



## SAUDI PARENTS' PERSPECTIVES ON THE INFLUENCE OF ACCULTURATION ON THEIR CHILDRearing BELIEFS

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### **Abstract:**

There are a considerable number of Saudi Arabian students who attend U.S. schools. To date, no published studies exist that relate to Saudi Arabian students, their families, and how they acculturate to American society. Acculturation affects parents and children in different ways, and it can affect the way parents raise their children. Using semi-structured interviews, this study examined Saudi mothers' perspectives on acculturation to American society and how those perspectives affect their childrearing beliefs. The descriptive qualitative study acknowledges mothers' perceptions about the adaptation of Saudi children to American society. The results showed there are some changes that occurred regarding parental beliefs of parents due to acculturation.

**Keywords:** acculturation, childrearing beliefs, ethnic identity, sojourners, positive parenting

### **1. Introduction**

Over the past ten years, the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) in Saudi Arabia has been sending students in scholarship programs to different parts of the world to complete their education. Students have earned both undergraduate and graduate degrees across many fields of study. According to the Higher Education Statistics Center of Saudi Arabia, the number of Saudi students in the United States (U.S.) in 2013 was 106,858. Further, the U.S. ranked first among other countries in its acceptance of students from Saudi Arabia (MOHE, 2015). Most of these students come to the U.S. with their families or establish families while in the U.S., and many Saudi students raise their children in the U.S while attending school.

Immigrant numbers are increasing all over the world. According to the reports of State Immigration Data Profiles, there are about 50 million immigrants in the U.S.

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According to state and demographic data of Texas, 34.4% of children between the ages of 6 and 17 have one or more foreign-born parents, and 5.3% are foreign-born children (Migration Policy Institute [MPI], 2015). People who leave their homes and move to another country have to somehow adapt to the host countries. As a result, changes may occur to the family system or routine. Raising children in a different country is different from raising them in one's country of origin (Costigan & Koryzma, 2011). A number of studies have been conducted to examine the differences between parent and child acculturation in a host country and most of those studies found that children acculturated more easily than parents (Consedine, Chentsova-Dutton, & Krivoshekova, 2014). As such, the differences between the acculturation of parents and children may create difficulties in child rearing for immigrant parents and may threaten the functional stability of the family (Spiegler, Leyendecker, & Kohl, 2015; Szapocznik & Kurtines, 1993). Furthermore, there are many factors that can affect the child-rearing beliefs of parents, as well as the discipline strategies that parents use with their children. Eventually, acculturation and one's own beliefs about parenting and discipline will have an effect on a child's development and behavior (Costigan & Koryzma, 2011).

## **2. Statement of the Problem**

A considerable number of Saudi Arabian students attend U.S. schools. To date, no published studies exist that relate to Saudi Arabian students, their families, and how they acculturate to American society. Some Saudi parents move to the U.S. with insufficient information about parenting experience in the American culture. Moreover, many parents may face considerable challenges when they first move to the U.S. as they adapt to the new culture with their children. The acculturation process might affect the family function and bring many changes to the family. Understanding parents' perspectives on acculturation to the American culture will help other parents to prepare themselves before they move. Also, it will help parents to understand any changes that might occur, whether temporary or permanent, in order to prepare themselves when they decide to move back home to their original culture of Saudi Arabia. Further, American teachers who have Saudi students need to understand how these families acculturate in order to make their classrooms more culturally responsive.

### **2.1 Purpose of the Study**

Acculturation affects parents and children in different ways, and it can affect the way parents raise their children. The purpose of this study is to examine Saudi parents' perspectives on acculturation to American society and how it affects their childrearing beliefs and discipline strategies. The author also aims to explore if Saudi parents observe changes in their children and parental perceptions about their children's adaptation to American society. Finally, it will help Saudis understand some aspects of the acculturation process and the challenges and barriers they may face when they move to the U.S.

## 2.2 Research Questions

The following research question will be addressed:

- 1) What are the perspectives of Saudi mothers regarding the ways in which American culture has influenced their parenting strategies and childrearing beliefs upon acculturation to the United States?

## 2.3 Significance of the Study

Conducting this study will help to provide an understanding of how Saudi parents discipline their children, as well as cultural factors that affect their child-rearing beliefs. It will help to provide an understanding of how the Saudi family functions.

The results from this study can also provide teachers with an understanding of Saudi family functionality and Saudi children at home. Teachers and others who work with immigrant children will benefit from understanding how the acculturation of Saudi families who live in the U.S.

## 2.4 Definition of Terms

- Acculturation: The process of adaptation to a new culture that makes an individual or group modify the way they live, and change some of their beliefs, in order to be capable of competing and coexisting with the rest of the community (Berry, 2003).
- Childrearing beliefs: The beliefs that parents hold that affect the process of raising their children. It affects the parenting style and the parenting strategies they use to discipline their children (Rodriguez & Olswang, 2003).
- Ethnic identity: The individual self, relating to a specific ethnic group in a dominant culture (Bhadha, 1999).
- Sojourner: A person who moves to another country temporarily for work or study and intends to go back to their home country when they are finished (Grisbacher, 1991).
- Positive parenting: Parenting behaviors that enhance children's psychological well-being and full development through using empowering, fostering, and non-violent strategies.

## 3. Literature Review

Living in a different culture has many positive and negative impacts on all family members, especially the children (Nesteruk & Mark, 2011). One of the most critical issues that immigrants may face is how to raise their children in a different culture (Weaver & Kim, 2008). When parents come from another culture, they will have to adapt in some ways to the host culture (Yagmulru & Sunson, 2009), even those parents who resist cultural changes (Goforth, Pham, & Oka, 2015). The adaptation will include adjusting their parenting style to try to see that their children will have limited conflict between home and school. Conflicts may arise from the need to keep and protect their original

identity while living in a different culture, as well as the need to adjust their living standards to feel comfortable and compatible with the new culture (Bornstein & Cote, 2006).

Acculturation is difficult for both parents and children, but there are some characteristics that may affect the degree of acculturation. The factors that might affect the acculturation of parents are: language proficiency level, academic achievement, self-esteem, ethnic identity, and psychological adjustment (Buki, Ma, Strom, & Strom 2003; Fever, Xu, Bahdaha, Narang, & Lieber, 2007; Goforth et al., 2015; Uayan et al., 2009). For example, if parents have a high language proficiency level, they face fewer difficulties communicating with their children and the community around them (Farver, Xu, Bhadha, Narang, & Lieber, 2007).

In order to live in a new culture, adaptation to the norms of the host culture is a necessity. Balancing between the original and host culture is required to understand the dynamics of both cultures. Children in the acculturation process depend on their parents to create that balance to nurture their normal psychological development (LaFromboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993).

According to Killian and Hegtvedt (2003), parental acculturation affects the way children perceive the new cultural beliefs that function in the host culture. Similarly, parent heritage culture has an influence on the parenting style of the parents. Parents, in this case, are one of the most important factors that help children adjust to the new culture (Killian & Hegtvedt).

### **3.1 Sojourning**

Sojourners are those individuals who leave their original country to pursue educational degrees, professional development programs, or work that makes them live temporarily in a foreign country (Grisbacher, 1991). Immigrants are individuals who were born in a different country and moved to live permanently in another country (Wedhwa, Saxenian, Rissing, & Gereffii, 2007).

Sojourners and immigrants share a number of issues, including challenges in the new culture, language barriers, adjustment and adaptation of skills, and emotional regulation (Grisbacher, 1991). The main difference between immigrants and sojourners is that sojourners are more likely than immigrants to emphasize biculturalism in their parenting style and make sure that their children maintain their heritage culture because they are planning to return to their home country (Downie et al., 2007). Several themes emerge in the literature regarding immigrants, sojourners, parenting, and acculturation, which will be discussed as follows.

Nakagawa, Teti, and Lamb (1992) conducted a study on Japanese mothers who were temporarily living in the U.S., and found that there is a relationship between social support and parental stress. Mothers who had less social support felt that they had a high level of parental stress and mothers who had a high level of social support in their life had less parental stress. The length of residency also affected the stress of those mothers.

Mothers who lived less than six months in the host country were found to have a higher level of stress than mothers who spent more than six months in the U.S. Spending longer time in the host country may allow mothers to settle in and adjust to their new situation, as opposed to the immediate stress that occurs with relocating. Likewise, Cho and Haslam (2010) reported a high level of stress on sojourning Korean students, especially during the first period of moving to the new culture. They found that there is a relationship between acculturation stress and suicidal ideation. Students who had strong social support from immigrants of the same ethnic group as they had reduced acculturation stress, and their shared experiences helped in facing challenges.

When international students move to a new country, they may discover a new self-identity that is created by the separation from family and their original culture. This can affect their self-perception and create changes in personality characteristics such as growth in tolerance and being independent. Being away from home the exposure to a new host culture, they develop new skills in confronting stress that help them adapt to the new environment (Brown, 2009). On the other hand, sojourners who have a strong attachment to their culture and families back home have been found to have acculturation difficulties to the host culture. For example, Raman and Harwood (2008) found that Indian students who are attached to their Indian culture, and in strong contact with their families back home, have suppressed acculturation to the American culture.

