



Family and Kinship Structures in African Communities: Implications for Social Work Practice in Australia

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Abstract. Objectives: The systematic literature review synthesises the current state of literature on the complexities of family and kinship structure in African communities and their implications for social work practice in Australia. The review aims to present available evidence on the impact of migration and resettlement on these structures and the effective care strategies that social workers can use to support and improve social work practice with African migrant communities.

Methods: Six databases including Web of Science, Google Scholar, PsycINFO, CINAHL, Informit and ProQuest were searched using search terms to capture the dynamics of family and kinship systems in African communities, and the influence of migration.

Results: Eighteen eligible studies were identified and selected for review. The review highlighted five primary themes; African family dynamics; migration and adaptation; child welfare and kinship systems; social work interventions; and cultural sensitivity. While the review highlights the centrality of African family and kinship structures in African migrants' social identity, support and intergenerational relationships, it also reveals social integration challenges. It emphasises the importance of interventions that support family cohesion and culturally appropriate social work with African migrant communities in Australia.

Conclusion: The review underscores the need for social workers and policy makers to incorporate culturally sensitive and inclusive practices that respect and accommodate African familial values

Index Terms- Social work, social development, Africa

I. Introduction

1. Background

Family and kinship systems in African communities have traditionally formed an essential social institution in African society through which all other aspects of life and structures, including the roles individuals play, the political systems, and the economy, were anchored (Deng & Marlowe, 2013; Layefa et al., 2022). The kinship system in Africa is not as rigid as the nuclear family model that is common in the Western world where the family unit is composed of the parents and the children only. They also include not only the biological family but also relatives in the extended family, fictive kin, and community members who take the role of family



members, thereby erasing the difference between family, community, and social networks (Amos 2013; Bukuluki, 2013). These structures are very important in determining people's roles and duties in society. They are a cultural practice that is collective and thus considered as part of the cultural norms. Besides child rearing and care-giving, the family structure is the main social control agent, the court, the economic partner and the moral compass of African societies (Bukuluki 2013). However, it is important to appreciate the fact that the African family system is diverse and differs with the region, ethnic group, and even class. For instance, while West Africans value the extended family structure with an emphasis on patrilineal descent, Southern Africans emphasise inheritance and descent by the maternal lineage (Makusha and Richter 2014). Likewise, polygamy, a common convention in some African societies, creates another layer to kinship roles and relationships, family structure, and gender relations (Ve, 2023). For this reason, any study on African kinship systems cannot ignore these distinct regional and cultural differences that may lead to overgeneralisation and simplification of the subject.

Migration adds another dimension to these kinship systems especially when African families have to move to countries such as Australia which has substantially different cultural, legal and social values regarding the family. Migration upsets the conventional family dynamics of people. Most families are separated across borders or the role of the large family is reduced in the diaspora. In addition, African immigrants find themselves facing a welfare regime that is developed in Western societies that are individualistic, and nuclear family-oriented and believe in state interferences where the family should intervene (Mugadza et al., 2020). This transition can be especially challenging for African families that use collectivist caregiving and decision-making practices leading to a cultural mismatch of the level of adaption of the families to life in Australia and their engagement with service providers (Rombo and Lutomia 2016). Most importantly, the breakdown of the African family through migration is not only from a geographic standpoint but is also influenced by socio-political issues such as racism, poverty, employment opportunities and the challenges of adapting to the cultural expectations of a new society (Bitew and Ferguson, 2011; Neumann 2013). Research indicates that African immigrant families in Australia encounter a lot of difficulties in managing the state's child welfare system as the communal child-rearing practices may not be compatible with the Australian legal provisions on child abuse and care (Kaur 2012; Raman and Hodes 2012). Such misconceptions have extensive effects and exacerbate the already existing rift between the African families and the social workers affecting service delivery, trust, and the wellbeing of the families.

Given the significance of family and kinship systems to the wellbeing and social functioning of African communities, understanding these collectivist system and the challenges in care and service provision caused by its disconnect with the individualistic nuclear family welfare regime in Australia is critical. As far as I know, there is a paucity of comprehensive systematic literature review focusing on the African family and kinship systems, the challenges that arise in their engagement with Australia's welfare system and the care strategies required to engage appropriately and improve social work practice with African migrants in Australia (Australian Institute of Family Studies 2016). This paper looks to address this research gap and



deliver in-depth insights into the complexities of African family and kinship systems, informed by African immigrants and effective practice strategies to engage and support them. This is vital for informing social work training, policy and practice so that the needs of African communities in Australia can be effectively addressed with culturally appropriate community-level resources and practices.

2. Research Aim and Objectives

This study is driven by the central aim of critically exploring how African family and kinship structures influence social work practice in Australia.

The key objectives of the study are as follows:

- To critically examine the diversity and complexity of African family and kinship structures.
- To explore the impact of migration on the maintenance of African kinship systems.
- To evaluate the cultural competence of social workers in engaging with African families.
- To propose practical strategies for improving social work practice with African immigrant families.

3. Research Questions

- What are the implications of migration for the structure and functions of traditional African kinship systems in the Australian context?
- What complications arise for African immigrant families trying to adapt their collectivist care-giving practices within Australia's nuclear-family-oriented welfare systems?
- What is the impact of socio-political issues like racism and employment opportunities on families of immigrants from Africa living in Australia?
- What are the practical strategies for improving social work practice with African immigrant families.

4. Research Rationale

There is an expectation that Western values should be the normative model on which social work interventions are based even when applied to culturally diverse people (Australian Association of Social Workers, 2020). This may lead to cultural imperialism where African family practices are either misrepresented, suppressed or entirely rejected in favour of Western practices that promote individualism over communal responsibility (Sanson et al. 1998). For instance, the meaning of 'child welfare' in African communities is anchored on the concept of 'fostering' where there are multiple caregivers in the extended family (Brown, 2011). On the other hand, the child welfare system in Australia is largely based on the parent's capacity, while the role of other relatives in care-giving, decision making and solving any disputes is least considered (Mugadza et al, 2019). Also, the growth of African immigrants in Australia means that there is a need for culturally sensitive practice in social work. The number of African immigrants in Australia has increased over the years, with the 2021 Australian Census showing that the demographic composition of immigrants has changed and it is more diverse and heterogeneous than it was in the past. (ABS, 2021). This could be partly attributed to the significant increase in the number of immigrants from Nigeria, Sudan, Ethiopia, etc (ABS, 2021). African immigrants



come to Australia with different perceptions of the role and responsibilities of the family, which sometimes conflict with Australian laws and norms resulting in conflict (Mugadza et al., 2020). Language barriers, racism, and low socio-economic status worsen the problems thereby limiting the participation of African families in social services (Li et al., 2021).

For these reasons, this research is not just about comparing the African and Australian family systems, but about analysing the effect that these differences have on social work. In this, it aims to problematise the notion that there is a single best way of practicing social work, which is by mechanically exporting the Western model into different cultures and environments. Thus, the findings of this study, which examines the impact of African family models on care provision, decision-making and family relations, will help social workers to enhance their cultural sensitivity. Thus, it supports the overall process of decolonisation of social work where traditional practice paradigms are replaced by respect for African cultural practices instead of imposing Western perspectives (Poyiadji et al., 2020).

II. Literature Review

1. African Family Structures

The African family system differs from the Western family system which is a nuclear family and also emphasises individualism rather than collectivism. As described by Bray et al (2018), these structures depict one of the most basic social, economic and political formations that are rooted in the cultural practices of most African societies to date. They are not simply the outcome of interactional processes but represent philosophical spiritual and economical presuppositions of social balance in societies where relations and kinship are considered the pillars of existence. Despite the differences within the African regions and ethnicities, several features characterise African kinship, namely the extended family, polygamous marriages, shared child care and the strict division of gender roles (Fullerton & Kendrick, 2017).

