

Doing family and fathering in Aotearoa/New Zealand: A community-based study with refugee-background men

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Abstract

Drawing on community-based research, this article explores how men from refugee backgrounds 'do' family and fathering in the Aotearoa/New Zealand context. Using Palkovitz and Hull's (2018) 'resource theory of fathering' as a framework, it examines the individual, interpersonal and contextual resources that shape their experiences of family and fathering. In particular, the men's narratives illustrate that shifting gender identities and power dynamics within family relationships, as well as reduced community involvement, present significant obstacles to traditional fathering practices. Yet participants also spoke of an attitudinal acceptance of shifts in the gendered division of labour that enabled them to more easily reorient themselves to the social constructions of gender prominent in Aotearoa/New Zealand. The article gives voice to a relatively absent presence in refugee resettlement scholarship – the experiences of fathers – and documents the approaches they identify to better support positive resettlement outcomes and family wellbeing.

Key words

Family, fathering, refugees, men, gender, Aotearoa/New Zealand

Introduction

Throughout the resettlement process, former refugees face a wide array of challenges, including: learning a new language; finding a job; familiarising themselves with new laws; and reconciling new social and cultural competencies which differ from those that are important in their home countries or temporary places of residence (Este & Tachble, 2009a; Bryceson, 2019). This article focuses specifically on how refugee-background men often find themselves navigating new social constructions of gender, fathering and family as they attempt to establish new lives in a country of resettlement. Their voices on these issues are largely absent in much of the forced migration literature.

Following a brief review of the relevant literature, we detail the community-based research project from which this article emerges. The project involved four male refugee-background researchers interviewing 40 refugee-background males. The article uses Palkovitz and Hull's (2018) 'resource theory of fathering' as a framework for exploring the challenges that refugee-background men experience and how they negotiate these. We argue that while parenting is a site of cross-cultural tension for all refugee-background males in the study, living in Aotearoa/New Zealand provides some participants with the space for new ways of doing gender, family and fathering. Building on participant views about what kind of resources or support would enhance their family relationships and parenting role, we present the men's thoughts on how positive familial relationships and experiences might be facilitated in Aotearoa/New Zealand within the context of a broader literature focused on migrant family wellbeing, empowerment and gender politics.

Doing family in a migration context

This section highlights some of the key sites of tension that exist when ‘doing’ family in a migration context. Refugees have very different migration journeys, experiences and settlement strategies when compared to other migrants, hence the need for our study; however, the paucity of research focusing on how former refugees do family means our review draws heavily on studies about migrants more generally. These studies highlight that western assumptions about family and gender roles are not universal and that the migration process can impact fathering roles in particular.

The nuclear family and the gendered division of labour

The nuclear family remains the most common understanding of what constitutes the family unit in Aotearoa/New Zealand and many other western countries. The idea that families are made up of two parents and their children who (generally) live together in one house without extended family members shapes many laws, policies and social norms (Hertz, 2006; Fineman, 2009). But the two-generation, independent family model that characterises many western cultures, and promotes autonomy/personal accountability, can contrast markedly with extended family models prominent in collectivist cultures. There, interdependence, filial obligations, conformity, duty and reciprocity are valued, and grandparents, aunts, nieces, cousins and distant kin are often considered part of the main family unit (Social Policy Evaluation and Research Unit [hereafter Superu], 2016). Alongside the rise of fluid family units and practices resulting from divorce and single parenthood (Smart, 2007), and ‘families of choice’ where same-sex couples partner and have children (Weeks et al., 2004), migration thus challenges assumptions about what constitutes family in Aotearoa/New Zealand by highlighting that the nuclear family ‘norm’ is *not* normal for many of its newer residents, nor indeed, for many existing ethnic minority groups such as Māori and Pasifika peoples (Superu, 2016).

Deepak’s (2005) study in the United States, for instance, found that South Asians practicing collectivist family models faced institutions and norms that forced them into living in nuclear family structures. Despite these challenges, Foner’s (1997, p. 964) study of Vietnamese immigrants to the United States documented how they ‘reconstructed kin-groups’ by ‘promoting’ distant kin or unrelated individuals to ‘closer relative’ status in the absence of normal kin networks. These networks helped them cope with scarcity and other challenges in an otherwise unfamiliar, foreign environment. The construction of ‘fictive kin’ – individuals who have historical associations with the family and its members, who support the family and are considered part of the core family unit – has similarly been observed among Asian and Pasifika groups in Aotearoa/New Zealand (Superu, 2016). Given family separation is a major issue for refugees (Marlowe & Humpage, 2015), it is likely a common practice amongst resettled communities. Thus, through an ongoing process of ‘negotiation, rejection, modification and reformulation of social and cultural norms’ (Deepak, 2005, p. 590), migrant families cope with the changing dynamics presented to them in transnational contexts. These processes result in a synthesis of cultures, or ‘creolisation’, where new social and cultural patterns emerge (Foner, 1997; McDonald, 2011).

