 2007, Edwards et al., 2006). Cross-cultural differences are also recognised in a number of different aspects of feeding practices: some parents encourage independent feeding during the toddler period while others prefer to feed their children (Harwood et al., 1999, Wise and Sanson, 1968).

Language and cultural barriers among South Sudanese migrants, along with the demands of their new environment, have an enormous impact on their original traditional beliefs. These impacts are often on the social and physical environments but are mostly in the attitudes and identities of individuals within the families and host community (Marlowe, 2010a). Tingvold et al.'s (2012) finding in US indicated that most Vietnamese considered language as a vehicle for cultural continuity through which values are transmitted and social support is facilitated within their new environment. An Australian study revealed that changes in lifestyle and surrounding social and culture could negatively influence the lives and behaviours of young refugees (Sanders, 2002). Tribe (1999) argued that cultural differences, and particularly the 'Western' understandings of what constitutes family and community, bear little resemblance to non-Western families. These cultural differences often become prominent because of language barriers and lack of information for the new settlers about their new country. Likewise, the lack of cultural awareness of the host community about the new settlers may lead to the latter becoming too isolated and being discriminated against socially and systematically (Marlowe et al., 2014, Marlowe, 2010a). Unless addressed, these

differences when added to the other challenges of involuntary migration may form significant barriers to successful integration for some individuals and families.

### 3.5 Impact of acculturation and intergenerational conflict: changes in parenting and disciplining practices

In addition when seeking to understand how new settlers respond to the parenting changes and challenges introduced by their new environment, there is a need to understand the concept of ‘acculturation’, which is defined as a process whereby individuals or groups from different cultures engage in and experience alterations to their original culture (Berry et al. 2006; Berry 1997). Acculturation also refers to behavioural and psychological changes that occur when different cultures meet, affecting individual behaviour, ethnic identity, attitudes and values, and which often causes stress arising from adjustment to a foreign country (Bemak et al., 2003, Berry, 1997, Berry et al., 2006, Tingvold et al., 2012). It also relates to health and other factors that may be affected by the degree to which people subscribe to and keep their own cultural beliefs, attitudes, and values.

As shown in Table 3.5, acculturation is the process whereby the characters and attitudes of people from one culture are modified due to the presence or impact of another culture, and is seen as a single continuum ranging from exclusive involvement in a person’s original culture and beliefs to exclusive involvement in the dominant or host culture (Berry, 2003). Such changes sometimes result in acculturative stresses as individuals try to understand the characteristics of the new culture, or try to give up their original culture partially or entirely (Berry, 1997, Berry et al., 2006, Poppitt and Frey, 2007). These require comprehensive coping strategies and/or support to mitigate stress which may include awareness or psycho-education about the impact of stress on families in the settler environment (Poppitt and Frey, 2007). Table 3.5 shows the four categories of acculturation and in what way it impacts on those who are acculturating.

**Table 3.5: Acculturation Categories** (Berry, 1997, 2003)

#	Category	Processes and impacts
1	<b>Assimilation</b>	Takes place when individuals adopt the cultural norms of a dominant or host culture over their original culture.
2	<b>Separation</b>	Takes place when individuals reject the dominant or host culture to preserve their culture of origin. Immigration often facilitates the creation of ethnic enclaves.
3	<b>Integration</b>	Takes place when individuals can adapt to the cultural norms of the dominant or host culture while preserving an aspect of their original culture. This process is often synonymous with biculturalism.
4	<b>Marginalisation</b>	Takes place when individuals reject both original and dominant host cultures.

Berry's concept of acculturation includes potential influences (including demographic variables such as education, age, marital status, gender), personality characteristics, and motivations as well as socio-cognitive factors (Berry, 1997). However, there have been limited efforts to analyse how such factors relate to acculturative stress. Such an analysis should include observed integrative representations which consider those variables and then evaluate causal linkages among them. Nevertheless, Berry et al.'s (2006) work examined how immigrant youth adapts and acculturates, with results similar to the above categories of acculturation. Berry et al.'s (2006) four distinct acculturation profiles are:

- Integration (oriented towards both original heritage and new national culture);
- Ethnic (oriented toward original culture only);
- National (oriented toward new national culture only); and
- Diffuse (orientation is ambivalent or marginalised).

The authors evaluate these categories against psychological and socio-cultural adaptation and suggest that migrants who adopt an integration strategy have the best psychological and socio-cultural outcomes. Those with diffuse profiles have the worst outcomes while those with ethnic and national profiles fall in between. Their research stressed the significance of encouraging youth to uphold a sense of their heritage and cultural identity, while establishing close ties with the wider society.

Poppit and Frey (2007) studied South Sudanese adolescents in Brisbane and confirmed that health and behaviours of immigrants are often affected by acculturation.

Acculturative pressures within a family arise after young immigrants start going to school as they experience more rapid acculturation than their parents, mainly to carry out their daily classroom activities and from other social interactions with their peers (Poppitt and Frey, 2007, Deng and Marlowe, 2013). During these acculturation processes, most young people are faced with conflicting beliefs and attitudes that generate disparities between their original and later cultures, putting them at odds with their parents. Research has indicated that many refugee families are not properly supported or prepared to deal with their new daily challenges, which many host cultures are familiar with and sufficiently well-resourced to overcome (Dunlavy, 2010, Renzaho et al., 2011). This indicates that successful resettlement not only involves moving from the immediate challenges of finding accommodation and work, but also adapting to unfamiliar systems, customs and becoming active participants in the social, economic and cultural affairs of the new country (Tribe, 1999).

Changes in the family and differences in educational levels and language skills can generate considerable intergenerational gaps as children acquire the new language and knowledge about their new environment more quickly than their parents (Khawaja and Milner, 2012). The impasse created when children start embracing some of the values of the dominant culture that contrast with their parents' beliefs can lead to tension and conflict. The children may find themselves caught in the middle as they attempt to accommodate both their parents and the new culture (Deng and Pienaar, 2011, Khawaja and Milner, 2012). This can create a profound identity crisis because of uncertainties about conflicting perspectives, loyalties and expectations (Deng and Marlowe, 2013, Khawaja and Milner, 2012).

As the autonomy of young people increases within their new social environment, so arguments and conflicts between parents and their children escalate. These arguments may be about autonomy and freedom, household chores, selection of appropriate friends, homework and care for siblings (McMichael et al., 2011, Milner and Khawaja, 2010). The difficulties stemming from these tensions normally highlight the fracture and breakdown of the family as an entity, and the support these youngsters receive from their parents may diminish. For instance, some young people get into financial difficulties and exhibit antisocial behaviour because of these intergenerational tensions (McMichael et al., 2011). According to McMichael et al.; unfortunately, these conflicts

may sometimes explode into physical abuse and violence within families. This underscores the need to understand the impact of the challenges faced by settler families.

Acculturation and cross-culture experiences thus involve variable interactions that comprise the youngsters' perceptions of both child-inclusive families and stress. Sanders (2002) stated that Australian-Sudanese families normally live together, and in such units the acculturation process affects the adolescents' appraisal of their adult's character. Sanders suggested that the involvement and the control of parents can be understood differently by the youths and, at times, stresses them. Parental guidance is a paradox in the acculturation context; it results in acculturation stress but may also give a sense of security and ethnic belonging. The study revealed that the changes in culture impacted negatively on the lives and behaviour of the young Sudanese (Sanders, 2002, Sanders, 2008). Children who attend learning or similar institutions immediately after arriving in Australia experience quicker acculturation than their parents, who take longer to adapt and to learn English. The association with other students or peers also sped up the process. The study results also showed that females experienced more acculturation stress than males due to the gender constraints within the family.

### **3.6 Settlement and integration challenges**

#### **3.6.1 Legal environment**

Parenting has an extraordinary influence at both local and national policy levels: for instance, Australian Federal and State governments both legislate for child protection (Kolar and Soriano, 2000a). This can also operate in reverse as policy has influence on parents and parenting. According to Victoria's State Department of Human Services (Child Protection), 'meeting children's needs and making sure that they are safe within the family is a shared responsibility between individuals, family, community and the government.' However, if the adults caring for them do not meet their responsibilities, maybe become abusive or exploit their positions of power, then it is the Child Protection Service's responsibility to take action (DHS, 2013). Understandably, the intention of this legislation or policy is to help children who are at risk of harm or whenever families may not be or are unwilling to protect them (DHS, 2013).

These child protection policies contrast sharply with the way many Africans and South Sudanese understand parenting practices. To them such issues are mostly left to family members to resolve and the government does not have much involvement (Victoria, 2007). For instance, family conflicts and child neglect or abuse are often handled by immediate and extended family, elders and community members who intervene, mediate and find amicable solutions. If the child abuse is serious, the child can be removed and cared for by relatives or community members, either temporarily or permanently. As a consequence, many South Sudanese parents find it hard to understand the logic behind government intervention in their family affairs. These differences and their implications are discussed in later chapters.

Nevertheless, these changes in parenting practices and the involvement of government (Child Protection Service) in their family affairs can create misunderstandings and impact negatively on individual and family well-being. For instance, there are many reported incidents in the media concerning domestic violence and family separations in the South Sudanese community (Hebbani and Van Vuuren, 2015). One of the new phenomena in this community includes the dramatic increase in the number of domestic homicides and suicides, allegedly connected to issues surrounding marital disputes, children, and the Victorian Child Protection Service (personal communication with community leaders and members affected, 2013-2016). For example, in 2013, two mothers in Victoria committed suicide. Community members reported that the suicides were connected, at least in part, to the deceased feeling depressed before or after their children were taken by the Child Protection Service (personal communication with community leaders and members affected, 2013-2016). Other factors such as past traumas and settlement challenges might be significant in driving them to take their lives, but this is an area that requires a proper study to fully understand the factors involved in such tragic incidents. Some South Sudanese parents feel that the authorities do not understand their culture and the challenges they are facing as they try to adapt to their new setting (Ochocka and Janzen, 2008).

### 3.6.2 Contentious settlement environment

As discussed in Chapters 5, 6 and 7, South Sudanese are facing many challenges during resettlement, amongst which are the changes in their families as they make efforts to adjust and adapt to their new environment. Within a few years of resettling in Australia,

the Sudanese were publicly criticised for not adjusting to the Australian way of life by some government officials, notably by Kevin Andrews in 2007 (Marlowe, 2010c, Marlowe, 2010a). Andrews, the then Minister of Immigration, commented that Sudanese people were failing to integrate into the fabric of Australia's society, saying they “don’t seem to be settling and adjusting into the Australian way of life as quickly as we would hope.” Andrew’s comment was never substantiated by hard evidence, but it contributed to fostering fear and exclusionary practices (Marlowe, 2010b). Although some studies have been made of refugee resettlement or settlement challenges, there has been very little research done on how quickly refugees can integrate into the fabric of their new environment or society, particularly taking into account the impact of changes in parenting practices and traditional culture on top of the many other challenges discussed throughout this thesis.

There has been little done, either academically or politically, to understand Sudanese experiences after settling in Australia, what may be the barriers to full integration and how to address them appropriately and holistically. It is imperative to assess the efficiency or effectiveness of the services available for new settlers or migrant families in the settlement and integration process. The speed at which they may fully integrate into their new environment depends on many factors. These factors include the services which are designed to boost that integration, and just how welcoming the new environment may be for migrants in matters such as the availability of jobs or acceptance into the workforce (Marlowe, 2010a). To obtain better service provision to achieve the desired integration outcomes, it would be preferable to examine and understand these factors rather than to measure the speed at which new settlers should integrate. There seems to be little understanding of their forced migration experiences as well as a failure to assess their dynamic needs. It is generally understood that new settlers may adjust to their new environment at a different pace, depending on their past and present experiences. How conducive or friendly is the new environment for meeting their needs? (Beiser, 2006, Gray and Elliott, 2001). This may include not only making the new settlers welcome and feel at home but also feel accepted by their host culture (Marlowe, 2010b, Lejukole, 2009). Bishop (2011) outlined three factors that influence changes in new settler families:

- Interactions with the host community's social or mental health services;

- Transnational ties to kinship; and
- Concurrence with original cultures and interactions with the local community.

These influences can affect how the families perceive the environment of the host community and can place them in a unique and often conflicting situation as they have to negotiate these influences, which are at times not recognised by community service providers (Bishop, 2011).

To date most research about South Sudanese focuses on basic integration issues such as housing, employment and educational opportunities, but little attention has been focused on parenting and youth challenges (Harte et al., 2011, Harris and Marlowe, 2011). These are appropriate and immediate needs, but as a result changes in parenting practices and how families are coping with them has been under-researched. Integrating new settlers may be more successful if parents, children and families are supported to cope with the impact of the changes in their households (Deng and Pienaar, 2011, Deng and Marlowe, 2013). Many previous studies on refugees have been on mental health or trauma as a result of forced migration and how those affected are coping in their new environment (Khawaja et al., 2008, Schweitzer et al., 2006, Marlowe, 2010c). These are significant and important areas to be looked at in the first few years of resettlement, but as time goes by the challenges to be faced evolve. This makes it imperative to ask what is changing within families. As discussed in subsequent chapters, for many South Sudanese coming from a collective society, changes in family structures, traditional parenting styles and gender role reversal or shifts in family power dynamics between the partners, and between the parents and their children, are the dynamic issues that now need to be given priority. They find these alterations confrontational, which often pushes the pre-trauma considerations to the bottom of their list of concerns and immediate needs. Indeed, addressing social issues and concerns may help to address trauma indirectly. Based on their culture, South Sudanese mostly see specialists such as doctors for physical health. To understand that mental health issues warrant the same attention as physical health needs time and education for many to understand and to see as a way of addressing some of their challenges.

Many services such as Child Protection use a Western model that excludes the perspectives of South Sudanese when designing services to meet their resettlement

needs. Excluding their perspectives has been identified as one of the reasons why many South Sudanese do not engage well with existing service providers (Westoby, 2008, Lejukole, 2009). It is unreasonable to expect them to understand services that are strange to them. It is unlikely that such services can successfully meet the needs of South Sudanese or other ethnic groups if the services' knowledge is based on its experiences with other refugee groups or solely on Western concepts. The services also need to apply a practical approach through consultation with the receiving community in order to assess how their needs may be met (Bishop, 2011). Adopting the 'one size fits all' approach, which implies that all the new settlers or refugees are the same while ignoring their uniqueness in terms of experiences, culture and needs, and thus applying the same interventions, means the service is unlikely to have a positive impact on their integration.

Most importantly, understanding and recognising the impact of these changes within family dynamics and structures and in the parenting practices of the South Sudanese may help inform service providers and policymakers as to how their needs can be best met. Documenting how South Sudanese families experience these service providers' interventions and providing a platform for their perspectives and suggestions as to how a service's delivery can be improved may provide a solid knowledge-base for future interventions with emerging communities. As highlighted earlier, to date there has been little research done on South Sudanese parenting experiences and the impact of changes to family structures. Most major research has been about Australian families and parenting: the changes in new settler families are experienced differently by diverse groups and family members, since each cultural group has unique experiences and cultures (Zubrick et al., 2008, Kolar and Soriano, 2000a, Earnest, 2006). Ochocka and Janzen (2008) suggested Western-based researchers need to understand multicultural parenting styles, the role of a new host society in shaping the parenting orientation and styles of immigrants, the supports needed for the modifications immigrants must make when adjusting to their new society, and the contributions that they could make to the new country.

Generally, these challenges are not unique to South Sudanese in Australia or elsewhere; they also affect other former refugees or migrants as well as indigenous Australians. As discussed, gender role changes as a result of acculturation can lead to marital challenges

and sometimes to domestic violence. A US study of Somali women has indicated that changes resulting from refugee women working outside the home and earning more than their male partners may lead to household problems; their menfolk experience a perceived loss of masculinity and of being breadwinners and heads of their families (Nilsson et al., 2008). As discussed in subsequent chapters, the fears of losing that status (as heads of a family) are prominent with some men who come from collectivist cultures. Nilsson et al. (2008) found that Somali women with greater proficiency of speaking English were more likely to experience psychological and other abuse from their partners. This was seen to be because their language ability is associated with their greater engagement in the community and being more acculturated into their new environment. Therefore, men's fear of power and cultural loss lead to possible abuse or power struggles within the family (Nilsson et al., 2008).

These changes in cultures and hierarchies may lead to confusion, struggles and abuse not only within the new settler families. A Norwegian study about Vietnamese migrants revealed that members of that community were brought up in a tradition where significant respect for the older generation and their authority was the rule, but this changed after coming into contact with different family and parenting practices (Tingvold et al., 2012). Tingvold and colleagues stated that parents have no choice other than to negotiate with their children to reconcile the changes within the family. These challenges are also relevant to some of the contemporary challenges many Aboriginal peoples in Australia face (Price-Robertson and McDonald, 2011). For instance, Price-Robertson and McDonald stated that indigenous Australians face immense challenges resulting from compromise in their strengths and resilience due to multiple complex problems as well as historical and ongoing depression, marginalisation and racism. The authors pointed out that most of their subjects' challenges are connected to the legacy of past policies of forced removal and cultural assimilation, which contributed to unemployment, poverty and violence exacerbated by substance abuse.

## Conclusion

Along with the traumas and various degrees of cultural shock suffered by refugees, the language barrier and the different rates at which children and their parents learn and

adapt to their new environment remain dominant factors and potential barriers to successful settlement. Previous studies have shown that acculturation is a leading source of stress for refugee families as they struggle to adjust to their new environment, particularly because their children learn the new language and culture at school faster than do most of their parents, who might still be holding onto their cultures of origin. This can cause tensions in families and inter-generational conflicts, and the children mostly struggle to negotiate a workable synthesis between their original and new cultures.

The research literature emphasises that experiences of resettlement can be challenging for many refugee parents and families as they are confronted by changes in families such as changing gender roles and by the impact of acculturation. These issues are compounded by a lack of social support, employment and many other challenges. The various orientations towards acculturation - integration, assimilation, separation or segregation, and marginalisation - play a vital role when considering the resettlement process. Among these orientations, integration is the preferred strategy for acculturating new immigrants because those who are involved in the process of cultural maintenance and intercultural contact strategies are likely to encounter improved possibilities for integrating into their new environment. To enhance integration, new settler families need support to improve parenting skills. This can include teaching parents through appropriate parenting programmes about the laws that govern parenting and child discipline.

These challenges are discussed further in later chapters, which cover South Sudanese traditional and transitional parenting practices, beliefs, and attitudes. The narratives from the South Sudanese who participated in this study provide opportunities for insight into how they are experiencing transitional changes in their families, and particularly about their new social, cultural and legal environments. Adding to the insights gained from this academic literature review, the next chapter presents the research design and data analysis, and explains how I have constructed meaning from their narratives about South Sudanese traditional parenting practices, their transitional experiences, the impacts of change and their coping strategies within their families.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Methodology: constructing meaning from the narratives of South Sudanese parenting practices

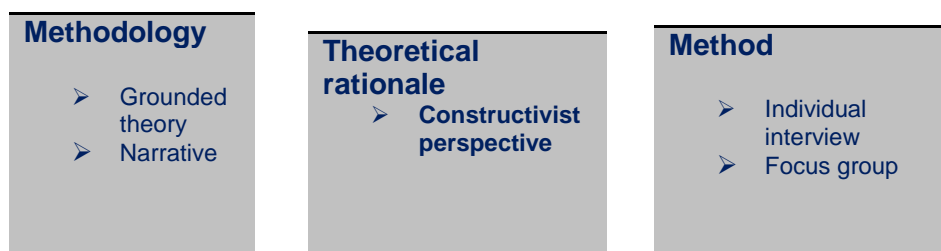
#### Introduction

This chapter is divided into four parts. Part One covers how I have approached the research design for this study, with a focus on the theoretical rationale, methodology and method. Part Two discusses participant recruitment and data collection, looking at the initial engagement of South Sudanese participants, my status as a cultural community insider and conducting interviews and focus group meetings. Part Three discusses data analysis and locating and working with the research data to develop themes, codes, insights and findings in order to develop the categories into concepts suitable for theory. Part Four reflects on the research rigor and trustworthiness of this study, taking into account ethics considerations, limitations arising from the participant demographics and my own position again as an insider researcher.

#### 4.1 Part One: Research design

This chapter outlines the three main components of the research design I have used in this thesis (Charmaz, 2006, Crotty, 1998, Riessman, 2008, Geertz, 1994) - the theoretical framework, methodology and method shown in figure 4.1 below. This design places the strongest emphasis on narrative and constructivist grounded theory.

**Figure 4.1: Research design**



#### 4.1.1 Methodology – constructivist grounded theory and narrative perspectives

Given the complexities of refugee experiences in various settings and contexts, it is imperative to use a variety of techniques to explore and understand them, as exemplified by Lejukole's (2008) and Marlowe's (2010b) studies of the pre- and post-migration challenges for South Sudanese migrants in Australia. These and other previous scholars used ethnographic, narrative and constructivist approaches to understand South Sudanese perspectives on how their past and present experiences impacted on their resettlement/settlement and integration, their trauma through the process, and the negotiation and construction of their identities in an unfamiliar environment (Lejukole, 2009, Marlowe, 2010c).

However, the debate on how best to approach refugee studies has been ongoing (Schweitzer and Steel, 2008, McMichael et al., 2015, Riggs et al., 2015, Bakewell, 2011). As Bakewell (2011) pointed out, there is a consensus that refugee studies should be multidisciplinary, but there is less agreement on how different disciplines can be combined to redefine problems outside existing methodologies. My study employs an interdisciplinary approach that integrates perspectives from sociology, psychology, refugee and migration studies, and family studies. It combines narrative and constructivist approaches, which are strongly interlinked and so help to understand and construct the complex experiences of South Sudanese-Australians.

Firstly, the use of narrative methodology in exploring individuals, groups, and cultures has been employed by many researchers as a primary method for making sense of people's experiences (Riessman, 2008, Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, Polkinghorne, 2007). Narrative research, according to Lieblich et al. (1998), refers to any study that generates or analyses narrative materials. From an everyday perspective, people are often storytellers by nature, and the stories they narrate provide coherence and continuity to their experiences, and play a central role in communicating with one another (Polkinghorne, 2007, Lieblich et al., 1998). In sociology and anthropology, narrative research is used to represent the character or lifestyle of subgroups in society, that are mostly defined by their gender, race, culture and religion (Lieblich et al., 1998, Riessman, 2008). Narrative research frameworks can yield rich data unobtainable

through questionnaires or observations alone. As Polkinghorne (2007) argues, the research itself is carried out to gather evidence from which a claim can be generated. For my study, this approach enables the development of a nuanced understanding of South Sudanese experiences of being parented in South Sudan and how that differs to their parenting practices in Australia within the resettlement context. Although life stories are subjective, they also contain 'narrative truths', which may be closely linked, loosely similar, or far removed from historical 'truth' (Eastmond, 2007, Polkinghorne, 2007). As Eastmond acknowledges, the narrative is not a transparent rendition of 'truth' but is reflective of the dynamic interplay between life, experience and story. To Polkinghorne (2007), storied evidence is gathered not to determine if events actually happened but about the meanings experienced by people, whether or not the events are accurately described. To help in understanding South Sudanese experiences, I linked this perspective to a constructivist approach, which stresses that meanings are constructed through the experiences and understandings of individual participants.

The constructivist perspective, which draws from symbolic interactionism, was first developed by Blumer (1969) and has become a prominent interpretive stance that examines society and individual actions and behaviours within the social world. As part of social psychology, this framework grew from the desire to understand the social and cultural influences that play a vital role in human behaviour (Crotty, 1998, Blumer, 1969). The constructivist stance in qualitative research maintains that meaning is neither objectively nor subjectively interpreted but is rather constructed by individuals, mainly participants and the researcher as they encounter and navigate their world(s) through the interpretive and discursive lenses of culture, family, society and history (Snow, 2001, Crotty, 1998, Charmaz, 2006). According to Bur (2003), there are certain features of constructivism that require adopting a critical stance towards knowledge that is more often taken for granted. To Crotty (1998: 25) in some cases, a statement can be verified because what is predicted of the subject is nothing more than something included in the very definition of the subject. This includes the recognition that knowledge is created and sustained through ongoing social processes, historical and cultural specificities, rather than existing independently of these. These constructions are always subject to change over time and vary with place. They can also be (re)constructed through social processes.

Constructivist grounded theory maintains that the analysis and theory-building it generates are interpretive rather than exact portrayals, created by the intersection of interpretations by both participant and researcher. This premise is embedded in the ethnographic process of conducting individual interviews as well as interacting with the participants or attending community activities and events. The construction of meaning is critical to understanding human behaviour, social processes and interaction expressed through the media of language, symbols and gestures (Blumer, 1969). This is because, in order to understand the associated meaning, a researcher must grasp the participants' meanings within a specific context (Charmaz, 2006).

Moreover, grounded theory is a research process that uses comparative data analysis applied in an inductive and iterative research approach. The inductive process provides a framework for understanding and supporting the reality that emerges from the collection of data, and then establishes conclusions that are, in theory, robustly derived from that collected information. This is in contrast to the deductive process, which begins with some statements (hypotheses) that can only be presumed to be accurate. The inductive process is primarily about developing hypotheses grounded in the data. It facilitates constant comparative methods through moving back and forth with the focus on data enhancement and classification, which helps to support or refute the theory (Bryant and Charmaz, 2007). This technique helps to identify patterns within the data through grouping segments of participants' texts into themes, using four stages of analysis (codes, concepts, categories and theory). *Codes* help identify anchors of reference and meaning and allow the main points to be gathered. *Concepts* are collections of similar codes that help make sense of higher-order insights and meanings through data interpretation, while *categories* are a broad group of similar concepts used to generate hypotheses, leading to *theory* generated from the collection and explanations in the previous stages (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The table below summarises the four stages of data analysis using this approach.

**Table 4.1.2 Grounded theory** (Glaser and Strauss, 1967)

<b>Stage</b>	<b>Purpose</b>
<b>Codes</b>	Identify anchors that allow the key points of the data to be gathered
<b>Concepts</b>	Collections of codes of similar content that allow the data to be grouped
<b>Categories</b>	Broad group of similar concepts that are used to generate a theory
<b>Theory</b>	A collection of explanations that explains the subject of the research

In contrast with other theoretical frameworks, the constructivist grounded theory is more flexible and thus to be favoured over a particular methodological choice that sets out a fixed hypothesis or deductive premise. A fixed hypothesis may sometimes constrain the scholar's understanding, particularly when conducting research with diverse cultures. For this same reason, Collier and Adcock (1999) argued against the idea of a single correct or ultimate meaning for all the concepts in grounded theory as being sometimes unproductive, since theory, goals and context may evolve around the data. As choices of concepts evolve, new knowledge may arise regarding how the alternative meanings can be connected to specific goals and contexts of research (Collier and Adcock, 1999). This makes the use of inductive premises more valuable and decisive when collating rich data in that they lead to robust and meaningful research outcomes and conclusions, as Chapter 10 demonstrates. Inductive reasoning is important in science, in part because deductive logic alone may not uncover new ideas and observation (Williams and Morrow, 2009).

#### 4.1.2 Theoretical rationale

I have used constructivist grounded theory as the main paradigm for my qualitative inquiry so that from within the participants' worlds of meaning, interaction and symbolism we explore the parenting beliefs and values that South Sudanese humanitarian refugees have brought with them to Australia and that they are using as they experience resettlement. I have been particularly interested in understanding how families from a refugee background reconcile these beliefs and values with their new social and cultural environments. My interest is in both the degree and meanings of change in parenting practices and attitudes, and in the impacts of such changes on individuals, their families and the wellbeing of their community in Australia. To achieve these aims, it has been imperative to create spaces that provide participants

with the opportunity to narrate their own stories and perspectives, which are especially relevant for exploring cultural change in societies such as the South Sudanese with strong oral communication traditions. The voices of minority communities sometimes remain unheard due to the nature of their refugee experiences, and language and cultural barriers, among other reasons (Stewart et al., 2008, Marlowe, 2010b, Losoncz, 2013). As Polkinghorne (2007, p.472) states, the reformists, who include narrative researchers, posit that evidence derived from personal descriptions of life experiences can serve to issue knowledge about neglected, but significant areas, of the human realm.

My rationale for using constructivism in conjunction with narrative methodology is that, as Eastmond (2007) emphasises, culture is central to lived experiences, not only in the making of a meaningful story by a particular subject, but also in ways that others understand and retell that story. My aim as a researcher has been to understand South Sudanese stories or interpretations of realities that derive from their social interaction with their new environment and interpersonal relationships, and then analyse and interpret these stories in order to build from them concepts and theories around cultural transitions in parenting.

#### **4.1.3 Method – fieldwork and interviews**

The primary methods for collecting narrative data in this study involved interpersonal and interactive engagement with South Sudanese through individual interviews, focus group meetings and partial participant observations. However, although narrative research is the study of stories in which participants are asked to retell the stories, sometimes in full, of their experiences or of events (Polkinghorne, 2007), my study focused only on understanding South Sudanese traditional and transitional parenting practices, and their experiences after settling in Australia. This method is relevant to this research project as it helps the researchers to impose minimal bias on the data as they collect it from the community: it enhances the transparent interpretation of data and assists the researchers to reflect (Brewer, 2000). Significantly, as a South Sudanese myself, I could identify with the participants, share refugee experiences with them, and work with them on their difficult issues such as trauma and related challenges during resettlement.

#### **4.1.4 Getting involved as an insider**

My forced migration to Ethiopia in the late 1980s, back to Southern Sudan and Kenya in the early 1990s, then to New Zealand at the beginning of the 2000s, and to Australia in 2013 was full of challenges but these journeys were later followed by academic success. These journeys were both personal and a testimony to how a refugee's life can be very tough: I have witnessed and experienced most of the things that my participants have experienced, particularly during the flight into forced migration (Deng, 2006). Although I fled then Sudan (now South Sudan) to Ethiopia and left my parents while still a teenager, without a doubt the experience of being parented played a significant role in the quest to understand more about South Sudanese parenting practices and experiences. As discussed in Chapter 5, South Sudanese children's upbringing is divided according to their gender. For instance, while growing up I was taught by my father and older brother about the duties and responsibilities of a male. Most of that teaching included going to school and after school, I used to attend to cattle-herding as well as socialising with other boys. Most of these cultural values which the South Sudanese have brought with them to their new environment are sometimes not well understood by support services, but often cause cultural shock, a sense of disempowerment and possible family breakdown in the context of resettlement transitions.

However, resettling in a new country which has a different culture and social system has proven even more challenging for new settlers. My involvement and work with South Sudanese, other Africans and other migrant and mainstream communities both in New Zealand and Australia have progressively enhanced my knowledge about resettlement issues. I found the experiences of resettling in a new environment personally challenging and this has led me to become a community leader and to advocate for new settlers who are struggling. As a result, I too became familiar with barriers due to language and culture, lack of appropriate services or, when appropriate services do exist, lack of knowledge about them. All these factors pose substantial obstacles to accessing appropriate support.

My community leadership and advocacy roles led me earlier to undertake research and to work with New Zealand government departments and in the private sector in areas such as education, mental health and social development services. Without a doubt, my involvement and work within these sectors has shaped my thoughts about the challenges faced by new settlers and the gaps that need to be filled through research to find out

how best to cater for the emerging communities. This research has included questioning how families, especially parents and their children who are the backbone of any future society, can be supported for better settlement outcomes and integration.

Certainly, being an insider has been highly advantageous, particularly in gaining access to the South Sudanese community and to research participants. The participants in this study report that my knowledge of the culture and the ability to speak the main community languages was decisive in collecting the qualitative data. My knowledge of the community and thus my ability to gain access to potential participants was enhanced through my involvement as a member in many community events, activities and meetings. That also led to gaining other information about the challenges faced by the South Sudanese community.

Participants in this study were recruited from the general South Sudanese community, including its sub-communities, social groups and individual South Sudanese, throughout Victoria, Australia, mainly from major South Sudanese tribes in Australia such as Dinka, Nuer, Acholi and Bari Speakers. Although the participants came from different South Sudanese backgrounds or tribes, their parenting practices and cultural values are almost similar. Most researchers tend to focus on selecting informants through community members who know each other well and can be asked to help in identifying other participants through chain sampling (Madden, 2010). Such a recruitment technique is important since the South Sudanese are a small ethnic community in Victoria, and most know each other. Establishing appropriate engagement with them was essential for recruiting participants, as word-of-mouth rather than writing is the best way to pass information around this community.

South Sudanese come from an open or collective society, so individual interviews, focus group meetings and participant observations were appropriate for explaining the aims of the study to them and for collecting the data. Participants were asked semi-structured questions (See Appendices 3A and 3B). No interpreters were required as I speak the participants' languages. However, the information to participants and the informed consent forms were translated/ interpreted into the participants' main languages (Arabic and Dinka) for those who do not understand English. Likewise, the fact that I speak these languages and come from the same cultural background helped me blend into the South Sudanese community and gain instant access as I immersed

myself in their everyday routines and experiences. In this way I had already built rapport with most of the people who could inform potential participants about what is going on in the community.

## **4.2 Part Two: Accessing the South Sudanese community and fieldwork**

Gaining access to the South Sudanese community was important, as conducting research with refugees as participants may sometimes prove to be more complex and challenging inasmuch as it may involve the protection and/or the violation of their rights even with informed consent through misunderstandings about their vulnerabilities as the result of past experiences, exposure to violence or natural disasters. However, whether or not being a refugee automatically signifies the presence of vulnerability, trauma or psychological illness as well as individual and group-level strengths has proven to be contentious (Miller, 2003). In other words, generalising that refugees are "vulnerable participants" may not only diminish the relevance of the term 'vulnerable,' but might create obstacles to more meaningful interviews and significant research (Levine et al. 2004). This is not to discredit the vulnerability in refugee participants that may exist or emerge on various levels, but it is important not to assume vulnerability and to treat refugee-background participants with the same dignity about their place in the world and their capacity to contribute to research endeavours as other research participants. My study has thus followed the normal standards and procedures for gaining informed consent, as outlined in the Ethics section in the final part of this chapter, while remaining mindful of the refugees' experiences.

### **4.2.1 Establishing rapport**

As a South Sudanese community member with leadership experience, I was formally asked to become involved in setting up a united South Sudanese community in Victoria. Although it took nearly two years, the community was finally united for the first time in Victoria in April 2015. I have also been involved in many other activities such as raising funds for those who have become internally displaced persons (IDPs) in South Sudan as a result of the political crises, which led to many deaths and the displacement of the civilian populations in the most affected areas of the country. As I became fully involved and known to many community members, I was sometimes asked to help in many things such as writing or editing letters for individuals and sub-communities, as

well as helping other students with their homework, assignments, essays and research. I was also invited from time to time to help design programs, to act as a Master of Ceremonies, as well as to give speeches and presentations about my studies on parenting practices and challenges, and on other related issues. Such massive involvement led to full rapport and trust as I was given access to individuals and families in the community. While involved in the South Sudanese community as a member, I always explained to them that I was also a researcher, which meant I was wearing two hats: a community member and a researcher.

What proved helpful in providing balance in my studies was the reflexive process, a technique which helped me to continuously reflect on my research as an inside-researcher. This process helped me to better examine both myself as a researcher and my relationship with the community. It is a self-searching technique, which involved examining my pre-conceptual and conceptual assumptions and how these assumptions affect my selection and wording of questions. Most importantly, this reflexive process helped me to reflect on the relationship between my research and my association with the South Sudanese community, and how these dynamics might affect responses to my research questions as well as my interpretation of the data. The constant academic supervision and discussion with my academic supervisors was also pivotal in these reflexive processes.

#### **4.2.2 Participant recruitment and conducting individual and focus group interviews**

Participants in the study were recruited through South Sudanese communities in Victoria such as sub-communities, social groups, and other organisations working with South Sudanese throughout Victoria. The researcher approached these organisations and their assistance was requested in circulating project information to potential participants. In addition, the researcher also drew on his own and supervisors' personal community networks using the snowball technique (Biernacki and Waldorf, 1981) to assist in recruiting the participants. However, no formal recruitment procedures were followed using snowballing or other techniques for gaining participants as most participants were either directed or approached by the researcher for further information about participating in the interview. The main criterion was that all the participants in both focus and individual interviews must be of South Sudanese origin. The criteria for individual focus group participants included parents aged 25-65 with one or more

children, and young people aged 18-24 years, who were not parents. All participants reside in Victoria and have been settled in Australia for not less than 24 months. The rationale for using these criteria to recruit South Sudanese participants in these particular age-groups was to capture the parenting experience and challenges they are facing since settling in Australia. For instance, choosing youth from 18-24 may be a limitation in this study as it excluded younger voices, but the need was to understand from the perspectives of these young people who might have come to Australia when under 15 years of age. The main rationale is that these age groups have a good understanding of their original South Sudanese and the new environments' cultures, including parenting experiences and how they were parented both overseas and in Australia.

Interested participants were then provided with the researcher's telephone and email contact details, and were given the opportunity to ask any questions prior to consenting to their participation in the study. The information to participants and the informed consent forms were usually translated or interpreted into Sudanese Arabic and Dinka if the interview was being conducted in either of those languages. As mentioned earlier, my ongoing academic supervision and training as a counsellor, as well as my prior research and work experiences with South Sudanese and other immigrant families were helpful in understanding how to recruit participants and how to guide them in narrating and constructing their stories.

The individual interviews involved parents and young adults with roughly equal gender representation (see Table 4.2.2). Young adult participants were not necessarily required to be related to parental participants to take part in the study. The interviews were conducted at convenient times as chosen by each participant, and at places such as their homes and African restaurants in Footscray, Melbourne. Each interview took approximately one hour, but in every case less than two hours, and was audio-recorded with the participant's consent in accordance with the National Human Research Ethics Standards relating to participant recruitment and research procedures.

**Table 4.2.2: Demographic characteristics of South Sudanese participants**

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Age range</b>
Individual interviews (parents)	7	7	14	27-60
Individual interviews (Youth)	4	3	7	18-24.5
Men's focus group	12	-	10	32-58
Women's focus group	-	10	10	28-63
Mixed focus group (men and women)	5	5	8	30-55
Youth focus group	4	3	7	18-23
Grand Total	32	28	60	18-63

Focus groups involved four separate meetings: one each with women and men; a third was a mixed group of men and women (all of whom were parents) and the fourth meeting was with young people (roughly 16-20 participants). Each of the first three groups had between six and eleven participants. These meetings were also audio-recorded with the participants' permission, and similarly conformed to National Human Research Ethics Standards for recruitment and conduct. The focus groups are significant as they allowed South Sudanese-Australians to share and discuss their parenting practices and experiences in a group setting.

#### 4.2.3 Participant observation

Participant observation was also conducted through interpersonal engagement and interactions with consenting South Sudanese individuals and the community during events and other social activities. This allowed me to develop a greater insight into different families' parenting experiences and practices, and how they are mediating changes within their families and the new environment. These informal observations took place where South Sudanese members have their daily activities, events, and meetings, either at community centres or within households. Cook and Crang (2007) suggested that researchers must gain access to the community and live or work among those they are studying in order to understand their worldviews and ways of life, and then return to the academic world to make sense of those observations by writing up and analysing the occurrences. My role as a researcher in this process was to observe and make what Geertz (1994) described as a 'thick description' of the unfolding events. Attending informal gatherings as well as getting involved in listening to some of the community's challenges through these social settings further refined my understanding on how to frame interview questions prior to and during the interview stage, as it highlighted additional areas that needed further study.

### 4.3 Part Three: Data analysis and locating the research

This part deals with data translation, transcription and analysis of participants' narratives. It discusses how I remained close to the data from the interviews right through to the final analysis of the data. The analytical process started with translating and transcribing the interviews and focus group meetings conducted in Dinka, Sudanese Arabic and English. Although some interviews and focus meetings were conducted in English, most were in Dinka and Sudanese Arabic, especially with parents who do not speak English. Even though my ability to speak both languages was advantageous in translating interviews and recordings of the focus group meetings conducted in these other languages, the process was lengthy and excruciating. It normally took many hours simply to translate and transcribe one interview or focus group, as it was crucial to record the participants' comments as accurately as possible.

#### 4.3.1 Initial coding

Transcription and analysis of data are essential in narrative and grounded research, and after each interview and focus group, I listened to the audio-recordings, transcribed the discussion, went through the notes taken during each interview and focus group, and noted the emergent themes. If interviews were conducted in Dinka or South Sudanese Arabic, I usually translated and transcribed them into English line by line, first by handwriting and then typing them, which formed the first step of the initial coding. After completing line by line coding, the initial codes were collated and compared throughout the interview transcripts and between interviews in line with the comparative analysis process. As Bazeley and Jackson (2013) state, early work with text and concepts is about laying the foundation for identification of key themes in the data. These initial coding processes were conducted occurrence by occurrence, given the large amount of data, and this helped in the process of initial conceptualisation of ideas. I was cautious not to jump to any conclusion, as Bazeley and Jackson (2013) warn. Although the quality of this process is enhanced by memo writing from early codes as well as by informed discussion of significant and frequent themes, which highlight areas for further investigation, I also constantly challenged my first ideas by drawing comparisons through sampling various cases (Bazeley and Jackson, 2013).

As Riessman (1993) explained, researchers ought to start by getting the whole interview's words and selected non-verbal features such as crying, laughter and long pauses correctly noted on paper. This allows the portions of the transcription to be selected for analysis to emerge or to change as a result of the researchers' close attention to the entire transcript, which exemplifies the nature of narrative interviews as dialogues (Riessman, 1993). As this process first involves initial hand coding of the transcripts, it also requires further revision and clarifications for accuracy. The final transcripts were coded manually by categorising common themes. These common themes or categories were elevated into concepts to build a framework to generate grounded theory. Although these subsequent analytic processes are presented in a linear manner, it is important to note that the process was in fact concurrent with engaging the South Sudanese, data collection and analysis. This approach allowed me to constantly revisit each step of the data collection and analysis.

The analyses of the interviews were aided by the use of thematic analyses as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) so that the data were coded thematically according to emerging themes. This process helps to identify patterns within the data and thus assists the analysis by grouping segments of the participants' texts into themes (Boyatzis, 1998). Grounded theory is primarily about developing hypotheses grounded in the data, where it is important to constantly compare the hypotheses formed back to the data itself, in order to support or refute the theory derived.

Coding the interview data was challenging as most of the audio recordings were conducted in Dinka and Sudanese Arabic languages, resulting in the need to first translate them into English. A further challenge was that some of the words do not have an English equivalent. Therefore, to make sense of the record, I had to find the words closest in meaning to the participants' comments. Again the ability to speak both languages was helpful in the coding process. I also employed my counselling skills of reflective practice to help ensure that I was aware of how I was constructing my emergent analyses and how my personal history might affect my interpretations. This process helped me to reflect on my experiences as ways of exploring and understanding the participants' comments about their presentation of issues when seeking to draw out the thematic meanings. I also remained conscious of the need to maintain a very high

level of self-awareness to avoid any countertransference. Above all, attending academic supervision was extremely helpful in the process of coding the comments into themes.

#### 4.3.2 Memo writing

The next important step is writing memoranda, which enhances analysis of the data and comparison of codes in the initial stages of the research process. For example, while doing initial coding, I was writing notes in the margins of the pages to capture ideas to be used in memos. Charmaz (2006, p. 133) defines this memo-writing process as follows:

*Memo writing is about capturing ideas in process and in progress. Successive memos on the same category trace its development as the researcher gathers more data to illuminate the category and probes deeper into its analysis. Memos can be partial, tentative and exploratory. The acts of writing and storing memos provide a framework for exploring, checking, and developing ideas. Writing memos gives one the opportunity to learn about the data rather than just summarizing material.*

As Charmaz describes, after completing the initial coding process of each interview, I used memos to amplify my subsequent analyses. Writing memos makes it easier to draw concepts from occurrences as well as to keep track of, refine and develop ideas through identifying concepts and accompanying themes. As the distinct contribution of grounded theory, memo writing opens the first codes to scrutiny and then allows subsequent examination of the categories. This process augmented my capacity to sort and store the data, which eventually led to developing the codes and categories. It helped to delineate the conditions under which either codes or categories emerged, were maintained or changed, to compare the codes or categories and note the gaps in data, and ultimately to improve the interview questions and abstraction of data (Charmaz, 2006).

#### 4.3.3 Focused coding

After writing memos while constantly comparing data to data as well as code to code manually, I moved to the subsequent stage known as focused coding. Although complex, this process is more precise and naturally conceptual than initial coding.

Focused coding helps when sorting the memos as it is highly important in formulating and generating a theory that explains the main action in the studied area. Although sorting through data and memos manually was a rather time-consuming, challenging and complex process, it not only helped me focus on being close to the data but it also aided the identification of recurrent patterns and multiple layers of meaning and it delineated as well variations and interconnections upon layers of themes within the data and memos. According to Charmaz (2006), focused coding makes it easier to search for the most frequent or significant initial codes in order to develop the most 'salient categories' in the data corpus and it requires a decision about which initial codes make the most analytic sense.

Sorting through a large amount of data was challenging as some participants' comments were repetitive although expressed in different words. Focused coding helped me to reduce the data or memos by identifying and combining the initial codes into broader categories and then to continue to refine until they became more conceptual (Bazeley and Jackson, 2013). This grounded theory coding process was applied in conjunction with narrative coding, a process appropriate for my study since it involves narrating South Sudanese parenting practices, experiences and actions as a significant part of understanding their circumstances through story telling (Riessman, 2008).

