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**Exploring the lived experience of parenting among Iranian  
immigrant**

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*For all those who are a light of hope in difficult times.*

*For my husband*



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## ABSTRACT

**Objectives:** Migration brings both benefits and challenges that affect living conditions, including parenting practices. Despite the growth of this phenomenon in Iran, the scientific literature has not deeply addressed this issue, and many aspects remain unknown or poorly understood. This gap may lead to potential harm to parent-child relationships and its side effects. This study aims to explore the experiences of Iranian parents in parenting under migration conditions through the lens of attachment theory.

**Methods:** A specially designed semi-structured interview was conducted with a sample of N=8 Iranian parents who had experienced parenting under migration conditions to explore their experiences. The collected data were analyzed using the qualitative technique of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA).

**Results:** Five main themes emerged: (a) “general experience of immigration” showed how immigrants balance satisfaction and unmet expectations, navigating the realities of their new environment against their initial hopes; (b) “challenges” involved overcoming significant barriers such as language difficulties, economic concerns, social isolation, homesickness, and discrimination; (c) “advantages” highlighted the meaningful benefits immigrants find despite hardships, including better prospects for their children, personal growth, improved family relationships, and educational opportunities; (d) “adaptation strategies” focused on the diverse methods immigrants employ to adapt, such as seeking familiar cultural elements, building new social networks, continuous learning, maintaining family connections, and joining local communities; (e) “relationship with the child” described how migration deeply

influences parent-child dynamics, with many parents reporting strengthened emotional bonds, while others experienced increased pressures affecting their relationships.

**Conclusion:** The study highlights the need for professionals to consider the complexities of migration in providing effective support to immigrant parents and suggests further research to explore diverse experiences and long-term effects on parenting and attachment.



## INTRODUCTION

The process of immigration involves people relocating from their country of origin to another country with the objective of establishing a permanent residence. As a result of this transition, one leaves his or her homeland, enters an unfamiliar environment, and adjusts to a different cultural and social landscape, which can negatively impact one's mental and physical health (Sangaramoorthy & Carney, 2021). Immigration can be considered the most rapidly growing social phenomenon in Iran over the past two years. Iran is currently experiencing another peak period of migration. According to a 2020 UNDESA report, the rate of Iranian migration was noted as 54.2% among global countries. Parenting among families from immigrant backgrounds is uniquely challenging and rewarding (Garcia Coll & Pachter, 2002). Above and beyond normative parenting demands, challenges for parents with a history of immigrant experiences include pressure to adapt to the mainstream environment while considering what heritage identity and values to retain and pass down to their children (Jambunathan et al., 2000). Recent research indicates that the experience of stress can hinder adaptive relationship functioning within the family (Buck & Neff, 2012). Parents with stronger feelings of parenting efficacy may engage in more positive parenting practices, such as using more reasoning and more monitoring (Costigan & Koryzma, 2011b). According to Kiang et al. (2016b), migrating and being a parent can significantly influence the way Iranian parent's approach parenting, resulting in both advantageous and disadvantageous consequences. Given the expansion of the phenomenon of migration in Iran and its impact on Iranian parents' parenting, this study aims to qualitatively explore the parenting experiences of Iranian immigrant parents, with a particular focus on parent-child relationships through the lens of attachment theory.

In the first chapter, the concept of migration and its challenges will be defined. One of the most significant challenges of migration, acculturation, will be discussed along with a key model that explains it and its impact on individuals' adaptation to the new country and culture. Next, parenting styles and the effects of stress and instability on these styles will be examined. Following this, the attachment theory and its connection to parent-child relationships will be reviewed, along with the existing attachment studies on migration. Finally, the state of migration in Iran will be addressed, and an attempt will be made to understand how the reviewed factors are related and what impact they have on parenting.

In the second chapter, the research will be described in detail. The objectives will be explained in more depth, and the methodology will be described with a focus on the participants, procedures, and tools used. The data analysis and the results will then be presented. The study will conclude with a discussion interpreting the results in light of the literature, identifying the limitations of the research, and outlining future perspectives.



## **CHAPTER 1: A THEORETICAL OVERVIEW**

### **1.1. Immigration Theory and Acculturation**

#### **1.1.1. Definition of Immigration**

The process of immigration involves people relocating from their country of origin to another country with the objective of establishing a permanent residence. As a result of this transition, one leaves his or her homeland, enters an unfamiliar environment, and adjusts to a different cultural and social landscape, which can negatively impact one's mental and physical health (Sangaramoorthy & Carney, 2021). Numerous challenges are exacerbated by factors such as discrimination, legal barriers, and economic hardship (Sangaramoorthy & Carney, 2021). These challenges are particularly pronounced under strict immigration enforcement regimes, which shape the health and well-being of immigrant families and their children (Barajas-Gonzalez et al., 2022). In addition, immigrants' health risks, especially those related to perinatal health, are critical areas of concern (Ewesesan et al., 2022). It is possible for immigration to have a significant impact on an individual's mental health. As immigrants navigate the challenges of leaving their homeland, adapting to a new culture, and coping with discrimination and legal barriers, they often experience high levels of stress, anxiety, and depression. These dangers to mental health are increased under severe immigration enforcement regimes, which further impacts the welfare of immigrant families. Alegría et al. (2017) explain that immigrants' health outcomes are further impacted by the process of acculturation, which affects them as they adapt to the culture of their new nation.

### **1.1.2. Definition of Acculturation**

The most widely used definition of acculturation is that it is the phenomenon that arises when groups of individuals with different cultures come into continuous contact with one another, which is followed by alterations in either or both groups' original culture patterns. It is important to distinguish the process of acculturation from the process of assimilation, which is at times associated with the process of acculturation (Redfield et al., 1936b). While this definition of the concept of acculturation considers assimilation to be merely a phase of acculturation, the two terms may sometimes be used synonymously (Gordon, 1964).

Although acculturation as a concept was initially proposed by anthropologists as a phenomenon occurring on a group level (Redfield et al., 1936), early discussions around the concept also recognized it as occurring on an individual level (Thurnwald, 1932). As a result of psychology's strong interest in the individual, the term psychological acculturation was first used in 1967 by Graves in order to formalize the concept.

It is important to note that acculturation is closely related to adaptation, which refers to the psychological well-being of an individual and how they manage socio-cultural differences. Therefore, it can be said that adaptation is a consequence of acculturation (Sam & Berry, 2010b).

### **1.1.3. Acculturation Strategies: Berry's Model of Acculturation**

John Berry's acculturation model is regarded as a seminal theoretical framework that describes the process by which individuals adapt to a new cultural environment. The Berry

acculturation model identifies four principal acculturation strategies based on a person's orientation to their native culture and to their new culture (Berry, 1997).

1. Assimilation: This is a strategy used when an individual does not wish to keep their cultural heritage but rather integrates completely into the culture of the host. If the dominant society is perceived as welcoming and inclusive, or if cultural identity is difficult to maintain, there is a high probability of assimilating.

2. Separation: In contrast, separation occurs when individuals prioritize retaining their original culture while minimizing their interactions with the host culture. The purpose of taking this approach may be to respond to real or perceived discrimination or to preserve distinct cultural identities. This strategy may be used to protect unique cultural identities or in response to actual or perceived prejudice.

3. Integration: One of the most adaptive ways, integration involves keeping one's own culture while engaging in the host society's culture to a greater or lesser extent. This dual participation, which offers both psychological and sociological benefits, can help one develop a bicultural identity that can move easily between the two cultures.

4. Marginalization: When individuals are not engaged in the culture of their host nor maintain a strong connection to their cultural origins, there is a least favorable outcome. Exclusion from both cultural groups can lead to marginalization in many cases.

Berry's approach sheds light on how people react to cultural change, which is useful in the fields of psychology, sociology, and public health. It can be used by scholars and decision-makers to create programs and regulations that encourage respectful environments for

cultural variety, facilitate successful cultural integration, and support positive acculturation results (Berry, 1997).

#### **1.1.4. ABCs of Acculturation**

Acculturation encompasses all forms of changes, at the individual level, there is need to consider the psychological changes that individuals in all groups undergo and their eventual adaptation to their new situations (Sam & Berry, 2010b).

These changes range from simple behavioral shifts (e.g., in ways of speaking, dressing, and eating) to more problematic, producing acculturative stress (Berry et al., 1987) as manifested by uncertainty, anxiety, and depression. Adaptations can be psychological (e.g., sense of well-being or self-esteem) or sociocultural (e.g., acquiring a new language; Ward, 1996).