Alongside these culturally-informed familial patterns, there are powerful constructions of the gendered division of labour. In many contexts, the father has historically been regarded the breadwinner and head of household, while the moral imperative of care and the ‘duties of love’ are placed on the mother (Lynch, 2009; Fineman, 2009). In western countries, this model is

increasingly being challenged by a ‘dual breadwinner’ model where both parents work outside the home (Tan, 2017) and by notions of a ‘collaborative partnership’, where husbands and wives are equals, fulfilling ‘different but complementary roles’ (Smart, 2007, p.11). The extensive entry of women into the workforce in the 1970s and 1980s, the rate of unemployment among men, and the rise of the feminist movement further redefined the expectations of parenthood to include ‘co-parenting’ and ‘intensive mothering’ (Este & Tachble, 2009a; Pedersen, 2012). The previously ‘emotionally distant’ father has also evolved into one expected to be more engaged and involved in the upbringing of children and in family life (LaRossa, 1988; Wall & Arnold, 2007; Telve, 2018). Although studies indicate that mothers still undertake disproportionate levels of parenting and other caring roles in western countries, fathers are demonstrating more engagement with their children compared to the more distant, breadwinning fathers prior to the 1970s (Wall & Arnold, 2007; Pedersen, 2012).

Yet Lynch (2009, p. 412) notes that, ‘In the global construction of the gender order, masculinity is defined for men in most societies in terms of dominance and caring for men is at best equated with breadwinning’. Thus, the gendered division of labour remains a strong cultural frame for understanding family dynamics and practices in the non-western countries where most of Aotearoa/New Zealand’s refugees originate (Deng & Marlowe, 2013; Simon-Kumar et al., 2017; Immigration New Zealand, 2019). Previous research highlights that cultural disparities around narratives of parenting, and their relationship to maternal and paternal roles, is a source of perplexity that compounds the difficulties former refugee/migrant families face in the settlement process (Marlowe, 2012; Forget et al., 2019). Little focus, however, has been placed on what resources are required to overcome such challenges or the positive opportunities that migration provides in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

Immigration and fatherhood

It has been advanced that men ‘do’ gender through the act of ‘fathering’, which is shaped by traditional masculine notions of what it means to be a father (Parreñas, 2008). This builds on what Connell and Messerschmidt (2005, p. 832) refer to as ‘hegemonic masculinity’ – that is, a normative, embodied understanding of ‘the most honoured way of being a man’. In particular, hegemonic masculinity is strongly associated with fatherhood and being a provider (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Social constructions of masculinity vary in different societies and are, of course, informed by different cultures, norms and histories. For instance, it has been recently argued that a form of ‘caring masculinity’ enables men to adopt what are viewed as traditionally feminine characteristics (such as emotional expression or taking on domestic roles) without departing from or rejecting masculinity (Hunter et al., 2017). However, the majority of studies of immigrant (including refugee) fathers focus on those originating from cultural traditions where the father is the head of the family (see, for example, Parreñas, 2008; Este & Tachble, 2009b; Deng & Marlowe, 2013; Telve, 2018; Forget et al., 2019; Poeze, 2019). These fathers are thus accustomed to occupying positions of authority, having financial responsibility as breadwinners, as well as having moral responsibilities as disciplinarians and role models.

Because gender is historical, gender hierarchies are subject to change and so too are masculinities (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Marlowe, 2012; Connell, 2014). While scholars advance that transnational parenting operates based on traditional divisions of labour in the source countries (Aure, 2018; Poeze, 2019), others believe that mobility influences gender norms over time (Hanson, 2010) and transforms expectations of the ‘fathering’ role (Aure, 2018). More specifically, Forget et al. (2019) suggest that refugee-background fathers face challenges on three levels:

- *Individual* (negotiating gender roles and reconstituting understandings of what it means to be a ‘father’);
- *Family* (intergenerational conflicts, managing new responsibilities and the shifting/reversal of gender specific roles brought about by the loss of extended family networks); and
- *Community* (language difficulties, underemployment, unemployment and discrimination which aggravate the complications fathers must navigate in the settlement process).

‘Cultural shock’, where behaviours are either challenged, accepted or rejected, is another major obstacle leading to misunderstandings and conflicts within family units. This can arise from multiple causes; in the context of refugee-background fathers, clashes between migrant and host society cultures can include different religious beliefs, fundamental principles and views in life, and various and different ways of ‘doing things’ (Forget et al., 2019). This may mean different ideas about appropriate discipline for children and, indeed, whether children have rights as individuals, as well as how parents’ household tasks and paid work responsibilities are shared (or not). These obstacles can potentially have serious legal implications, indicating the importance of examining how refugee-background men’s fathering attitudes and practices – which intersect with various social locations that include race, ethnicity, age, immigration, culture and other structural factors – shape the way they do fathering in the highly normative arena of family (Marlowe, 2012; Deng & Marlowe, 2013).

Previous scholarship regarding former refugee and immigrant parenting has primarily focused on mothers and their experiences (Este & Tachble, 2009b; Aure, 2018; Telve, 2018). Other studies interrogate how varied cultures hold different ideas about what ‘successful adults’ look like, how these inform parenting ideologies and the mechanisms immigrant parents use to cope with raising children as they move from one culture to another (Roer-Strier, 2001). In research on fathers, the focus is often on the impacts of away-fathers raising children transnationally (see, for example, Shimoni et al., 2003; Parreñas, 2008; Aure, 2018; Telve, 2018; Poeze, 2019), frequently positioning these situations as problems to solve. However, there is a growing literature that shows strong indications of the interconnectedness between successful integration and effective ‘fathering’ (Shimoni et al., 2003; Este & Tachble, 2009a; Deng & Marlowe, 2013; Forget et al, 2019).

