

iscte

INSTITUTO
UNIVERSITÁRIO
DE LISBOA

Familial Perspectives on Forced Parent-Child Separation in the Scope of Religious Belief

Reem Rachel Ezzeddine

Master in Psychology of Intercultural Relations

Supervisor:

Carla Sofia Mouro, Invited Assistant Professor, Iscte - Instituto

Universitário de Lisboa

October, 2023



CIÊNCIAS SOCIAIS
E HUMANAS

Department of Social and Organizational Psychology

Familial Perspectives on Forced Parent-Child Separation in the
Scope of Religious Belief

Reem Rachel Ezzeddine

Master in Psychology of Intercultural Relations

Supervisor:

Carla Sofia Mouro, Invited Assistant Professor, Iscte - Instituto

Universitário de Lisboa

October, 2023

Acknowledgments

I wish to convey my sincere appreciation to Mrs. Carla Sofia Mouro, for her steadfast support, and significant contributions throughout the entirety of this research endeavor.

This thesis is the product of not only my individual efforts but also the collective contributions and support from Mrs. Mouro. I am profoundly grateful for her role in ensuring the successful completion of this research.

Finally, I am indebted to my family and friends for their continuous support and understanding.

Resumo

Esta pesquisa concentra-se na questão do sequestro de crianças, examinando especificamente o seu impacto sobre os pais, com um foco particular no mundo árabe e na religião, enquanto também explora papéis de gênero e atitudes sociais dentro deste contexto. O principal objetivo é preencher lacunas na pesquisa existente e oferecer insights que possam aprimorar políticas e medidas preventivas. Para compreender aprofundadamente esta questão, o estudo adota uma abordagem qualitativa que utiliza entrevistas como forma de acessar a estas experiências. Um total de dez pais participou da pesquisa, categorizados em dois grupos, aqueles que vivenciaram a separação forçada em primeira mão e aqueles que não, mas que podem ter sido expostos a ela. Essas entrevistas foram conduzidas entre junho e agosto de 2023, priorizando considerações seguindo as diretrizes da Associação Americana de Psicologia. O estudo lança luz sobre como as crenças religiosas se entrelaçam com a separação entre pais e filhos, enfatizando os desafios enfrentados pelas famílias quando fatores religiosos estão envolvidos em casos de sequestro de crianças. Os resultados destacam as dificuldades vivenciadas pelos pais em tais situações e evidenciam a importância de sistemas abrangentes de apoio que levem em consideração tanto o bem-estar emocional quanto os impactos religiosos. Além disso, explora como a religião influencia a criação de crianças, ilustrando perspectivas de indivíduos com filiações religiosas. No final, o estudo revela insights sobre como religião, sequestro de crianças e experiências parentais estão interconectados.

Palavras-chave: Sequestro de Crianças, Separação forçada, Região Árabe, Crença Religiosa.

Abstract

This research focuses on the issue of child abduction, specifically examining its impact on the parents, with a particular focus on the Arab world and religion, while also exploring gender roles and societal attitudes within this context. The main goal is to fill gaps in existing research and offer insights that can enhance policies and preventive measures. To comprehensively understand this issue, the study adopts a qualitative approach that uses interviews as valuable sources of lived experiences. A total of ten parents participated in the research, categorized into two groups, those who have experienced forced separation first-hand, and those who have not, but may have been exposed to it. These interviews were conducted between June and August 2023, prioritizing considerations following guidelines from the American Psychological Association. The study sheds light on how religious beliefs intertwine with parent-child separation, emphasizing the challenges faced by families when religious factors are involved in child abduction cases. Results underscore the struggles experienced by parents in such situations and stress the relevance of comprehensive support systems that take into account both emotional well-being and religious impactors. Furthermore, it explores how religion influences child upbringing by showcasing perspectives among individuals with religious affiliations. In the end, the study reveals insights into how religion, child abduction, and parental experiences are interconnected.

Keywords: Child Abduction, Forced Separation, Arab Region, Religious Belief

Contents

Introduc*on	9
Literature Review	12
Child Abduc*on and Religious Beliefs	12
Parental Experiences in Child Abduc*on	14

Posi*ve Impacts of Religion and Child Upbringing	16
Role of Religion in Child Abduc*on	18
Role of Religion in Healing Trauma	20
Notable Factors to Consider Besides Religious Beliefs	22
Overview of study objec*ves	27
Methodology	28
Research Design	28
Par*cipants	29
Procedure	32
Data Collec*on	32
Ethical Considera*ons	33
Data Analysis	35
Analysis	37
Discussion	49
Implica*ons	54
Limita*ons	54
Conclusion	56
References	57
Appendices	65
Appendix 1 – Interview Ques3ons	65
Appendix 2 – Consent Form	66
Tabela 1. Characteristics of Participants	31
Tabela 2. Participants' Code, Age & Gender	37

Introduction

Child abduction is a distressing and widespread problem that continues to affect societies globally. Child abduction is defined by the American Psychological Association as “... the unlawful and non-consensual act of taking or detaining a child, typically under the age of 18, against their will, often involving the removal of the child from their legal guardian or custodial parent” (APA, 2020). Child abduction is recognised under many jurisdictions as being a criminal offense that posits the unlawful taking of a minor using violence, fraud, manipulation, persuasion, or force from their legal guardian (Miller & Koskinen, 2019). There are, nonetheless, two main forms of child abduction to consider, one which is parental, and the other is through a stranger (more generally known as the act of kidnapping); this research rather focuses on the former than the latter. Despite studies shedding light on this issue, there is still a significant gap in the current literature when it comes to thoroughly exploring the perspectives of parents regarding child abduction, particularly in relation to religion and in the Arab region. This context is selected because there are incidents of child abduction across different religious communities within this area that have reached public visibility, thus suggesting that this is a salient topic in this region. This research will therefore offer the insights of parents, both affiliated and unaffiliated to the situation, on several subtopics of this issue, while also exploring the connections between child abduction and religious beliefs.

This exploration will include the viewpoints of parents involved in a child abduction case, as well as the psychological impact on the individuals affected, while also trying to capture how societies represent, and consequently approve or disapprove of these situations by inquiring also parents that have not been directly involved in such cases. For instance, subjects like the rise of

hostility between the parents, the duration since the abduction occurred, and other stressors that may arise are all within the scope of this research. Namely, this includes examining the perspectives of both the parent who is perpetrating the act of abduction, and the parent who is victimized by the action, as well as from other parents in their communities. The paper will also analyse the factors that can lead to these acts while acknowledging that the individuals involved may experience different outcomes.

In addition to what preceded, this study investigates how religion impacts child-parent separation cases by looking into the presence of certain rulings, and ultimately the subsequent belief that arises from them, in different scriptures may enable or facilitate the rise of child abduction (Harrington, 2019). The paper aims to gain insight into the beliefs and teachings that might contribute to legitimise child abduction, and how they are utilised as a precursor to justify and allow the act to proceed. The Arab region, known for its range of religions and diverse religious beliefs, provides a suitable setting to explore this research. Even though the area is thought to be predominantly Islamic, it is also a home to four major religions, Islam, Judaism, Christianity and Zoroastrianism, and even within the major religions, the Arab region houses a plethora of sub-factions as well (Amer & Awad, 2016). The role of religion as part of the healing process for child-separated parents has also been highlighted in research (Ben-Arieh, A., & Fronese, I. (2011) and will also be addressed in the present paper.

Alongside the previous goals outlined, this research will also delve into the views on gender roles in the Arab world. Linked to religious perspectives, gender roles are determinant of which parent in a family is more susceptible to becoming a victim of this distressing reality; in other words, through analysing the religious beliefs of the selected religions, this paper will examine whether the father (Harrington, 2019; Tavares et al, 2021) or the mother (Trimblings & Momoh, 2021) is more likely to be the victim of child abduction. It is crucial to analyse these

perspectives to gain an understanding of the power dynamics within Arab families. In some nations, there is still a prevailing adherence to asymmetric or misogynistic beliefs about the responsibilities and expectations of different genders within families (Mulki & Ghanem, 2021). This research seeks to delve into these attitudes to better understand how gender roles potentially impact the occurrence of child abduction and the relationships within affected families.

Furthermore, it's important to acknowledge that the consequences of child abduction go beyond the individuals directly involved. These distressing incidents have an impact on families, communities and society as a whole (Tavares et al., 2021). In order to adequately assess and comprehend the long-term effects of child abduction on individuals and societies, an analysis of the diverse impacts and all parties involved will be taken into consideration. This research aims to explore the aspects related to child abduction with the intention of better understanding the individual experiences and social factors that contribute to the commission of such acts (Freeman & Taylor, 2020). This will be achieved by examining how these actions are presented by parents directly involved in child abduction, and comparing them to a group of parents not directly involved in such situations. Understanding the factors that individuals mobilise to legitimise committing child abduction or to contest it and how other parents in their community take a position on the topic is crucial in developing strategies and interventions for prevention.

In order to accomplish the objectives of this study we will take an approach incorporating insights from psychology, sociology, and religion. Through the integration of these disciplines, our research seeks to offer a holistic examination of cases involving child abduction, in the Arab world. This examination will consider the cultural, social, and religious backgrounds in which these cases take place.

Therefore, this work aims to address the lack of research in the literature on cases of child abduction in the Arab world. In the end, the results of this study can guide policy efforts, preventive actions, and assistance programs that aim to safeguard children and families from child abduction and its outcomes.

For this purpose, the study at hand will collect data from parents who have been part of child abduction, and compare them to a group of parents who have not been part. The research will outline the main themes concerning a number of crucial aspects surrounding child abduction and parenting. Data will be collected in the form of semi-structured interviews, and findings will be interpreted in light of previous research that covered the subject of child abduction. Ultimately, results will allow to arrive at conclusions and interpolations regarding the subject, which can be further analysed to develop interventions and specific approaches.

In the next chapters, the paper will include a review of current literature on the topic at hand, along with findings from a thematic analysis of structured interviews conducted with participants. Prior to the analysis, a methodology section will describe the methods and techniques followed to perform the interviews, collect data, and develop a thematic analysis. Finally, the conclusion for the paper will contain the key findings of the paper, along with suggestions for future studies around the subject of child abduction and the parents involved.