#### 4.3.4 Theoretical sampling

The next stage in generating narrative and grounded theory is the concept of theoretical sampling. Theoretical sampling is a process of data collection directed by evolving theory rather than by predetermining population dimensions. It is a key strategy in the methodology of grounded theory (Winter, 2000, Glaser and Strauss, 1967). I used this technique to develop a theoretical category as this process helps to elaborate and refine categories until further new properties are exhausted. The main aim of theoretical sampling is to fill out all the properties of categories, as it helps to tease out the hidden properties of categories. The theoretical sampling technique enriched and deepened my understanding of South Sudanese parenting practices and challenges in their new environment by elaborating and refining categories. The technique increased my understanding of the community's traditional parenting practices, challenges and concerns, and in particular, the discussions on how some of these might be resolved internally (within the South Sudanese community) or externally (by the service

providers concerned). While most of my interactions with the community, when attending events, cultural activities, parties, wedding, meetings, funeral and church prayers, were not audio-recorded, the information gathered helped to shape my better understanding of South Sudanese family and parenting practices and challenges, and provided extra material for analysis in developing categories and concepts.

As emphasised earlier, although some of the interviews were conducted in English, most were in Dinka and Sudanese Arabic, and the use of theoretical sampling improved the way that I asked questions in the language that the participants understood. It also helped in asking and explaining the questions appropriately for them to understand as well as in adding extra questions, particularly on the language barrier, which came up strongly during the interviews.

#### **4.3.5 Arranging categories into concepts and theory**

The final important process in developing a broader concept is to group together most of the codes into categories under the larger concepts. This process augmented the abstract interpretive understanding of relationships grounded within the data (Charmaz, 2006). Thus the techniques of grounded theory led to a major concept, which was fundamental to understanding South Sudanese parenting practices and transitional experiences within their families and community. The process enabled theories to be derived that are grounded in the data, and these theories are discussed in later chapters. This led to the final part of this thesis, which suggests how best new settlers may be supported to overcome their parenting challenges.

#### **4.4 Part Four: Considerations of the research and its limitations**

This study does not claim to represent all South Sudanese nor all of their parenting practices, their experiences and their perspectives about the challenges they are facing in Australia as a result of changes within their families. Nonetheless, most of the participants' comments and the outcomes of the interviews are consistent with previous studies on the challenges of settlement, as discussed in the following chapters. This final part of this chapter highlights some of the limitations to this study.

#### 4.4.1 Participant demographics

Although this study interviewed 60 South Sudanese (individually and within focus groups) represented by South Sudanese men, women and young people, the opinions and perspectives expressed by the participants depend on individual circumstances and may not represent those of the whole community. Some participants (both individuals and focus groups) may have chosen to take part in the study as a result of their experiences. As mentioned above, the absence of adolescent voices was one of the major limitations, since the youth participants interviewed were between 18 and 24 years old. However, South Sudanese comments in this study are consistent with previous studies, which show that their settlement challenges and concerns are widely shared by the majority of the families and community members.

Most participants stated that they chose to take part in this study so that their voices could be heard. Some of them spoke of their family's breakdown as a result of changes in their parenting practices on top of the other challenges they face. Most participants reported that they had never had an opportunity to participate in a study of this kind: some spoke of being systematically excluded from previous studies because of the language barrier. The participants reported that most researchers who are not Sudanese native speakers tend to choose participants who speak English, mainly to avoid the long process of finding interpreters who speak the requisite languages. This is understandable, given the complexities of interpreting and translating the data using another person who may filter the participants' information. However, those who have many challenges or who are most affected by the changes in their families after moving to a new country are those who do not speak English, amongst their other barriers to accessing support services. As a member of the South Sudanese community, I was advantaged and privileged as I speak their principal native languages and know the culture.

#### 4.4.2 Rigor and trustworthiness of study

Determining rigor and trustworthiness in a qualitative study has been championed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and expanded by Maxwell (1992) through categorising the validity of study into four specific typologies: descriptive, interpretive, theoretical and generalisability. To William and Morrow (2009), trustworthiness is often a balance

between what the participants say and the ways in which the researchers interpret the meaning of words. Making a balance mostly relies on subjectivity and reflexivity, particularly whenever research questions are asked in certain ways (Williams and Morrow, 2009, Lincoln and Guba, 1985). As Maxwell (1992, p.284) emphasised:

*It is possible to construe data as a kind of account... a description at a very low level of inference and abstraction. In this sense, it is sometimes legitimate to speak of the validity of data, but this use is derived from the primary meaning of validity as a property of accounts. In contrast, a method by itself is neither valid nor invalid ... Validity is not an inherent property of a particular method, but pertains to data, accounts, or conclusions reached by using that method in a particular context for a particular purpose. To speak of the validity of a method is simply a shorthand way of referring to the validity of the data or accounts derived from that method.*

With this quotation in mind, the means I used to instil rigor included exploring the trust value of the inquiry, and its validity and generalisability, a process that helps to minimise errors or misunderstandings and misinterpretation of data. I discuss the validity of my study using Maxwell's (1992) four typologies of validity (descriptive, interpretive, theoretical and generalisability) in conjunction with narrative and grounded approach and perspectives.

**Descriptive validity** in research refers to the accuracy and objectivity of the information gathered where a researcher has collected information or data from participants by recording and transcribing them accurately. The first questions regarding the validity of the study include whether the participants gave the information they understood or felt was relevant, and did the researcher record them correctly? Descriptive validity pertains to matters for which people have the framework for resolving issues at hand (Maxwell, 1992). As stated earlier, constructivist grounded theory maintains that the resulting analysis and theory can be derived from the interpretive portrayal given by the participants and interpreted by the researcher, even though that may not be precise information. This process, which involves conducting interviews and interacting with participants, focuses on meaning expressed through language and gestures as being critical to understanding human behaviour (Blumer, 1969). To make sense of and to understand the participants' associated meanings, I

focused on making sense of the participants' meanings within the context of the information they provided (Charmaz, 2006).

While descriptive validity deals with the accuracy of reporting the facts about the study, **interpretive validity** is mainly required to develop participants' data through meaningful interpretation. Interpretive validity is concerned with the intentions, beliefs, thoughts and feelings of the people whose lives are presented in the accounts (Maxwell, 1992). This process, which is grounded in the words, concepts and language of the people being studied, is viewed by Maxwell (1992) as an inextricably important element of data collection in the qualitative study. Although it is hard to measure the validity of research, the use of scientific validity, particularly in studies about refugees, is significant. Ellis et al. (2007) warned researchers that any study that lacked scientific validity, which is a prerequisite to research, may lead to false conclusions, misunderstandings and above all, harmful practices or interventions.

Although interpretive validity is viewed as an unavoidable process in data collection and interpretation, **theoretical validity** in qualitative research is whether the theory derived adequately explains and is supported by all the data and is credible and defensible. (Winter, 2000). This process was significant in explaining how I conducted my study about South Sudanese parenting practices and experiences in Australia by describing their accounts and interpreting the phenomena. According to Maxwell (1992), the previous two types of validity depend on consensus, while theoretical validity differs, as it goes beyond concrete description and interpretation to address the theoretical constructs that a researcher has developed during the study process, which mostly referred to either physical events or mental constructions (Maxwell, 1992). This understanding is critical in describing and interpreting participants' accounts by combining both description and interpretation of the phenomena, a process which was discussed earlier.

The final aspect for evaluating validity is **generalisability**, as qualitative studies are means of making sense of the world and human experiences. Generalisability is very significant in defining the degree to which the data collected during the study are based on a sample so that it represents the outcomes to be obtained from the general population at best or as a minimum from other members of that same sub-group from whom the data was drawn and documented. According to Maxwell (1992, p.293),

generalisability refers to the extent to which one can extend the account of a particular situation or population to persons, times or settings other than those directly studied. This limited understanding is unique to qualitative studies since qualitative studies are not designed for systematic generalisation to the wider population (Maxwell, 1992).

Despite these theories and conceptual framework, it is always challenging when conducting research with refugees or cultures that are unfamiliar with Western theoretical frameworks and concepts. There are always shortcomings in these processes, particularly for generalisability where the account finalised by the researcher from interviews may be drawn from a small sample of the population or where a researcher can only draw inferences from what the participants provided or from things that happened at a particular time (Flick, 2004, Maxwell, 1992). As Maxwell stated, an account based on interviews may be a descriptively, interpretively and theoretically valid account of a person's actions and perspectives in that interview, but may miss other aspects of that person's perspectives that were not expressed in the interview and this can easily lead to false inferences about his or her actions outside the interview situation (p.294).

However, the probabilities of making false generalisations in this study were minimised by using what Henwood and Pidgeon (1992) referred to as 'the importance of fit', which implies that the theme or analytical categories offered by the researcher must fit the data and this is demonstrated by the researcher writing clear and explicit accounts of how these categories evolved. Secondly, the 'integration of theory' applies: for this, I discussed the relationship between data analysis and the degree to which the data can be integrated or generalised (Henwood and Pidgeon, 1992). The other criterion of Henwood and Pidgeon (1992) that I used to minimise the possibility of false generalisation is 'reflexive' which requires a researcher to acknowledge and account for their own trustworthiness in the documentation of the study.

As stated previously, for this study I conducted individual and focus group interviews with South Sudanese women, men and youth as well as attending community activities and events to gain a comprehensive overview of their parenting practices and experiences in Australia. As an insider and through my personal engagement with South Sudanese as a community member, leader and professional educator, counsellor and health worker, I have gained a rich contextual understanding of their experiences, which

I used to balance out the subjective influences (Flick, 2004). I have also constantly checked my interpretation and analysis of the data collected through the interviews and focus groups against my contextual knowledge, experiences and previous studies, thus enhancing the accuracy and consistency of the data. Support and guidance from my supervisors throughout the data collection and writing stages were also very helpful. Most importantly I have allowed the participants' voices to take the lead throughout the analysis process.

#### **4.4.3 Locating myself in the research as an insider – a personal reflection**

My status as a member of the South Sudanese community in Melbourne created potential ethical issues around dual relationships, and to address these risks I always made it clear to the participants that their data were only going to be used for this research project, that personal information would not be divulged to anybody, and that participation was entirely voluntary. Although being an 'insider' is often connected with the possibility of bias and over-involvement, which obviously narrow a researcher's independence, these potential problems were overcome through maintaining research professionalism, ethical integrity, and ongoing support from my supervisors. Although being an insider researcher has both advantages and disadvantages, other research indications are that the dividing line between insider and outsider researchers can sometimes be unclear. However, I continued to reflect on and engage with the implications of my 'insider status' as a researcher and community member throughout the study.

Additionally, parenting is a very sensitive topic within South Sudanese cultures, as it is the backbone of every family and of society. Some participants were hesitant at the beginning as they looked upon me as one of their community members who had had similar experiences of forced migration and the challenges of resettlement. Their hesitation was not that they were reluctant to take part in my study, but mostly from an assumption that I was asking them for information about their parenting challenges that I was already fully aware of as a member of the community. Thus I always explained that, as a researcher, I would like to know things from their perspective and have them present their own history in their own voice without any preconceptions based on my prior knowledge. After some convincing and explanation, particularly on the aims of this study, most were willing to take part. Some participants spoke of having been

interviewed previously on similar issues but without seeing the changes they expected afterward, especially changes in the level of support provided. Some participants were also quick to point out that nobody had interviewed them before about their parenting practices and challenges in the depth that this study went to. Most participants were from the grassroots community, so some were participating in a study of this kind for the first time. Most were discussing their traditional parenting practices and challenges for the first time even though many had been in Australia and New Zealand for more than a decade.

#### 4.4.4 Ethics

There are always ethical issues when conducting studies like this, particularly in relation to confidentiality and emotional distress, and especially during the interviews, which involve talking about parenting, problematic relationships or family issues, where other previous negative experiences regularly resurface. Parenting is a very sensitive topic in the South Sudanese community, and participant identities were protected by ensuring that all data are stringently de-identified. Where there were possible risks to confidentiality for participants, for example, through participating in focus groups, those risks were clearly explained before gaining each participant's consent. During focus group meetings, participants were also asked general questions (see Appendix 4B) and I emphasised that participants need not to answer any specific question if it made them feel unsafe or uncomfortable.

Since most participants do not write or speak English, I always ensured that the project, its ethical guidelines, and the participants' roles and rights in this research were clearly explained in the languages they understood and that they were confident about taking part. In the case of any distress or concern triggered by involvement in the research, participants were provided with relevant information about where they could get some help.

As mentioned above, ethics approval was sought and granted for this project through the Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee. Participants were also given an explanation on how to direct any queries about their participation in this project to my Principal Supervisor at Victoria University, or for any further ethical

complaints about the way I treated them to contact the Ethics Secretary at the Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee Office and counselling support services.

## Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the concepts of narrating and constructing meaning in relation to South Sudanese traditional parenting practices, transitional experiences, the impact of changes within their families and their coping strategies. Part One presented the three components that make up the research design: theoretical perspectives, methodology and methods. Employing a constructivist approach provided an opportunity to make sense of South Sudanese parenting experiences in Australia as an inside researcher. Narrative and constructivist grounded theory were used to inform interpretation of the data gathered through individual interviews and focus group meetings. The methods of interviewing participants are always connected with ethical issues, but these ethical issues were addressed.

The second part of this chapter outlined the participant recruitment process - how I gained access to the South Sudanese community as an inside researcher and built rapport with potential participants. It described how interviews and focus groups were conducted. In my view, being an insider, speaking the same languages and knowing the culture led to easy access, interactions and contacts with the community and participants.

The third part demonstrated how the data were analysed and the research located through the initial coding process, a very important step which allowed the portions of transcription selected for analysis to emerge. The same process made sure that all of the participants' comments were captured, word by word and line by line. Since most interviews were conducted in South Sudanese native languages such as Dinka and Sudanese Arabic, the initial coding involved not only transcribing, but translating them first into English.

The next crucial step in the data analysis was memo writing, which was pivotal in comparing codes from throughout the initial coding. Writing memos makes it easier to draw concepts from occurrences as well as to keep track of, refine and develop ideas

through identifying concepts and accompanying themes. This procedure eventually led to focused coding, in which data or codes are constantly compared. These processes tend to be more conceptual as they enhance the writing of the memos and lead into generating theory. Focused coding was very helpful in sorting through the large amount of data, as the participants' comments tended to become more repetitive.

Also discussed in Part Three of this chapter was theoretical sampling which helped to develop and refine theoretical categories. The theoretical sampling process enhanced my understanding of South Sudanese parenting practices, issues and challenges, which I had gained through engaging with them, not only through the interviews and focus group meetings, but also through community activities and events, and took it beyond what I already knew as an insider. This stage of the data analysis process involved arranging and elevating categories into concepts and theory through grouping them under the larger themes.

The final section of this chapter was Part Four, which discussed participant demographics, the rigor and trustworthiness of the research and how I used personal reflection to locate myself as an insider within the research. This chapter concluded by highlighting the issues such as conflicts of interest and ethical concerns that might have arisen from being an inside researcher within the South Sudanese community, and how some of these were addressed.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Delineating traditional South Sudanese family structure, parenting practices and customary law

#### Introduction

The main focus of this chapter is to provide an overview of South Sudanese traditions and culture around parenting practices, beliefs and values. These include customary laws, gender roles and the responsibilities of parents and other family members. It analyses how South Sudanese define family and children's upbringing, their traditional beliefs and values, marriage arrangements and divorce. It is supplemented by the narratives that South Sudanese migrants have brought with them to Australia.

As part of their cultural beliefs, South Sudanese perceive parenting to be about nurturing children to be successful and respectful people in society. Some cross-cultural studies support the concept that different groups of people possess different beliefs and engage in different behaviours that may be normative in their own culture, but not in another (Bornstein, 2012). Bornstein stated that every culture is characterised and distinguished from another by widely recognised ideas about how one needs to feel, think and act as a functioning member of a given culture. Harwood et al. (1999) stipulated that parents hold goals which are consistent with those goals and expectations held by the society they are associated with. The central, integral part of South Sudanese parenting practices and culture, alongside gender roles and the responsibilities of every family member, is respect for parents and elders. This is a concept that dominated most participants' comments and discussion on the topics covered in this and subsequent chapters. Respect is knotted into almost every aspect of South Sudanese parenting practices, cultural beliefs and norms.

According to South Sudanese traditions, a family includes extended family members and in-laws and, within this paradigm, the role of looking after and disciplining children is shared. Although the immediate parents are expected to be central in such a noble and challenging role, members of the wider community are also expected to help in

disciplining children and shaping their behaviour for a better future. As a result, South Sudanese see parenting as a collective practice in which every member of society should be involved to help in children's upbringing. This emanates from the South Sudanese belief in the social reproduction of parenting from one generation to the next with the aim of raising positive children, which is an essential purpose of procreation.

South Sudanese understandings of 'good and bad' parenting are seen as an important element in fostering a respectful, successful new generation, or its opposite. 'Good parenting' according to South Sudanese is about meeting children's needs, so they become positive, disciplined and deferential members of the society, whereas 'bad parenting' is the reverse of these characteristics. This links to South Sudanese views as to what constitutes a 'good and bad' child. A good child is understood to be a product of good parenting, and South Sudanese believe that a 'good child' is someone who is a good listener, follows societal rules and is respectful to parents and all in the community, whereas a 'bad child' is the reverse of these. I also consider here the significance of discipline, its impact on children's developmental outcomes, and how South Sudanese connect it with 'good and bad' parents and children and see it as an integral part of their parenting practices.

## **5.1 Traditional South Sudanese beliefs, values and family composition**

South Sudanese parenting practices can be broken down into a number of separate topics - , beliefs and values, marriage arrangements, gender roles, and responsibilities of the father, the mother and others involved in bringing up children – and each of these topics is now discussed in detail.

### **5.1.1 Beliefs and values**

A family in the South Sudanese context is made up of a father, mother, children and extended family members such as grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, nieces, nephews, and in-laws (Jok et al., 2004, Deng, 2009). Parenting is based on nurturing children to be successful and respectful people in society. It is also about teaching them certain cultural values, customs and identities, a task that is achieved through oral instructions with which children are expected to comply. Children are also expected to become

involved in the social and community activities and rites. This is considered a significant part of learning about their traditions and ancestral history, the way people ought to live in their society, their historical background and their origin. Parents are expected to teach their children about all of these, and about what is right and wrong, good and bad, condoned and not within their community and society. Again, these traditional values are usually passed on from one generation to the next orally and through engaging and interacting with children and expecting them to follow the precepts. Such structures are subject to dynamic change, particularly for those who have emigrated to Australia and other Western countries, but equally (as discussed in the next chapters) some participants maintained that most of these structures are still in place.

*In the Western context, the family is defined in a narrow context. A South Sudanese family includes extended family members. Children are brought up to be good citizens and respectful in the society. South Sudanese take pride to make sure that they have brought up children who will make them proud and be seen that their parents have done a good job (**Participant 2 - male**).*

These beliefs and values are strongly held by most parents in the rural areas where children's bad behaviours are blamed on parents and the clan while doing and behaving well are seen to be the result of good parenting practices. Furthermore, South Sudanese believe that teaching children certain cultural values starts from the moment a child is born and welcomed to the world.

*According to South Sudanese cultures, immediately after the child is born, she or he is told “**pandun achek**,” meaning “welcome home” [in Dinka] or “the people who came before you are here”; therefore, she or he is born into the family (**Men’s Focus Group, Participant 8**).*

South Sudanese family members have well-defined duties and responsibilities based on their gender and age groups. Children are taught distinct responsibilities and roles within the family and community by their parents, relatives and other members of the community (Deng, 2009). In this hierarchical society, children are expected to respect and follow the societal norms, which parents and older members of the community impart. Any deviation from the norms involving misbehaviour toward adults is considered impolite and morally deplorable. The other most important part of teaching

children these cultural values is to preserve the languages and to strengthen knowledge about the extended family members and ancestral history.

*In South Sudan, most values and beliefs include practicing our culture by teaching our children about them. We believe that knowing your culture will always keep the values of the family alive. Parents make sure that they teach their children their languages, histories, background and about extended family members. We believe that if a child knows all of these, then she or he will keep the cultural values alive because these values are the family identity (Participant 11 - male).*

Most South Sudanese cultural beliefs are framed around their traditional customary laws and the expectations of society. Respect is a culturally entrenched concept and seen as one of the essential values every child must display toward their parents and all those who are older than them. The concept of respect dominated most of the participants' comments in the interviews and focus groups. The embodied features of respect include responding appropriately to demands and commands from parents and older family members' as well as listening to and obeying their instructions and suggestions. South Sudanese believe that part of the purpose of teaching children these cultural values is for the children to pass them on to the next generation. Customarily, they believe that children must always emulate these values and virtues from their parents and community members while growing and graduating into the adult world. Inevitably, parents are not only expected to be responsible for teaching their children these cultural principles, but also to be role models for the children as they do as tradition requires and put these societal values and beliefs into practice. Teaching children these cultural values also includes helping them learn how to navigate the world of uncertainty and to make appropriate choices for a better future.

*I guess the practices or the most important thing included things like teaching children the best, showing them examples that this is how life is... In your time as a teenager (as a child), you may not know what you can do as a person because you're growing, but it is the parent who will always tell you things that you can emulate while growing up and practice them when you become adult. The beliefs within the family are important, which always reaffirms the South Sudanese belief system. You believe in your family more than anything else.*

*They valued respect for one another such as compassion; that is what my parents personally taught me about - respect other people, and particularly elders; don't be silly (Participant 1 - male).*

Teaching children about life, cultural values and expected to emulate their parents and adults, mainly elders, are a significant part of their tradition. For another participant, spending time with children, making them feel loved and presenting oneself as a role model or guardian is not only about communicating the parents' values to them, but it is also about the quality of how the parents perform and behave while interacting and teaching their children these societal values.

*A good parent must show his or her children good examples by directing them in a good way - take them to church every Sunday, read the Bible and pray before they go to bed and spend time together as a family while doing things they like - go out together as a family and enjoy their time. Children will feel that they are loved by their parents and will grow up positive (Participant 10 - female).*

These comments echoed previous studies on the roles parents normally play in shaping their children's behaviours and developmental outcomes (Lipman et al., 1998, Smith and AJackiewicz, 2008). Several longitudinal studies have also supported these South Sudanese views that parents have a greater influence on their children's behaviours (Steinberg et al., 1994, Lipman et al., 1998, Zubrick et al., 2008).

### 5.1.2 Marriage arrangements

Although South Sudanese customs and customary laws vary slightly from one tribe to another, marriage is considered to be an affair between the families of the groom and bride rather than between two individuals (Taylor, 2008, Jok et al., 2004). Marriage is considered to be a prerequisite for becoming a parent; it is not only a union between a husband and wife but an alliance which involves kinship as part of the decision-making (Juuk, 2013, Deng, 2009, Madut-Kuendit, 2011). As a result, the couple's respective families are seen as custodians of this union and they have a dominant role and power in the marriage arrangement. If any issue arises between the couple after marriage, the families have every right to intervene with the objective of saving the union. Conceptually, marriage is a community affair rather than being a private matter (Taylor,

2008, Madut-Kuendit, 2011). Marriage is measured by and based on setting up a family and having children. Continuity of lineage is not only of primacy significance for the individual but it is sacred, as many South Sudanese (for instance, the Dinka) believe that marriage is intended to fulfil God's will, which is to make sure that the name of that person within a given family or clan does not die out (Deng, 2009, Madut-Kuendit, 2011).

Fundamentally, marriage is not seen as the fulfilment of individual desire, but as a social duty for procreation and continuity of lineage by the clan, society or tribe. Among the Dinka, the largest ethnic tribe in South Sudan, marriage is exogamic up to several generations, and, as discussed, an individual's goal to have a family is normally seen as the ultimate fulfillment of life and of their duty to society. In the process leading up to marriage, men seek women through courtship until they gain agreement from their potential wives and then they proceed to involve their family members - mostly male elders (Madut-Kuendit, 2011, Fadlalla, 2009). A young man is deemed as eligible for marriage by his family, and may then be courting young women. Therefore, a family meeting is often organised which discusses the young women he might be courting. The marriage decision is not based solely on which woman he loves the most but instead his family will make a final decision based on whether they believe the woman to be from a good family background. South Sudanese family members from both sides have legal rights according to the varying customary laws of each tribe, clan and chiefdom to refuse consent to the union as they have overriding powers to veto the marriage arrangement, even if the couple are deeply in love. (Madut-Kuendit, 2011, Deng, 1972).

Such marriage arrangements are in contrast to most Western cultures, where marriages are mostly decided by the couple. It is worth mentioning that 'Western' cultures are not homogenous, as they are also becoming multicultural, thanks to increasing immigration and cultural exchanges. Conversely because the world is becoming a global village influenced by modern life, the media and information technology, some South Sudanese customary laws and traditions are changing to conform to the expectations of the younger generation.

South Sudanese refer to young unmarried women as 'girls.' They are not allowed to have boyfriends before marriage as a suitor is expected to be known by the family, and he must express his interest through his own family, who will then approach the family

of the prospective bride. There are also arranged marriages in which the family of the groom choose a young woman who they want their son to marry, whether he is living with them or is away from home, perhaps as part of the diaspora.

Once these discussions take place and agreement is reached between the families of the potential bridegroom and bride, his family sends a delegation of elders to her family to announce their interest and intent to marry. After the girl's family agrees to welcome them, a discussion on the amount of dowry will eventually start; often cattle and materials are a bride-price to be paid by the bridegroom to the bride's family to settle the marriage alliance (Madut-Kuendit, 2011, Jok et al., 2004, Deng, 1972, Evans-Pritchard, 1951).

*In our culture, a man pays a dowry to marry his wife who becomes responsible for all the household chores. She is the one who looks after the children at home, while the man does many tasks outside the home (Men's Focus Group, Participant 1).*

The traditional method of dowry is still widely practiced by South Sudanese at home and in the diaspora. The dowry practice is sometimes a point of contention because it is increasing and becoming very expensive, particularly among Dinka and Nuer, although this varies between tribes. For example, in most Dinka and Nuer marriages, a man normally pays an average dowry of 50-100 or even more head of cattle, where each cow costs the equivalent of A\$350-A\$800 (Juuk, 2013). These dowries are often paid in the form of living animals but part of the dowry is paid in money if most of the in-laws live in cities or overseas. Some tribes in South Sudan have now started to accept the whole dowry in the form of money - something which was not previously culturally acceptable (Madut-Kuendit, 2011).

Moreover, in Dinka customary law, a marriage is only valid after having gone through these processes; namely engagement, negotiation, acceptance and finally exchange of the bride-wealth. In the process of finalising the union of the new couple, a ritual is performed in the form of a big ceremony with blessings for the newly-weds. In most traditional marriages in rural South Sudan, there is no registration or issue of a marriage certificate. These marriages are considered valid and binding as they are witnessed and blessed by the community elders and other members of both families (Juuk, 2013; Jok

et al. 2004; F. M. Deng 1972, 2009). After marriage, the newlyweds stay with the bridegroom's family until they establish their own home.

The marriage procedures may take a long time and disagreements can arise. Consequently, a man and woman sometimes elope because of frustration at these long processes (Madut-Kuendit, 2011). Such a marriage is hard to break since nobody will be interested in marrying a woman who has already gone with another. If such a marriage proves unsuccessful, the woman is often married again as a second wife, mostly to old men.

Another marriage that is common among South Sudanese Dinka and other South Sudanese tribes is the so-called ghost marriage where the groom dies before the marriage is finalised and the wife-to-be bears children to the next of kin - often a brother or close cousin to the late groom, and the children are named after him. According to Juuk (2013, p.105), there are three categories of marriages in many South Sudanese customary laws. These are: 'simple marriage' between a man and a woman, a 'polygamous marriage' which involves a man and two or more wives, and marriage to a kinsman of a deceased husband or groom.

Based on Dinka customary law, 'succession' may take place which allows the wife to be 'inherited' by the next of kin or surviving brother, if the first husband dies before they become old (Juuk, 2013). These Levirate marriages are commonly practiced in South Sudan. Levirate marriages provide support for widows and their children. All children of co-wives are raised together and have a wider family identity. Co-wives cook for all the children, although each wife has primary responsibility for her own children (F. M. Deng 1972, 2009). These practices are directly linked to polygyny, a form of plural marriage in which a man is allowed to marry more than one wife. This type of polygamous marriage is common and legal in South Sudan, many African countries and other parts of the world. Traditionally, the number of wives a man can have or marry depends mostly on his wealth and position in the community (Juuk, 2013; F. M. Deng 1972, 2009; Madut-Kuendit, 2011).

South Sudanese teach their children about these values as well as their lineage to avoid accidental or unapproved marriages between blood relatives. This is because no matter how distant the blood-relationship blood relatives are not allowed to marry one another

(Deng, 2009, Madut-Kuendit, 2011). It is culturally taboo to marry a blood relative as it is widely believed to bring bad luck and may cause health problems for the children of the marriage. This is in addition to the risk of the marriage being repudiated by the family and community members, if the marriage proceeds against their advice. Above all, same-sex relationships are taboo according to South Sudanese society.

*According to South Sudanese cultural beliefs and values, a child must know his or her parent's relatives who teach him or her about aspects of the future. He or she is answerable to his or her parent, relatives and the society at large. These are the most important values our children must learn while growing up. This is because when they grow up, they will get married. A child must know his or her relatives such as uncles, aunts, other relatives and their clan, so that in the future, she or he does not marry a blood-relative. We teach them how to help themselves, their parents, relatives and community (**Participant 17 - female**).*

As is common practice in most cultures, in the South Sudanese culture, a man and woman getting married must be mature enough and capable of reproduction, which is often determined by their ages, physical looks and approval given within their respective families, clan or tribe and their community (Deng, 2009, Madut-Kuendit, 2011, Evans-Pritchard, 1951). However, part of the marriage requirement involves making sure that an older sibling is married before a younger sibling's marriage is approved by family elders. This applies to both parties, although the requirement may be waived by the bride's family. This traditional pattern of waiting often causes major delays and may lead to late marriages, mostly for men as they are affected more than the women, and especially to marriage by impregnation and elopement (Deng, 2009, Madut-Kuendit, 2011).

Most traditional marriages only end if the wife dies or, in rare extraordinary cases, through divorce when a husband or wife separate because of unfaithfulness, or if the woman is unable to conceive or if the woman is considered to have failed to meet the expectations of her husband and in-laws. Divorce is made difficult by the traditional customary laws and courts as they prefer to preserve the union. As a result, most South Sudanese traditional marriages last until death, since most marital issues are resolved within the family and clan to avoid any sense of shame within the community. The divorced are not only disowned and shamed by the community, but also find it hard to

remarry as a result. Both families often first make sure the chances of saving the marriage are exhausted before agreeing to divorce, as termination of the union would mean a return of the dowry, which could be painful for both sides. The woman's family is obliged by customary law to return most of the dowry no matter how long the marriage lasted. If the union has produced children, part of the bride-wealth is left with the woman's family as repayment for the children, who will eventually remain with the man (F. Deng, 2009, Madut-Kuendit, 2011, Fadlalla, 2009).

Although these customary laws are rigid, and in many ways support men over women, South Sudanese women are also given high consideration. For example, if a husband is at fault, his family always supports the wife, and the court may penalise him for mistreating his wife. According to F. M. Deng (2009), although the concepts favour the male line, the roles of women are vital, not only for the physical dimension of procreation but also because it is the mother who inculcates in the child the ancestral values. F. M. Deng emphasises that, despite the acceptance of male dominance in the public forum, the influence of a mother is considered to be so great that it must be continued by encouraging loyalty to the agnatic group (Deng, 2009).

Next for discussion is how roles and responsibilities are divided between the married couple.

### 5.1.3 Roles and responsibilities for a father

South Sudanese come from a patriarchal family structure where a father holds primary leadership and moral authority over his family. He is also a primary protector and breadwinner for his family (Milos, 2011, Wal, 2004, Madut-Kuendit, 2011). This role includes protecting his family from any external threats and meeting his family's needs. Men are protectors not only of their families, but also of the clan, tribe and society: they are required to act in the group's interest by safeguarding territory as well as forming important alliances with other families through marriage (Madut-Kuendit, 2011, Juuk, 2013, Taylor, 2008).

*A father does outside home chores, such as bringing food home while the mother remains home to make sure that food is prepared as she is the one who knows what amount of food is enough for the number of family members at home. A*

*father teaches his son how to tackle outside home chores as well as other important things (Women's Focus Group, Participant 8).*

Such structures are changing, particularly among the educated group who mostly live in cities, as women also become breadwinners for their families.

A father, uncles and senior cousins have an important role in teaching young men about their manhood and the responsibilities, which they have to take on when they become adults. This role includes teaching his son(s) how to look after domestic animals and protect the family and territory. As part of learning about these responsibilities, young men are encouraged to socialise more with their peers. Importantly, the role of a father and other male relatives in teaching young men their gender roles and responsibilities increases after young men reach puberty, when they are initiated into maturity before getting married (Madut-Kuendit, 2011, Deng, 1972). After that initiation, the social spheres of the genders seldom overlap. Initiation rites vary among tribes and may involve putting some marks on the forehead (Dinka and Nuer) and other parts of the body. These initiations involve using knives to make permanent marks and can be painful, but it is considered as part of the beginning of maturity as well as testing the young men's strength and capabilities for becoming a man in the society.

As a breadwinner, the cultural norms and expectations are that the father will hunt, search for work and bring food home. He also has the role of disciplining and teaching his children, especially his sons, their responsibilities and the expectations of their society.

*A father teaches his son every aspect of life such as his role and what it means to be a man in society. Back in South Sudan, the responsibility of a man is to build houses by bringing building materials, besides protecting his family. In our culture, men don't cook; if they cook, they are even told that you are cursing bad luck onto your wives. For a man to step into the kitchen, he is shamed by the community members (Men's Focus Group, Participant 1).*

Since men cannot step into the women's domain such as the kitchen or undertake other female roles, they often depend on their wives or other women for several aspects of their lives. Although the division of labour assigns the roles of fishing, herding and

periodic hunting to the male, the roles and responsibilities of a father sometimes slightly overlap in area of farming where the mother too could perform tasks but then return to domestic duties afterwards while the man does other outside chores.

#### 5.1.4 Roles and responsibilities for a mother

The roles and responsibilities of South Sudanese and other African mothers are focused on domestic duties such as maintaining a household and caring for their children. A mother normally looks after her children by providing them with food and other essential forms of care. One participant explained the roles and responsibilities of a mother and father as mostly like Ministers of Interior and Foreign Affairs respectively. Parents and grandparents often teach new mothers how to conduct their domestic duties and how to recognise when a child is sick, hungry or misbehaving.

*The role of a woman at home is to look after the family. For example, she knows what the family eats, the clothes the children wear, school and other basic needs (Participant 9 - male).*

A mother is directly responsible for teaching her children their languages and culture from birth and ultimately focuses on her daughter(s) after they reach a certain age when teaching about gender roles becomes vitally important and the responsibilities for this are divided between the mother and the father.

*A mother always looks after her children. She knows when a child is sick or misbehaving. She also teaches her daughter how to be a good housewife, as well as other responsibilities. Children are mainly under the responsibilities of a mother who cooks for them the food brought by her husband (Participant 6 - male).*

Women thus do most of the domestic chores. Jok et al. (2004, p.7) state that in South Sudanese society, the roles and status of women reflect a culture that places a premium on the cohesion and strength of the family as the basis of society. The responsibilities for women in rural Africa and particularly in South Sudan are extensive when compared with those for women who live in cities.

One participant stated that between the father's and mother's roles childrearing roles are fulfilled as they are expected to work together to provide education and perfect their children's future and behaviours as part of earning a good status for them within the clan, tribe and society.

*Fathers and mothers are the first people in their children's lives. Mothers provide the basic needs while fathers provide protection. They both start providing education to their children at an early age as well as teaching them about their relatives, society (around them) and cultural values. Children are taught to understand that misbehaving or doing anything bad may bring shame and bad luck (curse) to the family (Participant 5 - female).*

Above all, according to South Sudanese tradition, a father and mother have an important role within the family: they are expected to work together in partnership to bring up their children with love and affection. As discussed earlier, they are expected to pass on the societal values and beliefs to the next generation. South Sudanese consider the role of a mother to be very significant since she is the one who produces children and makes the family stronger. Regardless of these gender divisions, in which daughters identify more with their mothers and sons with their fathers, mothers are naturally close to their sons from birth until they reach puberty, after which they associate with their fathers and other male siblings, relatives and friends within the community (F. Deng, 2009, Deng, 1972, Juuk, 2013). The reason sons identify more with their fathers and other males in the family and community is mostly to avoid being shamed by their peers and pejoratively labelled "a son of a woman". F. M. Deng (2009, p.15) noted that in Dinka culture, to be called a 'son of a woman' implies being too close to the mother and under her influence, and is a serious insult that no boy wants to risk. While parents have the primary responsibilities for teaching their children, the duties are divided among the father, the mother, other close relatives, distant relatives, friends and neighbours each of whom are assigned specific roles and responsibilities.

#### 5.1.5 Roles and responsibilities for non-parents and other members of the family

Although a mother and father within the South Sudanese family play central and distinctive roles, these roles and responsibilities are also shared among other members

of the family and relatives, mostly among those who are not yet parents, according to their gender.

*Those who are not mothers and fathers play a very important role in looking after those who are younger than themselves. They learn all types of parenting skills before they became parents themselves (Participant 3 - male).*

Every member of a South Sudanese community has specific roles and duties. Like many other cultures, young South Sudanese women before marriage have domestic chores akin to those of their mother and other women, while the young men follow their fathers' roles, which include responsibilities such as looking after the domestic animals. Giving young people and non-parents responsibilities within the family is an essential part of learning about their future responsibilities. Non-parents are also included in most of the decision-making within the family as part of this learning experience, so they learn not only their responsibilities but also how to be independent thinkers when they become parents.

*Those who are non-parents have some responsibilities, but they first learn from their parents, particularly the firstborn followed by his or her siblings [who] start doing some work at home to help their parents. Giving them responsibility is very important as part of their learning experiences (Participant 16 - female).*

However, for a young couple, when the firstborn is weaned, they are sent to their maternal families, where they sometimes remain for a year or longer depending on how much support the new couple needs, and how ready they are to stand on their own. Children are cared for by grandparents, elder siblings or non-parents and other relatives. According to South Sudanese and other African traditions, young men look after younger male siblings and livestock and serve adults. Young people of both genders who are not parents are also expected to associate more with their own gender, although young women are mostly closer to their mothers and other women than the young men are to their fathers and other male relatives. In the absence of a father figure within the family, an elder son customarily acts in the position of his father by carrying out the paternal duties, including disciplining siblings, and the same applies to the eldest daughter in the absence of her mother.

*Those who are within the family but a bit older can contribute to raising younger children. The adults within the family as well as extended families not only look after younger children but can even discipline them if they misbehave, without consulting their parents (**Participant 9 - male**).*

As related by the participants, giving elder children these responsibilities and tasks domestically and outside the home is not only an integral part of becoming an independent thinker but is an essential part of acquiring knowledge and preparing for marriage, and eventual individual responsibility within the family and society. These traditional beliefs, values, gender roles and family composition are very important to many South Sudanese. However, above all is respect, which is an indispensable part of South Sudanese culture, and the next section explains why these practices are of such significance to them.

## 5.2 Respect: an integral part of South Sudanese culture

Respect is an integral part of South Sudanese culture. It is considered to be a revitalisation of the ancestral line, a concept in which dignity and admiration are important parts of ensuring that individual names and reputations within the community are valuable assets to society and the group, just as the group is to the individual (Deng, 2009, Haydon, 2006). As discussed throughout this section, South Sudanese connect respect to age and other hierarchical relationships. According to Haydon (2006, p.464), to show respect to another, we need to have at least a basis for a provisional presumption about how our speech or action toward them will be perceived. Many also regard respect as an important component of an individual's identity as well as an influence within the community (Losoncz, 2013).

*I received a good upbringing with certain values such as respect for others, especially towards those who were older than me, including uncles, aunties, and distant relatives. I still maintain that right now at this age. For instance, if someone tells me that what I'm doing is not good, and that I should do it this way, I always listen (**Participant 16 - female**).*

South Sudanese believe that respect is something that helps to discourage people from acting unacceptably in society. No matter how old people are, they are still bound by these traditional values to listen to those who are older. As a result of upholding respect, the camaraderie established by age not only provides a strong sense of belonging and respect towards each other but it also creates a sense of loyalty as well as cooperative identity and partnership in areas such as social and cultural cohesion (Deng, 2009, Madut-Kuendit, 2011). Many believe that children's upbringing must include teaching them respect for other cultural values. However, although respect is a non-negotiable requirement, which children must have toward their parents and other adults, some participants supposed that respect is not only something deserved but is earned by showing a good example. The next comment summarises how South Sudanese are taught respect and other values by their parents and relatives while growing up.

*To me, what stands out are the values that were imparted to me by my parents, which include respecting people, being compassionate and loving one another. My parents also told me that you cannot get respected unless you respect others. Don't expect someone to respect you; first you have to respect that person (Participant 1 - male).*

For some participants, respect is learned from parents as they are responsible for disciplining and teaching their children such an important value. Children who respect and listen to their parents normally learn respect and other important values that help shape their future, and they become successful. Respect and listening to parents and elders are the most important part of South Sudanese children's upbringing. Another participant reiterated that respect is not something deserved but earned: while teaching children respect and other values, parents must lead by example as well through respecting those who are older than themselves.

*Listening and respecting those who were older than me was the most important thing that I picked up as a child. Living by the example of good people around you and of good things they do. Another thing is education; how I was pushed to go to school by my parent (Participant 5 - female).*

Respect as an integral part of South Sudanese parenting encompasses most of the discussion in this and the following chapter, including how families are formed,

marriage practices, gender roles and responsibilities. In conjunction with respect, it is essential to highlight that South Sudanese come from a collective society where every older member of the family, relatives and community elders can look after and discipline any child. Young people may be disciplined by anybody who is older than themselves, and they are required to respect that person without questioning his or her authority. As a result, respect mirrors how South Sudanese see parenting as a collective responsibility: it is not limited to the family but extends to the wider community and society.

### 5.3 Parenting as a collective practice

Although bringing up children and teaching them cultural values start with their immediate parents (the father and mother) and family members, South Sudanese also believe that disciplining children and looking after them are a collective responsibility for the wider community in which they are growing up.

*The responsibility for teaching children societal values and disciplining them is not only for parents, but also for relatives, neighbours and friends within the community. Children's upbringing is the responsibility of everyone in the community, according to South Sudanese cultures (Men's Focus Group, Participant 3).*

According to this cultural belief, parents always make positive contributions in their children's lives before others in the wider society can contribute to looking after and disciplining the children. A child is for everybody but nobody should hurt a child: for instance, if an adult finds a child on the street, they are obliged by their culture to help that child. Anybody can help or discipline anyone's child.

*Back in South Sudan, looking after children was the responsibility of everyone in the community. For example, any adult who found a child misbehaving can give them advice, and the child must listen to that person. Any adult can say, "You are the son or daughter of so and so, why are you behaving this way? Please stop." and the child must listen (Participant 9 - female).*

As part of that disciplining, South Sudanese participants see parenting as not only strictly about imparting cultural values to children or teaching them what is right and

wrong, but it should also be about bonding and building a good relationship between parents and their children. They consider positive engagement with children as part of encouraging them to be open and listening to their parents or caregivers.

*Parenting in South Sudan is a relationship between you, the parent, and your child, but it is also about right and wrong where parents are really strict. For instance, if you do anything wrong, there are consequences. If you do the right thing, then you have no problem: parents may praise you and make sure you are well cared for. Discipline in my view is to make sure that you're not really deviating to something in the end that creates a problem for you and the family at large (**Participant 1 - male**).*

This concept that collective parenting is a responsibility for the wider community and society is an important part of not only supporting one another but is also an essential aspect of imparting and passing society values to the next generation.

## 5.4 Parenting values: the concepts of 'good' and 'bad' parenting

### 5.4.1 'Good' parenting

Although South Sudanese concepts of 'good' and 'bad' parenting may be similar to other cultures, the participants gave a variety of definitions of what they believed to be 'good and bad parenting'. First, good parenting is a process of raising and fostering the next generation of positive community members and parents. How children are raised is how they will raise their own children, and this is about intergenerational transmission of values, which also focuses on creating heritage and history for children as they transition into the adult world. Good parenting practices are part of belonging to society. Participants also defined good parenting as catering for their children's needs and nurturing them to be responsible individuals by guiding and role modelling for them. It is also when children are looked after collectively by their parents, relatives and the wider community.

*Good parenting is when children are guided from a very young age to adulthood. Children are role modelled at as early an age as possible. For*

*example, girls start associating with their mothers or other female elders. The same with boys to their fathers and other males. These normally help children to pick up positive things from adults (Participant 5 - female).*

Zubrick et al. (2008, p.3) in their study of parenting and families in Australia stated that a socio-ecological model of children's health and individual needs arises from complex interactions that occur between the individual and the environments in which she or he lives. So a child's health and development occur in the context of the family, but also with other influences that include school, community and other environments as well as the cultural, socioeconomic, structural and political features within the community (Smith and AJackiewicz, 2008). As part of their culture, many South Sudanese believe that good parenting is about parents looking after their children's wellbeing and bringing them up with good manners. Most parents said that their children make them feel proud when they succeed in life and do good things in the community, which means that the parents have brought them up with good manners. Being a collective society, it is easier to identify parents who are not providing good parenting. The advantage of being in a collective society is not only that parents and members support one another but also that they often learn from one another, particularly if one has not gained certain parenting skills for themselves. The next comments illustrate the general understanding on what good parenting involves.

*Good parenting is when parents are available for their children, regarding their needs. For example, to be able to feed your children on time and keep them clean. We always want to keep our children satisfied and clean externally and internally. We make sure that they have food, clothes to wear. You have to provide them with good care and all other basic needs. Children for whom such needs are not fulfilled, turn out depressed or later become thieves and dishonest (Participant 7 - male).*

The above comments exemplified that if children are neglected and not provided with such basic needs, they are likely to have some issues arising later in their lives. It also means that good parenting is not only about raising children with cultural values but is also about teaching them about their backgrounds as well as how they are expected to behave in society. It is about making sure that children are connected to their family and the community.

