



UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG  
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK

The Role of Child Protection Professionals in Enhancing Parenting  
among Immigrants in Gothenburg: The perspectives of child protection  
professionals in Gothenburg.

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## **Abstract**

This study documented the role that child protection professionals play in enhancing parenting in Gothenburg – Sweden. It sought to answer three research questions, namely: what expectations do child protection professionals hold about parenting? What difficulties do immigrant parents in Gothenburg face? And what services are put in place to help immigrant parents to bring up their children in a way acceptable in Sweden? The qualitative research approach was used. Seven (7) child protection professionals were selected through a snowball sampling technique. A face-to-face interview was conducted to collect data from five (5) child protection professionals at Social Services and two (2) from a Resource Centre. Two groups of professionals working with the Social Services and a Resource Center (names withheld for ethical reasons) – were found to play important roles in child protecting in Gothenburg. They play investigative and care roles respectively and approach work differently – although they have a common goal towards child protection. The professionals have expectations about parenting which helps them to describe good parenting. They include showing love, handling disagreement and showing commitment to children. These expectations reflect consciousness about the new conceptions of childhood while meeting them, indicates practice of authoritative parenting – good parenting practice – that seldom leads to contacts with the child protection system.

Professionals are conscious of three categories of challenges faced by parents whom they engage. They include “difficulty in meeting high parental standards and “relational challenges” - which were found common to both Swedish and non-Swedish parents. A third-category challenge involving individual and structural challenges was found to be specific to immigrant parents. It was found that although immigrants experience specific and/or multiple challenges, immigrant-specific services hardly exist (apart from language and cultural interpreters). This was mainly because professionals are not allowed to see differences but needs and seem to be solving structural challenges at the individual level. Child protection professionals perform important roles in parenting through the available services. However, the special needs of African immigrants need to be considered in order to provide them with services that specifically meet their needs.

**Key words** (Parenting, Children, Child protection, Immigrant Parents, Needs-based support)

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## **List of abbreviations**

BBIC - Barns Behov I Centrum,

CPS – Child protection Service

CP – Child Protection Professionals

GU – Gothenburg University

MST – Multi-Systemic Therapy

MVP – “An investigative and treatment programme for children. Not sure of abbreviation.

UNCRC – United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

Soc. S – Social Services

RC – Resource Centre

UK – United Kingdom

US – United States of America

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background to the Study

Sweden is among the European countries noted to have experienced extensive immigration over time. Immigrants represent more than 12 percent of the population (Höjer, 2009) and believed to be increasing by the day. Out of the 9.1 million inhabitants, 1.9 million are children – aged 18 years and below, hence expected to be parented, as in most cultures. Immigrant populations usually have their origins from other countries and carry heritage cultural values that significantly influence their family relationships, socialization goals for child development and child-rearing practices (Leviner, 2013). However, upon arrival in the host countries they may be expected to nurture and socialize their children in accordance with the host country's legislation. Immigrant parents from Africa and residing in Sweden may also be required to nurture their children in a way that conforms to Swedish Legislations on child welfare, which also conforms to specifications of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The Convention places responsibility on society to protect children from harm but also respect rights of families in which children live (Assembly, 1989). This has often been critiqued by researchers and practitioners for raising complex questions about the fundamental rights of both children and parents as well as when and how authorities should intervene to protect children (Leviner, 2013). Expectations for bringing up children in most developed countries, including Sweden promote children's rights and new ways of conceptualizing childhood, engaging children in decision-making and other areas concerning their well-being. This requires parents to perceive children as social children possessing competent statuses as adults, hence be engaged as competent participants in adult-centred world. This often contradicts conceptualizations of children in most African cultures as incompetent, tribal children who have different conceptions than adults (Welbourne, 2012) hence may encounter limitations in diverse ways.

Despite these expectations for child rearing, evidence show that children experience parenting differently in all countries, both developed and developing. Additionally, socialization practices and appropriate ways of ensuring socially approved behaviour differ among parents Renzaho et



al. (2011). Studies including Lewig, Arney, and Salveron (2010) and (Cheah, Leung, and Zhou, 2013) have found differences in parenting styles among parents from developed and developing countries. In particular, authoritarian parenting styles are found common among African parents while authoritative parenting styles persist among parents in developed countries. African parents are often accustomed to cultures that allow the control of children's behaviour and social development in a strict boundary setting. They monitor children's interests, friends and activities, while discouraging autonomy (Renzaho and Vignjevic, 2011). Often, immigrant parents encounter problems with child rearing in developed countries since their parenting styles do not often promote children's rights.

These contradictions seldom reflect problematic parenting practices but may indicate dominance of western theories in child welfare, plus Euro-American cultural values universally accepted and imposed on non-Western cultures (Johansson, 2013). In Sweden, there is evidence that immigrant children are over-represented in out-of-home care (Johansson, 2011). This gives an indication that large numbers of immigrant families get involved with Child Protection Services. This may not imply that immigrant parents are "bad parents" or that child protection professionals delight in taking immigrant children into protective care. It may be reflecting the influence of Western hegemony in child protection (Johansson, 2011), coupled with misunderstanding among parents and professionals about their collective roles towards child protection.

### 1.1.1 The Social Services and Family Welfare in Sweden

Sweden is theorized by many writers as a social welfare state which emphasizes quality living conditions through tax-financed public services and environmental planning (Leviner, 2013). The country's family policy dates back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century but employs a modern family policy with a universalistic approach that was introduced in the early 1930s, during deep economic recession. The fundamental goals of the family policy is to; establish good conditions for raising children, provide social security for families, promote equal rights and participation of men and women to life and work through good child care provision (ibid).

These goals reflect the country's ambition towards welfare of families and children. It promotes mandatory reporting of neglect and abuse from citizens and professionals that frequently engage with children (Cocozza, Gustafsson, and Sydsjö, 2010). Parents and children are provided social and medical supports, including preventive services, health controls during pregnancies, parental and postnatal education programs and regular health controls for children in school. Additionally, local municipalities are required by law to provide family counselling to service users. This highlights the state's great desire to support families with children.

Social services play important role in implementing Swedish health and welfare policies within which family policy, exists. In Sweden, the Constitutional Act (1974), the Social Services Act (2001), the Care of Young Persons' Acts (LVU, 1990) and the Parental Code (1949) have stipulations for protecting Children's rights. Although national standards that govern individual rights and communal responsibilities exist, the decentralized nature of social services organization creates variations in the provision of child welfare services. Social Service (Soc. S) organizations in each of the 290 municipalities implement services independently, with maximized use of professional judgement (Khoo, Hyvönen, and Nygren, 2002) (even in the same municipality professionals approach work differently). Therefore, differences exist within service provisions among municipalities and reflect in varied investigation processes and assessment models used – as determined by professionals and organization they work with. According to Khoo et al. (2002), the limited demand for uniformity which maximizes worker judgement for assessing children and family needs within the system, – may be a contributing factor. All these differences make the Swedish family and child welfare system unique.

### 1.1.2 The Swedish Child Protection System

Child Protection is the system that finds, investigates and helps maltreated and children at risk of maltreatment (Cocozza et al., 2010). It incorporates prevention, response to violence, exploitation, abuse and neglect of children (UNICEF, 2006). It involves investigating and providing services to children experiencing risks or at risk of abuse or experiencing physical or psychological impairments, for various reasons (Sundell et al., 2007). All these definitions mainly focus on the child and Social Service remains the authority responsible for ensuring that

rights of children are protected (Berg and Kelly, 2000; Leviner 2013). All the legal instruments mentioned above as having stipulations for protecting Children's rights, work differently towards a common goal. While the Social Services Act regulates social supports and interventions, the LVU regulates taking children into protective care without parents or children's consent. The Social Services in each of the 290 municipalities in Sweden are authorized to implement child protection services independently. Although like all countries, the Swedish CPS operates within its legal system and the country's legal traditions, the traditions belong to the Nordic tradition (Leviner, 2013). This may be influencing the country's orientation to child welfare and its readiness to provide family intervention.

Western Child Protection Systems (CPS) often has orientations from family support or child protection. The Swedish CPS has a family support approach, (Cocozza et al., 2010). This approach incorporates the principle of solidarity, parent rights and the child's best interests but within the framework of family preservation (Norström and Thunved, 1996 in (Khoo et al., 2002). It perceives risks situations as resulting from dysfunctional family relationships rather than harmful parental behaviour. It strives to support parents to protect children within families and ensure change through consensus building. This however, contradicts child protection approach employed in England, Canada, US and Australia where interventions usually protect children from abuse and neglect from their families (Gilbert, Parton, and Skivenes, 2011). The Swedish child welfare also intervenes readily with more resources and measures, provides assessment driven interventions, with a focus on family preservation. Again, this contradicts countries, with selective approach where only needy children are eligible for limited range of services, within a structure driven system and narrowly focused on child protection (Khoo et al., 2002). Although the Swedish system may have many advantages for both parents and children, it is not free from criticisms.

### 1.1.3 The Swedish CPS critiqued

After her analysis of legislation guiding child protection in Sweden, Leviner (2013) reported that dilemmas exist in the legislation which complicates processes for implementing child protection regulations. They include duality in stressing parental rights and at the same time setting out high

ambitions to protect children from harmful environments – within which the parents sometimes exist. She added that these rights do not only conflict but parental rights to family and private life, which she labels ‘negative rights’ and often requiring the state ‘to not act’ is given legal priority over children’s rights to protection. Thus parental rights sometimes overshadow children’s rights, which she labels ‘positive rights’, and require state intervention. She asserts that priority given to parental rights; emphasises voluntarism, self-determination, and caution among child protection professionals. It implies also a risk of not prioritizing thorough investigation in children’s best interest, despite the need for such investigations.

Similar concern was raised by Coccozza et al. (2010) in their study, *Child Protection in a Family Service Organization* critiqued the filtering process used in the Swedish system as compared to that of England and concluded that the family-service organization in Sweden provides services to fewer percentage of children than a distinctive child protection system. This conclusion was made after following through 1570 reports made at one municipality to final decision. They found that 651 (41%) of the reports were not investigated, 84 % of filed reports did not demonstrate child maltreatment. The CPS is misunderstood by the public who have varied expectations about their roles (Berg and Kelly, 2000). Some families feel stigmatized by mere contact with social services; therefore, involvement with them, based on mere suspicion, if not handled well, might cause family disruption. This makes the high percentages of un-investigated and unsubstantiated cases reviewed in their work, problematic. It explains why the authors Coccozza et al. (2010) find the mandatory reporting approach used in the Swedish system, unusual. They refer to Ainsworth and Hansen (2006) who critiqued Australia’s mandatory reporting design for deviating from the main goal of identifying and helping maltreated children. According to them and other researchers, CPS with mandatory reporting permit too many social problems to be reported, making too many children and families targets for state intervention in their private lives.

Again, knowing that a five-year follow-up exercise revealed 61% of the children whose cases were not substantiated as targets for interventions raises questions about how cases are scrutinized for investigations.

Finally, the national legislation has no guidelines that explicitly state how to implement children's best interest (Johansson, 2013). This is compounded by uncertainties about how children's interests and protective needs should be handled when they conflict with parental rights. This creates uncertainties about processes for helping families to protect themselves and their children. It could likely create doubts for workers, as to when and how it is appropriate to intervene to ensure the best interest of children.

## 1.2 Statement of the Problem

Sweden is among the first countries that ratified the 1989 United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 2009). Therefore, like all governments who have ratified the treaty, Sweden acts appropriately to protect children's rights as specified in the convention. They include rights; to life, development, peaceful environment, family relations, not being separated from parents against their will, and against discrimination or punishment based on parents' beliefs.... States' responsibilities extend to respecting parents' rights and duties for directing and guiding their children into responsible adulthoods (Assembly, 1989).

However, these rights are promoted in the best interest of the child. Although several debates exist about when the best interest of the child is really promoted, professionals find ways to promote it anyway. This is because the convention allows state intervention if the best interest of a child cannot be promoted in his/her parents' environment. Interventions include social programmes that support parents and children, through preventive measures, reporting, investigation and alternative care – like adoption, foster and institutional care. Child protection professionals in most countries including Sweden, assume the arm of government that enforce this sensitive task. They assume the difficult role of bulging into families' private lives and questioning their way of living and sometimes when it has gone far, removing children based on their findings.

Although these professionals work in the best interest of children, their roles are often misunderstood by society, particularly parents, as principally concerned with monitoring, detecting abuse from inadequate parents and finding evidence to make decisions (Harris,

2012). These misunderstandings could strain cooperation between professionals and parents – making collaborative work difficult. Considering the importance of collaboration between professionals and parents in child protection, and the consequences that parents' negative perceptions about child protection processes may have for parents and practitioners, understanding professionals' roles towards child protection is important. This will help understand professionals as important stakeholders in child welfare, who should work collaboratively with parents, toward the common goal of child protection. It will also help lessen what Harris (2012) calls bureaucratic child protection system from persisting across generations and complicating future engagements.

In Sweden, immigrant children are overrepresented in out-of home care. These children often have; poor socioeconomic backgrounds, jobless and social support dependent parents, and live in segregated areas where gang activities are common (Johansson, 2011). If these factors were mainly responsible, then one would expect equal representations of all children from such backgrounds, in care. This is not so, although, Johansson found that migration status does not have statistically significant influence on placements. However, although socioeconomic factors may influence parenting practices negatively, the gap between expectations of parental roles and the reality of parenting in a new culture cannot be overemphasised.

In Australia, studies have found that immigrant parents particularly - refugee parents often fear losing their children to the host country. They are often less prepared for new parenting situations confronted in host countries – which make parenting difficult (Lewig et al., 2010). They feel the laws of the host country severely challenge their parenting roles. It may be difficult to accept that practices that worked in their countries attract child protection notifications. They cannot; use physical punishment; leave younger children in the care of older siblings – in environments where traditional social networks are absent. More painfully, they feel their children are supported to challenge their authority (ibid). The situation maybe complicated among immigrants in countries where different language is spoken. They may find communication difficult hence, laws on child protection, even if made available to them, may be difficult to understand.

I am yet to find a country where child protection laws are made accessible to immigrants in languages known to parents, as a way of improving their parenting practices. If parenting styles and practices of immigrants are not investigated to inform interventions for parents, state funds would continually support problems that could be prevented. Investigating and finding appropriate ways in which child protection legislation and parenting information can be interpreted for immigrant parents to understand and practice, may contribute positively to parenting practices. Consequently lessen the high involvement of immigrants with the Child Protection System (CPS) as earlier mentioned.

Studies by Berg and Kelly (2000) and Gilbert et al. (2011), in London and Sweden respectively, have shown that a large number of reports are made to child protection, few are investigated and very few are placed in protective care. Considering the high representations of immigrant children in out-of-home care, one could argue that immigrant parents may dominate the number of reports made to social services. Studies show that goals of parenting are consistent across cultures but are only achieved differently among parents. They include keeping children safe from harm, helping them progress towards developmental stages and instilling moral values in them. Achieving these goals depend on cultural, economic and social contexts (Lewig et al., 2010). Considering that parenting practices of most parents involved with CPS may be inherently harmless to children, understanding how child protection professionals perceive challenges immigrant parents face and empower them to rear children accordingly is vital. It will project the contribution of child protection professionals and help defray negative perceptions about their roles and consequently negative attitudes from parents and society.

### 1.3 Rationale to the Study

Parenting is an important activity for both children and parents. Parents are the immediate agents of socialization and may influence greatly the behaviour of children compared to other agents such as teachers, peers and community members. Despite the long-term impact of parental practices on children's development, there exist no detailed instruction manual for ensuring the health, welfare and safety of new-borns. Parents are nonetheless, expected to show love and affection and ensure the safety and well-being of children to meet societal expectations (Breland-

Noble, 2014). Understanding and meeting these expectations may sometimes be difficult for parents. These difficulties may intensify with immigrant parents, who often lack financial, social and intellectual resources, but are expected to promote children's well-being. In Sweden and particularly Gothenburg, limited research literature exists on how immigrant parents manage to rear children to suit the new culture, while managing also financial, social, intellectual and cultural challenges presented by the new environment. This study will add to the limited literature in the field and create awareness about difficulties faced by immigrant parents, thereby adding more voice to the need for policy changes. Changes towards narrowing gaps in employment rates among immigrants and majority populations may translate into improved living conditions and consequently parenting practices.

