



## CULTURAL TRANSMISSION IN CHILDBREARING AMONG MOROCCAN MUSLIMS IN QUEBEC: PRACTICAL GUIDELINES FOR SOCIAL WORKERS

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### **ABSTRACT**

*As the Muslim population in Québec increases, evidence shows that practicing Muslim Moroccan immigrant parents perceive cultural transmission as extremely important in maintaining and promoting their children's integration and success in their new society. They do, however, face many challenges in their negotiations of ethnic and host cultures, which will be further addressed herein. Social workers are positioned within a vital location in their capacity and commitment to promote culturally, religiously and socially informed interventions and support structures for these families and the challenges they may face. This article reveals an insider's view on Muslim Moroccan immigrant parents' childrearing strategies in the context of acculturation. Findings of the author's qualitative study, along with other relevant literature, are used to identify five main strategies employed by Muslim Moroccan parents in transmitting culture values to their children. This article will discuss implications of these strategies on frameworks of social work practice with these communities and outline social workers' strategic roles in this process.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Maintaining cultural context such as language, tradition, values, lifestyle, and religion in the host countries is a very challenging task for immigrant parents (Hassan, Rousseau, Measham and Lashley, 2009). Particularly for practicing Muslim-Moroccan immigrant parents, cultural transmission is perceived as extremely important in maintaining and promoting their children's integration and success in their new society, by transmitting their Islamic ideology and cultural heritage to their children; however, the challenges they face in the pursuit often pose conflicting framework of the host country in terms of family traditions, status differentials and achievement markers. (Chenouard, 2012; Moro, 2009). (Abdelfettah, 2016). As acknowledged by Canada Heritage (McAndrew, 2010), the increasing Muslim population in Québec reinforces the need to create progressively suitable and culturally aware social services that address cultural transmission challenges faced by immigrant parents and their children throughout the process of adaptation and integration in their host societies (Helly, 2004b).

This article analyses five different strategies used by Muslim-Moroccan immigrant parents, used to tackle the challenges in the host culture. These strategies arose from the author's study titled *Culture, Religion and Childrearing Practice: A case study of practicing Muslim-Moroccan Immigrants in Québec*, along with other relevant literature. These strategies include cultural transmission within the family; transmitting culture values as a part of cultural transmission; ensuring that children attend Islamic schools; ensuring strong connections with the country of origin; and monitoring children's socialisation to limit the perceived threat to their cultural heritage from the host society. This article discusses these strategies in-depth, pointing to their relevance

towards social work practice with Muslim-Moroccan immigrant parents in Québec, and in other areas with a similar contextual narrative.

By conceptualizing the different cultural transmission strategies used by practicing Muslim Moroccan parents, social work practitioners can play essential roles in developing strategies, programs and interventions which assist these communities, considering their cultural and religious discursive narratives. They can further assist in the establishment of training and educational programs for social workers working in the immigration sector, which place cultural transmission strategies and the perspectives shared in this article as essential in the integration of practicing Muslim Moroccan parents and their children in Québec. Communities, authorities and social workers have to be made aware of family issues such as challenges in childrearing, cultural transmission and attempts at integration in the host society. This will help with the provision of culturally and religiously sensitive work, enabling a greater capacity in understanding and accepting the internal dimensions of these parents, and conveying anti-oppressive social work practices that better support the well-being of these communities.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

