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New Migrant Parents

Understanding the experiences and attitudes of new migrant parents



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Executive Summary

This research aims to better understand the parenting practices of new migrants in Auckland's North Shore communities. Its primary use is to assist Whānau Marama Parenting, a parenting programme provider in Glenfield, Auckland to understand whether they are meeting the needs of this group in terms of culturally appropriate information, support, and positive parenting skills.

The key insights from this research are:

- 1** One of the key aims of this project was to understand the different methods of discipline used by new migrant parents and their understanding about Aotearoa New Zealand legislation regarding physical discipline. Most migrant parents we talked to use positive methods of discipline.



- 2** The qualities in their children most prized by the migrant parents we spoke to are obedience, respect, politeness and help around the house. They sometimes find it difficult to deal with behaviours that don't reflect these qualities.



- 3** There is a widely held perception among the migrant parents we talked to that the typical parent in Aotearoa New Zealand is positive and loving. For many, this is a good fit with their own parenting practices and aspirations.



- 4** Aotearoa New Zealand means "freedom" and "independence" for children. For the migrant parents we interviewed, this is both aspirational and problematic.



- 5** Many of the parents we spoke with have adopted a parenting style which is different to their own parents. This appears to be both a generational and cultural response to different parenting values.



- 6** Most of the parents we spoke to have at least one person they can turn to when they need help or information about parenting. There are, however, a small but significant minority who are isolated and struggling.



- 7** Many of the parents we interviewed struggle to understand the Aotearoa New Zealand education system and as a result some question the value of educating their children in Aotearoa New Zealand.

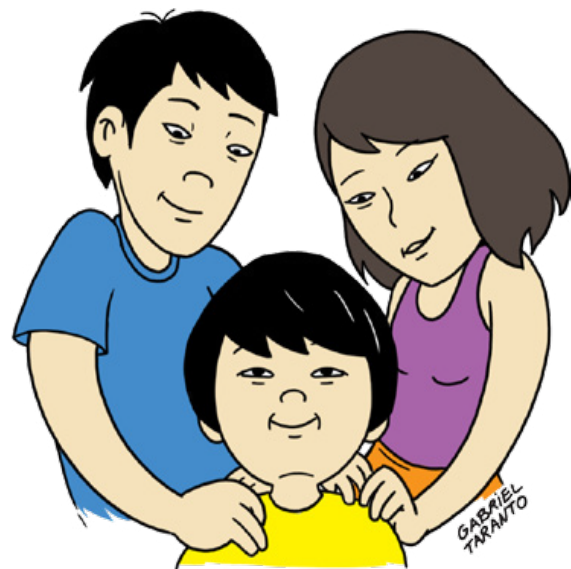


Introduction

Moving countries can bring joy and new opportunities. It can also be stressful. Once the immediate issues of housing, banking, and children's education have been dealt with, families need to deal with less obvious stressors associated with settling in such as making new social support networks, navigating differences in the education system, directing children's development in a new, unfamiliar context and learning about and bridging new cultures. The changes in patterns of normal family life and children's development for new migrants can be particularly stressful and challenging.¹

In her research on parenting patterns in first and second generation Korean-Kiwis, ('Kowis'), Hyeun Kim found that first generation migrants from Korea generally struggled with language and culture in Aotearoa New Zealand and were therefore unlikely to have had sufficient understanding and knowledge to integrate local ways of parenting into their own practices.² Moreover, her study participants described receiving conflicting advice on parenting and found it challenging to select what was right for them. They said there was little or no guidance to meet their unique needs while they were struggling with issues of conflicting advice based on cultural misunderstanding. Kim's study recommended the provision of culturally appropriate parenting programmes in partnership between professionals within the Korean migrant community and Aotearoa New Zealand organisations, better training and resources for New Zealand professionals to meet the needs of first generation migrants, and better programmes and resources to aid migrants' integration into their new communities.

Whānau Mārama Parenting has been delivering parenting courses on Auckland's North Shore since 2011. Approximately 46% of their parenting programme attendees identify as "Asian", with the majority being from Korea and China. This research is aimed at assisting Whānau Marama Parenting to better understand migrant families' cultural parenting practices to see if they are meeting the needs of this group in terms of culturally appropriate information, support, and positive parenting skills. The findings from this research will be incorporated into Whānau Marama Parenting programmes, and these programmes will then be evaluated to ascertain their effectiveness in meeting the needs of migrant families.³



¹ Dixon et al., (2010) "Family Resilience: The Settlement Experience for Asian Immigrant Families in New Zealand."

² Kim, H. (2013) Parenting Patterns of '1.5 Generation Kowis' In New Zealand: "Take Best Of Both Worlds To Raise The Next Generation" New Zealand Journal of Asian Studies 15, 2

³ This is phase two of this research, which will be conducted in mid to late 2018.

About the research

Research method

This project was a research collaboration between Whānau Marama Parenting, Point Research and a team of 21 volunteer peer-to-peer interviewers⁴ from new migrant communities on Auckland's North Shore.

