Title	Culture and parenting: Polish migrant parents' perspectives on how culture shapes their parenting in a culturally diverse Irish neighbourhood
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Publication Date	2023-05-26
Publication Information	Kealy, Carmen, & Devaney, Carmel. (2023). Culture and parenting: Polish migrant parents' perspectives on how culture shapes their parenting in a culturally diverse Irish neighbourhood. Journal of Family Studies, 1-19. doi: 10.1080/13229400.2023.2216184
Publisher	Taylor and Francis
Link to publisher's version	https://doi.org/10.1080/13229400.2023.2216184
Item record	http://hdl.handle.net/10379/17791
DOI	http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13229400.2023.2216184

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Published online: 26 May 2023.

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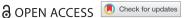
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ABSTRACT

While it is now widely acknowledged that child-rearing practices vary culturally, there has been little research or consideration on how cultural difference is experienced by Polish immigrant parents in Ireland. This paper reflects on how culture is experienced by migrant parents and shapes Polish migrant parenting in the Irish context. It draws on findings from a qualitative study which elicited Polish migrant parents' perspectives on the norms that shape parenting and their parental experiences, while residing in a culturally diverse neighbourhood in Ireland. Findings highlight that no single theoretical framework accurately captures Polish migrant parenting, which is a complex, multidimensional and dynamic phenomenon. Instead, insight is required into migration experiences, the influence of childhood, family relationships and obligations, as well as employment and parenting styles, all of which are underpinned by specific cultural norms and values, to better understand parental challenges in the adaptation to their post migration environment.

Introduction

Recognizing culture as an integral part of any society, it has been argued that parenting takes place within socio-cultural as well as individual family contexts and is comprised of different beliefs and value systems (Le et al., 2008). Furthermore, parenting practices vary cross-culturally with different interpretations of appropriate parenting (Azar & Cote, 2002). This results in a need for the cultural investigation of parenting, which includes the exploration of culture-specific beliefs and behaviours that guide how parents care for their children and enable the comparison of similarities and differences (Bornstein, 2012).

Previously a country of net emigration until the 1990s, immigration rather suddenly transformed the cultural landscape of Ireland as an unprecedented level of diversity was experienced as 'communities of people from all over the world have come to call Ireland their home' (McGarry, 2012, p. 1). According to the most recent statistics available

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(2016), there are 535,475 non-Irish nationals living in Ireland, accounting for 11.6% of the overall population. Non-Irish nationals are almost evenly split by gender with close to 50% aged between 25 and 42. Preliminary data from the 2022 census suggests all counties in Ireland experienced an increase in net migration over the past 6 years. Data on Accession State migrants (2016) revealed a decline in family households without children (from 10,751 to 7630) while the number of families with children increased from 20,830 to 27,425. According to Census 2016 data, 122,515 of non-Irish nationals are Polish and 45,292 households in Ireland are headed by a Polish national. 22.3% of Polish nationals are aged 21 or less, while the proportion aged 0–5 halved with the number of Polish children from 11,592 in 2011 to 5392 in 2016 due to an increase in the number of children of Polish parents classified as dual-Irish (CSO, 2016).

Child-rearing practices vary in different cultures (Garcia Coll, 1990; Azar & Cote, 2002; Le et al., 2008; Bornstein, 2012), yet Irish social science research has arguably con-tributed little to explaining how cultural differences are experienced by the diverse cohort of Ireland's immigrant parents. As Polish nationals are the largest non-Irish group in Ireland (2.6%) and predominately aged between 25 and 42, the most common age for family formation (Röder et al., 2014) their experience of parenting is interesting. First-hand expressions of Polish migrant parents' perspectives on the norms that shape their parenting, and their parental experiences provide valuable insights which can inform future social policy and appropriate support service provision.

This paper is based on findings from a qualitative study which elicited Polish migrant parents' perspectives on the norms that shape parenting and their parental experiences, while residing in a culturally diverse neighbourhood in the West of Ireland. Underpinned by theoretical perspectives on parenting and culture as well as literature on Polish parents and migration, the paper highlights that no single theoretical framework accurately cap-tures Polish migrant parenting as parenting is a multidimensional and dynamic con-struct. It is important to recognize that in the migration context, we need to understand the interplay of the role of employment, family relationships and obligations, childhood experiences and parenting styles. There are challenges to adaptation as parents are not only bound by structures inclusive of specific cultural norms and values of their post migration environment but also those of their home country.

