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### When Crayons Meet Tibetan Living Room Walls: Early Childhood in Exile

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# **When Crayons Meet Tibetan Living Room Walls: Early Childhood in Exile**

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Asia, Nepal, Mustang and Pokhara

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## Abstract:

This study aims to understand early childhood caregiving among Tibetan refugees living in Nepal. Due to the brain's enormous developmental plasticity from ages zero to three, children's experiences during this period are extremely important to explaining their future learnings in school, interactions with people, and engagements with their surroundings. Through interviews and observations, Tibetan parents shared their conceptions of early childhood, parent-child interaction norms, dreams for their children, and how their status as refugees in Nepal affects these. Research was conducted in two Pokhara district Tibetan settlements and one settlement in Mustang. Connected by the flow of children and adults for purposes of school and work, and under the guise of limited refugee status, conducting research in these places allowed for exploration of the ways that geographical and political contexts influence parents and children's experiences of early childhood parenting. The results indicated that investments in policy level improvements, and in boosting caregiver capacities to stimulate their child's early learning would be beneficial to meeting caregivers goals for their children's futures.

## Acknowledgements:

As I've learned from the Buddhist tradition, all phenomena connects and relies on each other; nothing is truly independent. This sentiment could not have been more true in the case of this project. I would like to thank several people for their support through the planning for and execution of this project, without them it would not have been possible. First I would like to thank Isabelle Onians, Hubert Decler, Patricia Owens, Nyima Dorjee, and Rinzi from SIT for their invaluable support throughout the entire project planning process. A special thank you to Nazneen Zafar for connecting me with Nepal's finest early childhood experts, and for her 24/7 email support in project concept planning and writing. Another big thank you to Dongaa (Dolkhar) Lhamo for her invaluable support in connecting me with the Snow Lion Foundation, and with homestay families and co-researchers throughout Pokhara and Mustang.

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\*Cover Photo Image: Child reading story books in kindergarten classroom (Tashi Palkhiel)

(All photos were shot by the author unless otherwise specified.)

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. *Life in Exile*

### 1.1.1. *Fleeing Tibet, Chinese Power, and Tibetan Refugees in Nepal*

In 1951 Chinese military forces occupied Lhasa, the capital city, of Tibet and assumed a tight hold over the country through, “systematic destruction of monasteries, the suppression of religion, denial of political freedom, widespread arrest, imprisonment and massacre of men, women, and children.” (Central Tibetan Administration, 2019) Due to the extremely dangerous conditions and brutal Chinese retaliation following the Tibetan National Uprising in 1959, His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama fled to India. Especially from this point on, Chinese forces dissolved Tibetans human rights and obtained a political and military strong hold over the country (Avedon, 1997). Free Tibet reports that over one million Tibetans have died as a result of China’s occupation, a toll much higher than that in some of the world’s most widely known genocides. Due to the severity of the conditions in Tibet, a huge number of Tibetans took extremely dangerous journeys across the Himalayan mountains into Nepal to escape Chinese oppression (Dolma, Singh, Lohfeld, Orbinski, & Mills, 2006).

The Central Tibetan Administration reports that there are now over 150,000 Tibetan refugees living in exile. Though 1959 marked the largest movement of Tibetans into Nepal (I. Lidell, personal communication, February 12, 2019), up until 2008 an average of 2,200 continued to cross the Tibet- Nepal border per year (Human Rights Watch, 2014).

The political situation intensified after the March 2008 uprisings, when unrest reached a high among Tibetans inside Tibet and outside in places like Nepal. Responding to Tibetans expressions against the Chinese government and in support of Tibet’s freedom through protest and self immolation, the Chinese government exercised more control over Tibetans living in and outside of Tibet. Through financial incentives the Chinese government was able to gain the cooperation of the Nepal government to control anti-Chinese sentiments. Doing so through intensified border security, surveillance, and other means (I. Lidell, personal communication, February 12, 2019). For Tibetans living in Nepal this meant that there were more intensive restriction placed on their freedoms as refugees. In practice, this means that Tibetans living in Nepal are restricted from exercising freedom of speech against China or pro-Tibet. Tibetans must also be careful not to organize around culturally Tibetan events, such as His Holiness’ birthday, as this may be perceived as an act of anti-Chinese government sentiment.

The Nepal government does not offer Tibetans refugees identity documentation or a path to citizenship. Though the Nepalese government initially administered identity documentation to Tibetan refugees through Refugee Identity Cards, they stopped doing so in 1994 due to powerful Chinese manipulative efforts (I. Lidell, personal communication, February 12, 2019). From 1994 on, and certainly due to increasing Chinese pressures, the Nepal government has not administered any formal identity documentation to Tibetans or offered a path to citizenship.



Due to their lack of documentation, Tibetans living in Nepal are extremely restricted in their rights as refugees. Tibetan refugees are not able to work in the public sector, own business or property, experience safety from deportation to Tibet, travel outside of the country or access higher education opportunities (I. Lidell, personal communication, February 12, 2019). Though their rights are still not ideal in India, the Indian government does provide Tibetans with Registration Certificates and Identity Cards that provide Tibetans with documentation, and enable them to travel outside of the country, though not especially easily. It is safe to conclude that Tibetans are not granted the rights and freedoms that globally-accepted documents, such as the UN Refugee Convention, assert that they should.

### ***1.1.2. Central Tibetan Administration, Snowlion Foundation, and Education***

Founded in 1959, the Central Tibetan Administration is the primary governing force on all things related to Tibetans living in exile. The CTA is lead by His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama and a democratically elected parliament. In collaboration and through the financial support of international nonprofits, the CTA is the primary force responsible for collaborating with Nepali and Indian governments to enable Tibetans to access homes, education, health care, etc. Shortly after Tibetans escaped Tibet, the CTA created the Department of Home to manage the resettlement of Tibetans into communities with the facilities to meet their basic needs, and to develop sources of livelihood (Department of Home, 2015). With support from and in collaboration with global organizations such as the Red Cross and Swiss Association for Technical Assistance, 12 settlements were established in Nepal.

The Swiss Association for Technical Assistance established the Snowlion Foundation in 1972 to care for issues of education and health in Nepal. Funded by the CTA's Department of Education, as well as private donors and foundations, the Snowlion Foundation operates and looks after Tibetan schools in Nepal (Snow Lion Foundation, 2019). Though there are a few Tibetan high schools in Nepal, there are many more in India administered through the Tibetan Children's Village. Tibetan children from Nepal often attend high school in India.

Tibetan children must attend school from ages 6 to 16, and are granted the right to tuition free education through grade 10 (Basic Education Policy for Tibetans in Exile). Sponsorships and scholarships from various international organizations are critical in financially supporting Tibetan children's education after then.

The schools are operate in accordance with the, "Basic Education Policy for Tibetans in Exile" document which details what education should achieve for Tibetans in exile. The document describes the role of education for young Tibetans, detailing how schools approach education at large. The document declares that:

“The general purpose of education is to awaken and develop the human qualities of wisdom, loving kindness and compassion; their dependent virtues of right view and conduct; and the art of creativity and innovation.

## *1.2. Global Discussion on Early Childhood*

### *1.2.1. First 1,000 Days*

Slowly but surely, government officials, policy makers, educators, caregivers, and the general population are gaining awareness of the huge importance of early childhood. To understand why early childhood is so important, one must first understand the basics of early development. The Harvard Center on the Developing Child's informative website and documents explain this basic information in terms to be accessible to all.<sup>1</sup> The first important concept that the center lays out is that the brain develops most rapidly from ages zero to three, the first 1,000 days of a child's life. During their early years, children make more than 1 million new neural connections per second. This is a time of life where children's brains are highly plastic, meaning that they are able to change and learn quite easily. After this time of prolific growth, children's minds decrease in plasticity. At this time, children's most frequently utilized neural connections solidify, and those that are less used are "pruned" or cleaned out from the brain. These solidified neural connections form the foundational pathways through which children think, learn, interact with others, and experience the world. Of course, humans continue to learn new things, grow, and change throughout their lifetimes, but it becomes more challenging for these development to happen at less malleable stages of life.

Children's early experiences, whether good or bad, determine this early development. As the Harvard Center on the Developing Child explains, "Genes provide the basic blueprint, but experiences influence how or whether genes are expressed." To put it clearly, children's experiences during early childhood are incredibly important in optimizing this foundational development. Studies suggest that these experiences not only predict a child's later emotional and social wellness, but also their ability to do well in school, with implications for their experiences across their lifetime.

How caregivers nurture and care for their children is among the most important factors in optimizing early development (Phillips & Shonkoff, 2000, page 225). The best things parents can do to enable healthy early development is show their children love, care, and warmth. Even before their children start to talk, parents can enable their children's optimized development through responding to their cues, be it a smile, coo, or cry (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000, page 244). "Serve and Return" interaction where parents and children communicate back and forth through gesturing, smiling, talking, singing, laughing, and playing is incredibly beneficial to this early development (Harvard Center for the Developing Child). By engaging with their children in these ways, parents stimulate their children's young brains and enable early learning to happen.

One of the biggest threats to optimal early development are children's experiences of toxic stress. Repeated experiences of adversity such as parental neglect, abuse, violence, and unresponsive parenting (such as that rooted in maternal depression) become toxic when they are

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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this paper, unless otherwise cited, information about the basic components of early development are from the Harvard Center on the Developing Child.

experienced chronically and without the protective buffer of a nurturing caregiver. When children experience challenges and moderate stress with the support of a protective buffer, such as a loving and nurturing caregiver, their bodies are able to handle these experiences. Without protective buffers, toxic stress can negatively and harmfully affect a child’s developing stress response systems, which has long-term implications for their social and academic abilities, as well as health and wellness (Shonkoff, 2012).

### ***1.2.2. World Health Organization’s Nurturing Care Framework***

The Nurturing Care Framework is a lens through which one can conceptualize the critical components of healthy early childhood development. The framework helps in explaining how caregivers’ larger context enables or challenges their capacity to optimize their child’s brain development through early caregiving. Created by the World Health organization in 2018, the framework asserts that caregiver’s interactions with their children inevitably exist within political, social, and cultural contexts that either support parents in using nurturing care or make it quite difficult to do so. The framework identifies good health, adequate nutrition, opportunities for early learning, security and safety, and responsive caregiving as the key components that together comprise nurturing care and enable children to experience optimized development during their first 1,000 days of life.

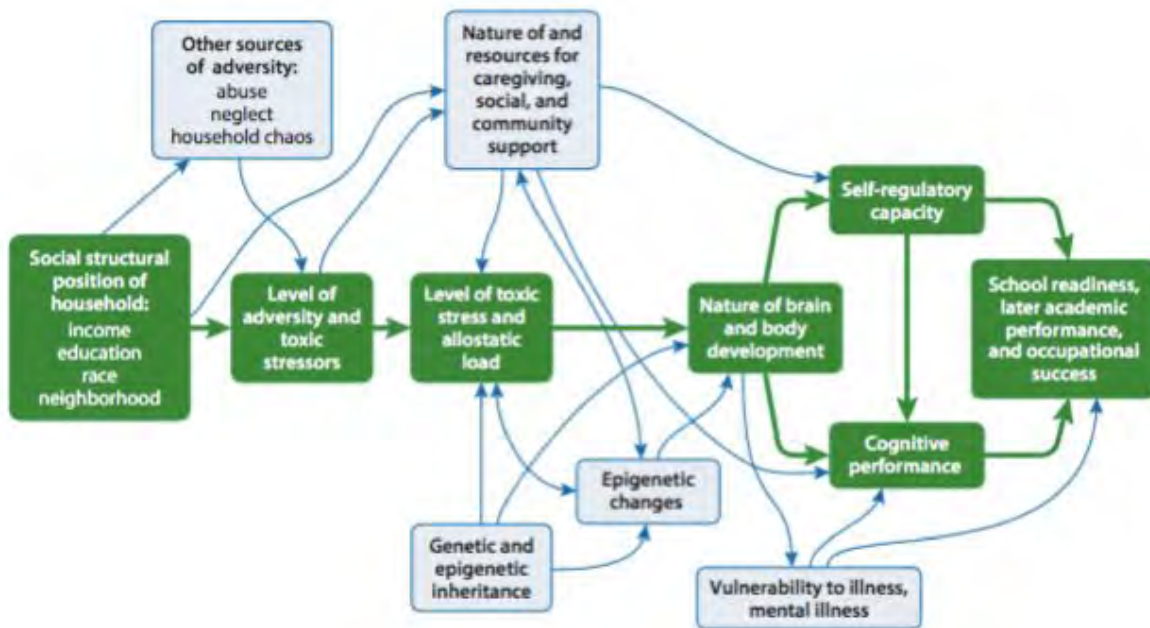


The Nurturing Care Framework debunks the common narrative that parents alone are to blame for how their children “turn out.” The illustration above shows that, although the caregivers’ capacity to provide the foundational components of nurturing care is certainly important, so is the community in which they live, the services they have access to, and the overarching policies in the places where they live. The framework takes the impetus off of caregivers and onto the larger environments in which they raise their children.

### ***1.2.3. Life Course Development***

Though there are always unexplained components of human development, research, albeit primarily in American and European contexts, suggests that early child development plays a key role in explaining life course development and the perpetuation of social inequalities. The below model created by American scholars McEwen and McEwen suggests that the influx of various experiential and genetic factors interacts with a child’s initial social position to

eventually determine a child’s preparedness for school, performance within school, and later occupational achievement (2017). The model suggests how influxes like the, “nature of and resources for caregiving, social, and community support,” determine how these initial social positions come to explain an adult’s occupational success. One might go so far as to draw a line from the final green box detailing occupational success back to the initial social structural box to explain how the individual’s occupational success goes on to, again, explain their social structural position in the world. In the case of America, a child’s disadvantaged social structural positions at birth might determine their life trajectory when caregivers do not live within contexts with child-development supportive policies, services, and communities that enable their use of nurturing care.



This model is just one example of the ways that a child’s early experiences can mediate and influence their progression through school and beyond. Upon understanding this reality, one can see how, from a social justice perspective, it becomes quite important that societies recognize how they can invest in early childhood. Through improving relevant policies, creating access to supportive services, empowering strong communities, and educating caregivers, investments to early childhood can mediate the long-term implications of a child’s initial, perhaps challenging, social position.

### 1.3. The Current Study

In America, suboptimal early child development is a missing link between the actualization of personal, social justice related, and society-level goals. In America, parents often dream for their children to be happy, get a good education, and achieve the American dream of social mobility. A host of social, economic, and racial factors prevalent due to the larger

political, and community-level realities of a place, as well as a lack of access to supportive services can make actualization of these dream quite challenging, at times nearly impossible. Beyond these larger contextual factors caregivers themselves have varying degrees of early childhood related knowledge and care capability.

Investing in early childhood, be it through providing caregiver's access to courses about early childhood development, improving the quantity and quality of supportive services such as preschools and playgroups in the community, or working to change policies affecting parents and children, seems an effective means to mediate the persistent effects of social position. Not to mention, investing in early childhood can lead to economic benefits at a societal level.<sup>2</sup>

With all of this said, it is important to note that the social, political, personal, and contextual factors that interact to rationalize how American society would benefit from investments in early childhood areas are contained to this specific environment alone. Aside from a text that details Tibetan cultural parenting, no literature exists on the interaction of these factors for Tibetans living in exile in Nepal.

This study aims to piece together the ways that Tibetan refugee parents in Nepal conceptualize early childhood, interact with their young children during the critical first 1,000 days of their lives, and dream for their children's futures despite their geo-politically restricted identities. To gain an understanding of the ways that these factors change or remain the same across communities, the study will explore the following questions within both urban and mountainous places:

- 1. How do Tibetan parents conceptualize the early childhood period from ages zero to three?**
- 2. What are the interaction norms between young children and their parents?**
- 3. What are parents dreams for their children's futures, and how does Tibetan refugee status affect these?**

## **2. Methodology**

### *2.1. Study Setting*

Tserok (also called "Namgyaling Tibetan Settlement," "Chhario," or "Chairok") was established in 1962 by the Central Tibetan Administration, and is home to less than 100 individuals. Tserok is situated in the Dhawalagiri region of the Annapurna conservation area in lower Mustang, Nepal. It is the only Tibetan settlement in the Northwestern Himalayan region, and one of just four in the Northern, mountainous Himalayan region (Frechette, 2002). The majority of families in Tserok make their livelihood through agriculture, labor jobs, and by

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<sup>2</sup> High quality education for 0-5 year old children have been shown to result in a 13% return on investment (Garcia, Leaf, Heckman, Prados, 2017).

selling souvenirs in nearby villages. A small portion of the population works at the settlement office, clinic, and school.

Approximately 18 kilometers (11 miles) from Tserok, Kagbeni is one of the most Northern villages in lower Mustang. It is primarily home to those with Nepali citizenship status, though a handful of Tibetans also live and work in Kagbeni selling souvenirs. Kagbeni is on the path many trekkers take to reach Jomsom, the nearby bus and plane transportation hub, after completing their trek on the popular Annapurna Circuit (APC). Thus, Kagbeni has many guesthouses and a small collection of souvenir shops.

