Parenting and child welfare services

The case of immigrant parents’ perceptions and experiences of the welfare system

By

Memory Jayne Tembo

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Summary

The Norwegian welfare system has a direct effect on how families experience their parenting. While state intervention in families is mostly done with the goal of improving the lives of the citizens, there is no doubt that this can be experienced differently by different groups of people. Comprising four papers, this study has two distinct but interrelated aims. First, the study aims to gain an understanding of how parents perceive and experience their involvement with child welfare services (CWS). Under this first aim, the study explores parental experiences of CWS in different contexts internationally and then, specifically, those experiences for immigrant parents within Norwegian CWS. The second aim is to investigate the challenges of parenting among immigrant parents in a comprehensive welfare system, of which CWS are a part. Under this second aim, the study strives to gain an understanding of immigrant parents’ experiences of parenting in a new context as well as how immigrant parents perceive the controlling role of the welfare system in their parenting.

The data for this thesis consist of both secondary and primary data. Secondary data were collected in the form of previous research articles and inform the first aim of this study, which is how parents perceive and experience CWS. The secondary data consist of 15 articles on parental experiences of CWS. The primary data were collected through in-depth interviews with 18 immigrant parents representing 15 families in Norway. Ten of these families had contact with CWS and five did not. The data from the interviews inform the immigrant parents’ experiences and perceptions of Norwegian CWS and the parenting challenges that immigrant parents experience in the Norwegian welfare state.

The results of parents’ experiences with CWS from both the secondary data and primary data revealed that parents experience their involvement with child welfare as emotionally stressful. This is attributed to how they
relate with caseworkers, the procedures that characterise involvement with CWS, and parents’ perceptions of help from CWS. Among immigrant parents, the results further show that certain past experiences and challenges associated with migration might further exacerbate vulnerability among immigrants when involved with CWS. In addition, the results show that parents perceive that their emotional expressions affect the progression of their cases, with some perceiving that resistance and anger are met with punishment, such as losing custody of one’s children. This leads to several strategies in the form of emotional management among parents to appear cooperative in order to attract favourable outcomes.

When exploring challenges that immigrant parents experience in parenting in a new context, the study revealed the differences between parenting related to expectations regarding the role of parents and concrete goals for parenting in daily tasks. The study concluded that immigrant parents experience the role of being parents as complex and more demanding in Norway than in their home countries. Three main themes were highlighted: an increased public/state intervention in family matters, a perceived emphasis on material provision as a measure of adequate/sufficient parenthood, and challenges related to socialising children into the traditional values and identity of their native country.

When exploring immigrant parents’ perceptions of the controlling role of the Norwegian welfare system in parenting, the results show that parents perceive that, in Norway, the responsibility of raising children lies with the state and not just the family. The results spread across four themes: feeling controlled, feeling stigmatised, feeling disempowered, and perceptions of damaging help from CWS. Parents’ perceptions seem to draw from the broader welfare system and not just CWS. Perceptions of controlled parenting are perceived through suggestions/instructions on certain parental demands from different welfare institutions. The results also point to perceived public scrutiny on parenting embedded in institutions like schools, health services, and CWS. Parents perceived
that their immigrant status led to being stigmatised as having neglectful and abusive parenting practices.

In sum, these findings seem to imply that parents’ perceptions of CWS are not only drawn from involvement with CWS but also their experiences as immigrants and that a perceived vulnerability in society perpetuates their challenges. Therefore, to understand immigrant parents’ perceptions, there is need to adopt a broader approach that entails understanding immigrant parents’ experiences of parenting in a comprehensive welfare state, where the role of the state in families is more explicit than it is in other countries. Having the broader welfare system as a point of departure provides more insights into how parents’ perceptions can be understood, which is this study’s main contribution.
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Introduction

1 Introduction

This dissertation investigates parents’ perceptions and experiences of child welfare services (CWS) and immigrant parents’ experiences of parenting in a comprehensive welfare state. Although the study departs from an international perspective on parents’ experiences of CWS, further focus is placed on immigrant parents’ experiences and perceptions in Norway.

Internationally, Lawrence (2004) highlighted that balancing general overall social welfare practices with the child protection discourse is difficult, as it involves the state’s duty to intervene appropriately in the family while still honouring children’s and families’ rights to self-determination and independence. In most child welfare systems, debates revolve around what should warrant intervention, considering that, at times, CWS are, on the one hand, accused of unnecessarily intervening in families while, on the other hand, also criticized for intervening too late when harm has already been done (Lawrence, 2004; Munro, 2011; Skivenes, 2004). The contradictions in child welfare work, which include separating workers’ help and control roles as well as balancing children’s and parents’ rights, contribute to the complexities that often characterise child welfare practice with parents (Burns, Pösö, & Skivenes, 2017; Devaney & Spratt, 2009; Ericsson, 2000). Such complexities and contradictions portray the interrelatedness of parenting experiences and child welfare involvement, which necessitates research on parents’ perspectives of the services coupled with their parenting experiences. The aim is to contribute to service development in child protection services and other welfare services through understanding parents’ perspectives.

Framed in the universality of a defamilialised welfare state, Norwegian CWS are integrated into the general family welfare services. Norwegian CWS are, therefore, a part of the broader comprehensive welfare system,
which comprises other welfare services and institutions. As Gjerstad, Johannessen, Nødiand, Skeie, and Vedøy (2015) elaborated, among other things, the Norwegian welfare system is characterised by the granting of extensive rights and resources to public social services and an elaborate social safety net, such as free education and universal health care for all citizens and permanent residents. According to a UNICEF (2019) report on family-friendly policies, Norway was listed as one of the three countries with the most family-friendly policies. This is based on indicators such as paid leave reserved for parents and enrolment in childcare centres for children under the age of three. The end of childhood report by Save the Children (2018) also ranked Norway third among countries with the safest and healthiest childhood based on indicators considered to be roadblocks to a safe and healthy childhood. Based on these accounts, Norway can be regarded as one of the best countries in the world for children and families. Huge government expenditures are made towards the Norwegian welfare system and its services. Due to these expenditures, services like those in child welfare have shown major improvements over the years (Christensen & Lægreid, 2005; Kojan, 2011). However, as Skivenes (2015) and Stang (2018) have noted, despite these improvements, Norwegian CWS have received much criticism from academics and the public, and many issues remain unresolved. In particular, CWS involvement with immigrants has received much attention and criticism (Stang, 2018; Vassenden & Vedøy, 2019).

By 2018, the European Court of Human Rights had accepted eight separate hearings against Norway for its CWS activities, and there has been broad and loud criticism concerning the decision-making of Norwegian CWS (Czarnecki, 2018; Skivenes, 2015; Stang, 2018; Vassenden & Vedøy, 2019). In 2016, 60 demonstrations were held worldwide, and banners in Australia, the United States, and Europe heralded messages that included “Children are not business,” “Bring back our children,” “Barnevernet (Norwegian child welfare) is
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Gestapo,” and “Fight against barnevernet” (Czarnecki, 2018). Despite efforts to ensure the well-being and best interest of the child, Norwegian CWS are described as a nightmare, where immigrant parents in particular battle for their children (Berg et al., 2017; Korzeniewska, Marta, Natasza, & Magdalena, 2019; Stang, 2018; Vassenden & Vedøy, 2019). To understand these issues, several topics seem to be interrelated, such as parents’ contact with CWS, parenting in new and perhaps peculiar contexts, as well as migration experiences.

The goal of this study is to understand immigrant parents’ perspectives of CWS and parenting in the welfare system. This might ensure that parents’ perspectives are integrated into service delivery in the welfare system and its constituent institutions as well as inform and equip personnel in welfare services with the kind of competence needed to develop better practices. This is also relevant to enhancing better relations between parents and professionals in welfare services, which would entail better outcomes for the children involved. Particularly regarding immigrant parents, this entails professionals being better equipped to assess those parents’ needs and provide effective prevention, protection, and family preservative services. Furthermore, when parents’ perspectives are incorporated and cooperation is achieved, it could improve trust in the system, which is relevant for future involvements between immigrant parents and welfare services.

1.1 Aim of the study

The study has two distinct aims related to each other. The first aim is to understand how parents perceive and experience their involvement with CWS. The second aim relates to exploring challenges of parenting that immigrant parents’ experience in the Norwegian welfare system. To answer these two aims, the sub-research questions that follow each of these aims below were explored independently and are the basis of the four papers. The main research questions are as follows:
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1. How do parents, and immigrants in particular, experience being engaged with CWS?

   a. Explore parental experiences of CWS in different contexts internationally. (paper 1)
   b. Explore immigrant parents’ experiences and perceptions of Norwegian CWS. (paper 2)

2. What parenting challenges do immigrant parents experience in a comprehensive welfare state?

   c. How do immigrant parents experience parenting in a new context (in Norway)? (paper 3)
   d. How do immigrant parents perceive the controlling role of the Norwegian welfare system in their parenting? (paper 4)

To answer the first aim, sub question (a), a research review was performed aimed at understanding how all parents experience their contact with CWS in different contexts (paper 1). This provided familiarity on how parents perceive CWS in general, from which nuances were drawn regarding the data with immigrant parents. This is crucial, as it contributes to understanding immigrant parents’ experiences, sub question (b) paper 2, in light of what might characterise other parents in contact with CWS. For the second aim, as previously elaborated, a discussion about involvement with CWS is closely associated with experiences of parenting in the broader welfare system due to the interrelatedness of family welfare services. Thus, parenting experiences in the welfare state are just as crucial to understanding parents’ perceptions of CWS, sub question (c) and (d) papers 3 and 4.

Taking into account how all parents experience CWS and how immigrant parents experience parenting in the welfare state, this study provides a broader perspective that allows for the exploration of nuances in the immigrant parents’ perspectives of CWS.
1.2 Study contributions

Since the 1990s, user perspectives, rights of service users and the importance of listening to their experiences have gained increased political and social interest in social work (Willumsen & Skivenes, 2005). Hence, service users’ perceptions of the services offered by the welfare system warrant research attention so that parents’ or immigrants’ perspectives might be integrated into practice (Berg & Ask, 2011). While more studies have recently explored immigrant parents’ experiences and perceptions of CWS, few studies have focused on these experiences in combination with experiences of parenting in the broader welfare system, which this study addresses. Berg et al. (2017) suggested that, to understand immigrant parents’ encounters with CWS, one needs to have a broader focus, which entails incorporating several aspects into the investigation. The novelty of this study’s contribution is that immigrant parents’ experiences and perceptions are being understood from different aspects that go far beyond an encounter with CWS.

First, departing from parents’ perspectives of CWS internationally, immigrant parents’ perceptions are investigated in relation to how other parents perceive or experience CWS. This allows for the exploration of aspects that do not necessarily characterise immigrants as a group but are more about being in contact with CWS, an aspect that might be overlooked if focus is placed on the migration status. This takes into consideration the nature of child welfare practice and its challenges as being of significance in the parents’ experiences and perceptions. Second, by examining how immigrant parents experience parenting in a comprehensive welfare system, this study allows for exploring the broader context, which is associated with the role of the welfare system in families. Insufficient parental care is often stated as a reason for sending notification to CWS (Statistisk sentralbyrå, 2016), which closely associates parenting practices with child welfare intervention, as earlier argued. This is also related to another contribution of this study:
perceptions of CWS within the broader societal interaction and not just as encounters with CWS in themselves.

By incorporating immigrant parents who have never had contact with CWS, the current study allows for an exploration of immigrant parents’ perceptions of child welfare far beyond personal experiences. This points to the premise that perceptions of CWS are also drawn from general perceptions of the state’s role in the family as well as relations to the broader societal structures. This entails experiences with schools, the health sector, and public interactions with members of the majority society. Lastly, this study also contributes to the general understanding of parents’ experiences with CWS through exploration of their emotional experiences, an area that is currently underexplored (Thrana & Fauske, 2014).

1.3 Concept clarification

Immigrant parents in this study refers to parents who are not native Norwegian and have moved, either permanently or temporarily, from their home countries to Norway for different reasons. The term immigrant is also used for children born in Norway of immigrant parents, and these are specifically called second-generation immigrants. Thus, a Norwegian citizen born to two or one immigrant parent is regarded as an immigrant.

The present usage of the term Western immigrants refers to immigrants from countries in the European Union and European Economic Area, Switzerland, the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. Non-Western immigrants are those from Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Oceania, excluding Australian and New Zealand (Statistisk sentralbyrå, 2019). The empirical data of this study were collected among non-Western immigrants based on this definition.
The terms *child welfare* and *child protection* are often differentiated based on the system, as I elaborate below in the section on international child welfare orientations. In this thesis, the use of these two terms is intentional. While Norway’s system is categorised as a child welfare service with emphasis on welfare provision, it also engages with child protection cases aimed at protecting children from harm (Skivenes, 2011). Therefore, I use CWS when referring to the Norwegian system in general but use child protection to mainly relate to other systems like those in the United Kingdom and United States. Child protection is mentioned in the Norwegian context to relate to protection cases and not the system.

Finally, the term *service user* or *client* in this thesis is used for an immigrant parent who has had contact with CWS. By referring to these parents as “service users,” I do not neglect the fact that the term in child welfare work can be debated (see Cowden & Singh, 2007), mainly because, in most child protection cases, the intervention might be involuntary, meaning parents might not decide to be involved but instead be forced. However, the term “service user” might fit the Norwegian child welfare context because Norway is classified as having a family service orientation, with a great deal of services implied, as will be elaborated later. The use of the term “service user” for parents who are in contact with CWS, therefore, acknowledges the ambiguities that surround these terms in the first place, as some scholars (Cowden & Singh, 2007; McLaughlin, 2009; Scourfield, 2005) have discussed.
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2 Contextual framework

2.1 International child and family welfare orientations

Cameron and Freymond (2006) argued that particular systems of child and family welfare are social configurations that stem from the visions for children, families, community, and society in different contexts. Different societies have different responses and practices regarding child rearing that reflect their priorities and desired outcomes for its members. Different priorities and choices are reflected in the design of the systems of child welfare or the absence thereof. The consequences for the choices differ in significant ways for the children, families, and service providers in the different systems or countries. Cameron and Freymond (2006), Gilbert, Parton, and Skivenes (2011b), and Gilbert (1997) have distinguished the different systems of child welfare, including child protection, family service, community caring, and another new orientation, which Gilbert et al. (2011b) called child-centric orientation. It is worth noting that child and family welfare systems are more visible and functional in Western countries than they are in some non-Western countries.

As Gilbert, Parton, and Skivenes (2011a) noted, in a child protection system, the state regulates social and moral arrangements by emphasising individual rights and responsibilities. There is a clear division between private and public domains to protect the privacy of the family. Intrusion into families by child protection occurs when parents violate minimum standards for the care of their children. This system relies on adversarial judicial systems to confer authority on their work and focuses on monitoring and controlling the behaviour of parents in high-risk families. A typical initial response in this system is a mandatory legal investigation of an allegation of child maltreatment where the formal authority of the law and courts provides the legitimacy for
intervening in families (Cameron & Freymond, 2006; Gilbert et al., 2011b; Parton, 2010). This system is exemplified in the United States, England, Australia, and Canada.

In family service, the state supports child and family welfare policies that reflect communal ideals about children, family, and community. The focus is on supporting parent–child relationships and the care of children. Ideally, emphasis is placed on reaching consensual agreements with families in the course of an intervention. Due to the nature of this system, it is assumed that families often will seek out help with their children voluntarily to get help with their parenting. The provision of services to maintain the family and parent–child bond is an initial response. Except in extreme situations, the family service system may focus on finding ways to support family functioning, and the use of coercion and contested court involvement is considered a last resort and is avoided if possible (Cameron & Freymond, 2006; Gilbert et al., 2011a; Parton, 2010). This system is demonstrated in the Nordic countries and the Netherlands.

Cameron and Freymond (2006) described community care as the third system, which involves reliance on consultation with parents, extended family, and the local community regarding the protection and care of children. Price-Robertson, Bromfield, and Lamont (2014) called this orientation child-focused community-based. The community caring system fits most of the child and family practices in most non-Western countries and is often found in Asia and Africa, though it is not well incorporated into government or policy structures (Cameron & Freymond, 2006; Price-Robertson et al., 2014). A strong value in this system is placed on keeping children within their families and communities. A common view holds parents responsible for providing adequate care for their children, with the belief that, if minimal norms for childcare are violated, this is because the parents will not or cannot take care of their children. Cameron and Freymond (2006) have provided examples of first-nation communities in Canada and the Maori of New
Zealand as societies that adopt community caring. Price-Robertson et al. (2014) further provided an example from the Gaza Strip, where child welfare is the responsibility of a committee within the community. Child-focused community-based groups have emerged as a key child protection response in emergency, transitional, and developmental contexts around the world, most notably in Africa and Asia (Price-Robertson et al., 2014). Often this is due to the absence of organised structures in the local and national government that take on the responsibility of ensuring child protection and welfare, as is done in most child protection and family service systems in Western countries.

Gilbert et al. (2011a) and Parton (2010) noticed a fourth new orientation that combines aspects of the child protection system and the family service system, which they call a child-focused orientation. Parton (2010) argued that this new orientation is not restricted to concerns about harm and abuse, but rather the object of concern is the child’s overall development and well-being. In this orientation, the state takes on a role of providing a range of early intervention and preventative measures as well as engaging in child protection aspects, as is done in Norwegian CWS (Skivenes, 2011). According to Parton (2010), the child-focused orientation is shaped by two major contrasting lines of influence. These are ideas performed by the social investment state and the growing recognition that children are individuals who should be allotted their own rights.

Hetherington (2002) observed a convergence between Esping-Andersen's (1990) typology of welfare regimes and Gilbert's (1997) categorisation of child welfare systems. The countries that Andersen labelled liberal welfare regimes, Gilbert categorised as having child protection systems, and the countries that Gilbert categorised as having family service systems, Andersen labelled as social democratic or conservative welfare orientations. The social democratic countries are categorised as having mandatory reporting, while the conservative
countries are categorised as non-mandatory reporting systems (Gilbert et al., 2011a).

### 2.2 The Norwegian welfare system and CWS

The Norwegian welfare system is characterised by a comprehensive social security system; institutionalised social rights and arrangements for welfare provision are based on solidarity coupled with universalism (Angell, 2004; Esping-Andersen, 1990). The ultimate goal of the Norwegian welfare system is to set off egalitarian institutions that provide a minimum standard of living and social services by reducing the need for privately organised service provision. It also aims to facilitate the redistribution of income and other resources to ensure that all citizens can attain a better minimum standard of living (Sørvoll, 2015). The responsibilities and duties of the Norwegian welfare state are divided into three levels. First, the national level is concerned with law and policy making; second, the middle level is concerned with the regional provision of specialised services in health care and secondary education; and third, at the local level, the municipalities provide primary health care, care of the elderly and handicapped, social work, kindergarten, and primary school (Angell, 2004; Regjeringen.no, 2019).

Allardt (1975) noted three common dimensions in the Scandinavian welfare provision model that also reflects the goals of Norwegian welfare system. The first dimension is “to have,” which refers to the provision of physical and material needs; the second dimension is “to love,” which refers to good social relations; and the third dimension is “to be,” which refers to a meaningful place in society—psychologically, culturally, and politically. To achieve these dimensions, the two most important instruments in Norwegian welfare policy include the transfer of money, in terms of unemployment benefits, sick benefits, and social assistance, and service provision, in terms of health services, care services, and child protection services (Angell, 2004).
Angell (2004) noted that, while the family is still very important as a social support system in Norway, the government and the municipalities have taken over the responsibility for the care of the elderly and children to a great extent. The family in the broader welfare system is therefore characterised by a degree of public intervention in the care of children and the elderly, which is decisive for the importance of the family to social policy. Norwegian family policy has further been claimed to have a distinctive feature in its combination of ideological individualism and public family policy (Angell, 2004). As can be observed in the organisation of the welfare system, CWS are an integral part of the broader family welfare system. While the duties are centralised in the child welfare institution at the municipal level, several other parts of the welfare system are also relevant to achieving the goals in child protection and welfare within the family.

Norwegian CWS are guided by principles of early intervention, support, equality of opportunities, and prevention, reflecting the goals of the welfare system (Forsberg & Kröger, 2010; Kojan, 2011; Picot, 2014; Pösö, Skivenes, & Hestbæk, 2014; Skivenes, 2011). Gilbert et al. (2011a) classified Norway’s CWS as a family service with mandatory reporting, similar to that of Denmark, Finland, and Sweden, though the researchers also observed that a child-centric orientation has recently characterised the Norwegian system. The mandatory reporting aspect entails that public and private employees are required by law to report any suspicions of maltreatment towards children to CWS (Skivenes, 2011). The system is also guided by a legal system that emphasises the rule of law for children and parents, as is stipulated in the Child Welfare Act (1992). Though the Norwegian child welfare system is classified as a family service, it also engages in protecting vulnerable children from abuse, which involves interventions in the form of care orders and involuntary measures that are sometimes ordered by the court (Skivenes, 2011). Different welfare institutions in the welfare system are therefore just as crucial and involved in attaining the goals of CWS. As Skivenes
(2011) and Kojan and Clifford (2018) mentioned, Norwegian CWS have a combined role of protecting children from harm and abuse, providing welfare through services, and promoting equal opportunities within the rule of law.

Children can receive help until they reach 23 years old, but after they reach 18, the help is voluntary. By the end of the year 2018, 57,013 notifications concerning 5,913 children were received by Norwegian CWS (Bufdir, 2019). Of these notifications, 55,623 children and youth of ages 0–22 received help from child welfare. Sixty percent of those who got help received in-home services, while the remaining 40% were placed out of home, either in a child welfare institution, foster home, or in a house with supervision. Relatively similar statistics were also found for 2017 and 2016 (Statistisk sentralbyrå, 2019).

Of the children who got help from CWS, 28% had an immigrant background, making children with immigrant backgrounds overrepresented when it comes to receiving help measures but not care orders. The overrepresentation in help measures has, to some extent, been attributed to the fact that unaccompanied minors are automatically registered in the child welfare system (Berg et al., 2017; Statistisk sentralbyrå, 2019). Furthermore, statistics also show a difference between Western and non-Western immigrants’ representation in CWS. In 2017, there were 54.4 measures per 1,000 children with non-Western immigrant backgrounds compared to just 18.9 among Western immigrants and 28.0 among children without immigrant backgrounds (Statistisk sentralbyrå, 2019). Research has shown that immigrant parents from non-Western countries, whose religious, ethnic, cultural, social, economic, and linguistic milieu is different and distinct from the Norwegian society, might experience their integration with difficulties (Hagelund, 2002). Hence, they might need help with their parenting from different welfare institutions and services.
Norwegian CWS have been criticised by the immigrant community for intervening more in minority families than families of the host population and for showing little understanding of immigrant culture and religion as newcomers in Norway (Berg et al., 2017; Czarnecki, 2018; Vassenden & Vedøy, 2019). The disproportionate representation of immigrant children and families compared to nonimmigrants in the child welfare system has been central in the criticism towards CWS, though this does not necessarily apply to care orders (Berg et al., 2017; Staer & Bjørknes, 2015). Several topics have dominated the debate about immigrants and CWS over time, ranging from intergenerational cultural conflicts between parents and children to juvenile crime and violence associated with migrant youth and physical punishment (Hollekim, Anderssen, & Daniel, 2016; Vassenden & Vedøy, 2019).

2.3 Immigrants in Norway

Despite strict immigration laws, Norway is increasingly becoming a multicultural society that attracts immigrants from different parts of the world for economic and safety reasons. According to Statistisk sentralbyrå, (2019), at the beginning of 2019, there were 944,402 immigrants, of which 169,964 were Norwegian-born to immigrant parents. Together, immigrants make up 17.7% of the total population, while that percentage was only 4.3% in 1992. The immigrant population in Norway comes from 221 different countries and independent regions, coming for work, family reunification, asylum and studies among other reasons (Statistisk sentralbyrå, 2019). Since the refugee crisis in 2015, there has been an increase in asylum seekers, with family reunification still one of the top reasons for migrating to Norway (Statistisk sentralbyrå, 2019). Immigrants from Poland make up the largest immigrant group in Norway, followed by immigrants from Lithuania, then Sweden, Somalia, and Syria (Statistisk sentralbyrå, 2019). Among the six continents, the largest immigrant group is from Europe with 48.2%, followed by Asia with 33.5% and then Africa with 13.9%. North
and South America together make up 4.1%, and Oceania has the lowest percentage with 0.2%. In view of this diversity in Norway, cultural considerations are receiving increased attention in social work (Bø, 2015; Križ & Skivenes, 2010b; Rugkåsa, Eide, & Ylvisaker, 2015b).
3 Previous research

This section focuses on previous studies on immigrant parents’ perceptions of CWS and their experiences of parenting in a new context. I will first look at what has been previously documented about immigrant parents’ perceptions and experiences of CWS, and then, I will present existing knowledge on immigrant parents’ experiences of parenting in a new context.

3.1 Immigrant parents’ perceptions of CWS investigations and measures

A growing body of research has aimed to discover immigrants’ perspectives of CWS as well as the challenges to effective practice with immigrants (Berg et al., 2017; Earner, 2007; Pine & Drachman, 2005; Rasmussen, Akinsulure-Smith, Chu, & Keatley, 2012). Internationally, research has shown that many immigrants are sceptical towards child protection services and that they express fear and mistrust of the services, which leads to questions about the underlying causes (Berg et al., 2017; Daliki, 2019; Fylkesnes, 2018; Ipsos, 2018; Korzeniewska et al., 2019; Križ, Slayter, Iannicelli, & Lourie, 2012; Paulsen, Thorshaug, & Berg, 2014; Rasmussen et al., 2012). There are, however, distinctions between different groups of immigrants and their perceptions of CWS. In the United States, for example, more studies have been done with Mexican and West African immigrants (Ayón, Aisenberg, & Erera, 2010; Osterling & Han, 2011; Parsai, Nieri, & Villar, 2010). Therefore, it might not be farfetched to surmise that most of the research with immigrants actually covers the perceptions of non-Western immigrants or refugees specifically, even though reference is often made to immigrants in general.
3.1.1 Perceptions of fear and mistrust of CWS

A recurring theme in immigrant parents’ perceptions of CWS in many studies is fear and mistrust of CWS (Berg et al., 2017; Fylkesnes, Iversen, Bjørknes, & Nygren, 2015; Korzeniewska et al., 2019; Križ et al., 2012; Paulsen et al., 2014; Slayter & Križ, 2015). In context, different reasons arise as to what this fear pertains. While fear is often associated with losing custody of children, in the United States, parents also fear deportation, especially in cases of undocumented immigrants (Ayón et al., 2010; Earner, 2007; Slayter & Križ, 2015). Fylkesnes et al. (2015) revealed that, in Norway, immigrant parents’ fear of CWS is not primarily linked to the contact with CWS in and of itself but to the fear of losing custody, which is associated with beliefs that CWS only intervene to take children away from parents. For most immigrant parents, the possibility that the authorities can actually take children from their parents is perceived as strange and shocking. According to Marthinsen, Clifford, Fauske, Lichtwarck, and Kojan (2013), perceptions that CWS are there to take children is common among non-Western immigrants, which increases their fears. Furthermore, research shows that immigrant parents express doubts on the rationale that placing children outside the home is in the best interest of the child, as it goes against their values on preserving families (Ayón et al., 2010; Fylkesnes et al., 2015).

Research has also shown that immigrant parents report fears of being discriminated and not being heard when in contact with CWS (Barn, 2007; Dettlaff, Earner, & Phillips, 2009; Fylkesnes et al., 2015; Križ & Skivenes, 2010a; Maiter, Stalker, & Alaggia, 2009; Osman, Klingberg-Allvin, Flacking, & Schön, 2016; Segal & Mayadas, 2005). These studies point to parents’ perceptions of institutional discrimination towards immigrants in child welfare. For example, Fylkesnes et al. (2015) noted that, in Norway, fear of being discriminated against was associated with parents’ perceptions that immigrant children are placed in Norwegian homes to be made more Norwegian. Parents also perceived
Previous research

structural discrimination as being embedded in how their home countries are presented. Furthermore, due to their status as immigrants, parents’ perceived a lack of effective dialogue with CWS, which leads to perceptions of not being heard (Fylkesnes et al., 2015). However, a lack of effective dialogue could also be attributed to language problems, as has been noted by Kriz and Skivenes (2009).

Previous research has also reported on immigrant parents’ mistrust of the child welfare system (Ayón et al., 2010; Korzeniewska et al., 2019; Rasmussen et al., 2012). Ipsos (2018) conducted a study on immigrant parents’ perceptions of trust towards CWS in Norway. The study found that there are variations of trust among immigrants from Poland, Bosnia-Hercegovina, Pakistan, Iraq, Somalia, and Vietnam, with those from Bosnia-Hercegovina having higher levels of trust and positive perceptions of CWS than those from Poland and Pakistan. They further noted that those who have had indirect contact with CWS (through relatives, friends, and others in their community) had low levels of trust and bad perceptions of CWS, as was also noted by Dumbrill (2009) in a Canadian study. This might signal the diffusion of stories from relatives and friends who have had personal contact with CWS.

3.1.2 Perceptions of conflicts in child-rearing practices and values

Perceptions of interference and unacceptance of immigrants’ child-rearing practices by child welfare workers has also been reported from parents’ perspectives (Dalikeni, 2019; Dettlaff et al., 2009; Dumbrill, 2009; Reisig & Miller, 2009). Dalikeni (2019) explored the tensions that immigrant parents report in child welfare involvement that arise from the clash of immigrants’ child-rearing practices with Irish social workers’ expectations. Parents perceive that child welfare workers’ expectations of good parenting revolve around more individualistic Western parenting styles as opposed to communal parenting. Studies by Ayón et al. (2010) and Rasmussen et al. (2012) also noted that immigrant parents perceive
that their values and child-rearing practices are often challenged by Western child welfare workers when they are put in contact with CWS. For example, parents in Ayón et al.’s (2010) study felt that their strong _familismo_ values, which entail promoting family preservation, are not prioritised by workers and are undermined. Reisig and Miller (2009) also noted that immigrant parents’ perceptions of CWS in the United States revolve around beliefs that immigrants’ parenting practices have been defined as child abuse by the mainstream culture and child welfare workers, which many parents perceive as prejudice.

3.1.3 What influences parents’ experiences and perceptions

While experiences are often based on actual involvement with CWS, perceptions of CWS often come from the immigrant community in general, even from those who have never had this contact (Dumbrill, 2009). For those in contact with CWS, Fylkesnes, Iversen, and Nygren (2018) study noted that, parents’ experiences were influenced by the type of service they receive from CWS, with those who had experienced out-of-home placements sharing more emotional and ambivalent stories than those who had experienced in-home interventions. These findings are similar to the international literature on parents’ experiences with CWS (Fuller, Paceley, & Schreiber, 2015; Harris, 2012; Palmer, Maiter, & Manji, 2006; Studsrød, Willumsen, & Ellingsen, 2014) and show how service helpfulness in CWS contributes to parents’ experiences regardless of whether they are immigrants or not.

