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Parents and children in resettled refugee families: What are determinants of informational parental support?

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Abstract

Parental support is vital for the well-being and resilience of children with a refugee background as they navigate resettlement. However, providing such parental support is challenging for parents facing significant life changes due to involuntary migration and are unfamiliar with their new society. This study distinguishes between emotional and informational support, focusing on whether parents prioritize informational parental support–involving advice or exchanging information–and examines its determinants. We applied a multiple linear regression model on a data set with 254 recently-arrived refugee parents of 10- to 16-year-olds. Results indicate that informational support is predicted by both the parent's educational level as well as their Dutch language proficiency. We conclude that enhancing language proficiency is crucial to empower parents in offering more informational support to their children, aiding their understanding of the new society.

INTRODUCTION

Having to flee one's country and resettle in a new country is one of the most stressful events a family can experience, as it forces each member to cope with major changes (Oznobishin & Kurman, 2009; Suárez-Orozco, 2018). For parents in these families *'parenting in a new country is a difficult task because the caregiver is experiencing a new*

environment while simultaneously attempting to provide a stable environment for a family' (Ochocka & Janzen, 2008, p. 88). For children, parental support is a crucial factor in their resettlement in a new country as it helps them to create a positive future (McMichael et al., 2011).

Parental support in general is an important theme within the academic literature on families with a refugee background. Research has mainly focused on the *outcomes* of parental support for children and has shown that perceived parental support is associated with fewer psychological difficulties in children (Fazel et al., 2012), protects children against psychological vulnerability and fosters resiliency (Almqvist & Broberg, 1999). Children with a refugee background are at a higher risk of mental health challenges because they have experienced turbulent times and been subjected to extreme stressors (De Haene et al., 2014; Fazel et al., 2012; Rousseau, 1995). Furthermore, other studies argue that parental support influences the adjustment of refugee-background children (Lau et al., 2018) and facilitates their psychological adaptation at school (Trickett & Birman, 2005), or highlight the positive effects of parental support on children's educational success and academic achievement (Cureton, 2020; Tadesse, 2014). In sum, parental support has been found to function as a protective barrier that is crucial to the well-being, resiliency, adjustment and futures of children with a refugee background (Almqvist & Broberg, 1999; El-Khani et al., 2016; McMichael et al., 2011; Walsh et al., 2006).

However, *providing* parental support can present a challenge for parents with a refugee background. Navigating their own psychological challenges stemming from cumulative disadvantages such as losses, potential traumas and resettlement struggles as well as adapting to a new country may hinder parents' ability to provide support to their children (Almqvist & Broberg, 1999; Bala, 2005; Cureton, 2020; De Haene et al., 2014; Suárez-Orozco, 2018).

In this study, we will look at two types of parental support within recently resettled families with a refugee background. First, there is informational support, which consists of parents giving their children advice or information to help them solve a problem or deal with an issue, such as educational challenges or difficulties in general. The second type of support is emotional support, which involves displaying love and empathy (House, 1981; Karkouti et al., 2020; Malecki & Demaray, 2003; Rezai et al., 2015). Studies on children without a refugee background have shown that these children consider both informational and emotional parental support to be important to them (Hombrados-Mendieta et al., 2012; Malecki & Demaray, 2003). However, research on resettled refugee-background families often places the sole emphasis on emotional parental support. For example, earlier studies mention how parents cheer up their children (Pérez-Aronsson et al., 2019), or measure how often parents spend time with their children in a close, loving atmosphere and listen to them (Lau et al., 2018), while other studies describe how parents motivate their children and boost their confidence (Ziaian et al., 2021).

So far, studies on refugee-background parents who provide informational support to their children are generally lacking. Although some qualitative studies discuss informational parental support, the emphasis is on the challenges related to providing informational support because parents who have recently arrived in a new country often have little knowledge of the resettlement country and limited language proficiency (Deng & Marlowe, 2013; Osman et al., 2020; Ziaian et al., 2021). These studies show that informational parental support is uncommon within recently resettled refugee-background families. Research often highlights that it is children who provide informational support to their parents as they learn the new language faster, leading to an acculturation gap between parents and children (Hynie et al., 2012; Osman et al., 2020).

