

NAVIGATING NORMS OF PARENTING; PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT IN REFUGEE FAMILIES

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Background: In the Netherlands, the organization 'IAG' provides intensive ambulatory family counselling services. Counsellors are asked by welfare organizations to observe and provide parental support and guidance in families' everyday lives. Although their care is on a voluntary basis, there usually is some pressure behind it, as counsellors are asked to report back and intervene when there are worries about the mental health, wellbeing and safety of the children. Based on the advice of the counsellors e.g. if parents are seen as incapable and non-cooperative, in some cases the custody of children is taken away from their families. A separate division of IAG is specialized in supporting refugee families. They, even more than the other therapists, regularly deal with conflicting (cultural) norms, e.g. on what constitutes safety, wellbeing or good (enough) parenthood.

Issues of Focus: Which contrasting norms on parenthood do intercultural family therapists encounter and how do they decide which norms to follow?

Methods: Twelve supervision meetings of psychosocial family counsellors were observed and ten in-depth interviews were held with 20 counsellors.

Potential Outcomes: My analysis of psychosocial family counsellors specialized in intercultural care shows that they on a regular basis have to navigate between conflicting norms of parents, Dutch institutes (youth welfare organization, school) and their own personal and professional norms. Norms they struggle with include those on children's (physical) safety, how much (in)dependence can be expected of children and on the importance of children being raised in the language and culture of their country of origin.

Discussion/Implications: In navigating various norms on good (enough) parenthood, the counsellors I studied were supported by regularly consulting with colleagues, many of whom had professional or personal experience with the cultural background of the parents. Having a unit specialized in intercultural care may be crucial in dealing with conflicting intercultural norms.

Learning Objectives

At the conclusion of this presentation, participants will be able to:

1. Identify potentially conflicting norms intercultural family therapists may encounter
2. Propose strategies to resolve conflicting norms