Theoretical perspectives on parenting and culture

Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1986) made several contributions to understanding the context in which human development occurs. Originally proposing the ecological model, which consists of four interrelated structures (micro, meso, exo and macro) and emphasized the multiple dimensions, levels and complexity of human life, his subsequent revisions acknowledged that the individual was overlooked in earlier work and that biological as well as genetic aspects of the individual are relevant in human development (Bronfen-brenner & Ceci, 1994). He proposed the bioecological model as a lifespan approach to development, emphasizing the importance of understanding bi-directional influences between individuals and their surrounding environmental contexts. Of fundamental sig-nificance to this model was the shift from a focus on the environment (exo and macro) to a focus on proximal processes (micro and meso) which conceptualized the interaction between a child and their immediate environment, especially the parent–child

relationship (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Further, he suggested that children's outcomes can be affected by a great number of social factors that interact with parenting. This highlighted that parenting/parenting styles do not only occur within a unique context that are specific to individual parent–child relationships but also within a broader context of family (including dimensions of kin relationships and obligations as well as the role of grandparents), community, society (including employment opportunities) and culture (i.e. cultural norms and values) (Jack, 2000).

Mistry et al. (2003) criticized Bronfenbrenner's ecological model for its tendency to treat culture and context as synonymous. They opposed the view that culture, situated in the macrosystem, was one of multiple systems in the model, 'operationalised as separate from the individual developmental outcomes with which it interacts' (p. 236). Instead, they suggested considering culture as more proximal to child development and parenting as it was believed to permeate all layers of the ecological model, including dimensions of interest for this paper.

Research by Belsky (1984) explored factors that govern 'competent parental functioning' and indicated individual differences of parental functioning. His model, 'Determinants of Parenting', proposed that child development can be predicted by three core factors that directly or indirectly determine parenting. These include (a) the attributes of children; (b) the developmental history of parents and their own psychological make-up; and (c) the broader social context in which parents and this relationship are embedded. Of relevance to this paper is the model's focus on social-contextual factors and forces that shape parenting, presuming that parental functioning is multiply determined (Belsky, 2014). Calling attention to the role of one's own childhood in shaping parenting, for instance, Belsky suggested that both harsh and supportive parenting tend to be transmitted inter-generationally. Further, he proposed that parents' personality shapes parenting by influencing parental emotions as well as the attributions they make about the causes of child behaviour. He argued that processes are potentially a product of how parents were raised by their own parents. In terms of marital processes, it was said that 'their association with child functioning may be direct and unmediated but also derive from the effect of marriage on parenting' (Belsky, 2014, p. 3). Belsky concluded that current research 'warns against general conclusions drawn regarding social-contextual forces shaping parental behaviour as individuals vary in their susceptibility to environmental effects' (2014, p. 3), which include migration experiences.

The idea of parenting as a multidimensional and dynamic construct was also supported by Zheng et al. (2017) in their investigation of different parenting patterns and child outcomes. They criticized previous research that assessed parenting with a variable-oriented approach which assumes 'associations among parenting variables with child outcomes to be the same across all individuals' (p. 1). Instead, the authors suggested that parenting dimensions, such as parenting style do not stand alone but interact with other dimensions, including those of interest for this paper in a 'complex and transactional system' (p. 3). To capture similarities among parents and examine associations of different parenting patterns with child outcomes, they proposed a person-orientated approach which takes a holistic view towards the multi-faceted dimensions of parenting and helps identify unique components of parenting that interactively predict child outcomes (see also Iruka et al., 2018).

Harkness and Super (1995) suggested that studies of culture and parenting within several different disciplinary paradigms share three common assumptions. First, there

is a recognition of the importance of settings for both parents and children as they not only define the variables of experience, but also incorporate important cultural meanings. Harkness and Super proposed that parents choose from a range of available possibilities to create settings of development for their children. They argued that this process is on-going and renegotiated in response to the changing needs of both parents and children as well as the changing environment (Harkness and Super 1995). Second, key to understanding parents' cultural construction of a child's life and its development are the activities that routinely take place within different settings. Harkness and Super suggested that activities, routines, or cultural practices involved in the care and rearing of children represent cultural themes of importance to parents. Settings and activities were argued to have inherent meaning for particular cultural groups and culturally shared ideas, or images are expressed in a variety of contexts. Finally, parenting was said to be mediated not only by the cultural experiences of parents themselves but also by characteristics and experiences of individual children (Harkness and Super 1995).

In order to investigate, how culture influences parenting, child development and outcomes, Super and Harkness (1986) proposed the 'cultural niche' model. The model consists of three interrelated subsystems: the physical and social settings in which the child lives; the culturally regulated customs and practices of childcare and child-rearing; and the psychology of the caretakers, including parental ethnotheories (Bennett & Grimley, 2001). The culturally influenced physical environment that parents provide for children may contribute to differences in child development and outcomes. Customs of child-rearing include common practices that are taken for granted within a culture. Further, 'parental ethnographies', which refer to the parent's psychology, include beliefs and values that are culturally constructed and relate to parenting as well as childhood (Hoghughi & Long, 2004).

While Bronfenbrenner's ecological model provides a useful framework in which to consider parenting issues in different contexts, Super and Harkness' model of the developmental niche focuses more specifically on the importance of cultural context in understanding parenting (Bennett & Grimley, 2001). The subsystem of ethnotheories or belief systems, which are often not explicitly expressed or consistent, come to the forefront, when parents confront choices.