Literature Review

Child Abduction and Religious Beliefs

Child abduction refers to the act of taking a child away from their legal guardian or custodian without permission, often with the intention of hiding the child's whereabouts (Finkelhor & Vanderminden 2018). This act violates the rights of the child to safety, security and the nurturing care provided by their parents or legal guardians. As a result, it inflicts psychological consequences

on the abducted child (Brunk et al., 2019) but also to a large extent on the parent separated from the child (Froese & Bader, 2010). Child abduction can happen for reasons like conflicts or family disputes. However, in many cultural contexts including the Arab region, religious beliefs play a determinant role in how child abduction is framed, legitimized and resolved. This context introduces an interplay between doctrine, family loyalty and legal implications that significantly affect the abducted child and both parents involved. The motives behind child abduction can vary greatly. In some situations, parents might feel that it is their spiritual duty to separate their child from the influence of the other parent or a secular society they view as morally corrupt (Hackett, 2016). The parent who abducts the child may genuinely believe that they are acting in the interests of the child guided by their beliefs even though the act itself is against the law and causes distress to both the child and the parent who is left behind (Humphries & Ellison, 2017). These cases often raise legal questions regarding the clash between religious freedom and what is in the best interest of the child (Ruck & Ruck 2016). The abducted child finds themselves in a situation torn between their abducting parent's religious beliefs and actions and legal measures put in place to protect their well-being. This presents a legal challenge for society which must find a balance between respecting religious freedom and ensuring the rights and welfare of the child are safeguarded (Lauten, 2020).

Throughout history, instances of child abduction have persisted, regardless of the differences in conditions or situations leading up to their occurrence. Different religious groups have varying interpretations of their faith that may justify or condone actions under circumstances, whether they pertain to child abduction in particular or otherwise (Froese & Bader 2010). Simply stated, one's faith can justify a person's decisions based on a set of variables dictated by their religion. The diversity of cultures and religions within societies makes it more challenging to understand these situations highlighting the importance of examining the

perspectives of families involved, as well as of the communities where these are inserted.

Religion can thus have a major impact in the upbringing of a child, and can have a particular role in the specific case of child abduction (Aslan, 2019), being either a facilitator or a deterrent, depending on the set of variables involved and the involved parent's beliefs.

Parental Experiences in Child Abduction

The experience of being a parent during a child abduction case is extremely difficult and emotionally overwhelming (Smith, 2018). It takes a toll on parents, both mentally and emotionally. When a child is taken away parents are suddenly thrown into chaos grappling with a range of emotions, legal challenges and the daunting task of trying to rebuild their shattered family. In the beginning parents of abducted children are hit with a whirlwind of emotions. They go through shock and disbelief followed by grief and despair (Cohen, 2015). Losing a child in such circumstances, especially if it's done by someone within the family, completely shatters the trust and security that parents usually have in their own family unit. This emotional turmoil becomes more complicated when religious beliefs are present. Parents may struggle with reconciling their faith with the loss they've experienced (Lauten, 2020). Parents who have been left behind after their child's abduction often feel a sense of helplessness and powerlessness (Humphries & Ellison 2017). They find themselves caught up in battles and complicated custody disputes that only add to their stress levels and uncertainty. Going through legal processes in cases of child abduction can take a toll on parents emotionally. They have to navigate the complexities of law, parental rights and deal with conflicting demands from their faith (Ruck & Ruck 2016). When religious beliefs are the driving force behind abduction, parents often find themselves grappling with the spiritual aspects of their situation. On one hand, they may feel

compelled to defend their faith and actions believing that what they are doing aligns with their convictions (Hackett, 2016). On the other hand, they face a dilemma as they consider the wellbeing of their abducted child who becomes caught in between loyalty conflicts (Froese & Bader 2010).

As said, the abduction of a child also disrupts family dynamics significantly, especially when it involves a spouse or partner as the abducting parent. The parent left behind can feel betrayed not by their partner but by their religious community that may have supported or justified the abduction (Cohen, 2015). This sense of betrayal deepens wounds and intensifies feelings of isolation. The long-term consequences for parents affected by child abduction are substantial. Research suggests that parents often go through a period of grieving and trauma finding it difficult to find closure or resolution (Brunk, Horselenberg & Merckelbach 2019). They may experience distress, anxiety and depression which can have an impact on their overall well-being and their ability to care for their other children (Finkelhor & Vanderminden 2018). During this time parents greatly benefit from support systems and interventions. These may include counselling sessions, therapy sessions and support groups that provide an environment for parents to process their emotions and share their experiences (Lauten, 2020). Moreover, legal advocacy efforts and international agreements like the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction aim to offer avenues for parents seeking the return of their abducted children (Ruck & Ruck, 2016).

Parents frequently find themselves caught up in battles navigating complex conflicts, over custody and struggling to secure the assistance of law enforcement agencies particularly in cases involving international abductions (Doughty, 2019). Research suggests that parents often experience prolonged grief and trauma which may manifest as symptoms of traumatic stress

disorder (PTSD) (Doughty, 2019). The emotional effects of child abduction can persist long after the case is resolved impacting parents' ability to maintain relationships at work and overall wellbeing (Doughty, 2019). Parents who experience child abduction may face repercussions within their communities. They might feel isolated and judged by their peers who may have different interpretations of faith and lack a complete understanding of the circumstances surrounding the abduction (Williams, 2017). This isolation can worsen the distress experienced by parents and further isolate them during this difficult time (Saunders & Browne 2019).

In summary, cases involving child abduction bring about turmoil for parents. Abandoned parents navigate through a range of emotions including shock and grief all the way to feelings of powerlessness and betrayal. When religious beliefs are intertwined with abduction cases the situation becomes more intricate as parents face the intersection between faith and the traumatic loss of their child. It is crucial to comprehend these encounters in order to create support systems and interventions that can assist parents in dealing with the difficulties that arise from child abduction cases connected to religious beliefs.

Positive Impacts of Religion and Child Upbringing

It is crucial to view the impact of religion on children within the process of their upbringing, as it shows the extent to which one's belief systems as a parent can change the way they address their children. Religion has always played a role in the upbringing and socialization of children across societies around the globe. It serves as a source of values, beliefs and ethical guidance that shape how children perceive the world and their own place within it (Smith, 2003). Beyond teaching doctrines, religion also influences moral development, cultural identity and how children form their overall worldview. One essential aspect of religion in child upbringing is its role in transmitting ethical values. Religious teachings often provide a framework for

distinguishing right from wrong, guiding children's behaviour and nurturing empathy and compassion (Gill, 2014). Moral lessons derived from texts and traditions act as a compass that helps children navigate ethical dilemmas throughout their lives (Nucci & Turiel 2003).

Additionally, religion significantly contributes to the formation of a child's identity. Many religious traditions are intricately intertwined with practices and rituals that are passed down through generations. These cultural elements do instil a sense of belonging in children. Also, they offer them a vibrant tapestry of customs, celebrations and traditions that connect them to their heritage (Ben Arieh & Frones 2011). Religious communities often play a role in shaping a child's identity and fostering a sense of belonging. Religion's impact on how children are raised goes beyond their upbringing, influencing their worldview and understanding of the world.

Religious stories provide answers to questions about life's purpose, existence and the nature of reality (Boyatzis et al., 2006). Growing up within frameworks shapes children's perspectives on the meaning of life, purpose and their connection to something greater or spiritual. Additionally, religion can provide solace and resilience for children when they face challenges or difficult life events. Many religious traditions offer rituals and practices that help individuals cope with grief, loss and hardships (Pargament, 1997). Believing in a power or divine presence can bring comfort and hope during times of crisis contributing to well-being and resilience in children (Park, 2010).

Furthermore, religion plays a role in emphasizing community involvement and social engagement during child upbringing. Religious communities often instil a sense of responsibility, towards others while encouraging acts of kindness, generosity and service (Maton et al., 2006). Children are often taught about the importance of compassion and helping others, which helps them develop a sense of responsibility, towards society beyond their family.

However, it is important to recognize that the role of religion in raising children can differ greatly among families and cultures. Some parents prioritize education and involvement in

institutions while others take a more secular approach that focuses on moral and ethical development without strong religious ties (Eisenberg et al., 2006). It is thus, after covering the aforementioned, important to consider the role that religion plays when it comes to cases of child abduction.

Role of Religion in Child Abduction

It is important to acknowledge that there are situations where religion might justify or worsen child abduction cases, especially when religious beliefs are used as justifications for abductions or hinder efforts, towards resolution (Smith & Jones, 2013). In situations where a parent who abducted a child finds support in their beliefs or interpretations, it can also complicate efforts to reunite the child with the original parent, as the abductor is creating an echo chamber, triggered by their own set of beliefs, that is justifying the abduction. This poses both ethical challenges as the child's best interests clash with the principles of religious freedom. Sometimes religious beliefs are used as a shield to resist authorities or evade conventions that aim to address cases of child abduction (Brown, 2013). The abducting parent may argue that their actions were guided by intervention or driven by their obligations, which makes it hard for legal authorities to intervene effectively. These arguments often prolong the process of abduction and create legal complexities making it even more difficult to protect the rights and well-being of the child involved. In some instances, religious leaders or communities may exert pressure on the abducting parent encouraging them to resist legal measures intended to resolve the situation. This influence from religion can create obstacles in cooperating with authorities and hinder communication with the left-behind parent, causing trauma and uncertainty for the abducted child. Religious beliefs can also give a sense of certainty to the parent who abducts, making them less likely to consider the well-being of the child (Berliner & Conte 2018). Their strong belief in

their faith can override concerns for what's truly best for the child leading to emotionally charged conflicts.

Religion has also the potential to play a role in cases of child abduction by providing a framework for finding resolution and promoting reconciliation. There are instances where religious leaders or members of the community step in to mediate conflicts and facilitate communication between parents who have abducted a child and the parent left behind (Gopnik, 2018). The teachings of religions that emphasize forgiveness, reconciliation and the importance of family can guide those involved in child abduction cases towards resolutions. This positive influence of religion can prevent harm to the child, and foster a sense of community support during this challenging time. Moreover, religion can offer spiritual solace to parents who are grappling with the trauma caused by their child's abduction. Many religious traditions provide rituals, prayers and communal support systems designed to help parents cope with the pain and distress caused by incidents (Strawbridge, 2019). These spiritual resources serve as sources of comfort, hope and resilience for parents as they navigate through the challenges associated with abduction while preserving their emotional well-being.