2.2 Extended Families and Kinship Networks

The African social organisation is anchored on the extended families where they are not only responsible for the care of the young but are also economic and political entities. Unlike the Western nuclear family model which centralises caregiving on the parent and their immediate offspring, the African extended family decentralises these responsibilities on a larger pool of members including grandparents, uncles, aunties, cousins, and other members of the community who have embraced the cultural practices of the family (Çağlar & Schiller, 2018). In African societies, therefore, the concept of a 'family' goes beyond the nuclear and extended families, but includes spiritual, communal and social families. This inclusivity gives a strong backing where people who are ill, disabled or old are looked after by the community, the bills paid and the moral compass provided by the same community and not individual families. Thus, although the culture of an extended family network helps people cope with various difficulties, it also leads to dependence and certain economic issues. Williams (2018) argues that it is a two-edged sword which puts pressure on successful family members particularly those who migrate to help finance the entire extended family. Williams (2018) further argues that though



remittances are critical in reducing poverty, they can also perpetuate income disparities within households and lead to the emergence of unhealthy dependence. For instance, migrants in Australia may be under huge pressure to remit money, which makes them struggle to find a meaningful economic niche in the new country.

However, depending on the extended kin for economic survival erodes individualism, especially for women as they are confined to set roles within the kinship system (Okocha et al., 2024). Another important feature of the extended family system is child fosterage which is practiced in most of the West African societies. However, children are taken to live with other relatives not necessarily because of parental or economic inability to extend family ties and responsibilities, and child-rearing, besides offering scholarships (Bray et al., 2018). Although foster care is a form of redistributing the tasks of child-rearing it is not without conflict, especially for communities in Diaspora where the formal structures of the state may not approve or respect such practices. For example, in Australia children being fostered within extended families may contradict Western laws such as parental responsibility and legal systems may consider this as abuse or abandonment (Fullerton & Kendrick, 2017).

3. Polygamy and Family Hierarchies

Marriage, in particular polygyny, is another characteristic of family life in many African societies although the prevalence of the practice is also influenced by the region, religion as well as the socio-economic status of families (Fullerton & Kendrick, 2017). Whereas the Western feminist critiques of polygamy mostly concern themselves with the rights abuses of women and their likelihood of being unfairly treated, it is imperative to contextualize polygamy. Existing literature reveals that in many African societies, polygamy is not only a symbol of status but also a necessity occasioned by the need for a workforce in agricultural-based economies. Polygynous men can attain more economic assets by producing more food since every wife and child in the polygynous family contributes to the workforce (Al-Krenawi, 2020). Polygamy also comes with certain problems, which are evident more so in women. However, polygamous unions, while being functional in traditional economies, result in conflict among co-wives thus the emergence of complicated family structures where women compete for resources, attention and the husband's favour (Fullerton & Kendrick, 2017). This sort of rivalry may also have a major psychological as well as social impact on the children, in terms of their loyalty splits and differential rights based on their mother's status within the home (Al-Krenawi, 2020). Polygamy also perpetuates patriarchy since men have the final say on family matters, assets and income. In such systems, women are usually subjugated and their worth depends on how many children they can produce, and how efficiently they manage the home front (Fullerton & Kendrick, 2017). Worse still, the polygamous family model is a very difficult model to practice especially for African immigrants in Australia because polygamy is unlawful and socially constructed as immoral in this part of the world. Those African families, who migrate to Australia, are faced with a legal system that does not recognize polygamous marriage, which often leads to the second or the third wife and their children being marginalized (Çağlar & Schiller, 2018). This legal disconnect leaves women, especially those who cannot have a legal claim to property or financial support in any way vulnerable. Besides, the shift to a monogamous



system can weaken the unity of the extensive family and cause the confrontation and alienation of relatives (Williams, 2018).

4. Gender Roles and Responsibilities

Patriarchal systems of African families dictate the roles that males and females are supposed to play in society. In most African cultures, men are considered the breadwinners of the families and are responsible for decision-making, especially on issues to do with land, property and family matters (Orazalin & Baydauletov, 2020). The girls on the other hand are normally confined to household chores, child care and business ventures like farming or petty trade for the family (Ve, 2023). It is important to note these roles, while culturally defined are also economically constructed. As in agrarian societies, the labour and efforts of women in agricultural production and other domestic activities are of great significance to the well-being of the family (Javeed et al., 2022). However, it is important to point out the drawbacks of such divisions of labour along gender lines. Even though men are usually endowed with the responsibility of leadership in the family, women are endowed with much power albeit in an informal setup, especially within the matrilineal societies where inheritance and family lineages are traced through the female gender (Kahloul et al., 2022). In these societies the women are involved in the decision-making process, especially in the sharing of resources or assets, the management of the family and taking care of the children. But it should also be noted that even within patriarchal societies, women were not passive and negligible in the household economy and community politics. They are performers of many roles including mediators, caretakers and economic providers, and their influence in the decision-making processes of the families cannot be underestimated (Ahmad et al., 2021).

Nevertheless, in the diaspora such gender roles are always distorted. Living in a new country such as Australia brings about new economic and social challenges that make families change their gender roles. They also pointed out that women may become the breadwinners in many cases especially if there are refugees and men may find it hard to secure employment or even change the traditional gender roles in a new cultural context (Fullerton & Kendrick, 2017). Such role swapping can cause a lot of strain in families since it is likely to make men feel less masculine since they cannot assume their traditional provider roles while women get new opportunities to be independent (Ahmad et al., 2021). This dynamic can present challenges to social work interventions because practitioners may have to consider rigid gender norms alongside shifting gender roles for diaspora men and women.

5. The Role of Elders and Communal Responsibility

Elders occupy a sacred position in the African family systems, and they are considered the repositories of culture and ethnic ethos (Ramirez & Böhm, 2021). Many African societies hold the elderly in high esteem and as such they are the ones who are given the mantle to make major decisions within families, disputes and distribution of resources. The use of elders as authority figures is therefore drawn from their closeness to the forefathers and as such a link between the elders and young people. The community respects its elders so much that the latter act as watchdogs of the cultural practices, making sure that the family members conform to the societal standards and practices, engage in communal activities and uphold good



relations within the family unit. Another component is communal responsibility as a principle and a system that indicates that the destiny of the individual cannot be separated from that of the tribe (Reyes-García et al., 2023). In most African communities, it is the role of family members to stand in for one another especially in moments of hardship or difficulties by offering either financial support, assistance in taking care of the family or giving moral support. This family-oriented culture embraces other individuals in society as an extended family rather than a nuclear family. During disasters and emergencies such as sickness or job losses, famine and food shortages among others, members of a family the community, and neighbours will collectively contribute to helping the affected individuals and families and ensuring none of them is left out (Ramirez & Böhm, 2021).

Although the communal responsibility model enhances unity and cooperation among the people, some difficulties emerge, especially in diaspora countries focusing on welfare and social services compared to traditional norms. For instance, several African immigrant families in Australia may have to come to terms with the fact that while they depend on their relatives to look after their children or elderly, or seek employment opportunities, such expectations defy the culture of an individual or nuclear family to fend for itself (Kandasamy et al., 2017). This tension can cause detachment and suspicion between African families and the service providers, especially when the service providers seem to disregard the importance of extended families and extended responsibility in African culture (Reyes-García et al., 2023).