In this study, we ask: what determinants predict the provision of informational parental support within refugee families during their early resettlement? We contribute to the existing body of research in various ways. First, prior studies on refugees have primarily investigated the outcomes of parental support (e.g. Fazel et al., 2012; Lau et al., 2018), whereas our emphasis is on exploring its determinants to gain a deeper understanding of how and why parents provide support to their children during the challenging process of resettlement. Moreover, our approach may uncover potential areas for improvement of parental support, which is instrumental in developing targeted interventions and support systems to assist refugee families in their adaptation to a new society. Second, whereas mostly small-*N* qualitative studies explore emotional parental support (Lau et al., 2018; Pérez-Aronsson et al., 2019; Ziaian et al., 2021) or describe why parents encounter challenges in providing informational support

(Deng & Marlowe, 2013; Hynie et al., 2012; Osman et al., 2020; Ziaian et al., 2021), we employ survey data of parents with a refugee background, who have been issued an asylum residence permit, in the first 3 years after arrival in the Netherlands. This quantitative approach provides valuable insights into under what circumstances informational parental support is provided within families with a refugee background during their early integration into the host society.

THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

In the following paragraphs, we elaborate upon House's (1981) typology of social support, which was originally developed to understand the role of support in work-related stress. Later, this typology has been applied in various studies on parental support, which we will discuss here in more detail. Subsequently, we elaborate upon the hypotheses of our study.

Typology of support: Focus on informational parental support

Although parental support is often discussed as one broad concept (see e.g. Hynie et al., 2012; Osman et al., 2016), several conceptual frameworks have been developed to make it more specific. Malecki and Demaray (2003) show that most frameworks can be mapped under the social support typology as developed by House (1981). In this study, we focus on House's types of informational and emotional support. Informational support includes providing information and advice with the aim of helping someone solve a problem or deal with an issue. In our study, we mainly focus on informational support related to education, as school is a crucial context for teenage children and their futures in general, and for refugee-background children in particular (Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007; Lynnebakke & Pastoor, 2020; Osman et al., 2020; Van der Ent, 2023; Van der Ent & Stam, 2021). For example, informational parental support for refugee-background children can consist of helping the child with finding useful sources for school assignments, advising them on how to deal with quarrels with other children and assisting them in understanding the homework instructions well. Furthermore, informational parental support is important for deciding on children's educational trajectory, as parents can help assess whether a school is an adequate choice for the child (Cureton, 2020; Gandarilla Ocampo et al., 2020). Previous studies have shown, however, that giving help and advice on education is especially difficult for parents with a refugee background, because of language barriers and unfamiliarity with the educational culture (Cureton, 2020; Tadesse, 2014). Emotional support involves displaying love, empathy and feelings of trust (House, 1981; Karkouti et al., 2020; Malecki & Demaray, 2003; Rezai et al., 2015). Children without a refugee background report that informational support and emotional support are the most important types of parental support (Hombrados-Mendieta et al., 2012; Malecki & Demaray, 2003).

House's typology of social support is often implicitly used in research (e.g. Hynie et al., 2012; Pérez-Aronsson et al., 2019; Ziaian et al., 2021) and we found only a few studies that explicitly apply this framework to parental support within a population with a refugee (Karkouti et al., 2020) or migration background (Rezai et al., 2015). Karkouti et al. (2020) explore social support amongst Syrian refugee youth in Lebanon but focus more on teachers than on parents. Rezai et al. (2015) apply the typology in a qualitative study on upward educational mobility amongst second-generation people with a Turkish or Moroccan background. They conclude that the parental support given to these future higher educated children by their guest worker parents consisted mainly of emotional support, such as showing an interest in their school performance, demonstrating confidence in them and encouraging them to do their best. It is concluded that informational support was often lacking and providing emotional support can be interpreted as parents *'compensating for their lack of capability to assist their children with homework assignments and important educational decisions (informational support)'* (Rezai et al., 2015, p. 14). Thus,

this study on families with a migration background and highly educated children shows some of the complexity of informational parental support.

Hypotheses

In the following paragraphs, we will discuss our hypotheses. Independent variables are derived from various studies (Binhas & Yaknich, 2019; Cureton, 2020; Deng & Marlowe, 2013; Hynie et al., 2012; Kretschmer, 2019; Osman et al., 2016; Tadesse, 2014; Ziaian et al., 2021) and further specified to our unique target group of parents with a refugee background who are at a relatively early stage of their integration process. Based on theory and earlier studies, this section describes how we expect the dependent and independent variables to be related.