The differing religious beliefs and cultural norms, between Muslims and Christians can potentially complicate matters for a parent involved in a child abduction case. In Islam parental rights and responsibilities are defined within a framework that emphasizes obedience to law (Sharia) and the preservation of family unity. The Quran serves as a guide stating that children should maintain ties with both parents (Quran 2;233). Therefore, a Muslim parent may feel compelled to justify their actions based on their understanding of obligations. They might believe that removing the child from the Muslim parent is in the child's best interest from a religious or cultural perspective. Similarly, Christian thought often places importance on family sanctity and parental rights. Principles such as "honor your father and mother" (Exodus 20;12) underscore the

significance of both parents in a child's life. A Christian parent may argue for their right to raise the child according to their faith. These religious considerations can create ethical complexities in cases of child abduction. Family court proceedings must navigate these intersections of faith, culture and what is deemed best for the child. While religious beliefs hold significance, the legal system primarily prioritizes the wellbeing of the child as stated in agreements, like the Hague Convention, on International Child Abduction (APA, 1980).

To summarize, religion's role in child abduction cases is intricate and diverse. The clash between freedom and the best interests of the child presents challenges for legal authorities, communities and parents involved in these upsetting circumstances. Striking a balance between respecting individuals rights and safeguarding children remains a struggle, in cases of child abduction. While religion can worsen these situations when religious beliefs are used as justification or perpetuation for the abduction (Wilson, 2011), it can also sometimes have an impact by encouraging resolution and providing support to parents. The role of religion in dealing with trauma is further explored in the next section.

Role of Religion in Healing Trauma

The experience of a child being abducted is incredibly distressing for parents and many find solace and support through their beliefs. Religion can provide comfort, meaning and hope as parents navigate the journey of healing. It offers them a framework to make sense of their grief and trauma (Bregman, 2018). Religious teachings often convey messages of resilience, comfort and the promise of healing in times of suffering. These teachings serve as a source of strength helping parents cope with the turmoil and uncertainty that come with child abduction. Religious communities also play a role in supporting parents after traumatic experiences. Many congregations create knit communities where fellow believers offer practical and spiritual support (Palmer & Park 2017). This sense of belonging counters feelings of isolation. Helps

parents find care and understanding from others. Prayer and spiritual practices are parts of the healing process, for parents affected by child abduction. Engaging in prayer or meditation allows them to connect with a power providing an outlet to express their grief, anger and confusion (Oliver, 2019). These strategies can assist parents in discovering tranquillity and composure amidst their turmoil fostering a sense of optimism and rejuvenation. The principles of forgiveness and reconciliation which are prevalent in traditions can also play a crucial role in the process of healing (Carter & McGoldrick 2019). Some parents may find solace in forgiveness whether it involves forgiving the parent who abducted their child or themselves for perceived shortcomings. The act of forgiveness has the potential to be enabling parents to let go of burdens that might impede their journey towards healing. Religious customs and ceremonies can provide opportunities for parents to commemorate their abducted child, pay tribute to their memory and attain closure (Pargament, 2019). These rituals can offer parents a sense of continuity and connection with their child when they are absent. This feeling of connection is a step in the healing process as it helps parents find meaning and acceptance. However, it's essential to recognize that the role religion plays in the healing process may vary depending on beliefs and experiences. While some parents may find solace and restoration through their faith others may grapple with questions about why a benevolent higher power allowed such a traumatic event to unfold (Bregman, 2018). These existential and theological inquiries can complicate the healing journey for parents. Religious beliefs can also come into play when it comes to ethical considerations surrounding child abduction. Sometimes, the religious convictions of the parent who abducts the child can create tension and conflict making it harder for the other parent to find healing (Cohen, 2017). Navigating these dynamics can be emotionally deterring and exhausting. Seeking support and guidance from religious leaders or counsellors may be necessary.

To sum up, religion plays a role in helping parents affected by child abduction heal. For many it brings comfort, support and purpose during the journey of recovery. Religious faith and practices can provide spiritual healing, foster a sense of belonging in a community as well as offer tools for forgiveness and reconciliation. However, each person's experience with religion's impact on healing is deeply personal and can vary depending on their beliefs and experiences. The next section will present some of the additional factors that may intervene in how child abduction is lived by affected parents and that can also intervene in how other parents in general interpret child abduction.

Notable Factors to Consider Besides Religious Beliefs

The legal and jurisdictional framework is a factor that greatly affects child abduction cases. These cases can become quite complicated especially when they involve crossing borders (Moorhead & Chase 2020). Parents often find themselves dealing with international treaties, like the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction and the intricacies of extradition laws. These legal complexities have an impact on parents' ability to ensure the return of their abducted child.

Cultural and societal norms also play a role in shaping how child abduction cases are perceived and handled. In cultures there may be differences in terms of parental rights and responsibilities especially during marital disputes (Mann, 2018). Cultural expectations regarding family structures and gender roles can influence both the parents who are left behind and those who have carried out the abduction. These norms can affect parents' willingness to cooperate with authorities or engage in mediation. Especially in the Arab region, where gender norms are still prevalent, and males are anticipated to be of a certain type, with females being of another, the issue of how society anticipates particular behaviour from different genders becomes an impactful variable.

The financial resources available to a parent can greatly influence their ability to navigate through a child abduction case successfully. Legal proceedings, travel expenses and the costs associated with litigation can be quite substantial (Bohman & Thomas 2019). Parents who have resources may have an advantage when it comes to accessing legal representation and the necessary resources to pursue the return of their child. On the other hand, parents with financial means may face obstacles in effectively pursuing legal avenues. These parents may go through a range of reactions such as grief, anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress (Doughty, 2019). Dealing with these challenges can impact their ability to participate in proceedings, make rational decisions and maintain their overall wellbeing. Seeking support and counselling is often vital for parents to cope with the toll caused by abduction cases.

In child abduction cases, effective cooperation and communication between parents are essential. The willingness of the parent who has abducted the child to engage in constructive communication can significantly affect how the case is resolved (Bailey, 2020). Parents who manage to maintain cooperative communication despite the conflict they are facing might find opportunities for negotiated settlements or mediated agreements. Conversely, adversarial behaviour and lack of cooperation can escalate tensions and prolong the process of resolving the abduction. The primary focus in child abduction cases should be on what's in the interests of the child (Verhellen, 2019). Legal authorities and courts prioritize the being, safety and developmental needs of the child when making decisions regarding custody and visitation. It is important for parents to consider how their actions can affect the child and their ability to create a nurturing environment. The focus on what's best for the child can influence the strategies and choices made by both the parent who remains with the child and the parent who has taken them.

The involvement of media and public opinion can also play a role, in cases of child abduction. When high profile cases receive media coverage it can shape perceptions, which in

turn may impact those involved (Gallagher, 2017). Parents may feel pressured by public opinion, which could influence their decisions, behaviours and willingness to participate in processes. Media attention can also affect how legal authorities handle cases potentially adding complexity and sensitivity to a difficult situation.

In order to cover the notion of child abduction thoroughly, a methodology was devised that compares findings of literary sources to the results of the primary research conducted. The methods utilised will be covered in the following section.

Methods to Combat Child Abduction

It is important to consider the available methods of combating child abduction, in order to assess the viability of their implementation and effectiveness of their results. Through reviewing these methods, one is able to create a holistic view of the situation, and how those involved feel and perceive their chances towards ratifying their conditions.

One effective approach to combating child abduction involves the establishment of international frameworks condemning these cases. The Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction, which was enacted in 1980, serves as a treaty that provides a mechanism for promptly returning abducted children to their country of habitual residence (Keates, 2019). This convention aims to ensure the resolution of abduction cases by fostering cooperation among countries that have signed it and outlining procedures for the safe return of children.

Taking measures plays a role in addressing child abduction. These measures often involve educating parents and children about the risks associated with abduction, custody rights and legal processes (Dyke, 2018). Educational programs and awareness campaigns are designed to equip parents with knowledge and resources to prevent abductions while encouraging

communication with their children about these risks. Effective responses to cross-border child abduction cases require border collaboration. It is crucial for law enforcement agencies, legal authorities and governmental bodies, across countries to work collaboratively in locating and reuniting children (Fawcett & Ratcliff 2020). Bilateral and multilateral agreements facilitate information, with enforcement of court orders thereby contributing to case resolutions.

Additionally, mediation and alternative dispute resolution mechanisms offer parents a path that avoids legal conflicts. Mediation can be highly effective when both parents are open to engaging in conversations and reaching beneficial agreements (Goodman, 2021). Trained mediators specializing in cases of child abduction can assist in facilitating communication, finding ground and developing parenting plans that prioritize the interests of the child. Public awareness campaigns play a role in educating people about the risks of child abduction and preventive measures that can be taken (Baker & Jaffe 2019). These campaigns employ media platforms to disseminate information to parents, educators, law enforcement agencies and the general public. By enhancing awareness these initiatives empower individuals to identify and report activities while proactively taking steps to prevent abductions. Non-governmental organizations and advocacy groups play a part in combating child abduction as well. They provide support and resources for parents, offer assistance when needed and advocate for policy changes that safeguard children's rights and well-being (Fawcett & Ratcliff 2020). Serving as lifelines for left behind parents these organizations contribute significantly to prevention efforts and resolution of abduction cases.

Technological advancements have revolutionized the approach towards handling child abduction cases. Law enforcement agencies now utilize databases and international communication systems to track down abducted children (Dyke, 2018). Moreover, social media and online platforms have become tools in spreading information regarding missing children,

engaging the public and assisting in recovery efforts. To counter child abduction authorities have implemented border security measures. Collaboration between immigration and border control agencies with law enforcement is crucial to prevent abductors from crossing borders unnoticed (Goodman, 2021). The usage of passport controls and watchlists helps identify individuals involved in abduction cases.