Each collaborative partner brought their own strengths and skills to the project i.e.

- Whānau Marama parenting has extensive links to the North Shore new migrant community, and a committed volunteer base. They were responsible for administering the project and coordinating the volunteer team and provided the venue for training and insight mining.
- Point Research was able to design the research, navigate the ethics process, and lead the volunteer training, insight mining and reporting processes.
- Volunteer interviewers brought their own strengths and skills, including the ability to converse in the language of those they were interviewing, and their new migrant networks.

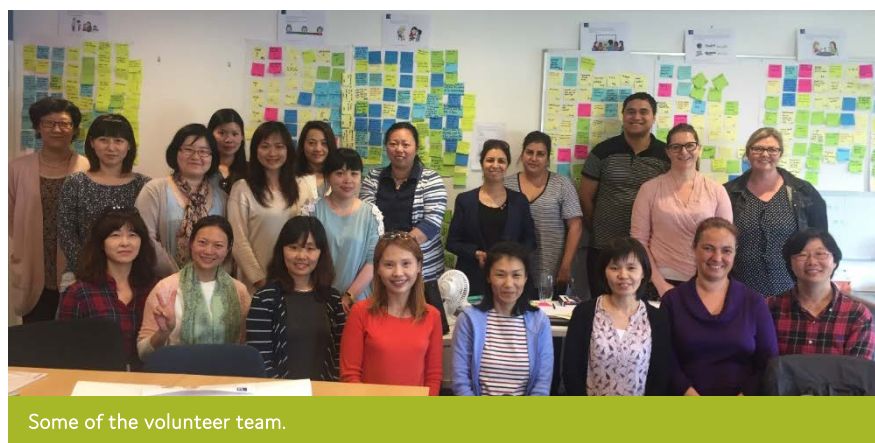
All volunteers participated in a one-day training workshop, which covered the basics of empathy interviewing such as establishing trust and building rapport, active listening, responses, reactions and restatements as well as an introduction to research ethics and information on what to do in the event of disclosure.

A volunteer coordinator from Whānau Marama Parenting was available throughout the project to assist volunteers with any queries, issues or questions. Both interviewers and interviewees had access to a counsellor if this was required.

Each volunteer interviewed between one and three new migrants from their personal and/or professional networks. Interviewees were required to be parents, and to have been in Aotearoa New Zealand for five years or less).

Data were recorded in an interview booklet in the language, and then translated and transferred onto an insight mining worksheet.

Project documentation, such as consent forms, interview guides and participant information sheets were translated where necessary.



⁴ All volunteer interviewers, and interviewees, were given koha in recognition of their time spent on this project.



Data were collected using insight mining worksheets and were then colour coded and transferred to post it notes. The interview team, along with Point Research and Whānau Marama Parenting, then generated key insights from the data using an inductive approach. Once this was done, the post it notes were then transferred to an excel spreadsheet which was coded to help further narrow down themes specific to each question.

Project ethics

One of the key aims of this project was to understand the different methods of discipline used by new migrant parents and their understanding about New Zealand legislation regarding physical discipline. Engaging new migrant parents in this research project meant there were several ethical issues that needed to be considered. Some new migrant families speak little to no English and we were mindful that some may have not been aware of New Zealand legislation around child abuse and neglect. Sharing their stories during interviews may have exposed child abuse and neglect that parents are unaware is illegal in Aotearoa New Zealand. We were also aware that discussing parenting practices may have raised issues around family violence and child abuse and neglect, including participants' own experiences of abuse.

Several steps were taken to mitigate these ethical issues.

1. In the event of disclosure around child abuse or neglect, interviewers were trained to first raise the issue with Whānau Marama Parenting, who could then notify the Ministry for Vulnerable Children | Oranga Tamariki if necessary. This process was outlined in the participant information sheet and consent form.
2. Interviewees were aware they could opt out of the research at any time and that there was no obligation for them to participate and no consequences if they chose not to participate.
3. All interviews were anonymised to ensure participants were not able to be identified.
4. Every participant was given contact details for helping services (e.g. counsellors, family violence services, Police, Ministry of Vulnerable Children | Oranga Tamariki) in case they needed support after their interview. This included ethnic specific counsellors where possible, but also choices of other ethnic, mainstream and Māori support services to ensure participants feel they could access confidential help.
5. Translated participant information sheets and consent forms were provided to each interviewee.

This project was reviewed by the New Zealand Ethics Committee (www.nzethics.com) which agreed that it met the appropriate ethical standards for social research.