Despite the tremendous contribution of child protection professionals in parenting, evidence show that positive contributions are often not documented. Instead media projections about negative outcomes in countries like England, Australia, Canada and Sweden, persist. Conflict, potentially abusive situations and occupational structures that less often promote professional capacity, also persist. These, plus emotional and intellectual demands of child protection work, contribute to the high professional turnover in many post-industrial countries (Healy, Meagher, and Cullin, 2009). In Australia, Healy et al. (2009) reported an annual turnover of 27 percent. Tham (2007), reporting from a study in Stockholm claimed that 48 percent out of 58 professionals who had only worked close to two years planned to leave their jobs.

High turnover contributes to high recruitment of novice workers, who often lack expertise and support required for the emotionally demanding task of child protection. This has implications for practice and parents served by CPS. Healy et al. found that despite the stress and demandingness of work, novices often perform initial assessment and investigation roles described as the most difficult social work task by a Swedish respondents. Engaging parents whose parenting styles are found inconsistent with the host country's culture may require expertise and knowledge about cultural differences. The study would help assess whether the background of professionals affect the kind of support they provide to immigrant parents.



It is from this background that this study investigates the role of child protection professionals in parenting among immigrant parents in Gothenburg.

## 1.4 Research Objective

- The study seeks to explore how child protection professionals construct parenting in Gothenburg. Furthermore, it aims at assessing how child protection professionals understand challenges faced by immigrant parents in Gothenburg and how they support immigrant parents to rear their children accordingly.

## 1.5 Research Questions

The study seeks to ask the following questions:

- What expectations of parenting do interviewed child protection professionals in Gothenburg hold?
- How do interviewed child protection professionals account for the challenges immigrant parents in Gothenburg face, as parents?
- How do interviewed child protection professionals help immigrants bring up their children – in ways acceptable in the Swedish culture?

## 1.6 Operational definition of key concepts

For the purpose of this study, the following concepts parenting, immigrants, children, child protection professionals, are defined to reflect notions below.

### 1.6.1 Parenting

It involves the interactions and processes between children and adults whom, biologically or legally are required to take responsibility for children. Children receive as well as contribute to

the parenting interactions and the interactions or processes are believed to impact on their well-being.

### 1.6.2 Immigrant parents

This involves parent who were not born in Sweden and are believed to hold pre-migration beliefs and culture that somewhat impact on their parenting practices. They include all immigrant parents whether Africans, Asians, etc. whose parenting beliefs may be very different from that of Sweden.

### 1.6.3 Children

These are persons under the age of 18 years who still live with their parents and are expected to receive the love, care and protection expected of parents.

## 2 Literature review

This chapter presents previous studies in the field of parenting and child protection. It discusses findings bearing in mind, their relevance to the study. Strengths and weaknesses presented in those studies are discussed and some reviewed.

### 2.1 Parenting Styles and Children's well-being

Parenting is a very important activity that many people perform sometime in their lifetime. How it is done, whether effectively or not, have implications for individuals directly experiencing it, as well as the whole society. Therefore, its nature and effects need to be understood for the benefit of both individuals and the entire society.

Earlier researchers have conceptualized parenting styles into; permissive, authoritative, authoritarian (Baumrind, 1966), indulgent and neglectful (Maccoby and Martin, 1983). These styles have been found to persist in most cultures and provide a framework for parenting behaviours and child rearing goals (Breland-Noble, 2014).

Permissive parenting according to Baumrind (1996) involves managing children's desires and actions in a non-punitive, acceptance and affirmative manner. Like all others, parents who employ this style, demand children's responsibility for household and orderly behaviour but use reason and manipulation instead of overt power and control. Children are consulted and given explanations for family decisions and rules, and they allowed regulating their own actions using parents as resources when they find necessary, instead of being forced to emulate them. Pardeck and Pardeck (1990) referred to (Elder, 1968), who reported that permissive parenting promotes autonomy among youth but parents find difficulty in determining how much freedom to give children while ensuring their safety.

Authoritarian parenting style which values obedience as a virtue and favours punitive measures to curb self-centeredness among children, involves controlling children's behaviour and attitudes to ensure that they conform to standards, deemed right by parents (Baumrind, 1996).

Authoritarian parents restrict autonomy among children; assign household responsibilities to enforce respect, discourage verbal exchanges, believing that they know what is best for the children (ibid). Authoritative parents on the other hand value autonomy and disciplined conformity, affirm children's unique qualities and interests encourage verbal dialogues with the aim of explaining reasons for rules and understanding why children object in cases of non-conformity. This provides children the opportunity to evaluate and understand parents' actions hence likely attain improved parent-child relations. Authoritative parenting has been proved by most authors including Darling and Steinberg (1993) as most effective since it drifts from strict authority to maturity demands, nurturance and effective and purposeful communication and have positive outcomes for children.

The five parenting styles have pervaded research, practice and popular cultures over time and found to consist of combinations of parenting dimensions of warmth, demandingness and autonomy granting. But, only warmth and demandingness are typically measured in research (Domenech-Rodríguez, Donovanick, and Crowley, 2009). However, limited consensus exist about their operationalization and the processes through which they influence child development (Darling and Steinberg, 1993). Although a number of researchers, including Maccoby and Martin (1983) and (Breland-Noble, 2014) have argued that these parenting styles impact children's emotional development and overall mental health throughout childhood and into adulthood. Darling and Steinberg (1993), point out inconsistencies between research results from Baumrind (1972) and recent studies.

The former indicated that authoritarian parenting, which incorporates fearful, timid behaviour and behavioural compliance among European American children, is associated with assertiveness among African-American girls. While recent studies investigating effects of authoritative across ethnic groups consistently showed authoritative parenting as strongly associated with academic achievements among European-American adolescents, it results in ineffective academic achievements among Asian and African-American youths (Lamborn et al., 1991; Darling and Steinberg, 1993; Dornbusch et al., 1987)

## 2.2 Parenting styles and parenting practices

The inconsistencies in effects of parenting styles lead Darling and Steinberg (1993) to explore why the influence of parenting style and practices varies across cultural contexts. They conclude that there is the need to understand the goals for socializing children in different cultural contexts. This is because, for example, different parents could use authoritative parenting style across different social milieus but result in different outcomes for children. These authors then assert that the distinction between parenting styles and parenting practice be made clear in order to help address questions on socialization processes involving children that remain unanswered in sociological studies. They however, argue that parenting style be conceptualized as the context that moderates the influence of specific parenting practices on the child (ibid). Thus, for example parenting style may be understood as the context within which socialization occurs rather than as socialization practice itself. They therefore suggest that how specific parenting practices vary as a function of this context must be investigated (Darling and Steinberg, 1993, p. 9).

## 2.3 The Complexity of parenting in a new culture

Studies differ on how immigrant parents fare in new cultures. Some report that some immigrant parents maintain values of collectivism, hierarchical role definitions and adherence to norms of their home country – early in children’s lives (Chao, 1994). These traditional values enforce shared parental responsibility across community, and shared responsibility among siblings, with older children looking out for younger siblings, (Guerin and Guerin, 2002). While the older generation wields authority and the whole community are involved to child rearing.

Reference is made to the fact that following migration to industrialized societies the “family” which prior to migration served as both responsibility and mutual support is replaced by the welfare system. Parents’ tendency to stick to authoritarian styles that is inconsistent with expectations of parenting of the host country does not only lead to their involvement with the Child Protection System but also may affect their children negatively during adolescence.

However, alternative but preferred parenting style – authoritative parenting is found to achieve better performance and stronger school engagement for adolescents (Steinberg et al., 1992).

In a similar study which sought to assess the impact of parenting interventions in Australia among African migrants and refugee families, Renzaho and Vignjevic (2011) reviewed an African Migrant Parenting Programme and came out with two major findings. The programme was implemented by the Spectrum Migrant Resource Centre (SMRC) to enhance effective parenting and relationship skills to help parents understand their children's needs and raise them confidently in the new culture. This was upon realization from the Centres' settlement programme that parenting-related problems present major challenges among African refugee families. Five (5) parent dimensions were assessed namely: (a) inappropriate parental expectations, (b) inability to demonstrate empathy towards children's needs, (c) strong belief in the use of corporal punishment, (d) reversing parent-child family roles and (e) restricts power/independence. It was revealed that parents changed their expectations of their children, had enhanced ability to demonstrate empathy towards children's needs, lessened their beliefs in corporal punishment, and demonstrated a low tendency to reverse parent-child roles – after a post-test (at the end of a 15 month period). This gives an indication that the intervention largely had a positive impact on the parents' behaviour and suggests that African migrants and immigrant families generally require culturally appropriate parenting skills from interventions to overcome parenting challenges in individualistic cultures.

It was also reported that parents strongly maintained the need to get children to submit to authority. Parents strongly resisted independence among children and this somewhat confirms earlier research findings that autonomy granting is typical of individualistic and not collectivistic societies (Triandis, 1995), the reason for which parents with traditional values resist such individualistic values among children. The study is strong on the point that perspectives of both women and men were captured; thereby discounting traditional ideas that parenting is an occupation for women. It nonetheless has some limitations. Only four countries, out of the 53 African countries and different cultures represented in Australia were included in the study. The intervention programme is implemented for only 15 months – indicating a limited time to evaluate attitudinal change in parents. In this case, a longitudinal study that follows parents from

the onset of intervention for a considerable period – considering children’s age, would give a more accurate effect of interventions.

Similar conclusions are captured in a literature review by Casanueva et al. (2008) who reported that findings from a randomized controlled trial of 163 Canadian families referred to child protective agencies that used the HOME score<sup>1</sup> to evaluate changes in parenting reported that the HOME scores remained stable at 1 and 2 years follow-up (Casanueva et al., 2008). In view of that, more time is needed to measure the outcomes of family interventions to be confident about the result.

## 2.4 Paradox of the Child Protection System

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) places responsibility on governments to ensure that the rights of all children (persons aged 18 years or below) are protected, respected and fulfilled, irrespective of race, religion, abilities, culture, sex or family status and so on. These rights include rights to; identity, association, education, live with parents unless otherwise, voice their views in decisions affecting them, protection from harm and learning family culture. Additionally, Article 5 of the Convention stipulates that, families’ rights and responsibilities, to direct their children into responsible citizens, should be respected. These two roles sometimes contradict since a number of children have had to be protected against situations (violence, abuse, neglect) in the family that violate their rights. Sharrock (2013) reported that majority of child maltreatment in United States are perpetuated by parents, with large numbers of children placed in out-of-home care.

Although most placed children are re-unified with parents, further victimization sometimes necessitates re-placements. Child protection officers sometimes protect children’s rights from parents whose rights to raising their own children, also need to be respected. This and other factors have raised concerns among researchers and practitioners about whether CPS should

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<sup>1</sup> Home score – provides a measure of the quality of a child’s home environment. It is used to explain the associations between characteristics of child’s home environment and child outcomes (**National Longitudinal Surveys | Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015**)

intervene in family and private lives. Concerns include how they should intervene, if they have to; the nature of risks needing protection; and the kind of future harm needing intervention (Leviner, 2013). Informed by mixed perceptions of satisfaction and dissatisfactions among parents served by CPS, Dale (2004) demands more explicit standards guiding child protection interventions. Standards clarifying when 'is appropriate or not' to remove children into foster care, level of parental contacts appropriate when in care. How cases requiring care proceedings or having to be managed voluntarily on child protection agreement – are decided on.

## 2.5 Services for parents involved with Child Protection System

In their study, Parenting Services for Mothers involved with Child Protective Services (CPS) in the US, Casanueva et al. (2008) found parenting training as the most common service provided to parents involved with CPS. Others include parental aid and family counselling. They used a subsample from a national data set of children investigated by CPS. It helped to analyse changes in maternal parenting and spanking behaviours among women who received parenting services and those who did not receive parenting services, although they had similar needs. A bivariate analysis revealed a modest maternal responsiveness and total parenting scores for mothers of 3-to-5 year old children who received parenting services. For example, it was reported that mothers of children between zero and two years old provided more learning stimulation, over time.

However, after controlling for maternal characteristics – maternal depression, child characteristics – Child health, and family characteristics – Intimate-partner violence, thus characteristics reported by earlier researchers as influencing parenting, the changes could not be confirmed (Casanueva et al., 2008). This led to their conclusion that parental training obtained through the Child Welfare requires requisite features to significantly change parenting practices hence the need for cohesive national, evidence-based, effective parenting training for families involved with CPS (ibid). Spanking however was not found to be influenced by parental training as both groups reported low rates at both baseline and 18 months follow-up. Nonetheless, they found that in both groups spanking increased after 18 months, indicating that as infants become more mobile they may engage in behaviours that parents attempt to suppress through spanking (ibid). This second finding, according to the authors points to the need to focus intervention on



families with toddlers – which is a great contribution towards improving the well-being of infants. However, the 18 months follow-up period, seem too short a period for which a significant effect could be known. Again they found that mothers were very conscious of the interviewers’ assessments and feared being reported if found spanking their children during that period. This could therefore be a confounding factor to the results presented.

The study lacks the perspectives of fathers, hence does not give a total reflection of the different contributions each parent makes towards influencing childhood behaviours. This cannot be ignored as research demonstrates that men and women differ in parenting dimensions, particularly on autonomy granting as pointed by Domenech-Rodríguez et al. (2009). This confirms findings by a study among Caribbean immigrants residing in New York, which examined the influence of parenting styles and other parenting practices on child outcomes. It indicated differences in outcomes for children regarding mothers’ and fathers’ use of authoritative parenting styles and reported that fathers’ parenting carry more weight in facilitating academic skills and social behaviours of children (Roopnarine et al., 2006). They corrected an earlier assertion and purported that mothers may not be solely responsible for influencing childhood social behaviours. This was informed by an association they found between fathers’ rather than mothers’ parenting styles and contact with children’s early academic skills. This trend persisted even after controlling for maternal influences.

## 2.6 Parental Engagement with Child Protection System

Another important factor in the context of child protection is parental engagement as several studies have shown that situations where parents engaged in decision-making processes co-operate with plans for children, positive outcomes are achieved for both service and children (Brophy, 2006; Dawson and Berry, 2002; Farmer and Owen, 1993; Kelly and Humphreys, 2001) in Broadhurst, Holt, and Doherty (2012).

To assess the impact of parental engagement, Broadhurst et al. (2012), reviewed the impact of the Public Law Outline (PLO) introduced in England and Wales in 2008 which sought to improve parental engagement, with the view of diverting cases from proceedings wherever safe

and desirable. The PLO was introduced because the number of applications for care proceedings – compulsory removal of children through care order – was increasing. It was also becoming costly while delay and inefficiencies in the court system persisted. Therefore, an alternative measure that promotes partnership between parents and professionals in decision-making processes was required (ibid). Despite the advantages envisaged by the introduction of the PLO, like all other programmes it received criticisms concerning the feasibility of attaining cooperation among parents and professionals. Criticisms were informed by national review of research proceedings in 2005-2006. It was indicated that it was difficult to attain even the limited form of partnership between parents and professionals where concerns about children were serious (Brophy, 2006) in (Broadhurst et al., 2012). This is because parents normally refused to accept blames for dysfunctions in families, blame children for problems or perceive concerns by child protection officers in their families' welfare as exaggerated – hence resist any form of support given.

After assessing the impact of the PLO, conclusions by Broadhurst et al. (2012), support that of Brophy (2006), in that pre-proceeding meetings, also revealed that parental compliance was difficult to achieve. Two forms of resistance were demonstrated. Majority of the parents passively resisted instruction through minimal acknowledgment of institutional authority or refusal to agree or respond to questions, while a smaller percentage overtly or verbally challenged institutional authority. The disagreements were found to result from different orientations about institutional requirements of the meeting and varying values shared by authorities and parents. Some parents felt they could better define their own problems and preferred forms of help. Moreover, although they sometimes acknowledged concerns presented by social services, they felt they were exaggerated. This was coupled with the lack of action plans, stipulating organizational plan to divert care proceedings, plus overly concentrated power on team leaders in directing the flow of engagement with parents – thus demonstrating issues of power in professional-client relationships (Broadhurst et al., 2012). These factors strongly affected parental engagement and outcome of cases. One important contribution was the need to review the timing for intervention, as they were found to come in too late. The family group conferencing, which supports families by drawing on family and friends and providing

opportunities for more negotiations with parents before crises strike, is proposed as an alternative measure to ensure that parental engagement is effective.

