



Minority women in the Nordic countries

*Report from a dialogue meeting
between Nordic minority women*

Minority women in the Nordic countries

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Introduction

This report is the result of a dialogue meeting between Nordic women with an immigrant background that was held in Oslo on 7–8 October 2002.

I should like to thank the Centre for Gender Equality for its help with planning and holding the dialogue meeting, and for producing the meeting report.

The conference was the first of its kind in the Nordic Region. The intention was to create forums for dialogue between immigrant women, and subsequently with the authorities in the Nordic Countries.

If the work for gender equality at the intersection between gender and ethnic background is to prosper, the authorities will need advice and points of view on what the women concerned consider to be the most important action areas.

The report sets out the many important and concrete proposals and recommendations to the authorities. I have noted that, for many people, the experience of everyday racism obscures and overshadows the work for equality between the sexes. Everyday racism has to be combated on many fronts and will require continuing efforts on the part of the authorities, organisations and the public. Inadequate language skills and a lack of opportunities to use education and professional experience represent important dividing lines between the minority and the majority. These represent recurrent

topics for all the working groups and are highlighted as areas where a concerted effort is required as a means of integration and equality.

Common to the minority and majority alike is the realisation that raising the consciousness of men and making them understand their own role and function, rights and obligations is important if equality between women and men is to become a reality, and that they must be actively involved in this work.

I am delighted that the work started with this conference was taken further at the conference held in Malmö in May 2003, and that Iceland will follow up on it in 2005.

I want to discuss at both national and Nordic level how we can work jointly to follow up on the input from this meeting. I should also like to continue the dialogue that has now been started – and include men.

Laila Dævøy

Background to the dialogue meeting between Nordic minority women

Background to the conference

The purpose of the conference was to follow up on the Minister's declared desire for initiatives to promote equality for women with a minority background. The conference is part of the follow-up to the 2002 action plan for the area of equality.

Objective – outlined by the Norwegian

Ministry of Children and Family Affairs

- To help improve the position of minority women, and increase their influence and power by seeing minority women's situation from the perspective of integration and equality.

The object of the conference is to elucidate areas, methods and measures for improving the opportunities for women in the Nordic Region with a multicultural background to exercise power and influence in both the public and private spheres. The work is intended to highlight the position of minority women in the development of new political areas where equality between women and men is the theme. The project includes work on Recommendation 23/2002 relating to meas-

ures against forced marriage, in which the Nordic Council recommends that the Nordic Council of Ministers should “draw up proposals for the coordination of measures against forced marriage in the Nordic Countries as soon as possible on the basis of experience and information exchange”.

The conference is financed by the Nordic Council of Ministers. The funds cover accommodation and travelling expenses for the Nordic organisations taking part in the conference in Oslo.

The Norwegian Ministry of Children and Family Affairs has asked the Centre for Gender Equality to take responsibility for planning and holding the conference.

Rachel Eapen Paul, Advisor, is the project manager and the person responsible for holding and following up on the conference.

Ellen Cathrine Lund, Advisor, is responsible for coordinating the conference.

The purpose of the conference is to give representatives of minority organisations or other minorities working on matters of equality and integration the opportunity to discuss current problems with officialdom, and, not least, to establish a dialogue with Nordic ministers with responsibility for equality.

Intention and objective of the Centre for Gender Equality

The Centre for Gender Equality is organising a working meeting for immigrant women in the Nordic Countries on 6–8 October 2002 at the request of the Norwegian Ministry of Children and Family Affairs. The purpose of the meeting is to identify how we can achieve equality between men and women in immigrant communities. In order to obtain an overall picture of minority women's situation, it will be necessary to consider problems from the perspective of both integration and equality. As the meeting is the first of its kind in the Nordic Region, it is desirable that a broad picture of the situation for minority women should be painted. At the same time, specific problems will have to be selected. The meeting is therefore structured around the following three main topics:

- 1) Social participation/language
- 2) Education/working life
- 3) Private sphere/violence

The objective for the dialogue meeting is to:

- make minority women more visible
- increase participation in decision-making processes
- look at existing initiatives and their targeting

The purpose of this working meeting is that immigrant women should be given the opportunity to put forward their own opinions on how equality policy should be developed. It is therefore a fundamental premise of the meeting that all the participants should themselves come from an immigrant background and be active in matters to do with equality between minority women and men. Such equality work can be channelled through an organisation, network, research, mediation or another form of engagement.

The meeting is also intended to give all the participants the opportunity to create networks, make contacts and establish the foundations for further contact and cooperation.