Ward et al. (2020) has identified three main areas of human life that change during acculturation, and referred to these as the “ABCs of Acculturation,” The ABCs are in turn respectively linked to different theoretical perspectives dominating the field: a stress and coping theoretical framework, a culture learning approach, and a social-identification orientation to acculturation.

##### **1.1.4.1. Stress and Coping Framework of Acculturation**

The work of Berry on acculturative stress highlights the affective perspective. This perspective emphasizes the emotional aspects of acculturation and focuses on such issues as psychological well-being and life satisfaction. The working hypothesis is that acculturation can be likened to a set of major life events that pose challenges to the individual. These life

events may qualify as stressors and provoke stress reactions in an individual, particularly if the appropriate coping strategies and social supports are lacking (reviewed by Berry, 2006b).

Drawing upon Lazarus and Folkman's stress model (1984), Berry (2006b; Berry et al., 1987) proposed the acculturative stress model. The core idea is that when serious challenges are experienced and are appraised to be problematic because one is not able to deal with them easily by simply adjusting to them by changing one's behavior then acculturative stress results.

In essence, acculturative stress is a stress reaction in response to life events that are rooted in the experience of acculturation. In line with Lazarus's stress model, not all acculturation changes result in acculturative stress because there are a number of moderating and mediating factors (both before and during the acculturation) such as personal characteristics including age and gender and social support that may influence the perception and interpretation of the acculturation experience. For instance, more acculturative stress has been found among older immigrants, females, and those lacking social support (Berry, 1997, 2006b).

#### **1.1.4.2. Culture Learning Approach**

People in cultural transitions may lack the necessary skills needed to engage the new culture (Masgoret & Ward, 2006). This may result in difficulties managing the everyday social encounters. To overcome these difficulties, individuals are expected to learn or acquire the culture-specific behavioral skills (such as the language) that are necessary to negotiate this new cultural milieu (Bochner, 1972). People must gain an understanding of intercultural



communication styles, including their verbal and nonverbal components, as well as rules, conventions, and norms and their influences on intercultural effectiveness. (Gallois et al., 1988).

Masgoret and Ward (2006) point out that second language proficiency and communication competence are the core of all cultural learning approaches and ultimately sociocultural adaptation. Language skills are relevant both for the performance of daily tasks in the new cultural society and in establishing interpersonal relationships in the society. Good language proficiency is argued to be associated with increased interaction with members of the new culture, and a decrease in sociocultural maladaptation (Ward & Kennedy, 1999).

#### **1.1.4.3. Social-identification Orientation**

When individuals and groups enter into an acculturation situation, they are faced with the questions “who am I? To which group do I belong?” (Berry, 1997). These two questions form the basis of one of the influential theoretical positions within the cognitive approaches: social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner 1979, 1986). The theory is largely concerned with why and how individuals identify with and behave as part of social groups. Tajfel and Turner (1986) argued that individuals need to belong to a group in order to secure a firm sense of wellbeing. In addition, humans have the tendency to put others and themselves into categories, and this helps us to associate (i.e., identify) with certain groups and not others. Moreover, humans compare the group they belong to with others, and there is a tendency to have a favorable bias toward seeing positive qualities of the group to which we belong, thereby boosting our self-image.

Within the context of acculturation, social identity theory is concerned with how groups and individuals define their identity in relations to the members of their own ethnic group (i.e., ethnic identity), on the one hand, and the larger society within which they are acculturating (i.e., national identity; Phinney, 1990), on the other.

#### **1.1.5. Adaptation: How Well Do People Acculturate?**

Adaptation in the context of acculturation has been defined variously, including health status, communication competence, self-awareness, stress reduction, feelings of acceptance, and culturally skilled behaviors (see Ward, 1996).

Psychological adaptation in this case refers to an individual's satisfaction and overall emotional or psychological well-being. Studies interested in psychological adaptation have oftentimes focused on mental health outcomes such as depression and anxiety. Sociocultural adaptation, on the other hand, refers to how successfully the individual acquires the appropriate sociocultural skills for living effectively in the new sociocultural milieu. The sociocultural adaptation has been operationalized in several ways including behavior problems, school achievement, and social competence. The two forms of adaptation are interrelated; both deal with problems and positive interactions with members of the host culture are likely to improve one's feelings of wellbeing and satisfaction. Similarly, it is easier to accomplish tasks and develop positive interpersonal relations if one is feeling good about him- or herself and accepted by others (Searle & Ward, 1990; Ward, 1996, 2001).

A number of studies have found that the acculturating strategy that people adopt is related to how well they adapt. The most common finding is that the integration strategy is the most

adaptive in several settings and is associated with better psychological and sociocultural adaptation (Liebkind, 2001; Sam et al., 2006).

## **1.2 Parenting Theory: Attachment-related**

### **1.2.1. Parenting Styles**

Parenting style can be defined as the attitude of parents toward nurturing of their children (Steinberg & Darling, 2017). According to Schaefer's theory (Schaefer, 1959), parenting styles include two dimensions: acceptance-rejection and control-autonomy. In the acceptance-rejection dimension, parents' behavior varies from the positive response to self-reliance behavior, excessive encouragement, and abstaining from punishment all the way to simple indifference, ignoring, lack of positive response, and using punishment. Similarly, along the autonomy control axis, it changes from giving almost complete independence to the child and complete control of the child's activities. How the parents' behavior fits inside these dimensions determines the four styles of parenting, including authoritative (high control and high warmth), authoritarian (high control and low warmth), permissive (low control and high warmth), and neglectful (low control and low warmth)

Authoritative parents are high in both demands and responsiveness. They are responsive to their children's needs and allow their children considerable freedom. However, they also expect their children to comply with necessary restrictions, provide explanations as to why they must do so, and do this in a warm and loving manner, not simply through punishment. Authoritative parenting is associated with positive developmental outcomes. Children with authoritative parents show positive development, such as self-reliance, achievement

motivation, and high self-esteem in childhood (Maccoby, 1980) and positive school adjustment (Chen et al., 1997).

In contrast, authoritarian parents make high demands but are low in responsiveness and sensitivity to their children, set strict standards of conduct, and are usually very critical of children for not meeting those standards (Dornbusch et al., 1987). Authoritarian parents often rely on punitive tactics and expect their children to respect their authority without explanation or much expression of warmth and affection. Children with authoritarian parents are less likely to learn to think for themselves or to understand why their parents are requiring certain behaviors. They tend to be withdrawn, obedient, and fearful of new situations and to have low self-esteem (Chen et al., 1997).

#### **1.2.1.1. Quality of Parenting**

The quality of parenting in parent-child dyads plays a key role in children's social, emotional, and cognitive development (Belsky, 1981). It interacts with the child's characteristics and behavior and is influenced by aspects of the individual parent and by the family's social context (Armstrong et al., 2005). For example, if mothers have positive, intimate, and appropriate responsiveness to their child's needs, young children easily form a sense of controlling the environment, a sense of self-worth, and an ability to securely explore the world around them (Ainsworth et al., 1972). Conversely, the quality of care can also hurt a child's development (McCollum, 1997). Children exposed to poorer quality parenting, and less adequate rearing environments, demonstrate feelings of general anxiety

and insecurity, unstable and negative emotions (Larsen & Buss, 2002) and problems in areas such as language, social development, and school performance (Mills & Allan, 1992).

### **1.2.2. Stress, Social Support, and the Quality of Parenting**

In recent years, a number of studies have demonstrated that the quality of parenting is both directly and indirectly influenced by parents' levels of stress and social support (Humphrey, 1988). Different stressful experiences, such as daily hassles, economic hardship, unemployment, and work-related stress, compromise the quality of parenting (Leinonen et al., 2003) and are associated with poorer physical and psychological functioning, poorer parenting skills (Crnic et al., 1983), more child behavior problems (Short & Johnston, 1997), reduced maternal sensitivity, and negative child outcomes (Crnic & Low, 2002).

For example, Landry et al., (2002) reported that greater maternal emotional stress directly influenced mothers' parenting, which in turn directly influenced children's social initiating, whereas a more negative maternal childrearing history indirectly influenced social initiating skills through its direct influence on maternal emotional stress. Similarly, Short and Johnston (1997) found that levels of life stress and maternal distress of mothers were associated with less positive parenting behavior and more child behavior problems. In short, stress affects parenting behavior, which negatively affects child development.

The negative effects of stress have been found to be alleviated by social support (Leinonen, 2002). Gottlieb (1983) defines social support as "verbal and non-verbal information or advice, tangible aid, or action that is proffered by social intimates or inferred by their presence and has beneficial emotional or behavioral effects on the recipients" (p. 28). Social

support has been shown to reduce the effects of parenting stress on maternal interactive behavior and thus limit its potential negative impact on developmental outcomes (Armstrong et al., 2005).