## 2.7 Immigrant Populations and Child Protection

In her study, the Multicultural Paradox, (Johansson, 2011) examined whether ethnic background is under-communicated in child welfare services in Sweden, and how they affect the well-being of marginalized migrant families. She argues that irrespective of progressive multicultural approach, the Swedish welfare state has failed to include large groups of migrants, thereby resulting in increasing segregation among immigrant populations. This, she adds, creates challenges for migrant children, reflecting their over-representation in out-of-home placements and racial discrimination within the child protection system. This makes the special needs of migrant children not recognized at early stages of life (Vinnerljung et al., 2008 in; Johansson, 2011). It also raises concerns about how the child protection service is perceived as an important multicultural Swedish welfare state, responsible for dysfunctional families and teenagers exhibiting risky behaviours.

Contrary to claims of racist's attitudes within the child protection system, Johansson found very limited experiences of overt racial discrimination from child protection professionals in Sweden. Nonetheless, she asserts that considering the small sample used in her study, it would be extremely ambitious to conclude that such discriminations do not exist within the CPS. Instead, efforts to build trust between workers and parents are encouraged.

Her study indicates again that not only migrant families encounter challenges within the child protection system but also social workers themselves have stories to share. Because they operate in a multicultural society, all their encounters with immigrant families require them to meet three considerations; follow organizational rules, recognize ethnic diversity while maintaining the child protection legislation in respect to individual families in need, as well as ensuring equal help and protection for all children (Government of Sweden, 2001 in Johansson, 2011). These were found to complicate the work of child protection professionals as they compound their

responsibilities and heavy workload. While working in a setting where uncertainty about when and how to intervene for minority groups – without being branded racists, abound.

In qualitative interviews with 18 families who had received child protection services, Dale (2004) found mixed perceptions about experiences of satisfaction and dissatisfaction regarding processes and outcomes of child protection interventions. While most participants reported very positive or somewhat helpful experiences, others thought it had caused them damage. These feelings of dissatisfaction support earlier findings that many parents involved with CPS feel they are; treated unfairly, judged as bad parents, disrespected, not given appropriate information, subject to arbitrary decision processes and overwhelmed by fabricated, distorted and exaggerated concerns from professionals (Cleaver and Freeman, 1995; Lindley, 1994; Thoburn, Lewis, and Shemmings, 1995; Howitt, 1992; in Dale, 2004). Consequently, dissatisfied participants reported mistakes in diagnoses and judgments about injuries and labelled the system as unfair. Dale found it surprising that despite high levels of dissatisfaction, only one family used the formal social services' complaint procedure and argued how that could indicate lack of awareness among management, and their not finding solutions, accordingly.

Without faulting his argument, I add that such behaviours may exist among other parents served by CPS, hence raise questions about parents' accessibility to CPS information. Thus, how well informed are parents, about child protection systems. How well are processes and procedures explained to parents? It is likely families might have been ignorant about complaint procedures and as captured by Dale (2004), thought using them would be unproductive. Some families with extremely negative experiences had decided not to formally complain, believing that social services can take punitive actions against them in retaliation. Several negative experiences persist and continue to be perpetuated over time. Although they might not be completely eliminated, further studies investigating perceptions of families served by child protection systems towards finding lasting solutions are encouraged. Studies investigating monitoring measures of processes and practices of CPS are also worthwhile.

Regardless of these experiences, some professionals were found friendly, interested and keen in collaborating with parents in the best interest of children. Professional characteristics parents

appreciate; include supportiveness, listening effectively, promoting cooperation and being “human”. Parents acknowledged that things get tough at initial stages, but reiterated that although their willingness to collaborate matters, professionals’ expertise and commitment is key to constructive engagement with parents (Dale, 2004). He then argues that although previous negative experiences of CP practices hinder cooperation, some parents would always disagree with professionals’ decisions, even when decisions are necessary. Hence, cautions that dissatisfaction by parents may not necessary reflect poor practice in all cases.

To lesson feelings among parents that important child protection processes and decisions do not involve them, they require greater clarity, consistency and transparency in decision-making to understand and judge that there is a “fair process” (ibid)

# 3 Theoretical and conceptual framework

## 3.1 Introduction

The study utilizes the Ecological Systems' perspective, the Stakeholders' theory, the new Concept of Childhood and Parenthood and Parentification. Parenting style and the child protection system both fit into the ecological systems' theory and the two concepts are used to complement them.

The ecological theory is selected because context becomes crucial for stakeholders when evidence show that factors within the environment influence parenting styles and consequently attract external support. This study focuses on the first four subsystems, namely: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem because they provide important framework to better understand the study. Most of the literature used in this section is obtained from Bronfenbrenner (1979).

To move to the Ecological perspective, an explanation of human development is given to enhance understanding. Human development is simply the process of enlarging people's choices through enhanced capabilities and functioning to be able to utilize available opportunities for achieving desirable outcomes (Baroudi, 2004). Healthy living, being educated, enjoying decent standard of living and human rights are all encompassed within human development.

## 3.2 The Ecological perspective

Bronfenbrenner proposed the Ecological perspective of human development in the 1970's and explained that human development is better understood when the entire ecological system within which growth occurs, is considered (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). It helps to understand the progressive interactions throughout lifespan, between a developing person and the changing environment. The process is however, affected by relations within and between immediate and external settings and formal and informal settings in which the settings are found. The system is composed of five subsystems that support growth. They are the microsystems, mesosystems,

exosystems, macrosystems and chronosystems. Within each system are processes and conditions that govern the life long course of human development in the environment of human beings. This study analyses the first four systems underpinning the ecological model.

The subsystem within which an individual exists incorporates the importance of context to the study. The study seeks to understand how child protection professionals interact with parents to maximize the different environmental contexts to promote enhanced developmental outcomes for children.

### 3.2.1 The microsystem

The microsystem provides insights about how face-to-face interactions between children and family, schools and peers, health services, etc. inhibit or further engagements within and from other systems. The family, particularly parents are assessed as part of multiple contexts within the ecological model. The physical, social and economic situations of parents could affect the life course of children. They could affect what parenting practices parents adopt. For example, Welbourne (2012) states that poverty impacts on parents' mental and physical well-being and consequently, their ability to parent. Poor parents are likely to raise children in need, neglected, and abused (Welbourne, 2012, p. 114), which remain concerns for child protection professionals. Additionally, certain challenges parents' face could hinder their ability to interact with systems within the microsystem to raise children. The microsystem helps to examine why systems within the exosystem (discussed below) indulge in processes within the microsystem. It helps also to assess whether professionals consider how challenges faced by parents affect their parenting – hence provide support services to help them accordingly.

### 3.2.2 The mesosystem

The mesosystem helps understand the impact of interaction between two or more systems containing the child. This includes interactions between home and school, school and health centre, home and religious settings, etc. A two way communication between these systems may impact positively on children's initiative, independence and grades in high school

(Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Little is however, known about the impact of communication between different systems and parenting. It is likely that for example, parents who interact often with teachers would be updated about children's well-being. Teachers could inform parents about their children's behaviour that may require interaction with other systems to solve. For example, teachers can communicate directly with parents about their children's aggression (which could be misinterpreted to result from exposure to violence) and direct the parents to receive psychological help. This may lessen the many false positives that have implications parents and social work practice.

### 3.2.3 The exosystem

The exosystem is the larger social setting involving linkages and processes taking place between two or more settings, at least one of which does not contain the child. However, the child experiences the positive or negative impact of their interactions (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). The system consists of neighbours, social services (CPS), mass media, police etc. Here, although the social services may not interact with the child – daily like the parent – except investigation periods, social services implement child protection legislation and provide services to parents, children experience the effect. Teachers and professionals may interact to ensure the well-being of children. Teachers are aware about their duty to report neglect, abuse and inconsistencies in children's behaviour. As they spend time with children, signs of abuse, neglect and poor parenting may be reported. This may attract investigations into the family situation towards providing necessary support – to improve children's well-being.

### 3.2.4 The macrosystem

This level encompasses the micro-, meso-, and exosystems characteristic of a given culture (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, p 40). It embraces belief systems, material resources, customs, life-styles and life course options that provide the societal blue print for a particular culture (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, p 40). Bronfenbrenner (1994) asserts that it is important to identify more specific social and psychological features at the macrosystem that eventually affect particular conditions and processes occurring at the microsystem. Paquette and Ryan (2001) provide the



following example: if a parents' culture requires that parents should be solely responsible for raising their children that culture would less likely provide resources to help parents. This, in turn, affects the structures in which the parents function. The parents' ability or inability to perform their responsibility toward their child within the context of the child's microsystem would also be affected.

This level helps to examine beliefs systems about parenting and conceptions of childhood, child protection legislations, individualist orientations, etc. within the host country – that guide child rearing processes. Again, pre-migration orientations about parenting and childhood, African-specific child rearing orientations towards childrearing that influence parenting practices are assessed. These help explore convergence or inconsistencies between pre-migration and post-migration beliefs about parenting, held by African immigrants – and their effects on parenting practices. It helps explore orientations behind support services provided by the social services. Again, whether professionals acknowledge the influence of context in which parents themselves developed – on their parenting practices. In addition, whether services provided to immigrant parents are informed by these contexts in order to empower them to fit into the Swedish culture. It helps understand how parents are supported to embrace the new culture and child protection legislation in Sweden.

Despite the important contribution of the model to the study, proximal processes have been found to have effects that are more positive in more advantaged and stable environments throughout the life course. This implies that children; for example, who grow in less stimulating environments, who are exposed to abuse and neglect, whose parents are less involved in school activities and less responsive to their needs, are more likely to cultivate negative outcomes. It implies that if nothing is done about the situations of migrant parents, attitudes and beliefs that contradict the beliefs of the host country may be internalized and perpetuated by children. This may possibly affect their future parenting practices, increase child protection notifications and consequently increase cost for social services.

### 3.3 The stakeholder theory

The stakeholder theory is a theory of organizational management and business ethics published by R. Edward Freeman in 1984, in his book *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach*. The theory addresses morals and values in managing organization. In this theory, managers identify stakeholders who can influence their company's accomplishments, and find ways to promote their interests (Freeman, 1984 in Brower and Mahajan, 2013). This contradicts the shareholder view where shareholders traditionally own companies and prioritize their own interests. The stakeholder theory acknowledges that groups like governmental bodies, communities, trade unions, etc. are interested in and could affect the operation of companies (Freeman, 1984). Other researchers have grouped them into core stakeholders; namely, shareholders, customers, employees, suppliers and community.

To qualify as stakeholders, entities should have stakes in companies and contribute significantly to their outputs. The stakeholder theory addresses problems of cooperation between crucial partners. This is because conflicts can cause harm to the company, while smooth cooperation benefit all parties involved (Tullberg, 2013). Tullberg again points to a differentiation of stakeholders into influencers ('power holders') and claimants. The former, includes government, NGO's, media, etc., who might not have strong ties with the company but exert powerful control over it. Claimants have close ties and are legitimately required to contribute to the company, but are often less powerful and likely to be victimized by the company's actions (Keler, 2002 in Tullberg 2013). Again, he introduces a combined definition that requires a stakeholder to be both complainants and influencers. However, this study sticks to earlier classification of stakeholders as encompassing influencers and complainants or managers.

Two important issues are argued by the theory; firstly, managers are encouraged to avoid stardom. This is because if one person (manager) receives praise for a company's success then he should be blamed for its hardships as well. Secondly, both influencers and claimants should remain loyal to the company by contributing significantly to its growth. It adds that a company's success depends on the smooth cooperation of its stakeholders. Therefore, although conflicting

interests may exist, there is the need to move beyond egocentric perspective to find solutions to problems (Tullberg, 2013).

The theory helps this study to explore the various stakeholders groups within the CPS and identify the stakes each hold towards the well-being of children.

The study by Brower and Mahajan (2013) reported that managers that recognize the needs of stakeholders can improve future opportunities and consequently satisfy the demands of other stakeholders. Nonetheless, companies that do not recognize stakeholders' impact on its outcomes may hamper future opportunities. Informed by these, the theory provides the opportunity to ascertain if both managers (parents) as well as stakeholders (CPS) understand and acknowledge their respective roles towards ensuring the well-being of children. Considering that cooperation among partners is also paramount to a company's success according to the theory, it will assess if both parties cooperate towards ensuring the best interest of children through enhanced parenting.

### 3.4 Different conceptions of childhood and parenthood

Since the early 1980s, researchers have expressed and developed values that support stipulations in the UNCRC, whose 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> articles outline children's rights to participation. This have informed arguments for seeing children as 'being' and not 'becoming', acknowledging their agency and competences, recognizing children's perspectives and voices in important issues concerning them – while promoting their best interest. These reflect the paradigmatic shift in conceptualizations of childhood as social and cultural phenomena while acknowledging structural constraints that influence childhood. They involve different processes with different goals, happening in different contexts and affecting differently adult-child relationships (Moses, 2008).

These are important to discussions on parenting styles and child development, as societal conceptions about children and childhood define the conditions societies create for them and how individuals respond accordingly (Nordenfors, 2012).

Again, the different ways of thinking about children produce different childhoods, varied public provisions for children, different ways of working with them (participation) and power relations between children and adults (Moss and Petrie, 2002; Nordenfors, 2012). Since views of children result from both individuals' conceptions and political systems' views of children and families, people's awareness about their conceptions makes them conscious of how their actions affect children (Nordenfors, 2012). Which she adds, is a better way of ensuring change and actually promoting children's rights. Therefore, because children's rights are promoted passionately in Sweden, and somewhat influence child protection approaches and expectations of parental responsibilities, discussions on children's competences and vulnerabilities become vital. It may be important for professionals to understand motivations behind parenting styles and practices of immigrant parents, as specific practices are expected of parents. Immigrant parents' understanding of conceptions of childhood in the host country may make them appreciate existent child protection processes.

Moses (2008), in her article 'Children and Participation in South Africa', observed the household and family, and the community, school and government – as the two domains (private and public) where participation could occur. Additionally, children's participation in the family and their parents' involvement in their lives may also be influenced by conceptions of parenthood. Moses' analysis of Shelmerdine (2006)'s work as captured by Nordenfors, revealed how different cultural and economic circumstances of adults in Cape Town (South Africa) affected their relationships with children. As adults from middle class backgrounds, mostly white, perceived their roles to provide and socialize children into responsible citizens, their poor and black counterparts did not. Children from the former had some space as independent stakeholders and granted autonomy while those from the latter were required to value obedience and adult control, over their initiatives, as children.

In countries like Sweden, which has large numbers of immigrants from diverse cultures, such traditional conceptions of parenthood and of children as vulnerable and in need of protection, inevitably exist. These, coupled with children's conceptions as incompetent create obstacles to parent-child-relationships. In this regard, like Moses (2008) asserts, despite the place society, including Sweden gives to children, the place and contributions of most children from poor

families go unrecognized. This may also account for why some immigrant parents even with understanding of society's view on parental practices, specifically spanking, continue to spank children. It may not be because they cannot stop or lack information, but because of internalized conceptions about children. The situation presents itself in academic work, where Nordic children remain key consumers of benefits and services but remain invisible in welfare policy research. This is partly because they are considered as dependent family members, rather than their own subjects (Johansson et al., 2008).

Important also to this study is conceptions about the best interest of the child. Johansson et al., assert that social workers contribute to social construction of childhood, when in their daily work with families and children, they take direct actions that reflect "the best interest of the child". Nonetheless, whether the best interest of the child is actually promoted in child welfare, requires more discussion. This is because children involved with child protection are often vulnerable and dependent on adult carers. Although the family's best interest might be assumed as the child's best interest, it may differ in some situations. Sometimes, when it becomes necessary, professionals statutorily remove children from their parents' home. This places professionals in conflicting situations - respecting parents' rights or protecting children (Banks, 2002; in Johansson et al., 2008).

It is often difficult to know whether removing say a parent, or providing specific intervention, promotes the best interest of children. This is so because more often professionals' use of expert knowledge in child protection decisions dominates over consultation with children, regarding their best interest. This reflects arguments that professionals combine rights discourses with care discourses. Thus, in child protection processes, professionals argue that children who express the will in favour of one parent risks carrying heavy responsibility in conflicts between parents (Röbäck, 2008 in Nordenfors, 2012). This display of adult power over children makes Nordenfors conclude that more work is required towards realizing the UNCRC. For which she calls for increased awareness about children and a review of conceptions and assumptions about children. This need for change applies to, not only parents, but also child protection professionals and the entire society towards improving the world for all.