Length of stay in the Netherlands

Since our focus was on parents with a refugee background who had recently arrived in the Netherlands, they were all relatively new to the country. It takes time to learn about a new country and become familiar with its system, language and culture (Ager & Strang, 2008; Berry, 1997; Cheung & Phillimore, 2014; Hess et al., 2018). We expect that providing informational parental support is particularly challenging for parents in the beginning since they have little or no knowledge of or information about their new country to transfer to their children. The longer these parents stay in the Netherlands, the more likely they are to acquire information and knowledge about their new environment in general. Furthermore, they will probably acquire more specific knowledge of the new educational system over time, giving them more scope to assist their child with another element of informational parental support: making educational trajectory choices (Voorwinden & Sondeijker, 2021). We hypothesize that the longer parents live in the Netherlands, the more informational support they will provide to their children (H1).

Dutch language proficiency

Studies on parental support show that limited language proficiency makes it difficult for parents to provide support in relation to education (Binhas & Yaknich, 2019; Kretschmer, 2019; see Antony-Newman (2019) for a meta-synthesis). In their research on refugee-background parents from the Middle East and Africa who have resettled in the United States, Cureton (2020), Gandarilla Ocampo et al. (2020) and Tadesse (2014) all conclude that limited language proficiency is an obstacle that hinders these parents from providing parental support and becoming involved in their children's education. They experience difficulties concerning contact with their children's school and teachers and with understanding the information given by the school (Cureton, 2020; Gandarilla Ocampo et al., 2020; Tadesse, 2014). Furthermore, it is often hard for these parents to help their children with homework (Tekin, 2011). In general, it can be hypothesized that parents can provide more informational support if their language proficiency is better, as this is a tool that enables them to acquire information about their new society. We expect that parents who are more proficient in the Dutch language will give their children more informational support (H2).

Mental health

People with a refugee background have been exposed to extensive stressors before, during and after the flight and are likely to have experienced severe adversity and loss (Phillimore, 2011). This exposure to stressful situations

puts them at a higher risk of mental health problems (Bryant et al., 2018; Cureton, 2020; Dagevos et al., 2018; De Haene et al., 2014; Fazel et al., 2005; Van der Linden & Dagevos, 2019). Parents' preoccupation with cumulative stress may also make them less available to their families (Suárez-Orozco, 2018) and undermine their ability to support their children (Bala, 2005; De Haene et al., 2014). Cureton (2020) discusses that trauma or psychological stress can also be a barrier to parents' involvement in their children's education and Tadesse (2014) argues that severe emotional distress might make it difficult for a parent to support their children with schoolwork. Thus, we hypothesize that parents with better mental health will provide more informational support (H3).

Educational level

Whereas the first three hypotheses are related to a refugee background, our fourth hypothesis refers to a pre-migration characteristic: the educational level that parents have obtained in their country of origin. Research on populations without a refugee background has consistently shown that the educational level of parents is a relevant factor to consider when studying parenting and parental support (Guryan et al., 2008; Lareau, 2015; Pels & Nijsten, 2003). Especially in relation to education, research has shown that higher educated parents feel more capable of assisting their children with homework (Bol, 2020; Driessen et al., 2005; Lee & Bowen, 2006) and making educational choices (Forster & Van de Werfhorst, 2020). We hypothesize that parents with a higher educational level will give their children more informational support (H4).

In sum, we formulate the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1. Parents who live for a longer time in the Netherlands will provide their children with more informational support.

Hypothesis 2. Parents who are more proficient in the Dutch language will provide their children with more informational support.

Hypothesis 3. Parents with better mental health will provide their children with more informational support.

Hypothesis 4. Parents with a higher educational level will provide their children with more informational support.

DATA AND RESEARCH METHODS

Participants

The survey data used in this study were collected as part of a broader project titled the Bridge research project, which focused on the integration of people with a refugee background who had recently resettled in the city of Rotterdam, the Netherlands' second largest city.[1] Participants were selected based on the following selection criteria: (1) aged 15 years or older, (2) had received a temporary asylum residence permit since 1 January 2016 and (3) lived in Rotterdam since June 2016.[2] The total sample of the Bridge survey consisted of 1004 respondents (response rate 66%) and is comparable to the refugee-background population in Rotterdam (Van der Linden & Dagevos, 2019) and in the Netherlands (Dagevos et al., 2018) with regard to sex/gender, country of origin and age.