The Centre for Gender Equality hopes that the Norwegian Ministry of Children and Family Affairs will be able to use the content of the dialogue meeting in its future work on minority women and equality.

Main conclusions drawn by the Centre for Gender Equality

Equality and majority women

The main impression from the dialogue meeting between minority women in the Nordic Region is that women with a minority background experience racism, discrimination as minorities, prejudices and language barriers to such an extent that the question of equality between women and men is more likely to be concerned with the above problems than equality in the traditional Nordic sense. The impression is, therefore, that the axis of the problem runs between minority and majority rather than between women and men. A question voiced by one participant: "How are we to become equal with our sisters?" illustrates this. One reason for minority women comparing themselves with majority women rather than with men is, of course, linked to the fact that majority women already have many of the opportunities for self-realisation wanted by minority women. At the same time, equality for minority women is about being integrated and accepted as multicultural.

Race and gender must be seen in conjunction

An important main conclusion drawn at the meeting is that it is impossible to distinguish between race and gender for minority women. On the contrary, race/ethnicity and gender must be seen in conjunction if the problems of minority women are to be understood and solved. This can be explained quite simply: when a white woman fights for equality she is only fighting a gender battle, whereas a minority woman is fighting two battles simultaneously – the gender battle and the battle for acceptance as a minority. Without this perspective it will be impossible for minority women to achieve equality in a Western, white-dominated country.

Language is the start

Equality between the sexes, which is largely about women having the same opportunities as those already enjoyed by men, was discussed explicitly at the meeting on only a very few occasions. But although the male-female axis was not always drawn clearly, all the topics were to do with improving the conditions for minority women in society. Topics such as civil liberties, power and influence, and violence against women were central to the discussions. But the topic that attracted the greatest attention perhaps was language and language training.

Motivation instead of punishment

Measures aimed at promoting equality can deprive women of freedom of action and independence, and penalise them unless the power structure in the private sphere is taken into account. The proposal that the right to citizenship should be linked to language, for example, will penalise those women whose men have no interest in their acquiring citizenship. For a woman married to a man who regards neither language nor citizenship as important this rule would result in a double punishment for the woman. She would acquire neither civil rights nor language skills. The proposal assumes that women are free to choose what they want, which is not always the case. Instead of making language a duty and linking the duty to rights, as the proposal concerning language and citizenship does, allowance must be made for the fact that women do not always decide for themselves what they want, with both men and women being given the motivation for women to learn the relevant Nordic language. If this is not done, women will be the losers – again. Initiatives aimed at minority women must have motivation as the driving force, not punishment. Punitive measures deprive women of freedom of action and independence both in terms of the rights they lose and in relation to the right to be treated as an adult who has, in any case, done nothing wrong and therefore does not deserve to be punished either.

Highlighting good role models

One clearly expressed frustration was that minority women are often shown in the role of victim. Many women do not recognise themselves in this role and would like to see minority women regarded as a resource. The media make a major contribution to stigmatising minority women in a very unfortunate manner. It is important that not only the media, but also the rest of society, should take responsibility for highlighting good role models for minority women in the same way that majority women have acquired more and more role models in the post-modern era.

Residence permit practice works badly for battered women

When it comes to violence against women, minority women are in many ways in similar difficulties to majority women. They also have special problems that will have to be dealt with separately. This applies in particular to the strict requirements regarding legally independent residence rights set by the Nordic Countries. Although the statute wording is gender neutral, women are more vulnerable than men, particularly women who are subjected to abuse and violence. Under the current system, women who are subjected to violence, abuse or threats can obtain a residence permit independently before the statutory 3-year qualifying period has expired. In this case, however, it is up to the woman to prove that she has been abused. The problem with

the burden of proof resting with the woman is that is very difficult for many women to document after the event that abuse has taken place.

Equality, equivalence and gender roles

Gender roles were not discussed much at the meeting. But one important aspect of gender roles was touched on – women's financial independence. Opinions were divided on the subject. Some believe that financial independence is an important principle of equality, while others are of the opinion that financial independence is not necessarily a principle of equality at all. Our interpretation is that more people believe that equality can be achieved by women's unpaid care work and other contributions to society being valued as highly as the paid work done by men. In other words, an emphasis on equivalence is wanted by many, and not the form of equality that has won through in the Nordic Countries following women's liberation in the 1970s. It must be pointed out, however, that these differences of opinion are between minority women. It seems that those differences can be linked to the younger and older generation. As we see it, equivalence and equality are not necessarily incompatible. According to the ideology of equality prevailing in the Nordic Countries, participation in society and financial independence are seen as the most important aspects of women's equality with men. Another important goal for equality work has been to raise the status of traditional women's work

(unpaid care work can be mentioned by way of an example).