Ipsos's (2018) study found that knowledge about CWS and where this knowledge came from influenced trust and perceptions of CWS among immigrants, which was similar to Marthinsen et al.'s (2013) findings. In Ipsos (2018) study, those who had more knowledge about CWS had higher trust and better perceptions than those who did not. Furthermore, parents who knew CWS from authorities like CWS itself had higher levels of trust than those who knew CWS from their social network, the
media, or friends. This implies that there are several factors that need to be taken into consideration to understand immigrant parents’ perceptions of CWS as well as to recognise that there are variations regarding perceptions of CWS within the immigrant population.

A study by Smette and Rosten (2019), though partially focusing on immigrant parents and CWS, showed how perceptions of CWS are also influenced by how concerns are sent to CWS and by the outcome of the cases. Negative experiences of shame and shock were reported by parents whose children or a third party reported the parents to CWS, leading to loss of custody. Negative experiences seemed to stem from perceptions that welfare services act as allies for children against their parents and that children can use this to threaten their parents. Smette and Rosten (2019) also noted positive experiences from parents who perceived that they had a good dialogue with CWS. These parents attributed the good dialogue to their calmness and not being angry when they met CWS workers, which Ayón et al. (2010) also observed in their study. This portrays the relevance of examining different cases and taking into consideration several factors in order to understand parents’ experiences and perceptions of CWS.

3.2 Immigrant parents’ experiences of parenting in a new context

Research has shown that immigrant parents’ experiences of parenting in a new context is characterised by both perceived opportunities and challenges (Friberg & Bjørnset, 2019; Smette & Rosten, 2019). Parenting can be a complex and demanding responsibility for everyone, and there is often need for support. However, the nature and provider of this support may be different in various contexts (Keller & McDade, 2000), and the same is true for expectations of parenthood (Hollekim et al., 2016; Kagitcibasi, 2013; Lewig, Arney, & Salveron, 2010).
Previous research

Research (Earner, 2007; Friberg, 2019; Friberg & Bjørnset, 2019; Lewig et al., 2010) has shown that immigrant parents report that they miss/lack the traditional informal support of extended families and community to assist them with material support as well as advice and emotional support in new contexts. While many immigrants perceive that there are various opportunities offered to their children in the new country, especially when migrating to Western countries, many express concerns over raising their children (Dumbrill, 2009; Friberg, 2019; Friberg & Bjørnset, 2019; Osman et al., 2016). Concerns include not knowing what CWS help entails as well as fears over losing traditional values in raising children. Smette and Rosten (2019) analysed immigrant parents’ perceptions of meeting helpful welfare services as well as attitudes towards getting help in their parenting. They noted that asking for outside help by contacting welfare services was enhanced by the parents’ self-esteem and confidence as good parents. Thus, parents who expressed confidence in themselves as good parents in terms of what is expected from the majority (Norwegian) society were more willing to ask for assistance and contact CWS for support, and they expressed trust in the system. Internationally, research has shown that immigrants are hesitant to ask for outside help in their parenting due to issues of mistrust in the system (Ayón et al., 2010; Dumbrill, 2009; Friberg & Bjørnset, 2019; Korzeniewska et al., 2019; Osman et al., 2016).

Perceived deficiency in parenthood based on social expectations in the new context also characterise immigrant parents’ concerns of parenting in new context (Fylkesnes et al., 2018; Osman et al., 2016; Perreira, Chapman, & Stein, 2006; Smette & Rosten, 2019). While parenting practices often differ in different contexts, immigrant parents often perceive that their parenting practices are deemed insufficient and that they lack parenting skills that could relate to ideals of good parenthood in the Western context (Dalikeni, 2019; Dumbrill, 2009; Fylkesnes, 2018; Rasmussen et al., 2012; Smette & Rosten, 2019). For example, according to Smette and Rosten (2019), parents perceived that the ability
to show and express parental care emotionally is important in the Norwegian context and is often used in CWS assessments. Similarly, Daliken (2019) also noted how immigrant parents perceived that eye contact with the child is used to assess parenthood and that social workers used this in assessing the parents’ relationship with their children. As can be observed in these examples, such arguments are also associated with how immigrants position themselves as parents when in contact with CWS. Fylkesnes et al. (2018) identified a strong theme in immigrant parents’ experiences with CWS related to a deficiency positioning in their parenting, which entailed a lack of normative knowledge and skills regarding the parenting ideals of the new context for their CWS interaction.

### 3.2.1 Parenting challenges in a new context

Studies have shown that daily stressors and adjusting as a parent in a new country will generally render difficulties for immigrant parents (Dumbrill, 2009; Friberg, 2019; Lewig et al., 2010). Being a parent in a new context involves several stressors that have a direct influence on one’s parenting, though how these are experienced and how they can affect parenting vary among different groups of immigrants (Friberg, 2019). Challenges, such as lacking the relevant parenting support, the fear that one’s identity is under pressure and scrutiny, and scepticism about meeting with public institutions, characterise immigrant parents’ experiences in new contexts (Friberg, 2019). Similar findings have also been reported in other studies (Ayón et al., 2010; Lewig et al., 2010; Maiter et al., 2009; Smette & Rosten, 2019). In addition, research also has shown that, for immigrant parents, settling in the new country can be challenging, as they experience struggles related to finances, language, loneliness, and other obstacles that affect their parenting (Earner, 2007; Maiter et al., 2009; Parsai et al., 2010).

Concerns about children’s upbringing have also been documented as a stressful aspect among immigrant parents (Friberg & Bjørnset, 2019;
Osman et al., 2016; Rasmussen et al., 2012). Kagitcibasi (2013) observed that immigrants often face concerns about raising their children with a different set of standards and expectations than that of their home country, which presents fears regarding the parents’ desired goals for their children’s upbringing. Research has shown that some immigrant parents express fear over their children’s independence and lack of discipline in the new context that could jeopardise the upbringing the parents want for their children (Dumbrill, 2009; Friberg & Bjørnset, 2019; Rasmussen et al., 2012; Smette & Rosten, 2019). Many parents fear that the new freedom that children obtain in the new country could lead to bad behaviours, such as crime, violence, drugs, and sexual promiscuity (Dumbrill, 2009; Friberg & Bjørnset, 2019). This is often coupled with the fear of social services, as parents worry that disciplining their children could lead to being reported to CWS; hence, they feel powerless as parents (Dumbrill, 2009; Friberg & Bjørnset, 2019; Rasmussen et al., 2012). Therefore, as these parents perceive a loss of their parental authority in the new context, they experience challenges in terms of achieving the discipline goals they set for their children as well as in finding alternatives to instil discipline in them (Friberg, 2019; Lewig et al., 2010; Parsai et al., 2010; Rasmussen et al., 2012).
4 Theory

4.1 The social construction theory

Theoretically, this research is grounded in social construction theory (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), which informs how the participants’ perceptions and experiences are theorised. The analysis transcends various binaries that meander across the parents as individuals and the social influences of their perceptions and experiences. Understanding parents’ subjective experiences is therefore relational to understanding the context of their experiences. This entails a social constructionist approach where subjective and objective meanings are pieced together to build a framework of reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). The theoretical approach in this dissertation reflects Burr's (1995) description of social constructionism. Burr described social constructionism as having a multidisciplinary background, which means that it has drawn its ideas from a number of sources, and where it has drawn on work in the humanities and literary criticism, its influences are often those of French intellectuals such as Foucault... Social constructionism therefore rises from and is influenced by a variety of disciplines and intellectual traditions (Burr, 1995, p. 10).

Starting from the theoretical umbrella of social construction theory, I discuss the concepts of childhood and family as social constructs. This is crucial to understanding the context of parents’ perceptions of child welfare and their parenting. Related to this, I will also discuss parenting approaches whose constructions have often been associated with collectivist and individualist values. Though these approaches are often attached to the theoretical importance of culture in determining parenting practices, I address how criticism of collectivism and individualism as determinants of behavioural patterns, dismisses assumptions that individualist and collectivist values each form coherent syndromes that
are polar opposites (Schwartz, 1990). This is significant in understanding parents’ perceptions of parenting and being different. In addition, I present Hantrais's (2004) classification of family policies, which is relevant to comprehending the state–family relationship in different governments. This provides insight into immigrant parents’ relationships with state apparatuses like the child welfare system as well as understanding their experiences of parenting in new contexts and the role of the state in families. To analyse parents’ experiences with CWS, emotional theories are discussed based on social constructionism following Hochschild's (1975, 1979) understanding of emotional management in social relationships. Finally, the social influences on the parents’ perceptions and experiences are discussed through Foucault’s analysis of power and governmentality, which relates to how parents perceive the role of the state in their families.

4.2 The social construction of childhood and family

The concepts of childhood and family are seen as social constructs, with their definitions varying among contexts (James, 2017). Understanding how childhood and families are constructed is therefore crucial to understanding child welfare interventions and how different groups of people perceive child welfare practices (Reisig & Miller, 2009), especially for those who come from different constructions. Berger and Luckman (1966) defined reality as a socially constructed phenomenon that we recognise as being independent of our own volition, whereas interactions are based on shared meanings. Society, in this regard, is understood as an ongoing dialectical process composed of the three moments of externalisation, objectification, and internalisation that lead to the formation of institutions in different contexts. Each society, therefore, constructs reality in a unique way and creates cultural meaning systems that are unlike meanings in another context (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Nussbaum, 2000). Thus, the reality of family as an
institution is socially constructed, and different contexts will present different constructions of what constitutes family and, consequentially, childhood or parenthood.

The social constructionist approach suggests that an adequate understanding of reality requires an inquiry into the manner in which this reality is constructed. Moreover, the concern is how this reality may appear to people from different realities, for example, the case of immigrants in a new country. If the reality of family and childhood is to be understood, account must be taken of its intrinsic character, which also forms the basis for understanding other realities. As Reisig and Miller (2009) argued, if an immigrant family does not apply the same subjective meaning to what may be considered “good parenting” based on the majority construction, conflict may ensue. Within a sociological frame of reference, it is possible to take reality as given without further inquiring into its foundations, which is a philosophical task (Berger & Luckman 1966). In this thesis, I argue that subjective understandings of the reality of family and childhood affect how one perceives other constructions of family elsewhere. In other words, parents’ subjective understanding of family and childhood constructions in Norway would affect how they perceive CWS and, to a greater extent, how they experience being parents in Norway.

Sawrikar (2016) and Skytte (2002) argued that approaches in child protection often include the notion of Western theories and constructions of family as being universally valid. Sawrikar (2016) and Reisig and Miller (2009) further noted that this often entails difficulties in child protection for minority groups who migrate to Western countries, as they are faced with different constructions and values regarding family and childhood. Berger and Luckmann (1966) observed that a crucial occasion arises when a society is confronted with another society having a greatly different history. This relates to how the multicultural debate highlights processes where differences are either ignored or accepted, especially in discussions about immigrants in a new country (Gray & Webb, 2013).
The problem posed by such a confrontation is worse than that posed by intrasocietal differences because the presumed objectivity is equal to ones’ own. It is much less shocking to deal with minority groups of deviants than to confront another society that views one’s own definitions of reality as ignorant, mad, or downright evil (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, pp. 107–108). Therefore, two societies confronting each other with conflicting constructions of family and childhood could both develop conceptual machineries designed to maintain their respective constructions of reality, where the most powerful wins, as they can impose their definitions of reality onto others. While this study focuses on the subjective experiences of the parents, I also acknowledge that these perceptions are humanly produced and constructed and, therefore, could be attributed to several aspects other than what I can account for in this study.

4.2.1 Parenting approaches in collectivist and individualist societies

Parenting approaches have often been associated with collectivist and individualist societal values (Kagitcibasi, 1997; Oyserman, Kemmelmeier, & Coon, 2002; Triandis, 2001). While individualist values are associated with autonomous and independent traits from in-groups that emphasise the worth of the individual “pursuit of private interests,” collectivist values refer to the interdependency within in-groups, with an emphasis on prioritising the good of the society over the welfare of the individual “pursuit of common interest” (Triandis, 2001). Kagitcibasi (1997, 2013) noted that individualist and collectivist (IC) concepts are often used to explain the expectations of family systems, child-rearing practices, and child and adult personalities in different social contexts based on the values and beliefs of that society despite the criticism associated with their usage. The central goal of IC constructs is to enable the “self” to function in a society in different contexts. This is based on the assumption that national character traits are based in the
culture and personality of a given society, which might explain the existence of similarities and differences among societies (Kagitcibasi, 2013).

In sociological terms, the IC concepts, especially the functional approach, could be associated with the notion that individuals in a society share some personality characteristics that serve the functional purpose of adapting to living in that society (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). This entails that certain values and characteristics are merely a result of socialisation in a different context, as discussed above in relation to family and childhood as social constructs. This offers insights into understanding the basic reasons for cross-cultural similarities and differences. Studies about the development of the “self” have involved linear causal links regarding settlement patterns, child-rearing practices, child and adult personalities, family systems and practices, and projective systems, such as cultural beliefs, religion, art, and magic (Kagitcibasi, 2013).

While individualistic values are believed to have their roots in the political, economic, religious, and psychosocial history of the Western world, collectivist values are associated with the ideas of the non-Western world (Kagitcibasi, 1997). However, one could also argue that the comprehensive welfare system enhances collectivism, as there is interdependency among citizens on the various welfare services provided by the state. Individualism is associated with modernity and modern values, whereas collectivism is associated with traditional conservative ideologies (Kagitcibasi, 2013). These ideologies, regardless of the criticism that I will introduce later, have been considered the most important signifier of societal differences and social behaviours related to parenting practices and present the dangers of stereotyping and prejudices (Oyserman et al., 2002; Schimmack, Oishi, & Diener, 2005).

Scholars (Brewer & Chen, 2007; Matsumoto, 1999; Schwartz, 1990) have criticised the validity of individualism and collectivism dichotomy
as a marker of cultural variations. A refinement of the individualism–collectivism dichotomy takes into account two orientations that inform the debate: value orientation and self-orientation. Value orientation entails that the dichotomy is reflected in social norms, values, conventions, and rules by dealing with whether individual interests should be subordinate to group interests. This is regarded as the normative interpretation of individualism and collectivism that is confounded with modernisation or tradition. Self-orientation deals with the degree of separateness and connectedness in relation to others. Examining these two orientations, Kagticibasi (2013) noted that normative collectivism gets weaker with changing lifestyles, as social norms and customs tend to change with socioeconomic development. As a challenge to the collectivist ideology, increased affluence leads to tendencies towards self-sufficiency and less dependency, which weakens hierarchical family roles that decrease normative collectivism (Georgas, et al., 2006; Kagticibasi 2013). Inasmuch as these ideologies might be more dominant in the regions for which they are predicted, the criticisms against them portrays that they are not absolute dichotomies and, therefore, are not markers or predictors of differences across cultures. A globalised world also challenges this dichotomy to a greater degree as immigrants from non-Western countries move to Western countries and are socialised into new norms.

4.2.2 The family–state relationship

To understand immigrant parents’ perceptions and experiences of child welfare and parenting, exploring the family–state relationship in different contexts is crucial. Hantrais (2004) categorised European countries based on the different ways of balancing state and family responsibilities in a way that insinuates how the state’s role in the different countries could influence how parents relate with the state. Hantrais (2004) categorised countries into defamilialised, partially familialised, familialised, and refamilialised family policies. These
categorisations seem to not only reflect the different approaches that countries adopt in child welfare work but also determine the level of state intervention into families, as Parton (2010) observed in relation to Esping-Andersen’s (1990) welfare typology.

On the one hand, the familialised policy in Hantrais’s (2004) description entails fragmented and largely uncoordinated approaches to family policy that are not administered by dedicated institutions. Thus, families are delegated the responsibility to look after their members. Similarly, the refamilialised concept implies that formal institutional structures for managing family policy exist and are legitimised but underfunded, which results in a rhetorical rather than practical state role in the family. In this case, the state is not trusted to deliver quality and reliable services. On the other hand, governments that are explicit in their efforts to minimise the reliance of individuals on their families characterise the defamilialised family policy. Thus, state intervention in family matters is legitimised, coordinated, and commands public support. This also follows a generous welfare and service provision for families to the extent that individuals can maintain a socially acceptable standard of living without relying unduly on family support (Hantrais, 2004). Therefore, weak state–family ties characterise the familialised cluster, while strong state–family ties characterise defamilialised, under which Norway can be classified. The different countries that the participants of this study came from can be classified as familialised and refamilialised, where the state does not intervene in family lives and families are given the responsibilities over their family members. These classifications are based on the participants’ descriptions of the countries they came from as well as an observation of Hantrais’s (2004) classifications cited by Tembo and Oltedal (2015).

For the purposes of this study, a familialised or refamilialised background might influence one’s perceptions of state intervention in families. This is crucial to understanding what might underlie parents’ perceptions and experiences, as the state’s role in families is different
from that in their home country. Parents might be faced with certain expectations from the state or a stronger existence of the state in the family. Križ and Skivenes (2010) observed that there might be different expectations of fathers, mothers, girls, boys, toddlers, and adolescents for immigrant parents in a new context. Such backgrounds can influence parents’ perceptions and experiences of state institutions.

4.3 The social construction of emotions

Emotions refer to the way the body, brain, and mind react when aroused by a meaningful event (Lazarus, 2006). The word emotion is mostly used interchangeably with feeling, as is also the case in this dissertation. However, Damasio (2004) defined feeling as the mental representation of the physiological changes that occur during an emotion. The role of emotions in child welfare work has been previously discussed both for caseworkers (Forsberg, 1999; Forsberg & Vagli, 2006) and parents (Davis, 2001; Thrana & Fauske, 2014). This might entail that both caseworkers and parents employ certain feeling rules in their interaction during child welfare encounters.

Studies about emotions are dominant in psychology, as emotions are regarded a psychological field (Damasio, 2004; Lazarus, 2006). However, emotional management, which refers to regulating emotions so they fit into a given social context (Hochschild, 1975; Nussbaum, 2000), is also sociological and entails social influences in emotional expression. In this sense, understanding emotions takes into account the combined influences of both psychological and sociological factors. Social constructionists argue that, although the components of emotions are universal, the patterns are socially constructed (Harré & Parrott, 1996; Nussbaum, 2000; Snyder, Heller, Lumian, & McRae, 2013). The social constructionist view suggests that emotions are sociocultural constructions that exist in social activity with their own emotional norms (Forsberg & Vagli, 2006; Nussbaum, 2000).
In this dissertation, I adopt the social constructionist view of emotions without disregarding the natural aspect of what brings about emotions, which is psychological. Emotions are undeniably natural and come to an individual naturally due to external factors, and this can be understood in the psychological sense (Lazarus, 2006). However, the expression of these emotions is socially constructed by adhering to feeling rules or norms (Hochschild, 1979; Nussbaum, 2000) in order to achieve positive outcomes in social relations. Hochschild (1979) introduced the term *feeling rules* to refer to socially shared norms that influence how people try to regulate their emotions in given social relations. She argued that emotions are an important element in conflicts and that they can be subject to acts of management or regulation. Hochschild (1979) suggested that, either through management or regulation, the individual works on inducing or inhibiting feelings to render them appropriate to a specific situation, which links the psychological aspect to the social environmental influences. This involves assessing the appropriateness of a feeling and the capability to manage the feeling (Hochschild, 1975, 1979). Furthermore, factors like one’s social position or status seem to influence the adherence to feeling rules (Hochschild, 2003). Previous research (Ayón et al., 2010; Brown, 2006; Dale, 2004) has shown that parents perceive that their behaviour and emotions are subject to interpretation by caseworkers in child protection, and this leads to emotional regulation by parents. In analysing the findings of this dissertation, I distinguish how parents involved with CWS might also exhibit feeling regulation and management in relation to perceived power imbalances with caseworkers.

Emotions are also crucial to understanding migration-related challenges, which involves delving into psychological sphere in apprehending immigrant parents’ perceptions. In exploring immigrant parents’ experiences, one cannot ignore factors that might enhance their emotional vulnerability, for example, social and economic conditions and lack of social networks, such as families and friends, which might
add pressures to their settling experience (Ayón et al., 2010; Dettlaff & Fong, 2014; Maiter et al., 2009; Skivenes, Barn, Kriz, & Pösö, 2014). Thus, emotional theories help us grasp parents’ experiences with CWS and develop possible explanations for factors that might influence these emotions among immigrant parents.

4.4 Foucault’s power and governmentality

The social constructionist perspective brings subjective and objective meanings together in an attempt to understand reality. When analysing parents’ perceptions and experiences of parenting in the broader welfare system, power dynamics seem central. Therefore, Foucault’s analysis of power is employed to comprehend parents’ perceptions and experiences of power embedded in societal structures. My intention is not to investigate power in CWS, as this is not the objective of the study, nor do I imply an adoption of critical realism in this sense. Rather power is understood in social constructionist terms as a focal point of the parents’ experiences and perceptions.

Reich (2012) noted that power comprises anything that establishes and maintains the control of one man over another. Thus, power covers all social relationships which serve that end and range in the continuum from physical violence to the subtle psychological ties by which one mind controls another. Foucault’s perception of power moves away from the authoritative, forceful, or coercive type of power to something subtler that eventually leads to what he termed self-governing. Foucault (1982) noted the two ways of exercising power over men, which can be summed up, first, as a top–down approach characterised by hierarchy, surveillance, and observation that depict a disciplinary mechanism, and second, as a bottom–up approach reflecting the effects of the panopticon, where subjects internalise the consciousness of being under surveillance (Foucault, 2012). Drawing from his work on the birth of prisons, Foucault explored modes of subjectivity and obedience to authority as emanating from the discipline mechanism. Using Bentham’s
conceptualisation of the panopticon, Foucault expressed power as an internalised authority and control of the mind (Foucault, 1977).

Hence the major effect of the Panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. So to arrange things that the surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action; that the perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary; that this architectural apparatus should be a machine for creating and sustaining a power relation independent of the person who exercises it; in short, that the inmates should be caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers. (Foucault, 1977, p. 201)

The Foucauldian perspective of comprehending power relations dwells on the experiences of the subjects. This entails linking the exercise of power to the governing and modes of thought of those subject, which results in a close connection between the forms of power and the subjectification processes. In this sense, governing is about achieving self-government, which includes structuring and shaping the possible actions of subjects (Lemke, 2002). Governmentality was introduced by Foucault to study the “autonomous” individual’s capacity for self-control and how this is linked to forms of political rule and economic exploitation. Hence, governing people, according to Foucault, is not a way to force them to do what the governor wants but is “a versatile equilibrium, with complementarity and conflicts between techniques which assure coercion and processes through which the self is constructed or modified by himself” (Foucault, 1993, p. 203).

Foucault (1977) criticised how modern societies control and discipline its members by sanctioning deviance using what he refers to as the psy-complex. Through the psy-complex, which comprises knowledge from medicine, psychology, psychiatry, and criminology, he argued that there is a prescribed normal family, just as there is a perfect and healthy childhood that is legitimated by this psy-complex. Foucault’s argument
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was that crucial decisions are made according to the criteria of normalisation for family life, mind, sexuality and rationality. Hennum (2017) adopted this criteria of normalisation in addressing the perceived standardisation of the normal parenthood and childhood, with which parents might implicitly be expected to comply. According to Foucault (1977), *governance* entails diagnosing, treating, and disciplining deviance in order to normalise and maintain social order.

Drawing from Foucault’s work, Parton (1991) linked family experiences with three discipline processes in the state/welfare machinery. First, hierarchical surveillance includes a nonreciprocal monitoring gaze in which power bearers are able to create knowledge for its members individually. Second, normalising judgement involves the continuous discretionary evaluation of conduct along set standards that allows the application of detailed impositions and privileges. The last process examination combines techniques of an observing hierarchy and those of the normalising agent. These elements are explored to understand the parents’ subjective experiences of how they perceive the role of the welfare system in their families. Parents’ experiences of parenting in the welfare state is thus perceived through the lens of governance of the family in Foucault’s sense, which Hennum (2017) referred to as the underlying aspect of standardised parenting.
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5.1 Philosophical position

This thesis adopts Charmaz’s social constructionist approach to grounded theory, which methodologically informs how the knowledge generation process is conducted. This approach lies within the interpretive approach and has flexible guidelines regarding the aspects of research and the interpretation of data. Charmaz (2006) articulated a stance of multiple social realities but referred to this as an empirical world. This means that, even though the key inductive grounded theory strategies remain intact, there is a shift away from assuming my objective stance as a researcher, and my subjective role in constructing and interpreting the data is recognised. Hence, emphasis is placed on the research subjects, the study of experiences from the standpoint of those who live it, and my interaction as the researcher with the data and analysis. The categories and concepts emanate from my work in the field as well as my understanding of it.

Knowledge and meaning in this thesis, therefore, is created through an interaction between the interpreter and the interpreted. The social constructionist paradigm of grounded theory as a method states that how the researcher conceptualises and understands what is interpreted cannot be approached as a blank slate with the goal of observing something in its true form. In the constructionist grounded theory approach, meaning comes into existence in and out of the engagement with reality through the acknowledgement of the viewer and viewed’s mutual creation of knowledge (Charmaz, 2006). Below, before discussing the research design, I position myself in the study and describe how my identity could have influenced the research process.
5.2 Self-positioning

My position as a professional researcher and a black immigrant in this study cannot be entirely separated from the research process. First, my professional identity gave me an outsider position among the participants, which might have hindered entry and acted as a barrier to recruitment, as participants associated me with the child welfare institution. However, I assume my immigrant identity gave me an insider position, which I believe influenced the participants to trust me during interviews. Although I expected some ease in gaining entry into the immigrant populations considering my immigrant (insider) position, this was not the case. Many parents still thought I was an employee of CWS and, therefore, were reluctant to do the interviews. Some directly told those who approached them that they did not want to talk to child welfare officers despite assurance that I was not in any way affiliated with CWS. However, once in the field, as I met the parents, my identity (as an immigrant) worked in my favour in terms of gaining trust. During data collection, I was visibly pregnant, which I assume influenced how informants perceived me (as a parent-to-be) and enhanced their comfort in sharing their experiences. Thus, I might have been viewed as one of them, being a black immigrant and a parent, as some clearly spoke out. During interviews, some participants used phrases that clearly portrayed that I was regarded as an insider. Phrases like “you know how they look at us,” “maybe you have seen this yourself,” and “you will see it since you are becoming a mother yourself” by the parents revealed how closely they regarded me not only as a fellow immigrant but also as a mother.

In my observation, black parents were very comfortable talking to me, while some of the Asian parents seemed cautious at the beginning of the interviews, as they were more into simply answering questions and not having conversations. For many of them, this changed over the course of the interviews as they opened up and spoke more freely.
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As Levers (2013) has suggested, while not completely external to the process of data emergence, one has to acknowledge the relationship between the emerging data and its constituent parts because the researcher cannot be removed completely to watch the process from an external standpoint. Alvesson and Skoldberg (2009) termed this philosophical position reflexive research, where the researcher influences the research process. Reflexivity acknowledges that there is no one way street between the researcher and the object of study; rather, the two affect each other mutually and continually in the course of the research process.

Apart from the influence during data collection, my position might also have affected the analysis of the data and the themes that were brought forward in this dissertation. Coming from a familial background similar to the one the parents described, I believe I more easily grasped the parents’ descriptions than perhaps someone who does not have the same background as the parents could. Growing up in Malawi, I clearly saw family hierarchies and the role of families, with parents being visibly in control of the family, and I believe this also exists in Norway, though perhaps more moderately. As the participants talked about losing authority and feeling overpowered, I related this to my background, which might have influenced the analysis and the themes discussed. Therefore, I cannot claim any neutrality, but I embrace this reflexivity, bearing in mind that my position as an immigrant as well as my understanding of the data might have influenced the themes discussed. However, I employed certain measures that helped me stick to the data to ensure that what I discuss emerged from the research participants. The use of participants’ quotes in reporting the findings proved helpful in staying true to the participants’ subjective descriptions. In addition, basing certain discussions on theoretical contributions and current research also proved useful in understanding the data from different viewpoints. Collaborating with my main supervisor and discussing the
data and analysis further challenged my position, which also mitigated my subjective interference in the data.

5.3 Research design

The objective of this thesis was, first, to understand parents’ experiences and perceptions of engagement with CWS and, second, to explore parenting challenges that immigrant parents experience in a comprehensive welfare state (Norway). The overall research design for this thesis is explorative and descriptive (Polit & Beck, 2009). The design consists of several research methods for tackling the different research questions with different research samples and methods of analysis, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 – Overview of the methodological specifications in the papers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Methods</th>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
<th>Papers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What parental emotional experiences are reported in previous research and what activated them?</td>
<td>Integrative research review</td>
<td>15 research studies on parental experiences of their contact or intervention with CWS</td>
<td>Constant comparative analysis</td>
<td>1. Published in Nordic Journal of Social Work Research. Pages 184–198.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Are there differences in parental experiences in the different countries represented in the study?</td>
<td>In-depth interviews</td>
<td>13 immigrant parents; 5 never had contact with CWS and 8 had contact.</td>
<td>Content analysis</td>
<td>2. Published as book chapter in the book Barneomsorg på norsk. Pages 105–124.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. What emotional experiences do immigrant parents report and what factors influence these emotions?

2. How do immigrant parents navigate their emotions, and how do they respond to caseworkers emotional expectations?

In-depth interviews 10 immigrant families who had contact with CWS. Thematic analysis


In-depth interviews 15 immigrant families; 10 had contact with CWS and 5 did not. Thematic analysis


To achieve the objectives of this study, qualitative methods were employed. Bryman (2016) noted that one of the central motifs of qualitative research is the way people being studied understand and interpret their social realities, mirroring the social constructionist grounded theory approach. Data for this thesis consist of both secondary and primary data. Secondary data were collected in the form of previous research articles on parental experiences of CWS, and this type of data informed the first part of the main question: how parents perceive and experience CWS. The integrative review method fitted the research question well, as it allowed for the investigation of parents’ perceptions of CWS in a different context, which would have been difficult, and perhaps inaccessible, to gather primarily. While secondary data are not unusual, and are often advocated, in explorative designs (Malhotra & Malhotra, 2012), the goal of including it in this thesis was to understand current themes on parents’ experiences with CWS. In addition to
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providing familiarity with the topic, secondary data account for nuances in understanding the primary data, with immigrant parents. The primary data were collected through in-depth interviews with immigrant parents in Norway. This set of data informed the second part of the first aim, exploring immigrant parents’ experiences and perceptions of Norwegian CWS, and the second aim, understanding parenting challenges immigrant parents experience in the Norwegian welfare system.

Creswell and Creswell (2017) defined qualitative research as an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem, which is often achieved through inductive approaches. To grasp the individual meanings that parents attach to their experiences and perceptions of parenting in the broader welfare system in Norway, I adopted an inductive research approach. In-depth interviews with immigrant parents were used as a data collection tool and generated rich data that enabled deep exploration and investigation into the descriptions and meanings that parents attached to them. The social constructionist grounded approach was helpful to achieve this objective in this case due to its commitment to seeing the world from the point of view of the actor (Charmaz, 2008). Furthermore, its emphasis on contextual understanding to comprehend the behaviour of a particular group or society in the context of meaning systems (Charmaz, 2006) was essential to understanding parents’ experiences in the thesis as a whole.

