

Sub-Saharan African immigrant parents' navigation of the U.S. child welfare system


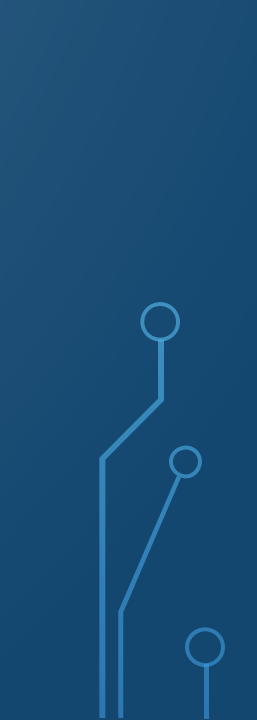
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November 3, 2022

Webinar
Association of Schools of Social Work in Africa





PRESENTER

- Assistant Professor of Social Work – 2019 to present
 - Evidence-based child welfare worker for 8 years
 - Social Services Specialist with low-income families for 4 years
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BACKGROUND

- The sub-Saharan African (SSA) immigrant population in the United States continues to grow since 1970 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014).
- Fifty-two percent growth between 2010 and 2018, outpacing the 12% growth rate for all U.S. immigrant populations during the same period (Echeverria-Estrada & Batalova, 2019).
- Factors such as poverty, racial discrimination, lack of formal and informal supports, and worker bias contribute to the overrepresentation of Black children in the U.S. child welfare system (e.g., Cénat et al., 2021; Child Welfare Information Gateway, CWIG, 2016; Dettlaff et al., 2020).
- Predominantly black, SSA immigrant parents are at a higher risk of becoming entangled with child welfare systems (CWSs) in the United States.
- No known studies have focused on this population and U.S. CWSs.

PURPOSE OF RESEARCH

- To explore how sub-Saharan African immigrant parents:
 - understand child welfare systems (CWS) in the United States
 - describe any experiences they have had with a U.S. CWS
 - make efforts to avoid becoming involved with CWS in the country

METHODOLOGY

- Qualitative research method
- Participants recruited in PA and DE after IRB approval
- Data collected through interviews
- Interviews transcribed using the Temi software with manual cleansing to ensure accuracy
- Thematic data analysis performed using the Dedoose qualitative data analysis software

PARTICIPANTS

- 15 total

- 7 females (47%), 8 males (53%)

- 12 from PA, 3 from DE

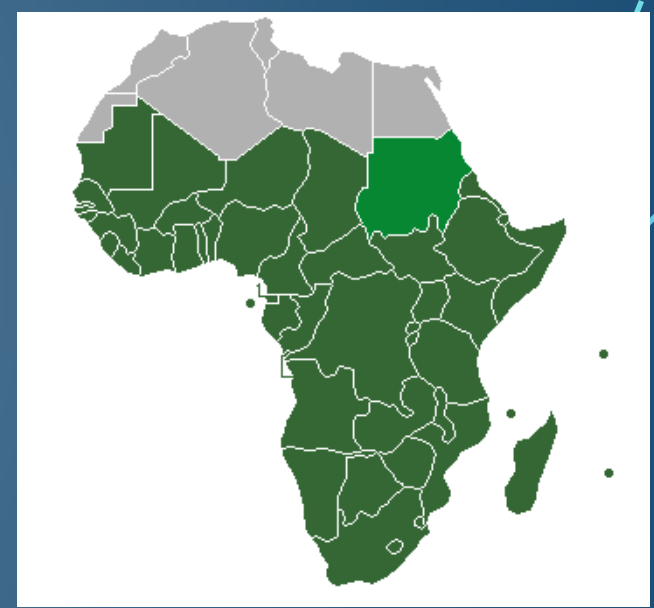
- All participants lived in the United States for at least five years

- Migrated from six sub-Saharan African countries

- Anglophone: Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, & Sierra Leone