Students who are able to adapt to the new culture easily find themselves accepting the challenges they face at the beginning of the transition period. Those students who integrate into the host culture are willing to be engaged with other people from different cultures (Lombard, 2014). Sometimes, having friends from the host culture helps sojourners to adapt to the new culture. Swami (2009) compared Chinese sojourner students in Britain who had relationships with individuals from the national host culture, to Malaysian sojourner students who had no contact with individuals from the national host culture. Swami found that Malaysian students had poor connections with the host culture. This affected their English language acquisition, which was worse when compared to the Chinese students. Furthermore, they felt discriminated against and not fully involved in the host culture. All of these experiences are related to types of acculturation, which will be explained next.

### **3.2 Acculturation**

Looking at the bidimensional model of acculturation (Berry, 1980), there are four approaches to acculturation: integrated, separated, assimilated, and marginalized. The integrated approach means that the person retains his or her practices and keeps the traditions of the origin country, and also adopts new practices and traditions from the host country. The separated approach means that the person keeps the original practices and traditions and refuses to adapt to the new culture. The assimilated approach means that the person adapts to the host country and to its practices and traditions, and does not keep his/her own practices from the origin country. Finally, marginalized means that the person neither adopts new practices from the host country nor keeps the traditions

and practices from the origin country (Sullivan, Schwartz, Prado, Pantin, & Szapocznik, 2007).

Many studies have been conducted that are concerned about the effects of acculturation in different ethnic groups such as Chinese, Korean, and Turkish (Cook & Sim, 2015; Hulei, Zevenbergen, & Jacobs, 2006; Yagmulru & Sunson, 2009). Although these studies were about different ethnic groups, there is a gap in the literature about Saudi Arabians. The current literature compares the acculturation of mothers and their parenting styles across cultures other than Saudi Arabian. The comparison in these studies took European and American parenting styles as standard because the studies took place where American and European cultures were the host cultures. For example, Turkish mothers have been compared mostly to white, middle-class European and American mothers (Yagmurlu & Sanson, 2009).

However, Hulei et al. (2006) saw this as an unfair standardization for other cultures, because each culture has its own characteristics and parenting values that are considered standard within their private culture; but, when one comes to discuss acculturation, it has to be compared to the host culture. Also, the socio-cultural contexts before and after moving should be taken into consideration when it comes to understanding the degree of acculturation of the parents and their children, as well as how the changes affect their parenting styles and different life aspects (Renzaho, Green, Mellor, & Swinburn, 2011).

Acculturation can affect parenting beliefs because parents want to help their children adjust to a new environment. Nesteruk and Marks (2011) found that Eastern European parents had to change some of their child-rearing beliefs when they moved to the U.S., such as giving children more freedom, making them more independent, and giving them more choices and a voice to discuss important issues. Parents believed that in order to integrate into society they needed to use different parenting practices, such as giving their children more freedom, more choices, and more power. At the same time, they maintained their original cultural beliefs.

In the family, we can find two acculturation outcomes that create an acculturation gap (Lau et al., 2005). For the most part, the degree of integration of children into the host culture might be higher than their parents. In some cases, we might find that the parent has fallen separated into the assimilation approach, whereby they are fully assimilated into the host culture (Buckingham & Brodsky, 2015).

Parents use different strategies to maintain their cultural beliefs, and at the same time, they teach their children the same traits of the host culture. For example, Nesteruk and Marks (2011) found that Eastern European immigrants considered learning traits such as self-confidence and public speaking skills to be advantages learned through acculturation to the host culture.

Parental behavior might change when they move to another country. Hulei et al. (2006) compared the disciplinary behavior of Chinese American and European American mothers. The study showed that Chinese American mothers maintained their heritage

and Chinese cultural values at home using positive reinforcement. At the same time, they believed they needed to make their children compliant with American rules (Hulei et al.). Cook and Sim (2015) compared Korean college students with American college students considering the cultural pattern, values, and ethics they embrace. They found that students preferred an integrated approach, where they felt open to change. They maintained their Korean traditions and became fully understanding of their traditional heritage and values. Similarly, Lopez and Bui (2014) found that the more international college students are involved in the host country, the higher assimilation and integration approaches into which they fall. They also found that the less involved with the host culture the students were, the higher their self-esteem.

Yagmulru and Sunson (2009) compared Turkish and Australian mothers in Australia and learned that mothers who are involved in Australian society tend to adopt integrated approaches. Here, they integrated two cultures and used more inductive parenting techniques. However, mothers who were not fully involved in society fell under separate approaches and were more attached to their culture's values and preferred to use traditional parenting methods. A number of different factors can affect acculturation and will be discussed in detail.

### **3.2.1 Length of Stay**

One factor that can affect acculturation is the length of stay in the host country. The longer the length of stay, the more integrated the family becomes, and the more similarities are found between the immigrant and the host cultures (Consedine et al., 2014). Driscoll, Russel, and Crocket (2007) conducted a study on patterns of parenting styles among Mexican generations who lived in the U.S. They found that the third generations are more likely to be assimilated into the American culture and adopt American parenting styles. Glick, Hanish, Yabiku, and Bradley (2012) also found that the sociability degree of children of immigrant mothers who arrived in the U.S. when they were adults is lower than children whose mothers were born in the United States. Mothers who were born in the U.S. had a more American parenting style. Kim, Shen, Huang, Wang, and Orozco-Lapray (2014) found that the longer the residency of the Chinese parents, the better control they had on managing both cultures; they no longer endorsed one of the cultures over another and tried to find a balance between both cultures.

### **3.2.2 Acculturation Gap**

Acculturation can affect the family structure and function, affecting different family members to different degrees, which can create acculturation gaps within the family (Makarova & Birman, 2015). The acculturation degree of partners can affect the relationships between partners, sometimes creating interparental conflicts. Cabrera, Shannon, and Tailade (2009) conducted a study on Mexican American parents who live in the US and found that mothers who had husbands with higher degrees of acculturation had more interparental conflict when compared to ones who had husbands with lower degrees of acculturation.

Acculturation sometimes may cause family conflicts between parents and their children, especially if there is a gap between parental and child acculturation. This gap is a predictor for internalizing and externalizing behavior problems (Marsiglia, Nagoshi, Parsai, Booth, & Castro, 2014). Families from Asia and the Middle East have a dominant relationship with their children. When these families move to the U.S., parents have difficulties dealing with their children when they become more argumentative and feel freer to express their opinions (Fever et al., 2007). Park, Kim, Chiang, and Ju (2010) also found that authoritarian parenting styles triggered Asian family conflicts in immigrant families in the U.S.

When studying Chinese mothers in the U.S., Buki et al. (2003) found that the mothers were less acculturated to American society in comparison to their children. They also found that the larger the acculturation gap between the mothers and the children, the more difficult it was for them to communicate and handle situations with their children. Fever et al. (2007) found that Indian mothers who were more exposed to American culture, and had more contact with American mothers, adopted new values and childrearing beliefs to make it easy for them and for their children to adapt to American culture. Parental status can come under threat when the family moves to a new culture, especially when the children have higher integration in the host culture. With the gap created by cultural and environmental changes, parental effectiveness might decrease (Martinez, 2006).

Acculturation also may affect parents' self-efficacy when it comes to raising children in a different culture. Ceballo and Hurd (2008) found that Latino mothers who live in the U.S. have lower parental confidence than European American and African American mothers. Mothers may find more parenting strategies in the new culture, which may make them question the traditional parenting strategies that they inherited from their original culture.

Moving to a new country also creates a lot of pressure on parents, where they face difficulties in different life aspects including language, social relationships, and economic status, which sometimes can cause depression and anxiety (Martinez, 2006). Delinquency may occur among new immigrants who have just arrived in a new culture. Titzmann, Raabe, and Silbereisen (2008) found that new immigrants in Germany were at risk of exhibiting delinquency, especially during the initial period in the new culture. However, immigrant parents who have adequate knowledge about the new culture and what is expected from their children in the new environment play a protective role.

The degree of acculturation of the parents depends on their familiarity with the host culture. There would be a discrepancy between the degree of the acculturation of parents and the acculturation degree of children, which will eventually affect their cultural adjustment, as well as their relationship with their children (Kim, Chen, Wang, Shen, & Orozco-Lapray, 2013).

### 3.2.3 Language

Language can also play a role in the acculturation degree of parents. Parents who have a higher proficiency level of the host culture's language adjust faster than those who have lower proficiency levels of that language. Uayan et al. (2009) conducted a study on Filipino mothers who are married to Japanese men and found that mothers had a difficult time adjusting to Japanese culture because of their poor language skills.

Jegatheesan (2009) conducted a study on interactions between Asian parents of children with disabilities and special education professionals. He found that the language proficiency level of the parents was a critical element when it came to providing special education services to those children. Even though an interpreter was available, some important elements of conversations and meetings were lost during translation and the mothers did not fully understand the situation, which created stressful experiences for the mothers.

Weaver and Kim (2008) found that language barriers affect acculturation as well as the relationship of Chinese immigrant adolescents with their parents. Adolescents were more oriented to the American culture, and they were weaker in the Chinese language; meanwhile, the parents were attached to their Chinese culture and weaker in the English language. The gap between adolescents and parents with low English language proficiency was larger than those whose parents had high levels of English language proficiency, which caused conflicts in families and led to depressive symptoms in the adolescents. Similarly, adolescents with low English language proficiency felt they were less supported.

One of the factors that create a gap between language proficiency in children and their parents is that children grasp the language faster because they are more exposed to the language in schools. Tong (2014) conducted a study on Chinese students and how language affected their acculturation to American culture. The students were exposed to the language in school, and they communicated with friends and teachers in the English language more than with their parents. These students also attended a second-language after-school program where they were able to practice more of the English language. This exposure to the language and to the American culture in school made them adapt faster to the culture than their parents.