Whittemore and Knafl’s (2005) revised framework for integrative reviews and Torraco's (2005) guidelines and examples for writing integrative reviews informed the design and analysis of the secondary data. The design involved specifying the review purpose, searching the literature, and evaluating and analysing the data from primary sources. Paper 2 elaborates this process in more detail.
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5.4 Study sample

As shown in Table 1, the sample for this thesis comprises 15 previous research articles (section 5.6) on parents’ experiences with CWS and 18 immigrant parents from Norway who represent 15 families (both parents were interviewed for three families). The 15 families comprise two different groups of parents: those who had contact with CWS (section 5.5.2) and those who did not (section 5.5.1). Experiences of CWS were obtained from those who had been previously involved with CWS, which provided a relevant sample for addressing the first aim of this thesis. The second aim required a sample of immigrant parents who had experiences of parenting in the broader welfare state, which did not need direct involvement with CWS. This explains the inclusion of immigrant parents who never had personal experience with CWS. Furthermore, Dumbrill (2009) noted that immigrants who have not been in contact with CWS personally also possess considerable knowledge of CWS, as the strong network bonds that often exist among immigrants lead them to provide support to relatives and community members who have had contact. Hence, parents who have never been in contact with CWS, though they do not possess personal experiences, can also provide broader perspectives about CWS from which immigrant perceptions can be understood. In this sense, parents who had never had contact with CWS provided variations in the analysis, as findings were attributed not only to experiences of CWS involvement but also to perceptions of the welfare system and interactions with members of the majority (Norwegian) society.

Immigrant parents were recruited from different parts of Norway. The ages of the participants ranged from 20s to 50s, and of the 18 parents, six were men and 12 were women. Three men were interviewed alone, and the other three were interviewed together with their spouses. Ten families were selected because they had been in contact with CWS, while the other five never had contact with CWS. The participants had in common their immigrant status and that they were parents mostly from
non-Western countries. The section below includes tables showing profiles of the participants who had no contact with CWS and followed by those who did have contact with CWS.

5.5 **Participant profiles**

Table 2 – Parents who had no contact with CWS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Origin</th>
<th>Years Lived in Norway</th>
<th>Reason for Migration</th>
<th># of Children</th>
<th>Age of Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#1</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Family reunification</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#2</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>Central Europe</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Work</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#3</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Family reunification</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#4</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>20s</td>
<td>Eurasia</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Study</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#5</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>50s</td>
<td>Southwest Asia</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Study</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3 – Parents who had contact with CWS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Place of Origin</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Place of Birth</th>
<th>Years Lived in Norway</th>
<th>Children</th>
<th>Migrated</th>
<th>Reason for Contact with CWS</th>
<th>How They Came to CWS</th>
<th>Out-of-Home Placements</th>
<th>Returned to Home</th>
<th>Status of the Case</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#1</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Refugee</td>
<td>Referred by others</td>
<td>Yes EP</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Closed</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#2</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>South Asia</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Refugee</td>
<td>Referred by others</td>
<td>Yes EP</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Closed</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#3</td>
<td>Man &amp; woman</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Refugee</td>
<td>Referred by others</td>
<td>Yes EP</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Closed</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#4</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>South Asia</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Refugee</td>
<td>Referred by others</td>
<td>Yes EP</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Closed</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#5</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Refugee</td>
<td>Referred by others</td>
<td>Yes EP</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Closed</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#6</td>
<td>Man &amp; woman</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Middle East</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Refugee</td>
<td>Referred by others</td>
<td>Yes EP</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Closed</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#7</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>South America</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Refugee</td>
<td>Referred by others</td>
<td>Yes EP</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Closed</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#8</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>South America</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Refugee</td>
<td>Referred by others</td>
<td>Yes EP</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Closed</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#9</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>South Asia</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Refugee</td>
<td>Referred by others</td>
<td>Yes EP</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Closed</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#10</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>South Asia</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Refugee</td>
<td>Referred by others</td>
<td>Yes EP</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Closed</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#11</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>South Asia</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Refugee</td>
<td>Referred by others</td>
<td>Yes EP</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Closed</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*EP=emergency placement
Sample of 15 previously researched articles


5.6 Recruiting immigrant parents

Seale, Gobo, Gubrium, and Silverman (2004) stated that, when trying to recruit minorities, it is very important to find knowledgeable informants and get a range of views on how to find the desired group of participants. Therefore, I contacted key informants from organisations for immigrants, religious groups, and other relevant institutions that are in contact with immigrants. While similar studies have made use of child welfare offices to recruit informants, as they are more familiar with the population, I made a decision early in the study to recruit informants outside of child welfare agencies. I assumed being recruited by agencies might bring fear among the informants and they might associate me with CWS, which could have made participants uncomfortable, influenced the interviews negatively, or led to skewed samples. The key informants helped locate possible informants and ask them if they wanted to take part in the study. I also relied on friends and colleagues for advice on the recruitment process, mostly those who have done research with similar populations before.

Once fieldwork began, it proved difficult to locate and recruit immigrant parents who had been in contact with CWS. Challenges emerged, as some parents refused to participate. Some stated they did not want to talk about their experiences, while others assumed I was working with CWS, a question I often met at the beginning of most interviews. While contact with CWS is stigmatised (Dale, 2004), I also surmise some parents might have refused due to suspicions of outsiders' intentions or the fear of exposure to the outside world, a fear Cohen and Arieli (2011) have noted regarding interviewing vulnerable/stigmatised groups. The difficulties in recruiting informants led to snowball sampling and availability sampling, which led to a large variation in the sample. Snowball sampling proved fruitful, as parents who met me were in a better position to describe to others who I was and what the study really involved in a way that could instil trust for other possible participants.
Since key informants approached the participants, it was difficult to gather detailed reasons for their refusal as well as the statistics. In future study, it would be insightful to understand why some parents do not want to take part in studies about their experiences with CWS.

5.7 Data collection from previous research

The secondary data were collected from the library database and other database search engines. According to Cooper (1989), a comprehensive literature search strategy is the foundation for integrative reviews because the search process influences the results, and a deficient search might lead to inadequate findings. An electronic database, which is often considered thorough and accurate in searching for research materials included in the database, was used in the search for previous research articles. More details on how the systematic search strategy was conducted are outlined in Paper 2. Whittemore and KnafI (2005) noted that computerised databases have limitations associated with inconsistent search terminology, and indexing problems may yield 50% of eligible studies. To address this limitation, they suggest using a number of methods in addition to the use of databases like ancestry searches, journal hand searches, networking, and research registries. Considering this, I employed two other search strategies in addition to a computerised database: networking and journal hand searching. The results of how these methods yielded the articles included in the research review are presented in detail in the methodology section for Paper 1.

5.8 Data collection among immigrant parents

Primary data were collected between October 2015 and February 2016 from a selected sample of 18 immigrant parents living in Norway representing 15 families. In-depth interviews were used as a data collection tool, and together, the interviews comprised approximately 25 hours of tape recording. Considering the small sample, in-depth interviews were deemed suitable due to their ability to obtain rich data
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by using open-ended questions. Some of the interviews were conducted in Norwegian and some in English, with the exception of one that was conducted in Arabic with the use of a translator. The verbatim transcript was written in English to make the findings understood by a broader audience.

Charmaz and Belgrave (2012) discussed qualitative interviewing for grounded theory and argued that grounded methods can keep us closer to the gathered data, which can compel us to question our assumptions and set aside our presuppositions to see past them. As stated earlier, the reflexivity of the social constructionist approach required my involvement both as a researcher and an immigrant during the data collection. In practice, my insider position (as an immigrant and parent-to-be) brought me closer to the participants, which I believe led the participants to trust me. For example, I observed how some participants were interested in knowing the same things that I asked them, such as what year they came to Norway, why they came, and where they came from. Many, especially African immigrants, asked me the same questions, which often led to a brief conversation about our countries and immediately connected us. I believe that such introductions and moments of connection led them to feel more comfortable talking to me from the beginning compared to those of Asian origin, as I mentioned earlier. The negative side of this closeness with the participants emerged when they wanted me to also comment or give my opinion on the differences of parenting in Norway and my home country or give my opinion about CWS, which I feared, if I indulged too much in such conversations, would disrupt their subjective viewpoints. Therefore, while I answered certain questions to maintain the closeness and the conversation, I also avoided questions that I believed could convey my opinions on the subject so as not to interfere with their narrations. Though some of the Asian participants were not very comfortable in the beginning, with time, they opened up, and I observed that they started volunteering certain information without being asked and were free to have a conversation
rather than simply answering questions. This could have been because they got to know me better in the course of the interview and believed in my position as a researcher and not an official from CWS. Being patient in building this trust among participants was very important in the interviews and took time. In my interpretation, when the participants talked freely and stopped relying on questions to elaborate their experiences, this was a sign of openness and trust gained.

In-depth interviews with open-ended questions provided detailed exploration of the parents’ experiences and perceptions. The richness of the data was useful during the analysis for defining the range and types of variation occurring in the data. From a grounded theory perspective, rich interview data offset the negative effects of several misleading accounts and, thus, reduce the likelihood of making misleading claims (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2012). During the interviews, a tape recorder was used mainly in the face-to-face interviews. All interviews were face to face except one, which was conducted over the phone, recorded, and later transcribed verbatim into English.

5.9 The interview questions

Two interview guides, one for parents who had contact with CWS and another for parents that had no contact (Appendix A and B), were prepared beforehand and provided guidance during the interviews. The interview guides included questions and follow-up questions on the parents’ background, migration history, network information, and knowledge about CWS as well as questions regarding experiences of parenting in Norway and their home countries. For parents who had been in contact with CWS, the main questions concerned their actual experiences with CWS, while for parents who had never had contact with CWS, the main questions were about their perceptions and knowledge of CWS and their experiences of parenting in Norway, which is a welfare state. In many instances, the interviews did not follow the guide, as interviewees were keen on telling their story and not really answering
specific questions, which I took to be a sign of trust and opening up. The interviewees were therefore allowed to discuss what they deemed important, which generated even richer data. For parents who were not free to tell their stories, the guide proved very important in steering the conversation.

5.10 Data analysis

Several methods for analysing the data were used in answering the four research questions. The different analytical approaches employed in this thesis were inspired by Charmaz and Belgrave’s (2012) basic strategies for grounded theory analysis. Therefore, though they are slightly different in how themes are reached, the basic analytical strategies are the same, as the focus is on a higher level of description rather than abstract interpretation (Vaismoradi, Jones, Turunen, & Snelgrove, 2016). First, to understand previous themes regarding parents’ experiences with CWS, the constant comparative analysis method was used. Second, content analysis (Polit & Beck, 2004) was employed in analysing the empirical data regarding research questions on parenting experiences. The flexibility of content analysis enabled the data to be analysed before the data collection and transcription were finished (13 out of the 15 families were analysed at this stage). Third, thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006) was used to analyse parents’ experiences and perceptions of CWS and the broader welfare system. These three analytical approaches have been used separately in the different research questions (papers) that make up this dissertation, as elaborated below.

5.10.1 Constant comparative analysis

Whittemore and Knafl (2005) recommended constant comparative analysis for integrative reviews. The choice of this analysis for the secondary data was also informed by the goals of the research review, which was mainly to understand previous themes on how other parents
experience their involvement with CWS. Comparing their experiences enabled an exploration of common themes, which gave a clear picture of the current knowledge.

Using the techniques outlined by Glaser and Strauss (1967), analysis involved comparing extracted elements by coding, categorising, and graphically displaying them, which was done in four stages. The first stage entailed comparing the incidents applicable to each category. In practice, this involved reading the selected articles, after which it was clear that most parents reported how they felt emotionally. The parents’ emotional experiences were then coded into categories that corresponded to what these emotions were associated with. This led to three different categories: their relationship with caseworkers, procedural factors in child welfare practices, and perceptions of child welfare help. In the second stage, the categories and their properties were integrated by moving from comparing incidents with incidents to comparing incidents with the properties of the categories that resulted from the initial comparisons of incidents. In the third stage, the data were reduced and condensed by coding following the research questions. This involved grouping the different parental emotional experiences into the three categories. Lazarus’s (2006) theory on emotions, stress, and coping was used as a conceptual framework, which also aided in clarifying the logic of the study by condensing the data into the appropriate categories, as presented in the findings section of Paper 1. Finally, comparisons were made in the findings to determine any differences in parental experiences in the different countries represented in the study.

5.10.2 Content analysis

Since the analysis of parents’ experiences of their parenting in Norway (Paper 3) occurred before the transcription of the data was finished, content analysis fitted better due to its emphasis on verbal material and its flexibility in being applied to a variety of different media and, therefore, not being limited to transcribed material (Bryman, 2016). This
approach allows for analysis through listening to recorded interviews that are considered analysable data. Following the second aim of this dissertation as well as parents’ tendencies to integrate experiences of parenting and CWS during data collection, the following research question was formulated: How do immigrant parents describe their parenting in Norway and what differentiates their experiences of parenting in Norway from that of their home country? Having the research question beforehand allowed for filtration of the data, as Graneheim and Lundman (2004) have suggested, which clarified the meaning units that were relevant to be coded while listening to the interviews. Analysis, therefore, involved listening to the recorded interviews several times, with the focus entirely on parenting experiences. Relevant meaning units that related to parenting experiences were then transcribed, and further subcategories and categories were abstracted. Three categories were abstracted and elaborated further: perceptions of increased public intrusion, linking parenthood to supply and consumption of material goods, and challenges related to socialising children and upholding their ethnic identities. Graneheim and Lundman's (2004) work on content analysis inspired this analysis, as Paper 3 elaborates.

5.10.3 Thematic analysis

To analyse how immigrant parents experience their contact with Norwegian CWS and their perceptions of the controlling role of the welfare system in their parenting (Papers 2 and 4), thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun, Clarke, & Terry, 2012) was employed. In short, thematic analysis mainly entails extracting key themes from the data. In Paper 2, one of the main themes extracted from the data was parents’ emotional experiences in child welfare. The thematic analytical procedures are explained in detail in Papers 2 and 4 following the research questions explored in each paper. Basically, the analysis in these two papers consisted of six steps: familiarisation of the data material,
generating initial codes, identification of possible themes, reviewing the themes, defining and naming the themes, and producing the report as outlined in the presentation of the findings in the papers (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun et al., 2012). Furthermore, thematic analysis is adopted in the discussion part of this thesis as a whole. The discussion is an extraction of the common themes presented in the four papers comprised by this thesis that answer the aims of this study.

5.11 Trustworthiness

Ensuring trustworthiness in research involves the validity and reliability of the research process. While validity refers to questions pertaining to whether the employed research methods measure what they intend to measure, reliability is particularly concerned with the consistency and stability of measuring a concept, which implies being able to replicate the results if the same procedures are followed (Bryman, 2016). While an explicit clear outline of the methods used in each part of the research’s process might enhance the reliability in quantitative research, the same cannot be said of qualitative research, as one cannot guarantee that one reality can be revealed through the utilisation of correct methods (Madill, Jordan, & Shirley, 2000). This is mainly because the results are also influenced by the researchers’ interpretation of the data, which might not be the same for another researcher. However, Golafshani (2003) argued for an examination of trustworthiness to ensure reliability and validity in qualitative research. Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) and Charmaz (2008) noted that trustworthiness (reliability and validity) in qualitative research could be enhanced by a multidisciplinary approach, good investigative skills, being comfortable with the participants and familiarity with the phenomenon being studied.

To ensure trustworthiness in this study, considerations were made regarding the data collection methods and how the different research questions contribute to answering the main objective of this thesis. The inclusion of secondary data enhanced my familiarity with parents’
experiences of child welfare, as did using primary data to inform the analysis. Additionally, combining the secondary and primary data coupled with exploring different questions provided a multifaceted view of the study’s objectives, which offered alternative insights into how parents perceive CWS and parenting in the broader welfare system. Exploring previous research and investigating parenting experiences of the broader welfare system offered a multidisciplinary approach that presented alternative interpretations and different angles through which to understand the data, and I believe this enhanced the trustworthiness of this study, as Miles et al. (2014) has argued for.

Finally, the sampling procedure that was adopted for this study aimed to ensure the participants’ comfort. As was evidenced during interviews, being associated with CWS agencies could have led to fear among the respondents. Furthermore, as I have written earlier, while I perceived that being an immigrant gained me trust among the participants, which led to their comfort during the interviews, it is crucial to acknowledge how my position and how this comfort/closeness could affect the trustworthiness of the results negatively. To counter negative effects of my interference with the data based on my position with the participants, including secondary data and talking to other researchers working on similar projects was helpful. This allowed me to cross check the presence of similar themes in previous research against my data. In addition, excerpts from the interviews are used in the papers within this thesis in attempts to enhance trustworthiness by staying true to the data and the parents’ constructions.

Bryman (2016) and Polit and Beck (2008) noted that social desirability bias is one of the main challenges in achieving reliability. This is a distortion of data caused by participants responding based on socially desirable traits so that their accounts conform to their perceptions of socially acceptable beliefs or behaviour (Bryman, 2016). Considering the topic of this thesis—“parents’ experiences with CWS”—certain responses might indicate vices in parenting; therefore, participants might
have avoided certain trends in their responses that would put them in a bad light. While measures were taken to convince the participants about their anonymity and confidentiality, and though I observed the participants’ comfort, it is difficult to determine whether there was social desirability bias in their responses that might have influenced the results. As Polit and Beck (2008) have noted, social desirability is difficult to counteract. Furthermore, constructionist epistemology, with its emphasis on multiple realities, makes it difficult to invalidate particular accounts as inadequate (Madill et al., 2000). Therefore, while social desirability might influence the themes raised, it does not make the findings any less trustworthy.

5.12 Study limitations

There are a number of limitations in this study. As mentioned earlier, due to the problems encountered during the recruitment of participants, especially for those who had been in contact with CWS, availability and snowball-sampling methods were employed. These methods could lead to several challenges. First, people could have led the researcher to informants they believed had more interesting stories to tell, which might have led to a more skewed sample. As can be noted in this study, most of the participants had experienced very serious CWS cases, which is reflected in the results of this study. Thus, the influence of sampling challenges on the results of this thesis cannot be ignored.

Second, this thesis is based on a small heterogeneous sample. The difficulties encountered during recruitment that led to availability sampling also introduced challenges in the quantity of participants recruited and their variation. While pinpointing what the results can be attributed to might be problematic due to the variation, the sample had certain similarities relating to the participants origin (non-Western immigrants). Therefore, despite the variation in the sample, as seen in Tables 2 and 3, the results present more similar themes, which can be considered a strength, as this signifies that these themes might be
common among different groups of immigrants. Furthermore, though the study is based on a small sample, as a qualitative study with in-depth interviews, I believe the data gathered were enough for the themes and discussions raised in this study. I acknowledge that this study does not inform perceptions and experiences of all immigrant parents, nor does it reflect child welfare practices, as these cannot be concluded in this study. However, it nonetheless provides important insights into understanding immigrant parents’ perceptions.

5.13 Ethical considerations

Ensuring the rights, privacy, and welfare of the people and communities that form the focus of a study is crucial in any research process (NESH, 2006). As Shea (2000, p. 28) noted, the highest duties of academics is to make sure that the human beings they study—fellow citizens they probe, query, prod, and palpate—are treated with dignity and respect. Josselson (2007) further argued the importance of these considerations in relation to interviews that involve narrating personal experiences that could entail issues of emotional harm, as was the case in this study (involvement with child welfare), which makes seeking consent, privacy, and confidentiality of data even more relevant.

Considerations were taken regarding the relationship to people who took part in the research in terms of respect, human dignity, confidentiality, and informed consent. In line with the duty to inform, receive consent, and notify (NESH, 2006), the participants were given information about the study and asked to participate freely. For those who consented, informed consents were obtained from the participants before any interviews commenced. To ensure that the informed consent contained all the information regarding the study, a draft of the informed consent (appendix C) together with other data collection materials were sent for approval to the Norwegian Social Science Data Service (NSD). The informed consent placed much emphasis on issues of voluntary participation, confidentiality, anonymity, and the ability to withdraw if
the participants no longer felt comfortable to continue, as recommended by NESH (2006). The study was conducted following the guidelines set by NESH, and an application for consent to conduct the study was sent to the NSD and was approved (appendix D) before data collection began.

NESH (2006) has also outlined researchers’ responsibility for ensuring that participants are not exposed to serious physical harm or other severe or unreasonable strain as a result of the research. In the broader sense, “strain” covers both everyday discomfort, risk of retraumatisation, and serious mental strain. During interviews with parents who had been in contact with CWS, the conversations were very emotional, a theme that is also discussed in the findings. In my observation, for some parents, recalling their experiences with CWS was very distressing. Many parents cried during the interviews. Although I did not anticipate beforehand how to handle this scenario, when this happened, I assured the participants I understood how recalling this would affect them, and I offered to stop if they wanted. However, none of the parents wanted to stop the interviews. I also offered to direct them to a professional if they might need to talk to someone later on, but none of them wanted that either.

In cases where the parents were very distressed, they emphasised why they agreed to do this in the first place. Some participants explained how therapeutic talking about their experiences was, which Corbin and Morse (2003) also noted in their study. Despite being distressed while talking about it, participants hoped that the information might help someone in the future through this research. NESH (2006) has emphasised the need to balance the risk of causing such strain against the benefit of the research for society and its value for the participants, as these parents elaborated. Furthermore, Corbin and Morse (2003) noted that, while emotional distress is always a possibility during interviews with sensitive topics, there is no indication that this distress is any greater than everyday life or that it requires follow-up counselling. They, however, highlighted the need to conduct such interviews with sensitivity by acknowledging
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participants’ feelings and considering those feelings rather than ignoring they exist. Thus, in this study, showing empathy and being sensitive during the interviews was a crucial ethical consideration with parents who had contact with CWS.
Methodology

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6 Summary of results

This section presents a summary of the results from the papers making up this thesis. Paper 1 is a synthesis of previous research on parents’ emotional experiences with CWS and is based on an integrative research review. Papers 2, 3, and 4 are based on the empirical findings from the primary data and concern immigrant parents. Paper 2 focuses on immigrant parents who had been in contact with CWS and explores their emotional experiences as well as parents’ perceptions of the role of these emotions in their cases. Paper 3 examines how immigrant parents experience parenting in a new context (Norway). Finally, Paper 4 investigates parents’ perceptions of the controlling role of the welfare system in their parenting and includes data from both parents who had contact with CWS and those who did not. Below is a summary of each of the four papers and their findings.

6.1 Paper 1: Parents' emotional experiences of their contact with CWS

This paper explored the dominant themes in previous research regarding how parents in general experience their involvement with CWS. The data for this paper were compiled from 15 articles representing five countries: Norway, Australia, Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom. All these articles had a common focus: parents’ experiences of their involvement with CWS.

The main theme that was abstracted across the 15 articles was the parents’ perceptions of negative emotional experiences. The focus was then turned explicitly to emotional experiences, as this was prevalent across the dataset. Using Lazarus's (2006) theory of emotions, the study clarified emotions and feelings through parents’ reports or their experiences with CWS. Although there were some positive experiences reported, the study revealed that parents mostly experienced their contact
Summary of results

as emotionally stressful. These emotions emanated from their relationship with caseworkers, the procedures in child welfare practice, and perceptions of help from CWS. What was striking in this study was that parents from different countries and with different statuses seemed to have more similarities than differences in their experiences, which could perhaps be attributed to what might be a universal reaction to responding to threats to the parent–child bond. However, we anticipated differences, given that the different countries represented in the study have different orientations in child welfare practice (Gilbert et al., 2011a; Parton, 2010).

Using the wicked problems concept (Head, 2008; Hunter, 2007) and its application to child welfare (Devaney & Spratt, 2009), the study showed that the nature of child welfare work as a wicked problem gives insights into why it is most often experienced as emotionally stressful for parents. Although different countries adopt different strategies in child welfare, some unifying factors might contribute to the experiences being similar and leading to more negative experiences. These factors deal with the nature of the problems in child welfare work that are seen as wicked problems and could also relate to the universal response among parents to perceived threats on families.

6.2 Paper 2: Navigating emotions in child welfare: Immigrant parents’ experiences and perceptions of involvement with CWS in Norway

This paper explored immigrant parents’ experiences of their contact with CWS in Norway and aimed to answer two research questions. First, what emotional experiences do immigrant parents in contact with CWS report, and what influenced these emotions? Second, how do immigrant parents navigate their emotions and respond to caseworkers’ emotional
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expectations? Data for this study were drawn from interviews with 10 parents/families who had previous or ongoing contact with CWS.

This paper highlighted parents’ emotional experiences and how parents interpreted the role of these emotions in their cases. Unlike Paper 1, this paper focused more on the source of these emotions for immigrant parents and how parents navigated them in respect to their cases. This paper revealed two sources of immigrant parents’ emotional experiences. The first included pre-existing migration-related factors, which were challenges parents had before they met with CWS that were related to their migration to Norway. The results showed that previous traumatic experiences in the parents’ migration journeys (especially for refugees) and other migration settlement challenges in a new context brought strong negative emotions in and of themselves. Although these factors were not necessarily linked to their involvement with CWS, nor were they stated as the cause for the involvement, they affected how parents perceived their experiences with CWS. The second source included stressful factors within CWS practices. During their involvement, parents’ emotions were triggered by emergency out-of-home placements, perceptions of being stereotyped and stigmatised, and problems related to dealing with different professionals during cases.

Using emotions and feeling rules theory by Hochschild (1979, 2003), this paper further explored how parents navigated their emotions based on how they interpreted caseworkers’ reactions to their emotions. Parents perceived that being angry and resistant was met with sanctions in the form of losing custody of their children or not having children returned home. Parents employed different strategies of either hiding their emotions to gain a favourable impression or showing their true feelings by fighting and resisting. The perceived power of caseworkers forced some parents to adopt defensive mechanisms, such as submitting and hiding their true feelings, for fear of attracting unfavourable assessment or being deemed bad parents.
6.3 Paper 3: Immigrant parents' experiences of parenting in a new context

This paper investigated how immigrant parents experience parenting in a new context in Norway. First, the main research question in this paper was how parents who have migrated to Norway describe parenting in a new context. Second, the study explored the differences that parents experience in parenting in their home countries and in Norway. The data for this paper were obtained from in-depth interviews with 13 immigrant parents, eight of which had previous contact with CWS and five who had no contact.

Theoretically, understanding parenting roles in a cultural and historical sense was central to understanding parents’ experiences while acknowledging the complexity that lies in “culture” as a concept. The study introduced central themes in parenting goals: collectivism, which is associated with the non-Western part of the world, and individualism, which is associated with Western parenting goals. This study also adopted Hantrais’s (2004) classification of family policy regimes, which was central in understanding parenting practices in different states.

This study revealed that immigrant parents experience several challenges in their role as parents in Norway. The study noted differences in parenting that are related to expectations of the role of parents and to concrete goals for parenting in daily tasks. The study concluded that immigrant parents experience the role of being a parent as more complex and more demanding in Norway than it is in their home countries. Three themes were mainly highlighted regarding these challenges. First, parents experienced an increased public/state intervention in family matters, as they perceived that, in Norway, the responsibility of raising children lies with the state and not just the family. State intrusion seemed to relate to perceived control in the form of formal advice from professionals in healthy and education institutions. The second theme was a perceived emphasis on material provision as a measure of adequate
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parenthood. Parents perceived that the provision of material goods is central and determines good parenting in Norway, and therefore, economical deficiency can be interpreted as a deficiency in parenting. Finally, parents reported challenges related to socialising their children with traditional values and maintaining the identity of their home country. Parents reported a loss of parental freedom to be in control, feel respected, and be able to discipline their children. Overall, parents perceived that they are often measured as lacking the necessary skills of being good parents in the Norwegian context. In this case, CWS were perceived as a tool to make them comply with the Norwegian standards of parenting.

6.4 Paper 4: Governing the family: Immigrant parents’ perceptions of the controlling power of the Norwegian welfare system

This paper investigated immigrant parents’ perceptions of the controlling power of the broader welfare system in their parenting. While initial focus was on perceptions of CWS, the results transcended to perceptions of the welfare system and society. The paper explored the perceived power of controlling families within the broader welfare context, of which CWS are a part, and examined how parents perceive the types and purpose of this control. Data comprised interviews with 15 immigrant families, 10 of whom had previous or ongoing contact with CWS and five of whom did not.

The study employed Foucault’s “governmentality” to understand the parents’ perceptions. Further, Foucault’s (1977) concept of panopticism was also employed to make sense of the parents’ perceptions of being watched and under surveillance in the broader welfare system and society. The results of this study encompassed four themes: feeling controlled, feeling stigmatised, feeling disempowered, and perceptions of damaging help from CWS.
First, parents perceived through suggestions/instructions on certain parental demands from different welfare institutions that the role of the broader welfare system is to control family functioning, and they perceived this as being intrusive. Second, parents reported feeling watched, as they perceived public scrutiny of immigrant parents’ parenting practices for possible abuse embedded in institutions like schools, health services, and CWS. Third, parents perceived that immigrants are stigmatised as having neglectful and abusive behaviours towards their children, and they felt their parenting practices were being monitored more compared to cases among Norwegians. This led to reports of feeling undermined as parents, as they felt the broader welfare system empowered their children over them.

The empowerment of children over their parents was perceived as problematic and individualistic by the parents, as it singles out the child and lacks focus on the family as a whole. Many reported that the functions/duties of CWS that are communicated to parents do not correspond with what happens in practice. This paper highlighted how perceptions of CWS are also drawn from interactions with the broader welfare system and its institutions and not just contact with CWS in itself.
7 Discussion

The aim of this thesis was twofold: first, to investigate how parents perceive and experience their contact with CWS, and second, to explore immigrant parents’ challenges with parenting in the Norwegian comprehensive welfare state. Although the study departed from a broader perspective of how parents experience CWS in different contexts, further focus was on immigrant parents’ experiences and perceptions of parenting in the Norwegian welfare system, of which CWS are a part. By beginning with a research review (Paper 1) that focused on immigrants as well as other parents and also explored factors related to parenting and the welfare system, the thesis sought to broadly explore pertinent factors that characterise parents’ perceptions of CWS by investigating the two interrelated aims.

Several factors are interlinked in understanding parents’ perceptions and experiences of CWS. The different papers in this thesis tackled questions regarding how parents (and immigrant parents in Norway) experience involvement with CWS, how immigrant parents experience parenting in a new context, and how immigrant parents perceive control of their parenting from the broader welfare system and society. In this chapter, I discuss some of the overarching themes across the different subjects that have been explored in the four papers. In addition, this section discusses how the different papers contribute to answering the interrelated research questions for this thesis. Finally, I highlight recommendations for future research and the study’s implications for social work practice.

7.1 Dilemmas regarding child welfare aims and goals

The overarching theme in this thesis is related to how parents perceive CWS as an institution, its aims, and its goals. The results of this thesis indicate that parents’ experiences and perceptions of child welfare first
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have to be understood in light of the context and nature of the work in child welfare protection. The results presented in Paper 1 suggest that procedural and relational factors influence parents’ perceptions of child welfare everywhere and that an understanding of what is helpful for parents is widely contested, and this is confirmed in the analysis presented in Papers 2 and 4. While the study did not set off to investigate Norwegian CWS, nor can I claim that I have done so, the parents’ perceptions and experiences highlight several dilemmas embedded in parents’ interactions with the child welfare system, as documented by previous research (Devaney & Spratt, 2009; Hood, 2014; Jansen, 2017; Munro, 2011). Two aspects characterise the parents’ experiences and perceptions: first, the ambiguities in defining abuse and grounds for intervention and parents’ understanding of it, and second, reconciling the best interest of the child with the parents’ autonomy.

