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Children's Experiences of Separation through Migration: the Case of Trinidad and Tobago



Transformative effects on family life of parental migration

*Learning from the Experiences of
Children in the Caribbean*



International Context

- Historical, economical and political landscape
- Current migration trends
- Globalisation, trade and service liberalisation
- Labour shortages in human service work in richer countries
- Demands for 'women's' skills and aggressive international recruitment practices
- Gender inequality
- Changing shape of family life
- Gendered parenting roles
- Immigration policies and practices

The Caribbean

Women in the Caribbean bear the major responsibility for the wellbeing of families





Feminisation of Migration

- While women's migration can be viewed as improved economic freedom for women, the socio-economic conditions within some Caribbean countries may in fact leave women with few choices
- The ramifications for parenting, children and family life of women's migration have been little acknowledged in previous migration studies



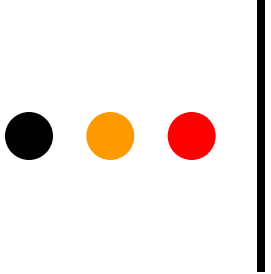
Study of migration - child-centredness

- *Utilises methods that are easy for children to understand and meaningfully participate in*
- *Acknowledges that children's insights are important in generating knowledge*
- *Recognises the importance of children's rights of expression (Article 12, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child)*
- *Represents a shift away from the objectification of children and regards them as active subjects within the research process*
- *Utilises research findings to address children's voicelessness*



Children's Rights and Research

- children's rights based on a view of children as vulnerable and thus in need of special treatment.
- emphasis on protection can prevent us from embracing the child as 'political' subject
- it is as if for children, the personal and the political are separate domains; a view which merely reinforces their powerlessness.

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- the 'special' status children are accorded often turns out in practice as treating them as disconnected from the social, familial and cultural context of their lives
 - It is not surprising therefore that children's views about the impact of these factors are marginalised when it comes to policy formulation.



Child-centred research challenges prevailing ideas

- regards children as active subjects in the worlds they inhabit
- important players in the politics of social change
- contributors in the production of knowledge



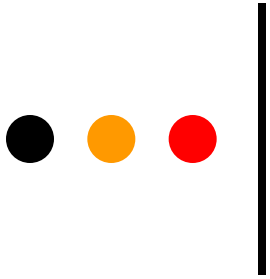
The application of child-centredness- a case example

- *design of the research*
- *methods used*
- *interpretation of findings*
- *dissemination of results*



Results

- Children separated from parents because of migration were more than twice as likely as other children to have emotional problems although their economic status was improved
- One third had serious levels of depression or interpersonal difficulties affecting schooling and leading in some cases to suicidal ideation
- Differences were found in relation to gender and ethnicity
- Resiliency factors included school performance and belief in family reunification.
- Parents went abroad to improve the economic conditions of the family
- Surrogate care arrangements (usually with relatives) provided for children's material needs but did not address children's emotional problems.

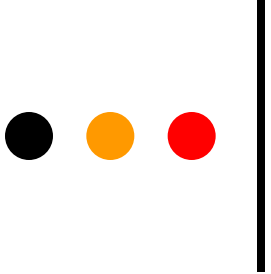


If children are to be actors in research, their understandings of the phenomena they observe, measure or are part of must be integrated into the methods and process of data conversion



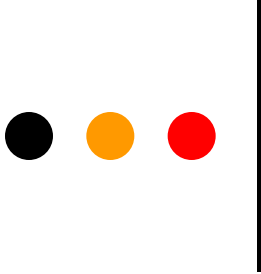
Children's participation in dissemination

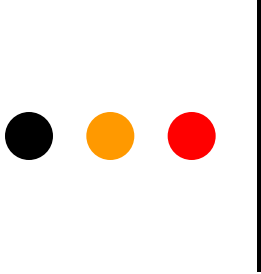
- the wishes and suggestions generated by the children involved
- the researcher's knowledge of the target audiences
- understanding of child-centred methods of communication.

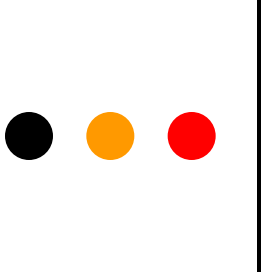


In the study, children
challenged three observations

- **Families' denial about the effects on children of separation**
- **Culturally-determined perceptions that children should be seen and not heard**
- **The assumption parents held that increased economic benefits of migration were worth the social costs**

- 
- **Drama-in-education methods were used to portray the main themes of the study to an audience comprising parents, care-givers, children and teachers**
 - **The actors designed and staged an interactive play based on the findings of the study. Composite characters were created to reflect the diversity and range of social circumstances of the children who participated in the study.**
 - **The play was performed using ‘freeze-frame’ methods.**

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- **This enabled key moments (based on issues that children wished to emphasise) to be frozen and children were invited to engage in the ‘moment’ to shape it as they wished; either by switching places and acting out the scene as they perceived it, or by changing the dialogue, situation or outcome, or by offering advice to the ‘child’ as to how he/she could manage the situation, or simply by directing the play**
 - **Each of these options provided children with the opportunity of altering the interpretation of the results of the study based on his or her perceptions of the issue being explored**

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- **This method utilised children in the construction, interpretation and verification of research about *their* reality**
 - **Using professional actors to play children gave authority and credibility to the information about the damaging effects of parental migration that would have been difficult to achieve had children staged the play themselves**
 - **The drama served as a foil to preserve confidentiality and the ‘act’ provided a mask for children to express their emotions while maintaining external presentations of self.**



Conclusion

Child centred research is essentially a political act since it seeks to produce knowledge aimed at social change