The lack of opportunities for minority women to obtain education, training and jobs was an ever recurring theme at the meeting. Against this background we might therefore say that minority women regard employment as an important part of equality, with it being linked to financial independence or seen as an opportunity for social participation/self-realisation.

Empowerment

Policy development must be based on the reality and totality of minority women. The problem today is that policy is developed as a response to events highlighted by the media and the overall situation of minority women is not taken into account. The traditional perspective on equality does not allow for minority women being subjected to sexual and racial discrimination at the same time. This is very unfortunate in terms of minority women's own goal of "empowerment", that is to say empowering minority women both as women and as a minority. The totality has to be taken care of. It must be possible for minority women to retain their integrity with their minority background even if they reject parts of the male-dominated culture to which they belong, in the same way that Western white women reject their male-dominated culture.

Some important points:

- Consequence analyses/assessments should be made of policies that are formulated. Policy development should come from an empowerment perspective, not a control perspective nor a victim perspective.
- Minority women are not to be deprived of freedom of action and independence, but empowered by policy and initiatives. They want support in order to organise and empower themselves. Initiatives must help to empower women and prevent their being deprived of freedom of action and independence. Initiatives must be inclusive, not controlling, and they must motivate, not punish.

Political initiatives proposed at the dialogue meeting

1. Language training must be strengthened

- Courses that are flexible with regard to time, not starting before nursery schools open and not just in the evening.
- Courses that are flexible with regard to level. Minority women come to language training with different starting points, so account must be taken of this so that the training is suitable for the level women are at.
- Many minority women give birth to a lot of children and have many consecutive periods of maternity leave, so it is important to offer language training during maternity leave.
- Mother-tongue teaching is important for a general understanding of the language.

2. Education and work participation has to be organised better

- Make it easier for minority women to have qualifications from their home country recognised, e.g. by offering extension courses so that women can avoid starting from scratch with education they have already completed. Supplementary courses and adaptation to Norwegian education based on the

qualifications women already have would make it simpler for women to enter employment.

- Adult education for minority women who have reached a low educational level is necessary.
- Provide minority women with information on their rights with regard to work participation.
- Offer mentor schemes for minority women in employment.
- Set up initiatives to encourage minority women to start their own businesses.

3. Initiatives aimed at men

- Consciousness raising among men to prevent fears and myths about women's liberation from growing up.
- Consciousness raising regarding male roles.
- Providing fathers with information about their rights and responsibilities with regard to caring for children.

4. The Immigration Act must be changed

- Current legislation in all the Nordic Countries requires minority women to have been married for three years before they are entitled to reside in the country independently. Women who want to leave their marriage before the three years are up must return to their home country, which may have serious and dangerous consequences for them.
- Under the present system, women who are subjected to violence, abuse or threats can obtain a residence permit independently before the three years

are up, but have to prove that they have been abused. The problem with the burden of proof resting with the woman is that is very difficult for many women to document after the event that abuse has taken place.

5. Interpreting services must be strengthened

- It is currently often the children or husbands of minority women who interpret/translate for them. Children can easily lose respect for their mother if they become the “experts”. A woman can find herself in an inferior role to her husband if all information passes through him. Minority women have to avoid being deprived of freedom of action and independence in this way.

6. Reinforcement of multicultural skills among professionals working with minority women

- Social workers and other professionals working with minority women have too little knowledge. Minority women often encounter incompetence and a lack of understanding for their special needs. This can result in poor advice and failure to give women relevant information. Hanne Kavli, a researcher at the Fafo Institute for Applied Social Science, shows in a study that, for example, labour market initiatives offered to women are only relevant for the job of housewife, because the support structure assumes that all minority women primarily want to stay at home. Men, on the other hand, are offered very different options.

7. Initiatives aimed at positive publicity

- Minority women must be represented in more contexts in society, including where the focus is not on minorities in particular.
- Minority women should gain a foothold on public councils and committees to ensure diversity and at the same time give them an opportunity to exercise power and influence. Positive role models would empower minority women in general and so help to give them a positive self-image. This would earn minority women increased respect and recognition among the majority.

8. Evaluating initiatives

- The authorities must evaluate and assess all the initiatives they launch.