*Good parenting is where every evening, you sit down with your children to tell them stories about how you grew up and how they should behave in the society. By doing that, you talk to your children as a mother or father in a very nice and helpful way, not in an aggressive manner, to make the children understand what you are trying to tell them and what you want them to learn and to have a good future (**Participant 10 - female**).*

South Sudanese do not consider good parenting as about being too strict or tougher in applying discipline to their children; rather it is about getting involved in listening to them, sharing ideas and responsibilities to foster peace and harmony within the family and the community.

*Parenting is when you (the parent) explain to your child the difference between what is right and wrong. For instance, if you punish your child for misbehaving, and you don't explain to him/her the reason, then that is a bad parenting. Good parenting is when you talk to your child and explain the difference between good and bad (**Men and Women's Focus Group, Participant 5 - female**).*

Good parenting is about respecting the hierarchy, the respect between parents and their children as sanctioned by their cultural values.

*Good parenting is about the hierarchy within the family in which a father is the head of the family, followed by his wife and children. In such a hierarchy, respect is highly preserved within the family and society (**Men's Focus Group, Participant 8**).*

Consequently South Sudanese believe that children are to be brought up not only to be good citizens but also to be helpful and of benefit to their parents and the wider community.

*According to South Sudanese, children are brought up for three benefits: 1) for themselves, 2) their parents and 3) the wider society or community. These three principles are very important for the children to grow up with as part of their future. Children are taught to think big and broadly about their future based on these principles and values (**Participant 7 - male**).*

As recounted by the participants, many raise their children with the aim and hope that they will succeed in life, look after their parents when they get old and contribute to the wider community or society. The most important part of good parenting is to make sure that children complete their education, again with the goal of thriving in life, which is why many expect their offspring to remain at home until they complete their education, before graduating into the adult world. Good parenting is measured by how children display themselves to the outside world as parents are culturally bound to make sure that their children project good images of them.

#### 5.4.2 'Bad' parenting

South Sudanese consider bad parenting as the reverse of 'good parenting' - or rather the parents' inability to look after and provide for their children's needs, when parents neglect, abuse or punish their children. This also includes failing to teach children their mother tongues, cultural values and societal norms or possibly even teaching them bad behaviour and manners. Participants also believe that bad parenting includes giving children too much or unreasonable responsibilities while they are too young and incapable of carrying out such tasks. Giving children too many responsibilities is common in a situation where parents may not be able to provide for or meet their children's needs.

*Bad parenting is when you are unable to look after your children or not provide for their needs. Making sure that children attend school is important. Parents who let their children do whatever they want, and who then messed up are obviously not responsible. This is obviously a tough call for parents because, again as children, they may have their own peer groups. However, I guess bad parenting is to do with your inability (as a parent) to look after your children in a way that the society expects (**Participant 1 - male**).*

Most also considered bad parenting to include when parents are not only neglecting their children but also leaving them hungry or with no proper clothing or hygiene. It is also when parents show violence in front of their children since it often stresses them psychologically and emotionally and they grow up unhappy. As part of the social reproduction of parenting across generations, children often pick up such bad behaviours from parents if they continue to witness violence. Participants believe that

children might think that it is how people live in society and start practicing those behaviours.

*Bad parenting is when parents argue or fight in front of their children... their children may start to pick up or copy such bad behaviours from their parents, thinking that maybe this is the way people are supposed to live. Because children learn from their parents, they apply the things that they learn or pick up from them as they always stick to such behaviour in their minds, especially when they are still young and can't distinguish between what is wrong and right. Children copy whatever parents or adults around them do. Parents are different; some can argue or even fight in front of their children while others try not to let their children see it - children are very clever. They can pick up any tension between their parents. Parents must show positive things to their children (**Participant 8 - female**).*

Some participants also stated that part of bad parenting also mean when parents abuse alcohol and neglect their children's wellbeing, particularly when children are abandoned.

*Bad parenting is when parents are negligent toward their children: for instance, they might leave them to suffer and do things that are of no benefit to them. Some parents who are alcoholic don't care about their children's wellbeing. They do not teach their children how to be responsible people (**Participant 17 - female**).*

However, South Sudanese also believe that bad parenting can be a result of lack of resources in the family. For instance, some children may be forced to start working at an early age because their family and parents may not be able to afford to provide for their basic needs. Many South Sudanese were deprived of the opportunity to gain education, while most also suffered physical and psychological abuses, which continue to impact negatively in their daily living, whether in South Sudan or in the diaspora.

*The bad thing is when parents might not have had all the resources they need to provide for their children - children might be struggling. They may start working*

*at an early age, engage in heavy work and might suffer psychologically. That is a bad part (**Participant 3 - male**).*

Some of these views are compatible with an Australian study on parenting and families, which found that lower levels of education and income, as well as poor coping skills amplified by psychological distress, are associated with lower parenting consistency (Smith and AJackiewicz, 2008). The participants' understandings of bad parents are consistent with those studies on the role parents play in influencing their children's behaviours and developmental outcomes that were discussed earlier. According to Zubrick et al. (2008, p.5), much of the research suggests that the child is the passive object of parents as the flow-on effect is from the parents to the child. This and previous longitudinal studies have indicated that parenting quality in conjunction with the absence of a positive relationship, manifested through such things as lack of warmth, insecure attachment, inflexible or inconsistent disciplining, increase the risk of children developing behavioural and emotional problems (Lipman et al., 1998, Steinberg et al., 1994).

As discussed in Chapter 3, parenting has an extraordinary influence of Australian Federal and State governments as well as on parents and parenting (Kolar and Soriano, 2000a). The government idea of parenting is mostly on meeting children's needs and making sure that they are safe within the family, something perceived to a shared responsibility between individuals, family, community and the government.' The government often get involves in the family, if the adults caring for children do not meet their obligations, either because they are abusive or exploit their positions of power. The Australian government support and provide resources for parents such as Raising Children Network, which is a comprehensive resource for Australian parents that provide ideas from pregnancy to newborns to teenagers, including hundreds of themes around raising children and how parents can take care of themselves (Riasingchildren, 2017).

Related to 'good and bad' parenting, the next discussion is on who may be regarded as a 'good or bad' child.

## 5.5 Social reproduction of parenting across generations: South Sudanese understanding of 'good' and 'bad' children

### 5.5.1 The 'Good' Child

Many participants believe that a good child is someone who is a good listener, polite and respectful to parents and those who are older; a child who follows societal rules and does not associate with children who are seen to be bad influences. Most importantly, they believe that whether the child's conduct is good or immoral, that is always to be attributed to its parents.

*A good child is the one who is disciplined, respectful, talking to people and introducing him/herself in a very polite way. For example, a good child will always offer services to an elderly person. People will always take pride and say she/he has been brought up well. Being respectful in public is paramount: like father, like son (**Participant 2 - male**).*

*A good child is one who listens to his/her parent and those who are older than him/ her such as relatives and neighbours (**Participant 17 - female**).*

Participants emphasise the first thing people most often ask if they find a child misbehaving in public is, "Whose son or daughter is that child?" For that reason, many South Sudanese parents try hard to make sure that they impart maximum discipline and respect in their children, to ensure positive behaviour. As mentioned earlier, children's good behaviour makes parents, relatives and the community proud and ultimately increases the level of admiration, recognition and respect from the community. The values of a 'good child' are completely the opposite of a 'bad child'.

### 5.5.2 The 'Bad' Child

South Sudanese consider a 'bad child' to be one who does the opposite of good, which includes failing to listen or to show respect to parents and elders; a child who is a shoplifter, troublemaker or who may be associated with bad influences or other children who are considered as bad in the community and society. However, some parents acknowledge that being a bad or a good child is what a child often picks up from his or her biological parents or caregivers.

*It's about respect; a child who does not respect the elders or other people is a bad child. For example, we respect our elders highly as part of our culture (Participant 6 - male).*

Children who do immoral things tarnish the image and reputation of their parents and the community they come from, according to South Sudanese. For instance, if a child steals or commits a crime, the parents are blamed and held accountable for that behaviour. Such children are disowned and sometimes isolated from the community. As a consequence, South Sudanese expect their children to respect their parents and societal norms and to protect their parents' names by doing the right thing. Parents are blamed unequivocally by the community for not having shown good parenting and role modelling skills to shape their children.

*A bad child is one who is obviously a thief. If you steal something, there are consequences or [you are] considered as a trouble maker, like fighting; you will always be regarded as a bad child. Maybe even associating yourself with a bad group; obviously, if you know that is a bad group but you associate with them...you are referred to as a bad person (Participant 1 - male).*

Participants repeatedly stated that children learn from their parents and other adults through imitating things that they see from them. Therefore, parents should not merely blame children for their bad behaviour. Such imitation of adult behaviour is because they think that whatever adults do must be good. For instance, children who are violent toward others might have copied it from their parents or other adults, or might have suffered some abuse themselves. Therefore, a good child is a result of good upbringing, and of parents who are close to their children and spend more time with them to help them learn positive things. Most importantly, teaching children good values such as honesty and being respectful to others are important assets and aspects of 'good parenting'.

The discussion of 'good and bad' parenting, as with 'good and bad' children, leads to the significance of discipline as an integral part of South Sudanese parenting practices.

## 5.6 Disciplining as an integral part of parenting practices

Research has shown an association between parents' disciplinary practices and children's developmental outcomes, and most importantly that such practices are based on various factors such as socioeconomics, ethnicity and gender (Giles-Sims and Lockhart, 2005, Smith and AJackiewicz, 2008). According to the participants, disciplining children starts from the moment a child is born and continues through to young adulthood. They stressed that children are protected and cared for as much as possible, and the disciplining procedures include singing songs to the younger children, as well as teaching them about their societal and cultural values. Most believed that discipline must also include explaining to the child at the time the reason for the disciplinary action.

*In South Sudan, when a child is born, she/he is cared for and protected in every way possible. There are times when a parent can praise his/her child and times for disciplining him/her. Certain disciplining starts from when a child is very young. Adults sing songs to him/her when the baby cries, to keep it quiet. This can be done by their mother or father or any other family member. While growing up, a child is taught everything of value in the community. If a child does good things, they get praise and are encouraged and supported to continue doing the same thing: if it is wrong, the adult explains to the child what is wrong so that she/he does not repeat the same (behaviour). In our culture, if a child is punished harshly, the relative or community members will intervene and stop whoever is carrying out the punishment (Men's Focus Group, Participant 6).*

Immediately after birth, the immediate care and disciplining of the infant are the responsibility of the parents who also continue to get some coaching and support from their own parents or grandparents, aunts and other relatives. However, when a child reaches a certain age, around six years old, the whole community is expected to contribute to children's discipline, which means any adult can discipline anybody's child, regardless of the lack of any relationship, if the child is found to be misbehaving in public.

*When a child is born, she/he is for the whole family; for example, the new mother is not left alone but is coached by the grandparents of the child,*

*including aunties and other relatives, to make sure that the child is brought up in a positive way. When the child grows up, there are different disciplining procedures put in place. The whole community will help in making sure that the child is disciplined. The child is for everyone and therefore it is their responsibility to make sure that the child grows up in a positive environment, and with good behaviour (Participant 5 - female).*

Since parenting tasks are enormous, parents must work together consistently to achieve the goals and objectives of positive discipline. Participants underlined that physical punishment is only done according to the age of a child or when a child reaches the age mentioned above, after having learnt to distinguish between what is right and wrong. They also reiterated that punishment is not intended to hurt a child but to teach them respect, social values, customs and rules. It is aimed at instilling fear and respect for the social rules in a child as it is important to bring them up as successful and law-abiding individuals in society. Many believe that children who are brought up respecting these traditional rules and values are those who can demonstrate positive behaviour within the society and beyond. A participant explained the significance of disciplining by comparing it to the rule of law, which everyone must uphold.

*We grow up being disciplined by our parents, and that is why we now know what we are doing with our lives. 'Common sense' physical discipline is not intended to hurt children because if it was then none of us would have survived nor have our own children who we brought to Australia. Disciplining children is the same whenever someone does something wrong or offends in the society: there are always consequences, for instance, they get arrested and put in prison. Such kinds of punishments are part of disciplining people to follow laws so that they do not repeat the same mistakes (Men's Focus Group, Participant 5).*

## Conclusion

This chapter has outlined and discussed traditional South Sudanese parenting practices, beliefs and values, looking at family structure, marriage arrangements, gender roles and the responsibilities of parents and each member of the family and kinship. Despite the

changes brought by modernity and influences from other cultures, South Sudanese continue to practice most of their cultural values, whether in South Sudan or in the diaspora. South Sudanese perceive parenting as a collective responsibility since every member of the community is expected to participate in the children's upbringing. This is a concept commonly found in many other communal societies that value community responsibility above individual interests: children are taught and encouraged to view community matters through a group lens, and every adult has shared responsibilities for teaching and disciplining children (Wise and Da Silva, 2007). This may be in contrast to some individualistic societies where autonomy, independence and the ability to get things done on one's own are encouraged from an early age as an important part of the children's upbringing (Wise and Da Silva, 2007).

This chapter has highlighted South Sudanese understandings of what they consider to be 'good and bad' parenting as well as 'good and bad' children, concepts that are intertwined with the goal of social reproduction by nurturing good children and parents across generations. It is also connected to the societal values, which every member is expected to have. Essentially, respect is an integral part of South Sudanese custom, so that children who show respect and good behaviour to their parents and elders are considered to be those who were well parented. So it is proper to discipline children, which may involve talking to or even hitting a child to achieve this goal, but the responsibilities of bringing up children are not left for parents alone but also for relatives and other adults within the community as they are culturally expected to help in shaping children's behaviours. As part of producing successful generations, South Sudanese expect their children to be successful in general, and specifically in education which they consider as an important part of prosperity. As highlighted by the participants' comments, children are expected to obtain qualifications and contribute to providing for themselves, their family members and the wider community.

Universally, parenting goals are objectives that parents must always bear in mind when raising a child, whether, for instance, children are expected to be independent or obedient. Tenets of discipline are attitudes held by parents and caregivers about the appropriateness of particular approaches to children's upbringing, such as teaching, removing and spanking. Developmental expectations encompass ideas about what can be expected of children at different ages; for instance, the age at which a child is

expected to reach key developmental milestones, such as smiling, crawling and identifying colours. Developmental expectations influence the way in which adults interact with children, although adult and child interactions are multi-determined (Baumrind, 1991).

Participants' comments in this chapter highlighted the traditional South Sudanese family structure, parenting practices, customary law and gender roles. This chapter has expanded on the context of these traditions, which helps to provide a backdrop to the next chapter which discusses the transitional parenting practices, beliefs and attitudes of South Sudanese who have settled in Australia

## CHAPTER SIX

### South Sudanese transitional parenting practices, beliefs and attitudes since settling in Australia

#### Introduction

Chapter 5 analysed South Sudanese participants' narratives about their traditional parenting practices, beliefs and values they brought with them to Australia. The aim was to understand how they were raised according to their traditional values, in order to better understand how they are trying to raise their children. This chapter focuses on how transitional changes are experienced and their impact on families, particularly on their current parenting practices, beliefs and attitudes. It is understood that adapting to the new environment induces changes within the family, for instance in gender roles and social support, compounded by an unfamiliar legal setting (Schweitzer et al., 2006, Renzaho et al., 2011, Milner and Khawaja, 2010). The common themes for this chapter include the impact of transitioning into new parenting practices, the changes in legal, social and cultural environments as well as in gender roles, intergenerational changes between parents and children, identity restructuring, and adjustment to new services and support.

Participants highlighted cultural shock as an issue, with their original culture and parenting values and practices not being recognised by the Australian legal system, especially not by child protection policies. They identified the difficulties of understanding their new social service provisions. They expressed strong concern that their children are no longer listening to them or respecting their authority as the children have abandoned their original culture and adapted the new one. Consequently, many parents are in the predicament of being caught between the old and new cultures and are therefore unable to apply or preserve aspects of their traditional culture and parenting practices. They believe that their new setting has given children too much freedom, which encourages them to abandon their parents and culture of origin, and they emphasised the importance of upholding features of their culture as well as the need for education about their new environment. Most also think that these changes have led

children not only to be noncompliant towards them, but also into bad behaviour and juvenile delinquency.

These changes have provoked enormous intergenerational conflict between young people, their parents and other family members in the community. These conflicts evolve into persistent arguments between parents and their children, so that the parent-child relationships are replete with tension. These arguments revolve around concerns about autonomy and freedom, household chores, selection of suitable friends, schoolwork and care of younger siblings. Although all these are blamed on transitional challenges, developmental aspects that are linked to adolescence add to the tensions and are to be treated as usual in the lives of families (Berry and Kim, 1988, Manderson et al., 2002). Even so, the development-related transition of the young ones into their adolescence and early years of adulthood fails to explain every tension adequately. These transitional challenges highlight the influence of various resettlement difficulties – continual change in the composition of households, family separation and culture-related adaptation (McMichael et al., 2011).

The South Sudanese come from a collectivist culture where everything, including looking after children, is seen and experienced through a collective lens, but this concept is being challenged by their new individualistic setting. These challenges are aggravated by the lack of the social support and networks, which many families used to enjoy from their relatives, friends and neighbours before they were displaced from South Sudan. The experiences of displacement, being transited through countries of refuge and arrival in Australia are all changes that have affected their traditional customary laws and marital relationships. These transitions have led to some family breakdowns, including separation and divorce, which are rare in South Sudanese cultures. Participants stated that although these changes have caused confusion among families, the other main concerns were racism, discrimination and bullying: they spoke of being picked on, mostly at school and in public places, simply for being different. They reported that racism, discrimination and bullying are not only perpetrated by the average Australian, but also by law enforcement agencies such as police and child protection agencies.

## 6.1 Transitional challenges and changes in parenting practices, and in legal, social and culture

Moving to a new country may be exciting and full of expectations, but after settling in and experiencing the reality of the new environment, new settlers often face culture shock with the changes in parenting practices and in social and cultural, on top of other transitional challenges. Culture shock occurs because of the strain and anxiety ensuing from contact with a new culture and consists mostly of feelings of confusion and loss of familiar cultural clues and social rules (Winkelman, 1994). Khawaja and Milner (2012) who have conducted extensive studies on South Sudanese settlement difficulties found that many South Sudanese were exposed to traumatic events during their refugee flights and possible psychological distresses are compounded by their adverse transit experiences. As a consequence, transitioning into a new culture and setting can be overwhelmingly challenging. Many participants spoke of finding some of their parenting practices and values unrecognised, while some disciplinary methods are outlawed or unacceptable in their new environment. Some have experienced a sense of alienation from being labelled as having brought unacceptable values into Australia.

*We often get blamed that it is because of bad African cultures, but that is not the case; we are just confused and shocked by the new ways of doing things (Women's Focus Group, Participant 3).*

For at least one participant, the transitional challenges started with having to pay rent and to live in cities, which is completely different from his former village life. For many, South Sudanese village life was all they knew before their forced migration.

*The first change is that we were not used to renting houses when we were in South Sudan, especially in the villages. It is hard for those who are not used to living in towns – many South Sudanese used to own their houses or had never been to the big cities before. Here, you find yourself paying several bills and other basic needs to sustain a living. Living in a high-rise building, where one feels constricted without enough space, is new to us (Participant 7- male).*

As emphasised earlier, the transitional challenges and impact of changes to their parenting practices immediately on arrival in Australia happened because of their new

environment's rules and the lack of social support compared to South Sudan, where family members and relatives used to help one another socially. The results of this study are consistent with other studies conducted on refugee settlement and transitional experiences (Khawaja and Milner, 2012, Khawaja et al., 2008, Renzaho et al., 2011, Ochocka and Janzen, 2008). Participants acknowledged that moving to a new country leads to considerable loss of the social structures that supported their parenting beliefs and strategies, so that they often found their parenting styles being questioned (Ochocka and Janzen, 2008). The participants stressed that these changes clash with their traditions, as parents try to impose their traditional parenting practices, while their children are learning or have learned about their rights in their new, adopted country.

Transitional changes and challenges are often accompanied by confusion, blame, distress and disappointment. For instance, many participants reported that their parenting practices have changed since coming to Australia because of the laws that forbid the right to physically discipline children which they were used to in South Sudan when it came to correcting children's behaviours. These transitional challenges cause confusion and powerlessness among the new settlers. As Ochocka and Janzen (2008, p.105) argued, even just living in a new culture, new settler parents question not only their parenting styles but the values on which they were based. The following sketches the challenges these parents are facing as they try to achieve balance between their original and new parenting practices.

*Here as parents, we face a lot of challenges. Parenting practices have changed a lot. For example, a child has a right to say anything, even not listening to his/her parent. You can't force your child to listen to you. Also, the influence outside the home is the most difficult thing. As parents, you try to talk to your child but how she/he might react (respond) can be quite different (**Participant 11 - male**).*

Schweitzer et al. (2007) noted the difficulties South Sudanese and other migrants face while making sense of their new environment and system of laws. Differences between Australian and South Sudanese everyday life and social set-up place pressure on them to gain knowledge about their new environment through learning the social norms of the new culture as well as the skills required for effective functioning (Schweitzer et al., 2007). South Sudanese parents spoke of having their parenting styles challenged, which

is often exacerbated by the lack of information about their new legal system. Renzaho et al. (2010) emphasised the importance of not only focusing on helping the new settler parents to understand the expectations of their new environment, and that it is also imperative for the service providers and policy-makers to have some knowledge and awareness of the diversity of the new settlers' parenting constructs as compared to the dominant paradigms of the host society. The emphasis is not to see this in a narrative of 'one-size fits all' (Renzaho et al., 2011). The authors believed that learning and understanding the dimensions associated with raising children is a two-way process, and that the host society stands to learn from migrant parenting approaches. While acknowledging the changes, the interviewed parents continued to reiterate their frustrations and disappointments as they feel unable to discipline their children, even if they see them misbehaving.

*One thing regarding parenting here is that, if you see anything wrong (a child doing), you don't really discipline children at home (physically) (Participant 1 - male).*

*Well, there are big changes because here the government has set up some laws that do not allow parents to discipline their children physically (Participant 10 - female).*

There are goals in parenting common across cultures, namely to keep children safe, to guide their moral orientation, to help them progress through their developmental milestones and become successful (Lewig et al., 2010b, Ochocka and Janzen, 2008). However, the way South Sudanese parents try to achieve these goals may differ in accordance with their particular cultural values and beliefs. In addition to these concerns about enforced changes in their disciplinary practices, South Sudanese parents also believed there are strong influences on their children outside the home, which have led the children to defy and disown their parents and to choose to create more of their own networks and culture. The fear of outside influences on their children has been well documented by many studies, which have looked at the changing roles and expectations of refugee children (Ochocka and Janzen, 2008). Parents stated that some of these children had renounced their parents and were on the streets committing crimes, which reflect adversely on their parents and community, who often get blamed for their children's bad behaviour. Ochocka and Janzen (2008) argued that migrant parents use

various strategies to transmit their values to their children. Being from a collectivist culture, many South Sudanese put greater emphasis on helping their children become well-adjusted members of the community than on self-actualisation (Ochocka and Janzen, 2008, Poppitt and Frey, 2007, Milos, 2011, Milner and Khawaja, 2010). Participants spoke of feeling shocked by some of the things their children are doing; for instance, young women drinking alcohol, which was unacceptable in South Sudanese culture.

*We came to a different culture, and our children are strongly influenced by outside friends, and when we try to advise them to do the right things, they run away from home. The child protection agency gets involved and takes the children away. However, some young people from our community and wider Australia are creating their own culture. Some children who are on the streets are from different cultural backgrounds but bind together by one thing: they have disowned their own parents and the community they belonged to and have established their new cultural identity. It is culturally unacceptable for a child to disown his/her parents and the community. Some of these children are doing bad things on the streets, which brings disgrace to their parents and the community they belonged to. In our culture, a child grows up respecting his/her parents and all those who are older than him/herself. It is shocking for us when we see our children being quite disrespectful to their parents and other adults. Some young people resort to drinking alcohol. It was unheard of in our culture for young girls to drink alcohol before they get married. It is so difficult for us; we don't know what to do. Back home, we used to have very structured programs for our children, which used to help shape their behaviour for a better future (**Men and Women's Focus Group, Participant 3 - male**).*

South Sudanese parents are concerned about raising children in Australia when the children begin to display what their parents consider to be antisocial behaviour and show a lack of respect toward them as the children start to take on individualistic norms and worldviews in preference to their traditional collectivist culture (Hebbani et al., 2012). Lewig et al. (2010) found that refugee children assimilate more quickly into their new setting than do their parents, who are often more isolated from the host society than their children. However, there is a host of other reasons creating barriers to integration

for adult migrants: it is simplistic to generalise that it is all because they want to keep their tradition and cultural values. Many South Sudanese adults were deprived of educational opportunities, while others were educated in Arabic and other languages; therefore they find it hard to learn English at the rate their children are learning it and so their integration and assimilation into their new culture is also slower (Renzaho et al., 2011). Another pressure on young refugees is that, on arriving in a new country, they normally attend school where they start experiencing intense peer influence and gain more exposure than their parents to things that they would not have been able to experience if they were in their country of origin (Lewig et al., 2010b). This makes it harder for new settlers to apply their traditional parenting practices, and they find this confrontational since they are not used to the new styles of parenting and disciplining, which they perceive to be more lenient and unhelpful for their children's future (Lewig et al., 2010b).

South Sudanese parents believe that their values are eroding as their children are not listening and, even worse, swearing at them. They feel strongly that their children no longer respect them because they know that they have freedom in Australia. These parents feel the government takes their children's side. They frequently quoted Australian laws that consider someone to be an adult at the age of 18 years when they are allowed to make their own decisions. Many South Sudanese believe that young people at that age are neither mature enough nor capable of making their own decisions. Therefore, they should remain under their parents' control until marriage. According to South Sudanese culture, children are expected to look after their parents when they get old, and most parents are concerned that their children are not going to fulfil that part of their cultural duty. Continuing the lineage is important and children are expected to marry and start a family while living with the man's parents, as discussed in Chapter 5. As Muchoki (2012, p.81) stated, young men from many African cultures see themselves as 'burdened' with the responsibility of bringing forth new community members through siring children after marriage, since that is seen as a duty for all men.

Despite their major concerns about the authorities, who they consider as one of the great influences in their children's behaviour and independence, some participants also believe that parents must take some responsibility in these transitional processes. These opinions are discussed in greater detail in subsequent chapters but, as one participant

commented, parents should not put the entire blame on the system but seek to find solutions to some of their transitional parenting and resettlement challenges through working together with their children and the authorities to address them.

*Sometimes parents are not working together. Therefore, we can't blame the authorities entirely for everything. Back in South Sudan, parents used to work together; any issue between them is resolved before it is heard outside the home. Since some parents have problems or split up, children ended up confused as well. There is nothing new here; our people should stick to some of our cultures. Parents should stay together to show a good example about life to their children. Parents must share responsibilities so that no-one should be blamed in the future. It is only fish that give birth to its offspring and leave them to survive on their own; humans must always look after their offspring - husbands and wives must look after their children collectively (**Women's Focus Group, Participant 9 - female**).*

In South Sudanese culture, parents are not only bound to look after their children but also to make sure that they behave according to social expectations (Deng and Pienaar, 2011). Anything less than satisfying such expectations is blamed on the parents for failing to impart appropriate discipline to their children. Such expectations normally ensure the couple and family work together to make sure that they protect their image and reputation within the community.

The following discussion is about the difficulties in applying and preserving South Sudanese traditional parenting practices in Australia, as their children make the transition to the new cultural and legal environments.

## 6.2 Difficulties in applying and preserving traditional parenting practices in Australia

As discussed earlier, South Sudanese parents expect their children to remain at home until they marry, but they believe that in Australia the children are being encouraged to leave home when they reach the age allowed by the law, which is 18 years old. In South Sudan, a child is expected just to listen to their parents, which is a sign of good

behaviour but in Australia children may listen and also have a say in matters related to them with their parents and may have a say in some matters. According to Australian Government's website (Raising Children, 2017), negotiating with your kids does not mean parents are compromising on things they think are important, such as cultural traditions, child safety and wellbeing, but it is about trying to find common ground and a win-win solution. However, most South Sudanese see this as a bad influence on their children and, in seeking to protect their children against this influence, some go to the extent of denying their children the pleasure of attending social activities with their Australian peers. These issues cause tension, can lead children to rebel, and create problems within families (McMichael et al., 2011). Those most affected by these challenges seem to be single mothers who have to assume the role as head of the household in disciplining and fending for their families. Most parents interviewed in this study insisted that they want their children to remain at home as part of helping them to prosper and they want the authorities to listen to their concerns and cease encouraging children to leave home.

*Our children are taught and encouraged to leave home when they reach age 18. They are taught that at this age, they are adults and can make their own decisions, including whatever they want to plan for their lives. It is good to teach children how to be independent, but it is not good when they are encouraged to think that they do not need their parents or other adults to help them make their decisions about their future. This is because in our culture, parents and other adults continue to play a greater role in children's lives up to age 30, or until they become responsible for their lives (Women's Focus Group, Participant 2).*

South Sudanese parents report significant erosions of intra-family trust, discipline, and attachment. When discussing what they expect the authorities to know about the South Sudanese culture, parents reiterated the significance of wanting to make sure that their children have a good future as defined by their culture. These cultural expectations plus what they went through in their refugee journeys have increased their expectations that their children should succeed, particularly academically.

*We want the system not to encourage our children to leave home - we will truly appreciate it if the authorities can listen to the views we are expressing here. We*

*have different cultures, and schools and authorities need to acknowledge and understand these differences. We bring up our children to have a good future so that they can also help their parents and the society later. As parents, we feel proud when our children do well. Sometimes we have no hope for some of our children as they may only finish or drop out of High School, but may not advance their education. Our hope in bringing our children to Australia was so that they may achieve good education for a better future (Women's Focus Group, Participant 1).*

In Lewig et al.'s (2010) study, participants spoke of having their traditional roles seriously challenged by Australian law. As the tensions and misunderstandings between parents, their children and the authorities continue to flare up during the transitional process, many South Sudanese argued that their traditional parenting practices worked for them, which was the reason they were who they are today and therefore they do not understand why some essential aspects of these practices are not recognised in their new environment. Some of these views were also reported by Lewig et al. (2010), who suggested the laws about child protection and parenting in Australia need to include educational and early intervention programs or parenting groups to address some of the underlying issues facing the new settlers. The parents felt that they do not have a voice in their new environment, particularly regarding their children's upbringing, and therefore appeal to the authorities to respect their culture and to consider their concerns.

*Australia is a big country, and young people who might have not acquired proper responsibilities should not be encouraged to leave home and end up not knowing what they are doing. We want the authorities to hear our concerns – the authorities should not come back to parents after the children they took away or encouraged to leave home have committed crimes. We do not have such opportunities to voice our concerns, and we hope our voices will be heard this time (Women's Focus Group, Participant 6).*

Shakespeare Finch and Wickham's (2010) finding from their study 'Adaptation of Sudanese refugees in an Australian context: investigating help and hindrances' stated that amongst settlement difficulties, those primarily relating to traffic laws and laws regulating the discipline of children are of major concern. Unfamiliarity with the new laws regarding children's discipline plus the fear of losing them and the changes in

culture where it affects children play significant roles in these concerns (Shakespeare Finch and Wickham, 2010, Deng and Pienaar, 2011, Deng and Marlowe, 2013).

Participants reiterated the significance of not only wanting the authorities to listen to their concerns but also to understand their cultural values and beliefs as part of enhancing their integration.

*We don't have more options because we are in a different society, much different from ours or something that we used to know, but it is good for the authorities to understand our culture and how the changes are affecting families and community. If we have rights as citizens of this country, then we will appreciate it if the authorities lend their listening ears to our concerns and views about how we may best be supported to integrate well into our new society (Women's Focus Group, Participant 2).*

Another participant was clearly frustrated as he spoke of not being able to perform his parental duties such as disciplining children as part of his role as head of his family.

*This is not working for me. If I yell at my children, they will say, "Dad, why are you yelling at us?" If I tell them to do their homework, they may say, "We don't want to!" It seems that children are not listening to their parents. Culturally, if a child doesn't listen, a parent can use reasonable force to make the child comply... It seems like I am only begging my children to comply with what I am telling them. They have the upper hand here rather than I do as their parent. If I use reasonable force, they will report to school, "Our father is forcing us." This (lenient parenting approach) may be working for Australian kids since it has been part of one generation after another - our children have become subject to these changes (Participant 6 - male).*

These challenges for the South Sudanese, as for many other new migrants, are connected with the acculturation issues. As discussed in Chapter 3, acculturation is one of the leading stressors for many new migrants as they struggle to adjust to their new environment. Children pick up their new language and culture quickly at school when they start interacting with their peers from the host community, but their parents at home still hold onto their cultures of origin (Richman, 1998, Birman et al., 2014). These transitional changes are exacerbated when parents continue to embrace their traditional

culture, with a strong belief that they do not want to see their children leaving the original culture (Fisher, 2007). This creates intergenerational conflicts as new migrant adolescents struggle to negotiate a workable synthesis between their original and new cultures. For instance, acculturative pressures arise within the family after moving to a new country where young migrants experience more rapid acculturation than their parents as they are also faced with conflicting values and attitudes that generate disparities between the original and current cultures, thus putting them at odds with parents (Deng, 2012, Berry et al., 2006, Khawaja and Milner, 2012). Research has repeatedly indicated that many refugee families are not supported enough or not prepared enough to deal with the daily tasks that most in the host communities are familiar with and that they do not have adequate resources to deal with their settlement challenges (Dunlavy, 2010, Renzaho et al., 2011). South Sudanese find the laws in their new country regarding child discipline different from those in their country of origin. Consequently, many parents are confused and feel powerless, and do not know what to do when their children who have learned about their new rights do not obey their parents as their culture demands.

The next section focuses on the challenges of transitioning into a new social and cultural environment, which many South Sudanese parents perceive as having contributed to their children's lack of respect towards them and community elders, contrary to their traditional cultural principles.

### **6.3 Transition into a new social and cultural environment**

The South Sudanese parenting traditions centre on taking moral care of children, which includes a high expectation that they should be respectful to their parents and elders. This is on top of expecting them to become successful and positive future leaders. Kwak (2003) stated that the universal developmental aspect of family dynamics is among the sources of intergenerational disagreements and conflict between parents and children. The transition into a new social and cultural setting has led some young South Sudanese to strive for their freedom and independence, which their parents view as a lack of respect toward them and community elders. Mostly, in the pursuit of psychological and behavioural independence, adolescents start to seek their self-concept and autonomous

identities (Kwak, 2003). Berry (1997) described these developmental and adaptation challenges as changes that take place in individuals or groups in response to environmental demands, which occur upon settling into the new environment and which could be, for a short or an extended period, mainly negative or disruptive. Since coming to Australia, most parents see their children departing from their cultural values, leaving many parents in shock and blaming their new liberty, which they believe has influenced their children's behaviour.

*A child cannot do whatever she/he likes. Children show respect to not only their parents but every adult. Any adult can discipline anybody's child if found misbehaving on the streets or anywhere. A child does not have the right to say to an adult, "You are not my parent," as an excuse for not listening to that adult. We were taught all these values while growing up. The culture here in Australia is totally different. This is because teenagers behave like adults and do not listen to those who are older. They can even swear at adults. This is really shocking for us because, in our culture, young people do not swear at any adult whatsoever. We are not sure why children behave like this. In our culture, adults are still maintaining respect, but some of our children who are growing up, especially those who were born here, show no respect toward their parents or other adults. As parents, it has become very hard for us to understand ... We are so distressed because of this - we praise God and hope that this might change. We don't know what our children are taught at school as they started misbehaving. We want to find out what brings these changes of behaviours and attitudes of our children (Women's Focus Group, Participant 1).*

As discussed in this and subsequent chapters, South Sudanese participants lack trust in their children's schools, which are the first point of contact with their new culture as parents consistently spoke of bad influence their children may be picking up. As emphasised by the above participant, some parents suspected that whatever their children may be taught at school might be contributing to their bad attitudes and lack of respect for parents and other adults. A recent survey conducted by Monash University in 2016 on "our attitudes to race, religion and culture" has revealed that many South Sudanese participants' trust in Australian institutions, particularly the police, was very low at only 26%, compared to the wider all-Australian response, for whom trust for

police was 81%. (Flitton, 2016). As discussed in this and the previous chapter, South Sudanese expect their children to listen, obey and respect their parents and elders. However, the new environmental demands contradict these expectations. As Hebbani (2012) stated, 'Coming to a new culture with rigid and traditional gender roles, former refugees often face acculturation challenges due to resistance from within their family and sometimes exclusion from the host community.' Young South Sudanese are trying to acculturate and adapt to their new social and cultural environment, an environment which conflicts with their parents' traditional expectations, beliefs and values. The following comments illustrate the frustrations some participants shared as they blamed their children for not making good use of their new freedoms and opportunities.

*In Australia, the security, health and education are good. There are many good things in this country, but some of our children are only picking up bad things from the good ones, for example, drinking and so forth. Education here is really good, although some of our children are not; many misuse these opportunities. Though Australia is a free country, we thought freedom comes with responsibilities (Men's Focus Group, Participant 5).*

The understanding that freedom must come with responsibilities is a concept shared by many cultures, and for South Sudanese it also involves accountabilities: parents are held accountable for their children's good and bad behaviours within the community. Therefore, each parent tries to teach their positive attitudes and behaviours as part of protecting their own integrity within the society, as discussed in Chapter 5. Lewig et al.'s (2010) study indicated that new migrants were concerned and worried about their children's safety and well-being as a consequence of giving them too much independence and about the impact it would have on their relationships with parents and the community as they drifted away from parental guidance. In this study, some participants also emphasised their expectations on their children in accordance with their African cultures. In many African and other communal cultures, children are expected to look after their parents when they get old (Mancini and Blieszner, 1989, Zhang and Goza, 2006). Such an expectation is embedded in South Sudanese culture, and those who do not meet this obligation are often disowned by the community. Previous research also signalled that shifting from a communal, hierarchical and patriarchal to an individualistic and egalitarian society can, due to lack of familiarity

with the new setting, cause a major impact on the families and culture of the new settlers (Khawaja and Milner, 2012). These differences between original and new cultures create barriers to understanding the requirements of the new environment as both parents and children struggle with acculturation stress. Parents blame the authorities concerned or the new system for encouraging their children's independence, which they believe has given their children leverage to be noncompliant and lacking in respect toward their parents and elders.

#### 6.4 Parents versus children on transitional power structures: intergenerational conflict

As in many other cultures, South Sudanese parents are held accountable for their children's behaviour, whether good or bad. However, some participants argue that a handful of their children become noncompliant when they regularly refuse to help their parents with household chores. This is against their tradition, in which children are allocated tasks in the family according to their gender roles. As already mentioned, some young people persistently argue with their parents, leaving parent-child relations sour and full of tension. There are various causes for these arguments - concerns around autonomy and freedom, household chores, selection of appropriate friends, homework and caring for younger siblings (McMichael et al. 2011). Even then, the developmental-related transition of the young people into their early years of adolescence and adulthood fails to explain every tension adequately. Young people's descriptions of family challenges or difficulties emphasised the influence of various resettlement difficulties and continual changes within families as well as culture-related adaptation (McMichael et al., 2011, Deng and Pienaar, 2011, Deng and Marlowe, 2013). Parents believe that children's compliance, and the expectation that they listen to their parents, is imperative and that being assigned tasks and given certain opportunities according to their gender and age is a significant part of learning.

*Our children refuse to help their parents at home. In South Sudan, helping your parents is part of children's learning - how will they learn if they do not listen to or learn from their parents? (Women's Focus Group, Participant 6)*

Moreover South Sudanese believe that their children are noncompliant because they are given too much freedom by the authorities, and that these freedoms should have come with some limits since children are supposed to be given instructions in order to have a better, prosperous future. Because of these changes in their children's attitudes, many parents are deeply fearful that their children might not be able to fulfil their cultural obligations since they are getting more and more disconnected from their parents and the community.

*Our children used to have freedom but with limits; this is contrary to here, where they are encouraged by the new culture and system to move out of their parents' home and do whatever they desire. Here, when a child reaches the age of 18, he/she is sent a letter, encouraging him/her to leave home. In our culture, children stay with their parents until they get married and start their own families. Even so, they may choose to stay close to their parents for mentoring and to look after one another. Encouraging children to leave home equates to a deliberate break-up of families (Men's Focus Group, Participant 2).*

The above participant comments regarding children sent letters after they reached 18 years of age is regarding government housing in which when children reach that age are considered as adults and started to have separate financial support from Centrelink and therefore, required to either pay rent or moves out of the house. Based on the experiences of most South Sudanese with their children, most of these young people listen to and respect their parents for their first few years, as they are still dependent on them for emotional and practical support. However, as they reach about five years following arrival and learn more about their new environment and its freedom and rights, they start to oppose some of the traditional values, which their parents still hold to. As a consequence, parents try to utilise their power, but since they cannot use physical discipline, which they were familiar with, they feel powerless, and the trust between parents and their children starts to wane because of the manifest efforts by the parents to micromanage their children's behaviour, friendships, and other activities. Parents are always anxious about what may happen to their children when they are away from home (McMichael et al. 2011). Many are frustrated that their children are given more freedom, which has led to some juvenile and rebellious behaviour, not only toward their parents and elders but also towards the police and others.

*There are a lot of changes and differences in our parenting styles. This is because, in South Sudan, we use to discipline our children physically, but that is not allowed in Australia. Here, if you discipline a child physically, then you will get into trouble with the police and Child Protection Service. This is a huge difference, and for that reason our children do not respect what we tell them as they tell us, 'This is Australia and not South Sudan,' which means they are telling their parents that the children can't be forced to do what the parents want. So, we try to reconcile our traditional parenting styles with Australian ones as we found that our way alone won't work here - we only tell our children about what is good or not for them. This is soft parenting (**Participant 9 - female**).*

The transitional experiences have caused major tensions between parents and their children. The results of this study echo previous studies which pointed out that migration causes a process of identity transformation that leads to changes in previous relationships in order to find a way for developing in a new environment (Waters, 1999, Berry et al., 2006). Berry et al. (2006) discussed this using four distinctive acculturation profiles: integration (oriented toward both original heritage and the new national culture), ethnic (oriented toward original culture only), national (oriented toward the new national culture only), and diffuse (orientation is ambivalent or marginalised). Young people are under enormous pressure to fit into their new culture as they do not want to be regarded as different. According to Waters (1999), this process of identity transformation normally occurs within the new social structure that migrants find themselves in, and includes many of the factors that sociology looks upon as correlated - education, availability of capital resources, cultural and racial attitudes. As part of their collectivist culture, South Sudanese see the task of looking after children as a collective responsibility. The following demonstrates concerns about not sharing their challenges as parents as well as some thoughts about child discipline and community stigmatisation.

*Here, if you are a father and another person tells you that your child is doing something bad, you will get upset. I really pitied that, because it is like saying, "You look after your kids, and I will look after mine." The children may be misbehaving, and they are called South Sudanese-Australian, and the*

*community gets the blame for their behaviour. If a child does something wrong, we get blamed for it, which is sad, and again that comes to the way this society is, a closed society (Participant 1 - male).*

Those who have children feel they have enough to do saving for their retirement. There are no rest homes or retirement villages in South Sudan. Therefore it is the responsibility and obligation for children, relatives and community members to look after their parents and elderly people. Those who fail to look after their aged parents are often disowned and shamed by their tribe, clan and society. Caring and looking after one another as well as parenting and child discipline is considered to be a duty of everyone in the community, but this is another communal concept challenged by the new environment.

#### 6.5 Transition into new parenting: childrearing and disciplining as a collective practice

The following comments describe the difficulties of applying the former South Sudanese collective disciplinary culture in Australia.

*The good thing about our traditional parenting is that any adult who found a child misbehaving (on the street) will discipline that child, and their parent will not say anything. This contrasts with the way it is in Australia, where you are not allowed to discipline somebody else's child as you may be told that it is none of your business. This was done positively in our culture because anything a child does without their parent is corrected by any adult (Participant 5 - female).*

South Sudanese struggle to come to terms with the individualistic style of raising children in Australia, where the task of disciplining children is left to individual parents and caregivers. Parents emphasised that looking after, and disciplining, children is part of the responsibilities that involve relatives and community members in childrearing. Since parenting is seen as a collective responsibility, many South Sudanese, particularly from cattle-rearing communities, used to send their children to cattle camps where they were exposed to living without their immediate parents and were disciplined by the

adults under whose care they were placed and who were responsible for them *in loco parentis*.

*Bringing up children the South Sudanese way is different. Looking after the child from birth to adulthood is the work of everybody in the community. My child is yours and yours is mine. I can't see any child being harmed by something or somebody and stand back and say that child is not mine. The way of disciplining is, if my child is naughty, my aunt, uncle or whoever can step in and discipline him/her. Back home, kids are sent to where they learn discipline such as a cattle camp - the disciplining can be quite rough compared to home, but this is where they learn some basic discipline as they can also learn from their peers. The other way also is to send them to an aunt's or uncle's home where they may learn from them (Men and Women's Focus Group, Participant 2).*

The concept of parenting as a collective responsibility, something widely practiced in a collectivist society where relatives and neighbours live close to one another, has been seriously challenged by the rule of law in their new environment. South Sudanese families have witnessed incredible differences in Australian parenting practices compared to those in South Sudan.