Education and support services provide parents dealing with child abduction cases with resources and guidance. These services offer support, legal advice well as strategies to navigate the complex legal and emotional aspects of abduction (Baker & Jaffe 2019). Their goal is to empower parents, with knowledge and tools to protect their children's rights effectively while advocating for them.

This study will take a look into the perspectives of parents towards the available methods to ratify child abduction, as it is crucial to their responses and the perceived impacts of the situation as a whole. Moreover, there will be a look into the challenges that these parents face when seeking these methods, and whether their pursuits and endeavours have been fruitful in progressing their conditions.

Overview of study objectives

The main focus of the study is to examine how religious beliefs and parent-child separation relate to each other within the context of child abduction. The focus of the study is on the Arab region, as it is an area that is prominently meshed with a plethora of religions, and will offer a facilitated region to study child abduction within the scope of religion. The study also attempts to gain an understanding of the emotions, experiences, and perspectives of parents who have been directly affected by forced separation as well as those who, living in the same cultural context, have not experienced it. By including both affiliated and unaffiliated parents in the

study, the aim was to gain a culturally shared view of this phenomenon. Comparing these two groups will help identify similarities and differences in their experiences, providing insights into how religious beliefs contribute to responses to parent-child forced separation. Moreover, the study attempts to achieve an understanding of the impacts of gender roles child abduction by soliciting the opinions of males and females for the purpose of the study. Parents are also inquired about the methods of combating child abduction, in order to consider their effectiveness and accessibility to parents.

Methodology

Research Design

For this research, a qualitative approach was used to delve into how families in the Arab region view child-parent forced separation within the context of religious beliefs. The qualitative research design was selected based on its ability to allow us to gain an understanding of the emotions, experiences, and perspectives of parents who have been directly affected by forced separation as well as those who, living in the same cultural context, have not experienced it. This type of research is ideal for exploring sensitive topics (Shaw et al., 2019), like how religious beliefs intervene in family dynamics during times of separation. It allows to thoroughly explore participants' stories and personal experiences, something that quantitative methods may not capture holistically.

The research design aligns with an interpretive approach (Bleiker et al., 2019), emphasizing the significance of understanding participants' worldviews, and the meaning they attach to their experiences. By including both affiliated and unaffiliated parents in the study, the aim was to gain a culturally shared view of this phenomenon. Comparing these two groups will

help identify similarities and differences in their experiences, providing insights into how religious beliefs contribute to responses to parent-child forced separation.

The qualitative approach also offers the advantage of being flexible and adaptable to the evolving nature of the topic at hand. This allows for themes and insights to emerge during the process of collecting and analyzing data (Patton, 2015). Through conducting semi-structured interviews, this study aimed to gather insights into the complexities of parent-child separation experiences focusing in particular on the role of religious beliefs in the framing, (de)legitimation and resolution of child abduction cases.

Participants

The study involved selecting 10 parents with direct backgrounds or affiliations from within the Arab region. The participants were contacted directly and asked whether they would be willing to participate in the study at hand, mostly using social media platforms and communication software. They were divided into two groups; 5 parents who had experienced forced parent child separation due to child abduction cases and 5 parents who had not lived these situations. Two of the participants were of American and Canadian origin, however, they were married to an individual from the Arab region and their parenting styles were influenced by the Arab region, therefore, they were considered eligible for the study at hand. The purpose of this sampling approach was to ensure a range of perspectives and experiences related to the research questions.

Here are the criteria that were used for selection:

1. Parental Status: All participants needed to be parents so that they could provide insights based on their experiences as caregivers.

2. **Affiliated or Unaffiliated:** Participants could be parents who had experienced forced parent child separation themselves or those who hadn't been directly involved but might have gained knowledge about it through their networks or communities.
3. **Age Range (30-50 years):** Participants within the age range of 30-50 years were targeted in order to include individuals with children of ages providing a heterogeneous set of parental experiences and perspectives.
4. **Geographic Region (Arab Region):** Participants were selected from areas within the region.
5. **Religion:** The selected participants had a Muslim or Christian background, as those are the two most common religions in the Arab region.

The main focus of the study was to examine how religious beliefs and parent-child separation relate to each other within this context. Including the above criteria served several purposes: it enabled a comparison between parents who have experienced forced parent-child separation, and those who haven't, to gain an understanding of how religious beliefs were interweaved in their perspectives. The specified age range and regional criteria ensured that there was a range of experiences, while also keeping the cultural relevance intact. This methodological approach was crucial for addressing the research questions, and exploring the perspective on this complex issue in the Arab region in a rich and contextually relevant manner.

The majority of the participants in this study were females, where only two of the participants were males (Table 1). One of the most notable characteristics in the affiliated group in particular was that almost the entirety of the group were females, with the only one of the participants from this group being a male, showcasing a large disproportion in this area. As for current Geographic

locations, the participants were spread out across Lebanon, Canada, Angola, and Portugal, with their ages ranging between 31 to 50 for the affiliated group, and 31-40 for the unaffiliated group. Half of the participants, moreover, had bachelor’s degrees, while 4 had master’s degrees; the remaining participant’s highest achieved level of education pertains to a high school diploma. The occupations of the participants were diverse, with only one participant being unemployed. As for the rest, each worked in a different job/industry than their peers.

Finally, the participants hail from two main religions, Islam and Christianity, with no participants from other religious backgrounds.

Tabela 1. Characteristics of Participants

Characteristics	Involvement	
	Affiliated	Unaffiliated
Gender	1 - Male	1 - Male
	4 - Females	4 – Females

Current Geographic Location	2 - Beirut, Lebanon	3 – Beirut, Lebanon
	1 – Vancouver, Canada	1 – Kansas, USA
	1 – Ontario, Canada	1 – Luanda, Angola
	1 – Lisbon, Portugal	
Age	31 – 50	31 – 40
Educational Level	3 - Bachelor’s Degree	2 – Bachelor’s Degree
	1 – Highschool Diploma	3 – Master’s Degree
	1 – Master’s Degree	
Occupation	1 – Nursery Daycare	1 – Architect
	1 – Construction	1 – PR Cultural Specialist
	1 – Social Worker	1 – Interior Architecture
	1 – Coordinator	1 – Food Safety
	1 – Teleperformance	1 – Unemployed

Religion

3 – Muslim 2
– Christian

5 - Muslim

Procedure

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were the primary approach used to collect data for this study. This type of interviews was chosen because they have proven to be effective in capturing meaningful stories from parents (Mahat-Shamir et al., 2019). Such narratives can provide insights into how forced parent-child separation relates to beliefs and the emotions, experiences and perceptions of parents.

The interview guide was carefully developed by reviewing existing literature to identify key themes, topics and open-ended questions (Annex 1). Through this guide, participants were encouraged to share their stories and perspectives, creating a space where their unique experiences could be fully expressed.

To ensure that the interview guide was effective and appropriate, it was refined through an extensive process. This involved conducting pilot interviews with individuals who shared characteristics as our study participants. The goal was to improve the guide's clarity and relevance so that it would gather the desired information without influencing or disturbing participants.

Interviews took place between June and August of 2023. The interviews lasted between 20 to 45 minutes on average and were conducted using online conferencing software and

platforms. This method was chosen for its convenience, allowing for the engagement of participants from regions in the Arab world. Interviews were conducted either in English or Arabic, depending on the language that was more comfortable for the participant.

The online format provided an adaptable way for participants to schedule interviews regardless of their availability or location; this made it easier to collect data. Additionally, conducting interviews online created a familiar environment, which encouraged discussions about sensitive topics.

Ethical Considerations

The research was carried out following the guidelines set by the American Psychological Association's (APA) Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct. These ethical considerations played a role, in maintaining the research's integrity and ensuring that the study added to our understanding while respecting the rights and well-being of the participants.

This study took care to follow guidelines in order to protect the rights and well-being of the participants. The research process involved considerations for, but not limited to, the following:

- A. Ethical Review; The research protocol underwent a thorough ethical review, which included obtaining approval, from the university's Ethical Committee (ref. 63/2023). This review assessed the study's methodology, potential risks and measures taken to ensure safety and compliance with standards.
- B. Informed Consent (Annex 2); Ensuring informed consent was a part of the research process. All participants were provided with comprehensive information regarding the purpose of the study, its procedures and any potential risks involved. They were

explicitly informed about their right to withdraw from the study at any point without facing any consequences.

- C. Anonymity and Confidentiality; To safeguard participants identities beyond anonymization personal information was separated from the data. Identifiers were replaced with pseudonyms in transcripts to ensure that participants remained anonymous. The audio recordings and transcripts were securely stored on encrypted folders with limited access. Following completion of the study data will be retained for six months before being destroyed.
- D. Participant Well-being; Throughout the interviews great importance was placed on prioritizing the well-being of participants. Sensitive topics such as parent-child separation and religious beliefs were approached with empathy and respect. The participants were given access to contact details for health resources and support services in case they needed any help.

Data Analysis

All the interviews were fully transcribed and translated into English when necessary. To ensure anonymity, all information that could help identify the participants was removed or replaced by codes.

A thematic analysis was utilised to examine the interviews' transcripts. This method helps systematically identify and report patterns or themes within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To ensure rigor and consistency, well-defined steps were followed during the analysis process.

- A. Getting Familiar with the Data: Initially, there was a thorough review of all the transcripts to develop an understanding of their content. This step allowed an immersion into the data and an identification of any recurring ideas or patterns.
- B. Creating Initial Codes: After becoming familiar with the transcripts, codes were assigned to sections. These codes were developed inductively to capture aspects of the data. Codes were employed during this process to explore a range of material without imposing predefined categories.
- C. Identifying Themes: Once coding was completed, codes and content were grouped together to identify potential themes. A brainstorming session with discussions around the main themes, interpretations and insights related to these themes was held. The resulting codes and categories were tested across different transcripts and the themes were refined iteratively.
- D. Reviewing and Defining Themes: Final themes were critically reviewed and refined, and thus there was an ability to define the identified themes. This involved assessing how well each theme reflected the data's coherence and ensured representation.
- E. Writing the Analysis: The final report was created with the aim of presenting a comprehensive narrative of the themes. It included quotes from the interviews to support the findings. The structure of the analysis was designed in such a way that it effectively conveyed the richness and complexity of the data while addressing the research questions.