6. African Diaspora and Migration to Australia

Historical Context and Migration Patterns

Family migration from Africa to Australia can therefore be said to be a rather recent phenomenon, whereby many families have been forced to flee their home countries due to political upheavals, war, or economic difficulties in different African nations (Boatcă, 2016). The first and second-generation immigrants in Australia have been students and professionals coming from South Africa and Nigeria; however, the third-generation immigrants have been through refugee resettlement programs from countries like Sudan, Somalia and Ethiopia (Feliciano & Lanuza, 2017). The refugees are, therefore, very different from the traditional Australian settlers; most of them have undergone traumatic experiences and displacement, and they are in great need of assistance when it comes to legal, social and economic integration into Australian society. The African-born population in Australia has increased in the last two decades, the largest groups are from South Sudan, Somalia, Nigeria, and Ethiopia (Binstock & Shanas, 2016). Although the individuals of these communities have different languages, religions, and cultural backgrounds, they all face the problems of having been displaced, being discriminated against and the process of assimilation into a new society. For many African migrants, travel to Australia is not easy at all as they leave their homes, and with it their extended families, which are so essential elements in their social and economic realities (Feliciano & Lanuza, 2017).

The process of migration brings about the disruption of the normal family systems that the African migrants depend on. For instance, most African migrants are likely to be displaced from their compound families either by the nature of migration



or by the host country's laws on family reunions such as in Australia (Piguet, 2020). This separation may produce great psychological and social pressure because individuals are forced to live in a different culture without their families' support. However, the breakdown of the extended family structures erodes the traditional system of caregiving and communal responsibility which is the hallmark of African kinship-based society and makes migrants depend on the state induced welfare and social services which may not align with the African traditional norms (Miguélez, 2016).

7. Social Work in Australia

Overview of Social Work Practice in Multicultural Contexts

The social work practice in Australia is guided by three key principles: social justice, human rights, and cultural competence (Byrne, 2017). Like any other multicultural nation, Australia has put in place measures to ensure that all people in the country are treated equally irrespective of the colour of their skin. While working with the clients, the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) Code of Ethics pays a significant concern to cultural competence meaning that the social workers should respect and have adequate knowledge of the cultural values, beliefs, and practices of the clients (Garner et al., 2020). This in essence implies that social workers have to patronize their clients in a manner that respects cultural background and experiences especially when dealing with immigrants and refugees. In the case of African migrants, social workers have a significant responsibility in the process of their integration through offering them services in housing, employment, education and even health. However, social work practice goes beyond an appreciation of the transport problems of the migrants; there is a need to understand the cultural practices and the family systems of the migrants from Africa. Lack of this cultural competence requires social workers to apply interventions that may not meet the cultural needs and expectations of the clients and may even cause negative results (Lee et al., 2016).

2.7.2 Challenges Faced by Australian Social Workers

In the centre of cultural competence recognition, numerous social workers in Australia face a problem in handling African migrant families (Volkow, 2020). Some of the problems include the failure on the part of the professionals to comprehend African kinship structures and how they impact the patterns of the families, the assessment of the care, and the decision-making processes (Javanparast et al., 2018). For example, in a child protection case, the social workers can fail to involve other relatives in the care of children believing that the responsibility of child care is the responsibility of the parent. This leads to conflict between the social workers and African families especially when the social workers interfere with the system in place that hinders the family's collectivistic caregiving. The above disparity between cultural principles and social work practice causes a loss of trust between the African families and the social service providers, thus becoming a challenge in developing a good working relationship with the clients (Byrne, 2017).



8. Hypotheses

The review hypothesizes that;

- Migration has disrupted traditional kinship systems among many African immigrant groups leading to weakened family cohesion and challenges in care-giving practices of African immigrants in Australia.
- African families' collectivist care-giving practices are often at odds with the individualistic, nuclear-family-oriented welfare systems in Australia, with a direct effect on the integration and well-being of African immigrant families.

III. Methodology

1. Positionality Statement

As a researcher, I am conscious of the fact that my background, experiences and values could influence my perspectives and approach to this study. As such, this review was approached from the position of an African immigrant who has significant experience of Africa's kinship and family system. Also, by virtue of my academic and professional engagement in social work (postgraduate student in the field of Social Work), I possess the foundational knowledge of the intricacies of social work practice with African communities, especially as it concerns migration, acculturation, and service provision. As a result, I have a familiarity with the challenges facing African immigrant families in their engagement with institutionalised care systems in Australia that informed my reflections on the review findings.

I admit that extended family support networks, collective responsibility and communal interdependence are hallmarks of African family and kinship structures, unlike the Western models of family and social care. Hence, my interest in this subject matter was driven by the need to address the disconnect between traditional kinship systems and the individualistic social work practice in Australia, and make sure that services are responsive to the wellbeing and developmental needs of African migrant communities.

While it is likely that my African background inform the interpretation of data, efforts would be made to maintain objectivity is maintained during the synthesis of existing literature. I am conscious of potential biases and thus, I am committed to make efforts to bracket these biases and preconceptions throughout the data collection and analysis process.

I remain professionally committed to approach this study with the goal of providing insights that would contribute to the development of social work practice that is culturally sensitive, inclusive and guided by the resilience ingrained in African family networks.

2. Research Design

This research employ a systematic review of literature on the effects of African family and kinship structures on social work in Australia, conducted in line with the Preferred Reporting Items of Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines (Moher et al., 2009). This decision was informed by the need to evaluate the current state of research and identify relevant themes, and debates with



regard to African families' interactions with Australian relevant service providers. Using data from pre-existing scholarly sources, such as articles, case studies, migration reports and demographic surveys, this work continues the exploration of existing knowledge to identify inadequacies in social work and cultural sensitivity (Meyers et al., 2017). There are several advantages of secondary data analysis especially when conducting research among diaspora communities where it may be expensive and time-consuming to embark on primary data collection. Since there exists a good amount of high-quality literature on the subject of African family structures and experiences of migration to Australia, the proposed method enables the researcher to take advantage of the existing literature to come up with new findings. Secondly, secondary data analysis enables the researcher to engage in a critical analysis of the selected sources with a view of affirming and comparing the findings to provide a sweeping understanding of how African families including the extended families and communal caregivers exist with the Western social work practices (Creswell & Poth, 2017). However, it is important to note some of the weaknesses associated with secondary data analysis. The researcher does not have direct access to participants and thus cannot ask further questions when analysing family dynamics that may arise when conducting primary research (Volkow, 2020). Hence, this study acknowledges the fact that although secondary data offer a general picture, they might not capture the detailed experiences of African families.

3. Search Strategy

The search strategy involved the completion of two rounds of search to identify relevant articles on African family dynamics and social work experiences in Australia. First and foremost, the Web of Science, Google Scholar, PsycINFO, CINAHL, Informit Health Collection and ProQuest databases were searched to locate published literature that explored African family and kinship dynamics and social work experiences in Australia. Secondly, grey literature was searched through sources, such as Social Care Online, Eldis, Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS), government and non-governmental organization websites for articles that explored family and kinship structures in African communities and their implications for social work practice in Australia. In addition, African community perspectives and voices were privileged as the search strategy prioritised and included articles and papers written by African scholars, groups and organisations.

The systematic search strategy involved the definition of search terms into three main categories: African family and kinship structures, African communities in Australia, and social work interventions. Table 1 presents an example of the key search terms used for the search. The final search was carried out on 30th November 2024. No date restrictions were applied to the search in order to fully capture relevant historical contexts and gain a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. The search strategy involved a wider search that includes hand searching of reference lists of systematic reviews to identify additional papers.



