

The Marginalization of Burundian Refugee Children in America: A Pilot Study

By

Mathias D. Dusabe

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Abstract

This study aims to understand the Burundian community in Nashville, especially their children's integration and adjustment in the host culture. It examines experiences, perceptions, and feelings of Burundian refugee children in their integration in America in the last ten years of being resettled in the US. This project seeks to understand how Burundian Refugee children, who are resettled in Nashville, Tennessee, have been affected by their adjustment to the American culture, and why some of the Burundian refugee children are marginalized and /or seen caught between their native culture and the host community culture.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Each year, about a million people emigrate from their home countries to the United States. Many of them are refugees. Refugees are legal residents of the United States. The United Nations define a refugee as “any person who, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his/her nationality” (UN High Commissioner for Refugees, 2007b). Refugees, who come to this country for better economic opportunities or safety with little knowledge about the language and the life in America, must adjust to the American culture and become multicultural. The processes of cultural adjustment are biculturalism, acculturation (for foreign – born immigrants), and enculturation (for born immigrants in the host country), with biculturalism being one of the ways of acculturation (Nguyen and Benet-Martinez, 2012).

Acculturation is defined as the process of learning and adapting to a new culture (Berry, 2003) as stated Nguyen and Benet-Martinez in *Biculturalism and Adjustment: A Meta-Analysis*. This assimilation can take a little while to accomplish. Bicultural immigrants are challenged each day by language use, social group, habits, cultural traditions, communication style, cultural identity, beliefs, or values. Integration (orientation to both cultures), assimilation (orientation to the dominant culture only), separation (orientation to the heritage culture only), and/or marginalization (orientation to neither culture) are the four possible acculturation strategies for immigrants either to be fully /partially adjusted, separated, or marginalized to the host culture (Nguyen and Benet-Martinez, 2012).

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

To explore pertinent information for this study, four significant areas were researched thoroughly on cultural adjustment problems of immigrants in the United States: (1) Burundian Refugee History Background, (2) Cultural Orientation, (3) Biculturalism and Adjustment, and (4) Cultural Adjustment in Children from Immigrant Parents.

Burundian Refugee History Background

Refugees are legal residents of the United States. Each year, the United States of America receives more refugees than any other country in the world. Burundian refugees are among those who are accepted in America. “War and the destruction of civilian lives in Burundi in 1972 led to the flee of thousands of Burundians as refugees in search of security and safety in neighboring countries’ refugee camps” (Bates et al., 2012).

The “1972 Burundians” is the term used to define the largest group of Burundian refugees who experienced their recent resettlement in the United States starting at the beginning of 2007. It also refers to the war in which they were victims as well as participants (Cultural Orientation Resource Center, 2007; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2007). The majority of the “1972 Burundians” are from Hutu ethnicity who fled ethnic cleansing by Burundi’s Tutsi government. Between May and August 1972, according to international agency estimates, 200,000 Hutu Burundians were killed, with an additional 150,000 Burundians fleeing to neighboring Tanzania, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Rwanda, where they have been living for over 30

years. A significant number of the Burundians resettling to the United States left Burundi as small children, or had not been born in Burundi at all (Cultural Orientation Resource Center, 2007; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2007).

As it is common for most refugees who came to the United States, Burundian refugees arrived with no possessions, no financial resources, limited job skills, and low literacy levels. The lack of basic needs for living positioned this population with a very difficult resettlement to America. From 1997 to 2007, the United States has resettled refugees from diverse nationalities, including Burundians in Middle Tennessee. Nashville refugee resettlement agencies, Catholic Charities of Tennessee, and World Relief Nashville received 356 Burundian refugees ranging in age from infants to senior citizens (Catholic Charities of Tennessee, 2008). Secondary migration by other Burundians attempting to reunite with their friends and family increased the population significantly within the same period. For activities, Burundian refugees have factory jobs in Nashville community and surrounding areas, attend churches regularly, especially their own church “Light Mission Pentecostal Church,” and their children attend Metro schools and community colleges (Richard, 2015).