Dinh, Roosa, Jenn-Yun, and Lopez (2002) also found that communication problems would arise when the parent had a lower level of English language proficiency, and the children had a lower level of proficiency in the native language of their parents. This can hinder the parent-child relationship of the immigrants, which can lead to negative parenting outcomes. Further, according to Cort (2010), parenting styles and the resources parents use can highly affect their children's English language acquisition.

Terriquez (2013) conducted a study on the involvement of Latino fathers in their children's academic life and found that, on average, Latino fathers' involvement is less than that of American white fathers. One of the main factors affecting the degree of involvement of the fathers was the language proficiency level, especially when they first arrived in the U.S.

### 3.2.4 Ethnic Identity and Sense of Belonging

Acculturation affects children's ethnic identity. The children find themselves between two cultures, and their acculturation degree and their parents' acculturation degree affect their sense of belonging. According to Shrake and Rhee (2004), positive attachment to the origin culture and a sense of belonging were predictors of internalizing and externalizing behaviors. Korean American students who scored high in ethnic identity had fewer behavioral problems.

According to Fever et al. (2007), it is very important for immigrant parents to establish a strong ethnic identity in their children that does not conflict with the host culture, in order to create a balanced sense of belonging. Parents hold the key to establishing that balance between ethnic identity and a sense of belonging. The acculturation of parents controls the degree to which children will adapt to the dominant culture without losing their ethnic identity.

Accordingly, children who have a strong cultural identity and sense of belonging to their origin culture will have healthier psychological development (Liebkind, 2006). Several studies found that some immigrants are strongly attached to their ethnic identity and maintain their traditions and cultural values. Goforth et al. (2015) found that Arab American adolescents had high levels of ethnic identity, which was negatively associated with behavioral problems, even though they were oriented more toward American culture. The reason was that they lived in an area with a high population of Muslim Arab Americans.

Adolescents with high ethnic identities also seem to have more stable psychological adjustment. Dong, Lin, Li, Dou, and Zhou (2015) examined Uyghur students in China and found that a strong sense of belonging to an ethnic group has a positive effect on the psychological well-being of students. Bhadha (1999) conducted a study on adolescent psychological outcomes of East Indian immigrants and found that adolescents whose parents had a high ethnic identity also had a higher ethnic identity and higher self-esteem than adolescents who had parents with a lower ethnic identity.

Parents who had high levels of association with their culture had stronger family relationships. Santisteban, Coatsworth, Briones, Kurtines, and Szapocznik (2012) found parents who had stronger associations with the Hispanic culture than the American culture reported high levels of family relationships. Nagoshi, Marsiglia, Parsai, and Castro (2011) found that adolescents who had high ethnic identities with a high degree of parental monitoring scored low in substance use.

When Yaman, Mesman, IJzendoorn, and Bakermans-Kranenburg (2010) compared family stress and parenting efficacies of Turkish mothers to Dutch mothers in the Netherlands, they found that Turkish mothers who were strongly attached to the Turkish culture showed less stress in their daily life and had fewer marital problems. This result was associated with fewer externalizing behaviors in their children. The Turkish mothers lived in small Turkish communities and their main social relationships were with Turkish families and friends, which made their attachment to the Turkish culture stronger.

### 3.2.5 Academic Level of the Parent

Another factor that might play a role in acculturation is the academic level of the parents. There is evidence in the literature that there is a relationship between the academic level of mothers, child-rearing beliefs, and their effect on child development (Kolobe, 2004). The more educated the parent, the more of an integrated approach they might follow and have fewer conflicts with their children. Buki et al. (2003) found that parents who had come to the United States to pursue their education were more integrated into U.S. culture because they had more English language proficiency and were more involved in society, which made the acculturation gap smaller.

Academic level and parent knowledge about their children's development is important. It can help the parent to choose the best strategies when it comes to raising their children. Immigrant parents who know more about child development and childrearing have better relationships with their children and fewer problems. Bornstein and Cote (2004) found that immigrant Japanese mothers had less information about children's basic development and parent-child relationships than multigenerational U.S. mothers. This indicates that immigrant mothers need more parental education in this area.

Yu-Wen and Meekyung (2008) conducted a study on parental acculturation of Filipino American families and found that 80% of the parents in the sample had a college education and their English language proficiency was high. The result showed that those parents were integrated into the American culture, which positively affected their children's psychological development. The parents were highly involved in their children's school and that was reflected positively in their academic achievement level.

### 3.3 Parenting Styles and Childrearing Beliefs

According to Ogbue (1981), each cultural group has its own standardized parenting values and childrearing beliefs. These values and beliefs affect the ways parents raise their children and promote competence and accepted social skills and behaviors within that cultural group. Parenting styles have been shown to highly affect children's characteristics and behaviors. According to Baumrind's (1978) theory of parenting styles, the four parenting styles are: authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful.

Authoritative parents have high levels of responsiveness with high levels of control. These parents are sensitive to the psychological and emotional needs of their children, and at the same time have a high level of control to protect their children. Children of authoritative parents exhibit psychological well-being and low rates of behavioral problems. Authoritarian parents have low levels of responsiveness with high levels of control, which may create emotional conflicts and cause behavioral problems in their children. Along with that, the permissive parent has high levels of responsiveness and low levels of control, and neglectful parents lack responsiveness and control and expose their children to poor psychological development.

Acculturation may change the childrearing beliefs of mothers and they may adopt new ideas in raising their children. Dosnajh and Ghuman (1998) found a remarkable

change between the child-rearing attitudes of Punjabi mothers of the 1970's and a more recent generation of Punjabi mothers of the 1990's who lived in Britain. Driscoll et al. (2007) found that parenting patterns are related to the parents' original place of birth and the acculturation degree has a significant effect on their children's well-being. In their study, the parenting styles of Mexican parents changed from the first generation of Mexican parents when compared to the third generation of parents. The first generation had greater control over their teenagers than the third generation of parents, which was reflected in the rate of behavioral problems.

Cheah, Leung, and Zhou (2013) examined the parental practices of immigrant Chinese who lived in the U.S. They thought the traditional Chinese parenting style was inconsistent when it came to establishing rules. They found that Chinese mothers learned how to be more consistent when it comes to establishing new rules and chose more age-appropriate discipline strategies, than American mothers. Yet, sometimes with the challenges the parents face in a new culture, they stick to their old parenting style and maintain their parenting strategies. In the study conducted by Renzaho et al. (2011) on African migrants (Sudanese, Somali, and Ethiopian) who moved to Australia, they found that because of the challenges of adaptation to a new culture, African parents had not changed their authoritarian styles. The characteristic of the parenting style of those parents included high control, sitting expectations, checking children's social environment, and required obedience. Sher-Censor, Parke, and Coltrane (2011) found that parental control over Mexican-American adolescents had a positive impact on strengthening the family values of the adolescents.

### **3.4 Children's Behaviors Related to Parenting Styles**

Parenting styles influence children's emotional and social development (Akhter, Hanif, Tariq, & Atta, 2011). Parenting values can affect childrearing practices and influence the way parents to raise their children, which will be reflected in the children's development process (Bornstien & Cote, 2006). Acculturation might play a role in the relationships between parents and children. Studies have shown that the more integrated approach the parent follows, the fewer behavioral problems the children will have (Fung & Laue, 2010). Also, the greater the acculturation gaps between the parents and their children, the more internalizing and externalizing behaviors the children will exhibit (Weaver & Kim, 2008). Mothers who have better communication skills with their children will be able to understand their children's behaviors and the challenges they may face in a new culture (Buki et al., 2003). Similarly, both the warmth of the relationship between the mother and her children and the degree of monitoring have an effect on the degree of internalizing and externalizing problems (Stevens, Vollebergh, Pels, & Crijnen, 2007). Children who have warm relationships with their parents and feel that they are loved have better emotional health. Also, parents who have more control and supervision over their children protect them from exhibiting behavioral problems (Wolfradt, Hample, & Miles, 2003). The degree of warmth in relationships between mothers and children is different from one culture to another. Perez, Rivera, and Dunsmore (2011) found that Latino

mothers believed that their children need guidance and emotional support, whereas Anglo mothers believed that children need to be independent and face difficulties by themselves. Cardona, Nicholson, and Fox (2000) compared parenting practices and developmental expectations of Hispanic mothers who live in the U.S. with Anglo-American mothers and found that Hispanic mothers used high parental control in order to make sure that their children succeed in the host culture. Zyes, Brigh, Alarez-Sanchez, and Cabassa (2009) conducted a study on the acculturation of Latino mothers and the relationship between mother-daughter relationships and suicide attempts and found that adolescent Latinas who had attempted suicide felt that their relationships with their mothers were weak in comparison to Latinas who had not attempted suicide.

Santisteban et al. (2012) found that Hispanic adolescents who had low levels of externalizing behaviors had parents who maintained a high level of respect regarding Hispanic traditions and values of their culture. Their parenting style was characterized by positive parenting, high levels of involvement, and positive discipline strategies. Morales-Campos, Markham, Peskin, and Fernandez (2012) also found that there is a relationship between the acculturation of Hispanic immigrant parents and the level of parental control and monitoring, and how it affects the sexual experiences of adolescents at early ages. They found that parents who are attached to their Hispanic culture have high levels of parental monitoring in order to protect their children from threats in the host culture. This reduces the possibility for children to engage in sexual experiences at early ages.

