

The impact of migration and acculturation processes on family relations

Riyadh Al-Baldawi

Abstract. Immigrant families which, either voluntarily or forced to, emigrate to a new country face numerous challenges such as having to adapt to a new culture, traditions, norms, social structures and a new way of living. Families which immigrate to Sweden from countries in the Middle East face entirely novel family structures and relationships which differ significantly from those in their native countries. In order for them to adapt to and accept these new structures and relationships, a high level of preparedness and flexibility is required from all family members. Families with a strict patriarchal structure face more challenges and difficulties in their adaptation and integration process. This situation negatively affects the adults' and children's psychosocial statuses and causes numerous psychosocial and psychosomatic problems. This article intends to describe and illustrate these difficulties and how they affect the internal and external relations of the immigrant families. Our focus is primarily on changes to the family structure in general and the patriarchal family structure in particular. This article is based on long and extensive clinical experiences at Orient Medical & Rehabilitation Centre in Stockholm, Sweden, when observing and evaluating immigrant families from the Middle East. These families were admitted to our centre through recommendation from the Swedish social authorities to help them with different conflicts and struggles. We studied and analysed these conflicts and struggles and intend to, through this article, reflect on the psychosocial and somatic consequences of their adaptation and acculturation processes.

Keywords: migration, acculturation process, integration, family conflict, family relations, family structure, patriarchal family relations, psychosocial conflict, psychosocial status, somatic status, cultural encountering, cultural identity.

WCPRR December 2010: 70-85. © 2010 WACP
ISSN: 1932-6270

INTRODUCTION Migration is a complicated, dynamic and often long process. It begins when individuals or families choose voluntarily, or are forced, to leave their native countries (Rack, 1982; pp 24-39). There are various reasons for migration, in some cases to escape crises such as local or regional wars, ethnic or religious conflicts, in other cases for work or study (Eyrumlu, 1998). Migration is not just a matter of movement in space and time; it also concerns movement between different social and economic systems. The encounter with new cultures and methods of production requires a reconstruction of the individual as well as the family structure, in order to adapt to these changes and to find ways to integrate (Lader, 1990). Migration can take place within a country (*domestic* or *internal* migration) or entail moving to other countries within the same region (*regional* migration) or to other parts of the world (*international* migration). This article emphasises the latter form.

Sweden has been an immigration country since after the Second World War. During various periods of time, different individuals and families from various part of the world came to Sweden. Since the 1970's the largest group of immigrants has consisted of refugees who came to Sweden to

Correspondence to: Riyadh Al-Baldawi MD, PhD, Ass Prof.
Medical director for Orient Medical and Rehabilitation Centre
Stockholm, Sweden

mailto: r.baldawi@orienthalsan.nu

Received: August 25th, 2010. Accepted: December 7th, 2010

escape various conflicts within their country of origin or the region they belong to. Many of the refugees came from the Middle East, part of them came alone and others with their family members. According to the family reunion policy many of those who came alone could bring their closest family members to Sweden, after they had received residency. Today approximately 12% of the Swedish population has an immigrant background. The largest group of refugees today has their roots in Iraq, Iran, Lebanon, Syria and Turkey.

The size, structure and character of the internal relations of the families are usually influenced by various factors. The type of work, socio-economic class and living areas in their country of origin could be of the utmost importance to them.

Figure 1 Family size, structures and internal relations depending on existing type of work and place of living

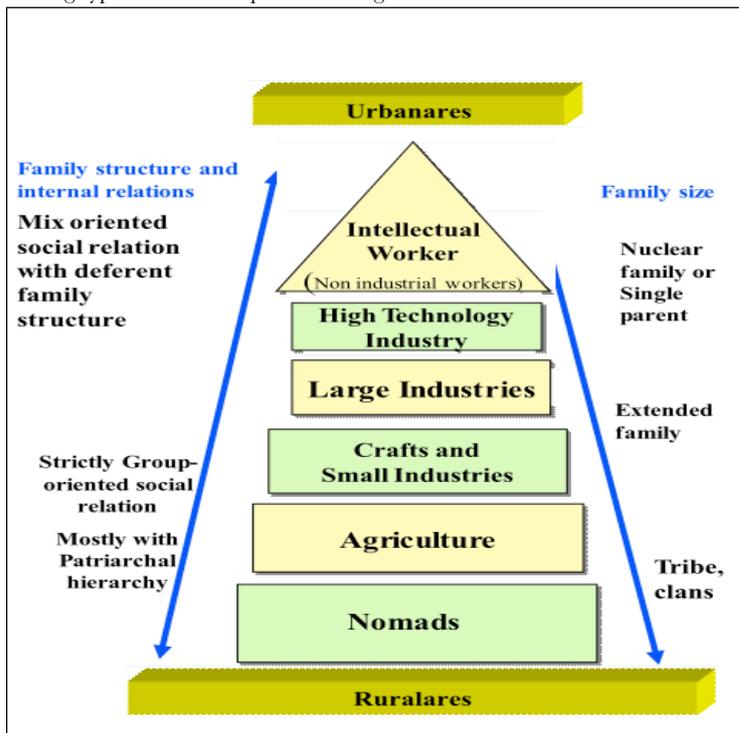


Figure 1 illustrates the importance of the movement between the rural and urban areas. This movement usually brings a lot of changes in family structure and even size. In the Middle East countries the family size could be changed from *clan* or *tribes*, which is characterized by a large number of family members to smaller forms such as *nuclear family type* which includes only the parents and their biological and adopted children or the *extended family* which includes closer relatives of the parents as well. Even the single parent model of relation is rising up in some urban areas of Middle East society.

The internal family relations are influenced by many factors. The socioeconomic class belonging plays an important role in the way the families practise their way of life. The living areas such as large cities, small towns/ villages or the type of business previously run by the family and/or educational level of the family members are also very important factors (Rack, 1982; pp 72-88).

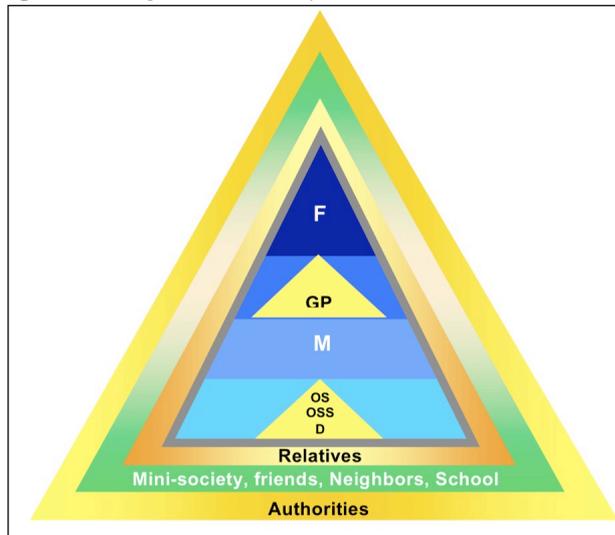
The social relations in the rural areas are mostly dominated by what we call *the group oriented model of relations*. This kind of relations is characterized by a strict *patriarchal family structure*, whilst the urban areas are usually dominated by a mix of social relation models which indicate variable forms of family relations.