7.1.1 Contested views of neglect and abuse

First, parents’ perceptions and experiences seemed to be influenced by how they understand abuse and neglect and what would/should warrant CWS intervention in families. The National Research Council (1993) noted that the achievement of a consensus regarding the definition of child abuse is fraught with problems in different contexts, which produces problems in the intervention, treatment, and prevention of abuse. Reisig and Miller (2009) further observed that this is even more problematic for immigrant groups who might have different constructions of childhood and what is an acceptable or unacceptable upbringing. As child welfare practice employs a great deal of professional discretion, especially in Norway (Samsonsen & Willumsen, 2015), determining what translates to abuse and neglect is dependent on the caseworker’s assessment. The findings demonstrate that many parents do not understand how abuse is defined by child welfare workers and what constitutes grounds for child welfare intervention into families. This leads to overall perceptions that CWS intervene in families based
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on superficial reasons that have no harmful consequences on children. When investigating immigrant parents’ perceptions of parenting in a new context (Paper 3), parents perceived expectations about consumerism, which emphasised that material provisions for children are involved in the views of proper childcare or neglect. Furthermore, when investigating immigrant parents’ perceptions of the controlling role of the welfare system (Paper 4), parents reported that close surveillance of parenthood does not merely focus on abusive and neglectful parenting behaviour but also other parental choices, such as how one talks to their children and factors relating to children’s freedom and happiness.

Therefore, parents believe that abuse is not understood as a singular act, such as corporal punishment or outright violence, of which non-Western immigrant parents are often suspected (Hollekim et al., 2016; Lewig et al., 2010; Reisig & Miller, 2009). Parents perceive that a combination of factors, including sociocultural and economic, are determinants of good parenting and that falling short of this normative good parenting scale translates into one’s parenting being defined as abusive and neglectful. Parents perceive that daily parenting and regular parental choices are crucial in defining neglect or abuse. Furthermore, immigrant parents perceive that their different parenting practices are often misunderstood as abuse, which other scholars (Ayón et al., 2010; Rasmussen et al., 2012; Reisig & Miller, 2009) have also pointed out. These findings imply that immigrant parents’ fear of child welfare is not necessarily related to a lack of information, as the parents seem well informed about the aspects that might lead to an involvement with CWS. The question, however, persists as to whether the information the parents have actually reflects CWS practices, which this study cannot answer.

Parents gave examples of certain parental choices, such as refusing to let children go on sleepovers, failure to buy toys, not playing with children, what food the children eat, what time they sleep, or how the parent talks to the children, as determinants of one’s parenting, which the parents believe translates to how abusive or neglectful parenting is deduced. The
study suggests that parents’ understanding of abuse is related to being measured on a scale that determines good parenting, which is often based on middle-class ethnic Norwegian standards. This is crucial in understanding parents’ perceptions and experiences of CWS and the welfare system, as parents are suspicious of the role of welfare support in their families, and as Paper 4 elaborates, they conceive that role is to govern families into the pre-set normative parenting ideals of the welfare system.

Scholars have noted that the primacy of children’s psychological well-being has become central in defining children’s well-being and development (Hennum, 2010; Picot, 2014; Smette & Rosten, 2019). This might affect how grounds for intervention are justified and how interventions are understood by parents. Norwegian CWS are classified with the family service system that provides a range of welfare services for both protecting and supporting children (Kojan & Clifford, 2018; Skivenes, 2015). This means that intervention is not only a response to neglect and abuse but is also embedded in the broader welfare system, and it also entails the provision of services that enhance children’s well-being and development (Forsberg & Kröger, 2010; Pösö et al., 2014). However, for these parents, different forms of intervention, including those that aim to provide help measures and parental advice, are still perceived negatively and as control. As evidenced in the findings, even the parents who approached CWS for help themselves, which might imply they trusted CWS, ended up feeling investigated for suspicions of abuse. Picot (2014) and Reisig and Miller (2009) noted that finding a consensus in arguments related to children’s well-being and what is in their best interest is difficult, if not impossible. The problems surrounding definitions of abuse reflect Devaney and Spratt’s (2009) conceptualisation of child welfare problems as wicked problems, as the definition of these problems are contested and the solutions are not agreed upon, and the parents’ experiences and perceptions in this study reflects this.
7.1.2 Best interest of the child vs parental autonomy

The parents’ perceptions in the present study suggest that the central position of children and their interests are strengthened in child welfare and the broader welfare system at the expense of parental rights and autonomy. Previous research has shown that children’s position has become central in child welfare legislation in recent years (Ericsson, 2000; Larsen, 2002; Picot, 2014; Skivenes, 2011). Child welfare practice in Norway is guided by the principle of “the best interest of the child” (Child Welfare Act, 1992) and ensuring children’s rights is regarded as a powerful tool for improving the lives of children, as highlighted in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 1989). However, as the findings demonstrate, it may also create difficulties related to perceptions of what these rights entail, defining what is in the best interests of the child, and who defines it, as well as parents’ position in this debate and the impacts this might have on child upbringing.

As Pupavac (2011) and Hennum (2017) noted, the iconisation of children has its dark side, as it precludes that which does not fit or match ideals and idealisation. In addition, this might also entail excluding parental rights and family autonomy (Ericsson, 2000; Hennum, 2010; Hollekim et al., 2016). The child welfare act emphasises on safeguarding the interests of the child in all measures (Child Welfare Act, 1992). The findings of this study, indicate that parents feel excluded and disempowered by the state in determining what is best for their children. Thus, state measures of ensuring the child’s best interest are perceived as measures that weaken family bonds and render parents powerless. For the immigrant parents in this study, their goals for their children are linked with the goals for the family as a whole. Therefore, measures that ensure strong family bonds that hold traditional values, promote discipline, and nurture respectful children are paramount goals which they perceive to be jeopardised by the state’s intrusion into families. Furthermore, while parents want everyday life choices, such as deciding what food children should eat, when children should sleep, and other
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parental choices, to be regulated by the parents, they perceive advice from health institutions and schools as state interference that they feel obliged to comply with to be considered good parents in Norway. Parents, therefore, view statutory control in roles that determine what would be best for their children. As Hantrais (2004) pointed out, different countries have differing family welfare regimes, with the opposite ends representing family-regulated and state-regulated family policies. In Norway, the state has an explicit role in families (Angell, 2004; Picot, 2014; Tuastad, Handulle, & Perez Alfonso, 2017), which Hantrais referred to as defamilialised regimes, whereas the countries the respondents come from seem to correspond to familialised systems, where the responsibility of the family is left to the family. Coming from familialised systems, parents enjoy the autonomy over their families, which they might feel is threatened in a defamilialised regime. Such backgrounds might influence how parents perceive their parenting in a broader welfare system, where state interference is seen as losing authority as parents to the state. Furthermore, state support in defamilialised regimes supplements the help that parents might lack from previous traditional bonds from their home countries that might be nonexistent in the new context. Previous research (Friberg & Bjørnset, 2019; Lewig et al., 2010; Osman et al., 2016; Smette & Rosten, 2019) has shown that parents perceive a lack of the traditional informal support that they had in their home countries when they move to another country. Thus, the suspicions surrounding getting help from the state or refusing to receive state support could probably leave the parents vulnerable and their children more at risk.

Nevertheless, establishing what is in the best interest of the child warrants a broader interpretation and an interdisciplinary approach that also takes into account parents’ perspectives. The “best interests” principle is open to a wide-range of discretionary judgement (Sandberg, 2009, p. 34), which might seem to empower caseworkers, as it is their definition that is taken into consideration in most official settings. The
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psychological well-being of children (Burman, 2016; Hennum, 2010) might be difficult for parents to interpret and understand in everyday parental choices.

7.2 An emotionally stressful encounter

The analysis also reveals the significance of understanding parents’ emotions in child welfare as well as the role they play in the outcome of child welfare cases. It is not surprising that parents experience fear, anxiety, sadness, and anger when confronted with possible custody deprivation or even child protection investigations, which is elaborated on in Papers 1 and 2. However, understanding parents’ emotions and their resistance to child welfare requires broader exploration of what influences them as well as the consequences they might have in their involvement with CWS. The findings of this thesis reveal that parents’ emotions are drawn from how they relate with caseworkers and how they perceive help from CWS and the involvement of authorities in their families, as well as from the parents’ personal struggles. As parents strive to understand why CWS intervene in their families, and as they perceive that aspirations for their families are threatened, the encounter with CWS becomes emotionally stressful. This seems to characterise the experiences of many parents involved with CWS despite the context or parental status. However, in addition to what might provoke emotions for most parents in contact with CWS, this study further highlights certain factors that might be emotionally stressful for immigrants, whose emotional vulnerability is accelerated when involved with CWS. It is therefore crucial to explore different aspects of the parents’ lives that might make them vulnerable in addition to their involvement with CWS.

The rationale underlying the focus on emotions in this thesis was twofold. First, exploring emotions aided in understanding experiences and perceptions in a psychological sense, similar to Lazarus's (2006) description of emotions, stress, and coping. Second, understanding perceptions and experiences mostly concerns exploring how people feel.
It is therefore not surprising that, although emotions were never the intended angle from which experiences and perceptions could be studied, they emerged as relevant in investigating the first aim of this thesis. Previous research has shown that the intervention of CWS in most families is associated with emotional stress for parents (Davies, 2011; Thrana & Fauske, 2014). Thrana and Fauske (2014) noted that CWS negotiate with families in difficult situations, and in certain instances, parents might feel inadequate in their parenting due to the CWS intervention of CWS as this study suggests. The parents also might feel stigmatised, and an intervention, as the findings show, could be perceived as control and not help. This often translates to conflicts and tensions between parents and caseworkers where emotions take a toll. In the analysis of previous research of parents’ perceptions of CWS (Paper 1), the findings revealed that emotions are central in parents’ narratives of their experiences with CWS, as was also the case with immigrant parents in Paper 2. Focusing on the different triggers of emotions mentioned in Papers 1 and 2 allowed for a distinction between experiences and perceptions that might be common for all parents in contact with CWS and those that might be specific to immigrant parents in particular.

Paper 1 portrayed how different parents have unique challenges that influence their experiences. While there were some common experiences for all parents, the different circumstances characterising the parents’ lives also presented additional challenges. Paper 1 presents findings from indigenous people, immigrants, natives, and battered mothers who perceived that their different positions worked to their disadvantage when they were in contact with CWS. For example, immigrant parents mentioned issues like culture shock, employment challenges, racism, lack of support in their traditional family values, previous traumatic experiences, such as war and dangerous journeys to safety, which seem to perpetuate their challenges. In contrast, Johnson and Sullivan (2008) and Fleury-Steiner and Brady (2011) discussed how battered mothers
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who were themselves victims of violence might further be victimised during child protection investigations. All this points to factors that are emotionally stressful for the parents in themselves that need to be explored and taken into consideration when involved with CWS. While emotions seem to be crucial in understanding parent–caseworker relations, first and foremost, this has to be understood in psychological terms, as Lazarus (2006) explained, which makes it crucial to understand what might trigger vulnerability. For many parents, involvement with CWS affects their behaviour, appraisal, and decisions, as Ingram (2013) also noted, and this is triggered by personal issues as well as issues related to child welfare involvement. Therefore, to explore parents’ perceptions and experiences, investigating what triggers their emotions is key, as this might uncover what aspects are relevant in the parents’ lives that need to be considered in their involvement with CWS.

The role of emotions and the associated power to define emotions cannot be ignored. Through the sociological understanding of emotions (Forsberg & Vagli, 2006; Hochschild, 1975, 1979), power imbalances are visible in the parents’ experiences. While previous research has revealed that caseworkers experience several emotions in their work (Forsberg, 1999; Mandell, Stalker, de Zeeuw Wright, Frensch, & Harvey, 2013) and this study has documented parents’ own emotional experiences, the power to determine what these emotions imply and what influence they will have on the case resides with the caseworker. Lazarus (2006) highlighted that an appraisal of a situation might follow behavioural responses that are expressed emotionally, for example, when one is angry. As the findings reveal, parents perceive that their emotions are interpreted negatively (bad, uncooperative, psychotic parent) and might affect how caseworkers decide their cases. Hochschild's (1975, 1979, 2003) theory about emotional rules entails that emotional expressions are governed by rules often set by those who are superior in a relationship. Parents’ experiences with emotional expressions reflect this. Although some parents fought and resisted, they perceived that
resistance brought sanctions, as the caseworkers could interpret this negatively. Healy, Darlington, and Feeney (2011) and Darlington, Healy, and Feeney (2010) noted that, while parents’ participation in child protection cases is both feasible and desirable, the statutory context of child welfare work presents challenges in realising these goals. Although the findings do not explicitly relate to participation, how parents analyse the responses associated with expressing their emotions could hinder them from participating. The results reveal that parents fear how CWS defines what they say or do during cases. As they perceive that they are overpowered, the result is fear of either expressing themselves or participating meaningfully in their case. It is important to understand the vulnerability that parents feel in expressing themselves in order to find ways to enhance parents’ participation without them feeling judged, as some parents in this study reported.

7.3 Perceived social control and mistrust of authorities

Embedded in immigrant parents’ perceptions of the broader welfare system are issues of power imbalance and mistrust of the system. The analysis of the dilemmas regarding the aims and goals of CWS shows that questions regarding how to define neglect and abuse or who knows what is best for the child all involve some power imbalance. The findings suggest that parents perceive that the broader welfare system and its constituent welfare institutions, such as CWS, social welfare services, and health services, are very powerful and are enforced by the state, which makes parents feel powerless and controlled. Where power is, trust becomes eminent, as trust may provide legitimacy for the exercise of power. In the Norwegian context, Christensen and Lægreid (2005) and Nyseter (2017) noted that there are high levels of trust in the government among the citizens, and this trust permeates to other welfare organisations as well. Nyseter (2017) further noted that high levels of trust are made possible by economic equalities and are crucial for the
functioning of the welfare state. However, the findings of this thesis show that parents express mistrust towards the welfare system embedded in health welfare, education, and social services. Previous research (Berg et al., 2017; Ipsos, 2018; Korzeniewska et al., 2019) also has shown the mistrust of welfare services among immigrants, even though there are variations among different groups of immigrants regarding levels of trust (Ipsos, 2018).

Different factors seem to contribute to this mistrust. In a study among immigrants, Eamer (2007) noted how some immigrants, especially refugees, might be prone to fear of authorities and be unlikely to engage with and trust authorities as a result of their past negative experiences of government authorities in their home countries. While this could explain why refugees might fear authorities, this was not observed in this study. However, following Hantrais's (2004) categorisations of the different family policy regimes in different countries, the parents’ experiences and Hantrais’s inferences could be connected. The findings reveal that, for most parents, intrusion of the state into the family through professionals, even if it is to help, is resisted and perceived negatively. Since most of the parents in the primary data came from familialised and refamilialised family regimes, they might be more resistant to state intervention, as families in their home countries are a more private than public affair. As this study has shown, parents feel the state is far more involved in family affairs in its goals to protect children, which make them feel powerless as parents, hence perpetuating mistrust in all matters related to the state and the professionals represented in welfare services. The findings further reveal that the fear of CWS, which, in essence, is the fear of losing custody of one’s children, permeates to other welfare institutions, as parents become suspicious of the role that these institutions have in reporting concerns to child welfare. Thus, mistrust of CWS pervades to mistrust of educational and health services as well as a broader mistrust of the society in general. A danger with this mistrust is that parents may not benefit from other services that might be available for their children,
which can cause vulnerabilities for their children, as previously noted by Rasmussen et al. (2012).

7.3.1 *Perceptions of controlled parenthood*

Identifying parental success and failure is imperative to ensure child safety (Lord Laming, 2003). It is therefore not surprising to see how parents’ perceptions and experiences of parenting are interrelated with experiences of involvement with CWS. Foucault’s (1977) concept of governance reflects the parents’ perception of the role of the state in parenting. The results imply that parents perceive an idealised notion of good parenthood, which they feel they are forced to comply with and are measured by as immigrants. The broader welfare system is therefore perceived as an instrument of ensuring the standard parenthood through the involvement of different professionals who offer parental guidance and support. Parents further perceive that failure to comply with suggestions from professionals could risk them being labelled bad parents and reported to CWS. The results show that parents attribute their immigrant position as a deficit to this concept of good parenthood as Fylkesnes et al., (2018) also observed, which Hennum (2010) further noted is often associated with ethnic Norwegian middle-class standards. Previous research (Hennum, 2010, 2017; Stefansen & Farstad, 2008) has also evidenced this perceived standardised parenthood that might be used as a measuring rod in noting concerns or intervention. The parents in this study believed they are closely monitored through the welfare organisations due to the stereotypes that are associated with immigrants as abusive parents, while they acknowledged feelings of being deficient in their parenting based on Norwegian standards. Parents perceived that their identities are constructed unfavourably (e.g., immigrants, abusive parents), which automatically results in a disadvantaged identity that warrants being excessively controlled and surveilled. This is followed by the belief that they lack the power and ability to challenge how their
identities are constructed and that they have to live with the consequences of these constructions, as is elaborated in the next section.

### 7.4 Sociocultural differences: A double-edged sword

In response to the controversies surrounding immigrants and CWS, several studies (Berg et al., 2017; Hennum, 2017; Paulsen et al., 2014) have questioned whether CWS provide equal services to families across different social and ethnic groups and have inquired whether immigrants are treated differently. Cultural differences are often identified among social workers as one of the problems of working with immigrants (Bø, 2015; Križ & Skivenes, 2010a, 2015; Skytte, 2002). It has further been argued that understanding cultural differences is important when assessing the needs of ethnic minorities in child welfare (Dalikeni, 2019; Harrison & Turner, 2011; Rasmussen et al., 2012). In line with this observation, Dettlaff and Fong (2014) noted that children from immigrant families have often been considered at increased risk of child maltreatment due to the many risks associated with immigration and cultural differences. Differences in parenting styles and parental expectations are considered particularly relevant to becoming vulnerable to be reported to CWS as well as vulnerability during contact with CWS. However, the results of this thesis indicate that parents perceive that “cultural difference” is often used as a stereotyping tool. Immigrant parents in this thesis perceived that judgements were made against them based on assumptions regarding their ethnicity rather than who they are individually in what Harran (2002) termed as being viewed through an ethnic lens and Rugkåsa et al. (2015b) termed as culturalisation, which might enhance certain judgements and stereotypes.

Park (2005) approached cultural assumption in social work as an instrument of power and control in her examination of the particular meanings that social work assigns to culture. This has also been observed in other studies (Julkunen & Rauhala, 2013; Rugkåsa et al., 2015b) that
analyse the constructions embedded in culture as a signifier of difference. While the findings in the current study clearly show that parents acknowledged having different values than those of the host society, they perceived that these differences are often portrayed negatively in Norway and are translated to bad parenting practices. Harran (2002) observed that, while understanding cultural differences might be important in child welfare with ethnic minorities, it could also present challenges if ethnic minorities are only viewed through ethnic lenses. As the analysis of this thesis shows, immigrant parents perceived that they are first seen based on their cultural/ethnic differences in the welfare system and by the society at large. They perceived that this assigns them (immigrants) as a “must-watch group” for possible child abuse, and hence, they perceived close monitoring. It should be emphasised that parents who had never had contact with CWS based their perceptions on interactions with the broader welfare system and the society where they perceived that suggestions made towards their parenting might imply that they are failing as parents. Furthermore, others based their perceptions on second-hand information, which could be wrong or misguided. Some studies (Skivenes, 2015; Tuastad et al., 2017), however, have shown that there is no discrimination or bias when social workers deliver services, which calls for more research into the area.

Exploring cultural differences in context, Kagitcibasi (2013) noted that the individualism and collectivism concepts are often used as absolutes that would determine parenting styles for different groups of people. However, the criticisms that she highlighted in such categorisations are crucial. While these terms might explain some cultural characteristics, culture does not have an impact solely on its own (Rugkåsa et al., 2015b), and one cannot ignore intracultural/societal variabilities. Therefore, preconceived ideas about knowledge of different cultural groups might be discriminatory and biased. Immigrants strongly feel stereotyped and “cultured” in their interactions with the welfare system, which leads to
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negative perceptions regarding the involvement of authorities in their families. It is clear in this thesis that cultural information about parents is important. However, parents object as to how cultural information about immigrants as parents is constructed and used. Parents perceive that certain information about immigrants existing in media influences how their identities are constructed, which leads to perceptions that overemphasis on cultural differences is disempowering and discriminatory.

7.5 Concluding remarks

7.5.1 Recommendations for future research

The present study suggests the need for research to focus on different aspects in the broader welfare system that influence parenting experiences to understand parents’ experiences and perceptions of CWS. Research needs to explore how parenting is experienced, how parents perceive receiving help, and how they perceive their position in the broader welfare system. Focusing on emotional experiences, the present study contributes to an area that is currently underexplored in child welfare but is very crucial to understanding parents’ perspectives. Future research can explore further how parents’ emotions affect child welfare involvement by researching how caseworkers interpret parents’ emotional expressions in CWS. Another aspect that also needs further investigation is the cultural influence on emotional expressions, which seems relevant for child welfare work with immigrants who belong to different contexts that might have different cultural rules for emotional expression, as noted by Miyamoto and Ryff (2011).

This thesis also contributes with user’s perceptions of the cultural challenges or cultural problems in child welfare work with minorities. This topic has been highlighted recently, as child welfare institutions search for more ways to enhance cultural competency and sensitivity
(Rugkåsa, et al., 2015a; Rugkåsa, Ylvisaker, & Eide, 2017). The problems associated with cultural differences reported in this study differ markedly from those noted by social workers as reported in previous research (Križ & Skivenes, 2010b; Sawrikar & Katz, 2014). By exploring parents’ perspectives, this study portrays how culture might be perceived as discriminatory and stereotypical, which supports other studies (Julkunen & Rauhala, 2013; Park, 2005; Rugkåsa et al., 2015b). Looking at cultural differences as a double edged sword, the present study portrays how emphasis on culture might be complex by presenting both positive and negative effects in practice. There is a need for more research to explore the problems related to cultural differences from immigrants’ perspectives.

7.5.2 Implications for social work practice

This thesis has several implications for social work practice with immigrants in different welfare services based on the parents’ perceptions. First, this study has implications for the approaches used in understanding parents’ involvement with CWS. Adopting a bottom–up approach rather than a top–down approach to understanding service recipients seems reasonable based on the findings of this study. DeJong and Berg (1998) emphasised the importance of complete and comprehensive information about the parents and their challenges in making good decisions in welfare services, which this study has touched upon. This information is better obtained from the parents themselves. While cultural sensitivity and cultural competence is advocated for in social work, it might lead to distorted expectations that, once one has cultural information about the parents, then working with people from other cultures will be easier, which is not the case. Thus cultural competence might present challenges of a sort of ‘one-size-fits-all’ or transferable knowledge that can also help with the next case, which could disregard unique characteristics of the parents. As this study’s findings have shown, parents perceive that what they find most important is not
taken into consideration in CWS encounters, as they feel they lack safe spaces in which they can give sufficient information about themselves, especially based on how they perceive their emotions are interpreted by caseworkers and how they are perceived. The study suggests the need to understand the families’ unique needs, one family at a time and within a broader context. This entails taking a social constructivist approach, in which professionals work with the individual in the environment.

This study also suggests the need to pay attention to the emotional “baggage” that especially refugees and asylum seekers bring with them. It is crucial to understand that absolute deference from parents during child welfare cases is problematic, especially with parents from different contexts where rules about emotional expression might be different but also with parents who might have other vulnerabilities. The struggles that parents, and more so immigrant parents, have faced and now face in the new environment cannot be downplayed, which calls for the need to appreciate the parents’ context. Therefore, it is imperative for scholars and practitioners to pay attention to emotions and reflect on the role emotions play in the process.

Finally, parents’ perceptions of the intrusion and the demands on their parenthood permeate into how they react when they meet with CWS. As the findings show, perceptions of CWS are constructed from not only interactions with CWS but also the welfare institutions at large. While some welfare services are not compulsory, there is a need to clarify that the parents have freewill regarding their parenting and the advice directed at their parenting. This cannot be achieved in CWS, as parents are met with other family welfare services that shape their perceptions of the broader system outside of CWS. This might also necessitate the need for transparency with parents in all welfare service provisions in the different welfare institutions. To develop trust, parents need to be aware of and be made to understand the reasons for CWS interventions, how the procedures work, and the role of family welfare services into their families.
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Appendices
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Appendix A: Interview Guide for in depth interviews with parents who had contact with the CWS

Introductions about the study explaining more on the contents of the consent form and what the study is about.

**Background Information**
1. How old are you?
2. How many children do you have?
3. How old are your children?
4. What is your educational level?
5. What is your current employment status?
6. What is your marital status?
7. Do you own the house you live in or you rent?

**Migration history**
8. Where are you originally from?
9. How long have you been in Norway? / When did you come to Norway?
10. How often do you visit your home country?
11. Why did you come to Norway?
12. Do you speak Norwegian? Are you fluent or basic?

**Network Information**
13. Tell me about the people you are in contact with here in Norway.
14. Did you come to Norway with any of your relatives/ or do you have any relatives in Norway apart from your immediate family?
15. Do you know many people from your country here in Norway and do you meet them often as friends.
16. Do you have Norwegian friends? If not why?
17. Do you know migrants from other countries? If yes, where do you meet with them and how often?

**Knowledge about child welfare system**
18. Tell me what you know about child welfare service in Norway and how you know that.
19. Do you talk about child welfare services with friends or anyone, if you do what do you talk about and who do you talk with?
20. From your knowledge of the child welfare services in Norway what kind of cases are common in bringing people into contact with the child welfare?

Contact with the child welfare service
21. Tell me more on issues surrounding your contact with the child welfare service.
   □ Tell me how you were contacted or did you contact them yourself? And anything surrounding how you first got into contact with CWS
   □ What was the case about? (If you are okay to talk about it)
22. Tell me your views regarding the progression of the case.
23. How was the communication between you and the CWS?
24. Can you tell me about the information you received related to the case. (Were the workers transparent with you as to what was going on and how they came at different decisions)
25. How long did the case take to be completed or do you still get in contact with the child welfare from time to time.
26. Did you have any feelings of fear when you got in contact with the child welfare services?

The help given
27. Can you tell me more about the assistance you received from CWS consisted of?
28. Tell me your perception of the help you received on the case.
29. What was the conclusion of the case?
30. In your opinion do you think you needed the help you were given or the intervention with the child welfare services?

The relationship with the child welfare workers
31. Tell me about your relationship with the child welfare worker?
32. How did you arrive at decisions during the case?
33. Tell me how this made you feel?
34. Did you feel like you were being understood by the CWS if yes how? If not why?
35. How do you think the CWS caseworker perceived you?
36. Was the relationship based on trust or mistrust?
37. Did your relationship with the worker change over time.

Parenting style and child welfare services
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38. Are there any differences in raising a child in Norway and your home country? (Difference in parenting style?)
39. Has this got anything to do with why you were in contact with the CWS?
40. Do you think you have to change your parenting style just because you are in Norway? Would you raise your children differently if you were still in your home country? Can you explain why would you do the things you answer to in this question?

Cultural influences
41. Do you think cultural differences influenced your experience of the child welfare intervention? If yes how?
42. How do you think your case would be handled in your home country?

General questions
43. What do you think are challenges for immigrant parents when they meet the child welfare service in Norway?
44. How can one address these challenges or what would you want to be addressed in your contact with the CWS?
45. Do you have anything you want to add related to what we have discussed?
46. Do you have any questions?

Thank you very much for your participation
Appendices

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Appendices

Appendix B: Interview Guide for in depth interviews of parents perceptions of CWS

Introductions about the study explaining more on the contents of the consent form and what the study is about.

Background Information

1. How old are you?
2. How many children do you have?
3. What is your educational level?
4. What is your current employment status?
5. What is your marital status?

Migration history

1. Where are you originally from?
2. How long have you been in Norway? / When did you come to Norway?
3. Why did you come to Norway?
4. Do you speak Norwegian? Are you fluent or basic?

Network Information

1. Do you have Norwegian friends?
2. Do you know migrants from other countries? If yes, where do you meet with them and how often?

Your perception of child welfare

3. Tell me what you know about child welfare service in Norway/ what is your perception about the child welfare in Norway.
4. How did you build or come to that perception
   a. Was it by reading about it?
   b. On TV
   c. Any other channels?
5. Do you talk about child welfare services with friends or anyone, if you do what do you talk about and who do you talk with?
6. From your knowledge of the child welfare services in Norway what kind of cases are common in bringing people into contact with the child welfare?

7. Do you know anybody close to you who has ever been in contact with the child welfare?

8. If yes, what was their experience?

**Parenting style and child welfare services**

9. Are there any differences in raising a child in Norway and your home country? (Difference in parenting style?)

10. Do you think you have to change your parenting style just because you are in Norway?

11. Would you raise your children differently if you were still in your home country?

**CWS in your home country**

12. Can you tell me how the child welfare services in your home country function?
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Appendix C: Approved informed consent

Can I interview you about your views on child welfare services?

My name is Memory Jayne Tembo and I am a PhD student at the University of Stavanger. I am doing research on immigrant parent’s experiences and perceptions of the child welfare system here in Norway as part of my PhD. I would like to hear more about your experiences and your perceptions of the child welfare system. This is an invitation to participate in this study as an interviewee.

Background and Purpose
Over the years, issues regarding child welfare and immigrants in Norway have surfaced in the media both local and international. Different people have different experiences with the CWS including Norwegian citizens. It is therefore important to understand how immigrant parents experience the intervention with the child welfare service and understand their perception of the CWS. This knowledge might help in informing service practices that are in line with the immigrant parent’s needs. The experiences and perceptions will add knowledge which is necessary in reviewing public services with the aim of improving them to serve the people. The participants for the experience part in this study will be immigrant parents who have been in contact with the CWS and perceptions from immigrant parents who have never been in contact with the CWS. This research is part of my PhD project and is attached to the University of Stavanger.

The sample of this study includes immigrant parents both those who have been in contact with the child welfare service and those who have not. Selection of the participants is based on purposive sampling and snowball sampling in order to include participants with various backgrounds. A diverse population will help to accumulate diverse experiences on the subject.

What does participation in the project imply?
Data for this research will be collected through in depth interviews. The interviews will take approximately 1:30 to 2 hours.

Participants will be asked to answer questions about their experiences with or their perception of the Child Welfare Service. I would like to know more about your experiences with the CWS with regards to the following themes:
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- Your experiences and views about the child welfare service
- Your views on the reason that brought you in contact with the CWS
- Experiences of your relationship with the CWS (workers)
- A comparison of parenting in Norway and your home country
- Differences in parenting approaches

In order to talk and listen carefully I will use a tape recorder to record your answers if you approve.

**What will happen to the information about you?**
The record will be written down carefully, and all information that can identify you will be removed in the written material. The information will be kept confidential. The data will be stored in my computer and only I have access to the voice record. I will delete the voice record no later than December 2018.