Tashi Palkhiel is one of the four Tibetan settlements in Pokhara, the second major city in Nepal (second to Kathmandu). Home to about 600 people and established in 1962, the Red Cross and Swiss Association for Technical Assistance were instrumental in its formation (K. Sopa, personal communication, April 23, 2019). Many families in Tashi Palkhiel sell souvenirs to tourists in the camp itself, at the nearby hillside trekker host spots, and at the popular Pokhara lakeside. Some are also employed at the local Rasilo Juice Factory. A small collection also run small restaurants and convenience stores, or have jobs at the camp's administrative office, clinic, or school.

Tashiling is another Tibetan Settlement in Pokhara, initially established by the United Nation High Commission for Refugees as a temporary camp for refugees fleeing Tibet in the early 1960s (Central Tibetan Administration, 2019). About 12 kilometers (7.5 miles) from Tashi Palkhiel, Tashiling is home to about 500 Tibetans. Aside from selling souvenirs, individuals in the community most commonly run small businesses. A small collection also work as teachers, clinic staff, and for the settlement administration.



**Image 1: Map of Nepal, red circles outline the primary study settings.**

## 2.2. *Sample*

30 caregivers participated in this study (n=30). Participants included seven caregivers from Tserok (n=7), two from Kagbeni (n=2), eight from Tashiling (n=8), and thirteen from Tashi Palkhiel (n=13). Of the caregivers who participated in this study, most had three and four year old children, though the youngest was 10 months and the oldest was seven years. Of the 30 participants, 93.33% had (or, in the case of grandparents, cared for) one or two children (14 had one child, 14 had two children, 1 had three child, and 1 had four children). In all but one case participants were politically Tibetan, meaning that they did not have Nepali citizenship. One participating mother from Tashiling had married a Nepali man and gained citizenship this way.

Of the caregivers in Tserok (n=7) two participants were grandmothers (n=2), four were fathers (n=4), and two were mothers (n=2). In one case, a father and grandmother from the same family participated. The mean age of the participating caregivers' youngest child was 3.57 years old (42.84 months) (range- 3 years to 4 years old), and 57% of these children were girls.

In Kagbeni, one caregiver was a father (n=1) and the other a mother (n=1), both of whose children were currently under the care of their spouses in Tserok who were also parent participants. The mean age of their children was 3.5 years old (range- 3 to 4 years) and 1 of the children was a girl.

In Tashiling, of the participants (n=8) one was a grandmother (n=1), five were mothers (n=5), and two were fathers (n=2). As was the case in Tserok, two members from the same family participated (mother and grandmother). The mean age of the participating caregivers' youngest child was 4.09 years (49.14 months) old (range- 18 months to 7 years old) and 28.6% of these children were girls.

Of the Tashi Palkhiel participants (n=13), three caregivers were fathers (n=3), six were mothers (n=6), two were grandfathers (n=2), and two were grandmothers (n=2). In Tashi Palkhiel, two couples from the same families participated (a grandfather and grandmother couple and a mother and father couple). The mean age of the participating caregivers' youngest child was 3.10 years (37.20 months) old (range- 10 months to 5 years) and 54.5% of the children were girls.

To protect participants identities, researchers refer to them using pseudonyms for the purpose of this paper. Given the number of caregivers who were grandparents, for the purposes of this paper, parents and grandparents will both be referred to as "parents"

## 2.3. *Interviews*

Researchers utilized SIT Institutional Review Board processes to ensure that they obtained proper informed consent prior to conducting interviews and observational sessions with caregivers. Interviews were typically conducted in participants' homes and took 45 minutes to one hour. The author and a co-researcher often both participated in the interview together and, as

needed, the co-researcher asked the questions in Tibetan and translated the participants' responses to English for the author to understand. See Appendix for a complete list of the interview questions.

#### *2.4. Observation*

Researchers also collected observational data of parent-child interaction in public spaces, during interviews with parents, and, in a few cases, obtained parental consent for longer term observation in addition to the interview period itself.

#### *2.5. Additional Primary Sources*

Aside from their primary focus on conducting interviews and observation of parents and their young children, researchers also conducted interviews with local community leaders (such as school headmasters, teachers, and settlement leaders) to learn more about the conditions of parents and children in their communities. Researchers also spent time observing the school and classroom environments to provide context for the experiences young children have at nursery and kindergarten. In the special case of Tashiling, the researchers conducted additional interviews with SOS Children's Village staff.

To protect their identities, researchers refer to teachers from the schools and SOS Children's Village mothers using pseudonyms in this paper. The researchers refer to settlement leaders, headmasters, and SOS Children's Village administrative staff by name due to their positions of leadership in the communities.

### **3. Results**

#### *3.1. Early Childhood in Context: Mustang and Pokhara*

##### *3.1.1. Tserok, Mustang*

Tserok is nestled at about 2,650 meters (8,695 feet) nearby the Kali Gandaki River and a 20 minute walk south from Marpha. The area is home to apple and apricot orchards; Marpha is particularly well known for prolific apple harvests and production. Making it from Pokhara to Tserok is nothing short of a journey. Travel 13 hours from Pokhara on the F042 road, and longer if you're unlucky with road construction, walk across a short bridge, about 10 minutes through apple and vegetable farm land, and you've made it. Look up in any direction to find looming hillsides and high mountain peaks. Bob Ankerson, Vice President of the Tibet Fund, described that of all of the Tibetan settlements' terrain, Tserok's reminds him most of that in Tibet (B. Ankerson, personal communication, April 13, 2019).

Founded in 1962 by the Central Tibetan Administration, Tserok is home to a dwindling population. Dakpa Richoe, the headmaster of 21 years at Shree Saraswati English School,



reported that only about 80-90 of the total 223 residents were currently living there, marking the large collection of children and young adults who were living outside of the camp for school and employment opportunity. Dhakpa explained that these days people are unlikely to return to Tserok after attending high school because of the lack of job opportunities and access to facilities.



**Image 2: Tserok Tibetan Settlement, Mustang, Nepal.**  
**Photo courtesy of Dhakpa Richoe.**

Tserok's Shree Saraswati School is small, currently educating just 29 children, only 14 of whom are Tibetan. The others are Nepali students primarily from the Buddhist, Thakali caste.<sup>3</sup> The school is operated by the Snow Lion Foundation, and employs four teachers, including Dhakpa, who is both headmaster and teacher.

Of those living in Tserok, economic opportunities are sparse. Several families engage in agricultural pursuits, mainly harvesting apricots and apples. Others do temporary labor jobs such as home construction in the settlement or nearby. In the majority of families, however, either father or mother will commute to or live in a nearby village to sell souvenirs or to do other work such as teaching. In fact, this was the case for six of the seven families from Tserok who participated in this study. Those selling souvenirs either commute to Marpha or live in Jomsom or Kagbeni.<sup>4</sup> Many families spoke to the unfortunate reality that their shops were not very profitable these days since tourists can find similar products in Kathmandu when they first arrive to Nepal.

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<sup>3</sup> Since Thakali parents traditionally send their middle children to become monks or nuns, many enroll their child(ren) at Shree Saraswati so they can learn Tibetan language, necessary for monastic pursuits (D. Richoe, personal communication, April 15, 2019).

<sup>4</sup> These villages are hubs for trekkers.

The trans-locational trend of Tibetans raising less children combined with the small number of young Tibetans returning to start families due to the poor economic opportunities means that Shree Saraswati School is likely to close within the next five years. In fact, the collection of nine three and four year olds in the camp now is likely to be the last cohort of children going through the school.

On the experience of living there, stay-at-home dad Tashi spoke earnestly about the challenge of raising a family in Tserok, in comparison to a place like Kathmandu. Having grown up in a more urban context he described that the conditions of day to day life were challenging due to the extremes of the environment such as using frigidly cold water to wash clothes. He also explained that there isn't much to do in the area; Tserok doesn't have facilities like those available in urban contexts.

After their school day children could be found wandering, running, and skipping through the settlement. The village holds a feeling of strong community among its small number of residents, noticeable when adults offer their neighbor's children packaged sweets, and in the moments when you hear children yelling through their friend's window, "come out to play!" When gathering to pray for a resident's one year death anniversary, almost the entire community came together in the community hall. Children ran in and out of the space as they pleased, playing amongst the sound of their elder's prayers and outside in independence when they wanted.

### ***3.1.2. Kagbeni, Mustang***

Travel about 18 kilometers further North along the F024 road to arrive at Kagbeni, situated at 2,804 meters (9,200 feet). On a clear, sunny day, you can look both North and South to see prolific snowy mountains towering in the distance. Kagbeni is home to Buddhist and Hindu sacred sites such as the Kag Chode Thupten Samphel Ling Monastery.<sup>5</sup> The northern part of the village feels like a maze to a foreigner, old, multistory, stone homes and cattle shelters fill the area. In the Southern area, a plethora of guest houses advertising hot showers and wifi welcome Annapurna Circuit trekkers.<sup>6</sup>

Kagbeni is one of several tourist-oriented villages in Mustang and an ideal place for Tibetans from Tserok to sell souvenirs. Two of the spouses of individuals in Tserok lived in Kagbeni, selling souvenirs from their small shops to provide for their families back in the settlement. We interviewed these individuals to shed a light on their experience of living away from home to make money for the family, an experience shared by many in Tserok. The very small population of Tibetans living in Kagbeni (four) is indicative of the fact that Tibetan people most always live together, in community with other Tibetans. Pasang, one of the two

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<sup>5</sup> The original monastery is still standing today, built in 1429.

<sup>6</sup> The Annapurna Circuit, traveled by 22,000 foreigners in 2017, is one of the most popular treks in Nepal (Gurung, 2017). Though the full circuit is much longer, many trekkers complete their journeys in Muktinath, the first village after crossing the Torong Pass and just North of Kagbeni, or in Jomsom, the region's transportation hub directly South of Kagbeni.

participating parents, explained that since she was one of ten children her parents chose to live in Kagebni over Tserok because in Tserok they would have had to live in a small, cramped home.



**Image 3: Mountain views from Kagbeni**

### ***3.1.3. Tashiling, Pokhara District***

Tashiling is one of four Tibetan settlements in Pokhara. When you turn off of Siddhartha Rajmarg road, Tibetan restaurants lining both sides of the street indicate your arrival. Initially established in the early 1960s as a temporary settlement for those fleeing Tibet, Tashiling is now home to around 500 individuals. The CTA-constructed homes are arranged in rows, with grassy areas connecting one segment of linearly situated homes to another. The Shri Gaden Dhargyaling Monastery and medical clinic sit not far from one another, the two largest buildings in the community. From the settlement you can see the beautiful Pardi Khola River and lush green hills in all directions. A short walk from the settlement are small plots of Nepali-owned farm land and Devi's Fall.<sup>7</sup> Though cows roam the grassy fields, Tashiling is situated close within Pokhara District; Tashiling feels more urban than not.

The settlement is home to the SOS Hermann Geminer School, also a Snowlion Foundation school, which children can attend from nursery through tenth grade. Children can join the nursery once they start walking, some families send their children there at as early as 14 months. The school educates both children from Tashiling who live with their biological families and those who live in Tashiling's SOS Children's Village. The SOS Children's Village works to create loving homes and families for children who either don't have parents or only have one parent who is struggling to care for them (financially or otherwise). The Children's Village comprises 12 homes, each run by an amala ("mother") and her 10 (adopted) children.

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<sup>7</sup> Devi's Fall is a waterfall often visited by tourists.

The living situation for children growing in this part of the Tashiling are in quite a unique situation. SOS supports their amalas with funds to cover the expense of food, clothing, and other necessities, as well as with the support of counselors and other staff, and biennial trainings about caring for their children. Lobsang Gyaltsen, the director of village and school, is referred to as “pala” by the children, telling of the village’s priority on creating familial relationships between children and the village adults. Lobsang Dolkhar, an administrative employee described how the village children and amalas have access to staff support as needed 24/7.



**Image 4: Grandma chases three year old in Tashiling field.**

In contrast to the village amalas, parents caring for their children in the settlement juggle caring for their children with the added stresses of work. For many families in Tashiling, one or both parents lives elsewhere to provide financial support for their children and aging parents. Of those participating in the study, three had spouses living abroad to make money for their families. In one family, both parents worked as teachers in Kathmandu while their parents cared for their children. Among the parents who stay in Tashiling for work, the opportunities are mostly contained within the community. Many work at or own souvenir shops, convenience stores, or restaurants within the settlement itself. A few work at the clinic as health workers or at the school as teachers.

Parents were quick to mention their feeling of familiarity among those in their community. Where everyone knows everyone, Tashiling’s biggest threats to young children are the cows and buffalos that sometimes roam the area. Large, grassy, vehicle- free fields welcome children and parents to play outside, providing them the space to run free. Dolma mentioned how it was very safe in Tashiling because only Tibetan people live there.

### ***3.1.4. Tashi Palkhiel, Pokhara District***

Tashi Palkhiel is another of the four Tibetan Settlements in Pokhara. Located just off of the Baglung Rajmarg road, the settlement is home to about 600 people.<sup>8</sup> A few small souvenir

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<sup>8</sup> Baglung Rajmarg road it a busy street that buses take when traveling from Mustang to Pokhara.

shops, Tibetan restaurants, and convenience stores form an entrance to the settlement. In a cluster lie the community hot spots: a basketball and badminton court take up part of a larger open grassy space with the Rasilo Juice Factory to one corner and the Jangchub Choeling Monastery to another. Opposite to these is a line of concrete tables where Tibetans sell their souvenirs to tourists who often visit the settlement. Beyond this is the Mount Kailash School and hostel for children from Mustang. To the South lies a maze-like collection of homes, joined together with dirt, gravel, and concrete pathways- sometimes narrow, sometimes wide enough for a motorcycle to pass through. A short walk to a hill above the settlement gives way to valley views.



**Image 5:  
Looking down  
on Tashi Palkhiel  
Tibetan Settlement  
from a nearby  
hillside.**

Settlement Leader Karma Sopa explained that the camp was established in 1962 thanks to the generosity of the Red Cross and Swiss Association of Technical Assistance. Through the 1970's and 80s the carpet factory flourished providing financial sustenance to those in the settlement. However, competition in the industry and rumors of child labor lead to a dwindling in the factory's success. Since then, most individuals in the settlement sell souvenirs. Some of those selling souvenirs in the camp itself do so from small shops, while the majority do so from the long line of concrete tables on the road that tourists must cross from the settlement's entrance to the monastery that they often visit. Women and men selling souvenirs call out to foreigners as they walk past the line, "Please come look," "just look," "please buy something small to help my family," "just 100 or 200 rupees," "please," a sense of desperation crisp in their voices.

Aside from selling them in the camp itself, many families often send one adult member to sell souvenirs at the Pokhara Lakeside and in the surrounding hillsides in areas frequented by trekkers. In many instances, either mother or father will often go off to sell souvenirs for a few

months during peak tourist season. One parent from the community explained that the money they made during the three months of peak tourist time would have to sustain them through the rest of the year.

Aside from souvenir selling, some from the settlement work making juice, peanut butter, and other treats at the Rasilo Juice Factory.<sup>9</sup> Dhundup, one of the administrators at the small factory explained that it was first opened by an American individual in hopes to create economic opportunities for Tibetans in the settlement. Dhundup explained at the factory they try hard to provide young people short term employment when they are home from school for holiday vacations since youth employment opportunities are incredibly poor.

The community's lacking economic opportunity does not reflect itself in the vibrant and active afternoon scene that emerges around 5:30 pm. On a Tuesday night indicative of the experience most nights, the basketball field was full of activity: older children played soccer and clustered into groups to talk, a few children played badminton, younger children roamed the area, two adult men played badminton at the newly constructed net, and mothers sat on the periphery in conversation. Dhundup explained that the community recently fundraised to build the badminton net, and will be having a tournament soon. A leader of the youth club, Dhundup is trying to engage more young adults in improving the community.



**Image 6:**  
**Tashi Palkhiel**  
**community**  
**spending their**  
**after-school,**  
**pre-dinner hours**  
**playing outside.**

Parents felt strongly that Tashi Palkhiel was a good place to raise their children. Rigzin explained how if a person is troubled, everyone unites to help them out, which he felt was a great

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<sup>9</sup> During the apple, orange, and pineapple seasons, Rasilo employs twenty to thirty individuals at 400 rupees a day, much higher than most jobs offer. In the off seasons, the factory has around five employees making peanut butter and toasted coconut snacks.

moral learning environment for his grandchild. Karma and Metok echoed these points, describing that people were very friendly in the community, and always looking after each other.

Students in Tashi Palkhiel go to Mount Kailash School, under the purview of the Snow Lion Foundation. Students are both from the settlement itself, and from Mustang. Of those from Mustang, a majority of the children come from Tserok and Manang to attend Mount Kailash. “Ayahs” help to care for the children while they live in the school’s hostel, as many come at young ages from Mustang to pursue their education. Children can join the nursery as young as two and a half years old. The nursery and kindergarten, educating children through age six is the responsibility of the settlement’s administration rather than the Snow Lion Foundation.

### **3.1.5. Mobility**

Though located in physically distinct places, Tserok, Kagbeni, Tashiling, and Tashi Palkhiel meld together to form a cohesive and interacting system linked by education and work opportunity. Children from Tserok attend schools in Tashiling and Tashi Palkhiel schools after grade three. Likewise, parents of children in Tserok often pursue work opportunity in nearby tourist- oriented villages such as Kagbeni. Caregivers raise their children admits pervasive movement: migrating, commuting, attending school, working, and living across place. A close look at these places and their connections to each other enables one to understand the contextual elements of environment that affect early childhood related experience for parents and children, and how families navigate these.

