

Paternal disengagement and the "breakdown of fathering" have been identified as a primary risk factor for children, and a priority for research and intervention (Health Canada, 1998). While there is a significant body of research that focuses on the negative effects of fatherlessness (Furstenberg & Teitler, 1994; Glossop & Theilheimer, 1994; Keen, 1991; Lamb, 1981; Lewis, 1981; Lupri, 1991), research on fathering is in its early stages. Little is understood about the barriers to paternal engagement in child rearing or about effective strategies to reduce these barriers. Several factors are thought to mediate the nature and effectiveness of paternal engagement. Lamb (1981) suggested four variables: motivation, skills and self-confidence, support, and institutional practices. Furstenberg (1994) summarized much of the literature on father disengagement in suggesting that some fathers are pushed out of the family by geographic mobility and increased economic demands. More current research conducted over the past few years has highlighted both the cumulative negative impact of stress factors on effective parenting and the importance of social support. In fact, a recent study of traditional families (Woodworm, et al., 1996) found social support to be the strongest determinant in positive fathering.

Fathers who are new immigrants and/or refugees face multiple stressors. These stressors are often inter-related and may include underemployment or unemployment and the role reversal that occurs when mothers obtain work outside the home where fathers face social isolation and loss of self-esteem (Clark, et al., 2000). Robertson (1992), Gilan (1990), Espin (1992) and others have documented the trauma induced by war and enforced refugee status with the incumbent feelings of uprootedness, loss, grief and depression.

There are many prevention and intervention programs that aim to provide support, education, and other strategies to enhance the ability of parents to meet the developmental needs of their children. However, many of the programs for parents are primarily directed at mothers (Barlow & Shimoni, 2000), and few programs have specifically addressed the roles of fathers. The fact that women usually staff family support services has been used to explain both the discomfort that many fathers feel in accessing services and the hesitancy service providers often feel towards men in their programs (McBride & Rane, 1997). Immigrant and refugee fathers face additional barriers to accessing services. Difficulty in communicating in English, lack of information about services, perceptions that help is unavailable or that professionals won't be able to help them and fear of stigmatization and deportation, have been identified as key barriers.

Roer-Strier (in press) sheds new light on some of the barriers facing immigrant parents. Her research describes four different frameworks that guide childrearing coping strategies used by immigrant parents. Every culture has an image of how children should be as adults and these images guide childrearing ideologies, perceptions and values. When immigrants move from one culture to another, they are faced with several alternatives. First, immigrant parents can preserve the image of a successful adult from their home country. Second, they can abandon it in favour of the image of the flourishing adult in their new country in relation to their interface with host country institutions and professionals. Finally, these parents can develop a new image that is some form of

combination. Despite the choice made, immigrant families need to find ways to cope with the different norms, expectations and values regarding children that are prevalent in the new country and surface when they interact with professionals or authorities at schools, health and social services.

Coping strategies have been referred to by Roer-Strier (1996) as the traditional uni-cultural style, the rapid assimilation style, and the bi-cultural style. The uni-cultural style refers to parents who see themselves as their children's chief socializing agents, and who preserve the image of the "successful adult" from the home country. The rapid assimilation style is more likely to be adopted by immigrants who believe that the faster their children adapt to host country norms, values and behaviours, the easier it will be for children to succeed. Frequently associated with the rapid assimilation style is a withdrawal of parental authority as they see the host country professionals (teachers, medical professionals, social service professionals) as more competent to help their children assimilate. Parents adopting the bi-cultural style encourage the child to behave, dress, eat and talk like "other children" outside the home, but inside the home children are expected to conform to the culture of their home country.

Roer-Strier (1996) emphasized that there is no inherent value in any one of these strategies. However, if service providers do not appreciate these differences, this could present yet another barrier to the accessing and receipt of suitable support. For example, if the rapid assimilation style results in a partial relinquishment of parental authority to the experts, this could mistakenly be interpreted as a lack of paternal concern.