Table 1: Key search strategy terms from database search

	Keyword	Search Term
1	African family and kinship structures	“African kinship system” OR African family structure” OR “African household structure” OR “African kinship and social structure” OR “cultur*” OR “African kinship care” OR “family network”
2	Social work interventions	“social work intervention” OR “social work” OR “Australia welfare system” OR “wellbeing” OR “quality of life” OR SEWB” OR “social care” OR “humanitarian service” OR “care-giving practice”
3	African communities	African community” OR “African society” OR “Africa*” OR “African migrant*” OR “African migrant family” OR African refugee family” OR “sub-Saharan African family”
4		1 AND 2 AND 3

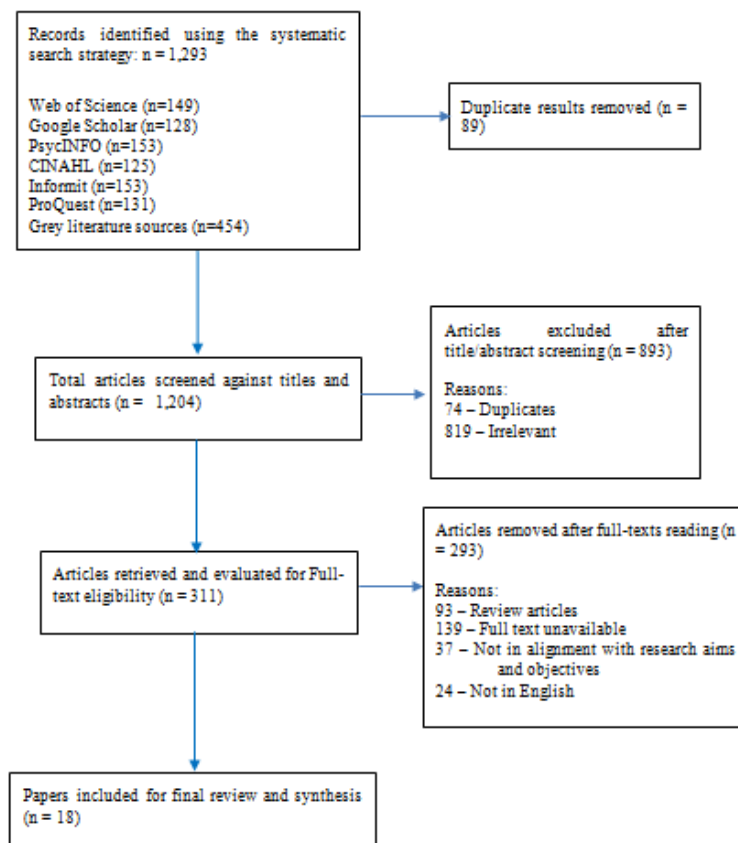


Figure 1: Flowchart for the search and selection process



4. Eligibility Criteria

The review prioritised and included relevant articles that; had English as the language of publication; involved primary research, either qualitative or quantitative with any study design; focused on the African family and kinship systems; were published in peer-reviewed journals including books and other relevant non-published papers identified from grey literature search; and related to effects of Australia's individualistic, nuclear-family-oriented welfare system on the integration and well-being of African immigrant families. Review articles were not included in the review as well as study protocols and papers that were not related to the research questions.

5. Screening

The search strategy identified a total of 1,293 search results (839 published articles from the six databases and 454 resources from grey literature sources). The screening process involved the importation of peer-reviewed articles and grey literature results into Endnote referencing software and Microsoft Excel respectively where duplicates were identified and removed. Thereafter, peer-reviewed articles were imported in the Covidence platform where titles/abstracts and full-text screening was carried out based on the eligibility criteria. Results from grey literature search underwent the same title/abstract and full-text screening process as the peer-reviewed articles using Microsoft Excel. The flowchart in Figure 1 depicts the search and selection process used in the review.

6. Data Extraction and Analysis

A Microsoft Excel data extraction tool was developed and used to extract information from the selected studies. Data extraction was based on the following data points: author(s) and year of study; study location; study aims; study design and methodology; key themes and recommendations. Data extraction was informed by the primary and secondary review questions such as complexities of African family and kinship system; African immigrant families' engagement/adaption to Australia's nuclear-family-oriented welfare systems; impact of African family models on care provision, and social work interventions; and inclusivity of community participation. Finally, the included studies were analysed using a narrative synthesis method as the main approach to identify and integrate the various forms of evidence that emerged as well as synthesise practical strategies for improving social work practice with African immigrant families. Narrative summary is particularly useful when seeking to synthesise various study findings across many studies.

IV. Results

1. Study Characteristics

A total of eighteen articles met the inclusion criteria and were eligible for review. Twelve articles employed qualitative study design methods which included semi-structured interviews, focus group meetings and ethnographic observations of the participants in their natural environments (Lamm et al., 2008; Križ & Skivenes, 2010; Msengi & Msengi, 2010; Bitew & Ferguson, 2011; Brown 2011; Rasmussen et al., 2012; Deng & Marlowe, 2013; Deng, 2016; Caglar & Schiller, 2018; Mugadza et al., 2020; Ikafa et al., 2022; Layefa et al., 2022). While three articles utilised a mixed methods (Renzaho et al., 2011) and secondary research approaches (Philips, 2011;



Piquet 2020) respectively, only three articles used quantitative design methods which involved the use of surveys (Renzaho & Vignjevic, 2011; Feliciano & Lanuza, 2017; Okocha et al., 2024). This indicates that despite the fact that available evidence may provide nuanced understanding of the African family and kinship system and its implications to social work practice with African migrants, generalisation challenges in the absence of quantifiable empirical evidence.

Studies were conducted in several countries with a majority focus on Australia (n=6). Other studies were conducted in Europe (n=5), North America (n=4), Africa (n=4), Oceania (n=1), and Asia (n=1).

Table 2: Study characteristics of selected studies

S/N	Author(s) and Year	Study Location	Study Aims	Study Design and Methodology	Key Findings	Conclusion
1	Mugadza et al., (2020)	Greater Western Sydney local government areas, Australia	To explore ways Sub-Saharan African migrant parents and caregivers handle parenting between their own culture and parenting culture of their new environment	Qualitative study: Focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews	Culture and collectivity as parenting is grounded in traditional values and their own childhood experiences; authoritative parenting styles - moulding good children is a collective responsibility; family functioning and relationships; and host context - perceptions of Australian parenting is at odds with their traditional family values and expectations	Child protection professionals should focus on developing culturally sensitive to engage effectively with migrant families; build trust through community engagement and community-based initiatives; and integrate culturally informed approaches within Australia's child welfare framework
2	Bitew and Ferguson (2011)	Australia – Ethiopia	To examine the impacts of cultural difference on the secondary school induction and learning experiences of Ethiopian-Australian immigrant students	Qualitative study using interviews	The study results showed some specific discriminatory forces related to cultural differences that contributed to, and inhibited, the students' learning when they relocated	Incorporate culturally responsive strategies and support systems to assist immigrant students navigate challenges to social integration



S/N	Author(s) and Year	Study Location	Study Aims	Study Design and Methodology	Key Findings	Conclusion
			living in Melbourne, Australia.		between countries and school systems.	
3	Brown (2011)	Namibia	To explore child fostering patterns across sub-Saharan African communities and the social, economic, and cultural factors shaping fostering decisions	Qualitative ethnographic study using interviews and participant observations	Childcare is a collective and communal responsibility as children typically move within and outside of large extended kinship networks. Works as a mechanism for resource distribution and child-rearing support	Focus on inclusive policies that support traditional fostering systems while ensuring children's welfare.
4	Renzaho et al., (2011)	Melbourne, Victoria, Australia	To examine how African migrants living in Melbourne, Victoria, Australia adapt their parenting styles in a new cultural setting and its impact on children's lifestyle behaviours.	Mixed- methods approach using surveys and focus group discussions	Cultural differences, changing family power dynamics and inter-societal conflicts posed huge challenge in parenting for African migrant families. Study also observed lifestyle- related concerns on account of significant changes in children's dietary habits and physical activity patterns	Intervention programmes intended to support the health and welfare of African migrant families in host communities should be culturally tailored and apply an acculturation lens that accommodate positive family structures and other socio- cultural determinants that shape their lives.
5	Msengi and Msengi (2010)	Midwestern university, USA	The study aimed to explore the beliefs of African international students who migrated with their families on child- rearing practices and challenges	Qualitative study using focus group discussions and semi- structured interviews	African international students reported faced challenges maintaining their cultural identity, adjusting to westernised parenting norms	Services and support systems should be culturally appropriate and tailored to the needs of African migrant families