### 3.5 Parentification

Garber (2011) refers to parentification as pathological parent-child role changes, which often happen in the context of divorce. Whether it involves parent-to-child or child-to-parent, exchange, it can compromise the child's health and development. Research works differ on what makes up parentification. However most models of parentification use universal elements like: a child assuming parental role, role reversal and a disturbance in generational boundaries (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Spark, 1973; Chase, 1999; Jurkovic, 1998; Karpel, 1976; Minuchin, Montalvo, Guerney, Rosman, & Schumer, 1967 in Hooper, 2007).

Garber discussed its existence among immigrant families, chronically ill, profoundly depressed and substance dependent parents who may sometimes lose sight of their responsibilities. He refers to claims that mothers are more likely than fathers to parentify and daughters are more likely than sons to be parentified (Peris et' al in (Garber, 2011). Parents whose parents were not nurturing may turn to their children to fulfil those dependency needs. In addition, the failure of an adult's relationship - through divorce, separation may increase the risk of parentification.

This may be detrimental to children's development since research shows that it does not matter what the motivation is, whether parents willingly gave up their role or personal or cultural challenges resulted to it. Parentification interferes with a child's development, peer relationships and ability to maintain healthy relationships with his parents or other adults. Hooper (2007) who defines it as role corruption asserted its ability to interrupt with childhood development due to poor relationships and attachment issues.

This concept is important to this study as it helps to analyse processes that possibly lead to parent-child role changes among immigrants and how parents are helped to manage them in Gothenburg. Especially because parents might have migrated from environments where collective responsibilities and leaving younger children in the care of older children are permitted (Lewig et al., 2010). Having been separated from extended family member who served as social support or care for children in their absence, this theory will help to examine how parents maintain their roles without interfering that of children. It gives understanding to how

parents-child-roles are maintained in a foreign culture. It could help inform services provided to parents to prevent this parental pathology from perpetuating across generations.

## 4 Methodology

This section presents the framework and research design of the study. It provides a brief description of the qualitative approach used, the different research subjects, the data collection method, data analysis and processing technique and limitations. It also covers ethical issues and challenges encountered in the research process.

### 4.1 A qualitative approach to research

The qualitative research approach is used in the design of the research, data collection and analysis. This is because the study seeks to understand how professionals construct parenting and how they support parents to “do” the kind of parenting that is acceptable in Sweden. It is also informed by Kvale (1996)’s assertion that to know how people understand their world, talking with them is key. The study focuses on words and meaning instead of quantification. It appreciates the depth of knowledge that choosing qualitative approach provides, at the expense of breadth of information provided with quantitative approach (Brannen, 2007). It relies also on inductive logic with great interest in generating theories rather than hypothesis testing, as practiced in quantitative approach (Bryman, 2012).

Ontological, epistemological assumptions and theoretical considerations are considered important when choosing methods (Bryman, 2012; Brannen, 2007). The researcher adopts the ontological position described as interpretivist, which explains that the social world is understood from interpretations given by its participants. In this study, parenting as a concept and how parenting-related challenges are perceived while immigrants “do parenting” are understood by examining the actual interpretations given by child protection professionals as they engage parents directly in child protection processes. The research design explores further the area of parenting and child protection among immigrant parents but from the perspectives of

child protection professionals. The explanation given by child protection professionals give depth and detail in order to elaborate earlier findings while adding additional information to the phenomenon (Patton, 2002). Therefore, it is both exploratory and descriptive.

#### 4.1.1 Qualitative Research

In an attempt to create a research design that explores complex phenomena and their interrelationships, researchers make different decisions to address the research questions proposed (Kvale, 1996). Bolin (2011) refers to Yin (1994) who says that:

A research design is what could be called an action plan for getting here to there, where here may be defined as an initial set of questions to be answered and there is a set of conclusions about the proposed questions. As discussed earlier, this may be exploratory or descriptive.

Bolin adds that when such questions are asked, researchers need to be aware of their preconceived ideas about the phenomenon under study. Since such preconceptions could possibly affect the research process. Among my preconceptions about the study area is that immigrant parents arrive in Gothenburg with heritage values about parenting which affect their parenting practices. Therefore, they might need special support to understand and meet the required parenting practices in the new culture. Again, large numbers of immigrant children are involved with social services and this creates doubts about the role of CPS among immigrants. This also affects immigrant parents' confidence in performing parenting activities they seemingly performed well in their home countries. Therefore, an understanding of professionals' role among immigrant parents might be helpful. These preconceptions result from my reading of literature on the course, Children in Adverse Life Situations, as part of my Masters' programme and previous conversations with some immigrant parents.

Furthermore, coming from an African country with collectivists' values and specific expectations about parenting and child protection processes and/or how systems should be interacted with, I have been conscious of my subjectivism and its possible influence on this study. However, I tried to be open-minded, unbiased and open to criticisms (Smith, 1990) in the research process. As encouraged by Ratner (2002), I often asked for clarifications during the interviews in order to



capture the actual meanings professionals wanted to convey. Thus, I showed respect for their psychological reality and comprehended it accordingly (ibid). Furthermore, during the analysis and interpretation, I kept going back to the transcript to ensure that I interpreted the actual meanings from professionals' statements before grouping them into themes. The themes were then summarized to reflect professionals' pinons from the interviews (ibid).

Despite these efforts, it is worth mentioning the difficulty in conducting qualitative research in a strictly objective manner (Patton, 2002), because subjectivity often guides each step of the research process (Ratner, 2002). However, because researchers (including me) remain data collectors and data interpretations and need personal contacts with subjects and situations to be able to report accurately (Patton, 2002, p. 51), knowing my biases and theoretical predispositions helped me to pursue meaningful, credible and empirically supported findings (ibid).

## 4.2 Data related issues

### 4.2.1 Source of Data

The study uses both primary and secondary data. The primary data is collected through interviews from child protection professionals that have at least six (6) months experience with working with immigrant parents. Secondary data from scholarly sources like journal articles, published dissertations and books were used. This was to gain an appreciable understanding of the subject area and help with literature review – considering its importance to the study.

### 4.2.2 Obtaining Secondary Data

Databases such as SAGE Journals, Scopus, PubMed, Cambridge Journals online, Wiley online library etc. were searched, for secondary data – through the Gothenburg University website. Words used for the search included: parenting, child protection, immigrant parents, parenting and migration, parenting and child protection, child protection and Sweden, parenting and child outcomes, CPS services for parents, etc. I selected literature that were very relevant to the study, and were somewhat current however; some situations required me to refer to original authors and/or literature proved very important to the study, although they were somewhat old – so I had

to use them. An example is the reference to Baumrind (1966), one of the early writers on parenting.

## 4.3 Sampling procedure

With particular interest in issues of child protection among immigrant, I purposefully obtained the contact of a professional working in a predominantly immigrant community. (Name withheld for ethical reasons). However, considering the very tight schedules of professionals, and the sensitive nature of the topic, I followed through with the snowball sampling technique. Thus, the first contact was very instrumental in establishing contacts with others – professionals at the Social Services and Resource Centre. This group does not necessarily reflect the description given by Gilbert (1993) when he proposed that Snowball could only be used for sample members involved in a network with others who share special characteristics – like drug users. However, considering the characteristics mentioned above, the first contact had to recommend or vouch for my legitimacy – as Gilbert says characterises snowballing.

Bryman (2012) discusses one of the weaknesses with this procedure. The nature of selection makes obtaining a representative sample difficult. He adds that since the orientation of sampling in qualitative research is mostly guided by preference for theoretical sampling<sup>2</sup> than statistical sampling<sup>3</sup>, there is a better fit between snowball and qualitative research. Hence, for this type of research it is a good option.

### 4.3.1 Gaining access to the child protection professionals

An initial contact was made through one of the child protection supervisors via email. After briefly explaining the research topic, its purpose and period for conducting it, I requested to interview her and some of her colleagues. She agreed to participate and got other colleagues to participate. (I did not have to go through the head of the institution). The contact of a family

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<sup>2</sup> Theoretical sampling – the processes of data collection aimed at generating theory.

<sup>3</sup> Statistical sampling – selecting a sample from a population and generalizing it to the population upon mathematical manipulation.

therapist at the resource centre – who works directly with clients – was also given. He also agreed to participate in the research, with one other colleague. I met all the professionals individually, before the actual interview, again, to explain the research and its purpose – in other to prepare them for the actual interview – and schedule interview dates.

#### 4.3.2 Sample

Five (5) professionals from Social Services (Soc. S) and two (2) from a Resource Centre (RC) were interviewed. This is because all professionals work towards one goal – child protection but with different approach and scope of work. Nonetheless, an understanding of both roles and the different contributions are needed in order to understand the child protection role in entirety. All interviewed professionals hold social work degrees. Three out of the seven (7) are Swedish and four (4) are immigrants, just like the three Swedish, all interviewed professionals have obtained some social work education from Sweden. They all have appreciable experiences in social work practice – particularly, child protection. The number of years they have worked in child protection, with the current organization, specifically immigrant parents range between six (6) months and 11 years. Only one (1) respondent has six months experience, the rest have more than one (1) year experience. These professionals have been given pseudonyms in the analysis to ensure anonymity. They are Anita (Soc. S), Brenda (Soc. S), Candy (Soc. S), Eva (Soc. S) and Hada (Soc. S), Franca (RC) and Gaby (RC). Only one (1) male was interviewed at the Social Services, and the interviewees from the Resource Centre are all males. Female names were used to increase anonymity for the only male at the social services and because more females than males were interviewed. The names of both the Social Service and Resource centres are also withheld.

I decided to analyse seven (7) interviews for this work, firstly because I realized that child protection is a sensitive area, hence some professionals are less enthusiastic about granting interviews. Again, it was difficult to get more participants for the study because of their busy schedules. It is difficult to say that I reached meaning saturation after the seventh interview, considering the number of child protection organizations in Gothenburg and the diverse experiences workers possess. However, considering the depth and quality of empirical

information collected from the seven (7) interviews. I could say that I had sufficient information to communicate the meanings that professionals sought to convey.

#### 4.3.3 Adequacy of sample for analysis

I decided seven (7) interviews were enough for my analysis not only because of the sensitive nature of the CPS or high caseloads of professionals which seemingly make them less enthusiastic about granting research interviews. But I realized during the analysis that the depth and quality of information collected was sufficient to allow the deep and case-oriented analysis, vital to all qualitative enquiry (Sandelowski, 1995). I was confident that the number was neither too-large for attaining that purpose nor too small for providing the rich textual understanding needed in this study (Sandelowski, 1995, p. 183).

#### 4.3.4 In-depth interviews

The method for data collection was guided by the objectives and research questions according to scientific practice (Kvale, 1996). Individual interviews were used because of its ability to elicit professionals' understanding and experiences of the phenomenon, (ibid). Additionally, it is selected because it is free from being influenced by responses of other professionals – as could be in Focus Group Discussions. An interview guide with list of questions giving all professionals the opportunity to answer the same kinds of questions was used – in a semi-structured format. The questions in the study were guided by the need to explore professionals understanding and construction of parenting and how that affect how they support them. Again, they were influenced by previous readings from similar studies and theories that guided the study. The questions on the interview guide followed particular themes that professionals could explore – while making also, data collection systematic for all professionals. The themes were interrelated and did not have to follow particular order as proposed by Patton (2002) or as in structured interviews (Bryman, 2012).

The choice of semi-structured format for interviews, was to ask questions in a way that encouraged professionals to give “thick descriptions”, thus elaborated and detailed description of

the phenomenon (Bolin, 2011). Despite the advantages of using an interview guide in semi-structured interviews, Bolin refers to Patton (2002), who presented some weaknesses for using it. It includes the possibility of omitting salient points while pre-structuring themes and the difficulty in comparing different responses because of the flexibility with which interviewer sequences and asks questions.

The interviews lasted between forty-five and one hour thirty minutes (45-1:30). Each interview was recorded to make transcription and analysis easy. The questions were pre-tested with one professional at the social services and one at the resource centre. This was to ascertain if the right questions were being asked. After that, some questions were reworded and questions connoting the same ideas reconstructed. However, this was not used in the analysis. All interviews were conducted in the offices of the professionals, because they found that more convenient.

## 4.4 Analysing the data

I was concerned initially about analysing seven (7) interviews for this study. However when confronted with the enormous empirical data (after transcription) and the difficulty in making sense out of it – I resolved it was enough. I understood why Patton (2002) said that:

Qualitative analysis becomes challenging when the researcher has to make sense of massive amount of data. Thus, through reducing voluminous raw information by separating trivial from significance, identifying significant patterns and meaningfully communicating the essence of the data (Patton (2002) in (Bolin, 2011)).

As I reflected and interacted with the empirical data and theories during the analysis process, I realized that some questions needed further elaboration while others could have been avoided because they seemed to elicit similar responses as other questions. Although follow up questions were asked through emails, the responses lacked the spontaneity and richness that the face-to-face interviews had. Furthermore, during my last interview my attention was drawn to exploring professionals' perceptions about how immigrant parents/families respond to services provided. This would have introduced an interesting perspective but it was too late considering it.

Finally, I appreciated why Bolin refers to Patton's (2002) assertion that analysis clarifies what would have been most important to study only if we had prior knowledge (Patton, 2002 in Bolin, 2011). I also conclude that I could have approached my study differently with what I know now about the area.

#### 4.4.1 The thematic analysis

The thematic analysis which involves extracting distinguishing themes between and within transcripts (Bryman, 2012), inspired this analysis. According to Bryman, themes generate from thoroughly "reading and rereading" transcripts that make up the data. Therefore, the raw data was processed by firstly, tape recording the interviews and transcribing them verbatim.

I then developed a coding system to enable me search for patterns and themes (Table 1). I used a template with columns for each interviewee linked to various questions – and quotes. I continued by reducing the data through coding and labelling each code, sought for recurrence of the coded text and links with different codes (Bryman). I was informed by the abductive approach, where both theoretical concepts and passion for identifying patterns without referring to theoretical framework, both guided the coding (Dey, 2004; Patton, 2002 in Bolin 2011).

Some themes emerged from asking direct questions while others just emerged from different questions. For example, "doing parenting the Swedish way" emerged from asking specific questions about how professionals expect parents to show love, handle disagreements and relate with children. By reading the transcripts severally, I highlighted repetitions, similarities and differences and placed them under categories. For example, parent-child-interaction and parent-systems-interactions recurred and were placed under the theme accordingly. This was informed by Bryman's emphasis that repetition is a common criterion for establishing themes from a pattern (Bryman, 2012. p 580).

*Table 1. An extract from coding system*

Question	Brenda	Anita	Franca	Candy
How do you expect parents to		Having knowledge about		Having time with children,

show love to children?		children's schools, talking with teachers		showing interest in their school activities, by talking with them
Quote				

In this situation the theme developed from reflecting on the concept parenting and the indicators of good parenting as discussed by researchers like Ramaekers and Suissa (2012). Contrarily, other themes like “perceptions of children as victims of crimes” emerged from responses to questions like: what are the reasons for which parents get involved with CPS and what support services are available. Coming from a country where child abuse is illegal and children witnessing violence is rarely discussed, to the extent of needing social services attention, it came out as a surprise. It often emerged from different questions and discussed passionately. Therefore, responses to the direct questions re-confirmed the existence of this practice among parents.

Secondly, I interpreted opinions and perceptions of professionals within the coding system. I tried to interpret the information closely to what often happens in professionals’ real-life experience. Interpretations were guided by the research questions and theoretical concepts. I constantly reflected on the empirical data and how they related to the relevant theories.

Finally, I related the themes to theories and concepts and also sought for theories and/or concepts that explained the themes better. For example, the theme “different conceptions of childhood” was discussed with a discourse between theoretical concepts and the data. However, “perceptions of children as victims of crimes” emerged from the data and I sought for concepts to explain it. This reflects Bryman’s assertion that “your work can acquire significance only when you theorize in relation to it”. I made efforts to repeat that as it serves as an evaluation measure also, for qualitative research.

The data was presented by first introducing the content and supporting it with relevant quotes from the transcripts. Quotes were presented both verbatim and in parts – to present professionals views and support discussions of themes and concepts. Longer quotes (more than three lines), were presented in a paragraph without quotation marks (GU Handbook, 2014). When part of the

quote was removed it was presented as follows: “...good parenting ...” and/or /.../ good parenting/.../.

The names of professionals (fictive) were presented along the quotes. When information was missing or the sentence was difficult to understand but had been explained in a different way, I put in my word in bracket to reflect what the interviewee meant. Names of interviewees were constantly presented to show whether they worked with social services or resource centre.

## 4.5 Issues of reliability and validity

Bryman (2012) refers to Guba and Lincoln (1994) who assert that it is necessary to specify ways of establishing and assessing the quality of qualitative research. He identifies trustworthiness as a means of assessing qualitative research – which would be discussed further.