The combination of key ideas of Super and Harkness (1986, 1995), Belsky (2014) and Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1986, 1994, 2006), arguably provides a more detailed and comprehensive framework of parenting as it accounts for the complexity of the individual parent and context but also the importance of culture as proximal to the parenting experience. However, it assumes a relatively stable cultural context, which ignores social transformations such as migration.

Literature on Polish parents and migration

Recent years have seen an increased academic interest in Polish migrant families and their experiences of settling into their Western European host countries, particularly Scandinavia, the United Kingdom (UK) and Ireland. Polish nationals are the biggest economic migrant group across Europe, frequently migrating with their families which has multiple implications (Kędra et al., 2021). Relevant to the topic of culture and parenting and specific to the focus of this paper on Polish migrant parenting is a review

of aspects related to family life such as employment, family relationships and obligations and childhood, as well as parenting style in the context of migration.

Employment

Bobek et al. (2018) in their study on Polish migrant workers argued that while better employment opportunities along with higher earnings attract many Polish nationals, financial motivation is not the only reason for migration. Other factors include better career prospects as well as the experience of something new. Findings further suggested that there was a wider choice of employment available (p. 172) and that Polish migrants were frequently willing to accept work at the bottom of the structure on a short-term basis (p. 177) and that financial reward was not always decisive in their employment choice, as the Irish 'social atmosphere' was better, and workers experienced lower levels of everyday stress (p. 176). Furthermore, Pustułka and Ślusarczyk (2016a) suggest relocating to a different welfare and work macro-regime impacts the micro social sphere of decisions within a family (p. 72). Abendroth and Den Dulk's research shows how a line is often drawn between the Scandinavian countries, while 'in other European countries work-life balance support is seen as a private responsibility, with people depending mainly on help from relatives or friends' (2011, p. 235). The latter is clearly the case in Poland (Pustułka & Ślusarczyk, 2016a, p. 76). The Polish post-communist welfare in transition seems to be based on the two non-compliant norms: an economic necessity for dual-earner model, and a cultural superiority of traditional gender roles. In essence, '[p]ost-communist states encourage dual careers but give families scant support' (Żadkowska et al., 2016, p. 77). For working women, workplace observations elicited renegotiations at home, but also eradicated the dilemma of whether it makes sense for them to work at all. This pertains to the common situation when the entire mother's salary was spent on childcare in Poland, thus rendering being at work, away from a child, questionable.

Family and family obligations

Polish survey data from Aspiracje Polaków w latach ('Aspirations of Poles in 1998, 2008, 2018') repeatedly highlight the importance of family life in Poland. Aspirations related to personal, or family matters dominate over career ambitions or financial goals with an increase from 53% in 1998 to 64% in 2018 (Czarnecka, 2019).

Pustułka and Ślusarczyk (2016b) highlight how the lives of transnational family members are embedded in managing ties and kin relationships beyond borders with an obligation to maintain strong intergenerational ties and cherish kinship relationships (Ignatowicz, 2011). White (2011) and Botterill (2014) observed the important role of family considerations in planning an eventual return to Poland, with the sacrifice of family viewed by many Polish individuals as most challenging consequence of EU mobility.

Given the opportunities and constraints of the places of origin and residence, migrants' families have to come up with viable caring and living arrangements and must come to terms with the fact that in their care culture of origin, these solutions may not seem legitimate (cf. Kofman, 2012, p. 147). Kordasiewicz et al. (2018) describe a new perspective on care, 'ethnomorality', which entails the interplay between culturally

established obligations negotiated in the transnational context and background factors (family relations, migration regimes and others) and care as a multi-faceted complex social phenomenon, entailing both emotional and material (instrumental) aspects (p. 76). They argue that care is a socially constructed social bond. Obligations to family in Poland was investigated by Krzyżowski and Mucha (2014). In their assessment of caregiving of Polish migrants in Iceland and their elderly parents in Poland, the authors argued that.

> the culturally determined necessity of the personal fulfilment of children's obligations to care for older parents, including personal care and practical household help, is a long-lasting element of the Polish normative system, strengthened by the weakness of the institutional support system. (p. 22)

Their study found that migrants (especially women) make use of return visits to Poland to care for their parents, thus fulfilling intergenerational obligations in the eyes of non-migrating family members and the local community in Poland. In addition, Polish migrants frequently visit parents with their own children to facilitate more time spent with their grandparents, who use the opportunity to directly teach them about their Polish cultural heritage.