Across place, parents’ work opportunities and circumstances determine the extent to which grandparents and siblings participated in raising their grandchildren.<sup>10</sup> It is culturally expected that children, parents, grandparents, and sometimes even great grandparents, live together in Tibetan families. In the case of their parent’s poor health, mothers and fathers assumed care for both their aging parents and young children. In other cases, grandparents in good health assisted their children in caring for their grandchildren and occasionally for their parents as well. In the instances when one or both parents worked, grandparents became instrumental in caring for their grandchildren. Grandparents became invaluable caregivers when one or both parents lived in other countries or villages, sometimes caring for their grandchildren for several months of the year. In other instances when parents worked locally, grandparents often took care of their grandchildren while their children were working. In many situations when both adults were home parents and grandparents worked together in caring for their little ones.

In many families, one parent assumed the role of primary bread maker and the other assumed the position as child and home carer, though these roles were not consistently assigned

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<sup>10</sup> A note on the role of siblings: In Pokhara siblings sometimes helped to care for their nieces and nephews though they didn’t typically live in the same homes. In many families a father or mother’s siblings worked abroad in places like Canada, France, or Germany. In one case, a mother from Tashi Palkhiel was currently caring of her sister’s three year old Tibetan-Canadian child for a year so that she could learn Tibetan and attend the Tibetan kindergarten.

to mother or father on the basis of gender. Except for in the case of families with one parent working in Europe, gender did not appear to play role in determining which parent would work and which would care for the home and children.<sup>11</sup> In many instances, mothers worked and (for some) lived, outside of the home, while their husbands assumed the primary home-keeping role, defying traditional gender expectations. In other instances the roles reversed. In both situations, it was not uncommon for the home-based parent to do work locally in addition to their domestic work and child care.

### *3.2. Conceptions of Early Childhood*

#### ***3.2.1. Low Birth Rate***

Across locations, Tibetan families are having less children. While many factors interact to explain this phenomena, parents often mentioned two: 1) how expensive it is to raise children, 2) the use of family planning. Metok, father to five children and grandfather to one four year old grandson expressed his concern that Tibetans are having so few children. He explained that these days parents feel that two children is the ideal amount, a mindset he connected with parents being educated. His concern is that the Tibetan race is shrinking, and at too fast a rate. He explained that the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) is also concerned, and is currently trying to incentivize families to have more children through offering to financially support families upon having a third child.

#### ***3.2.2. Development in the Early Years:***

Several parents classified early childhood into two developmental time frames: before three years and after three years. Well aligned with the start of Lower Kindergarten, parents conceptualized three years old as a milestone in children's lives. Pema put it succinctly that, "under three years old they don't understand much so we have to care more and give food on time, and make the baby healthy. After three we have to teach about habits, before this they only understand a little bit."

In speaking about early childhood, parents often used language like Pema's, expressing the belief that children don't understand much when they are so little, and are in the greatest need for care. The concept of innocence came up often in conversation, suggesting that parents think of early childhood as a time when people's minds are not yet impressed upon, and one where actions may be less intentional than intentional.

Though often seen as more of a time for caring than learning, some parents expressed that children do start learning some before age three. Some parents shared the sentiment that the early

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<sup>11</sup> Three participating families had one parent who worked abroad, all from Tashiling. In two families the male parent worked in Europe while their wives cared for their children. In one of these families, the female parent also worked locally, running a restaurant in Tashiling. In a third family the mother had worked in Singapore while her husband cared for their home and children, as well as worked in the community in a settlement administrative position.



childhood period was an impressionable one, regardless of age specifically. Kelsang, a teacher in Upper Mustang whose family lives in Tserok, described zero to three as infancy, and ages four through seven as a time of critical physical and brain developmental. Tashi saw ages four through seven as the time when children had more curiosity to learn, and, “questioning minds.”

### **3.2.3. How Parents Should “Be”:**

*Lhamo coaxed three year old Tenzin to eat her food, each spoonful met with rejection the rejection of Tenzin’s sealed lips. Lhamo followed Tenzin as she moved through the living room, playing with various toys, making several attempts to feed her three year old. Unflustered and seemingly calm, Lhamo stopped trying after having made several attempts, never having forced Tenzin eat or showing her own frustration. After giving up, Tenzin plopped down in Lhamo’s lap, to which Lhamo gave her a kiss and held her close. The antithesis of, “you’re not getting up from the table without eating two more bites.”*

*(Tserok)*

Across context, many caregivers expressed the importance of treating young children with a certain gentleness. Caregivers elaborated that the gentle way is one where parents say good things with kindness and using polite words. The motives behind using this gentle approach were, of course, varied.

Two parents mentioned the that it was important to use patience in interacting with their children because otherwise it would be easy to feel irritated by the things they do. Bhuti, a grandmother from Tashi Palkhiel explained that children will do what you want them to do when you approach them in this way. Gyatso from Tashiling echoed Bhuti, adding that in the case of her daughter, “if we say don’t do it she will definitely do it.” Lhamo explained that it was important not to use bad words in front of children because they may copy these. Many parents explained that they should use a gentle approach because young children are “innocent” with undeveloped minds.

Dolma from Tashiling highlighted the fact that it was a habit among Tibetans to use loud, screaming voices with children. Yangkey from Tashi Palkhiel, as if he were speaking to an audience of parents, instructed, “Don’t shout or make noise, speak gently, don’t say ‘don’t do this.’” Other parents explained that it wasn’t always easy to use this gentle approach. Together their comments indicate that perhaps parents don’t use the gentle approach exclusively, even if it is their intention.

Rabgyal from Tashi Palkhiel explained that he found it important for one parent to be more tough on the child and one to be more of a friend. In his family, Rabgyal assumed the jokester dad role, one who was more fun to be around and a friend to his children. He enjoyed sharing a relationship like this with his children because they were always happy to see him and spend time together. His wife on the other hand, was more tough on the children. He thought it was beneficial to have both types of parents in the family because the children didn’t listen much

to him, but they listened to their mother because she was more harsh. Rinchen, a mother in the opposite side of the same situation reported the difficulties of her position as the “tough parent.”

Some parents perceived differences in the parenting approaches used by those who were educated versus those who were uneducated. Kelsang, a teacher in Upper Mustang described a major difference in how he approached his child versus how his wife, who is uneducated does. He made clear that whereas he applies methodology about how children learn and think to his interaction, his wife did not, and often was more harsh in interacting with their child. Along similar lines, from Tashiling described that teachers who are uneducated are more likely to shout, beat, and be violent with their children. In contrast, she recalled that she sees her educated friends using more friendly approaches with their children.

In the case of the SOS Children’s Village amalas, child safeguarding is a key component of the approach that amalas are trained to use when caring for their children. Informed by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), SOS’s Securing Children’s Rights document details the ways that mothers must care for their children with special attention to upholding their rights. In action, SOS amalas must protect and honor their children’s survival rights through meeting their basic needs, development rights by allowing for the child’s healthy development, protection rights through ensuring their safety, and participation rights through allowing their children a say in making decisions that affect them and their communities (Securing Children’s Rights, 2013).

#### ***3.2.4. Caring for Basic Needs and Keeping a “Close Eye”:***

When describing their role in children’s early lives, caregivers almost always brought up the importance of meeting their children’s basic needs. On the topic of hygiene some caregivers mentioned the importance of keeping their children clean through doing things like changing their children into clean clothes. Parents frequently spoke about feeding their children. Several mentioned the importance of feeding children on time, and providing them with good food. In describing the right kinds of foods to feed their children, a few mentioned feeding their children home cooked foods, fruits, and juices. One caregiver mentioned the importance of hygienic food. Interestingly, a few parents in Tserok mentioned the importance of checking to make sure that they were not feeding children expired packaged food. Dolma, the community nurse, was pleased to hear that parents had learned from her community health briefing where she taught parents about checking the date on foods before allowing their children to eat them.

Parents often also spoke about taking care to ensure that their children were not doing things that could be physically harmful. Parents reasoned that they should so do because their young children are knowledgeable about what will hurt them, and how things work. Many parents conveyed concern that their child would fall down and get hurt if they didn’t keep a close eye. Parents in Tserok mentioned needing to keep an extra close eye on their children because of

the recent landslide.<sup>12</sup> Parents also detailed that they need to see to it that their children don't eat harmful things, touch hot water or play with gas.<sup>13</sup>

Dolma, the nurse from Tserok, shared that she found differences in how educated versus uneducated parents approached caring for their children. She explained that uneducated parents didn't think about whether a food would be good for their child's sensitive digestive system, often feeding hard to digest foods. She also noted that uneducated parents felt less inclined towards checking to confirm that their children were playing in clean places. Dolma expressed that with more education parents could be better equipped to care for their children. While she felt that her monthly community health briefing were helping some, she explained that it is challenging to change people's behaviors as many were uninterested in learning new things.

### **3.2.5. Good Health:**

*After managing to dress Tenzin in her uniform for school, Lhamp carefully placed the what looked like a necklace over her neck and one arm, all at once arming her for the day ahead. Protecting her from demons and benefitting her veins and nervous system, the black and white threads hung across the little one's chest, sacred pendants dangling at the lowest point of the string.*

*(Tserok, Mustang)*

To maintain their children's good health parents acknowledged food and hygiene to be important. In the case of food, parents spoke about the importance of feeding children good food like vegetables, rice, dhal, tsampa<sup>14</sup>, and fruits. Nyima from Tashi Palkhiel also spoke to the importance of giving her children fresh buffalo milk versus the packaged milk which was more readily available. Two parents mentioned that it was important for their children to eat homemade foods. Parents often mentioned their attempts to feed their children non-artificial foods and discourage their children from eating chocolates and candy. With this said, parents also frequently mentioned that they gave their children chocolates to stop them from crying and being upset. Observation revealed that, across context, children often casually ate packaged chocolates and candies. Especially in Tashi Palkhiel, several children's upper teeth were partially black. One child's upper teeth were almost entirely black, indicating her consumption of sweets and lack of oral hygiene. One parent from Tserok mentioned that other adults were often giving his child chocolates and treats, or money to buy these, making it challenging to control his child's intake.

Aside from food consumption, parents also brought up the importance of caring for their child's hygiene. Among hygienic practices parents mentioned teaching their children how to dress and clean themselves. Parent from Tashiling and Tashi Palkhiel also mentioned the

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<sup>12</sup> In March 2019 a landslide occurred during the night time in Tserok destroying the community health clinic among other things. No one was hurt in the event.

<sup>13</sup> Most families have gas stoves in their homes, powered by exposed tanks.

<sup>14</sup> Roasted flour that Tibetans typically mix with Tibetan butter tea and eat as a staple food.

importance of changing their children's clothes and washing their bodies, indicative of the warmer and humid environment in Pokhara. Likewise, parents in Tserok mentioned the importance of keeping their child warm due to the cold conditions. One parent from Tserok explained it was also important that her child did not spend too long in the sun because doing so could result in a fever. One parent reported teaching her children to brush their teeth, trim nails, and wash the feet, face, and hands before bed, all practices she learned while a student in boarding school.

In the case of more serious and unexplainable health challenges one parent recounted turning to religious leadership in healing her child. Tsomo told of how her little one was sick with pneumonia for seven months. She thought her child was initially sick due to a change in the weather. After visiting the hospital for extended periods over the months, her son was still not doing well. Upon performing a special puja<sup>15</sup> two times in the home, a lama asserted that the child needed a new name. Upon completing the pujas and changing her name to the new one given by the lama, her child's long lasting pneumonia stopped.

Tibetan parents traditionally take spiritually-rooted measures, and the occasional use of a lama's assistance, to treat their children's health problems and to protect them from spiritual disturbances (Brown et al, 2008). One parent described taking protective measures when her child was not eating and sleeping well, at times calling out in the night she saw some sort of figure or ghost. These included sprinkling Tibetan medicine into her child's food<sup>16</sup>, wafting incense blessed by a lama to the child's face, and placing black soot on her nose. Traditionally, this smudge of soot is trusted to protect the child from nightmares, through scarring these images from entering the child's mind (Brown et al, 2008, p. 178). Tibetans traditionally believe that before age eight children's young and impressionable minds are especially susceptible to the spirits entering and disturbing their consciousnesses (Brown et al, 2008, p. 175).

Parents also take actions in daily life to protect their children. When parents feed their children, they often first put the spoon inside their mouths. Sometimes they eat a bit of the spoonful before offering the bite to their child. Perhaps, at times, pre-masticating the food.<sup>17</sup> Other times, parents simply put the food into their own mouth before putting it into their child's. One mother explained that the practice was not intended to enable easier digestion, but rather used as a protective measure to protect children from demons that could otherwise attack their vulnerable child, but would instead attack their parents who are equipped to reject them.

### **3.2.6. Home Environment:**

Across location and family, parents were convinced that children should not be exposed to their parents fighting with each other. Some described that it was harmful for their children to see because their fighting would stay on the child's mind and worry them. Others suggested that

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<sup>15</sup> An act of ceremonial worship.

<sup>16</sup> Tibetan herbal medicine is quite bitter and unappealing to young palates.

<sup>17</sup> Where the parent chews the child's food so that it is more easily digestible.

fighting disturbs the child's mind. One parent suggested that fighting will affect the child's mind negatively beyond the immediate moment and into long term.

Parents made use of different techniques to avoid fighting with their spouses. Dhundup from Tashi Palkhiel explained it well that, "there is always conflict because when we put two hearts and minds together there will be challenges." He explained how when he and his wife inevitably need to discuss things that they leave home to speak away from their children. Rabgyal from Tashi Palkhiel described that when his wife starts to fight with him he walks away from the situation instead of engaging. Pema, a mother in Tserok, recounted that she used to argue with her husband in front of her children quite often because she didn't filter her thoughts before speaking. Because her husband always ignored her comments, she stopped arguing with him.

For such a commonly held belief, social norms and education must both play a contributing roles. As highlighted in *The Tibetan Art of Parenting*, whereas the focus is often placed on, "the expression of the individual," in American families, within Tibetan families there is usually a greater emphasis on getting along and maintaining social harmony (Brown, Farwell, & Nyerongsha, 2008, p. 183). Perhaps this social trend contributes to less fighting within families in general. Tseri In Tserok and Tashi Palkhiel, several parents also mentioned that they learned about the importance of not fighting in front of children at a workshop offered by the Snow Lion Foundation. Aside from fighting in front of children, parents also mentioned the importance of not smoking or drinking when their children were around. Pemba took the concept of an ideal home environment further in explaining that a healthy household is one where family members gather together, share their opinions with one another and talk together.

### **3.2.6. Parent-Child Attachment:**

*As his aunt pulled him away from the living room where his mother sat, three year old Norbu screamed. He flopped his body from place to place, reaching for his mother who remained calm and encouraged her sister to take him outside so she could have peace during the interview. After a few minutes outside, the sound of his wails quieted down. Dolma explained that her child was quite attached to her, to the point that he never wanted her to leave his sight.*

*(Tashiling, Pokhara)*

Parents spoke to the importance of showing love and care for their children, especially when they were young. Nyima from Tashi Palkhiel explained that it was most important to love children when they were young because the early years are a learning time. She explained that parents should be caring when children are young because if they aren't, their children will be distant them when they're older. Many parents expressed a similar sentiment, that love and care were especially important during the early years; if parents show their children love when their children are young, they will share a strong bond later.

Several parents expressed a genuine desire to build close relationships with their children for the purpose of building close connections in themselves. Many shared the feeling that showing their children love would automatically result in their children showing love back. Parents frequently described showing care for their children through spending time together, nurturing their children, and caring for their wellness.

Several caregivers reasoned that the amount and quality of time spent caring for their child determined the quality of bond they would share. Echoed by others, Rigzin explained that his grandson is most attached to him, even over his mother, because he had cared for him the most. Gyatso, who teaches kindergarten in Kathmandu had to leave her 11 year old son with her mother in Tashi Palkhiel when he was just 14 months old for her work. She reflected that her distance from her son when he was young explains why they are not very close these days. Gyurmey, suggested that the quality of time spent together was also influential. He explained that unlike his wife who often shouted at his children, he always showed his daughters love and affection when they were young. When his wife left their family to start a new family after working for several years in Singapore, his daughters were naturally upset, but not too upset, because they hadn't formed a strong attachment to their mom as they had with their dad. His point also suggests that attachment isn't necessarily biologically driven alone; attachment can be developed.

In the case of the amalas caring for adopted children at the SOS Children's Village, attachment couldn't be any more dependent on investments of well-spent quality time. Conversation with four amalas from the village revealed that they unanimously placed importance on building strong bonds with their children. From their experiences of forming strong bonds from previously nonexistent relationships, the amalas recounted that showing children love, attention, and compassion, as well as speaking to the kindly is important to forming strong emotional bonds. Amalas explained that as their children aged they continued to foster and maintain emotional closeness through spending their free time with their children, often eating snacks together and providing the space for their children to share their feelings.