Participants will not be identified indirectly in the written files, nor through the publication in journals or books.

**Voluntary participation**
Participation is voluntary. You can at any time choose to withdraw your consent without stating any reason.

If you would like to participate or if you have any questions concerning the project, please contact Memory Jayne Tembo on 92507626 or email memory.j.tembo@uis.no.

The study has been notified to the Data Protection Official for Research, Norwegian Social Science Data Services number.

**Consent for participation in the study**
I have received information about the project and am willing to participate

-------------------------------------------------------------

----------
(Signed by participant, date)

☐ I agree to participate in the interview
Appendix D: NSD approval letter

Norsk samfunnsvitenskapelig datatjeneste AS
NORWEGIAN SOCIAL SCIENCE DATA SERVICES

Memory Jayne Tembo
Institutt for sosialfag Universitetet i Stavanger
Ullandhaug
4036 STAVANGER

TILBAKEMELDING PÅ MELDING OM BEHANDLING AV PERSONOPPLYSNINGER

Vi viser til melding om behandling av personopplysninger, mottatt 09.04.2015. Meldingen gjelder prosjektet:

43070 Child Protection in A Multicultural Context; Immigrant Parents’ Perception & Experiences Of Child Welfare Services In Norway

Døgning ansvarlig Universitetet i Stavanger, ved Institusjonens øverste leder

43070 Child Protection in A Multicultural Context; Immigrant Parents’ Perception & Experiences Of Child Welfare Services In Norway

Personvernombudet har vurdert prosjektet, og finner at behandlingen av personopplysninger vil være regulert av § 7-27 i personopplysningsforskriften. Personvernombudet tror at prosjektet giromføres.

Personvernombudets tilråd forutsetter at prosjektet gjennomføres i tråd med opplysningene gitt i meldelsesomset, korrespondanse med ombudet, ombudets kommentarer samt personopplysningsloven og helsetilsaksloven i medfør. Behandlingen av personopplysninger kan settes i gang.


Vennlig hilsen

Katrine Utaker Sagdal

Kjersli Haugstedt

Kontaktperson: Marthe Brykland tlf: 55 58 33 48

Vedlegg: Prosjektvurdering

Dokumentet er elektronisk produsert og godkjent ved NSD’s roller for elektronisk godkjennelse.
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Paper 1

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Nordic Social Work Research
2018, Vol. 9, No. 2, 191-196
https://doi.org/10.1080/2156857X.2018.1489665

Parents’ emotional experiences of their contact with the Child Welfare Services: a synthesis of previous research- a research review

Memory Jayne Tembo and Ingunn Stavseth
Department of Social Studies, University of Stavanger, Stavanger, Norway

ABSTRACT

A number of studies have investigated parents’ experiences with the Child Welfare Services (CWS). The purpose of this review is to analyze previous research on how parents experience their contact with CWS. The aim is to determine current knowledge, and to provide a synthesis of current understandings. The main research question that guides this review is What parental emotional experiences are evident in previous research and what activated them? Furthermore, we compared the experiences among the different countries represented in this study. The wicked problem concept and emotions, stress and coping theory informed the analysis. The revised framework for integrative review inspires the methodology and analysis. Data was collected through a computerized database search, networking and journal hand search. Fifteen articles are included in this review representing five countries: Norway, Australia, Canada, the US and the United Kingdom. The analysis shows that even though parents reported some positive experiences, the contact is often stressful and highly emotional. To various degrees, anger, sadness, fear and anxiety were common responses. This review indicates that relational and procedural aspects of the process and parents’ perception of help measures in child welfare evoked parents’ emotions. The findings reflect more similarities than differences in emotional experiences in the different countries. We conclude with a discussion of implications for social work practice.

KEYWORDS

Parental experiences; emotions; Child Welfare systems; wicked problems; integrative review

Introduction

Internationally, understanding, supporting and providing families and children with a safe environment is the core target of child protection/welfare systems. Child welfare services also aim to recognize and respond to child maltreatment (Gilbert et al. 2009; Gilbert, Parton, and Skiveness 2011). The priority of any child welfare system is to help parents and children in the community in a supportive way and to keep notions of policing and coercive intervention to a minimum (Berrick et al. 2017; Munro 2011). Nevertheless, child welfare and protection laws make it possible for the state to intervene in families, and to exercise social control over parents and family life, and if necessary with force (Gilbert, Parton, and Skiveness 2011). Although the promotion of child welfare is a significant political and social challenge in modern democratic states, understanding and responding to child abuse and neglect is controversial, complex and challenging (Munro 2011; Gilbert et al. 2009; Gilbert, Parton, and Skiveness 2011). This also means that different agents such as children, workers and parents, may have different, although valid views and perceptions of family functions, interventions and service outcomes.

CONTACT Memory Jayne Tembo <memory.jtembo@us.no>

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Child welfare practices often target the child’s wellbeing and often the child is the main and sometimes the only recipient of services. However, most services targeted at children are delivered through the parents, hence parents have a central and dual position as service users and subjects of investigations, as they are often the targets of educational, therapeutic, regulatory and other measures (Gilbert, Parton, and Skivenes 2011). Parents as recipients of these services ought to have a voice in how the services have met their needs and expectations. Thus, the views and understandings of parents are decisive to a successful outcome.

The purpose of this study is to review previous research on parents’ perceptions of their contact with child welfare services. The aim is to determine the dominant themes in this subject, and to provide a synthesis of current understandings. When we started the analysis, essential parts of the perceptions were parents’ emotional experiences. We therefore explicitly turned our attention to parents’ emotional experiences. Emotions arise in response to significant stimuli and events, and an encounter with child welfare services has emotional dimensions for many reasons, including a large impact on parents’ behaviour, attention, decisions, appraisal and motivation (Ingram 2015). In recent years, there have been arguments for the need for an awareness of the emotional worlds. Thrama and Fauske (2014) argue that it is important to incorporate the emotional perspectives of parents into research on encounters with services and social workers. Moreover, CWS negotiations with parents are difficult, and conflicting situations and emotions often have to be dealt with. A failure to understand or deal with parents’ emotions may hinder adequate help and support, as well as effective child protection.

Previous research has highlighted several aspects of particular importance to parents. Firstly, parents’ satisfaction or dissatisfaction tends to relate to the perceived helpfulness of the services (Fuller, Peadley, and Schreiber 2015; Thrama and Fauske 2014). Secondly, studies have identified a link between the quality of the relationship and positive outcomes (Trotter 2002). Lastly, parents’ perceptions are also based on the procedures used within the organization (Samøsen 2016). Research reveals a growth in formal procedures, a pervasive spread of bureaucratic mandates and a range of different tools and technologies within child welfare organizations (Gilbert, Parton, and Skivenes 2011, 249). Therefore, we will study in particular how emotions interact with perceptions of relationships with social workers, the procedures and the measures/helplines the families are offered.

Secondary to the primary aim, we will explore how parents’ experiences vary among the different countries represented in this study. Comparisons of child welfare practices in several countries have shown that practices vary markedly between countries (Berrick et al. 2017; Gilbert, Parton, and Skivenes 2011; Parton 2011). Consequently, children and families become eligible to participate in the services through different means in different countries. Gilbert, Parton, and Skivenes (2011) distinguished three child welfare orientations/models: family service, child protection and child focus orientation. In the family service orientation, entry to the system is based on need, and effective measures to safeguard children are those that can also promote their welfare. Hence, safeguarding is not seen in isolation to the wider range of support and service provision to families and children, with the service having a broad concern (Parton 2011). The child protection model has a narrower orientation directed towards imminent harm and risks of harm to a child (Berrick et al. 2017). The child focus orientation is not restricted to narrow forensic concerns about harm and abuse; instead, the object of concern is the child’s overall development and well-being. This orientation involves early intervention and preventative measures, and seems to borrow elements from both child protection and family service orientations (Gilbert, Parton, and Skivenes 2011). Research also indicates that social workers use very different assessment tools and approaches in these three models (Berrick et al. 2015; Samøsen 2016). Systematic differences between the types of systems have been reported regarding the amount and level of structure, regulation and procedures, in addition to space for individual professional judgement (Berrick et al. 2015). We would therefore anticipate that the system features and the framework and regulations in each country, together with the different emphasis on the individual child or the family as discussed by Gilbert, Parton, and Skivenes (2011), would have a different effect on the interactions and perceptions of...
Appendices

Theoretical background

Emotions, stress and coping

Our understanding of emotions is grounded in Lazarus’ (1999) theory of stress, emotion and coping, which is explained by the appraisal process. Lazarus (ibid.) defines emotions as complex organized systems consisting of thoughts, beliefs, motives, meanings, subjective bodily experiences and physiological states that arise from people’s struggle to survive and flourish, by understanding the world in which they live in. We use emotions and feelings synonymously, since feelings are also embedded in this definition of emotions. The underlying idea is that how one interprets an event causes one’s emotional reaction to it or the feelings associated with it. Thus, each emotion or feeling informs us, as to how a person has appraised the significance of what is happening to him or her for his or her own well-being in an adaptation transaction, and what might be done about it, which is the coping process. In this sense, emotions portray different scenarios or stories about an ongoing relationship with the environment. It therefore follows that knowing the emotion being experienced also provides an understanding of how it was brought about (Lazarus 1999).

Lazarus (1999) described the origin of stress in a like manner with emotions by attributing both to the appraisal process. He argued that stress is the troubled reaction to stressful stimuli, which leads him to build a link between stress and emotions. Therefore, if people report feeling pressured, harmed or threatened, or feeling disturbed, angry, anxious, sad, depressed and so forth, this is stress in emotional response terms. This is further linked to coping, which is the effort to manage psychological stress. Coping might be positive or negative. Considering this, the parents’ experiences reported in this study as emotions or feelings are in essence parents’ appraisals of the events that surrounded their contact with child welfare services. Parents’ descriptions can be regarded as stress in emotional terms, and how they dealt with these emotions is how they coped, whether appropriately or inappropriately, with the situation. Earlier approaches to emotions reduced emotions to independent dimensions, such as pleasant-unpleasantness, excitement—relaxation and positive-negative (Lazarus 1999). The findings of this review point to some of these emotional dimensions. Using Lazarus’ (1999) theory of emotion, stress and coping, we grasp how parents create meanings out of their interactions, which enables us to understand their perceptions of child welfare services.

Wicked problems

Devaney and Spratt (2009) argue that the issue of protecting children is a wicked problem. One of the characteristics of wicked problems is that they have no stopping rule or definitive ‘solution’. The solutions are neither right nor wrong, and every wicked problem might be considered a symptom of another problem (Head 2008). Head (2008) argued that the nature of wicked problems and their solutions are strongly contested. Wicked problems have incomplete, contradictory and changing requirements, and as such, solutions to them are often difficult to recognize because of the complex interdependencies. The solution of one aspect of a wicked problem may reveal or create another, even more complex, problem (Hunter 2007). Devaney and Spratt (2009) highlighted that a change in child
protection services is pointless without an adequate understanding of the culture within which the change is expected. Devaney and Spratt (2009) therefore argued for the need to understand the very nature of the problems in child welfare services as wicked problems. We argue that the findings of this review could be explained by the nature of the problem in child welfare practice, being a wicked problem in the sense that Head (2008) refers to. Similar to wicked problems, child welfare problems cannot be resolved by scientific and technical expertise, but instead understanding subjective experiences that include the emotional aspects. This can provide alternative starting points for improved practice.

**Method**

In order to fulfill the research aims, we carried out an integrative review to determine current knowledge and to provide a synthesis of current understandings. The integrative review method not only summarizes research, but also provides a more comprehensive understanding of a specific topic. This is the only method that allows for an inclusion of articles with diverse methodologies (Whittmore and Knall 2005). Given that parents’ experiences of the child welfare services are best or most often explored using qualitative approaches, and that there are few such quantitative studies, it was best to summarize empirical findings using an integrative research review design.

Research reviews are ‘research of research’, and must therefore meet the same standards of methodological rigour as primary research (Whittmore and Knall 2005). To help increase the yield of accurate results emerging from appropriate databases, a systematic and well-defined literature search strategy was developed, as illustrated in Figure 1.

**Search methods**

A comprehensive computer-assisted literature search was performed in Academic Search Premier, EBSCO Host, Scopus, Medline, Soc index with a full text and Cinahl. Keywords such as ‘child welfare services’, ‘child protection services’, ‘intervention’, ‘parents’ experiences’, ‘mothers’ experiences’, ‘fathers’ experiences’ and ‘user perceptions’ were used individually and in various combinations during the search process. In addition to the computerized database, we also manually scrutinized reference lists of selected articles and used networking as an additional search method. In Figure 2, the criteria for literature inclusion and exclusion are described more thoroughly.

**Analytical process**

We used the constant comparison method of analysis advocated by Whittmore and Knall (2005) for integrative reviews. Glaser and Strauss (1967) explain that this analysis combines the analytic procedures of constant comparison and explicit coding with the purpose of systematically generating theory. In our analysis, we compared the incidents that were applicable to each category by coding each incident in the data into categories that emerged as we read the articles. We then integrated the categories and their properties by moving from comparing incidents with incidents to comparing incidents with properties of the category that resulted from initial comparisons of incidents. The next phase according to Glaser and Strauss (1967) is delimiting the theory. Here, we clarified the logic of the study by reducing and condensing the data to the categories that appeared to be relevant to the emergent conceptual framework. This led to relational and procedural emotional aspects and help measures.

**Characteristics and quality appraisal of selected studies**

A synthesis of the data collected started with an evaluation of the characteristics of the selected articles. We did an appraisal of the studies, following guidelines for evaluating quantitative and qualitative research methods advocated by Burns, Grove, and Gray (2011). We analyzed articles based on their scope and purpose, methodology, sampling strategy and sample, data collection methods, ethical
Appendices

Figure 1. Flow diagram depicting search strategies and outcomes.

considerations, study limitations and the implications of the study for practice and research. All articles, with the exception of one (#13), adopted a qualitative research design and all articles, except for two (#6, #10) used interviews for data collection, while #6 used a photo voice method and #10 was based on the researchers’ own experiences. Many of the studies used purposeful sampling, with the sample size ranging from one (#10) to 715 participants (#13) in the quantitative design. Most of the respondents were women, whereas only approximately 13% of all respondents were men. All studies, with the exception of three (#3, #8, #10), stated some limitations of their studies, which mostly related to lack of
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inclusion criteria</th>
<th>Exclusion criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Focusing on parents’ voice</td>
<td>- Articles whose participants were not parents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>regarding their experiences of CWS</td>
<td>- Articles published before 2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Articles dating from 2000 to present,</td>
<td>- Articles in other languages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to get studies that are more recent</td>
<td>- Articles that discuss parental experience of specific programmes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and limit the results</td>
<td>in child welfare. This was to obtain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Published and peer reviewed</td>
<td>general perceptions of CWS, but</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>articles to ensure quality</td>
<td>also limit the results.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Publication in English</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2. Inclusion and exclusion criteria.

generalizability due to sampling. Lastly, all studies, except for two, described some implications for either practice or research or both. In Table 1, a summary of the studies is presented more thoroughly.

Results

The purpose of this review was to analyse previous research on parents’ emotional experiences of their contact with child welfare services, and what activated these emotions. We also compared parental experiences in the countries represented in this review.

Parents’ emotional experiences

Across the data set, parents reported both positive and negative emotional experiences. To various degrees, anger, sadness, fear and anxiety were common responses. Even though emotions like fear changed throughout the contact (Studsrød, Williamsen, and Ellingsen 2014; Samsoersen and Williamsen 2015), fear that was mainly caused by the possibility of having the children removed from home was most often present from the beginning. In addition, the contact made most parents feel vulnerable in general (Ayon et al. 2010; Johnson and Sullivan 2008; Earner 2007; Dunbrille 2006; Spratt and Callan 2004; Hunter 2006; Studsrød, Williamsen, and Ellingsen 2014).

In several reports, parents reported that they felt hysterical and shocked (Spratt and Callan 2004; Harris 2012) and even traumatized (Davies 2011; Healy, Darlington, and Feeley 2011; Johnson and Sullivan 2008; Dale 2004; Dunbrille 2006; Studsrød, Williamsen, and Ellingsen 2014). Overall, the reports carried overwhelming messages of negative emotions such as shame, mistrust, stigmatization, frustration, despair, anger, humiliation, embarrassment, discrimination, confusion, sadness, betrayal, oppression, loss and panic. As narrated in Davies (2011; 202, 203):

My involvement in the investigation caused increased levels of stress and anxiety; making me feel victimized as a mother... I still cannot find a concise vocabulary that expresses my oddly juxtaposed and turbulent feelings... Although the case was closed, we found the experience devastating...

The reports also carried messages of positive emotions among parents such as hope, respect, relief and gratitude. Nevertheless, the overall impression is that parents perceived the contact as emotionally stressful. Moreover, the results revealed that parents handled these emotions differently, including showing their real emotions, hiding their feelings or faking how they felt (Ayon et al. 2010; Johnson and Sullivan 2008; Dunbrille 2006; Davies 2011; Harris 2012). These can be regarded as coping strategies used to reduce stress. Parents reported having to exercise hard emotional work, which for some, also had a damaging long-lasting effect. For instance, a parent reported working hard to hide her depression in order to give a better impression to the caseworker (Ayon et al. 2010). Davies (2011), who had an experience with child protection services herself, reported feeling vulnerable, frightened and scared for a long time after the actual experience. This may indicate post-traumatic stress where
Table 1. Profile of the empirical articles included in the integrative review.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country and Child Welfare System</th>
<th>Scope and Purpose</th>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Sampling Strategy</th>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Data Collection Method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>USA: CPS</td>
<td>Understand how Black American parents perceive their interactions with CPS and how this process promotes or hinders their interaction with CPS.</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>Purposive sampling</td>
<td>10 parents with a history of immigration</td>
<td>In-depth interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom / United Kingdom</td>
<td>Understanding how parents' perceptions affect relationship between parents and their service providers.</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>Purposive sampling</td>
<td>10 mothers who had been separated from their children and had been in contact with CPS due to the violence but not child abuse</td>
<td>In-depth interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada: CPS 2007</td>
<td>Understanding how parents' perceptions affect relationship between parents and their service providers.</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>Purposive sampling</td>
<td>11 immigrant parents that had contact in previous child protection services with CPS within 5 years</td>
<td>Semi-structured interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada: CPS 2003</td>
<td>Understanding how parents' perceptions affect relationship between parents and their service providers.</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>Purposive sampling</td>
<td>11 immigrant parents living in Canada</td>
<td>Focus group interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States: CPS 2000</td>
<td>Understanding how parents' perceptions affect relationship between parents and their service providers.</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>Purposive sampling</td>
<td>10 parents who had recently been investigated</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada: CPS 2000</td>
<td>Understanding how parents' perceptions affect relationship between parents and their service providers.</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>Purposive sampling</td>
<td>11 families who had contact with CPS due to the violence but not child abuse</td>
<td>Photo voice method by participatory action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States: CPS 2000</td>
<td>Understanding how parents' perceptions affect relationship between parents and their service providers.</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>Purposive sampling</td>
<td>10 families who had contact with CPS due to the violence but not child abuse</td>
<td>In-depth interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States: CPS 2000</td>
<td>Understanding how parents' perceptions affect relationship between parents and their service providers.</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>Purposive sampling</td>
<td>11 families who had contact with CPS due to the violence but not child abuse</td>
<td>Semi-structured interviews</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 1. (Continued).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of participants</th>
<th>Gender of participants</th>
<th>Sample size</th>
<th>Similarities in design or methodological approach</th>
<th>Difficulties in generalizability</th>
<th>Limitations of study</th>
<th>Implications for practice and research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Ayres, Aldenog (2012)</td>
<td>16 women and 3 men</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>The sample was not representative of the target population.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Johnson &amp; Sullivan (2008)</td>
<td>20 women and 3 men</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>The study was conducted in a single site.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Pincus &amp; Finland (2011)</td>
<td>19 women and 3 men</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>The results may not be generalizable to other settings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Easteal (2007)</td>
<td>9 women and 4 men</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>The sample size was small.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Marks (2012)</td>
<td>12 women and 4 men</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>The study was conducted in a single site.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Dunbill (2008)</td>
<td>9 women and 4 men</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>The sample size was small.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Midyke &amp; Fennell (2011)</td>
<td>11 women and 1 man</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>The study was conducted in a single site.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Burke (2004)</td>
<td>17 women and 3 men</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>The sample size was small.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Spratt &amp; Callan (2004)</td>
<td>6 women and 3 men</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>The study was conducted in a single site.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Difficulties in generalizability**:
- Limited sample size
- Participants not representative of the target population

**Limitations of study**:
- Sample selection bias
- Limited generalizability
- Small sample size

**Implications for practice and research**:
- Highlight the importance of understanding the experiences of parents and carers in the context of child protection and intervention.
- Explore the effectiveness of current child protection policies and practices.
- Highlight the need for further research to better understand the experiences of parents and carers in the context of child protection and intervention.

**Scope and purpose**:
- To provide a comprehensive overview of the experiences of parents and carers in the context of child protection and intervention.
- To explore the effectiveness of current child protection policies and practices.
- To highlight the need for further research to better understand the experiences of parents and carers in the context of child protection and intervention.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Qualitative</th>
<th>Qualitative</th>
<th>Quantitative</th>
<th>Qualitative</th>
<th>Qualitative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sampling Strategy</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Snowball sampling technique</td>
<td>Participants were recruited by the child welfare services</td>
<td>Participating parents were recruited from two CFS agencies</td>
<td>Participating parents were recruited by city councils</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample</td>
<td>The author</td>
<td>45 Australian indigenous parents</td>
<td>18 parents</td>
<td>275 parents</td>
<td>67 parents randomly selected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data collection method</td>
<td>Self-collection</td>
<td>In-depth interviews</td>
<td>In-depth interviews</td>
<td>Open ended survey format</td>
<td>Semi-structured interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender of participants</td>
<td>1 woman (the author)</td>
<td>7 women and 11 men</td>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>57 (9%) women and 5 (8%) men and one couple</td>
<td>10 women and 1 man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical considerations</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>Not stated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations of study</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Information related to participants’ memories of events that were not available through other sources</td>
<td>Snowball sampling method may produce a biased sample</td>
<td>Access developed in the study can only be applied to the sample that participated, therefore not transferable</td>
<td>The study did not measure the frequency or strength of parents’ perceptions of experiences or the assistance, the data collection tool did not allow for rich data on the experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications for practice/research</td>
<td>Implications for practice and policy</td>
<td>Implications for practice</td>
<td>Implications for research</td>
<td>Implications for research</td>
<td>Implications for practice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
emotional stressfullness can exist long after the experience (Lazarus 1999). The results show that parents worked hard to manage their emotions, and to cope with their overwhelming feelings.

**Emotions and relationships**

Across the dataset, we abstracted a link between parents’ emotions and their perception of their relationship with caseworkers. The findings reveal that parents’ emotions were evoked by their perceptions of caseworkers’ attitudes or personality and their perceptions of communication skills. Parents reported distrust, fear and uneasiness when they communicated with the caseworkers. Negative experiences, were perceptions of caseworkers who were dishonest or withheld information, which led to confusion, fear and anger (Studsrød, Willumsen, and Ellingsen 2014; Ivic, Brathwaite, and Harris 2012; Davies 2011; Harris 2012; Ayon et al. 2010; Johnson and Sullivan 2008; Earner 2007; Dale 2004; Dumbrill 2006; Healy, Darlington, and Feeney 2011; Spratt and Callan 2004). The respondents in Palmer, Maiter, and Manji (2006) felt misled or betrayed, as such emotional experiences led to a decreased trust in their caseworker and the services in general. Parents were afraid to participate because they feared that anything they said in attempting to participate would be used against them later. Thus, their perceived threat of harm led to submissiveness as a coping strategy (Palmer, Maiter, and Manji 2006; Healy, Darlington, and Feeney 2011; Harris 2012; Ayon et al. 2010; Fleury-Steiner and Brady 2011; Samsøn and Willumsen 2015).

Nonetheless, the findings also indicate some positive relational experiences. Studsrød, Willumsen, and Ellingsen (2014) and Johnson and Sullivan (2008) reported that parents felt that helpful relationships, as well as correct and truthful information, led to positive feelings. Parents who had a positive relationship with their caseworkers described them as respectful, sympathetic, open-minded, friendly, not overpowering, pleasant, competent and knowledgeable, good listeners, fair, warm-hearted and supportive (Studsrød, Willumsen, and Ellingsen 2014; Palmer, Maiter, and Manji 2006; Davies 2011; Harris 2012; Ayon et al. 2010; Johnson and Sullivan 2008; Spratt and Callan 2004; Fleury-Steiner and Brady 2011). As a result, parents felt respected, hopeful, gratified and even relieved. Parents who had negative experiences described their caseworkers as disrespectful, lacking empathy, judgmental, oppressive and controlling, overpowering, dismissive, dishonest, coercive and threatening. Hence, parents were angry, anxious and afraid. Parents seem to have similar experiences regarding how they relate with their caseworkers across the countries represented, and no significant differences were observed. Parents also reported difficulties dealing with different professionals (Healy, Darlington, and Feeney 2011; Ayon et al. 2010), which created barriers to participation, thereby making them feel powerless and more anxious.

Power relations also affected how parents related to caseworkers. In some cases, parents felt powerless, which according to Earner (2007) meant that they lacked resources, support, money or the right connections, while they perceived the caseworkers as being oppressive. This led to fear and insecurity among parents (Samsøn and Willumsen 2015; Studsrød, Willumsen, and Ellingsen 2014; Palmer, Maiter, and Manji 2006; Harris 2012; Ayon et al. 2010; Earner 2007; Dale 2004; Dumbrill 2006; Healy, Darlington, and Feeney 2011). Dumbrill (2006) gives an account of how parents respond to their perception of power during an intervention. He uses three terms: 'power over', in which parents feel controlled, 'power with', in which they felt like partners and 'shifts in power', in which parents noted changes in the exercise of powers as a result of caseworkers being changed. Although not used explicitly, Dumbrill’s terms are reported in other studies. Parents noted power imbalances, in which they felt coerced into complying in order for the caseworker to like them, or because they felt that otherwise, the caseworker would use their power against them (Ayon et al. 2010; Harris 2012; Dumbrill 2006). For this reason, parents are then inclined to feel submissive, powerless and insignificant, which are also aspects of fear.
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M. J. TEMBO AND I. STUOGRØD

Emotions and procedural factors

Procedural factors also influenced parents’ emotions. We interpreted procedural factors as the aspects that deal with the processes or procedures during assessments, as the findings reveal negative and positive experiences of procedures within the services. In Stuøgrød, Willumsen, and Ellingsen (2014), parents reported rigid assessments, and in Palmer, Maier, and Manji (2006), parents felt the process emphasized checklist documentation and rigid bureaucracy, as opposed to individualized, empathic and warm-hearted assessments. Making a comparison between England and Norway, Sømsøn and Willumsen (2015) found that a clear assessment tool with many standard questions gave parents clarity over the case in England, whereas their Norwegian counterparts experienced a lack of clarity due to the use of professional judgment, which created confusion and fear. These experiences were reported in all studies, albeit with various emphases. Parents also expressed a lack of closure because there was no clear end of the case, no one declared them innocent (Davies 2011) and they were not offered apologies if cases were unsubstantiated (Ayón et al. 2010). This is associated with feeling judged and a sense of guilt, both of which are related to feelings of hurt or harm.

Emotions and help measures/services

There are positive experiences reported in some articles regarding help or services offered by child welfare. However, differences exist on what help should be, and whether parents felt they needed help in the first place. Parents appreciated ‘concrete’ or ‘tangible’ help like money, food, shelter, education and psychiatric treatment, emotional support and therapeutic services (Palmer, Maier, and Manji 2006; Stuøgrød, Willumsen, and Ellingsen 2014). These experiences led to positive feelings of gratitude and relief. According to Harris (2012) and Johnson and Sullivan (2008), parents also appreciated it when child welfare services provided access to valued services and influenced other organizations that were important to parents, such as housing departments, to speed up help for them. This also brought relief and gratitude to these parents. Even so, some parents believed there was no need for intervention or help, and that child welfare exaggerated issues (Dale 2004). Respondents in Ivec, Brathwaitte, and Harris (2012) questioned the soundness of the purpose of authorities. They doubted what workers referred to as ‘help’, as they felt help should have the goal of keeping the family together and not separating children from their parents. Other parents reported that services did not help, but instead caused further damage and problems within their families (Dale 2004; Davies 2011) which led to anger, trauma and fear. Parents who were satisfied with services had contacted child welfare services themselves, which was primarily applicable in Norway (Stuøgrød, Willumsen, and Ellingsen 2014; Sømsøn and Willumsen 2015). Comparing Norway and England, Sømsøn and Willumsen (2015) noted that Norwegian parents had higher expectations of help than parents from England. Therefore, we might anticipate that Norwegian parents would be more disappointed if they did not receive the expected help.

Discussion

The main research question raised in this study was; what parental emotional experiences are reported in previous studies and what activated them? Across countries, parents reported helpful and unhelpful relations, trust and mistrust of the child welfare services, negative and positive feeling and experiences of the procedures and both positive and negative emotions. Negative cognitive appraisals of feeling accused, disrespected and being treated dishonestly, as well as positive appraisals of fairness, friendliness and respect, were reported and influenced parents’ emotions across the dataset. Following Lazarus’ (1999) theory, these emotions signify parents’ appraisals of their relationship with social workers.
Parents’ emotions might reflect ‘actual’ social workers’ practice, the nature of the problem in child welfare work or parents’ attributes/personality. On the one hand, considering the similarity of the experiences across the dataset, and Lazarus’ (1999) argument that if an event is appraised in the same way by many people, we might attribute the cause of the emotions to external things in the environment. We could argue about the nature of the problems in child welfare work being wicked in the sense that the problems are contradictory and have changing requirements, and solutions to them are often difficult to recognize as such because of the complex interdependencies. These problems are therefore likely to provoke emotions hence the similar reactions. On the other hand, it is important to note that parental experiences in these studies might have been influenced by whether services were received voluntarily, involuntarily or the reason parents were in contact with child welfare services. Moreover, many parents who become involved with services might find it difficult to form good working relationships, because of prior experiences of rejection, marginalization etc. (Gilbert, Parton, and Skivenes 2011). Consequently, these parents might more likely feel accused or scared, and thus more inclined to negative interpretations. Furthermore, Gilbert et al. (2009) argue that in most cases, the child welfare services intervene in families because of existing problems like child abuse and drug and substance abuse, etc., in which the home situation poses a danger to the security of a child. In addition, assessment and service involvement poses a risk of losing custody of the child. Hence, these situations possibly make parents feel more vulnerable. As a result, emotional experiences probably reflect various causes, and have various outcomes.