Based on our recognition of the considerable stressors facing immigrant fathers, the risk of paternal disengagement, and the difficulties faced by immigrants in accessing appropriate support services, we proposed a study that would shed light on issues facing immigrant fathers, which could inform service developers and providers. It was important to gain an understanding of the meaning of fatherhood, the deeply felt values and beliefs that guide immigrant fathers as well as the joys and the challenges they face. The study attempted to avoid the pitfalls of a deficit model. The term "deficit model" is used widely in the literature to highlight the approach used in intervention programs that have, inadvertently, turned environmental risks (such as those faced by immigrants and refugees) into personal deficits. Attempts are then made to "overcome" these deficits by designing and developing programs to compensate for basic skills. Many parent education programs would fit this description. In the process, the "client" (child or family) was often "dissected into a smorgasbord of needs and deficiencies. At the same time, the positive personality and social traits of the child or family were overshadowed or discounted" (Sautter, 1994). Thus, in many well-intentioned programs, the "whole child" or parent was overlooked, while deficits were treated by a series of remedial strategies. Myths were thus perpetuated about groups who had special needs for support or education. Rather, we endeavoured to glean understandings of fathers' strengths, which could be utilized in the conceptualization of prevention and intervention programs. A "strengths model" or "assets model" would concentrate on the strengths of the clients and develop strategies for support that build on the personal skills, interests, ability, and culture of the individual. Understanding the positive qualities and human potential that

families bring and utilizing those qualities and that potential is thought to be more promising in terms of positive outcomes for children and families, Sautter, 1994).

METHODOLOGY

Greenfield (1994) calls for a new methodological paradigm when studying minority and immigrant families that is based on the inclusion of methods of data collection aimed at studying participants' perceptions and attribution of meaning of the studied phenomena. Greenfield emphasizes the importance of investigating the multiple perspectives of immigrants, professionals and socializing agents in the host culture as well as the researcher's own perspectives. We chose in-depth interviews, our primary data source, as the method most likely to provide us with rich data from which to explore fathering from the perspectives of the participants. While our study was limited to exploring the perceptions of immigrant fathers who participated in the study, our research process enabled us to shed some light on the interface between professionals, socializing agents in the host culture, and our own perspectives as researchers. A description of the process used to develop and pilot the interview questions follows.

The research team met to construct an initial list of questions. These questions emerged from a review of the literature and from our previous research and practice experiences. For example, each member of the research team had played a significant role in the development and evaluation of a family resource centre for immigrant and refugee families with preschool children. Through discussions with the program staff over the past five years, as well as direct contact with participants of the project, we had accumulated considerable anecdotal data regarding fathers, their beliefs, their challenges, and their needs for support. This was important background information that gave us an indication of the sort of data that would be helpful to generate from this study. The study's questions considered feelings, values and beliefs towards fathering as well as similarities and differences in fathering in Canada and the home country. Fathers were also to be asked about opportunities for and barriers to fathering in Canada.

After the construction of the initial list of questions, a reflective session among the researchers was held to question the possibility of cultural bias in the very choice and construction of interview questions. In our first draft of interview questions, we included queries about the thoughts, feelings and attitudes of fathers when they received the news of pregnancy and throughout the pregnancy. However, as discussed below, we were cautioned that such a question might be inappropriate. We needed to put aside our western assumption that father's attitudes and feelings through the pregnancy were in some way a predictor of the relationship with the baby after birth given that, as far as we knew, this phenomenon had not been studied in a cross cultural context.

It was important that the interviews be held in the participant's first language to ensure that language would not be a barrier to self-expression. To this end, we hired four first-language interviewers and held a workshop for them. The purpose of the workshop was twofold. First, we wanted to review the techniques and strategies for open-ended questions. Second, we wanted to ensure that the questions we proposed were appropriate

in the cultures of the participants. Again, the rich discussion that emerged with the first-language interviewers was itself an education for the researchers. For example, one first-language interviewer from the South Asian community advised us that questions dealing with pregnancy would create some discomfort for the men she was interviewing.

Other first-language interviewers discussed the appropriateness of different settings for the interviews, such as home, office or neutral territory. We discussed whether some key words in the proposed questions adequately translated from one language to another. Questions were adapted to ensure consistency, while at the same time, making cultural adaptations where required. We decided to have the first-language interviewers translate the tapes into English by speaking onto another tape, as they would be more sensitive to the nuances of meaning.

The first-language interviewers then piloted the interviews, translated the audiotapes and met with the researchers to see where additional questions or probes could be added. At the end of that process, the first-language interviewers proceeded to interview the participants and translate all the audiotapes into English, which were transcribed and submitted to the researchers for analysis.