In explaining the quality of their bond, a few parents provided examples of their children's attachment-indicating behaviors. The most common of these mentioned behaviors was that their children cried upon separation from their parents. Metok recounted how his grandson used to show emotion when they video called his mother in India. Having spent a lot of time caring for him, these days his grandson is more attached to his grandparents and doesn't cry when they call his mom. Gyatso explained that when she leaves her children to go to Kathmandu for work, she and her husband cry; suggesting that parent's attachment-indicating behaviors may not be too different from those of their children.

A few parents shared experiences of their child being too attached to them. Yangkey explained that when his son was younger he was too scared to leave him with others. Thus, they spent a lot of time together and formed a very close relationship. Now five year old, he described that his son is too attached to him, not wanting to spend time away from him and feeling shy around others. To a further extreme, Dolma's three year old wailed when her sister tried to take him outside during our interview. Dolma explained that after leaving her child with his

grandmother for four days when she had to go to Kthe became extremely attached to her. Aside from crying when separated from his mother, her son will wait right outside of the bathroom door when she is there. His behavior is so pervasive that Dolma has to be strategic about sneaking out of the house when she has to leave without him. She was happy to report that her son doesn't cry when he goes to school.

In discussing the opposite experience of attachment, Pemba, mother of a five year old in Tashi Palkhiel, spoke to her observation that children struggle when they have to move to hostels at young ages and live completely detached from their families. As is the case for those from Tserok, many children must leave their homes to pursue education in Pokhara around age eight. From her perspective, the love shared by parents and grown children is different when parents do not have the opportunity to spend quality time building bonds with their children while they are young.

Parents from Tserok, did, in fact, speak to their worries about when they will inevitably have to send their children to Pokhara. Two parents from the community shared that they and their spouses were considering the possibility of one parent accompanying their child when they move to Pokhara for school so that their child wouldn't have to do so alone. They worried most that their child wouldn't receive enough care at the hostel, and wouldn't be prepared to care for themselves. Many parents anticipated missing their children once they moved to Pokhara.

Parents across the settlements often planned to send their children to India for their high school years because their children could get documentation there and because the schools were good. Tsomo, softly crying, explained that having already sent her older daughter to India for school, she is not sure about being able to send her younger son. She imagined that she and her husband would feel sad and lonely without him. She expressed the conundrum of whether it would be best to send him for better education at the expense of dismantling their entire family.

### **3.2.8. Spending Time:**

*For five months of the year, Sangyal sat alone behind of the counter of his small shop where assorted jewelry, packaged foods, and scarfs filled the space. 18 kilometers south, his children had just finished their school day in Tserok and were now watching cartoons, locked inside their one-room home while their mother finished her day's work in the field.*

*(Kagbeni and Tserok)*

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*"All gathered together with them, children feel more happy. But, of course, parents need to earn money, the school fees are expensive."*

*(Tashi Palkhiel)*

Across place parents explained the importance of spending time with their children. Many made clear that spending time with their children was best for their children's wellness. Nyima from Tashi Palkhiel described how, if she didn't spend time with her children and instead

left them alone, they will feel bad and be shy later in life. Along these lines, many parents expressed that their children felt best, and happiest, when spending time together. A few added that they thoroughly enjoyed spending time with their children, and that doing so is the way through which they form a strong bond with them. A couple parents expressed that their children learned things through interacting with them.

Though they were living in the place where families were most commonly separated for the purposes of work, caregivers in Tserok expressed that it was absolutely best for both mother and father to spend time, together, with their children. Caregivers explained that spending time together was beneficial for both children and their parents. In the case of the children, caregivers explained that each parent offers their children something different; children learn more when they spend time with both parents. One mother explained how children need care from both mother and father so that the child feels that both are invested and engaged in their life. Moreover that her child benefits from the love of two adults versus one. Caregivers expressed that it was also beneficial for parents to spend time with their children because they themselves would feel comfort in knowing how their child was doing, and enjoy feeling connected with them.

In the case of Tserok parents described that work circumstances make it very challenging for them to spend as much time with their children as they would like. Parents reported that, while they find it important for their children to spend time with both parents, their circumstances do not allow for this reality. Tashi explained that parents must make money to not only finance the family's day to day expenses, but also to save for the future costs of their children's education. Thus, it is most practical for one parent to care for the home and their children, perhaps doing work locally, while the other lives and works elsewhere. Parents consistently echoed his explanation of the situation. Sangyal and Pasang, the parents working in Kagbeni whose families lived in Tserok, expressed that living away from their children was by no means easy, but necessary.

Beyond Tserok alone, parents in Pokhara also expressed the challenge of working and spending time with their children. Dhundup explained that parents in Tashi Palkhiel feel pressure to make and save money to finance their children's future education costs. Often this point was reflected in the fact that parents sent their children to the nursery at the earliest age possible, and in the fact that many grandparents cared for their grandchildren while parents worked locally or abroad. Phurba from Tashiling shared that her mother does a nicer job of caring for her child because her mother has more time whereas she has to work.

### ***3.2.9. Raising "Good Children":***

Caregivers spoke about how to raise "good children" with "good habits." Parents often prioritized teaching their children how to do basic things properly, like eating and cleaning the home. With this said, children weren't necessarily doing these things consistently at young age. One mother and father of a three year old always spoon fed their child as she squirmed around the living room, playing with toys during meal time. In contrast, children in Tashi Palkhiel all were given spoons to feed themselves during the afternoon snack time at school. When ramen



dropped off of their spoons and created a mess on the floor the teachers were unfazed, cleaning the missed attempts after all the children were done eating.

Beyond these, parents often mentioned the importance of teaching children to use manners when talking with others, especially elders. Many hoped for their child to politely greet others through saying “Tashi Delek!” or “Hello!” Kelsang from Tserok also explained that he slowly teaches his son the respectful traditions within the Tibetan language.<sup>18</sup>

A small collection of caregivers explained their efforts to teach their children religious habits and respect. One mother from Tserok expressed the importance of teaching her daughter to respect holy books, pictures of the Dalai Lama, and sacred spaces like the community gompa<sup>19</sup>. She explained that she often involves her daughter in religious practices like reciting mantras and circumambulating their community stupa<sup>20</sup> so that she will know how to do these things. Another mother in Tashi Palkhiel mentioned with pride that she does good things like praying in front of her child, and now her one year old has caught on- she even knows how to do Om Mani Padme Hum and spin their prayer wheel. A father in Tashi Palkhiel mentioned intentionally doing his Om Mani Padme Hum prayers in front of his children so that they would learn to do this.

Many parents spoke to their child’s innocence in young age. Often they explained that their child didn’t yet know good from bad so it was important for parents to teach these things. To do so, parents frequently reported talking to their children about forming good habits. One mother from Tashiling recounted that she also teaches her son about good and bad things on the spot, like in the supermarket when he touches things that he shouldn’t and she tells him not to touch these because it’s other’s property. Three parents explained that their children learn from seeing what adults do, reasoning that whether the content was good or bad, children learn through what they see.

In talking about their daughter, Pemba explained how she and her husband, “have to show perfect behavior as parents in front of her so she will be automatically good.” Along these lines, parents from Tashi Palkhiel and Tashiling spoke about protecting their children from seeing other bad behaviors like people smoking cigarettes, drinking alcohol, and playing cards. They expressed concern that if their children saw others engaging in these behaviors, they would think that these practices were okay and later engage in them when older. Rinchen from Tashi Palkhiel explained that children learn bad things quicker than good things, so parents must do good things in front of their children. Parents often echoed this sentiment, explaining that children copy what their parents do, so it’s best they do good things. Dhundup took the point further in his assertion that, “children are very very intelligent.”

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<sup>18</sup> The Tibetan language has a collection of honorific words that indicate respect when used in reference to another people and sacred places or objects like Buddhist texts.

<sup>19</sup> “Monastery”

<sup>20</sup> A stupa is a Buddhist commemorative monument.

Despite these views some parents expressed that when their children were young they were less capable of understanding and remembering things. On the topic of developing good habits, Kelsang explained that his three year old is, “very small so he can’t remember, but in one or two years slowly he can learn.” Several parents expressed a similar sentiment, that their child’s capacity to remember things wasn’t yet developed, but, with time, would strengthen. Many parents described how they would slowly teach their children more things as they grew older. Dawa from Tashi Palkhiel explained how that her eight year old understands good and bad in a way that her four year old doesn’t yet understand. For this reason, she holds her eight year old to a higher standard, with consequences for his bad actions because at his older age he understands what he is doing.

Though some parents indicated that teaching their child to develop good habits early on would lead them to be good people later in life, this perspective was not shared across all participants. Three caregivers explained how their child’s later behaviors and choices could not be predicted now. For them, investing it was still very important to take actions to help their child develop good habits, but less with the intention of molding their future disposition alone. According to these caregivers, there was no way to know whether their children will be good or bad. They explained that they felt this way for several reasons including that: 1) their children will use their knowledge in whatever way they like in the future; 2) people change dispositions throughout a lifetime; 3) fate was important to determining these sorts of things.

One father explained that although he teaches his children the best things now, once they grow they will do things according to the environment they’re in. He also mentioned that how they will be depends on their karma. A parents living and working in Kagbeni brought up the point that there are formative parts of his children’s lives that he can not control since they will have to go to school in Pokhara, away from their family. Complicating the topic further, one mother explained that she does, in fact, tell her children to be good now in the hopes of their becoming something good in the future, but she alone can’t dictate or predict this future.

### **3.2.10. Freedom to the Children:**

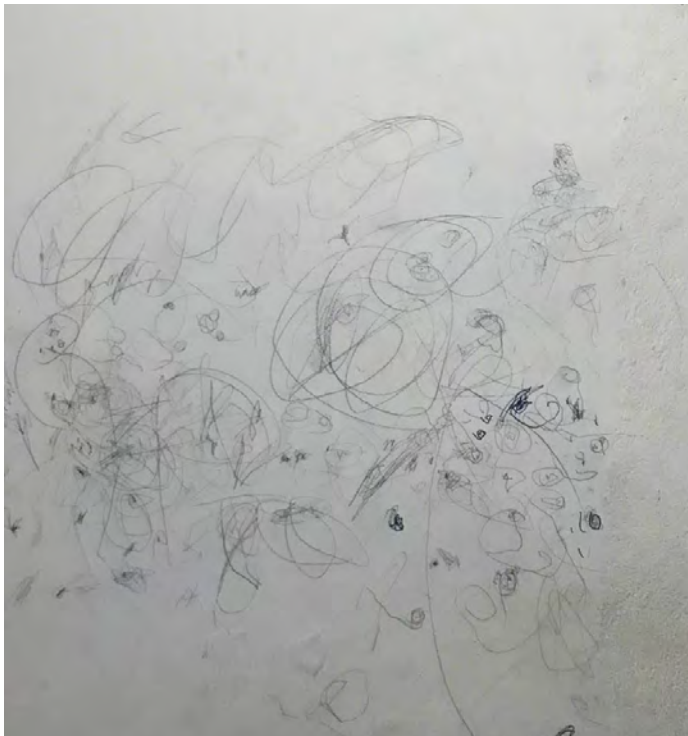
*Dolma’s grandmother looked on without a single crinkle of frustration in her face as three year old Dolma took all of the books off of their living room bookshelf and scattered them throughout the room. The walls of their playroom were covered by scribbles, going not much higher than three feet. I think I know the culprit...*

*(Tshiling, Pokhara)*

Phuntsok’s walls were covered by ink that her three year old granddaughter had scribbled in no obvious figure or shape. Without skipping a beat, Phuntsok explained that it was no problem that her granddaughter used the walls like paper. “We must let children be independent and free,” she explained, “let her be free now so later she will be intelligent and smart... if I let her write free, she will become a successful student.” Nyima from Tashi Palkhiel expressed a similar sentiment adding that, “parents should give children what they want, let them speak what they want to speak, and do what they want to do.” She explained that allowing this freedom

would encourage her children to be confident and not shy. She noted that early childhood is, “learning time,” so parents should let children do what they wish, later mentioning that she would let her children draw on the walls because she can rub it off later.

Across location, but most prevalent in Tashiling and Tashi Palkhiel, parents expressed a carefree attitude and insistence that, as long as they were not doing harm, it was best for parents to let their children have freedom of action. In Tashiling and Tashi Palkhiel most parents explained that they would (or already had) allowed their child to draw on the walls because they can paint over it or scrub off the ink later. Pemba from Tashi Palkhiel explained, “it’s okay because we can buy paint and put it, there is a solution so no problem, and they are very small, so let them to create a mess.”



**Image 7: The scribbles that covered Dolma’s playroom. (Tashiling)**

Though parents most commonly expressed the importance of granting their children freedom, some expressed that they would draw the line a bit sooner than allowing their children to draw on the walls. For example, the SOS amalas unanimously explained that it was important to encourage their children’s freedom and only stop them when they were doing bad . but that they would stop their children from drawing on the walls because this made too much of a mess. Unlike some of the other parents who did not express intentions of involving their child in the future wall cleaning or painting process, these amalas explained that

they would make the child clean the wall and teach them to color on a paper in the future. The amalas’ explanation suggested that, more than limiting their freedom, they wanted to impress upon their children the importance of respecting the home space. Perhaps their approach was also informed by the fact that they did not own their homes, SOS did.

Likewise, Rabgyal, a parent from Tashi Palkhiel expressed a similar sentiment as the SOS amalas, recounting that when his son wrote the letter “A” on the wall after his first few days of school, he washed it off and taught him to only use paper in the future. One grandparent explained that his response to his child drawing on the walls would depend on what the child drew. He explained that if the child wrote the ABCs on the wall then he would let him, but if it were just lines he wouldn’t allow it. His approach suggested his value of granting his child freedom when it was in an explicitly academic context.

Tenzin Woser, the headmaster at Mount Kailash School in Tashi Palkhiel was surprised to hear that many parents had expressed the importance of granting their children freedom. He explained that Tibetan parents have historically been less accepting and encouraging of their children's individual expressions, often treating these expressions with corporal punishment. He felt that things were definitely changing these days, but that the change was slow going.

Since becoming headmaster, Tenzin worked hard to build less hierarchically-driven relationships with his students. Instead of conforming to the traditional role of headmaster who children should fear and run away from, he worked hard to build caring relationships with his students and encouraged his teachers to do the same. Through workshops and consistent support for his teachers, the school has created more student-driven learning environments, quite different from the traditional teacher-driven ones. Overtime, these efforts have driven improvement in the culture of school and relationships between students and teachers. Tenzin explained that he feels most accomplished in his work when students approach him, and joke with him, instead of running the other way when they see him. Tenzin was encouraged to hear that parents were allowing their children to express themselves freely, but was quick to admit that there is still a lot of room for growth within the community in this area (T. Woser, personal communication, April 22, 2019).

### **3.2.10. Role of Parents in Schooling:**

*“What is this, Tenzin?” “Lion!” Crawling between the area piled high with toys and the blanketed one where an iPad was propped up and playing child-oriented programming, 20 month old Tenzin learned about wild animals from the comfort of his living room thanks to the with the help of his grandmother and plastic toy animals.*

*(Tashiling, Pokhara)*

When it came to their role in preparing children for school and in supporting their at-home learning, parents' own academic achievement often came up as an important factor. When asked if they did anything to prepare their children for school, uneducated caregivers often first responded that they were not educated. Some parents and grandparents explained that because of their lack of education they did not do anything to prepare their children for school. This was especially common among grandparents who cared for their grandchildren while the children's parents worked elsewhere. In several cases, grandparents explained that the child's parents taught them some things like ABC's when they were home seasonally and/or before they initially left to do work in other countries. Since they were not around however, grandparents were unable to continue these teachings without their children around. Others, however, described teaching their children what they knew, even if it was very little such as the alphabet. Aside from teaching academic content, some mentioned preparing their children for school through buying the books and clothing they needed and encouraging them to feel excited for school. Some of these caregivers also mentioned that they supported their children in their schooling through encouraging them to do well in school and to study hard.

Among those who were educated, a few mentioned that their education helped them in understanding what kinds of pre-academic support their children would benefit from. Lhamo from Tserok described that she tries to teach her child things so that she will have an easier time in school once she goes there. Tashi Palkhiel added that she tries to prepare and support her children in school because she didn't have this kind of support when she was young which was challenging for her as a young student.

In terms of the types of things parents did to prepare their children for school, the alphabet and rhymes came up most in conversation. Pemba from Tashi Palkhiel explained that she started teaching her daughter the ABC's around age two. To teach them, she recounted drawing the each letter with dashed lines that her child could then outline. Tsomo described teaching her children by saying things like, "What color is this?" and "This is A, A for apple." Aside from teaching things in English, several parents mentioned the importance of teaching children the Tibetan alphabet as well as speaking and singing to them in Tibetan.

A few parents explained that aside from teaching the alphabet, they also taught their children the colors, names and sounds of animals, rhymes, numbers, and how to hold a pencil. Two parents from Tashi Palkhiel showed me large books containing colorful pictures of things, organized categorically (e.g. animals, foods, colors, etc.). Both families were enthusiastic that the books were helpful to teaching their children. Aside from these families, parents did not recount using books to teach their children, or to prepare them for school. One parent mentioned that the more things parents did to prepare their children for school the better the benefits for their children, but that she doesn't have much time so she just teaches her daughter the ABC's. Across educated and uneducated parents, many mentioned that their children learned words, numbers, and songs through engaging with technology such as mobile phones and the television.