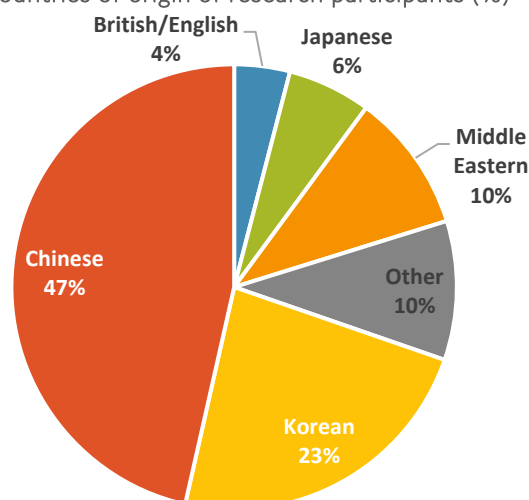
Research participants

60 migrant parents participated in this project. Most were mothers (we also talked to 3 fathers and 1 grandparent), aged between 35 and 44 years who were parenting one (50%) or two (42%) children who ranged in age from 5 months to 23 years (with an average age of 8 years old).

All interviewees had resided in Aotearoa New Zealand for less than five years, and the average residency time was two years.

The parents we spoke to have come to Aotearoa New Zealand from all around the world, including China, Japan, Korea, England, Argentina, Iran, Iraq, Fiji, India, Malaysia, Bulgaria, Turkey and France.

Figure 1: Countries of origin of research participants (%) (n=60)



Project collaborators

Whānau Marama Parenting

Whānau Marama Parenting delivers a programme of high quality, practical, results-based, multicultural parenting courses that teach parents and whānau to positively connect with their children and other family members using non-punitive skills and strategies.

Integral to Whānau Marama Parenting are a large team of volunteers, most of whom are new migrants, who are committed to creating strong, respectful relationships in new migrant families to by helping parents to positively connect with their children and other family members.

www.whanaumarama-parenting.co.nz

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Key Insights

Discipline

One of the key aims of this project was to understand the different methods of discipline used by new migrant parents and their understanding about New Zealand legislation regarding physical discipline. We found that most migrant parents we talked to use positive methods of discipline. Very few use physical force.

More than half of interviewees discipline their children through talking, active listening and conversation, and one quarter try preventative measures such as having a good routine and rules in place and role modelling the behaviour they want to see or using positive praise and encouragement.

It does appear, however, that some parents struggle with positive discipline, with one in five choosing to discipline by lecturing, scolding, shouting or nagging. Four parents told us they used physical discipline or had used it in the past. According to these parents, the amount of physical force used was minimal, such as "a slap on the hand" or "hit on bum."



"Thinking spot is my constructive discipline without sharing force or fluster."

Most parents appeared to know that the physical punishment of children was illegal in Aotearoa New Zealand. There was, however, some variation in how well parents understood the statutory response, with one claiming that smacking children carried "severe punishment", and another believing "your children can phone the police if they are not happy with their parents."

HOW MIGHT WE...

- Ensure new migrant parents understand the laws that protect children's rights in Aotearoa New Zealand to live free of family harm?
- Support culturally appropriate methods of positive discipline?

Dealing with challenging behaviours

The qualities in their children most prized by the migrant parents we spoke to are obedience, respect, politeness and help around the house. They sometimes find it difficult to deal with behaviours that don't reflect these qualities.

Around about one-third of parents we spoke with told us they struggle to deal with challenging behaviours, particularly around not listening, active disobedience (including talking back), not doing what they are asked, aggressiveness and sibling rivalry. These parents not only needed more information on how to deal with these behaviours, but also on how to maintain their self-control and emotions when doing so.

Several parents spoke about not feeling they know how to communicate with their children, both in general but also when they display challenging behaviours. These parents told us they sometimes find it hard to communicate their expectations to their children in a constructive way which encourages the positive behaviour they want to see.



"When children do something wrong I criticise them and they don't accept it. It makes me feel tangled and I don't know how to do it."

HOW MIGHT WE...

- Support parents to build communication skills that encourage respect and cooperation at different ages and stages?
- Help parents to understand the difference between obedience (following instructions of an authority figure) and respect (acting with due regard for the feelings, wishes and rights of others)?
- Steer parents towards cultivating respect, rather than obedience?

Perceptions of parenting in Aotearoa New Zealand

There is a widely held perception among the migrant parents we talked to that the typical parent in Aotearoa New Zealand is positive and loving. For many, this is a good fit with their own parenting practices and aspirations.

Almost half of the migrant parents we spoke to told us one of the things that most surprised them about parenting in Aotearoa New Zealand was that parents appeared to be respectful and tolerant towards children, likely to listen, to discuss rather than tell, and less critical.

The word 'relaxed' was often used by our interviewees to describe parenting in Aotearoa New Zealand. For these interviewees, relaxed meant not stressing over academic results, playing with children, not pressuring children to be the best, showing affection, and praise. This relaxed style of parenting appealed to those who wanted a more loving and affectionate relationship with their children than they had had with their own parents.



Relaxed parenting, however, wasn't always a positive construct for the parents we spoke with. Sometimes our interviewees felt parenting in Aotearoa New Zealand was *too* relaxed. Several interviewees believed that children in Aotearoa New Zealand had largely unrestricted and unmonitored access to technology such as phones and iPads, that they spent too much time playing and not enough time learning and were not as obedient or respectful as children in their home country.