Programme

SUNDAY, 6 OCTOBER

- 15:45 The participants will be collected from Hotel Stefan by Ellen C. Lund.
- 16:00 Words of welcome from Rachel Eapen Paul, Centre for Gender Equality
- Presentation of the meeting objectives and some practical information
- 16:20 Introduction by Nita Kapoor, Advisor
- Presentation of the participants. All the participants will introduce themselves, the organisation/network they belong to and their sphere of work, and say a little about what they want to focus on at tomorrow's meeting.
 - Activation and preparatory work for identifying problems, trends and dilemmas in the political struggle of minority women in the Nordic Region

MONDAY, 7 OCTOBER

- 09:00 Words of welcome from Rachel Eapen Paul, Centre for Gender Equality
- 09:05 Contribution by Eva Khan, ORKIS (Oslo Red Cross)
Forced marriage, how do current measures work?
- 09:20 Clarifying questions and brief comments on the contribution
- 09:30 Bernadita Nunez, Terraferm
Legislation on arranged marriage in Sweden – a critical look
- 09:45 Clarifying questions and brief comments on the contribution
- 09:55 Contribution by Amber Khan, World Islamic Mission
Forced marriage, what solutions are there?
- 10:10 Clarifying questions and brief comments on the contribution

- 10:20 Contribution by Meltem Safak, Mira Centre
An new generation on the march in an equal Norway
- 10:35 Clarifying questions and brief comments
on the contribution
- 10:55 Contribution by Rachel Eapen Paul,
Centre for Gender Equality
What principles of equality can be agreed on?
A brief analysis
- 11:10 Organisation into three workshops by Ellen C. Lund,
Centre for Gender Equality
- 11:15 **Workshops**
What circumstances create equality for minority women?
Group discussion.
- 12:45 **Workshops** – each group has its own topic.
The topics are: Group 1: *Social participation/language*,
Group 2: *Education/working life*,
Group 3: *Private sphere/violence*
- 14:00 Group 1 presents the main points from its group work.
- 14:15 Full conference dialogue, the rest of the participants
supplement the group work.
- 14:45 Group 2 presents the main points from its group work.
- 15:00 Full conference dialogue, the rest of the participants
supplement the group work.
- 15:40 Group 3 presents its main points.
- 15:55 Full conference dialogue, the rest of the participants
supplement the group work.
- 16:25 Full conference dialogue
*Principles of equality and visions – recommendations to the
Nordic governments and the road ahead.* Introduction by
Rachel Eapen Paul
- 17:00 Rounding off, practical information on dinner

TUESDAY, 8 OCTOBER

- 08:30 Meeting with Nordic officials on gender equality
- 14:00 Meeting with Laila Dãvøy, the Norwegian Gender Equality
Minister, and other representatives of the Nordic govern-
ments)

Minutes from start to dialogue meeting on 6.10.02

Presentation and workshops

Presentation of participants

(see list of participants 1.9)

Some of the topics identified in the group – not sorted or put in order of priority

- Family welfare, women and young people
- Participation by women in particular and minorities in general
- Children, education, opportunities for growth
- Parent-child relations
- Health
- Motivation for self-development
- Language
- Self-organisation
- Empowerment
- Mainstreaming
- Rights: language, bilingualism, pension, social security, etc.
- Recognition of previous education
- Civil liberties/ citizenship
- Existence as refugees and refugee women
- Family violence, crisis centre after crisis centre
- Networks and services for minority women
- Traditional practices, genital mutilation, forced marriage, etc.

- Marriage, women's rights
- Family matters and problems
- Rules and legislation
- Immigration, residence and work permits.
Independent status
- Family reunification
- Mother tongue
- Self-organisation and self-help
- Housing
- Racism/ racial discrimination
- Religion and religious identity
- Integration
- Diversity
- Sexual abuse
- Identity
- Women's struggle for emancipation in their country
of origin and the link with our situation here
- Public focus on negative and sensational aspects
with regard to minorities – consequences for women
and families
- Psychosocial topics/problems
- Participation in working life
- Culture conflicts, generation conflicts
- Hidden agendas, e.g. immigration control under
the pretext of emancipation for minority women
- Awareness of own rights, dissemination of
information to minority women
- Specialised services, integrated services
- The interface between gender and racism
- Encouraging change, not forcing it

Group work

GROUP 1: *Trends/Social development affecting equality for minority women*

- Honour-related problems
- Rape, sexual abuse
- Violence, lack of knowledge of the facts
- 11 September 2001 – Islamophobia
- Headgear/scarves, fashion
- Media, sexualisation and exploitation of women
- Visible role models
- Globalisation, including crime
- Immigration
- Political situation, drift to the right
- Privatisation of the economy and services
- Aggression

GROUP 2: *Framework conditions affecting the position of minority women in the Nordic Countries*