S/N	Author(s) and Year	Study Location	Study Aims	Study Design and Methodology	Key Findings	Conclusion
			faced n their pursuit of higher education		and finding a balance between childcare and academic responsibilities. Financial difficulties, limited social support, peer pressure and prejudice were other challenges they faced while integrating into the host community	
6	Lamm et al., (2008)	Germany , Cameroon, and India	To explore whether parenting ethno-theories change with time and across different cultural settings	Qualitative study using in-depth interviews and observations	The study showed that parenting ethno- theories are not only intergenerational but also vary in their adaptations to changing cultural settings. Although there is a global trend towards western models of parenting, the rate of change differs across various cultural environments	Intervention programs seeking to improve the health and welfare of African migrant families should not only be culturally sensitive but also embrace traditional care- giving knowledge while adapting to current needs and expectations
7	Felicia no & Lanuza, (2017)	United States	To analyzing the educational trajectories of children of immigrants within the U.S. educational system	Quantitativ e using longitudinal survey data	The social class positions of immigrant parents are often higher in their home countries than in the US and their children achieve higher levels in education compared to White Americans whose parents were born in America. Thus, the reproduction of	Non-economic resources such as pre-migration educational and social backgrounds of immigrant parents (intergenerational educational mobility) play a key role in educational success and should be in the foreground of



S/N	Author(s) and Year	Study Location	Study Aims	Study Design and Methodology	Key Findings	Conclusion
					original class status is responsible for their educational success rather than extraordinary upward mobility.	future research and policy considerations
8	Çağlar & Schiller, (2018)	Mardin, Turkey; Manchester, New Hampshire; and Halle/Saale, Germany	To challenge dominant preconceptions that migrants exist on the society's periphery and are a threat to social cohesion	Qualitative study: comparative ethnographies	Immigrants participate actively towards urban regeneration and play multifaceted roles in city-making processes. Migrants navigate complex power structures, connecting local, regional, national, and global institutions.	Re-evaluate urban policies to not only recognize and support the contributions of migrants in urban revitalisation but to integrate them as key stakeholders into urban development planning.
9	Renzaho & Vignjevic (2011)	Australia	To investigate the impact of African Migrant Parenting Program in Australia on migrant and refugee families from Congo, Liberia, Burundi and Sierra Leone..	Quantitative study using pre- and post-intervention surveys	Although the African Migrant Parenting program enhanced parenting confidence, and improved knowledge of Australian parenting norms as well as communication between parents and children, inter-societal conflicts and cultural adaption posed significant challenges for African migrant parents	Prioritise continued support for migrant parents through culturally appropriate parenting programs and long-term community engagement strategies.
10	Piquet, (2020)	Europe	To examine the intricacies of European refugee crisis, particularly in terms of border	Case study using relevant policy documents, migration	Countries in Europe applied repressive border policies, increased securitization and	Policies on migration and asylum-seeking should reflect a more equitable



S/N	Author(s) and Year	Study Location	Study Aims	Study Design and Methodology	Key Findings	Conclusion
			control measures, containment strategies, and legal asymmetries.	data, and media reports on Europe's response to the crisis	truncated the rights of asylum seekers. Different refugee groups were treated differently based on nationality and political relevance.	asylum system that promotes human rights and ensure fair treatment to all irrespective of origin or race
11	Deng & Marlowe, (2013)	New Zealand	To examine the family dynamics, experiences and challenges of South Sudanese refugee parents adjusting to parenting in a new cultural and social context	Qualitative study using interviews	South Sudanese refugee parents and their families reported significant challenges adapting to new cultural expectations of parenting, child disciplinary norms, as well as economic and social integration challenges. The loss of traditional support systems exacerbated stress.	Embed culturally appropriate parenting support programs and policies that bridge traditional values and practices with host-country expectations. Greater community engagement and support networks are essential for successful engaging with African migrants
12	Layefa et al., (2022)	West Africa	To explore contemporary kinship systems and role-relationships in West African societies, with special focus on their evolving nature	Qualitative ethnographic study using interviews and observations of kinship networks	West African family and kinship systems are central to social organization. Although these systems are experiencing transformations as a result of migration, modernization, and economic factors, extended family relationships play integral roles in childcare, decision-making, and resource-sharing.	Advocate for policies that recognise and accommodate kinship-based social structures, particular in areas concerning inheritance, and family law in social welfare systems .
13	Križ &	Norway	To explore the	Qualitative	Child welfare	Enhance



S/N	Author(s) and Year	Study Location	Study Aims	Study Design and Methodology	Key Findings	Conclusion
	Skivenes, (2010)	and England	perception of child welfare workers concerning the challenges faced by minority parents in their respective countries.	study using semi-structured interviews	workers faced challenges balancing child protection with cultural sensitivity. Minority parents often lacked knowledge of social norms and legal frameworks, leading to misunderstandings and conflicts	efforts to help welfare workers incorporate cultural competency and better communication strategies to better support African migrant families
14	Deng, (2016)		To explore the perspectives of parents and young South-Sudanese Australians on parenting practices in the resettlement context, with special focus on the cultural influences, family changes during resettlement and the challenges associated with these changes	Qualitative study using focus group meetings and semi-structured interviews	South-Sudanese parents and their families faced significant challenges in the process of social integration. Parents experienced intergenerational conflicts and misunderstandings within families as they struggled to adapt traditional South Sudanese parenting practices to the Australian context; social integration is further hamstrung by changing power structures and gender roles within families, and lack of social support	Implement holistic family-parent-and-community approaches to address social integration challenges during resettlement and provide culturally appropriate support respect traditional practices while facilitating social integration
15	Philips , (2011)	Australia	To analyse the classification of Southern Sudanese refugees as "African-Australians" and the impact of such labelling on their	Content analysis of media, policy documents, and community narratives.	The representation of South Sudanese refugees as "African-Australian" misrepresents the diverse ethnic and cultural identities,	Prioritise social cohesion and a more nuanced representation of African migrant communities in media and policy.



S/N	Author(s) and Year	Study Location	Study Aims	Study Design and Methodology	Key Findings	Conclusion
			identity and integration.		resulting in stereotyping and social marginalization.	Focus on developing targeted support programs that recognise cultural diversity among African communities
16	Rasmussen et al., 2012	New York City, United States	To investigate disciplinary practices among West African immigrant parents and their interactions with child welfare authorities.	Qualitative study using in-depth semi-structured interviews	West African immigrant parents often employ traditional disciplinary practices (e.g., physical discipline) that are at odds with U.S. child welfare laws. Majority of African migrant parents felt misunderstood by authorities and feared intervention from social services.	Enhance efforts to educate African immigrant parents on acceptable disciplinary practices and prioritise culturally informed welfare practices while working with African immigrant communities cultural connections.
17	Okocha et al., (2024)	United States	To examine the relationship between infancy/toddlerhood's social network compositions and vocabulary development.	Quantitative study using observational and longitudinal assessments of infants and toddlers.	Compared to children with fewer close relationships, those with a greater number of close relationships (parents, caregivers, siblings) had larger vocabularies; Distributed models of child-rearing and social interaction play crucial roles in early child development	Focus interventions on strengthening social connections and networks through parental engagement and early childhood education programs to support childhood development
18	Ikafe et al., (2022)	Western Australia	To explore resettlement stressors affecting African migrants in Australia and the	Qualitative study using semi-structured interviews	Resettlement stressors faced by African migrants include discrimination,	Social work practices should incorporate a multilayered approach to



S/N	Author(s) and Year	Study Location	Study Aims	Study Design and Methodology	Key Findings	Conclusion
			coping mechanisms employed to manage the stress		cultural adjustment, and socioeconomic challenges. Familial support, community networks, and faith-based practices are vital support factors coping mechanisms used in managing resettlement stress .	support African migrants effectively. This includes recognizing the importance of community and faith-based support systems, providing culturally informed services, and addressing systemic barriers to facilitate cohesion and integration.