In part, the limited attention paid to former refugee fathers in the literature results from women and children from refugee backgrounds being regarded as more vulnerable, both generally and sometimes as the result of being victimised by the men within their families. Sözer (2020) notes that categories of ‘vulnerability’ have real and material implications in which the ‘most vulnerable’ groups are deemed most worthy of attention and resources and, in this case, research priorities. We acknowledge that hegemonic masculinity, generally, and the trauma of the refugee experience, more specifically, can facilitate power imbalances that sometimes translate into problematic behaviours like family violence. However, the refugee community organisation leading our research project identified that understanding family violence and other problems in refugee-background communities required specific exploration of the experiences of refugee-background men. Simon-Kumar et al. (2017, p. 1387) contend that it is increasingly acknowledged that ‘[c]ulture is not merely the cause of violence, but can be mobilised in anti-violence interventions’. Similarly, we believe that we need to understand how masculinity plays out in specific cultural contexts to better inform policy interventions targeting refugee-background men.

Believing that the notion of vulnerability cannot be divorced from the context that creates such vulnerabilities (Turner, 2019), we turn to Palkovitz and Hull’s (2018) mid-range father-centred theory, which interrogates the intersections of immigration, culture, race, ethnicity

and age as they occur in the fathering experience. This resource theory of fathering places fathers at the centre when examining father-child relationships, their lived experiences and their management of the resources available to them (Palkovitz & Hull, 2018). In this model, resources are any attributes and capacities, interpersonal networks and dynamics, or external circumstances that impact the performance of fathering. Such resources go beyond tangible and measurable assets, and include cognitive, affective and behavioural capacities that are deployed with the various personal, interpersonal and contextual resources. These resources correspond to and are mobilised in the personal, interpersonal and contextual ‘dimensions of diversity in fathering’ (Palkovitz & Hull, 2018, p. 183), which relate to many aspects of the individual, family and community level considerations previously discussed. This broad definition of resources allows a strength-based approach to fathering: ‘even men with “limited means” can father from a position of supply rather than need’ (Palkovitz & Hull, 2018, p. 185).

Although this article does not focus on father-child relationships exclusively, we build on the resource theory of fathering to analyse the lived experience of men from refugee backgrounds, which is ‘at the core of a heuristic model where fathers are centrally positioned within an array of personal, interpersonal, and contextual resources’ (Palkovitz & Hull, 2018, p. 185). Whilst acknowledging the challenges that fathers encounter, we recognise their capacities to respond to those challenges and the important roles that they assume within the family sphere (Turner, 2019). The article thus contributes to the broader literature on fathers from refugee backgrounds by exploring their family relationships in the specific context of Aotearoa/New Zealand, highlighting the importance of understanding not just the gender roles that men bring with them, but also how men interact with the specific social, political and economic contexts in their countries of resettlement.

This resource model aligns with more general understandings of what ‘successful integration’ means for former refugees integrating into a host society. For instance, Ager and Strang (2008) identify ten core domains: employment; housing; education; health; rights and citizenship; social bridges; social bonds; social links; language and cultural knowledge; and safety and stability. They not only argue for improved engagement across these various domains, but also for the removal of barriers existing in each domain through the promotion of ‘facilitators’ that address language limitations, lack of cultural competencies, and fear and instability in their local environment (Ager & Strang, 2008). Both this model of integration and Palkovitz and Hull’s (2018) resource theory of fathering highlight that the challenges faced by former refugees are multidimensional and overlapping, requiring a research focus on the varied factors and contexts that inform how men from refugee backgrounds do family and parenting in the migration context. This is evident in the way we use the resource theory of fathering to frame our discussion of research findings later in the article.

Research design

The research project was initiated by Aotearoa Resettled Community Coalition (ARCC), an organisation representing multiple refugee-background communities, after its Governance Board identified research as a means for meeting its strategic goal to be a more responsive organisation. Humpage was a current member of the board and Marlowe was a former member; both had academic experience working with and writing about refugee-background communities, thus they volunteered their time to assist with a research project that aimed to produce findings useful to the organisation, while also building research capacity within ARCC and its member communities. This was facilitated by a formal relationship with the University

of Auckland's Community Action Research and Evaluation (CARE) Initiative, which provides research and evaluation mentoring to support research initiatives within the community sector, and funding from the Lotteries Community Sector Research Fund.

Having received approval from the New Zealand Ethics Committee, four refugee-background men (Chaol, Karabadogomba, Pau and Selvahamar) were paid to attend two workshops run by Marlowe covering ethics, interviewing, development of the interview schedule, recruitment and data analysis; to conduct a total of 40 interviews in Auckland across the period November 2017 to May 2018; and to present findings to their respective communities. Community researchers were from Burundi, South Sudan, Myanmar and Sri Lanka, representing four of the 10 main national groups represented by ARCC. The men all held leadership roles in their communities, had a high standard of written and spoken English, and could speak at least one of the languages spoken by the 10 national groups. The men were supported by the general manager of ARCC (Yor), who managed the research project with assistance from Humpage, while a PhD student (West) was employed to assist with timely analysis of the research findings and the drafting of a research report.

Although the project did not specifically employ a feminist methodology (Harding, 1987), its interest in gender and its community-based focus mean there are some strong parallels. For instance, the research required everyone involved to consider their positionality. None of the academic researchers were from a refugee background and only one was born outside of New Zealand, requiring reflection on assumptions about refugees as 'vulnerable', the 'universality' (or not) of gender norms, and the quality of New Zealand's social and political institutions. In order to ensure they took a reflexive approach to gender, all interviewers practiced conducting interviews with each other, requiring them to consider their own answers to the questions they asked of participants. A data analysis workshop was held to collaboratively ensure that the key themes identified by West's data analysis resonated with the common narratives heard by the community researchers in interviews and their own knowledge of settlement.