- Legal, legislation, regulations
- Educational
 - Minorities:* Language, Culture, Social
 - Majority:* Initiatives to change attitudes towards ethnic minorities
- Raising consciousness
- Promoting the positive influence of minorities.
Research and statistics to illustrate this.
- Political development encouraged by minorities

GROUP 3: Obstacles to achieving equality as minority women in the Nordic Countries

- Unilateral integration, imbalance of power and competence
- Ignorance
- Lack of awareness of own rights
- Attitudes, prejudices
- Paternalism
- Lack of self-confidence among minorities
- Identity
- Generalisation, stereotyping
- Racism
- Language/terminology, us/them, always being labelled as “immigrants”

GROUP 4: Important players whom we have to influence in order to promote the equality of minority women

- Women/Men. Subjects.
- Decision makers at all levels
- Heads of state, selected politicians
- Immigration authorities and officials
- Media. Opinion formers.
- Social workers
- Teachers
- Health authorities and professionals
- NGOs. – Voluntary organisations.
- Legal system
- Interpreters
- Banks, equal rights to banking services
- Multicultural professionals
- Business people

- Police
- Employers
- Trade unions
- Activists in the local community
- “Everybody”

MINUTES OF THE DIALOGUE MEETING ON 7.10.03:

Contributions,
full conference discussions
and group work

Contribution by Eva Khan, ORKIS (Oslo Red Cross)

ORKIS pursues various intersecting activities. We operate preventive help, crisis help, study help for Year 10 and above. The study help is not for those with school problems, but offers ordinary help with lessons. We have immigrant mothers who come to us to learn Norwegian, youth groups, a network group. We also offer family mediation to establish a dialogue in the family. Mediation is between the first and second generations, but we do not offer treatment when there is a crisis in the family. We are not mini-psychologists, but fellow human beings. We also refer people on when they require more help than we are competent to give. Mediation is for establishing a dialogue in the family.

We have been commissioned by the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs to run an information line on forced marriage. People phone to ask questions. The line is not just for those facing a crisis. The info line has received 700 calls in the last 6 months. Most are from people asking for advice and from the media. Out of the total of 700, 258 asked for help. Of these 51 were taken up as cases. These were people who had encountered problems. (Figures for January to July.)

What are the problems? Whether the marriage is forced, arranged or for love is a question of definition. What does voluntary mean? Is there a small amount or a lot of coercion, many people ask? For us it is coercion if the person in question asks for help. We want to

increase the competence of the people manning the phones.

Any girl who needs a place to live has a crisis centre to go to. Boys, on the other hand, do not have alternative accommodation. Nor is there anywhere for “Romeo and Juliet”, boys and girls who run away together. The Norwegian Red Cross now has five loan apartments. The public authorities have a responsibility to provide housing. Boys have three apartments.

We are engaged in dialogue with immigrant families. ORKIS does not want to do this work alone. Cultural advisors with the same national background as those needing help are also important.

Questions/comments

Mediation: *“What procedure do you try first?*

What sort of mediation?”

– It is either the young person who asks for it, or the mother or father. We cannot contact the family direct. We are concerned not to exacerbate the crisis. Any young person needs 2 weeks to reflect, we think. No one changes identity in one go, for example.

“What about concern for the other part, the parents?

We have heard that the young person is looked after, but what about the parents?”

– Girls at the crisis centre still have contact with their family. Our aim is to empower the parents so that they can return to their community without encountering difficulties. We suggest, for example, that they can buy

themselves time by saying that the girl is studying – and that is why she cannot marry at present.

“Do you have a duty to inform the authorities about young people under 18 years of age?”

– Yes, where violence and young people under 18 are concerned. But we do not ask people where they are calling from or where they come from.

Contribution by Bernadita Nunez, Terraferm, Sweden

It is a major problems that there are rules requiring women to live with their husband for two years before they can obtain a residence permit. Women who are subjected to violence should not be deported as a matter of principle. But the burden of proof is on women, the standard of proof is high, and it is difficult for women to prove that they have been subjected to violence. How is she to document the injuries she has sustained? That is why virtually no women satisfy the strict criteria that have been set. This affects both girls and women.

Sweden law has a statute that prohibits arranged marriages. But it is difficult to judge what is arranged. It is often men who bring women over, and the men say that they were forced by their family. Sweden has a so-called “seriousness assessment”, but the requirements are difficult to put into practice. Having different rules for different people is not acceptable either.

One problem is that honour rests with the women/ girls. Those who resist risk being ostracised or killed. Several women have been killed in Sweden.