HOW MIGHT WE...

- Help new migrant parents understand that 'relaxed' parenting is often underpinned by the six principles of effective discipline (love and warmth, talking and listening, guidance and understanding, limits and boundaries, consistency and consequences and a structured, secure world), and increase their confidence, skills and knowledge around these?
- Expose new migrant parents to the new neuroscience that promotes the benefits of self-directed and play-based learning in childhood?

Freedom and independence

Aotearoa New Zealand means “freedom” and “independence” for children. For the migrant parents we interviewed, this is both aspirational and problematic.

An emphasis on sport and physical activity in school, the perceived lack of pressure on academic results, the number of children who walk around with bare feet and children who leave home before they are married were all seen as indicating both freedom and independence for the migrant parents we spoke with.

For some parents, this was aspirational and one of the main drivers behind their relocation to Aotearoa New Zealand. They liked seeing their children enjoy the outdoors, enjoyed spending time together as a family doing activities and liked watching their children play with their friends.

Whilst this was aspirational for some parents, it was problematic for others. Several parents spoke about the tension they felt between their expectations of obedience and academic success for their children, and their children’s demands for the type of freedom and independence they observed among their friends.

One of the more interesting observations, made by at least one quarter of the parents, was the number of children who go barefoot. Whilst bare feet represent the freedom and independence they felt was typical of Aotearoa New Zealand children, the parents we talked to also told us it was dirty and unhygienic.



“It seems that [New Zealand parents] would like the kids to be independent and tough in the earlier stage.”

HOW MIGHT WE...

- Help new migrant parents navigate the tension between their expectations of their children, particularly around study and academic success, and their children’s desire for the freedom and independence that they believe their peers have?
- Give new migrant parents a safe place to identify and try some Aotearoa New Zealand parenting norms and test them against their own parenting norms and values?

Changes in parenting style

Many of the parents we spoke with have adopted a parenting style which is different to their own parents. This appears to be both a generational and cultural response to different parenting values.

Most of our interviewees told us they hold tight to the values they were raised with and are passing these on to their children, particularly around respect for elders, religion and filial piety.

Many practice cultural traditions that bring family together, such as Chinese New Year, Eid, Diwali and Spring Festival. Food and eating together is a common way of bringing families together.

Most, however, also told us that they had abandoned what they called the 'negative' aspects of their own upbringing, such as physical punishment and authoritarian parenting styles. They told us they are more likely to listen to their children, more likely to let them follow their own interests and less likely to pressure them to be "the top".



"My parents didn't tell me they love me or give physical affection. I try and do this and show love to my children. I want them to feel loved by their parents."

HOW MIGHT WE...

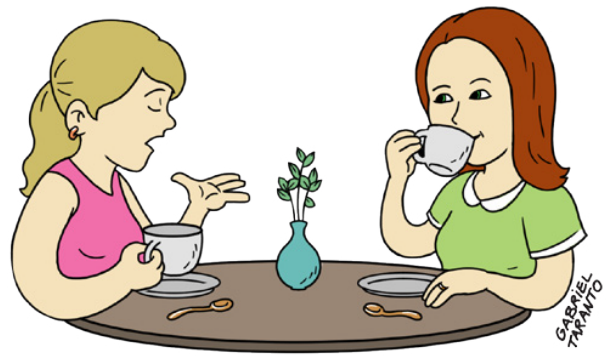
- Assist new migrant parents to reflect on their upbringing and identify the parenting style that best suits their family and their values?
- Support new migrant parents to reflect on their own childhoods and increase their empathy towards their children by identifying what they needed when they were young?

Sources of support

Most of the parents we spoke to have at least one person they can turn to when they need help or information about parenting. There are, however, a small but significant minority who are isolated and struggling.

Social networks are the main source of support for the parents we talked to. These networks are both online and community-based (i.e. neighbours, church and school friends).

Seven out of 10 parents told us they had friends or some form of social support they could turn to for help or information about parenting, however a small number are struggling to find both practical and emotional support for their parenting. Some find the absence of close family who can help care for children difficult, and whilst others have made friends, they don't feel their friendships are at a stage where they can ask for help, such as with childcare or school drop off or pick up



"No family to support us [means] we get fewer breaks from parenting. Without a break we are more tired and less patient."

It does appear, however, that most parents can access parenting information when they need it, with 48 out of 50 parents naming at least one source of parenting help. Of these, seven out of 10 turns to social support, half use the internet, and around 4 in ten also read parenting books and magazines.

Six out of every 10 parents have accessed some type of formal parenting support, such as Plunket, Whānau Marama Parenting or Toolbox.

HOW MIGHT WE...

- Provide opportunities for new migrant parents to build their own peer support networks focussed on both practical and emotional support?
- Identify reliable sources of online support for new migrants, and steer them towards these places?