Parenting style

A review on historical parenting styles and child-rearing practices in Poland suggested viewing Polish parenting from the perspective of citizens' perception of the Polish nation (Ryndyk & Johannessen, 2015). The nation is frequently conceptualized as a 'mother' among Poland's citizens, with the icon of 'Our Lady of Częstochowa referred to as "Queen and Protector of Poland" with significant implications for the image of motherhood in Poland' (Ostrowska, 2004). The ideal 'Polish Mother' was to embody a woman with absolute devotion to her family, strong enough to care for the family on her own, and without 'a meaningful life of her own' (Reading, 1992). Within the communist era, the parent–child relationship was characterized by a strong bond between the mother and child, whereas attachments were supposed to be limited, if not entirely absent, in father–child relationships (Wejnert & Djumabaeva, 2005). Since 1989 however, the involvement and roles of fathers have undergone significant changes due to a gradually more positive valuing of Western models of fatherhood (Wejnert & Djumabaeva, 2005). While changes in the traditional division of domestic labour occur slowly, Titkow and Duch (2004) argued that it is still predominately performed by mothers. In the migration context, the role of host country settings, including its labour market demands cannot be ignored. Research has shown that considerable constraints were faced in terms of spending enough time with families, as well as gaining access to affordable childcare (Kilkey et al., 2014). Challenges were particularly notable for dual-earner families. Thus, it was suggested that traditional parenting styles and gender roles were not necessarily a cultural indication but rather a reflection of an adaptation to the host country's structures (Ryndyk & Johannessen, 2015). Levitt and Jaworsky (2007) and Pustułka and Ślusarczyk (2016) explain how mothers as providers and members of households/families/kinship structures receive conflicting messages from the public and the private spheres of both the homeland and the new country, which they must somehow reconcile.

Lack of extended family support has been identified as an issue for migrant families, and Polish migrants frequently employed a so-called transnational care strategy that saw grandmothers come from Poland to look after their grandchildren for short and also longer periods of time (Kilkey et al., 2014). This finding was partly supported in an Irish study by Bojarczuk and Mühlau (2018) who stated that support from grandparents is a common phenomenon but that this option is not available for a substantial number of migrant mothers. Highlighting the importance of family in the destination country for a variety of supports, the authors argued that although they provided a 'safety-net', particularly for childcare and emotional support, locally based friends and neighbours are actively involved in providing childcare support.

Methodology

In order to explore how culture shapes Polish migrants parenting and is experienced by these Polish migrant parents, qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analysed by means of manually applying the framework approach (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994). All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. The framework approach places emphasis on transparency of the researcher's interpretations of participants' experiences through five interconnected stages that guided the systematic analysis of data and allow the researcher to move back and forth, until a coherent account emerges:

Stage 1: Familiarization (this involves first cycle coding: *In-vivo* coding; Descriptive/ Open coding)

Stage 2: Identifying thematic framework (this stage includes second Cycle Coding: Focused Coding)

Stage 3: Indexing (Indexing data by applying framework to all interview transcripts)

Stage 4: Charting (Summarizing indexed data and display in chart form)

Stage 5: Mapping and Interpretation (Analytical memos)

The Ardaun-Roscam-Doughiska (ARD) neighbourhood, which lies on the east side of Galway city on the West of Ireland, was chosen as the study site. The area is most noteworthy for being both substantially diverse in terms of nationalities and cultures as well as consisting of a relatively young population. Home to over 33 nationalities (King, 2014), nearly half of all residents in Doughiska and an estimated 20% of residents in Ardaun and Roscam are foreign nationals, with the Polish community being the largest of the foreign national communities (1/3 of foreign national residents in ARD; CSO, 2016; Frecklington, 2019). Further, 29% of the area's residents is under the age of 18 compared to Galway City's 19% and the Irish State's 25% (CSO, 2016; Frecklington, 2019).

Previous research by Engling and Haase (2013) identified the area's proportion of lone parents to be significantly above the national average and amongst the highest in Galway City. In terms of social class composition, it was found that the area fell well below the national average with regard to professional classes, whereas the number of low-skilled workers was significantly above the national rate. Interestingly, third-level education was well above the nationally prevailing rate. In terms of language skills and unemployment, the most recent data suggests the requirement of language support for 49% of the ARD population. The unemployment rate which includes both retired and disabled residents stands at 8.3% and is above the city's (7.8%) as well as the Irish state's (7.9%)

average (CSO, 2016; Frecklington, 2019). FitzGerald et al.'s study (2016) identified multiple challenges for the area such as diversity and efforts to unify different cultures and ethnic background. The lack of integration as a result of low interaction between different cultural and ethnic group but also English language proficiency proved to be problematic.

The sample for this study consisted of 15 male and female caregivers of children aged 3 months to 11 years who reside in the ARD neighbourhood and came to Ireland between 7 and 14 years ago. Parent participants for this study originated from diverse locations across Poland and their ages ranged from 30 to 40 years. More than half of all parent participants were employed and had no extended family in close proximity. Research participants became parents in Ireland and were thus unable to compare the experience of parenting in Poland first-hand. Ethics approval for this study was obtained from the relevant University Research Ethics Committee and voluntary informed consent was provided by all participants. To prevent the disclosure of data that could be linked to participants' identity and thus compromise anonymity, pseudonyms were used. Throughout the article, literal quotes from participants are presented.