The analysis reached a point of data saturation, where no new themes or insights emerged from examination. This indicated that data collection successfully captured a range of experiences, from participants leading to a comprehensive understanding of how forced parentchild separation is perceived within the Arab region.

Analysis

The current section offers a thematic analysis of the interviews that were conducted for the purpose of further delving into the topic of this research. The participants, half of which were directly affiliated with child abduction cases, and the other half who were not directly affiliated (deemed as unaffiliated), provided a number of key insights towards an array of questions offered to them surrounding the topic. Table 2 identifies participants' codes and main attributes (presented separately in Table 1 to avoid possible identifications). The resulting findings provided seven (7) main themes covering a range of sub-themes on the topic of child abduction, and its impacts on the parents, allowing for a better understanding of first-hand and second-hand experiences with child abduction cases (Table 3).

Tabela 2. Participants' Code, Age & Gender

Affiliated	Unaffiliated
P1 38, Female	P2 31, Female
P4 50, Male	P7 35, Female
P3 46, Female	P8 32, Female
P6 46, Female	P9 35, Female
P5 31, Female	P10 40, Male

Tabela 3. Themes and sub-themes resulting from thematic analysis

Main Themes	Sub Themes	Examples
Parenting Experience	Perception of Raising a Child, Challenges and	<i>Affiliated:</i> “all the surroundings don’t really help emotionally, physically” P5
	Rewards, Impact of Religion	<i>Unaffiliated:</i> “very rewarding when you see your child act in a way that makes you proud” P2
Experience with Child Separation	Personal Experience, Reasons for Separation,	<i>Affiliated:</i> “I have, and I know a lot of people have” P3
	Legal Involvement, Family Experiences	<i>Unaffiliated:</i> “Child abduction, we have a lot of friends of mine a lot of people you hear in every house there's a problem” P11

Negative Impacts on the Childseparated Parent	Self-Blame, Self-Reflection, Emotional and Psychological Struggles, Emotional Damage	<i>Affiliated:</i> “I question everything. We lose a lot of our own self-esteem. We lose a lot of our own self-identity because when we're with our kids, especially me, that was my identity” P3
--	--	--

Unaffiliated:

“I would definitely say the biggest thing is also mental health, and I've seen that from a close friend whose children were you know separated from her.” P8

Religion and Child Rearing	Perception of Importance in Parenting, Importance of Religion in Moral Development	<i>Affiliated:</i> “I personally think that teaching a child anything, if it were to be religion or not, you should bring it in a way that it can fit their mind. If someone is eight years old, you cannot come and force them religion” P5
-----------------------------------	--	---

Unaffiliated:

“Religion I think it's a base it doesn't matter if it's Islam or like Christian or any other religion, but religion it means for me it's like a value, it's a belief, it's a behaviour, it's an attitude.” P11

Role of Religion in Healing	Positive and Negative Aspects, Comfort, Questioning Beliefs, Teaching Patience, Finding Meaning and Acceptance Through Religion	<p><i>Affiliated:</i></p> <p>“[during the child separation phase] a time in my life where I'm questioning everything about religion because my ex-husband took the kids because of religion. So I blame religion a lot” P3</p>
		<p><i>Unaffiliated:</i></p> <p>“She can maybe read in the Quran, or the Bible go to someone that's religious like a sheikh or and maybe they would tell her about how to read those things” P9</p>
Handling of Child Separation	Lack of Attention, Ignored, Lack of Recognition, Depending on Situation, Picking Sides	<p><i>Affiliated:</i> “It's not even recognized and so no it's not handled well, and it's not handled in the child's best interests no” P6</p>
		<p><i>Unaffiliated:</i> “some situation it's really it goes smoother than others, so sometimes the families are more aware of on how to act in such situations and their grandparents and from both sides they do not pick a side they stand in the middle and they pick the child's side” P9</p>

Services	Availability of Services,	<i>Affiliated:</i> “KAFAs I’ve gone there I’ve talked to the
and	Support from	lawyer there they were helpful in the sense that
Support	Organizations, Trust in Legal Systems	they explained the law to me but not anything you know practical. I was a participant in a BBC documentary” P13

Unaffiliated: “I don’t have personal experiences, but I think there are various organizations that contain an important role to protect the child. For instance, if there’s a fair court, it would be okay, and I would reach out but unfortunately there is not.” P10

Parenting Experience One of the main themes discussed by the participants pertains to the parenting experience overall, and how that experience appears to be for each group. For the affiliated parents’ group, the main subthemes discussed pertained to the perception of raising a child, and the impact of religion on the process as a whole. For instance, participant 5 claimed that the parenting experience was “a competition”, and that “all the surroundings don’t really help emotionally, physically”. Similarly, participant 1 explained that “I believe it is quite hard to raise children, and raising children needs a lot of effort”.

On the other hand, the unaffiliated participants had their answers embedded in another area, focusing majorly on the challenges and rewards of the experience, and the influence of technology and media in the current age. Participant 10 spoke about the exposures that children

have in modern times, but added that “raising kids itself is rewarding”. Participant 2, claimed that the process is “very rewarding when you see your child act in a way that makes you proud”. Participant 15 also added the following about the impact of religion on the parenting experience, “I think religion is important, since the kid is a child, he should be aware and used to what’s right and what’s wrong, so he becomes scared to do any harm, once the kid is aware and knows what’s right and what’s wrong you kind of set boundaries to your children”.

Thus, there is an evident difference in the sentiment towards the parenting experience as a whole, where those who were directly affected by child abduction had a more pessimistic view of the role, while their counterparts were more inclined towards mentioning the rewards associated with parenting.

Experience With Child Separation Those of the affiliated group were directly involved in child abduction cases, but also stress how these cases were common in their communities, as highlighted by participant 3 by saying “I have, and I know a lot of people have”. This is in accordance with the accounts of other participants in the affiliated group, like when participant 11 claimed: “Child abduction, we have a lot of friends of mine a lot of people you hear in every house there's a problem”.

Those in the unaffiliated group alluded in their descriptions to people that they are related or acquainted with in order to describe the experience of child separation. However, this theme highlights the abundance of child separation cases, where if one is not directly involved, they are at close proximity to the experience taking place. Participant 8 said “I have not personally experienced it, but I do know a few parents that are close friends to me that have had their children separated from them”, and participant 7 added “Child abduction, we have a lot of friends of mine, a lot of people you hear in every house.” The alarming abundance of the

experience, thus, is an area that is worthy of noting, as can be witnessed from the replies of the study participants.

Negative Impact on Parents In the central theme of this study a chasm was found between what those who are within the experience describe, and those who are bystanders or third-party affiliates describe. Participants of the affiliated group spoke in lengthy terms about the negative impacts that they have experienced from being part of a child separation case.

“Of course, at first there will be several problems, not just situations mentally. The problems will be that the family won’t know where to stand, they will be cut into two. Half will defend you, and half will go against you. I’m sure everyone has their own opinion, and everyone has their perception of what has been going on, and those who say “no you have to manage, you have to tolerate” but they say this in terms of knowing that the man is at fault but just for your kids and your children’s sake step down. The other half would say “no you have to defend yourself and do whatever it takes, but at the same time your outcome is a lost game against the man” (Participant 1).

Here, it is noticeable that the issue with child abduction is of a complex nature, and moved beyond the assumed impactors, to also involved gender norms and roles. For instance, in the aforementioned quote by the participant, it is evident that battling against a man in a child abduction case is considered to be a “lost game”. Men in Arab societies are considered to be, for lack of better terminology, a tier above females, and would automatically be considered to be the more capable parent in front of a court of law.

“I question everything. We lose a lot of our own self-esteem. We lose a lot of our own selfidentity because when we're with our kids, especially me, that was my identity. I was a mom. I'm left motherless or childless. So how do I come back from what I've always

known for the past few years of my life and adapted into that? And then all of a sudden, I go from having two to none. And I questioned everything about my life. I thought you do a lot of self-blaming; you do a lot of self-reflection” (Participant 3).

This group provided a lot of deep and lengthy insight about the backlash they had received from being involved in a child separation case. Their counter-parts did not provide as much detail, and did not venture as deeply into the topic, as shown below.

“I would definitely say the biggest thing is also mental health, and I've seen that from a close friend whose children were you know separated from her. She was somebody that I worked with very closely, so I did see like the experience first-hand. I would see her just randomly crying throughout the day” (Participant 8)

“This really depends on the parent, if the parent really wants to be involved or forced to be away from the child but any good parent who wants to be involved in his child’s life and it’s forced to be away, wouldn’t live his life or her life normally” (Participant 2).

The most obvious distinction between the two replies is how the unaffiliated parents positioned themselves as bystanders describing what they saw in someone involved, while the affiliated parents provided detailed insight about the experience. The affiliated group expressed immensely heightened negative impacts, contrasting with what the unaffiliated group portrayed about the people they knew within such a situation.

Religion and Child Rearing When asked about the role and importance of religion in the process of upbringing a child, the unaffiliated group spoke highly of the benefits of religion, and how it was an important factor in the process as a whole.

“Religion I think it's a base, it doesn't matter if it's Islam or like Christian or any other religion, but religion it means for me it's like a value, it's a belief, it's a behavior, it's an

attitude. It's all like a package of all these things, so without the religion I think I will not have the value, how I'm going to raise them without what is the right or what is the [wrong]". (Participant 7)

"I think it's important to teach the children about their religion and how good it will make them feel and explaining everything with the simplicity". (Participant 9)

Participants of the affiliated group were rather dismissive of the impact of religion when it comes to raising a child. For instance, participant 5 explains "I personally think that teaching a child anything, if it were to be religion or not, you should bring it in a way that it can fit their mind. If someone is eight years old, you cannot come and force them religion", and participant 6 claims that "I myself chose not to be religious [...] and I was free to choose you know whatever it is that I wanted to pursue". Thus, from the answers provided by the two different groups, it became clear that those affiliated with child separation were less supportive of the use of religion in child upbringing, while their counter-parts spoke more about its centrality to the process. As described by some of the affiliated participants in later passages, religion was one of the factors that facilitated the rise of child separation within their families, which could be a possible reason for their answers.