*Part of African tradition is that children go out and play around all day, climbing trees and exploring their world by themselves until they come home tired, but here, neighbours do not even know one another, and the children do not play outside by themselves - the only way (for them to socialise outside) is for parents to take them to parks or movies. This is new for us, and parents need to learn and adapt to these changes so their children can feel a bit equal to other Australian children (Participant 6 - male).*

Although some parents are confused about what parenting and disciplining might be applicable or acceptable in their new environment, some are also calling for more discussion on how to find alternatives to their traditional physical disciplining, which is all they knew. The debate on whether smacking and spanking are harmful is still controversial around the world today (Kazdin and Benjet, 2003), and South Sudanese come from a culture where such practices are allowed. Kazdin and Benjet pointed out

that whether to spank children or not is controversial among lay and professional people alike: the use of spanking as a disciplinary technique is prevalent. The following comments extended this debate.

*From a theoretical viewpoint, when you hear people talking about, you know disciplining is wrong - sometimes you can smack or don't smack [referring to discussions within the society] this is causing confusion for parents. My fear or the problem is, you can hardly see whether these people that are talking about smacking are actually doing it in their houses or not. You know, people talk or say smacking a child is an abuse, but the question is, how those people live in their own houses, do they really practice what they say in public or is this talk only tailored towards others? I questioned that; most or some Sudanese also question it - is this only tailored toward other people from other cultural backgrounds, because they are 'presumed' to be hostile to their children, or it is embedded in everybody's house? (**Participant 1 - male**).*

As stated by these participants, the lack of trust towards legal institutions is sometimes created by the lack of communications with the new settlers about the duties and responsibilities of the statutory institutions such as child protection, police and other services. Many South Sudanese parents spoke of having to find out that they are not allowed to smack their children as smacking is equated with corporal punishment, which is considered by some parents from collectivist cultures as an important component of disciplining children. Straus (2000) defined corporal punishment as the use of physical force with an intention of causing a child to experience pain, but not to injure, for correcting or control of the child's behaviours. This includes spanking on the buttocks and slapping a child's hands. Corporal punishment often has some consequences in children's lives, and an American finding indicated that children who experience corporal punishment risk developing major social and psychological problems such as physical violence and depression (Straus, 2000). South Sudanese parents emphasised the significance of disciplining their children with love, but also remaining an appropriate guardian with the focus on nurturing a positive next generation, without being pressured or made to fear the law, as long they are doing the right thing for their children. Some suggested that not to discipline their children is equal to letting the children do whatever they like, even allowing them to break the law.

As discussed in Chapter 5, the word ‘discipline’ according to South Sudanese means making sure that children listen to their parents and other adults through obeying their commands. Since physical disciplining is not allowed in their new environment, some parents felt disempowered, while others insisted on the right to continue to discipline their children using non-physical disciplinary actions such as restraining them or withdrawing their desired activities. Many South Sudanese went through many challenges with their children, yet they persevered and continued to make sacrifices for them, more so than Australian parents who appear to have access to a better welfare system in which families are supported. In South Sudan or in the countries of refuge and transit, there is no welfare system and parents have to provide for their children, and the examples given below by this participant show that they care for their children and the future.

*I think that is really misleading - I feel very strongly that even if it means somebody is taking me to court. I will stand my ground to defend myself strongly on that. If you look at the circumstances, South Sudanese went through a very difficult life, even though they go without food, I never saw a South Sudanese parent killing or throwing away his/her kids because they don't have food or whatever - they would even sacrifice themselves whatever way they can for the sake of their children. To say that, somebody is going hard on his/her kids, I think that's a lie. I am not saying that South Sudanese cultures are perfectly right; there are some parts of the culture that need to be challenged, no doubt about that, but as far as raising kids are concerned I personally believe that South Sudanese always try their best to look after their children with love: in telling their children not to do wrong things, they do it with love, not with hatred or dislike of them (**Participant 1 - male**).*

All South Sudanese parenting has a similar goal of nurturing and looking after children with hopes of seeing them grow to be productive beings. However, parental values differ as some South Sudanese did not have much parenting experience while in South Sudan and sometimes had to try to craft their new parenting styles from what they remembered and what they have learned during their flight and following their arrival in Australia. Australian parenting practices are different from South Sudan, and many South Sudanese consider the former to be a ‘soft approach’, verbal without getting

physical, in which parents only talk to their children and compromise at certain levels. Many see parenting within a bigger framework, as culturally it includes other members of the family and community who normally help to raise children. These transitional challenges are also impacting on South Sudanese traditional customary laws, and on marital and gender roles within the family, and these are the next points for discussion.

## 6.6 Transition in traditional customary laws, marital and gender roles

As discussed in Chapter 5 in relation to traditional parenting practices, South Sudanese have structured customary laws and gender roles as well as ways to manage domestic and marital problems within the family and at a community level. Customary law refers to a body of traditions, culture, social conventions and rules and, through its long usage and widespread acceptance, it is used as part of governing in traditional African societies (Deng, 2009, Juuk, 2013). Culturally, it is sometimes considered morally wrong to disclose marital issues to outsiders. In consequence, many South Sudanese women endure domestic violence, which outsiders do not know about, and divorce is almost taboo (Deng, 2009, Driscoll et al., 2007, Deng and Marlowe, 2013). Typically, if the problems persist within the family, they are often referred to the elders who try to resolve them in the interests of the children. As discussed in the previous chapter, in the rare case when divorce occurs, children are left with their father who has permission to remarry and the new wife takes over their upbringing. In the case of death of the father, a family member assumes that role until the firstborn (or a son) reaches adulthood to take up those obligations. A widower is allowed to remarry, but a widow is only allowed to remarry within the immediate family of the deceased husband, especially if she is still young and wants to bear more children after her husband's death. These traditional norms, roles and responsibilities are changing rapidly as they are being challenged by the new culture, in which a widow can remarry a man of her choice without being pressured to remarry within the family. The transition has led to husbands making some changes in their traditional roles so that they help with the household chores, or a wife becoming head of her family and a breadwinner. All these changes are being received by South Sudanese in the diaspora with mixed feelings.

*Here, a husband may stay at home, or both parents may work to earn a living. Some children are also confused, especially when husbands and wives or partners start to have some misunderstandings between them. It was very rare back in Africa for husband and wife to separate because the older women can supervise or guide the younger women or parents and their children (Women's Focus Group, Participant 3).*

Some South Sudanese stressed that most of their confusion resulted from having found it hard to understand their new environment and permitted parenting styles, and that has led to domestic problems. South Sudanese come from a society where there is limited government intervention in marital and domestic issues as these are often addressed by family members and community elders. Most men, in particular, find it confronting and often confusing, and question the system's approach; particularly why Australian law gives government officials powers to intervene in minor marital and family relationship issues (Muchoki, 2014).

*The new system has been confusing not only for our children but their parents (husbands/wives or partners) as they also ended up having many problems among themselves as a result. It is hard to apply any parenting style that we were used to as some are not compatible with the laws of our new country. For instance, if we try to use the Australian styles, we find some strange and very unfamiliar stuff in it, or we do not apply it well either (Participant 8 - female).*

New settlers' unfamiliarity with their new system, and primarily the legislative aspects of this system, was perceived to have made it hard to reconcile this with the cultural beliefs and values that they brought with them. For this reason, settlement support services need to engage new, emerging communities, which include the South Sudanese, so as to understand their traditional values and beliefs, and to provide psycho-education in understanding the new environment's laws, particularly those concerning family, child discipline and parenting practices (Deng and Marlowe, 2013, Marlowe et al., 2014).

Participants also explained other changes from their customary laws, mostly about how marital and other domestic issues were resolved in South Sudan. They also acknowledged the implications for traditional marriages (discussed in Chapter 5), which

often involve a return of dowry in the event of divorce. This is because most South Sudanese marriages, whether they take place in South Sudan or Australia, have to be blessed by some older relatives, and mostly the dowry is paid to the family of the woman back home in the form of cows, other domestic animals and materials.

*Back in South Sudan, a man has to pay a dowry. Therefore, any separation is very complicated as it involves both families. In the unlikely event of divorce, the dowry is always returned to the family of the man. In contrast, in Australia, marriage is an agreement between a man and a woman, and if they decide to separate, they could just go to their separate ways (Participant 7, male).*

In South Sudan, sometimes parents or relatives can choose a wife for their sons and vice versa (F. Deng, 2009), but South Sudanese children in Australia do not adhere to these cultural procedures any more. This has caused concern among the older generation and has exacerbated tensions between them and young people. Participants related that their children are marrying bad husbands or wives. To prevent unapproved marriages, many South Sudanese parents expect their children to remain at home before marriage, even after they become adults. The following comments demonstrate some parents' concerns regarding their children's refusal to adhere to their traditional values, where parents can say who their children will marry and what they will study.

*You know back home, for example, if your child is in school, and you want him/her to be a teacher, you say, "I want you to study to be a teacher," but it is different here. Back home, parents can even choose wives for their sons or husbands for their daughters. I think these are the main differences. Parenting here is totally different. Sometimes I feel like we are a lost generation because we are not going to fit into our original culture or the Australian culture (Participant 11 - male).*

According to South Sudanese culture, young women are not allowed to have boyfriends outside marriage since suitors are expected to approach their parents and relatives and, only if accepted, the bride-price is discussed, fixed and the marriage ritual takes place (Deng, 2009, Sanders, 2002). In Australia, young women may date for years before they get married as they are allowed to choose their boyfriends and future husbands. South Sudanese-Australians find it hard to accept the idea of allowing their daughters to date

or choose boyfriends and future partners as they see fit without any input from their parents and relatives.

*Young people, particularly girls, are ending up having boy/girlfriends while still very young. This was unacceptable in our culture (Women's Focus Group, Participant 5).*

Since coming to Australia, these changes have created many problems between parents and their children. Traditionally, young women are expected to marry when they reach 16 years of age. They are also considered sources of wealth as the groom gives the family of his wife a dowry. In South Sudan, young women sometimes marry as young as 14, although this might be changing as, since independence in 2011, South Sudan enacted laws that banned child marriage. However these laws are difficult to enforce in rural areas, particularly amongst those who have not been sufficiently educated to understand that change. This is in sharp contrast to Australia, where teenagers are not allowed by law to get married until they turn 16 year of age. Moreover, since being exposed to their new culture, many young South Sudanese women have decided to embrace their new liberty as part of their adaptation and assimilation into their new environment. As already stated, this causes tensions and stress within the family, especially for their parents. Boys are also subject to the same controls and expectations about who they should have as friends by their parents, who feel that their sons' future wives should be subject to their parents' approval as well.

The last part of this chapter explores hindrances, such as racism, discrimination and bullying, which make transition and integration harder.

## 6.7 Transitional hindrances: racism, discrimination and bullying

As a contributing factor to their children's behaviour, some participants believe that their children are being picked on and bullied on a daily basis at school and in other public places because of their skin colour. Shakespeare, Finch and Wickham (2012) identified a number of hindrances such as racism and racial discrimination, employment difficulties and inadequate or inappropriate assistance, which made the new settlers' transition and life harder in their new setting. Wren (2001) described racism as

stemming from 'race', which signifies the pseudo-scientific division of all humans into distinct categories based on skin colour, most having associated character traits, and it is belief in the inherent inferiority of particular racial groups, which may sometime be grounded in religion and perceived cultural superiority. Being picked on because of being different is one of the issues encountered by many South Sudanese and other new settlers (Deng and Marlowe, 2013) and this aggravates their settlement challenges. Young people who attend school are the first to experience being picked on.

*One of the good things here is education, although there is systematic racism sometimes. Although it is said that everybody is equal here in Australia, there are some people within the system who do not treat our children the same way as other Australian children are treated. Our children suffered bullying. Some teachers have bad assumptions about our children as they consider them to be from violent backgrounds. The racism our children face at school sometimes leads them to drop out or end up fighting their bullies and then being labelled as bad children, or they get expelled. We don't know what the future holds for some of our children, as some are ending up on the streets (**Participant 7 - male**).*

Another participant described what her children were reporting to her about name-calling and also gave an example of a young South Sudanese who was picked on in the train.

*Sometimes there is a lot of name-calling toward our children and us, simply because of our skin colour. For example, a racist guy went further on the train and told a young South Sudanese, "You black people will fail like your Aboriginal brothers" (**Women's Focus Group, Participant 10**).*

Parents spoke of things their children were telling them about racial remarks toward them such as, 'Go back to where you came from', simply because they were perceived to be different because of their physical features (skin colour), accent or not sounding like one of them (the abusers). Dunn et al. (2004, p.409) argued that those who believe in racial hierarchy and separatism are in the minority and largely the same people who self-identify as being prejudiced, while cultural intolerance, denial of Anglo privilege and narrow constructions of nationhood have a much stronger hold. The authors went on to state that the narrow understandings of what constitutes a nation are in conflict

with equally widely-held liberal disposition toward cultural diversity and dynamism. Many South Sudanese are worried about their children's safety through fear of them being picked on and bullied a justifiable fear as they are abused daily by other children, and even by adults, because of their skin colour. As a consequence, parents reported that they were sometimes asked by their children why they were different. Being told to 'go back to where they come from' prompted some children to search for their identity by asking their parents these questions, and the parents struggle to answer.

Participants believe that bullying and racism toward their children were not only being perpetrated by average citizens but also by some in authority, such as the police, who often target them because of their skin colour. A few years ago, there were reports of Victoria Police stereotyping and stopping African youths without any justification, and a formal policy and practice commitment by Victorian Police was undertaken beginning in 2014 to reform both education and community field practices in response to these reports (Grossman et al., 2013, Victoria-Police, 2014). There are myriad negative media reports about encounters between African youths and police. Because of the power of the mass media, this has portrayed African youth, particularly the South Sudanese, negatively. Many studies have echoed these concerns from the parents (White, 2009, Grossman and Sharples, 2010, Simons, 2008).

*The police sometimes target our young people because of their skin colour. As a result they become even more violent toward the police, particularly when the police stop them, and some will resort to fight (resisting) as they lose their trust and respect for the police due to [being] unnecessarily stopped by them. Some of our children have become very wild because of mistreatments. Whenever our people are seen together in big numbers, the police always become suspicious or suspect them of gang-related activities, which is just based on an assumption only. It is part of our culture to congregate and socialise together (**Participant 7 - male**).*

There are possible clashes in the areas where large numbers congregate. However, these gatherings are gradually changing since the South Sudanese now know (after being in Australia for many years) that these gatherings are regarded with suspicious by the police and other members of the wider community, who have never witnessed such congregations. Parents are also concerned that their children suffer discrimination in

school. This causes much distress and is a substantial contributor to young people's negative and challenging behaviour toward their parents and authorities. Some participants reported that, although Australia is a multicultural society, some people regard themselves as being more Australian than others, and such intolerance is hindering transition or integration into their new setting. Some participants believe the service providers, and probably the wider Australian society as well, know little about them and their culture or cultural values. For that reason, they are being judged based on that sparse knowledge, without being able to share the many positive aspects of their culture. If others know more about the positive things in their culture, that might help reduce the stigma. These issues arising from the transition process highlight the need for cultural exchanges and awareness as well as for psycho-education, not only for new settlers but also for the host community and the authorities concerned, to make their integration work better and to minimise misunderstanding and suspicions on both sides.

## Conclusion

This chapter has provided an overview of South Sudanese parents' transitional experiences, particularly as they affect their parenting practices, beliefs and attitudes since settling in Australia. Its main emphasis was to understand the transitional challenges related to changes within families. Obviously, understanding parenting issues is multifaceted, especially when it concerns new migrants who have come from a collectivist to an individualistic culture where they are confronted by different social realities (Ochocka and Janzen, 2008).

Coming to a new country and culture can be quite exciting before arrival and during the first few months of settling in, but after a while new settlers find it challenging in terms of adjusting to their new setting. Barry and Hallett (2004) stated that some of these challenges relate to the realities and difficulties associated with acculturation, which connects to parenting issues when different perspectives on childrearing are manifested and experienced by the new migrants. These difficulties may include language barriers, traumatic experiences, different cultural perspectives and a lack of traditional family supports (Barry and Hallett, 1998).

The transitional challenges include cultural shock, anxiety and confusion as the new settlers find many of their traditional beliefs and values unrecognised and sometimes in conflict with the laws of their new country. These challenges are often worsened by the loss of social structure and lack of support around them as they deal with other settlement issues, and this often leads to the new settlers blaming their new culture for having an adverse influence on their children.

South Sudanese parents are anxious about these transitional changes: not only about their children's future, which is paramount for all of them, but also about the loss of their status and cultural values as they find most of their taken-for-granted parenting and disciplining practices, particularly the use of physical discipline, incompatible with their new country's laws. The parents find it confronting as they feel deprived of what they knew as ways to raise their children. These anxieties are compounded by changes in gender roles and role-reversal, particularly for men who were used to being heads of the household and breadwinners for their families but who find themselves no longer able to fulfil those roles and to exercise their powers. The new reality challenges these traditional power structures which often become redundant at some point.

South Sudanese came from a communal culture where collective disciplining of children is considered part of children's upbringing and nurturing for a better future. However, the absence of support in the transitional process in their new environment has made it hard for parents as some became the sole caregivers for their children without much external support. They spoke of being left to figure out for themselves how to adapt to the new laws and settings without any guidance to help them understand the new environment's requirements and expectations. Some expect the authorities concerned to open more dialogue with them about their challenges and how they may be supported in replacing some of their traditional parenting practices, particularly those relating to child discipline, with other strategies that will still be effective in shaping children's positive behaviours. These suggestions are significant and worth considering by the authorities: part of helping the new migrants must include promoting positive parenting practices in the new settler communities to enhance the consistency and knowledge about effective non-physical disciplinary practice (Deng and Pienaar, 2011). For instance, parents need help to feel confident about managing their children's behaviour through setting limits and boundaries as an integral part of nurturing parent-

child relationships as one way of replacing physical disciplining (Deng and Pienaar, 2011; Deng and Marlowe, 2013). Positive parenting is about positive discipline, and a gentle guidance aimed at keeping the children positive. According to Sanders (1999, 2012), the author of the 'Triple P-Positive Parenting Program', positive parenting is a parenting and family support designed to prevent and treat behavioural and emotional problems in children and teenagers. In other words, the program has multilevel, prevention-oriented parenting and family support strategies aimed at preventing behavioural, emotional and developmental problems in children through enhancing the knowledge, skills and confidence of parents (Sanders, 1999, Morawska et al., 2012). According to Sanders (1999), 'Triple P' incorporated different levels of intervention on a tiered continuum to increase strength for parents, universal parent information strategy. It provides parents with better access to useful information about parenting through coordinated media and promotional campaigns using print and electronic media, parenting sheets and videotapes that demonstrate specific parenting strategies.

The changes in customary laws, marital practice and gender roles among South Sudanese in the diaspora are adding to the challenges of settlement. Participants spoke of family breakdown due to these challenges and reported a high rate of marital separations. As discussed in Chapter 5, divorces is rare in South Sudan since marriage involves the clan/community and if any problem arises, they try to resolve it in the interests of the children and family reputation. Parents spoke of their children leaving home and deciding to marry whomever they choose without parental or relative consent as was the tradition. Having highlighted South Sudanese transitional challenges, the next chapter explores the impact of these challenges on South Sudanese families, their community and their parenting practices in Australia.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### The impacts of parental changes within South Sudanese families and community

#### Introduction

This chapter builds upon the previous chapters which looked at the concerns and the impacts from the challenges that the South Sudanese face as a result of changes forced upon their traditional parenting practices while they struggle to adjust to their new environment. It underlines parents' concerns about children losing their culture and their lack of respect toward parents and other adults.

These changes have had profound impacts on South Sudanese parents. They report a high level of distress and anxiety as well as powerlessness, as they believe that they are neither listened to nor acknowledged by the authorities who, they believe, listen only to their children. This chapter explores participants' apprehensions in relation to their children's freedom and independence, which many parents believe have encouraged their young ones to seek more liberty, to leave home and to abandon their culture, parents and schools altogether. As with other collective cultures, South Sudanese do not see children's independence as helpful for their future, and this often leads to major intergenerational conflicts between parents and their children.

The chapter considers the impact of role reversals within the family, of changes in gender roles and changes relating to cultural values and beliefs, all of which participants believe have led to social erosion and family breakdown. The changes in gender roles and power structures within the family, particularly in the areas of women's and children's rights, have led to some discontent among South Sudanese men as they report having lost their status and roles as heads of their families and breadwinners.

Traditional South Sudanese gender roles were discussed in Chapter 5. Contrariwise, women have expressed concerns about doing double labour within and outside the households and demanded that men get more involved, especially in raising their children. South Sudanese are finding it challenging to keep their traditional gender roles in Australia since there is a lack of extended family members to provide social and other

support. Again as discussed in Chapter 5, South Sudanese used to enjoy a greater network of support, particularly for parents or mothers, but this is unavailable in their new environment, especially for those who have no family in Australia.

This chapter explores the impacts resulting from lack of parenting support for some families, which has created a significant obstacle to their integration into the new environment. It underlines the lack of language support for parents, which is also compounding parenting challenges. The language barrier is one of the leading obstacles not just for communicating with mainstream society and prospective employers, but also within families. Some children are losing their native tongue at an alarming rate and this creates communication barriers between them and their parents who might have not learned sufficient English, which their children have acquired rapidly.

The final matter considered in this chapter is the impact of Child Protection Agency policies and other aspects of their new legal, social and cultural environment on traditional South Sudanese parenting practices. Typically, these issues are again complicated by language and cultural barriers, lack of social support and concern that some of their cultural values are not being recognised in their new setting. As with other new settlers in Australia, many South Sudanese found it hard and challenging to understand their new setting's demands, particularly those concerning Child Protection laws or policies about disciplining children, as discussed in Chapter 6. This is often aggravated by children's quickness in assimilating into their new social environment, which leaves their parents struggling to make sense of, and adjust to, their new setting, and this in turn often leads to their isolation within the host community (Lewig et al., 2010b, Deng and Pienaar, 2011).

The acculturation framework has been used to understand how to carry out health promotion and other activities for the public benefit, and also as a way of trying to make sense about how people subscribe to and retain cultural beliefs, attitudes, and values. The study of acculturation plays a significant role in understanding how the characters and attitudes of people from a given culture adjust to the presence or impact of another culture (Berry, 1997, Berry, 2003, Berry et al., 2006). However, the results from these studies of acculturation have also been criticised. For instance, Hunt et al. (2004, p.973) argued there are multiple misconceptions and errors in the central assumptions underlying the concepts of how acculturation is examined. They concluded that

acculturation as a variable in health research (and, by implication, in other arenas) may be based more on ethnic stereotyping than on objective representations of cultural differences.

### 7.1 The impact of changes in cultural values: listening and not being listened to

As discussed in the previous chapter, culture and tradition are intertwined with the people and their community as they refer to the way individuals make meaning of and how they perceive life and its challenges, including language and learned characters, as these both directly influence a given history or socioeconomic system (Copping et al., 2010). Krulfeld (1994) stated that cultural experience is a complex process involving loss and regeneration. The author argued that the process of adaptation is also a creative one of establishing a new culture and identities of exploration and experimentation. South Sudanese are going through cultural changes and loss, which Winkleman (1994) described as circumstances that provoke individual reactions and depend on a variety of factors, including previous experience of other cultures and cross-cultural adaptation, the difference in one's own and the host cultures as well as preparation and social support networks. The acculturation process may entail changes in traditional beliefs and adapting to new values. There has been a great impact on the original South Sudanese culture and beliefs as a result of the new social and cultural demands, and the new physical environment, and the attitudes and identity of individuals and families have also been affected. Many South Sudanese parents believe that most of their cultural values are unrecognised, although when they first arrived they were told that Australia was a multicultural society and that they were free to keep aspects of their cultural values. They realise that this was only as a matter of policy as it differs from their actual experiences. Some participants reiterated that authorities neither respect nor are interested in understanding their culture despite what is stated in the multicultural policy documents, and they blame the new system for family separations caused by interference from the authorities. These concerns have led to major disappointments and frustrations.

*When we first arrived here, we were told that Australia is a multicultural society, and that we can keep our cultures. How come then we are restricted*

*instead of allowing us to use some of our valuable parenting practices to avert these problems (parenting)? This is because authorities often interfere in our families and take our children away and after that, they get spoiled and then turn around and blame their parents and the community that they stripped of all the powers they have as their own children's legal guardians. The most frustrating thing is the fact that both sides are not listened to. For example, if a child or wife made a report of any kind of abuse against the husband/father, his side of the story is not taken on board, but only a child and woman's side is considered. In our culture, you listen to both sides. All of these contradict our culture and many families have been broken apart because of these. We are not against the laws, but some of our culture needs to be respected and considered as well so that the family doesn't end up breaking apart (**Men's Focus Group, Participant 7 - male**).*

Some South Sudanese parents blame these challenges - the loss of culture, unstable relationships and status within the family, issues with household discipline and control - on the changes caused by the new system. Some men see 'role reversal' within the family as a consequence of failure by the authorities to recognise their cultural values, since these changes create enormous confusion in families. Women too are blaming the system, and the men for being less involved in their children's upbringing. These concerns resonated with the studies by Khawaja et al. (2012) and Marlowe (2010b), in which South Sudanese men spoke of the impact of 'role reversal and powerlessness' as they have seen the women and children gain the upper hand as being the ones to whom the authorities listen most when it comes to family issues. Like many other new migrant families, South Sudanese-Australians experience low intra-family conflicts when they first arrive. These concerns and conflicts arise later and centre around changes in relationships, disciplinary practices, unplanned pregnancies, misuse of alcohol, dissonant values and parents' waning trust in their children, which results from a sense of powerlessness (McMichael et al., 2011, McMichael, 2012). South Sudanese parents believe these matters are out of their control and most believe that being unrecognised culturally is partly what has led to many of their children dropping out of school, as the children quote the law to intimidate parents about their rights and the likely consequences of their control over them. Participants revealed a deep sense of loss and helplessness due to the fear of intervention by the authorities in their family affairs.

*Parents are really concerned about their children's future wellbeing. For example, my neighbour the other day had her daughter, who was 16 years old, get picked up by her unknown boyfriend at night; she was caught leaving without even informing her parents until her mother heard the sound of a door and went to check what it was, but found out that her daughter was loading her luggage into her stranger boyfriend's car. The mother asked her where she was going at night, but she just jumped into the car and left. Her mother thought that her daughter was kidnapped and started crying and called the police who then contacted her daughter to find out where she was going without her parent's knowledge, but she told the police that she decided to move in with her boyfriend. The police said to the mother that they can't do anything since she was safe, although she was so young to leave home and stay with a boyfriend. You see where these frustrations are coming from; the authorities are not very helpful: they allow children to do whatever they like. Otherwise, how can a 16-year-old be allowed to move in with a boyfriend who her parents don't even know? Such laws have killed our community because children are not listening to their parents any more. You know; the issues are out of our hands due to the laws that our children keep quoting that they have right after they reach a certain age when they are allowed by law to do whatever they desire (Participant 16 - female).*

The above scenario illustrates many South Sudanese concerns: most are shocked that their children can leave home without parental consent. As discussed in Chapter 5, the traditional concept is that a boyfriend or girlfriend is not allowed outside marriage, and young women especially are not permitted to move out or stay with boyfriends. As a result of changes within their families, many South Sudanese are faced with conflicting beliefs and attitudes which create an imbalance between the original and later cultures, and they do not have the normative knowledge and skills within their new environment to manage these variations. Although South Sudanese have some alternative coping strategies, which are discussed in Chapter 8, most families are poorly equipped to handle the daily tasks that mainstream Australians are acquainted with. These difficulties are the reason for the parents' apprehension that their children are not going to inherit their cultural values and legacies. Most South Sudanese parents believe they are not being listened to, either by their own children or by the authorities concerned,

and suggest the latter need to recognise how it is impacting on them and their relationship with their children as well as to consider their concerns and opinions instead of only listening to their children.

*As parents, you bear your children so that they continue to represent your names when you pass on. Parents are really suffering in this country because in Africa, authorities can listen to parents' concerns since all they want from their children is to be successful in life. Here, a child is given freedom to the extent that they are even taken and given their own accommodation, and because they didn't learn basic responsibilities they end up drinking alcohol, taking drugs, fighting and committing other crimes. Most of these children have no future (Participant 17 - female).*

Participants' concerns regarding 'not being listened' to by the authorities and their children are one of the recurring themes in most of their comments and discussions. These competing values and the demands of the new environment need to be reconciled to create a conducive environment for better settlement and integration. Bornstein (2013) argued that it is imperative to learn more about the parenting and the culture of new settlers so that practitioners can effectively enhance parent and child development through strengthening families in diverse social settings. Bornstein went on to emphasise that such a process can help to identify some "best practices" on how to promote positive parenting and child development.

## 7.2 Impact of changes to traditional parenting in family unity and wellbeing

As discussed in the previous chapter, on arriving in Australia, many South Sudanese families face with instant changes within their families, and when they find it hard to adapt to the new culture and to hold onto their traditional cultural values the result can sometimes lead to isolation and marginalisation. The need to adapt to those changes is in addition to the parenting difficulties generally faced by mainstream Australian parents - health issues, socioeconomic stress, social isolation and children's behavioural challenges. Many South Sudanese and other refugee parents face extra pressures due to changes in family structure, language and cultural barriers, unfamiliarity with the new

system and cultural expectations (Lewig et al., 2010b). Some children adapt to the new culture quickly and start abandoning their original culture, but others are also confused and struggle between the original and new cultures (Berry et al., 2006, Khawaja and Milner, 2012). Since many South Sudanese parents try to preserve their cultural values, they expect their children to hold onto them as well, so their children's failure to do so trigger tensions and conflicts, and puts strains on the family as an entity. South Sudanese parents are concerned about the family breakdown because of these changes and challenges. Participants in this study believe that this family disintegration results from children's lack of respect to their parents and elders, lack of understanding of and respect for their cultural values by the authorities (government and other service providers), and the latter's influence on their children's behaviour.

*If you go hard on your own children you lose them, although you're fighting for their benefit, which they do not understand. When we try to discipline our kids, it is against the laws of this country, but when we do not discipline them they end on the streets and we get blamed for it. Children have to learn respect from their parents (at home) so they can respect others. The government needs to sit down with parents to understand South Sudanese cultures as well as work with them to find ways how to help these children. The laws are encouraging young people to do bad things, and they end up on the streets, giving the police a hard time. The community where these children come from becomes a topic in the media as they are being blamed for why their children are not following the rules, but that is because our children did not fit into their new way of life. Our tradition is considered abusive (here) while it was fine in our country of origin. I was brought up in that culture: here I am; I don't drink, smoke or cause problems on the streets because my parents brought me up with discipline and respect, which I want to pass on to my children just as our ancestors passed that to our parents and then to us (**Participant 6 - male**).*

These comments illustrate both concerns and suggestions shared by many South Sudanese parents in this study. They spoke of being caught between their traditional parenting practices and those of the new environment. As new settlers, South Sudanese are struggling to adjust their traditional parenting practices, and it is imperative that a right balance is found as to how to develop a strong new social and cultural identity

while incorporating the positive aspects of the new society into their parenting practices to strengthen healthy family relationships (Centre., 2000, Deng and Marlowe, 2013). This study confirmed the impact of changes, concerns, challenges and issues facing South Sudanese and other new settlers in their new environment. Losoncz (2015) found that many South Sudanese parents want to raise their children to become responsible and successful adults, but their traditional strategy for achieving such goals is challenged by the Australian cultural context. South Sudanese participants acknowledged Australian authorities' disapproval of some of their parenting values, which they believed to be shown through their intervention in family issues and the subsequent removal of children. However, this has often led to more mistrust of the authorities as parents see the role of Child Protection agencies as removing their children and breaking up the families (Losoncz, 2015).

*I have seen some worse scenarios among other South Sudanese families, where young people fall out with their parents, particularly children who went to school and picked up some wrong concepts about their rights and freedoms. Parents also try to discipline their children in a hard way and children end up taken by the government agencies, which keep them under their care. Because of these issues and misconceptions, some South Sudanese families have disintegrated. While under government's agencies' care, children lose their roots. Not only that, husbands and wives break up. Most of the children taken by the government agencies are not succeeding in their lives - academically or workwise (Participant 5 - female).*

The concerns highlighted by this participant and many others would justify further studies to substantiate whether the children taken by Child Protection based on an allegation (sometimes unsubstantiated) of abuse or neglect do better or worse after they were taken. Losoncz (2015) emphasised the significance of social institutions and authorities' responsibilities to provide a safe environment for children to grow up in. Instead, they appear to focus on one-way communication rules and implement often rigid protocols which prevent them from responding successfully to the needs of socially-disadvantaged refugee families navigating difficult cultural transitions (p.1). Many parents are anxious for their children's general wellbeing, and regard a high rate of truancy or drop-outs from school as indicating a lack of well-being (Losoncz, 2012).

Many are pessimistic about their children's future as they consider they have lost control over the children as a result of dynamic changes, especially in their behaviour.

*Of most concern is that children are not finishing school and not doing things the way we used to do in our culture in which we had control over them. If parents lose control over their children, then those children will not do well any more. Not all, but about 80% of children who leave home, are not doing very well at all compared to those who remain home with their parents (**Men and Women's Focus Group, Participant 2 - male**).*

Changes and unfamiliarity with the new system often causes profound anxiety or depression and can even bring to surface traumatic experiences. Many South Sudanese were exposed to numerous traumatic events, whether to an individuals' life or their families, as the reason for their relocation, and moving to a new country such as Australia with a different system, culture and parenting practices and laws can create additional psychological distress (Khawaja and Milner, 2012, Milner and Khawaja, 2010). The following comment sketches an intense sense of loss after feeling confronted by various challenges of resettling into a new environment.

*This environment has given us so much depression and anxieties because our children have changed, and they are not listening to us (parents). A child may go out without their parents' permission, so parents are constantly worried about what might happen to them out there (**Participant 18 - female**).*

These concerns about children's lack of respect toward parents, loss of control and their future prospects were constantly reiterated by almost every participant and are discussed throughout this thesis. The greatest concerns are about the abandonment of cultural values, about their future and about frustration toward the authorities who, parents believe, have given their children unlimited freedom and independence, which lead to family breakups.

### 7.3 Children's autonomy

South Sudanese parents not only fear erosion of their culture as a result of their children losing their cultural values. They are also concerned about their children missing the opportunity for a better future as they continue to misuse the freedom and independence offered by their new environment.

*Most of the children who are taken by the authorities are lost. You find only 1 of 10 children succeeding. Most have never had these opportunities or freedom in their lives before. After they are given such freedom, they don't use it so well for their benefit. It is a tragic loss to South Sudanese and Australian society: they will not contribute to this or their country of origin (Participant 5 - female).*

Participants were very articulate in voicing their concerns and suggestions about their parenting practices and the difficulties they are facing in holding onto some of their cultural values and encouraging their children to behave according to their traditions. However, some of these expectations contrast sharply with the demands and realities of the new environment for their children who are the ones more closely engaged in acculturation or cultural transformation, mostly at school, and who have to not only meet but conform to these changes and demands (Bornstein, 2012). Previous studies have also noticed that the new culture can be quite alien and a shock to anyone who had never come across it before, and the South Sudanese are witnessing elements of cultural shock due to the dynamic changes within the family (Winkelman, 1994). As shown in the previous section, participants spoke of being shocked by a culture that allows teenage girls to have boyfriends and sometimes get pregnant outside marriage while still young, to the detriment of their future (Deng and Pienaar, 2011, McMichael et al., 2011). Although women as young as 15 can be married in South Sudan (Deng, 2009), many participants reiterated that it was not a decision made by a teenager without their parents' consent. In South Sudan, most marriages have to be approved and blessed by parents and relatives of the couple. Many parents agreed that the opportunities for young women in South Sudan to attend school and obtain education were quite limited, at times non-existent, and that could have led to earlier marriages, but in Australia they believe their daughters have the opportunity to acquire a world-class education rather than rushing into early pregnancy.

*The impact is so great in the community. Young boys at the same age are also getting expelled from school because they are not concentrating at all on their studies because there is a lot of fun and distractions. Very young girls under the age of 16 are also getting pregnant, which is not allowed by the laws of this country, but it is happening a lot within the wider Australian community. This is happening in our community a lot more because our children misunderstand what having rights and freedom mean for them in this country. There are many teenage mothers - they dropped out of school or just drink and they have no future. This has affected our community so much (**Participant 16 - female**).*

Although the number of teenage pregnancies and early parenthood seems to be reducing, it is still quite prevalent globally, and the teenagers from new settler families are at greater risk as they are also still struggling with high levels of acculturation and intergeneration challenges. Teen pregnancy and early motherhood not only cause tensions in families and disrupt the teenagers' education but it also has negative economic, social and health impacts (McMichael et al., 2011). South Sudanese parents' concerns about their teenagers' health and future as a result of early pregnancy have been well acknowledged in previous research, which found that teen pregnancies were associated with hypertension in the mother, pre-term delivery, poor foetal growth and low birth weight and neonatal deaths (Skinner and Hickey, 2003, McMichael, 2012). The authorities may be as concerned as the parents about teenagers' behaviour, but participants expressed difficulties in understanding why the new culture has, from their point of view, challenged their parenting powers. Most believe their parenting skills were doubted by the authorities, despite them being parents and having successfully raised their children before coming to Australia.

*Bringing up children in this country has become quite challenging for us, not because we don't know how to look after our children or don't have experience, because if we don't know how to look after our children, we would not have brought them this far (Australia). The problem here is because of a new culture where we felt doubted that we can look after our children that well. My daughter has not been listening to me since she reached 15 years old. She only talks of what she learnt at school (**Women's Focus Group, Participant 7**).*

There was a consistent sense of powerlessness and hopelessness throughout the participants' comments, particularly from the older generation who believe they have lost control over their children. Most of these concerns are consistent with Mansouri et al.'s (2015) pilot study, *Intergenerational relations in newly-arrived communities in Victoria*. The study pointed out that culturally-insensitive interventions by service providers, such as police and Child Protection Services, were said to exacerbate the problem of preserving parental authority in the new cultural context. Participants in that study believed that child protection officers did not seem to listen to families or make an effort to work with them, but only engaged with the young people, which often 'drives a wedge' between them and their parents.

These issues lead to other major concerns as a result of changes in gender roles and power structures within the family, particularly, as some men see it, when considering women's and children's rights.

## 7.4 Women's and children's rights

### 7.4.1 Changes in power and financial structures

Like many other new migrants, South Sudanese undergo certain transformations to meet the demands of their new environment. The most significant part of these transformations is on their identity and culture. Going through gender, power and status changes within the family is a cause of domestic problems, particularly between husband and wife. Krulfeld (1994) stated that the alteration of access to resource allocations and new differential employment opportunities in a different situation sometimes foster changes in gender and statuses, and eventually in the gender model in migrant communities. Most changes are causing major strains, particularly around who manages and controls the finances in the household (Krulfeld, 1994). Traditionally, such responsibilities were held by men who were also heads of their family and the breadwinners, roles which have been subject to tremendous changes since migrating to Australia.

*Here, the financial system at home is in the hands of wives. We are picking up differing and conflicting cultures and systems. There are several issues on the*

*financial side between husbands and wives. Many are struggling with the differing cultures - the roles of a husband and wife are mixed up here (Participant 7 - male).*

As these comments illustrate, most men spoke of having lost status and powers as head of their families due to changes brought about by their relocation and new environment. Benesova (2004) found that Nuer men (of South Sudan) in the United States had more difficulties enforcing their desired pattern of household organisation because their authority over their wives was greatly diminished. This was because after moving to a new country, many migrant women discover some of their rights that they might have been denied in the original culture and which are opposed to their traditional culture, and men continue to contest them (Benesova, 2004). Participants in this study agreed that these challenges of transitioning into the new environment are enormous since their traditional family structure and culture do not translate easily to their new country (Gustafson and Iluebbey, 2013). These challenges and issues are based around who holds financial responsibility in the household.

*Here, there are many issues between husbands and wives because of financial management. For example, Centrelink normally puts the money for the children into a woman's account. The husband/partner thinks that she may be receiving a lot of money. Some women too may think that the money only belongs to them and their children. Therefore, they exclude their husbands/partners from the decision-making about its use and this can create conflict between them. However, the reason the money is put into a woman's account is because she is the one who knows what the children need. The problems also occurred if one of them decided to send money to his/her family members overseas without consulting the other. One of the partners may not agree with that, and this can cause tension within the family. Some men are not working, so they don't have any income, unlike back in South Sudan where they used to be quite productive through their farming and animal rearing. Many South Sudanese men find themselves not breadwinners for their families any more, and they become quite depressed because of that. Such strains may lead to some men abandoning their wives and children altogether. Children may also follow suit since their fathers*

*left. The family starts to disintegrate completely. The lack of male role models is a real problem for some confused young people (**Participant 8 - female**).*

Khawaja and Milner (2012) stated that many South Sudanese women described their men as trying to control women financially and socially as that was the tradition. Some men acknowledged that holding onto some of their traditional values that are incompatible with the new environment is causing conflict in their families, and this often leads to authorities intervening and ultimately to separation. However, others believed that giving up the most important parts of their responsibilities and culture may translate into loss of their identity as men.

*I think one of the problems is if we keep holding onto our traditions and say we don't want to change. The involvement of the government into the family's affairs is not part of our culture or the way it was done in our country of origin. This is the problem and saying this is the way it is done here; these are the challenges. The challenge is that, I leave my culture and identity as a man in my house, and if I am going to lose my identity as a husband and father, then that means I am losing my identity here (**Participant 11 - male**).*

There is no doubt that many South Sudanese men feel their role and responsibilities as head of their families have been challenged as they believe that part of their culture was something they were born and raised in, and that they inherited it from their parents and ancestors (Deng and Pienaar, 2011). Some female participants acknowledged that some of these transitional challenges are caused by cultural shock and confusion in families, but they also blamed men for using it as an excuse to abandon their partners and children.

*The new culture has been confusing for us all. This is because some husbands leave home and move out and claim that they have been kicked out by their wives, well, that is not always true because many men are not kicked out. Some men who left home normally did because of other issues or influence from other men. Such a circle continues to destroy many families. As women, we do not have that much power to kick out our husbands. If a husband does not beat his wife or causes no problems at home, I am sure the police will not just come and ask the man to leave his house. The problems are caused by these cultural*

*shocks, and the fact that some men do not want to listen to their wives or to have a civil discussion with them about the issues that brings misunderstanding or problems at home. Some men choose to beat their wives. Since it is unacceptable to fight in front of the children, the police will remove the man from the house. It is important to have a dialogue about issues that are affecting families rather than resorting to physical or emotional violence (Women's Focus Group, Participant 1 - female).*

The impact of these transitional challenges has led to many South Sudanese feeling anxious or fears about the loss of their traditional culture. F. M. Deng (2009, p.39) explained that there is a delicate balance between the stability of conforming to traditional norms and adjusting to challenging conditions, perspectives, and expectations. The author suggested there is a need for the law to play an educational role by prescribing normative standards that transcend traditional codes and, in his opinion, because of the delicacy of the issues, change must be a self-propelled process of improvement from within rather than an imposition from outside (Deng, 2009). Clearly, any change imposed does not seem to have a great impact in enhancing new settlers' settlement and integration, as such impositions are resisted or avoided by the new settlers. Therefore, as they strive to adjust their cultures and traditional practices to improve integration into their new environment, the authorities need to play an educational role, particularly in the areas of the rule of law and child discipline.

The impact of these changes in gender roles and power structures within the family has sparked conflicts and separations, but has also given the women an opportunity to pressure men to take up some household tasks to compensate for the lack of external support in their new environment.

#### **7.4.2 Women's double labour and demands that men should help**

As discussed in Chapter 5, South Sudanese have distinctive gender roles within families according to their traditional culture. Women do almost all the domestic labour such as cooking and caring for children, while men mostly do tasks outside the home (Wal, 2004). Although some of these tasks were often shared among family members and relatives, since coming to Australia South Sudanese women have had little support as most did not immigrate with family members and relatives. South Sudanese women are

thus doing double work and therefore expect men to take on some domestic tasks. Women raised a number of concerns about the lack of men's involvement in their children's upbringing since coming to Australia. They emphasised the significance of working together to meet the challenges of settlement and to raise their children for a better future. Lack of male involvement in their children's upbringing is deeply rooted in South Sudanese culture where it is seen as a woman's responsibility.

*If the mother is sick or doing something, the man should step in to help. Women get frustrated by the lack of support and when she tries to raise that concern with her husband, he gets very upset or resorts to violence and the police get involved. Then he will leave home and claim, "My wife has kicked me out," but he is the one who doesn't want to change to help his wife since he knows that there is no other network of support as there used to be [in South Sudan] (**Men and Women's Focus Group, Participant 2 - female**).*

The traditional division of tasks according to gender in South Sudan is still practiced by those in the diaspora. At home women dominate the household chores and men command the public and outside home activities (Wal, 2004). However, some men felt their traditional authority and roles within their families have been challenged, while others echo the women's call for men to make some changes to their traditions and to become more involved in helping women with some tasks, especially in their children's upbringing.

*Men must get involved in parenting their children so that their children come out stronger and positive in their lives. Children's needs are high, especially when they reach a certain age. Parents need to have good parenting skills and strategies on how to deal with their children's behaviour. Some parents still think that they can apply their traditional parenting styles, but that won't work in this new environment (**Men and Women's Focus Group, Participant 2 - male**).*

Since coming to Australia, South Sudanese families receive little or none of the support which they used to draw from relatives and friends. Therefore, participants urged couples to work together in raising their children.