Education

Many of the parents we interviewed struggled to understand the Aotearoa New Zealand education system and as a result some question the value of educating their children in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The focus in Aotearoa New Zealand on inquiry-based learning, the lack of an instructional textbook, the perceived lack of homework and the infrequent communication from schools and teachers about children's progress is challenging for many of the parents we spoke to, particularly those from China and Korea.

Nearly half of all parents we spoke to said that one of the main differences they had noted since coming to Aotearoa New Zealand was how relaxed schools were, with not as much pressure on children to achieve academic results. Some of these parents felt that schools prioritise play and sporting activities over academic subjects.

It came as a surprise to many parents, particularly those from China, to learn that Aotearoa New Zealand did not have a set textbook. They told us that the lack of a textbook made it extremely difficult to judge what their children were learning, and as a result some questioned whether they were learning anything at all. Four parents were considering sending their children back to China for their primary and intermediate years.

"Student don't have textbook in primary school. I don't know what my son is learning about."

There were, however, several parents who appreciated what they felt was the relaxed nature of Aotearoa New Zealand classrooms. They liked that children weren't 'forced' to achieve, that their test scores weren't shown in public, that there was no 'absolute right or wrong judgement', and that teachers were respectful and encouraging rather than critical.

"NZ teaches kids to be themselves"

Several of the migrant parents we talked to told us they struggled with the tension between wanting their child to be successful at school and not wanting to put undue stress or pressure on them. Their children, too, objected to additional homework claiming their peers didn't need to do this.

HOW MIGHT WE...

- Communicate the value of and principles behind inquiry-based learning to new migrant parents?
- Assist new migrant parents to better judge children's academic progress?

- Understand the communication needs of new migrant parents in terms of their children's education?

Discussion and Conclusion

This research has identified several areas where culturally appropriate information around parenting practices, support, and positive parenting skills may be provided to new migrant families. The challenges faced by many of the parents we talked to around their children's behaviour suggest they could be supported to build communication skills that encourage respect and cooperation at different ages and stages. In addition, while most participants told us they used constructive and positive methods of discipline, there does appear to be some who need more information on the laws that protect children's rights in Aotearoa New Zealand to live free of violence.

Education as a means to future success is important to many of the parents we spoke with, and it appears these parents may not share many of the same beliefs around the value of play and active exploration in childhood that are part of the dominant parenting and education discourse in Aotearoa New Zealand. It may be helpful, therefore, to expose new migrant parents to the new neuroscience that promotes the benefits of self-directed and play-based learning in childhood. This may help them to reconcile their cultural beliefs and own experiences around the value of play with the many and varied play opportunities that will be offered to their children through early childhood care and schooling. This research has also identified a need for schools to look at the provision of information to migrant parents in terms of children's academic progress and understand how they might better tailor communication towards parents' needs.

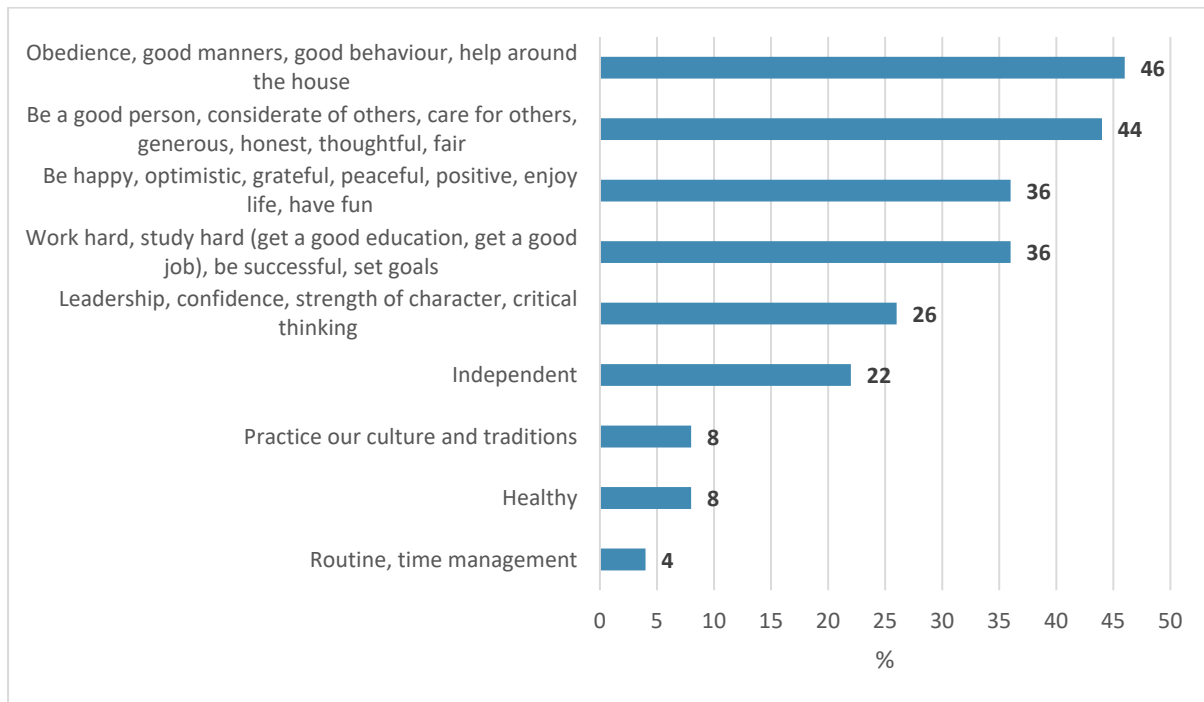
Some of the parents we spoke to told us their expectations around children's study and academic success conflict at times with children's desire for freedom and independence, which is largely shaped through their peer experiences. Not only that, parents also talked about their own internal conflict between wanting their children to succeed while not wanting to put additional stress or pressure on their children. There may be an opportunity here to provide a safe place for migrant parents to identify and try some Aotearoa New Zealand parenting norms and test them against their own parenting norms and values to try and work through and find agreed solutions to some of this conflict or tension.