Research findings

The study found that in the first instance, ideas about the nature of parenting stem from childhood experiences of the relationship between family and the Polish state, which in turn informed how parents perceived the role and responsibilities of parents towards family. Parents described the importance of maintaining the household and fulfilling gender roles. This in turn was coupled with contextual factors' impact on and influence of cultural norms, such as employment, each playing a significant role in how parents perceived their role as parents.

Family life and employment

Money, better employment opportunities as well as improving lifestyles are attributed as key motivators for migration to Ireland. This was described as the result of the poor financial situation, lack of public welfare security and the difficulty of upward social mobility in Poland despite a strong Polish work ethic. Searching for a 'better life' led parents to migrate for financial reasons, seeking employment to gain financial security and improve their social status. The findings suggested that Polish parents in this study were reared in environments that reinforced the culture of a strong work ethic while also being concerned with a functioning family life.

Repeatedly referring to their own childhoods, the importance of paid labour to financially provide for the family was recalled. Further, families were concerned to keep a *clean*, *respectable and functioning* home. To lighten parental burden, and in particular their mothers', who were commonly employed as well as responsible for the home, parents spoke about having taken up household responsibilities as well as the care for younger siblings from a young age:

> My childhood suffered through that … I had to be responsible very quickly, because of the younger brothers … I just lost something that like. My mum was working always, she had her own business. My dad was always working, so obviously my sister and myself were the oldest ones. So, had to [help with household chores]. (P15)

> I have two younger sisters, so I'm the oldest, yeah. So I have to say, when I was 10, my youngest sister, she came to world and so I actually took my mother's part to care for her because, because she was working, you know. (P13)

> It is different, because … when my parents; there was so important the work. Food for kids … My parents was not talking to me too much. Not talking with me about problems … More, I go with problems to my sister. Now, is little different time …. Is more important the mental [wellbeing] of the kids. We are … talking more (P4)

While it was evident that the performance of home duties is still mainly assigned to mothers, nonetheless fathers took a more active role in dual-income families. With few exceptions, both mothers and fathers considered themselves caregivers with the responsibility of ensuring both the physical and emotional well-being of their children. In many cases, this was conjoined with a desire of both parents to provide financial security and gain access to opportunities that enhance their children's lives. The majority of participants highlighted that life in Ireland is 'easier' notwithstanding the high cost of childcare and rented accommodation. However, many expressed dissatisfactions with the lack of family time they experience now and the impact this has on their children.

> My daughter she started cry when he was leaving yesterday. She was like 'daddy, don't go, like we wanna, I wanna be together'. My daughter was kind of distressed. (P13)

Many parents repeatedly spoke about the women's need to negotiate between joining the workforce while spending the salary on childcare and staying at home to look after the children.

> I have to mind the little one and trying to be the best and do the, all food and everything, I'm trying to do on my own. Not easy. Actually, my maternity leave is finished. Yeah, I have to think about, I can't leave kids, too small, and I don't even want to leave them with someone else, so I have to wait few months. I don't know what I will do. I don't wanna go for social. Maybe I will find some part-time or something. When my boyfriend is off or something. No, I have to think and talk to him. (P7)

A small number of female participants spoke about the impact of work on their well-being, using expressions like *stressed*, *always tired* and *using all your energy*. About one third of participants engaged in shift work with their partners to avoid the need for formal childcare.

> My husband is sleeping upstairs; he had night shift. He is doing night shift now and I finished my night shift last night. Before, I was doing day shifts, which is the same thing. We have to work. There is no way other way. I have to say that it is not too bad. I'm lucky coz I don't have to hire any childcare or anything. There is no … way that I put my child to childcare, paying 12 h. (P13)

This arrangement helps to maximize financial gain, establish security and combat financial constraints which are heightened by the cost of childcare.

Family life and parenting

Family matters were considered private, and attempts were made to resolve issues within the family unit. Using terms such as 'personal' and 'protective', the following narratives summarizes what is considered to be key beliefs of Polish people on family matters.

'Oh, it's very personal'. 'Oh, they talk about my family'. 'This is my house; this is my rules; you don't really have to get involved and tell me what I should do'. 'This is my thing, my kingdom'. A little protective, yes. (P10)

In the majority of cases the need to invest time in their children was emphasized. While *being together* and *happy* were important elements for the facilitation of a close family bond, time spent with children also meant to get to know them better. Furthermore, the need to spend time away from everyday responsibilities to strengthen ties was proposed. There was a consensus that the ability to teach children, spend time with them as well as feelings of love and affection were the most positive aspects of parenting.

> The nice thing is just watching them growing and I don't know, watch them be happy with us. Everything actually. As long, I love, as long as they are healthy with us (P6)

> … sometimes … I leave all dishes and I do that at the end of the day … It's more important to colour with L., do something with her (P4)

To uphold a strong family unit, time spent with children was reported to be pivotal. Participant 2, for example, highlighted her need to be with her children and the discomfort she felt in being apart when on a holiday with her husband.

