

Navigating resettlement and inclusion: key messages from research with refugee children and youth
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Dr. Muireann Ní Raghallaigh,
Associate Professor of Social Work / Programme Director Professional Masters in Social Work, UCD

Muireann.niraghallaigh@ucd.ie @MuireannNiR



University College Dublin
University for All



Overview of Paper

Navigation of resettlement and inclusion by
refugee children and young people

Key role of their parental, staff and peer
microsystems in supporting this navigation &
challenges in this regard

How the broader macrosystem impacts
resettlement and inclusion

Priorities for future directions

Terminology

International Protection Applicant

Refugee Status and Subsidiary Protection

Programme Refugees

Temporary Protection Mechanism



Refugee
Children
and Young
People
(C&YP)

C&YP arriving to seek international protection

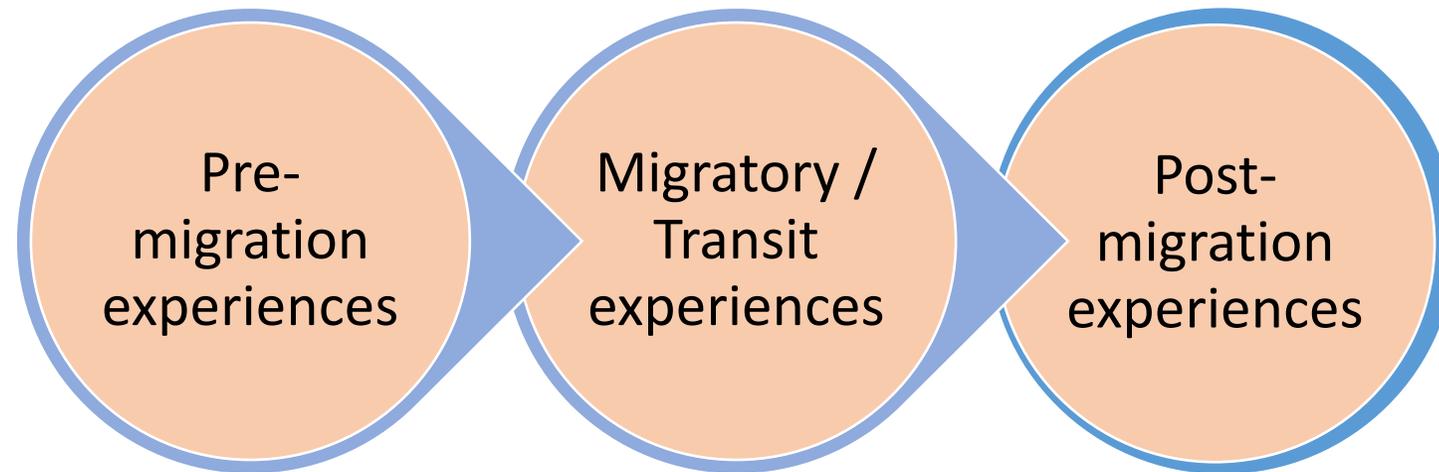
C&YP arriving via resettlement schemes

C&YP arriving accompanied

C&YP arriving unaccompanied

C&YP reunited with family members

Experiences of Refugee Children and Young People



Refugee children and young people face “a rupture in the narratives threads running through their lives” (Summerfield, 1998, p. 16).