As demonstrated by research, factors such as socioeconomic status, ethnicity, religiosity, culture, gender, and developmental stage of children play a role in influencing child rearing practices (Le et al., 2008). The concept of cultural transmission suggests that cultural resilience or assimilation is impacted by the type of socialization of an individual (Bisin & Verdier, 2005). Cultural transmissions influence preferences, attitudes and norms (Bisin & Verdier, 2005). The literature identifies 3 main modes of cultural transmission: vertical, horizontal, and oblique (Bisin & Verdier, 2005), (Wilder and Kandler, 2015). Vertical cultural transmission is grounded in the supposition that children absorb their parents' knowledge (Wilder and Kandler, 2015) Oblique cultural transmission considers that, in parallel with parents, older groups of individuals, such as extended family members and relatives, teachers and religious leaders, act as bridges along the process of cultural transmission (Wilder and Kandler, 2015). Horizontal mode of transmission suggests cultural influence through peers or relatives or the same age group (Wilder and Kandler, 2015). Kandler and Wilder (2015) identify an additional mode of cultural transmission defined as unbiased - cultural transmission among all the population. They also highlight that additional forms of transmission, as well as dynamic interactions among different modes of transmission, all have additional impact on an identity. Fogarty (2018) suggests that fluctuating environment, cultural innovation, population size and density all play a part in the complexity of cultural identity formation.

Due to the limited research on practicing Muslim-Moroccan immigrant parents in Québec, this literature review is divided into a theoretical analysis. First, it will address the related parenting practices from Arab-Muslim immigrant parents; and subsequently it will shed light on the condition of practicing Muslim Moroccan immigrant parents in Québec and in other parts in the world.

## **PARENTING AND CULTURAL TRANSMISSION IN ARAB-MUSLIM IMMIGRANT PARENTS**

Arab-Muslim parents face many difficulties in the host countries (Hernandez, 2007; Laaroussi, 2008). Amongst these challenges, particular attention has been drawn to address the challenges faced by mothers due to the vital role they play amongst Arab-Muslim families (Hernandez, 2007; Laaroussi, 2008, Beitin & Aprahamian, 2014; Laaroussi, 2009). Across many Arab-Muslim cultures, women presume the primary responsibilities of childrearing placing a considerable

amount of responsibility on how mothers influence their children on various aspects (Kulwicki, 2008). Accordingly, it is considerably harder for many mothers identifying as Arab-Muslim to maintain traditional values while childrearing in a Western society. For instance, some studies have pointed to the essential role that mothers play in mediating the tension between their spouses and their children in discussing what is acceptable adolescent behavior whilst considering both cultures (Hattar-Pollara and Meleis 1995, in Aroian et al., 2011). Simultaneously, Arab-Muslim mothers have to adapt themselves to a variety of post-migration challenges, such as navigating an unfamiliar environment with a new culture, language, limited financial and social resources (Aroian et al., 2009). The results of these challenges include a strained impact on parenting and on the mother-to-child relationship (Aroian et al., 2009).

Another pressing issue involving immigrant Arab-Muslim children is the assimilation of culture, the process of internalizing one's culture of origin and externalizing or exhibiting the host's culture. It is important to note that there have also been contrasting results amongst studies conducted on the child rearing practices of Arab-Muslims living in the west. A determinant factor for the variation of this result lie in the differences of the family's socioeconomic statuses and educational background (Stevens et al., 2007).

### **PARENTING AND CULTURAL TRANSMISSION IN MUSLIM-MOROCCAN IMMIGRANT PARENTS**

The process of parenting and cultural transmission for practicing Muslim-Moroccan immigrant parents seem to be based on three important features. The first one is based on the educational background of mothers, as a factor in impacting parenting and cultural transmission (Battaglini et al., 2002). The second feature is based on the religious and individual orientations strengthening effective transmission. Finally, the third feature is based on the parental encouragement for children to maintain and be involved in both culture of origin and host cultures, having a positive effect on their school and community participation (De Plaen, 2008).

The literature suggests that parenting and childrearing practices amongst immigrant families, including practicing Muslim-Moroccan immigrants, require much more in-depth research work in order to create useful and practical recommendations on how to improve immigrant children's quality of life and behaviors in host countries (Daglar et al., 2011; Tyyskä, 2008). For instance, a number of researchers have pointed towards the role of parents' behavior on children's socialization. Children equipped with the necessary tools to become successful members of society are linked to the adaptive childrearing strategies expressed in the parent-child interaction context (Bornstein, 2002). It is through this awareness of cultural responsibility that parents exercise childrearing practices that promote cultural identification among their children.