Considerations of validity and reliability remain important for most researchers. This is because they strive to develop measurements that measure accurately concepts of interest to them (validity) which also remain consistent from one measurement to the next – reliability, (Gilbert, 1993). For example, in this study, a good parent may be one that is able to show love, handle disagreements and interact with children in a way consistent with the Swedish culture. This reflects what Bryman discusses among others, as concurrent validity – where a criterion is developed to guide the measurement. However, he refers to Wood and Williams (2007)’s study, which used questionnaires; but realised that the slightest variation in wording of questions resulted in different responses. Therefore, since this study uses question guide and sometimes questions were explained further to aid interviewee’s understanding, measurement validity may be difficult to attain for this study. Bryman (2012) again explain that Reliability is concerned with whether say – showing love, handling disagreements and interacting with children could be repeated severally to provide the same responses. It therefore suits quantitative research, which uses questionnaires, but again, its relevance is critiqued (ibid). I agree with him that since qualitative research is not preoccupied with measurement then measurement validity and reliability are not so relevant to this study. However, alternative criteria for evaluating qualitative research are considered below.



#### 4.5.1 Trustworthiness

According to Bryman (2012), generalizing findings from qualitative investigations may be unreasonable for various reasons. For example, interviews often involve selecting small samples through non-probabilistic procedures, making it difficult to generalize findings to other settings or even the sample population. He adds that sometimes it is difficult to enumerate precisely, populations used in qualitative research. Therefore, qualitative findings are to generalize to theory instead of populations

Bolin refers to Kvale (1996) who suggests that an analytical generalization could be used for assessing qualitative data. This, she means the researcher using reasoned judgement about the extent to which one study can point to what might occur in similar situations. In this study, results are discussed with linkages to other research results and theories. This aims at promoting the trustworthiness of the study.

Transparency in accounting for methods used, research process and analytical processes is also mentioned as a way of promoting trustworthiness (Kvale, 1996). This study tries to describe the different stages and processes involved right from the beginning to the end of the research process.

#### 4.5.2 Ethical Considerations

This explains issues regarding how subjects were treated in the study. Bolin (2011) refers to Laine (2001) who states that one characteristic of qualitative research is that the researcher is often in direct contact with people, which consequently have ethical implications. I have been in contact, primarily with professionals at the Social Services and the Resource Centre.

Firstly, I received an introductory note from the Gothenburg University about the Masters' programme and the need to conduct the research as a course requirement.

I showed it to interviewees, when it was necessary. Through verbal interactions and with informed consent forms, the purpose, process and consequences of the study and implications for

participation were explained to interviewees. This was to provide adequate information to professionals, to decide whether to continue in the study or possibly, opt out during the interview process and/or before the results are published. I explained to interviewees the possibility of contacting them again with follow-up questions, during the analysis period. No money was given as compensation; the professionals understood the need for the study and willingly agreed to be interviewed.

The face-to-face interviews were conducted in the month of March and follow up questions through email were done between April and May. This was during the analysis when it was realized that few more information was needed. Before each interview, professionals were provided with informed consent forms detailing the research purpose, and issues of confidentiality. I was concerned about the small number of professionals interviewed, and the fact that they may be familiar with each person's orientations and way of work; they might trace who says what in the final report. Therefore, female fictive names were used in the analysis to enforce anonymity. It was explained that interviews may last between one hour and one hour thirty minutes, and recording of interviews was preferred to enable easy transcription and analysis.

Again, it was explained that the information sought was strictly for academic purposes and professionals' participation was greatly valued. The interviews were recorded with a phone (Samsung Galaxy, X3), with consent from the professionals. The questions involved professionals experiences with immigrant parents, some questions required them to provide examples. However, private questions and questions that could be harmful to professionals' work were avoided. All transcribed material has been securely saved and stored and would be deleted after the report is finalized. Each of the two organizations would be provided with the final report to enable them know how information they provided was used.

## 4.6 Limitations to the study

Results of this study should be interpreted with caution because of the small sample size (7) representing views of two groups of professionals. The professionals were selected through a

snowball sampling procedure; making it difficult to generalize these findings to all child protection professionals in the two organisations. Professionals were difficult to reach and I believe if more professionals were interviewed, the result might have been somewhat different. However, this study is concerned with quality of information. Again only (1) male compared to five (5) females, was interviewed at the Social Services. Two males were interviewed from the Resource Centre. Although more females than males are employed by social services, the sample does not reflect the population of professionals there.

Professionals described parenting challenges among immigrant parents. These accounts may be missing the actual experiences and the nuances of parenting, since it gives a third-persons' perspective of what happens in specific situations. Therefore I acknowledge that these participants' perceptions may not be consistent with "facts" (D'Cruz and Gillingham, 2014) about challenges parents face. However, since perceptions influence experiences more than objective facts (ibid), their responses are taken as valid for parents they meet.

Despite these limitations, the study adds to literature and understanding of challenges faced by immigrant parents in countries where language is a barrier and how professionals support them.

## 4.7 About the Child Protection Service and Resource Centre

The Social Services play important role in implementing Swedish health and welfare policies. They collaborate with the Resource Centre towards child protection. The two organizations play investigative and care roles, respectively. However, provide almost the same services and the Resource Centre normally receives referrals from social services. The services provided are voluntarily and free of charge. They include family therapy, MST, MVP, Contact family, Contact person<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup>Family therapy – It involves various specializations – individual, couple, family, reflective counseling and network mobilizing. To parents having difficulties with parenting – required to have service base on compliant reports or parents' own application. Between 6 weeks and 1 year.

MST – It is a treatment for youth, 12 and 16 years exhibiting problematic behaviors –school and relational problems, involved in criminality, drugs etc. Provided for up to 5 months.

Social Services also purchase programmes such as foster parents, institutional placements, shelters for abused women.

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MVP – It is an investigative or after treatment program for children 0 -18 whose parents are suspected or proved abusive. Between 6 weeks and 1 year.

Contact family – It is form of social network provided to children, 6 months and 2 years (+) - who lack important family figures in their lives.

Contact person – It is provided to youth, who need exposure to social activities and introduced to extended supportive relationships aimed at providing support to parent and siblings

## 5 Findings and Analyses

This chapter presents the empirical data mainly from interviews. Data are presented to reflect a general introduction of how parents get involved with the child protection system. This is followed by discussions of themes under each research question. Themes are discussed and supported by direct quotes from professionals. Some quotes highlight agreements and contradictions from interviews and are supported or/and challenged with relevant literature. The research questions are:

- What expectations of parenting do child protection professionals hold?
- What difficulties do immigrant parents in Gothenburg face?
- What services are put in place (if there are) to help immigrants bring up their children (in a way that suits the Swedish culture).

### 5.1 Discussions under research questions

This section gives an introduction of how parents get involved with CPS. It then presents and discusses themes under each research question. Under the first research question, expectations about parenting are explained to reflect: *showing love, handling disagreements and commitment to children*. Findings under the second research question explain three categories of challenges faced by parents: *category one challenges, category two challenges and category three challenges*. Quotes presented reflect opinions of the following professionals: Anita Brenda (Soc. S), (Soc. S), Candy (Soc. S), Eva (Soc. S), Hada (Soc. S) and Franca (RC) and Gaby (RC). The quotes selected reflect responses that capture what most interviewees said, are good examples to explain what is discussed at a particular time and/or reflect important contradictions that explain the phenomenon under discussion.

### 5.1.1 Becoming involved with Child Protection System

This explains how parents get involved with the CPS, either voluntarily or involuntarily. It discusses sources of mandatory reports and roles performed by Professionals at Social Services (Soc. S) and Resource Centre (RC) – respectively.

The data revealed that interviewed child protection professionals<sup>5</sup> often work with immigrant families and children between the ages of 0 and 16 years. Parents get involved with the CPS either voluntarily or involuntarily. The involvement is voluntary if individuals personally approach the child protection service or the resource centre for help. It is normally because parents identify problems with parenting and need help accordingly. According to the professionals, parents get involved voluntarily when they: have difficulty resolving conflict with children, need guidance with communicating with children or setting age appropriate boundaries, have teenage children involved with criminality and need help for themselves on drug and alcohol addiction issues.

All seven (7) interviewed professionals say that, parents and families can also become “a case” with CPS, if institutions required by law to act as mandatory reporters of child abuse and neglect, report cases. Majority of reports come from schools, then hospitals, dental facilities, police and prisons (concerning children of parents serving jail terms). Again, citizens and family members concerned about the welfare of children could also make reports. Reports are normally based on suspicion of a problematic home situation. Problematic home situations<sup>6</sup> include; abuse and neglect for younger children, violence against children and between parents, irregular school and hospital attendance, teenagers involved with fights and crimes. After reports are made, then the investigative role of professionals at Soc. S, which are usually carried out within a maximum of 4 months period, begins. Two professionals say the investigation period involves frequent meetings with the parents and children, resource centre and other systems. When asked about why people make reports, Anita (Soc. S) explained as follows:

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<sup>5</sup>Child Protection Professionals – both professionals working at the Social Services and the Resource Centre.

<sup>6</sup> Problematic home situations – abuse and neglect for younger children, violence against children and between parents, irregular school and hospital attendance, teenagers involved with fights and crimes

They [schools]<sup>7</sup> have obligation by law to contact us if they suspect a child doesn't have a good home situation. So maybe if a kindergarten child comes to school in dirty clothes or with bruises....If they have a suspicion, they don't need facts... then it's our job [as professionals] to find out if it's bad at home or just a suspicion.

I observe that professionals interact with mandatory reporters towards protecting children. All professionals (from Soc. S) explain that if a suspicion is substantiated, the family is offered "needs based" support to help improve the situation. They investigate the families' circumstances to ascertain if the child is at risk, as suspected. The results of the investigation determine the kind of services provided, and whether parents/families should be engaged further, for which case they are referred to the resource centre. This confirms professionals' need for evidence for decision making as Harris (2012) discusses, but it may be in "children's best interest" contrary to the misunderstood position Harris discusses in the literature review. Nonetheless, professionals' decisions to support families are not based on suspicions. Professionals work in consultation with parents and other systems<sup>8</sup> that have frequent contacts with the child and can provide information to help substantiate reports received. Anita (Soc. S) adds that:

[We receive reports] mostly from schools and we do our reports... we can collect a lot of information ... from different systems...to verify the suspicion.... So if a teacher suspects family violence because he has seen bruises [on the child] and the parents say maybe the child fell down..., we can talk to the doctor and check his folder to see if the family has visited the hospital several times with similar thing [s].... We can [also] ask the school to fill [in] different documents ... And [also] ask the police if parents have been arrested before.

This somewhat reflects interactions between professionals and important systems in the child's life (within the mesosystem) who often interact with the child. Hence could have valuable information to help professionals make informed decision. About five (5) professionals

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<sup>7</sup> Insertions in brackets are my words.

<sup>8</sup> Systems – school, hospital, dental institutions, recreational centers, etc.

mentioned that they investigate the child's needs with particular interest in what parents themselves can contribute "in meeting those needs".

"In the report we look at what the children need and how parents see to it that the children get the [help] they need. ... But when we have finished with our reports... and if the family doesn't want any help we shut down the report" (Anita, Soc. S).

Brenda (Soc. S) also presents the need for agreeing with parents on help needed as follows;

So as soon as we and the parent agree that there is a problem that we need to solve, they get access to this [help from resource centre] and even if... we feel like this [it] isn't such a big problem but if the parent feels like it is, they get access [anyway].

The information presented indicates that professionals (who fall within the exosystem) interact with systems that interact with the child daily or frequently (parents and school) in the microsystem. Professionals' interactions with parents and school illustrates Bronfenbrenner (1994)'s argument that within the exosystem, processes take place between two or more settings, at least one of which does not contain the child or interact with her daily. However, whose interactions may positively or negatively affect the child

According to interviewed professionals, help provided to families after investigations, are voluntary - professionals agree with parents on the problem and help needed. Parents have the right to refuse services because if they do not see the need for it then providing help will not be useful. Most professionals say that for parents who resist help, they find alternative means of getting them to understand the problem and receive help – instead of forcing help on them, which might not be useful. This somewhat reflects the social work value of self-determination which supports clients' right to freely make decisions that contribute towards changing their situation (Slonim-Nevo, 1996)

"... I don't believe in forcing somebody for anything [help]... because how helpful will that be? .... [Instead] we motivate people... to be aware of their problems and when they want to change their situation, then, we can help them...." (Candy, Soc. S)



This, furthermore, might be demonstrating professionals' understanding that parents are the ones to live with outcomes of decisions; hence strive to involve them in solving problematic situations. Most professionals say that parents are aware of professionals' statutory power, but that does not influence their working relationship. They do not force parents to receive help because they possess such power. Candy (Soc. S) adds that:

“.... Social workers have power to take children from parents and parents are aware of that.... But we don't force them to receive help....”

However, after efforts to help parents to improve on their parenting practices, if they still refuse services under home conditions that are detrimental to children's well-being, then professionals could employ their statutory role of taking children from problematic environments into protective care – in the child's best interest. First, help is provided. This is captured by Anita (Soc. S) accordingly:

[after] our report,... if the family doesn't want any help [we end the session] and in some cases when they don't want help and we see that *they really need it* ..., then we use this law [LVU] <sup>9</sup> that uses force [and] place the child in a different home. But first we have to offer them some help. The main thing is that [we prefer that] the child live[s] with the parents but in some cases where the parents do drugs, are criminals [and] hit the child we [rationalize that] we have to [re]move the child.

According to professionals in the social services, they perform the investigative and assessment roles mentioned above. They however work closely with social workers specialized in different areas at the resource centre – that provide direct services to parents.

The professionals at the resource centre confirm that they engage parents/families directly towards ensuring improved parenting practices. They also provide services based on family

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<sup>9</sup> The Care of Young Persons Act (LVU) - regulates taking children and youth into care without the parents' or children's consent.

needs and involve parents in the planning and helping processes. Their counterparts at the social services had mentioned this earlier.

Almost all professionals provide “needs based” help and allow parents/families to tell whether they see any improvements or change in their situation before ending the session. This helps to assess the impact of intervention on an individual level, and based on a family’s satisfaction, terminate the contract. Families are however welcome anytime to receive help again – voluntarily if they want. However, there are times that old cases could be re-opened due to new reports.

## 5.2 Doing parenting the Swedish way

This section presents how interviewed professionals discuss their expectations about parenting. Professionals’ responses to research question one “what expectations about parenting do child protection professionals’ hold?” helped develop the theme, *doing parenting the Swedish way*. They captured how parents in general and immigrant parents in particular – should relate with their children in acceptable ways in the Swedish culture. They are showing love, handling disagreements and commitment to children.

### 5.2.1 Showing love

Showing love is a category under the theme, *doing parenting the Swedish way*. Professionals were asked how they expect parents to show love to children. Ramaekers and Suissa (2012) in their book “The Claims of Parenting” explain that love (and play) maintains functional relationship with children’s development. For example parents who “spend quality time” with children develop a healthy and emotionally stable individual. I therefore, wanted to understand professionals’ construction of love in the Swedish context, and, if they could demonstrate it and have reasons for expecting parents to show love.

In showing love, interviewed professionals expect parents to express verbally how they feel – tell children they love them and show it “through actions”. By spending time with children, playing

and taking them out. Getting involved with their everyday lives, especially school activities and knowing whom they hung out with. These confirm some practices of love discussed by (Ramaekers and Suissa, 2012). They also expect parents to appreciate children and let them feel cared for by supporting them through developmental stages, providing for their needs and by not neglecting them. Gaby (RC) responds accordingly to how she expects parents to show love to children:

A parent should be able to say it, ...communicate [it through], hugs and kisses, proper nourishment, caring and spending time with them, help[ing] them achieve what they want to achieve in life, and again buying them clothes, things for proper development.... It's a great achievement for a parent to be able to communicate love verbally.

Most professionals interviewed identify parents' ability to tell children they love them as very rewarding, as it costs nothing but very useful for parents who cannot demonstrate love by providing material thing. A similar view was expressed by Threlfall, Seay, and Kohl (2013), when they examined the low-income African American fathers' perception about parenting.... Although the men were financially deprived, they expressed their roles to provide, nurture and teach but emphasised on 'being there for their children. Providing children with needs for development comes out strongly among professionals. However, they seem to prioritize parental involvement in children's daily lives over the provision of material stuff. According to Candy (Soc. S):

When we ask some parents to tell us how they love their kids, many think by buying iPhone.... But we think [otherwise], having time with children, being interested in (their) activities or school, by talking with them, finding out what happened at school. Showing interest in what they love [like] sports. These come before material stuff". Eva (Soc. S) expresses a similar opinion:

"... I feel [some] parents think they show love...." They go like; we give them everything, TV, phone, material stuff so why are they complaining?"