Resettlement and Inclusion

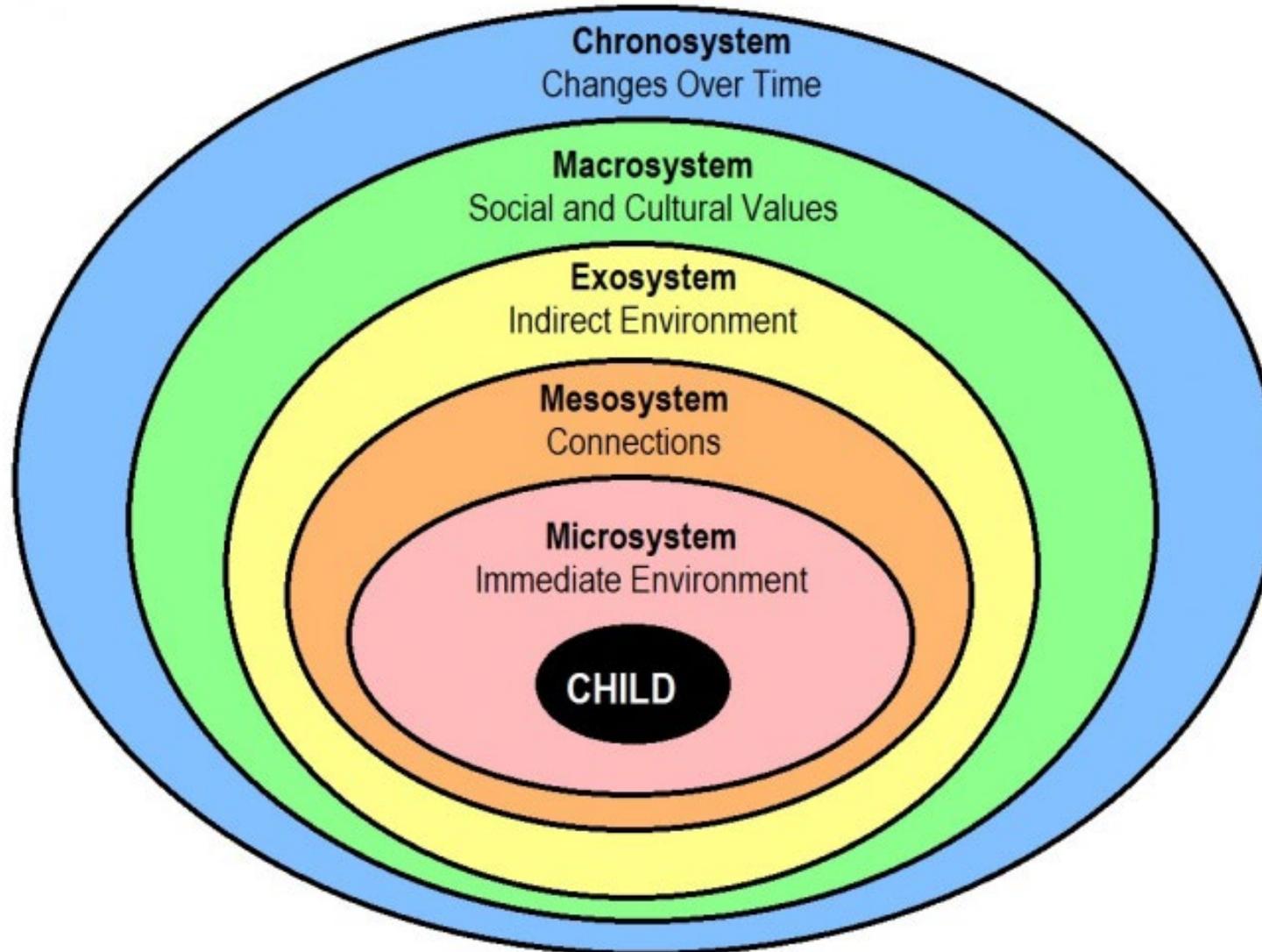
Resettlement

- Process of ***settling*** in a country, “the activities and processes involved in **becoming established**” (Valtonen, 2004) – “a process of growth - **of personal and social development within a safe and stable context of possibility**” (Correa-Velez et al., 2010)

Inclusion

- Ability to participate on an equal basis; experiencing a sense of belonging; feeling connected to the ‘host’ society

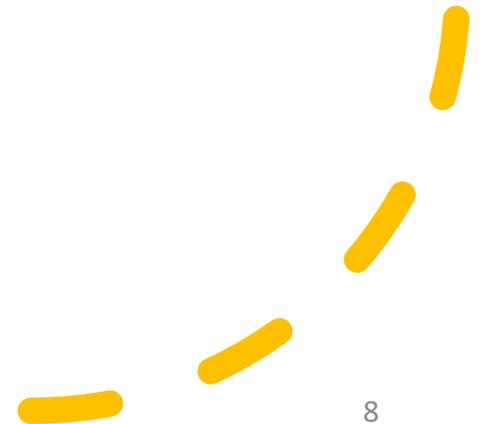
Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory



Key Question

Who are the key people in refugee children and young people's microsystems and how do their relationships with them impact resettlement and inclusion?