While it appears that acculturating Muslim parents are making great strides in preserving their ethno-religious identity, they face many challenges and contradictions in their host societies. Many clashes between the ethnic and host cultures take place during the cultural transmission process; however, a striking research gap in addressing the active role that immigrant parents play in managing these clashes is present (Armeli, Marandi, Ahmed, Kara, & Merali, 2007 and Bérubé, 2004).

Additionally, in comparison to the rest of Canada, a negative public opinion towards Muslim immigrants is evident in Québec (McAndrew, 2010). Due to this prejudice, there's an added role for parents throughout the process of cultural transmission in that they need to prepare their Muslim children for such unfavourable treatment, sharing tools on how to address it, resist it and

overcome it (Helly, 2009c; Helly, Hmimssa, & Brodeur, 2014). Consequently, social workers working with Arab-Muslims, and particularly Muslim-Moroccan immigrant families in Québec, have an essential role in assisting with these challenges. The suggestion here is that only through an informed approach, and in partnership with the parents themselves, can these practitioners effectively support these families' challenging experiences.

### **CULTURAL TRANSMISSION STRATEGIES IN PARTICIPATING IMMIGRANT-MOROCCAN PARENTS**

The author's study identified five essential strategies used by participating Muslim-Moroccan immigrant parents active along the cultural transmission process. These strategies are used not only in childrearing practices but also to tackle the challenges from the host culture, during the cultural transmission process. They intersect with much of the literature, and emphasize the need for social work professionals to analytically consider the intersectionality of religion, culture, social context and gender when working with Moroccan immigrant parents, and in some contexts, with Arab-Muslim immigrant parents and their children.

The first strategy identified is the cultural transmission within the family, which includes the strategies employed by the participating parents to ensure that the religious identity is passed on to their children. The second strategy consists of transmitting cultural values as part of cultural transmission. The third strategy is to ensure that their children attend Muslim private schools where religion, language and cultural values are taught. The fourth strategy is ensuring that children maintain strong connections with their country of origin. The fifth and final strategy involves monitoring their children to perceive the host society as a threat to their cultural heritage. The following section breaks down each of these strategies.

### **METHODOLOGY**

Qualitative method was used in order to collect data presented herein. In order to understand the context of the phenomenon of cultural transmission strategies of practicing Muslim Immigrant-Moroccan parents, the research gathered information by interview processes with the focus group. By doing this, the researcher was able to obtain information of social experiences of Immigrant-Moroccan parents and their childrearing strategies. Additionally, the information was subject to clarification by the interviewer. By using an inductive reasoning method the research was able to investigate the meaning behind the claims of the interviewees by making these claims explicit and transparent. The data gathered was then carefully analyzed. Conclusive evaluation of the information gathered allows for social work practitioners to integrate these findings into their strategic practice in assisting Immigrant-Moroccan populations in cultural transmission and integration processes.

#### **First Cultural Transmission Strategy: Cultural Transmission within the Family**

The first strategy stresses how family practices seek to highlight the family's ethnicity, religion and Arab traditions as a form of inculcating cultural values and preserving family traditions. Parents use their role modelling as a central strategy hoping that by growing up and seeing their parents practicing religion, their children will, in time, adopt the same behaviours. Role modelling was exhibited through practice of religion in forms of prayer, religious ceremonies and celebration of festivals (Elkchirid, 2016). Parents believed that by performing these religious practices, children

would ask questions and adopt same practices. In one of the interviews a Moroccan Muslim parent explains it in the following way