A further parallel with feminist methodologies was that the research intended to make specific and significant contributions to the communities being studied. In addition to providing paid employment to refugee-background men, the research was reported back to ARCC member communities via three community consultations in West Auckland, Central Auckland and South Auckland in September and October 2018. The aim was to provide ARCC member organisations and research participants with an opportunity to reflect on outcomes and raise issues not fully covered in the research findings. Feedback from these consultations is incorporated into the findings section of this article.

Finally, life-history interviews methods were employed to discuss participants' experiences related to family and parenting that covered three significant time periods (before migration, in transit, and settlement in Aotearoa/New Zealand). The literature identifies life-history interview methods as an effective and resonant way of eliciting the type of information sought (Ghorashi, 2008), as they afford participants a high level of agency in deciding the kinds of experiences discussed which is extremely important in collaborative, community-based research such as this project.

Interview participants were all over 18 years of age, identified with one of the ten main national groups represented by ARCC member groups and had lived in Auckland for at least one year. The majority (31 of 40) of participants had been in Aotearoa/New Zealand for less than 15 years but only 11 had settled for less than five years. The majority (33) were aged under 50 but only 27 were in full- or part-time employment, with three retired or studying and the remainder searching for work. 26 participants were married, two were living in a de facto relationship and four were divorced, with the remainder being single. Twenty-seven participants had children,

around half of whom were born in Aotearoa/New Zealand. All 40 of the participants identified as belonging to a faith community, with the majority (25) being Christian. The largest number of participants came from Myanmar (11), Burundi (8) and Sri Lanka (7). Although participant quotes are followed by their country of origin and age, which were the dominant demographic variables shaping findings, small sample sizes mean discussion of aggregate findings are presented in terms of participants from South-East Asian (20) and African (18) countries. Only two participants came from Middle Eastern countries.

The interviews lasted between 45 and 180 minutes and were transcribed by professional transcribers. Given that each of the four interviewers met the eligibility requirements of the study, the pilot interviews they conducted with each other as training were included in the sample. West conducted a thematic analysis of all 40 transcripts, using both the research questions and emerging themes to code findings (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Thematic findings were first discussed in an analysis workshop with the research team, and then in community consultations, to ensure these resonated with the communities being researched. Grava then integrated these findings with the existing literature review discussed in this article.

Doing family and fathering in Aotearoa/New Zealand

To address the implications of doing family and fathering, we bring the participant voices alongside the resource theory of fathering as an organising framework. This allows us to identify the personal, interpersonal and contextual resources that powerfully inform the lived experiences of refugee-background men in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Importantly, Palkovitz and Hull (2018, p. 194) stress that the dimensions of fathering diversity and associated fathering resources are intricately interdependent; they ‘interact and influence’ each other ‘in ways that defy pure separation’. For instance, ethnicity is an individual attribute (resource) the father possesses, but its mobilisation has impacts on the:

- Personal (his views of himself relative to his subscribed role as a father, for example as ‘breadwinner’);
- Interpersonal (his relationships with his partner, his family and the wider community);
- Contextual dimensions of fathering (such as the wider, culturally ascribed gender roles and expectations and structural affordances associated with fatherhood – see Palkovitz & Hull, 2018).

We believe this theorisation improves our understanding of the lived experiences of men from refugee backgrounds, the barriers they encounter in the settlement process and the strengths, possibilities and hope that arise from their experiences. In the sections that follow, participants articulate how they negotiate their understanding of their sense of identities as individuals and as fathers. Alongside these narratives, they suggest approaches to support positive settlement outcomes and to minimise familial conflict.

Personal resources: Shifting gender identities

For Palkovitz and Hull (2018), the ‘personal resources’ dimension includes the bio-psycho-social-spiritual systems that comprise a bricolage of an individual’s experiences, abilities and traits acquired through life, which shape the father himself. This can encompass health, intelligence, personality and identity as they are operationalised in the performance of fathering. Here the focus is on interview participant discussions of how settlement in Aotearoa/New Zealand brought expectations that redefine their social constructions of what it means to

be a ‘husband’ or ‘father’ (Forget et al, 2019), thus challenging their own sense of identity, as well as those of partners and children.

All participants came from countries where a gendered division of labour clearly framed women/mothers as ‘housewives’ and men/fathers as ‘providers’ or ‘breadwinners’, emphasising male *financial* responsibilities. Indeed, half of the participants named financial security as their main duty as a man. Others referred to themselves as the ‘king’ or ‘head’ of the family, stressing their *decision-making* responsibilities, as this participant suggests:

Man is identified as a breadwinner, a provider, a protector for the family. He is the king of the family, and he is the one to direct the family. (Burundi, 40s)

The frequent use of the ‘king’ trope as a recurrent theme was discussed with the interviewers in the data analysis workshop, highlighting how this term resonates with both notions of leadership and strength, as well as a responsibility to protect and secure the safety of family – a role of great pertinence in a forced migration context. This identity was very strongly embedded within the majority of the men interviewed, not only because it afforded them power and authority within the family but because it reflected ‘tradition’ and:

because it’s part of our culture. We grow, and we follow our mothers; my grandmother did these things, and my mother and father do these things. So, this is very natural for us to grow with it. (Sudan, 40s)

Others firmly believed that such divisions reflected the differing abilities of men and women, largely because men were perceived as physically stronger and fitter so they could complete tasks such as clearing fields and herding cattle, while women – who were associated with lesser strength – had child-caring responsibilities that kept them tied to the home. Men who took part in community consultations stressed that, in some cultures, men do not cook, clean or even enter the kitchen because it is seen as taboo – not least because it constrains the ability of the woman to manage the household.