This background influences the way in which the immigrant family adapts and integrates to the social life of the receiving country. Consequently the immigration of a Middle Eastern family to a European country can be experienced as easier if this family has an urban background and higher educational level or family members with good professional experience. These families have increased opportunity when it comes to reconstructing their internal relations in the new country, even though our work with immigrant families from different Middle Eastern countries indicates that this rule is not definite. In some cases we find that families from urban areas are more conservative and rigid than those having a rural style of living with limitations in education and professional experience. The changes in family structure involve many other factors. The socio-political atmosphere in the receiving country is of importance in influencing the level of discrimination and marginalisation in the labour market. All these factors and many others play an important role in the way in which immigrant families are able to change their way of family relations and structure in order to adapt to the model which is dominant in the receiving country. In some cases, the importance of keeping the old native family model becomes a protest against the feeling of rejection, discrimination and marginalisation the family members feel they experience in their daily lives in the new country.

Later on in this article I would like to focus on the changes in family internal relations for immigrant families with Middle East backgrounds, with a patriarchal family structure. After immigration to a new society (in our case Sweden) these families encounter a lot of challenges due to the large differences in the character of relations, family structure and the daily practice of living according to the dominant model of family relations in the hosting country. During the last 15 years our equipe at the Orient Medical and Rehabilitation Centre, Stockholm, has worked specifically with immigrant families with these kinds of family relations. In this article, I will summarise the experiences of clinical evaluation and family therapy work, which our colleagues in the family team at the centre have carried out during this time. Most of the immigrant families with whom we have worked were referred to us for clinical evaluation by the social authorities due to internal or external problems in family relations. Therefore this paper illustrates just those families who have experienced serious problems in their adaptation and acculturation to the new society. We are sure that the majority of immigrant/refugee families in general, or specifically from Middle Eastern backgrounds, solves many of these problems encountered in their daily lives without the need for professional help.

THE PATRIARCHAL FAMILY STRUCTURE Most of the immigrant families that have immigrated to Sweden during the last 30 years were from Middle East backgrounds. The majority of them came as refugees. Major groups of them have today their origin in Iraq, Iran, Turkey, Lebanon and Syria. They belong to different ethnicities such as Arabic, Farsi, Azari, Kurdish, Armenian, Assyrian and others. They have different religious backgrounds; the majority are Muslims and the second largest group are Christian. Some of them belong to other old religious groups such as Sabbi, Zardosht, etc. Most of these families have come from countries where the patriarchal family structure is very common as the dominant model in the family relations. These types of relations belong to the *holistic* way of thinking. According to this, the individuals only exist when they belong to a group. The family in the holistic context is regarded as an indivisible unit. The individual relinquishes his or her autonomy in order to be part of a group. In this case the group forms the social identity of the individual through their role in the family or society (Ahmadi & Ahmadi, 1995). The structure of this type of relation is illustrated in **Figure 2**.

Figure 2 The patriarchal family structure - Scheme



F	Father
GP	Grandparent (s)
M	Mother
OS	Oldest son
OSS	Other son(s)
D	Daughter(s)

The patriarchal family has a hierarchical structure that is usually illustrated as a pyramid with the father at the top. The *father* has a dominant role in family internal relations. He is delegated by his group to have social and financial responsibility. He is also the one who represents the family in its external relations in society. That makes the father belong to the “official sphere” of the family (Hylland Eriksen, 2000). This role is often maintained both by social norms and the law.

These types of families usually include *grandparents* as part of the family. They play an important role in building the family and giving the newly married couple a social legitimacy and financial support. This is very important in paving the way for the new family to be accepted by the rest of society. In this way, grandparents fulfil a social security function for the new couple. This function is very important in countries that lack this kind of social service (Ahmadi, 1998). Involving grandparents in the family everyday’s situation may also cause problems for the new couple because they do not feel free to make their own decisions regarding the way they want to live. The grandparent’s subsystem also has a hierarchical structure. The male usually has more power in decision making than the female.

On the third level of this structure we find the *mother*. The patriarchal structure is inherently unjust towards the female part of the family (mother and daughter), which is usually relegated to second place in social activities (Fathi, 1985). In the most traditional patriarchal systems, the woman belongs to the private sphere of the family. That means she is allowed to play an important role within the family, but not in the official external relations (Rosaldo, 1974). There are many factors which can support a woman’s role and make it stronger in these families, i.e. having more children and boys in particular, coming from a family of high social status, or raising children in the traditional way expected by the society in question. It is a paradox that the mothers, who suffer (as women) from the patriarchal conditions of injustice, must raise their sons to become “patriarchs” in their future families. At the same time they are expected to prevent their daughters’ emancipation, because if something goes “wrong” with the daughter, the mother will be accused and given the blame (Rudolph Toubia, 1979).

On the fourth level of the patriarchal structure we find the *children* subsystem. Here we also find a hierarchical system, placing the boys over the girls. The oldest son in the family is introduced at a very early stage to become the father’s successor. Many families give the boys more scope in the family’s

social life as a part of the education they need to become an official representative of the family and to further the family tradition. The daughters are considered as part of the family's private sphere. This means that they bear the oppression of the whole system and must adjust to all the family's traditions as well as being generally subjected to strict control both within and outside the family. In many families the girls try to compensate for the injustice in these roles by doing very well at school. This can make the competition between boys and girls very stiff. The traditional family tries to influence this situation by adopting a tougher attitude towards the girls. Some are prevented from completing their studies and are made to stay at home and help their mothers run the household; others are forced to work within the family or relatives' business outside the home. This injustice results in many girls trying to find various ways of freeing themselves from this situation as soon as possible. Unfortunately, many societies with this kind of family structure do not have a well-developed support programme to help the family in general and the girls in particular. This situation has forced many of these girls to choose an early marriage as the safer way of escaping their families (Rudolph Toubia, 1979). They hope to find freedom by building a new family. Unfortunately, many of them find that the conditions in the new family are not better than those from which they have escaped. Other girls try to involve themselves in the family's financial affairs in order to gain better conditions. However, the men within and outside the family are not prepared to accept them as equal partners. In families without boys among the children, or in which the boys do not fulfil their expected social and/or economic role, the daughters usually take more responsibility and space within the family structure. Nevertheless, they still encounter difficulties in representing the family in its external relations with society.