*"They wonder why they do not have access to other ceremonies or why their families do not celebrate ceremonies or festivals of Québec. Children often ask why Christmas is not celebrated in the family. They want Christmas party, they want the tree, but I said no! There is no tree; we have our own holidays; we don't celebrate the feast of Christmas, Santa Claus. We have our celebrations, although we give toys and candies, but to make a tree, I do not do it, to decorate. I do not decorate. But there are many questions: why do my friends decorate? But I told him no and we try to explain in the best way possible so that they can understand" (IN 05).*

As a strategic approach, the parenting practices used in the home establish a family context that affects the children's perceptions of parental family obligations, expectations and, subsequently, the relations between parents' family obligation expectations and children's ethnic identity. As found in the author's study, for the children of Moroccan parents, the transition to adulthood is expressed mostly within the models provided by parents, and is transmitted mostly by the mothers. In parallel with a study conducted by Nyirarukundo (2003), the cultural transmission process with children is mainly led by mothers. It can be translated as the attachment to the Moroccan culture and identity through family education, supporting the highlighted importance of the maternal education in the family (Su & Costigan, 2009).

Another characteristic of this strategy is the parent-child relational orientation of Moroccan parents with their children. This is mostly a rule-oriented process; defined by Tuttle (2012) to be of high hierarchy and high connection in parent-child relational orientation through cultural roles and rules. Functional roles such as religious identity transmission influence how attachment bonds are experienced and expressed between the participating parents and their children. Positioning the parents' role to prepare their children to be a part of the social order of their authority and to be aware of their social location. When the parent-child relationship is rule directed, decision-making is simplified, conflicts are minimized, and the relationship is characterized by stability motivated by the need to support and maintain the family whole (Tuttle et al., 2012). One of the most important aspects outlined by Muslim Moroccan values is the subject of respect for authority and elders. A parent in an interview from the study puts it in the following words

*"For me at home, it's a must to raise them by putting a priority on respect, learning Arabic, the Quran, and to pray. In our own community, we must teach them how to respect older people. In our community, we explain and educate children the need to respect the older people, to not raise your voice when you talk to them, and to not disrespect them. In school, the first thing they are taught is discipline - to respect their teachers, classmates and that, as they must impose to their peers the same mutual respect. For the society, it's the same thing: respect and discipline" (FG 19).*

Finally, parenting among Moroccan immigrant parents reflects their cultural and religious values, shaping the process of childrearing to conform to the main values of Islam. However, immigrant parents need to adjust their practices and values to the host society simultaneously. For that reason, behavioural control and selective socialization is an essential parenting strategy employed by Moroccan parents. For instance, as Smetana & Daddis (2002, cited in Le et al., 2008) emphasize in their research study, Moroccan parents in Québec are consistent in communicating and enforcing rules and setting restrictions. Other studies also report that character formation and identity formation are the key goals of their parenting approaches (Maiter,

& George, 2003). Internalized cultural values, beliefs, and norms and external factors related to their social context and environment, such as collectivism, dual socialization, and environmental stress, guide the approaches to parenting. Social worker's strategic role in assisting parents' successful cultural transmission lies in bringing awareness of the above listed factors to the parents. In a recent study by Van De Pol and Van Tubergen (2014), findings conclude that warm family ties facilitate religious transmission. A stronger transmission is found within families strongly embedded in religious communities and associate with the Moroccan community. Contrarily, some studies observe that when parents excessively place pressure on their children to adhere strongly to their original culture, children construct identities that are contrary to their parents' wishes (Cheng & Kuo, 2000). Social Workers' role stands in outlining the impact of different childrearing strategies to parents in order to guide them in successful cultural transmission.

### **Second Cultural Transmission Strategy: Transmitting Culture Values as a Part of Cultural Transmission**

The second cultural transmission strategy is based on transmitting cultural values as an essential parenting strategy during childrearing practices. While strongly intersecting with first strategy, these two strategies intersect confirming what other various studies have found when examining the relationship between parenting practices and childrens' development. It was found that warmth, reasoning, monitoring, and autonomy-promoting parenting practices are associated with stronger feelings of ethnic belonging and more ethnic identity exploration (Feldman, & Rosenthal, 1994). By highlighting these principles to Muslim Moroccan parents, social workers are able to not only manoeuvre effective cultural transmission, but also address common challenges among Muslim immigrants in Quebec that concern discipline that borderlines with Western definition of abuse (Elkchirid, 2016).