Social support can come from many sources and be of many different kinds (Cutrona & Suhr, 1992). In general, however, it is consistently found to have a positive influence on parenting. Emotional support has been found to buffer both authoritative and nonpunitive parenting against strains (Stevens, 1988). Partner support has been found to influence maternal attitudes and behaviors and thus to indirectly influence young children's behaviors (Crnic et al., 1983). Similarly, positive maternal outcomes have been associated with increased support provided by parents (Barth & Schinke, 1984) and grandparents (Tinsley & Parke, 1987). These mental health challenges are associated with parenting styles and behaviors that impact the child-parent relationship, particularly in relation to attachment.

### **1.2.3. Attachment Theory**

#### **1.2.3.1. Attachment and its styles**

Attachment theory is a well-known concept in psychology, psychiatry, and psychotherapy (Ma, 2006). Initially developed by British psychoanalyst John Bowlby, this theory addresses the dynamics of interpersonal relationships. According to Bowlby, attachment is seen as a fundamental and innate need (Bowlby, 1973) that refers to a relatively stable emotional bond between two individuals. One party strives to maintain closeness or proximity to the attachment figure and acts in a way to ensure that the relationship continues (Bowlby, 1980).

Empirical research on infants, initially conducted by Canadian psychologist Mary Ainsworth, identified three attachment styles: secure, avoidant, and ambivalent, in infants and children (Main, 2000; Ainsworth et al., 1978), and a fourth style, disorganized attachment, was later recognized (Hesse & Main, 2000). The Strange Situation Protocol, innovatively designed by Ainsworth, serves as a standardized research tool for assessing these attachment styles in children. This experiment involves creating situations that trigger attachment behaviors, revealing how children use their caregiver as a secure base (Schafer, 2007). The findings are based on observations of their attachment behaviors in two contexts: initially, during a separation from the parent, and subsequently, upon reunion. Consequently, four distinct attachment styles are differentiated along a behavioral spectrum of exploration, avoidance, intimacy, and attachment to a secure base (Tan et al., 2005). For example, children with a secure attachment style maintain a healthy balance between intimacy and independence, are free to explore their environment, and use their parent as a secure base when experiencing stress. Infants with an avoidant attachment style are overly independent in their exploratory behavior and distance themselves from their secure base even when stressed. Infants with an ambivalent attachment style show almost no signs of independence, such as exploratory behavior, when stressed and exhibit clingy behavior towards their secure base. Finally, infants with a disorganized attachment style do not fit into any of the aforementioned categories and display varied attachment behaviors: they often exhibit peculiar exploratory behaviors and seem to have an ambivalent attitude towards their bases (Loetz et al., 2013).

### **1.2.3.2. Parent-child Interactions**

Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969) and its extensions (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Sroufe, 2005) have led to decades of research on parent-child interactions, and parenting practices, styles and behaviors to investigate whether they serve as foundations for children's development across behavioral, emotional, cognitive, attentional and physiological domains. The foundational assumption of attachment theory is that the formation of caregiver child attachment relationships is innate and necessary for human survival (Bowlby, 1969).

However, although almost universally formed, attachment relationships can vary and much research has concentrated on identifying when and why they may be secure or insecure (Ainsworth et al., 1978). More specifically, when observed using the Strange Situation to assess caregiver-child attachment, secure relationships are identified through a child's ability to explore the environment in the presence of a caregiver and to rely on the caregiver as a secure base for comfort and safety when needed. In contrast, an insecure caregiver-child attachment relationship is indicated by gaps in signs of child comfort and safe haven behaviors (e.g., exploration of the environment) in the presence of a caregiver. Insecure caregiver-child attachment has multiple forms and might also be indicated by signs of child fear or anxiety, anger, or resistance to soothing by a caregiver when the environment is novel or threatening (e.g., in the presence of a stranger).

Moreover, early attachment relationships have implications for children's development and adjustment. A secure attachment has been associated with children's better executive functioning in areas such as working memory, cognitive flexibility, inhibitory control



(Bernier et al., 2012), language skills (Belsky & Fearon, 2002), and socioemotional competence (Bohlin et al., 2000; Sroufe, 2005). Insecure attachment has been associated with children's emotion regulation deficits, and COS-P Randomized Controlled Trial Results 4 mental health and conduct problems (Fearon et al., 2010; Groh et al., 2012; Thompson, 2016; Zimmer-Gembeck et al., 2017). Alongside defining and identifying variations in the quality of the caregiver-child attachment relationship, research has concentrated on how secure or insecure attachment relationships emerge.

One of the foundations of attachment theory is the focus on caregiver sensitivity as the most direct correlate of whether caregiver-child attachment status is secure or insecure. Caregiver sensitivity is the ability to appropriately attend and respond to infant signalling of emotional and physical needs (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Cassidy et al., 2017a; Mesman et al., 2012). Sensitive responding to child distress not only fosters the child's use of the caregiver as a safe haven (because of expectations of comfort) but also fosters use of the caregiver as a secure base for exploration (because a distressed child cannot explore) .

This central feature of attachment theory has been supported; caregiver sensitivity has been shown to be an important precursor of parent-child attachment quality (De Wolff & van IJzendoorn, 1997; Lucassen et al., 2011), a predictor of secure attachment continuity throughout childhood and into adolescence (Beijersbergen et al., 2012), and is associated with lower risk of psychopathology and school underachievement in longitudinal studies (Carlson, 1998, Moss & St-Laurent, 2001). Caregiver sensitivity is also related to other child outcomes, such as language development and social competence (Barnett et al., 2012) and

is associated with lower levels of child internalizing and externalizing behaviors (ZimmerGembeck et al., 2015).

### **1.3. Immigrant challenges and the Quality of Parenting**

#### **1.3.1. The Influence of Immigrant Challenges on parental stress**

Parenting among families from immigrant backgrounds is uniquely challenging and rewarding (Garcia Coll & Pachter, 2002). Above and beyond normative parenting demands, challenges for parents with a history of immigrant experiences include pressure to adapt to the mainstream environment while considering what heritage identity and values to retain and pass down to their children (Jambunathan et al., 2000). Recent research indicates that the experience of stress can hinder adaptive relationship functioning within the family (Buck & Neff, 2012).

This spillover effect of stress has been demonstrated in different types of family relationships. For example, financial stress has been shown to spill over into parenting behaviors, such as parents' expressions of warmth, reasoning, and control (Leinonen et al., 2003). When parents experience stress, they may be less likely to engage in parenting behaviors that contribute to positive relationship functioning with their children. For instance, numerous studies with nonimmigrant populations have supported the Family Stress Model, which argues that contextual stressors such as economic hardship can be psychologically distressing for parents and can lead to disruption in family relationships (Conger et al., 2000). Economic stress due to immigration was related to less positive parenting in immigrant families (White et al., 2009). Other sources of stress also impact

parenting. For example, parents' psychological distress was related to lower parenting sensitivity, which is then associated with children's maladjustment (Conger & Donnellan, 2007). Similarly, in a study of divorced mothers, those who experienced higher levels of stress were found to be harsher, more critical and unresponsive, and less consistent in parenting (Tein et al., 2000).

Acculturation-related stress can lead to the source of stress on parenting. Acculturation stressors from outside of the family, such as navigating a new language and coping with discrimination, may spillover into the family (White et al., 2009). Although much research shows that acculturation stress impacts immigrants' psychological functioning, such as depressive symptoms (Yeh, 2003), less well examined are the effects of such stress on immigrants' functioning as parents.

In contrast, there is conflicting evidence as to whether acculturation is protective or detrimental to a person's stress level. Some research suggests that becoming acculturated to the dominant culture may result in internalizing stereotypes and challenges associated with the dominant culture's standards of success, whereas other work shows that it can be protective against stress and other mental health disorders (Conroy et al., 2021). For parents of a minority culture, acculturation may be useful in navigating social services, healthcare and educational establishments (Conroy et al., 2021). Acculturation impact may also vary depending on caregiver age at the time of immigration (Conroy et al., 2021). For example, learning English would be more difficult for an individual who immigrated later in life while a younger immigrant may have more difficulty with the development of their personal identity (Bridges et al., 2019).