These accounts may be reflecting a gap in professionals' expectation about showing love and what some parents actually do, or think they should do. It may also be enforcing professionals' conceptions of the child as "being" and not "becoming" resulting from their social work education in Sweden or influenced by individualists' and child protection legislation in Sweden – that guide practice. This may contradict the pre-migration beliefs and customs influencing child-rearing practices among immigrant parents. Therefore emphasise the need to identify contradictory beliefs within the macrosystem which ultimately influence parenting practices at the microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1994) and address them accordingly. Contrarily, professionals' expectations could be reflecting what Ramaekers and Suissa (2012) refer to as the third persons' perception about parenting. According to the authors, this sometimes differs from what the first person (involved in direct-parent-child relation) experiences. Professionals seem to adopt the 'what a child needs is love' approach where from a third person's perspective, parents' role involves providing love, warmth and protection to be good parents (Ramaekers and Suissa, 2012, p. 69). Although these qualities might differ from parents' perspective, parents who do not demonstrate them might miss the mark of good parents.

### 5.2.2 Handling Disagreements

This section presents professionals expectations about how parents should handle disagreements as acceptable in Sweden.

Almost all interviewed professionals share a common opinion regarding handling disagreements. They believe that handling disagreements should not end in violence (physical or verbal) so as to attract CP notifications or make children feel less loved. Professionals meet some parents that exhibit violent traits when they disagree with children. As professionals perceive the need to promote safe environment for children, they work within laws that strictly 'say no' to violence. For example the current Swedish child welfare legislation identifies children experiencing physical and psychological violence and sexual abuse – among others – as needing care and protection, hence intervene accordingly (Gilbert et al., 2011, p. 9). Nonetheless, professionals believe maintaining patience and adopting alternative means are more preferred. Candy, presenting her thoughts radically, says:

/ .../ we expect parents to stop being violent /... /

Professionals perceive communication as the most critical means in handling disagreements with children. They express the need for parents to communicate love while explaining parental responsibilities towards guiding them. This becomes essential before they reach age 18, where they can decide for themselves, because the Swedish law no longer classifies them as children. Similar reasoning is expressed about parents being responsible for explaining good and wrong acts to children – because they enable children develop good traits (Cheah et al., 2013; Ramaekers, Suissa, and SpringerLink, 2012).

Anita (Soc. S) responding to how to handle disagreements says:

I think it's important to communicate with children when we disagree [with them] and [let them] know that my parents love me anyway. ... [Also discussing] parents' role is important until they are 18 [years] and can decide [for themselves]".

By stressing the importance of communication, Gaby shares tips she provides to clients that have proved helpful overtime. She thinks considering a child's age to understanding specific parental roles and responsibilities facilitates communication, when handling disagreements. She says:

"[I propose] communicated, well explained boundaries at specific stages [even before disagreements set in].... But children should [be made to] understand parents' protective role and responsibilities to setting rules"

Such boundaries, she labels "structural boundary" where instead of spanking a child, parents should use more concrete structures that portray a kind of "give and take" relationship. Franca (RC) shared a similar example that supported the "give and take" relationship. They explain that it usually works with something the child loves to do. For example, setting a rule to get a child to eat and watch his favourite TV programme at the same time. Gaby (RC) illustrates it as follows:

*Desired action: eat your food.*

*Rule: you leave the table when I say so. Leaving before I say so means no TV.*

“The child probably doesn’t want to eat because he wants to watch TV. Although he may refuse and [whine] initially, he later realizes that it’s easier to eat the food than miss the TV programme which he finds [more rewarding]”.

She explains that the parent restricts the child on something he loves [watching TV] in exchange for obeying the rule [eating]. In addition, since the child gets what he loves anyway, he is less likely to interpret his parent’s action as “not loving”.

Most parents when handling disagreements might miss this point. She however, cautions that this may not work for all children and depends on a child’s age.

Expectations discussed by professionals on violence and communication while handling disagreement, reflect Baumrind’s authoritative parenting style discussed in the literature review. The authoritative parent, who values disciplined conformity and affirmation for children’s autonomy, would seldom encounter problems with CPS since already they encourage verbal dialogue and explain reasons for rules, to children. These however, are in line with what the professionals find “good parenting” skills. Contrarily, parents who manage children using excessive physical discipline – reflecting authoritarian parenting – could have their children having bruises, running from home or engaging in high risk behaviours that could attract child protection notifications (Lewig et al., 2010, p. 7)

### 5.2.3 Commitment to Children

This section captures the last opinion of interviewed professional’s expectations of how parents should relate with children. Parents’ commitment to children is categorized into two. The nature of: parent-child interaction and parent-system interaction, thus important systems in children’s life.

#### **Nature of parent-child interaction**

Among the common expectations mentioned by professionals was parents’ ability to maintain emotional connection with children from infancy through adulthood. Professionals expect such

emotional connections even when children are too young to talk. They expect it to show in how parents understand and respond to children's needs and set rules as children age – without being overly intrusive or distant. Parents are expected to balance support for children emotionally and physically while also maintaining their stance as parents. The following are Brenda and Anita's assertions, respectively:

Emotional connection is one of the most important things that we look for, especially in younger children who are not old enough to talk... [I look out for] emotional connection... How parents respond to the children's signals (or) listens to what children say".

Brenda (Soc. S) also says:

"... It's important that they [parents] maintain emotional contact ... be able to be the parent [and] not some friend or something [else]. A parent should be able to decide the rules of the family and not the children" Anita (Soc. S)

All professionals interviewed, generally reckon that parents' inability to maintain this connection can have detrimental effects. They share experiences of some parents' who lose confidence when children take over control and authority from them. This, they say is common among immigrant populations where parents become inactive upon realizing that their parenting tool, "disciplining through hitting" are made redundant by the Swedish law, hence cannot act. This supports findings by Cheah et al. (2013, p. 5) that Chinese parents rely on strict discipline and firm control (Authoritarian or African parenting) to ensure that children behaved well – while residing in the US. They were more likely to use physical and verbal punishment than US parents. Parents accustomed to disciplining in this manner may be frustrated in a culture where it is forbidden.

It may be confirming why immigrant parents in Ramaekers et al. (2012)'s work strongly resisted independence and autonomy among children and demanded that children submit to authority. Lewig et al. (2010) also reported frustrations among refugee parents (immigrants) in Australia about the consequences of independence for their children and how it affected parent-child

relationships. Particularly, they felt the Australian culture and laws severely challenged their traditional roles, making disciplining methods known to them no longer useful.

Anita (Soc. S) explains how such occurrences affect parents:

Sometimes we meet families where the children have taken over the control and...the parents say that they can't [control them]... maybe [because] they are very used to using violence to enforce rules.... And...it's illegal in Sweden; [so] they don't have the tools to enforcing rules without using violence.... And [the children] take control from them.

These accounts reflect the pathological parent-child role change discussed by Garber (2011) and Hooper (2007) as parentification. It may also be frustrating for parents to know that their pre-migration parenting skills “which worked” are not considered good parenting skills in Sweden.

### **Nature of interaction with systems**

This section presents interviewed professionals' expectations of how parents should interact with important systems in the child's life like schools, hospitals, and recreational centres. These systems may interact with other systems one way or the other and their interactions may directly or indirectly influence the child's development (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

Professionals expect parents to understand the roles of important systems in children's lives and engage with them appropriately. Professionals consider the school as very vital in children's lives; therefore expect parents to interact with teachers, understand their roles and not shirk their parental responsibilities. They believe such interactions enhance parents' understanding of children's needs and behaviour in school. It also contributes positively towards child outcomes since parents and teachers form collaborating partners towards children's well-being.

According to Anita (Soc. S):

“... [Parents should] have knowledge about children's schools, understand their [the schools'] role, not expecting too much from the school, talking with teachers, knowing where and who children hung out with....”



Personally, coming from a developing country, where frequent parent-teacher engagements (if care is not taken) could be misconstrued as seeking favours or attempting to intimidate teachers (anecdotal information), I wondered whether it is not too intrusive. Professionals in this study do not find it intrusive if parents frequently call teachers to discuss children's well-being, know how they behave or follow them to school when they suspect absenteeism in children. I reckon, that the school, hospital, dental institutions, recreational centre, etc. mentioned in the interviews are included in the mesosystem; hence their processes directly affect the child. Parents who interact often with teachers can easily inform the teachers about their children's strengths and weaknesses, and in turn, parents can be updated about how their children behave in school. They can ask teachers about the rights' children are taught and teachers will be comfortable discussing suspicions that would have been reported directly to Social Services – for parents to seek help if needed. Earlier researchers have found such interactions to positively influence children's academic skills and provide opportunities for teachers and parents to understand children's activities in home and school contexts (Roopnarine et al., 2006). If parents do not interact with these systems to promote children's well-being but exhibit unacceptable parenting practices then they risk being reported mandatorily since the systems perform their roles – with or without parents' approval.

Another feature of interaction expected by professionals is parent's ability to access – seek and receive – help. Almost all professionals interviewed find rewarding, parents who are able to know when their children need help and accept it accordingly. There is a consensus among professionals' responses that most parents they meet face parenting difficulties as found by Lewig et al. (2010) some of whom according to them, even fear losing children to the host country. However, it makes a difference to them when parents understand children's needs at particular times and seek help from the right system. Accessing help includes seeking medical or psychological help for children or even approaching social services or the resource centre for self-help – towards improving parenting.

“I expect them [parents] to ask for help when they need it. I expect a good parent to receive help when we say that we feel like you could use some help... [they should] maybe say if you say so then we could try this”

Reviewing this from the eye of the ecological theory, expectations reflect the need for parents to engage with systems in the exosystem. It consists of neighbours, media, legal and social services, whose interaction, indirectly affect the child. When professionals narrated experiences with good parents, this came out strongly. A parent who is able to put the child's needs first and go to the right places for help. Their engagements with voluntary clients stress this point. Thus, some parents are able to identify their need for support to be good parents – ranging from being able to relate with children, seeking medical help, quitting addiction or leaving the violent men in their lives. Professionals expect this from parents because they know that policies and services exist to support parents. However, one cannot vouch that parents are aware of such policies and services. Therefore, there is need for accessible information to enhance engagements among systems in the exosystem.

## 5.3 Parental Challenges

This section presents challenges faced by parents in general and immigrant parents in particular. They emerged when interviewed professionals responded to specific questions under the second research question: “what difficulties do immigrant parents face in Gothenburg?” Discussions reflected parents inability to “do parenting” as acceptable in the Swedish culture. Challenges that emerged are grouped into three (3) categories; First Category Challenges – Parenting expectations set too high: Second Category Challenges– Relational challenges and Third Category Challenges – Individual and structural challenges. The unacceptable parental practices are first introduced.

### 5.3.1 Unacceptable Parental Practices

This presents practices that emerged from the interviews as existing and could be practiced by both Swedish and non-Swedish parents. Interviews with professionals and literature show that normally, social services will not engage parents, unless their parental practices are unaccepted in Sweden. Therefore, parents may not be expected to exhibit them. They include physical and verbal abuse of children, exposure of children to frequent violence between parents, neglecting

children physically and denying their emotional and material needs. Such practices are perceived under the Swedish child welfare legislations as needing care and protection (Gilbert et al., 2011).

### 5.3.2 First Category Challenges – Parenting expectations set too high.

These challenges, according to interviewed Professionals reflect common challenges faced by all parents – whether Swedish or non-Swedish.

Parents experiencing these challenges may exhibit the unacceptable practices discussed above but do not seek help. Some professionals think that parents who fall under this category may be aware of parental expectations in Sweden, but find them extremely high to meet. The following are accounts by two professionals Eva and Gaby, respectively.

Society expects a lot from parents today. Parents need to do a lot for children, e.g. care for them, know about society, [children's] school and how they act in school, set rules good at specific age and attend all check-ups at different [locations]. And sometimes it's hard to meet them [all]" Eva (Soc. S).

In presenting a similar view, Gaby adds another perspective; lack of capacity of parents to meet these high expectations. She says:

It is difficult being a parent and understanding [roles of] systems that they interact with.... Understand[ing] a teacher... a school counsellor, recreation therapist, doctors. And parents do a lot of loving that takes a lot of energy so don't have the capacity to understand these [other] roles.

Most of the professionals are of the opinion that the Swedish system requires a lot from parents, thereby making it difficult for parents to meet up. However, they did not mention how to deal with these societal expectations on a structural level. This may indicate that further investigations exploring how parents manage to meet these expectations and ways to help them may be important to informing policies on parenting.

### 5.3.3 Second Category Challenges - Relational challenges

These are also challenges affecting all parents, whether Swedish or non-Swedish that have relational problems with children, but do not seek help.

The challenges that professionals think parents they meet face include difficulty relating with children. Some parents are unable to balance emotional contact, trust children and maintain age-specific rules. They think parents sometimes struggle with knowing how their children behave outside home – since some children exhibit “double standards” – while at home and outside home. This is a major source of conflict between parents and children. Anita reports it as follows:

For all parents I think it's hard to balance rules and emotional contact and also all parents may be struggling with how their children when outside behave.... Sometimes we meet families where the police have caught the child destroying or stealing... and the parents have hard time believing because the child is calm...at home....”Anita (Soc. S).

One professional believes these challenges get more challenging in societies where children are more technologically advanced than their parents are. Hence, although parents may set rules preventing children from interacting with strangers on say internet, they find difficulty in maintaining such rules because they lack understanding of how social media, like Facebook or skype work.

Such situations seemingly put parenting styles adopted by parents to test. Professionals think parents may require some proficiency in settling relational problems without hindering their development. Pardeck and Pardeck (1990) acknowledged that parenting style is important to controlling adolescents' autonomy. He refers to Becker (1964) who divides control strategies into love-oriented – involving praise and reasoning and power assertive – extremely authoritarian, valuing physical punishment. He purported that since the use of either of these two or the Baumrind's classical parenting styles have implications for adolescents development, integration between love-oriented and authoritative parenting style – is suggested.

### 5.3.4 Third Category Challenges (a) - Individual challenges

This category is specific to immigrant parents who face two groups of challenges. They are personal and structurally related. The personal challenges may be interrelated with the first two category challenges – discussed above. The structural challenges are somewhat created by the system within which immigrants live. They include integration related problems – segregation, unemployment and language related problems.

The interviews reflect difficulties parents face with meeting parental expectations in Sweden. Parents may consequently exhibit unacceptable practices including: abusing children physically and verbally, neglecting and exposing them to parental violence. These practices may be common among parents having trouble with partners, and post-traumatic stress. Sometimes these parents displace their anger on children. This is consistent with reference by D'Cruz and Gillingham (2014) to earlier research that children of mothers who experience maternal stress and mental ill health have increased health risks across the life course.

About half of the professionals say reports of violence against children and between partners are common among immigrants and think culture also contributes, accordingly. To this, Franca explains:

Violence may be more common in immigrant families. [Also] different ways of raising children, cultural difference, post-traumatic [stress] which could get worse because they stay indoors often, without jobs, they think a lot... things can get worse and they translate it to children and partners.

Some professionals mentioned “spanking”, “holding ear” “pushing” “maintaining stricter boundaries for girls than boys” as contributing to violence against children. These may exist because immigrant parents desire to maintain hierarchical role definitions and adherence to norms of their home country as presented by Chao (1994) in the reviewed literature.

### 5.3.5 Third Category Challenges (b) – Structural challenges

These are immigrant-specific challenges, often created by the system they live in. Parents often have limited control over them, and challenges may require policy reviews and programming to change. From the interviews, these challenges reflect the inability of some immigrant parents to meet parental expectations in Sweden because they face multiple difficulties that make parenting difficult.