2. Themes

Four primary themes emerged from the data analysis: African family dynamics; migration and adaptation; child welfare and kinship systems; social work interventions; and cultural sensitivity.

African Family Dynamics

Nine papers reported that the African family as a diverse network of relations that goes beyond the simple nuclear family as is seen in the developed world (Lamm et al., 2008; Brown, 2011; Deng & Marlowe, 2013; Deng, 2016; Mugadza et al, 2019, 2020; Ikafa et al., 2022; Layefa et al., 2022; Okocha et al., 2024). These structures play a very essential social role in nurturing economic, political as well as social life within African societies (Deng & Marlowe, 2013). A critical look at the structure of the African kinship systems shows that they are not merely social relationships but are inextricably connected to the cultural, historical and economic contexts of African societies. The African family system is characterised by the extended family unit where families live together and are involved in social economic activities. Unlike the so-called nuclear family of the West where care-giving and financial responsibilities are confined to an exclusive family of procreating couples and their offspring, the African style of an extended family is a large network of people including grandparents, siblings, nieces/ nephews, cousins, and other related or even non-related kinsfolk known as ‘fictive kin’ (Layefa et al, 2022). The extended family system serves multiple functions: it offers social inclusion, helps in solving interpersonal conflicts and serves as a cushion during hard times of economic difficulties (Ikafa et



al., 2022). It is expected that all members of the family should work for the family's benefit, and success, and achievement are regarded as being in the interest of the entire family.

However, this system also has some built-in contradictions and drawbacks. On one hand, it fosters collective responsibility but on the other hand, it undermines individuality, especially the woman. Bitew and Ferguson (2011) reported that within the extended family system, women are likely to experience a takeover of most care-giving roles as the female work is supposedly to cater for both the nuclear as well as extended families. This burden is most especially felt among the rural folks since gender roles are strictly adhered to among this group of people. Furthermore, the pressure that successful family members should help the other less fortunate ones financially puts the family under more economic pressure and makes it a dependent unit (Mugazda et al., 2020). While it is a normal practice for people to rely on others for support due to cultural beliefs of reciprocity this can sometimes cause social stress especially when migrating in search of a better job. The other feature of African families is the practice of communal care-giving that is practiced in the community. In many African societies child-rearing is a communal affair where other persons besides biological parents bear the responsibility of rearing children (Brown, 2011; Mugadza et al., 2020; Layefa et al., 2022). Parents are assisted by grandparents, aunts, uncles and in some cases neighbours and this is due to the collectivism that is placed on children compared to the nuclear family model prevalent in the West. This communal care-giving model is premised on the rationale that the welfare of children is a common affair and the responsibility to raise the child is shared amongst the community members. This practice is also helpful in reducing the stress that comes with the responsibility of raising children and also helps to strengthen the social fabric of society.

Communal care-giving is not without controversies. The first of the critical issues is that there could be a conflict of roles and responsibilities of the various parties involved. In this case, when several family members can care for the child then it becomes hard to determine who has the final say in the matters regarding the child's welfare. This creates conflict since most of the caregivers may hold a different opinion on the way children should be raised and disciplined. In addition, the communal care-giving model may often lead to overburdening elderly family members especially the grandparents, who may be forced to adopt full-time care-giving despite their limited financial or physical capacity (Lamm et al., 2008). This becomes particularly an issue when there are economic challenges or people move from rural areas to urban areas or other countries in search of a better life leaving behind elderly parents to take care of young children. Another important discovery is the roles of elders in the African family systems. It is not only cultural assets that are preserved by the elders but, they are also important decision-makers within the family (Okocha et al., 2024). They use their age and experience and are involved in the settlement of issues, keeping togetherness of the family and major family decisions including marriage, inheritance, and resource control (Lamm et al., 2008). However, it is pertinent to note that there are conflicts associated with elders' position, despite it being a more favourable status. In this case, the elders' authority can perpetuate patriarchal systems and neglect the opinions of young family members especially



women who might have different experiences and the freedom to do as they please (Okocha et al., 2024).

Another type of family structure that still prevails in African families is polygamous families, especially in the West and East African countries (Al-Krenawi, 2020). Polygyny is where a man marries more than one woman and is recurrently presented in the African culture and context as a way of boosting family labour, wealth and status. Every wife usually has her own family and children but they are all under the husband's roof as a big family. Polygamy is beneficial in society and to the economy, especially for the agricultural communities where there is an increase in the labour force and there is also benefit from the formation of strong alliances between the families. But it also generates internal family dynamics which include a lot of tension. Makusha and Richter (2014) also reported that the family systems in Africa are also rooted in patriarchal systems which is also a key determinant of the family processes. It was also evident that in most African societies, men are the decision-makers in most of the households, including control of land and other resources, family welfare and issues (Makusha & Richter, 2014). The roles and responsibilities of women include managing the home and contributing towards the economic needs of the household through farming or trading but they have limited say in the matter. This pattern of differentiation is a reflection of how society constructs and defines male and female roles bearing in mind that men are associated with public power while women are expected to work within their homes (Bitew & Ferguson, 2011). Yet, this is not an equal playing field since there are variations across different regions. In such cultures as matrilineal, women dominate the family, especially in issues concerning inheritance and the extended family (Orazalin & Baydauletov, 2020). This variation also shows that there is great diversity of the African family structure and therefore generalization of the gender roles should not be encouraged.

Thus, the comparison of African and Western family models shows that the gaps are rather profound, especially if African people are faced with the nuclear family model which dominates in countries such as Australia. The nuclear family model that reduces the family to a cohabiting conjugal pair, an ideology of independence, and the centrality of the couple and their offspring is quite different from the family systems of Africa that are collectivist and intergenerational (Mugadza et al., 2020). In Australia too, it is expected that the care-giving responsibility is the responsibility of the parents which may be a problem for the African families who depend on the extended family system. Studies reported that tension between family models often poses a challenge in social work practice as the practitioner does not have adequate appreciation of the cultural importance of the African family practices hence practicing in a way that does not meet the family needs and expectations (Msengi & Msengi 2010; Križ & Skivenes, 2010; Deng & Marlowe, 2013).

Migration and Adaptation

Migration severely affects the structure of the African family as they adapt to the new culture, laws and economy in Australia. This means that one of the most significant consequences of migration is the disruption of the big family structures. According to the observation made by Adger et al., (2020), many African people live near their families and there is always communication and interdependence between



families. However, the migration process tends to split the families and separate parents and children from their other relatives hence the lack of support from the extended families. This fragmentation can be especially painful in child-rearing and household management without grandparents, aunts, uncles, or other relatives, which leads to more stress, loneliness, and economic strain (Vinke et al., 2020). Another important discovery is the change in the gender roles which has been interrupted. According to Bitew and Fergusson (2011), most cultures in African countries portray men as the head of the households and the role of sourcing for income and feeding the family is often assumed by the male members while women are expected to be homebound and responsible for child upbringing. However, the process of migration alters these traditional gender roles most of the time. The African women especially in refugee families may end up being the breadwinners since they will easily find employment even in the low-paying sectors like cleaning services since the language barrier, lack of education or racism will lock out the men from finding employment (Deng, 2016). This shift of roles brings about tension in the family since the men feel that their authority has been stripped of them and women feel empowered and financially independent (Renzaho et al., 2011; Deng, 2016).