*Here, there are frequent parent interviews at school, but men leave them to women, although it is important for both parents to get involved in understanding how their children are doing. Unfortunately, only a few men attend parent interviews. Some men are not involved in their children's upbringing. When wives try to explain that they are also required to attend parent interviews at school, some get upset and this may lead to misunderstandings or domestic issues. Some men question their wives or partners about what gives them the right to force him to do things that men don't do according to South Sudanese culture. This is a new society, and women are not getting the support they would have received if they were at home. Therefore, partners must work together to bring up their children instead of being left for women (**Women's Focus Group, Participant 1**).*

However, despite the lack of men's involvement in helping their wives or partners with household chores, research has indicated there are some changes in men's attitudes after a few years in their new countries, as they gradually start to get more involved and take some parenting responsibilities (Ochocka and Janzen, 2008). Some men over time also find the new environment helps bring them closer to their families, which contrasts with the tradition where women, men and children socialise and eat separately (Deng and Marlowe, 2013). Most participants in this study acknowledged the importance of adapting to the changes brought about by their new environment, although some male participants were also critical of a system they believe has given all the household responsibilities to women and sidelined men, which then encourages more conflict, separations and divorce within the South Sudanese community. The same concerns were highlighted in Losoncz's (2012) study in regard to role reversal, in which South Sudanese men believed that the Australian cultural values and laws have given women and children more rights, and that this has undermined their status and traditional regulatory powers, leading to high levels of conflict within families.

## 7.5 Lack of parenting support for families and parents

Lack of parenting support for migrants has created considerable barriers to their integration into the new environment. Deng and Marlowe (2013) recommended

collaborative social support and effective communication with those communities as a vital part of communicating the difference between discipline and punishment of children. Part of providing effective communication and support for parents and families requires comprehensive educational programs on parenting to promote and create general awareness within the resettlement context. The authors emphasised the significance of incorporating programs that will help familiarise parents and families with the Australian systems and family laws. In this current study, participants emphasised the lack of appropriate parenting support and existing service providers' ineffective communication with families and parents on how they can best be supported. Some parents believe that the lack of support and consultation, and exclusion of the ethnic community by the relevant service providers often exacerbates their families' challenges. One of the leaders in the South Sudanese community explained the lack of proper consultation with the grassroots or ethnic community as a potential barrier.

*Sometimes some of these organisations come and consult with a few members of the community on the streets and claim that they have consulted with the wider community. The real suffering people are not only on the streets: they are in their houses. Reaching the grassroots is very crucial in supporting the community members who are in real need. These organisations, for example, Multicultural Affairs, need to assess and find out how effective they are by reaching out to the grassroots levels (**Participant 7 - male**).*

These concerns were expressed differently by a female participant who spoke of the lack of support for families and parents as leading to many of the issues with their children. She explained the only support she has been getting has been from their ethnic community members. This sentiment was echoed by many others.

*We are let down by the authorities, particularly those who teach children unnecessary independence. I came here as a single mother of four children and I struggled to bring them up by myself. None of my children did well, whether in education or other aspects of their lives. This was because I didn't have much support while bringing them up in my new environment. There was no support from service providers or the South Sudanese community. I was sometimes only supported by a few friends in the community who cared, as they saw I was often*

*depressed. They offered me help, but they didn't have much capacity to support me either as they were also struggling (Women's Focus Group, Participant 7).*

Uba (2003) listed some factors that contribute to stress within new settler communities and families: social isolation, lack of social support systems, cultural shock, financial problems and intergenerational conflicts. The author suggested there was a need for more research on the role of social support systems and their effect in the prevention of resettlement issues. Some South Sudanese also find it hard to give one another support as they are scattered throughout the cities and suburbs.

*South Sudanese are scattered all over different parts of Victoria. We are like 'sign posts'. For that reason, it is hard to support one another. It is hard for us as we came from a collective to an individualised society where everything is always about 'triple 0 (Victoria-Police)' rather than resolving problems within the family and at the community level (Participant 1 - male).*

As previously stated, South Sudanese come from a collective culture where support is drawn from family, relatives and community members. They now live in a society where they find it hard to get this support and because they are geographically scattered it makes it almost impossible to give one another support. This exacerbates their settlement challenges. Lewig et al. (2010) identified a number of challenges faced by the new settlers when parenting without the social and other support that had been available in their countries of origin. The authors went on to state that such a lack and separation from immediate and extended family members put extra strains on parents adjusting to their new culture (Lewig et al., 2010a). Some parents also reported having heard nothing about parenting training or support since coming to Australia and in this way emphasised the need for this sort of support as a way of overcoming some of their parental challenges. Other participants recognised the existence of some support services for parents and families, which many may not be fully aware of, as they too mentioned the failure of those services to reach out to the new settlers. The lack of understanding about service provisions and lack of appropriate engagement by service providers, together with cultural and language barriers, have further limited their access to mainstream support.

*Unfortunately, there is not much support for families and if there is, many families are not aware of them. Services that are available normally fail to reach out to the new settlers. As a settlement caseworker, I have been an advocate for better services for the new settlers. When families are coping with the resettlement challenges, these are things that can cause problems within the family. Support does not mean (only) putting new settlers into houses, but it goes beyond that to include explaining the support that is available for them in a language they understand: what they are getting and what will be their contribution to their new country (**Participant 2 - male**).*

Despite the lack of this support, many South Sudanese are grateful and appreciative of other ongoing government assistance for their families such as financial support and other resettlement provisions.

*We are very appreciative of the government support. They really helped us settle into our new environment. Without their support, we would not have managed, especially Centrelink, which provided us with financial support (**Participant 18 - female**).*

It is apparent that some remaining challenges will always cloud the other positive things the government and nongovernmental services are providing to the new settlers. Indeed, some participants were frank in pointing out some of the opportunities for improvement in areas such as lack of collaboration or consultation, and in particular, how they can be better supported in the areas of social and parental needs to overcome their settlement challenges. To compensate for these challenges many South Sudanese continue to give one another support.

## 7.6 Lack of language support for parents

Command of the local language plays a central role within the resettlement context for new settlers who are trying to transition and integrate into their new culture and environment. Many find it hard to integrate quickly because of the language barrier on top of the other challenges. Deng and Marlowe (2013) found that the language barrier is not only an obstacle to ‘positive parenting’ and to obtaining access to parenting services

but it is also a barrier to finding employment, gaining further education and obtaining health care. The language barrier also contributes to isolation and discrimination, which may lead to mental and other health issues (Deng and Marlowe, 2013). Some parents reported that the language barrier posed an immediate challenge as they found it hard to express themselves or communicate with the authorities who are working with their children, particularly in regard to countering some of the allegations of abuse and neglect. To some, there is a growing barrier between parents and their children as the latter replace their original tongue with the new language, and this has created obstacles in understanding.

*The language barrier is the biggest issue. Sometimes parents do not understand English, and your children don't understand your language - the way you want to express yourself to them or even how you want to say good things to them. If you cannot understand each other, this is a very big cultural gap (**Participant 11 - female**).*

The following comments illustrate the lack of suitable language support, not only for parents but for all those who have never been to school or attended English classes before coming to Australia.

*Language is also an issue for some of our struggling community members. Those who came here with no English language background continue to suffer. Some have never been to school while others might have been educated in languages other than in English. Those who have a low level of English get put into certain classes according to their age groups, and such young people do not succeed because they do not have a basic foundation in English (**Participant 7 - male**).*

In addition to these challenges, Nah (1993) found that the places of origin and pre-migration contribute to the differences in speed and ease of language acquisition. The author submitted that a verbal culture and those in similar linguistic circles seem to learn the new language faster than those from a less verbal culture (Nah, 1993). Many South Sudanese come from a verbal or oral language background, and most seemed to learn their new language quickly. However, it may be far too simplistic to theorise or generalise about this: there needs to be a further study to understand the rate of language

acquisition for those who came to Australia as adults and whether from written or oral backgrounds.

On the other hand, learning a new language alone does not guarantee an end to settlement challenges since the newest settlers still face cultural barriers, discrimination and lack understanding about the new system and service provisions: these continue to pose greater challenges. Many parents identified the lack of language support for them as posing an immediate challenge in that they struggle to communicate with their mainstream counterparts and their children who may quickly forget their language of origin. Interviews disclosed a number of concerns and recommendations that most South Sudanese parents shared regarding language, communication barriers and the use of children as interpreters.

*Language support is the priority for the new settlers so that they are able to understand their new system or what they are entitled to. The parent-child relationship is another area where family tensions start. If a parent lacks the language, kids can come up with anything and ask their parent to do as they wish. There are some services that use children as interpreters for their parents, which is not good, since children are not equipped to interpret sensitive issues (Participant 2 - male).*

The language barrier also affects meeting children's learning needs: the parents who have no background in English are unable to help their children with homework. As a consequence, most participants recommended homework support centres for children to get that help. Inevitably, children tend to acquire great advantages over their parents in the new environment, particularly after learning English quickly. Then they become more powerful than their parents who often struggle to learn English and so rely on their children as interpreters and cultural brokers with the host community (Deng and Pienaar, 2011). Jones and Trickett (2005) found that such changes in children's roles encompassed a wide range of behaviours in which the adolescent becomes a broker between family members and local institutions, other adults and their peers. Most often, these roles involve translating documents sent home from school, arranging for doctors' appointments, answering phones as well as explaining what their native-speaking peers are talking about when visiting new settlers' homes. This finding was confirmed by the present study. Participants spoke of the role reversal within the family as children

become quite well-versed in their new language and culture; they think that they know more than their parents because of those language abilities. One mother wept while explaining her frustration regarding her daughter's behaviour and believes the authorities always sided with her daughter in any dealings.

*Some of our children start to disrespect their parents, thinking that they know more than their parents, which is not true because learning the new language and culture doesn't make them more educated than their parents; we know more about life than they think. We came here quite disciplined. My daughter told her doctor, "This old woman (me) is annoying," and the doctor told me to leave her alone, stating that if anything happened to her (as she has threatened to take her own life), then I would be held accountable if I didn't leave her alone. She speaks very good English, and presented herself very well and people often believe her despite her destructive behaviour, including excessive alcohol misuse. Our children want to change our cultures by force (**Participant 18 - female**).*

As discussed earlier, Lewig et al.'s (2010) study found that new settler parents are concerned about what they perceive to be government support for children's independence, which includes education about their rights, financial support and the role schools and police play in encouraging them to challenge their parents' power. Instead of encouraging children to challenge their parents' culture and authority, some parents emphasised the significance of supporting children whose parents do not have a background in English with which to help them succeed academically. This is because most of these children are not getting educational or extra-curricular support outside school.

*The language barrier is an issue. For example, children might bring their homework home for their parents to help them, but some parents don't know English and are unable to help them. The children might go back to school with their homework undone, and that can affect them (academically). Children may internalise this, thinking that their parents are not being helpful to them (**Participant 6 - male**).*

The issue of any language barrier between parents and their children is worrisome. The mother tongue was strongly emphasised by parents as something that they want their children to preserve. In Mansouri et al.'s (2015) report, participants had stressed the significance of supporting new settlers to preserve their language heritage since that is part of cultural safeguarding. Some participants encouraged their compatriots to recognise the significance of making an effort to help their children maintain aspects of their languages as part of upholding their culture.

*Some parents are not helping their children to maintain our culture and languages. For example, you find parents speaking their language, but when talking with their children, they speak in English. How can you be speaking your mother tongue fluently, yet your children don't speak it? Later, they turn around and blame their children for not maintaining their cultural values, but part of maintaining your culture starts with preserving your mother-tongues. Unfortunately, some parents came here with no English, so they thought that speaking English with their children would help them to learn it, but some have now realised that it wasn't such a good idea. I have rules in my house: I have told my children that when they are home, they must speak Dinka but English at school, and it worked for my children. They speak Dinka fluently. Parents must have some good house rules for their children to follow. To me, some children are spoiled because their parents did not put down good house rules. However, to resolve these challenges, community members need to work together to find solutions (Men and Women's Focus Group, Participant 7 - female).*

As these comments illustrate, parents have the responsibility to preserve and teach their children their mother tongues. South Sudanese schooling was interrupted by years of civil war. Since coming to Australia, most are eager to learn English, but it often takes an adult longer to learn a new language than it does for young people. This does not mean that many South Sudanese adults who came to Australia with no English have not learnt it, but the speed of learning a new language varies from one person to another. The challenge of the language barrier is linked to the impact of child protection policies on South Sudanese parenting practices within their new legal, social and cultural settings.

## 7.7 Impact of child protection policies on traditional South Sudanese parenting practices

South Sudanese find it challenging to reconcile their traditional parenting practices with Australian expectations, even without the additional language and cultural barriers. As discussed elsewhere, they have to deal with the impact of change in their traditional parenting practices and the challenges of the new legal, social and cultural environment. Most find aspects of their traditional parenting styles, which were legal in their country of origin, are now not acceptable or even illegal because they differ from Australian policy on child protection. Even more challenging for the new settlers, each Australian state and territorial government manages and operates its own child protection policies and services (Lewig et al., 2010a). According to the Child Protection Policy in the State of Victoria, 'meeting children's needs and making sure that they are safe within the family is a shared responsibility between individuals, family, community and the government.' However, if the adults caring for children do not meet their responsibilities, maybe by becoming abusive or exploiting their positions of power, then it is the Child Protection Service's responsibility to take action (Victoria, 2007). The objective of this policy is designed to protect children who are at risk of harm or whenever families are unable or unwilling to protect them (DHS, 2013).

There are some major legal implications in child discipline. The nature of the State intervention contrasts sharply with the way that many Africans understand childrearing, where family and children's issues are mostly left to family members to resolve and the government has little involvement. For instance, in most African and some other cultures, family conflicts and child neglect or abuse are usually handled and addressed at the level of immediate and extended families, elders and community members who normally intervene, mediate and find amicable solutions (Deng, 2009, Deng and Pienaar, 2011, Deng and Marlowe, 2013). As a consequence, many South Sudanese parents find it hard to understand the logic behind State intervention in their family affairs. Participants spoke of having given into their children's demands, as they feel intimidated by them due to the possibility that the child may call Child Protection or the police. They find navigating between their cultural beliefs and what is required in the new environment quite intimidating, confrontational and confusing, particularly the

legal implications when it comes to child discipline. Parents feel constrained in exerting their reasonable powers to discipline their children.

*Some parents don't see the role of disciplining children as their responsibility anymore because if they discipline them, the police and Child Protection will get involved. That itself has caused some parents to shy away from taking responsibility for disciplining their children as was the case in South Sudan. Kids also threaten their parents that they will call the police or Child Protection if they don't do certain things for them. Because parents don't want their children to be taken away, they shy away, back down or give into their demands, so that they remain with them. The consequence is, those children will end up making their own choices, and at the end of the day those choices may not be truly good for them and society. You find some children as young as 12 years old roaming around... This does not mean that these children don't have parents; they do, but parents are afraid what might happen if they discipline them (**Participant 1 - male**).*

The variations between states in child protection policies have further affected many South Sudanese families who sometimes relocate from one state or territory to another. Most of these movements are prompted by a search for the best accommodation, job opportunities and where there are well established South Sudanese communities for better support. These families who move may be oblivious of local policies and many only seem to learn about them following intervention. For instance, many South Sudanese have moved to Victoria over the past few years, and this number has increased substantially, according to community leaders. Some of these families are settling in new suburbs where social and support services may not exist or the family does not know the area. It begs the question, who is supposed to educate them about the state's child protection policy? This merits additional study to understand how new settlers are encountering each State or Territory's policies as they move across Australia.

According to South Sudanese culture, even if a child has been treated badly, the authority or elders do not accuse or reprimand the parents in front of that child. Parents can only be reprimanded in the absence of their children. The reason for this that if parents are told off in front of their children, it can cause the children not only to lose

respect for their parents but lead them to think that their behaviour is justified or condoned by a person who they consider to be more powerful than their parents.

*We really want the police to take their hands off our children. When the police come to domestic issues between children and their parents, they start talking in favour of the children in front of their parents. The police normally blame the parents in front of their children, and the child will say, "You see, I told you it was my right," and even swear at you in front of the Police. It is culturally inappropriate to blame parents in front of their children as it leads children to disrespect their parents even more. Police in Africa cannot blame parents in front of their children (**Participant 18 - female**).*

Further to their concerns about the authorities having taken over the role of parenting, some parents also noted that their children are going through radical changes as they try to reconcile their South Sudanese and Australian cultures, and they emphasised the need for appropriate social and cultural support to overcome these challenges. The changes in parenting have led to dramatic changes in their children's behaviour with some as young as 12 years old drinking alcohol and not responding to their parents' instructions. Like many other researchers, Lewig et al. (2010) stated that children tended to assimilate more quickly into a new society than do adults, who are often left more isolated in the host community. As a result, some South Sudanese parents see this as an unwinnable war with their children and authorities, and therefore suggested there is a need for dialogue with the police and the appropriate authorities about their children's behaviours and the allegations of abuse they make against their parents.

*I feel sorry, as a former refugee, seeing our people are struggling... Some children are not doing so well, and they have brought shame to our community. The few who are doing bad things stand out to the extent that the good things some of our people are doing are being overlooked (**Participant 6 - male**).*

Fear of stigmatisation because of the behaviour of a few children is of real concern to most participants, who believe that the issue is something exaggerated by the media who choose to write only bad things about the South Sudanese community and do not recognise the positive things that are happening in the community or the contribution they are making to their new environment. As recounted earlier, some parents are

concerned that most of the children who were taken by the authorities are not doing well after all, as most ended up being ill-treated or neglected while under the care or custody of Child Protection. They believe that most of those children were taken based on ill-founded allegations of being abused by their families or guardians and have been indulged while in the custody or oversight of Child Protection, and many are now languishing on the streets and in prisons.

*Some parents say that many young people who are taken by the authorities and placed in foster-care are not doing very well. Some of these children who were taken explained some heartbreaking experiences in their foster-care homes. This is where the question comes: As parents, do we want such things to happen to our children? There is a lot of child abuse (past and present) in foster-care homes in Australia. Do we want our children to be victims or part of that statistic as well or should I rather risk talking to my children? I believe that as a parent, I have responsibility for bringing up my children (**Participant 1 - male**).*

These concerns were raised by many South Sudanese parents and requires further study, probably through interviewing these young people to find out about their experiences while in child protection custody as well as what changed in their lives after they were taken by that service. Child Protection Services do not engage sufficiently with the South Sudanese community, families and parents: many participants expressed stress that they do not understand the role of this service and what they can do to help the family stay together.

*Some of us are scared of the Child Protection Service because they normally take away our kids and we end up being unable to do anything tangible in their lives.... Does Child Protection understand how painful it is that they take our children and they end up being spoilt in their hands? Unfortunately, after our children get spoilt, they send them back to us or blame their parents for not looking after them well. Instead of helping parents to stay with their children, they break them up first and blame parents later (**Women's Focus Group, Participant 4**).*

The sentiments in that last statement (“they break them up first, and blame parents later”) are shared by many parents who argued that instead of breaking the family up, it

is better to help them stay together. They believe that most of their children who left home are failing in all aspects of life. There is a sense of intense hopelessness due to an inability to understand the service's policy when looking at the results of its intervention and the changes it brings within the family. A complicating factor is that there are already embedded stigmas attached to the police and the authorities because many South Sudanese were persecuted and some of their family members were killed by the authorities in Sudan, which led to their flight to refugee centres.

Most participants' comments echoed Losoncz's (2012) findings, which also highlighted South Sudanese concerns about family breakdowns as a result of intergenerational conflicts prompted by Australian cultural values and the subsequent greater sense of freedom for women and youth, who had been under strong social control in their original culture of heritage. Losoncz went on to point out that the prevalence of family separation in the community has resulted in a high number of children growing up in single-parent homes, often that of a mother. Some participants reported that some community members see these misunderstandings and misconceptions by Child Protection and the police as playing a role in breaking up families. The lack of understanding by and about these agencies and the legal system, when added to language barriers and other resettlement issues, increases the negative impact on family cohesion and parenting practices. They believe that some of the abuses and neglect their children report to Child Protection or the police are made up as a result of the parents not meeting their material demands, which are sometimes beyond the parents' financial means.

*One of the bigger problems is a misunderstanding of the law, and the lack of support for the family. The role of child protection needs to be redefined: it shouldn't be about splitting up the families, but to really to help them stay together. Children sometimes misuse child protection and accuse their parents of abuses and neglect so that they are taken away. They may demand things that are sometimes beyond their parents' control. If they don't get what they need, they will say, "You are not providing for my needs, so I will find somebody else to provide it." Most issues between children and parents are attributed to struggles over these. Unfortunately, the impacts are severe, particularly for*

*those who are solo parents. For example, a mother of 3-5 kids is under tremendous pressure (Participant 2 - male).*

As former refugees, many South Sudanese may have few of the things their children are demanding, as the above comments show. When the children feel their needs are not being met, some rebel or make some allegation to get the attention of parents and the authorities. As with many other migrants, South Sudanese find their traditional parenting practices forbidden by Australian laws, and this has led to their children's rebellious behaviour. Lewig et al. (2010) found that, based on earlier Child Protection workers' actions, cultural differences are an influential underlying issue that has led to Child [Protection] concerns for refugee families. This finding was echoed by what some parents reported. They believe there are assumptions that Africans come from a violent culture because they are from war-torn backgrounds and do not understand the laws of their new country. Many parents think that this misconception has clouded some authorities' fair judgement on how they have, in fact, treated the children.

*We feel like the laws are not being applied equally because we are seen as people who came from violent backgrounds and may be likely to hurt their own children. It is really tough for us as mothers who carry a child for nine months, give birth and care for that child for them to start swearing at you later. Some children are telling their parents, "Who do you think you are?" A child is not supposed to swear at his/her parent (Participant 8 - female).*

South Sudanese parents raised some concerns regarding their children refusing to carry out household tasks assigned to them. As discussed in this and previous chapters, the issue of household chores often leads to more general arguments about autonomy and freedom, selection of suitable friends, homework and care for younger siblings, and these lead to mistrust between parents and their children (McMichael, 2012). Participants stressed the significance of teaching children responsibilities and assigning them tasks as a part of their learning and cultural obligations. The impact of parental changes, particularly in childrearing practices, and the difficulties in coming to terms with their new environment have caused significant distress within the family, especially in the relationship between parents and their children.

## Conclusion

This chapter has critically examined the impacts of changes in South Sudanese parenting practices, and particularly the parents' concerns about their children losing their traditional cultural values. Respect, the most integral part of South Sudanese culture, appears to be diminishing among young people growing up in Australia. These changes in their families and the concerns regarding cultural loss are connected to their children becoming more independent and not complying with their parents' requests. Most parents saw their children's freedom and independence as being something encouraged by the authorities, particularly Child Protection Service and other agencies working with them, without these agencies understanding the differences in and importance of cultural traditions.

The changes in gender roles and power structures within the South Sudanese family lead to conflict; for instance, men consider that women and children's rights have led to their authority as the head of the family being defied. Lack of parenting support has been highlighted as one of the leading contributors to conflict in the family. At the top of these challenges and concerns reported by the participants is the language barrier, particularly lack of English language support for parents who either have never been to school or have obtained an education in languages other than English. South Sudanese parents believe that it is important for them to be able to speak English, not only because some of their children are losing their mother tongues but also to help them integrate. Adolescence is often challenging for young people and their parents in every walk of life, as they go through this developmental transition, a fraught period when the adolescents test boundaries and challenge their parents' authority (Mansouri et al., 2015), but it is even more daunting for the new migrant families who are at the same time in transition from their original to their new culture.

The most significant impacts noted in this chapter were from child protection policies and how they conflict with traditional South Sudanese parenting practices. In their new environment parents are struggling to find common ground on child discipline. Parents are no longer able to use physical force, which was traditionally an accepted practice for correcting children's behaviours. Moreover, many parents understood that using physical force often resulted in Child Protection involvement and the removal of children, and this has led to parents feeling powerless to cope with the situation. These

challenges are fracturing intra-family cohesion and trust, noting that trust is a significant societal capital marker and is closely related to families' wellbeing (Renzaho et al., 2011).

South Sudanese parents believe that the authorities lack sufficient knowledge about their culture and some of their settlement challenges, particularly as these concern their children. They spoke of their community being stigmatised due to the behaviour of a few children. As a result, many are calling for Child Protection Services and other social support services to provide education about the policies related to child protection and acceptable approaches to discipline. They are also appealing to these authorities to recognise those sections of their cultural values which are not harmful to their children, so that they may have a voice in their children's upbringing, since they see the new freedoms and independence to be very unhelpful to those children who defy their parents and are on the streets.

This chapter has also shown that South Sudanese are not readily able to access appropriate resources and support as a result of language and cultural barriers, compounded by unfamiliarity with what the new services can provide. However, they do have some strategies and tools for coping with some of their other settlement changes and challenges. The next chapter looks at these coping strategies and their application to the changes in their families and parenting practices.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### South Sudanese strategies for coping with the impact of change in their families and parenting practices in Australia

#### Introduction

*We need the government and supporting organisations to work with the community and find how to resolve parenting and other resettlement challenges. There needs also to be education for parents about child protection and other laws that affect families (**Participant 7 - male**).*

Having established a contextual understanding of transitional challenges and their impacts in the previous chapters, this chapter now explores parents' strategies for coping with these changes in their community, families and parenting practices in Australia. The relevant themes emerging from the data include: understanding South Sudanese culture and resettlement challenges; the roles of the community and church or spiritual leaders in the community; integrating South Sudanese and Australian parenting practices; empowering families and the community to address some of their settlement challenges; taking responsibility and recognising their shortcomings; embracing the changes in their new environment; parents as role models in shaping their children's behaviours and teaching respect, culture and language as a significant part of an individual's identity within society.

The first theme, understanding South Sudanese culture and the challenges of resettlement, saw participants emphasise the significance of the authorities and support services gaining an understanding of their culture and their challenges in order to better assist families with appropriate parenting support. The support services and providers can achieve a level of appropriate support for South Sudanese through consulting community members and the families who need support.

The second theme, the role of the community and church or spiritual leaders in the community, focuses on coping strategies: participants spoke of relying on their spiritual leaders as well as on fellow community members for spiritual, social and emotional

support. However, the main concern raised by participants is that these leaders, elected by their community, are neither recognised nor empowered by the government and "official" support services so that they may continue to volunteer and provide appropriate support, even though they are the main source of immediate support within the community. This is positive in the sense that they are getting support from one another; however, participants stated that the reason they rely so heavily on their community's leaders and members for such support is that they find it hard because of language and cultural barriers to access mainstream social and other support services.

The chapter then turns to a third key theme: how South Sudanese may benefit from integrating some of their traditional parenting practices with those expected by mainstream Australian society. When speaking of trying to integrate with their new culture, participants emphasised the need for additional support from the relevant service providers. This theme led to some recommendations in which participants stressed the significance of positive parenting support as part of empowering the family and community to address the settlement challenges.

The chapter goes on to discuss the significance of parents and community taking some responsibility for addressing some of their challenges. Participants have identified deficiencies (ie room for improvement) in trying to find solutions to some of these challenges at family and community levels. To achieve this, the discussion also focused on embracing some of the dynamic changes occurring within their families and the community, which means using the advantages that participants identified in their new environment.

This chapter concludes by examining the significance and meanings of the role of parents as role models for their children, as primary caregivers and as teachers. Because parents are most often the primary caregivers and teachers for children in South Sudanese community contexts, they are held accountable by society for teaching their children good behaviour. Part of this includes parents teaching children respect, culture and language as fundamental elements of their identity. This also has a bearing on the question of what kind of legacy South Sudanese parents would like to leave for their children.

## 8.1 Understanding South Sudanese cultures and challenges as a conduit to enhancing appropriate parenting support

Culture is intertwined with the people and their community as it refers to the way individuals make meaning of and how they perceive life and its challenges, including language and learned characters, as they both directly influence a given history or socioeconomic system (Copping et al., 2010). In other words, culture is an essential element in the resettlement context: it influences the way individuals make sense of life, values, attitudes and its characteristics as it has a direct impact on individual history (Potocky-Tripodi, 2002). Most South Sudanese parents felt the host authorities do not sufficiently understand their traditions and cultures (Ochocka and Janzen, 2008). Some viewed Australian policies on resettlement as occasioning persistent separation of family members, which is also similar to other countries' policies in resettling refugees (McDonald-Wilmsen and Gifford, 2009). Culture plays an integral role in the attitudes to and the challenges of their new environment. As discussed in previous chapters, community members highlighted the significance of not only recognising their culture but also using community leadership as one way to address some of these cultural barriers, challenges and concerns. In South Sudanese culture, community issues are often resolved by the community leaders, chiefs and elders, but since resettling in Australia, South Sudanese are concerned that even minor issues go straight to the authorities such as police, child protection and courts.

*My recommendation is that I want Australia to give us time and to value our culture as well, instead of just jumping straight away into solutions when there are family issues. They need to have a better understanding of our culture, not just to get the police involved in the issues (**Participant 11 - male**).*

For this participant, it is vital to understand African and South Sudanese experiences and cultures and to identify family and community needs before devising support, in order to provide appropriate, meaningful services to such a diverse community with complex needs and challenges.

*First, to identify the needs before providing support, I think the issues to do with parenting are much rooted in the law enforcement and welfare agencies that deal with families on daily issues... Considering, understanding and evaluating*

*the experiences of the South Sudanese community, family and parents, then provide proper support with sufficient knowledge are imperative (Participant 3 - male).*

Indeed, each culture has things that sometimes shocks or surprises others, or that those others may be interested in learning about as part of embracing multiculturalism. However, understanding why things are done in a certain way is an important pathway to fostering harmony in a multicultural society. Tribe (1999) stressed that cultural differences, and the 'Western' understandings of what is family and community, at times bear little resemblance to the understandings of non-Western families. These cultural differences can become more prominent due to lack of adequate information for the new immigrant about their host culture, as well as the lack of cultural awareness by the host community about the new settlers, which can sometimes lead to both direct and indirect discrimination against new immigrants (Tribe, 1999, Marlowe, 2009). These differences, as well as many other challenges arising from involuntary migration, may constitute a momentous barrier to successful resettlement for some new settlers. As a result, many participants want government agencies and social support services, particularly those that are working with families, to coordinate, consult and work both across agencies and with the South Sudanese community to search for viable solutions to their parenting challenges.

*I felt ignored by the government as a parent. If the government can consult parents as well as listen to them and understand about our culture, I am sure things can be worked out to help these children. No South Sudanese wants to hurt his or her children. Government agencies and parents need to work together to address the root causes of the problems at home by helping the family to stay together (Participant 6 - male).*

They also want the relevant services to inform parents better about the roles of service providers in areas such as child protection, positive parenting training and advice about the laws of the country. This last point was seen as especially important in providing alternatives to traditional physical approaches toward child discipline.

*Parents need support in the areas of understanding the parenting styles here so that they might be able to balance or modify their parenting styles to fit the laws*

*of this country. Parenting training or workshops can help. This is because some parents decide to abandon their children altogether after they feel that they are not listening to them. Parents should not abandon their children. They should continue to find how to convince them to come back home. Never give up on your child (Participant 9 - female).*

Lack of access to mainstream services prompted the participants to recommend setting up specific support services that will help to raise awareness and provide psycho-education on child discipline and the relevant laws. Participants appealed to authorities to provide workshops and parenting training on how to reconcile the traditional parenting practices with their new environment as well as on laws and policy related to child protection and the family.

The question as to who should educate new settlers about the consequences of using traditional physical disciplining practices often remains unanswered. As discussed here and in previous chapters, although there is a range of specifically focused mainstream services, there are also barriers to accessing them for new settlers. These barriers range from language and culture to a lack of understanding of new and often unfamiliar types of service and support.

The benefit of designing purpose-specific programs to address these intersecting needs and questions has been demonstrated in other countries. For example, Deng and Pienaar (2011) evaluated a positive parenting program in New Zealand that had been conducted with South Sudanese and other migrants. The program had a significant impact through identifying families' and parents' needs and devising training to suit those needs. The program helped to promote positive parenting in the community through strengthening parents' consistency and application of knowledge, with a special emphasis on effective non-physical disciplining as one way of supporting new immigrant parents and caregivers to advance their skills and confidence to make the necessary changes in their traditional parenting practices. As discussed in this as well as in Chapters 3, 6, 7 and 10, there is no specific parenting practice that will ever work for all Australian and culturally diverse communities, but positive parenting provides guidance and platform for parents to share and discuss their parenting challenges. Therefore, providing parents with certain tools that substitute the traditional techniques used (eg verbal and behavioural rather than physical discipline) while still valuing the underlying values and

principles of good parenting (eg respect, concern for others, healthy choices) is significant in helping parents cope as they struggle with a sense of powerlessness or uncertainty about how to correct their children's behaviour. This is especially crucial when parents feel deprived of being able to use what they know or brought with them to their new environment. This study was not intended to evaluate the effectiveness of the positive parenting program in the other Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities as there are no data to generalise its effectiveness. However, Morawska et al.'s (2012) study indicated that the positive parenting program has been rated by practitioners as moderately acceptable to families from diverse cultural groups.

## 8.2 South Sudanese coping strategies: community and spiritual leaders as immediate support

### 8.2.1 Adaptation and social capital: the communal self

The most significant social capital South Sudanese have is their communal culture. The circulation of social capital in this context occurs through socialising and congregating together during both good and bad times to give one another support in trying to overcome resettlement challenges, especially the feeling of isolation. Research has shown that social support is pivotal not only in making people feel cared for, loved and that they belong, but is also significant in preventing individual ill-health through influencing both positive mental and physical health (as measured by mortality rates) (Stansfeld et al., 2006). Overcoming resettlement challenges and changes means settlers must invent some adaptive coping strategies. Many South Sudanese spoke of having found some common places where they socialise together and give one another the needed social support that includes reminiscing and sharing their past and present experiences.

*Some South Sudanese, especially men, decided to find common places where they can spend times together to socialise and support one another. Some spend their time together playing dominoes, pool and other indoor and outdoor games, which have helped many men therapeutically. This was part of our culture; we used to spend time together, share what affects individuals and give each other*

*some support. Despite many other changes, this is part of the culture that we have maintained quite strongly (**Participant 7 - male**).*

Goodman (2004) found in her study of unaccompanied South Sudanese minors that the notion of the communal self was significantly revealed in the content of the narrative and linguistic devices, which participants used to tell their stories. As part of their culture, South Sudanese see themselves as part and parcel of the community and the people, and therefore voice their concerns through the use of pronouns, such as ‘we or us’ to tell of shared experiences of their past and present. Indeed, many see the impact of their challenges and changes within their families, particularly in relation to parenting, as collective problems and therefore use collective pronouns to describe them, as can be seen in the participants’ comments throughout Chapters 5-9. Seeing issues and challenges as a communal problem is a significant coping strategy that many South Sudanese, as with other immigrants from collectivist cultures, use to normalise and mitigate the enormity of the impact on them (Deng and Pienaar, 2011). This helps blend the impact of the challenges by emphasising that one is not alone; instead of personalising such challenges, people externalise them.

*As adults, we always get together to support and counsel ourselves on these issues that we are facing in our new environment. We meet to talk about these issues... Those who don’t know how to cope normally end up isolating themselves or even commit suicide as they feel hopeless. Those who are connected within the community benefit from listening to stories that are even worse than their own and start to realise that they are not alone. Some even feel that their situation is even better, compared to what they hear from others. Socialising together has helped our community members a lot (therapeutically) because, in these social groups, members give each other support as well as exchange ideas on how to deal with these challenges and changes within their families (**Participant 9 - female**).*

This comment shows aspects of how South Sudanese are coping with both structural and individual challenges in their new environment. The concept is of a communal culture in which people share and discuss their individual issues through socialising and counselling one another as peers, a concept that is sometimes lacking in the more individualised cultures, which tend to see counselling as a professionalised rather than

socialised form of support. Individual counselling is a foreign concept to many South Sudanese. Previous studies have revealed that group counselling as well as psychosocial and psycho-education supports are more effective in helping those from collectivist cultures, especially for South Sudanese who perceive individual challenges as collective problems (Deng and Pienaar, 2011, Deng and Marlowe, 2013). This does not mean that individual therapy may not work for some individuals, but parenting challenges are seen by many South Sudanese as collective issues, which is why many strongly recommended positive parenting programs that bring parents together to discuss and find ways of overcoming them. Goodman (2004) also found that South Sudanese believe collective and community counselling provides protection against the traumas and hardship they experienced as they rely on one another for support and encouragement: noticing that one is not alone in one's suffering provides individuals with a motivation to survive challenging situations.

Another important social capital, which some participants spoke of, is a sense of resilience. They believe that has given them the determination to overcome their parenting and other resettlement challenges.

*What helps us in maintaining our cultures is the determination to remember what brought us here in the first place (Men's Focus Group, Participant 2).*

South Sudanese have gone through traumatic experiences because of their forced migration, and throughout their refugee journeys they have built a notable capacity for resilience through being compelled to learn survival and adaptation skills to cope with their harrowing experiences (Marlowe et al., 2014, Marlowe, 2010a, Milner and Khawaja, 2010, Deng and Marlowe, 2013, Deng, 2013B). However, such resilience as part of South Sudanese social capital for coping with settlement changes and challenges is sometimes either overlooked or not recognised. Grossman (2013) argued that identifying protective factors is important in understanding the particular resources a given socio-cultural group has at their disposal. The author went on to emphasise the significance of considering the interconnections between various protective mechanisms, how they might influence one another, and to what extent. So South Sudanese who have successfully survived inhumane and cruel conditions become strengthened by their experiences of adversity, and this response is called adversity-activated development (Papadopoulos, 2007). This is a good example of a positive

effect of trauma, one which refugees did not possess before the adversity. It also focuses on the refugee as an individual who will deal with suffering in unique and varied ways and, as a result, will show various psychological needs (Alayarian, 2007). This implies that each person has a different psychological immune system that is unique to them and which establishes their response to traumatising events. The discussion that follows explores how South Sudanese are making use of their learned resilience to integrate traditional parenting practices into their new setting.

### 8.2.2 Community leadership role

Kelly (2003, p.40) identified two aspects of community: one is warmth and interconnectedness between members of the group, the other, subliminal shared values and goals. Despite division and rivalries which are often polarised by the political situation in their country of origin (Kelly, 2003), South Sudanese continue to provide a variety of support to each other. Like many other new settlers, South Sudanese have relied heavily on one another for social and emotional support, often drawn from community and church leaders as well as from their peers and social circles more broadly. The leaders' participants referred to in this study included both men and women who were either elected by the community association or who have the ability to understand their new system, speak both English and original languages and can provide all kinds of support to community members. Rex et al. (1987) outlined the significant functions of the new settlers' associations for overcoming isolation, defending their community interests and planning how to generate material support and promote their community image. Although "community" may mean different things to different people, South Sudanese have large to small sub-communities from which they draw help and support. The community association role includes creating bridges between the new and host society through networking and information-sharing as well as enhancing the integration of the new settlers into their new environment (Rex et al., 1987, Gamble and Weil, 2010). Reliance on other community members can be attributed to having a shared culture, to valuing solidarity and a sense of belonging, yet that reliance can also limit their capacity to learn about and adapt to the new environment. Heavy reliance on ethnic community members can also be attributed to language and cultural barriers and, in particular, a lack of familiarity with their new setting or the mainstream culture, as discussed in previous chapters.

Many South Sudanese parents highlighted that solutions to some of their parenting and family challenges include recognising the roles of the spiritual and community leaders and empowering them to resolve some of the challenges at family and community levels. When tensions are created by misunderstandings in the family because of cultural changes and challenges, many participants believed that empowering the community leaders might help to mitigate the degree of family disintegration, divorce or separation as well as discouraging young people from leaving home, and subsequently abusing alcohol or drugs, or committing crimes.

*South Sudanese came from a society where community leaders are well regarded. Recognising and empowering community leadership to resolve some of the family issues will help reduce their issues. The authorities are risking more breakdowns within the South Sudanese community as many children are ending up on the streets, committing crimes and then landing in jail. For instance, if a child is caught misbehaving, the police should call the leader of the community and let the community leadership try to talk to that child (Men's Focus Group – Participant 8).*

Some participants reported not getting much support from existing mainstream social services; some spoke of having not heard of outside help apart from their own community since coming to Australia.

*There is no much support from outside our community; we normally come together in this place (a park in the city) to share our concerns and support each other (Women's Focus Group – Participant 1).*

Maton (2008, p.5) stated that community empowerment is a group-based, participatory and developmental process that empowers marginalised people to gain greater control over their lives and environment as well as to acquire valued resources, basic rights and to achieve important life goals and reduce societal marginalisation. Maton emphasised that empowerment takes place over an extended period, mostly in community settings where members live, and to achieve the empowering goal, a community setting must meet the empowering process and outcomes. The empowering process and outcomes, Maton (2008, p.7) suggested, are significant for increasing individual development, community betterment, and social change. It also includes the theories of change,

correlates of individual member empowerment, empirical studies of organisational characteristics and case studies examining the development and functioning of one or more individual settings (Maton, 2008). There is very little understanding about South Sudanese in these fields of community empowerment. Besides calling for community empowerment, South Sudanese parents also advise their community members to embrace the changes introduced by their new environment and to make sure that they continue to seek community and professional support.

*You know it is important to accept the challenges or changes and to find help through counselling and community advice, especially from elders and church leaders. This is the only way to cope with these challenges; otherwise, it is hard to cope by yourself, so you need somebody to journey with you, to help and guide you through all of these challenges... People need to connect and find help (Participant 11 - male).*

### 8.3 Integrating South Sudanese and Australian parenting practices

In addition to the above discussion on mutual support as a coping strategy for meeting their challenges, there is a conversation to be had around the integration of their traditional parenting practices and Australian parenting practices. Creating equilibrium between old South Sudanese and new Australian parenting practices may strengthen effective integration. In this study, some parents spoke of bringing these practices and cultures together to deepen their integration, but also of needing support to preserve aspects of their original culture (Berry, 1997). Participants maintain that parenting training or workshops about the relevant policies or laws of their new country would improve the integration process. Some participants emphasised the significance of integrating both old and new cultures to increase understanding and their adaptation to their new environment, and to minimise clashes with their traditional practices.

*As family and community, we need to adapt and learn our new society's laws, although it will take time to get there. We need to accept the laws of the new country by scrapping some bad traditional practices; otherwise, if we keep imposing our ways, then they will clash with the new one. We need to take from*

*the new culture for our better integration. If we do not adapt, then our children are running away from us and they end up on the streets.... Many Australian children are not, so why our children? We need to teach them both cultural values (South Sudanese and Australian) (Participant 6 - female).*

These suggestions show how South Sudanese parents are making an effort to integrate and adapt to their new environment, but they require support. The speaker highlighted again the lack of support and unfamiliarity with their new system, which is seen to be one of the main barriers to integration. Although some find it hard to reconcile the differences between their old and new cultures, most understood that they have little choice but to find appropriate tools for integrating both cultures and parenting practices. In a positive parenting program conducted in New Zealand in 2006-2010, parents were encouraged at workshops or training sessions to balance their traditional parenting with an understanding of various parenting practices/styles within the New Zealand context (Deng and Pienaar, 2011). The program was successful since it was not intended to replace traditional parenting practices but to integrate both new and old styles as a pathway for enhancing the parental skills required to fulfil the primary role of parenting in an unfamiliar environment. Some participants also suggested parents and other community members need to work together through sharing their parenting challenges and making use of both internal and external support for community members. For parents to succeed in disciplining their children, they need positive parenting and communication skills, especially knowledge of non-physical disciplining practices (Deng and Pienaar, 2011).

*It is hard to reconcile because several changes are imposed on us by the authorities... We are talking to our children to hold onto some of our cultural values. They say, 'When you go to Rome, act like a Roman.' Parents must work together in disciplining their children, by being consistent. They must also set good examples that their children can follow. For example, if the parents want to go out, they must inform their children about where they are going and expect the same from them. If I am late from work, I always call to let my family know that I am coming home late. Never expect somebody to respect you while you don't show the same to them (Participant 1 - male).*

Indeed, children copy what their parents do, and the above comments resonate with the point made by Joshi (2015) that in the past adults used to declare that they were allowed to swear or hit but children were not, and now the parents should not swear and shout unless they want their children to copy them. Participants acknowledged that not all parents have the same level of skills, but part of acquiring parenting skills may be through sharing ideas at family and community levels.

*The best ways to cope with changes and challenges are to deal with family issues at family and community levels, and not to make it private because it could be my problem today and maybe my neighbour's tomorrow. Therefore, parents and community have to work together in overcoming family and parenting challenges. People don't have to judge parents, those who are struggling with challenges. Instead of labelling certain parents as bad, they need support so that the family can cope with these issues since moving to a new country comes with many challenges, and it takes years to overcome them. The struggle with challenges causes fractures within the family (Participant 2 - male).*

Some parents also spoke of using more lenient approaches rather than the stricter traditional parenting styles, in which children were given strict instructions by parents and adults and were expected to follow them without question. They stressed that being more lenient might help to prevent their children's removal by Child Protection because of alleged abuse or neglect. Some are trying to replace their old physical disciplining practices and instead become closer to their children through engaging with them.

*We mix some of our cultural values with Australian because if we use most of our cultural values solely, then our children will run away from us. Therefore, we have to mix them by taking a little from our culture and Australian cultures and use them. We are trying to learn how to talk to our children nicely, not even like parents anymore, but like their friends (Participant 1 - male).*

Some parents have well-established parenting strategies as part of integrating and adapting to their new environment.