All but one of the interviewers was female. We discussed the possible impact of this on the responses. However, the confines and scope of the study did not allow for further exploration of this factor.

The analysis consisted of identifying key themes that emerged. The three researchers, to ensure the reliability of this process, reviewed all transcripts. We then looked for patterns that were consistent amongst all the fathers, and those that seemed more predominant within the different groups.

The Sample

Due to the exploratory nature of this study, sample selection techniques were chosen that would lead to the gleaning of diverse perspectives on fathering. The techniques referred to as purposeful sampling and snowballing (Stainback & Stainback, 1988; Patton, 1990) seemed to be the most appropriate mechanism by which to obtain a spectrum of perspectives. We asked staff at Calgary Immigrant Aid Society, ESL teachers and interview participants to recommend friends and acquaintances or clients (with appropriate permission). We recruited fathers from four groups: former Yugoslavian, South American, South Asian and Chinese (from Hong Kong and the mainland). Our intention was to recruit at least five participants from each group.

All participants were fathers of preschool children. Some were relatively new arrivals, while others were immigrants who have been in Canada longer (up to a period of five years). The average time in Canada was 2.75 years. The average age of the fathers was 38 years, with both younger (in their early twenties) and older fathers represented. We attempted to include both employed and unemployed fathers (41% had part-time employment, 12.5% were fulltime employed, 4.15% combined part-time employment

with studies, and the rest were unemployed). Approximately one-quarter of the sample had participated in programs offered through the Calgary Immigrant Aid Society, and about one-half of the participants had at least one contact with an immigrant aid professional.

The group composition of the sample of 24 immigrant fathers included: 6 Chinese (4 from the mainland, 1 from Hong Kong, 1 from Taiwan); 6 South American (1 from El Salvador, 4 from Colombia, 1 from Chile); 2 identified themselves as Yugoslavian and 2 as Bosnian; and 7 fathers were from South East Asia (3 from India, 1 from Nepal, and 3 from Pakistan).

RESULTS

Gaining an understanding of the fathers' internal mechanisms--perceptions, values, hopes, goals and coping strategies was the first objective of our analysis. The second objective was to look at external factors such as time and resources that impact the engagement of fathers with their children. In essence, we were trying to gain an understanding of what immigrant fathers bring to Canada, and what Canada provides for immigrant fathers.

What Immigrant Fathers Bring to Canada

Feelings About Fatherhood. Our diverse sample of immigrant fathers all shared deep expressions of commitment, concern and responsibility when asked about the meaning of fatherhood. The fathers talked about taking responsibility for providing for their children, serving as a role model, guiding and teaching them, and preparing them for the future. They spoke of the longevity of that commitment in terms of providing for the child until she or he was able to complete university. To some, the commitment seemed overwhelming and somewhat stressful. To others, fatherhood was a source of tremendous pride and joy. For many, it was a mixture of both. The following quote from one of the South Asian participants captures these feelings:

... When I became a father, I realized that my family is complete and now I am head of the family ... I feel proud that there is someone to carry my name forward. And then also I realized that there are responsibilities ... Towards taking care of providing food, shelter and better education. I sort of feel proud and happy that I am a father ... but also I ... have realized that I have ... a lot of responsibilities to make them good, not only right now ... but into the future and I have to try my best to make them good citizens ...

Another father also expressed the pride in fatherhood in terms of his status in the community:

Being a father, I have a feeling that I'm different now and I have a ... bigger responsibility. (I am) treated differently because I am a father now. They will treat me as a real grown up ... And I have my status raise because ... I am a father. Oh, I am feeling that I am happy to be a father, but I get myself like the feeling of a

bigger responsibility ... and ... have more burden now.

(a father from China)

One of the fathers described fatherhood using the word love--and that was included in a rich description of the passion and intimacy that a father feels for his child. Another father spoke of "that special feeling". Interestingly, the most emotional descriptions of fatherhood emerged in the interviews with the Chinese fathers--a group that is often perceived as less (publicly) expressive of emotions than the Europeans or South American fathers.