Connell (2014) explains that gender distress can occur when men raised with expectations of financial responsibility and authority over women are integrated into a capitalist economy, necessitating them to rethink the gender divide. In a resettlement context where resources can be scarce and a whole family may be required to contribute to household finances, refugee-background men often suffer a diminishment or loss of their identity as ‘breadwinners’, along with the socio-cultural status that comes with it. Moore (1994) argues that the negation of social interpretations of what a ‘good father’ means can result in conflict and potentially manifest as violence in the home.

Although the strength of the culturally-embedded constructions of gender meant all participants acknowledged that life in Aotearoa/New Zealand challenged their ideas of who they are, some certainly appeared to struggle with this more than others. Most participants view relationships between men and women as ‘equal’ in Aotearoa/New Zealand but only a few explicitly appreciated this difference:

In my culture, men must work to support the family and women must be housewives, look after the kids. This is good, but – even the Kiwi way, for a woman to have a job, it’s good and I like it ... the men to share at home; your wife is cooking, and you have the kids showered, and put them to bed. (Eritrea, 50s)

[In NZ] we help each other to do many things, which back in my country, we can’t do; I can cook, I wash the dishes, I can clean the house; so, those kinds of duties for women. Since I’ve been in New Zealand, I’ve learnt, no jobs for just men, no jobs for just women; so, all jobs are equal. The role for men is to do everything which men and women can do; can help women. (Burundi, 30s)

In this way, some men were able to explore new ways of fathering that involved greater engagement with their children, something that several participants indicated they appreciated;

others were quite proud of their new culinary skills. This demonstrates that new identities as ‘involved dads’ or ‘good cooks’ can evolve that still maintain the underlying cultural driver to protect and care for their families. The reference to ‘helping’ still assumes the mother is ultimately responsible for many parenting tasks but suggests this protection and care is practiced in other ways in this participant’s home country.

Forced migration hones a certain ‘adaptability’, as men, women and children from refugee backgrounds demonstrate their capacity for tenacity, resilience and hope for a new future; as one participant put it:

The things that I went through, in my past life, are the driving force that is driving me forward. My past is my strength. (South Sudan, 40s)

For instance, the interviews provided evidence of adaptability amongst fathers from all backgrounds when taking up new occupations (including developing their own businesses), quickly shifting to nuclear family living and/or negotiating gender roles when their partners were able to find work where they could not. There is some indication that gender roles were less ingrained and more open to negotiation amongst participants from South-East Asian countries than those from African countries. However, these findings were not uniform as one participant from Burundi noted that part of his ‘protector’ role was actually to listen to and accept what his wife was thinking. This diversity within regionally-based groups stresses that culturally subscribed roles are personal resources, even if these are clearly influenced by interpersonal and contextual resources.

Gender roles also appeared less rigid amongst men aged under 40 compared to those who were older. In particular, those aged under 30 were more likely to be single without children and many of them had arrived in Aotearoa/New Zealand when still school-aged so had more opportunity for acculturation to local norms than men with families who arrived later in life. This suggests that the length of residence/age of arrival may be an important demographic consideration, although it was not one we could sufficiently explore with the data available. Whether shifts in gender identity were viewed positively or not, participants similarly highlighted the need for greater information to be provided to refugees selected by Aotearoa/New Zealand to help them prepare for these anticipated shifts. The next section further highlights how gender identity played a key role in shaping family dynamics.

Interpersonal resources: Changing family and community dynamics

In the resource theory of fathering model, ‘interpersonal resources’ refer to multiple social contexts that shape fathering (Palkovitz & Hull, 2018). Here we first focus on relationships within the family which have already been discussed in the literature, highlighting that shifting gender roles between family members (Este & Tachble, 2009b) and expectations to replace more authoritarian with more communicative and consultative forms of parenting can lead to familial tensions and conflict (Osman et al., 2016). Second, we offer fresh insights into the scarcity of social supports and networks in a migration context, which have received less attention in the literature.

One of the most significant challenges to family relationships that the refugee-background men described was that their female partners were more likely to be contributing to household finances in Aotearoa/New Zealand than in their country of origin. As the last section of this article highlights, this is due to difficulties in finding (adequate) paid work, which in some situations has been easier for the women in their household. In other cases, women receive government benefits paid in their own name and bank account. Some participants believed that

when women had more financial independence than the traditional breadwinner gender roles allowed, there was an increased risk of family break-up because it gave women and children an independent income that allowed them to survive, if necessary, without a male breadwinner. Whilst we fully acknowledge the importance of this financial independence for women (and the protections this can afford), it is important to acknowledge the sense of loss that men feel when traditional practices and their sense of power and authority is challenged, because this may shape their behaviours and their ability to adapt:

Here in New Zealand, the government talk about women and their freedom and they've got a lot of support and help; but, they use that kind of support as a weapon, or a shield, or something that they can use to control the husband. (Myanmar, 40s)

At least one participant drew upon culturally-embedded constructions of gender to suggest that women did not have the skills for such a shift in power:

African women, if they are not mature, if they are not educated; I don't think it's good to have the money in their hands. (Eritrea, 50s)

But the overriding emotion present in interviews and community consultations was fear about family break-up, rather than loss or anger. As a community consultation member pointed out:

Man's resettlement challenges, be it lack of secure and meaningful employment or discrimination, have huge impact on the family. While some gender roles change by default, disagreements brought about by change of gender roles [can] be a threat to the family unit if not handled with care. (South Sudan, 40s)

This notion of handling the situation 'with care' does not primarily suggest the retention of power by fathers and husbands. Rather, it signals how the fear of family break-up is enhanced in a context where refugee-background men are separated from many of their other family members and friends and potentially their 'breadwinner' roles, particularly through a discriminatory labour market. Thus, the 'care' noted here positions men as an important part of the solution as these families navigate new social constructions of family, parenting and gender roles. Whilst it is not always possible to achieve family unity for a range of reasons (as there may be family conflict and violence), the participants articulated the need to not *automatically* frame men as 'problems' but instead to hear their voices – alongside those of mothers and children – within the family.

One of the community consultations recommended that these issues be discussed with Immigration New Zealand and Work and Income so that there is a better understanding of the cultural challenges families face if they believe that dividing money between different family members will eventually divide the family. Strategies to avoid such conflict could also be shared at community gatherings; for instance, one consultation participant described how his wife managed all the family finances to avoid conflict over money and this helped build trust between them. This example illustrates the risk of reifying culture or making essentialised assumptions about gender. It is possible to emphasise the importance of acknowledging male perspectives and finding culturally resonant solutions that can establish a balance with New Zealand's laws and ensure people's rights, regardless of one's gender, age or some other social location, without advocating for the centralisation of resources in men's hands.

Although the participants from African countries were more likely to express dissatisfaction with the shift in power dynamics between men and women, especially with regards to the new levels of financial freedom afforded to women in Aotearoa/New Zealand, their narratives were not *always* about a loss of *power*. For instance, participants from African countries were more likely than others to report that they spent less time with their children in Aotearoa/New Zealand because the cost of living was so high, causing them to work longer hours to support their families than in their home country. This was framed as a loss both to the children (in

terms of guidance and discipline) and to *themselves* (in terms of the strength of child-father relationships).

In contrast, participants from South East Asian countries were more likely to say they spent more time with their children than in their countries of origin. As one participant articulated:

Looking after the baby, I would say it's not because of a responsibility, because of love ... I just personally want to be with my boy and to play with him. That's the kind of thing, normally men don't do back in our country. (Myanmar, 40s)

Another South-East Asian participant viewed the ability of a mother to support her family without a male provider in Aotearoa/New Zealand as a positive development:

if a man is lost in our country then it is difficult for women to take that [breadwinner] role, and look after the family and everything. Here, there's more opportunities for women; if anything happens to a man, the women can continue, and they have welfare facilities. They can easily look after the family. (Sri Lanka, 50s)

For most participants, however, the inability of a family to survive on only one income meant that, for practical reasons, men simply had to take on more caring responsibilities:

both people have to go out to work, and most people are tired. So, the only option is for them to take turns with the cleaning, cooking and looking after the children, otherwise it becomes too tough on the people. (Somalia, 20s)

Thus:

Men in Burundi do lots of things, because he's a king, we call them a king, but when we came over here, there was no more king; the women and the men work together. (Burundi, 30s)

While we should not assume that being physically present with children necessarily means they are 'involved fathers' actively engaging with their children (see Parreñas, 2008), this acceptance – rather than resistance – to a changed reality appears to be a significant factor in minimising the conflict within partner relationships. Such acceptance could be nurtured through peer support programmes and relevant social services.

Participants offered fewer examples of father-child conflict than partner-conflict, possibly because only half of the participants had children prior to settlement in Aotearoa/New Zealand and only two became fathers in their countries of origin (remaining children were born in forced migration contexts). As such, men had little to say about the roles and responsibilities of children prior to resettlement, although many felt that children brought up in Aotearoa/New Zealand lacked knowledge and awareness of their good fortune to be raised without ongoing conflict around them. More generally, intergenerational cultural disparities were a source of exasperation. Other research has noted tensions where parents' authority is challenged and respect is undermined (Deepak, 2005; Deng & Marlowe, 2013). These tendencies were evident amongst participants, some of who expressed a sense of powerlessness to maintain traditions:

Here in New Zealand, it really doesn't matter if you don't want to do what your parents do, or what your parents say to you, you can argue back; or you can call the police if you don't like your parents. (Myanmar, 40s)

This view is enhanced when children, who acquire language faster at schools, often inadvertently become 'cultural brokers' (Deng & Marlowe, 2013), functioning as interpreters for their parents. One of the younger participants described how he filled this role as a child:

there's a reversal of roles; so things that the parents would normally be doing, the children will have to do, like for example, if you take your kids to the parent/teacher interview at school, the parents would normally speak to the teacher, but here I would be expected to translate. (Somalia, 20s)

While discussion in the next section highlights how the legal framework in Aotearoa/New Zealand, which frames children as bearers of rights, can contribute to parent-child tensions and perceptions of family conflict, so too can the third and final interpersonal resource discussed here: limited kinship and community networks. Participants noted that forced migration not only separated them from their extended family of grandparents, aunts and uncles and cousins, but also from broader communities that contributed to parenting or family conflict resolution in their country of origin:

Back home ... If a child misbehaved on the street, or two children fight, the Somali person just walking in the street would tell them to stop, and they would probably hit them ... the parents will say 'thank you' for disciplining them ... Because it's the responsibility of the whole town to raise the child. (Somalia, 20s)

Participants highlighted how the absence of similar kinds of community networks in Aotearoa/New Zealand compounds some of the difficulties they have in adapting to new ways of being and 'doing' family. This was not always negative:

In New Zealand we have a nuclear family; we need to spend more time here with children. In our home country, extended family members help ... I found here, we spend more time with children ... we have to fulfil all their needs; loving and caring needs. (Sri Lanka, 50s)

Despite these positive framings, nearly all participants expressed that family separation was a significant source of concern. Some had, however, found ways of adapting. For instance, they relied on neighbours for financial and moral support, on faith communities, and (for the young men) on recreational groups, particularly when first arriving in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Participants thus strongly emphasised the value of elders and respected leaders being active in their communities, acting as advisors and mediators to those new to Aotearoa/New Zealand or facing family difficulties. Australian research (Humpage & Marston, 2005) stresses that such community engagement not only supports refugee-background individuals but can raise awareness of the issues they face at the political and institutional level. The next section indicates how further engagement and resourcing in the community development space could benefit resettlement support in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

Contextual resources: Limited work opportunities, racism and new legal frameworks

'Contextual resources' are theorised by Palkovitz and Hull (2018) as the circumstances within which men perform 'fathering', including culture, work, neighbourhoods, and social class. At an institutional level, economic opportunities, the quality of one's living environment and the availability of health care can also shape fathering and family dynamics. Here the focus is on issues of underemployment/unemployment and racism/discrimination that complicate the settlement process (Shimoni et al., 2003; Este & Tachble, 2009a; Deng & Marlowe, 2013; Osman et al., 2016), as well as the challenges associated with navigating new legal/policy environments in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

The most common contextual factor mentioned by participants was the inability of many refugee-background men to find secure, meaningful paid work in Aotearoa/New Zealand. This is an issue raised by many other studies (see Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment [hereafter MBIE], 2012; Lundborg, 2013; Correa-Velez et al., 2015), while earlier discussion identified how the inability of some participants to fulfil their roles as financial provider weighed heavily on their sense of self as a breadwinner. Notably, however, they rarely considered this a personal failing but instead framed poor employment outcomes as the result of contextual problems. For example:

Most of the time, government, Work and Income [the social security agency], give money, and have training courses, but hardly ever consider what skills the person has, and what kind of job he can do, here in New Zealand. Lots of people from my country come to New Zealand, and have very good skills, but because of the lack of English, they can't get a decent job; they're stuck with the odd jobs. (Myanmar, 40s)

Limited access to language education and lack of recognition of international qualifications were two significant barriers named as limiting work opportunities. But one participant also highlighted that successfully gaining work that was only part-time, casual or temporary often meant ineligibility for other financial assistance, creating new challenges:

Once in employment, the family benefits get stopped, [state] house rent goes up and you cannot pay all the bills with earnings from minimum wage while providing for a large family. People who fall in this terrible situation have no choice but to quit work because the burden of having little job or low pay job is higher than the burden of staying unemployed. (Myanmar, 50s)

Again, this frustration was linked to not being able to fulfil their role as a breadwinner (and more broadly their desires for a productive, fulfilling life), even if it potentially offered greater opportunity to care for their children (for instance, by being home when they returned from school). This kind of experience led one participant to argue that 'special considerations' could help mitigate the difficulties refugee-background workers are subjected to in the labour market:

I always ask myself: if I was denied a simple cleaning job because I didn't have a New Zealand experience as new arrival, how difficult is it for newly-arrived skilled immigrants and qualified refugee communities to find jobs in their disciplines in New Zealand? I think refugees need special consideration in job market. (Democratic Republic of Congo, 30s)

As an example, Work and Income could minimise the penalties (such as reduction or cancellation of benefits) that refugee-background beneficiaries face if they are unable to find jobs within a prescribed period of time.

Racism and discrimination also prevented participants from gaining meaningful work. Participants of African origin reported incidents of racism more than others, a finding echoed by a nationwide study of the MBIE (2012). However, a community consultation suggested racism was commonplace across all refugee-background communities:

I was once a pizza delivery man. There were moments where I had to deliver a pizza and upon seeing me with Middle Eastern face, the person who made the order yelled at me, asking me to go back [home] or he would to call the police for trespassing charges, although he knew he made the order. (Iraq, 30s)

While participants agreed overall that Aotearoa/New Zealand is generally safe and peaceful, they indicated that government agencies could improve access to language resources, make it easier to get qualifications recognised and work to reduce racism, thus enabling them to better deal with the challenges they face at the personal and interpersonal levels. This could enable them to be better 'breadwinners', thus potentially reinforcing traditional gender norms. But overall the men felt that improving the broader social context in which refugee background men interact with individuals and organisations would allow them to meaningfully contribute to culturally resonant solutions that would improve family wellbeing and functioning.

Despite the challenges noted above, many participants spoke of translating the survival skills they developed when living in refugee camps and countries of asylum into small businesses and other entrepreneurial endeavours in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Others retrained and learned new skills to become more employable. While this stresses that positive resettlement outcomes result from both individual agency *and* structural support (Marlowe & Humpage, 2016), participants in the community consultations called for ARCC to develop partnerships with businesses and organisations, such as the Auckland Chamber of Commerce, to facilitate refugee-background communities gaining work experience and, eventually, employment. This ability to reflect

on their circumstances, set priorities and goals, and initiate action are aspects of the resource management function in Palkovitz and Hull's (2018) resource theory of fathering.