### **1.3.2. Impact of Acculturation Stress on Parenting Self-Efficacy**

Research indicates that the processes of immigration and acculturation can significantly impact parenting self-efficacy (PSE), as these experiences often entail navigating new cultural norms and expectations that can influence parental roles and competencies (Kiang et al., 2016). Drawing on Bandura's (1997) social cognitive theory, PSE can be defined as parents' assessments of their ability to influence their children in important and meaningful ways. Diverse implications of PSE have been identified, including for a wide array of parenting practices and child outcomes (e.g., Dumka et al., 2010; Glatz & Buchanan, 2015a; for a review, see Jones & Prinz, 2005). To date, PSE has been mostly measured at global (e.g., general effectiveness) and task-specific levels (e.g., discipline, helping with homework) with little attention to culture, despite Bandura's (2002) emphasis that the development, structure, implementation, and purpose of self-efficacy varies across contexts. The expectation that parenting efficacy will mediate relations between acculturation and psychological adjustment was based on the predictions of self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1997). Self-efficacy theory stipulates that mastery experiences are the most effective way of generating strong feelings of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Success experiences improve one's confidence in their capacity to influence events and achieve desired results, whereas obstacles and challenges diminish emotions of effectiveness. Immigrant parents who have a higher level of acculturation are more likely to succeed in parenting, which leads to stronger beliefs in their ability to parent effectively. On the other hand, immigrant parents with lower levels of acculturation may have more obstacles in parenting, which reduces their confidence in their parenting abilities. According to self-efficacy theory, the belief in one's own abilities

contributes to a person's mental and emotional health (Bandura, 1997). Self-efficacy beliefs impact individuals' perception of situations and their emotional response to certain scenarios. Individuals who possess a higher level of self-efficacy are anticipated to perceive issues as opportunities to overcome and bounce back more swiftly from failures. They are less inclined to dwell on the negative parts of a scenario or hold the belief that hard circumstances are beyond their skills. Consequently, stronger feelings of self-efficacy are expected to be related to less stress and depression, more active coping, and greater satisfaction (Bandura, 1994). Parents' acculturation was expected to be related to their parenting practices. Thus, parents with stronger feelings of parenting efficacy may engage in more positive parenting practices, such as using more reasoning and more monitoring. (Costigan & Koryzma, 2011b)

#### **1.4. Immigration experience for Iranians**

##### **1.4.1. The State of Immigration in Iran**

Immigration can be considered the most rapidly growing social phenomenon in Iran over the past two years. The decline in social hope, economic stability, and basic freedoms such as access to unrestricted internet, alongside the dire conditions of economic, social, and political factors, have triggered a widespread and mass migration phenomenon in Iran. Given the lack of development in research infrastructures and studies on migration in the country, the quantitative and qualitative dimensions of this phenomenon remain largely unknown. Nevertheless, Iran is currently experiencing another peak period of migration. According to a 2020 UNDESA report, the rate of Iranian migration was noted as 54.2% among global countries.

### **1.4.2. The Impact of Immigration on the Parenting of Iranians**

According to the research conducted by Ghorbani et al. (2021), the parenting techniques in Iran have undergone considerable changes over generations, with a noticeable increase in both affection and authority. This development represents wider societal trends towards individuality and increased educational achievements among parents. The research demonstrates a notable rise in the levels of acceptance-rejection and control-autonomy aspects of parenting techniques in the present age as compared to previous generations. These factors have a significant impact on a range of behavioral and emotional outcomes in children. The study emphasizes that modern Iranian parents are likely to adopt more authoritative parenting styles, contrasting with previous generations that exhibited more authoritarian or neglectful tendencies. According to Kiang et al. (2016b), migrating and being a parent can significantly influence the way Iranian parent's approach parenting, resulting in both advantageous and disadvantageous consequences. Migrating frequently requires individuals to adjust to a different cultural environment, leading to notable changes in parenting practices and beliefs. Migration allows Iranian parents to assimilate into a different cultural setting, fostering more flexible and adaptable approaches to parenting. Exposure to diverse traditions about parenting might result in a more democratic approach, encouraging open communication and nurturing a supportive family atmosphere. Parents and children can experience improved psychological well-being by acquiring new methods that are more effective in their new environment (Kiang et al., 2016b). On the other hand, relocation might bring about enormous stressors that have a negative effect on parenting. Adapting to a different culture, financial challenges, and social isolation can increase

parental stress and anxiety. These factors can exacerbate strict or authoritarian parenting practices, which are often less effective and can hinder children's social and emotional development. Moreover, migration can cause parents to feel less capable of parenting and a decline in parental proficiency, which can negatively impact the entire dynamics of the family (Kiang et al., 2016b).

## CHAPTER 2: RESEARCH

### 2.1. Research Objectives

Relocating to a new country can be a positive and optimistic time for immigrant families. However, it can also represent a stressful period of change as families adjust to the sociocultural differences of their new home. The process of adjustment following immigration is typically referred to as acculturation, defined as the changes that take place when two cultures come into continuous first-hand contact (Berry, 2003). Most immigrants experience significant changes in many aspects of their lives during the acculturation process (Bernstein et al., 2011), including feelings of loss, separation, alienation, and anxiety about the new cultural environment (Tummala-Narra et al., 2012). These experiences can lead to acculturative stress (Oh et al., 2002), involving the emotional burden of adapting to a new culture (Berry, 2003). Even though many immigrants adapt well to the new culture, the process can disrupt psychological functioning, at least temporarily (Chung & Epstein, 2014). The quality of parenting in parent-child dyads is influenced by aspects of the individual parent and by the family's social context (Armstrong et al., 2005). For example, if mothers have positive, intimate, and appropriate responsiveness to their child's needs, young children easily form a sense of controlling the environment, a sense of self-worth, and an ability to securely explore the world around them (Ainsworth et al., 1972). Conversely, the quality of care can also hurt a child's development (McCollum, 1997). Children exposed to poorer quality parenting, and less adequate rearing environments, demonstrate feelings of general anxiety and insecurity, unstable and negative emotions (Larsen & Buss, 2002) and problems in areas such as language, social development, and school performance (Mills & Allan,



1992). Immigrants who are in a parenting role experience the pushes and pulls of their own acculturation process in the context of raising children in a novel cultural environment (Costigan & Koryzma, 2011). Also, Immigration can be considered the most rapidly growing social phenomenon in Iran over the past two years, therefore, examining the experience of parenting in immigration conditions is very necessary for future interventions. Starting from the research question "What is the experience of Iranian immigrant parents in raising children in the conditions of immigration??" the study therefore set itself the objective of deepening the understanding of Iranian immigrant parent's experiences within parenting in immigration context.

## **2.2. Methodology**

### **2.2.1. Participants**

8 people with experience of parenting in immigration conditions participated in this research. Mothers are between 36 and 42 years old ( $M = 39.3$ ,  $SD = 2.1$ ). Of these, 3 people (37%) have a bachelor's degree, 5 people have a master's degree (63%). At the time of participation in the research, 2 people (25%) were employed and 6 people (75%) were without a permanent job. All participants had immigrated to Europe and lived in the following countries: 3 in Portugal (36%), 2 in Sweden (25%), 1 in Italy (13%), 1 in France (13%) and 1 person in Germany (13%). It had been 2 to 7 years since the participants immigrated ( $M = 4.1$ ,  $SD = 1.9$ ). Also, their children are between 6 and 11 years old ( $M = 8.3$ ,  $SD = 1.7$ ).

### **2.2.2. Procedure**

This research was carried out following the approval of the Psychological Research Ethics Committee of the 17 Area of the University of Padua (unique code 438-a, 01/25/2024). The participants in this study were recruited through Instagram, thanks to the publication of a call for participants by some publishers regarding the experience of parenting Iranians in the context of immigration. All participants, before the interview, expressed their consent to participate in the research by completing and signing the informed consent form that was sent to them via email. At the same time as sending the informed consent, the participants also received a link where they could reserve an interview spot. After booking, they were emailed a Google Meet link to connect on the day of the interview. After that, a short questionnaire was sent to the participants to collect their personal information (age, occupation, highest educational qualification obtained, region where they live, duration of migration and age of children). The interviews, which were conducted on the Google Meet platform by different researchers, were recorded and then transcribed verbatim. The duration was between 30 and 50 minutes.

### **2.2.3. Instruments**

In order to deeply examine the experiences of the interviewees in relation to their parenting experience in immigration conditions, a semi-structured interview consisting of 10 open questions with an expected duration of approximately 50 minutes was made. The interview was divided into three parts: In the first part, mainly the parent's experience of immigration and the challenges and benefits of immigration were asked. In the second and more basic

part, the parent's experience in relation to his child was examined from the perspective of attachment. Finally, the final section was devoted to exploring one's suggestions for helping immigrant parents (the full list of questions is shown in Appendix A). This tool was designed by a team of two researchers after an in-depth review of the available literature. A special effort was made to create a safe and non-judgmental space for the participants in which they could freely narrate their experiences.