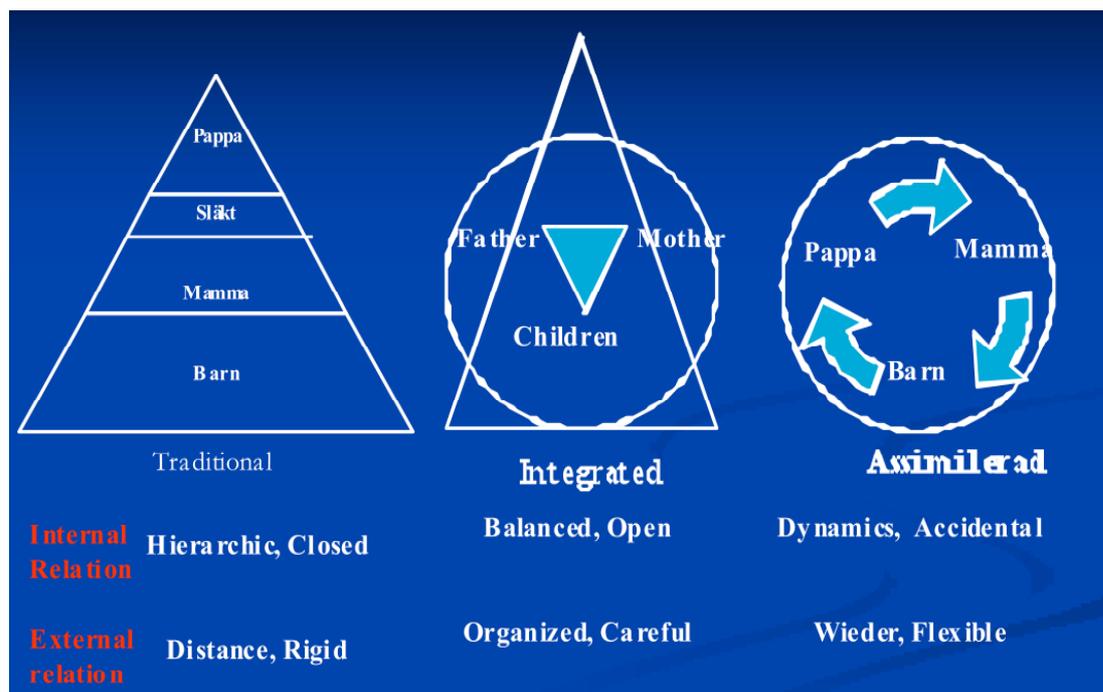
The patriarchal family usually belongs to a larger system that includes *relatives* and the *mini-society*, which includes the neighbourhood, friends and schoolmates. These surrounding systems play an important role in helping the family with many internal problems as well as in protecting and supporting the family in their external relations. These systems can also be a burden for the family, hindering it from freely making internal decisions. In the periphery of the surrounding system we find different *authorities*, with which the family usually has a very limited contact.

THE FAMILY STRUCTURE IN THE NEW COUNTRY In Sweden the process of acquiring a residence permit takes a long time, in some cases more than 2-3 years. During this time many families live in uncertainty and insecurity. This situation has a negative influence on the family members' mental and physical conditions (Ekblad *et al*, 1996). Children usually suffer a lot. It was only a few years ago that the Swedish State gave immigrants' and asylum seekers' children permission to go to mainstream school during the time their families were waiting for a decision regarding their residence permit. Although most of these families stay at the refugee camps to which they had been sent on arrival, some of them establish friendships helping them finding an apartment for a short time. This means that the family often moves from one place to another with a detrimental influence on the children, who are scarcely able to continue their studies at the same school, are forced to change and break their social relationships, and can be undermined in their trust in each other and in the system in general (Nyberg, 1993). Many of the adults have no opportunity to work and usually spend passively this waiting period (Wattjersson & Wackenfors, 1993). A few Swedish lessons are not enough to occupy their long days of waiting. This passive life can be a negative factor, making it difficult for them to be active again when they finally receive their residence permit (Tham, 1994). Fortunately, in Sweden there is currently more than one project at the state and municipal level actively addressing these problems (Ekblad, 1996; Ekblad *et al*, 1997; Al-Saffar & Borgå, 1995). Over the past 2-3 years we have noted that the processing of the residence permit takes less time and that municipalities have adopted a policy of granting asylum seekers a limited labour permit during their waiting period. This gives positive effects for the immigrants although, unfortunately, as yet many of the refugees and asylum seekers are without this opportunity. The situation described above has a negative influence on family life and on the relations between the family members. The family still feels itself to be subjected to the same unstable and insecure conditions as before, making the family structure weak and the internal relationships unclear. The future organisation of the family structure is

dependent upon these social and economic conditions and the problems the family members may encounter and live with during their waiting period (Minuchin, 1978). The family members (both adults and children) still need to be very close to each other in order to find various ways to solve these problems, and indeed to survive, this resulting in a continuous consolidation of internal family relations. Also the external relations do not have a clear structure and are dominated by fear and insecurity. For this reason the family tries to find relatives or friends who can help them to attain more stability and security in their social contacts. Many families try to move to an immigrant dense area to feel more comfortable and secure.

Receiving the permanent residence permit means a new period can begin. The family members feel much more secure and try to establish their social life by seeking accommodation as soon as possible. Unfortunately, many of them are unable to find a suitable place to live in the cities in which they had contacts and friends. Many families are thus forced to leave the cities and move to smaller towns, where they are easily able to find accommodation but are usually far away from their close relatives or friends. For those who choose to stay in the cities, a long time may elapse before they found an apartment. When the family members finally receive their residence permit and begin their social adaptation to the new society, then the question of which type of family structure they would adopt become significant (Schjödtt & Egeland, 1994). Many years of clinical work with families from Middle East backgrounds have shown that these families develop generally three types of family structures in the new country. We called these structures as follows: the *traditional*, *integrated* and *assimilated* which have been illustrated in **Figure 3**.

Figure 3: Internal and external family relations in different type of family structures



In an earlier study on 28 families (Al-Baldawi, 1998a), we found 13 (46.4 %) keeping intact the *traditional* (patriarchal) type of structure they practiced in their country of origin, even after years of living in the new country; this has been recognized as a major risk factor for conflicts with the system of the new country which in general does not accept this model. On the contrary, 11 (39.3 %) organised their relations in a new way we called the *integrated* type. These families tried to find a

balance between the norms and traditions they have from their country of origin and those they encountered in the new country. This mission is not so easy but in general if they find they can establish this balance, it makes their lives in the new country much more harmonic. 4 families (14.3 %) developed a model we called the *assimilated* type, which usually means that this kind of family try to destroy their old structure in order to adopt a new model which they think similar to the one practiced by the indigenous people. The lack of references on the way the indigenous people organize their relations put the members of these assimilated families in front of a huge challenge. They are usually not accepted by the indigenous families as a part of them; at the same time they lose a functional contact with their fellow countrymen. That puts these families in a vacuum in their relations which negatively influences their lives.