All parents are influenced in some way by the way in which they themselves were raised. Most of the parents we talked to wanted to hold tightly to what they viewed as positive cultural constructs and values, such as respect for elders and filial piety, whilst trying to incorporate more positive parenting constructs around discipline, authority and affection than they had experienced in their childhoods. There may be some value, therefore, in supporting new migrant parents to reflect on their own upbringing and increase their empathy towards their children by identifying what they needed when they were young, and to use this to identify the parenting style that best suits their family and their values.

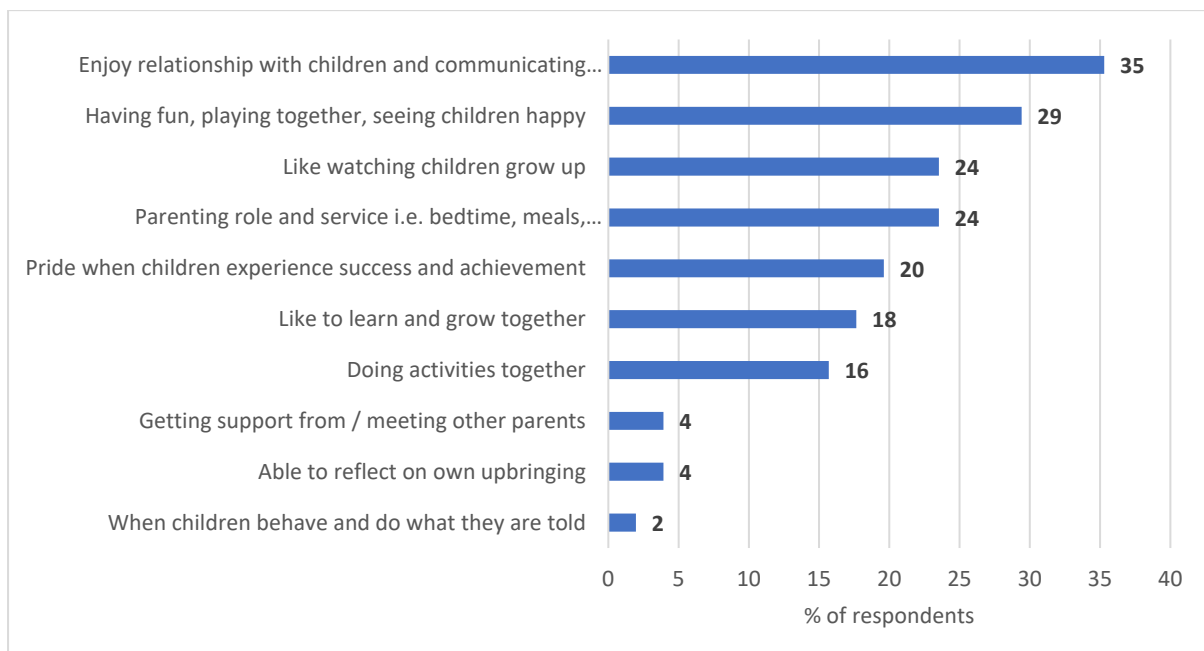
Some of the parents we spoke to told us the settling in process is made more difficult by not having access to the types of close social support provided by family and friends in the countries they had migrated from. There appears to be a need for more opportunities for new migrant parents to find and build peer support networks focussed on both practical and emotional support. The development of online networks may be particularly valuable.