Cultural Orientation

Approximately 50 million people worldwide are displaced from their home countries, and about one million of among those are economic immigrants, refugees, students, tourists, etc. who come to the United States of America each year. Kirst-Ashman (Cox & Pawar, 2006). As soon as they get to this country, those immigrants must adjust to the American culture and language.

Most agencies sponsoring immigrants, especially refugees, give them a head start by making them actively participate in cultural orientation for their integration in the American culture. World Relief is one of the three agencies for social services that resettle refugees in the Nashville area. They have operated for many years in Nashville, Tennessee. World Relief has a cultural orientation in place for its refugees to attend. An Orientation Handbook, a document that welcomes refugees resettled in Nashville, gives them a summary of the basic aspects of the American culture. In their first week on the American soil, those immigrants who are sponsored by the World Relief Agency must attend this orientation. The purpose of this orientation is to teach them about American culture, what their expectations are, and how to behave in their new surroundings. They learn how to be quickly integrated in American lifestyle, and how to become self-sufficient. This cultural orientation helps new refugees in Middle Tennessee to succeed in their resettlement process and cultural adaptations in America (Richard, 2015).

Biculturalism and Acculturation

As a result of being exposed to more than one culture, immigrants become culturally challenged individuals who go through the process of acculturation. According to Nguyen and Benet-Martinez:

Acculturating individuals face two central issues, the dominant cultural orientations (sometimes referred to as the acculturation outcome), reflecting the extent to which acculturating individuals are involved with the host or mainstream culture and the heritage cultural orientation (sometimes referred to as the enculturation outcome, capturing the extent to which they are involved with their

ethnic minority or non-dominant culture. These two cultural orientations apply to multiple dimensions or domains: language use or preference, social affiliation, daily habits, cultural traditions, communication style, cultural identity/pride, perceived discrimination/prejudice, generational status, family socialization, and cultural knowledge, beliefs or values. More broadly, acculturating individuals may be involved in both, either or neither cultures with regard of their behaviors or practices, values and beliefs, or identity (Nguyen and Benet-Martinez, 2012).

The study performed by these researchers, shows how both biculturalism and acculturation are tightly connected and correlated, with biculturalism being one of the paths to acculturation. Also, it explains how bicultural individuals may be seen as marginal by being caught between cultures, as it is often the case in plural societies here in the United States.

On the other hand, biculturalism plays a significant role in self-perception of competence in immigrants. On her study on biculturalism and perceived competence of among Latino immigrant adolescents, researcher Birman found that acculturation to America culture predicts positive self-perceptions of competence with American peers, while acculturation to Hispanic culture predicts positive self-perceptions of competence with Latino peers (Birman, 1998).

Cultural Adjustment in Children from Immigrant Parents

Children from immigrant families in the United States face many challenges. Those who go to school quickly succeed in speaking English and imitating the American life style of their peers. However, “the process of adaption to a new culture in children

growing up from immigrant families is accompanied by a host of changes across multiple life domains, which can create both challenges and opportunities for children's psychosocial adjustment. The processes of cultural adaptation often vary among immigrant families and may even vary among members of the same family" (Chen et al., 2014). On the one hand, the majority of children (foreign born) from immigrant parents often maintain a few elements and practices from their heritage culture. On the other hand, it is extremely difficult for children (born in the host country) who have immigrant parents to adapt their family's culture. The study shows that American orientation of children is associated with a better psychological adjustment in children with a highly involved parent. While a poorer child adjustment is associated with a greater parent-child gap and lower guidance parenting and /or with authoritarian parenting, strict rules, and harsh punishments (Chen et al., 2014)

Theory

The study is based on a process that has three distinct phases: psychological, social, and behavioral. These phases are derived from a review of literature on the process of cultural adjustment in immigrants. The theory for this process comes from diverse sources listed above as clues for immigrants to psychologically and socio-culturally success in their cultural adjustment. Nguyen & Benet-Martinez state that (1) “Psychological adjustment refers to psychological well-being (life satisfaction, positive affect, and self-esteem, as well as alienation, anxiety, depression, loneliness, and negative affect), (2) whereas sociocultural adjustment refers to behavioral competence (academic achievement, career success, and social skills, as well as (3) health-related behavioral problems, such as delinquency and risky sexual behaviors)” (Nguyen and Benet-Martinez, 2012). This proposed the idea for this study on cultural adjustment process in individuals. These are the main issues of my study on the cultural adjustment in immigrants. The above-mentioned researched studies demonstrate the areas of interests my project as pertinent processes in immigrants’ cultural adjustments.