Questions/comments

“What about women brought from other countries, Asian women brought over by Nordic men and treated as slaves – what sort of measures do the authorities have for such groups? Don’t these marriages fall into the same category? Even if they are not forced by their parents, when they come here and are subjected to violence they too are sent back if they divorce.

– Regardless of the terminology used, no woman should be forced and there should not be laws that facilitate this.

“There are a lot of women who come from different countries and marry voluntarily – what are you doing about them?”

– We are fighting to change the law in Sweden. We have a crisis centre in order to help all women. We provide information on the consequences for women.

“I call them economic refugees. There are men who starve them, men who use physical violence, and the problem is that these women do not have the resources to run away. This is a big problem. The women are also embarrassed to have put themselves in this situation. Because they are English speaking, they should have known better, and they feel thoroughly ashamed.”

– Changing the law is important, but we must also work to ensure that they can obtain asylum. We also have to take seriously the fact that there are individual

differences. Public officials must therefore get better at asking the right questions. As things stand, they don't know what sort of questions to ask."

"How is the crisis centre organised? How many languages do you speak and do you have interpreters?"

– We can help women in 27 languages. We can meet women in crisis, we may have knowledge of abused women. We do not want to use interpreters who cannot help woman to woman. We therefore have women with lots of different linguistic backgrounds. We arrange contact with other women who speak the same language as the woman who needs help. We have a national hotline, which is free. Nor will the telephone bill show that the woman has phoned.

Contribution by Amber Khan, World Islamic Mission

Forced marriage. What solutions are there?

The murder of Fadime put forced marriage and honour killings on the agenda. But suspicion is being thrown on Muslims in this connection. Honour killings have been linked to religion and this is wrong in my opinion. The religious communities can act as a support network. They can prevent what goes against Islamic teaching, and they can help to mediate. Norwegian law and the Norwegian authorities also have to make a contribution. It is important for the authorities to enter into a dialogue to avoid isolating themselves. Preventive initia-

tives like those used at ORKIS are needed. I and many other young people from minorities want to promote dialogue as a method. Dialogue is the only way to go in my opinion.

Comments

“Young Muslims are irritated by the media. There is ignorance of rules and the Koran in the media and among people. According to the Koran, forcing someone to marry is totally prohibited. There are also laws in Norway that prohibit forced marriage. But Norwegians kill and rape too, and what is done about that? Is there no justice here? There are lots of big questions surrounding this that have not been answered.”

“The religious communities have scholars, so they can help. But the scholars have limited authority. Everyone has to play a role, the authorities, etc. But I put forward a single method, and that’s dialogue.”

“Pakistan is the country with the highest visibility in Norway. The cases that have been in the media most involve people from Pakistan, they are Kurdish, Muslim and Somali. But at lot of strange things go on in other nationalities too. There is, for example, forced marriage in China as well. But the media don’t write about it, and the impression is that it only happens with Muslims and people from Pakistan.”

“Preventive thinking is needed. The dialogue has to be started much sooner. We have to talk about girls’ expectations of life, what they are aiming for. Is it possible to do something here, talk to girls about what they want from life?”

“Young people must turn to us for mediation before the problem becomes a serious crisis. But this is a long process and will take time.”

“It’s not just a law that can change behaviour. We need consciousness raising. Many people know that it isn’t lawful to force someone to marry, but they want to preserve their culture and norms, and so break the law. They don’t even think about what the law says or what Islam says. They do it to conform to their norms. We require adult education. Parents need to know that they mustn’t coerce their children because of tradition. Children also require education in order to set boundaries for themselves. This is a long process that is part of the socialisation process. Children have to learn that they don’t need to follow their parents blindly.

“Young people have to be educated so that they can break down traditions themselves. Even if some people practise forced marriage, it isn’t acceptable.”

“I don’t believe that the Norwegian authorities understand our culture. Those of us who are mothers sometimes don’t manage to meet our children halfway. Mothers don’t understand what their children are learning in and out of school. The first and most important thing is therefore language. Mothers have to be able to speak the majority language in order to be able to bring up their children here. Many women don’t want to go out, and this applies not just to Muslims, but also to Latin Americans. Children learn a lot at school, but they learn a lot about rights and not as much about duties. We (parents) have to teach them about those.”

“It is necessary to differentiate between women’s lives and what we call dialogue. I’m afraid that when we start with dialogue it ends in violence. We have to start by protecting women, then we can get a dialogue going.”

“If there is no dialogue, confrontation can be the result, which affects more people.”