Because of the purpose of our study, we used a subsample of the Bridge survey that included all respondents with a child between 10 and 16 years of age (N = 264), because for this age group advice and information regarding

homework and their educational trajectory is considerably meaningful. All these parents answered an additional block of questions regarding their parent–child relationship, which included questions about the parental support they provided. If a participant had multiple children in this age category, they were asked to answer questions about the oldest child. There was no missingness on these questions about the parent–child relationship. The ten respondents for whom data on their educational level was missing were excluded from the analysis. This resulted in a sample of 254 respondents, consisting of 112 men and 142 women. The period selected, starting in 2016, partially coincided with the period of high influx of mainly Syrian asylum seekers in the Netherlands (Statistics Netherlands [CBS], 2016), who have fled their country due to the civil war that started in 2011. Whereas Syrians form the largest refugee group globally as well as in the Netherlands (UNHCR, 2022), consequently the majority of the respondents in our sample originated from Syria (84%). Other respondents were from Eritrea (6%), Palestine (4%) and Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen, Guinee and Pakistan (all less than 3%).

Procedure

The questionnaire was tested thoroughly[3] and made available in Dutch, Syrian Arabic, Tigrinya and English. The addresses of the invited respondents were drawn from the population register by the municipality of Rotterdam. Data collection took place from June to October 2019. We used a sequential mixed-mode design; respondents were first invited to complete the survey online (computer-assisted web interviewing: CAWI) but also had the opportunity to fill in the questionnaire with an interviewer (computer-assisted personal interviewing: CAPI). In the case of CAPI, respondents were linked to interviewers with the same (Syrian or Eritrean) background. These fieldwork strategies were chosen with the aim of fostering respondents' participation (De Leeuw et al., 2008; Laganà et al., 2013) and resulted in a rich data set containing extensive information on respondents' background characteristics, opinions and integration indicators.

Measurement of a dependent variable

To measure emotional support and informational support the following question was asked: 'We will show you several sentences about your relationship with your child. You can choose a maximum of three sentences that fit the best. You can also choose fewer than three'.[4] The sentences were (1) I comfort my child when s/he is sad (2) I always try to make my child happy (3) I understand what my child is thinking and feeling (4) I help my child when s/he finds something difficult (5) I help my child with homework from school (6) I contribute ideas regarding my child's choice of school and future. Whereas the first three sentences measure emotional support, the latter three sentences concern informational support.

Subsequently, we created a 5-point scale with the values on parents choosing (1) only emotional support (2) mainly emotional support (3) emotional and informational support equally (4) mainly informational support and (5) only informational support. This scale from emotional to informational support allows us to examine what type of support is provided most often, according to the parent. A higher value on this variable means that the parents indicated that they prioritized informational support. For reasons of readability, we will refer to this variable as informational support.

Whereas earlier studies on parental support used questions that focus on whether or not specific support is provided and to what extent (e.g. Gordon-Hollingsworth et al., 2015; Hombrados-Mendieta et al., 2012; Malecki & Demaray, 2002), we have chosen to let parents choose the three sentences that describe their situation most accurately because we consider this more suitable for our sample. Earlier studies on the parent–child relationship have shown that this topic may be considered sensitive within a refugee-background population (Dumbrill, 2009; Voorwinden & Sondeijker, 2021). In their survey study on Syrian parents in the Netherlands, Miltenburg and

Huijnk (2018) suggested that parents may have painted too rosy a picture of their child's situation. Our way of questioning asked parents to prioritize, as they had to choose the examples of support that were most applicable to their situation. This meant that they could not indicate that they provided all types of support equally to their child. By doing so, we tried to circumvent social desirability in parents' answers.

Measurement of independent variables

The *length of stay in the Netherlands* was measured in months and calculated by subtracting the completion date of the questionnaire from the arrival date in the Netherlands. This variable was included as a continuous variable, whereby a higher score indicated a longer stay in the Netherlands. To assess the respondents' *language proficiency in Dutch*, they were asked: 'How well do you speak the Dutch language? On a scale from 1 to 10, what score would you give yourself? 1 means that you speak no Dutch, 10 means that you speak Dutch very fluently'. Although this measurement is a self-report of language proficiency, earlier studies on migrant and refugee populations have evaluated it as a plausible measure that strongly correlates with more objective measures (Dagevos & Miltenburg, 2018; Dagevos & Odé, 2011; Klok et al., 2021). For this self-reported variable on language proficiency, a higher score indicated that the respondent reported being more proficient in the Dutch language.