Rationale and Summary

The above processes are characteristics of important steps in immigrants' cultural adjustments, but they are probably not the only factors that contribute to the success or failure in individuals' adaption to a new culture. Since socio-economic and demographic status may also play significant roles in cultural adaption in immigrants in the host country, such alternative factors will also be taken into consideration with the initially considered factors for this study. Immigrants selected for this study are coming from the same area in Africa (Burundi). They arrived in Nashville at the same period, and had sponsoring agencies' support, with similar social services for newcomer refugees in Middle Tennessee. They are among these 8,500 Burundian refugees who, due to the wars that have torn through that tiny country, have been approved for resettlement in the United States in 2006 (Bates et al., 2012).

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Burundian refugee parents' interviews overview: Interview questions have been developed based on the cultural adjustment of their children in the American culture. The researcher has convened a small group of Burundian community leaders to determine the cultural appropriateness of the interview questions and to identify one or more culturally-relevant child transitions from the native culture to the host culture. Individual Burundian children and their parents have been interviewed in a location of their choice with the investigator.

One-on-one interviews have been conducted with participants. Both qualitative information and quantitative interview questions have been used. A written consent form has been given to the participant. The consent has been verbally explained to the participant and any questions have been answered before the interview began. Reiterated from the consent form has been that the participant's information and responses had to be confidential, participation was voluntary and the participant could refuse to answer any of the questions or may stop the interview at any time.

Both qualitative and quantitative methodology have been used in this study to discover the differences in cultural adjustments in a sample of 21 participants. Seventeen Burundian children from families arriving in the Nashville community between 1997-2007 were interviewed, along with 4 parents. Demographic information was quantified in conjunction with observation and convenience sampling. The relationship between children with parents has been taken into consideration to measure its impact in this adaptation process. By living nearby and speaking their language, the researcher's

personal observation and interview has helped in identifying culturally relevance sampling methods. The goal for this study was to discover how they have been impacted in their cultural adjustment, and why some of them are seen as marginalized and /or caught between their native culture and the host culture. The methods and forms used in this study have been submitted to Middle Tennessee State University's IRB for approval before implementation.

In this study, Burundian parents have been interviewed along with adult children. The ethnographic interview data, frequencies, percentage, rates, and other descriptive data have provided the investigator insights to answer the question on why some of Burundian refugee children are marginalized in America culture. This study is a pilot study leading to a larger study with Burundian children refugees from across Tennessee.

Limitations

A clear limitation in the implementation of the ethnographic interview is that this method is time consuming. Some of Burundian refugee children did not take the ethnographic interview because they were out of state during summer vacation. Another limitation is that only twenty five percent (25%) of respondent parents who were available were female. The reason behind this limitation is maybe about their back home culture pattern that prevent females to express themselves openly when spouses are present. It would be helpful to hear about their feelings on how their children integrated the new culture. Let us hope that females will be able to contribute to related researches and surveys in the future.

Data collection: Community Interviews

The investigator received study approval from the Middle Tennessee State University's Institution Review Board (IRB) prior the implementation of the study. Nine questions have been asked to Burundian Refugees Children and some of their parents. The questionnaire was originally intended to be sent to 30 Burundian young adults, 18 years old and over, and at least one of their parents. However, only 21 participants were reached for the survey and have responded to the socio-economic and demographic survey.