> We had a … situation when we went for the trip for 9 days. My daughter stayed with granny … After 3 days, it was so difficult for us … From that time, we said no more. All family. (P2)

All participants enjoyed spending time with their children which frequently involves fun activities.

> We love trips; so usually on Sunday, or Saturday, we are going around Ireland and we like to go and see places; so, we are trying to do like something fun. (P1)

Participants highlighted that there are many opportunities to work shift patterns in Galway city, which is helpful for sharing care obligations. However, shift work arrangements also brought change to gendered patterns of caregiving, which particularly mothers' struggle to accustom to. Two interesting cases below illustrate contrasting accounts which demonstrate the interplay of employment, migration experience, labour division between partners and the moral dimension of motherhood:

> Since I … work weekends, it's not too bad, because I'm here for kids … during the week … I focus on the kids now; … it's tough as well because we not together during weekend; but I'm here for them and I can pick up H. from school. I can do homework with her; I can do many things … Since I changed the shift, I think it was the best I could do … For the kids actually, so, it is not too bad. (P6)

> I get her ready for school, then her dad kind of takes over, kind of kills me sometimes because he does all the activities with her because I'm at work. (P15)

To achieve desired behaviours, most parents of older children agreed on the use of explanations and conversations with their children to clarify behavioural expectations. Further, removing electronic devices as form of discipline is regularly employed. Some parents, and in particular those with younger children up to the age of five, used outdoor activities, time out, grounding or extra chores to enforce rules.

Concerning gender differences in both discipline strategies as well as consistency in the enforcement of rules, some parents spoke about mothers adopting a 'softer' approach. In several cases, participants described agreeing with their partners, but some argued about appropriate measures of discipline.

> He is more strict than I am; let's say that he tells her that she is not getting something … That's another argument … I kind of don't have his back and I just … and I do differently. It's just because my parents were very very strict and I'm very much different. So, it sometimes causes argument between me and my husband. (P15)

In a minority of cases participants who parent alone agreed that they attempt to strike a balance between a 'soft' and 'firm' approach to discipline.

Findings also suggest a generational difference in Polish child-rearing, arguably through the influence of the host country but also a change in parenting globally. P6, for instance, compares her parenting approach to Irish parents, praising and expressing the wish to adopt some of their strategies with regard to rules and the way they communicate with their children:

> I think, Irish parents are good parents, because they have rules. I heard that many times. Kids usually sleep good. I don't know, how they do it. Maybe … the way they talk to their kids. Explaining or … how nice they are to them. That's what I like. I would like that more, like myself. (P6)

Some parents revealed how parenting has changed over time, with a move towards an emphasis on safety, communication and the expression of affection towards children. Most participants illustrated their attempt to depart from their parents' methods of parenting, while a small number described following their own parents' approach. This finding was also observed when exploring the transmission of values.

> I was raised in 80's and 90's in Poland and it was totally different time … I remember my childhood and my parents. They've been so relaxed … me and my friends and other kids from apartment buildings … We were playing outside like whole day. We had a key on our neck. Our parents … if we went for half a day, they didn't know, where we are … Here today, it's like no way … It's like totally different time. It's not safe … (P1)

> I think it's different now because … parents show … love … more than in the past, when we were young … My parents were not talking to me the same way I'm talking to my kids. So nice and I never had so many nice words … I wasn't on my father's knees so often like H. is on R.'s. It's different; we are hugging, we are affectionate. We are talking about feelings, love. I had no such conversation with my parents in the past. That's much much different now … I think that wasn't only them. It was the time, changing like, is. (P6)

> Is good to see that our way of be parent is good for them … They are not scared; they are open to talk about everything. They are not afraid to talk; even if she dropped something … we try to tell her 'Oh, nothing happened'. (P3)

While the narratives provided display most participants' inclination to deviate from their parent's ways of child-rearing, some interviewees expressed the wish to follow their parents' approach.

> My parents were very good parents, you know. My father is still alive, so I wish to be like them. As a mother, I wish to be like my mum; definitely you know. (P14)

Relating to the values parents endeavoured to impart, independence featured strongly. Accounts of autonomy permeated not only the narratives of participants with older children but also those with young children and children with a disability. In the discussion of moral responsibilities towards 'others', politeness, tolerance, and kindness were considered important.

In terms of Polish customs, some parents described in detail Christian customs of Christmas and Easter festivities which emphasize shared meals and family time. However, festivities were primarily family-centred rather than religious:

> I see it more … things like Easter, Christmas as … family centred rather than religious, strictly … I always think of the family thing. Rather than religious. Now we go, for Easter, we go to the church and do the blessing; so, we do it. But still, I think more of a family tradition than the strict … it's like that. (P8)

The provision of opportunities which were not available to them in their own childhoods stood at the fore of parental aspirations for their children:

> Everyone has their own dreams … The same old story with the piano. I really wanted but my parents never had enough money to send me for lessons so now I'm trying to do. (P7)

In order to assist parents engaging in employment as well as helping in the upkeep of the household and responsibilities towards their children, all parents described that extended family is frequently called upon for support. While some parents have access to this type of support by family, and described the benefits of this, others miss extended family and lack grandparents' support.