All these families practice different ways of organizing their internal and external relations. The *traditional* type tends to practice a strict hierarchical and closed way in managing their internal relations. That makes often distant and rigid their external relation (outside of home and in relation to authorities such as social services and school, etc). The *integrated* families have a well balanced and relatively open internal relation but they tend to be careful and well organized in their relations with other people outside the family and particularly with authorities.

There are many factors which could affect the process of change in the family structure after migration to the new country. Among these factors we found the most important of them are family members' age, educational level, professional experience, cultural flexibility and socioeconomic background. We also found that the factors in background have to compare with the level of socio-cultural and political preparedness of the receiving society, which can promote an atmosphere of welcoming encounters and opportunities for the first generations of immigrants, in order to gain the employment adequate to their educational and professional experience. Our 5-year clinical observations yielded the general conclusion that the majority of immigrant families practicing a patriarchal family relation in their home country were able to accept change to their family structure and tried to find different ways to adopt the new challenges in the receiving country. I will now focus on the traditional type of family relation which in my opinion generates the most serious conflicts in the new society and requires a lot of understanding and professional help.

THE TRADITIONAL TYPE OF FAMILY RELATION In the traditional family type the parents together or, more often, the father and the adult male in the family strive to maintain a patriarchal rigid structure, which resembles the structure they had in their native country. This could be obtained in the new country by creating a different protection system around the family, which enables them to carry on patriarchal relations within the context of the new country. This is one of the reasons why such family moves to an immigrant dense area, in which the majority of the people belongs to cultures which accept this type of relations. This gives the male part of the family, particularly the father, the legitimacy, support and power they need. Some of the fathers obtain their power also by becoming active members within the most traditional and rigid national groups, which confirm their role as a patriarch. For these fathers, maintaining the old and rigid type of family structure becomes a goal in their new life. The old model represents the stable and safe way of avoiding many problems and changes faced by the family in the new country. This strategy may be the norm for many immigrant families at the beginning of their life in a new society and may be seen as a part of their adaptation process. For the traditional families this strategy became a life style as well as their identity in the new society.

To live according to this model can imply some kind of isolation from the rest of the society (Guernsey Jr *et al*, 1967). This model is not anchored or accepted by the majority of the people in the new country. In many highly industrial countries (such as Sweden) the nuclear family structure is the most popular and accepted model within society. In this model, the family usually consists of the parents and their biological or/and adopted children. The family relations assume (at least according to the law) equal responsibility and obligations between the family members and the parents in particular. The authorities (such as the social services and schools) are obliged to protect these forms of relations

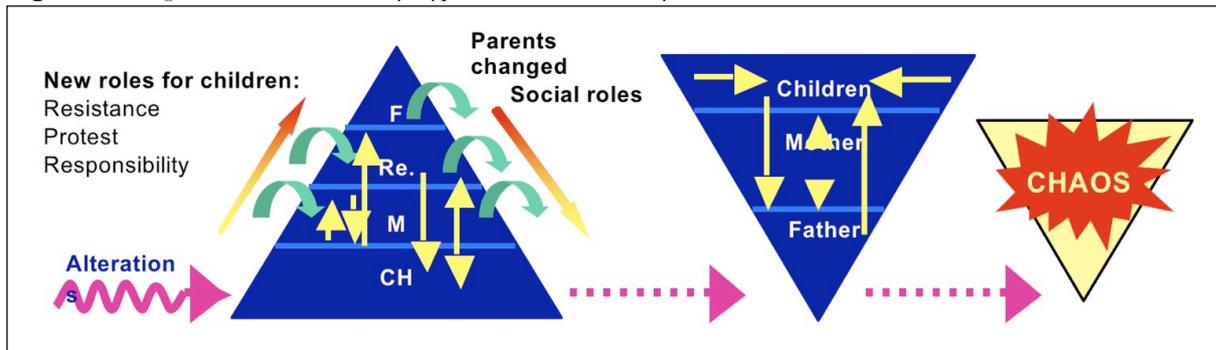
according to the law. This is why the traditional families in the new society have many problems and conflicts with these institutions and the indigenous people, as well as those living in the same area. This may be one of the factors that force the family to withdraw from participating socially and to live isolated within their area to avoid the influence of the new society and its institutions as much as possible. The longer the family lives in the new society, the more difficult it becomes to keep this form of traditional family structure intact. They could be influenced by various factors, some of which are mentioned below:

children, through their studies at school, have greater opportunities to become involved in the new society much faster than their parents. The children quickly learn the new language as well as much of the new society's code system. This gives them a new position within the family, becoming stronger over time. The new situation gives more possibilities for the children to protest against the old roles and to show resistance towards the parents' (particularly the father) traditionally dominant role within the family;

parents who are old, sick, and suffering from traumatic experiences in their past or those who are without sufficient knowledge or professional experience, have difficulties in being active and finding suitable work in a modern and high technological market. They are obliged to live off the support programme provided by the social services or the national health insurance in the new country. This has resulted in these parents becoming more socially isolated and passive. They usually live on the periphery of society and fail to identify with the life style of their new country. They are also poorly motivated to learn the new language or embrace other cultural aspects. This makes them feel more isolated and marginalized in the new country. Much of their life experience from their native country is not usable and this involves them losing their social status. This may in turn lead to a fixation on the culture, traditions and life style of their native country. The situation described above makes the father lose his classic function as head of the family and undermines his responsibility of representing the whole family in its external relations with society. The social security system in the new country takes more economic responsibility for this kind of immigrant family, thus greatly threatening the role of the father.

The *mother's* role has also changed. The regression of the father's social role places a new responsibility and challenge on the mother. This new situation forces many of these women to find new ways of playing their role in the new country. The women have usually been more open to establishing social contacts with neighbouring families. The mother also has to establish good relationships with many institutions in the new country, such as schools, social services and others, in order to keep the family life running. This gives the mother a greater opportunity to become involved with the new society's social life, at least more openly than the father. Her traditionally closer relationship to the children helps the mother to adapt more quickly to the new social codes. These conditions forces many mothers to quickly learn (passively, by talking with people, and/or actively by seeking special courses) the new language. Some of them try to find a job outside the family, in order to give themselves and the family a better financial security. This also contributes to the women's possibility to integrate. All these factors together give the mother a new position and role within the family, thus contributing too many changes in the old patriarchal system. All these changes in the family turned the structure upside down (**Figure 4**).