### **2.3. Data Analysis**

The data analyzes were conducted using a qualitative methodology, the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). IPA is a qualitative research methodology particularly suited to collecting and analyzing data in a rich and in-depth way, focusing on how individuals make sense of their experiences with respect to a particular phenomenon they experience (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith et al., 2010). IPA is based on the principles of phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography (Smith & Osborn, 2014; Smith et al., 2010). Briefly, phenomenology deals with how individuals experience and make sense of a particular phenomenon; hermeneutics instead deals with the interpretation of these experiences and the exposition of the interpretations and meanings expressed by the people who have experienced the phenomenon under examination (Cooper, 2023; Smith et al., 2010). Each individual, in interpreting these experiences, can offer unique qualities, insights and perspectives: in this sense, the process of interpreting IPA is subjective, changing from person to person (Smith et al., 2010). Finally, idiography allows researchers to focus on individual experiences through detailed, case-by-case analysis, rather than through a global survey (Frost, 2011). In this way, IPA provides rich insight into individuals' lived

experiences of a particular phenomenon in the context of their subjective world and, by definition, applies to small interview samples – 10-15 interviews (Smith et al., 2010).

The IPA analytical approach was implemented in three phases: in a first phase, the transcripts of the interviews were read several times, noting descriptive, conceptual, linguistic and interpretative observations in the margins. In a second phase these observations were translated into themes through a deeper level of conceptualization; this phase involved a transcript-by-transcript analysis, participant by participant, to place our interpretation of the themes within that very specific context, that is, the thought, voice and system of meanings of each participant. By observing and interpreting the conceptual convergences and divergences found in the various transcripts, it was possible to identify subordinate themes. In a final phase, the transcripts were reread again: some themes were renamed or reconfigured, others were dropped, with the aim of capturing the common points and differences between the participants' experiences in order to capture their nuances and carry out a careful and in-depth analysis. At this point, it was possible to find patterns among the subordinate themes, which merged into the superordinate themes. It is important to underline that no theme was predetermined on the basis of the interview topics: all the subordinate and superordinate themes that emerged, summarized in Table 1, emerged during the interviews through the voices of the participants and are therefore an attempt to represent their experience as faithfully and accurately as possible.

## **2.4. Results**

From the data analysis, 26 subthemes emerged that could be traced to 5 superordinate themes, as is can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Themes and sub-themes emerged from the analysis.

<b>THEMES</b>	<b>N of occurrences</b>	<b>SUBTHEMES</b>	<b>N of occurrences</b>	<b>Illustrative quote</b>
<b>1. General experience of immigration</b>	<b>11</b>	Satisfaction despite difficulty	3	<i>I knew that if I migrated, no, there wouldn't be such things. But it didn't matter to me at all.</i>
		Mismatch between expectations and reality	8	<i>... everywhere has its difficulties</i>
<b>2. Challenges</b>	<b>72</b>	Limit personal growth	4	<i>I didn't look for a job or study. Because I had two children, and it was very important for me to ensure their mental peace here</i>
		New language	10	<i>... and for communication, especially in school with teachers and the school staff, we have a lot of problems</i>
		administrative process difficulty	3	<i>... but I don't get an appointment. This is really bad. We don't have access to a doctor at all.</i>
		different lifestyles and cultures	5	<i>Well, the houses here are not at all like the houses in Iran.</i>

### 3. Advantages

	Unstable circumstances and difficulty in planning	15	<i>... and it's hard to make proper plans</i>
	Economic concern	7	<i>... incomes are not very high, and this, along with not having financial support from our families in Iran, has made us very cautious about buying anything</i>
	Loneliness and homesickness	14	<i>... I mean, I have a strong emotional attachment, and I still think about going back."</i>
	discrimination	2	<i>... and discrimination is gradually starting to show itself</i>
	Emotional instability	5	<i>I experienced daily mood swings</i>
	Building new relationships	7	<i>I also want to get to know the Swedish people better</i>
<b>15</b>	Assurance of the child's future	4	<i>I really endure all these hardships so that Adrian can have a good future.</i>
	New learning opportunities	2	<i>I can say that in these two years, their achievement has been adding one or two more languages</i>
	Less crowded and peaceful city	5	<i>... the population here is very small. I dislike being surrounded by constant noise</i>

<b>4. Adaptation Strategies</b>	Greater intimacy with spouse	4	<i>Here, your spouse is much more supportive, much more caring, and helps a lot more.</i>
	<b>35</b> Seeking similarities	7	<i>Because our cultures are similar, they were happy to know there were people like them.</i>
	Building new relationships	5	<i>Since then, we've become friends, and we have family-like interactions</i>
	Learning new skills	5	<i>I tried to educate myself. I learned some new software and skills.</i>
	Having a job and achieving success	4	<i>I also work in fashion design. Through a friend, I became a member of the art faculty association here</i>
	Taking care of the child	2	<i>I think having a child changed everything</i>
<b>5. Relationship with the Child</b>	Access to support programs	12	<i>"Iranian parents who have migrated can meet once a week, share their concerns, help each other, and have a facilitator, preferably a psychologist."</i>
	<b>66</b> Quality time	13	<i>We play chess together. We bought a small pool table at home, and we play pool. We also read books together</i>
	Safe haven and secure base	17	<i>We talked a lot about his feelings together. When a problem came up, I tried to empathize with him</i>



Concern for their challenges	28	<i>For the first two or three months, he was crying all the time. Every day I took him to school with tears, and I cried on the way back, wondering why he was crying. He had a very hard time.</i>
New parenting style	8	<i>here, I manage everything myself</i>

### 2.4.1. General experience of immigration

The first overarching theme addresses the general experience of migration. This theme is supported by 11 references and is observed in all 8 transcripts. Within this theme, 2 sub-themes have been identified, as illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2

#### 1. General experience of immigration

a. Satisfaction despite difficulty
b. Mismatch between expectations and reality

#### a. Satisfaction despite Difficulties

This sub-theme refers to individuals' sense of satisfaction despite the numerous challenges of migration. Participants often use phrases that reflect their awareness of difficult conditions and their realistic expectations.

For example, a participant named Parisa, referring to her perception of living conditions in the country she intends to migrate to, says she knew it would be hard: *"When I was in Iran, I had talked to many friends who had migrated, and I was fully aware of the challenges ahead of me."*

Zahra, speaking about her awareness of the different living conditions in another country compared to Iran, says she knew that after migrating, she wouldn't have all the conveniences she had gained in Iran: *"I knew that if I went, I wouldn't have the conveniences I had in Iran,*

*like spending freely for myself. I knew that if I migrated, no, there wouldn't be such things. But it didn't matter to me at all."*

Additionally, Masoumeh mentioned that the conditions were not as hard as she had thought: *"We thought it would be tougher, or the conditions would be more complicated in every way, but here, I don't know if it was luck or what, but everything came together, and we really have a calmer life here compared to Tehran."*

### **b. Mismatch between expectations and reality**

This sub-theme refers to individuals' experiences where they had perceived the conditions of the country they were migrating to as better, but upon facing the challenges, their expectations were not met as they had hoped. Participants often used phrases that indicated the difficult nature of migration.

For example, Reyhaneh says that the conditions of migration were not as depicted to her in Iran: *"Well, I think really everyone in Iran thinks that everything here is great, with good financial conditions, peace, and so on. But, well, everywhere has its difficulties."*

Fahimeh points out that she thought she wouldn't have to worry about her child's school after migrating, but in reality, it was not the case: *"Well, I felt like we're coming to Europe, there must be a much higher educational system than in Iran. More time should be allocated for children's sports, leisure, and mental well-being. But it wasn't like that, and even their school hours are different from ours. In Iran, kids go to school at 8 in the morning, for example until 2. But here, one day they go at 10, another day at 12. It depends on how available the teacher is, and this caused..."*

Additionally, Simin says that initially, due to the significant gap between expectations and reality, she intended to return to Iran: *"When stress and worries here increase, they make you frustrated, you want to say, 'I just want to go back.'"*

**2.4.2. Challenges**

The second overarching theme addresses the challenges of migration. This theme is supported by 72 references and is observed in all 8 transcripts. Within this theme, 10 sub-themes have been identified, as shown in Table 3.

*Table 3*

**2. Challenges**

a. Limit personal growth
b. New language
c. administrative process difficulty
d. different lifestyles and cultures
e. Unstable circumstances and difficulty in planning
f. Economic concern
g. Loneliness and homesickness
h. discrimination
l. Emotional instability
m. Building new relationships

### **a. Limit personal growth**

This sub-theme refers to individuals' experiences where, due to the instability of migration conditions, they had to delay their personal growth, such as pursuing a career, and instead allowed their spouse to focus on this aspect while they concentrated more on parenting and managing their own emotions.