Appendix One

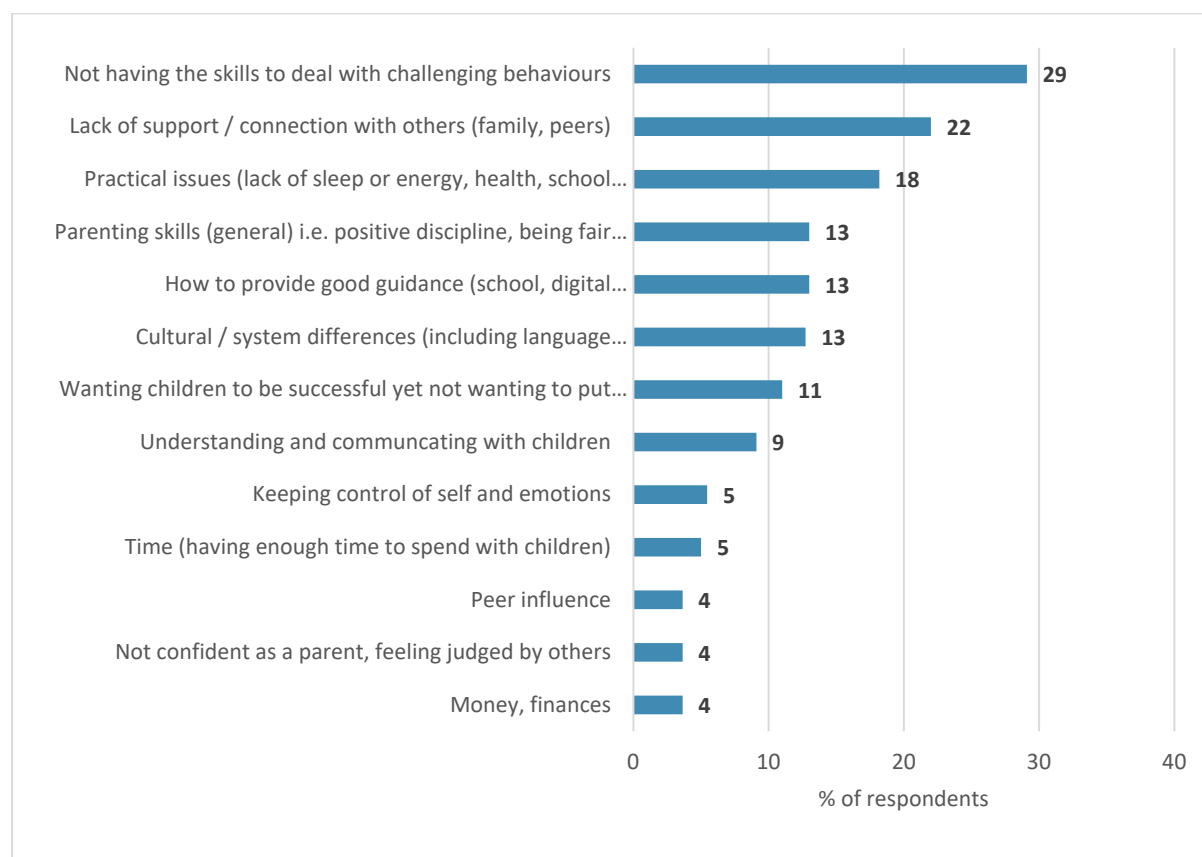
What personal qualities do you want your children to have? (n=50)



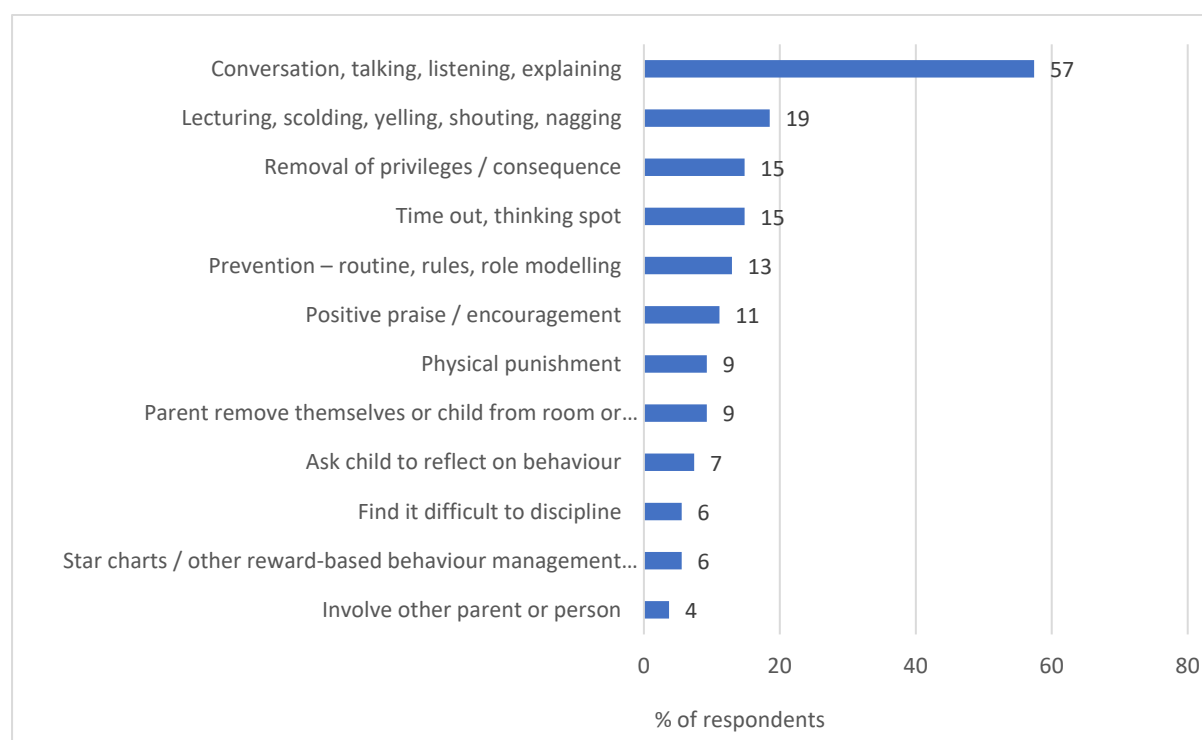
What do you most enjoy about being a parent? (n=51)