Figure 4 Changes in Traditional Family Types in the New Country

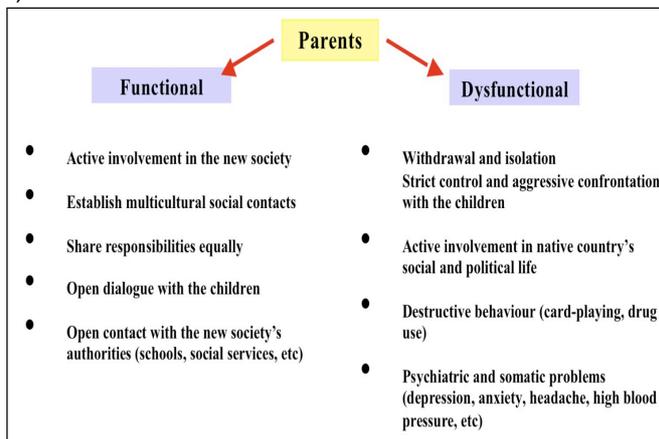


F Father
 Re Relative(s)
 M Mother
 CH Child(ren)

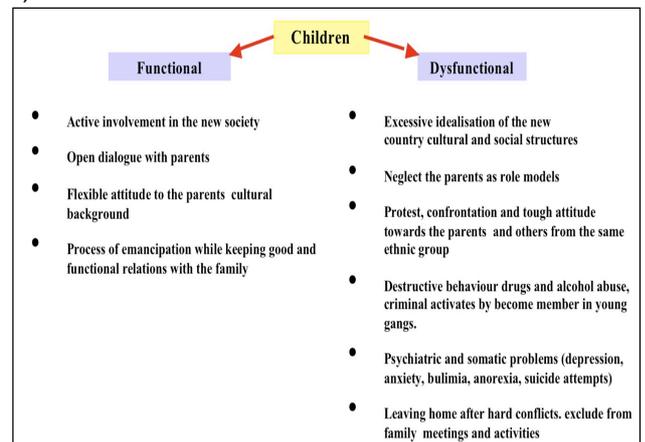
The father finds himself at the bottom of the structure and the children take on new leader roles in the family. The mother usually finds herself between these two powerful subsystems. It is difficult to decide which of these two sides she would support in the case of conflict. If she takes the father’s side she can lose the trust of her children, and if she supports the children she would be afraid of losing her husband. No one in this system, which had been turned upside down, had experience of how to function in his or her new positions and roles (Haley, 1971). This puts the family relations in chaos costing them problems between the family members and between the family and the authorities in the receiving country. The family members react differently in this new situation. Many strategies with social, physical or/and psychological symptoms are manifested as a reaction to the changed structure (Al-Baldawi, 2005). These symptoms are illustrated in **Figure 5** a) and b).

Figure 5 Strategies in Meeting with the Changes in the Family Structure

a) Parents



b) Children



Fathers can react in both constructive and destructive ways depending on their level of education, social flexibility and their job status in the new country. Constructive strategies for meeting the new role within the family involve becoming more active in society by, for example, studying the language, finding a job and developing a more open attitude towards the new social conditions. Some of the fathers unfortunately choose destructive strategies by adopting a hard attitude and aggressively

confronting the rest of the family in order to try to keep their control within the family system. Some of them set unacceptable rules and limits for the family members, which make many of them, particularly the teenagers, protest. Other fathers choose to abdicate (physically and/or mentally) their family responsibilities. An extreme example is given by those who become actively involved in social and political life of their native country, to the point of being active members of various conservative, nationalistic societies and groups. Some fathers can exhibit destructive behaviours such as playing cards for many days or using various drugs. Still others choose to idealise the old country's rules and way of life proposing them as a model to be followed in the new country.

Psychiatric problems, such as depression and anxiety, as well as different somatic symptoms such as headache, high blood pressure, etc. are other possible ways for some of these fathers to reduce their feeling of shame at the loss of their traditional role. Referring to their poor health status makes it easier to escape this feeling of shame.

The mothers also meet the changed family structure in a variety of ways. As mentioned earlier, some mothers adopted an active attitude in compensating for the reduction in the father's role. Another choice is to file for divorce as a way to escape the problems within the family. In Sweden during the past 10 years we have noticed a dramatic increase in the number of divorces amongst immigrant families particularly among those who originate from the Middle East region. The financial independence, which the women are able to achieve in the new country, helps them to take this opportunity to have another way of life and to free themselves from increasing problems within the family. Unfortunately, many of these women are still treated with skepticism and are socially isolated by their relatives and friends leaving them lonely. Many of these women are unable to deal with their loneliness and isolation, finding themselves in a stressful situation since belonging to the group and the family is often an integral part of her social identity. Some of these mothers tend to become high consumers of health care, displaying all kinds of psychiatric problems, such as different types of depression, as well as high suicide risk and/or somatic problems.

The children also meet their new role in the family in different ways. The reduction of the parents' social role generally (particularly the father) generally makes it difficult for them to be a role model for their children. In this case many of the children try to compensate for this gap by finding a role model outside the family, such as a good teacher or a sports coach, or by doing well at school. Some of the teenagers unfortunately find a role model within the criminal fraternity or in drug user gangs, which have a detrimental effect on their studies. Others choose to deal with the conflict with the parents by leaving the family (Persson, 1992). In some cases the conflict becomes so bitter and intense that forces the children to seek help at school and from social services. Reactions from these institutions can vary: in some instances they try to find ways to improve the relations within the family, in other cases they are forced to remove the children and take them into care, according to the temporary custody law, to minimise the risk of physical or mental damage. Various psychiatric and/or somatic problems such as depression, anxiety, attempted suicide, bulimia and anorexia have been noted among the teenagers, particularly the girls (Minuchin *et al*, 1978; Johansson, 1997).

The changes in family structure create a disharmony within the family, which influences both its internal and external relations. This situation also affects mentally the individual. It is very important to see the mental and social disharmony manifested in the individual (such as depression, anxiety, sleep problems, irritation and conflict with others) as a part of the family problem in general. We can thus find solutions to these problems at both individual and family levels. Some of these psychological and social symptoms can be related to the stress created by migration. Other symptoms may be related to the conflicts encountered by the family in its adaptation process to the life style of the new country. If we treat the individual's symptoms alone on an individual level, without addressing the home situation and family relations, it may mean that our treatment has a limited effect with a high risk of relapse.