Positive and negative encounters likely arise from a complex mix of: an understanding of the professionals and the relationship, how the problem is understood, the help they receive, the situation parents are in and how they cope with it (Thrama and Fauske 2014; Lazarus 1999). Positive emotions may facilitate adequate interactions between parents and professionals, while negative emotions may act as barriers for positive interactions, as well as adequate assessment and sufficient help. Lazarus (1999) reveal that different coping processes have different functions, either problem-focused or emotion-focused, in which the coping actions are reacted either to one’s self or to the environment. Therefore, parents themselves and their environment can trigger emotions and strengthen them, both positively and negatively. Nonetheless, research with parents has pointed to specific skills and behaviors that caseworkers can use to overcome parents’ initial fears and help them engage in services. These include: respecting their views and opinions, communicating honestly and openly about processes and remaining outwardly calm in the face of parents’ intensely expressed negative emotions (Fuller, Paceley, and Schreiber 2015, in 2015). If caseworkers listen and provide reassurance, parents may be empowered to try new methods of coping with current problems, which could possibly set a context for behavioural change that leads to improved family outcomes (Fuller, Paceley, and Schreiber 2015).

This review involved 13 studies from five countries, analysing the emotional experiences of parents in contact with child welfare services. When exploring the secondary research question and comparing parents’ experiences in the different countries presented in this study, the analysis revealed that the emotional experiences of parents in contact with child welfare seem to be similar across the dataset. We argue that the nature of the problems in child welfare work is wicked in the sense that Head (2008) refers to, and hence provokes similar emotions across the dataset since the appraisal is the same. Like wicked problems, in attempting to solve the problem of child maltreatment or by intervening in the family, parents’ cooperation is needed. This is often problematic considering that the definition of the problem is contested, and that parents and workers often disagree on issues concerning its solution. This may create problems of cooperation between parents and workers, since there is no fixed problem or solution, and this is in addition to the already existing problems that cause child welfare involvement. Similar to wicked problems, child welfare problems cannot merely be solved by rational scientific skills, which seem to be overemphasized in current child welfare practices (Gilbert, Parton, and Skivenes 2011). Instead, Head (2008) proposes deliberation and debate.
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concerning the issues and the need to explore alternative ways, which in our case might include exploring the role of emotions. It is probably inevitable that parents involved with child welfare services will have negative experiences and emotions, given the possibility that the process may ultimately lead to removal of children. Moreover, even though children are not removed, assessments, home visits and other procedures in child welfare could still be traumatic for parents, as strong emotions have to be dealt with (Davies 2011). It is therefore necessary to address parents’ concerns and seek better coping strategies for their emotional well-being, to enhance their attention, decisions-making skills and motivation for necessary change when involved with services (Ingram 2015).

A distinction is made on parents’ expectations of help from child welfare services, which influences emotional experiences. As the findings reflect, parents in the Norwegian study seemed to expect help, while parents from England did not, and seemed grateful when they did receive tangible help. This might be expected since Norway’s child welfare service operates on a needs-based principle. The Norwegian child welfare system operates within a comprehensive welfare state with universal welfare services, which is not the case in liberal states (Gilbert, Parton, and Skivenes 2011). This shows that the political and economic context in which child welfare services work may affect what services can be provided.

The findings reflect more similarities than differences across the countries concerning parental experiences, even though the countries supposedly have different characteristics except for the provision of help as seen above. Parton (2016) stated that there have been changes in child welfare systems over the years in several countries. He notes official policy attempts in England to refocus practice, so that family support is maximized. He also notes how countries, which had previously operated according to a clear family support system, have attempted to respond to increasing concerns about harm to children, thereby leaning more towards the characteristics of a child protection system. In making distinctions between the child welfare systems, Gilbert, Parton, and Skivenes (2011) note the blurriness that exists between them. The findings of this review reflects this blurriness, as there are more common experiences than differences across countries. A study by Berrick et al. (2017) also indicates that some of the anticipated differences across countries do not show up in comparative research as expected. We believe that changes in child welfare practices in different countries might be responses in trying to resolve questions about best practices in child welfare.

These findings might imply that parents are reluctant and resist intrusions, as there seem to be more negative experiences than positive from the involvement of child welfare. Besides that, the findings might also imply that services are overly intrusive, as power structures seem to be at the core of child protection work. Kirton (2008) defines this controlling power as the formal power to intervene. Parents’ emotional experiences and coping strategies might portray their sense of vulnerability in relation to this controlling power. Cowden and Singh (2007) argued that partnership in child welfare services is desirable, but the legal framework of protecting children and ensuring their safety and the nature of the problem, pushes the agenda in child protection into risk management. This makes it difficult for a cordial relationship to exist between parents and caseworkers, hence the negative experiences.

This review revealed that, even though the terms ‘parents’ or ‘families’ are often used in article titles, the samples often consisted of mothers reporting their perceptions (approx. only 13% of the respondents were fathers). This reveals a significant absence of fathers’ involvement in CPS/CWS, or it could be explained by limitations of the research designs of the included research.

Limitations of the review

In addition to the methodological considerations mentioned above, some further limitations of the study must be pointed out. Although we used a rigorous search strategy in our database, this might not have been an exhaustive method, so other relevant studies may have been left
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Conclusions and Implications for Social Work Practice

The findings imply that child protection practices are rarely perceived as exclusively helpful, and often emotionally stressful for parents. Even though some parents report positive experiences, many in this review, are dissatisfied with both the help they receive and the way they are met. The analysis suggests that parents have common emotional experiences regardless of where they come from, which are related to relational and procedural experiences and help measures. Indeed, parents overall experiences with CWS is characterised by both positive and negative feelings and not either of the two. It may seem impossible to give all families (exclusively) positive experiences, considering that child welfare work is a sensitive and stigmatic field for parents, in which there is often doubt about parents' ability to take proper care for their children. Child welfare also involves a touch-and-go type of action for workers since cases need to be handled with urgency, which might influence how workers meet parents. Even though legal frameworks emphasise family involvement, cooperation and empowerment, it is difficult to achieve in practice. Nevertheless, in order to engage positively and to develop, or retain optimism for parents when measures are implemented in their homes, it is crucial that social workers strive to help parents find it meaningful to change or adapt their behaviors. Given the similar perceptions of parents across countries, implications for best practice could be that workers should strive to make parents feel they are heard, involved, have a say, take part, etc. These practices can address their emotional well-being and bring about positive emotional experiences. This might not only help during the case, but might also avoid post-traumatic stress disorders that could arise when parents perceive the experiences as traumatic. Given the complexity of the matter, we need sound and appropriate child welfare practices, as well as qualified education and training that also deals with emotions.

Funding

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References


Appendices


Paper 2

Navigating emotions in child welfare: Immigrant parents’ experiences and perceptions of involvement with child welfare services in Norway

Memory Jayne Tembo
VID Specialized University, Norway

Abstract
This study explores immigrant parents’ emotional experiences in child welfare services as well as parents’ emotional management and their interpretations of the role of emotions in the child welfare system. The analysis revealed that strong negative emotions dominate parents’ experiences and correspond to immigrant-related challenges and factors associated with child welfare involvement. The study suggests that parents perceive that the way child welfare workers interpret their emotions affects the decisions the workers make and how the parents are perceived during the case. The study further highlights ways that parents manage their emotions during cases to prompt favourable outcomes.

Keywords
Child welfare, emergency placements, emotional management, feeling rules, immigrant parents

Introduction
Emotional exchanges during interpersonal communication can have serious social consequences, either by maintaining and enhancing positive relationships or by becoming a source of antagonism and discord (Fredrickson, 1998). Research on child welfare services (CWS) has shown that an emotional dimension is present in child welfare and affects parent–caseworker relationships (Thrana and Fauske, 2014). Negative emotions, such as anger, fear, anxiety and sadness dominate parents’ experiences and can negatively affect interactions with caseworkers (Davies, 2011; Tembo and Stuchlak, 2018). Perhaps equally important is how parents’ emotional expressions might be interpreted by workers and how they may affect their involvement with CWS and the outcomes of their cases. Although the study focuses on CWS, this applies to all social work practice, where client–worker relationship contributes to desirable outcomes. Previous research has shown that...
many parents express resistance to CWS, which often results in severe consequences, such as loss of custody or not being reunified with children placed in care (Mireck, 2012). Studies have further shown that parents employ different tactical strategies to maintain a favourable impression on caseworkers so that they may avoid these negative consequences (Ayón et al., 2010; Dale, 2004). This mainly includes being strategic in exercising their voices during cases and being tacit about their actions, which scholars have argued affects parents’ participation and relationships with caseworkers (Ayón et al., 2010; Dumbrill, 2006). Central to these strategies are perceptions of power relations between parents and workers (Dumbrill, 2006). One way Foucault (1992) understood power relations was power as strategic games (tactics) that appear as a feature of human interaction by structuring the possible actions for others. From the perspective of governmentality, Foucault (1991) analysed modes of subjectivity as being linked to the construction of responsible subjects whose moral quality is based on the fact that they rationally assess the costs and benefits of a certain act as opposed to other alternative acts. In this study, we argue that, just as parents are tactical about exercising their voices and regulating their behaviour to be appropriate in the CWS context (Ayón et al., 2010; Dale, 2004), they seem to employ the same strategy with their emotions, in a way similar to Hochschild’s (2003) theory of emotional management. Considering that child welfare interventions involve critical interpersonal relationships between parents and caseworkers, research on emotions and its implications in CWS are indispensable.

Ensuring a good relationship and collaboration between caseworkers and parents is considered essential to effectively help and protect children (Child Welfare Act, 1992), as is, according to Parsai et al. (2010), an understanding of the parents and their challenges. Taylor and Thoburn (2017) suggested that relationships between family members and professionals contribute significantly to the outcomes of child welfare practice. Nevertheless, parents’ perceptions of their relationships with professionals in social work practice and what affects those relationships have been underexplored, specifically from the perspective of immigrants, who, as research has shown, are vulnerable due to migration-related challenges (Ba, 2015; Earner, 2007; Måset et al., 2009). This study explores how immigrant parents emotionally experience contact with CWS and will answer the following research questions: (1) What emotional experiences do immigrant parents in contact with CWS report, and what factors influence these emotions? (2) How do immigrant parents navigate their emotions and respond to caseworkers’ emotional expectations? Highlighting immigrant parents’ emotional experiences, the study contributes knowledge on immigrants’ perspectives in child welfare work and the complexities embedded in migration- and child welfare-related challenges. This knowledge is important in enhancing the parent–caseworker relationship in child welfare practice as well as client–caseworker relationships in general social work practice. The study also contributes knowledge on parents’ perceptions of the role of their emotions in case outcomes and the strategies parents adopt to curb negative outcomes, an area that is currently underexplored. While some of the experiences discussed in this study might also concern non-immigrant parents involved with CWS, this study focuses on immigrant parents’ perspectives.

Contextual background: The Norwegian child welfare procedures

The Norwegian child welfare system adopts a family-sensitive and therapeutic approach to families and children that implements both protective and supportive strategies for children at risk by providing a wide range of services as well as undertaking compulsory protective actions when necessary (Skivenes, 2011). Skivenes (2011) further argued that there are many indications that a child-centric perspective has emerged in the Norwegian child welfare system that focuses more on the rights of children as individuals. Norwegian CWS is mandated to intervene with families to ensure that children and youth living in conditions possibly detrimental to their health and
development receive the necessary assistance and care. The Child Welfare Act (1992) guides CWS practices in Norway and mandates that CWS decides whether to investigate or drop cases within 1 week after receiving notifications of concerns. Investigations might lead to implementing help measures for parents or dropping the case. If help measures fail, out-of-home placement, which is immediate out-of-home placement without parents' consent, is considered as a last resort. However, if CWS finds that children's lives or health are in immediate danger, emergency placements can be made at any point during this process. This whole process, which entails the reporting, investigation, assistance and out-of-home or emergency placements, is emotionally stressful for many parents (Tembo and Stadstrød, 2018) and contributes to the tension characterising parent–caseworker interaction.

**Previous research and theoretical framework**

Responding to criticism regarding overrepresentation of immigrant families in Norway's CWS, much research has focused on how social workers work with immigrants and immigrant parents’ experiences with CWS (Asa et al., 2015; Berg et al., 2017; Fylkesnes et al., 2017). Research has also focused on challenges like cultural differences, migration-related factors, language, parenting approaches, racism and prejudices in social work practices (Bo, 2015; Johansson, 2011; Kriz and Skivenes, 2009). Furthermore, immigrant parents' mistrust and fear of CWS (Berg et al., 2017; Fylkesnes et al., 2017) have also been documented. Internationally, research with immigrant populations has shown that the immigration experience presents various challenges (Barner, 2007; Maiter et al., 2009). Moreover, as Kent (2007) noted, the migration process, especially for refugees, allows for greater exposure to traumatic events that can have negative consequences for children and parents and, hence, as Dettlaff and Fong (2014) argued, might increase immigrant parents' possible CWS involvement and influence how they relate with caseworkers. While involvement with CWS might be challenging for most parents (Tembo and Stadstrød, 2018), migration-related factors and acculturation challenges might perpetuate vulnerabilities for immigrant parents (Berg et al., 2017; Tembo and Stadstrød, 2017). Hence, understanding and responding to immigrant families present significant challenges for child welfare and social work practice.

Power relations cannot be ignored in understanding child welfare work with parents. As noted earlier, several studies (Ayón et al., 2010; Dale, 2004; Dumbrill, 2006) have pointed out how power relations/dynamics contribute to how parents strategically interact with caseworkers to invite favourable outcomes. Power relations therefore, seem salient in analysing the parents' emotional experiences and management during cases. The theory of emotions and feeling rules (Hochschild, 1979, 2003), which posits that emotions can be and are often subject to acts of impression management, is used to explore how parents navigate emotions and respond to caseworkers' emotional expectations. According to Hochschild (1979), feeling rules entail emotional regulation as individuals work to induce or inhibit, manage or control their emotional responses to make them socially and contextually appropriate. Snyder et al. (2013) added that this is done to enhance social acceptability and desirability. Thus, emotional expressions are socially constructed through adherence to feeling rules to achieve positive outcomes in social relations (Hochschild, 1979).

Hochschild's theory offers an understanding of emotions as part of 'presentation of the self', which relates to Foucault's ideas of 'government of the self', where actions are constantly weighed against the risks and consequences that follow (Foucault, 1991). Hochschild (1979) contended that emotions and actions must be aligned with the norms and expectations that are found in social settings. However, power dynamics are what determine whose expectations are adhered to in social settings, often resulting in feelings of inferiority in those who must adhere to the expectation set by
others whom they perceive as superior (Hochschild, 1979). This theory guides the analysis of how parents navigate emotions to achieve favourable outcomes, or the lack thereof, in their cases.

**Methods**

This study builds on the analysis of data obtained through in-depth interviews with 13 non-Western immigrant parents, representing 10 families, who had previous or ongoing contact with CWS in Norway. Non-Western immigrants were chosen due to the significant differences from the host society in ethnicity and cultural background, among other factors, as compared to Western immigrants. The data were collected between August 2015 and April 2016, and the interviews lasted an average of 1.5 hours each, with the data generated consisting of 16 hours and 40 minutes of recorded interviews. All interviews were conducted at the participants’ homes, except for one that took place at a neutral location per the participants’ preference. One interview was conducted in Arabic with the aid of a translator, and the rest were conducted in either Norwegian or English. The participants were recruited with the aid of key informants, such as teachers, pastors and other professionals working or in contact with immigrants. The majority of the participants were in contact with CWS for suspicions of violence in the family, and one was in contact for suspected child neglect. Three of the four parents who referred themselves to CWS to ask for help narrated that they were investigated for violence and possible neglect later in the case. Table 1 presents the demographics and information regarding the participants’ cases. Pseudonyms have been used to ensure the participants’ anonymity.

An interview guide with open-ended questions was used to obtain a broader perspective on the parents’ experiences with CWS. The main question asked during the interviews was how the parents experienced contact with CWS. In response to this, participants reported how they contacted or were contacted by CWS, the reason they were contacted, how they conducted themselves and how they felt during the case. The study was approved by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data in 2015. The participants were given consent forms to sign before the interviews commenced, and participation was voluntary. As seen in Table 1, the participants have been assigned pseudonyms, and the regions of the world where the participants come from are used rather than specific countries to ensure anonymity. The study adopted the Norwegian National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and Humanities’ (NESH, 2006) ethical guidelines and requirements for research.

The data were analysed thematically as described by Braun et al. (2012). This involved familiarisation with the data, through which parents’ emotions, perceptions of being controlled and parenting challenges emerged as overall themes. Perceptions of being controlled and parenting challenges are discussed in separate papers. This article focuses mainly on parents’ emotional experiences. The analysis explored various emotions related to common occurrences across the dataset and what prompted them. Two factors were distinguished: pre-existing stressful factors related to migration experiences present before the parents’ involvement with CWS and factors related to child welfare involvement. Common threads extending across the entire dataset were identified, leading to themes that explore the context of the reported emotions and the meanings attached to them as well as parents’ responses.

In terms of limitations, due to challenges encountered in trying to recruit informants, snowball sampling was used, which might have increased the chances of recruiting families with negative experiences, and hence, the findings might be subject to biases. Nevertheless, the findings have important implications in understanding parents’ behaviour when involved with CWS and parents’ interactions with caseworkers, which are key for effective practice and successful outcomes in child welfare.
Table 1. Demographics of the study participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Marital status</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Place of origin</th>
<th>Number of children</th>
<th>Reason for migration</th>
<th>How they contacted CWS</th>
<th>Out-of-home placement</th>
<th>Children returned home</th>
<th>Current status of the case</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Refugee</td>
<td>Referred by others</td>
<td>Yes/EP</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Closed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asabi</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>South Asia</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Family reunification</td>
<td>Self-referral</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grace</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Separated</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Family reunification</td>
<td>Self-referral</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessie and Arnold</td>
<td>Man and woman</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Both in 30s</td>
<td>South Asia</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Refugee</td>
<td>Referred by others</td>
<td>Yes/EP</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denise</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Refugee</td>
<td>Self-referral</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Closed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enaya</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>20s</td>
<td>Middle East</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Refugee</td>
<td>Self-referral</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maya and Sai</td>
<td>Man and woman</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>South Asia</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Refugees</td>
<td>Referred by others</td>
<td>Yes/EP</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valeria</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>South America</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Family reunification</td>
<td>Referred by others</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cherry</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>South Asia</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Studies</td>
<td>Referred by others</td>
<td>Yes/EP</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Closed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria and Smith</td>
<td>Man and woman</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>20s and 30s</td>
<td>South Asia</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Refugees</td>
<td>Referred by others</td>
<td>Yes/EP</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Closed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CWS: child welfare services; EP = emergency placement.
Appendices

Findings

Strong negative emotions, such as anger, anxiety, sadness and fear characterised the parents’ experiences and dominated their descriptive accounts. It was evident that remembering these experiences aroused strong negative emotions. Some of these emotions were apparent during the interviews, as some parents cried and used vocal intonations, raising and lowering their voices and sighing to express anger and sadness. Parents in this study seemed to have experienced serious child welfare cases, hence the negative emotions. Parents whose children were not placed in care feared losing custody of their children, and as immigrants, some parents feared deportation due to child welfare cases. The parents also reported other emotional experiences and perceptions, such as shock, anxiety, hopelessness, shame, lost freedom, judgement, false accusations, stereotyping and, in a few cases, gratitude and relief. Various factors seemed to have influenced these emotional experiences, as further discussed.

Pre-existing migration-related factors

Pre-existing stressful factors consisted of background experiences in the parents’ lives that were not necessarily related to contact with CWS but that the parents perceived as relevant to their contact. The parents implied that their CWS contact lacked a holistic approach that incorporated understanding of their past experiences and challenges as immigrants. The data did not suggest whether these factors were causes for CWS contact. Nevertheless, they were subjectively meaningful to the parents and provoked negative emotions. As shown in Table 1, some parents had migrated to Norway as refugees and undergone traumatic experiences during their journeys. Paul explained,

There was war, and we were split. My wife went her way. I went my way. I only took my son [of four children] ... We lost our daughter. We lost each other. My wife thought I was dead, and I thought she was dead. I found my daughter on Facebook 13 years after we had split. [Lowering his voice and sobbing] It’s very sad. I don’t like to talk about it ... When my children were placed out of home, it was like the war all over again.

As Paul discussed his experiences with CWS, he kept referring to the traumatic events that led to his migration to Norway. These experiences brought sadness by themselves, and his CWS experience might have rekindled the trauma by reopening old wounds.

Other parents also reported settlement challenges for immigrants, as Asabi stated,

I have no one here. At home, you can get help from your mom and relatives. Learning the language is not easy ... Getting a job is very difficult ... But my caseworker just said, ‘You will be fine. There are also some Norwegian single moms doing fine’ ... I was helpless.

Asabi migrated for family reunification, following her husband, from whom she was advised to separate due to suspicions that he abused their children. She experienced loneliness and helplessness, as she lacked the support of an extended family. She perceived the comparison with Norwegian single mothers as unfair, as they might have support systems to which she did not have access. As the parents discussed their CWS experiences, they did not isolate these experiences, which might have reinforced their emotional stress. Coming to Norway as refugees or through family reunification and the consequences this implies were some of the factors the parents wanted their caseworkers to take into consideration, which they perceived caseworkers did not.
Stressful factors within CWS

The parents reported a range of emotions related to the actual CWS contact. While some emotions were linked to child welfare processes, some were related to how the parents believed they are perceived as immigrants. Emotions like anger, shock, fear and shame were initiated by emergency placements, perceptions of being stereotyped and perceptions of interprofessional collaboration.

Emergency out-of-home placements. As shown in Table 1, five of the seven parents whose children were placed in care experienced emergency placements. These parents expressed how shockingly and unexpectedly their cases started and the emergency placements were implemented. The parents described being surprised, afraid and humiliated when they were informed that their children had been placed in care without prior CWS involvement. For these parents, anger and fear characterised their initial CWS contact, as Jessie and Arnold expressed,

It was a normal day. We were waiting for our son to come from school... He never showed up. We started looking for him... then we got a call that CWS took him from school... Who does that? You take someone’s child and keep them worried... I went there [the child welfare office] fuming with anger... I was uncontrollable, and I said things I later regretted.

Emergency care orders, by their nature, are emotionally stressful for parents and often meet resistance and opposition from parents, as previously noted by Storhaug and Kojan (2017). Parents who experienced emergency placements started their relationships with CWS on a negative tone, which might have affected how they related with caseworkers moving forward. Parents felt that emergency placements were made without much deliberation and consideration.

Interprofessional collaboration. Both positive and negative emotional experiences were reported regarding the involvement of other professionals during cases. Fear and vulnerability were expressed by parents who perceived the use of force, in some cases, through police involvement. Furthermore, parents perceived that police involvement made the contact dramatic and humiliating and was considered a sign of legitimating CWS’ power, which influenced how they related with caseworkers. Enaya stated,

Child welfare services here have full authority... They have higher authority than the UDI [the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration]... They have the police and courts in their hands. If you are in their bad books, you have nowhere to go. So I was scared... I was afraid that I would be deported.

Enaya believed she could never win against CWS due to its powerful position, which she feared could also affect her immigration status. The involvement of courts was also met with distrust, as parents believed the courts could not be objective and, therefore, were likely to side with CWS. In contrast, some parents reported that involvement of other professionals provided positive expert opinions, which brought relief. This occurred mainly in cases where professionals like psychologists gave needed support and objectivity that worked in the parents’ favour.

Feeling stereotyped and stigmatised. Parents also attributed their emotions to how they were treated by caseworkers. Many parents perceived that caseworkers stereotyped and generalised immigrants as abusive parents, and some believed caseworkers were more focused on confirming abuse accusations than impartially investigating cases. While research with non-immigrant parents involved with child welfare (Davies, 2011; Tembo and Stadsrud, 2018) has also shown that parents feel
judged due to perceptions that caseworkers focus more on confirming accusations, the parents in this study attribute this to immigrants being a stereotyped and stigmatised group. The findings show that parents’ relationships with caseworkers were marred by perceptions of feeling judged as bad parents due to their immigrant backgrounds and perceptions that stigma in CWS is fuelled by caseworkers’ preconceived ideas on parenting cultures in other parts of the world.

Navigating emotional expectations

Perceived feeling rules. Across the dataset, parents reported explicitly stated and indirectly implied expectations on acceptable emotional expressions from caseworkers. Some parents reported getting clear instructions on how to behave and which emotions were not allowed, while others gradually learned that some emotional expressions like anger were not tolerated, no matter the justification. Victoria and Smith recalled a visit to their son who was placed in care:

Victoria: My son saw us and rushed to hug me, and I cried, but I was told not to cry.
Interviewer: Were you told why you were not allowed to cry?
Smith: No, but they say you cannot hug your child. You cannot cry. You cannot even hold their hands... Every time we met our son, it was sad...

Victoria and Smith met their child when they were already emotionally stimulated following the emergency placement. In this scenario, the instruction not to cry was stressful, as they felt that crying happened involuntarily considering the context, and hugging their son would communicate their love. In addition, they had trouble controlling themselves and probably expected the caseworker to be sympathetic and understanding. Similarly, Grace believed that her caseworker expected her to exhibit certain emotions to appear compassionate and be considered a good parent:

When they said I could go and see my children in their office, I refused. They expected me to be happy and jump at the chance... I didn’t want to see my children on their terms... And I was labelled a bad mother who doesn’t love her children for that.

The parents perceived that they were expected to manage their emotions based on their interpretation of caseworkers’ instructions and expectations. For Victoria and Smith, their emotions were deeply intertwined with their relationship with their son, and the instructions were challenging, as disbelieving them would mean being uncooperative even though they felt they needed to show love and lacked the ability to hide their sadness. For Grace, emotions were important to her mental health and autonomy. However, she perceived that, to qualify as a good compassionate mother, she was expected to show certain emotions unwillingly.

Positive experiences: Feeling understood. While some parents perceived some feeling rules in their interaction with caseworkers, other parents felt that their caseworkers were empathetic and did not sanction them for expressing their anger and dissatisfaction. These parents felt that feelings or emotions were accepted and understood. Arnold noted,

My caseworker had patience... she was calm... When I was angry, she would just calm down and listen to me. She understood that, in that situation, it could cause anger. When I sent an angry SMS she answered calmly.

Arnold felt his caseworker understood his reactions as something expected and normal, considering they were involved with CWS involuntarily and had lost custody of their child. Owing to the
empathetic behaviour of the caseworker, these parents noted that, over time, they also changed how
they interacted with the caseworker. Arnold further recalled,

At first, I was so angry and sad. I was emotional... The caseworker helped me understand. When I was
angry, she would be calm and tried to make me understand... With time, I began to understand, and we
had a good contact.

For these parents, an empathetic and non-judgemental caseworker tranquilised their anger and
lead to a better relationship.

Parents’ emotional management. The findings showed that parents who perceived sanctions when
they did not act according to their caseworkers’ emotional expectations gradually learned to man-
age and control their emotions to produce the expected sentiments, while others did not. Parents
described different ways of handling their emotions throughout their cases. These included show-
ing their real feelings through opposition, resistance and fighting or hiding their emotions through
submission, while others opted for avoidance. Overall, parents’ perceptions of how workers per-
ceived their emotions and behaviours led to adoption of different strategies among parents, as
elaborated below:

Submission. Some parents reported feeling powerless and controlled and experienced a lack of
knowledge needed to navigate the child welfare system. These parents felt that the only option
they had was to dance to the tune of the caseworker through submission. Thus, these parents
reported being submissive by downplaying their real feelings and acting in ways they perceived
was expected by the caseworker, probably out of fear and a need to display cooperation. Cherry
stated,

I was so angry. I was shouting and criticising her... She [the caseworker] threatened to take my children
because I criticised her. Then, my husband said we should just do as they say so they would not take our
children. Because if we criticise them, they would do anything.

Cherry and her husband felt that hiding their anger would lead to not losing custody of their
children. However, Cherry stated that her children were later placed into care, which she inter-
preted as revenge for her anger outburst earlier in the case, and when the children were returned
home, she attributed it to her submission.

Like Cherry, other parents felt that, when they acted in anger, it confirmed to caseworkers that
they were bad, uncooperative and unfit parents. Grace recalled being labelled unstable and psy-
chotic for shouting angrily at her caseworkers, which she also attributed to the reason she lost
custody of her children. Parents appeared to navigate their emotions based on their perceived
power positions in their relationships with caseworkers to enhance favourable outcomes.

Resistance and fighting. As highlighted earlier, many parents expressed resistance in the begin-
ning of the cases, and some were angry and aggressive towards their caseworkers. However, while
some parents modified their behaviour and emotions in the course of their involvement with CWS
after considering the consequences, some parents were resistant and fought their way through their
cases. For instance, Paul said,

I was so angry. I said, ‘Stop bullying me’... [Raising his voice] I was so angry and aggressive, I told them
to call the police, but I must take my children, I had to fight for my children.
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Parents who resisted throughout their cases often stated that they did not agree with what was being regarded as a problem in their families and perceived that CWS intervened unnecessarily. These parents reported that they fought in several ways to either have their children returned home or to avoid losing custody. Some parents linked the challenges they encountered in their journeys to Norway as some of the reasons they were determined to fight. Fighting and resistance took many forms, including angrily communicating their dissatisfactions to caseworkers, going to court as well as involving lawyers and others who could help in their fight.

Avoidance. Other parents concluded that nothing good came out of meeting caseworkers. These parents perceived that meeting caseworkers only worsened their situations, and they decided to avoid contact with caseworkers to let the procedure run its course. Grace recalled,

Every time I met my caseworkers, there was tension. I always felt trapped; you can’t say the right things ... so I didn’t answer their calls and did not open the door when they visited. I avoided meeting them because, after three months of investigation, they are supposed to close the case.

Like Grace, Asabé considered fleeing Norway, which she compared to living in a war zone: ‘I thought if it becomes so unsafe for me to live here, then I would rather go home, even though there is war ... It is better to die by a real bomb than live with these invisible bombs’. Some parents reported experiencing a huge shock at the outcomes, so they froze and did nothing, which might be considered a response to traumatic events.

Overall, while some parents perceived that their anger, resistance and frustrations were interpreted negatively, others perceived that, while their anger was undesirable, it was still understood as a normal expected reaction for someone in their situation. Parents implied that caseworkers had the power to define parents’ emotions as something negative or understand them as a normal reaction to what they were going through, which informed their responses.

Discussion

Parents included in this study experienced serious accusations of child abuse and neglect as well as compulsion measures; hence, their emotional encounters need to be analysed in light of this. Although these findings reflect experiences that might be common for other parents in contact with CWS (Tembo and Studsrud, 2018), clearly, for immigrant parents, several other challenges influence their vulnerable experiences. Research suggests that traumatic events elicit a variety of emotional responses, and some of these emotions may manifest later in life during stressful circumstances (Amstutz and Vernon, 2008; Rusceo et al., 2002), further affecting emotional regulation abilities (Snyder et al., 2013). Immigration and acculturation challenges may increase stress (Kent, 2007) and elicit resistance and emotional responses when stressful situations are encountered (Mirick, 2012). Building on previous research (Earner, 2007; Kent, 2007; Maiter et al., 2009), this study suggests that, for immigrants, migration-related challenges might permeate into how they relate with caseworkers, intensifying resistance and emotional reactions and making deferential behaviour challenging.