Values and Beliefs. Without exception, when responding to the question about values and beliefs that guide their fathering the participants shared beliefs about honesty, integrity and respect for others. Respect for families emerged in almost all the interviews with a particular emphasis on respecting elders. This response was found in all the cultural groups but most consistently in the South Asian group of fathers. Across all groups in this study, fathers expressed a desire their children to grow up educated, financially secure, and having positive family relations.

Some interesting differences emerged with respect to the centrality or importance of preserving elements from their previous country, when we considered the responses to questions about the guiding beliefs of fathers and their goals for their children. Amongst the Chinese fathers, both from Hong Kong and the mainland, there was very little or no mention of preserving former traditions or values. The importance of education as a means to future success was the predominant theme amongst the Chinese fathers. And the importance of individual's choice and independence came through

(I want) freedom for the child to develop.

They can do what they are interested in or what they want to do.

The Latin American fathers shared with the others the importance of education, family connections, respect and honesty, and referred as well to the importance of their religion.

Religion is a very important thing as a value to raise your family.
Moral values are very important ... and I want my son to be the same.

All of the South Asian fathers in the study talked about their core values as something they received from their parents, their culture, and all expressed the wish that these cultural values be preserved.

(Here in Canada) I have to constantly ... guide my children or explain to my children that our religion does not give permission for certain freedoms, which they see in this culture.

Engagement in Childrearing. In our study, we did not find consistent patterns within or between groups in terms of the manner in which fathers engaged in raising their children.

We looked at the father's role in decision making for the children. Some (relatively few) fathers stated that they, as the head of the family, should be making the decisions.

The final decision is always mine because it is done in our country--that all the decisions regarding the house or any member of the house is taken by the men ...

(a father from South America)

Yet another South American father expressed the opposite view, saying:

The majority of decisions are taken by my wife.

For most of the fathers, decisions were either made together or according to their area of expertise. Two of the Chinese fathers stated that decisions about education were their domain, whereas the wife would make other decisions.

The immigrant fathers in this study were engaged with their children as providers (when they can), guiders, mediators between the two cultures (discussed in more detail below), and through recreational interaction with their children. The fathers we interviewed play with their children, read to them, watch T.V. with their children and help them with their homework. They go for walks with their children and talk to them. This quote from one of the Latin America fathers is similar to many of the responses across the entire sample.

Every evening I read to them before they go to sleep. I tell them stories or read to them. On weekends, we go outside to the park or playground. We go roller skating, bicycling, I try to answer all their questions and this is not always possible. I try to learn how they have spent their day. She likes to read ... we sing and we dance. I ask my children about their activities at school ... I also play with them.

The amount of time that fathers spent with their children was related to employment situations. It was interesting that many of the immigrant fathers expressed their sense that Canadian fathers were less engaged with their children than they were and less than they should be.

In general, Canadian fathers are more liberal. They give children a kind of freedom that the children cannot handle because of immaturity. As a result, the father loses control of the children and children do whatever they want.

(a father from Latin America)

... In my opinion, Canadian fathers do not give enough love and values to their children ... they do not share time with their children ...

(a father from Latin America)

Coping Mechanisms. We revisited our data to see if patterns of coping mechanisms would emerge from this sample of Canadian immigrant fathers, which could be summarized in terms of the rapid assimilation, uni-cultural, and bi-cultural models proposed by Roer-Strier (1996).

While there were differences within each group of fathers, clear patterns emerged. An emphasis on preserving the culture of the former country was most consistent among the South Asian fathers. They spoke of being guided by the values of their parents, and high on their list of expectations for their children was remaining true to their culture of origin. And, an important part of their role as fathers was to protect their children from outside influences in order to protect their culture.

I guide my children according to how my parents took care of me ... My expectation for my children as adults will be that they should be financially independent ... and have good educational background, and they should have a good family life. They should respect their elders the way in our culture people do. Another thing is I want them to understand the religion ... and for that I am training them also and hopefully they will follow what I expect them to do. (a father from South Asia)

The Chinese fathers (both from the mainland and Hong Kong) strongly represented the uni-cultural model--with an interesting twist. Almost without exception, the fathers stressed how important it was for their children to be successful "Canadians".

However, unlike the findings in an Israeli study (Roer-Strier, 1996) where rapid assimilation parents tended to relinquish their authority to the experts in order to speed up the assimilation process, the Chinese fathers showed a fierce determination to learn the Canadian ways so that they could facilitate and foster the children's assimilation.