For instance, parents use behavioural control, reinforcement of rules that are mainly dictated by religion such as respect of elders and behavioural codes related to gender interaction. The motivation for this high level of monitoring is that parents perceive many aspects of the host culture as threats, if not dangers, for their children (Louise & Vacchelli, 2013). Monitoring among Muslim parents takes place in controlling their children's environment and socialization. This is especially enforced among adolescent children. A parent in an interview explains how and why this monitoring takes place:

*"We would like the children to respect religion, to live and become as adults as real Muslims should be, to behave according to the rules of the Quran and religion. Therefore, we pay attention to who they become friends with, who they meet outside school or outside home. In adolescence we usually don't let them party, for example, with other kids, because here in Québec the use of alcohol is frequent among adolescents. Girls are not allowed to have boyfriends before marriage and to adopt sexual behaviors, because these are not the ways of a true Moroccan in terms of behavior" (IN 09).*

A number of studies focused on the dynamics of Arabic-speaking and Arab-Muslim reveal a state of family disharmony characterized by three major themes: 1) parenting and youth freedom; 2) parents' struggle to preserve cultural values; and 3) changes in gender roles in the post-immigration context. Similarly, the author's study reflects some degree of disharmony amongst transmitting cultural and religious values as part of cultural transmission. As an illustration,

Moroccan participating parents report the discrepancy between generations and their struggle to maintain cultural values. These factors influence the transmission of the original values and the identity development of the new generations in the Moroccan immigrants. Whist parents seem to be attached to the values of the culture of origin, they show signs of difficulty in raising their children according to the rules of Islam and Moroccan values post-migration in Québec. Hence, strong religious and cultural orientation is crucial in implementing cultural transmission practices in order to overcome the the challenge of how they can integrate in a non-religious environment.

### **Cultural Transmission Strategies Three: Ensuring Children Attend Muslim Schools**

A third strategy is driven by Moroccan parents who ensure to enrol their children in private Islamic schools where religion, language and culture are taught. Arabic schools in Quebec do not separate language and religion. Most of the private Arabic schools were founded by Moroccans. These schools, according to the parents who gave the interviews, provided more strict educational principles, which adhered to their cultural values. These schools provided more emphasis on discipline. However, some parents expressed dissatisfaction with the quality of educational curricular and the teachers' insufficient qualifications. Given the difficulty for immigrant Moroccan parents to isolate their children from socializing with other members of the host society, participants maintained sending their children to private schools to learn Arabic and the culture of origin, mainly to increase their childrens' interaction and socialization among other Moroccan peers. Indicative of a process of separated acculturation this tendency contributes to the preservation of the main values of the country of origin through which parents want their children to remain detached from the host country. Studies have found that the family is a key learning ground for feelings of ethnic identity (Knight, Bernal, Garza, Cota, & Ocampo, 1993). But the influence of friends and the impact of the larger society contribute much to the behaviour change of children, especially as the child grows older. In the host society, there are institutions such as schools, places of worship, government and friends that can play important roles in the child's socialization and behavioural change. Participating Moroccan parents perceive the influences exerted by these external socialization agents as constraints and challenges. Consequently, this strategy comes with a number of negative outcomes, due to the distancing of Muslim students with their other peers. Indeed, Muslim students have been the subjects of an important number of educational controversies in the last twenty years, mainly because of their differences from those students of the host culture (McAndrews, 2010), which may affect their well-being. Social workers are able to address the challenges of integration while facilitating cultural transmission by educating parents of existing language and religion classes that can be taken up by their children. Additional to private schools, there are Arabic Saturday schools that also teach religion, language and values.