To measure *mental health*, we use the Mental Health Inventory 5 (MHI-5). This is a concise instrument that is frequently used to evaluate psychological health (Driessen, 2011; Rumpf et al., 2001) and has been used more often for populations with a refugee background (Uiters & Wijga, 2018). The inventory consists of five questions on how the respondent felt in the four weeks prior to the questionnaire. Questions include how often the respondent felt (1) nervous (2) depressed and gloomy (3) calm (4) so bad that nothing could cheer them up (5) happy. Answers were on a scale ranging from (1) constantly to (6) never. Subsequently, the positive items (calm and happy) were reversed, and all questions were recoded to a scale ranging from 0 to 5. To calculate the MHI-5, a sum score of all five items is calculated and multiplied by 4. This results in a score from 0 to 100, whereby a higher score means better mental health.

Level of education is assessed by the highest completed level of education abroad. Since the respondents had been in the Netherlands for a relatively short period of time, they had hardly completed any education in this country. We therefore chose to focus on their completed education in their country of origin. Educational systems vary across countries. Based on earlier studies and documents (Al Hessan et al., 2016; Baumbach, 2011, 2016; Miltenburg & Dagevos, 2018; Nuffic, 2015, 2016; UNESCO, 2011) the different educational levels were recoded into one variable ranging from (1) no education or primary education not completed (2) primary education (3) lower secondary education (4) higher secondary and vocational education and (5) higher education.[5]

Some background characteristics were included in the analysis as control variables. We included a control variable about the respondent's country of origin to examine whether differences between countries play a role. Since most respondents originated from Syria, we created a dichotomous variable (1 = Syria). Furthermore, we added the *gender of the parent* and the *gender of the child* as a dichotomous variable (1 = female). *Age of the parent* and *age of the child* were included as continuous variables, to examine whether they influence parental support. A dichotomous variable about whether the partner was living in the same household (1 = yes) was also added. Finally, we controlled for the *survey mode* that was used for completing the questionnaire, since earlier studies have shown that this mode can influence the collected data (De Leeuw et al., 2008; Kappelhof, 2015).

RESULTS

To examine the determinants of informational parental support in relation to emotional parental support, we conducted a linear multiple regression in SPSS 25. During the analysis, the model was built using stepwise regression.

We started with the control variables and subsequently added length of stay in the Netherlands, language proficiency, mental health and level of education to the regression model. Since this stepwise approach did not lead to changes in the outcomes of the independent variables, we decided for reasons of brevity to only show the final regression model with all independent and control variables included.

Descriptive results

Table 1 shows the range, mean and standard deviation of all included variables. Regarding the dependent variable *emotional to informational support*, the mean demonstrates that emotional support is more frequently reported than informational support. This corresponds to earlier studies that describe that parents with a refugee background mainly provide emotional support to their children (Lau et al., 2018; Pérez-Aronsson et al., 2019; Ziaian et al., 2021). Furthermore, Table 1 displays a Dutch language proficiency score of 4.37. This low self-reported grade is not surprising, considering the relatively short length of stay (Dagevos & Miltenburg, 2018). Mental health has a mean of 61.95, which is comparable to the reported mental health of Syrians in the Netherlands (Uiters & Wijga, 2018).

Correlations and multiple regression analysis

Table 2 shows the correlations between the main constructs. It can be observed that most correlations are significant, and all significant correlations are positive. The exception is mental health; none of the associations with mental health are significant. With regard to our research aim, it can be noted that parents' length of stay, language proficiency and level of education all have a significant and positive correlation with informational

TABLE 1 Descriptive Statistics of Dependent, Independent and Control Variables.