As we can see in **Table 1**, *conflict with authorities* has been recognized in 3 traditional families. The differences in the way the children are raised and in their development lead to major conflicts between

these families and the authorities, particularly the schools. Many of the teachers have to help bolster at the children's self-confidence and this may be interpreted by the most "closed" parents as constituting a threat to their traditional (holistic) way of live. According to the holistic way of thinking, the child is an indivisible part of the undivided family. The schools, as a part of modern industrial countries, function according to the individualistic way of thinking. In this model the individual is considered to be an autonomous unit in society with rights to their own integrity and identity.

Table 1 The psychosocial consequences of the changed family structure

	Traditional family	Integrated family	Assimilated family	Total
Conflicts with authorities	3	0	0	3
Conflicts with relatives	0	2	0	2
Divorce	1	3	3	7
Conflicts between generations	7	4	1	12
Maltreatment	2	1	0	3
Drug abuse	0	1	0	1

These differences make the distance between the school and the family rather substantial, which in turn has a negative influence on the children. The daily journey between home and school may mean a journey between two different systems, making them both painful and heavy burden to bear. In some cases the children use this situation to improve their role within the family by threatening the parents to inform the school or the social services about how bad the conditions at home are. A lack of information about the new society and parental rights regarding the children's upbringing can lead to these parents abdicating their responsibility. This situation may also have negative effects on the children and their development in that the loss of control may leave them in a vacuum without clear orientation and direction. There is another aspect of the conflict between family and the authorities in the new country. Many of the families from Middle East and North Africa are suspicious of authorities, which is usually due to the repressive role of authorities in undemocratic systems. The people learn to avoid contact with these institutions as much as possible.

This background may prevent some of the families from achieving a good and positive relation to the authorities in the new country. The authorities often play quite different roles in democratic societies and the contact between them and the inhabitants is often closer and deeper.

It is only the school that may be more acceptable to the family. In undemocratic systems this institution plays a positive and welcoming social role. This is why many of the immigrant families initially turn to the school to seek help. Unfortunately, a lack of information on the previous life style of immigrants and their traditions, as well as migration-related social and family problems, inflexibility and lack of time and educated teachers make the school system in the new country often incapable of meeting these parent's needs with respect and enough understanding. This attitude deepens the parents' suspicion towards the society in general and the school in particular.

Conflicts with relatives were admitted by 2 of the families that had chosen the integrated structure. The new type of family structure, characterised by relations of more openness and equality irritated relatives with more traditional attitudes and this was usually given as the reason for these kinds of conflict. In one case the father wanted to give more freedom to his children, particularly his daughters. This was met with protests from the closest relatives (uncles and aunts) who considered such an upbringing to be wrong and against traditional and religious rules. The father in this case was forced to

leave the area in which the family lived and to abandon his family. This situation was very difficult and the father felt that he was a traitor and alone. The feeling of guilt made him depressed and forced him to seek psychiatric help. This kind of conflict becomes more painful if the family only has a few relatives in the new country thus limiting the members' choice.

Divorces occurred in 7 cases and represent the second major problem in our sample. The prevalence of divorce is the same among integrated and assimilated families. However, the reasons for divorces are different. The most common reason is a conflict between the parents. The financial independence and the support the women enjoy in the new country results in many of these women daring to petition for divorce. In our study, all of the women who divorced had a job and a relatively high level of education. There was one case of divorce in a traditional family. The woman had asked for a divorce because she had become chronically ill and was unable to fulfil her role of taking care of the family. Women in the traditional families are regarded as a private part of the patriarchal system. They have been taught that they can only exist by belonging to part of a group. This feeling may be one of the factors explaining the low number of divorces among this type of family. The social sanction of shame may be another reason hindering the woman from asking for a divorce. Many of these women are afraid of social isolation which is the natural punishment given by the ethnic group and relatives for such an act. Traditionally, people consider divorce to be unacceptable and an improper social act. In many cultures, even if the man initiated the divorce, is the woman who suffers the consequences. In some cases the divorce was stopped by the Catholic churches, which forbid the divorces even when both partners had accepted the separation.

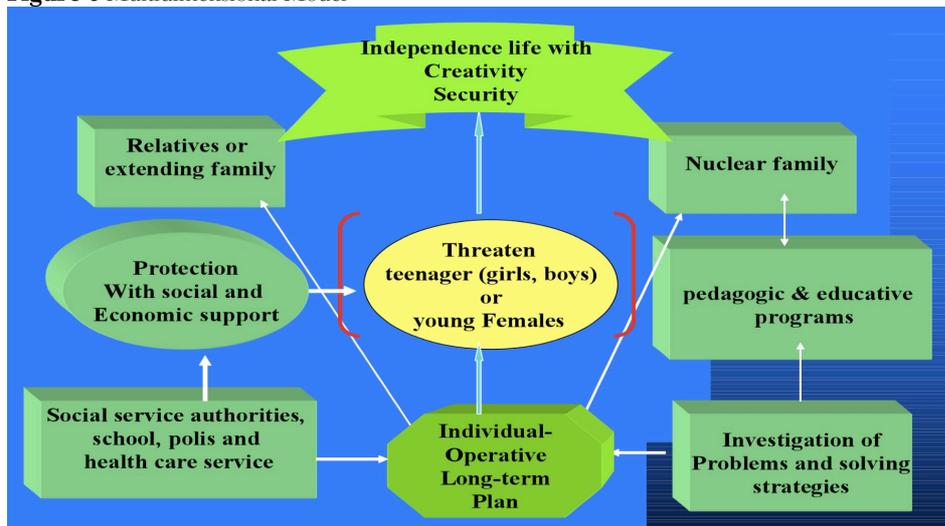
Generational conflicts includes both parent/children and son/daughter conflicts. This type of problem was admitted in 12 cases making them the largest group in our sample. 7 of these cases were found amongst the traditional families. The predominant type of conflict in this group is between parent (especially the father) and the teenagers in the family, particularly the daughters. The young generation in the traditional families grows up split between the family traditions and rules and the demands from the new society. This split gives rise to a new crisis, which we call "The crisis of cultural affiliation". We can find this kind of crisis, of varying intensity, amongst almost all young immigrants. They usually find themselves caught in between two worlds, each with their own specific rules and social norms. It may be more difficult for teenagers growing up in traditional families to meet this crisis because of the major differences in traditions and norm systems between the home and the new society. It is not an easy task to make the right choice between these two systems. If the young person chooses to adopt the new society's rules, he or she will encounter many problems with parents and relatives. In some cases this conflict may result in the young person leaving the family indefinitely. If these teenagers choose to follow the family's way of life and its traditions they may find themselves isolated from their friends at school or at work. Many of these teenagers try to find a balance between these two worlds. This costs them a great deal of energy and stress. Without support from the indigenous people and the social institutions of the new country this may prove to be an impossible mission. The development of various kinds of psychological and social problems may be the result of the stress experienced by many of these young people.