The ambiguity and complexity of child welfare work are evident in the present study. The findings suggest that migration-related challenges, coupled with problems embedded in child welfare involvement, are stressful for parents and evoke strong negative emotions. As the findings show, emergency placements and parents’ perceptions that other professionals were working against them evoked feelings of anger, mistrust and fear, which, as Mirick (2012) noted, could be expressed in undesirable ways. Furthermore, parents perceived discrimination in CWS, which could also influence resistance towards services and caseworkers. A recent study by Wotford et al. (2019) found that
perceptions and experiences of discrimination, especially discrimination based on a minority status (which applies for the current study population) are associated with greater relationship strain. Previous research has shown that, in Norway, issues of discrimination based on racism and prejudices are not emphasised and discussed by workers, as is the case in the United States and United Kingdom (Križ and Skivenes, 2015). This signals the need to recognise discrimination as a challenge and explore how it is experienced by immigrants. Furthermore, migration-related challenges, such as past traumatic experiences, lacking a supportive network, settlement challenges and fear of deportation, all contribute to higher risk of resistance to services among parents (Mirić, 2012). While these stressful factors influence parents’ negative emotions, it is the power dynamics between parents and caseworker that influence what these emotions will entail for the outcomes of the cases. Since the caseworkers are the ones who have the power to define how parents’ emotions will be interpreted and what consequences they will have, parents perceive that they have to be strategic in how they interact with caseworkers, as Ayón et al. (2010) and Dale (2004) have previously portrayed in their studies. Moreover, Dawson and Berry (2002) noted that cooperative parents are less likely to face court proceedings or removal of their children than uncooperative parents.

The analysis further shows how parents made meaning of their emotions and caseworkers’ emotional expectations and how parents responded to these expectations. While some parents believed negative emotions pushed caseworkers to make unfavourable decisions, others perceived that they were understood by their caseworkers. Regardless, parents perceived that their emotions affected how they related with caseworkers and their cases. Although the present study consists of a small sample, there is supporting evidence (Brown, 2006; Dawson and Berry, 2002; Reich, 2012; Smith, 2008) that workers often assess families’ progress and measure their engagement by their level of cooperation or compliance. In Hochschul’s (1979) theory, cooperation and compliance is demonstrated by maintaining an inferior position and obeying the rules set by the superior, which creates a formula for constant enhancement of the superior’s ego via inevitable comparison. Applying Hochschul’s reasoning, parents who recognised the caseworkers’ power and what this power meant for their future, employed different strategies, such as submission, escaping, freezing, hiding or downplaying their emotions, to appear cooperative. Thus, parents could suppress their emotions only if they adopted deferential behaviour and an inferior position, thus allowing for emotional regulation (Hochschul, 1979). Nevertheless, emotional regulation/management is not feasible for all, as some parents expressed their resistance through fighting and opposition or avoiding caseworkers. Several factors beyond the scope of the present study might underlie the latter response. Nevertheless, given the stressful factors associated with CWS involvement and migration-related challenges, emotional regulation could be difficult for some immigrant parents. As Mirić (2012) noted, resistance in child welfare involvement, though not desirable, can be expected and might be considered normal since most parents might be in contact with CWS involuntarily. Furthermore, aspects like culture, personality, sociocultural context, age and gender also influence emotional regulation (Snyder et al., 2013). Therefore, expecting deference from parents and using it to determine fitness of parenthood would mean disregarding a very important aspect of the parents’ lives: their context. Although emotional regulation is not in any way suggested as a requirement for parents in contact with CWS, the findings indicate that parents perceived it to be an important skill in their relationships with caseworkers, as they perceived that failure to accomplish it would lead to sanctions (e.g. losing custody of one’s children). However, Smith (2008) noted that parental deference and compliance is not necessarily associated with parental behavioural change towards their children, implying that parents’ resistance does not always refer to parental incapability or vice versa.

While the present study focuses on stressful factors for immigrant parents, Studsrød et al.’s (2016) study revealed that all parents might have underlying stressful factors that need to be taken
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into consideration when meeting child welfare workers. Studsrød et al. (2016) noted that parental challenges, such as relationship breakdowns, mental health and drug problems and single parenthood, can also affect child welfare involvement. Detlaff and Fong (2016) observed that an easily overlooked aspect when working with immigrant families is migration-related challenges, including their journeys, which might have involved stressful environments and traumatic events, as was true for some of the parents in this study. Considering challenges confronting immigrant parents, Mirick (2012) suggested that caseworkers need to consider the context of the parents in order to understand parents’ resistance (negative emotions) in child welfare work. The findings show that migration-related factors and the stressful factors associated with CWS contact influence parents’ resistance when involved with CWS. Reich (2012) noted that workers often make assumptions regarding the link between parental compliance and motivation and the ability to change, which leads to resistance and non-compliance having negative outcomes. This view disregards the stressful factors that influence resistance among parents as something normal and expected. This signals the need for deeper understanding of parents’ resistance in child welfare work, which accounts for the context of the work as well as the individual, in a way that does not blame the parents (Mirick, 2012). This implies the need for caseworkers to employ holistic approaches in understanding and dealing with immigrant families in addition to measures that address the needs associated with child welfare problems.

Conclusion and implications for practice

Although this study is based on a small sample, the findings have important implications for child welfare and social work practice with immigrants. The study highlights the need for child welfare workers and social workers in general, to be alert to the significance of immigrant-related challenges, such as migration journeys and settlement challenges, when working with immigrants. While the analysis indicated that parents’ emotions might affect caseworkers’ decisions, the views represented in this study were those of parents and not caseworkers. Understanding relationships is relational; therefore, caseworkers’ views should be explored in future research to further understand how parents’ emotions influence relationships and decisions in CWS. Furthermore, considering that child welfare involvement is stressful for most parents, there is a need to explore healthier emotional outlets for parents during investigations as well as understanding parents’ emotions in the context in which they surface. Future research can focus on ways to enhance and implement healthier emotional outlets for parents.

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ORCID iD

Jayne Tembo https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8942-9815

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Kapittel 6
Foreldreskap i en ny kontekst: Når mor og far har migrert til Norge
Memory Jayne Tembo og Ingunn Studsrød

Introduksjon


I dette kapittelet vil vi utforske migrantforeldres opplevelse av forskjeller i foreldreskapet mellom opprinnelseslandet og vertslandet. Spørsmålet som stilles i studien, er: 1) Hvordan
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beskriver foreldre som har migrert til Norge, foreldreskapet i ny kontekst? 2) Hva skiller de erfaringene de har med seg fra hjemlandet, fra det de erfarer i Norge? En bedre forståelse av foreldrenes erfaringer er viktig for å kunne støtte minoritetsforeldre i Norge. Det kan også bidra til bedre hjelp til barnefamilier som trenger det.

Undersøkelsen omfatter både foreldre som har hatt kontakt med barnevernet, og minoritetsforeldre som ikke har hatt det. Noen erfaringer, verdier og opplevelser blir viktige og trekkes frem i en gitt setting, mens andre fungerer underforstått, blir glemt eller tolkes som mindre viktige. De forskjellene foreldrene trekker frem fra hjemlandet, er konstruert på bakgrunn av deres (nye) erfaring med foreldreskap i Norge. Foreldrene bruker fortellinger om forskjeller for å resonere og å gi mening til foreldreskapet i Norge i dag. På denne måten får vi tilgang til deres opplevelse av hva som er annerledes i opprinnelseslandet, og vi får kunnskap til deres fortolkning av foreldreutfordringer i Norge. Vi kan da få tilgang til minoritetsforelders perspektiv på omstillingene de opplever som foreldre.

Vi vil først gjøre rede for relevant forsking og teoretisk perspektiv før vi gjennomgår studiens metodiske fundament. Vi viser så og diskuterer funnene før vi har en kort avslutning.

Foreldreskap i en globalisert verden

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Sosial-okonomisk utsattethet


Nettverket vil også virke inn på muligheten til å forstå og tolke det samfunnnet en utsøver foreldreskapet i. Hvis en er ny i landet og ikke snakker språket, er det større sannsynlighet for at kulturell bakgrunn fra hjemlandet vil ha større påvirkning enn hvis en er født og oppvokst i Norge og behersker språket (Paulsen, Thorshaug & Berg, 2014). Utfordringene for foreldre er større hvis en ikke behersker språket, og har lite tilgang til støtte og hjelp fra familie og nettverk.

Innvandrertamilier og barnevernet

Norsk statistikk viser at barn og familier med innvandrerbakgrunn har større sannsynlighet for inngripen fra barnevernet. Hvert fjerde barn i barnevernet har innvandrerbakgrunn, og det er langt flere enn den andelen de utgjør i befolkningen (Dyrhaug, 2016). Flesteparten mottar frivillig hjelpetiltak (Berg, Paulsen, Midjo, Haugen, Garvik & Tøssebro, 2017). De siste
årene har det vært en økning i omsorgsovertakelser i innvandrerfamilier (Dyrhaug, 2016),
men det er liten statistisk forskjell i omsorgstiltak mellom barn med innvandrerbakgrunn og
resten av befolkningen (Berg et al., 2017). Det synes likevel som om det oftere er
akuttplasseringer i innvandrerfamilier (Bufdir. Rapportert av Skogstrøm, 2016). Ved
akuttplasseringer kommer barnevernet uten forvarsel og henter barnet, og det er et
dramatisk ingrep i en familie der foreldrene fratas daglig foreldresonsorg (Baugerud &
Melinder, 2011). Nesten 70 prosent av akuttplasseringene på landsbasis gjelder
innvandrerbarn (Skogstrøm, 2016).

Mangelende foreldrederfigligheter oppgis oftest som årsak til at det sendes bekymringsmelding
til barnevernet, og også som årsak til tiltak (Statistisk sentralbyrå, 2016). I minoritetsfamilier
er offentlige etater bekymret for vanskjhetsel og fysisk maktkas i oppdragselsen (Hollekim,
Anderssen, & Daniel, 2016; Lewig, Arney, & Salveron, 2010). Vi vet imidlertid lite om
immigrantforeldrenes egen fortolkning av det de erfarer, og hva de mener er utfordrende i
foreldregjeringen.

De siste årene har en rekke vondne barnevernssaker vært fremme i mediene og
migrasjonsmiljøer har kritisert barnevernet for rasisme, barnetyveri og grov
forskjellshandling. «Å være «god mamma og pappa» etter én målestok kan vurderes
annerledes etter en annen, men det er det norske foreldreskapet migrantenes blir målt etter i
Norge, hevdes det (Skogstrøm, 2016). Aadnesen (2015) skriver at barnevernet erstickeres for
at deres forståelse av barns beste er preget av vestlig etnosentrisme. Kanskje er
migrantforeldrenes vansker av slik art at de oftere trenger hjelp fra det offentlige. Kanskje
oppfattes forskjellige foreldreaffer i seg selv som problematisk og bekymringsfullt og fører til
offentlig ingripen i familien (Pôõõ, 2015). Uansett skaper barnevernets mak og rykte stor
frykt for barnevernet blandt migranter i Norge (Fylkesnes et al., 2015). Studier av foreldrenes
egne oppfatninger av foreldreskap kan forhåpentligvis bidra med utvidet kunnskap og, om
mulig, bedre kultursensitive avveiningen.

3 I flere land, for eksempel Russland, Romania, India, Polen, USA og England har det vært skriverier og/eller
demonstrasjoner rettet mot barnevernet i Norge og det har vært arrangert demonstrasjonstog i en rekke land,
også i Norge, se for eksempel http://www.vg.no/nyheter/utenriks/romania/massedemonstrasjoner-mot-norsk-
barnevern-i-19-land/a/23593260/
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Teoretisk forståelse og begrepsavklaring


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Metode


2 En del av flere studier i MemoryTembos stipendiatstilling ved Universitetet i Stavanger
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kontakt med informantene, informasjon om studien og forespørsel om deltakelse.
Informanter derfra ledet oss så videre til andre.

Studien ble meldt til norsk senter for forskningsdata (NSD), som tilrådet studien. Vanlige forskningsetiske retningslinjer er fulgt.


Spørsmålene omfattet informantenes erfaring med barneverntak i opprinnelseslandet og i Norge og opplevde forskjeller mellom kontekstene. Spørsmålene hadde til hensikt å utforske mulige utfordringer som immigrantene opplever som foreldre i ny konteks.


Foreldreskap i ny konteks: utvidelse og innsnevring
Foreldrene opplevde forskjeller mellom ny og gammel konteks. Forskjellene omhandlet både opplevelser av forventninger rettet til foreldrerollen (parenthood) og konkrete endringer i daglige gjøremål (parenting) som foreldre. Forskjellene omhandler tre ulike, men sammenvevde forhold: økt offentlig innblanding, forsørgelse og forbruk og sosialisering av kultur og etnis identitet. Slik foreldrene beskrev det, handler foreldreskap i ny konteks både om en innsnevring og en utvidelse av forventninger og daglige gjøremål som foreldre.

Før vi beskriver og drifter funnene mer detaljert, vil vi kort beskrive informantene.

<table>
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<th>Alder</th>
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**Økt offentlig innblanding**
Foreldre i alle kontekster trenger hjelp og støtte i foreldrerollen, men foreldrene opplever at det er ulikt hvordan og fra hvem. Som foreldre i Norge opplever foreldrene økt offentlig innblanding i familielivet og mindre hjelp fra naboer og andre uformelle aktører. En av informantene (I #9), som aldri har hatt kontakt med barnevernet, tematiserte dette forholdet:

... du vet, hjemme (i mitt hjemland) hvis min nabo eller andre er i nærheten og du skal løpe og kjøpe noe på butikken, så trenger du ikke ta med deg barna dine, fordi du vet at det er noen som passer på dem. Å forlate barna i mitt hjemland kalles ikke omsorgssvikt (neglect) ... Selvfølgelig, du kan ikke forlate en baby eller en 2-åring alene, men det jeg mener, er at du kan overlate barna til naboen. Her kjenner jeg en venn som lot sin 5-åring leke hos naboen mens hun gikk på butikken, men naboen gikk til barnevernet istedenfor å passe på barna. Jeg lurer på hvorfor hun gikk til barnevernet for å melde vennen min, istedenfor selv å passe på barnet hvis hun var bekymret ...

Informanten forsto ikke hvorfor naboen ikke selv tok ansvaret for et barn hun var bekymret for. For henne var det selvsagt at naboen delte morens ansvar for barnet, også uten at det ble avtalt eksplisitt med naboen. Hennes erfaring hjemmefra brakte hun med seg i den nye konteksten. I Norge, imidlertid, kan en vanligvis ikke ta for gitt at en nabo passer et barn uopfordret. Det er vanlig å lage avtaler hvis en annen skal passe ens barn. Hvis barnepass
ike er avtalt eksplisitt, er det ikke gitt at noen passet barnet. Naboen derfor kan ha tolket det som at femåringen var uten oppsyn av voksne. Det vekket hennes bekymring, og bekymringen utløste en melding til offentlige myndigheter, dvs. barnevernet. Informantene opplever at nordmenn overlater mer ansvar til offentlige myndigheter. Også fordi barna tilbringer tid i organiserte fritidsaktiviteter, barnehager, har kontakt med helsestasjonen osv., opplever informantene mer styring og rådgiving fra offentlige myndigheter. Flere av informantene opplever at det foreldreansvaret de erfarte før de flyttet, var nærmere det som er beskrevet som typisk for kollektivistiske kulturer (Ayö & Aisenberg, 2010; Jävo, 2010). Informanten ovenfor fortalte at i hennes hjemland involveres aldri det offentlige i “familiære affærer”. I Norge, derimot, har flere etater og profesjonelle aktører ansvar for barn, slik det er typisk for de-familiariserte velferdsregimer (Hantrais, 2004).

Informantene opplever dessuten større grad av vurdering som foreldre i Norge. De opplever at den målestokken de måles i forhold til, er strengere enn hva de er vant til hjemmefra. En av informantene (I#6) sa det slik:


Forsørgelse og forbruk
Informantene opplever at i Norge er foreldreskap, forsørgelse og forbrukersamfunn
normativt innvævd. Ulike typer av forbruk er med på å karakterisere foreldres relasjon til
barna og signaliserer kvaliteter ved foreldretatferd (I #1):

... Her i Norge tror jeg at barna får alt de ønsker seg fra foreldrene. Min venn fortalte
meg at noen hadde spurt ham om hvorfor barna ikke har leker... Leker må kjøpes, ikke
sant... De tror at fordi han ikke kjøper leker til barna, så er han en dårlig far, eller at
han ikke elsker barna sine. Men han sliter jo allerede med å forsørge familien, så hvor
skal han skaffe penger til leker? Og disse tingene er ikke så viktige heller i våre
hjemland... Jeg syns synd på barna våre, fordi skolekameratene har disse tingene. Så
canskje føler barna at de mangler noe, men unnsatt hvor mye en kjøper, vil det altid
være nye ting, så du kan aldri holde tritt med det.

Flere av informantene var flyktninger, og de har gjerne strammere økonomi enn andre
foreldre. Statistisk vet vi dessuten at innvandrerfamilier i Norge gjennomgående har
vedvarende lavere innntekt enn andre (Epeland & Kirkeberg, 2015; Paulsen et al., 2014).
Sitatet beskriver opplevde forskjeller mellom egen og andres økonomi og en fortolkning av
forbruk. Fattigdom er ikke kun en økonomisk størrelse, men er også en subjektiv opplevelse
av forholdet mellom eget og andres levekår. Studier påpeker at økonomiske utfordringer kan
omtolkes som svikt hos foreldre, og særlig kan det ramme innvandrerforeldre (Dumbrill,
2006; Lewig et al., 2010; Parsai, Nieri, & Villar, 2010), slik vi også ser i datamaterialet her.
Informantene erfarer at materielle ting fortolkes ulikt i de to sammenliknende kontekstene.
Her opplever de at økonomisk forbruk blir mer sentralt, og materielle ting blir viktige, blant
annet for barna selv. I vestlige samfunn er barn en kommersielt prioritert aldersgruppe
(Foros & Vetlesen, 2015). Det gjelder særlig ungdom, men i stigende grad også yngre barn
(Rysst, 2005). Rysst (2005) viser for eksempel at for barn i alderen 8–12 blir ulike former for
forbruk anvendt for å vise hvem de er (i et sosialt fellesskap), og til relasjonsbygging.
Manglende penger til shopping og andre typer forbruk (for eksempel deltakelse i dyre,
«kul» fritidsaktiviteter) kan påvirke innvandrerbarnas opplevelse av å bli inkludert eller
utestengt fra et etnisk norsk miljø. Gjennom sosialisering i barnehage, skole osv. sosialiseres
barna og deler kulturelle former for forbruk med etnisk norske barn. Barn (og foreldre) er
ulike og vil forhandle med omgivelsene på ulike måter. Forbruk (for eksempel av en viss type
moteklær eller sko) er likevel sentralt som en strategi for å fremstå som "kul", være "in" eller til å gi andre ønskede kvaliteter og kan øke eller minske et barnets popularitet (Rysst, 2005). Fravær av penger kan føre til at en ikke klarer å skaffe seg noe andre kan se opp til, slik som fine ferier, organiserete fritidsaktiviteter, fritidsutstyr og annet (en standardpakke). Barn som ikke har mulighet til å skaffe seg materiell standardpakke, står derfor i fare for å bli eksekludert fra et sosialt fellesskap og gir da barna et handicap (Rysst, 2005). Foreldrene deler kanskje ikke oppfatningen av viktigheten av "ting". Likevel erkjenner de at økonomiske vansker åpner eller stenger andre dører for barnet i Norge, men hva som var tilfellet i hjemlandet. På den måten blir forbruk innvendt i foreldreskapet på en annen måte her enn hva som var tilfellet før. Andre studier peker også på at økonomiske utfordringer kan omtolkes som svikt ved foreldre, og særlig kan det ramme innvandrerforeldre (Dumbrill, 2006; Lewig et al., 2010; Parsai, Nieri, & Villar, 2010).

**Sosialisering av kultur og etnisk identitet**
Uavhengig av hvor en oppdrar sine barn, har foreldre vanligvis noen verdier eller kulturell bagasje de ønsker å videreføre til sine barn. Foreldre er kulturformidlere og overførere av kunnskap fra en generasjon til en annen. Informantene opplevde, naturlig nok, at deres rolle og mulighet til kulturell kunnskapsformidling var forskjellig og vanskeligere i Norge. Som majoritet støtter storsamfunnet foreldres sosialisering; som minoritet er foreldres kultursosialisering mer avgjørende. Foreldre uten daglig omsorg for barna, og hvor barna bor i fosterhjem, problematiserte særlig vanskene med kulturell sosialisering (I #8):

> ... Jeg ønsker at mine barn skal vokse opp og kjenne sine røtter. Det er veldig viktig for meg. Jeg ønsker å gi dem en følelse av hva det betyr å være (sør-amerikansk), forstår du? Begge guttene mine er født her fordi jeg kom for lenge siden. Men jeg har lært dem spansk. De snakker spansk flytende. Jeg ønsker også at de skal ha tilknytning til sin familie, og derfor har jeg noen ganger tatt dem med til USA for å feire bursdagen hvor de har mange slektninger, og der har vi hatt et stort bursdagsselskap for min yngste sønn på hans fødselsdag. Jeg så at min sønn var så lykkelig. ... Jeg var så stolt av å kunne gi ham den opplevelsen. Men jeg tror ikke at han får det der han er nå (i fosterhjem). For meg er det så vanskelig. Jeg fikk ønske at han kunne være hos en
(sør-amerikansk) familie fordi det ville gitt meg litt fred å vite at mitt barn ble oppdratt slik jeg ville oppdratt ham.


*Mitt barn ble plassert i fosterhjem, noe som i seg selv er vanskelig for meg og var helt traumatisk, men på toppen av det hele, ble han plassert i en norsk familie. En dag da jeg spurte hva han hadde spist til middag, svarte han påse og brød ... Jeg ble helt forskrekket. Jeg mener, hvordan kan du gi et barn det til middag? For meg er ikke det godt foreldreskap. Men jeg kan ikke dømme dem, og jeg vil jo heller ikke at de skal dømme meg. Poenget er at jeg ønsker at mitt barn skal vokse opp med verdier fra mitt hjemland. Han må ikke miste hvem han er, eller gleme hvor han kommer fra.*

Foreldreskap handler også om valg av mat og gjennomføring av måltider. Mat og måltider er dessuten sentralt for å opprettholde minoritetsfamiliers forbindelser til hjemlandet og for å uttrykke identitet (Vallianatos & Raine, 2008). Slike "små ting" er også viktig for å støtte og identifisere familien som en sosial enhet (Ursin et al., 2016).
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Informantene formidlet at barna var integrert i majoritetsamfunnet, og at de betraktet seg som norske. Andre studier har vist at barnas integrasjon kan gå fortere og lettere enn foreldrenes (Kriz & Skivenes, 2010). Mange av informantene har lang botid i Norge, men har fortsatt tette bånd til det opprinnelige hjemlandet. De kan føle stor tilhørighet til hjemlandet, selv om de fysisk ikke bor der. Man kan også føle tilhørighet til flere kontekster samtidig (Kaya, 2010). Barna håndterer kanskje uansett konfliktene som gjelder kulturer og verdisett, lettere. Selv om det er ulikheter mellom informantene, og de vekstegler ulike ting, vil noen foreldre ønske å sosialisere barna via en tradisjonell oppdragelse, mens andre generasjonen ønsker noe annet (1#3):

... hun kom hjem og ønsket å bli behandlet som sine venner på skolen. En dag sa hun at hun ønsker å bli med på overnatting hos en venn, fordi det skulle de andre vennene gjøre. Jeg kan ikke tillate det, hun kan ikke være ute hele natten. Jeg opplever at hun ikke respekterer meg mer, slik hun pleide når vi var i vårt hjemland. Hun må få det fra etsteds, og hun lærer så raskt.

Det som føltes riktig for førstegenerasjonen, kan oppleves annerledes av barna. Barna bringer med seg majoritetens oppfatninger og forventninger, mens foreldrene tolker barnas forventninger negativt. Informanten ønsket mer kontroll, respekt og lydighet av datteren. Annen forskning har tematisert at innvandrerforeldre oppdrar barna strengere enn andre, og at de særlig er opptatt av kontroll ovenfor jentene (Moen, 2011). Hvis barn og foreldre har ulike forventninger, kan forholdet mellom første- og andregenerasjons innvandrere derfor være preget av motsetninger, spenninger og identitetskriser (Kaya, 2010).

Innvandrerforeldre kan føle at de mister autoritet som foreldre, og det påvirker maktdistribisjonene mellom foreldre og barn (Kriz & Skivenes, 2010). For mange innvandrerforeldre kan det å tilpasse seg eller integrere seg i det norske samfunn bety en forskyvning av makten fra foreldrene til barna. Et slik skifte strider mot en autoritær oppdragertil, som hevdes å være vanlig i kollektivistiske samfunn (Darling & Steinberg, 1993). I en autoritær oppdragertil er det et klart familie-hierarki, og barna forventes å leve opp til foreldrenes forventninger, vise respekt og oppfylde (Holm-Hansen et al., 2007). Utvikling av barnas individualitet og selvrealisering er ikke et mål for oppdragelsen, i motsetning til det å vise respekt for foreldrene. Det siste er en klar verdi i den såkalte autoritære oppdragertilen. I vår studie kom alle informantene fra land som har trekk fra en
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kollektivistisk kultur. Autoritært oppdragelsesstil kan synes mer tilpasset en slik livsform – sammenliknet med autoritativ oppdragelsesform, som er mer vanlig i individualistiske, vestlige kulturer.


Samtidig erfarer foreldrene en utvidelse av foreldreskapet. De opplever at forventningene til hva som er “godt nok” er mange og omfattende i vertslandet. Informantene bringer med seg en oppfatning om at det er “godt nok” bare å sørge for barnas basale behov, slik som mat, husly og klær. I Norge, imidlertid, opplever foreldrene at “bare det” ikke er bra nok. Her er fortolkningen av hva det er å være “gode foreldre”, mer utvidet og mer omfattende. For eksempel opplever deltakerne en forventning om større barnefokus i oppdragelsen, eller spesifikk forventning til måltider, leggetider, mat og forbruk, slik vi viste ovenfor.

Diskusjon

Fokus i denne studien var en utforskning av migrasjonsforeldres beskrivelser av foreldreskapet i ny kontekst og det som skiller de erfaringene de har med seg fra hjemlandet, fra det de erfarer i Norge. Foreldrene beskrev både opplevde forskjeller rettet til foreldrerollen og endringer i daglige gjøremål som foreldre. I diskusjonen vil vi særlig løfte frem at opplevd forskjell handler om utvidelsen og innsnevring.
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Spørsmålene hadde til hensikt å utforske mulige utfordringer som immigrantene opplever som foreldre i ny kontekst. Vi har derfor studert opplevde forskjeller i foreldreskapet mellom opprinnelseslandet og i Norge. Det betyr at vi ikke har spurt hva foreldre opplever er likt, eller hvordan de opplever sitt foreldreskap i det store og hele. Spørsmålsstillingen innebærer at de forholdene vi fikk kunnskap om, var det som informantene har erfart som ulikt, og der de mente at omstillingen også var særs vanskelig og gjerne tidkrevende. En kan innenve til en slik tilnærming at det skaper en antagelse om et felles foreldreskap «her» eller «der».
Opplevde forskjeller vil også variere mellom individer og familier (ikke bare kulturer).

Likevel vil migrasjonsprosesser representere et skritt inn i noe ukjent (Berg & Lauritsen, 2009; Qureshi & Fauske, 2010; Sun, 2013). Flytting fra en kjent kontekst og etablering i en ny og ukjent kontekst innebæter en vekslende mellom fortid og nåtid og mellom ulike kontekster samtidig (Qureshi & Fauske, 2010). Noen omstillinger vil nok være lettere enn andre.
Antageligvis vil omstilling være lettere i noen situasjoner og for noen personer, mer enn for andre. Omstillingen vil være påvirket av en rekke faktorer, f.eks språkkunnskap, nettverk og sosial støtte, økonomi og tid til forberedelse. Alle informantene i vår studie har et annet morsmål enn norsk, og mange har flyttet fra én verdensdel til en annen. Forskjellene de beskriver, er preget av dette.

Funnene peker likevel på noen felles opplevelser som migrantforeldre har i skiftet fra en kollektivistisk kultur til en individualistisk kultur. Alle informantene kom fra land som har trekk fra en kollektivistisk kultur, og den verdsetter andre normer og gjøremål enn en individualistisk norsk kultur. Det kan f.eks. være et typisk trekki ved kollektivistisk livsform at voksne i mindre grad leker med barnet, og at det er lite verbal kommunikasjon eller ansikt til ansikt-dialog (Holm-Hansen et al., 2007). I de modeller som forfektes for godt foreldreskap i
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Norge, derimot, er fokus på barna best praksis.\textsuperscript{a} Forventninger til foreldrenes involvering i barna og deres hverdagsliv er sentralt i Norge (Kriz & Skivenes, 2010). Typisk for den barnesentrerte oppdagelsen er individualisering av familiemedlemmene og verdssetting av barn som autonome individer (Skivenes, 2011). Derfor vil en forelder som posisjonerer seg annerledes, og som for eksempel i mindre grad deltar på barnas arenaer, kunne bli møtt med et mistenksomt blikk.

Foreldrene opplevde at verdssetting av hva som anses å være godt foreldreskap, eller barns beste, er ulik innenfor flerkulturelle samfunn, slik også andre forskere har pekt på (Aadnesen, 2014). Kanskje er det likevel slik at noen oppdragelsesformer er funksjonelle og hensiktsmessige i én setting, mens de er mindre funksjonelle i en annen (Jåvo, 2010).

Fortellingen om å forlate en femåring hos naboen uten nærmere avtale om barnepass kan tyde på det. Mange foreldre i Norge er yrkesaktive og er ikke hjemme og passer barn. En kan derfor ikke vite om noen passer et barn hvis det ikke avtales eksplisitt.


\textsuperscript{a} Se for eksempel International Child Development Program, som også har vært utviklet til etniske minoritetsforeldre http://www.icdp.no/icdp-programmets-m
bringer også med seg forventninger (og sanksjoner) til foreldrene og deres gjøremål, for eksempel i form av organisert fritid, leksehjelp, trening eller annet.

Foreldrene opplever dessuten at foreldreskapet i Norge blir innsnevret. Foreldre har erfaring for offentlig ingripen (fra helsestasjoners, skoler, barnehager m.m.) i familiens privatliv. Dessuten opplever de at målestokken for "godt nok foreldreskap" blir smalere og strengere. Foreldrenes opplevelser kan knyttes til Hantrais’ (2004) kategoriseringer. Det offentlige tar et stort ansvar for familiemedlemmene og for foreldrenes oppgaver i Norge. Det de-familiariserte regimet har vanligvis også allmenhetens støtte for statens involvering i familiens (private) affærer. Det gjør seg for eksempel gjeldende i barnevernet, hvor offentlig ansatte har en juridisk meldepunkt hvis de er bekymret for et barn. Private aktører har en moralsk plikt til å melde hvis de er bekymret, og barnevernet har ansvar for å undersøke slike meldinger og eventuelt å sette inn tiltak i familien (Barnevernloven, 1992). I andre verdensdeler, og land hvor informantene i vår studie kom fra, slik som Afrika, Asia og i Sentral-Europa gjelder et annet familiarisert velferdsregime. I disse regimene er det svak legitimitet for statlig ingripen i familien. Her bærer private nettverk og storfamilier ansvar for barneomsorg og andre familiære oppgaver. I en kollektivistisk kulturramme er det vanligvis flere enn foreldre, slik som slekt, nabolag, storfamilie, som bærer ansvaret for gruppemedlemmene av barn, og som deltar aktivt i omsorgen og oppdragelsen av barna (Jåvo, 2010). Foreldre som har migrert fra en familiarisert til et de-familiarisert system, fra en kollektivistisk til enn individualistisk kulturramme, vil derved kunne oppleve store forskjeller.

hvorvan de skal leve sitt liv. Omstillingene til migrantforeldre kan derfor være større og annerledes enn hva andre foreldre opplever i dagens Norge.