Finally, a common theme amongst participants was how they had to navigate a new legal context in Aotearoa/New Zealand, one that often sat in tension with their traditional cultural practices. For instance, many refugee-background families come from cultures where physical discipline is regarded as normal and necessary; they stressed that it should not be assumed that refugee-background families know Aotearoa/New Zealand's family laws. Community consultations recommended workshops and training sessions to educate refugee-background communities about what are considered acceptable levels of child discipline in Aotearoa/New Zealand. They also stressed the need for refugee-background communities to build stronger relationships with Oranga Tamariki (Ministry for Children), District Health Boards and other key ministries supporting families.

Some members of the community consultations viewed Oranga Tamariki, in particular, as being there not to *protect* but to divide the family unit by stressing the rights of the child. Simon-Kumar et al.'s (2017) research in Aotearoa/New Zealand suggests ethnic minority *women* hold similar fears. Our interview participants spoke more broadly about their perceptions that children had greater rights in Aotearoa/New Zealand than they would have had in the countries of origin, making it difficult to uphold traditional cultural norms regarding the male breadwinner or head of family roles they had grown up with:

That's the main struggle parents have: in Burundi children happy to obey parents; and also, it is like they don't have any right of what they do, or what they say, they have to follow the parents; but here, because society is open, they learn to know their rights, they know their freedom. So, you have to make sure you understand the difference of how we were raised, and the society here. Yeah, they have too many rights, but it up to you to balance those rights ... (Burundi, 40s)

While acknowledging that the safety of children (and women) is important, participants wanted New Zealand Police to be aware of the critical mediator roles that community elders can play within families before situations escalate to domestic violence or child abuse. They felt this would help avoid both family disintegration and the often-serious legal consequences of Oranga Tamariki or police intervention. This is an example of what Simon-Kumar et al. (2017, p. 1394) refer to as 'moving beyond the "culture as oppression" trope to working *with* and *through* culture to bring about change' (emphasis original). Such interactions would not require some sort of ethical relativism where all actions and approaches were relevant to traditional cultural practices. Rather, mediation could ensure that the expectations set in New Zealand law are met, whilst also ensuring that community perspectives are understood, thus creating a context for empowerment, engagement and, ultimately, better outcomes (see for instance Milos, 2011; Lewig et al., 2010). Whilst non-negotiable expectations and laws around people's rights and safety remain, situating men as integral voices in these discussions avoids reifying negative stereotypes and opens new possibilities that reposition them within a strengths-focused framework.

Conclusion

It is vital we understand the integration processes that refugee-background people go through when arriving in Aotearoa/New Zealand. It is also important to stress that, while forced migration journeys can involve significant hardship – including prolonged separation from family – research shows that the refugee experience can build resilience, develop competencies and offer new opportunities that can benefit integration into a new country (Shimoni et al., 2003).

With this in mind, this article has drawn upon Palkovitz and Hull's (2018) framework, which aligns with theories of refugee integration, to both theorise the adaptation processes experienced by refugee-background men and offer practical suggestions about how to build capacity for successful resettlement in Aotearoa/New Zealand. The resource theory of fathering places the father at the centre and starts from a strengths-based perspective by presuming that *all* fathers wield some positive fathering resources. We have adapted this framework to include all refugee-background men, not just fathers, to highlight the multi-layered yet interconnected personal, interpersonal and contextual resources they draw upon when doing family in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

Palkovitz and Hull's (2018) framework helps us identify that the ways in which refugee-background men manage the resources available to them can ultimately dictate their success in performing gender roles that not only create a strong sense of self but also fit with the new cultural norms and legal frameworks of the settlement country. Moving away from only viewing men's attitudes and behaviours as contributing to the vulnerability of women and children, and examining how various factors and resources work together, can provide better understanding of the lived experiences of such men *and* the families to which they belong. For instance, it was noted that African participants when compared to South-East Asian participants were more likely to resist shifts in the gendered division of labour within their own families. This is perhaps unsurprising given that their inability to fulfil a strongly-ingrained social construction of how a 'good' husband and father behaves diminished their sense of self (personal), while also limiting their ability to spend as much time with their children as they had done in their country of origin or during their refugee journey (interpersonal). They also noted heightened experiences of racism that likely affected their ability to enter the paid labour force (contextual). Their resources were thus weaker than those of South-East Asian participants who appreciated they spent *more* time with their children than before and did not report as much racist hostility within Aotearoa/New Zealand society.

This article has drawn upon the voices of refugee-background men to highlight how they navigate challenges associated with shifting gender identities, a changing division of labour and power, family separation and loss of community and cultural parenting norms. It has further documented their views on how their resources could be strengthened: better information sharing between new arrivals and government authorities regarding differences in gender roles, including how this shapes policy and law; recognising the role community leaders and organisations can play as mediators between families and government authorities; and addressing structural issues such as unemployment, underemployment and racism. To avoid potential negative outcomes such as family violence or child abuse, refugee-background men indicated they desire support in finding new ways of doing family that enable all family members to achieve the hopes and dreams of a better life in Aotearoa/New Zealand. They believe that men's voices offer critically important perspectives and should be positioned as resources, rather than simply as problems to be solved, in order to seek positive outcomes for men, their families and the wider community.

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