**Image 8: The book parents used to teach new things. (Tashi Palkhiel)**

Dhundup from Tashi Palkhiel made the point that it was best for children to learn even basic knowledge through experience. For example, he and his wife took their children on a jungle safari where they could actually see animals to learn their names and what they looked like. He described that even the experience of

riding on a real bus with his child was a learning experience where his sons could come to form strong understanding through experience. Dhundup explained that when he teaches children in this way, they are more likely to remember their experiences and what they learned.

A couple caregivers described that their children were too young to learn pre-academic things. Karma explained that her one year old daughter is too small to learn a lot, but she does teach her the ABC's. She described that her daughter repeated them back aloud, but that she didn't actually understand what it was that she was saying. Khando from Tashiling explained that her daughter didn't learn much in the home before attending school. Grandmother Phuntsok from Tashiling explained that her two and a half year old couldn't yet speak so she doesn't understand things, so there was no reason to teach her things.

Once in school, parents spoke to the importance of encouraging their children to do their homework, when possible helping their children with it, and checking that it was completed. At 4:30pm when we met to talk in Tashi Palkhiel, Tsering Wanchu's five year old son and his friend were already in homework mode. The children sat together at a small table in the living room, working to finish their homework only having finished their school day 30 minutes ago. Rabgyal from Tashi Palkhiel described that it wasn't always possible to help his children with their homework. Since he doesn't know how to write in Nepali, he was unable to help his son when he had questions. He felt like sometimes his child would ask questions about Nepali to mock the fact that his father didn't know the language.

Aside from attending school, only one parent mentioned the topic of organized extracurricular and academic activities. Tsomo from Tashiling, a former teacher, mentioned that since her son has homework to complete after school she does not assign him additional academic activities in the home. With this said, however, she did wish there were more tutoring opportunities in the community, and that the teachers could give their students more time outside of school. She also explained that she wished there were more activities that would make children feel good like painting, drawing competitions, and football.

### ***3.2.12. Parent Education:***

Parents most commonly explained that they learned to be a parent through their experience of doing so itself; though some also received support from others who had more experience. One grandmother from Tserok explained that she would often advise her son about how to care for her grandchild. Two mothers from Tashi Palkhiel and Tashiling mentioned benefiting from the advice and support of their own mothers, sisters and mother-in-laws in raising their children. In Tashiling one parent explained that her mother was not especially helpful in advising her how to care for her newborn, but the community nurse was supportive and taught her things as a new parent, like how to bathe her tiny baby.

Aside from taking advice from more experienced individuals, a total of four mothers from Tashi Palkhiel and Tashiling reported that they consulted online sources when they had questions related to their children and parenting. No parents from Tserok mentioned learning about these topics online. Two shared that they watched videos about how to set up activities and

games for their children. One mentioned that she learned ideas about how to care for her children through these videos. Another explained that she watches videos of experienced European and Indian mothers to learn things about caring for her children. She also recalled watching videos by made by foreign doctors about healthy pregnancy practices. She and another mother also mentioned reading things online about parenting when they had questions or concerns.

Dolma, the woman in Tashiling who both watched videos and read things online about parenting explained that she would really appreciate having more opportunities to learn about parenting and pregnancy. Currently pregnant with her second child, she explained that when she visits her doctor for checkups he does nothing more than check whether her baby's heart is beating through ultrasound. She felt that she would benefit from learning more about what kinds of things to eat during different stages in her pregnancy, but her doctor never takes the time to support her in acquiring this knowledge. Aside from issues regarding health alone, Dolma expressed her desire to meet with a parenting counselor so that she could learn more about how to best care for her children. She watches Youtube videos made by experienced mothers from India and European countries about these topics. As far as she knows there are no videos created by Tibetan parents on these topics.

Unlike those mothers who lack access to resources about parenting, the SOS Children's Village mothers are required to take part in trainings designed specifically to improve their knowledge on child-related topics. Lobsang Gyaltzen, the director of the Pokhara SOS Children's Village, explained that twice yearly all of the village amalas attend a 10 day training in Kathmandu organized by the national Nepal SOS office. The trainings focus on various topics relevant to caring for their families. Lobsang explained that these trainings include information about child development. One village amala explained that she wanted to become an amala because she would learn all about how to care for children and a home which would be helpful when she one day started a biological family. Aside from parenting itself, she shared that before working at SOS she didn't know how to cook and clean and learned these things through working there.

Though it wasn't a widely shared experience, some parents described having attended a parenting workshop put on by the Snow Lion Foundation. The most commonly mentioned workshop was that at the Pokhara Lakeside and attended by parents from Tashi Palkhiel. Though relatively nearby their homes, parents from Tashiling did not mention having attended rgu workshop. Three parents from Tashi Palkhiel mentioned that they or their relatives attended the workshop. Dawa explained that her husband attended the workshop and, from what he recounted to her, she learned that it was important not to shout or scold her children. Rigzin's daughter attended the session and brought home an Early Grade Reading poster, which was hanging on their living room wall. Upon asking Rignzin, who mainly cares for his grandson, about the poster, he explained that he doesn't know anything about it, and that he and his grandson never read together.

When describing differences in their parenting approaches, Dhundup from Tashi Palkhiel explained that his mother-in-law does better than he and his wife at caring for their children because she attended trainings at the lakeside, organized by the Snow Lion Foundation and

USAID, on the topic. He recounted that the workshop was helpful because she learned new things how to care for, talk to, and communicate with their children.tse

Dhundup also described how he had paid to attend a private counseling session on parenting in Kathmandu. His friend recommended that he go so he and his wife attended together. During the session he learned about how to raise and look after his child, conflict management, and child psychology. He looks forward to attending another class on how to raise his children as they get older. He explained that the counseling was not put on by an organization but was instead found through personal connection. He noted that other parents in the community never attend these types of trainings.

Yangkey from Tashi Palkhiel recounted having attended a special workshop by the Snow Lion Foundation all the way in Kathmandu. Though it was two years ago, he explained that his friend recommended for him to go, and the SLF covered the expenses for he and other parents from each settlement to go. He explained that he was the only young parent from Tashi Palkhiel who volunteered to go, the other attendees were 50 and 60 year olds. Though he was quick to say that it was very helpful and that he learned many important things, he didn't quite remember what exactly it was that he had learned. But, within a few moments, he whipped out his notebook where he had kept his workshop notes. Below are a list of the things he had written in his notebook. Reading through the list, Yangkey reflected that he was using most of the points that they taught at the workshop despite the fact that he didn't recall what he had learned off the top of his head. However, when it came to the point about reading books with his child, he described that he hadn't really integrated reading into his parenting habits. Yangkey explained that he had never learned about the topics of the worship before attending it,. From his notebook:

- junk food kills brain cells
- important to give baby quality time
- schools need democratic teaching systems
- every school needs a nurse and child counselor
- important to hold respect for baby and sense of gratitude
- give praise for good things
- it's bad to criticize children; don't use bad words in speaking about him, especially when his friends can hear him; best to say good things about child in front of his friends
- "What does a child feel when their parent hugs them?": they feel emotionally secure
- talking with children is beneficial
- giving children more time is beneficial
- build a secure relationship
- do not give the child a mobile device for more than one hour, their brain will change upon using it
- develop a habit of reading books
- take children to new places

(Parenting Workshop Notes, Tashi Palkhiel)



In the context of Tserok, a few parents mentioned having learned “rules” related to parenting from the Shree Saraswati School at a workshop presented by the Snow Lion Foundation. Rabten explained that the SLF education officer visited Tserok two to three years back and established rules that teachers must and parents should adhere to. The workshop was reportedly very helpful and mainly focused on educating parents not to beat their children, yell at them, or to fight in front of them. Another dad in the community explained that learning about health and education has benefited the community in that parents have better relationships with their children these days, and know how to be healthy and care for themselves.

One mother in the community shared her desire for an outside organization to come to Tserok and educate parents about how they should treat their children. She felt that this was important given the fact that many parents are uneducated. She expressed her prediction that this type of education would be effective at changing parenting behaviors for the better.

### ***3.2.13. 21st Century Children Call for 21st Century Parents:***

*“It was easier to raise 8 children back then than it is to raise one child today.”*

*(Tashi Palkhiel)*

Caregivers often drew a clear line between the behaviors, intelligence, and needs of the children, “these days” and those of children in the past. In most conversations on the topic, caregivers identified that these differences were generational, referring to the children of today as part of the, “21st generation.” Caregivers explained that these 21st generation children are: picky, sharp minded with powerful memories, knowledgeable, tech savvy, creative, curious, and poor listeners. While caregivers often expressed pride in their children’s intelligence, some also explained that it was challenging to raise their children because they were always wanting things, hard to satisfy, and not very keen on listening to their elders.

A few parents shared that their children were brilliantly curious and insightful. Kelsang from Tserok explained how his son is very curious to learn, often asking him unanswerable questions like, “How much beard do you have?” and “Where does water come from?” Lhamo from Tserok explained that her daughter often asks similar unanswerable questions and says things that are quite wise. She expressed her feeling that this was common among children these days, not something unique to her daughter alone.

To explain the roots of these differences, caregivers often detailed the recent changes to context and resources in their communities. Several grandparents described that when they were raising their own children, they wouldn’t do much more than attend school, eat, and sleep. In contrast, they explained that children today have access to many more facilities, better schools at a younger age, as well as material goods like toys, and technology. Some grandparents also explained that they are able to spend more time with their grandchildren these days, in comparison to when they were raising their own children and were quite preoccupied with working to put food on the table. Dolma Tsering, the nurse from Tserok, explained that better nutrition and access to vitamins like iron tablets and injections during pregnancy also contributed

to the changes in children's disposition. With this said, one kindergarten teacher from the SOS school in Tashiling mentioned that these days children eat lots of artificial sweets and less organic food than they used to, perhaps explaining their poor listening power.

Some caregivers explained that parents these days are also quite different than they were in the past. When describing caregivers today, parents often noted that they were quite young and more educated than in past generations. While several parents did not attend school beyond grade seven or eight, those who did were certainly the most formally educated in their families. Parents often mentioned that through general education and child-specific workshops, such as those put on by the Snow Lion Foundation, parents were changing to use a more gentle approach with their children, one where they didn't hit, shout, and fight as much as they had in the past.

Kelsang, who works as a teacher in upper Mustang, but whose family lives in Tserok, explained that parents are raising their children at a time when the world is changing, and they must keep up. Tashi explained that as infrastructure and technologies are rapidly advancing, so should social circumstances. He described that parents used to beat their children with sticks, a method used to scare children into being a certain way. Tashi declared that this approach no longer works for children. From his perspective, children need more love and care, and opportunity for free learning. He explained that although parents still beat their children these days, albeit quite a bit less than they used to, they were also, simultaneously, showing their children love. He went on to detail the changing role of schools, especially noting that schools used to be teacher-centered, but these days they are shifting to focus more on students. He expressed that, just as schools were shifting, so should parents.

### ***3.2.13. The Role of the Nursery and Kindergarten:***

In Tserok, children attended school from 9am to 4pm, with a one hour lunch break in the middle of the day. Children enrolled in the nursery (from as young as two years old) and the lower kindergarten (three and four years olds) class spent their day in the same classroom, together. Dhakpa Richoe, the school's headmaster, explained that at such young ages, the teachers did not put much pressure on the students. Instead they were granted freedom. The kindergarten classroom contained miscellaneous toys, and a variety of puzzles. On a typical day, children in lower kindergarten had Tibetan, English, Drawing/Reading, Math, Nepali, and Music classes. Teachers catered activities to the needs of individual students such that in one moment some children might play on their own, while others write the alphabet in their notebook, and still others do writing activities with the teacher.

In Tashi Palkhiel, children could attend school at as young as two and a half years old from 9:30 am to 4:30pm, with a one hour lunch break. Karma Sopa, the camp leader described that the focus of the nursery and kindergarten was for children to play. Pema, the head teacher at the kindergarten described that the most important things to do with the children when they were so young is to play, talk together, and build strong relationships. At this kindergarten, there were a large collection of story books for children to read, stuffed animals, blocks, and games- all organized by category. Here, the youngest children were typically separate from the older children, who would flow in and out of their classes depending on whether they felt interested in

learning. The teachers described that it was best to encourage children to learn when they want to and to, otherwise, let them play. Though these children also had Tibetan, English, Math, and Nepali classes, they approach in these subject with overall less structured than in Tserok.

In Tashiing, children could attend the nursery as soon as they were able to walk, as early as just one and a half years old for some. Children attended school from 9am to 3:30 pm, but parents had to deliver their child milk and snack at 10:00 am, and pick them up again for a one hour lunch break at 12:30 pm. The three teachers explained that they use Montessori methods at their school since the head teacher was trained in South India on these methods. The classrooms were full of Montessori learning manipulative, books, and a range of toys. The kindergarten children followed a structured schedule though the schedule depended on what day of the week it was. Subjects included: Math, Nepali, English, Tibetan, Song and Rhymes, Story, Sensorial, Nature Walk, Hygiene, Games, and Coloring/Drawing.

### **3.2.15. Difficulties of Parenting:**

*“This is our duty- we have to do it. Taking care is very hard because morning to dawn we have to take care- they may fall down or get burned, all day we have to worry”*

*(Tashi Palkhiel)*

Parents expressed various challenges associated with raising their children. Some explained that it was challenging to care for their children’s basic needs and keep them safe, especially 24/7. A few parents explained the challenges of feeding their children on time and preparing them for school. v, a father from Tserok explained that it was especially challenging to take care of his child when his wife works in Jomsom. Parents also explained the challenge of ensuring their children’s safety, noting the difficulty of always having to watch after their children because, if not, they might get hurt or sick. Parents from Tserok often noted that it was difficult to always worry about whether their child was safe in the natural environment, especially because of the recent landslide. Others shared that it was worrisome when their children were sick.

Several parents from Tashiling explained the challenges of going back and forth between their child’s kindergarten throughout the day. Dolma explained that she had to drop her son off at 9:00 am, return to provide him snacks and milk at 10:00 am, collect him at 12:30 pm to feed him lunch at home, return him to school at 1:30 pm, and pick him up for the day at 3:30 pm. Collectively, she had to make 5 trips to the school and home. Other parents also mentioned the inconvenience of having to bring their child morning snack. For working parents who were not working in the immediate area, they had to make arrangements with their relatives to make sure their child was cared for at all of these pick ups and drop offs.

Dhundup from Tashi Palkhiel explained that it was difficult to balance daily work and spending time with his children, but that these difficulties were far less concerning than those he anticipates to face in paying for his children’s later education. Many parents echoed Dhundup, explaining that, while there are some challenges in caring for their children now, their biggest

concern was about making the money to support the future costs of education that they would need to finance. Pema from Tserok described that it was especially difficult to care for her children and work when her husband is off in Kagbeni, working and living there. She described that she has to prepare her children for school, work at her field, and do community work. She mentioned that before they attended school, and sometimes after the school day, she would take her children to the field with her.

A few parents explained the challenge of being present for their children and taking time to care for themselves due to their busy work lives. A few mothers explained that since having children they didn't have the time for themselves to do things like read, which they used to do and enjoy. One father from Tashi Palkhiel described that he no longer had time to spend with his friends, who were mostly unmarried. Khando from Tashiling explained how, after working a full day in her restaurant, she often feels quite exhausted which makes it challenging to play with her 20 month old. Another working mother from Tashi Palkhiel expressed the same sentiment.

### 3.3. Caregiver- Child Interaction Norms

#### 3.3.1. Nurturing Behaviors:

*10 month old Karma sat in his stroller directly in front of his dad. As he started to cry, Dhundup bent down to kiss his head. For a few minutes his crying continued to which Dhundup rocked the carriage and comfortingly touched his son. Eventually, when his cries didn't stop, Dhundup picked up his son, gave him a kiss and held him close, then he stood to bounce his son. As the cries persisted, Karma's grandmother came and took the baby into her arms- within 5 minutes his mother breastfed him.*

*(Tashi Palkhiel)*

Though caregivers did not often explain how love directly benefits their children's development, there was a resounding opinion that it was important. Sangyal from Kagbeni reasoned that, "if we do not show them care when who will show this to them?" suggesting his belief that this love was fundamentally necessary. In attempting to explain why it was important to show his grandson love, Metok from Tashi Palkhiel referenced that, like animals, children need love, especially the little ones. Rabgyal from Tashi Palkhiel explained that although he doesn't know how to help his children much in their education, he learned during his time studying in a monastery that it's important to give love to everyone. He felt strongly that he should and wants to give his children love.

Caregivers described and demonstrated a wide range of loving behaviors with their young children. Parents detailed that they showed their children love through playing and talking with them. Rabten from Tserok put in nicely when he said that if he spends time with them he is automatically showing them care. Parents often demonstrated love and care through sharing in physical closeness with their child, hugging them and holding them on their laps. Children often approached their parents to hold on to their legs or to get a quick hug. In Tashiling, Phuntsok's grandchild would repeatedly run to her arms laughing after wrestling her brother. Phuntsok

didn't miss a beat in picking her grandchild up and holding her close in her arms. Every afternoon, Lhamo carried her three year old tied to her back with a scarf to do three rounds around the small gumpa in Tserok. She explained that she had a rough childhood with abusive parents which she still feels poorly about to this day. Her lack of loving and caring parents motivates her to show her daughter a lot of love now. The amalas from SOS described the importance of showing their children a lot of love and attention, especially when they first arrived to the Children's Village.