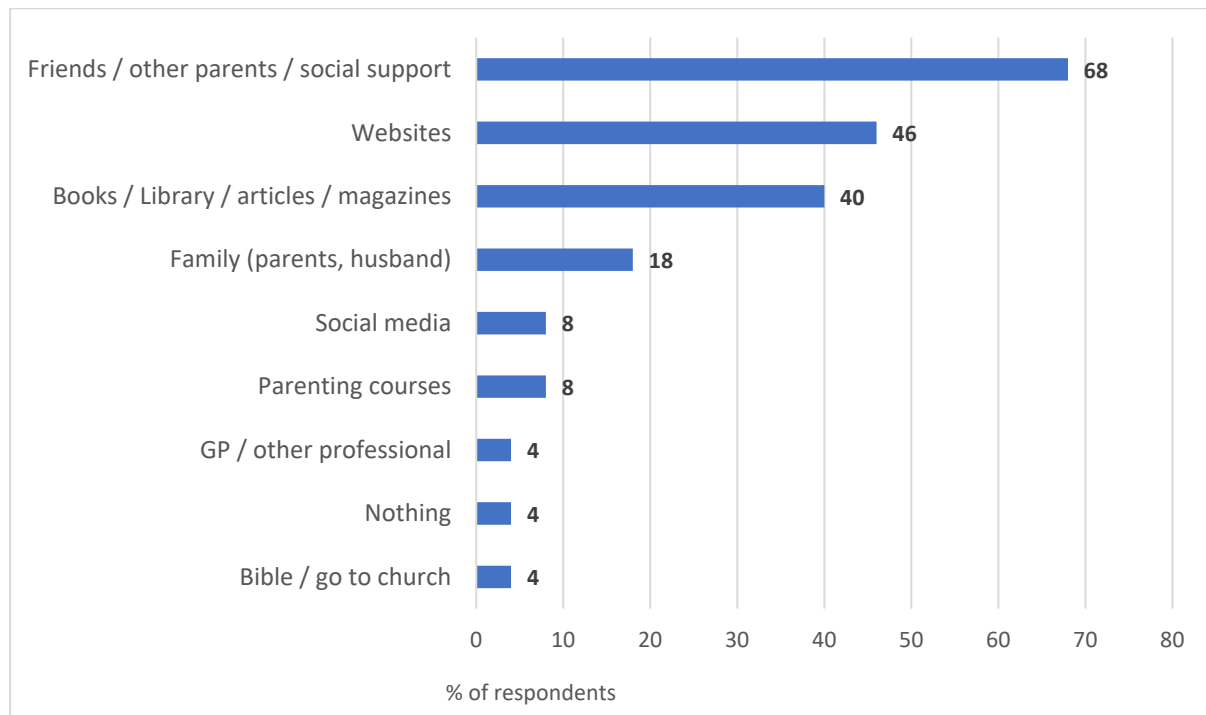
What are the parts of parenting you sometimes struggle with?



How do you discipline your children?



Where do you go to when you need help or information about parenting?



Parenting Courses/classes attended

57% of migrant parents interviewed have attended a parenting course (some have attended more than one).

38% of parents have not attended any form of parenting course

5% believe they do not need to attend a parenting course (i.e. they are trained teachers or child development experts)

 = 36%

 = 23%

 = 3%

What advice would you like to share with other parents who might be coming to live here?

1. Kids in Aotearoa New Zealand have more freedom, independence and free will. Plus, they play a lot of sport (23%).
2. Parenting in Aotearoa New Zealand is very relaxed. Sometimes it may even be a bit *too* relaxed (21%).
3. Parents are more respectful and tolerant of their kids. They are more likely to show love and affection, and praise their kids (21%).
4. School is a lot more relaxed and less stressful. Children will play more and won't learn as much (17%).
5. Try hard to learn English, communicate with people and make friends. Research where you want to live and the local schools (15%).
6. There are lots of community activities to do and community services to help you (13%).
7. Aotearoa New Zealand is a good place to raise children (8%).
8. You will probably spend more time as a family, more time playing with your kids (6%).
9. You are not allowed to physically discipline your children (4%).