Interviewed Burundian young adults openly stated their experiences, perceptions and feelings on how they were integrated in the host culture. All the respondents arrived in the United States between 1997 and 2007 are currently living in and around Nashville in urban and suburban settings. Thirty eight percent (38%) of the respondents were female and sixty two (62%) percent of the interviewed were male. Ten years was the range of the years they have been living in Nashville, Tennessee and surroundings. At least four parents of the respondent Burundian young adults indicated that their children integration in the American culture was positive. Seventy- five percent of the respondent parents were male and twenty five-percent were female. All the respondent parents still live with their children as it is cultural seen in their home country where even single children stay with parents until they get married.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The number of participants interviewed was 21. The content of transcripts have been analyzed and organized into codes and themes in accordance with descriptive methodology. Qualitative and quantitative analysis of the demographic survey have been employed to identify emerging themes responses to open-ended questions in the interviews. Emergent themes have been analyzed and interpreted by the researcher. For survey data, frequencies, percentages, rates, ratios and other descriptive data have been used to analyze the cultural adjustment of the interviewed individual. A total of five themes have emerged from the study. Participant's motivation and passion for the project was demonstrated as they shared personal statements regarding their own experiences in integrating the host culture. To enhance understanding the experiences and perceptions of Burundian refugee children in America, some of results of the interviewed are presented below each theme.

Theme 1: Languages Barriers

1.1 Age

A total of 15 of 21 participants from the interviewed Burundian Refugee Children were under ten years of age at the time they arrived in America. None spoke English. This group struggled for a little while in adapting and adjusting to the new culture, but quickly found quickly their way to adjusting well to the host culture due their young age. The remaining group had a hard time learning the language. The entire group interviewed stated unanimously that language barrier is the hardest thing everybody goes through in the first six months. Age is a big factor in learning and adjusting to the host culture. Coming to America at a younger age make the transition much easier compared to those who come at an older age.

1.2 School

Ten of the interviewed children that stated going to school soon after their arrival in America was difficult. The contact with peers helped them learn the language and make friends quickly. However, seven remaining participants who were under school age had to stay home, watching TV, and /or playing with neighboring children. It took time for this group to learn the language until they went to school. The four adults interviewed state that it was very hard for them to learn the language due to their age. They couldn't go to school. Also, they didn't have enough time to join organizations that help immigrants to learn the language due daily work in order to feed their family.

Theme 2: Adaptation and adjustment factors in the host culture

2.1 Foreign-born

All the interviewed Burundian refugee children and their parents are foreign-born who came to America for safety and better life. Soon they arrived in the United States, they worked hard to adapt and adjust to the culture. As similar to for other immigrants, ways used by Burundian Refugees to succeed in the adaptation process are found through their most responses: American friends, school, work, church and social media. Examples of other of their responses to the question 4: *How did you learn the American Culture?* “Currently, I still have issues with assimilating to American culture”; “I learn it through people who have been living here before my arrival” said two people interviewed. One can see that those who come at a young age adapt and adjust more quickly than those who come at an older age. This is the reality of what can be seen through children adjustment into a new culture.

2.2 Children born in the host country

According to the interviewed, children born in America do not have much adjustment to make. They feel integrated already. However, their parents still have much to teach them about their own culture. Otherwise, children born in America adjust well to their host culture.

Theme 3: Making American friends

3.1 Age

The younger immigrants are, the easier is for them to make friends in a new host country. Burundian refugees that come to USA at young age do not have any unusual problems making friends. Eight from the interviewed, the youngest of the group made friends soon they arrive in America. The remaining, mostly older ones, had a hard time of making friends even until now. Half of the parents interviewed did not experience any problems of making friends in America due to schooling. However, the other half of the participants still struggle to have friends with aging and language barriers being the big problems for them.

3.2 Education

Burundian refugee children who had the opportunity to go to school had the chance to learn the language and make friends. Thirteen from interviewed Burundian refugee children along with half of the interviewed parents are educated. They actually go to school and /or have a job, and are having friends at their school and /or work place. The remaining group, even they are working in some local companies, still have difficulty making friends due to language and other educational barriers.

Theme 4: School Systems

4.1 American School System

All interviewed children state that American school system does not seem challenging to them. It is easy for those who get in. Also, they state enjoying its equipment and technology, as well as other benefits such as free and/or reduce-fee lunches, free transportation, etc. They are happy to attend school. Those who come at 18 years of age and over cannot enter school in America.