- (1) Parents
- (2) Staff
- (3) Peers



(1) Parents

- Importance of parental support
- Family members as key to successful resettlement and inclusion
 - Impact of separation from family members (especially parents) on well-being and integration
 - Key role of family in the lives of refugee young people: emotionally, practically, financially (Atwell, 2009; McMichael, 2011)
 - Family providing a sense of continuity during a time of discontinuity

Challenges of Parenting

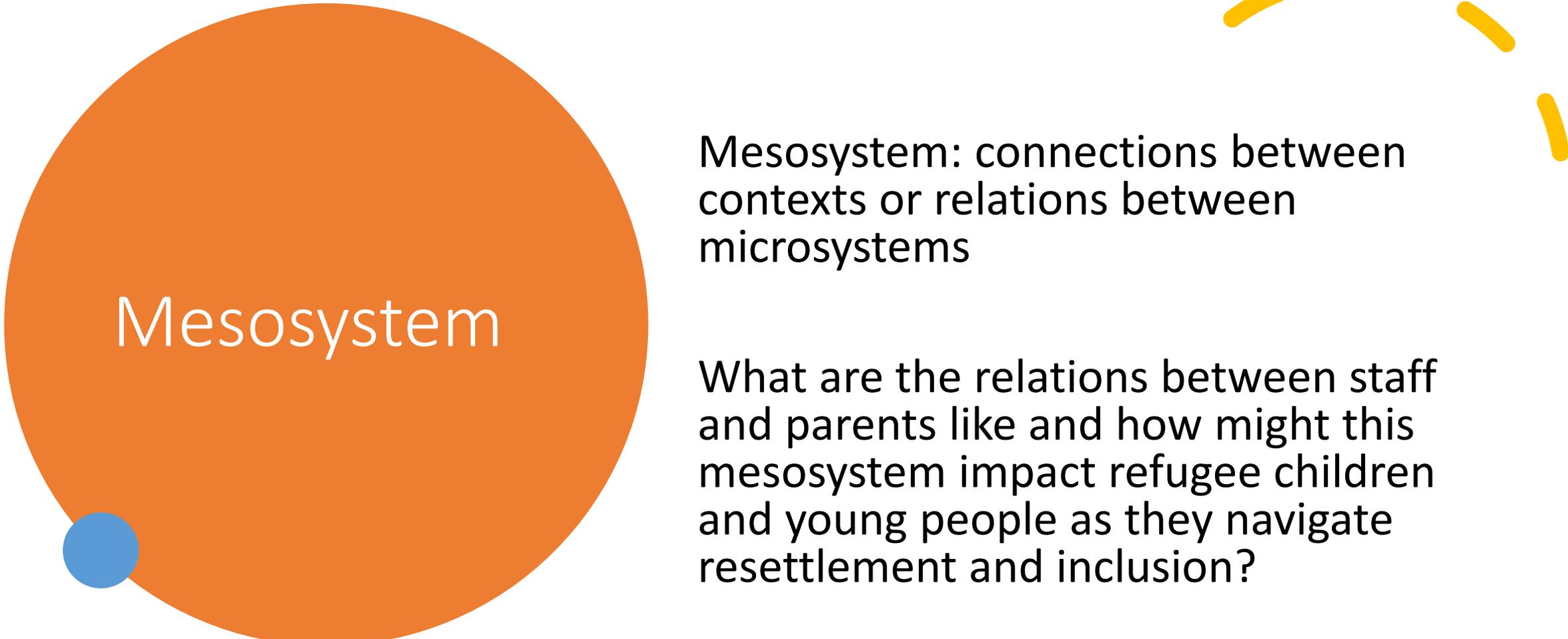
- But parenting in this context is extremely challenging:
 - Multiple losses experienced
 - Trauma and mental health difficulties
 - Living in congregated, largely unsupportive settings
 - Navigating a completely new environment, often with little social support; different parenting styles & expectations (Dalikeni, 2021)
 - Language barriers
 - Experiencing racism and discrimination (Moran et al., 2017)
 - “Acculturation stress” (Berry, 1997)

Research

- “It is mental torture for one to leave his country and family, then coming here to face all these restrictions and emotional torment is worse. You have to sign in everyday ... All these restrictions and regimented lifestyle have knock-on effects on our children, it tends to build up You have no direction, like a zombie, waiting for the next instruction from the management or the Justice people. How can you be a good parent, when you don’t have control over your life, and cannot control your children’s life, you have everything, power, control taken over from you; who is parenting who?” (cited in Ogbu et al., 2014)
- “There will always be this inferiority, like these people are more superior than I am. I don’t know my status in this place, so I don’t know what would attract this kind of reaction from other people in the community. They don’t see me – it’s the people ‘up the hill’. The position itself for the hostel, everyone can spot you. You’re not in the community you’re separate, so they know that different nationalities are from the hostel. (Female interviewee, cited in Moran et al., 2017)

(2) Staff in Congregated Settings

- Staff in reception centres/DP centres/emergency accommodation as key people within the child's microsystem – frontline service providers
- Challenges
 - Lack of relevant professional expertise in working with refugees
 - Lack of understanding of the experiences and needs of refugees
 - Lack of role clarity & unfair expectations
 - Possessing power



Mesosystem

Mesosystem: connections between contexts or relations between microsystems

What are the relations between staff and parents like and how might this mesosystem impact refugee children and young people as they navigate resettlement and inclusion?