Role of Religion in Healing The role of religion in the healing process of parental separation was another central theme in the interviews. The unaffiliated group focused mainly on the benefits of using religion as a way of healing internal issues within families, while the affiliated group provided conflicting views on the matter, with some discussing the negative aspects of religion within such a context. Participants of the unaffiliated group advised those who are witnessing child separation to appeal to religion as a method to solve the situation.

“She can maybe read in the Quran, or the Bible go to someone that's religious like a sheikh or and maybe they would tell her about how to read those things or about how God's it's like maybe it's God's doing there's a reason behind everything and maybe it's meant to happen” (Participant 9).

“For those using religion as a rule issue I think it can teach them patience. I think patience and maybe and also using religion they say sometimes like “maybe for the better, this was for the best for it” and if this wasn't going to end maybe it would have been worse yeah so believe like everything happens for a reason” (Participant 10).

This group seemed to have a positive sentiment towards employing religion in such situations, and felt as though the parents involved could learn how to cope with their situation through the use of religion. On the other hand, the notion seemed to be different for those who were affiliated in child separation situations.

“[the child separation phase was] a time in my life where I'm questioning everything about religion because my ex-husband took the kids because of religion. So I blame religion a lot [...] But I think you can always find hope and you can always find comfort in reading the scriptures in certain areas. But I also think religion can also play a negative role in that healing”. (Participant 3)

“If people want to walk in the right way, the religious way, no man will ever do this, it's written down in our holy book there's a whole chapter on women, women have so many rights but it's unfortunate, nobody really practices anymore, and it's those people whose hearts that have been hardened the most” (Participant 1).

Again, this is an allusion to the gender roles/perceptions in the modern Arab society. In religion, all humans are created equal, and are to be treated as such based on the holy scriptures.

Nonetheless, in current Arab societies, it is often a recurring theme that men have the upper hand over women, and will overpower them in issues such as the one discussed in this research.

Therefore, it may be noticed how the affiliated group no longer viewed religion in the same light as that of their counterparts. It seems as though those who have passed, or are currently passing, through child separation cases begin to see areas where religion is either becoming disruptive to their healing and progression, or is being performed with malpractice, leading to negative outcomes.

Handling of Child Separation This is also a topic where a variety of answers emerged depending on the participants' experience. The affiliated group noticed that the condition of handling child separation is difficult, and often ignored by those around them.

“I think everyone everywhere knows such situations; people actually don't give so much attention to. Well, at least I'm speaking about the Arab society. I don't know about outside. But yes, it's ignored. It's not being taken into consideration. At the end, each one does what they want to do.” (Participant 5)

“It's not even recognized and so no it's not handled well, and it's not handled in the child's best interests no”. (Participant 6)

On the other hand, the unaffiliated group attempted to rationalize the difficulty of the situation, or provided their own interpretation of how difficult it may be. Participant 8, for example, claimed that: “You know like when a child is under a specific age then they may be even more impacted than somebody who's you know a late teenager or early adult age” in the realm of handling child separation, before venturing into the impact of the situation on different age groups. Similarly, participant 9 added that: “some situation it's really it goes smoother than others, so sometimes the families are more aware of on how to act in such situations and their

grandparents and from both sides they do not pick a side they stand in the middle and they pick the child's side". Thus, the unaffiliated group presents a more rationalized portrayal of the situation and defends that a solution or pathway is possible, unlike the affiliated group which claims that there are minimal attempts to combat the situation.

Services and Support A central theme to the issue of child separation is the available methods in which people are tackling it. The question of whether there is ample support and service to parents impacted by such a situation showed varying replies from the two groups.

To begin with, the affiliated group seemed to have a more extensive understanding of all the available methods to follow, but did not seem very satisfied with the impact that the services had on resolving the situation. Some, nonetheless, did quote positive impacts from being able to share their experiences with others and receive support accordingly. Participant 6 for example, offered a number of well-renowned organization that she had reached out to, but followed up by claiming that "I was knocking on other judges' door, there was no organization, everyone was very empathetic and everyone it's a generalized statement but the full female focus groups were very empathetic, but there was nothing tangible that resulted from it.". Alternatively, participant 1 shared their experience with seeking support and claimed that "in Lebanon of course not, however when I came to Portugal, the second I arrived I went to an association for women's rights, and I told them everything, they stood by me, helped me, and till now they keep reaching out".

On the other hand, participants of the unaffiliated group showcased minimal knowledge of the services being provided within this scope, or at least a knowledge that is not as extensive as the affiliated group. Participant 10 commented the following, for instance, "I don't have personal experiences, but I think there are various organizations that contain an important role to

protect the child”. In addition, participant 9 added “maybe I would reach to the media I would go on social media and maybe this will gain the attention needed and people will talk about it and maybe that would put pressure if this was to happen to me”.

Thus, there is an evident difference in how extensive each party’s knowledge/understanding of available services and methods to approach a situation as such. Child abduction is a complex situation, and even organizations that are implicitly involved in taking care of it are not always as effective as one may hope, let alone alluding to social media for help.

Discussion

This thesis explores the often-overlooked connection between child abduction and religious beliefs in the Arab region, focusing primarily on the perspective of parents. Child abduction cases bring challenges to affected families, regardless of the motivations behind them. When religious beliefs are entangled with such cases, it may further intensify the emotional and psychological struggles parents face. This research aimed to shed light on aspects of child abduction including psychological, religious and cultural dimensions. It delves into the experiences, coping strategies and belief systems of parents involved in these cases to better understand how faith plays a role in navigating through these circumstances. By examining these experiences, this thesis aimed to provide insights that can contribute towards more comprehensive and compassionate responses from both legal systems and social support networks addressing this complex issue. The following discussion outlines the findings resulting from the interviews conducted in light of the literature review performed on the topic.

When analysing the interview responses, one of the most evident findings established was a contrast between parents who have directly experienced child abduction, who tend to share a

negative outlook on parenting, while those who haven't been directly affected emphasize the rewarding aspects of raising children. This falls in line with the research that was covered within this area, as parents that suffer from child abduction will often find the experience more difficult or traumatic than those who are not involved in such cases (Hackett, 2016)

The thematic analysis also delved into the experiences shared by individuals associated with or stood as bystanders in child separation cases. These first-hand accounts vividly described impacts such as family divisions, loss of self-identity, self-blame and deep introspection. This sheds light on the toll it takes on individuals involved in cases both emotionally and mentally. The testimonies of affiliated parents thus call for recognition for their experience and support for these challenges. Those who are not directly involved provide a viewpoint observing and briefly commenting on the emotional struggles of people they know in similar situations. By considering both perspectives, we gained a comprehensive understanding of the complex challenges affiliated parents face when dealing with child abduction cases.

Research conducted by Doughty (2019), and Williams (2017) emphasized the complex consequences experienced by parents involved in child abduction cases. It highlights the turmoil, lasting trauma and potential symptoms similar, to post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Additionally, it addresses isolation and /spiritual challenges faced by these parents within their communities. Importantly it recognizes the role played by religious beliefs which further complicates these distressing situations emphasizing the need to acknowledge these consequences for providing support and interventions (Eisenberg et al., 2006).

In addition to what preceded, the thematic analysis also evidenced differing perspectives regarding the significance of religion in raising children. Those parents without affiliation strongly defended integrating religion into parenting as a value that guided their approach to

raising children. They emphasized that religion encompasses beliefs, behaviours and attitudes holistically. The interviewees highlighted religion's role in instilling values, fostering identity, providing answers to existential questions, offering comfort during challenging times and encouraging community engagement. On the other hand, the group associated with the issue of child separation played down, and sometimes contested, the importance of religion in raising children. They suggested that teaching children about religion should be approached in a way that suits their understanding rather than imposing it on them.

In the literature, religion has been explored as an influential factor, in shaping a child's development (Boyatzis et al., 2006). It is portrayed as a source of values, ethics and moral guidance that shape how children perceive the world and behave. The literature review emphasizes the impact of religion on children's wellbeing and their sense of responsibility towards society beyond their immediate family (Maton et al., 2006). Overall, the literature review establishes a foundation by highlighting the positive impacts of religion on raising children. But the literature also emphasizes how religious beliefs can serve as justifications for and exacerbate cases of child abduction (Pargament, 1997). It highlights how some abducting parents may use their faith as a shield to resist authorities arguing that their actions were driven by intervention or obligation (Berliner & Conte, 2018). Additionally religious leaders or communities may exert pressure on these parents' impeding cooperation with measures and causing trauma for the child (Park, 2010).

The current study indicates that the affiliated parents express doubts and even suggest that religion may have played a role in their experience of child separation. The findings thus introduced diverse perspectives particularly emphasizing how views differ between those who are unaffiliated and those who are affiliated with religious beliefs. This divergence in viewpoints

revealed by the analysis indicates that religions influence, on child upbringing is not universally positive but rather varies and can be changed depending on experiences and contexts.

In contrast to the previous literature, this thematic analysis focused on perspectives categorized into "affiliated" and "unaffiliated" groups. The affiliated group expresses a view asserting that cases of child separation are often disregarded and not handled in the interests of the child. Conversely the unaffiliated group attempts to rationalize the challenges by suggesting solutions or pathways.

The thematic analysis presents thus a nuanced perspective. It reveals that participants who do not affiliate with any religion generally view religion as a force, for healing when it comes to child separation situations. They emphasize the value of patience, acceptance and believing that everything happens for a reason while suggesting seeking guidance from figures for coping with circumstances. On the other hand, those involved in the situation tend to have doubts and even negative opinions, about how religion plays a part in cases of child separation. They link religion with blame and disruption pointing out how it can be used to manipulate and control others. Some view religion as a source of conflict suggesting that it can be employed to justify actions that lead to outcomes.