In **Figure 6** we describe our multidimensional model to help the young people in their conflict within the patriarchal traditional and rigid type of family. In general striving for an independent life is a normal phase in individual's development. But in conservative families young people in this phase could face problems not just within the nuclear family (parents), but even with some of relatives and members of the extending family.

We suggested in our model that the social service authorities have to act concurrently at the individual and family level. On the individual level, by giving to the youngest the protection they need in case of a hard conflict. This support has to include both social and economic component. Each of such cases

needs an individual operative plan to help these young people to reach a safety and creative live. On the family level, by early investigate the characters of the actual problem within the family and to identify how they may constitute a threat. This will help the authorities to construct a special pedagogic and educative programme to work directly with these elements in order to minimize their negative roll on the conflict. Identifying and isolating these elements within the family reduces the confrontation and makes possible for youngest to establish functional relation with the rest of family members.

Figure 6 Multidimensional Model



The conflicts between the children, particularly between the boys and the girls, result from the differences in the upbringing, and from discrimination of the girls within the family. In traditional families the parents often look to the boys as a part of the family's future. The male in the patriarchal structure illustrates the power and the official part of the system. This means that the boys grow up with the feeling that they are an important part of the family who has to look after its future and success. The male is thus regarded as the part of the family that will maintain stability and safeguard to the family's traditions. This gives a dominant role to the boys, particularly to the oldest one in the family. Fathers and mothers who strive to educate their boys so that they will be able to shoulder this responsibility support this role.

As we mentioned earlier, the patriarchal system regards the female part of the family as part of the private sphere. This means that the females have no chance of representing the family in its external relations. The daughters are taught to play a secondary role within the family and in society. This unjust situation gives rise to great tension between the boys and girls within the family system. The boys are given greater opportunities for having contact outside the family, whereas the girls are forbidden to have such kinds of relations without the permission of the male part of the family. It is accepted that many of the male teenagers engage in sexual relations before getting married, whereas this kind of relationship is absolutely forbidden for the female teenagers. Many families look favourably upon the sexual activity of the male teenagers and fiercely condemn the female teenager for merely having a male friend outside the family circle.

The tension within the family becomes more intense when the family moves to the new country where the equality of relationships between the male and female are guaranteed by law. This helps the female part of the family show their protest against the old and unjust situation between the genders. Girls find support from school and social institutions in their struggle for equality in relations within and outside the family. This support makes the problems in the family more visible thus forcing the male part of the family, particularly the father, to find a new way of meeting this situation. The father needs both wisdom and cultural flexibility to accept these changes and to find a new way of raising the

children without any discrimination. Accepting new social rules is a process in which these fathers also need a great deal of support from the authorities. This process takes time and there is a need for constant education with respect to the difficulties these fathers encounter when going through this painful transition.

These changes can take place with less dramatic consequences if the social institutions in the new country support the family system and do not set one part of the family against the other. The goal of interventions of social support should be to maintain the family as a functional unit as far as possible. A more positive goal would be to help the father and rest of the male part of the family to understand the need for change. At the same time help should be offered to the female part of the family in order to show ways they can use their newly won freedom and other opportunities the new society offers them without destroying the family system.

The teenagers, as well as their parents, need the family as a system to provide them with the security and stability they need to meet the changes in the surrounding environment. It is very important to explain to the traditional parents that the emancipation and self-confidence of their children is a normal developmental process. They need to regard this process as a positive issue rather than seeing it as a protest against them or the old traditions and norm system.

To give support only to the children within the family may force the parents to abdicate their responsibilities and resist going through the process of change. The family must have a chance to experiment with its own solutions to the problems it meets. The role of the authorities should be one of support and supervision, which is very important in helping the family to find a balance between the old traditions and the new way of life. The freedom and emancipation of young people will be more effective and stable if they are accepted and supported by the family.

Domestic violence occurred in 3 cases and 2 of these concerned families with a traditional type of structure. In both cases the father had resorted to physical violence to exert control over his young children. Unfortunately, corporal punishment is still used as a method of raising children in many parts of the world. Many countries have laws against such methods but still many children are exposed to this kind of punishment within the family and even at school. It is not so simple to change this kind of attitude in child rearing. Such practices raise problems with many authorities in the new country. It often proves difficult to investigate and work with this kind of problem.

There are many questions regarding these problems, for example: How can we convince parents to stop using corporal punishment? How can we develop an effective and appropriate instrument to identify as early as possible the use of corporal punishment within the family? How can we protect the children from this kind of child rearing practice without destroying the family system? Is there any difference between using corporal punishment in order to attain child rearing goals and use as a part of parents' efforts to maintain control and demonstrate power?

These questions and many others still require much discussion at the local and international level. The international community condemns the use of any sort of physical and psychological violence against children. To reach this goal worldwide we need to work both on the national and international level with intensive education programs addressing this issue. On the national level we need to work hard with the immigrant families and particularly those from countries, which still have a tolerant attitude to these practices. It is a tough task to change behaviour that has been learned over many generations. In my opinion the goal in this work is not only to force the family to respect the law but to help the members understand why they must refrain from using these kinds of methods. The most important aspect of our job is to teach the parents other methods of bringing up their children. Another important issue is to teach children to respect the new methods introduced by the parents. From our clinical observations we have found that the children being brought up with a rigid attitude usually have greater difficulties in understanding and following another way of communicating. This could be one of the reasons why school teachers and new friends experience difficulties in having relationships

with these children. The damage caused by physical and/or mental punishment could influence the children's future adaptation to, and integration in, the new society (Al-Baldawi, 2004).

To achieve a better result we need to create an open dialogue between the authorities and the newly arrived families. It is very important to explain to these families the legal and social consequences of using these illegal and socially unacceptable methods.

Drug addiction was admitted in only one case. The father had been a drug user before the family migrated. He used the drug in question as a part of his self-medication for the pain and anxiety he suffered after a long imprisonment for his political activity in his home country. Arriving in Sweden gave him the security he needed but at the same time he lost his social and political status. This degradation in social role made him feel empty and using drugs became one of these compensation strategies.

CONCLUSIONS This article is a reflection of many years of clinical observations and hard work with immigrant families (Al-Baldawi, 1998b; 2002; 2005). The material I have presented is limited and cannot explain all the problems and changes encountered by the immigrant family during the migration process. I see this work as an orientation in a very important and complicated problem. The majority of immigrant families have the capacity and enough life experience to find different solutions to these problems. We need to help these families trust in their own capacity and give them the social and economic support and supervision they need in order to work on their problems by themselves. It is very important to offer this support as soon as the family arrives in the new country, that is, before any of the problems occur. Helping the highly educated immigrant as soon as possible to find a job corresponding to their educational level and experience gives a positive effect not just with regard to the individual, but also to the whole family.