4.2 Back home school system

One hundred percent (100%) of interviewed children affirm that school system back home is very competitive with hard corporal punishments toward students. African schools do not have enough equipment and technology. No free lunches or transportation are available, making students' life harder and costly. They attest that, back home, schools are available to wealthy families that are able to support all related fees.

4.3 Participation in school

Soon after they arrived in America, 82 percent of interviewed Burundian refugee children under the age 18 attended school where they met American fellows. The 18 percent remaining, eighteen years of age and over, did not have a chance to go school and still have the feelings of being lost in the new culture or caught between the host culture and back home culture.

4.4 Differences between the American school system and back home school system

For the question “*What differences have you found between the American School System and your school back home?*” the following answers emerge from the interviews: “American students take school for granted more than fellow new comers in the United States”; “American teachers are less aggressive and American students are not competitive in school”, “Schools in the United States are based on the age of the student whereas back home schools are based on the student level of intelligence”; “The majority of schools back home are Christian schools while schools in US are mostly for the states”; “Back home, students walk to go to school while American students have free transportation”; “Corporal punishments are still used in school back home which is not the case in America”; and “Back home, students are more respectful and disciplined where the majority of students are disrespectful toward teachers and school administrators.”

Theme 5: Integration in host culture

5.1 Age

Age is an important factor of integration in any given country. Burundian refugee children who come in America under 12 years of age did not have a problem integrating in the host culture. All of them went to school and had the chance to find Americans friends who helped in the integration process. *“Immigrants who come in America at a younger age made the transition much easier compared others that come at an older age”* is this answer given by most of the respondent to the question: How did you learn to adapt to the American culture?

5.2 School

Fifty percent (50%) of the interviewed stated that going to school helped them to adjust quickly to the host culture. It was easy for them to find friends once English was learned. Those who did not have a chance to enter a school system had a hard time adjusting. They have to enter the workplace as soon they get to America to survive financially.

5.3 Work

Twenty nine (29%) of the respondents enter the workplace as soon they arrive in America. The workplace is where they spend the most of their time daily and where they slowly learn the culture. For the question *“How did you learn to adapt to the American culture?”* One of them answers: *“I still have issues with assimilation in American*

culture.” Many from this group are still seen caught between American culture and back home culture.

5.4 Churches and Social Medias

Nineteen percent (19%) of the respondents state that churches and other charity organizations have helped in adjusting to the host culture, while fourteen percent (14%) say that social media have been one of the tools in their adjustment process.

5.5 Self-description now in both cultures

At the question “**Describe how you see yourself now in both cultures? Do you feel yourself full, middle, or less?**” Fifty seven (57%) of the interviewed respondents said that they feel in the middle of both cultures. The followings are some of respondents’ answers: (1) *“I feel like I have the best of both worlds. I still have my African roots /or traditions, but I’ve adapted some parts of the American culture as well.”*(2) *“I am in the middle of both cultures.”* (3) *“I think, I am 50/50.”* On the other hand, thirty three percent of the respondents say they see themselves as more Burundians than Americans, while only ten percent (10%) of them feel to be more Americans than Burundians.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This pilot study provides much-needed research for understanding and /or explaining of existing problems in Burundian refugee children's adaption, integration and adjustment to the host culture. The descriptive analysis of the study answers the questions how Burundian Refugee children have been affected by their adjustment to the American culture and why some of those children are marginalized and seen caught between their native culture and the host culture. Language barriers and the lack of education are the most handicaps that make struggling some of Burundian refugee children in their integration process to the American culture. Furthermore, the result of the study indicates that learning the language, attending school, age and education, are key factors for Burundian community to better integrate to the American culture.

Trends

The main ideas or trends from the study concern what Burundian refugee children express from their own experiences on the integration process to the host culture. This would help immigrants' sponsors and volunteers finding a better ways to help future refugees that come to America to better integrate to the new culture. The trends emerging from the study are described below:

Trend 1: Learning first the language

The most frequent idea among Burundian refugee comment on their integration in American culture is learning the language first in order to better adapt and integrate a new culture. They think that learning the language soon after their arrival in America is

the key to succeed in their daily activities. Language barriers have been a big handicap for the majority of Burundian immigrants.