For example, Fahimeh says that after migrating, she decided to dedicate all her time to her children: *"Still, for two years, I didn't look for a job or study. Because I had two children, and it was very important for me to ensure their mental peace here. I provided all the support. Talking to them, taking them to the park, leisure activities to reduce the pressure of migration on them."*

Masoumeh says that due to the uncertainty of their plans, she hasn't pursued a job and is still dealing with her job responsibilities in Iran: *"Because our plans are not clear, I still have my work in Iran. But, well, I don't spend much time on it or follow it up. But here, I am a housewife. I do the housework. But, well, almost all the shopping and cleaning and everything is on me here."*

Additionally, Zahra says that considering the importance of paying more attention to her child, she intends to work remotely: *"Now I'm studying my language. I changed my field. I had previously studied tourism, now I've taken a UX design course. Now I'm strengthening both that and my language to look for freelance work. I want to work remotely."*

## **b. New language**

This sub-theme refers to individuals' experiences of significant challenges due to the language of the country they migrated to, which was often different from English. This created serious difficulties for them in interacting with others and for their children in school.

For example, Simin says that she, her husband, and her child know English but not the language of the country they live in, which is Portuguese, and this has created a major challenge for them: *"Our main issue here, since we came to Portugal, has been that we don't know the third language. My husband and I speak English, and the classes we sent our child to in Iran were obviously in English. The idea of Portugal came up a year ago and was settled in a year. But this language issue is a concern, and for communication, especially in school with teachers and the school staff, we have a lot of problems."*

Fahimeh says that the first and most important challenge they faced was not knowing the language of the country they migrated to: *"The first issue is the language. When you go to a country where the language is different from yours, the first challenge for both the family and the children is learning the language. Now, since my children were completely fluent in English, when they came here, they had to learn a third language. So, Farsi and English were okay, now Portuguese. This was a big challenge for us, especially in the first year."*

Additionally, Zahra says that not knowing the language has caused her embarrassment and made her avoid social situations: *"It's a big challenge, and I feel embarrassed if an Iranian comes here, and I want to go out with them and then face a problem because of this issue. So, I need to improve my language. I'm also taking German classes, actually. I've completed*

*levels A1 and A2, but since I haven't been in the environment and haven't spoken, even the little I had learned, I've forgotten now."*

### **c. administrative process difficulty**

This sub-theme refers to individuals' experiences of emotional hardship due to the need to visit administrative offices and health centers for obtaining temporary residence permits and physical check-ups, which involved a lot of difficulties and long waiting times.

For example, Reyhaneh says that for their citizenship processes, they were asked for a document that didn't exist in Iran, making the situation difficult for them: *"For our citizenship processes, they wanted a document, a birth certificate. Everywhere we went, they didn't understand that we don't have birth certificates like they do. In Iran, birth certificates are issued immediately, and we get an ID card. We kept saying, 'Here, this is the ID card,' we kept translating it, but they didn't understand. Because of this issue and their attitude, I got upset and told my husband, 'Why did we come here at all? Let's go back to our own country.'"*

Additionally, Zahra says that she had to wait a long time to see a doctor, which was very frustrating for her: *"I've been going to the clinic for a year... going to health offices, but I don't get an appointment. This is really bad. We don't have access to a doctor at all."*

### **d. different lifestyles and cultures**

This sub-theme refers to individuals' experiences of encountering different living conditions, such as the style of house construction and different shopping habits, as well as different cultural beliefs and practices in the new country, which took time for them to accept.

For example, Reyhaneh says that the different style of houses and the climate caused her problems at the beginning of the migration: *"Well, the houses here are not at all like the houses in Iran. They are much smaller, and they don't have as many amenities as Iranian houses. And because they are close to the ocean, the humidity is very high, so all the clothes, walls, everything was moldy all the time."*

Additionally, Fatemeh says that due to the different school system compared to Iran, she faced new issues and had to make an effort to accept them: *"In school, the kids, because of their proximity to puberty, got into the issue of romance. Well, the child is growing up. Not just Toranj, all the kids in the class. For example, these things don't exist in Iran because the schools are gender-segregated. But here, their view is that it's an instinct and a natural stage of growth. And culturally, it might be hard for us to accept. That's why I took a course on Swedish sociology with my husband. After that, I was able to create a balance between my own culture and here."*

#### **e. Unstable circumstances and difficulty in planning**

This sub-theme refers to individuals' experiences of not achieving the desired stability in their living conditions after migration. This lack of stability and uncertainty prevented them from making proper plans for their future, which in turn caused anxiety.

For example, Simin says that at the beginning of their migration, they had to move to a different city twice, which resulted in their child missing the registration for preschool: *"We changed cities twice. So, when we finally came to this city, Lisbon, several months of the school year had already passed, and the schools said they were full, so Shervin missed his*



*preschool. This lack of stability is very noticeable for immigrants. It's very tangible because they are always waiting, not knowing what will happen next, and it's hard to make proper plans."*

Fahimeh says that because they are in a non-English speaking country, they are considering a second migration, which adds more instability: *"We are also taking steps towards a second migration, maybe to an English-speaking or more advanced country. Although this is also uncertain and not a definite plan."*

#### **f. Economic concern**

This sub-theme refers to individuals' experiences of unsatisfactory economic conditions and income, especially in the early years after migration. They had to be very cautious with their spending on necessities.

For example, Zohre says that her and her friends' income experience in Europe has not been very good, and since they didn't have financial support from their families in Iran, they had to be meticulous about their purchases in the first few years: *"At least we can say that in some European countries, incomes are not very high, and this, along with not having financial support from our families in Iran, has made us very cautious about buying anything."*

#### **g. Loneliness and homesickness**

This sub-theme refers to individuals' experiences of feeling homesick due to being away from home and family, and feeling lonely due to the lack of friends, acquaintances, and social gatherings they used to have.

For example, Zahra says she felt lonely because her friends and social gatherings were missing: *"Look, let me say something about loneliness first. Sometimes, yes, you wish you had someone, like you could go to their house for a party. But because I am very social, loneliness really bothered me."*

Fatemeh also mentions that she missed her sisters a lot, which made her want to return to Iran: *"Yes. I missed them. I have two sisters. I mean, I have a strong emotional attachment, and I still think about going back."*

Reyhaneh says that at the beginning of their migration, both she and her husband experienced the loss of their loved ones, which made their feelings of homesickness and loneliness even stronger: *"In the early days, we had just arrived, and both my husband and I lost our parents within 40 days. So, we both went through a very tough time and were very homesick."*

#### **h. discrimination**

This sub-theme refers to individuals' experiences of encountering discrimination in certain situations, such as their child at school or themselves in various circumstances.

For example, Zahra says that initially, she did not experience discrimination, or at least she thought others did not show it, but after a change in government, she began to notice a few instances: *"Not at first, but in the past couple of years, the government changed, and the right-wing came in, and discrimination is gradually starting to show itself."*

### **l. Emotional instability**

This sub-theme refers to the experiences of individuals who, due to the challenges of migration and being away from their home country, experienced mood swings and emotional fluctuations, which were sometimes difficult for them to manage.

For example, Fahimeh says that due to the challenging circumstances, she experienced anxiety and withdrawal, which led to emotional overeating: *"I experienced daily mood swings; I felt better in the mornings, but by the evening, I would feel worse and would distract myself with eating."*

### **m. Building new relationships**

This sub-theme refers to the experiences of individuals who made significant efforts to build new relationships in order to connect with the community and manage feelings of loneliness and homesickness. They tried to establish connections both with locals and with fellow nationals, though sometimes these efforts led to mixed experiences.

For example, Parisa mentions that the Iranian community in her new country is small, and while she enjoys their style of gatherings, she also wants to befriend the locals in Sweden. However, cultural differences have sometimes made this challenging for her: *"I became friends with the Iranians here, and we have a pretty good relationship, but I also want to get to know the Swedish people better. Sometimes, I feel unfamiliar with their style of gatherings and occasionally feel like they don't want me around."*

### 2.4.3. Advantages

This main theme addresses the benefits that individuals have experienced from immigration. It is supported by 15 instances and is observed in all 8 transcripts. Within this theme, 4 sub-themes have been identified, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4

### 3. Advantages

	a. Assurance of the child's future
	b. New learning opportunities
	c. Less crowded and peaceful city
	d. Greater intimacy with spouse

#### a. Assurance of the child's future

This sub-theme refers to the experience of individuals feeling assured about their children's future and the educational standards after immigration, which they consider one of their primary motivations for migrating.