- Francophone: Ivory Coast, Senegal

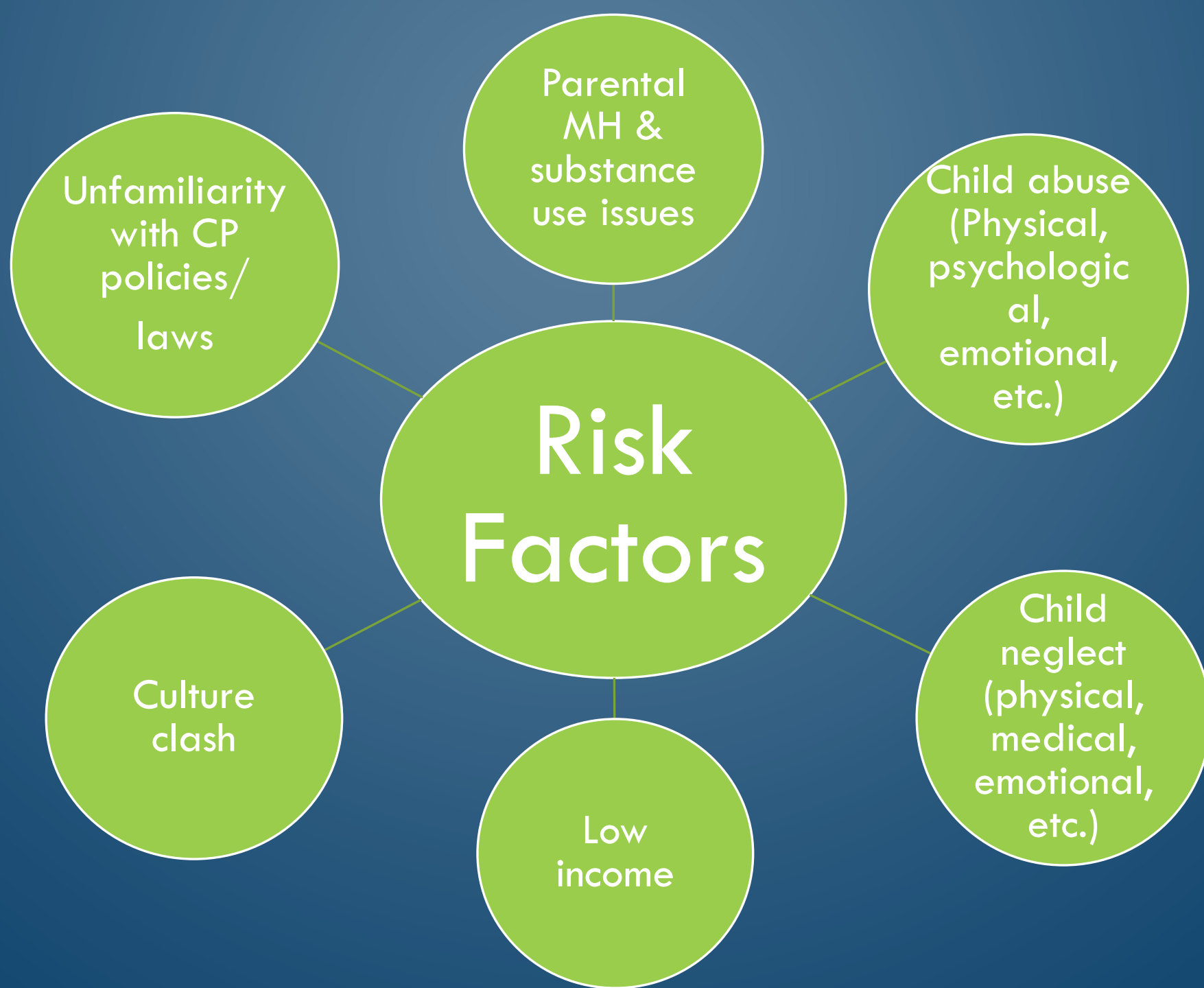
- Only one participant needed a translator



FINDINGS

Two major themes:





Risk Factors

Parental
MH &
substance
use issues

Child abuse
(Physical,
psychologic
al,
emotional,
etc.)

Child
neglect
(physical,
medical,
emotional,
etc.)

Low
income

Culture
clash

Unfamiliarity
with CP
policies/
laws

QUOTES (RISK FACTORS)

- Parental MH & Substance Use Issues

I understand that some parents are into drugs. I understand some parents are into heavy alcohol. So, that might make those parents to start abusing their children, which will now attract the attention of DHS (O, Nigeria).