Immigrant parenting styles can also affect children's academic performance. For example, Chinese immigrants have high academic expectations for their children. Yuwen and Chen (2013) conducted a focus group with Chinese students and found that students attributed the high expectation of their parents to their Chinese culture. They believed it is normal among families to set such high expectations and agreed that it has a positive influence. Li Chiu, Feldman, and Rosenthal (1992) found that Chinese immigrant parents, despite the pressure and the stress of moving to a new culture, were more involved in their children's academic life in the new culture than they were in their original country.

### **3.5 Schools and Student Culture**

As migration and immigration escalate (Wong-Lo & Bai, 2013), American schools invariably represent the diversity of the people who live in a particular country. Teachers often have one or more students in their classrooms who are new to the country in which they reside. Students from families who have cultural values and traditions that differ from the norm regarding language, religious practices, food choices, and other defining cultural distinctions will need teachers who have sufficient information about the various cultures (e.g., Bullock et al., 2014; Elhoweris, Whitaker, & Salend, 2007; Obiakor, Algozzine, & Bakken, 2007).

According to Rueda, Limn, and Velasco (2007), it is not uncommon that teachers make judgments regarding their international students based on surface characteristics of the culture (e.g., dress, greeting style, accent, facial and body expressions) without

having sufficient information or considering group differences and family traditions. Understanding a student's culture may help teachers understand the differing behaviors that students from culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) backgrounds exhibit in the classroom. For example, according to Ash, Rice, and Radmond (2014), a student may exhibit less acceptable social behavior during interactions with native-speaker peers, compared with non-native speakers or peers from the same language. Furthermore, this understanding may help minimize differences between the culture at home and the culture at school.

According to Crozier and Davis (2007), when international parents were asked about school expectations regarding their participation in the academic life of their children in the U.S., the parents indicated there were none, other than bringing them to school every day and ensuring they did their homework. Although it is important for schools to be as clear as possible about their parental involvement expectations, it is especially important to international parents because they may be unfamiliar with local school customs. Understanding immigrant students' cultures are essential for schools and teachers. There are many community-based programs that depend on an understanding of the immigrant cultures in order to provide the best services for them. For example, Lee and Hawkins (2008) established an after-school community-based program for Hmong students and their families. They found that the program helped the Hmong families to acculturate to the American culture and face academic and social barriers.

### **3.6 Parent and School Involvement**

One of the roles of schools is to ensure that students receive appropriate instruction in academic and social skills to help them be successful. Teachers and administrators need to be more knowledgeable about the barriers that may prevent parents from becoming involved in their children's education, and address them in a meaningful manner. As schools become more diverse, it becomes more difficult for schools to provide and manage appropriate services (Lacroque, Kleiman, & Darling, 2011; Ramirez & Soto-Hinman, 2009; Singh, Curtis, Wechsler, Ellis, & Cohen, 1997).

Another key to success is parental involvement, which is one of the most effective elements to ensure academic achievement (Walker, Ramsey, & Gresham, 2004). Schools cannot work in isolation; there must be a strong collaborative connection and understanding between the school and the parents (Robinson, 2004). It should be kept in mind that various cultures view education in different ways. Some highly respect and value teachers and schools, while others place little emphasis on education. For example, the Chinese consider academic achievement as a successful proof of their parenting style; therefore, they prefer home-based involvement rather than school-based involvement. They appreciate and trust the teachers' decisions and do not want to interfere with their teaching style (Wong-Lo & Bai, 2013).

Educators and administrators should think about parents as the main resource for collecting data, planning services, and as partners in the educational process. One well-

documented way to include parents is by creating a parent-community advisory group, representative of all the families from different backgrounds, to work together in planning and establishing community-based school services (Cheney & Osher, 1997; Klopvic, Vasu, & Yearwood, 2003).

### **3.7 Theoretical Framework**

The result of immigrant acculturation does not only affect immigrants, it also affects the ecological system of society. The changes resulting from acculturation influence social, economic, and political changes (Phinney, 2003). Acculturation is defined as the process of adaptation to a new culture that makes an individual or group modify the way they live and change some of their beliefs in order to be capable to compete and coexist with the rest of the community (Berry, 2003). According to the bi-dimensional model of acculturation by Berry (1980), immigrants fall under four categories of adaptation to the new culture: integrated, separated, assimilated, and marginalized. This model explains how people adjust to new cultures to be capable of interaction and functionality in the new society. The degree of acculturation of parents has an influence on their parenting style. In a new culture, parents may find themselves making adjustments to their parenting techniques in order to create a balance between the new environment and the way they want to raise their children. Some parents prefer to stick to their traditional parenting style, while others adapt to new techniques.

As described previously, there are four parenting styles according to Baumrind (1978): authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive, neglectful. These parenting styles can be affected by acculturation when parents move to another country. Many factors can influence the acculturation degree of parents, including the acculturation degree of their children, language proficiency, socioeconomic status, the original culture from which they came, and the ethnic style of the parent. Children may exhibit difficult behaviors when the acculturation degree between them and their parents is different. Acculturation gaps can cause family conflicts between parents and their children.

### **3.8 Summary**

Living in a different country as an immigrant is not easy. There are many differences between western Saudi culture and American culture. Those cultural differences can affect both parents and children through the acculturation process. There are different elements that can influence the parenting style of immigrant parents and children's behavior during acculturation to a new culture. Acculturation can result in positive and negative outcomes. Through this study, the researcher seeks to understand the acculturation process of Saudi parents and their children and if it results in changes to the childrearing beliefs of Saudi parents or Saudi children's behaviors.

## 4. Material and Methods

### 4.1 Participants

Participants in this study meet the criteria established by the researcher, including: (a) Saudi mothers holding Saudi nationality; (b) Saudi Arabian by birth, (c) have lived in the U.S. for no less than two years, (d) have one or more children between the ages of 7-12, (e) are stay-at-home mothers, (f) are dependents of their spouses who attend an American university, and (g) have an adequate English proficiency level.

The local Saudi Students Community Organization was used to find and recruit the participants (see recruitment letter in Appendix A). The target number of interviewees was six, which would be a suitable number to obtain enough information for this study (Weiss, 1995). Once the participants who met the criteria were found, an invitation was sent to them to participate in the study. The target number was met and six mothers who live in the local area responded to the invitation sent through the Saudi Students Female Community group. Participant information can be found in Table 3.1.

**Table 3.1:** Mothers' Information

Name	Education level	Number of children	Husband status	Mothers' childhood	Living period in the US
Sarah	Bachelor	3	PhD student	In Saudi	5 years
Mona	Bachelor	3	PhD student	In Saudi	6 years
Nadia	Bachelor	3	PhD student	In Saudi	5 years
Ahad	High school	4	PhD student	In Saudi	5 years
Rania	Master	3	Master degree student	In Saudi	6 years
Mariam	Master	3	PhD student	In Saudi	5 years

After confirmation of participation, the participant chose a suitable place and time for the interview. The interview took about 60-90 minutes.

### 4.2 Data Collection Procedures

After deciding upon a time and place, the researcher conducted the interview. The interview started with a conversation about the background and the purpose of the study and how the interview would be conducted. The participant signed a consent form (see Appendix B). The researcher made sure that the participant was comfortable and answered all questions posed by the participant prior to the start of the interview. The participant had the choice to conduct the interview in English or Arabic. All of the participants preferred to answer in Arabic so they were able to expand their answers and give more details. The interview questions had been sent to the participants in English

prior to the interview so they had more time to understand the questions and ensure that they were comfortable answering them. The researcher had an Arabic copy of the questions in case the participants needed a translation. All participants agreed to have the interview recorded.

Beginning with demographic questions, the researcher used semi-structured questions to guide the interview (see Appendix C for a list of questions). The participant was given a chance to share experiences related to the study and additional relevant questions were added if needed by the researcher. This helped the researcher to encourage the participant to elaborate and give more details. Notes were taken throughout the interview, and the researcher added follow-up questions if clarification was needed at the end of the interview.

The interviews were translated and transcribed by the researcher using a recorder and notes. Once transcribing was finished for each interview, a copy was sent to each participant to review, verify, make corrections and add information if needed. (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### 4.3 Data Analysis

After translating the interviews, individual reports about each participant were created that contained an overall researcher reflection on each interview. This helped the researcher to summarize important observations from each interview. Afterwards, the transcribed interviews were sent to each participant along with the reports to make sure that the interviews were transcribed and translated in a way that did not misinterpret the information the participant shared, as well as to ensure that there was nothing the participant wished to omit or add. This member-checking tool helped the researcher to add more credibility to the study.

The researcher then used Weft QDA to analyze the data, which is a free and open-source tool used for coding qualitative data (<http://www.pressure.to/qda/>). This software helped to organize the data and to compare and discover relationships in order to find common themes (Guba, 1978). The program has very basic organizing tools that organize the interviews imported from text files by uploading the interviews transcript files into the software one by one. It allowed for grouping the participants' quotes into different categories and coding groups created by the researcher, and allowed easy access to each coding group created. Sub-coding can also be created under each code. It also helps with code review by checking coding patterns through the documents.

Descriptive coding and value coding were used to find initial themes emerging from the data. Descriptive coding helped to find the main themes in the data, and value coding helped to find themes related to cultural values and beliefs, as well as participant attitudes toward the host culture (Saldana, 2013). Some emotional coding emerged during the coding process, which was expected due to the emotional experiences of the participants as they moved from their own country to live in another country.