*Having understood the issues (of parenting), I have set up different strategies based on how the society is since there are cultural clashes. What I have been doing with my family is to identify the needs - identifying my children's interests and see if those are important for their mentoring and social connection, and if they are, what resources need to be allocated to keep them connected... By providing that, it keeps children close to their parent as they are provided with their needs. That is how I have shifted a bit from my traditional styles to meet the needs or demands of the current situation (**Participant 3 - male**).*

As discussed in this and previous chapters, identifying children's needs and interests makes it easier to be close to them and manage their behaviours. Child discipline as a form of guidance provides opportunities for children to develop an internal locus of control, thereby learning to take responsibility for themselves and their actions, and adopt the values that are acceptable in the family and society (Deng and Pienaar, 2011). Setting house rules often helps in shaping children's behaviours. Joshi (2015) suggested that when setting house rules, parents should involve their children in defining and writing them down and sticking them on the fridge, while making it clear what will happen if these rules are broken. However, each parent has their unique style of parenting, which can be understood at least in part through the four parenting styles (*authoritative, authoritarian, permissive and indulgent*), identified by Baumrind (1991) and discussed in Chapter 3. Aspects of these parenting styles are reflected in the South Sudanese parenting practices. Most participants were familiar with and engaged in authoritarian styles. However, since coming to Australia, some parents have been trying to adapt to the authoritative parenting style, while others are becoming permissive because they are unable to apply their traditional disciplinary practices, i.e. physical discipline. The following participant spoke of having a set of house rules for managing her children's behaviour.

*I always sit down with my children and talk to them and teach them things such as not to be violent; if someone wants to fight you (at school), just walk away or tell your teachers... If you see your friends with stuff you don't have, don't complain why you don't have them. I normally put my house rules on the wall, such as: love, laugh, kiss always, say sorry, always share things and listen to your parent. These are my rules for my children... We are trying to adapt but not*

*to lose our traditional parenting practices. I am trying to adapt the new parenting styles while holding on to some of my old traditional parenting styles (Participant 10 - female).*

Having a set of house rules, include praising and rewarding children for good behaviour, is significant in transforming and shaping children's behaviour. These include stopping children from doing things that are inappropriate and helping them to understand why certain behaviours are unacceptable within the family and society (Deng and Pienaar, 2011). This is an example of Baumrind's authoritative parenting style as discussed in Chapter 3.

The transformation of children's behaviour requires parents to make an effort. Research has indicated that children thrive when there are firm boundaries, for instance, saying no firmly to children about undesirable behaviour (Joshi, 2015). To reconcile these new and modern strategies with their traditional parenting practices, some South Sudanese parents are encouraging each other to make friends with people outside their community as a way to gain more support and to learn about the laws of their new country. The following comments reinforce the significance of broader connections, not only within the local ethnic communities but also with the wider community as part of learning and familiarisation with the new environment and system to enhance integration.

*To be connected does not mean only within your community, but you also need to have some friends from the wider Australian community because sometimes some might not know how to face the problems in Australian ways... If you go to fellow South Sudanese, they will advise you what they know, but it doesn't work here, so you also need to have friends from the wider Australian community... especially how to balance between the cultures (Participant 11 - male).*

Reconciling old with new parenting practices creates some challenges for many South Sudanese, but as most participants commented, they realise that most of their traditional parenting practices are not applicable in their new environment and they need to find techniques of integrating them with new ones. Parents need support and empowerment to succeed in their integration process.

#### 8.4 Taking responsibility and acknowledging shortcomings

The first few years in a new country are often full of cultural shock and generate a state of confusion as new settlers make an effort to understand their new setting while reconciling their traditions with the current environment. As noted in this and previous chapters, South Sudanese spoke of their challenges and sometimes blamed the authorities for encouraging family breakdown.

Some research has indicated that many new immigrants go through similar stages of transitioning into their new environment. For instance, their first few months are seen as a honeymoon period, as immigrants are often excited about the experiences of being in a new country and are greatly relieved to have succeeded in getting there. The first impressions are almost all positive as everything seems possible and long-held hopes are coming true (Berry, 1990, Adler, 1977, Deng, 2013B, Berry, 1992). This honeymoon phase is followed by a developing sense of disenchantment, in which all the disadvantages and limitations of the new country become more obvious as the novelty of the new environment wears off. Instant success has not happened, and life may have turned out much harder than expected. The new immigrant feels unexpectedly and emotionally distressed and may react with self-blame and withdrawal (S. A. Deng, 2013).

The South Sudanese sense of the need to take responsibility for their situation and noticing their shortcomings falls into this second phase, as they start to think of themselves as bicultural or multicultural. This can then highlight for new settlers some of their perceived shortcomings in parenting practices, resulting from failing to teach their children certain values at an early age. Some participants blamed the parents for failing to give more attention to their children's needs. These perceptions of blame can be highly gendered. For example, during a mixed focus group meeting, men and women blamed each other for these perceived shortcomings in parenting, mostly focused on what role parents should play in their children's upbringing. As part of the discussion on identifying some of their shortcomings and taking responsibility, a male participant believed that South Sudanese mothers were to blame for not giving enough attention to their children's needs.

*I strongly believe that South Sudanese women are to blame for their children's failure because sometimes children can even fight among themselves while their mothers continue to watch TV or are on the phone talking to their friends. The reason I say this is because when kids return from school, their mothers don't look after them at home. They leave the kids to play play-stations, movies, games or whatever they want to do and that is not good (Men and Women's Focus Group, Participant 3 - male).*

These views were echoed by a female participant in the same focus group, stating, "Some women also have problems as they are always on the phone talking to other friends without paying more attention to looking after their children." (*Men and Women's Focus Group, Participant 5 - female*) However, another female believed that men were responsible for their parenting shortcomings as they are not fully involved or do not support their wives or partners, who might not have acquired a sufficient level of education, notably in English, to support their children with homework for example.

*Some women don't know how to read and write, but their husbands or partners are not helping in their children's upbringing. Many South Sudanese men left the responsibilities of looking after their children to women only, which is not fair (Men and Women's Focus Group, Participant 4 - female).*

Furthermore, some participants acknowledged that each parent has different parenting styles, which play a significant role in their positive or negative upbringing. A female participant responded to a male participant who laid the entire blame on women:

*That is not true: the thing is, it is according to how you raise your children. Here we have different policies for children's upbringing in every house. For example, in my house children have times for doing certain things. For instance, after they return from school, there are allocated times for doing their studies, drawing, eating, showering and bedtime...We have different parenting styles (Men and Women's Focus Group, Participant 1 -female).*

As discussed earlier, although participants acknowledged the diversity in parenting styles, some shared the strategies that they use in their households and emphasised that children's behaviour often reflects their home environment.

*Parenting means the way of bringing up a child... What the child does is a reflection of where that child is growing up... If the child is good, that means there is something good at home, which also means that children's behaviours are reflections of their base or home environment that they are growing up in (Men and Women's Focus Group, Participant 2 - male).*

Despite sharing their experiences and practices, some parents do not share their parenting difficulties because of the stigma of being labelled as bad parents. Some do not want their children to associate with families who they believe indulge or condone bad behaviour and are potentially a bad influence on their children. Conversely, some parents insisted that sharing their issues and challenges is a significant part of social support, as discussed at the beginning of this chapter.

*Some are finding it very hard and start to isolate themselves from the community as they fear that if they associate themselves with other community members, then their children may be carried away by those who they believed are not doing so well. Others avoid the community because of the stigma that their children are not doing very well. This is because, in South Sudanese culture, parents are always blamed if their children are not doing well in life (Participant 5 - female).*

This tradition is a significant barrier to sharing their challenges, yet some participants are overcoming this so that community members may provide support. Acknowledging these shortcomings and taking some responsibility and urging each other to make efforts in certain areas as part of overcoming their resettlement challenges suggested that many South Sudanese have taken some significant steps from disintegration to reintegration and autonomy. Reintegration occurs when the new immigrant does less self-blaming, but blames their culture for the lack of success in the new culture (Valtonen, 2012, Adler, 1977). They also have developed a sense of autonomy, as they can now identify both strengths and weaknesses in the new environment. This period is followed by a sense of independence in which the immigrants become confident in managing conflicts between the old and the new cultures and environments (Adler, 1977, Berry, 1990, Deng, 2013B, Berry, 1992).

## 8.5 Embracing changes in the families and community

Based on the findings of this study, South Sudanese parents have acknowledged the significance of embracing some of the changes within the families and community as part of coping with their parenting and resettlement challenges. As discussed above, most have passed the honeymoon period: when they first arrived, everything was wonderful, but that was rapidly followed by disenchantment in which everything has all gone wrong because of the resettlement challenges. Most are now in the transition towards reintegration, where they see the challenges as not entirely their new system's fault, and are heading towards autonomy and independence in which they see their challenges from both the old and new perspectives (Adler, 1977, Deng, 2013B). The first parts of the transition (after the honeymoon period) are full of bitterness and regret, compared with the later parts when they have developed some strategies to cope with the challenges. Berry (1992) argued that behaviour shifts when an individual move to another culture and that these behavioural changes are associated with acculturative stress. These changes occur as a result of moving away from previously learned patterns toward those more often found in the new society and these learning and unlearning periods are not conducive to settled repertoires of behaviour. Berry believed such a shift involves stressful psychological phenomena that include conflict and often result in new forms of behaviour that interfere with smooth day-to-day functioning.

However, these transitions are not homogenous for all new settlers since there are many contributing factors to the resettlement and parenting challenges. All these have been discussed earlier in this paper - language and cultural barriers, lack of social support and socioeconomic conditions. While many South Sudanese remained concerned about these changes and challenges in their parenting practices and cultural values, they also identified some advantages provided by their new environment.

*The big dynamic change here is the fact that parents don't have much support that they used to enjoy in South Sudan. The benefit here is that, those who use excessive force to discipline their kids will not be able to do so because of the law. A lot of newly-arrived immigrants can easily misunderstand things around parenting in their new environment. ... Through these misunderstandings and misconceptions about the laws that protect innocent people, the family tends to guess a lot of things... For example, 'How dare the government prevent me from*

*disciplining my own kids; it is my right as a parent?’ Yet, not knowing what the laws are in Australia. So misunderstandings and misconceptions give wrong impressions about the authorities (**Participant 2 - male**).*

As these participants observed, many have come to realise that their parenting values have changed since some practices formerly considered as ‘normal parenting discipline’ are no longer part of their children’s upbringing. For example, parents and other adults picking up a stick to discipline a child was normal in South Sudan where it was considered to be a societal responsibility to discipline anybody's child. Parents reiterated that each parent has different parenting styles, whether in South Sudan or in Australia.

*We have to follow some of our traditions, which are good, but also follow what the policies say and how they work here (**Men and Women’s Focus Group, Participant 1 - female**).*

Participants acknowledge the advantages provided by their new environment such as education and security. For instance, they pointed out that some young South Sudanese are well-educated, some hold good jobs and others have bought houses as part of integrating into their new environment. These are some of the things the South Sudanese wish the media would cover rather than always picking on the negative aspects of their community.

*A couple of advantages: the children who listen to their parents and follow through with their education are now doing very well in life. I have also learned that many young South Sudanese have achieved so well, and some hold good jobs since they have an education and language ability. Those who failed to be educated are those taken by the government agencies and put in foster care... They stopped going to school and started drinking or using drugs... Some are just loitering on the streets (**Participant 5 - female**).*

Further, participants believed that integrating some of their customs and doing what the policies of the new country require of them, just like every other citizen, is for the benefit of their children who are growing up and will remain Australian.

*The benefit is that our children have gone to school and are learning a lot of things, but the challenge is that they are getting confused between the two cultures as they do not know which culture to follow: they are still African but they do not have much knowledge (of African culture), and when they try to fit into the Western culture they do not feel they belong there either. 'They are the lost generation' - the only thing is to find how to integrate both cultures. It takes years to integrate, and most South Sudanese have been here for less than two decades (Participant 6 - male).*

No doubt, many young South Sudanese are struggling between their culture of origin and Australian, and this has caused great intergenerational conflict with their families. However, many parents believe that their children will not go back to South Sudan as they are more used to their new culture and environment than to their culture of origin. Therefore, it is imperative to integrate into the new culture while maintaining aspects of the original. The other thing they embrace is that their new environment has made them closer as a family, which the circumstances did not allow in South Sudan.

*The good thing about these changes is that it creates equality or an equal share of decision-making within the family. Sometimes a family sits and has a meal together. This is a good thing because sitting together as a family and discussing things is very important (Participant 11 - male).*

Embracing and accepting some of the changes are necessitated by the demands of their new environment. This does not mean that they have to give up all the important values within their culture, but integrating them enhances resettlement. Dynamic changes in families and in parenting practices are happening everywhere, and adapting to these variations is a significant step for both parents and their children. Joshi (2015) argued that new-old-fashioned parenting (NOFP) involves finding a balance between modern parenting and traditional ways. Foner (1997) stated that the culture from which immigrants come might also be going through some transformational changes in the migrant's lifetime, and it may be misleading to assume a timeless past of family tradition there. The author stated that immigrants are often influenced by their local cultural beliefs and values such as marriage, school and kinship as disseminated by mass media. Indeed, there have been rapid changes in South Sudan, especially following independence in July 2011, since when it has been exposed to the outside

world and connected to the Internet. This means that South Sudanese, who may have spent years in other countries of refuge and the diaspora, have started to return home. This includes people from neighbouring countries and the rest of the world, who all came into contact with the local cultures. South Sudan has also enacted its first legislation on child protection (among other things): although it is not as strictly enforced as in Australia and other developed countries, it is a matter of reinforcing it.

## 8.6 Parents as role models for their children

Participants emphasised the significance of parents being role models for their children as well as teaching them about their culture and societal responsibilities. Joshi (2015) stated that a child's experience of parenting has a significant impact on their ability and expectations, especially on how to tolerate disappointment and frustration after they become adults. Therefore, parents are responsible for teaching children boundaries and how to communicate better as these are vital skills in forming and preserving healthy relationships, and such learning starts in their home environment from those with they form their first affiliations. Culturally, South Sudanese believe that children's good or bad behaviours reflect their home environment or their parents' success or failure. In becoming good role models for their children, parents not only have to teach their children good behaviour but also to demonstrate what Sanders (1999) referred to as self-management: the skills that parents use to become more self-sufficient, self-evaluative, self-monitoring and self-determining of their performance goals and standards. There is no one parenting style, but parents are held responsible for raising their children with positive behaviours as they select which aspects of their own and their children's behaviours they wish them to work on by setting goals and choosing specific management strategies (Sanders, 1999). To some participants, their children are sometimes lacking role models as a result of marital disputes.

*Children sometimes do not have role models while growing up. Problems have increased between husbands and wives, which led to this (Women's Focus Group, Participant 3).*

There are apprehensions that the entire community is getting the blame for a few who are doing bad things. Although each parent has a different parenting style, some suggested taking an assertive and consistent role in engaging and disciplining their children to shape their behaviours positively instead of fearing the authorities.

*My question is, what kind of people do we want to raise? As a society, we have to comply with the rules.... The children go out there and start doing bad things and then society says, 'Yes, these are South Sudanese who are doing bad things.'... South Sudanese are really confused on what to do. Children's issues are always or partly to be blamed on the parents... Some parents think that their hands are tied, but they should remember that children's brains are still developing... Parents must talk to their children about everything... parenting is a difficult task (**Participant 1 - male**).*

Some parents emphasised the need to change the negative image that has tarnished them in society. There was also strong emphasis in trying to resolve family feuds, instead of involving the police in minor disputes within the families or kinships. As documented in previous studies, politicians and the media are believed to have played negative roles in picking on the bad stories to report about South Sudanese and have ignored positive aspects, which would have helped to balance the image of their community (Losoncz, 2013, Marlowe, 2010b).

*The other thing that the wider Australian society should understand is that not all South Sudanese children are on the streets: some of our children are doing really well, but the media only pick on few bad incidents to make all the South Sudanese community look bad. Our community needs to be strong so that such negative connotations and labelling of our community as bad because of a few is countered by telling the truth and facts about us. This is a new environment for us and being united and working together to advocate for ourselves and a better integration is crucial. In this country, you have to advocate for yourself. According to South Sudanese, there are procedures for resolving family issues (**Men and Women's Focus Group, Participant 6 - female**).*

As discussed in Chapter 5, the role of South Sudanese fathers was to be the breadwinner and family protector, but after moving to Australia, these roles have had to change;

some cannot be breadwinners as most find themselves unemployed, while mothers are left without parental support, which they used to receive from family members and relatives. Some participants believed that the lack of male role models in the family was a contributing factor to children's misbehaviour.

*The other thing I suppose is that some are single parents raising children on their own, which is really a challenge because those parents could be single mothers... I don't know whether it is a cultural thing, but most children who are having problems are with solo mothers. Maybe they would have done better if their fathers were there to discipline their sons... The lack of male role models might be playing a big part (**Participant 1-male**).*

Parents are considered the first teachers for their children, as they are expected to teach them positive attitudes, confidence and other essential skills before they graduate to the wider society. However, achieving such a noble goal needs constructive strategies and effort from parents and the community.

*You teach your children to stand on their own feet. You show them their rights and what they can do to be successful in their lives (**Participant 18 - female**).*

Teaching children the skills, values and positive attitudes they need before they become independent includes understanding their behaviours and influences to improve the parents' strategies to achieve the desired outcomes. For instance, parents stressed the significance of understanding their children's behaviours to improve their disciplinary approaches and encouraged one another not to give up on their children who may not be listening to them, but to continue trying to improve their behaviour for a better future.

*Parents need to keep trying to convince their children... They need to give them support as this can let the child understand that his or her parents really love him or her, which can even change the behaviours for the better. People should not isolate themselves when they are dealing with difficulties; they need to interact or talk to their friends about these so that they may feel listened to (**Participant 9 -female**).*

As stated earlier, parents are held accountable for their children's good or bad behaviour, and these cultural beliefs add an enormous pressure on parents as they try to protect their status in the community and raise the next positive generation. Joshi (2015) stated the significance of parents doing what is best for their children in the long term by showing some conviction and standing by their decisions, even if it occasionally causes tears and frustration for the children. As quoted earlier, being a role model is about being close to your children and listening to them. Although parents have the final say as decision-makers, research has revealed that seeking children's views and opinions on issues that affect them helps to reinforce positive behaviours, particularly if they are involved in setting the consequences and rewards for positive behaviours (Joshi, 2015, Sanders, 1999, Deng and Pienaar, 2011). Being a role model for children led to the next discussion on respect, culture, language and identity.

### 8.7 Respect as intertwined with culture, language and individual identity

As discussed in the previous chapters and identified in previous studies, South Sudanese see respect as something embedded in their culture, language and identity (Losoncz, 2013, Marlowe, 2010c). For instance, they expect respect not only from their children but also from the authorities working with them and from those who are interacting with them in the wider community. Respect is significant in forming inter-ethnic relationships within society (Buriel, 1993). Losoncz (2013) found respect to be critical in preserving individual reputation, identity and influence in the South Sudanese community. There are different types of respect, and the most significant to South Sudanese include respect for oneself and others, and shared respect amongst others, which is a part of human dignity (Deng, 1972, Losoncz, 2012).

*To be respected, a person has to be proud of who they are, and their culture...  
Our children sometimes lack these qualities (respect) (Men's Focus Group,  
Participant 9).*

As part of maintaining key aspects of their culture, parents expect their children to embrace respect, something completely intertwined with their culture and language into one identity. However, reinforcing such values has proven difficult as some children

while assimilating the new values are opposed to these traditions or sometimes find them hard to work through. Therefore, parents are urging one another to have an open and honest dialogue with their children, which is significant in both maintaining the parent/child relationship and as part of family discipline.

*As parents, you don't have to give up on your child because if you are stronger in trying to help your child, you can. (The effect of) your child is the same as going to the toilet - you cannot come out and announce to everyone that you left something terrible and smelly. Your child is a part of you and no matter how bad he/she is; you don't give up on him or her. Parents need to be honest and open with their children when talking about these challenges. Being close to your child is very important... Parents must learn strategies for talking with their children; they need to be friends with them (**Men and Women's Focus Group, Participant 6 - female**).*

Some parents are determined to do their best to raise their children to retain aspects of their cultural values. Another participant gave an example of how he maintained his mother tongue through his parent's help while he was growing up in a predominately Arabic-speaking community.

*I was brought up speaking different languages (mostly Arabic), but my parent taught me my mother tongue. Since I learnt how to speak my language, I was able to fit into my tribe (Nuer); otherwise, if my parent did not insist on teaching me, then I would have lost or not fitted into my culture. My parent taught me to hold onto my language as it is my identity (**Participant 6 - male**).*

Another participant held parents to blame for letting their children forget their native culture and languages and suggested one way forward.

*The language barrier between the parents and their children is a real issue. Parents are to blame because they have a responsibility to teach their children to preserve their mother tongues. Parents must teach their children while growing up. Especially when they come back from school, parents and children should speak their language at home so that their children do not forget it (**Participant 9 - female**).*

Many participants have raised the issue of the language barrier between parents and their children as creating gaps and tending to increase intergenerational conflicts. They spoke of expecting children to maintain aspects of their culture, but without their native languages children will not be able to uphold their culture, as culture and language are interconnected. Part of belonging to a certain culture includes the ability to understand the culture and speak the language. Parents believed that their children are not only forgetting their mother tongues but are also abandoning their culture and other traditional values. Given this, what kind of legacy are the parents going to pass on to their children as they age? This is discussed next.

### 8.8 Leaving a legacy for the next generation

As discussed in Chapter 5, South Sudanese have a strong sense of pride when it comes to protecting individual and family reputations in the community. Parents are culturally obliged to pass on to their children a good legacy. That includes raising children to have good cultural values, attitudes and behaviours. Parents are expected to instil a sense of collective responsibility and the obligation to continue the lineage, as demonstrated, for example, through being required to name their children after their parents, grandparents, and ancestors. According to F. M. Deng (2009), permanent identity and influence within South Sudanese society are directly linked to maintenance and perpetuation of a good name. Leaving behind a good legacy for the next generation is connected with respect for oneself. Since respect is an important element of South Sudanese culture as being intertwined with one's identity, dignity and status in the community, it is the duty of every member of that community to protect each other's reputation from being spoilt or defamed (Deng, 2009). In this study, parents were asked to discuss how they would like to be remembered by their children. Most spoke of expecting to be remembered as mothers and fathers who have done their best to provide a better future for their children.

*I want my children to remember me as a mother who looked after them very well through guiding, advising them and doing whatever I could to make them positive people... so that they may do the same things to their offspring,*

*relatives, and the community. They will remember me, particularly if they can do well in their lives (Participant 16 - female).*

Some would like to be remembered by their children as good role models, carers, and guardians.

*I would like to be remembered by my children and others as a good role model, nurturing and someone who looked after them. This is an area that needs more research and open discussion since there is a lot of misunderstandings and misconceptions. Sharing information is very important for a proper resettlement of new settlers (Participant 2 - male).*

Many parents also believed that part of a good legacy for their children is through making sure that they are well educated.

*I would like to see my children well educated; that is, when they say, “Thank you mum for not giving up on us and for teaching us to be good and successful or to be who we are today.” I don’t want them to remember me as a bad parent but as a good one (Participant 10 - female).*

Education is highly valued in South Sudanese culture and those whose children are well educated are highly regarded in the community. All parents in this study spoke of having struggled throughout their refugee journeys to bring their children to Australia and would like to make sure that they gain a world-class education so that they should have a better future. Most of the parents were deprived of an education due to decades of civil war, which affected those living in the southern part of the country, now the Republic of South Sudan. Therefore, they expect their children to make them proud and to help their family members with the education that they gain. Although no substantial research has yet been done on how many South Sudanese have acquired an education since arriving in Australia, there is some indication that the South Sudanese community is one of the emerging ethnic groups with a significantly higher number of graduates than other ethnic communities, who have been in Australia for decades. Many South Sudanese believe that education will improve their participation in their new country.

*I want my children to participate in everything in this country, even in parliament, so that they may say that our mother has made us who are today (Participant 18 -female).*

As discussed in the previous chapters, like other new settlers, South Sudanese parents felt powerless if they could not control their children's behaviour, yet there is a strong emphasis on trying to leave a legacy for their children. The above comments sketch some of their expectations for their children and the kind of legacy they want to leave. Thus, most of the emphasis is on trying to help their children to become successful members of society more than on self-actualisation.

#### **8.9 Positive Parenting: Empowering families and community as a conduit for addressing transitional challenges and changes**

As discussed in previous chapters, South Sudanese families, especially parents, are struggling with changes in families and unfamiliar parenting practices as they are exposed to a new culture and practices. Such exposure has led to a loss of confidence in their parenting approaches and orientation, since they must abandon some of the social structures that sustain their values, beliefs, and strategies (Deng and Pienaar, 2011). In this section of the interviews and discussions, the participants proposed many recommendations as to how parenting and other resettlement challenges can be resolved. The recommendations include empowering families and community as a conduit for addressing the identified parenting challenges. Participants suggested an open and honest dialogue and discussion between their community and service providers in order to devise suitable and sustainable support, such as education about the laws relating to child protection and a positive parenting program. The following summarises these concerns and recommendations.

*We want the authorities to listen to parents' concerns and have some dialogue with them. Such dialogue will help to find solutions to these challenges facing our community. Parenting training, about the laws on children, is very important. All we need for our children is for them to have a good future. The reason why we are quite strict in not allowing our children to go out as they*

*wish is because there are a lot of bad influences out there (Women's Focus Group, Participant 1).*

Calling for such discussions and dialogue is appropriate as it should result in support relevant to those who are struggling with parenting challenges. A female participant highlighted these concerns and emphasised the need to work together.

*We find it very hard to know what to do when our children misbehave because we came from a culture where we discipline our children with a reasonable force whenever they misbehave, which is not allowed here. As a consequence, some of our children have become very ill-disciplined, disrespectful and are on the streets. Was the help given to us, to bring us here, to fail? The so-called freedom has spoiled many children because children may go out as they wish and if their parents say anything, they run away. The authorities working with our children need to show us how the alternative disciplining procedures work (Men and Women's Focus Group, Participant 6 - female).*

Many participants believed that programs which bring parents together to discuss their parenting challenges could give parents enhanced opportunities to interact and share their experiences and help one another (Deng and Pienaar, 2011). These programs should be devised in a way that meets their family's needs by teaching them some alternative disciplinary approaches. Trying to adapt to a new setting with different parenting practices is often depressing and daunting for new settlers. However, previous studies and parenting programs have shown that when new settlers are properly consulted to gain understanding of their needs, cultural values and beliefs, and appropriate support programs are devised through involving them, delivery seems to be effective (Deng and Pienaar, 2011, SKIP, 2011, Westoby, 2008). As stated earlier and as illustrated by the above comments, many participants suggested equipping parents to tackle their parenting challenges. The significance of empowering the community to resolve some of their issues at their level is that this was part of their traditional practice.

*We came from a culture where we used to resolve our issues at family and community levels...we used to have chiefs or sultans. Our community members know who can help in resolving problems. Such people can be identified here*

*and organise to help... A basic agreement can be drawn up in conjunction with the Australian laws and some of our cultural values to be used by the appointed mediators (South Sudanese) in the community. This can help minimise the issues, especially for young people who are always having trouble with the police (**Participant 7 - male**).*

Those comments were echoed by another participant who identified the significance of involving the community elders to mentor younger parents who are struggling in the community.

*Open and honest discussion within the family and community about parenting challenges is very important. Those who are older also need to provide support or mentoring to those who are younger. Parenting training is strongly recommended. Parents need to share experiences and ideas on their parenting challenges. Parents do not have to fear that if they ask for help they will be labelled as bad parents. Elders and wise people need to be engaged in helping parents and young people. There are a lot of misunderstandings and misconceptions about the new settlers in the wider Australian community in which some consider African/South Sudanese to be hostile to their children. Nobody can hurt his or her child intentionally, but they think that we abuse our kids. There is a need to share cultures within the wider Australian community. A program which provides cross-cultural experience is paramount. Service providers and the majority of people within the wider Australian community know very little about the good parts of our cultures. Sometimes, they get their information about our culture through negative media about poverty, violence or war (**Participant 2 - male**).*

Nevertheless, some South Sudanese do lack knowledge of where to take their children for pleasure, leisure, and extra-curricular activities and this had led to conflict between parents and their children.

*We strongly need parenting support such as positive parenting training, workshops and even going out camping with our children. Sometimes our children say that they are always bored at home and need to go out (**Participant 18 - female**).*

There was a strong emphasis on how parents could find solutions to their parenting challenges through setting up a common place where they could socialise together and share experiences. However, participants also spoke of becoming more individualised through being scattered in different suburbs, which made it harder to give one another support.

*Parents need to create a parents' club, which may not need many resources: a place where parents can go to share their experiences of their parenting styles as well as how they are overcoming the parenting challenges. The problem is, we are becoming very individualised and we don't even care so much about others but only about own children. People are not sharing ideas as they used to in South Sudan (**Participant 1 - male**).*

Nevertheless, some participants believe that some solutions to their parenting challenges can be found within their families and community. They stressed that there were things they can do instead of blaming the authorities for everything. They suggested the need to work together in discussion and brainstorming sessions to identify possible solutions for the resettlement issues and challenges.

*There are things we can do as families, parents or community to resolve some of the issues that are affecting us before we should blame the authorities. We have to accept that we are in a new environment. Therefore, let us make some changes in our culture to cope with the current challenges. There are needs for discussions about these challenges and to find ways of resolving them (**Women's Focus Group, Participant 4**).*

Some participants identified the importance of having community centres where parents can share their experiences and give one another support. There was also an emphasis on not only empowering the community, but also working to create a better understanding of South Sudanese culture through having their most educated members employed in the relevant support sectors.

*The way parents can be helped is to employ some of our community members to work in different sectors, particularly with social workers, counsellors, police and other relevant sectors. Having our community members in these sectors will*

*help to address some of the problems that are facing parents/families and community in general since they will have good understanding of our cultures and greater inside knowledge about the current issues and challenges (Participant 17 - female).*

Participants made several suggestions about pathways to resolve their parenting challenges. They consistently stated their belief that if their community is empowered, the community leaders and members can help to resolve some family issues, such as domestic violence, through acting as mediators. Parents identified the need to share their parenting challenges and suggested support from the community elders for young parents and positive parenting training as possible solutions to the challenges faced.

## Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the strategies used by the South Sudanese to cope with the impact of changes in their family and parenting practices in Australia. It highlighted the significance of understanding South Sudanese culture to enhance appropriate family and parenting support. Participants made various suggestions as to how to overcome their parenting challenges - cultural exchange to strengthen mutual understanding within a multicultural society; the need to identify community needs and to devise appropriate support services. Most suggested better collaboration with the relevant support services as such cooperation will increase awareness on both sides and will educate families and parents about Australian laws, particularly those concerning child protection policy. Participants draw much of their social and emotional support from their ethnic community leaders, church or spiritual leaders and from ordinary members of the community. However, the significant roles played by the community leadership, the elders and the church leaders, have not been recognised, and they do not have sufficient powers to resolve the family and community challenges, which were traditionally resolved at community level. Most of the support that South Sudanese give one another to overcome the challenges caused by their new environment comes from socialising together, one of their main coping strategies.

South Sudanese migrant to Australia have faced many challenges because of forced migration, but what has kept them going, as some participants recounted, has been the resilience they developed during their refugee journeys. Amidst the challenges of forced migration and resettlement, participants spoke of trying to find strategies for integrating some of their traditional South Sudanese and Australian parenting practices. They emphasised that integration can be achieved through making an effort with support from the relevant service providers. For instance, they expect the relevant services to help them learn about Australian laws and policy in regard to children's upbringing and discipline.

Participants also emphasised the need for parents to teach their children cultural values as a way not only of preserving their own cultural values but also to make it easier for their children to integrate their old and new environments. Integration is seen as appropriate for their children's future as they become part and parcel of their new society. To achieve this, there is a need to upskill parents and caregivers to use positive parenting practices. Participants also urged parents to share their experiences and challenges and to help one another. Some parents also spoke of using more lenient parenting approaches, in contrast to the traditional South Sudanese parenting style, where children are told what to do and are expected to comply. They also identified the importance of parents being close to their children as it gives the parents opportunities to learn and understand their needs, and to guide their behaviours towards positive desired outcomes.

Because being in a new society makes it hard for migrants to understand their new country's laws and policies, participants encouraged their compatriots to make friends with people from the mainstream culture, since such connections will improve the speed with which they learn and understand their new environment. The participants also highlighted a need for positive parenting training or programs as part of equipping and empowering the family and community to address their transitional challenges and changes. As indicated by previous studies and programs (Deng and Pienaar, 2011), positive parenting training offers parents opportunities to share their experiences and ideas and to support one another. It is also an opportunity for parents to learn alternative methods of child discipline since their traditional parenting practices, which are based on physical discipline, are not generally acceptable in their new country. The success of

such programs depends on constructive preliminary consultation with the families and communities expected to benefit. Chapters 5-7 focused on understanding South Sudanese traditions, transitional parenting practices and the impact of parental changes within their families, while this chapter has highlighted that South Sudanese are acknowledging their shortcomings and taking some responsibility for addressing the parenting challenges they have identified. Some participants believed that accepting that responsibility is important, since children's behaviour generally reflects their parents' behaviour and their home environment. Such a belief is strongly embedded in South Sudanese culture. Parents are always their children's first teachers and role models. Therefore, they are accountable for teaching their children positive behaviours and societal and cultural values, which include a sense of respect and their traditional language, not only as part of upholding and preserving their culture, but also to leave a good legacy for the generations to come.

The next chapter discusses South Sudanese youth's perspectives on parenting and culture.

## CHAPTER NINE

### South Sudanese youth identity: perspectives on parenting and culture

#### Introduction

This chapter presents the other side, the perspectives of young South Sudanese on their complex cultural identities and on parenting and being parented in Australia. While some of the youth comments contradicted parents' views, there were many similarities regarding settlement challenges. The recurring themes in this chapter echo those of their parents - their own forced migration experiences, generational conflict, parental control versus young people's freedom and independence, youth engagement, support and respect. Chapters 5-8 discussed South Sudanese traditional parenting practices, transitional experiences, the impact of parental changes and challenge and coping strategies using the data collected from interviews with parents, so clearly the parents' voices dominated the discussion. Now it is the turn of the young people who provided input in both individual and focus group interviews.

The chapter briefly highlights the forced migration experiences, both pre- and post-migration, of the youth as well as looking at the settlement challenges associated with acculturation and intergenerational conflicts. An established predictor of refugee adolescents' psychological well-being is their post-migration experiences, which cover both the difficulties faced and the extent to which social support is available and accessed. The psychological impact of pre-migration trauma coupled with loss add to the cultural shock and stressors associated with adapting to a new country. These often result in many young people becoming more susceptible to mental health issues and difficulties in acculturating as they struggle for balance between the culture of origin and the resettlement environment (Schweitzer et al., 2006, Milner and Khawaja, 2010, Deng and Pienaar, 2011, Deng and Marlowe, 2013, Marlowe et al., 2014).

In this chapter, the young participants share their experiences and perspectives on the difficulties they are facing not only in adjusting to their new environment but also in dealing with generational change and their parents' expectations that they should retain

at least part of their original culture. Young people blame some of their difficulties on the perceived lack of strong South Sudanese community leadership, from whom the young people expected to have received some support to overcome at least some acculturation and intergenerational issues. The young people shared how they have been, and still are, adjusting, negotiating and juggling between their new culture and their original South Sudanese culture. They also advised their fellow South Sudanese youth to stay out of trouble and off the streets, to listen to their parents and to focus on their education and the future. Many South Sudanese youth are assuming leadership roles in tackling and addressing their challenges as a result of the perceived lack of guidance from their elders. This is, of course, in contrast to the parents and elders who allege that young people do not listen to them, as discussed in the previous chapters.

## **9.1. South Sudanese youth identity, culture and perspectives on parenting and being parented**

### **9.1.1 Forced migration experiences**

South Sudanese were exposed to traumatic experiences resulting from forced migration and young people, in particular, seem to have been more susceptible to these harrowing experiences than were adults who might have developed some coping strategies or resilience. According to Kohli and Mather (2003, p.203), young people's vulnerability arises through coming face-to-face with traumatic events, and, particularly for those who become refugees, the effects of war or natural disasters are punishing them in various ways. Upon arriving in their new country, those experiences are often aggravated by difficulties adjusting to the new setting as they try to balance between the new and original cultures (Schweitzer et al., 2006, Milner and Khawaja, 2010). Earnest (2007) stipulated that refugee children's native culture influences various aspects of their psychosocial well-being, and a cultural explanation may be quite disparate to Western understanding. Adolescent refugees are prone to the effects of their migration experiences, and this includes their new environment's demands as they struggle to forge their new identity and dual cultural membership (Earnest et al., 2007). Research on resilience has also indicated that not all adolescent refugees who experienced traumatic events become traumatised. This is mainly because some have developed

resilience out of these experiences and, in comparison to Australian youth, young refugees are no more traumatised from child abuse or other abuses (Kohli and Mather, 2003, Grossman, 2014). Most South Sudanese adolescents grew up in war-torn Sudan and in transit countries of refuge also undergoing war, and they spoke of having witnessed bombardment, violent death and other forms of atrocities through their refugee journeys.

*What I saw is different; I was born in the war, and life was difficult in South Sudan because people used to run for safety most of the time; those who managed to study were very few. The civil war has impacted greatly on young generations, particularly those who were born in the wartime. Some of us have seen people killed and many other bad things in our presence. These are still in our memories despite the fact that some of us are now grown-up adults (Youth Focus Group - 3 male).*

This participant recounted varied pre- and post-migration challenges - a rough life in refugee camps, different cultures with attendant cultural shock, a new and unfamiliar system plus the difficulties of adjusting to life in a big city, as some had never lived in a city before coming to Australia.

*After coming here, we found different cultures and how life goes on is different. There were some people who had never been to cities before. Life in refugee camps was tough since there was not enough food, water and other basic needs, and no employment. Access to resettlement was hard. After coming here, we were met with cultural shock, because even going to the market, you find everything different, and getting used to the new environment needs time. After arriving here, people are always expected by the system to get used to everything straight away, but it is not easy. Most young South Sudanese have seen so many traumatic things, and these will not go away quickly (Youth Focus Group - 3 male).*

These pre- and post-migration experiences plus the demands of adjusting to a new setting often sparks numerous parenting challenges within the families of the new settlers. As noted already from the participants' comments and discussion elsewhere in this thesis, most of their traditions have to change, as parents and children are required

to deal with circumstances that compel them to fit into their new country's culture and laws (Deng and Pienaar, 2011). The demands occasioned by forced relocation create tensions, which have adverse consequences on the refugees' psychosocial status (Menjívar and Menjívar, 2000, McMichael et al., 2011). While many have retained coping strategies from their pre-migration experiences, which have been used to help these adolescents become more resilient in coping with post-migration challenges, they are at times poorly prepared or not supported enough to deal with these challenges and changes.

### 9.1.2 Youth identity

As discussed earlier, and as is the case with many other refugees, culture and identity form an important part of South Sudanese upbringing: it commonly constitutes intergenerational connections and cultural transmission (Yenika-Agbaw and Mhando, 2014). Berry et al. (2006, p.322) studied young people and asked them three questions: 'How do immigrant youth live within and between two cultures? How well do they deal with their intercultural situation? Are there patterns of relationship between how adolescents engage in their intercultural relation and how well they adapt?' The findings from the answers to those questions created more debate but also a better understanding of how immigrant youth integrate their culture of origin with the host culture. Young participants in this study identified themselves as either South Sudanese or South Sudanese-Australian, and all identified with an integrative profile as they believed they are integrating their traditional and new cultures. They believe they are South Sudanese in origin but also Australian by citizenship, and that they are adapting to their new Australian culture alongside that of their origin. All the youth who participated were either born in Sudan, South Sudan or in the transit countries of refuge before coming to Australia with their parents, relatives or caregivers. The youth participants were aged between 18 and 24 years and have been in Australia for over eight years, which means that most would have come to Australia between the ages of 9 and 11 – or even younger.

These young people were asked to discuss the differences they see between South Sudanese and Australian traditions and cultures. Most identified many observed differences, especially around cultural values such as respect and freedom. Some of them have mixed feelings when it comes to their experience of the new freedoms in

Australia. Some still identify strongly with South Sudanese culture as they continue to engage in the activities of that community, but others reported losing their culture and native tongues altogether.

*I identify myself more with South Sudanese culture. I still do things according to my culture because I don't want to forget it (Youth Focus Group - 5 Female).*

*To be honest, I think mine is half, mostly I still follow my cultural values, but I have forgotten my language, which is the only problem I have. However, I am now trying to relearn it (Youth Focus Group - 4 Female).*

Identity is an important part of South Sudanese culture. For them it is what identifies an individual and their origin. According to F. M. Deng (1995), identity is the way others define individuals based on race, ethnicity, religion, language, culture and other determining factors: identity is a concept that gives a deeply-rooted psychological and social meaning to the individual in the context of group dynamics. However, as the groups vie for power, material resources and other values, these dynamics may involve cooperation, competition or conflict (Deng, 1995). South Sudanese identities are affected by their forced migration as well as by their changes and challenges in the new environment as they struggle to balance between their new and traditional cultures (Marlowe et al., 2014, Attias-Donfut, 2012).

### 9.1.3 Intergenerational conflict: experiences and perspectives of growing up between differing cultures

As discussed in Chapter 3, additional acculturative stresses in a family arise when young migrants go to school after resettlement and start experiencing more rapid changes than their parents, mainly in order to complete their daily classroom activities and to interact socially with their peers (Deng and Pienaar, 2011, Marlowe et al., 2014). During this acculturation process, most young migrants face conflicting beliefs and attitudes that generate disconnects between their original and their current culture, putting them at odds with their parents and caregivers (Berry, 1997). They face constantly conflicting values from their original cultures (parents at home) and those of the new social environment (schools and other social settings) as well as also starting to learn about individual freedoms (Poppitt and Frey, 2007). Research has indicated that

many refugee families are not supported enough or are unprepared to deal with these changes and challenges (Dunlavy, 2010, Renzaho et al., 2011).

An Australian study revealed that changes in lifestyle and the surrounding social and cultural environment could negatively influence the lives and behaviours of young refugees (Sanders, 2002). That study reminds us that successful resettlement means more than addressing the challenges of finding somewhere to live, but also means adapting to unfamiliar systems and customs, and becoming actively involved in the social, economic and cultural affairs of the new country (Tribe, 1999, Deng and Marlowe, 2013, Sanders, 2002). In trying to make sense of their experiences, South Sudanese youth were asked to discuss how they navigate between differing cultures, what stresses arose from this and what their strategies were for coping. Although some young people spoke of doing what their parents, as their guardians, tell them to do, others acknowledged the challenges of growing up between differing cultures in which conflicting values often sparked tensions and struggle between them and their parents.

Some of the young people interviewed believe they need to uphold their home traditions as it is important for them to pass them onto their children and subsequent generations. Those who came to Australia as adolescents spoke of not having seen a 'strong culture' in Australia when compared to what they had experienced earlier. Most were referring to the idea of being together and supporting one another - even just greeting neighbours in the morning. One participant explained the differences he observed in Australia when compared to South Sudan.

*Our African culture is always about togetherness and support for one another. For instance, when you wake up, the first thing you do in the morning is to check how your relatives, friends or neighbours are doing or even visit them. People eat together and stay together in bad and good times. When practicing these parts of our culture here, some people who started to know about such cultural values always give us some positive feedback. For instance, someone told me that if we supported one another like this in Australia, then we would avoid all of these problems due to isolation, which is causing a lot of problems within the wider Australian community (Youth Focus Group - 3 Male).*

A “strong culture” in these comments provides an example of cultural shock, as a key element of their original culture (‘togetherness and support for one another’) is perceived to be missing in the new environment. These comments also underscore the significance of cultural exchange and the benefits to be gained from comparing and discussing diverse cultural values.

Another participant set out some other challenges facing South Sudanese youth as they transition from adolescence into adulthood in an Australian environment.

*Turning 18 years is a tough age for many young Sudanese. For example, we have different cultures between South Sudanese and Australian. Most Sudanese boys when they turn 18, try to move out of home; they can even fight with their mums, particularly when their mums ask them to do certain things. According to Sudanese, even when you reach 18 or 24 years old, you still live with your parents until you get married and do the right things, but here, the culture has changed and that is affecting young Sudanese and the community (**Youth – Participant 13, Male**).*

While South Sudanese youth are trying to adjust to their new environment and culture, they are also expected by their parents to follow their traditions and customs. Previous studies have suggested that acculturation is a leading source of stress for new settlers as they struggle to adjust to their new country (Berry, 1997). This is because children are learning their new language and culture at schools, and through interaction with the Australian culture elsewhere, but when they return home, their parents expect them to follow their original cultural values (Richman, 1998, Searle et al., 2012). This situation becomes contentious when parents continue to embrace their ancestral cultures, with a strong emphasis on not allowing their children to depart from their original culture and identity (Fisher, 2007, Deng and Marlowe, 2013). This is what creates intergenerational conflict and, like many other immigrant adolescents, the South Sudanese struggle to negotiate a workable synthesis between their original and new cultures in their new environment (Deng and Pienaar, 2011, Deng and Marlowe, 2013).

## 9.2. Power and control: South Sudanese youth perspectives on respect and being parented in Australia

### 9.2.1 Parental control versus young people's new freedom and independence

The South Sudanese youth also shared their perspectives on respect, parenting and being parented in Australia. From the parents' perspective, as discussed in previous chapters, the young people's autonomy increases in their new environment, which leads to arguments and intensifies conflict with their parents. Sometimes these arguments surface around autonomy and freedom, household chores, selection of appropriate friends, homework and care for siblings within the family (McMichael et al., 2011, Deng and Pienaar, 2011, Deng and Marlowe, 2013). The difficulties stemming from these tensions can show up fractures within the family entity and may lessen the support adolescents receive from their parents, which in turn may lead to financial difficulties and to antisocial behaviour (McMichael et al., 2011).

The main area of conflict between parents and youth views has been about control. South Sudanese youth gave examples of parental control clashing with their new freedoms and independence, and the differences between the Australian and South Sudanese approach based on their different cultural understandings. For example, in Africa, young people are not allowed to talk back to their parents but are expected to listen to them with respect, and they can only answer if invited by their parents.