Most parents described in some form or other the significance they place on relatives and their role in child-rearing. To establish or keep connections between children and family in Poland, the transmission of the Polish language was perceived as essential. There was also consensus that one is obliged to take care of one's own parents.

Many parents indicated a close bond with their extended family and try to stay close to their relatives. Visits and the use of technology were described as useful resources to support contact with family in Poland. Nonetheless, participants emphasized the difficulty of preserving strong ties despite regular communication.

Discussion

This research highlights how parents tried to foster a strong and positive parent–child relationship to transmit the value of family as a source of security while at the same time opting for shared responsibility for providing childcare and income. Parental challenges arose in the attempt to balance both family time to maintain a close bond, and the obligations of employment. Parents experienced the impact of Irish macro and exo (i.e. formal and informal social structures) level systems in these endeavours. Because they are migrant workers, with a lack of recognition of their previous education, many parents found themselves struggling financially. This was despite Ireland's economic opportunities and the parental perception that life was easier in Ireland than in Poland. The struggle between financially supporting the family as well as providing sufficient care towards their children was most notable for mothers, who frequently spoke about a negative impact on their mental health. This study suggested that Polish parents consider

themselves to share egalitarian values, but that mothers appear to suffer a heavier burden of duty. Most parents in this study were proponents of equality concerning the division of labour. However, the interplay of their migration experience, labour market opportunities as well as high childcare costs, frequently led to difficulty in implementing this commitment to equality. This resulted in parents' maintaining traditional roles in their division of labour. This research supports previous literature on migrant parents' employment and lower wages (2018), work-family conflict (Roman & Cortina, 2016) and the argument that employment arrangements have a negative effect on family time and individual well-being (Presser, 2003). Interestingly, parents from this study were reared in a culture that places strong emphasis on a good work ethic maintained by all, with evidence showing that Polish mothers always struggled with dual responsibilities. However, the predominately female reporting of stress and depression in this study suggests that Polish mothers in the migration context are extremely concerned about the negative impact of their employment on their children's emotional well-being and the importance to adapt to normative standards of what constitutes 'a good parent'.

Children in Poland were previously argued to serve as instruments to their parents' needs and plans rather than being viewed as individuals with their own rights (Jerschina, 1991). However, this paper emphasizes that Polish parents valued and strived to nurture a close and intimate bond with their children, which, according to many, best flourishes through open communication and emotional affection, but requires sustained time investment (Zheng et al., 2017). Their approach and perspective differed from that of their own parents as many described that their childhood was marked by a close family bond but lack of parental affection, communication and time commitment. This paper highlights how participants followed the Western trend of intimacy and communication with their children (Dill, 2014), which also serves to reinforce the value of family.

It was evident that parents in this study experienced an upbringing where the proximity of culture and associated norms was felt in the immediate and also wider context of parenting. This in turn shaped how parents now perceive their role as parents. However, this paper suggests that these cultural norms were not stable. Child-rearing in the post migration context consisted of Polish parents negotiating between cultural ideas about parenting, which stem from their own childhood ecologies, and competing belief systems in their immediate environment as well as wider context. For example, Polish norms (similar to Irish norms, Fahey, 2014) such as familial obligation, privacy, work ethic and the importance of the transmission of culture were strongly retained, while parents tried to abolish the traditional division of labour. Maintaining a good Polish work ethic was important for the majority of parents but posed challenges, particularly for women who were torn between childcare and financially contributing to the family. While the female struggle was particularly evident, Polish migrant mothers' narratives suggest a strong ethic of self-sufficiency with the aim of being neither dependent on state benefits nor formal childcare support. Further, parents cultivated affection, communication and independence as well as respect for autonomy, all of which are cultural norms arguably more prominent in Western parenting (Dill, 2014).

In the most proximal context of child-rearing evidence suggested challenges for authoritative parenting. Parents in this study were strong proponents of authoritative

parenting, but challenges were observed in terms of parental gender and assigned parenting roles as well as parenting styles among Polish parents. Most parents fulfilled their traditional functions as assigned by gender. Tensions were observed, where parents failed to execute their agreed role adequately. Single mothers described performing both maternal as well as paternal functions, often finding it difficult to maintain the right balance due to motherly agreeability and nurture coming more naturally to women (Brody & Hall, 2000).