### **Cultural Transmission Strategy Four: Ensuring Strong Connections with Country of Origin**

A fourth strategy involves the understanding that close contact with the country of origin allows children to gain knowledge about the basics of religion from their source, their family members and relatives living in the country of origin. According to Waldinger (2007), this is a common behavior amongst immigrant Moroccan families and immigrant families from other origins too. Even so, to the best of our knowledge, there are currently no reports from the literature regarding the intensity of contact with the country of origin amongst Moroccan immigrants in Canada.

For instance, the Pew Hispanic Trends Research Project revealed the relationship of Latinos with their country of origin. It was discovered that most Latino immigrants maintain some kind of connection to their original country by sending remittances, traveling back or telephoning relatives; but the extent of their attachment varies considerably (Waldinger, 2007). Nevertheless, the author's study seems to indicate that Moroccans are more attached to their country of origin than other ethnic groups. Several participants described their cultural transmission practices through travelling to Morocco:

*"I like going to Morocco; we went there, both of us, in January 2011. My family and I loved everything. I thought it was a good idea because my daughter discovered the behavior of the other girls in Morocco. I know other parents who go to Morocco with their children to spend the holidays under other circumstances. I think this is the best solution for our children to discover the reality of Moroccan values" (FG 30).*

### **Cultural Transmission Strategy Five: Monitoring to Perceive Host Society as a Threat**

The fifth strategy entails the parents' attempt to control the living environment of their children, which includes establishing guidelines around behavior and work ethic, as well as a requirement of religious practices. Monitoring the children's behavior in the environment of the host country protects the second generation from unwanted influences; and ensures the conformity to the religious practice from the country of origin. The motivation for this high level of monitoring is that parents perceive many aspects of the host culture as a threat, if not a hazard, to their children. Parent participants listed things such as alcohol use, consumption of meat products, girls interaction with boys, and other perceived liberal practices as threats to their children's preservation of cultural identity in Muslim context. The aspect of perceived threats from host country has to be taken into consideration by social workers' intervention with the subject populations. It is important that practitioners understand and respect the context of values and priorities in Muslim families. It is vital for practitioners to consider the cultural values of Moroccan immigrants in Canada, instead of imposing Western values on them, which may conflict with their own and cause confusion. Promoting knowledge and understanding of the host culture's traditions is suggested for effective intervention. Practitioners may outline that Canada, unlike European societies, is not a threat to preservation of cultural identities, but rather a multicultural society.

### **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

This article proposed that social work practice with Muslim Moroccan immigrant parents in Québec, but also, in other Western and secularly oriented host societies, should be informed more strongly within a cultural, religious and social sensitivity. Through an analysis of the strategies shared in the author's study, it is possible to conclude how Moroccan immigrant parents render several issues as vital within the cultural transmission process during childrearing. Along with the literature gap, the increase in Muslim families in Québec reinforce the need for additional research on this particular visible minority, and for stronger social services focused on the community and families (McAndrew, 2010). This article provides a foundation for further work based on this topic.

Our analysis surfaced five main strategies which discussed and analysed various methods for transmitting culture, religion and ethnicity values such respectively, cultural transmission within the family; cultural and religious values and essential during cultural transmission; ensuring that children attend Muslim schools; embark on regular trips to Morocco; and maintain close and rigid





relationships with children. Given the centralities of the social work profession, social workers are well positioned to adopt an analysis and deeper understanding of these strategies in order to enrich their practice frameworks and create more inclusive and knowledgeable support, interventions and strategies for Muslim Moroccan parents and their children. Childrearing and cultural transmission are clearly essential processes within the lives of the community, and cannot be separated with their overall experiences in their host cultures. Recognizing a need for specialized knowledge and skills in this particular practice, might render social workers more effective in collaborating with the parents and their own strategies.

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