African families in UK are 'parenting in fear'

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Black African families in the UK are parenting in fear of being penalized by authorities due to cultural differences and institutional racial misconceptions, according to new research published today in *The British Journal of Social Work*.

Researchers carried out in-depth interviews and held focus groups with Nigerian parents living in and around London. Findings revealed a strong influence of the structural forces of race, power and cultural differences on parents' thought processes and actions.

Some of the issues raised were a loss of identity, stigma attached to their children speaking English with an accent, not being sure of welfare and other laws and subsequently concern of falling foul of authority, and concern that disciplining their children could lead to punishment by child welfare agencies or social workers taking their children away.

Two thirds of the parents interviewed said they would consider sending their child to Nigeria to live with a relative if they proved to be difficult to manage in the UK, with some suggesting they would do it in order for their children to gain perspective. Three interviewees had already done so.

One parent said: "No matter what you as an African are in this country, you are still seen as an immigrant; whatever they want to call you, they'll call you.

"So, I decided, 'okay, I have to take this girl back home, for her to go

and see and appreciate what she's got there. That's why when she came back she appreciated it because I'm sure they worked hard to make her understand."

Many parents expressed the assumption that involvement with social workers or health professionals is an avenue for children to be removed into care.

One father said: "You have to be extremely, extremely careful with the way you support your kids as well, so that you won't get yourself into trouble. You can lose your child."

According to Gov.uk, black African people make up 1.8% of the UK population, yet 4.8% of children with child protection plans are black African, suggesting an over-representation.

Lead author Dr. Cynthia Okpokiri, Senior Lecturer in Social Work at Anglia Ruskin University, said: "There are significant cultural differences between UK and Nigerian parents when it comes to raising children. Parents in Nigeria tend to enforce stricter discipline and adopt a clear hierarchical family unit with help from people in the community.

"In the UK, children learn by pushing boundaries, and community involvement is discouraged—here, parents, rather than neighbors or extended family members, have sole responsibility for their children. For example, it would be frowned upon for a neighbor to admonish someone else's child.

"We found a very clear desire among Nigerian parents to try and adopt UK parenting styles, as they wanted their children to grow up being able to thrive as British citizens. However, we found a fear of being misunderstood, either by fellow parents, social workers or other authorities, shaped the way they bring their children up.

"Our research reveals the need for social work professionals and other child welfare authorities to understand the different pressures on black African parents who are unfamiliar with UK parenting norms."

Provided by Anglia Ruskin University