This is also true in the migration process where intergenerational conflict is commonly witnessed among African families. The kids that grow up in Australia are brought up under the influence of Western culture and this is not the same as the traditional culture of their parents. This cultural difference is well observed in matters of education, gender and ethics of discipline. African parents, who expect their children to obey them and respect the elders, experience that their children are socialized to the Australian liberal culture of individualism and self-actualization (Rasmussen et al., 2012; Mugadza et al., 2020). This generational tension may foster conflicts because the parents think that they cannot control their children as they used to do (Rasmussen et al., 2012). The implications of the study also reveal a conflict between African cultural practices and Australian culture. As in any traditional African society, the responsibility of nurturing the young ones is that of the whole community with the immediate members of the family being the main caretakers of the children (Jha et al., 2018). Nevertheless, in Australia, the nuclear model of the family prevails, and most of the services in the social area are based on individualistic principles that child-rearing should be independent and self-sufficient. For instance, the act of referring a child to go and stay with relatives in another country or region which is common among African families may be regarded by the Australian social workers as abandonment or neglect hence necessitating intervention (Rasmussen et al., 2012).

It also impacts the role changes within the African families that are under consideration in the course of adaptation. Migration disrupts the family and traditional roles of women and men and the distribution of care-giving roles in the family as well. For instance, African women who used to be employed in domestic work in their countries may become wage earners while African men who were supposed to be the breadwinners may be assigned chores of taking care of the children. This reversal of roles is emancipating to women because it places them in charge of the family's financial aspect. However, it can bring conflict, especially for male individuals, who feel castrated because they cannot provide for the family (Renzaho



et al., 2011; Deng, 2016). This intergenerational conflict is more so because many African parents have little understanding of the Australian social systems, for instance, schools, child protection services and the legal system, which tends to diminish parental authority. For instance, African parents may punish their children through physical means which is acceptable in most African cultures but is considered child abuse in Australia (Rasmussen et al., 2012). Therefore, it may make African parents frustrated and feel that the Australian institutions are taking over their roles making them feel alienated.

Another problem for African families in Australia is that cultural norms regarding care-giving also pose difficulties. Care-giving roles in many African cultures are assumed by an extended family since the parents are usually at work with others like grandparents, aunts, uncles or relatives being involved in the upbringing of children (Brown, 2011; Layefa et al., 2022). However, Australian social services may presuppose that parents are the only caregivers and there can be little awareness of the role of other kinsfolk in child care. This can cause issues and disagreements between the African families and social workers; particularly when the members of the extended family come in to take care of the children but they are not given legal recognition or approval by the legal or social services agencies (Križ & Skivenes, 2010).

Child Welfare and Kinship Systems

The research findings suggest the importance of the kinship systems in child welfare cases of African families in Australia. As noted by Madden et al., (2016), the contemporary African family structures present care-giving as a collective family responsibility which involves not only parents, and children but also grandparents, aunts, uncles, and even fictive kin. This type of sharing care-giving is rooted in the African culture and is considered an important aspect of the family to keep the children safe from harm. However, this practice may pose difficulty when African families interact with the Australian child welfare system as most of it is based on the presumption of a parent as the primary caretaker. Among the findings, there are the extended family regarding child well-being cases. In many African cultures, once the parents are unable to care for the children due to factors such as; poverty, sickness or migration, the grandparents or other close relatives come in to take care of the children (Browning & Cruz, 2018). However, Australian child protection agencies may not understand the legitimacy of these care-giving arrangements especially if the caregivers are not the legal guardians of the child. This can culminate in scenarios whereby children are taken from their families and placed in foster care although other capable extended families could take care of them (Madden et al., 2016). The conflict between African caregiver's traditions and Australian child protection legislation is a common theme of the literature. As a traditional African family structure, childcare is considered to be a collective family affair where other relatives also have the responsibility of bringing up children (Lee et al., 2017). However, the policies on Child Welfare in Australia may tend to emphasise parental responsibility and may not have effective provisions for respecting and acknowledging the role of other carers such as extended family members.



Social Work Interventions

This study shows that the social work interventions with African families in Australia remain limited by cultural misinterpretation and the practitioners' incompetence (Philips, 2011). Most social workers in the field have been educated under the paradigms of individualism, independence and nuclear family orientation derived from the Western cultures and this poses a major challenge when dealing with African families whose values are anchored on collectiveness, large family networks and communal care-giving (Križ & Skivenes, 2010; Rasmussen et al., 2012). Such ignorance leads to the development of interventions, which do not address the needs and expectations of African families resulting in tension and distrust between them and the social workers (Browning & Cruz, 2018). One of the main concerns highlighted is that the nuclear family model dominates the social work practice. For example, owing to the Western family model social workers tend to concentrate largely on the parents and children they are working with and do not take into consideration other relatives who also play a significant role in the care and emotional support of the family or decision making (Renzaho & Vignjevic, 2011; Dominelli, 2015). This reductionism can lead to the omission of significant family members from decision-making processes regarding the well-being of children or the provision of support to families in which these people are vital for the family's functioning.

In child protection, for instance, social workers can take children away from their homes because the parents are neglecting them or abusing them, without investigating if the grandparents or other relatives could be taking care of the children. In African societies, there are trends where children are left with grandparents or other relatives when their natural parents are unable to take care of them (Adger et al., 2020). However, this practice might not be understood in the right sense by the Australian social workers and they may perceive it as if the children are neglected with no proper way of handling the family issues. Therefore, some children end up in foster care or taken away from their families when relatives who are ready to take care of the children are available (Dominelli, 2015). The results also stress the need to include cultural competence training in social workers' practice. The literature also presents many examples where cultural incompetence caused adverse or non-beneficial interventions (Adger et al., 2020). For instance, when African families practice communal care-giving practices, a social worker who lacks understanding of those practices may end up wading into the affairs of the family in a manner that causes more stress to the family (Ikafa et al., 2022). Cultural competence training may also assist social workers in acquiring adequate knowledge of the cultural norms and beliefs of African families for better practice.

The literature also cites successful approaches to social work intervention that have considered African family systems. In some cases, social workers have embraced culturally sensitive ways of performing their duties by including extended families in the decision-making processes as well as acknowledging their responsibilities in taking care of the patients (Adger et al., 2020). For instance, in the case of a Sudanese refugee family, the social workers were able to deal with the issue of cultural sensitivity by engaging the elders of the family when they were concerned themselves with the welfare of the children. Through acknowledging the elder's jurisdiction and the kinship care systems of the family, the social workers were able to



find a satisfactory middle ground that would allow the child to sustain their relation with their culture while at the same time allaying the child protection agency (Vinke et al., 2020).

Cultural Sensitivity

Several studies highlighted the need for cultural awareness during social work practice with African families and communities (Lamm et al., 2008; Msengi & Msengi, 2010; Bitew & Ferguson, 2011; Križ & Skivenes, 2010; Renzaho & Vignjevic, 2011; Rasmussen et al, 2012; Deng & Marlowe, 2013; Deng, 2016; Mugadza et al, 2019, 2020; Ikafa et al., 2022; Layefa et al., 2022;). The absence of cultural sensitivity has an impact on the communication and treatment of families as well as makes interventions ineffective. On the other hand, culturally competent practices provide a positive impact on African families by enhancing the results of the intervention since there is enhanced trust. Another theme that has been well discussed in the literature is the concern of the need to ensure that social workers have a good appreciation of the cultural beliefs and practices that African families hold. This includes acknowledging the significance of the family networks, communal care provision and elderly in decision-making and conflict-solving (Yilmaz et al., 2017). Those social workers who do not consider these cultural aspects may end up imposing European standards and expectations on African families and, therefore, provide services that do not fit the needs and cultural beliefs of the families. There is therefore need to incorporate cultural features in the interventions to enhance the experiences of African families. According to the studies reviewed, social workers have reported many cases where they managed to gain the trust and enter into better performing interventional cultural understandings of African families (Madden et al., 2016). For instance, those social workers who met community leaders and involved the extended family in decisions regarding the families' welfare were likely to offer a better solution to the families' problems (Browning & Cruz, 2018). The second result is the necessity of cultural competence for social workers, which compares with the first result. According to the literature, social workers who have been trained in cultural sensitivity are more capable of handling African families and offering culturally appropriate services (Madden et al., 2016). This training may assist social workers in gaining a better understanding of the culture of African families, the practice of caregiving and the cultural antecedents of these practices.