Interactions Between Parents and Centre Staff:

Multiple challenges associated with parenting in DP and other congregated settings, some of which are directly related to staff

Evidence of parents feeling disempowered (Ogbu et al., 2014; Moran et al., 2017)

Over-representation of children in direct provision in referrals to Tusla (HIQA, 2013)

Over-involvement of staff in the lives of residents – inappropriate use of power

Research on
the Needs of
Refugee
Children
(Ní Raghallaigh
et al., 2019;
2021)

Evidence of **problematism and regulation of parenting practices** by reception centre staff.

The staff associated causes of parenting 'problems' with the parents themselves, rather than considering systems level issues.

In response to these 'problems' staff assumed a regulatory role over parents in different ways: by **(1) informing and warning, (2) watching and regulating, (3) taking on parental roles; and (4) referring to child protection and welfare services.**

How Parenting was Viewed

Safety and welfare of children identified by parents as primary reason for coming to Ireland

- ***“So every family came here for the sake of their children so that they feel safe”- Parent***

Challenges of parenting in reception centres highlighted by parents – shared spaces, rules in place

- **In contrast....**

Reception centre staff did not acknowledge the difficulties of raising children in these environments, but viewed the parenting practices of reception centre residents as problematic:

Reference to need for parents to ***“step up”***

Supervision of children identified as ***“a huge thing”*** & ***“a big problem”***

Staff Responses: 1. Informing & Warning

Staff informed parents about their duties as parents and warned them of consequences:

- ***'At the welcome we tell them that they are responsible for the children; that we're not childminders; however, if we feel they are neglecting the children then a referral will be done to Tusla'.***
- ***'We tell them that when you do go to your homes ...you can't leave your child out in the street [when] you're inside. You can't. Eventually you'll be deported and those kids will be taken off you. You must keep an eye on your kids. Anything could happen to a child. It could be abduction, it would be anything. So, you need to keep an eye. You need be with your children all the time.'***
- They are ***"always threatened with reports to social services"***

Staff Responses: 2. Watching & Regulating

Evidence that residents were 'parenting inside a fishbowl' (Holtrop et al., 2015: 185).

- '... they know that we're watching them...'
- '... your managers have to be, you know, watching all the time, being vigilant all the time'
- Staff emphasised the need for rules and regulations
- ***'Well, the first day when they arrive ...have a meeting with them and [put] some rules on the table, and after that ... be very strong and follow these rules. No ... exceptions, because if [you] do [that] once, you are lost.'***
- Governance of how families eat:
- ***'There was one person at one time just was not engaging with us or the restaurant; she didn't want to take [her child] there. But then she was told they must come ... they must eat in the restaurant; we need to know what they're eating. So she eventually gave in and she had to come to the restaurant every day'***

Staff Responses: 3. Taking on Parental Roles

Examples of staff “taking on parental roles”, akin to becoming “pseudo parents” (Anthony et al., 2018).

‘Like we’d often correct a parent if we saw the children just before a mealtime coming out with six chocolate biscuits... because obviously they’re not going to eat then. And again we’d encourage the parents that if the child is not hungry that they make sure and that they put away soup for them or they put away whatever meat dishes there and leave it in the kitchen and let them eat it later on that evening, that they’re not snacking on rubbish foods.’

One staff member described her role as “like a mummy... taking care of everything” and said that “everything goes through me”

Staff Responses: 4. Referring

Exact data on number of referrals to the state child and family agency not available

In one centre where lack of supervision viewed as “a **huge problem**”, only 2 referrals made.

Sometimes other strategies adopted first, then referral made if parents were “**not listening**”

Concern re unnecessary referrals especially at beginning

Staff often positioned themselves as in possession of relevant child protection knowledge

Potential implications for children and young people?

- Disempowerment of parents and erosion of their sense of autonomy
- Implications for relationship between children and their parents
- Stress caused to parents by these interactions likely to impact children and young people and cause children and young people to worry about their parents.