Two cycles of coding were applied. In the first cycle of coding, the researcher read the transcribed interviews one by one, and then compared them to each other to find the

common themes to be compared and divided into categories using memos. After categorizing the quotes into groups and dividing them into initial coding groups using the software, they were printed from the software and organized manually by the researcher. This helped the researcher to find the emerging patterns from the quotes and to recode each group to find the basic themes. Each theme was revised individually to find the subthemes and to define each code under each theme. In the second cycle, themes that were found in the first cycle of coding were revised several times to make sure all themes and concepts were functional and to make sure that no important data was omitted (Saldana, 2013).

During organizing the codes under each theme according to the emerged patterns, a co-coder, who is a PhD-holding Saudi mother who used to live in the United States, helped the researcher to revise interviews, themes, and the codes to make sure that the researcher had no bias and organized the codes in more structured themes according to the research questions. This helped the researcher to establish inter-rater reliability, which helps to remove bias and strengthens the reliability of the study (Bernard, 1995).

#### **4.4 Trustworthiness of Data**

There are four criteria that should be met when it comes to checking the trustworthiness of qualitative data. These criteria are: (a) credibility, (b) transferability, (c) dependability, and (d) conformability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility was checked first by the prolonged engagement, which was already established because the researcher comes from the same culture as the participant, which helped in having enough understanding of the Saudi culture. This helped to deeply understand the cultural values of the participant and how they affect the acculturation process. Second, by using member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), the participants were given the opportunity to revise the transcribed interviews and recheck them to make sure that the researcher had not misinterpreted their responses. The participants were also invited to give feedback on the individual report that was created for each participant in the initial analysis stage of the interviews. Third, a co-coder from the same nationality as the participants and who is familiar with the Saudi culture was used to increase the credibility of the data analysis procedure.

An audit trail was used for enhancing the transferability of this study. By keeping the documents of raw data, notes, and memos of all stages of this study and by providing thick descriptions of the study in all stages, it is hoped that readers will be able to transfer or generalize the findings of this study. Dependability was enhanced using the help of the dissertation committee, which made sure that the researcher followed the right steps in conducting the study. Conformability was enhanced using the help of the dissertation committee, the co-coder, and the audit trail.

## 5. Results and Discussion

### 5.1 Results

The purpose of this descriptive qualitative study was to understand how sojourning Saudi mothers perceived the influence of acculturation, first on their parenting style. The researcher aims to understand the acculturation of Saudi families who live in the United States as sojourners and their experience of childrearing in a different culture. This chapter includes a detailed discussion of themes that emerged from data collected from the interviews. The collected data involved the perspectives of the mothers regarding their parenting and childrearing beliefs. The three themes that appeared are related to Research Question: What are the perspectives of Saudi parents regarding the ways in which American culture has influenced their parenting strategies and childrearing beliefs upon acculturation to the United States?

#### Theme 1: Before and After

In order to understand how parenting styles and childrearing beliefs were impacted by acculturation, we need to understand the parenting life of mothers in Saudi Arabia, and how the parenting styles changed since they moved to the U.S. For this it is necessary to point out the differences between parenting children in the home country of Saudi Arabia and the host country of the U.S., and how the childrearing beliefs were impacted by the acculturation process.

#### A. Authoritarian vs. Authoritative

Mothers thought that if they raised their children in Saudi Arabia, they would not use the same strategies that they are using in the U.S. The mothers stated that they would be more authoritarian in Saudi Arabia when it comes to discussing issues and making decisions regarding their children. As mother Ahad said:

*"Like, if we wanted to go out, she will have to listen to me and wear what I tell her to wear or we will cancel the going out and I will get mad. Even when I got married my mom used to do that with me. You have to obey what your mom says and you have no right to argue or object. If your mom said something, you have to do it. But here, while I am childrearing her here, I know this way is wrong."*

According to the mothers, parents in Saudi Arabia have absolute authority to make decisions on behalf of their children, without giving the children a chance to give their opinion or share the decision-making opportunity. For example, Sarah said: *"In Saudi, we don't give the children the chance to discuss issues with us like discussing problems in detail."* This was also confirmed by Ahad: *"I will not be giving them the freedom I am giving them here."* This same opinion was shared by Mariam as well: *"At the end I tell her it is my decision, if she didn't respond to me or if get stubborn then at the end I decide and end the issue."*

In Saudi Arabia parents are more authoritarian when comparing their style of parenting at home versus when they moved to the U.S. Sarah said: *"In Saudi, there is no discussion or arguing; if we said 'no' that means absolute 'no' we don't give them the freedom to talk,"* while comparing to her parenting now in the U.S. she said:

*"I have to explain it to them and convince them somehow why it's not allowed. I let them talk to me and get all their questions answered and let them explain their opinion and we discuss until they are fully convinced and satisfied."*

In the U.S., mothers preferred to be more authoritative and discuss issues with their children and involve them in the decision-making process. Due to the cultural differences, they felt there is a need to explain why one has to choose one thing over another and why they are not making similar choices to Americans. They learn to explain the differences and the reasons, convince the child rather than being authoritarian and order the child to follow what they are saying without giving them the freedom to discuss the issues. Sarah mentioned *"I like when we discuss issues. Now they come to me if they have some issues or problems, and they are not scared of me or afraid to share it with me."* Living in the U.S. affected the way mothers treat their children and they are more open to discussing issues and giving the child the chance to share the decision-making. Mariam said:

*"Yes, I don't want to be the strict mom that imposes her opinion and only passes orders and she has to obey me. No, I want to have conversations with her and we talk together to decide on things and then at the end I have to make the decision. I really care that she understands and gets convinced."*

Ahad also agreed with the same strategy when she said:

*"In this point she is right, I don't have the right to say "no, you are wrong." I told her, "are you convinced that it is right?" and she said "yes", so I let her do what she wants and after a while, I noticed that she quit it. It's like she needs to try something, and when she is done she is fine. So, this is what annoys me, but I let her do what she wants."*

The mothers think that their way of childrearing in the U.S. is different in many ways. For example, they get less angry at their children. As Mona said: *"It affected me on the way I get angry at them, that's made me more patient."* They started to use different strategies to show their disapproval; for example, Ahad began to use her facial expressions:

*"If she did something wrong, I show her that I am mad by my face expressions. My face expression changes with her so she knows that I am mad at her. She starts to review what she has done wrong or what mistake she made, and then she comes to apologize."*

They would rather use new strategies other than the physical or verbal punishments that parents in Saudi usually use. Mariam mentioned, *"I became more structured; in punishment, I stopped using hitting and harsh words. It taught me different enlightenment ways that we are not used to it."* Mothers learned new ways to teach their children like reward systems, such as Nadia who stated that, *"Every time they do something I put a star next to the task and by the end of the week I reward them."* She said that she did not use reward systems when she was in Saudi before: *"the rewards and punishment, I haven't used it before and I did not know anything about it honestly. I started to use that when I came here honestly."*

### **B. Societal Effects in Saudi vs. Societal Effects in the U.S.**

According to the mothers, their life in Saudi Arabia is busy because families over there are attached to each other. As Sarah said: *"It is not like when we were in Saudi. In Saudi we were busy. We used to go out a lot. In Saudi, we are so connected to my family and my family-in-law."* So, when it comes to raising children, mothers feel like everybody shares parenting responsibilities with them; as Ahad mentioned, *"the society in Saudi Arabia raises your children with you more than I raise my children by myself. The society child rears them with me."* And Mariam agreed with her by stating, *"Over there everybody participates in childrearing the kids."*

Mona also said that society has an effect on mothers and their parenting: *"It is not like the way in Saudi Arabia. Because in Saudi the society has an effect on you."* This social group influences the mothers and makes them feel uncomfortable because of the criticism they receive. For example, Mona said, *"The society in Saudi Arabia imposes themselves into your life along with their criticism... They criticize everything thing you do. They told you what to do and what not to do."* According to her, parenting in Saudi Arabia is more exposed to social criticism, and she finds that it influences her way of childrearing.

Because of the external interference of extended family members and friends, mothers feel that they do not have strong influences on their children. As Sarah mentions, *"I think in Saudi I influence my kids about 20%."* Ahad agreed by stating: *"I lived in a community, where not only the parents raise their children. There are a lot of communities in Saudi Arabia."*

On the other hand, their social life in the U.S. is different. Mothers feel more comfortable with childrearing in the U.S. because they have no external interference as they used to have in Saudi from relatives and friends. For example, Mona said, *"Here you have more freedom that people don't get involved in your life or anything you do."* It also makes them feel more stable since no one intrudes upon their parenting decisions and makes changes. Sarah said, *"Here it is only me and their dad, we are the only people who decide about rewarding or punishment, no one is involved in our way."* They feel that they have absolute control and authority over their children here, unlike in Saudi Arabia. Rania stated: *"I have total authority over my kids. No one can interfere my way in childrearing my children except me and their father."* They have more privacy and they are not criticized for their parenting by other people. When asked about privacy, Sarah said *"There is nothing that would intrude*

*my way of childrearing my kids."* Rania agreed with the same thing when she said *"That's what I am saying here, there are a lot of things that I can control and do it my way, me and my husband, no one get involved."*

### **C. Interference of Relatives vs. Family Bond**

Most of the mothers agreed that there is a high degree of interference from relatives and friends in their way of life and in their parenting. As Mona said, *"They give you their opinion that you don't like, and they intrude on your way of raising children."* Mothers believe that they lose their control and authority with such interference; close relatives may interrupt mothers' decisions and, in some cases, they weaken her decisions by interfering in her authority, for example, Mariam said:

*"Like her grandma, grandpa, uncle, and aunt... if I said something my decision might be revoked, or if her dad said something it would change. Someone else might suggest letting her do what she wants and they say it would be only for this time. Even the way you dress them, they might interfere and get involved."*

This kind of interference breaks parental decisions and the children become distracted from the parents' guidance. Sarah said, *"But still it has a little negativity because it made the mom lose a little bit of her authority over her kids because the kids got confused."* Moreover, mothers reveal that relatives think that they have the right to impose their opinions and direct the mother in childrearing, which, Rania said, *"made them believe that they have the right to interfere in the childrearing process of their grandchildren."*

On the other hand, some mothers thought this interference is not always negative. It has a responsibility and eases burdens. Rania said, *"The positive is that there is someone who helps the parents to raise their children in a good way, especially in the religion aspect."* Ahad agreed with that when she said, *"So they used to take a huge weight of responsibilities from me."* For her, it was helpful that there are other people who are involved in childrearing with her:

*"When one of my children says an inappropriate word or does a bad behavior, I have my sisters with me, my mom, my sisters-in-law, my mother-in-law... the whole family raises my children with me. Even my brothers-in-law, when they saw the child doing something wrong, they told him, "No this is wrong, you are not supposed to do that.""*

On the other hand, when families moved to the U.S., they feel a greater bond as they have their own privacy and they live by themselves without relatives who get involved in their life. For example, Rania said, *"It is nice that we are stuck more together here as a family. They have no one else to go to except for me or their dad,"* and Sarah agreed on the same point when she said, *"I feel like I know my children more here, and I gave them more time and energy. It is not like when we were in Saudi."* Mothers felt that they were able to become closer to their children and have the chance to know them since they are the only ones

who are responsible for them, as Sarah said: *"Here it's only us. I raise them more here myself and I give them more attention."* Similarly, Nadia thinks that her life with her family is more beautiful here when she said:

*"I found life very easy and beautiful. As I said before they will be very close to their family members... I didn't get to know my children until I got here. So, I feel when someone comes to the U.S., they will get to know their family and get closer to them and that's it. I think they don't have to worry."*

In Saudi Arabia, their lives are full of family members who are involved in their daily life. There are not only extended family members or friends, but also hired help who can ease responsibilities as well, such as private tutors, maids, and drivers. Mona mentioned that:

*"In Saudi, I can bring a private tutor who is going to take care of their homework and schooling, and I can get a maid who can clean for them. In Saudi, my relationship with them as a mother would be only a title as a mom and I won't give them that much time because I am going to be busy with my job."*

Those individuals may affect the relationship the mother has with her children and create a distance between her and her children, as Nadia said, *"In Saudi, I haven't. Honestly, I was really away from them... I mean over there most of the time they were with the maid or with my mom."* But in the U.S., it is only a small family, namely the mom, the dad, and the children, as Rania said, *"It is nice that we are stuck more together here as a family. They have no one else to go to except for me or their dad."*

Mothers felt that they became closer to each other and the children did not have someone else to reach. They have to do everything with their children, which tightened the mother-child relationship and made it stronger. Sarah mentioned, *"Yes, there is a difference. I think our bond is stronger here as a family"*, and Nadia said, *"I become closer to my children. I take more care of them."* Also, Mona agreed that she is spending more time with her children in the U.S. than in Saudi Arabia when she said *"Here, no, it's different I have to spend most of the day with them."*

## **Theme 2: Change in Responsibilities**

Being away from home and family, mothers found themselves taking total responsibility of their children. While they used to have help from their mothers, mothers-in-laws, sisters, and maids, in the U.S. they found themselves taking full responsibility, as Mariam said:

*"I became independent when it came to solving so many problems. In the past, I used to get help from my sister or talk to my mom. Here I depend on myself totally. My problems with my husband with my kids... I depend on myself, and try to solve it. I felt here there is*

*power and so much independence, and I succeeded by myself and I feel more confident than before."*

Mona also mentioned that now she is doing everything by herself and she does not need help from someone as she used to in Saudi Arabia, where women need Mahram (Mahram is the male guardian of the women by Islamic law) to take care of the large majority of her issues: *"My life is beautiful, but hard at the same time. I can do everything by myself. I don't need to depend on someone or to have Mahram in anything I want to do. I can take my kid anywhere without needing to have someone to take me."*

### **A. Independence**

This change of responsibility made the mothers feel more independent and it strengthened their parenting when they found that they can do everything by themselves. Although it was hard at the beginning, as Ahad said, *"That was very hard on me at the beginning"*, and it took her a while to figure out how she was going to child rear her children by herself when she added:

*"So, I can say that the beginning of my childrearing process for my children as an independent mother started after a month or a month and a half. That time was when I felt that I am literally raising my children by myself."*

Later, though, it seems that they are enjoying childrearing their children by themselves without getting external interference and it made them enjoy being mothers. For example, Nadia is feeling so proud that she is taking care of her family now without any help:

*"As I said I started to be independent and was raising my children by myself. I thank God everything was depending on me, away from the maid, away from my mother. It's my life, my house, and those are my kids and my husband. I thank God we became a bonded family. The bad thing, honestly, is that all the effort is on me."*

In Saudi Arabia, mothers have to depend mostly on their mothers or the maid; as Nadia said, *"Honestly, I become more independent here. In Saudi I do nothing. I depended more on the maid or my mom."* Mona also mentioned that when they depend on others it creates a distance between the mother and her children: *"And once you have maids you will depend totally on them so you will not know your kids."*

Since they moved to the U.S., mothers felt very independent and that made them more confident, and they feel that they are enjoying motherhood in the U.S., even though they have more responsibilities. As Ahad said, *"I was feeling comfortable and that I am ready for motherhood 100%,"* and Mona mentioned that she has the freedom to raise her children in her own way: *"Here as a mom I have the total freedom in raising my children the way I want."* Life in the U.S. has helped mothers to become more independent. Mariam said:

*"Here you will find yourself and you will get to know your kids. The environment here will help you to control them, especially if you are a mom who wants to be a perfect mom. Everything is available and prepared for you and I think the best way to build a good child in the first four or five years is to be away from outside pressure like this one said something and the other said something different, ... but here is the best childrearing place."*

## **B. Father's Role**

Because the husbands of this sample are full-time students, and most of them are PhD students, the mothers felt that they have more responsibilities toward their children since the fathers are busy with their schooling. Nadia said *"I was really exhausted because no one could help me. Even my husband he has his study and he dedicates all his time to his study so I was really exhausted."* With the father busy, and with the absence of their relatives, she feels like she has to fulfil these roles for her children. For example, Ahad said, *"I spend so much effort to be the mom and the dad and the society for them."* Even though the fathers are very busy with school, the mothers explained that the fathers are trying their best to make it up for their families when they have time. Nadia also said that her husband is very busy with his school, but he is trying to make it up when he can:

*"He takes them out and they spend time with him. We call Saturday family day. We stay together and spend time together from the morning until the night. We go out and we chat together. He tries to be close on this day to make up for the rest of the days of the week."*

With sharing responsibilities fathers are becoming closer to their children, as Sarah said, *"Now I feel he is enjoying his life within the family more. Now he appreciates his life with kids more and he is enjoying it more."*

Mothers also explained how fathers helped in difficult situations when they were unsure of how to solve issues regarding their children. For example, Rania said that her husband can deal easily with her oldest daughter, especially when it became hard for her to deal with her: *"I get surprised that I can't get to this level of understanding with her, he can do it but for me, I am still trying."* Ahad mentioned that when her daughter began to ask questions about cultural differences, especially regarding Hijabs, she had her husband discuss it with her daughter to convince her about this issue: *"When she started to ask a lot about my hijab, I turned her to her dad."* Sarah also has given her husband the final call in some cases when she feels that she cannot handle the situation; for example, she said:

*"I let him have the final words and say "no" to them. Even if I say "no" and the kids insist or argue, I end up saying "yes." So, in some cases, I put him in charge. Now he has started to help in such cases because the kids can't argue that much with him."*

Mariam also said that because her daughter is very close to her father; she listens to him and she had a strong bond with her father:

*"Her father helps me a lot because he is very close to her, and he can reach her mind a lot and that helps me a lot. He takes her out and provides her with things she needs and activities she likes to do."*

### **Theme 3: Acculturation Factors Helped Better Parenting**

There were some elements that helped the Saudi family acculturate more easily to American life. These factors, according to the data coded from the interviews, are: neighborhood, American people's attitudes, and the schools. These elements helped the mothers make parenting in the U.S. much easier and helped the children to adapt to the culture.