**Image 9: Nightly walk, 3 times around the stupa with her little tied to her back. (Tserok)**

### **3.3.2. Play:**

*A gaggle of six children running here and there, tossing, and rolling balls around her, Lhamo was the only adult playing with the children during the evening after-school village play time. She ran with the children, chasing her daughter and her little friends, from which laughter resonated across the concrete court.*

*(Tserok)*

Parents often reported that playing was their children's most consistent and constant activity. Across place, parents more often than not reported playing with their children. One amala from the SOS Children's Village described that she felt like a child herself when she played with her children. Another mother from Tashi Palkhiel explained that parents, "have to do like the kids," referencing that she takes part in different activities with her daughter like dancing and painting. Many parents reported dancing and singing with their children, often playing music from their phones to accompany. Some mentioned playing outside with their children, sometimes

with a ball to toss around and otherwise without toys. Other parents described playing things that were less commonly reported by other parents such as: hide and seek, letting their child ride on their backs, wrestling, blocks, cards, puzzles, and cars. One parent from Tashi Palkhiel described taking her daughter to swim in the nearby river, another mentioned that she would fill a tub in their yard for her daughter to swim in. Others mentioned that there was no particular play activity they did, but rather they followed whatever their child wanted to do.

While the majority of parents described playing with their children, two from Tashi Palkhiel, two from Tashiling, and one from Tserok described that they didn't do so, or didn't always do so. One grandmother explained that while she spends time with her grandchildren, she doesn't actually play with them much. Another mother explained that her children play and she watches them to make sure they don't get hurt, but doesn't actually play with them. From Tashiling, one grandmother described that sometimes she plays with her grandchild, but other times she lets her play on her own since she has to do other things in the home like caring for her



**Image 10: Lhamo plays with a group of children after school. (Tserok)**

ill mother. Another mother from Tashiling described that she normally plays with her son, but since becoming pregnant with her second child has less energy to play with him, though she noted that he still plays with the neighbor kids. One mother from Tserok explained that she used to play with her children, but these days doesn't have time to do so.

On the topic of using toys when playing together, and which were appropriate, it seemed that there was quite a bit of variation from family to family. In some homes, parents had quite a few toys- from dolls to drawing utensils, lego kits, blocks, and stuffed animals. For others, however, it seemed that there were not many toys that children played with, or at least that they

were out of sight in the home. Upon asking parents whether they would allow their children play with toy guns, most thought that this was fine. Tsomo from Tashiling described that it was not problem for her son to play a toy guns because in Nepal it is very challenging to actually purchase a real gun. While she could imagine this might be a concern in other countries where there is access to real guns, she explained how this was not the situation in Nepal. A few other parents described that it was not acceptable because they didn't want their children to pretend to target others. One father expressed concern that his son could buy a gun in the future, complicating Tsomo's explanation.

### **3.3.3. "If you had a free day for fun together, what would you do?":**

*As she fastened Tenzin's shoes, Lhamo explained that Tenzin told her she wants to go somewhere outside. Though Lhamo wasn't sure where her three year old was planning to go, she her daughter in getting her shoes on and readily followed her lead out the door.*

*(Tserok)*

When questioned about what they would do with their children if they had a free day for fun, some parents shared specific activities, while others explained that they would do whatever their child wanted. A few parents listed activities that they would do with their children such as: playing, singing, dancing, drawing, playing outside, and doing puzzles. In Pokhara two parents described letting their children play with water outside. A few parents also mentioned engaging in cleanliness and care activities like feeding breakfast, bathing, and, putting on new clothes.

A few parents in Tashi Palkhiel and one in Tashiling mentioned taking their children outside of the home to go to a new places like the Pokhara Lakeside. For those in Tserok, this kind of outing is not possible due to the fact that there are no facilities in the village or nearby. With this said, two fathers mentioned that it was fun to take their children to Kathmandu and Pokhara during their holidays. Both made the point that it was beneficial for their children to see new places because it was interesting for their children and a good learning opportunity. They mentioned taking their children to zoos and swimming pools in the cities.

Several parents responded that they would do whatever the child wanted to do together. These parents often mentioned that they would ask their child what they wanted to do and then follow their lead in playing together. Phuntsok from Tashiling described having followed her granddaughter outside just yesterday. She described how her three year old granddaughter lead the way around the neighborhood and she followed her lead rather than interjecting her own path. She recounted how her granddaughter would be upset if she didn't follow her, or suggested a different way to go. She explained that it was best to go where the child wants and do what they want with them.

### **3.3.4. Book Reading and Storytelling:**

*A bookshelf sat against the wall with picture books stacked, though several also lay on the floor nearby. Three year old Dolma flipped*

*through their pages. Dolma's grandmother explained that they never read together, as she can't read. But, Dolma still plays with the books.*

*"I told my mother just to give her the books to play with while I was working in Kathmandu. Now they're all torn,"*

*(Tashiling)*

It is safe to say that across Pokhara and Mustang parents and children do not function within culture of book reading. For some the idea of reading with their children seemed a foreign concept, others rationalized that there is no reason to read with their children since they couldn't yet speak. Though many did not express plans to ever read together, some parents planned that once their children were able to understand the letters and the story, then they would read together. One mother from Tashi Palkhiel explained that she doesn't read with her daughter because she doesn't have time. Several grandparents explained that they don't know English so there is no way to read together.

With this said, some parents shared that they did read with their children. Reading practices were most common among parents in Tashi Palkhiel. Yangkey and Metok described reading books with their children to teach them new words. They used books with pictures of objects and things, categorized by family such as fruits, animals, and the letters of the alphabet. Yangkey, who had attended the Snow Lion Foundation parenting workshop in Kathmandu, explained that this was good to do with his son, but that he had only done so one or two times.

Two other mothers from Tashi Palkhiel described that they read with their children because of the encouragement from their siblings living abroad. Tsering recounted reading books with her one year old occasionally, and, "little by little." She explained that while reading she would make a barking noise when a dog appeared in the story, and encouraged her daughter to do the same. She explained that her sister from Canada had given her the books and recommended she read with her daughter. Pemba's sisters in Canada and India also encouraged her to read with her daughter. They explained that it was important that she read with her daughter even if she didn't yet know how to do so, and that reading together when she was little would help her daughter to develop an attachment to book reading throughout her life. Though they had just started reading together before bed time, Pemba explained that her daughter was always excited to read together.

One family in Tashi Palkhiel mentioned reading Tibetan books, created by USAID, with their children. Dhundup mentioned the book titles being, "The Fat Cat" and "Grandmother and the Crow." He explained that they didn't have many words, but lots of pictures which his son often made up different stories about. Written in Tibetan, Dhundup referenced books created through the Tibet Early Grade Reading (TERG) program, an initiative of the Central Tibetan Administration Department of Education, with support from USAID and in collaboration with The Tibet Fund (The Tibet Fund, 2017).



Aside from reading physical books, a few caregivers recounted telling oral stories to their children. Pemba, the mother from Tashi Palkhiel who explained having just started reading books with her four and a half year old relayed that she makes up stories in her mind to tell her daughter before bed. She described that her daughter is engaged and invested in these stories, often asking questions about the characters and their experiences. Pasang who was living in Kagbeni explained that, when back in Tserok, she told her four year old imaginary stories. Rangdol, grandmother to Pasang's daughter, described that she tells her granddaughter stories, but that she does not usually listen or find interest in these. A grandfather from Tashi Palkhiel expressed the same sentiment, explaining that he tries to tell his grandson stories but he does not listen.

In addition to telling imaginary stories, a few parents described telling real-life stories about their childhoods and the basic history of Tibet. One father from Tserok explained that he is, gradually telling his son stories about his childhood. He and another father in Tserok also mentioned that they are slowly teaching their children the story of Tibet. Quick to clarify that they were teaching very basic things about the Chinese invasion now, the fathers hoped that overtime their children would develop a strong sense of Tibetan identity and work towards reclaiming Tibet as adults.

### **3.3.5. Technology**

*Tenzin and her dad sat in front of the television engrossed in morning cartoons. Having just recently woken up from sleep, and still bundled under a pile of pink blankets, Tenzin slowly ate her cereal, her dad feeding her a spoonful at a time. They often exchanged grunts and giggles, engaged in an acknowledging conversation with one another about the funny things happening on the tv.*

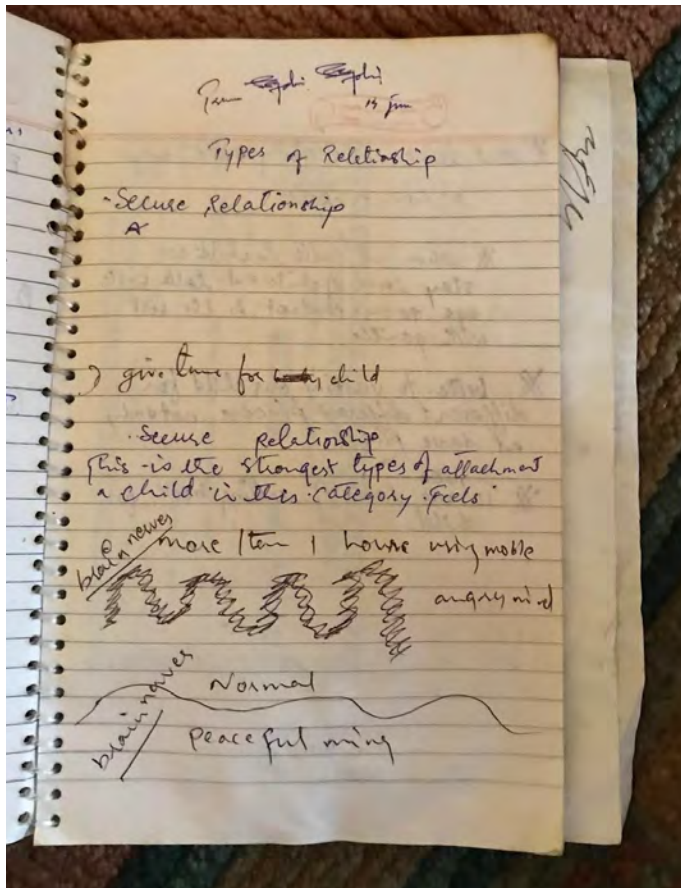
*(Tserok)*

Parents consistently described the when their children engaged with technology they experienced both harms and benefits. Caregivers often described that their children intuitively knew how to use technology, and were quite entertained by the things they watched on the phone, especially. Parents exclaimed concern over their children spending too much time on mobile phones. Parents frequently explained that they did not like the way that their children were hyper-focused on the phone when they were using it, to the point that they were unaware of everything else happening in their environment. Rabten explained that it is important for children to listen in on others' conversations and to engage in these, but that, while playing on his mobile, his son is too hyper-focused to do so.

Many parents also expressed other concerns related to their children's phone usage. Several parents explained their concern that if their children spent too much time on their phones they wouldn't spend enough time doing homework which could negatively affect their academic achievement. Some parents also described that watching screens could be harmful to their children's eyes. A couple parents expressed concern over the inappropriate content accessible through technology, such as fighting. One grandparent explained that she doesn't allow her

children to watch these things. Another parent described that he turns his phone to airplane mode or child mode to ensure that his children can only access appropriate, previously downloaded content and applications while playing on it.

A few parents mentioned that spending too much time with technology could be harmful to a child's mind. Lhamo from Tserok explained that her brother in Canada warned her about the dangers of letting her daughter spend too much time on her mobile device. Because of his concerns she slowly weaned her daughter from using the phone, and now only allows her to watch cartoons on the television, though she prefers for her daughter to play outside instead. Tsomo from Tashiling detailed too much time on the phone was harmful to her son's brain and eyes. She shared that she only allows him to use her phone for 30 minutes, and then encourages him to play outside. Pemba from Tashi Palkhiel took a similar approach, limiting the time her daughter could spend on her phone to 30 minutes. She described that it was good for watch the phone for a little bit of time because she learns so much through doing so, but too much time is bad for her eyes and brain. Nyima from Tashi Palkhiel explained that she learned through a video on Facebook that too much time on the phone was harmful to children and, since then, restricted the amount of time she allows her children to play on it.



Yangkey from Tashi Palkhiel explained that he learned at the Snow Lion Foundation in Kathmandu that the phone is very bad for his child. They taught him to never give his son the phone for more than one hour because doing so changes the brain itself. He learned that when his son watches too much television or spends too much time on a phone his brain waves will change, causing his son to feel anger.

**Image 11: A drawing from Yangkey's notebook, depicting the difference in brain waves when the child spends too much time watching technology, versus when they don't.**

A few parents described employing ingenious methods to restrict the amount of time their children could spend on their phones. Rabten from Tserok explained that his wife would hide her phone and lie to their children that she left it at work when they asked for it.

Rabgyal from Tashi Palkhiel explained that he gave his children the phone to play with once it was already down to 30% battery so that the phone would naturally die after a short amount of time.

Some parents expressed that parents give their child too much access to their phones, making children addicted to technology. A couple of parents described that some children are in the habit of spending so much time on the phone that they will not even eat without watching it. They explained that parents enabled their children's addiction through giving their children the phone for too much time as a means of entertainment as they did their own work. Tashi from Tserok explained that when he needed to do house work, and was unable to watch his daughter play outside, it was helpful that he could easily amuse her through turning on the television or letting her play on his phone.

Parents whose children were reportedly addicted to their phones expressed a feeling of helplessness. about their situations Parents described that if they didn't give their children their phones they would become upset and cry until their parents gave in. Dolma from Tashiling theorized that her three year old son's aggressive demeanor is a result of watching too many aggressive cartoons on the mobile that he then tries to reenact in real life. Dolma explained that it is impossible for her not to give her son the phone because he is so addicted to it. Moreover, once giving him the phone, it was impossible to convince her son to watch anything other than the two aggressive cartoons he prefers.

Despite the laundry list of harms technology may cause, parents also expressed that the phone also benefited their children. Parents often recounted that their children learned English, Hindi, Nepali, and sometimes even Chinese through watching television and playing mobile games. Parents also frequently noted that through child-focused apps their children learned the alphabet, rhymes, and other educational material.

Some parents expressed the belief that watching cartoons on the television was less harmful to children than spending time on their mobile phone. One parents explained that her children learned valuable moral lessons through cartoons. Lhamo explained that when she and her husband watched cartoons with her child, her daughter was able to learn things from the shows that they could later talk about together. For their family, watching cartoons was a way to spend time together, too. With this said, it was not necessarily common that parents sat down with their children to watch television together.

### ***3.3.6. Socializing with Other Children***

Parents agreed that it was important for their children to socialize with others, though they had different concepts of why this was important, when it should happen, and how. Many parents expressed that it is important for young children to interact with other children because they can learn things through play. Others expressed concern that without this interaction their children would be shy and unable to speak up. Many parents also mentioned that it was fun for their children to play with others, suggesting that they placed value on their children having fun. With these said, some parents mentioned that sometimes interaction was less beneficial because

children sometimes fight and learn bad things from each other. However, these consequences were not severe enough to outweigh the benefits.

Parents frequently explained that they found nursery and kindergarten to be important because it allowed children the opportunity to interact with other children at a young age. Kelsang from Tserok explained that he thought it was beneficial for children to go to school early on so that they had the opportunity to interact with other children. Parents expressed this sentiment across communities.

With this said, Dhundup from Tashi Palkhiel believed strongly that before they interact with other children and make friends, children must come to know their own family. He explained that it was a trend among parents to send their children to the nursery as young as they possibly could. Though he understood that many did so because of challenging financial situations and the need to work, Dhundup felt that until they were at least two and a half parents should arrange their circumstances to be able to care for their children in the home. He reasoned that his children can spend their whole lives learning about the world outside of their home, but early childhood was the time for them to learn about the home and family

Interestingly, at a separate time, Dhundup's wife described that she felt some regret in not exposing her two and a half year old son to other children earlier. She explained that it is quite important for children to spend time with other children. Since they didn't expose him to other children, their son had been crying throughout his first days at the nursery. Because her son has had a hard time adjusting, Dhundup's mother went with him to school with him for the first week to help him in making the transition. For this reason, she planned to expose her 10 month old to other young children around age one and a half.

Lhamo explained that it was quite important for her children to play with other children, but that she should also be engaged in their play as a parent. Lhamo described that when children are playing with their friends along they may feel a bit unsafe and sad. When she goes to play with her three year old and her friends, her child feels happy and safe. She often plays with the children at the basketball court in the afternoons. She described that in the Winter she invites the children to her home to play inside together. She explained that no other parents make a habit of playing with their children as she does.

### ***3.3.7. Spending Time Outside***

Parents almost unanimously agreed that it was beneficial for their children to spend time outside of the home. Across place parents explained that it was good for their children to play outside because their children could play with other children and form friendships. In Tserok and both settlements in Pokhara children often spent time playing outside together after school and on Saturdays (holiday). In Pokhara parents often explained that it was also beneficial for children to spend time outside so that they could see new things and broaden their minds. Khando from Tashiling explained that it was important for her son to spend time outside because he could get air and see movement. Likewise, Metok from Tashi Palkhiel described that spending time

outside was important because his grandchild was able to expand his mind to know about things that he otherwise wouldn't.