For instance, Simin mentions that she is pleased with the basic standards maintained by all schools and appreciates that her child is not forced to attend religious classes. *"Well, the density of schools that meet a basic standard is appropriate. All of them maintain a basic, correct standard. They don't force religious classes on the kids. They give them proper freedom of action, don't have unreasonable expectations. They don't push too hard academically in the early years."*

Similarly, Parisa states that the most important reason for her migration is to ensure a good future for her child. *"I really endure all these hardships so that Adrian can have a good future."*

#### **b. New learning opportunities**

This sub-theme refers to the experience of learning new skills due to immigration. Individuals expressed satisfaction with the opportunity to acquire new abilities and skills.

For instance, Fahimeh mentions that the opportunity to migrate allowed her family to learn new languages, especially her children. *"My daughter, besides English and Persian, can speak Portuguese and French. Or my son, in addition to Persian and English, has become proficient in Portuguese. I can say that in these two years, their achievement has been adding one or two more languages."*

Similarly, Zahra says that immigration has made her a more patient and resilient person. *"It made me stronger, meaning that when I face difficulties and challenges, I look for solutions, and I am patient and resilient."*

#### **c. Less crowded and peaceful city**

This sub-theme refers to the experience of feeling more at peace due to living in a small and less crowded city. This sentiment was particularly expressed by interviewees who had previously lived in bustling cities like Tehran.

For instance, Parisa mentions that she believes the smaller population and the quietness of the city contribute to a unique sense of tranquility and better mental health. *"For example,*

*the population here is very small. I dislike being surrounded by constant noise. I like that it's quiet around me; it feels like everyone is calmer and healthier. Besides the lack of noise pollution, there is also less air pollution."*

#### **d. Greater intimacy with spouse**

This sub-theme refers to the experience of having a closer and more intimate relationship with their spouse after migration. Interviewees attributed this to the fact that they felt they only had each other for support, as there were no other close friends or family members around.

For instance, Reyhaneh mentions that after migrating, she received more affection from her husband. *"Here, your spouse is much more supportive, much more caring, and helps a lot more. The affection seems greater, the attention and love, because there is no one else here. It feels like your relationship with each other improves here."*

#### **2.4.4. Adaptation Strategies**

This general theme refers to the various strategies and methods individuals employed to adapt to the challenges of migration. It is supported by 35 references and has been observed in all 8 transcriptions. Within this theme, six sub-themes have been identified, as shown in Table 5.

Table 5

**4. Adaptation Strategies**

	a. Seeking similarities
	b. Building new relationships
	c. Learning new skills
	d. Having a job and achieving success
	e. Taking care of the child
	f. Access to support programs

**a. Seeking similarities**

This sub-theme refers to the experience of seeking out people and situations similar to their previous experiences, beliefs, and culture in order to adapt better after migration.

For instance, Fahimeh mentions that to alleviate the difficulties of migration, she sought out Iranian friends who shared her beliefs. *"One thing I did was find Iranian friends, friends who were Muslim, and on weekends, our kids spent time together. Because our cultures are similar, they were happy to know there were people like them. We shared our problems, and it was comforting to know we were all experiencing the same things. I also have some religious roots, so I found the local mosque. During Ramadan, we went there to break our fast and pray. It made me feel better."*

Reyhaneh also says that to reduce feelings of homesickness, she and other Iranians formed a group to celebrate Iranian festivals and events together. *"Especially during the first couple*

*of years, I felt very homesick around Nowruz, but gradually, we started organizing gatherings with a few Iranians to celebrate these occasions together."*

### **b. Building new relationships**

This sub-theme refers to the experience of individuals seeking to establish new relationships with people from the country they have migrated to, in order to better adapt to the conditions. They aim to learn more about the culture and social interactions of the new environment.

For example, Zohre mentioned that, to enhance her adaptation after migration, she befriended a mother of one of her son's classmates. *"The mother of my son's classmate reached out to me, saying if I needed any help or assistance as a newcomer, she's there for me. Since then, we've become friends, and we have family-like interactions."*

### **c. Learning new skills**

This sub-theme refers to the experience of individuals who, after migrating, seek to learn a new skill to better adapt to their new environment. This pursuit gives them a sense of dynamism and usefulness and significantly helps them manage feelings of homesickness.

For example, Fahimeh mentioned that to manage her ruminative thoughts, she tried participating in online courses. *"At home, I tried to educate myself. I learned some new software and skills. This helped to take my mind off those thoughts and worries."*

Similarly, Parisa mentioned that to adapt to the new conditions, she tried to learn cycling and made it a part of her routine. *"A month after I arrived, I bought a bike and started learning to cycle, and I practiced every morning."*



#### **d. Having a job and achieving success**

This sub-theme relates to individuals who, after migration, defined goals for themselves to better adapt to their new circumstances and aimed to achieve them, leading to increased success and adaptation.

For example, Fatemeh mentioned that executing a project she had been working on gave her a great sense of accomplishment. *"I also work in fashion design. Through a friend, I became a member of the art faculty association here, and last year I showcased two of my designs."*

Additionally, Parisa stated that finding a job and progressing in it helped her. *"After a lot of searching, I found a job, and then I started setting small goals for success, which really helped me."*

#### **e. Taking care of the child**

This sub-theme discusses how individuals, after migration, focused more on taking care of their children in order to better adapt to their new circumstances. They spent more time with their children, seemingly shifting their focus away from thoughts that troubled them.

For example, Zahra mentioned that her restlessness improved by focusing on and taking care of her child. *"I think having a child changed everything. Because my priority became only Toranj, my thoughts were less focused on separation and longing."*

#### **f. Access to support programs**

This sub-theme refers to the interviewees' suggestions for developing a support program based on their experiences. Their main recommendations revolve around forming support

groups where parents with similar conditions can gather and share their experiences. Additionally, they suggested forming groups facilitated by a psychologist.

For example, Fatemeh spoke about having gatherings where Iranian parents can meet weekly and receive help from a psychologist. *"Iranian parents who have migrated can meet once a week, share their concerns, help each other, and have a facilitator, preferably a psychologist."*

Similarly, Fahimeh expressed her desire for a space where she could learn about the new culture. *"I wanted to know how people here form close friendships, how both adults and children can create bonds of intimacy."*

Simine suggested that the presence of a family who has been settled for a long time and can empathetically share their experiences would be beneficial. *"Having a family who has been here for 5, 6, or 7 years and has achieved stability, and can share their journey with newly arrived families, can help reduce their anxiety and provide a clearer path forward."*

Parisa mentioned that having counseling sessions with an Iranian psychologist who has migration experience would be reassuring. *"If I were to talk to a psychologist, I would prefer them to be Iranian, and it's crucial for me that they have migration experience to truly understand what I am going through."*

### 2.4.5. Relationship with the Child

The fifth main theme refers to the interviewees' relationship with their child. This theme is supported by 67 references and has been observed in all 8 transcribed texts. Within this theme, 4 sub-themes have been identified, which are shown in Table 6.

Table 6

#### 5. Relationship with the Child

	a. Quality time
	b. Safe haven and secure base
	c. Concern for their challenges
	d. New parenting style

#### a. Quality time

This sub-theme refers to the relationship between the interviewees and their children, focusing on the quality time spent together. Some participants discuss the impact of instability on their shared time, while others mention that due to the challenges faced after migration, they have tried to engage in more one-on-one activities with their child.

For example, Masoumeh says she spends most of her weekends with her child. *"During the weekends, Soran and I would be together, doing things he liked. He really loved nature. He loved gardens and such. I'd take him there, just the two of us doing things together. My husband wasn't as interested. It was mostly just me and him spending time together."*

On the other hand, Simin says that due to her own turmoil, she didn't know how to spend time with her child. *"I would just say, well, now what should I do with this kid? What activities can I do with Shervin that he would enjoy?"*

Fahimeh mentions that because of her busy schedule, she had less time to spend with her child. *"Well, as you know, parents here are really busy. I haven't spent much time with him."*

Conversely, Parisa says that because she spends more time at home, she spends more time with her children than she did in Iran. *"We play chess together. We bought a small pool table at home, and we play pool. We also read books together. I brought many books from Iran, and I read to them. My older daughter isn't as interested in these activities, so I spend more time with her outside the home. For example, she says she wants to go shopping for clothes together. She likes to invite her friends from Iran, go to the park, and play games like volleyball."*

#### **b. Safe haven and secure base**

This sub-theme refers to the relationship between the interviewees and their children, focusing on the aspect of providing a safe haven and secure base. Almost all interviewees mentioned that they exercised sufficient empathy and support, knowing that migration created challenging conditions for their children, helping them explore the new environment.