I think is more the mental issue in terms of the parents where they are not able to handle their parenthood (N, Ghana).

- Child Abuse (physical, psychological, emotional, etc.)

My understanding is that in very minor cases of things that us as Africans we perceive to be minor, you can end up losing your child for something as simple as just caning a child... And they can go to school and say, my dad slapped me, or my daddy caned me, and you will find that they [school] don't take that on face value (L, Kenya).

QUOTES (RISK FACTORS) CONTINUED...

- **Child Neglect (physical, medical, emotional, etc.)**

I know some situation like if the mother is not able to take care of the kids, they [CPS] take the kid (M, Ivory Coast).

I know that if you have any problem with the kids or maybe if they [CPS] think you're not taking good care of the kids, they can take them away from you and give them to foster parents (O, Nigeria)

- **Low income**

They [SSA parents) will need some sort of childcare and sometimes due to issues around income, one would have to stay home and the other would have to work to take care of the child, but if they do not have enough income where one would just have to work and the other stays home, they would have to juggle with trying to take care of the child and work (H, Ghana)

QUOTES (RISK FACTORS) CONTINUED...

- Culture Clash

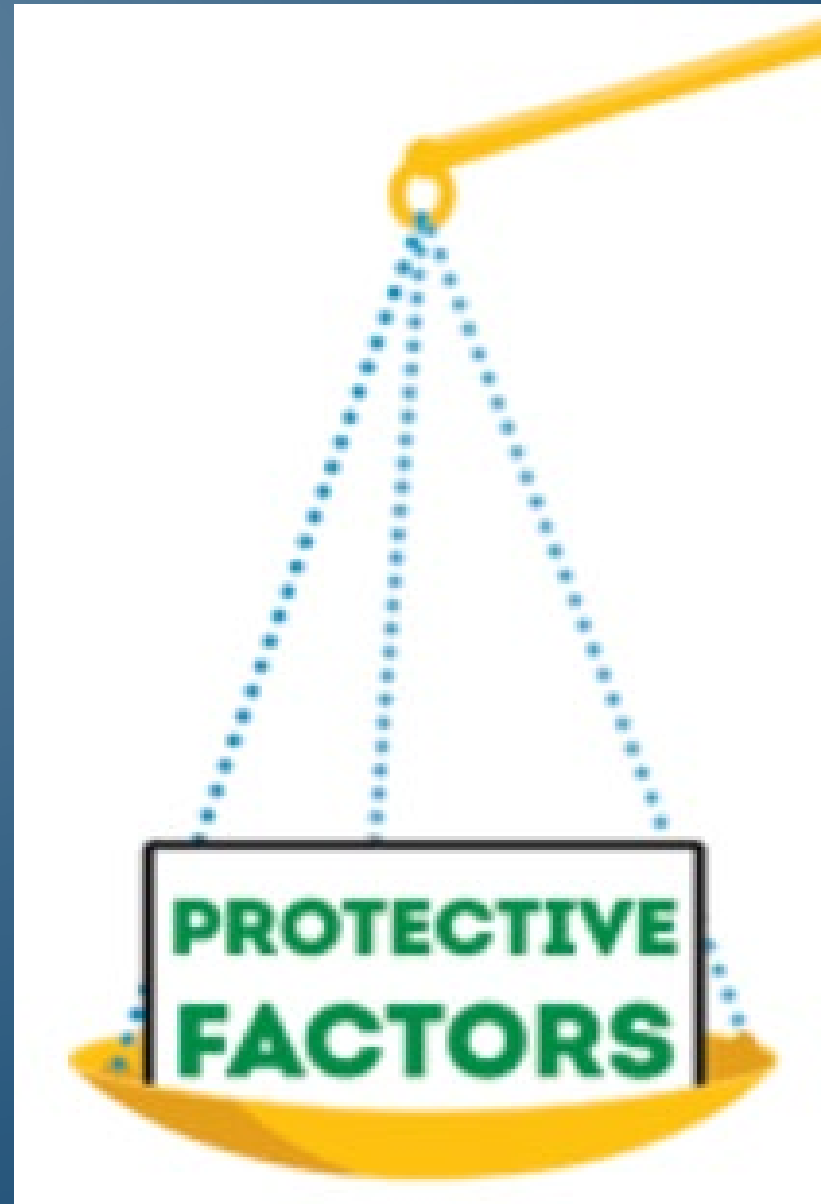
This is a kind of a cultural clash because in Africa, even though there is a social welfare [system], it is just in principle... So, people coming from Africa into this environment are shocked to learn that the social welfare policies or child welfare policies here are taken very seriously, so it becomes a cultural shock, and it affects them in diverse ways (I, Sierra Leone).