	Range	Mean	SD
Dependent variable			
Emotional to informational support	1–5	2.22	1.21
Independent variables			
Length of stay (in months)	15–39	28.43	5.67
Language proficiency	1–10	4.37	1.84
Mental health	0–100	61.95	23.87
Level of education parent	1–5	2.77	1.42
Control variables			
Country of origin (Syria)	0–1	0.84	
Gender parent (female, mother)	0–1	0.56	
Gender child (female, daughter)	0–1	0.51	
Age parent[a]	23–66	41.17	8.01
Age child	10–16	12.84	1.96
Partner in household (yes)	0–1	0.89	
Survey mode (CAPI)	0–1	0.46	

[a]Our sample includes a few young mothers (23 years, $n=1$; 26 years, $n=2$; and 27 years, $n=1$) with children in the ages of 10 and 11 years old. Furthermore, the oldest respondents in our sample are fathers (66 years, $n=1$; 62 years, $n=1$; 61 years, $n=2$) with children in the age range of 10 to 15 years old.

TABLE 2 Correlations between the main constructs ($N = 254$).

	Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1	Emotional to informational support	-				
2	Length of stay in the Netherlands	0.172**	-			
3	Language proficiency in Dutch	0.253***	0.304***	-		
4	Mental health	−0.103	−0.098	0.058	-	
5	Level of education parent	0.204**	0.160**	0.340***	−0.027	-

Note: *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$. (one-tailed).

TABLE 3 Determinants of informational parental support in relation to emotional parental support ($N = 254$).

	Beta	SE	*p* value
Independent variables			
Length of stay (in months)	0.096	0.014	0.141
Language proficiency	0.162	0.045	0.020
Mental health	−0.083	0.003	0.188
Level of education parent	0.135	0.055	0.039
Control variables			
Country of origin (Syria)	−0.160	0.203	0.010
Gender parent (female, mother)	−0.069	0.169	0.322
Gender child (female, daughter)	−0.030	0.145	0.613
Age child	0.112	0.04	0.084
Age parent	−0.089	0.011	0.220
Partner in household (yes)	0.019	0.231	0.944
Survey mode (CAPI)	−0.125	0.157	0.055
(constant)		0.876	0.107

parental support. As can be derived from the correlations, there is no multicollinearity in our analysis (all VIF scores <1.5).

A multiple regression analysis was performed to test the effect of our independent determinants–length of stay, Dutch language proficiency, mental health and level of education of the parent–on our dependent variable informational parental support. Country of origin, gender of the child, gender of the parent and child, age of the parent and child, living together with a partner in the household and survey mode were included as control variables. The analysis shows that 15.6% of the variance is explained by the variables included in the model.

Table 3 shows the effects of all hypothesized determinants and control variables. We expected that the longer parents live in the Netherlands, the more informational support they will provide to their children (H1). However, the analysis showed that length of stay has no significant effect on informational parental support. We did find support for the effect of Dutch language proficiency (H2). Confirming our hypothesis, Dutch language proficiency had a significant positive effect ($\beta = 0.16$, $p < 0.05$) on informational parental support. Our hypothesis that mental health has a positive effect on informational support (H3) was not supported in the analysis. A parent's mental health was not a significant determinant. The last hypothesis concerned an expected positive impact of the educational level of the parent on informational support (H4). Our analysis shows that the effect was significant and in the expected direction; a parent's level of education has a positive effect on whether they provide more informational support than emotional support ($\beta = 0.14$, $p < 0.05$).

With regard to the included control variables, a negative effect of Syria as a country of origin can be observed ($\beta = -0.16$, $p < 0.05$). Thus, a parent originating from Syria had a decreasing effect on informational parental support. In our view, interpreting this finding is complicated. Since the non-Syrian part of our sample is scattered across different countries of origin (e.g., Eritrea, Palestine, Iraq), it is problematic to examine group differences and provide explanations regarding the country of origin. No support was found for the effect of the control variables on the gender of the parent and child, so our research shows no differences between fathers and mothers providing informational support to their sons and daughters. Furthermore, no support was found for the effect of a parent living together with a partner in the household, the survey mode or the age of the parent. With regard to the relation between informational support and the age of the child, the analysis indicates that an increase in age may matter for informational support. It is possible that older children have a greater need for information and advice from their parents. However, at 0.05 level ($p = 0.084$), this finding is not significant, but the absence of a significant effect might be related to the relatively small sample size.