For example, at the question “**What do you advise to newcomers that may help them adjust very quickly in USA culture?**” one of them says: “*Learn the language first and be willing to work towards self-sufficiency.*”

Trend 2: Connections

Another common theme among all the participants was how difficult is to get American friends without speaking the language. All the interviewed feel that the language is a critical tools for helping them to connect with friends and neighbors.

Trend 3: Lack of language

Language barriers are often experienced by all immigrants who do not speak American language. Without speaking the language, it is hard for them to get the medical, social, and financial services that they need. The Burundian community in Tennessee have experienced the same issue of language barriers.

Hope for a good integration in America

Burundian refugee children in Tennessee, as other immigrants in the United States, retain a hope for a successful integration to the host culture. Learning the language is the key to be successful in their daily life and activities. Their full integration in America can be possible with the help of community organization, sponsoring agencies, churches and other social services agencies in this process. By learning the language, the Burundian community of Tennessee will be able to succeed in their adaption and adjustment in the

American culture. Members of the Burundian community is hopeful to have time and necessary resources to be integrated fully into America culture.

The research method used by the investigator was essential to produce and finalize data collection process and to analyze the descriptive study of the Marginalization of Burundian refugee children in America. Qualitative and quantitative analysis of the demographic survey on Burundian community show how Burundian refugee children have been affected by their cultural adjustment in the new culture and answer the question why some of them are seen as marginalized and /or caught between their native culture and the host culture.

The solution for the successful integration of Burundian Refugee children in America would involve an active participation of community organizations, sponsoring agencies, churches, and other social services agencies in their process of learning first the language needed to succeed.

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Appendix A

Questions Interviews

1. When and where were you born?
2. When did you come to America?
3. How did you learn to adapt to the American culture?
4. What church /school did go to here in the U.S.? What was the hardest thing you went through in your six first months after arrival to the United States? What differences did you find between the American church /school system and your church /school system back home?
5. Was it easy for you to find friends in your host country?
6. Describe how see yourself now in both cultures? Do you feel yourself full, middle or less?
7. What do you advise to new comers that may help them adjust very quickly in USA culture?
8. How do your parents appreciate your integration in the American culture?
9. Within your family, are there any cultural adjustment differences between foreign – born and those born here in USA?
10. To what degree do you feel that you are American? Not at all -Somewhat -Partially (50/50) -Most of the time -Always

3/23/2015



Investigator(s): Mathias Dusabe
Department: Health and Human
Performance Investigator(s) Email:
mdd4c@mtmail.mtsu.edu

Protocol Title: " The marginalization of Burundian refugee children in America: A pilot study " Protocol Number: 15-196

Dear
Investigator(s),

The MTSU Institutional Review Board, or a representative of the IRB, has reviewed the research proposal identified above. The MTSU IRS or its representative has determined that the study poses minimal risk to participants and qualifies for an expedited review under 45 CFR 46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110, and you have satisfactorily addressed all of the points brought up during the review.

Approval is granted for one (1) year from the date of this letter for 100 (ONE HUNDRED)

participants. Please note that any unanticipated harms to participants or adverse events must be reported to the Office of Compliance at (615) 494-8918. Any change to the protocol must be submitted to the IRB before implementing this change.

You will need to submit an end-of-project form to the Office of Compliance upon completion of your research located on the IRB website. Complete research means that you have finished collecting and analyzing data. **Should you not finish your research within the one (1) year period, you must submit a Progress Report and request a continuation prior to the expiration date.** Please allow time for review and requested revisions. Failure to submit a Progress Report and request for continuation will automatically result in cancellation of your research study. Therefore, you will not be able to use any data and/or collect any data. Your study expires 3/23/2016.

According to MTSU Policy, a researcher is defined as anyone who works with data or has contact with participants. Anyone meeting this definition needs to be listed on the protocol and needs to complete the required training. **If you add researchers to an approved project, please forward an updated list of researchers to the Office of Compliance before they begin to work on the project.**

All research materials must be retained by the PI or faculty advisor (if the PI is a student) for at least three (3) years after study completion and then destroyed in a manner that maintains confidentiality and anonymity.

Sincerely

Institutional Review Board
Middle Tennessee State
University