“I’m a critical Muslim. We believe that religion ought not to control politics. A dialogue has to be established that includes the imams, because the imams play an important role. We have a problem with some imams in Denmark because they are listened to and followed, so they have power. The imams should inspire and use their power in a good way. We have to focus on equality between women and men. We have to concretise equality, but this is not the practice in reality.”

Contribution by Meltem Safak, Mira Centre

I work at the Mira Centre, which is a resource and competence centre for minority women. My job involves work specifically aimed at young people. We are working for real equality in Norwegian society. We want to stimulate minority women to take part in community life. We have visions. How are we to become equal with our sisters? The methods have often been divided and grim, it is easy to become hysterical. Multicultural people are rarely seen as a resource. On the contrary, we are seen as a threat, particularly since 11 September. Never before have I felt myself so different as after 11 September. Never has there been as great a need to cultivate my background – I’m from Turkey. I miss being allowed to be different. And I miss being respected as a resource. We represent a resource. We require acceptance of more methods. Not so that people say that something is too Norwegian or that something is brainwashing, but in order to be equal with the majority.

All the focus on forced marriage is due to the fact that misery sells. Language and multicultural youth have been completely overshadowed. Preventive work is the way ahead. Young girls are looking for role models. They are trying to build the third way. Minority women want to be themselves. These girls are already in educational establishments, but they are searching for their place in Norwegian society. Because it is through their resources and background that they can become equal. Education, language and professional competence will lead to young girls being able to put themselves on an equal footing with Norwegian girls. Education is the most important weapon we have; with education girls can stand on their own two feet.

But we must not go in for quick solutions that lead to stigmatisation and communities isolating themselves. Young people will gradually find their own solutions. But they have to be listened too, and more solutions have to be sought at the same time. We have to inspire young people to rely on themselves, to see that they can make their own choices, help them build up a self-image and break down barriers that impede their opportunities for self-determination. Young people need more self-confidence and pride in their own background. We have to prevent conflicts between the generations, and we have to encourage people to act on their own initiative. It is important that young people should be able express their own opinions.

Questions/comments:

“How do you get women to visit your centre when there are obstacles such as husbands and family?”

– We create arenas with mothers and daughters, for example. We hold courses, lectures, talks. Women can come along and develop things themselves. We hold themed evenings. But it is important how we advertise these events. If there is conflict in the title, people don't come. If the title of a themed evening is “conflict between first and second generation immigrants”, for example, no mothers will come. If, on the other hand, it's “the meeting of the generations” more people will be interested. We once used such a title and lots of people came. We have very good contacts with parents. We have our own newsletter and a website. And we deliberately don't use the media. We don't want a media presence at our events.

“Can you take the offensive by disseminating information on girls' lives, what sort of problems they have and what sort of help they need?”

– Yes, we already have lots of people making contact.

“There are role models, but they are not publicised. There are methods, but they're not publicised either. We have to highlight the positive things that go on.”

“Many young people say that they daren't take part in the media debate because they are afraid of getting a dressing down. We have to be so quiet in everything we do. We couldn't, for example, sit in a café and talk loudly about 11 Septem-

ber as ethnic Norwegian's could. That's the problem: we're prejudged."

"What about those who come to our country as teenagers and can't speak the language, how do you get to grips with them?"

– Our methods aren't quick fixes. It's true that they face major problems. You have to concentrate on school for them. Languages skills are the key to all sorts of things. There is a great deal of focus on violence in the home, but not on the fact that there is a lot of violence in school. And there is in fact, up to and including teachers.

"The problem is segregation. There are a great many young people who don't even go to school. They've created a whole youth culture that leads to crime, etc. Have you worked with these groups? Do you reach the others who don't come to you of their own accord?"

– When we talk about problems in schools, we don't talk about them as if they only concern minorities. We talk from an equality perspective and from an integration perspective at the same time.

Contribution by Rachel Eapen Paul, Centre for Gender Equality

If I were to make a sort of analysis of what we have talked about so far today, I would start by asking myself what sort of principles of equality can we agree on. Equality is about an even distribution of power and influence, benefits and burdens. We know that women

have a different status to men. This is the same for all the Nordic countries. But what we need to clarify is how this relates to us as minority women. What principles of equality can we agree on? The aim of this conference is to establish what we as minority women can do to influence gender and equality policy.

We are talking about these principles:

- justice
- equal participation in community life
- equal opportunities for power and influence
- dividing responsibilities and duties equally between men and women

Minority women suffer different forms of discrimination to minority men. What is more, minority women suffer different types of discrimination to white/majority women.