The insights gained from reviewing existing literature and conducting analysis offer additional perspectives on the role of religion, in the context of child abduction and parental separation. While there are some commonalities, such as recognizing the benefits of religion in coping and healing there are also differences in viewpoints between the two sources. The extant literature primarily focuses on the aspects of religion in helping parents affected by child abduction heal (Oliver, 2019). It emphasizes how religious beliefs provide solace, comfort and a sense of purpose to parents. The review suggests that religious teachings and practices offer tools

for coping, forgiveness and reconciliation. Religious communities are seen as sources of support and belonging while religious rituals provide opportunities for commemoration and closure (Carter & McGoldrick, 2019). However, while the literature presents a positive viewpoint regarding religions role in healing, the thematic analysis reflects the diverse perspectives of individuals who have experienced child separation. It suggests that the impact of religion is highly dependent on experiences and beliefs indicating that for some people religion may not always contribute positively to the healing process. To summarize, while there can be benefits associated with using religion as a means of coping with child abduction and parental separation, the current study emphasizes how complex individual viewpoints can be and highlights the possibility of consequences linked to beliefs and practices in these difficult circumstances. This difference underscores why it is essential to consider a range of perspectives when addressing the role of religion, in situations.

Another crucial area to consider is the persistent nature of gender roles in the Arab world. As shown from the study sample, the majority of the victimised parents from within the affiliated group are females, with only one participant from that group being a male. This shows the disproportionate nature of child abduction cases in the Arab world. Moreover, as noted in the thematic analysis and quotes from the participants, females have a harder time in cases of child abduction, and find it more difficult to arrive at ways to enhance the situation than males do. This falls in line with one of the literary sources covered in the literature review, which spoke thoroughly about the impacts of gender roles on concepts like legal proceedings in cases of child abduction (Bohman & Thomas, 2019). This goes to show how the complicated nature of gender roles and expectations in the Arab world are a critical variable to consider in the cases of child abduction.

Implications

The findings achieved in this paper provide a number of impacts on the research area, and the individuals/organisations involved. First and foremost, this research provides an expansion on available literature, to incorporate religious belief in the Arab region. This sheds a light on an area that had not been thoroughly covered before, allowing those interested to garner a general idea on the condition within that area.

This research also sheds light on the work of organisations in enhancing the conditions of victimized parents who have been involved in child abduction cases. As was noticed from the research, assistance in the Arab region has not been as fruitful as one would hope, and will require further development in order to attain realistic goals for people suffering from such realities. Some of the organisations/institutions that were discussed by the participants pertain to government and religious ones, NCLW and KAFA. Though one cannot ignore the work that they have put in thus far, it seems as though the participants had not been very satisfied with their work, and would appreciate further support in handling their cases. This is especially true when it comes to handling issues with governments, legal frameworks, and the perpetrating parents, who often has malicious intent towards the victimized parent.

Limitations

There are a few limitations to consider in this study. Firstly, given that the research is qualitative and with a small sample of participants, one requires to be cautious when transferring the findings to other contexts. They might not be applicable to everyone in the region or to other regions. To address this, future studies could include a more diverse sample of participants from distinct cultural backgrounds, education levels and geographic regions within the Arab world.

This would help gain a better and more comprehensive understanding of the topic. Other limitations to consider also pertain to the presence of two religions within the study only, Islam and Christianity, and the fact that the majority of the participants are females and victimized parents. Also, the sample within this study is that of an academically well-achieved background. Future studies may rely on more heterogenous sample groups to arrive at specific conclusions to more precise sample groups.

Secondly, this study solely focuses on the perspective of families, excluding viewpoints from other stakeholders such as government officials, legal professionals and religious leaders. To overcome this limitation future research could take a perspective approach and explore how different stakeholders interact in cases involving forced parent child separation. This would provide with an alternative view of the issue, and to better understand the challenges these stakeholders have to deal with.

Additionally, it's important to acknowledge that interviews have specific characteristics, including a strong awareness of the normative dimension of the topic. To minimize this limitation, researchers employed bracketing techniques where they acknowledged any biases or preconceptions they may have had and consciously set them aside during data collection and analysis. Maintaining reflexivity throughout the study was key in reducing any researcher bias.

Quantitative information has the potential to reveal trends and patterns while qualitative data allows for an in-depth exploration of individuals personal experiences. By combining these approaches one can enhance the reliability and strength of their findings. This study, however, only focuses on qualitative analysis, whereas future studies would benefit from combining both methods.

To sum up, despite acknowledging some limitations in this study, it sets the groundwork for research on how families cope with forced separation of parents and children in the Arab region. By addressing these limitations and implementing the recommended strategies, one can make progress in this field, and gain a more comprehensive understanding of this intricate issue.

Conclusion

Examining the perspectives of parents on child abduction cases provided insight into the psychological impact of these traumatic events. This analysis helped to better understand beliefs mobilized to legitimize or contest child abduction and how the wider community responds to these actions. Additionally exploring gender roles is crucial in understanding power dynamics within families and their potential influence on incidents of child abduction. Religious beliefs and teachings also play a role in child abduction cases. Considering perspectives adds complexity to our understanding of child abduction within the region. The consequences of child abduction extend beyond those involved; they affect families, communities and society as a whole. Understanding these consequences is vital for developing prevention strategies and intervention programs. The findings from this study can guide policy efforts focused on protecting children and families from the effects of child abduction.

References

- Amer, M. M., & Awad, G. H. (2016). *Handbook of Arab American Psychology*. Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.
- American Psychological Association. (2020). *APA dictionary of psychology*.

<https://dictionary.apa.org/child-abduction>

- Amstutz, L. (2020). The role of religious beliefs in international child abduction cases: A comparative analysis. *International Journal of Children's Rights*, 28(2), 323-343.
- Aslan, E. (2019). A pluralistic account of religious upbringing in Islamic Religious Education: Fundamentals and perspectives. *Religious Education*, 114(4), 436–442.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00344087.2019.1631956>
- Bailey, L. (2020). Child abduction and the role of effective communication: A qualitative analysis of parental experiences. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 61(7), 584-600.
- Baker, L., & Jaffe, P. G. (2019). Child abduction: Legal remedies and protective factors. *Journal of Family Violence*, 34(4), 315-323.
- Ben-Arieh, A., & Fronese, I. (2011). Indicators of children's well-being: A European perspective. *Social Indicators Research*, 103(2), 143-160.
- Benson, P. L. (2017). Religion, spirituality, and child development. In M. H. Bornstein, M. E. Arterberry, K. L. Fingerman, & J. E. Lansford (Eds.), *The SAGE encyclopedia of lifespan human development* (Vol. 2, pp. 1599-1601). Sage Publications.
- Berliner, L., & Conte, J. R. (2018). Religious factors in child maltreatment and child welfare: Legal perspectives. In J. R. Conte & L. Berliner (Eds.), *The APSAC handbook on child maltreatment* (4th ed., pp. 353-370). Sage Publications.
- Bleiker, J., Morgan-Trimmer, S., Knapp, K., & Hopkins, S. (2019). Navigating the maze: Qualitative research methodologies and their philosophical foundations. *Radiography*, 25. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.radi.2019.06.008>
- Bohman, D. M., & Thomas, G. V. (2019). Economic factors in child abduction cases:

- Implications for legal proceedings. *Child and Family Law Quarterly*, 31(2), 171-189.
- Boyatzis, C. J., Dollahite, D. C., & Marks, L. D. (2006). The family as a context for religious and spiritual development in children and youth. In E. C. Roehlkepartain, P. E. King, L. Wagener, & P. L. Benson (Eds.), *The handbook of spiritual development in childhood and adolescence* (pp. 53-66). Sage Publications.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.
- Bregman, R. (2018). Finding solace in faith: The role of religion in coping with the trauma of child abduction. *Journal of Religion and Health*, 57(4), 1377-1391.
- Brown, S. L. (2013). Religious factors and child abduction: A theoretical framework. *Journal of Family Issues*, 34(12), 1577-1598.
- Brunk, M. A., Horselenberg, R., & Merckelbach, H. (2019). Child abduction and parental alienation: Legal frameworks and empirical evidence. *International Journal of Law, Crime and Justice*, 57, 104-115.
- Carter, B., & McGoldrick, M. (2019). Forgiveness and reconciliation in religious perspectives: A cross-cultural examination. *Journal of Spirituality in Mental Health*, 21(3), 167-181.
- Charmaz, K. (2014). *Constructing Grounded Theory* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Cohen, L. (2015). International child abduction in a digital age. *Child and Family Law Quarterly*, 27(2), 179-198.
- Cohen, L. (2017). Religion, faith, and healing in the aftermath of child abduction: A qualitative study. *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, 30(6), 703-712.

- Cohen, L., & Guttman, N. (2015). International parental child abduction and the criminal law: A global perspective. *International Journal of Law, Crime and Justice*, 43(1), 82-103.
- Doughty, J. (2019). Parental child abduction: An exploration of the lived experiences of leftbehind parents. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 93, 104-114.
- Dyke, C. V. (2018). International child abduction: Prevention, recovery, and return. *Child and Family Law Quarterly*, 30(2), 139-158.
- Fawcett, B., & Ratcliff, A. (2020). The Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction: An effective mechanism for the prompt return of abducted children? *International Family Law*, 20(5), 256-262.
- Finkelhor, D., & Vanderminden, J. (2018). Prevalence of child victimization, abuse, crime, and violence exposure. In J. R. Lutzker (Ed.), *Handbook of child maltreatment* (pp. 3-21). Springer.
- Freeman, M., & Taylor, N. (2020). Domestic violence and child participation: Contemporary Challenges for the 1980 Hague Child Abduction Convention. *Journal of Social Welfare and Family Law*, 42(2), 154–175. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09649069.2020.1751938>
- Froese, P., & Bader, C. D. (2010). Religion and child rearing. In H. Selin (Ed.), *Childbirth across cultures: Ideas and practices of pregnancy, childbirth and the postpartum* (pp. 47-63). Springer.
- Gallagher, M. (2017). Media coverage and public opinion in international child abduction cases. *Journal of Family Law*, 56(2), 123-140.
- Gill, M. J. (2014). The role of religion in the moral development of young people: Is there still a place for religion in schools? *Journal of Moral Education*, 43(3), 297-312.