Avslutning

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Kriz, K., & Skivenes, M. (2010). 'We have very different positions on some issues': how child welfare workers in Norway and England bridge cultural differences when communication with ethnic minority families. European journal of social work, 13(1), 3–18.
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Appendices


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Appendices

Paper 4

Tembo, M., Studsrød, I., & Young, S. (under second review). Governing the family: Immigrant parents’ perceptions of the controlling power of the Norwegian welfare system. Resubmitted after major revisions to *European journal of social work* on 09.01.2020.
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**Governing the family: Immigrant parents’ perceptions of the controlling power of the Norwegian welfare system**

Authors: 1st Memory Jayne Tembo (Research Fellow)
          2nd Ingunn Studsrød (Professor)
          3rd Susan Young (Doctor)

Affiliation: VID Specialized University, Department of Social Studies

Corresponding email address: memory.tembo@vid.no

Address for Memory Tembo: VID Specialized University
                          Department of Social Studies
                          Misjonsmarka 12
                          4024 Stavanger,
                          Norway.

Telephone for Memory J Tembo: +47 92507626

Address for Ingunn Studsrød: University of Stavanger,
                             Department of Social Studies
                             Postbox 8600 Forus,
                             4036 Stavanger,
                             Norway.

Telephone for Ingunn Studsrød: +47 9488 5966

Address for Susan Young: University of Western Australia
                        Dept. Social work and social policy
                        M431
                        35 Stirling Highway
                        Crawley WA 6009
                        Australia

Telephone for Susan Young: +61 8 64882998
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Governing the family: Immigrant parents’ perceptions of the controlling power of the Norwegian welfare system

Abstract

Norway is a comprehensive welfare state. While these types of systems are considered attractive for supporting families, tight control of familial life and members might go with them. It is important to understand how different parents perceive and interpret interventions and measures aimed at improving their lives. This paper explores immigrant parents’ perceptions of the welfare system and examines the types of control they perceive in their parenting through involvement with CWS and other welfare institutions. The study draws data from interviews with 15 immigrant families, 10 of which had contact with CWS and 5 that were not involved with CWS. In our analysis, we argue that immigrant families feel disempowered through their interactions with the welfare system, which they perceive to be controlling through excessive surveillance of immigrant parents parenting practices. We argue that perceptions of CWS are not only derived from direct interaction with the services, but also from interactions with other welfare institutions and the broader society.

Keywords: governance, welfare system, parents’ perceptions, welfare institutions, immigrant parents

Introduction

The Norwegian government can be defined as a defamilialised welfare regime where state makes explicit efforts to support families by providing universal comprehensive welfare to its citizens (Hantrais, 2004). Norway is a pioneer in prioritising children’s rights (Hollekim, Anderssen, & Daniel, 2016; Hennum, 2014) and the “child’s best interest” is of fundamental concern in all measures affecting children (Skivenes, 2011). However, securing children’s individual rights entails increased interventions in family life and implies tightening social control of family members (Ericsson, 2000; Picot, 2014; Hennum, 2014). Hence, services
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offered by the state do not merely support citizens but also function as tools for authorities to protect children and ensure that families’, parents’, and children’s lives do not deviate too markedly from what is considered proper and healthy parenting and childhood (Ericsson, 2000; Hennum, 2010; Hollekim et al., 2016; Picot, 2014). The CWS serves a combined role of child protection and provision of welfare, with particular authority to make intrusive measures into families, if necessary (CWA, 1992). However, thresholds for making decisions relies upon normative understanding of proper parenthood, which have been criticised for alluding to Norwegian middle-class norms (Haug, 2018; Hennum, 2010). This might lead to immigrant parents having different perceptions of state support and intervention in their parenting than Norwegians. By focussing on immigrants, we presume that authorities might exert control more comprehensively and subtly for immigrant groups, whose parenting practices differ from what might be considered standard norms of parenting. State involvement might also be perceived negatively, particularly if parents hold conflicting views of child upbringing and good parenting, especially for citizens from regimes where child upbringing is the supreme responsibility of the family (Friberg & Bjørnseth, 2019; Tembo & Olmedal, 2015; Hantrais, 2004).

Although parents have a right and duty to exercise parenting and control their children (Children Act [Barneloven], 1981), raising children in Norway is not solely a private matter but a public affair. An extensive controlling bureaucracy surrounds Norwegian childhood (Friberg & Bjørnseth, 2019). Professional health nurses, minority advisors, child and adolescent psychiatry services, CWS, among others, are all expected to support parents in their role (Smette & Rosten, 2019); an aspect that is often appreciated among most Norwegian young parents (Ellingsæter & Perdesen, 2015). From childbirth, parents receive detailed advice and guidelines about children’s diet, hygiene, bedtime, upbringing and socialising (Smette & Rosten, 2019). Although it is not compulsory, children are expected to attend
kindergarten from an early age and, in their spare time, participate in organised activities. Furthermore, authorities stress the importance of inter-professional cooperation in protecting children (NOU, 2016) and offering services that promote equal opportunities for children (Skivenes, 2015). Statistics (Dyrhaug & Sky, 2015) and previous research (Berg et al., 2017; Staer & Bjorknes, 2015) has shown that immigrant families are overrepresented in CWS often due to economic support, voluntary parental guidance and the automatic entry of young unaccompanied asylum seekers into the CWS system. With this degree of family friendly policies and state’s support in raising children that is reportedly valued amongst Norwegian parents (Ellingsæter & Perdesen, 2015), a central question regards how immigrant parents’ perceive interventions by the welfare state to support them in their parenting. This is important as it determines immigrant parents’ willingness to engage with public institutions that may have important implications for their children’s health and education outcomes.

The objective of this study is to explore immigrant parents’ perceptions of the controlling power of the welfare system in parenting among parents who have had contact with CWS and parents who have not. Since various welfare services holds various types of roles and authorities, including both group of parents will hopefully contribute with a broad spectrum of perceptions and experiences. This study explores two questions in particular: i) what types of control do the parents perceive in their parenting from the welfare system, and ii) how do parents view/interpret the purpose of this control?

Though this study focuses on Norway, the findings have implications for the rest of Europe. As Korzeniewska et al., (2019) noted, with the increase in migration to Europe and within Europe, building trust between migrants, public institutions and the society of settlement is a precondition for successful integration of immigrants. As has been noted in Norway, problems in CWS and migrants have led to diplomatic tensions between Norway and India as well as Norway and Turkey (Vassenden & Vedøy, 2019). The mistrust of welfare services in
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Norway is a cross-border problem as several demonstrations internationally have also pointed out the problems between Norwegian CWS and immigrants (ibid). In light of Norway’s stance on ensuring children’s well-being and what has been achieved so far, by examining the challenges especially among immigrants that confront these achievements, Norway presents a good case from which lessons for the rest of Europe can be drawn. With the increased diversity in most European countries due to migration, similar concerns and challenges might be encountered.

Perceptions of trust in the welfare system

Generally, Norwegians have high degrees of trust in the government and believe in a well-functioning welfare state (Christensen & Lægreid, 2005; Ellingsæter & Pedersen, 2015; SSB, 2019). The survival of the welfare state has been attributed to the trustworthiness of the population, making it a mutually beneficial relationship (Christensen & Lægreid, 2005; SSB, 2019). Statistics (SSB, 2019) show that immigrants in Norway have higher levels of trust in the political system but much lower levels of relational trust with other people as compared with Norwegians. Furthermore, while research shows that many immigrants perceive the Norwegian welfare system positively, with regards to high standards of education and health care services, there seems to be mistrust in how they relate with professionals working in these services (Friberg & Bjornset, 2019; Gjerstad, Johannessen, Nodiland, Skeie, & Vedøy, 2015). For example, Handulle and Vassenden (2020) have noted the suspicions that immigrants have with school and kindergarten personnel in fear of being perceived negatively and consequently reported to CWS. It is further noted that factors like discrimination and unemployment tend to reduce trust among most immigrants (SSB, 2019). In this article, we argue how perceptions of the broader welfare system and the relational mistrust in welfare providers links to mistrust of child welfare services.
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Perceptions of child welfare services among immigrants and non-immigrants

Although immigrants are a heterogeneous group, Friberg and Bjornset (2019) notes that, for many immigrants, the encounter with the Norwegian child welfare system and its norms can be a shock. Recent trends shows that this does not only apply to non-western immigrants but includes European immigrants as well (Korzeniewska et al., 2019). While some immigrant parents acknowledge they need help in their parenting and, in some cases, express satisfaction with support from the state and CWS (Friberg & Bjornset, 2019) many also express mistrust (Fylkesnes, Iversen, Bjerkenes, & Nygren, 2015; Korzeniewska et al., 2019). Friberg and Bjornset (2019) noted that some immigrant parents perceive a state–family conflict in CWS because they see it as a constant threat and an invasion into the sovereignty of the family.

Internationally, research shows that many parents perceive their interactions with CWS as emotionally stressful (Tembo & Stadsrod, 2018). Among Norwegian-born parents, previous research on parents’ perceptions of CWS have revealed mixed findings. Stadsrod, Willumsen & Ellingsen, (2014) and Samsonsen and Willumsen (2015) noted that Norwegian parents express both positive and negative experiences of CWS, which they further noted corresponds to experiences of their case proceedings. Thus, there is no general mistrust of the services among Norwegians but rather the different experiences people have, brings about either trust from positive experiences or mistrust if they have negative experiences. While many welfare services, including CWS, are meant to improve living standards, they might also be perceived, interpreted, and experienced differently by the recipients, which the present study seeks to explore.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of this study draws from ideas of governance (Foucault, 1991), especially Foucault’s (1977/2014) concept of panopticism. The analysis uses Foucault’s understanding of power and surveillance in maintaining social order. In “Governmentality,”
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Foucault (1991) showed how the state has become both overseer and enforcer of family operations, though he did not identify immigrant families specifically. A particular feature for Foucault was how the state uses its power to oversee, or surveil, the lives of citizens and, initially, prisoners, with the metaphorical use of Bentham’s invention of the Panopticon. Foucault was predominantly interested in how deviance from the social order is constrained to ensure what he termed “docile bodies” (Foucault, 2012). While he later amended the disciplinary ideas put forward in this work, the central ideas of the observing gaze to ensure compliance and the encouragement of self-discipline to ensure self-governance and obedience remained. We use these ideas in understanding immigrant families’ perceptions of the Norwegian welfare system in relation to their parenting.

Methodology

Data for this study were collected from interviews with 15 immigrant parents in Norway. Snowball sampling was used to recruit participants. Ten of the immigrant families had been in contact with CWS (users). All together, they had experienced assessment processes and voluntary and involuntary procedures, among them care orders. The sample also included five immigrant parents who had no previous contact with CWS (non-users). All parents had various experiences with other welfare services and institutions, such as health nurses, kindergartens etc.

Sample and data collection

Five of the participants originated from South Asian countries, five from African countries, and one each from countries in South East Asia, the Middle East, central Europe, Eurasia, and South America. Three of the participants were interviewed with their partners, while the rest were interviewed individually. The parents’ ages ranged from 20s to 50s, and they had 1–4 children in the age range of 2–29 years old. Six of the participants came to Norway as
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refugees, five on family reunification, three for studies, and one on work immigration. The time they have lived in Norway ranged from 2–30 years.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews. An interview guide was prepared beforehand that steered the course of the interview discussions, but it was flexible and allowed participants to navigate the order of the topics. Parents that had contact with CWS were mainly asked about their experiences with CWS while those that did not were mainly asked about their perceptions of CWS. The parents’ responses were however more broad relating to the broader welfare system and not limited to CWS. All participants were also asked about their experiences of parenting in Norway and many made reference to the welfare system in their responses.

The interviews took place in their homes at their request, except for one that took place at a neutral meeting place suggested by the participant. The shortest interview lasted 58 minutes 38 seconds and the longest lasted 3 hours 7 minutes. In total, the data consists of 25 hours 53 minutes of recorded interviews. Interviews were conducted in English and Norwegian, with an exception of one interview in Arabic with the use of a translator. Verbatim transcriptions of interview data were written in English to make the quotes understandable to a broader audience. While acknowledging the controversies embedded in terms like ‘user’ or ‘client’ in referring to parents who have been in contact with CWS, in this paper, we use the terms user and non-user for identification purposes in reporting the findings.

Data analysis

To analyse the data we used Braun, Clarke, and Terry’s (2012) thematic analytical process. This involved familiarizing ourselves with the data, which we did through reading and re-reading of the interview transcripts. While reading we identified some codes in the data and it became evident that parents perceived that their parenting practices and families were being
controlled by the broader welfare system, which influenced their perceptions of welfare services and the CWS. We then looked for and documented themes in the codes and we identified six themes. These were perceptions of feeling controlled, watched, stigmatised, disempowered as parents, altered family hierarchy and lastly rumours and perceptions of damaging help in CWS. These themes were then finalised and named when we established data that fitted into the themes. Finally, we reviewed the themes to ensure that no data were missing in each of the themes and that each theme had a specific identity. This exercise reduced the number of themes to four, as some themes were merged with similar themes having same identity. We analysed the themes with inferences from Foucault’s insights on “Governmentality” (1991) as we have reported in the discussion.

**Ethical considerations**

Several measures were implemented to ensure ethical conduct following the Norwegian National Committees for Research Ethics (NESH, 2006) guidelines. The study received approval from the Norwegian Social Science Data Services. Before interviews commenced, participants were given written information about the study, and they provided written consent to participate and have their interviews recorded.

**Results**

Parents in this study indicated that they felt controlled formally by the state and informally by society, as well as through community interactions, which resulted in self-regulation of their behaviours to avoid negative attention and coercive measures that lead to problems with CWS. Participants perceived that control is intensified among the immigrant population due to stereotypes of immigrants as abusive parents. The findings elaborate on the following themes: feeling controlled, receiving damaging help, feeling watched, and feeling disempowered as parents. Below, we present the results in detail, followed by a discussion.
Feeling controlled: “Everyone is there to decide for your family”

Parents perceived that the role of welfare institutions is that of controlling family functioning within the broader welfare system. Control was perceived through expectations, suggestions, instructions and demands on their parenting, which they saw as an intrusion into private affairs. Some of these demands were linked to the parents’ involvement with the CWS, which also explains why this theme was more prevalent among the users. Furthermore, other parental demands concerned ordinary parental choices, such as children’s bedtime, after-school activities, diet among others, that were not necessarily related to CWS. Parents reported they felt they lacked the liberty in deciding how their children should be raised, supported, and disciplined. Parents experienced that their private parenting choices and performance became a public/state affair:

There is freedom in [home country]; you decide yourself how to raise your children …

We decide what will be best for the family. But in Norway, we can’t decide everything for our children. Everyone is there to decide for your family—police, health personnel, kindergarten, and CWS—they all decide what you should do. (User)

Although parents acknowledged that some of these parenting suggestions or demands were not directly articulated, they felt they had to satisfy the demands in order to pass as good parents. For instance, one parent explained that she did not want to send her children to kindergarten, but she sent them anyway for fear that authorities would interpret not attending kindergarten negatively: “I did not want to take my child to kindergarten, but then they will say I am failing as a parent” (non-user). One parent who had contact with CWS narrated how she felt controlled in making a personal decision for her family on whether to divorce her husband or not.
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I got a call from CWS [saying:] “we have taken your children away, but we are not taking the children from you but your husband because he has been violent with the children” ... I was given a choice by CWS saying either I separate with my husband or lose my children. I said I didn’t want to separate with my husband... She said, “If you want to stay with him, then we take the children from you also.” (User)

It is noteworthy that, in cases of violence, CWS has to act on safeguarding the children, which might explain the grounds for this demand. Regardless, she felt excluded in making a personal and private decision about separating with her husband. Other parents who had contact with CWS also expressed similar concerns over demands intended to avoid their children being placed in care or to have their children returned home after emergency out-of-home placement. These parents talked about having their parenting skills supervised and judged and the difficulties of not knowing what is expected. One parent described how she was asked what kind of food the family eat and felt reprimanded for eating a lot of meat and not fish when a caseworker checked her fridge. Parents perceived this as controlling and an intrusion into parenting and private lives by the state.

Feeling watched: “There are always extra eyes on the children”

Across the dataset, parents reported public scrutiny of their parenting and believed that observation and evaluation of parenting, children, and family life are embedded in associated welfare service institutions like schools, health centres and CWS. Parents believed schools and health services watch parenting and family life in order to control them and to report them to CWS. Across the dataset, parents perceived a need to be watchful of their behaviour to avoid being reported to CWS. Schools were mostly cited as surveillance arenas. One mother said:
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I knew it is typical when children begin school and the mother is an immigrant there are always extra eyes on the children. The teachers always asked my children how it is at home, asking if I beat them… I knew they were closely watching me. (User)

In addition to schools, parents also reported mistrust of health institutions:

I do not trust any institution. I do not trust schools, hospitals, and doctors… not even my GP. I cannot trust anyone. They are all under CWS… They see a blister and they call CWS… They are connected. (User)

Besides perceptions of surveillance by welfare institutions, parents were also watchful of what other citizens might think of them and tried to eliminate possible misconceptions that others like neighbours might have:

Sometimes she [her daughter] throws tantrums and cries a lot, and that makes me afraid. I always think, “What will the neighbours say?” One time I found myself explaining to my neighbour why my child was crying. She did not even ask me [laughing]… I just felt like I need to explain before she gets some crazy ideas and say I am beating my child. (Non-user)

Parents reported perceptions of this seemingly global surveillance, even in informal settings. They were not afraid of a specific person but felt that someone might be watching them and later report them to CWS. This mother explained, “I have to behave a certain way when in public with my daughter. I cannot shout at her… When in public, I watch how I talk to her because people watch everything” (non-user). Parents reported adapting their behaviours to portray unsuspicious impressions due to internalised consciousness of being watched.
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Feeling stigmatised, “They think that immigrants are not good parents”

All parents in this study believed that due to their immigrant status, they are closely watched, rendered suspects, and monitored. Parents perceived that public services pay closer attention to immigrants than Norwegians to look for possible neglectful and abusive behaviours. Participants believed stereotyping fuels close surveillance of immigrants.

I think the target is mostly immigrants... I know some Norwegians are in contact with CWS, but for immigrants, it is worse. They think that immigrants abuse their children or they are not good parents. (Non-user)

Furthermore, they believed that immigrants who need social welfare are more exposed to state scrutiny than independent citizens are. This led to beliefs that the circle of surveillance is broader and intensified for refugees than other immigrants:

It has to do with your position in society... If you are independent, it is difficult for them to know what you do and you are respected... But for refugees, they need a lot of help from the municipality. Then, you are not really respected, and I think you are more exposed than if you are a work immigrant. (Non-user)

Parents associated dependency on welfare with disrespect and being powerless as well as more exposure to intrusion and surveillance on one’s parenting. The interconnectedness of different professionals from various welfare services was clearly perceived as a surveillance mechanism, which led to fears and mistrust of the whole system.

Feeling disempowered as parents: “They just tramp on the concept of family”

Parents expressed concerns regarding what they perceived to be an individualistic approach to helping children in the welfare system that challenged and excluded the broader family, especially parents. For example, parents thought that CWS aimed to help and support the
child only and overlooked the interests of the whole family. A mother who had her child placed in care elaborated:

They are supposed to work for the family, but they just tramp on the concept of family. They destroy families... Now, they are turning my son against me... he thinks we do not love or want him. All they wanted was to take my son... They could have helped us as a family. (User)

Parents perceived that singling out the child encourages child emancipation and weakens family bonds, thereby elevating children’s rights at the expense of the parents’ wishes and authority. One parent described that her children were placed in care because they were not happy. While there might have been more to the story (as she also stated that her husband’s character was questioned and their home was described as dangerous), in her understanding, the children’s happiness was the primary reason for them being unfit parents. This suggests, at the least, miscommunication between the authorities and parents. Parents perceived that minor and superficial reasons are often used to justify interventions, some of which might be beyond their control or might be impacted by economic challenges. Parents feared that children could manipulate their stories in search of good things that their parents cannot afford:

My son could have said what he said out of his own fantasies. Because as a child, he might think of being free, having the things that other kids have. He might look at our situation as immigrants who are struggling and feel like it might be better staying somewhere else... Children know that CWS helps them so they manipulate the situations to get what they want. (User)

This father felt that, in general, intervention might empower children to think they are in charge of deciding where and how they want to be raised. Parents also referred to their
immigrant status as one of the factors that might motivate their children to devalue them and label them as inadequate parents who are not providing for their children’s “wants.”

*Alterning the family hierarchy: “Here, the boss is the child”*

Parents perceived that children are often trusted and their rights respected more than parents’ authority and family bonds. They believed this weakens parents’ ability to take care of and discipline their children. One parent (user) reported how his son used CWS as a shield to avoid being disciplined by his parents when he had stolen from the shops. Perceptions of child empowerment at the expense of parents’ authority led to beliefs that there is a restructured power hierarchy in families where children have power and authority over their parents. Some parents reported how children used this authority to force parents into complying with their wishes: “Some kids now threaten their parents, saying they will report to CWS that they are being beaten or mistreated when they need a toy or something. They say if you don’t buy me this, I will go to child welfare” (non-user). Due to the parents’ perceived ethnic stereotypes as immigrants, they reported compliance to their children’s wishes for fear of being reported to CWS. Thus, parents assumed children are placed at the top of the family hierarchy, rendering parental authority ineffective:

> Here, the boss is the child and as a parent, you need to make sure you don’t anger your child... So parents are afraid of their children. (Non-user)

Compared with their own upbringing, parents observed a loss of power in their parental status in Norway. It was evident that the fears of being reported to CWS affected these parents’ relationships with their children and made it more difficult for them to make decisions regarding discipline, school and seeking health care.
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Rumours and perceptions of damaging help: “Help turned into my nightmare”

While the themes presented earlier relate more with the broader welfare system, this theme was more related to child welfare services. While parents heard that CWS is there to help and support children and families, their own experiences and the rumours leaned towards controlling families and removing children from home. Sentiments that CWS’s goal is to take children from parents were repeated across the dataset. Three of the 10 parents (users) contacted CWS themselves to get help. However, they described how a child protection case was later opened and they were placed under investigation. These parents felt manipulated and scammed into contacting CWS:

It was the biggest mistake of my life to ask them for help... I regret ever going there...
They just wanted to control me. The help turned into my nightmare when I was told I was under investigation and could lose my child. (User)

It is noteworthy that, in this case, the parents were not aware of the procedures involved in asking for help from CWS, which requires an investigation be carried out before help is given (CWA, 1992). This indicates the need for more explicit information and communication about CWS procedures. While acknowledging their need for support, some parents felt they had no liberty to ask for the help they needed but rather that professionals dictated the kind of help they should receive. Thus, parents perceive professionals do not understand family’s needs but rather act on their own expertise, contrary to what the parents need, which also leads to negative perceptions of help from most welfare services.

Discussion

The analysis shows that these parents felt excluded and disempowered in the processes of achieving and defining what is best for their children in the broader welfare system. Our
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analysis employs aspects of governance stipulated by Foucault (1991) and his metaphorical application of the panopticon. Comparing the perceptions of the two different groups of parents (user and non-user), the analysis shows more similarities than significant differences in perceptions of the role of the welfare state into families and parenting. However, some themes were more prevalent amongst the users, as they were related to parents’ experiences with CWS where perceptions of controlled parenting seemed to be intensified by the involvement with CWS. Nevertheless, all parents in this study perceived control of families, surveillance and being stigmatised in their parenting by welfare institutions.

Scholars (Ericsson, 2000; Hennum, 2014; Picot, 2014) have argued that the child-oriented focus in the Norwegian child welfare system entails increased interventions into family life. This follows perceptions that the child-centric orientation might challenge family preservation and sideline parents and the rest of the family in making decisions regarding the child’s life (Hennum, 2014; Skivenes, 2011). Parents therefore feel overpowered and believe they have to comply with what is demanded of them, if they are to avoid any problems related to involvement with CWS. In examining the concept of power, Foucault (1982, 1991) considered that power could be exercised supportively in a more subtle and hidden way, and these parents’ perceptions seem to concur with this notion of power. Nonetheless, this supportive power in parenting embedded in different welfare institutions, is experienced as authoritative. This is due to parents’ supposition that non-compliance to what is suggested by professionals will lead to a report to CWS, and consequently, possible loss of custody of their children, which could function as a form of discipline (Foucault, 2012). Foucault (1991) noted that, to exercise power, force is not necessarily essential, as power can be exercised through mechanisms that influence one to regulate himself/herself. Discipline, according to Foucault (1977), can be achieved through the application of techniques not necessarily identifiable as power per se that lead to self-governance. Self-governance entails creating circumstances in
which human beings control themselves to fit neatly into the prescribed normal/social order (Foucault, 1977). Parents in this study evidenced their awareness of how they are perceived by neighbours, schools, and the public, and they seem to regulate their behaviours in accordance to the supposed normative parenthood in order to be perceived as good parents, a form of self-governance in Foucault’s sense.

Foucault considered “family” as having moved from individual family to a segment of the population managed by the government. Thus, translating his ideas from the surveillance of prisoners by the panopticon to the family, family too needed to be surveilled and disciplined, as “the family becomes an instrument rather than a model: the privileged instrument for the government of the population and not the chimerical model of good government” (Foucault, 1991, p. 100). Here, we see the transition of family from a model for government to an instrument of government and, as such, shaped into the requirements of social order. Like Foucault’s (1977) panopticon metaphor, parents in this study believed that surveillance is widespread and not only conducted by authorities in welfare institutions but also by neighbours and people in public, hence the need for self-governance in order to avoid discipline from CWS is intensified. Parents reported having constant consciousness of being under surveillance but not necessarily instances where they observed this surveillance directly. The different strategies parents used, such as acting differently in public, explaining to a neighbour why a child is crying, and other hiding behaviours, were in response to being conscious of the unseen surveillance as Foucault also argued in relation to prisoners and the panopticon. Furthermore, parents perceived that they are structurally placed in a disadvantaged position (immigrants, recipients of welfare, abusive parents), which automatically results in a disadvantaged identity warranting more surveillance. Though parents perceive that they lack the power to challenge how their identities are constructed, they exercise power over constructing images they believe will lead to positive impressions.
Smette and Rosten (2019) observed that, when professionals give suggestions about child rearing in their professional role, the disparity in power relations increases when the professionals have a majority background and the receiving parent is an immigrant. Parents in this study felt controlled, watched, disempowered, and stigmatised because they believed that kindergartens, schools, and social and health services do not offer help in ‘good faith’ but rather to identify wrongs they can report to CWS. As immigrants and, for some, as recipients of welfare services, they considered themselves easy targets for interventions and control from the state. These findings support previous research (Friberg & Bjornseth, 2019; Smette & Rosten, 2019) illustrating that control is also perceived from broader informal society and not just CWS or other related authorities and professionals. It is beyond the scope of this study to confirm parents’ perceptions of how they are constructed; nonetheless, research indicates that minority parents are more vulnerable to “critical eyes,” from both majority and other minority groups (Smette & Rosten, 2019). Concerning perceptions of refugees being treated differently, contrary to this belief, research indicates that social workers do not discriminate between working parents and parents that are unemployed or living on welfare benefits (Skivenes, 2015). It is therefore important to scrutinise the aspects parents express in defining discrimination, as it is the parents’ perceptions that are important in determining their willingness to engage with social services. The findings also reveal immigrant parents’ fear and mistrust of CWS as well as lack of knowledge on CWS procedures, supporting previous research (Eide & Rugkåsa, 2015; Fylkesnes et al., 2015; Berg et al., 2017).

While parents’ fears are centred on involvement with CWS, they also extend to other welfare services, such as schools and hospitals, as Friberg and Bjornset (2019) previously noted. It is our assumption that the fear of being watched might cause vulnerabilities, as it might lead to not seeking necessary services available for the health and well-being of their children. Our analysis shows that immigrant parents perceive helpful and supportive measures from welfare
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institutions negatively despite the aims/intentions of these measures. Taking into account the different family policy backgrounds in the parents’ home countries, we might also assume that the parents’ backgrounds could have affected their views. While Norway’s defamilialised family policy entails explicit and broad state intervention into families (Hantrais, 2004), the parents’ home countries can be categorised as refamilialised and familialised, where state intervention into families is minimal and, hence, parental authority is strongly felt as Tembo & Olteadal (2015) have shown. Thus, interference into family life might be regarded as crossing boundaries that are meant to be private and, as such, resisted vehemently and experienced negatively.

Limitations

The variation in the sample might present some limitations, as it is not possible to associate the findings to specific characteristics of the sample. Parents’ perceptions might therefore be attributed to other factors than those accounted for in this study. However, due to the similarities in the findings, the variation might also be a strength as it reflects that the perceptions of control are widespread across different immigrant parents. Furthermore, though we did not focus on the variation of the immigrant parents in the analysis, no significant differences of perceptions were observed on the reported themes across the data set. However, other research designs might be more suitable in exploring similar and different patterns between different immigrant groups as some research for example (Friberg & Bjørnset, 2019) have shown that parents that have lived in Norway longer have more positive perceptions to the welfare system than those that have not. It must also be added that we only interviewed few parents, most of whom had negative experiences with the CWS; we might therefore expect them to be more critical and negative towards the welfare system. However, having similar perceptions from parents that have never had contact with CWS also shows how other factors aside from contact with CWS influences parents’ perceptions of control.
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Despite these limitations, we believe the findings reveal an important picture crucial to understanding immigrant parents’ perceptions of welfare support.

Recommendations for practice and future research

The broader welfare system is meant to enhance the living standards of children and their families and to protect children from harm. These aims are dependent on parents’ trust in engaging with these services. When parents perceive that a visit to the doctor might lead to a referral to CWS, the result is fear of health services, which might jeopardise their children’s health. It is evident in this study that understanding immigrants’ parents’ fears and perceptions of CWS goes beyond the examination of parents’ involvement with CWS in itself. There is a need to take a broader approach, which includes examining perceptions of the different services in the welfare system as this study shows that fears of CWS are related to perceptions of mistrust in the whole welfare system. To ensure comfortability with welfare services and institutions, approaches that enhance parents’ inclusion and transparency of how the system operates could improve parents’ engagement with services. This study suggests that, for immigrant parents, the comprehensive welfare state poses certain challenges, which need to be explored in future research, in order to understand parents’ perceptions of the individual services like those in CWS.

References


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