#### **A. Neighborhood**

Being in the same neighborhood as the school gave the families a sense of belonging. Getting to know the neighbors who attend the same school as their kids made the kids feel more comfortable and established friendships. For example, Sarah explained how her son started to make friends when they moved to the same neighborhood as the schools. She said *"Then we moved to this house, which is in the same neighborhood of the school. He got to know the neighbors and he used to walk with them to the school. He felt better by that time."* Also, Nadia mentioned that she enjoyed life more when she was able to get to know her neighbors, and it helped with homesickness. She said *"I loved the life especially after I met other Saudi girls. I really loved the life hereafter I got to know my Saudi neighbors."*

Mothers felt more comfortable living in neighborhoods where they felt welcomed, as Sarah revealed:

*"The life here is easier, the people here are so nice, and they are so simple. It was easy to get to know the neighbors. They are so simple and they get along with us easily, especially when we moved to this house."*

Mona also mentioned *"I mean the American society themselves, our neighbors and the people we know. They are very simple, and at the same time, they do have a good financial status."*

#### **B. American Attitude and Life Style**

Most of the mothers held some fears before coming to the U.S., but all these fears were shed when they arrived and saw the welcoming attitude of American citizens towards them. That helped the mothers to blend into society and have a sense of belonging. Also, this attitude is reflected in their way of parenting. Sarah said, *"I was afraid that my children will be different and the American traditions will impact them, but when I came here there was nothing different."*

This fear was mostly because those mothers came from a very different culture and a very conservative society in Saudi Arabia; as Nadia said, *"I got scared because we come from a conservative society... I was afraid that my children would see some stuff that we don't accept in our culture and I was really scared of this. But when I came it was totally the*

*opposite.*" Also, Ahad was worried that her children would absorb American traditions that are opposite of her conservative society traditions: *"They will learn and be exposed to stuff that is not acceptable for me, especially because I came from a very conservative society."*

But when they arrived here these fears diminished as they found that there was no negative influence from American culture on their children. As Sarah said, *"When I came, I found myself controlling the situation at my home, and there were no bad traditions that would affect our lives as we always heard or watched in movies."* Ahad said: *"Here the society is very friendly and very kind and if there are some differences in some acts, I can be understandable."* Similarly, Sarah said, *"I feel comfortable here and the people here help me a lot."* Mariam shared her feeling after she arrived in the U.S. and found them different than she expected when she said, *"When I came here, I found it much easier than I expected. I got involved with the American society and it was easy for me."* The feeling of being accepted in society made the mothers feel more comfortable as Rania said, *"When I came here and I saw how people are very nice and when they see you anywhere, they smile at you and they ask and talk to you."* Also, Mona said, *"The way the people treat you here is very amazing."*

Similarly, the easiness of life in the U.S. helped mothers to be more independent in their parenting. Although there are no family members or a maid who can help the mother, the easy lifestyle in the U.S. made them feel more confident handling their children and doing well in their parenting. Mona explained how easy it is to get the stuff she needs such as groceries and their daily life products, *"Here you can get your stuff easily without any help from others."* And Mariam said that she likes the life system and her daily routine with her family:

*"I love the life here. I wake up in the early morning and I don't even need to go out at night. If I do I go out in the night with my husband and kids, it is because this is the system here."*

Ahad mentioned that living next to a public library helped her in her parenting by taking the children out to read, as local public libraries do not exist in Saudi Arabia: *"Among the things that made my life easier is I used to live near a public library."*

### **C. Schools**

Schools played a huge role in helping mothers and their children adapt to life in the U.S., as Rania said, *"Among the things that make it easier is the schools. It helped them a lot to adapt to life here."* Mona agreed by stating: *"The things that made our life easy are the school and the education here."* Most of the mothers agreed that schools helped their children when they had problems. For example, Sarah said that the school helped her son when he faced social withdrawal:

*"Yes, the school. As I told you the school and the teacher were very good, and they worked collaboratively with us when my son had his problem. I think the education system here is very good. The teachers are very nice and kind too."*

They were also very understanding about the cultural differences and teachers worked collaboratively with the families to deal with any problem through which the child was going. For example, Ahad said:

*"They always contact us and they always ask, if they have an activity or something in school, they always ask through email if that is ok for us to do it with my child. Like is that ok with your religion or culture. So, they were very understandable."*

Also, the schools helped to build and shape their children's personalities, which were different from normal children in Saudi. Mona said, *"But I found it is better than Saudi Arabia because they teach the kids in a fun way and they concentrate on working at school and doing their homework there."* Also, Mariam said:

*"But I feel that the education is very good, which was my only concern. They widen the child's horizon and encourage him/her to have other hobbies, which is what I really want from the school. This was more than enough for me."*

#### **D. Local Saudi Community**

Mothers agreed that being surrounded by the Saudi community helped them a lot in their life here in the U.S. For example, Rania said, *"Being with the Saudi community who live here. When we have someone who comes from the same place it makes life easier for you in a different country."* It is similar to a support system for many of them, and is especially important because they are away from home and family as Nadia said:

*"Thank God, I felt like I am with my family and between my sisters. I didn't feel like such a foreigner with them. We always meet together; every one of them supports the other. It was the opposite and we love the U.S. in a way that you won't imagine. Those girls made me love the U.S. more and more."*

Also, Mariam thinks that being with the Saudi community helped them to adapt to life in the U.S. more easily as she said, *"Maybe the Saudi families helped us adapt here and make it easier."*

## **6. Discussion**

The purpose of this study is to examine Saudi mothers' perspectives on acculturation to American society and how those perspectives affect their childrearing beliefs and discipline strategies. The author also aims to explore if Saudi parents observe changes in their parental perceptions about their children's adaptation to American society. Finally, it will help Saudis understand some aspects of the acculturation process and the challenges and barriers they may face when they move to the U.S.

Regarding the research question of this study, related to the effect of acculturation on Saudi mothers' childrearing beliefs, the researcher found three main themes that emerged from the data collected. Findings regarding each theme will be discussed next.

### **Theme 1: Before and After**

The findings regarding this theme are related to how the parenting style of the mother was before in Saudi Arabia and how it shifted when the family moved to U.S. First, the mothers' perceptions were that they changed from being authoritarian mothers to authoritative ones; Saudi mothers who lived in the U.S. were afraid of the cultural differences that might cause problems in childrearing, which could lead to behavioral problems. The mothers in this sample came from a very conservative society in Saudi Arabia where there are rules for everything: they are attached strongly to their traditions and have strong connections to their families and extended family members, many times extended families all live together, men and women have separate social gatherings, women should be covered, and they are mostly under male authority. According to Killian and Hegtvedt (2003), parental acculturation can affect children's acculturation to a new host culture. Parental heritage culture has a huge influence on parenting style, which will affect the children's adjustment process to the new culture. For example, in some cultures, parents can be very authoritarian, such as in Saudi Arabia where the mothers in this sample think that they used to be more authoritarian, and then they become more authoritative when they moved to the U.S.

The mothers in this sample were aware of the degree of conflict between the two cultures, specifically that they came from a culture where parents have high authority and control over their children and came to a more open society where children have more independence and speech freedom. They found that an adjustment in their parenting style was required. The mothers believed that being authoritarian would help them in childrearing in the U.S. due to the cultural effect that caused changes in the child-mother relationship. Mothers found themselves needing to create a balance between the two contradictory cultures to help their children live comfortably and to prevent any problems from developing related to a struggle between the two cultures. According to LaFromboise et al. (1993), this is a necessity because children depend on their parents to create this balance that leads to normal psychological development.

According to LaFromboise et al. (1993), adaptation to the host country is necessary for living comfortably in a new culture. In order to create a balance between both cultures, a person should be aware of the differences and know well the norms of both cultures. The Saudi mothers follow an integrated approach where they feel that a balance between two cultures is very important in strengthening their relationship with their children. This helped the children to not develop behavioral problems and did not create an acculturation gap between the parents and their children. The more integrated approach the parent follows, the fewer behavioral problems the children will exhibit (Fung & Laue, 2010). This was very obvious in this sample where the mothers were more integrated, which helped their children to not exhibit behavioral problems.

Santisteban et al. (2012) found that positive parenting, a high level of involvement, and positive discipline helped Hispanic children to have low levels of externalizing behavior during the process of acculturation to the American culture. Those parents also maintained a high level of respect for their Hispanic traditions. We can also see that here, where Saudi mothers tried to maintain their Saudi identity at the same time they were exposed to American culture. They integrated the American culture by accepting the beliefs that did not conflict with their own without losing their Saudi identity. They also tried their best to be open with their children by discussing issues with them, and practicing positive parenting by using different strategies such as sharing decision-making with the child, giving the child more speech freedom, and changing punishment strategies. This is one of the main characteristics that sojourners have: they emphasize biculturalism in their parenting by keeping their identity and making sure that their children maintain their heritage culture because they know that they will get back to their home country at some point (Downie et al., 2007).

Saudi mothers became more open and they let their children have more freedom to be argumentative than they would have let them have back home. They allowed them to express their feelings and opinions, share their thoughts and discuss them with their parents. Saudi children became more aware of their right to discuss issues with their parents and that strengthened their personalities where they became more independent, and responsible, shared their opinions and thoughts, became stronger critical thinkers, and discussed issues with their parents, as the mothers mentioned in the interviews. Children became more confident, too. As Nesteruk and Marks (2011) found, the same result occurred in Eastern European parents when they moved to the U.S., and they believed that in order to integrate into American society they had to use different parenting strategies. This, in turn, gave their children more freedom and more choices, and a chance to discuss important issues while they kept their original cultural beliefs.

Also, Fever et al. (2007), in their study about families from Asia and the Middle East who had dominant relationships with their children, found they now have difficulties when they move to the U.S. and their children become more argumentative. In such cases, parents should adapt their parenting style so they can maintain good relationships with their children and avoid acculturation gaps.

One of the main changes that occurred in the parenting life of Saudi mothers in the U.S. is the lack of external interference from relatives, as their parenting was previously highly affected by the interference from other family members such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, and sometimes close friends. Being away from their home country established stability in their parenting in the U.S. Saudi mothers felt more comfortable raising their children in the U.S. because they were away from the eternal interferences that they used to have in Saudi Arabia. While mothers were in the U.S., they did not have anyone who could get involved in their parenting life.