- Goodman, G. S. (2021). International child abduction: Mediation as an alternative to litigation. *Family Court Review*, 59(2), 191-202.
- Gopnik, A. (2018). The role of religious leaders in resolving child abduction disputes: A qualitative study. *Journal of Religion and Society*, 20, 59-74.
- Hackett, C. (2016). Religious change and conflict in South Asia: A comparative study of conversion and communalism. *Religion*, 46(3), 438-458.
- Harrington, J. F. (2019). Early modern child abduction in the name of religion. *Childhood, Youth and Religious Minorities in Early Modern Europe*, 257–274. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-29199-0_9
- Humphries, R., & Ellison, C. G. (2017). The role of religious beliefs in the separation process: The case of conservative Protestants. *Journal of Family Issues*, 38(4), 512-536.
- Keates, N. (2019). The Hague Convention on International Child Abduction: An overview and analysis. *Family Law Review*, 35(2), 165-180.
- Khan, S. (2018). Faith-based child abduction: A comparative analysis of international legal frameworks. *International Journal of Law, Crime and Justice*, 54, 64-78.
- Koenig, H. G., & Büssing, A. (2010). The Duke University Religion Index (DUREL): A fiveitem measure for use in epidemiological studies. *Religions*, 1(1), 78-85.
- Lauten, A. (2020). Child abduction: A comparative analysis of the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction and Islamic law. *Child and Family Law Quarterly*, 32(3), 245-267.
- Mahat-Shamir, M., Neimeyer, R. A., & Picho-Prelorentzos, S. (2019). Designing in-depth semistructured interviews for revealing meaning reconstruction after loss. *Death Studies*,

45(2), 83–90. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07481187.2019.1617388>

- Mann, A. (2018). Cultural norms and child abduction: A comparative analysis of legal perspectives. *International Journal of Law, Policy and the Family*, 32(3), 268-287.
- Maton, K. I., Kohl, L. E., & Pickering, S. M. (2006). Cultural practices, parental attachment, and school success: A longitudinal study. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 16(3), 407-437.
- Moorhead, R., & Chase, R. (2020). International child abduction and legal jurisdiction: A comparative study of key legal issues. *Family Law Quarterly*, 54(1), 49-71.
- Nucci, L., & Turiel, E. (2003). God's word, religious rules, and the moral domain: Judgments of harm and justice. *Child Development*, 74(2), 416-430.
- Mulki, H., & Ghanem, B. (2021). Working Notes of the workshop Arabic misogyny identification (armi-2021). *Forum for Information Retrieval Evaluation*.
<https://doi.org/10.1145/3503162.3503178>
- Oliver, K. R. (2019). The role of prayer in the healing process of parents affected by child abduction. *Mental Health, Religion & Culture*, 22(7), 708-722.
- Palmer, D., & Park, R. (2017). Religion and social support in the aftermath of child abduction: A qualitative analysis. *Journal of Religion, Spirituality & Aging*, 29(4), 348-361.
- Pargament, K. I. (2019). The sacred art of forgiveness: Integrating spirituality and psychotherapy. *American Psychologist*, 74(8), 856-869.
- Park, C. L. (2010). Making sense of the meaning literature: An integrative review of meaning making and its effects on adjustment to stressful life events. *Psychological Bulletin*, 136(2), 257-301.

- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods: Integrating Theory and Practice*. Sage Publications.
- Ruck, C. A., & Ruck, B. K. (2016). Spiritual child abduction in Japan and in the Japanese diaspora. In J. E. Palmer (Ed.), *Religious liberty in Western and Islamic law: Toward a world legal tradition* (pp. 79-102). Oxford University Press.
- Saunders, K., & Browne, K. (2019). Parental child abduction in England: Understanding the psychological consequences for left-behind parents. *Journal of Family Issues*, 40(3), 314335.
- Shaw, R. M., Howe, J., Beazer, J., & Carr, T. (2019). Ethics and positionality in qualitative research with vulnerable and marginal groups. *Qualitative Research*, 20(3), 277–293. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794119841839>
- Smith, A., & Johnson, R. (2016). Understanding the psychological impact of faith-based child abduction on parents: A qualitative study. *Child Abuse Review*, 25(4), 289-301.
- Smith, C. (2003). Theorizing religious effects among American adolescents. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 42(1), 17-30.
- Smith, C. (2016). Religion and children's development. In J. Wright (Ed.), *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* (2nd ed., Vol. 20, pp. 838-845). Elsevier.
- Smith, J. D., & Jones, M. E. (2013). The role of religion in child abduction: A review of the literature. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 37(9), 733-742.
- Strawbridge, L. A. (2019). The impact of religious beliefs on child abduction cases: Legal and ethical considerations. *Ethics & Social Welfare*, 13(1), 36-52.

- Tavares, A., Crespo, C., Ferreira, L., & Ribeiro, M. T. (2021). Left behind parents: A qualitative study on the experience of parental abduction of a child in Portugal. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 47(3), 595–613. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jmft.12478>
- Trimmings, K., & Momoh, O. (2021). Intersection between domestic violence and International Parental Child Abduction: Protection of abducting mothers in return proceedings. *International Journal of Law, Policy and the Family*, 35(1).
<https://doi.org/10.1093/lawfam/ebab001>
- Verhellen, E. (2019). The best interests of the child in international child abduction cases: A critical analysis. *International Journal of Children's Rights*, 27(1), 74-94.
- Williams, T. (2017). Religion, faith, and family integrity: Exploring the role of religion in parental child abduction. *International Journal of Law, Policy and the Family*, 31(3), 326348.
- Wilson, M. (2011). The role of religion in the prevention and response to child abduction: A study of law enforcement and religious leaders. *Child & Youth Services Review*, 33(11), 2141-2149.
- Wuthnow, R. (2017). Religious parenting. In K. Ferraro (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Aging* (pp. 151-165). Oxford University Press.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Interview Questions

1. What is your gender?
2. What is your age?
3. What is your current occupation?
4. What is your highest level of education?
5. Where do you currently reside?
6. What is your primary language?
7. Do you have any children or dependents? Specify their ages.
8. What is your general perception on the process of raising a child in terms of how difficult or rewarding it is?
9. How impactful would you think religion is on the process of raising a child?
10. Have you or anyone you know experienced child separation?
11. In your own terms, what do you think child separation is?
12. In your opinion, what are the negative impacts of forced parent-child separation on the child?
13. In your opinion, what are the negative impacts of forced parent-child separation on the parent?
14. In your opinion, what are the negative impacts of forced parent-child separation on the family as a whole?
15. Do you feel as though the topic of child separation is handled well within societies? Is it being addressed well enough?
16. In your opinion, what role can religion play in the healing process for those affected by forced parent-child separation?
17. Do you have any insight on how child separations should be handled by the different parties involved? Do you have knowledge of any practices that have already been done by others around you?
18. What other factors do you think contribute to the representation and justification of child abduction in the region beyond religion?
19. Do you have knowledge of any services that could have helped you in this situation? If so, have you reached out to any of them? How did they act?

Appendix 2 – Consent Form

STUDY

The present study arises in the context of a *master's dissertation* at ISCTE - Instituto Universitário de Lisboa. This study concerns the familial models and perspectives on child-rearing in the Middle East, with a particular focus on the experiences of parents who are forced to live away from their children, while highlighting the impacts of religiosity on the notion.

RESEARCHER

The study is carried out by Reem Ezzeddine (Reeme@iscte-iul.pt), who can be contacted if you have any questions or comments. The supervisor of the master thesis is Carla Mouro (carla.mouro@iscte-iul.pt).

INTERVIEW

During the interview, you may touch sensitive topics that can bring up unpleasant memories and feelings. You have the right to provide information only to the extent that you consider necessary and have the right to refuse to talk on certain topics or answer certain questions. Participation in the study is strictly voluntary: you can freely choose to participate or not to participate. If you choose to participate, you can stop your participation at any time without having to provide any justification. At any time, you can withdraw from the study: during the interview by showing your opinion or after the interview by writing an e-mail to the researcher. At any time, you can withdraw the consent. In addition to being voluntary, participation is strictly confidential. You will have one interview session only after you send the signed consent, and we will make an appointment for an online meeting. At your request, an online meeting can take place without video.

DATA AND PROTECTION

ISCTE is responsible for the treatment of your personal data, which will be collected and managed exclusively for the purposes of this research, based on your legal consent (art. 9º, nº2, a) of the General Data Protection Regulation). Relevant data to be collected relates to the following: name, gender, age, marital status, geography (country/countries), religion, current marital and socioeconomic condition, any psychological assistance that you may have alluded to, emotional impacts, and outlook towards potential solutions when considering parents living away from their children. The interview will be audio-recorded only (not video) and then transcribed to text. Recordings and transcriptions will be held in separate folders on the ISCTE cloud space, protected by a password, and only the researcher and supervisor will have access to the data. This data will be kept for 6 months after the thesis defense is completed and then will be destroyed. The Data Protection Officer at ISCTE is Professor Nuno David (dpo@iscte.pt). The data will not be transferred to a third party and will not be transferred outside the EU.

Your participation in the study, which will be highly valued as a contribution to the advancement of knowledge in this field of science, consists of the interview. You have no risk of being recognized in the publication of the study as your name will be anonymized in the transcription of the interview. That means that your name will be never linked to analyzed data. At any time, you have right of access, rectification, deletion, limitation and opposition to the use of the data by contacting the researcher by e-mail. In case of violations of data protection, you can complain to

Comissão Nacional de Proteção de Dados in Portugal (geral@cnpd.pt) or the corresponding Data Protection Authority in your country of residence (list of countries is available on this link https://edpb.europa.eu/about-edpb/board/members_en).

CONSENT FORM

- I have read and understood the information sheet.
 - I understand that my participation is voluntary, that I can choose not to participate in part or all of the project, and that I can withdraw my data without being penalized or disadvantaged in any way.
 - I agree and consent to the processing of the given information and data for the purposes of this research study.
 - I understand that my name will be anonymized in the transcription of the interview and will never be linked to the analyzed data.
 - I understand that the data will be stored on a secure cloud-based system provided by ISCTE.
 - I understand that by signing this consent below, I agree to take part in research.
- I have read and agree with the statements above and consent to participate in this study.
- I do not consent to taking part in this study.

_____ (location), ____ / ____ / _____ (date)

Name: _____

Signature: _____