Parents from Pokhara, especially those from Tashi Palkhiel, explained that aside from playing outside with their friends, children also benefited from going to physically different and new places with the family. Pemba described taking her child to the market and play areas in the city because it was refreshing for her daughter. Yankey mentioned that taking his son out of the house and to new places was important because doing so enabled his son to learn new things and ask questions.

In the case of Tserok, parents most frequently considered that time spent outside was beneficial to their children, though two parents expressed concern about their children doing so because of the potentially unsafe physical environment. One father explained that it was better if his daughter spent time inside the home on his mobile or playing games because it was safer than being outside. But, he detailed that his daughter often wishes to play outside and he allows her to do so. One grandmother explained that her three year old granddaughter always goes outside play which becomes worrisome when she goes for too long.

Interestingly, both parents from Kagbeni whose families were in Tserok described concern about their children spending time outside. Sangyal explained that if the child is old enough to protect themselves then it was fine that they spend time outside, but otherwise a parent should always go outside with them. Pasang explained that she feels better and more safe when her child is nearby, later adding that she preferred for her daughter to stay inside the home.

The majority of parents in Tserok explained that it was better for their children to spend time outside the home than inside. One parent mentioned that her children felt bored when they stayed inside the home and that it refreshes their minds to go out. One parent described that their children typically spent two to three hours playing outside with their friends after school. Aside from playing, parents occasionally took their children on short motorcycle rides through the area. Though opportunities for excursions to new places were not available in Tserok, two parents expressed that it was important to take their children to see new places and things. They recounted taking to their children to new places like Pokhara and Kathmandu over longer school holidays from school.



**Image 12: Dad prepares to take his little one for a ride. (Tserok)**

### **3.3.8. Responsive Caregiving- Crying:**

*In tears over having hit her head on the table, Lhamo swiftly picked up Tenzin and plopped her on to her lap where she held her close, quickly putting an end to her daughter's cries through a loving embrace.*

*(Tserok)*

Parents most frequently explained that their children cry when they don't get their way or what they want. Otherwise, parents recounted that their children cried if they shouted at or hit them. Parents often responded lovingly to their child's tears, giving them a hug, kiss, or ride on their backs to cheer them up. Parents also often described getting their child whatever it was that they wanted, or feeding them a treat like chocolate or juice as a distraction. Parents also mentioned telling jokes, taking their child outside to roam, and showing them toys as a means of distraction.

Some parents also took other approaches to manage their children's tears. The amalas from SOS explained that they take their crying child to visit one of their friends at another village home to cheer them up, an advantage of living so close to each other within the Children's Village. Tsomo from Tashiling also described engaging in discussion with his child about why they were crying to understand the root causes. After doing so described consoling his children.

### **3.3.9. Responsive Caregiving- Naughty Behavior:**

*Having spent the past couple hours watching cartoons and playing together with his friend, two year old Tsering wailed when his mom came to collect him for dinner. His cries and lack of movement away from the couch where he sat indicated that Tsering wasn't too keen on the idea of going home. Without wasting a beat to take off her shoes, Tsering's mother kneeled to the floor and reached across the room to grab Tsering's leg, pulling him across the small living room to the door.*

*(Tserok)*

Of all things, parents said most about their children's naughty behaviors and how they handled these. Perhaps indicative of the efforts of groups like the Snow Lion Foundation to educate parents not to use corporal punishment, and the ban of corporal punishment within school classrooms, many parents explained that they never hit their children. Some expressed that they didn't do so because it was harmful to the child. Gyurmey from Tashiling explained his feeling that it is very bad for parents to beat their children because they have such soft, innocent, young minds. He described that children are not animals so parents should not treat them this way. Three fathers in Tserok explained that they never hit their children. They described that beating and scolding was harmful because their children: are too little, would not understand

why they were being hit, will feel poorly, and experience negative effects to their minds. One expressed that in the 21st century children are quite different than they used to be, and though it used to be an effective strategy, these days hitting has an immediate negative affect on young minds.

Among the parents who were against hitting, several expressed that it was challenging when their spouses hit or scolded their children. Three fathers, two from Tserok and one from Tashiling, described that their wives would beat and scold their children. One told his wife not to hit their child because she is too little and will not understand what is happening. Another reasoned that he and formed a much closer relationship with his children than his wife because his she beat and scolded his daughters, which he would never do.

Instead of hitting or scolding their children, these parents described that they would use other methods to discipline their children. Gyurmey from Tashiling found it effective to discuss the issue at hand with his daughters, conversing about what had happened. Rabten from Tserok described that he scolded his children through telling them what they should have done in the situation. Jangchup explained that he has started to talk with his daughter more about her poor behavior as she grew older. Kelsang from Tserok described giving his child the materials to become bored in his naughty behavior. For example, when his child took interest in ripping the pages of a book, that instead of scolding him, Tashi gave him an unimportant book that he could rip. He described that his son then got tired ripping the book and would stop.

A few other grandparents explained that they did not hit their grandchildren, instead using a wide variety of other tactics to change behavior, but for reasons other than a conviction that hitting was harmful to their grandchild. One grandmother from Tashi Palkhiel giggled as she shared that sometimes she wants to hit her granddaughter but doesn't because she is too cute and little. Another from Tserok explained that she used to beat her child but felt quite bad doing so, so now she never beats her. One grandfather from Tashi Palkhiel explained that while he does not hit his grandson, he sees no problem with other parents doing so. One grandmother from Tashi Palkhiel described that children these days don't listen when adults approach them aggressively, so she tried to convince her grandchild to do the right thing gently and bribed her using chocolates. Among other grandparents, one explained that when his child was naughty he would ignore him until he changed behavior. Another described trying to distract her away from the naughty behavior.

The amalas at SOS detailed how they are not allowed to hit their children due to child safeguarding requirements which uphold their children's rights and autonomy. Instead of hitting the children, the amalas described that they would scare the child into better behavior through threatening to take them to get an injection at the doctors office. They explained that this had been an effective method at changing their behaviors. Teachers at the SOS kindergarten in Tashiling explained that since rules were implemented prohibiting their use of corporal punishment, it was very challenging to control bad behavior in the classroom. Instead of hitting the children they described prohibiting their children from engaging in fun activities and outings such as the weekly nature walk which worked effectively.

Several parents explained taking a middle-way approach to discipline, one that both acknowledged the harms of using corporal punishment and its effectiveness at correcting poor behavior. Pemba from Tashi Palkhiel summarized this perspective in explaining that, if parents beat their child too much they will become immune to the effects of discipline, but if they only show their children care their children will have bad behavior. These parents expressed that beating their children was harmful to them because it puts too much pressure on their minds. One parent explained that it was especially bad if parents beat their children harshly or on their heads or backs. Given their explanations that beating was harmful to their children, it made sense that these parents described only pinching or hitting their children lightly when they used physical punishment. Some of these parents also described that unless the behavior was very bad, they would first try to correct behavior through talking with their children about what they did wrong and giving their children advice on better approaches. Some described using these tactics in combination with corporal punishment or threats of corporal punishment. Two mothers described locking their daughters in the toilet for a few minutes as an alternate punishment for very bad behavior.

Parents often described that when they beat and scold their children it comes from a place of care versus from a desire to hurt their children. explained that she shows love for her child and also beats him when he does naughty things. She described that she didn't beat her two year old to make him feel pain, but rather to scare him into not repeating the same bad behavior. She explained how her son is almost always naughty, and often quite aggressive too, so this type of approach was necessary. Other parents described scolding their children after they had done something potentially dangerous to ensure that they didn't repeat this behavior and hurt themselves.

A couple of parents explained beating and scolding their children when they were frustrated, and then immediately regretting that they had done so. Pema from Tserok explained that when she gets angry she scolds and hits her children, to the point that her neighbors have advised her not to do so. She described that after scolding her children she feels regret, ruminating, "Why did I scold them? I shouldn't have scolded them because they're so little. Scolding is not good. They didn't understand why I scolded them. Why did I do that?" Yangkey from Tashi Palkhiel explained that he doesn't hit or scold his child frequently, but when he does he feels very bad about having done so. Phurba from Tashiling explained that after yelling at her son he cries which makes her feel emotional and prompts her to console him.

One parent explained that they saw no problem with hitting and scolding their child. Khando from Tashiling explained that her 20 month old son often takes all of the clothes from the cupboards, plays in the water, and climbs all over the place. In addition to telling him not to do these things, she will beat him, but her son never listens. She explained that her son used to smile a lot, but suddenly changed in disposition. These days he likes watching the mobile and will only eat when he is watching it.

When it came to explaining the roots of bad behavior parents detailed different perspectives. Many parents expressed that their children were too little to understand what was good and bad, that many of their bad behaviors were unintentional. Dhundup explained that



while his child sometimes did mischievous things intentionally, like putting his finger in his baby brother's ears or nose, other times he did naughty things in-deliberately, like picking unripe tomatoes from their garden. Likewise, Pemba from Tashi Palkhiel explained that one time her daughter turned the kitchen gas on, which was unintentionally quite dangerous. described that her aggressive two year old was aggressive due to heredity and exposure to violent fighting cartoons on her mobile device.

### **3.3.10. Consistency**

Though not a topic that parents often explained as important to their interaction with their children during the early years, a few parents did describe how consistency in their parenting benefitted their relationships with their children. Rabgyal from Tashi Palkhiel explained how his children never repeatedly asked him for things because they understood that he was always honest in his interactions with them from the get go. For example, if he said he wouldn't or would buy something for them they trusted that he would follow through on his word because he never changed his response on these types things. Likewise, if he told his children to play on at the basketball court and that he would return in 15 minutes he always came back on time. Similar yet a bit different in concept, Pemba from Tashi Palkhiel explained that her daughter always listened to her because she set consistent expectations for her. The amalas from SOS described that their children benefited from their use of a consistent schedule which detailed what time was for homework, what was for dinner time and bedtime, and so on.

### **3.3.11. Processing Frustration and Experiencing Joy**

*“As a parent I feel that I have an aim, I want to work for my children and can work for them. One day they will support me.”*

*(Tashiling)*

Parents employed various methods to process their experiences of child-related frustration. Many parents explained that they occasionally felt frustrated because of naughty things that their children did. Many parents explained that when they felt this way they took measures to calm themselves down. Some parents described that they would go outside of the home or separate themselves from their children for some time. Rigzin, a grandfather in Tashi Palkhiel explained that he would stay quiet for a while when he was angry, to which his grandson would eventually approach him with apologetic love. Some parents described taking other actions to calm down like: lying down to relax, listening to music, and looking at their phones. Tashi, a father in Tserok, explained that he tried to imagine his children's point of view while listening to music and roaming around outside.

While most parents expressed that they felt frustration, two parents from Tashi Palkhiel explained that they didn't experience frustration. One mother described that she feels happy and enjoys parenting because her daughter is such a great companion. She smiled as she described that wherever she goes her daughter comes with her, and that they have a great relationship. Another mother explained that she also feels happy and enjoys parenting because she loves playing with her children and seeing her smile.

### ***3.3.12. Communication and Conversation***

When it came to norms and perceptions of communication with their children, some parents understood communication with their children to be an important component of their job as parents. Pema from Tserok encapsulated this thought well in his description that, although his son doesn't yet talk well, he tries to understand what his baby wants so that he can give him these things. Some parents expressed the challenge of understanding what their children were trying to communicate. from Tashiling described that she is the only one who understands what her son is saying when he talks.

On the topic of sharing in conversation, some parents expressed the belief that it was important and beneficial to talk with their children. Nyima explained that even with her 10 month old she found it important to talk so that he can listen and slowly come to understand what she says. She explained that she talks about regular things that are happening around him using a polite tone and slow pace. Karma explained that through talking with her daughter she will come to know more words and have an easier time speaking in the future. Sangyal from Kagbeni explained that talking with her daughter is very important because through talking children learn not to be shy and it will be easier for them to speak later on. A couple parents expressed the sentiment that talking with their children when they were young would help ensure that their children not become shy later in life.

Parents generally expressed excitement at their children's developing language skills. A few parents explained that they have started being able to hold conversation with their children. Rigzin, a grandfather in Tashi Palkhiel smiled as he described that he talks to his grandson quite a lot, often about their days. Parents frequently mentioned talking with their child about what happened at school or who they played with while outside. One mother revealed that it was not always easy to talk with her children after a long day. On the topic of whether she enjoyed talking with her son she said, "It depends on my mood, if I am tired and have lots of work then sometimes I don't want to listen. If I am not stressed and tired then I can listen... and listening is important."

### ***3.3.13. Protection from Harm***

Across locations, parents explained that there was generally very little that they had to protect their children from within their communities. Perhaps arising from the close sense of community and trust in their own people, parents felt that their children were growing up in safe environment. With this said there were some things that parents explained needing to protect their children from.

In the case of Tserok, the only thing that parents were concerned about protecting their children from were whims of their natural environment. The recent landslide in March of 2019 which had destroyed one of the pathways along the river nearby the community, the health clinic building, and some toilets. Parents often expressed worry about the more destruction that might

occur during the upcoming rainy season when there is an even greater risk for landslides. The last landslide happened at night, but what could've happened if it were during the day and if children had been playing in the area? Parents living Kagbeni whose families were in Tserok expressed feeling that their children were safe because their spouses were there to care for them.

In the case of Tashiling and Tashi Palkhiel, parents often prefaced their responses by saying that they found their community to be a safe place without much potential for harm. In Tashiling, one parent mentioned needing to protect her child from buffalos in the summer. Another mentioned protecting her child from teenagers who can be wild and smoke cigarettes which she doesn't want her son to see. In Tashi Palkhiel more parents expressed concern over protecting their children from exposure to people who were drinking, smoking, and playing cards. Aside from this, a couple of parents explained needing to protect their children from cars on the nearby big road. But, even on this topic parents did not express much concern because adults from the community were always looking after the safety of all children.

Pemba from Tashi Palkhiel expressed concern about protecting her child from larger societal dangers outside of the settlement. She cited having learned that child rape and violence are prevalent through her phone and the television. For this reason she taught her four and a half year old never to accept things from strangers and not to wander outside of the community. With this said, Pemba explained that these worries did not concern her within the Tashi Palkhiel community, that she felt completely safe within the confines of the camp.

### 3.4. *Dreams, Worries and Tibetan Identity*

#### 3.4.1. ***No Documents = Big Problem***

*“Maybe my son wants to be a pilot or a doctor, and has the quality for that, but his identity will stop him from doing this.”*

*“My biggest hope for my children is that they don't feel that they are a refugee, that their refugee status doesn't stop them from reaching their goals and stop them from using their energies for the betterment of society. My biggest hope is that we can go back to Tibet, or, if not this, that the Nepal government provides documents, and that we can serve the Nepal government through paying taxes. I can do so many things if they provide citizenship, or just some kind of documents... Nowadays the biggest thing people need are innovative ideas. I have a plan, I have an innovation, I have creativity, but I don't have capital or investment opportunity. My creativity is always being pushed down and down and down, turning into a bitterness.”*

*(Tashi Palkhiel)*

Caregivers explained that all of their biggest challenges as refugees in Nepal were rooted in the fact that they don't have citizenship or refugee status. Parents expressed that the biggest restrictive factor associated with not having documentation is their lack of employment

opportunity. Many parents described how they are unable to work in banks, Nepali government positions (including as teachers in government funded schools), as nurses or doctors in non-Tibetan clinics and hospitals, or as licensed trekking guides for tourists. These restrictions means that Tibetans are limited to selling souvenirs (as many Tibetans currently do), working within Tibetan institutions (such as Tibetan schools, medical clinics, nonprofits such as the Snow Lion Foundation, and settlement offices), finding part time employment from willing Nepali employers, or operating their own small shops or restaurants.

Many parents described that due to the lack of employment opportunities, even if their children did very well in school, achieved high marks or were even to get a masters degree or PhD, there is no way for them to use their talents and education in Nepal. One father from Tashi Palkhiel explained how at least those Tibetan children who dropped out of school and started doing souvenir businesses had jobs. Many of those who completed higher education often ended up unemployed. Time and time again parents expressed that Nepal is a dead zone for opportunity. Pemba from Tashi Palkhiel explained how, as a nurse, she wishes to be able to work in larger hospitals where she could be exposed to a larger range of health problems, learn more about her profession, and develop her craft as a nurse. Instead, she is only able to work in the Tibetan clinic where a handful of patients come every day.

Other restrictive factors make it quite challenging for Tibetans to function productively and independently within Nepali society. One mother explained that Tibetans must show identity documentation to do things as simple as buy a SIM card for their phones or to stay at hotels. Another mother mentioned that Tibetans are not allowed to buy land. Yangkey from Tashi Palkhiel explained that Tibetans are unable to open bank accounts, get loans, or invest in stocks. He described that Tibetans don't have the supportive infrastructure to encourage saving and investing, which could bring more financial security within Tibetan communities. As it is now, families are just, "working and eating." For any endeavors outside of their limited rights as refugees, parents explained that they had to rely on connections with people in positions of power or use bribery. Dawa from Tashi Palkhiel expressed frustration with how dependent Tibetans had to be on others to do things in society.