When professionals talk about challenges immigrant parents face, on the third category, different forms of challenges emerge as structural challenges. Integration related problems emerged strongly. Many factors like unemployment, living in segregated communities, and language barrier with its related problems emerged as being linked with integration. The segregated conditions of immigrants may be confirming Johansson (2013)'s assertion that the Swedish welfare state has failed to include most immigrants despite its multicultural approach – resulting in increasing segregation of immigrants. Most professionals explain that immigrants are less often integrated into the society and therefore they feel isolated from the Swedish society. Anita (Soc. S) states that:

In this suburb is poverty and overcrowded living circumstances.... [Other] problems come from unemployment... and exclusion from society. And I will say immigrants are more likely to live in these areas and more likely to be excluded than Swedish parents"

Interviewed professionals say that immigrants often live in segregated areas, dominated by immigrant populations, which makes socialization with non-immigrants difficult. Such areas often have youth crimes and gang activities, thereby making parents worry about who their children associate with. Schools in such communities may not measure up to other areas, thereby affecting children's education. Two professionals discussed the poor quality of education in these areas. One explained further that it is often difficult to enrol children in schools in communities with higher standards, considering the low financial standing of immigrants.

These circumstances may make parenting difficult for immigrant parents. This situation may be common among immigrants in developed countries. A similar study among refugee parents

(immigrants) in Australia also reported that poverty and social isolation affect parents (Grant and Guerin, 2014). Franca (RC) expresses her view as follows:

“...The immigrant parents they all meet the process of integration, sometimes you [they] are not sure about what is happening with job, with apartment, about choice of school too [for children]...”

Brenda (Soc. S) shares a similar opinion:

[Immigrant] parents don't meet many Swedish adults, are not able to find jobs, mostly live among countrymen.... The community [is] full of violence, crime, worrying about who your child hangs out with. [One] needs to be a “hard parent”<sup>10</sup> to protect his children in such environment[s]

Another common problem observed by Professionals is how language creates conflicts between parents and children. While children learn Swedish easily and speak it fluently, their parents struggle with it. However, in a country like Sweden where parents are expected to be involved in children’s school, recreational, hospital and other important activities, language becomes an extremely valuable asset. Parents need to speak Swedish in order to help children with Swedish homework, and participate in school and hospital meetings. While parents feel isolated from the society, their children get very integrated. Lewig et al. (2010) reported a similar finding on assimilation when they said that children assimilate easily into new societies than adults who are often isolated within the host community than children. Immigrant children, mostly teenagers, are seen to know much more about the society than parents.

They sometimes interpret societal laws and content of letters to parents. Some professionals say it gives a lot of responsibility to children and they begin to take power from parents. This process is consistent with the parentification discussed earlier by Garber (2011) and Hooper (2007). One professional explained the “cultural shock” that parents experience, upon realising the difference

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<sup>10</sup> Hard parent – a parent who is very strict.

between the host and home country when the adult seems to know everything and children hardly speak.

According to Candy (Soc. S):

They know more about the society and their rights, and even explain to parents. For example if they go to hospital, the kids [sometimes] translate so the kid of gain power. Therefore, when parents are there to set the boundaries, it's too late because the kids already have power.

### 5.3.6 Supporting Parents become Good Parents

This section presents discussions under the third research question on “how parents are supported to become good parents”. It presents what professionals do when they realize that parental practices conflict with parental expectations in Sweden. The kinds of supports available to all parents in general and immigrant parents in particular and how professionals provide the support, are discussed. The following themes are discussed: *needs based approach, different approaches to work, conflicting perceptions of childhoods, and perceptions of children as victims of crimes and professionals and challenges*

### 5.3.7 Support Services - Providing Needs Based Help

Professionals support both Swedish and non- Swedish parents. The interviews reveal a consensus among all professionals that when inconsistencies are found between parenting practices and parental expectations discussed, they play a role in providing support for improved parenting. Two professionals explain that they use BBIC<sup>11</sup>, an assessment tool to guide all assessments. Moreover, services are provided based on individual needs and not whether someone is Swedish or immigrant. When asked about whether services that target immigrants exist, Candy (Soc. S) stated that:

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<sup>11</sup> BBIC - Barns Behov I Centrum, meaning Children's needs at the center.



*/.../ No, (we use) BBIC, is ...something that guide us/.../*

Among all professionals, the family therapy comes out strongly as the most common service recommended for parents. They attribute this to the flexibility in designing interventions to fit the needs of different families. According to Anita (Soc. S):

“... The most common [service] is the family therapy.... If I have [my report indicates] different needs in different families... I can direct the family therapist on what things I want him to work on.”

The Resource Centre offer services to parents based on what is agreed on by professionals at Social Services. Children, whose family situation indicates a need for placement in different homes, are also placed accordingly. Both groups of professionals acknowledge that immigrant parents often need interpreters during meetings and they provide accordingly. Some professionals also said that sometimes when they need help understanding particular cultural situations, they hire cultural interpreters. Professionals at the Resource Centre, also confirm not seeing differences, when providing services to parents:

*/.../ I don't see differences, I am blind to them, I see parents [and] child's needs. /.../ (Franca)*

They explain further saying, sometimes the needs of families require them to just listen to them or help mobilize their immediate network – and they do just that.

One contrasting view for the need for provision of “needs based” support was provided by Hada (Soc. S), who although favours the provision of “needs based” support thinks is required to help parents to fit into the Swedish culture. She says:

“They [immigrants] get the same help as Swedish.... No they don't have different needs.... They also need to know...how you [to] raise children here. They get all the information that you [all parents] need”

The provision of needs based support is very important and reflects professionals' acknowledgement of their professional ethics for approaching clients with respect and dignity

and without discrimination. However, professionals seem to be solving structural problems requiring policy reviews on an individual level. This raises questions of rights for immigrant parents, in that they need specific supports in order to meet parenting requirements of the host country. To this, many researchers have recommended the provision of culturally appropriate support services that strengthen families and community's capacity to parent (AIHW; 2005, p. 94 in Grant and Guerin (2014) ). Since this may not be within the mandates of professionals, they may have to play their roles as advocates towards ensuring that systems responsible for that would act holistically to help parents.

Additionally, the statement by Hada, "No they [immigrants] don't have different needs" seem to indicate elements of ignorance about cultural differences between Sweden and Immigrants' home countries. This would have raised issues about her background since she is an immigrant herself, so may be perceived to know about existent cultural differences. Like all interviewed professionals, she has social work education in Sweden. Therefore may be expected to possess the cultural competencies provided by Swedish social work education that supposedly promotes an appreciation of global issues which impact on local concerns – as discussed by Lyons (2006). However, I went back to her transcript, and found previous statements, which indicate her knowledge about cultural awareness. For example, when asked about challenges immigrants faced she said:

"....For some of them it's hard to raise their children as they want and as their culture allows them to do...."

This indicates enforcement of professional practice requiring child protection professionals to be "blind to differences" and see needs – especially of children.

### 5.3.8 Perceptions of Children as Victims of Crime

Although earlier discussions convey the idea that professionals see parents as experts over their families as some professionals say, (discussed earlier), it introduces another perspective. Professionals perceive what I call, the "magnetic effect" of family problems. Thus, when a problem affects one family member, especially parents, it somewhat affects other family

members directly or indirectly. It reflects a systems' way of viewing the family. Hada (Soc. S) emphasises this by saying:

[In my work with domestic violence group] ... usually I meet men [that beat their wives and] they say yeah, I told her to clean or cook and she didn't. [Things like these] affect the whole family even if the child isn't the one being beaten. So it's not only about hitting the child, it involves the child seeing a parent being hit

Children who observe mothers being beaten may not be seen as offensive in immigrants' home countries. For some, it may be an offensive act but may not attract CP notifications. Some professionals think the depth of research explaining effects of children witnessing such violence contributes to the seriousness that professionals attach to it. From professionals' narrations, such children are perceived as "victims of crimes" that need support or be removed from the violent environment because of adverse future effects on them. It however illustrates how processes and interactions within the child's immediate environment affect him/her. The professionals, (in the exosystem) who in the Swedish system are aware of the effect of such interactions, come in to enforce the child protection legislation in Sweden by supporting parents or removing children if necessary.

Mostly [reports are about] violence against children and between parents we don't see any difference between child being hit and child witnessing violence. Because research shows that those children [witnessing violence] are exactly the same as those being hit.... It's a big part [of our work]". Candy (Soc. S).

## 5.4 Conflicting conceptualizations of childhood at play

Listening to professionals speak about violence within families revealed that their conceptualizations of childhood, differ from that of parents they meet. While professionals perceive children as competent individuals that understand the world, they think most immigrant parents hold different views. They believe this affects how professionals and parents respond to

children's needs differently. This creates challenges for workers in their engagements with parents. Brenda (Soc. S): explains that:

We meet lots of immigrant parents in whose culture; children aren't seen as a person[s] with their own thoughts.... Parents from [such] cultures ... disregard children needs [to contribute to situations around them]. They think [children] don't need to know about this [what goes on] ... are too small to question them as parents..., they should just do what I [parents] say.

*Eva (Soc. S) also thinks that:*

Parents...born in another country raise children in a different way than Swedish parents. So it's not a big deal to like push the head back, taking [pull] the ear, or something. For them, that's how they raise the[ir] children that [and] is a good way. But it's not ok in Sweden.

Professionals tend to understand these as cultural challenges and clashes in orientations about childhood. This gives an indication that some parents maintain the child rearing practices when they migrate. This supports (Cocozza et al., 2010)'s finding among African immigrants who discouraged autonomy, set strict boundaries and adopted hierarchical approach to decision making –that contradicted parenting practices in Australia. They say some parents, including Swedes, find difficulty in processing and discussing reports filed against them – hence deny it and shut professionals off. According to them, some parents think children have too much power in Sweden and making adults [parents and teachers] incapable of disciplining them. Hada (Soc. S) presents this by saying:

Parents think that in Sweden, kids are the ones who decide, they can do whatever they want ... but they will never do that in their [home] countries. If they do that they will get beaten. And teachers back home can discipline children but here they cannot do anything.... For some of them it's hard to raise their children as they want and as their culture allows them to do.

With a similar lens, Candy (Soc. S) points that Swedish laws are somewhat biased towards children's rights, without discussing children's responsibilities in families. Interviewed professionals tend to understand the frustrations parents may be facing, but can only support parents to rear children as acceptable in Sweden. Though they try to discuss children's responsibilities in their own small way, they may need society's support to achieve change.

We tell parents what we expect from them so it will be easy for them. What is expected of parents is included in the law.... [But in] Sweden we talk about parents' responsibilities and children's rights but never talk about children's responsibilities like you do in Africa....We try our best here but when the whole society is not doing that, it becomes hard.

Consequently, since their mandates for work is backed by law, they cannot support parents on issues that are illegal according to Swedish laws.

#### 5.4.1 Different Approaches to Work

Under this theme, discussions on how the two groups of Professionals – those at Social Services and Resource Centre, approach work are presented. Responses from professionals indicate that although they both work towards protecting children, they seem to approach work differently. Their approaches to work are discussed below.

#### 5.4.2 Parents as experts verses professionals as experts

At the Resource Centre, professionals engage parents/families directly while providing service. Parents are approached as partners in whose hands responsibilities for their families are placed. The two professionals interviewed at the Resource Centre, would prefer parents to take helpful cues from them during interaction sessions. They prefer this, to advising parents on their families. This helps to give responsibility to parents as experts of their own families. It also lessens feelings that professionals know what is best for other peoples' families. Surprisingly one professional would even prefer to be challenged about options provided to parents. Gaby (RC) had this to say when asked about his role as professional:

I sometimes use myself as a mirror...I like to be someone in whose conversation... can throw out a bunch of tools so they can pick up and use which one they want .... I see myself as an advisor, I like them to listen to my advice and say that that it's good to hear but wouldn't work for me.

She says she holds this view because of his belief that every family is different and parents know best what is good for their families.

Like all professionals at the Social Services, these professionals also have expectations about parenthood but emphasises more on what parents think is right. For example although Franca thinks communication, is important to “showing love” she believes that individual parents’ idea about “showing love” to their children is more important.

(Showing love) it is an individual thing we don't teach parents how to be a parent, we ask them....What is the culture in your home? We must be very careful because we don't know... Every family has their own culture”. (Franca).

Apart from my observation that Professionals at the Resource Centre “give power” to parents, it could also be observed that they perceive and recognise parents’ vision for a desirable future for their children. This perception can be compared with the Solutions-Based Approach, proposed by Berg and Kelly (2000). The approach, which assumes that families know more about their situations than anyone else, does enable workers and clients to formulate goals and construct solutions together. Evidence of this approach shows when professionals at RC explain their role in parenting.

The following statements indicate the contrasting approaches employed by these two groups of professionals. Hada (Soc. S) and Gaby (RC), respectively say:

When asked about whether immigrant parents need special help, Hada responds accordingly:

They also need to know how it works here [in Sweden]... how children are raised. They get all the information they need so [there's] no difference.... Yes, we have to understand

[their culture], but in the end they have to know how it works here.... It's not like you understand them and let them continue to do what they know [or want to do]

This indicates the social worker as an expert approach. Gaby (RC), responds to the same questions as follows:

Personally, I have children, but what works for one doesn't work for the other.... People see me as an expert; but I don't see myself as an expert on someone's family. I am an expert on family matters... but not in [someone's] family. Parents are the experts in their families.... I can only help them to be better or best" (Gaby).

Gaby's approach to work differs from the investigative and statutory role played by Hada. Hada's statutory power and other working conditions seem to require her to approach work differently. The scope of work and timeline within which professionals at social services operate with may be contributing to this. For example they are expected to complete investigative role within (4) months, have high caseloads, making follow-ups on cases somewhat difficult and burdened with bureaucratic paper work (Berg and Kelly, 2000; Khoo et al., 2002; Gilbert et al., 2011). These professionals "direct parents" to services, they "do not engage them" extensively as professionals at the Resource Centre. High societal expectations (Berg and Kelly, 2000), particularly, "media's eye" on them for what goes right or wrong (ibid).

Anita (Soc. S) explaining why they approach work differently from professionals at the Resource Centre, says:

/.../ we have a lot of different families. The [family therapists] have smaller amounts of families that [so] they focus more and they are also not writing reports like we do. They are more like helping /.../

By examining this using the stakeholders' theory, indicates professionals, parents, schools, etc. as important stakeholders in children [the company] but with different levels of influence and demands. Though the professionals may have weak ties with children, they can exert more control over the children within the Swedish culture. Parents, labelled as managers [by the

theory], although have strong ties and legitimate responsibilities towards children, are less powerful (Keler, 2002 in Tullberg 2013). The theory suggests smooth collaboration between stakeholders to ensure the child's well-being. This is facilitated by shared understanding and responsibilities. Therefore, professionals' understanding of parental roles and collaborating accordingly may reflect their commitments to promoting children's best interest.

How professionals at the Resource Centre collaborate with parents is what the theory encourages towards ensuring children's well-being as it makes parents feel in control of their families' decision despite challenges they face. Both groups of professionals see parents as stakeholders but engage them differently. These two roles could be examined using the police and pastoral power, described by Holmes (2002) as security apparatus of government. Where both agents of social control (police) and agents of care (pastoral power) complement each other in achieving specific objectives of government (Holmes, 2002, p. 86).

## 5.5 Professionals and challenges

Almost all professionals interviewed, at both Soc. S and RC face challenges while working with parents involved with CPS. They say that most parents find it difficult to understand reports against them or disagree with professionals on how they perceive the problem. Some professionals mentioned that this is typical of parents with mental disability or some form of addiction and/or the result of negative rumours about social services. This confirms Johansson (2011)'s assertion when she referred to a report by Government of Sweden, (2001) that not only immigrant families encounter challenges within the CPS but social workers themselves have challenging stories to share. These challenges whether involve trust or language issues or professionals' need to recognise ethnic diversity while maintaining child protection legislation or providing equal help for all children (as pointed by Johansson), could hinder engagements with parents. Interviewed professionals acknowledge that it sometimes difficult to obtain collaborative engagements and this could result in parents' refusing help.



“The parents sometimes have hard time trusting the social services in the beginning due to rumours about our work....or maybe have psychiatric disorders or addiction or a combination of both....”

The difficulty with engaging parents may be resulting from limited understanding among immigrant parents about the stakes child protection professionals hold in their children’s well-being. This may be because they come from countries where parents, families and communities have full control over children and state interventions are minimal or almost non-existent. Therefore, immigrant parents may find it difficult to accept government’s (child protection professionals) in parenting in Sweden. The resistance parents’ exhibit may consequently affect children’s outcomes and hamper their future development – as explained by the stakeholders’ theory.