*The rules are also different here compared to South Sudan. Here, young people are allowed by law to do whatever they like while in South Sudan, young people are not... Here, children talk back to their parents, and they have to listen to them (Youth Focus Group - 5 Female).*

Some of the young people observed the differences in how young people are parented in Australia compared to South Sudan where children are expected to respect their parents, and they are not allowed to answer back when they are given commands. This was contrasted with some young Australians, who may show no respect to their parents.

*The difference is, if I come home late, my parent will ask me, 'Where have you been?' and I have to tell them exactly where I was. But the way I see the other Australians; if their parents ask them, they can just disrespect them. South*

*Sudanese young people have to give reasonable answers (Youth - Participant 12-Male).*

On the subject of parental control, some of the young people said that their parents become very protective and controlling of them as they fear outside influences and the possibilities of getting into trouble with the law.

*Parents fear that police might catch the young people or maybe that they will go and join a gang (Youth Focus Group - 2 Male).*

As discussed earlier, the issue of parental control versus young people's new freedom and independence often leads to struggles in many new settler families. As Mansouri et al. (2015, p.6) stated, these intergenerational tensions arise from competing understandings about the rights and responsibilities of young people and the level of autonomy and freedom they should be entitled to. However, some of the younger participants also emphasised the significance of parental guidance since greater freedom can be a distraction to young people looking for a better future.

*South Sudanese are stricter in their parenting styles. Children have to follow what they say; if not, you get disciplined. But in Australia, there are some kinds of freedom for the kids... There are laws that can take parents to court and accuse them of child abuse. It is actually a problem because you are growing up, and you don't know what is right and wrong... Parents are already grown, and they have been through things, so they know what is bad and good for you. Therefore, having too much freedom is bad for some young people (Youth - Participant 12 -Male).*

Although some youth acknowledge the importance of parental control, strictness creates divisions and problems for some parents and their children. Understandably, even though many South Sudanese parents believed that being stricter is a necessary part of their children's upbringing, strictness does not work in controlling their children as they are already aware of their rights and freedoms in their new environment. This has posed a great challenge to parental authority.

### 9.2.2 Physical discipline

The South Sudanese youth participants grew up in refugee camps. They believe that Australian parents do not beat their children, unlike the South Sudanese, who use corporal punishment for correcting behaviour. Physical disciplining is defined as a physical attack on children, and according to Straus (1991, p.134), the most common forms of this include spanking, slapping, grabbing and shoving of a child “roughly,” with more force than needed. It is understood that such practices often create conformity, particularly regarding the immediate situation, but it increases the likelihood of deviance such as delinquency in adolescents and offending (Straus, 1991, Lansford et al., 2005, Mansouri et al., 2015). Physical force is often linked to the need for control and demands for respect. The following comments illustrate the ‘good and bad’ sides of physical discipline.

*The biggest difference is, they (Australian parents) don't beat their kids, but in South Sudan, if you do something wrong, you get beaten until you learn... There are great differences between Australia and South Sudanese cultures because rules here (Australia) are different. However, physical disciplining was bad, but it teaches you not to do the same thing next time, but the way I see it here, they (parents) tell you don't do it, and you still do it because you're not being disciplined... In our culture, they discipline you in a way you will understand, so that next time you know the consequences and say, 'I will not do that again'*  
**(Youth - Participant 15 - Male)**

One participant recounted the differences between mainstream Australian and South Sudanese parents who are more culturally inclined to yell or use physical force when disciplining and correcting their children's behaviours.

*Some Australian parents leave their children without doing much about it (their behaviour), while South Sudanese parents might yell or beat their children up as well as do everything to make sure that their children are listening to them*  
**(Youth - Participant 20 -Female).**

The South Sudanese youth were asked to give examples of what happened if they did not listen to their parents' instructions and expectations. Most believed that they are being treated according to their parents' traditions and that this is different to the treatment of their Australian peers who are free from being forcibly control.

*Australian young people are much freer than us (young South Sudanese) as we are expected by our parents to only do things that please them (Youth - Participant 4-Female).*

As highlighted earlier, many South Sudanese parents were raised in a society where physical force was used to correct children's behaviour. This has created a need for parenting support, especially to provide alternative techniques to physical discipline. As Mansouri et al. (2015, p.6) states, there is often a lack of shared intergenerational cultural understanding of appropriate parenting practices, particularly those related to disciplining and punishment of children. Mansouri et al. emphasise that the lack of these shared understandings may lead to the involvement of the police and the Child Protection Service and, at times, to separating children from their families and communities. As a consequence it increased the risk of youth homelessness, offending, and alcohol and drug abuse.

### 9.2.3 Parental expectations of youth

This study has shown that the parents persist in expecting their children to hold onto aspects of the original culture. As discussed above, these expectations and the influence of acculturation stress within South Sudanese families are linked to adaptation changes, which create intergenerational gaps and conflicts. Milner and Khawaja (2010) stated that these conflicts within refugee families result in increased interpersonal distance among family members. At the same time children's faster integration or assimilation into their new culture and environment are of major concern to many South Sudanese parents, while the children see their parents' expectations as over-controlling and an infringement of their rights and independence. Such a division continues to widen the gaps between them.

*My parents expected me to hold onto our traditional culture and language as well as integrating into the Australian culture (Youth - Participant 4 - Female).*

As discussed in Chapter 3 and subsequently, integrating aspects of the original and new cultures has been shown by research to be an effective method of overcoming acculturation challenges for the new settlers, particularly for the youth who are growing up in a conflicted cultural environment. Pouch (2006) believed that these intergenerational gaps have divided South Sudanese families into three groups: the older generation, adolescents (12-25 years old) and children who were born either in the transit countries or Australia. According to South Sudanese culture, the role of adults is to educate the younger generations about their cultural values, norms, and language (Pouch, 2006). The older generation felt that the younger groups are not interested in learning about their culture of origin while young people think that their community and the elders are to be blamed for not helping them cope with the changes imposed by acculturation. In this study, South Sudanese youth believe that their parents expect them to hold onto their traditional culture and language, which means having respect for them and elders.

*My parents expected me to respect them and other people who are older than me and everybody else (Youth-Participant 12 - Male).*

Parental expectations on young people to hold onto the original cultural values require parents and community elders to bridge these intergenerational gaps through proper engagement, as the young study participants recommended.

*My parents expected me not to smoke or drink. It's all about making sure that I grow up in a good way and be a good person (Youth - Participant 13 - Male).*

However, these expectations create a dilemma for some when choosing between their parents' demands and conforming to peer pressures, for instance to smoke and drink as their friends do, and making the right choices can be difficult.

As discussed in Chapter 5, young men and women are encouraged to learn and socialise with their older sibling and relatives. The next comments come from a young man who was interviewed at his uncle's house. As part of learning about their culture, young South Sudanese are required to spend time with their uncles/aunts and other male/female role models in the community to help them learn about man and womanhood.

*My parent expected me to know my people and about how they live and how they get through things; this is what they want me to hold onto... That is why I came to my uncle's house to learn more about my culture (Youth - Participant 14 - Male).*

For this participant, parents not only expect them to learn from their uncles and aunts here in Australia, but they encourage them to go to South Sudan as part of learning and preserving their culture.

*They (parents) always tell us to follow our South Sudanese cultures you know - they always tell us to go back home and see how things are done at home, and they always tell us, 'In the future, your life will be based in South Sudan, always keep South Sudanese cultural values, do not lose faith in what our culture is and do not fall off the track' (Youth - Participant 15 - Male).*

As also discussed in previous chapters, parents have high expectations that their children should preserve their cultural values and their native languages. Some of the young people agreed with their parents on the need to uphold these values as part of their identity. Berry et al. (2006) identified an integration profile in their study of young immigrants and argued that adolescents who identified with the integration profile, which consisted of having a strong involvement in both ethnic and host cultures, performed better than those who did not fit that profile. They found that immigrant youths who identified strongly with ethnic and host identities were integrating into their new environment better than those who chose only to assimilate into their new culture or those who separated the two or kept their original culture without integrating with the new one (Berry et al., 2006, Berry, 1997). Youth who integrate both cultures reported a high level of national language competence and average ethnic language competence, which suggested the use of both languages normally creates balance and strengthens adaptation and integration into the new environment (Berry et al., 2006).

### 9.3. Youth perspectives on resettlement challenges

#### 9.3.1 Listening to parents

As discussed earlier, youth resettlement challenges chiefly concern the interpersonal and social conflicts of young people who are graduating into a world of greater autonomy, but these challenges sometimes include unhappiness due to other family issues such as parents' separation and families breaking up. The conflicts between parents and their eventual separation usually leave young people in the care of one parent. These separations adversely impact on the children's development as families are pivotal in their day-to-day lives. Families are supposed to provide stability and support, and to afford them a sense of belonging, guidance and common understanding of their surroundings and future (McMichael et al., 2011).

The South Sudanese youth participants were asked to discuss these issues and what advice they would like to offer their peers who are struggling with challenges during resettlement. They acknowledged the challenges of adjusting to the new environment as well as meeting parental expectations to understand and keep their tradition. The following comments highlight young people's perspectives on their origin and their new environment, and show conflicting intergenerational opinions.

*My parents taught us to be more careful, not to take everything (we see around us for granted). Parents need to be aware that we are in a different country, and we cannot follow (or hold onto) everything about our traditional culture here (Youth-Participant 4-Female).*

These comments show intergenerational differences as parents insist on holding on to their traditional practices while the younger generation emphasises the significance of trying to balance between old and new cultures.

As previously discussed, parents need support to set suitable parenting goals to bridge the gaps between their traditional and the new parenting practices (Goodnow and Collins, 1990, Pervin, 1989). Young people also acknowledged and advised their peers who are struggling between the two cultures (South Sudanese and Australian) to listen to and respect their parents as they often get blamed for their children's behaviour.

*We should listen to our parents because if you don't listen to them when they want to talk to us, you cannot be successful in life. When you do bad things, they come back to your parents and they get blamed for what their children do out*

*there, and it affects them... I think as a grown-up young man, I should listen to my parents, and if I am doing something wrong, my parents can tell me to stop, and I must stop if I want to be a good person in the future. Also to listen to friends who talk about education and doing the right things, not those who are not following their education (Youth- Participant 13 - Male).*

These comments echoed parents' perspectives and expectations that their children should listen to them and avoid misbehaving as culturally it tarnishes their parents' reputation in the community. Over-protectiveness, sometimes in a rigid or orthodox way, has been noted in parental expectations of their children (Potocky-Tripodi, 2002). Such rigidity and controls are additional to parents' expectations that their children's educational achievements will redeem the family's suffering; these concepts are all common among South Sudanese families.

### 9.3.2 Staying out of trouble and off the streets

As highlighted by the parents and supported by most studies, young immigrants quickly develop familiarity with the dominant culture and may embrace some of the values that oppose the traditional values still held by their parents, which results in apparent conflicts between children and their parents. Such changes leave young people caught in the middle as they try to adjust to their new environment while being expected by their parents to preserve their culture of origin. Some young people continue to experience a sense of intense identity confusion between two conflicting cultures (Deng and Marlowe, 2013, Ingamells and Westoby, 2008).

The youth participants advised their peers to 'stay off the streets' and to go to school as well as always to ask for help when needed.

*Stay off streets and stay in schools (Youth Focus Group – 1 - Male).*

*My advice is that some came a bit grown up while some have grown up here... Most of us who grew up in refugee camps have seen a lot of difficulties in life. I always talk to many other young people to use the opportunities they get in Australia and do something good for themselves and their community. For example, finishing one's education can lead one to do anything positive in his/her or her life. A lot of youth here are not making use of these and abandon*

*educational opportunities. I think God gave us the opportunities, because here, those who don't want to study or who are unable to study for whatever reason; they go to work and make money so that they can help themselves and their families. Even older people are still doing their studies in this country (Youth Focus Group - 3 - Male).*

These comments echoed a survey conducted by Grossman and Sharples (2010) with youth from Sudan and the Pacific Islands on safety and policing; it highlighted some of the issues that youth are facing in Brimbank, Victoria. When asked to give tips on safety, young respondents recommended that when in public, going in a group was best in keeping safe from violence; they advised their peers to stay away from violent behaviour, not to become involved with bad company, and avoid places where violent people or groups hang out (Grossman and Sharples, 2010).

*Not to join bad young people on the streets who are drinking alcohol and using drugs. Seek their own direction rather than following other or those on the streets. This is because there are a lot of bad influences on the streets (Youth Focus Group - 2 - Male).*

The Grossman and Sharples (2010) survey highlighted youth perspectives on the significance of education and encouraging self-control, respecting others, choosing friends carefully, the need for adult supervision and protective procedures such as counselling and controls over drugs and alcohol. In line with the parents' comments, the young people too believe that many South Sudanese are languishing in jail due to their antisocial behaviour, which is exacerbated by intergenerational conflict or identity confusion amid conflicting cultures. This young participant recounted how easy it is for young people to get into trouble with the law and get a bad police record, which then affects employment and other opportunities for young people.

*You get into trouble, and you will never get a better education, job and a better life but if I was in South Sudan, I would still have a better life. The laws here are different and when you get into trouble with the Police, your life is finished, and you may not get a better job; you get rejected. But in South Sudan, people know your family background and may spare you. Yes, most of the time, especially*

*many Sudanese boys and girls are in jail now, and they are not gonna have a better life (Youth - Participant 13, Male).*

As documented in the previous chapters and in other studies, racism toward South Sudanese (young and old) has a large negative impact on them with both parents and young people stating that they often feel unsafe because of their racial visibility and refugee status (Grossman and Sharples, 2010). This and previous studies have also documented young people's poor relationships with the police and their lack of trust and confidence in responsiveness and understanding from the police, even when they feel their safety is threatened (Grossman and Sharples, 2010, Losoncz, 2011). As highlighted earlier, some young people claimed that another reason youth get into trouble is due to the lack of strong community leadership to voice their concerns and challenges, and to offer them appropriate support.

*If there was strong community leadership, which can present the issues affecting the community to the concerned agencies, then they would have got the support they needed (Youth Focus Group -3 - Male).*

However, South Sudanese youth are not blaming all their difficulties on racism, police and lack of “strong community leadership” to voice their concerns, since they too can contribute to improving their situation, as they explained earlier in their advice to their peers.

At least one participant also attributed young people's issues to the distracting nature of technology.

*Growing up here, I didn't have all these distractions like TV and all that. It would have been different... Mum always tells me, "Don't download this stuff." ... They distract kids, don't be distracted by TV, games and other stuff (Youth - Participant 14, Male).*

These comments echoed many South Sudanese parents' concerns about the impact of technology, which they considered a great distraction to their children's focus and concentration on activities that are for their future benefit. According to Richtel (2010), students often face distractions and time-wasters as they are caught up with using

computers and cellphones more, while the constant streams of stimuli they are offered pose a profound challenge to their focus and learning. Technology is not only a distraction to young people's (and adults' too) focus and learning, but it is disconnecting them from ordinary interactions with their parents and peers. Research has indicated that it is also affecting their developing brains, which can become habituated more easily than adult brains, as they are constantly switching tasks and so are less able to sustain attention (Richtel, 2010).

#### 9.4. Youth support for a better integration and future

##### 9.4.1 Better youth engagement and educational support

Some young immigrants struggle to balance their parents' expectations and the demands of their new environment, and this can lead to intra-family arguments. As discussed in previous chapters, many South Sudanese parents came from authoritarian parenting backgrounds where children are told what to do rather than engaged in discussions regarding parental expectations. This parenting style leads to more tension between parents and their children, which is fuelled by the young immigrants wishing to establish a robust understanding of their rights and freedom in this new environment. Thus power and control and expectations are interpreted differently within the family. According to Mansouri, how intergenerational conflict is managed by newly-arrived migrant families depends on the family members' cultural affiliations and interpretation, especially in applying the most widely-used family management model. This view reinforces what the South Sudanese young people feel; they spoke of their need for discussion and proper engagement within the community. When asked what support would be significant for them, South Sudanese youth stressed the importance of support to overcome acculturation issues and to help build a meaningful future, and that they would like to be given options, for example, to decide what they would like to study.

*Support to have a bright future...given more options in deciding our own education (Youth - Participant 14, Male).*

Likewise, some suggested community homework centres as a specific example of the type of support that would be of direct benefit, where those who are struggling with their studies can go for assistance.

*Help, for example, by setting up community homework centre for young Sudanese, so that like once a fortnight for struggling students who have trouble doing their assignments to get some help. For example, I might know math; some may not. If the student goes there, they might get help from someone who knows about a particular subject; English is our second language. We need something like that because some young Sudanese do not get help at home when their teachers give them homework, but if there are people out there to help them, then most can go there to seek help (Youth - Participant 13, Male).*

Many South Sudanese were deprived of education and for some, English was not the language of instruction at school - or even if it was, most young people have never attended well-resourced classes with well-trained teachers, either in South Sudan or especially in their countries of refuge before coming to Australia. After their arrival in Australia, most spoke of being put into classes according to their age with little or no academic support. This created a potentially complex tension between being in an age-appropriate class and being in a class that suited their academic level. As a result many young South Sudanese have lower proficiency in formal English and general education when compared to other Australians, who might have started their education earlier. As discussed earlier, since many of their parents do not have good educational backgrounds, they cannot help their children with their homework or provide other educational support. Previous research has shown that refugees and international students in Australia (and probably elsewhere) face many academic, cultural, social and linguistic challenges (Harris and Marlowe, 2011).

There are also some indications that many schools in Australia are inadequately equipped to provide proper English support for students where English is their second or third language (Matthews, 2008, Harris and Marlowe, 2011). For instance, many South Sudanese learn and speak their tribal tongue and Arabic before they learn English or other languages. South Sudanese youth reiterated the significance of homework centres as a support point for youth, not only for the educational support but also as providing encouragement and motivation through opportunities to connect with one

another. As this and previous studies have indicated, some young people need ongoing support to engage and encourage them to focus on their education and their future.

*Parents and community members need to engage with young people through talking to them, helping them in whatever way they can, to make their lives better. Advise and encourage them to go to school, help them with their studies and to do good stuff (Youth - Participant 19, Female).*

The significance of community centres was reiterated time and again by all the youth participants as one substantial step in offering them support. The next comment provides some suggestions regarding issues faced by South Sudanese youth: enforced idleness or unemployment; lack of engagement in meaningful activities; lack of male role models in the family, an issue which was also highlighted by parents (as discussed in previous chapters) as one of the leading challenges, particularly for single mothers.

*As a new community, we need help. Our community is not very organised like other ethnic communities to advocate for itself. Some ethnic communities are doing very well and have their own community centres, which help their youth since they run programs or activities that engage youth constructively. The reason many youths are causing problems or getting into trouble is because they are doing nothing... When you feel bored, you may end up doing stupid things that you didn't intend to do in the first place. If youths' free times are filled up with some activities, then it will prevent them from committing crimes or falling out of schools and the system. The Australian government needs to support the community, particularly young people so that they do not fall into trouble (Youth Focus Group - 3 - Male).*

Some of these concerns and solutions echo a previous study, which indicated that when young people are properly engaged and supported, it helps them succeed educationally. Scales et al. (2006) stated that learning support had a great potential in the lives of marginalised youth who do not engage in the community and who are often described as vulnerable, disadvantaged or at-risk-youth. The research highlighted the significance of school and community collaboration and family engagement as well as literacy development and support services. The South Sudanese reported a lack of collaboration

and engagement between school and their community, which has led to some youth being left in limbo or in the middle of a dispute without proper support.

#### 9.4.2 Young people envisioning their parenting styles

In the final part of the youth interviews, young South Sudanese were asked to discuss what kind of parents they intended to be. Most spoke of intending to teach their children their native language, to preserve some of their cultural values, and to give their children more freedom, which they believed had not been given to them by their parents.

*I want my children to have a bright future, learn my language and be freer, and to have a mixture of South Sudanese and Australian cultures (Youth - Participant 4 -Female).*

This question was designed to check some of the challenges South Sudanese youth are facing as they are being parented in their new environment. They echoed their parents' voices in their expectations of a prosperous future for their children. However, they stated that they would allow their children to choose their friends carefully, and not allow themselves to be distracted from focusing on their childrens' education and future. While some young people could not imagine being parents yet, others spoke of the significance of being good, loving and caring parents.

*Good care for my children; show them love, spoil them but not too much (Youth Focus Group - 4 - Female).*

Others envisaged that their parenting would involve providing their children with better education, teaching them societal values such as nonviolence and being good role models for them.

*Well, being a parent is to provide your children with good examples. This is because children copy what their parents do. A strong family is a result of strong parents (Youth Focus Group - 3 - Male).*

Although in answering this question most of the young people envisaged the kind of parents they would like to be (in due course), they also talked again about

intergenerational conflict and lack of support and engagement either from their ethnic community or service providers. They also repeated the need for community centres where those who are struggling academically could receive some support.

Ultimately, this and previous studies have indicated that acculturation is one of the leading sources of stress for immigrant families, and particularly for young people as they struggle to adjust to their new environment (Cunningham and Cunningham, 1997, Marlowe et al., 2014, Milner and Khawaja, 2010). As discussed, young settlers often learn their new language and culture at school faster than their parents can, but when they return home, their parents might still be holding onto their cultures of origin (Richman, 1998). As a consequence, tensions build as parents continue to embrace their traditional culture and values, and expect their children to also hold onto them (Schweitzer et al., 2006). This often creates intergenerational conflict as the children struggle to negotiate a workable synthesis between their original culture and the new culture in their new environment (Poppitt and Frey, 2007).

Like other immigrant refugees, South Sudanese families spend their first few months learning about their new system and language, but most parents lag behind in learning about the dominant culture while their children start questioning or opposing some of the cultural values that the parents continue to hold onto dearly. Thus, these changes in culture and family dynamics affect parenting negatively, leaving too many parents struggling to raise children in their new environment, often with little or no social support (Schweitzer et al., 2006).

## Conclusion

This chapter has focused on South Sudanese youth's experiences and perspectives of their original and new environment and culture. It has highlighted that identity, as in many other cultures, is an important part of South Sudanese culture and children's upbringing. Some South Sudanese young people are strongly attached to their culture of origin but also see themselves as South Sudanese-Australian, a cultural hybrid, in which they have gained new forms of citizenship.

However, their pre-migration experiences significantly affect their ability to adapt to their new environment, and this adaptation is profoundly encompassed by the post-migration challenges and changes they are facing while at the same time they are still expected by their parents and the community to hold onto the most important parts of their traditional culture. This chapter has highlighted the issues of intergenerational conflict and the difficulties for young people navigating between the two cultures. It is understood that young people quickly develop familiarity with their new culture and embrace some values that may be opposite to those of their parents, and that this obviously sparks conflict between them. Consequently, young people are caught in the middle and this has seemingly led to great identity confusion as they juggle between two conflicting cultures. Parental demands on their children to preserve their cultural values while they are trying to adjust to their new environment often trigger tensions between them, which are also fuelled by the external influences that young people encounter at school and other places of inter-cultural contact.

The young people spoke of having seen significant differences between their original culture and Australian culture: they gave examples from the African cultures where young people are told what to do and not allowed to answer back to their parents or any adult. The discussion also highlighted the consequences from parents continuing to hold on to their traditional controlling parenting styles, while their children have found a new freedom, autonomy and independence. These same factors have also led to some changes for women, who were culturally denied some basic rights and freedoms, and these changes have in some cases led to family disintegration, as discussed in the previous chapters.

South Sudanese parents have high expectations that their children should, among other things, hold onto some of their traditional cultural values, especially respect for parents and adults, should preserve their native languages, and also achieve academically. Culturally, young people are not allowed to smoke or drink, and are often denied the rights to socialise with their peers, whom parents believe to be 'bad company or a bad influence.' Parents' voices were also echoed by some of the young people, who advised their peers to respect their parents and consider them as their guardians, and to stay out of trouble and off the streets. Some also highlighted the distractive nature of technology

such as Facebook, PlayStation and television on some young people, who should focus instead on their education and on other activities beneficial for their future.

Also as related in this chapter, the young people underlined some advantages and disadvantages of strict parenting. For instance, some told how parental control encouraged them to focus on their studies and prevented them from being ‘carried away’ by their new freedoms and independence. However, they also highlighted the disadvantages of parental control as it made it hard for the young people to adjust to their new environment. It has also led to some young people rebelling against their parents and leaving home or (conversely) being taken by Child Protection Services. Because of these parental controls, South Sudanese youth stated that they were being treated differently by their parents, as compared to the treatment received by their mainstream Australian peers, who have greater freedom. The different orientations towards acculturation (covered in earlier chapters) – integration, assimilation, separation or segregation and marginalisation – are important considerations in the resettlement process. Integration orientation is a preferred strategy for integrating new immigrants who are involved in the process of cultural maintenance and intercultural contact, because that approach is likely to increase the possibilities of successfully integrating into their new environment (Deng and Marlowe, 2013, Berry, 1997).

As discussed earlier, young people struggle to negotiate the gap between their parents’ expectations and the demands of the new environment. This has helped to identify a need to support them on how to integrate into both cultures. Young people connected this lack of support to the lack of a strong South Sudanese community, which they believed would have helped them in education and would have engaged with them as they struggle to make sense of these changes. The young people also made the connection between the lack of educational support and their parents’ illiteracy in English, as many had been deprived of education because of their forced migration, while others were educated in Arabic and had not acquired sufficient English proficiency to help their children with homework or assignments. As a result, young people consistently referred to the importance of having a strong community leadership and community centres where those who are struggling can get some help and support with homework and assignments.

The following, concluding chapter provides a summary and a commentary in bringing the threads of all the chapters together to offer suggestions, based on the comments from the South Sudanese participants, as to how best they may be supported to overcome their parenting challenges in Australia.

## CHAPTER TEN

### Conclusion: refitting and completing the jigsaw

#### Introduction

This final chapter brings together the pieces of the puzzle consisting of all the previous chapters' explorations of South Sudanese parenting practices, the experiences and perceptions of participants and the challenges they face regarding their traditions, their transition into Australia and their day-to-day coping strategies. It offers some concluding remarks and suggestions on the importance of engaging the South Sudanese community through providing parenting support programs using family-, parent- and community-centred approaches. Parenting is the basis for the future of every society, and raising children well is an investment that benefits both parents and the society or country that they belong to, as the children too become global citizens who can transform the world into a better place for following generations. Therefore, providing children with the best parenting support and nurture by parents, community members and support services is both morally and practically essential, particularly for those whose lives have been disrupted by trauma and the challenges arising from their refugee and resettlement experiences.

#### 10.1 Refitting the pieces of the puzzle

This study was motivated and informed by my work experiences with Sudanese and other migrant communities (and particularly with parents and young people) in New Zealand and Australia, helping with their parenting challenges and other resettlement or settlement-related issues and concerns. The aim of this study was to give South Sudanese parents and young people the opportunity to share their experiences and concerns, while at the same time increasing the knowledge as to how those changes affect families and individuals while they are adapting to a new environment. It was also aimed at increasing cross-cultural knowledge of how changes in family and parenting practices affect communities transitioning into a new environment as well as

increasing the awareness and understanding of the issues among policymakers and service providers, particularly among those who are responsible for supporting these communities. It is significant to establish this contextual understanding, as Grant and Guerin (2014) suggested. There is a need to explore with parents who are refugees, how they raise their children in the new country, and identify the challenges, supports and strength they bring to the role. The authors went on to state that this knowledge will help future generations of newly-arrived and settling Australian citizens (p. 330).

As discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, the South Sudanese have endured decades of protracted civil war from 1955-2005 and fighting has continued even after the CPA in 2005 (Collins, 2008, Arop, 2006), which led to the secession of South Sudan in July 2011 (LeRiche and Arnold, 2013, Young, 2012). These, the most destructive civil wars in Africa, have led to the loss of millions of lives and displaced many others to places as far as Australia.

Like many other refugees, the South Sudanese fled their country of origin to neighbouring countries before they resettled in Australia (Miller and Rasco, 2004, Schweitzer et al., 2006). This means some began to blend their culture of origin with aspects of the other cultures that they interacted with even before their eventual resettlement in Australia. Others have held on to the parts of their original culture that they still remember, although they may have been away from their home country for a long time, and in this time some changes would have taken place in their original culture due to the influences of the technological age. The world has become a global village because of advanced technology, and today some people in the remote villages of South Sudan (and other parts of the world) are beginning to have greater access to the Internet and start learning from other cultures. Clearly, these changes will dictate how a nation's cultures can adjust to create commonalities and to match those technological influences.

Chapter 3, the literature review, has highlighted that parenting practices have never been based solely on the characteristics of individual parents, but there are other influential factors that affect parenting, and these include different cultural approaches. It underlines that parenting practices are also influenced by government policies of assimilation or multiculturalism, the parent's culture and other psychological physiognomies of adults caring for children. According to Bronfenbrenner's (1977,

1986) social ecology model, developmental expectations are often another influence on the way in which adults interact with children, although adults' and children's interactions are in fact multi-determined.

Chapter 4 explained the interdisciplinary approach employed in this study. The study has combined education, sociology and psychology, and the fields of refugee, migration and family studies. It used both narrative and constructivist approaches, which are strongly inter-linked and help in understanding and constructing the complex experiences of the South Sudanese (Charmaz, 2006, Riessman, 2008). To construct meaning from South Sudanese accounts of traditional parenting practices, transitional experiences, changes and coping strategies, I used these qualitative approaches to explore and understand their perspectives on how their past and present parenting experiences have influenced their resettlement (transition/integration), and the ongoing negotiation and construction of their identities in an unfamiliar environment. This approach has enabled the development of an in-depth understanding of South Sudanese experiences of being parented in South Sudan, and how that differs to their parenting practices in Australia. To obtain their narratives, the data collection involved interpersonal and interactive engagement with 60 South Sudanese (parents and young people) through individual interviews and focus group meetings. As a community insider researcher, my interaction with South Sudanese participants allowed me to become immersed in their day-to-day lives, from which I was able to gather for my enquiry rich data that resonated on multiple levels.

In understanding and conceptualising South Sudanese experiences, Chapter 5 examined what the South Sudanese have brought with them into resettlement in terms of their traditions and culture around parenting practices, beliefs and values, customary laws, and traditional gender roles, which include the responsibilities of parents and other family members. This material helped create a better understanding of how the South Sudanese define family and children's upbringing. Children's upbringing and disciplining are considered to be the responsibility of every family and community member, with an understanding that parenting is a shared collective responsibility. The aim in exploring these traditional parenting practices was to obtain a comprehensive context for use when looking at how the South Sudanese parents were raised (including

their transitional experiences) and how they are raising their own children since coming to Australia.

As informed by Chapter 5, Chapter 6 examined changes during the period of transition, the experiences of the South Sudanese and the impact of these changes and experiences on families, particularly as they affected their parenting practices, beliefs and attitudes since settling in Australia (Deng, 2016). These changes mostly related to the challenges in transitioning into the new social and cultural environment (Darling and Steinberg, 1993, Bornstein, 1991). This has led to immense difficulties for many South Sudanese parents as they are caught between the old and new cultures and are often no longer able to apply or preserve aspects of their traditional parenting practices. The participants in this study generally believed that their new environment has given children too much freedom, which has simply stirred them into leaving their homes, their families and their community and abandoning their culture of origin, sometimes to fall into juvenile offending.

These changes have at times created very significant intergenerational conflicts between young people and their parents (Poppitt and Frey, 2007, Berry, 1997, Deng and Marlowe, 2013). These challenges can be aggravated by a lack of the social support and networks amongst relatives, friends and neighbours that many families had enjoyed and relied upon before being forced to flee their homeland (Deng and Marlowe, 2013, Deng, 2016, Deng and Pienaar, 2011). These transitions have led to family breakdowns, including separation or divorces, which have had a profound impact on some families, with high levels of distress, apprehension and a sense of powerlessness being reported.

Chapter 7 discussed changes in gender roles, parenting practices and power structures within the family, and the relationship of these changes to women's and children's rights. These changes have also led to some contention among South Sudanese men who feel they have lost their status and role as heads of their families. Women, on the other hand, expressed concerns about continuing to perform double labour within and outside the household and demanded that men should become more involved in raising their children. While moving to a new country may be a significant relief to those who have been persecuted and forced to become refugees, the new environment also presents its own challenges, which can sometimes be gender specific. For instance, South Sudanese mothers were used to receiving support from members of the extended family,

but this support is often not available after resettling and this may create significant hurdles to successful integration and a sense of wellbeing.

These settlement and parenting challenges are compounded by the language barrier, which often limited the ability, particularly of women who struggle with literacy or interrupted education, to access mainstream support services and prospective employment (Sanders, 2002, Copping et al., 2010). More generally, language issues compound these challenges for all parents and families. There can be challenges when children lose or abandon their native tongues, fostering communication obstacles between children and their parents who might not have acquired sufficient English (Deng and Pienaar, 2011, Deng and Marlowe, 2013, Renzaho et al., 2011). As discussed throughout this thesis, the issue of the language barrier is connected with other issues relating to the new legal, social and cultural environment. Some families have found it hard to understand the new expectations imposed on them, particularly those concerning child protection laws or policies about disciplining children, and this difficulty in understanding is often worsened by the children's rapid assimilation into their new social environment, leaving their parents behind and grappling to adjust to these changes (Renzaho et al., 2010, Renzaho et al., 2011, Berry et al., 2006, Deng and Marlowe, 2013). Building a sustainable relationship between parents and their children is paramount, since children learn their new language much faster than their parents do, and integrate or assimilate into their new culture more quickly.

However, despite these barriers, this study demonstrates that South Sudanese parents and families have some well-developed resilience and coping strategies and tools for addressing their various settlement changes and challenges (Schweitzer et al., 2007, Grossman, 2014). As discussed in Chapter 8, participants spoke of relying on their fellow community members for spiritual, social and emotional support and help in accessing mainstream services. It underlines the importance of empowering the community so that the parents and community members continue to take responsibility for addressing settlement challenges (Gamble and Weil, 2010). Participants identified some problems which they would like to focus on in order to find solutions at family and community level. As discussed below, the participants reinforced the significance of recognising and empowering the family and community to address their settlement challenges.

As part of gaining an inclusive perspective on South Sudanese families and parenting in Australia, young South Sudanese were interviewed about their cultural identities and their experiences of being parented in Australia. Chapter 9 showed that mostly the parents and the young people were in agreement in stressing that many of the conflicts between young people and their parents are caused by the changes presented by their new environment, and that the relevant issues include acculturation, intergenerational conflict, parental control and young people's new freedoms and independence (Poppitt and Frey, 2007, Berry et al., 2006). Although some of the young people spoke of their traumatic experiences of forced migration as contributing factors to the challenges posed by resettlement (Schweitzer et al., 2006, Milner and Khawaja, 2010), they also blamed some of these difficulties on a perceived lack of social support, and on the fact that some parents still hold on to traditional values. Most of these young people are in situations where they are trying to be accepted by their Australian peers and to integrate into their new culture as well as trying to hold on to aspects of their original South Sudanese cultures (Berry et al., 2006, Deng, 2016).

As established in this and previous studies, most former refugee parents see their children blending into their new culture, leaving them behind as they struggle to learn about their new culture and language (Milner and Khawaja, 2010, Deng and Marlowe, 2013). Some families have lost all aspects of their culture and may end up in separate groups, in isolation or marginalisation (Berry, 1997). Chapter 3 suggested that the best way to approach resettlement is through integration, a process in which new settlers take aspects of their original and new cultures and combine them to create a bridge between the competing cultural values and beliefs (Berry, 1997, Berry et al., 2006).

Having briefly summarised the results of this study, the question is, "What next, and what are the South Sudanese recommending?" The following sections explore and discuss how settlement and parenting challenges may be tackled, based on participants' comments and recommendations.

## 10.2 Community-centred approach

### 10.2.1 Community-based consultation and collaborative approach

In addressing some of their challenges, South Sudanese are calling for appropriate consultation and collaboration between them and the official support services to create mutual understanding, leading to more efficient and effective service delivery for those in need. Many South Sudanese participants acknowledge the need to integrate some of their traditional and Australian parenting practices. They believe that integration can be achieved through their combined efforts. Collaboration and cooperation is likely to increase awareness by families, parents and the community of Australian law, particularly concerning child protection policy and its implications for child discipline. Most participants raised concerns about the lack of a community-based approach and consultation and they feel that the relevant agencies need a better understanding of South Sudanese culture. Many South Sudanese participants believed that whenever child protection workers intervene in their families, the parents' concerns are often not listened to but are dismissed. Dumbrill (2008) argued that when social workers intervene in refugee families' difficulties, they should first ask about any concerns the parents may have for their children, to ascertain how the parents are responding to these concerns.

As discussed in Chapter 5, South Sudanese parents came to Australia with established parenting practices, which differ from those permitted in their new setting. Thus there is a need for service providers to have constructive dialogues aimed at reassuring parents that the service providers also have their children's interests in their hearts and minds. This may lead to improved trust, understanding and cooperation before the providers explain their concerns for the children's wellbeing (Dumbrill, 2009, Renzaho et al., 2010). Most South Sudanese participants in this study argued that the government agencies and non-governmental organisations that provide services often make assumptions about their settlement challenges. Without proper consultation and collaboration concerning those challenges and how a particular program can be delivered to meet their needs, it is unlikely that any program will succeed. According to Lejukole's (2009) studies on South Sudanese resettlement or integration, there should be adequate consultation with the South Sudanese and other refugee groups regarding policies, program activities, and services that concern their lives, and the way in which these programs and service are delivered to them. For Lejukole, if the South Sudanese are not involved in those decisions that concern them, they are likely to feel alienated and disempowered by the very services established to serve them.

The community-based collaborative approach is also effective if the service providers can make good use of the community's existing structures to strengthen their service delivery. Such collaboration may not follow the ways in which the services were traditionally set up to operate, but a practical approach, particularly in an area like parenting, is more likely to find constructive methods of addressing resettlement or settlement challenges. Collaboration among researchers, policymakers and service providers is also crucial in creating a positive working relationship with families and communities for effective, coherent, inclusive and appropriate support for their needs. This echoes Bishop's (2011) suggestion that the best approach to addressing the challenges of refugees in Australia entails having researchers, service practitioners, and policymakers adopt approaches that bring together in collaboration all the practices relating to the challenges. Renzaho, et al. (2010) also suggested that it is important for policy to reflect an awareness of the changes in family dynamics that are associated with immigration from an African context to the Western context. For example, challenges to the traditional role of fathers require that African migrants use different new parenting strategies to meet their children's needs and manage behaviour. Such approaches create a likelihood that there will be better working linkages with those from migrant backgrounds thus ensuring the services given are more fittings and helpful. Based on the South Sudanese participants' comments and recommendations in this and previous studies, collaborating and working alongside families and community is effective in delivering service to the ethnic communities (Dumbrill, 2009, Renzaho et al., 2010, Deng and Pienaar, 2011, Deng and Marlowe, 2013, Losoncz, 2013).

It is important to acknowledge there are some challenges in identifying who the service providers should approach, especially when ethnic communities are fractured because of ongoing conflict in the country of origin. However, that is no excuse for not consulting with families at the grassroots level and for not dealing with any possible structure in those communities. Based on the participants' comments and recommendations, service providers sometimes use the excuse that because refugee or ethnic communities are so divided, they decided to draw up programs without adequate consultation, even though these are sometimes based on little knowledge or understanding of the challenges to be addressed. As a result, attempts to implement such programs often fail to meet the targeted needs.

The South Sudanese in Victoria are structured under the umbrella of the South Sudanese Community Association of Victoria (SSCAV) which has sub-communities representing regions, states and tribes in South Sudan. All of these have structured leadership, often elected by their members, and the service providers that aim to provide inclusive and effective services to this community should consider finding out and learning about how these structures might help in reaching out to the grassroots. Most of these sub-communities' leaders are close to and thus knowledgeable of their members' needs, and may provide a more effective link. For parents to have full and efficient access to social and other services, the South Sudanese participants recommended that service providers consider recruiting some of their community members to help connect them to the grassroots or those in real need. Obviously, some families and parents may not access social support because of language and cultural barriers, and such a link may prove effective in minimising those barriers.

In addition, Dumbrill (2008) found that some complications in service delivery are connected to negative, prejudicial or hostile societal attitudes toward refugees, which often intersect with societal discourse in which refugees are portrayed as passive victims or as threats to national security. That study was echoed in the present study by South Sudanese participants' concerns that they are sometimes discriminated against and treated differently by service providers who seem to display discriminatory attitudes by portraying them using what Dumbrill described as "deficits discourse," which feeds on a notion that they are a "burden" to the host community. These adverse attitudes by a few individuals are reinforced by negative media reports, which feed the host community with negative news about the new settlers in their new environment. It is important to acknowledge that South Sudanese participants' concerns are not meant to suggest that all the service providers and media are hostile to them. However, negative stereotypes and discrimination practiced by a minority in the host society seem to have an enormous impact on those who are struggling with changes and challenges in their families (Zubrick et al., 2008). For instance, a youth group/gang called "*Apex*", believed to be composed of young South Sudanese and those from other minority cultural backgrounds, has dominated the media for much of 2016 (Crane, 2016, Smith, 2016). *Apex* is said to be a street name in the Melbourne suburb of Dandenong, where many of them reside, but the media are reporting their antisocial behaviours in a way that gives a negative representation of the whole community where they come from (Crane, 2016).

As a result, South Sudanese young who have no idea about or who have never heard of *Apex* are reporting a rise in racism toward them at schools and public places as they are suspected of being *Apex* gang members (Smith, 2016). Although these are only a few individuals, yet, given the higher visibility of South Sudanese and other Africans, the consequences for the community are far greater. There is no excuse for violence, but rather than vilifying the community where they come from, most of these youngsters need support to overcome some of their underlying challenges that led to this antisocial behaviour in the first place. In dispelling these negative representations of minority groups, there is a need for constant cultural training of the service providers/agencies and the media on how to approach the Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities (CALD): effective collaboration and consultation with them will devise support for better integration.

Some South Sudanese community members and leaders have reported that service providers are competing for limited funding from the government and therefore lose focus on service delivery itself as they stop collaborating with their competitors. Such collaboration is essential in order to deliver effective and holistic services to migrant communities which sometimes find it hard to distinguish between social and counselling services, government agencies and non-governmental organisations. Collaboration and consultations among service providers and with the recipient families and communities may help to address their challenges effectively: a community-based collaborative and consultative approach is associated with community empowerment. This is discussed in the next section.

#### 10.2.2 Family and community empowerment

The participants acknowledged the need to empower families, community leaders and elders to address some of their settlement and parenting challenges. However, what do we learn and understand about community empowerment? According to Maton (2008, p.5), community empowerment is a group-based, participatory, developmental process through which marginalised or oppressed individuals and groups gain greater control over their lives and the environment, acquire valued resources and basic rights, and achieve important life goals and lessened societal marginalisation. Some participants associated their parenting challenges with the lack of appropriate family empowerment, insufficient targeted support services as discussed earlier, a sense of powerlessness

resulting from alleged government (and primarily Child Protection Service) intervention in their families, and a low socioeconomic status (Kaur, 2012).

In tackling these concerns and challenges, empowering families and the community is to the long-term benefit of the new settlers, since the more they are empowered, the more they take responsibility for addressing some of their own challenges and shortcomings. According to Gamble and Weil (2010), community practice involves four processes: organising, planning, sustainable development and progressive change. The authors argued that this helps to improve opportunities for all community members as well as to limit or eliminate factors that contribute to community degradation and disintegration. These suggestions support the South Sudanese call for empowerment for their community: they are asking for appropriate engagement to develop and empower their local leadership, and to equip them with knowledge about their new social and legal environment. Most significantly, this can be done through providing the local leaders with the skills and organisational power to make positive decisions that affect and empower their community's emotional, environmental and economic independence. Gamble and Weil (2010) stated that, when working with a community group, planning is effective if it involves identifying a shared vision for change and outlining the steps required to achieve those desired outcomes. The appropriate planning process provides an opportunity to engage the potential recipients of the services being provided whereby they can identify the needs and challenges through specifying the intended results and then formulate activities that will produce desirable outcomes. Linked to planning is 'sustainable development', a process Gamble and Weil suggested may help to alleviate social and economic disparities in the local and the international communities.

It is worth remembering that traditionally most South Sudanese and by large many other African used to resolve the majority of their domestic disputes and issues at the family and community levels. This part of their culture is also one of the reasons why some are still reluctant to access mainstream social or psychological support services, as they still prefer to try to resolve their issues among themselves, mostly with the help of community elders or leaders, without outside involvement (Deng and Pienaar, 2011). That is why empowering them to take responsibility for their families and social needs is imperative for effective integration. Clearly, the impact of the loss or diminution of one's own culture that is inherent in most migration experiences compounded by the

seemingly inevitable loss of social support and of connection with one's own community often undermines the integration process and a sense of belonging in the new environment. Again (and it is worth restating), if properly empowered, community members can tackle some of these needs. Gamble and Weil (2010) suggested that part of community empowerment should also include 'progressive change,' a process of ameliorating negative conditions. This progressive change is significant in improving the lives of those who often feel excluded from mainstream communities, both socially and economically, particularly in planning and decision-making. Such exclusions may be based on their ethnicity or race, gender and socioeconomic status.