Like I mentioned before, the legal system, the human rights, the lifestyle, all this contributed to the way I taking the part as a father in Canada. I myself learning and also adjusting to the new way of living ... I see my responsibility as a role model for my kids so even though I am not totally used to the new lifestyle ... I am trying to adjust to the new way ... (and am) taking care of the kids as a father as immigrant in Canada.

Interestingly, one of the resources that this father cited as helping him to learn the "Canadian way" was the local community Chinese newspaper. Another father from China expressed a similar stance.

But in Canada, it is more emphasized for the child to have individual development ... That is why now I am in Canada I know I have to learn to be a father because we cannot to put all the Chinese culture of parenting on ourselves to raise the kids So as Chinese parents in Canada, we need to learn continuously to pick up some good things in raising our child

These data may suggest a fourth coping strategy or perhaps a subcategory (discussed in the final section of this paper).

What Canada Provides to Immigrant Fathers

Time Surprisingly, time was a gift that Canada provided to some of the fathers. Several of the men, especially the Chinese fathers from Hong Kong, maintained that they were able to spend more time interacting with their children:

In Canada, I will be able to have more time to stay with the children whereas in Hong Kong I was not able to spend time with children as I was too busy with work

In Canada, the father seems to have more time to spend and stay with the children

One of the Latin American fathers said:

I have more time to share with my daughter and I feel more relaxed playing with her In my home country, I worked long hours and the traffic jams made me feel stressed

Participants in the study shared their enthusiasm for the resources available to them in Canada. They described amenities such as parks and playgrounds as instrumental in facilitating interaction between the fathers and their children.

The thing I like here is that there are so many things I can do with my children ... hiking, swimming, and skating.

(a father from the former Yugoslavia)

It is different in my country. We do not have the recreational resources children have here.

(a father from Latin America)

However, there were also strong expressions of dissatisfaction with the limited opportunities for family life because of the need to combine long hours of work with learning English.

Support. While one of the Chinese fathers commented on the support parents receive from government concerning the health and education of children, many more of the participants talked about the lack of support networks in Canada. This was usually in reference to informal family and community networks that shared the responsibilities and tasks of parents.

Here, in Canada, I find myself having to pay more attention to my children because I do not have other family members to take care of my kids.

This sense of lack of support was expressed consistently in each group of participants. Indeed, this was a predominant theme in each group.

Opportunities. Most of the fathers in the study spoke of the opportunities that living in Canada will provide their children, particularly concerning education. There seemed to be optimism within most of the participants that their children will have a better life in Canada than they are currently experiencing. The following quote from a Latin American parent is quite representative in its mix of hope and optimism:

It's a very new experience for us ... There are things we like about this Canadian society. We still think this is the best choice for our son. That he can have better opportunities as an adult in this society. So I think the educational system is very good here. And I have to say the same situation that we are both working and working different shifts during the day has obligated us to organize us better as parents and take serious responsibilities towards the child.

A strong theme among the Latin American fathers related to the opportunity to live in an atmosphere of safety and security. This was the only group that highlighted this aspect of life in Canada.

A final opportunity that Canada has provided to fathers that was mentioned in several of the interviews was the opportunity to learn about parenting and child development. This theme arose primarily within the Latin American and Chinese fathers.

Canada offers good information and advice on how to parent children in the best way.

(a Latin American father)

Two of the fathers interviewed had participated in parenting programs through the Calgary Immigrant Aid Society.

Barriers. Congruent with other studies on immigrants to Canada, the lack of employment or employment in a job that did not utilize their education and skills seemed to be the biggest barrier to effective fathering. Fathers expressed this in different ways. One Chinese father spoke of this in terms of not being able to be the man of which his children would be proud. Other fathers spoke of unemployment as a barrier to effective fathering in terms of their inability to realize one of the primary roles of the father--that of the family provider.

Not having the right job that I enjoy is a big influence on me. I have change so many jobs always trying to find a better financial situation.

(a father from the former Yugoslavia)

I feel stress thinking about my budget all the time.