Whatever the reactions may be from the family members due to the changed family structure, we must acknowledge them as signals which need a very active intervention, not only on the individual level but, even more importantly, on the family level. To regard the family as a system and to treat family problems (even those which are manifested individually) together gives much better results on both an individual and family level.

Many of the problems discussed in this article can be considered as normal issues in the initial stages of all kinds of migration. The problems become dangerous when they become chronic and negatively influence the integration process. Social support interventions have to respect the immigrants' social and cultural background and their life experience. Showing such respect will definitely help to create a deep and open dialogue, particularly with parents, in order to help them to accept the changes on the individual and family level.

Finally, I would like to see this article as a springboard for more in depth and extensive studies of these particular issues.

REFERENCES

- Ahmadi F, Ahmadi N. *Iranian Islam and the concept of the Individual. On the Non-Development of the Concept of the Individual in the Ways of Thinking of Iranians*. Uppsala, Uppsala University, 1995
- Ahmadi N. *Om jag uppfattningens betydelse för tolkningen av sociala normer* [Swedish]. In: Ahmadi N (Ed). *Ungdom, Kulturmöten, Identitet*. Stockholm, Liber, 1998
- Al-Baldawi R. Psykosociala konsekvenser av en förändrad familjestruktur. *Läkartidningen*, 95: 2223- 2231, 1998a
- Al-Baldawi R. *Migration och familjestruktur* [Swedish] In: Ahmadi N (Ed). *Ungdom, Kulturmöten, Identitet*. Stockholm, Liber, 1998b

THE IMPACT OF MIGRATION AND ACCULTURATION PROCESSES ON FAMILY RELATIONS

- Al-Baldawi R. *Culture, migration and the reconstruction of individual identity and family structure*. In: Banno Gomes N, Bigestans A, Magnusson L, Ramberg I (Eds). *Reflections on diversity and change in modern society : a Festschrift for Annick Sjögren*. Botkyrka, Sweden, Multicultural centre, 2002
- Al-Baldawi R. *Long terms measures to combat honour-related violence*. In: Mojab S, Abdo N (Eds). *Violence in the name of Honour. Theoretical and practical challenges*. Istanbul, Bilgi University Press, 2004
- Al-Baldawi R. *Migration och ungdomarnas psykosociala utveckling* [Swedish]. In: Örebro L. *Varken Barn eller vuxen*. Stockholm, Gothia, 2005
- Al-Saffar S, Borgå P. *Spånga – öppenvårdspsykiatri för en mångkulturell befolkning - Rapport nr. 4* [Swedish]. Stockholm, Centrum för psykosocial forskning och utveckling (CPFU) nuvarande: Enheten för Psykisk Hälsa (EPH), 1995
- Ekblad S. *Diagnostik och behandling av patienter med invandrarbakgrund. En ettårsuppföljning på en psykiatrisk öppenvårdsmottagning - Stressforskningsrapporter (Stress Research Reports) nr. 262* [Swedish]. Stockholm, Institut för Psykosocial Medicin (IPM), 1996
- Ekblad S, Belkic K, Eriksson NG. *Health and Disease Among Refugees and Immigrants: A quantitative Review Approaching Meta-Analysis. Implications for Clinical Practice and Perspectives for Further Research. Part I Mental Health Outcomes – Stress Research Reports nr. 267*. Stockholm, Institut för Psykosocial Medicin (IPM), 1996
- Ekblad S, Eklundh T, Wennström C, Al-Falahe N, Känsälä R, Westin M. *Posttraumatiskt stressyndrom bland patienter med invandrarbakgrund. En utveckling av ett pågående tvåårigt rehabiliteringsprojekt på Fittja psykiatriska öppenvårdsmottagning - Stressforskningsrapporter (Stress Research Reports) nr 272* [Swedish]. Stockholm, Institut för Psykosocial Medicin (IPM), 1997
- Eyrumulu R. *Iranska familjer I Sverige – ett nord Europisk samhälle* [Swedish]. [Iranian families in Sweden, a North-European society]. Gothenburg - Angered, Invand-lit, 1998
- Fathi A. *Women and the family in Iran*. Leiden (Netherland), E.J. Brill, 1985
- Guerny Jr BG, Minuchin S, Montalvo B, Rosman BL, Schumer F. *Families of the Slums: an exploration of their structure and treatment*. New York, Basic Books, 1967
- Haley J. *Changing Families. A Family Therapy reader*. New York, Grune & Stratton, 1971
- Hylland Eriksen T. *Små platser stora frågor – En introduktion till socialantropologi*. [Norwegian] Nora, Nya Doxa, 2000, pp 99-112
- Johansson LM. *Migration, Mental Health and Suicide - An epidemiological, Psychiatric and Cross-cultural study*. Stockholm, Karolinska Institutet, 1997
- Lader M. Psychiatry and life events: biological and social mechanisms. *Triangle*, 29: 57-64, 1990
- Minuchin S. *Families and Family Therapy*. Cambridge (MA), Harvard University Press, 1978
- Minuchin S, Rosman BL, Baker L. *Psychosomatic Families. Anorexia Nervosa in context*. Cambridge (MA) & London, Harvard University Press, 1978
- Nyberg E. *Migration of Families with Children – Family relations in a changed life situation*. [PhD dissertation in Swedish with abstract in English]. Stockholm, Pedagogiska Institutionen, Stockholms Universitet, 1993
- Persson B. *Det tidlösa våldet*. Stockholm, Rädda barnen, 1992
- Rack PH. *Race, Culture, and Mental Disorder*. London, Tavistock, 1982
- Rosaldo MZ. *Women, Culture and Society: A theoretical overview*. In: Rosaldo MZ, Lamphere L (Eds). *Women, Culture and Society*. Stanford (CA), Stanford University Press, 1974, pp 17-43
- Rudolph Toubia J. *Marriage and the family in Iran*. In: Bardis PD, Singh Das M (Eds). *The family in Asia*. London, George Allen & Unwin, 1979, pp 208-224
- Schjöldt B, Egeland TA. *Från systemteori till familjeterapi* [Swedish]. Lund (Sweden), Studentlitteratur, 1994, pp 71- 80
- Tham H. *Ökar Marginaliseringen i Sverige?* [Swedish] In: Fritzell J, Lundberg O (Eds). *Vardagens villkor. Levnadsförhållanden i Sverige under tre decennier*. Stockholm, Brombergs, 1994
- Wattjersson K, Wackenfors M. *Projekt "Mansgruppen". Rehabilitering av Invandarmän*. [Project "Mangroup": Rehabilitation of Immigrant Men]. Försäkringskassan i Norsborg, 1993