Because mothers felt more stable, in control, and had total authority in making decisions regarding their children, it also strengthened the family bond and mothers became closer to their children. Due to the parental style the mothers followed where

they became more authoritative and at the same time were more integrated when it came to acculturation, their children did not exhibit any serious behavioral problems in their academic or social life. These mothers established a strong relationship with their children and became very close to them, which helped strengthen the family bond that led to a lower chance of developing behavioral problems, as the degree of warmth of the relationship between the mother and her children can have effects on the degree of having internalizing or externalizing problems (Stevens et al., 2007).

### **Theme 2: Change in Responsibilities**

Mother's responsibilities changed once they moved to the United States. This change that occurred in their parenting is related to the number of responsibilities the mothers have. Saudi mothers used to have help from their families when they lived in Saudi Arabia. The disadvantage of being away from home is that there was no one who could help them with their parenting. Saudi mothers felt that they have more responsibilities towards their children, especially because the fathers were busy with their school life. Fathers were involved only when they felt needed and when the mothers reached out to them in special cases. However, fathers in this study also had a special bond with their children, especially their daughters.

### **Theme 3: Acculturation Factors Helped Better Parenting**

There were four elements that helped mothers to adapt to life in the United States and helped in their acculturation process. Those elements included: neighborhood, American people's attitudes and lifestyles, schools, and the local Saudi community in the area. Neighborhood is associated with the school because being in the same neighborhood as the children's school helped the parents to feel more included with the small society of the school. It also helped the children to strengthen their relationship with American friends from school. Ash, Rice, and Remoned (2015) found a student may exhibit less acceptable social behavior, specifically shyness and unsociability, during interactions with English native speaker peers, compared with the non-native speakers or peers from the same language. But with being included in the same society of the school and neighborhood they felt more comfortable and had more friends who were English native speakers, as the mothers mentioned in the interview that their children started to have more relationships when they moved to the same neighborhood of the school. Another element that affected the living of Saudi sojourners was American citizens' attitudes towards them and the American lifestyle. Mothers found it easier for them to child rear in the U.S. due to the easier lifestyle where accessibility to public services is much better than in Saudi Arabia. The availability of public services such as transportation and libraries helped the mothers in this study. Similarly, with the recent political situation related to Islam and the misunderstanding of it (Burke, 2003), most of the mothers felt afraid of how American people would treat them and accept them in their community, but they found that Americans were very nice and they felt safe living in an American community. The school was also an important element in helping Saudi mothers and

their children to adapt easily to American culture. The understanding and support that was provided by teachers and schools helped the children adapt easily, especially during the first period when they had just moved. Saudi mothers in this sample agreed that schools had a huge role in making their lives easier in the U.S. This is similar to the situation seen by Lee and Hawkins (2008), who established an after-school community-based program for Hmong students and their families. They found that the program helped the Hmong families to acculturate to the American culture and face the academic and social barriers students and their families face. The program was very helpful for those students and their families in adapting to the American culture and overcoming academic and social problems. Such programs are needed for families who have just moved to the U.S. Each school should consider having programs that support international students and their families.

Mothers in this sample reached out to the schools when they faced problems with their children and the school administration helped them overcome those problems by being understanding of their culture and providing support for the children. One of the roles of schools is to ensure that students receive appropriate instruction in academic and social skills to help them to be successful. Teachers and administrators need to be more knowledgeable about the barriers that prevent parents from becoming involved in their children's education and address them in a meaningful manner. As schools become more diverse, though, it becomes more difficult for schools to provide and manage appropriate services (Lacroque, Kleiman, & Darling, 2011; Ramirez & Soto-Hinman, 2009; Singh, Curtis, Wechsler, Ellis, & Cohen, 1997).

One of the important elements that made acculturation easier for Saudi mothers and their children is the local Saudi community in the area. Mothers felt attached to their friends from the same culture, as a form of a social support system while they are away from their home country. This helped Saudi mothers and their children to have a sense of belonging within the Saudi community in the area. Sojourners who had strong social support from immigrants of the same ethnic group as had reduced acculturation stress, and their shared experiences helped in facing challenges (Cho & Haslam, 2010). Similarly, Nakagawa et al. (1992) found that Japanese mothers who had social support had less parental stress. For Saudi mothers, they found the social support they needed in the local Saudi community and that provided relief.

### **6.1 Overall Discussion Related to the Proposed Theoretical Framework**

Regarding the bidimensional model of acculturation, Berry (1980) explains how immigrant adaptation to a new culture can be categorized under four approaches: integrated, separated, assimilated, and marginalized. Berry explains how people adjust to new cultures to be capable of interaction and functionality in the new society. In the current study, Saudi parents fell under the integrated approach, such that they kept their cultural identity and also accepted the new culture, and integrated some aspects of the new culture that did not contradict their traditions and customs. The degree of acculturation of the parents in this study had an influence on parenting style, such that

the Saudi mothers in this sample shared how they changed their childrearing style and started to use new methods in childrearing their children. In a new culture, parents may find themselves making adjustments to their parenting techniques in order to create a balance between the new environment and the way they want to raise their children without losing their traditions and identity. Children may exhibit difficult behaviors when the acculturation degree between their parents and themselves is different, but in this study, there was no acculturation gap between the parents and their children. Since the mothers were largely following the integrated approach to acculturation, there were no acculturation problems that caused negative behavioral changes among the children. The findings from this study were also examined with regard to Baumrind's (1978) four parenting styles: authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive, neglectful. In this sample, the mothers agreed that they changed their parenting style from authoritarian to authoritative due to living in a different culture. Mothers in this sample believed that in Saudi Arabia, mothers are more authoritarian, but upon moving to the U.S., they had to change their parenting style and be more authoritarian with their children. They felt the need to make this change to avoid the cultural contradictions and behavioral problems that they might face with their children when the children compared their original traditions to the host culture traditions and lifestyle. Parenting style can affect the acculturation process of children. Given that the mothers in this sample were more authoritative, there were no major behavioral problems among the children resulting from acculturation to the U.S. culture.

## **6.2 Limitations**

First, there is limited literature available on Saudi sojourners, Saudi children's behaviors, Saudi parenting styles, and acculturation of Saudi families, which made it difficult to connect the findings from this study to past literature and affected the ability to generalize findings from this study. Second, acculturation for the target parents for this study was likely affected by the brief amount of time they spent in the U.S. Most of the mothers that the researcher interviewed were living in the U.S. during their spouse's study program, which ranged from 3-7 years. The longer a period of time Saudi student families spend in the U.S., the more likely it is that they will notice the effect of acculturation on their children's behaviors.

Third, the time for recruiting the sample for this study was in the summer when most Saudi students went back home with their family, so it was difficult to find mothers who have older children, where the effect of acculturation and behavior changes would be more obvious, as age can be a factor that plays a huge role in acculturation in sojourner children.

Finally, the translation of interviews from Arabic to English without losing part of the data was quite challenging. The Arabic language is very complicated compared to English. The translation from Arabic to English can be very critical because if the researcher interprets one word in the sentence incorrectly that would affect the whole meaning of the sentence and that would affect the data. For future research where the

translation is needed, the presence of a translator while the interview is conducted is recommended. This will help the researcher make sure that the translator will understand exactly what the participant means, because translating from Arabic to English is dependent upon context. Another option is to transcribe the interview in the original language and have them analyzed in Arabic and then translate after this step in English. Translation could be very critical in such studies because the researcher might lose part of the data during the translation process.

## **7. Recommendations**

Research needs to be conducted with the sojourner children to learn the emotional experiences the children are going through in the host culture. This will help to build a support program for them in order to make their adaptation easier. Research also needs to be conducted with American teachers to know if Saudi children exhibit any kind of different behaviors that inhibit the learning process in schools.

A longitudinal study needs to be conducted with mothers when they return back to their home country to see how they re-acculturate to their original culture and if they exhibit any parental difficulties. At the same time, a study with Saudi sojourner children should be conducted when they return back to their country to examine their emotional experiences when they return to their home culture, and determine if they are exhibiting any emotional or social problems during their re-acculturation to their original culture, to see if re-integration is reflected in their behavior positively or negatively.

Schools in Saudi Arabia need to establish support programs for sojourner students who live outside of the country for long periods of time. Counseling programs at school should consider an emotional support program for those students who would be at risk for emotional problems. Establishing awareness programs for families who intend to move to different countries by providing parents with programs that strengthen the parenting skills they need for child rear in a different country, and at the same time prepare the children emotionally for living in a different country, would be beneficial.

## **8. Conclusion**

This study examined the experiences of mothers of Saudi children who live temporarily as sojourners in the U.S. The study provided us with a deep understanding of what those mothers are going through bringing up their children in a different culture, and what the children are experiencing emotionally and behaviorally during their time living in the U.S. It provides us with insight through the perspectives of the mothers on how acculturation can affect their childrearing beliefs and their children's behaviors. Raising children is a challenge for most mothers, but raising children in a different culture can be even more challenging. Mothers need to understand that raising children away from home will be challenging for them and for their children. They need to be aware of the emotional struggle that the children might go through, especially during the first period

of transition. They need to understand that some cultural contradictions may affect their way of childrearing, and an adjustment from being an authoritarian parent to an authoritative one will be needed.

### **Conflict of Interest Statement**

The author has no conflict of interest to declare. The Author have seen and agreed with the contents of the manuscript and there is no financial interest to report. I certify that the submission is original work and is not under review at any other publication

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