- Unfamiliarity with CP policies/laws

[SSA parents are] not well educated about what exactly is appropriate and what's not appropriate. I often find that there's a lot of not only miseducation but also misconceptions of how the system is supposed to work and for the responsibilities of a parent (M, Senegal).

In Africa you can just leave your kid and run out to buy something and the neighbors that are there will help you take care of the kids. It is not [like] that here and most times you have to take your children to all the things you need to do. Some of them don't know this law and they leave their kids and go out to do stuff and by the time they'll come back, maybe people will...call child welfare on them (O, Nigeria).

- Home training
- Avoidance of abuse and neglect
- Responsible parenting
- Social support/networks
- Community resources



QUOTES (PROTECTIVE FACTORS)

Home Training:

I believe in being supportive and being clear and nurturing them emotionally because, especially in this country where there's so much racism, I have to hold them close. I have to give them the best that I can emotionally and psychologically so that when they get out there they are armed; they can be able to withstand what society is going to throw at them. (F, Kenya)

Avoidance of Abuse and Neglect:

So I follow the law. Like I said, we came here with a different mindset, we came with our culture from Nigeria. But whatever they say is the law, you have to follow it. I think that's it. If they say don't beat your child, you don't do it. All you need to do is talk to your children. (M, Nigeria)

QUOTES (PROTECTIVE FACTORS) CONTINUED...

Responsible Parenting:

Keeping an eye on them, to ensure that I've given them the best care I can as a father. And one of the things I have done as a family, I have to work and my wife had to sacrifice her time staying home to take care of the child is something we agreed on as a family for now. (M, Ghana)

Social Support/Networks:

We have our own Nigerian community where we go. We have local church groups that help educate some of us on how the system works. (F, Nigeria)

QUOTES (PROTECTIVE FACTORS) CONTINUED...



Community Resources:

So you think about the resources that are here, the number of non-profit organizations that provide services to give help to struggling families are very good, they are more than you can ever imagine. (M, Sierra Leone)



DISCUSSION






- Child abuse, child neglect, low income, and parental mental health and substance use as risk factors for families' interaction with child welfare systems have been extensively researched in extant studies (e.g., Cénat et al., 2021, CWIG, 2020; CWIG, 2019; Dettlaff & Boyd, 2021)
 - Culture clash and unfamiliarity with child protection policies and laws, as risk factors, have not been extensively investigated.
 - Other studies have shown that social networks and community resources are protective factors associated with involvement with the CWS (Davidson et al., 2019)
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DISCUSSION

CONTINUED...

- In this study we found that most participants did not have first-hand experience with the U.S. child welfare system
 - Most participants were able to identify ways to avoid the child welfare system and protect their children from entering the child welfare system
 - Most participants worked in professional jobs so their experiences may not be representative of those who are low income
 - More investigation is needed to understand the experiences of sub-Saharan African parents with the U.S. child welfare system
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IMPLICATIONS FOR CHILD WELFARE POLICY & PRACTICE

Partnership with community organizations to connect SSA immigrant parents to income-generating opportunities

Sensitizing SSA immigrants on child abuse and neglect laws, policies, and practices

Integrating SSA community networks into the child welfare framework

System of educating newly arrived immigrants of resources available to them

Interdisciplinary approach to include social welfare, public health, mental health, and related fields

PUBLICATION OF THIS STUDY

- Manuscript from this study has been accepted for publication in the *American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children (APSAC) journal*.

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