A young person stated that staff “**need to understand the parents**” as “**they can’t take much more**” (young person)

- ‘Warnings’ likely to erode sense of trust and result in fear of state services amongst children and their parents



(3) Peers

Establishing Social Bonds & Social Bridges

Research highlights the crucial role played by peers in helping refugee children to resettle in host countries.

Social Bonds: Connections with people of a shared sense of identity

Social Bridges: Connections with people of a different background

Social Bonds and Social Bridges

- “...because there was a few people, like Syrian people with me, so we were like families together....That was really perfect for me....Then when I moved to here it’s like—I’m just like I spend lots of times alone...” (Young person cited in Smith et al., 2020a)
- “When you get to Ireland it’s good for you to get friends...it’s so good to have a friend. I have lots of friends who are Irish...they help me in the school so much.” (Young person cited in Smith et al., 2020a)

Relationships with Peers

- **Challenges**

- Different context for establishing friendships
- Perceived as 'different'; Racism and Discrimination (de Anstiss, Savelsberg, and Ziaian 2019; Mohamed and Thomas 2017)
- Language barriers (Madziva and Thondhlana, 2017)
- Particular challenges for girls? (Smith et al., 2020)
- Trauma (Sirin and Rogers-Sirin, 2015)
- Financial barriers & social exclusion
- Acculturation and parental concerns

Research

- *“...Here you get friends, but they are really really, few. [little laugh]. I don’t have friends, like. Few friends. But at home [in country of origin], like, in the evenings, you can just go the neighbours. You just go and visit them. But here, everything is on time. And, like, when you are going somewhere, like, you have to call to make an appointment. But there you just drop in, they don’t mind”. (Ní Raghallaigh, 2007)*
- *“I mean you feel ... how ... you feel different. Although you might have Irish friends, you would feel actually different, because maybe they would have expensive runners, maybe go to clubs, expensive pens, school bags ...[...] Like, here you have ... in [my country], like, you don’t have to compete for fashion like those kind of, you know. But here, someone buys runners in your class and you know, everyone must compete. Getting more better runners” (Ní Raghallaigh, 2007)*

Good Practice

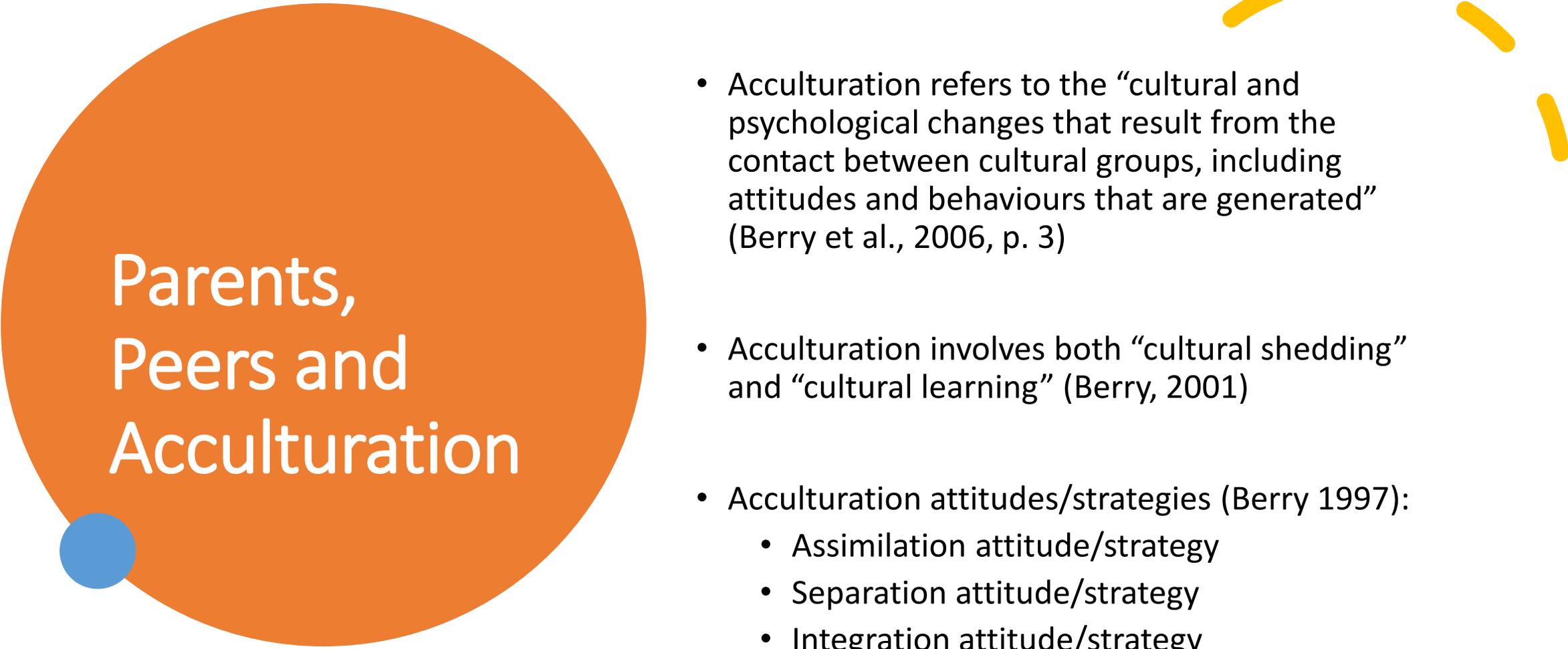
- Example of youth work with Irish young people and Syrian refugees