Robustness check

To evaluate the robustness of our model, we checked whether it changed when several moderators were added. We included moderators on (1) language proficiency and length of stay (2) language proficiency and parental level of education (3) language proficiency and gender and (4) the parent's level of education and gender. Additionally, we replaced the sum score on mental health (MHI-5) with a frequently used dichotomous variable that used 60 points as the cut-off point (Driessen, 2011) to see whether this would change our findings. These alternative models yielded largely the same results as shown in Table 3. None of the moderators were significant, and neither was the mental health variable cut-off point. Moreover, the significant determinants of informational parental support–Dutch language proficiency, parental level of education and Syria as country of origin–remained significant in these alternative models.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Parental support is highly relevant for children with a refugee background, as it fosters their well-being and resiliency, as well as helps them to adjust to and navigate their new living situation (Almqvist & Broberg, 1999; El-Khani et al., 2016; McMichael et al., 2011). However, it can be challenging for parents to support their children during this early period of integration (De Haene et al., 2014; Hynie et al., 2012; Pérez-Aronsson et al., 2019). Using House's (1981) social support typology and distinguishing different types of support, we contribute to a better understanding of informational parental support within refugee-background families. Earlier research has mainly focused on emotional parental support within these families (Lau et al., 2018; Pérez-Aronsson et al., 2019; Ziaian et al., 2021) or used qualitative methods to investigate the challenges and problems related to this type of support (Deng & Marlowe, 2013; Hynie et al., 2012; Osman et al., 2016), suggesting that informational support within refugee families is uncommon. However, informational support is important for children as support with educational trajectory choices or assistance with homework can help them achieve a better societal position. In our study, we address the circumstances under which informational parental support is provided more often than emotional support in families with a refugee background.

With this study of a sample of recently arrived parents with refugee backgrounds, we found that a higher educational level of the parent increases the prioritization of informational support. Whereas earlier studies on parents and children without a refugee background have argued that the educational level of the parent affects parental support in general and support related to education in particular (Bol, 2020; Driessen et al., 2005; Lee & Bowen, 2006), our study shows that educational level as a pre-migration characteristic

of the parent is also crucial to understanding informational parental support within families with a refugee background.

Furthermore, we found that greater Dutch language proficiency is associated with providing children with more informational support than emotional support according to the answers given by the parents. The effect of Dutch language proficiency is a flexible post-migration factor as it is a skill that parents with a refugee background develop after their resettlement. The importance of language proficiency, especially for informational support in relation to education, has also been stressed in previous studies (Cureton, 2020; Tadesse, 2014; Voorwinden & Sondeijker, 2021). Our findings suggest that parents who possess sufficient Dutch language skills can obtain more information to inform and advise their children and consequently are able to provide more informational support. In other words, language can be considered a tool that helps parents understand the Netherlands, enabling them to give their children information and advice.

We did not find support for length of stay as a determinant of informational parental support. This finding suggests that informational support does not develop naturally by itself over time. Another possible explanation for this is that the length of stay does not differentiate enough in our sample as the respondents had only been living in Rotterdam for between 15 and 39 months. It is possible that more time is required for an increase in informational parental support and that further longitudinal research can shine a light on this. Nevertheless, it is important to study the role of informational parental support during this early phase in the integration process, since information and advice can be particularly important during this intensive period when almost everything is new for these children.

In addition, although previous (qualitative) studies argue in favour of a link between mental health and informational support in refugee families (Cureton, 2020; Tadesse, 2014), our findings showed that mental health does not affect informational parental support. This seems a surprising result at first sight because mental health is often an important factor in research on refugees in general (e.g. Bronstein & Montgomery, 2011; Fazel et al., 2005) and in studies on parents and children with a refugee background in particular (e.g. Almqvist & Broberg, 1999; Bryant et al., 2018; Osman et al., 2016). One possible explanation may be that mental health has an influence on parental support in general, instead of affecting informational support specifically. Since cumulative stress and mental health problems may lead to diminished availability (Bala, 2005; De Haene et al., 2014; Suárez-Orozco, 2018), it is possible that mental health issues undermine a parent's ability to provide emotional and informational support in equal measures.