For example, Simin says that she talked to her child about their emotions to give them a sense of being understood. *"We talked a lot about his feelings together. When a problem came up, I tried to empathize with him using methods I had learned, and we would talk at an appropriate time. Sometimes, even a few days after an issue arose, he would reflect on*

*it, and I would try to respond in a way that encouraged us to sit down and discuss how he felt at that time."*

Additionally, Zahra explains that to help her child feel more comfortable in new environments, she would describe the place in advance. *"Beforehand, I tell her where we are going. For example, we're going to Lily, a very big store that sells food and clothes. Just remember to tell me to buy the cheese."*

Parisa also shares that when attending gatherings, she did not pressure her child to separate from her and interact with others. *"I would tell her that she could stay by my side as long as she wanted. Gradually, she would go to the other kids, but I noticed she would look back at me from time to time."*

### **c. Concern for their challenges**

This sub-theme refers to the relationship between the interviewees and their children, focusing on parental concerns regarding their children's difficult experiences in the context of migration. The interviewees mentioned that a significant portion of their worries revolved around their children's struggles due to migration. These concerns mainly centered on their children's experiences at school, homesickness for Iran, and damage to their children's self-esteem.

For example, Simin says she was worried during the first year because her child had a hard time at school due to the language barrier. *"When he went to school, at first he thought they spoke English, but he realized he couldn't communicate with them. By some luck, or misfortune, his first-grade teacher couldn't speak any language other than Portuguese."*

Reyhaneh also mentions that her child struggled at school because he didn't know the language. *"He could communicate with his coach, but not with the other kids. For the first two or three months, he was crying all the time. Every day I took him to school with tears, and I cried on the way back, wondering why he was crying. He had a very hard time."*

*Parisa explains her worry about her child's self-esteem due to the feeling of being unable to communicate with others at school. "Every day he came back from school and said, 'Mom, I feel stupid, I can't do it. "*

Additionally, Simin mentions that initially, her child was very homesick and restless due to being away from his grandparents. *"Every night he would remember how much he missed them. At first, he even cried at night before falling asleep. That was in the beginning, before I started working. Gradually, he accepted that he had to see his grandparents, aunts, and uncles through WhatsApp, and long calls became the norm between them. They would sit and play together for an hour or two."*

#### **d. New parenting style**

This sub-theme refers to the relationship between the interviewees and their children, focusing on the experience of a new form of parenting. The interviewees mentioned feeling alone without their family around to help them, but they also noted that this absence gave them a sense of greater independence in their parenting style due to the lack of differing opinions from others.

For example, Zahra says that because her family is not there to help her take care of her daughter, she has no free time for herself and can't find time to spend with her husband. *"My*

*family is not here, and sometimes I really need help with parenting. For example, I really need to leave Lily and go to a cafe. Once, my husband took a day off, and we both put Lily in daycare. The two of us went to the center of Stockholm together."*

On the other hand, Fatemeh says that being away from others gives her more independence in her parenting style. *"For instance, I believe in a certain style of parenting, but implementing it was very challenging due to others' perceptions and judgments. In gatherings, the main challenge was that my child would cry and want something, and I didn't want to give it to them. Ten people would come and say, 'Just give it to them today, let it go for today,' but here, I manage everything myself."*

## **2.5. Discussion and Conclusion**

Today, a significant number of people decide to migrate, and this phenomenon is increasingly common in Iran. Among those who migrate, a substantial number are families with parenting responsibilities. Since migration is a challenging phenomenon, these challenges affect parents and family dynamics. The impacts parents experience from their surroundings influence their emotions and behaviors, subsequently affecting the relationship they have with their children (Berry, 1997).

This study aimed to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of Iranian immigrant parents regarding parenting in migration conditions, specifically focusing on the aspect of parenting related to attachment needs. The experiences of 8 individuals were heard, and data analysis revealed five main themes: overall experience of migration, challenges, benefits, adaptation, and the parent-child relationship.

Participants reported a variety of positive and negative experiences with migration. They mentioned migrating in search of better economic and educational opportunities for their children while struggling with feelings of homesickness and separation from family and friends back home (Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007). For instance, one parent stated, "We migrated for a better future for our children, but being away from family and old friends is still hard for us." These mixed feelings can influence parents' behaviors and emotions, and consequently, the quality of their relationship with their children (Chen et al., 2012).

Participants reported facing multiple challenges. As noted in the literature, cultural and language differences, lifestyle changes, and economic and social pressures are among the challenges that can cause stress and anxiety in parents (Berry, 1997). One interviewee mentioned, "Dealing with a new culture and learning the language was very difficult for us. Sometimes we felt that no one understood us." These conditions can lead to difficulties in parenting and forming attachment bonds. Some parents also suffer from feelings of inequality and discrimination in the host society, which can negatively impact their morale and behavior (Motti-Stefanidi et al., 2012).

Despite the challenges, participants reported enjoying several benefits. As highlighted in the literature, they pointed to better access to educational resources, more peaceful environments, and a better future outlook for their children (Kwak & Berry, 2001). One parent noted, "Our children can attend schools that meet basic standards." Another parent mentioned, "I endure all the difficulties of migration to ensure my child's future." These benefits can help create a sense of security and satisfaction in parents, strengthening their attachment bonds with their children (Hazan & Shaver, 1987).



Participants reported using various strategies to adapt to their new conditions. As noted in the literature, maintaining connections with family and friends in Iran through modern communication technologies, joining local Iranian immigrant communities, utilizing local support resources, and forming new connections with people in the host country are among these strategies (Titzmann & Fuligni, 2015). One parent stated, "My child accepted that from now on, he will talk to his grandmother through WhatsApp." Another parent said, "I tried to find Iranians here so we could celebrate events together." These adaptations can help reduce stress and anxiety, improving the family's quality of life (Glick, 2010).

Parents' experiences and their reports indicate that migration can impact their relationship with their children. They mentioned deciding to spend more quality time with their children due to the challenging conditions they were aware of and showing more empathy in addressing their children's challenges. They also helped their children recognize and regulate their emotions. Participants reported that in the new environment, they tried to accompany their children and provide a safe haven and a secure base for them. As noted in the literature, some parents indicated that migration has strengthened their emotional bonds with their children because they spend more time together and receive more support from each other (Chen et al., 2012). For instance, one parent said, "Migration has brought us closer. Now we spend more time with our children, and it has helped strengthen our relationship." However, other parents reported additional pressures and parenting challenges that could reduce the quality of their relationship with their children (Motti-Stefanidi et al., 2012). Additionally, participants reported that migration helped them experience greater independence in the parenting process.

Overall, research has shown that phenomena involving significant change and uncertainty have a substantial impact on individuals, which can affect their relationships as well. This study found that the migration of Iranian parents to other countries involves unique opportunities and challenges. The research indicated that Iranian immigrant parents have experienced multiple challenges and benefits, impacting their relationships with their children. Many have tried to support their children to prevent psychological harm and attachment disruptions, but some have struggled with instability and have not been able to adequately meet their children's attachment needs. Thus, the experiences of immigrant parents are diverse and complex, affecting their emotions, behaviors, and relationships with their children.

To provide more effective psychological and therapeutic services to this population, it is essential for professionals to consider these complexities and help parents cope with the challenges of migration in a healthy and constructive manner (Tummala-Narra, 2004).

Some limitations of this study should be addressed. Firstly, qualitative analysis is characterized by "local" generalizability, thus being limited to the analyzed sample. There may also be sampling bias: the request for participants shared by promoters on Instagram may have mostly reached parents who are well aware of modern parenting methods and the importance of properly addressing their children's attachment needs.

Future research should explore more diverse samples of Iranian immigrant parents to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of their experiences. Additionally, examining the long-term effects of migration on attachment styles and parenting can provide a better

understanding of this topic. Research should also investigate various strategies to support immigrant parents and reduce the stresses and anxieties associated with migration, helping them cope with parenting challenges more effectively and healthily (Glick, 2010).

## APPENDIX A

### Semi-structure interview

1. What was your experience of migration like?
2. What were the benefits and challenges of this experience?
  - How did you adapt to the new circumstances?
  - Do you want to tell me a specific episode?
3. Do you believe this experience influenced your relationship with your child? If yes, how?
  - Do you want to tell me a specific episode?
4. How much quality time are you used to spend with your child?
5. When your child entered a new place, how did you support her/him to get to know that place?
  - Do you want to tell me a specific episode?
6. How do you usually respond when your child needs you?
  - Is there a specific episode that you remember about it?
7. What were the main challenges you encountered in parenting after migration?
8. In your opinion, which aspects of the migration process contributed to these challenges?
9. What support do you have in place to overcome these challenges?
  - Do you want to tell me a specific episode?
10. What kind of support, in your view, would have been beneficial to you on this journey?

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