Within the family, challenges were evident for both the parent-parent relationship and intergenerational relationships. They occurred as a result of a shift from solely focusing on familial functioning to an emphasis on familial transaction. Previous research defined the transactional perspective of family as intimates who through emotional ties generate family identity, sharing history as well as future (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2004). In addition, parents tried to replace the authoritarian and permissive parenting styles of their own childhoods by adopting authoritative parenting and a positive emotional climate of child-rearing (Darling & Steinberg, 1993; Baumrind, 1991), which parents believed was the norm in their host country. This often led to a sense of disharmony or 'cultural dissonance' (Macdonald, 1998) in the midst of change in their cultural environment. Cultural dissonance was evident where parental adaption to the parenting styles of their new environment did not match that of their partner as well as at an intergenerational level where grandparents continued to reinforce previously held Polish norms. While overall findings support the idea that one's own childhood plays a part in shaping parenting, the study for the most part disagrees with Belsky's (1984) suggestion that both harsh and supportive parenting are transmitted intergenerationally. Only a small number of parents described that their parenting reflected the parenting styles of their own parents. Instead, evidence suggests that most parents only fell back on traditional strategies of the past, when newly acquired ones failed.

Evidence of the interplay between family, the Polish state and employment, all of which impacted child-rearing, suggested that parenting did not solely occur within the parent–child relationship but also within a broader context (see also Jack, 2000). Thus, the findings support Bronfenbrenner's ecological model and the notion that childhood and parenting dimensions do not stand alone but interact, are interrelated as well as interdependent with other dimensions of the ecological system. Further, by finding that parents repeatedly referred to their own upbringing when describing their approach to child-rearing, the study supports Belsky's argument that one's own childhood has an impact on parenting.

In terms of how culture shapes parenting norms, the evidence supports Mistry et al.'s (2003) critique of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model for its 'tendency to treat culture and context as synonymous and to have culture situated in the macrosystem' (p. 236). The study found that cultural norms governed both the parent–child relationship as well as contextual factors, which impacted on child-rearing.

Conclusion

Cultural norms that shape how Polish parents perceive their role as parents initially stem from their own childhood ecologies in Poland. Post migration, practices are mediated by competing belief systems both within the family as well as those of their host country.

Norms are not stable, suggesting that parents negotiate norms, while bound to structures of both home and host country. Intra-group differences are the result of different circumstances which determine the adaptation to the post migration environment as well as differences prior to migration. This paper supports the view that parenting is a multidimensional and dynamic construct, shaped by the environment within which it occurs. However, it has also highlighted the need to recognize that in the migration context, there are challenges to adaptation as parents are not only bound by structures of their post migration environment but also those of their home country. A framework that incorporates an understanding of other cultures' parenting as well as the role of a new context in shaping the parenting of immigrants is recommended for theorists in the area of parenting and culture. Furthermore, alongside culture, migrant parenting can be considered as an adaptive process shaped by a multitude of contextual factors. Parenting differences not only occur between migrant and mainstream groups, but also within groups, highlighting that there is no singular parenting experience.

The paper also provides some useful recommendations for future social policy and social support service provision. Culture-specific norms and values have a significant impact on how parents perceive their role as parents and an acknowledgement that culture is proximal rather than separate from children's development and the parenting experience is suggested as a key underpinning principle. While policy makers and support service providers adopt an ecological perspective, which highlights that parenting not only occurs within the unique context that is specific to individual parent–child relationships but also within a broader context of family, community and society, policy and services aimed at Polish families ought to consider that their parenting occurs both within the context of their host as well as home countries. Increased cultural competence with respect to Polish culture-specific norms and values around employment, family relationships and obligations as well as parenting style would improve the service provider's response to Polish parents. However, as the process of parental adaptation is complex and fluid, a one-size-fits-all approach will not suffice, highlighting the need for individual needs assessment and associated responses.

Existing policy and service provision aimed at migrants largely focuses on their integration into Irish society and mainstream culture as well as on attributes associated with low socio-economic status. While it was evident that Polish families are frequently in low-income jobs and struggle with childcare and high rental costs, there is a Polish cultural stigma around welfare dependency and formal assistance which needs to be acknowledged as it may disguise actual needs for support.

As previously identified by FitzGerald et al.'s study (2016), the authors agree that the culturally diverse nature of the ARD neighbourhood and lack of 'local' residents poses challenges in terms of integration and transfer of values and behaviours. Social policy and service provision thus need to be mindful of limited exposure to the 'receiving society' when planning support strategies.

Having focused specifically on the perspectives of Polish migrant parents concerning child-rearing in a culturally diverse neighbourhood in Ireland, there is a need for similar research to be conducted for other migrant groups. Analysing similarities and differences between groups would assist in developing appropriate policies and services that better support migrant parents.

Limitations

Results from the sampling technique employed are a limitation as it generated a sample profile of participants who were in similar positions with regard to economic status and good English language proficiency. The use of a small sample size cannot produce findings that are generalizable to the Polish population as a whole. However, the gained insight into an area that lacks research in the Republic of Ireland can be used as a pathway for future research as suggested.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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