Another surprising finding is that the gender of both parent and child is not associated with informational parental support. Earlier studies on Syrian families in the Netherlands have shown that they have quite traditional attitudes regarding family roles, with the mother being mainly responsible for the children's upbringing (Mulders & Tuk, 2016; Van der Linden & Dagevos, 2019). Contrary to what may be expected based on these studies, our study shows that gender differences do not lead to differences in the type of parental support that is provided. Perhaps gender attitudes are more egalitarian than we assume, or traditional gender attitudes go hand-in-hand with a strong belief that information and advice–in our study mainly related to education–are equally important for both boys and girls (see also: Van der Linden & Dagevos, 2019).

Notwithstanding our contributions, we believe that some limitations of our research need to be addressed. First, not all variables that could be important for informational parental support were included in our model. For example, parental support is demand-driven (Hombrados-Mendieta et al., 2012) meaning that it is also important to know what type of support a child needs or what other sources of support (teachers, friends, peers, etc.) are available to them (Karkouti et al., 2020; Malecki & Demaray, 2003). Though this information was beyond the scope of our study, we encourage researchers to elaborate upon this in future research. Second, we have deliberately chosen to construct a dependent variable consisting of a scale ranging from emotional parental support to informational parental support, to minimize the social desirability bias in parents' answers. While this approach allows us to examine what type of parental support is prioritized, it has the disadvantage of not allowing us to calculate the level of emotional or informational support provided separately. It would be an important contribution if further research could measure the extent to which both types of support are provided while circumventing social desirability. Third, two out of three

items on informational support in our study are about education, because school is a central context for children with a refugee background. Further research can contribute using a broader operationalization of the concept. Fourth, it can be argued that for children under 10 years old, informational parental support could also be beneficial. Including younger children in future studies on parental support can shine a light on this. And lastly, our research is cross-sectional in nature which means that it is difficult to make claims about causality. Therefore, it would also be useful to supplement the current findings with a longitudinal research design. Furthermore, longitudinal data may contribute to our understanding of whether informational support increases more over time because parents have been living in the Netherlands for longer and/or their language proficiency has increased.

The main findings of this study shed light on some implications for policymakers, refugee agencies and schools that may help to improve the situation and integration process of families with a refugee background (see also: Van der Ent, 2023). Informational support does not increase naturally in line with a longer stay in the Netherlands, so to facilitate the prioritization of informational support, action is needed. It is crucial to foster parents' Dutch language proficiency, as language is a tool that enables them to understand their new society. Since learning a new language takes time (Abou-Khalil et al., 2019), schools could make their communications more accessible using less advanced language levels, for instance, B1 language level, or provide translations in other languages. In addition, schools could consider using buddy programmes, in which recently resettled families are connected to established families who can assist them in getting to know Dutch society in general and increase their knowledge of the Dutch education system in particular (Crul, 2017; Kneer et al., 2019). Furthermore, since adults with a refugee background must participate in a civic integration programme (in Dutch: *inburgering*), some specific modules about Dutch society may be beneficial for them. Especially when teaching materials could be tailored to parents and include relevant information about their children's education, it might be easier for them to provide informational support to their children. Additionally, the determinant of parental educational level indicates that children predominantly receive a different type of support from a lower-educated parent than from a higher educated parent, which points to the importance of considering the educational characteristics of a family to support parents and children. All this is important because when informational support is available for refugee-background children, both children and society will reap the benefits.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Research data are not shared.

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ENDNOTES

[1] See earlier publications of the Bridge research project for findings based on the Bridge survey (Dagevos & Van der Linden, 2021; Klok et al., 2020; Van der Linden & Dagevos, 2019).

[2] Although it was not obligatory to obtain formal ethics approval from the Erasmus School of Social and Behavioural Sciences for non-experimental studies including adults at the start of the Bridge research project, we gave a great deal of thought and consideration to ethics. We discussed our study extensively with the university's privacy officers to ensure respondents' anonymity. Furthermore, special attention was paid to the informed consent forms; all were translated by a professional translator into English, Syrian-Arabic and Tigrinya, and signed by all respondents.

[3] The questionnaire was tested with regard to the comprehensibility and formulation of the questions, translation, the process and technical aspects of the questionnaire, readability and the user-friendliness of the chosen interface (CAPI/CAWI, browsers and devices).

[4] Most respondents chose the maximum of three sentences ($N = 218$). A smaller group chose two sentences ($N = 12$) or one sentence ($N = 24$).

[5] A detailed explanation of the recoding of educational levels can be found in Van der Linden and Dagevos (2019), page 48 to 52.

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