Some individuals spoke to the fact that Nepali systems and officials discriminate against Tibetans. One grandmother from Tashi Palkhiel explained how Nepali people are always favored in situations where there is a choice between a Tibetan person or a Nepali person. For example, in a motorcycle accident involving Nepalis and Tibetans, Nepali people will be favored. Gyurmey from Tashiling described how Nepali employers may employ a Tibetan for temporary work, but replace them once they find a Nepali to do the job. Dawa from Tashi Palkhiel also explained that in instances when they must visit official Nepali government offices, the officials condescendingly ask them to show their identity documents, knowing well that they do not have these because of their Tibetans names. In these situations Tibetans are expected to bribe officials with money to get what they need.

Parents also mentioned their inability to travel outside of Nepal as a major struggle. Parents described that in the case of India, it is possible to cross the border though they must pay the border security officer to get across. Beyond the case of India, it is quite impossible for

Tibetans to travel unless they first acquire fake Nepali citizenship. This, however, is incredibly expensive, costing four to five lakhs per person according to one community leader.<sup>21</sup> He described that once purchasing their fake identification documents, Tibetans are able to get out of Nepal. Though, once arriving in a new country like France, the border office would immediately identify their passport as fake. From here, it is up to the individual to make a strong enough case that the border officials allow them into the country.

Interestingly, a few individuals explained that that they didn't blame the Nepal government for restricting their rights within society. Instead, they identified Chinese power and pressure as the force controlling Nepal, which they described as a small and relatively weak country. Despite the challenges of their situation in Nepal, one parent expressed his appreciation to the government for allowing Tibetans to live there in exile.

### ***3.4.2. Future Worries***

*“We are always wondering what will happen in their future, we are suffering because we don't have the passport and citizenship in Nepal. What will happen to them? Will they suffer the same?”*

*(Tashiling)*

Parents often expressed concerns about their children's future education and lives as refugees. Across location parents felt concerned about financing their children's education. To ensure they were able to financially support their children in the future, parents had to work incredibly hard in their day to day lives to save money. This often meant parents could not spend as much time as they wanted with their children. This financial concern was magnified amongst families who hoped to send their children to India for high school and beyond. Many parents from Tserok also expressed concern about sending their children to Pokhara for school after their child completed grade three. These parents most frequently expressed concern that their children won't be able to care for themselves once they are on their own in Pokhara. Some parents expressed concern about whether their children would suffer as they had because their lack of documentation and refugee status in Nepal.

### ***3.4.3. Preparing for Change: Importance of Education***

Despite the limited rights and opportunities for Tibetans currently living in Nepal, parents expressed that it was extremely important that their children get a good education which suggests their optimism for the future. Parents were adamant that education was most important to their children's futures. Rabgyal from Tashi Palkhiel explained that he can't promise that he will buy his children cars, but he promises to do everything he can to support his children's education, even if they want to get a PhD.

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<sup>21</sup> One lakh is equivalent to nearly \$1,000 USD. For reference, an employee at the Rasilo Juice Factory in Tashi Palkhiel explained that employees at the factory earned 400 rupees a day (roughly \$4 USD) which was more than in most places.

Parents rationalized the importance of education in a variety of ways. Some expressed the sentiment that they wanted their children to get a good education because, unlike in the past when it wasn't even a possibility, children these days *have* the opportunity to get a good education, so they should. Several explained that they wanted their children to become educated because they never had the opportunity to do so, and their life had been challenging because of this. Perhaps drawing on his own experience, Tashi explained that his children might feel sad if they don't have the chance to learn. One parent shared that it will benefit his children to be able to read and write because they can use these skills to better navigate through Nepali society. Another uneducated parent described that he wanted his child to be able to understand and talk about complicated things.

Parents explained that education would open doors for their children. Bhuti, a grandmother in Tashi Palkhiel explained that without a degree or strong skills her grandchild will not be able to do anything. Several other parents expressed a similar sentiment, adding that if their children have the opportunity to go to a country outside of Nepal, being educated would be crucial to their success there. Many parents expressed the feeling that, although the employment and life opportunities were not ideal for Tibetans today, children needed to prepare for the future should the circumstances of their reality change or new opportunities arise. A couple parents described their hope and optimism that the citizenship situation in Nepal might improve to allow Tibetans better employment opportunities.

#### ***3.4.4. To India and Beyond!***

Though their children were quite young, a significant number of parents explained that they were starting to think about sending their children to India for school around their high school years. Many parents believed that schools in India are better than those in Nepal. Parents often described that children who went to schools in India came back with great behavior, manners, and a strong sense of Tibetan identity. In India, their children could attend Tibetan Children's Village schools which not only emphasize preserving Tibetan culture, but also offer lots of extra curricular activities. Parents felt confident that here children could learn what it meant to be Tibetan. Additionally, their children would get to meet His Holiness the Dalai Lama.<sup>22</sup> Parents also frequently mentioned that the schools in India are less difficult than those in Nepal, which would be better for their children.

Beyond their aspirations to send their children to India for the good schools, parent explained that in India their children could also get Indian refugee cards after attending school for a few years. With this documentation children would be able to travel abroad and access more economic opportunity. Tsomo explained that although her elder child is currently in India to pursue the benefits of education there, she isn't yet sure whether she will be able to send her seven year old son there as well. She explained that it would be quite sad and lonely with both of her children outside of their home, but she knows that going to school in India will prepare her children up for a brighter future.

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<sup>22</sup> Due to Chinese pressure, The Dalai Lama can not come to Nepal.

Some parents also expressed their hopes for their children to one day live in other abroad countries such as America or Canada to pursue better education and quality of life there. Though parents aspired for their children to move to these places, doing so requires obtaining documentation. The SOS Children’s Village kindergarten teachers described that all of the children from the village were financially supported to attend high school and higher education in India, which meant that they could acquire refugee documents there. From here, many village children went to Europe and America for economic opportunity. Pasang from Kagbeni explained that the currency and pay is much better in European and American countries. Though she described that she would help her now three year old daughter go abroad if she wanted to do so, Lhamo from Tserok explained that she worries that the pace of life is much faster in European countries, and that her daughter might not be as happy there.

### 3.4.5. *Supporting Their Dreams*

*“Artist or whatever it is, I should support.”*

*(Tserok)*

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*“ What they want.”*

*(Kagbeni)*

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*“I’m not sure what they will do, they will choose.”*

*(Tashi Palkhiel)*

Across place parents described their plans to support their children to do whatever they decide to do in the future. Parents often explained that it was up to their children to decide what job or career they want to pursue, and that they would support whatever choices their children make. Parents anticipated that their child would decide about issues related to their futures in grades 10 through 12, according to their history of academic achievement and desires. Pemba from Tashi Palkhiel explained that it didn’t matter what profession they hoped to pursue, and that she never pressured her children to pursue a specific career like doctor or engineer. Parents very rarely expressed that they had specific professional aspiration for their child’s future.

Though most parents did not describe a specific career that they hoped for their children to pursue, two caregivers did mention specific intentions. Metok from Tashi Palkhiel described that he hoped for her grandchild to become a monk because he had a unique tendencies and awarenesses. For example, if they hid something out of sight when he was not home, his grandson often knew that something was hidden and where. Yangkey described that if his son is unable to assume a position of leadership as a “big boss” that he would want him to work with tourists because he could form financially beneficial relationship with them.

On only one occasion did a parent describe that their child had an idea of what they hoped to become when they grew up, perhaps implying that the classic, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” question wasn’t a prevalent one in these communities. Sangyal from

Kagebni described that his older daughter, a seven year old, wanted to become a doctor. In explaining his dreams for her future, he said that he hoped she could become a good doctor and help many people, suggesting that he took his little one's aspirations seriously.

### ***3.4.6. Role Models in the Community***

Parents in Tashi Palkhiel were the only caregivers that had specific individuals in mind as good examples of who they hoped their children to become. Parents most often mentioned the camp leader and school headmaster as the archetypes of success. They described both men as strong leaders who had grown up in the camp and assumed meaningful roles within the community at young ages.

### ***3.4.7. Hopes for the Future***

*"My life is okay, but I want more for them."*

*(Tashi Palkhiel)*

Though parents often had hopes for their children's futures, it was interesting that several expressed a sense of uncertainty in discussing the concept of future, perhaps reflective of their Buddhist background.<sup>23</sup> Aside from supporting their children in doing what they want to with their futures, parents also expressed hopes about the type of adults their children would become and quality of life they would enjoy. Parents frequently hoped for their children to live happy and "good" lives in good health. The idea of the "good life" seemed that it wasn't one filled with extravagance, but rather one where their children didn't experience difficulty and felt happy.

Caregivers also often expressed a desire that their children become independent and able to stand on their feet. Parents explained that it was not good when children were dependent on their parents as adults. Along these lines, some parents explained that they hoped for their children to become leaders within their communities, that they become people others knew well. A few parents also described desires for their children to help others in their community, especially other Tibetans. A few parents mentioned that they wanted their children to work towards reclaiming Tibet.

## **4. Discussion and Implications**

This study made clear that many moving parts contribute to early childhood experience and parenting among Tibetans living in exile. Due to their lack of documentation and resulting poor economic opportunities, families exist must be dynamically mobile to build the financial stability. Amazingly, a driving force behind parents efforts to make this money was their conviction in the importance of their child receiving a high quality education. Though their status as refugees restricted what was possible for parents to do, and often added a slew of challenges,

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<sup>23</sup> Buddhist cornerstone concepts of impermanence and attachment don't lend themselves particularly well to discussions of the future.



especially logistical, families were optimistic that their hard work would pay off in their children's ability to pursue what they wished later in life.

Though parental movement could be stressful for a child if they lacked strong, supportive relationships, it seemed that young Tibetan children were very well supported. Despite the flux of their communities and families, and the anticipation of attending far away schools, families did not feel frantic. Rather, families were well grounded with a sense that they would persist through the challenges of everyday life to enable their children to do more than they were able to. The strong sense of community security that parents described was palpable after school time when children got to play outside with their friends. Feelings of security were so strong in these communities. Truly amazing, in fact, to think that across three separate communities individuals were not bogged down by concerns about safety.

Despite the extreme challenges of their political status and experience of living within a country where they are not afforded equal rights or opportunities, or even basic rights to experience freedom of travel, speech, and employment, Tibetan communities felt strong and united. Parents, teachers, and community leaders expressed hope for the future and tapped into this hope when they engaged with children, though it could be easy to do the opposite.

When it came to patterns of parent conceptions of early child development, parents' understandings of their caregiving roles were shifting. Many parents described playing with their children, allowing them the freedom to engage with others and their natural environment, and following their children's lead. While change is always in-progress, and some parents were less engaged, many parents were making strides towards empowering their children to express their own autonomy. Parents consistently took a caring approach with their children, and emphasized the importance of spending quality time with them when they were little.

Parents were cognizant of the fact that the children of today were quite different than those just a generation ago. They saw children as more engaged, intelligent, curious, and less easy to go with the flow. Parents expressed their compulsion to support their children's early learning and to do things that helped their children develop further. For the most part, parents expressed the benefits of learning about parenting, and were receptive to learning more about how to raise their children best.. This openness was noticeable most commonly in parent's assertions that they shouldn't fight in front of their children, or hit them. Additionally, a couple parents started reading with their children though it wasn't the norm, upon recommendations of the benefits from their siblings abroad.

Parents interest and enthusiasm to learn more about caregiving coupled the huge importance they place on their child's later education suggests that investing in enriching children's early development could be quite natural and beneficial to their later educational success. Parents already described that their communities and families felt safe, their relationships were increasingly responsive and child-focused, and that they found it quite important to spend time together nurturing and caring for their children. From a Nurturing Care perspective, the areas of responsive caregiving and safety and security were approached quite

impressively. However, it seems that the area of early stimulation is one most opportune for improvement.

Already parents often expressed an understanding of the importance of practicing ABC's and singing songs as a means of preparing their children for school and learning. With this said, parents didn't often express an understanding that active engagements with their child through play, art, reading, conversation, or even just walking around together, creates rich learning experiences for their children. Based on actions which suggested their intuitive understandings of many early childhood development components, caregivers seemed that they would benefit from learning more about how to use all components of nurturing care to optimize their children's early brain development.

With all of this said, it is also extremely important to consider how improvements to Nepal's treatment of Tibetans refugees would benefit both Tibetans and Nepali society at large. If Tibetans were able to have their own bank accounts and access to loans, they might be able to start innovative businesses or nonprofits working on behalf of issues that they experience, but currently don't currently have the agency to address. If they were able to easily pursue high education in Nepal and then use their brilliant minds within Nepal, this would benefit Nepal greatly. These sorts of changes might also enable Tibetan parents to care for their young children in the ways they see best. For example, changes to policy that enable better access to economic opportunities might allow parents to spend more time with their families and young children, something parents saw as very important though was not commonly possible. With all of this said, Chinese pressures makes these sorts of political changes extremely challenging to even consider.

Through the fortified support of their parents during the early years and beyond, young children's 21st century curiosity about the world and intelligence in navigating it will continue to blossom. Perhaps due to a stronger base of rich early child development, children will be able to think even more creatively than before, problem solving in new and innovative ways. A quality of insight and wisdom that might just be what is required to improve Tibetans undeniably complicated and restricting political position as refugees in Nepal.

## 5. Appendix

### 5.1.1. Interview Questions

#### **Demographics:**

- How many children do you have? What are their ages?
- What do you do with your child during the day? Who cares for them?
- Do you have a spouse? Do you parent together, or does one parent care for the child?

#### **PART 1: Tibetan Parents' Positionality in Nepal and Dreams for Child**

- What are your dreams for your child?
- Does being a Tibetan refugee in Nepal mean there are things you wish you or your children could do or be, but can't?
- If you were to be granted proper citizenship status by the Nepal government, would this influence your dreams for your child?
- Can you tell me about a child in your community who is now an adult and living a good life, one that you are pleased with?
- Can you tell me about what most children do after their schooling?
- What will your child realistically do when they grow up? How will their life likely be?
- In a perfect world of opportunity, what do you wish your child could do and be?
- What do you hope most for your child as he/she grows up?

#### **PART 2: Parents' Approaches to Early Childhood and Parenting**

- What is the most important thing for parents to do when their children are 0-3 years old?
- What kinds of things can parents do to raise a good child?
- What kinds of things can parents do to prepare their children for school?

- What skills do students need to do well in school? Do you work on developing these in the home?
- Is home the child's first school? Why or why not?
- What happens between ages 0-3 for children? What qualities or skills do they develop (if any)?
- How should parents "be" around their children?
- Are you able to act as your child's teacher? If yes, what do you teach them? If no, why not?
- Do you know enough to be a good parent to your child? Why yes or why no?
- Where did you learn about how to raise children?
- Is the time when you raise children an exciting time of life?
- At what age do children start learning things?
- Is it better for parents to spend their time making money for their children to go to school or spending more, high quality time with their children?
- Is it good for children if their parents spend time with them? What should parents do when they spend time with their children?
- Are there any things that you've seen parents do that are bad for young children?
- Should parents read with their children? At what age should they do so?
- Should children spend time with other children? Why?
- Is parenting difficult? Why or why not?
- Do you ever feel frustrated as a parent? What do you do when you are feeling frustrated?
- What do you worry about when it comes to raising your child?

**PART 3: Parent-child Interaction Norms**

- Do you ever point to things and say what they are when with your 0-3 year old?
- Do you tell your child stories?

- Does your child ever make sounds or say words? What do you do when they make sounds, point, or say words?
- Is it important to spend time outside?
- When your child goes outside do they take a ball or toy with them?
- When you are outside with your child, what do you do?
- If you had a day to spend with your child without work or responsibilities, what would you do for fun?
- Does your child ever copy things that you do or say?
- Are there things in the community you must protect your child from (dust, people, sound? Why is it harmful?
- Does your child play with other children?
- Do you ever have fun with your child? What kinds of things do you do?
- How does your child play? Do you ever play with them? What do you do together when playing?
- When your child cries, why does he/she cry? What do you do when your child cries?
- When your child gets worked up, energetic, or stuck in bad behavior, what do you do to help them calm down?
- What does your child do that's naughty? How do you respond?

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## 7. Future Research

There are several potential areas for future investigation. Firstly, since those parents who attended the parenting workshops often described that they learned many things through doing so, it would be interesting to study the extent to which the workshops actually change parents behaviors. Additionally, it might be interesting to explore whether parents share the information that they learn with other parents or their families. These things would be meaningful to explore given the fact that several caregivers mentioned the benefits of these workshops and their interest to learn more about parenting . Beyond workshops alone it would also be interesting to explore whether parents were interested in and responded well to learning information about early childhood through other methods such as online videos, texts, posters, or books.

On a different strain, it might be meaningful for a student who has interest in early education to study the nurseries and kindergartens in Tibetan settlements. Especially given the fact that it seems the schools are at a time of transition towards student centered learning, it could be interesting to learn how teachers and parents make this transition, especially in the case of early education.

Though parents often described the concept of the “the good life” when referring to their hopes for their children, we didn’t focus on digging deeper into what this concept really meant. It would be interesting to learn more about what parents mean when they use this term.

There were not many infants included in this study since families in the settlements mainly had three and four year olds. It would be interesting to learn more about parents conceptions of infancy and how they interacted with their newborns.

## 8. Contact Information



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