Before:

- “You know, young people from Irish communities were speaking about the young people who’d come over from Syria or whatever as nearly less than, or certainly needy or traumatised. They were very much using stereotypical words that you might associate with kind of the civil war and that kind of migration issue.... a lot of it was ‘poor’, ‘poverty’, ‘war’. There was trust issues. And a lot of young lads would certainly have spoken about ‘Islam’ and ‘Muslim’ and ‘ISIS’ and ‘war’ and ‘fighting’ and ‘killing’ and all that ...”

After: - Youth worker described the ‘massive transformation’ that occurred

- “When they met each other and got to know each other a bit, all that was gone. And it continued to stay like that. Those young people would still speak about the positive experience of having those ideas being challenged and those words have never kind of come out of their mouths since.”
- (From Ní Raghallaigh et al., 2019)



Parents, Peers and Acculturation

- Acculturation refers to the “cultural and psychological changes that result from the contact between cultural groups, including attitudes and behaviours that are generated” (Berry et al., 2006, p. 3)
- Acculturation involves both “cultural shedding” and “cultural learning” (Berry, 2001)
- Acculturation attitudes/strategies (Berry 1997):
 - Assimilation attitude/strategy
 - Separation attitude/strategy
 - Integration attitude/strategy



Acculturation and Acculturative Stress

- “Acculturative stress” refers to the stress experienced when there is a cultural conflict between one’s culture of origin and the culture in the new country. (Berry, 1997)
- Young people may ‘integrate’ more quickly than their parents and tension or discord can arise where different acculturation strategies are utilised. (see Fazel et al., 2012)

Contextual Considerations - Macrosystem

- **Globally:**
 - Increasingly hostile environments and border policies
 - Increasing numbers of displaced person's globally
 - Rising global inequality
 - Rise of the far right and anti-immigrant sentiment
- **Nationally:**
 - 'State sanctioned' poverty and exclusion (Arnold, 2012)
 - Private, for-profit actors providing essential services to potentially vulnerable populations
 - Inequitable treatment of different groups of refugees
 - Housing crisis
 - Lack of investment in resettlement supports and in anti-racism training and initiatives

Future Directions?

- End direct provision; build houses
- Staff all accommodation settings appropriately with ongoing training and reflexive supervision for all
- Consider what we can learn from care provision for unaccompanied minors
- Invest in tailored, family support services, in youth services and in appropriate mental health services
- Engage – individually and collectively - with the uncomfortable reality that not all refugee populations have experienced the welcome that refugees from Ukraine have – Why is this? How can we harness this solidarity and desire to help for the future?
- Invest in anti-racism training for all working with refugee children and young people
- Engage in long-term planning for refugee resettlement
- Gather data; Conduct longitudinal research

“People who are also asylum seekers or refugees”

“The label ‘refugee’ cannot say all about the person who bears it. Being or becoming an asylum seeker, or a refugee, is a critical life event. It is not the only one though, and it cannot subsume all of the identities, interests, life projects and concerns of people who are also asylum seekers or refugees.”

(Boaccagni and Righard, 2020:378)



Go Raibh Maith Agaibh! Questions?

Muireann.niraghallaigh@ucd.ie

Twitter: @MuireannNiR



University College Dublin
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