(a Latin American father)

Fathers also talked about the impact of underemployment on their status and self-esteem:

... In China, I have education, background, the social status ... So in getting ... employment its more confidence like working in China as a father ... I would see myself like proud and (have) confidence ... Because like the son will observe how the father have status in the employment. So in China, I would see myself as more confident and proud of myself ... But in Canada, with the barrier as my inadequate English ... it seems that I am not able to achieve the confidence ... now I am working in restaurant and when my child says what am I doing now, and this will not be a good example for my child then ...

DISCUSSION

A call for proposals from Health Canada for projects related to paternal disengagement provided the impetus for this study. As current social work thought (Saleebey, 1997) emphasizes the strength model, we chose to look at paternal engagement. This allowed us to recognize the immigrant fathers' strengths as well as potential barriers. While a study of this kind is not intended to be generalizable to a wider population, we found a high level of paternal engagement in each of the fathers interviewed. The sample of fathers included a mix of age, culture and socio-economic status.

The study certainly identified struggles of immigrant fathers, particularly with respect to their employment. Clearly, however, among these fathers, we could see no acute risk of disengagement. Rather, we saw a group of fathers from four different cultures, which are positively engaged with their children as they face the struggles of acculturation, language acquisition and employment.

What have we learned that would support recommendations for enhancing paternal engagement? On a macro level, we repeatedly saw stress related to unemployment and underemployment. Likely, the most important services that can be provided to immigrant fathers are intense support for learning English and any other strategies for enhancing their chances for suitable employment.

Most of the fathers either expressed appreciation for the parent education opportunities in which they had participated or expressed a desire/need to learn more. Therefore, we strongly recommend that efforts be made to include immigrant fathers in mainstream programs or to create new opportunities that are specifically geared to fathers who are facing the challenges of immigration while taking on childrearing responsibilities. Most programs today, hopefully, are making efforts to be culturally sensitive. The knowledge gained from this study can perhaps enhance the level sensitivity by providing a framework for understanding the coping mechanisms that fathers may utilize in this acculturation period.

On a simplistic level, knowing that fathers may utilize a rapid assimilation style may help us to gear the programs and services to helping immigrant fathers become the transmitters of the new culture to their children through providing them with as much information about Canadian ways as possible. On the other hand, appreciating the uni-cultural style will guide us to develop programs that support the fathers who are attempting to preserve their own cultural heritage and at the same time be successful in Canada. Understanding the bi-cultural model would encourage professionals to explore what cultural elements are important to fathers to preserve in their home setting and how these choices can be respected.

Perhaps most importantly, professionals may use this knowledge to reflect upon their own perception of these coping approaches. As Roer-Strier (1996) found in her study, professionals tended to feel most comfortable with parents who fit the rapid assimilation model--as this mechanism left their own expertise and/or values unchallenged. Hopefully, we can utilize this awareness to diminish any value judgement that would impede the development of respectful and supportive relationships with immigrant fathers.

As we had hoped, this study raised several questions that warrant further study. Our study shed a new perspective on the rapid assimilation model, which was developed in another country. Like the original study, our study included fathers who saw rapid assimilation as the best way to help their children. However, rather than relinquishing their responsibilities to professionals, they showed fierce determination to acculturate quickly so that they could foster their children's acculturation. This raises questions about the factors that influence paternal engagement in the acculturation process of children. Expanding this kind of study to other cultural groups within Canada, and also internationally, will enhance our understanding of fathers, and our ability to support their engagement with their children.

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R. SHIMONI, Department of Health and Community Care, Bow Valley, College 332-6th Ave. SE Calgary, Alberta T2G 4S6, Canada

DAVID ESTE, Faculty of Social Work, University of Calgary, Calgary, Alberta T2N 1N4, Canada

DAWNE E. CLARK, Department of Child and Youth Studies, Mount Royal College 4825 Richard Road SW, Calgary, Alberta T3E 6K6, Canada

R. SHIMONI, Department of Health and Community Care, Bow Valley College, 332-6th Ave. SE, Calgary, Alberta T2G 4S6, Canada

DAVID ESTE, Faculty of Social Work, University of Calgary, Calgary, Alberta T2N 1N4, Canada

and

DAWNE E. CLARK, Department of Child and Youth Studies, Mount Royal College, 4825 Richard Road SW, Calgary, Alberta T3E 6K6, Canada