V. Discussion

The review aimed to explore African family and kinship system and its implications for social work practice with African families and communities in Australia. One of the key findings of the review was the importance of African family and social networks as support systems African for immigrant families in their struggle for social integration in Australia. These findings are consistent with studies of African family and kinship system involving various African migrant communities conducted in other Western societies (McEvoy, et al. 2005; Okocha & Janzen 2008; Mills 2014).

However, the values and beliefs of African family system has always resulted in tensions between the collectivistic nature of African family life and the



individualistic model adopted in most social work practices in Australia Migration has disrupted traditional kinship systems among many African immigrant groups leading to intergenerational conflicts, misunderstandings within families and challenges in care-giving practices of African immigrants in Australia. Many African family values and expectations conflict with the social work system because while communal and collective responsibility is at the core of the African family structure, the social work system is built on an individualistic framework. Deng and Marlowe (2013) observed that African families' collectivist care-giving practices are often at odds with the individualistic, nuclear-family-oriented welfare systems in Australia, directly effecting the integration and well-being of African immigrant families. This structural misalignment impacts what social workers can or cannot see and how they can or cannot intervene in African families, producing both problems and possibilities for culturally sophisticated practice. Family caring, decision making and conflict-solving in African societies are rooted in the collectivist orientation of families. This collectivism is not well understood by social workers in the study and as a result, the interventions they propose tend to disconnect parents from their extended families. While European families consider the nuclear family as the appropriate family structure where children are cared for by close family members, African families believe in the extended family system where care-giving responsibilities are shared among many relatives. Unfortunately, most of the social work interventions which target the nuclear family erode the above support structures often in a manner that is not intentional, (Browning & Cruz, 2018). This finding emphasises the importance of social workers to enhance their awareness of the various forms of African immigrant families.

Adding to this is the fact that elders play a central position in African families, a concept, which is not well captured in the Western models of social work intervention. Elders who are the guardians of cultures and the primary decision-makers on most family issues especially those concerning the young and the weak play pivotal roles in child-rearing, care-giving, as well as solving family disputes (Vinke et al., 2020). Thus, any social work practices that seek to empower parents by denying the authority of elders will end up excluding some of the most important decision-makers in African families. This not only means that families' messages are often misunderstood or at least partially misunderstood, but also that cultural respect which is paid to elderly people is being undermined; all these aspects make other challenges of social work with families even more complex. Gender roles in African families also demonstrate other cultural challenges that the social workers come across. This means that traditional African families hold the man as the head of the family and the women are expected to take care of the children. These roles are interfered with by migration, since as seen, most African women in Australia take up the role of breadwinners since they are accorded better employment prospects as compared to the men (Rasmussen et al, 2012). Such change in gender roles within families results in stress or conflict because the men are unable to accept the loss of their dominance while the women are demanding freedom. These shifts need to be understood by social workers with cultural awareness of the possibilities for power that these changes pose and the possibilities for oppression as well. If the changes in the roles are not fully understood in culture, the interventions made may also worsen the family instead of improving it.



The study identifies significant structural and functional disparities between the African and the Australian families which present a major difficulty for social work practice. The African family system is collectivistic and intergenerational in stark contrast with the Australian families which are more individualistic nuclear families. Tying into these findings, this comparative analysis reveals how these differences work to question social work practices in contexts like caregiving, child protection, and family support. Perhaps the most obvious factor is the collectivist concept of caring for the elderly in African societies. In an African setting, child care is provided by several relatives including grandparents, aunts, uncles and other related members of the family or not related at all (Brown, 2011). This communal caregiving model is a key feature of the cultural belief in the family's interdependence and shared responsibility for child care. Still, this strategy is rather contrary to the general principles of Australian social work, assuming that the role of caring belongs to the parents and is based on the nuclear family model. Social workers educated in the Western mode of family systems may have a wrong perception of the role of the extended family especially when relatives are involved in the care of children where such may be perceived as neglect or abandonment (Creswell & Poth, 2017). This cultural difference can make interventions that disintegrate African families by taking away the children from their families and putting them into foster care even when the extended families are willing and able to take care of them.

The study outlines some important concerns that social workers encounter while working with African immigrant families. Prominent among such issues is the conflict of cultures in terms of the roles of the family in providing care. The collectivist approach to the African family caregiving system which is extended family caregiving contradicts the individualistic Australian welfare structures which mainly focus on the nuclear family. This inter-societal conflicts cause African families and social workers to have conflict of some sort especially when other members of the extended family are willing to take the caregiver role but are not recognized by the social services department (Križ & Skivenes, 2010). Hence, social workers who do not understand the cultural meanings of care extended by families may end up causing a breakdown of the care structure by removing children from their parents or neglecting elderly relatives. The other major concern is the change of roles of women in African families after migration to other countries. As the research shows, African women get more involved in the family's breadwinning since they have better chances of finding a job as compared to men (Al-Krenawi, 2020). This tends to cause conflict within the family since the men are stripped of their dominant power and the women on the other hand are given power. These shifts present social workers with a double-edged sword on the one hand promoting women's rights, on the other hand, the changing culture of families. Any attempts made within those interventions that do not take into consideration cultural aspects of those gender roles may contribute to the worsening of family conflict and hinder the process of women's empowerment within the family.

VI. Conclusion and Implications

In recent times, Australia has witnessed an influx of African immigrants and their families. In Australia, social work policy and practice, especially those that deal



with child protection and welfare services are deeply rooted in the individualistic principles and values. Parenting and childrearing in African families is a communal responsibility and parenting is often facilitated through non-governmental institutions. In contrast, Australia's child protection system is characterised by interventions and preventive approaches backed in law and policy. With regards to working with African families, it is imperative for social workers in Australia to have a common understanding and respect for the socio-cultural dynamics that shape parenting, family functioning and acculturation of African migrants. The review stresses the need for culturally sensitive social work practices that recognize and respect African kinship traditions. It challenges the dominance of Western individualistic frameworks in social work and calls for inclusive strategies that accommodate the care-giving and family structures of African immigrant communities. Enhancing cultural awareness in social work can lead to better integration outcomes for African families in Australia.

2. Recommendations

Based on the challenges found in this study, several practical recommendations have been offered to social work practitioners in Australia. These recommendations are intended to make cultural competence better and make it so social work interventions are more relevant to the lives of African families.

- Training of Social Workers Engaging African Immigrant Families; Another recommendation that the study revealed is that there is a need to ensure that cultural competence training is provided for social workers who are working with African immigrant families.
- Establish interventions that acknowledge the core value of kinship and extended family structures within the African community.
- Promote a more nuanced cultural understanding of African Family and kinship structures for Policy Development: There is a need to promote policies that will accommodate the cultural nature of African families for the social work practice to reflect on the cultural aspect.
- Encourage Community-Oriented Social Work Practice: The last advocacy is the encouragement of community-based social work practice which will help in the use of social capital by African community leaders.

3. Suggestions for Future Research

- Investigate the long-term adaptation of African immigrant families to Australian social systems.
- Examine policy changes that could bridge the gap between collectivist African care-giving practices and Australia's welfare models.
- Conduct comparative studies on social work practices in different multicultural contexts to identify best practices for culturally competent interventions.

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