Therefore, both managers (parents) and stakeholders (CPS) should understand and acknowledge their respective roles towards ensuring children’s well-being. Measures are required to explain to immigrant parents, the Swedish child protection legislation, conceptions about childhood and roles of important stakeholders in children’s well-being, etc. At least this provides parents with some knowledge about parental expectations in Gothenburg-Sweden and available supports. A similar study by Lewig et al. (2010) found that lack of knowledge about the Australian laws exist as it is not communicated. They therefore argued that immigrants “need to know what is okay” to do and not do, in host countries. Both staff and community participants found the need for providing new arrivals with parenting information in Australia as a step towards preventing parent-child problems (Lewig et al., 2010, p. 329)

In situations where parents just refuse to cooperate, Dale (2004) suggests that although negative child protection experiences hinder cooperation with parents, some parents would always disagree with professionals’ decisions, even when decisions are necessary or not. Therefore professionals need to keep working, as long as children’s best interest are promoted, but acknowledge that “dissatisfaction does not necessary mean poor practice” (ibid).

Language barrier affects interviewed professional's engagement with parents. One professional narrated her difficulty in communicating with parents on phone. She believes that language barrier presents inequality in accessing information among immigrants and non-immigrant parents. She asserts that while a call to Swedish parents can take hours, the following, is the situation for immigrant parents:

/.../ I say 'Tuesday, 1 o'clock, here, Tuesday/.../

## 6 Discussions

This section presents and discusses selected findings of the study. The study investigated the role child protection professionals play in enhancing parenting among immigrants. The perspectives of professionals that have worked with immigrant parents in child protection, for at least six (6) months were captured. The discussion covers the three research questions, namely:

- What expectations of parenting do interviewed child protection professionals in Gothenburg hold?
- How do interviewed child protection professionals account for the challenges immigrant parents in Gothenburg face, as parents?
- How do interviewed child protection professionals help immigrants bring up their children – in ways acceptable in the Swedish culture?

The study found out that two groups of professionals working with Social Services and a Resource Centre (names withheld for ethical reasons) – are key in protecting children in Sweden. These professionals support parents to improve on their parenting skills when parents personally identify challenges with their parenting and seek help or when mandatory reporters and/or concerned citizens report problematic home situations, needing help. These professionals have expectations about parenting which inform their judgements of whether parents they meet exhibit practices acceptable in the Swedish culture.

Professionals expect parents to love children by telling them and “showing through actions”, communicating with them in conflicting situations instead of “using violence” and interacting with important systems in children’s lives. I found also that although professionals expect parents to exhibit these practices, they acknowledge that parents in general and immigrant parents in particular experience challenges that make parenting difficult. These findings may not be representative of all child protection professionals in Gothenburg and Sweden as a whole, but the data shows some processes in practice that need reflecting on to improve the parenting

practices for immigrant parents and also help improve practice. The themes: good parenting, new conceptions of childhood, parentification and supports for parents are discussed.

## 6.1 Good parenting

Professionals expectations of parents to love through words and action, communicating disagreements instead of “using violence”, maintaining emotional connection and interacting with important systems in children’s lives, reflects their expectations about good parenting which are consistent with Baumrind’s authoritative parenting. It values disciplined conformity, affirms autonomy, encourage verbal dialogue and explain reasons for obeying rules. Authoritative parenting style is adopted by many parents in developed countries (Renzaho et al., 2011) and Ramaekers and Suissa (2012) argue that “looking at each child as individual and allowing opportunities for development”– is fundamental for this style. They add that while it helps parents manage expectations and encourage good reward, it grooms children to be well balanced and communicate well at all levels (Ramaekers and Suissa, 2012, p. 96). A study by Renzaho et al. (2011, p. 10) found that authoritarian parenting style which he calls “African parenting” persisted among African immigrants in Australia. Parents reinforced obedience and expectations, closely scrutinized children’s behavior and environment and used discipline and rewards – some of which inhibit rights to autonomy, emphasized by UNCRC (Johansson, 2013). This “African parenting” although instill communal values in children have aspects like “corporal punishment” that are often inconsistent with expectations of the host countries – like those held by professionals in this study. This inconsistency resulting from conflicts between pre-migration values and values of the host country remain challenging for parents and are likely to attract child protection notifications. It presupposes that measures addressing these inconsistencies are needed to prevent immigrants’ involvement with the CPS.

## 6.2 New Conceptions of Childhood

Additionally, professionals’ expectations in handling disagreement through communication instead of “using violence and their perceptions of “children as “victims of crime” reflect

influence of the new conceptions of children. Interviewed professionals perceive the need for promoting children's rights and seeing them as social children with competent statuses whose participation in decisions affecting them, should be promoted. Therefore, they expect parents to, (considering children's age) engage them through "dialogue" and reasoning because of children's competency in understanding situations. This is important since professionals are mandated to encourage parents to act in the best interests of the child (Johansson, 2011). However, the issue of concern is, "do parents hold similar conceptions?" about childhood. If they do not then, they will find difficulty in treating children from such perspectives, since the different ways of thinking about children influence the way they are treated (Moss, & Petrie, (2002) in Nordenfors (2012). Furthermore, conceptions about parenthood and of children as vulnerable and in need of protection, inevitably exist in Sweden and most children are dependent on adult caregivers (Rasmusson 2006 in (Johansson, 2013). This raises questions as to whether child protection professionals have measures to deal with the gap in these conceptions. Thus parents' misunderstanding or misinterpretations of children's rights, the new conceptions of childhood and parental expectations in Gothenburg – Sweden.

## 6.3 Parentification

Parentification is one of the themes that emerged when professionals discussed challenges often faced by immigrant parents.

Some professionals expressed their thoughts about how some children misinform parents about societal rules. They tell parents that Swedish children are allowed to stay out at night and sometimes threaten to call social services when parents do not cooperate with them. This makes parents feel less powerful and creates conflicts among them and children. These challenges are unique to immigrant parents and add to the two levels of challenges (challenge in meeting high parental expectations and relational challenges) faced by all parents. Therefore, parenting becomes complicated for immigrant parents, making them susceptible to contacts with CPS. This is consistent with the concept, parentification discussed by some researchers as a pathological parent-child role change (Garber, 2011) or role corruption (Hooper, 2007). Hooper confirms the existence of parentification among immigrant families but in contexts like divorced homes,

among chronically ill and profoundly depressed parents and substance dependent parents. However, this study observed it in a context where language remains a barrier. Garber also identified parentification's ability to interrupt childhood development due to poor relationships and attachment issues. This reflects "multiple vulnerability" of parenting among immigrant parents. The enormity of the problems may be overwhelming for immigrant parents.

Lewig et al. (2010) raised similar concerns when they referred to findings from (Centre for Community Child Health, 2004 and (Gonsalves, 1992; Lamberg, 1996). Their work with refugee parents revealed that refugee parents also experienced many parenting difficulties that mainstream Australian families experience (poverty mental health, child behavioural problems, etc.) Nonetheless, refugee parents face additional stresses, trauma-related problems because of separation or death of family members, language difficulties and different cultural expectations about child rearing (ibid). These, they asserted could lower parents' adaptability, thus receptivity, responsiveness to children and increase children's needs for such adaptability. In such situations, systems would be required to influence policies and services to respond to the needs of parents with such difficulties. And as was concluded after reviewing Renzaho and Vignjevic (2011)'s work, suggest the need for culturally appropriate parenting skills from interventions to overcome parenting difficulties in individualistic cultures.

## 6.4 Supports for parents

Professionals support both Swedish and non- Swedish parents to improve on their parenting skills in case of inconsistencies. Almost all professionals provide needs based help. Investigations incorporated individual children and family needs and the BBIC<sup>12</sup>– is used. The family therapy (service) was found as the most common service given to most parents and immigrants (among services like MVP, etc. <sup>13</sup>– see footnote). This is because professionals find its' flexibility and ability to capture the different needs of different parents, rewarding. Casanueva et al. (2008)'s finding which reported parenting training as the most common service

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<sup>12</sup> BBIC - Barns Behov I Centrum, meaning Children's needs at the center

<sup>13</sup> Family therapy, MVP, MST, Contact parents, contact families.

for mothers involved with CPS in the US is somewhat consistent with this finding. However, the family therapy incorporates broader and varied services and may provide more than parenting training. It was encouraging to know that professionals are “blind to differences” and see needs. Because of that sometimes they just had to listen to parents since that was the need. Professionals might be enforcing ethical principles for treating clients with respect, dignity and without discrimination (Slonim-Nevo, 1996). Nonetheless, professionals found challenges among all parents and specific challenges among immigrants. However, apart from providing immigrants with language interpreters<sup>14</sup> and cultural interpreters<sup>15</sup>, no immigrant specific services exist. This raises question for why these structural challenges<sup>16</sup> could not be addressed concurrently. A similar observation was made by Johansson (2013, p. 263) that because the UNCRC encourages social workers to act in the best interest of the child, CP professionals emphasize equal rights for all children without considering the language and economic difficulties ethnic minority parents encounter (Johansson 2012; Kritz and Skivenes 2010a, 2010b in Johansson, 2013).

Considering that these problems affect children’s development, I wonder if professionals also could not observe their role of social worker as “advocate” towards ensuring structural changes that will consequently lead to promoting children’s best interest – as required by the UNCRC.

In conclusion, I observe that the Swedish system requires parents to meet certain expectations while structural challenges inhibit immigrant parents from meeting them. Nonetheless, limited measures to ensure that immigrant parents meet these expectations exist, hence needs addressing.

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<sup>14</sup> Persons who interpreters langue during meetings – for easy communicate with immigrant parents.

<sup>15</sup> Persons who understand the different cultures

<sup>16</sup> Structural challenges - lack of integration and its related challenges, language barrier – with its parentification related problems.

## 7 Conclusions

This study documented the role that child protection professionals play in enhancing parenting in Gothenburg – Sweden. It sought to find out the: expectations of parenting held by interviewed child protection professionals in Gothenburg; how interviewed child protection professionals account for challenges immigrant parents in Gothenburg face, as parents; and how interviewed professionals help immigrants bring up their children – acceptable ways in Sweden.

The qualitative research approach was used. Seven (7) child protection professionals were selected through a snowball sampling technique. A face-to-face interview was conducted to collect data from five (5) child protection professionals at Social Services and two (2) from a Resource centre

Two groups of professionals working with the Social Services and a Resource Center (names withheld for ethical reasons) – play important roles in child protecting in Gothenburg. They play investigative and care roles respectively and approach work differently – although they have a common goal towards child protection. The family therapy is the most common service provided free of charge to parents - by the Resource Centre, on Social Services' referral or to voluntary clients.

The professionals have expectation about parenting which helps them to describe good parenting. They include showing love, handling disagreement and showing commitment to children. These expectations reflect consciousness about the new conceptions of childhood while meeting them, indicates practice of Authoritative parenting – good parenting practice – that seldom leads to contacts with the child protection system. Professionals are conscious of three categories of challenges faced by the parents they engage. They include “difficulty in meeting high parental standards “and relational challenges - which were found common to both Swedish and non-Swedish parents. A third category that involves individual and structural challenges was found to be specific to immigrant parents. It was found that although immigrants experienced specific and/or multiple challenges, immigrant-specific services hardly exist (apart from



language and cultural interpreters). This was mainly because professionals' are not allowed "to see differences but needs "and seem to be solving structural challenges at the individual level. Child protection professionals perform important roles in parenting through the available services<sup>17</sup>. However, the special needs of immigrants need to be considered in order to provide them with services that specifically meet their needs.

## 8 Recommendations

Future research on this topic could examine how immigrant parents respond to specific social services. It is important to explore perspectives of parents to know how they perceive services provided by child protection professionals. It will give them the opportunity to explain "the nuances of parenting" and how they manage in a new culture.

Child protection professionals could explore ways of ensuring that immigrant parents receive information about the Swedish laws on parenting, child protection processes, roles of important systems serving as mandatory reporters and the conceptions about childhood. This would lessen how parenting expectations are misunderstood and misinterpreted in the new culture (Cheah et al., 2013) and limit problems between parents and children. Parents become aware of available services that enhance parenting plus alternative strategies to dealing with children in Gothenburg. Although some parents receive parenting information from attending Swedish for Immigrants (SFI) lessons, the professionals interviewed indicate that such information is not comprehensive and immigrant parents, who do not attend SFI lessons, miss such information.

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<sup>17</sup> Family therapy (Involving individual, couple, family, reflective counselling), MSV, MST, Contact parents, Contact families.

The data revealed that some parents receive some information from attending SFI<sup>18</sup>, this information is mostly inadequate and immigrant parents who do not attend SFI classes do not receive any information at all.

A measure that targets new arrivals (although may require a lot of work), may be worthwhile. It would be commendable if this information were communicated in different languages to make understanding easy among immigrant parents.

CP professionals are encouraged to advocate for policy reviews that address issues of unemployment, segregation and other structural challenges that affect immigrant parents and consequently the well-being of children.

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<sup>18</sup> SFI – Swedish for foreign immigrants.

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## Appendix 1

The University of Gothenburg  
Gothenburg-Sweden  
15<sup>th</sup> March 2015

The Director  
Social Services Department  
Gothenburg-Sweden

Dear Sir/Madam,

**PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A FIELD WORK AT THE SOCIAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT**  
**LILIAN AMANKWA**

I am Lilian Amankwa, a graduate student at the University of Gothenburg. I am in the second semester of a two-year master programme in Social Work with Families and Children.

As part of my programme, I am required to conduct a research on the topic "The Role of the Child Protection Professionals in Enhancing parenting among immigrant parents in Gothenburg. The research interest stems from the fact that immigrants contribute to the increasing population in Sweden. Although they arrive in Sweden with heritage orientations of parenting, may be "do parenting" in a specific way. The study therefore seeks to explore how immigrant parents perform their parenting roles in the new context. In case the Child Protection professionals contribute to enhancing parental roles, the study seeks to explore how they do it.

This letter is therefore to request an interview with five social workers at the Social Services Department to enable me carry out the study. The purpose of the research is strictly for academic purposes and information on participants would be kept strictly confidential.

I would be very grateful if I could be granted access, to enable me interview the social workers as planned.

I trust my request would be kindly considered by your outfit. Kindly see my email address: [lili.mak@hotmail.com](mailto:lili.mak@hotmail.com) and Tel: 0046 735 732 165 through which I could be contacted for further clarifications or discussions.

Thank you,

Yours Faithfully



Lilian Amankwa

## Appendix 2



INSTITUTIONEN FÖR SOCIALT ARBETE

### Informed consent

The following is a presentation of how we will use the data collected in the interview.

The research project is a part of our education in the International Masters' program in Social Work at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden. In order to insure that our project meets the ethical requirements for good research we promise to adhere to the following principles:

- Interviewees in the project will be given information about the purpose of the project.
- Interviewees have the right to decide whether he or she will participate in the project, even after the interview has been concluded.
- The collected data will be handled confidentially and will be kept in such a way that no unauthorized person can view or access it.

The interview will be recorded as this makes it easier for us to document what is said during the interview and also helps us in the continuing work with the project. In our analyze some data may be changed so that no interviewee will be recognized. After finishing the project the data will be destroyed. The data we collect will only be used in this project.

You have the right to decline answering any questions, or terminate the interview without giving an explanation.

You are welcome to contact us or our supervisor in case you have any questions (e-mail addresses below).

Student name, e-mail, signature

Supervisor name & e-mail

Lilian Amankwa

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Interviewee name, e-mail, signature

## Appendix 3

**Interview Guide for the topic: The Role of Child Protection Professionals in Enhancing parenting among immigrant parents in Gothenburg-Sweden.**

### **Child Protection Professionals (CPP)**

**What expectations do cp professionals hold regarding parenting among immigrants?**

- What are the reasons for which parents receive services from CPS?
- How different are the reasons among Swedish and immigrant parents you have worked with? Examples.
- Do you have expectations of how a good parent should relate with children? How?
  - Showing love?
  - Handling disagreement?
- What do you do when these expectations conflict what parents actually do? Examples for immigrants and Swedish parents.
- In what situation would you say a parent is doing well as a parent? Examples.
- Do you think parents have difficulties being parents in Gothenburg? How?
- Can you see differences in challenges faced by Swedish and immigrant parents?
- Can you see similarities in challenges faced by Swedish and immigrant parents?

**What measures are put in place to help immigrant parents bring up their children in ways acceptable in Gothenburg?**

- What role do you play in enhancing parenting?
- What services are available to ensure that immigrant parents improve on their parenting styles?
- What informs the services provided to parents?
- Are the services different among Swedish and immigrant parents?
- In what ways do you help immigrant parents improve on their parenting in Gothenburg?
- When are the services provided? Before or after parenting styles are identified as inconsistent with that of Sweden?
- Do you encounter and challenges working with parents? Examples for immigrant and Swedish parents.