To Gamble and Weil (2010), each community must define what change would be "progressive" for it, making community empowerment vital for the well-being of its members: being part of a community with a sense of empowerment means that its members can easily seek help from one another. It may also help the members maintain a viable status within their community, which they may use as a bridge to integrate into their new environment, particularly after they develop a sense of belonging and self-esteem. A sense of having a social matrix and the network they lost may also be reconstituted if the members can share their past and present experiences, challenges, and difficulties. A New Zealand study on the long-term settlement of refugees in that country has indicated that social networks are important for newly-settled refugees to meet their material and informational needs (Searle et al., 2012). South Sudanese participants reported that informal gatherings and small social group activities were often beneficial for those who might have been isolated or traumatised by pre- and post-resettlement experiences or by the challenges of settlement. As part of feeling empowered, this and previous studies have shown that a social network that includes host country members also provides significant support for integration, both socially and practically, and, in particular, for learning new parenting skills and gaining employment (Searle et al., 2012). Community empowerment also means providing parenting support that is family- and parent-centred for the settler parents and caregivers. This is discussed in the next section.

### 10.3 The family- and parent-centred approach

### 10.3.1 Positive parenting and other social support

Positive parenting support for parents and caregivers as discussed in Chapter 9, using a family- and parent-centred approach is likely to help tackle some of the parenting challenges facing South Sudanese, and other African and international settlers, in Australia. This approach can be effective when the service providers believe that families and parents have rights in the decision-making process as to what is significant for their children, and are seen and considered as experts in their families (Novita, 2007, Deng and Pienaar, 2011, QCOSS, 2017). As discussed previously, parenting involves a wide range of understanding and support for children, including their physical, social, emotional, cultural needs and their intellectual development and general wellbeing (Deng, 2016). Research has also shown the importance of addressing these changes and challenges through dialogue and collaboration with the migrant families and their community, regarding what is or is not negotiable concerning parenting practices in their new country (Deng and Pienaar, 2011, Deng and Marlowe, 2013, Milos, 2011, Tingvold et al., 2012, Grant and Guerin, 2014). A lot of work has been done by the settlement services set up to support new migrants but as this study has shown, parenting and other related challenges remain obstacles to proper integration. As participants have commented, these challenges, which include insufficient understanding of the new legal, social and cultural environment, continue to create barriers to accessing support services and so hinder integration. There is a need to relaunch strategies on how to reach out and educate the new migrants about the laws on parenting. What might be suitable strategies for disciplining their children, as substitutes to physical disciplining? (Williams, 2010, Deng and Pienaar, 2011).

The South Sudanese participants suggested there needs to be a constructive discourse between the community and the relevant service providers, notably the Child Protection Service, concerning family laws. Such a discourse could create a framework for a better understanding of parenting practices in the resettlement context. Such a dialogue must focus on providing comprehensive and appropriate parenting programs for newly-arrived refugees, although it is also imperative that parenting issues be addressed, mostly at the post-resettlement stage, for long-term integration. According to the Refugee Council of Great Britain (2004a), the fundamental principle of integration must begin at the point of the refugee's arrival. To ensure inclusiveness and holistic programs,

migrant families must be fully involved in developing and delivering integration strategies. The Council noted the significance of inter-agency coordination in identifying the elements of integration that may work for each group (Council, 2004).

The quality of parenting that children receive has a major effect on their development. Parenting practices in particular have a major influence on children's development (Sanders, 2008, Berry, 2002, Zubrick et al., 2008). Sanders argued that family risk factors such as poor parenting, family conflict and marriage breakdown, strongly influence children's risk of developing various forms of psychopathology. To Sanders, lack of a warm, positive relationship with parents, insecure attachment and harsh, inflexible or inconsistent discipline practices, inadequate supervision of and involvement with children increase the risk of children developing major behavioural and emotional problems. Discipline as a form of guidance provides opportunities for children to develop internal control, thereby learning to take responsibility for themselves and their actions, and adopting values that are acceptable in the family and to society. Healthy parenting must include praising children for what they have done well, and stopping them from doing things that are inappropriate, to help them to understand why certain behaviours are acceptable while others are not.

The fundamental core of positive parenting support must be based on understanding, recognising and appreciating the traditions and cultural views of the new settler families and parents while also informing them about the different parenting practices and expectations in their new environment (Deng and Pienaar, 2011, SKIP, 2011). As discussed earlier, for positive parenting support to succeed it must centre on empowering families through understanding their parenting practices in their pre-settlement environment in order to help them adjust their parenting practices to their new environment. A parenting program for emerging communities that supports different cultures has to be designed and delivered on an evidential basis. For instance, understanding each culture and allowing its members to have a central role in designing a program to suit their needs, increases the likelihood of success for such a program, as the recipients are more likely to accept it.

A community-based positive parenting program piloted in Auckland, New Zealand, demonstrated that working with a refugee community to design parenting programs that meet their needs made them feel they had ownership of it (Deng and Pienaar, 2011).

Obviously, when communities feel that a program is not appropriate for their needs or that they are not a part of it, they often back away from it or may accept it passively or reluctantly, and consequently it cannot have a positive impact. Because of their culture they might accept it passively simply in order not to appear disrespectful, and some may also still have fears of authority resulting from their refugee experiences. As part of the community approach, a positive parenting program must seek to supplement and work with existing local and national organisations to build and extend the capacity of their support for families, parents and children. Such a program must be family- and parent-centred, encourage parents to identify their challenges and needs, and identify how they can be supported. The example of the Auckland parenting program piloted in the Sudanese community used a parent-centred approach where trainers provided facilitation and the resources required to increase the parents' involvement and learning (Deng and Pienaar, 2011). Most importantly, parents were asked to identify what they wanted to learn about New Zealand laws and child discipline practices, and how they might acquire and apply knowledge about the rights of children and responsibilities of parents while preserving their culture of origin.

A positive parenting program needs to be presented in a manner that contributes to the positive development of these families and children. As discussed in Chapter 5, the South Sudanese come from a background where physical discipline is part of their parenting practices. Therefore, a significant part of any program is one that enhances and promotes consistency and application of knowledge about the effectiveness of non-physical discipline for parents and caregivers through increasing their confidence, skills, and knowledge (SKIP, 2011, Deng and Pienaar, 2011). The family- and parent-centred approach enables parents and caregivers to feel confident about managing their children's behaviours through setting limits and boundaries as an integral aspect of loving and nurturing parent-child relationships. It is understood that supporting parents through encouraging them to use non-physical discipline is more effective than using physical force, where children tend to withdraw and internalise how they are treated, which hurts them emotionally (SKIP, 2011). As the South Sudanese participants in this study commented, after they find themselves exposed to a new culture, some parents start to lose confidence in their parenting approach and orientation when they lose the social structures and support that had preserved their cultural values, beliefs, and parenting practices. New settler families need parenting and other social support to

avoid serious distress during the phase when they are adjusting to their new environment and systems, and this need is shown clearly by the prevalent stressors for solo parents who have no support.

The South Sudanese are asking for a parenting program that is designed in a way that gives parents the opportunity to share their experiences of parenting in their new environment and to come together in order to learn skills and practices from one another. It is desirable to devise a program that provides parents with the right tools and information to enable them to learn how to raise children in their new environment by improving their understanding of Australian laws, especially those relating to parenting and child protection. A program that brings parents together will provide opportunities for younger parents to learn from those with more experience, and establish some balance between their tradition and acceptable parenting practices. It could also create a community where parents can adapt and integrate a mutually acceptable approach to positive parenting (Deng and Pienaar, 2011; Deng and Marlowe, 2013). Mickel (2013) argues that part of parenting is resolving relationship problems through empowering parents and through manipulating the environment to nurture and transform it from the unknown to the known, both in knowledge and values. For parents to be effective in their parenting, they need to choose an appropriate intervention (Mickel, 2013).

To supplement this family- and parent-centred approach in the form of parenting support, appropriate social and counselling support is also required. This is further discussed below.

Although counselling was not the focus of this study and given that many South Sudanese are not familiar with its significance, the challenges and concerns the participants raised regarding parenting mean that it is imperative to recommend counselling as part of providing support to the family as well as empowering the community. It is likely that refugee parents who are experiencing a real or perceived loss of status may continue to experience profound challenges, including frustration and anxiety within the family environment (Miller and Rasco, 2004). It is imperative that the South Sudanese, and by extension other migrants, focus on current settlement-related challenges rather than dwelling on the after-effects of the trauma they have experienced. As post-trauma feelings and a sense of loss can affect parenting practices, so making emotional support important, it is important to understand how these needs

are interlinked, how they may be prioritised and how they can be met. This will pose a challenge for many service providers.

Ultimately, it is understood that indirect or group counselling as part of empowering family and community can be more effective for some South Sudanese parents as it gives them the opportunity to start talking about their challenges and concerns. A 'positive parenting program' provided to Sudanese parents and their community in Auckland gave parents opportunities to learn about New Zealand's child protection laws and to share their experiences in a safe group setting (Deng and Pienaar, 2011).

However, this does not mean that individual counselling may not work, especially for those who do not want their difficulties known by others, mostly because of possible stigma if those issues became known within their community. Hence, the individual's needs must be appropriately assessed to determine who may benefit from group work or from individual counselling. Likewise, it is imperative to understand that refugees are not a homogeneous group and that their needs can sometimes be met using different approaches, according to individual experiences or competence in the language of the host country. For the psychological needs to be met effectively, it may be necessary to integrate practical, social and emotional support. Like many other migrants of similar backgrounds, most South Sudanese families' and parents' priorities are 'here and now', which are often practical in nature, rather than resulting from possible traumatic experiences.

Holistic support for families and parents must also include addressing young people's challenges, which is the next discussion.

### 10.3.2 Holistic approach to youth challenges

As discussed in Chapter 9, the South Sudanese young people enumerated a number of challenges and concerns, which ranged from parents who continue to hold onto their strict South Sudanese parenting practices to finding themselves rejected and often being portrayed badly in the media. As with many other new settlers, young South Sudanese are trying to adjust their culture of origin to their new environment. They may choose their new Australian culture over that of their origin, but such changes create tension within families, particularly when parents do not wish them to desert their original culture. As discussed in Chapter 3, the acculturative stress refers to a unique stress

involving adjustment to a foreign country, which suggests a need for coping strategies to deal with the associated emotional and physiological reactions (Bemak et al., 2003, Poppitt and Frey, 2007). The acculturative stress South Sudanese youth face involves acculturation-specific factors, such as ethnic identity, dissonant cultural values and second-language competencies (Poppitt and Frey, 2007). A significant source of acculturation stress is the perceived parental involvement and control which young people see as an infringement of their rights, based on their understanding of their new environment. Most start adopting to a different culture and in particular, those relating to individual freedoms (Poppitt and Frey, 2007). These young people are often faced not only with the need for more rapid acculturation than their parents, in order to conform to and perform daily activities within and outside the classroom, but also suffer bullying and discrimination, mostly from their peers; but even at times from their teachers.

Their ethnic identity is sometimes associated with their level of self-esteem where self-esteem plays the role of a mediator between general wellbeing and conflict in a two-culture concept, and the same applies for their social group identity, which involves the feeling of belonging to both native and ethnic cultures. The unilinear model of acculturation implies that an individual loses connection with his or her original culture as he or she adapts and integrates the second culture in his or her daily activities (Miller and Kerlow-Myers, 2009). The underlying theory of the unilinear model is that alterations in cultural attachment happen one at a time, with the original culture on one side and the second culture on the other. In contrast, the bilinear model of acculturation suggests the probability that individuals can acquire and become competent in a new culture while continuing attachments and competence in their original culture (Miller and Kerlow-Myers, 2009), which results in reasonable outcomes.

According to Papadopoulos (2007), it is important to conceptualise the amount of support that adolescent refugees need and to link that with ways to maintain their capability for resourcefulness and resilience. Papadopoulos suggested that professional services must distinguish between refugee trauma and psychological trauma. Refugee trauma involves refugee experiences, and the entire phenomena associated with the particular reality of being a refugee; psychological trauma pertains to the psychological impact of trauma experienced by refugees irrespective of external causes. Service providers have an important role in assisting young migrants, provided they understand

the complexities involved. These include the way the situation of a refugee is perceived by society and the general interconnections between refugees and mental health systems. The self-concept and sense of meaning in the lives of migrant youth come from their identification and interactions with cultural and family systems (Schweitzer et al. 2006). The experiences of adolescent refugees weaken their cultural and family systems, leading to separation from their families and their ethnic community (Schweitzer et al. 2006).

There is a need to recognise the role of both pre-migration and post-migration stressors in understanding the mental health and wellbeing of adolescent refugees (Schweitzer et al. 2006). Likewise, the therapeutic work relating to adolescent migrants should focus not only on the problems, difficulties, trauma and pathology but also (and more generally) on the strengths and other support that enhance their integration of their original cultures and the new environment. Counselling plays an important role in addressing some of the young migrants' challenges. Therefore, counsellors and social workers involved in the psychological adjustment of young migrants need to understand that each adjustment phase of a refugee's experience can be a source of stress and risk to their mental wellbeing. As they learn about their new environment and struggle to adjust to the conflicts between their original and new cultures, they need help during these adaptation stages to acquire coping skills and new behavioural and communication patterns.

As with many other emerging communities, South Sudanese young people suffer racial discrimination, abuse, bullying and sometimes experience a sense of rejection from members of the mainstream community who consider them different and thus that they do not belong. As discussed in Chapter 9, some young people also spoke of good experiences and their gratitude for the support they are receiving from their mainstream Australian contacts and support services. According to Kovacev and Shute (2004), young refugees from Yugoslavia, who resettled in Australia, showed very strong personal benefits from support by classmates, since positive affection from peers is closely linked to the way they perceive themselves. The authors also found that young refugees who have close friends to depend on have better prospects of gaining a better self-perception and they view themselves as more accepted in society. Such a finding undoubtedly demonstrates the presence of a positive correlation between adjustment and

social support, as young refugees who had close friends to depend on achieved a greater sense of self-worth or self-esteem (Kovacev and Shute, 2004).

As both parents and young people commented in this study, there is a need for holistic support to address young people's issues in the areas of education and employment, as well as to deal with the challenges resulting from acculturation and the feeling of alienation from their parents and the new environment. However, this holistic support must be created with the aim of managing and influencing them for a better future. This study has shown there is a lack of appropriate support for new migrant families even though the current global political goal concerning refugees is to improve their capacity to become economically independent and self-sufficient in their new country (Bemak et al., 2003). Therefore, it is important to address the key deficiencies in policies concerning refugees' resettlement or settlement, which neglect the long-term support required for new settlers. All the South Sudanese participants, both parents and young people, highlighted these as contributing factors to their parenting challenges and youth problems. McMichael, et al. (2011) argues that settlement-related services that are focused on young immigrants must unequivocally connect with family-linked contexts to aid their families to resettle successfully. The effectiveness of supporting the establishment of new settlers' networks as a means to ameliorate the difficulties they face has not yet been adequately examined and addressed.

As part of comprehensive support for the family, both for parents and for young people, it is important to make them feel self-sufficient through employment and that they are thereby contributing to their new environment. So in the next part of this chapter, I discuss employment as a contributing factor to the challenges faced by South Sudanese families.

#### **10.4 Employment opportunities for inclusive integration**

Looking for a smooth transition into a new environment, the pressures of becoming financially independent often exacerbate parenting challenges (Abdelkerim and Grace, 2012). The South Sudanese and other migrants are not only hard-working; most want to work and earn their daily living, mainly to support themselves and their families, both

in Australia and in their countries of origin or those still languishing in refugee and displaced person camps. Unemployment for men has significant implications for them within their families and the new environment. Many South Sudanese men felt they were not fulfilling their obligations as breadwinners for their families and that they need money and employment to meet their traditional and social responsibilities. They also felt that they were no longer heads of their families, which they had been in South Sudan. They believe that the new environment has given their wives or partners and children more power than them, financially as well as in legal rights and freedoms. Thus many South Sudanese men felt culturally condemned by the authorities and ousted from their traditional roles as heads of their families. There may also be mental health implications arising from the lack of employment for the new settler parents and young people but the impact of unemployment on their mental health and on their parenting practices has not been adequately researched.

As many South Sudanese parents and youth commented, this study has shown that the lack of employment is one of the key factors contributing to parenting difficulties and family separations. The challenges stemming from unemployment are compounded by the frequent allegations that in many cases their children make demands for material resources from their parents and when those demands are not satisfied, the children rebel against their parents or inform their school that they are being abused, whereupon the school notifies the Child Protection Service. As a consequence, parents believe that if they can meet their children's financial and material needs, that will help reduce and avert family separations and Child Protection Service interventions.

Unsurprisingly, most participants reported that they were being denied job opportunities by potential employers, not on merit but on a racial basis, which is often covertly concealed under a claim that they either do not have Australian work experience or that another, more experienced, candidate was chosen. Dumbrill's (2008) study in Canada with refugee participants indicated the employers often told refugee applicants that they cannot be offered jobs because they do not have Canadian experience. However, most refugees wonder how they can get the experience required in their host country if they are not given work. Some employers may benefit from cultural training through government agencies and other service providers to help them understand that being refugees or otherwise different should not be a potential barrier to employment.

Consistent anecdotal reports from South Sudanese community members and participants in this study have suggested that potential employers often reject them before short-listing job applicants, although their credentials might otherwise match the criteria in the job descriptions. They simply make a determination based on the applicants' names, which may sound strange or foreign to them. Such obstacles indicate the existence of discrimination not only against South Sudanese but also against many other new migrants (Forrest et al., 2016). These difficulties in finding employment only exacerbate family challenges and create a significant barrier to their integration.

Further, South Sudanese are often inaccurately and negatively represented in the news media, and these portrayals are believed to have created a heightened sense of discrimination and may be the reason for denying employment (Colic-Peisker and Tilbury, 2007).

The South Sudanese take pride in their education, and today there are good numbers of them who graduate from universities across Australia and New Zealand, but most have remained virtually unemployed after having spent many hard years in study. Many graduates have managed, despite English being their second or third language, to acquire education or qualifications that they then cannot apply in practice in the Australian labour market. The experience of being denied employment opportunities because of their race or heritage has a strong negative impact on their families and on their general wellbeing and self-esteem (Colic-Peisker and Tilbury, 2007), and it discourages some young people who have already enrolled or intend to enrol in tertiary education.

This study has shown that successful parenting and integration into a new environment also means having a job and thereby feeling a sense both of belonging and of financial security. Lejukole (2008) argued that successful resettlement and integration are gradual processes and entail social, cultural, political, economic and environmental transformations and orientations. According to Losoncz (2013), the South Sudanese hope to integrate into Australian society economically and socially and thus to contribute to their new country either directly or through the indirect participation of their family members, but they have found their pathways to social and economic inclusion blocked. Therefore policymakers, government agencies and settlement support services individually and collectively need to address the unemployment issues and

other potential barriers to integration. The settlement agencies working with these communities also need to focus on tackling discrimination as a barrier to better integration.

### 10.5 So what?

Firstly, despite these family and parenting challenges, many South Sudanese have found their own ways of integrating into Australian society. Many have successfully acquired the education which they were denied in their country of origin. Some are employed; others are self-employed or running businesses. There were positive comments by participants during the interviews. In particular, they expressed gratitude for the opportunities relating to security and education in Australia, something they had lost in Sudan and during their forced migration. However, as highlighted earlier, refugees are not a homogenous population. Each individual refugee and family group experiences pre- and post-resettlement differently, which is based partly on the level of their needs and partly on the support that they were given on their arrival, such as the welcome they might have received from their host and their local communities.

Most participants in this study appreciated that they were given the opportunities provided through this research project to share and voice their parenting challenges, difficulties, worries, and concerns and particularly to talk about parenting as it affects their day-to-day lives. The participants also felt comfortable sharing their concerns and difficulties about parenting issues because of my ability, as the researcher, to speak their languages and my insider knowledge of their culture. Language is an important means of communication, which is why it is necessary to provide appropriate English classes for refugee parents as a significant way to help them alleviate their stresses and enhance their integration. Irrespective of their traumatic experiences and the varying degrees of cultural shock, changes in families and parenting challenges, which are influenced by the language barrier and lack of employment, remain dominant factors and potential barriers to the successful integration of South Sudanese and other migrants. This means that addressing parenting challenges includes and is included in addressing most of the other barriers to integration.

What is this study recommending? The challenges facing South Sudanese and other migrants who have come to Australia as refugees suggest an urgent effort is required from government agencies and other support services to work in consultation with newly-arriving and recently-settled migrant communities. It might also be appropriate to revisit the question as to how long such new migrants, who come with complex challenges resulting from forced migration and settlement, need integration support. Most resettlement or settlement support services seem to end their support after a short period with particular refugee groups, hoping that such a period is sufficient to allow them to go about their new lives as Australians. As shown by this study, whether settlement has been successful cannot be determined within the first few months or even the first few years of support. A short period may only be a honeymoon period for those who might have not yet comprehended or felt fully the reality and challenges of their new environment. Therefore, there are urgent needs for the agencies working with refugee communities to collaborate more closely with them in order to understand their actual needs, particularly when (as with the South Sudanese and parenting skills) there is a conflict between Australian law and cultural traditions.

This can be achieved through appropriate consultation and collaboration with service providers and CALD communities as part of holistic and good practice, consistency and clarity or understanding of the service being provided. This includes having adequate consultations regarding policies and program activities, particularly on how the services being provided can make an impact. Although South Sudanese and other former refugee families and communities need to organise and advocate for themselves as part of tackling their settlement's challenges, such as family violence and youth issues. Government agencies and other settlement support services also need to focus on how to empower the communities, not only to take the ownership of resolving most of their challenges but also providing a platform to let them have more input into the decision-making that affects them directly.

CALD communities can also benefit from the family and parent-centred approach through providing positive parenting training and support, particularly around the options to disciplining children through non-physical methods. Otherwise, a national framework for Child Protection, particularly regarding strategies for meeting the needs of the families from CALD and the wider community, is significant. For instance, a

revisit of the current policies, legislation and practice guidelines with an understanding and incorporation of CALD traditional parenting practices and settlement challenges may help inform the best approaches and effective service delivery when working with them. This can be achieved through developing a clear and straightforward communication strategy and providing education to the families from CALD and newly-arrived refugee communities about the statutory role of the Child Protection Service, family laws, and in particular, children's, women's and men's rights: this is where misunderstanding often occurs.

Policymakers need to revisit the effectiveness of their multicultural society as it seemed to be reflected in the talk, but is not being reflected in most of the services provided by the government agencies and employers. The latter appear to discriminate against the minority communities. There is a need to redevelop the inclusive policies to include those who are in the margin of the communities, particularly former refugee's communities. Participants highlighted hindrances to their transition such as racism, discrimination and bullying; parents commonly spoke of themselves and their children being picked on. Many stated that these issues have affected them and their children in several ways. They talked about being denied opportunities for employment as well as being picked on, mostly in public places, including schools, just for being different. These issues have been reported not only in this study but also in previous studies (Losoncz, 2013, Marlowe, 2010b). Most employers are discriminating against former refugees and other migrants by denying them opportunities solely based on being different. There is a need for policies on media approaches to multiculturalism. Most often, the media has tended to vilify minorities, and this seems to increase negative perceptions towards refugees and other migrants. This is not a suggestion to regulate the media, but their approach to the minorities is impacting negatively in promoting cohesion, multiculturalism and integration of the newly-arrived refugees who often feel excluded and stigmatised as a result.

There is also a need for ongoing cultural awareness training for employers and service providers who work directly with former refugee and other migrant communities, so that they can deliver culturally appropriate support services with less bias and misunderstanding between the providers and recipients.

However, further study is needed to evaluate the effectiveness and how long the support being given to newly-arrived refugees should be. Further consideration also needs to had as to what has (or has not) been working well regarding Child Protection Services approaches with CALD and newly-arrived refugees as it has been with indigenous communities? What are the causes of increased former refugee youth antisocial behaviours, juvenile and serious crimes, which parents alleged to be due to the inappropriate involvement of Child Protection and the laws they believed to have given their children more freedom? It is hoped that the outcomes of this study will be to further increase the knowledge that policymakers, government agencies and service providers already have on how to support both parents and young people in settler families.

## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1A: Information to individual participants



## INFORMATION TO PARTICIPANTS INVOLVED IN RESEARCH

### Individual Interview

#### **You are invited to participate**

---

You are invited to participate in this research project titled: **Fitting the Jigsaw: South Sudanese Family Dynamics and Parenting Practices in Australia.**

This project is being conducted by a student researcher, **Santino Atem Deng** as part of his PhD study at Victoria University under the following supervisors:

**Professor Michele Grossman** (Chief Investigator), Centre for Cultural Diversity and Wellbeing

**Dr. Nicole Oke** (Associate Chief Investigator), College of Arts

**Dr. Isabelle de Solier** (Associate Chief Investigator), Centre for Cultural Diversity and Wellbeing

#### **Project explanation**

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This project investigates South Sudanese parenting experiences and practices from the perspectives of both parents and young adults (18 years and above). It investigates the nature and meaning of changes experienced by South Sudanese families in relation to continuity and transformation in traditional parenting practices since settling in Australia.

#### **What will I be asked to do?**

---

You will be asked to give informed consent to take part at individual interview to share your opinions about your parenting experiences, practices, beliefs and values, and how you are negotiating these within your new social and cultural environment, following your resettlement in Australia. We are also interested to know what has changed in your parenting practices, and the impacts of these changes in terms of individual, family and South Sudanese community well-being in Australia.

#### **What will I gain from participating?**

---

Some South Sudanese community members may have experienced parenting challenges due to forced migration and changes within the traditional family and parenting practices, including different culture, new environment, intergenerational gaps (between parents and children), language and/or cultural barriers. However, very little is known about the resettlement-related parenting challenges in the new environment that some people may have experienced, the impacts of these and how families may be supported when dealing with such issues. This study will help develop new community-based knowledge about the experience of changes in parenting

practices, styles and attitudes that can improve people's ability to cope successfully with family life and relationships in a new environment. As a participant, you will be contributing to greater understanding and knowledge that can lead to better parenting support services and help South Sudanese families thrive in Australia.

### **How will the information I give be used?**

---

The information you give will be analysed using thematic analyses and coded thematically according to the emerging themes by a PhD student/researcher (Santino Atem Deng) to produce new knowledge about South Sudanese parenting experiences and practices in Australia in the form of a Thesis. The thesis will be examined by academic experts in the relevant field of study. The research team may also use some of the information you give to write reports, academic articles for publications and conference presentations.

### **How will this project handle my personal details and information?**

---

The information you share for this study will be kept strictly confidential, and your personal information will not be divulged or shared with others. Your name or any other identifiable details will not appear anywhere in the PhD thesis, articles or conference presentations that will be produced from the data collected for this study. However, while your personal information will be kept strictly confidential, your involvement in the research itself may become known to others in the community. Audio-recording of individual interviews will be kept in a secure digital storage facility at Victoria University; all the transcripts and fieldwork notes will also be kept in a secured locked filing cabinet at Victoria University and only accessible by the research team listed below. After five years, the minimum required time for maintaining research materials, the data collected for this study will be destroyed.

### **What are the potential risks of participating in this project?**

---

Some people may find discussing changes within their family or parenting experiences, practices and resettlement-related challenges sometime emotional or distressful. If it happens to you or for any other reason, then you have every right to discontinue or withdraw from the interview, and your withdrawal from taking part will not affect or disadvantage you, in any way possible.

If you feel that, after answering the questions, you would like to talk to a professional about any stress or emotional problems you may be experiencing then, please contact 'Victoria Foundation House' (Refugee Mental Health Program; Brunswick Phone: 3-9388 0022 Dandenong 3-8788 3333 or Transcultural Mental Health Centre (1800 648 911) using the Telephone Interpreter Service if needed (13 1450). Men who speak Arabic may also have the option of contacting the Men's Line Arabic Call Back Service on 1300 78 99 78.

Details of any other support you might need, for example, South Sudanese Community elders or leaders will be provided on your request.

### **How will this project be conducted?**

---

The project is being conducted by PhD student (Santino Atem Deng), using face-to-face (individual) interviews. Individual interviews will take about an hour. The interviews will be conducted at participants' convenient times, and places they have chosen (for example, at their homes, community centres or Victoria University premises). Prior to each interview, participants will be given full explanations of the study to ensure that they understand their associated roles and rights to withdraw from the interviews. Participants will be asked to consent to interview and audio-recording to help the PhD researcher (Santino Atem Deng) remember and analyse the accurate information you

give him. Participants may be offered the interview's transcripts, digital recording and opportunities to listen, clarify and correct any aspects of their information after the interviews.

Santino Atem Deng will be your main point of contact during the study, although the overall project will be managed by Professor Michele Grossman (Chief Investigator).

### **Who is conducting the study?**

---

The members of Victoria University conducting this research are:

- 1. Professor Michele Grossman (Chief Investigator), Phone:** (03) 99195011 or **email:** [michelegrossman@vu.edu.au](mailto:michelegrossman@vu.edu.au)
- 2. Dr. Nicole Oke (Associate Chief Investigator), Phone:** 3-99194751 or **email:** [Nicole.oke@vu.edu.au](mailto:Nicole.oke@vu.edu.au)
- 3. Dr. Isabelle de Solier (Associate Chief Investigator), Phone:** 3-9919 5657 or **email:** [Isabelle.deSolier@vu.edu.au](mailto:Isabelle.deSolier@vu.edu.au)
- 4. Santino Atem Deng (PhD Student Investigator), Phone:** 03-99197063 or **Mobile:** 0470641271 or **email:** [santino.deng1@live.vu.edu.au](mailto:santino.deng1@live.vu.edu.au)

However, any queries about your participation in this project may be directed to the Chief Investigator (**Professor Michele Grossman**).

Nevertheless, if you have any queries or complaints about the way, you have been treated; you may contact the Ethics Secretary, Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee Office for Research, Victoria University, PO Box 14428, Melbourne, VIC, 8001 or phone 3-9919 4781.

## Appendix 1B: Information to focus group participants



### INFORMATION TO PARTICIPANTS INVOLVED IN RESEARCH

#### **Focus Group Discussion**

##### **You are invited to participate**

---

You are invited to participate in this research project titled: **Fitting the Jigsaw: South Sudanese Family Dynamics and Parenting Practices in Australia.**

This project is being conducted by a student researcher, **Santino Atem Deng**, as part of his PhD study at Victoria University under the following supervisors:

**Professor Michele Grossman** (Chief Investigator), Centre for Cultural Diversity and Wellbeing

**Dr. Nicole Oke** (Associate Chief Investigator), College of Arts

**Dr. Isabelle de Solier** (Associate Chief Investigator), Centre for Cultural Diversity and Wellbeing

##### **Project explanation**

---

This project investigates South Sudanese parenting experiences and practices from the perspectives of both parents and young adults (18 years and above). It investigates the nature and meaning of changes experienced by South Sudanese families in relation to continuity and transformation in traditional parenting practices since settling in Australia.

##### **What will I be asked to do?**

---

You will be asked to give informed consent to take part at focus group discussion to give your opinions about your parenting experiences, practices, beliefs and values, and how you are negotiating these within your new social and cultural environment, following your resettlement in Australia. We are also interested to know what has changed in your parenting practices, and the impacts of these changes in terms of individual, family and South Sudanese community well-being in Australia.

##### **What will I gain from participating?**

---

Some South Sudanese community members may have experienced parenting challenges due to forced migration and changes within the traditional family and parenting practices, including different culture, new environment, intergenerational gaps (between parents and children), language and/or cultural barriers. However, very little is known about the resettlement-related parenting challenges in the new environment that some people may have experienced, the impacts of these and how families may be supported when dealing with such issues. This study will help develop new community-based knowledge about the experience of changes in parenting practices, styles and attitudes that can improve people's ability to cope successfully with family life and relationships in a new environment. As a participant, you will be contributing to greater understanding and knowledge that can lead to better parenting support services and help South Sudanese families thrive in Australia.

### **How will the information I give be used?**

---

The information you give will be analysed using thematic analyses and coded thematically according to the emerging themes by a PhD student/researcher (Santino Atem Deng) to produce new knowledge about South Sudanese parenting experiences and practices in Australia in the form of a Thesis. The thesis will be examined by academic experts in the relevant field of study. The research team may also use some of the information you give to write reports, academic articles for publications and conference presentations.

### **How will this project handle my personal details and information?**

---

The information you share at focus group discussion for this study will be kept strictly confidential, and your personal information will not be divulged to others. Your name or any other identifiable details will not appear anywhere in the PhD thesis, articles or conference presentations that will be produced from the data collected for this study. However, while your personal information will be kept strictly confidential, your involvement in the research itself may become known to others in the community. Audio-recording of focus group discussions will be kept in a secure digital storage facility at Victoria University; all the transcripts and fieldwork notes will also be kept in a secured locked filing cabinet at Victoria University and only accessible by the research team listed below. After five years, the minimum required time for maintaining research materials, the data collected for this study will be destroyed.

### **What are the potential risks of participating in this project?**

---

Some people may find discussing changes within their family or parenting experiences, practices and resettlement-related challenges sometime emotional or distressful. If it happens to you or for any other reason, then you have every right to discontinue or withdraw from discussion, and your withdrawal from taking part will not affect or disadvantage you, in any way possible.

If you feel that, after answering the questions, you would like to talk to a professional about any stress or emotional problems you may be experiencing then, please contact *'Victoria Foundation House' (Refugee Mental Health Program; Brunswick Phone: 3-9388 0022 Dandenong 3-8788 3333 or Transcultural Mental Health Centre (1800 648 911) using the Telephone Interpreter Service if needed (13 1450). Men who speak Arabic may also have the option of contacting the Men's Line Arabic Call Back Service on 1300 78 99 78.*

Details of any other support you might need, for example, South Sudanese Community elders or leaders will be provided on your request.

### **How will this project be conducted?**

---

The project is being conducted by PhD student (Santino Atem Deng), using focus group discussions. Focus group discussions will take about 1.5-2 hours' maximum. The interviews and discussions will be conducted at participants' convenient times, and places they have chosen (for example, at their homes, community centres or Victoria University premises). Prior to discussions, participants will be given full explanations of the study to ensure that they understand their associated roles and rights to withdraw from the group. Participants will be asked to consent to audio-recording to help the PhD researcher (Santino Atem Deng) remember and analyse the accurate information you give him. Participants may be offered the interview's transcripts, digital recording and opportunities to listen, clarify and correct any aspects of their information after the discussions.

Santino Atem Deng will be your main point of contact during the study, although the overall project will be managed by Professor Michele Grossman (Chief Investigator).

### **Who is conducting the study?**

---

The members of Victoria University conducting this research are:

- 1. Professor Michele Grossman (Chief Investigator), Phone:** (03) 99195011 or **email:** [michele.grossman@vu.edu.au](mailto:michele.grossman@vu.edu.au)
- 2. Dr. Nicole Oke (Associate Chief Investigator), Phone:** 3-99194751 or **email:** [Nicole.oke@vu.edu.au](mailto:Nicole.oke@vu.edu.au)
- 3. Dr. Isabelle de Solier (Associate Chief Investigator), Phone:** 3-9919 5657 or **email:** [Isabelle.deSolier@vu.edu.au](mailto:Isabelle.deSolier@vu.edu.au)
- 4. Santino Atem Deng (PhD Student Investigator), Phone:** 03-99197063 or **Mobile:** 0470641271 or **email:** [santino.dengl@live.vu.edu.au](mailto:santino.dengl@live.vu.edu.au)

However, any queries about your participation in this project may be directed to the Chief Investigator (**Professor Michele Grossman**).

Nevertheless, if you have any queries or complaints about the way, you have been treated; you may contact the Ethics Secretary, Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee Office for Research, Victoria University, PO Box 14428, Melbourne, VIC, 8001 or phone 3-9919 4781.



## CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS INVOLVED IN RESEARCH

### Individual Focus Group discussion

#### INFORMATION TO PARTICIPANTS:

**We invite you to participate in the investigation of South Sudanese parenting experiences and practices in Australia.**

Project title:

**Fitting the Jigsaw: South Sudanese Family Dynamics and Parenting Practices in Australia**

#### Researchers:

1. Professor Michele Grossman (Chief Investigator), Centre for Cultural Diversity and Wellbeing
2. Dr Nicole Oke (Associate Chief Investigator), College of Arts
3. Dr Isabelle de Solier (Associate Chief Investigator), Centre for Cultural Diversity and Wellbeing
4. Santino Atem Deng (PhD student), Centre for Cultural Diversity and Wellbeing

#### CERTIFICATION BY SUBJECT

I agree to take part in the research project title: **Fitting the Jigsaw: South Sudanese Family Dynamics and Parenting Practices in Australia**, and by signing this form:

- I certify that the aims and objectives of the study, together with any risks and safeguards associated with the procedures listed hereunder to be carried out in the research, have been fully explained to me by the PhD student, Santino Atem Deng; and that I freely consent to participation involving the below mentioned procedure:
  - Focus group discussions which will be audio-recorded
- I certify that I have had the opportunity to have any questions answered, and that I understand that I can withdraw from this study at any time and that this withdrawal will not disadvantage me in any way. I have been fully informed that the information I provide will be kept confidential.
- I understand that the data from the focus group discussions will be kept in a secure storage facility which will only be accessible to the research team. I also understand that the data will be destroyed after five years, unless I give further consent for future uses after that period.
- I certify that I am 18 years and above, and that I am voluntarily giving my consent to participate in the study being conducted at Victoria University by PhD student researcher, Santino Atem Deng.

I, therefore, consent to:

**Focus group discussions:**

**Yes** ☐ **No** ☐

I give permission for the information I provide to be used without my identity being revealed in publications (e.g. in reports, journals and conferences): **Yes** ☐ **No** ☐

I understand that during or after the focus group if I feel stressed or reminded of any bad experiences by the discussion, then I will be provided with relevant information about where I may get help (as showed in the Information to Participants' sheet).

I understand that any queries or concerns about my participation in this project may be directed to the Chief Investigator (Professor Michele Grossman) on Phone: 3-99195011 or email: [michele.grossman@vu.edu.au](mailto:michele.grossman@vu.edu.au) at any time.

I understand that if I have any further queries or complaints about the way I have been treated I may contact the Ethics Secretary, Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee Office for Research, Victoria University, PO Box 14428, Melbourne, VIC, 8001 or by Phone: 3-9919 4781.

Participant name (print):-----

Signed: -----

Date: -----



## CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS INVOLVED IN RESEARCH

### Focus Group Discussion

#### INFORMATION TO PARTICIPANTS:

**We invite you to participate in the investigation of South Sudanese parenting experiences and practices in Australia.**

Project title:

**Fitting the Jigsaw: South Sudanese Family Dynamics and Parenting Practices in Australia**

#### Researchers:

5. Professor Michele Grossman (Chief Investigator), Centre for Cultural Diversity and Wellbeing
6. Dr Nicole Oke (Associate Chief Investigator), College of Arts
7. Dr Isabelle de Solier (Associate Chief Investigator), Centre for Cultural Diversity and Wellbeing
8. Santino Atem Deng (PhD student), Centre for Cultural Diversity and Wellbeing

#### CERTIFICATION BY SUBJECT

I agree to take part in the research project title: **Fitting the Jigsaw: South Sudanese Family Dynamics and Parenting Practices in Australia**, and by signing this form:

- I certify that the aims and objectives of the study, together with any risks and safeguards associated with the procedures listed hereunder to be carried out in the research, have been fully explained to me by the PhD student, Santino Atem Deng; and that I freely consent to participation involving the below mentioned procedure:
  - Focus group discussions which will be audio-recorded
- I certify that I have had the opportunity to have any questions answered, and that I understand that I can withdraw from this study at any time and that this withdrawal will not disadvantage me in any way. I have been fully informed that the information I provide will be kept confidential.
- I understand that the data from the focus group discussions will be kept in a secure storage facility which will only be accessible to the research team. I also understand that the data will be destroyed after five years, unless I give further consent for future uses after that period.
- I certify that I am 18 years and above, and that I am voluntarily giving my consent to participate in the study being conducted at Victoria University by PhD student researcher, Santino Atem Deng.

I, therefore, consent to:

**Focus group discussions:**

**Yes** ☐ **No** ☐

I give permission for the information I provide to be used without my identity being revealed in publications (e.g. in reports, journals and conferences): **Yes** ☐ **No** ☐

I understand that during or after the focus group if I feel stressed or reminded of any bad experiences by the discussion, then I will be provided with relevant information about where I may get help (as showed in the Information to Participants' sheet).

I understand that any queries or concerns about my participation in this project may be directed to the Chief Investigator (Professor Michele Grossman) on Phone: 3-99195011 or email: [michele.grossman@vu.edu.au](mailto:michele.grossman@vu.edu.au) at any time.

I understand that if I have any further queries or complaints about the way I have been treated I may contact the Ethics Secretary, Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee Office for Research, Victoria University, PO Box 14428, Melbourne, VIC, 8001 or by Phone: 3-9919 4781.

Participant name (print): -----

Signed: -----

Date: -----

## Appendix 3A: Individual Interview Questions (Parents and young adults)

PhD Research Project - Santino Atem Deng

*Interview ID number:* -----

Project title: Fitting the Jigsaw: South Sudanese Family Dynamics and Parenting Practices in Australia

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### Sample Individual Interview Questions (Parents and young adults)

#### I. Demographic information:

1. Age: -----
2. Gender: (M/F): -----
3. State and Suburb .....Postcode: -----
4. Marital status (**circle one**): single – engaged – married – separated – divorced –widowed/widower – de facto
5. When did you leave South Sudan? .....
6. Where did you live before coming to Australia? .....
7. When did you arrive in Australia? -----
8. What is your employment status: employed (part or fulltime); unemployed, but seeking for job or unemployed, but not seeking for a job; on pension or disability support; fulltime mother or father; student (fulltime or part-time)
9. Since you arrived in Australia, have any other members of your family left or arrived? Can you provide details if so?

#### II. South Sudanese tradition and culture of parenting practices, beliefs and values

1. What is parenting in South Sudanese tradition or culture (e.g. children's upbringing and disciplining practices)?
2. What are some examples of 'good' parenting and 'bad' parenting practices that come to mind when you think about South Sudanese cultural traditions?
3. What is the role of a mother or father in a South Sudanese family?
4. What are the most important parenting practices, beliefs and values?
5. Looking back on your own childhood, what stands out as the most important aspects of parenting that you received as a child?
6. In South Sudan, what does it mean to be a 'bad' child or 'good' child?
7. What parenting role, if any, do people who are not the mother or father play in South Sudanese traditional culture?

#### III. South Sudanese transitional parenting practices, beliefs and attitudes after settling in Australia

1. Has your understanding of parenting practices changed since coming to Australia? If so, how?
2. Have any of your parenting values changed, and how do you feel about these changes in parenting values? (e.g., are there challenges? Benefits? Mixed feelings? Can you give examples of these?)

3. What are the main differences you see between Australian parenting styles and South Sudanese parenting styles? How do you feel about these differences?
4. Do you see parenting as grounded only in being a mother or father or does parenting go beyond this? If it does, how does this work?
5. What kind of parenting styles are you using now in Australia, are there differences from your desired parenting practices? If so, can you explain how this is working for you?

#### **IV. The impacts of parental changes within South Sudanese families and community**

1. Has the relationship between or among your family changed because of changes in the parenting styles practiced within your family? If so, in what way and what does that mean for you and your family in Australia?
2. What are the impacts of these changes in parenting styles for your community more generally?
3. Are there advantages or problems associated with these changes? Can you give me some examples?

#### **V. South Sudanese coping strategies with the impact of changes within their families and parenting practices in Australia**

1. How do you (as family and community) cope with challenges, problems or issues arising from changes within your family and parenting practices in Australia?
2. How well supported do you feel in terms of parenting and family life since settling in Australia?
3. How could you be better supported as a parent, based on your parenting experiences in Australia?
4. In ten year's times, how would you like to be remembered by your children as a parent?
5. Finally, is there anything else you would like to share or say about your general experiences of parenting practices?

## Appendix 3B: Focus Group Discussion Questions (Parents and young adults)

**PhD Research Project - Santino Atem Deng**

**Project title: Fitting the Jigsaw: South Sudanese Family Dynamics and Parenting Practices in Australia**

### **Focus Group Discussion Questions (Parents and Young Adults)**

8. What is parenting in South Sudanese tradition or culture (prompt: children's upbringing and disciplining practices)?
9. What are some examples of 'good' parenting and 'bad' parenting practices that come to mind when you think about South Sudanese cultural traditions?
10. What is the role of a mother or father in a South Sudanese family?
11. What are the most important parenting practices, beliefs and values in South Sudanese culture?
12. What part of your parenting practices, beliefs, and values are you still holding onto in Australia, and why?
13. What is changing or has changed (or probably won't) in your families in terms of culture, parenting practices, attitudes and gender roles following your resettlement in Australia?
14. How are you reconciling these parenting values within your new social and cultural environment, following your resettlement in Australia?
15. What are the impacts of these changes within your families, for example, in terms of individual, family and South Sudanese community well-being in Australia?
16. What has helped you (as an individual, family or community) in overcoming the resettlement challenges and changes introduced by your new environment (Australia)?
17. What kinds of support are you getting, for instance, from your own family, friends or South Sudanese community members, and service providers in your residential areas?
18. If you are not receiving any support, how can support be provided to meet your parenting needs?

### **Focus Group Discussion Questions (Young Adults)**

1. What are your experiences of being parented in Australia?
2. Were you parented differently in South Sudan (or country of refuge) compared to Australia (prompt: if you were born and grew up in South Sudan or country of refuge)? If so, how?
3. In your experiences and understanding, what are the differences between your South Sudanese and Australian traditions and cultures?
4. Do you identify more with Australian or South Sudanese culture?
5. While growing up in Australia, did your parents expect you to hold onto certain South Sudanese cultural values? If so, what are they, and in what way?
6. Is there any particular way you believe you are or would like to be supported either by your parents, or community or support services in Australia?
7. What kind of parent would you like to be if you become a parent?
8. What is your advice to other young people (from other cultures) growing up in Australia?
9. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences of growing up and being parented as a young South Sudanese person in Australia (or overseas such as in South Sudan or country of refuge)?

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