The concept of empowerment is of great importance to women, and is therefore relevant to all of them. But for minority women the problem is not just one of vulnerability to gender discrimination, but also the fact that they live in a system/society in which they, as a minority, can be ostracised, stigmatised and often controlled. In this way the types of barrier, obstacle and discrimination faced by minority women are different to those faced by men in these groups and by majority women.

“It is a privilege not to have to defend oneself against abuse, violence and racism,” says Kimberle Crenshaw, an American human rights lawyer. Crenshaw uses the

metaphor of a large crossroads, an American intersection, to illustrate the multiple discrimination suffered by some women. She points out that some women are at the point where patriarchy, racism, class/caste, poverty, etc., meet, and are therefore subjected to multiple discrimination.

Shereen Razack, another researcher, says that it is important to understand the complexity of women's lives. She says that "systems of domination interlock and sustain one another." In other words, the patriarchal system upholds the racist system, while the racist system underpins other systems.

When people come up with measures that further marginalise vulnerable groups of women, it is an obstacle to their equality as women. For minority women and black women this can mean that the fight against racism is just as important as the fight against gender discrimination and sexism, and that for them the fight against racism is an integral part of women's struggle and the battle for women's rights. In order to illustrate how ethnicity/race and gender are linked, we can turn the question on its head and ask if it is possible to empower a minority woman as a woman while she is oppressed (controlled) as a minority?

So what should we do? The minority community lives on the periphery. In the minority community the family is important to us. Gender equality is therefore about women and men in that family, and we know that there are inequalities of power there. But out in the majority community we also have inequalities of power. The entire minority is oppressed by the entire major-

ity. Men and women are influenced by the majority community, and minority women are oppressed both as a minority and as women.

We are talking about women, race, ethnicity, women from poorer countries that are far apart and extremely different. That is wrong. We must highlight women in all these situations. We must see women as made up of all this at the same time, but we must see them primarily as women in order to empower them.

If immigrant women are to be empowered as women, they must also be empowered in parallel as immigrants.

Group work

*Presented to the full
conference with comments*

Group 1 gives its presentation

Topic: Language / social participation

OBSTACLES:

- Racism, Islamophobia
- Culture, stigmatised, us and them, the media play a big role here
- Rightwing wave
- Hierarchy of cultures, some cultures are higher, more civilised, than others
- Lack of religious tolerance
- Lack of representation for minority women
- Education
- Language, American accent more acceptable than a Turkish accent
- Media attention
- Representation, lack of diversity, pluralism
- Lack of democratic processes
- Lack of agency
- Ignorance of legislation and regulations, norms
- Lack of strategy
- Ignorance of rights

- Lack of role models and female leaders
- Lack of information on language
- Lack of focus on competence instead of focus on ethnic background
- Lack of respect
- Lack of research on minority/equality

PLAYERS / PROCESS

- Men and women
- Authorities
- Media
- NGOS
- Neighbourhood
- Parties

INITIATIVES

- Lobbying
- Education
- Responsibility
- Publicity
- Networks
- Using culture as a resource

Comments of full conference

“If women take a problem up, it affects the minority groups as a group, because they are judged by society as a whole as a group. Therefore women perceive this as a dilemma. But if they don’t speak for themselves, they are oppressed as women. This is a difficult dilemma for many minority women: should they speak out and be perceived as disloyal? Or should they be loyal and live with the problem? We have to make ourselves

visible as women and highlight the fact that we have something unique as a minority.”

“Who defines what equality is? Is financial independence, for example, a culturally defined matter? We talk about equality, but should we perhaps be talking about equivalence?”

“I define equality as equal opportunities for women and men. We have to define the male imams’ monopoly on defining Islam. Women can’t let women down by not taking their part out of a fear of criticising their own culture.”

“Women must be able to choose whether they work outside or in the home. Earning money is not necessarily the same as equality. In Islam there is a difference between what women and men should do. Being a valuable member of the family should not depend on money. A woman can’t be less valuable even if she doesn’t work”.

CLOTHES: “Whether to wear the hijab or not must be a matter of choice. There is nothing to stop a woman from becoming a leader because she is a woman. Islam is no obstacle. Women can be anything they want. Norwegian women have become bishops. Why not have female imams? Imams set the premises for women’s lives. Who could set the premises if the imams lose this power?”

“We have to separate religion from politics. Religion must not control politics, but be a source of inspiration. Not everyone is qualified to interpret. Only God is allowed to set limits. We want to establish an alternative in order to break men’s monopoly position. There must be religious pluralism in every democratic society. We must create alternatives.”

“Islam does not break with democratic principles. Indeed we separate state, religion and society. The imams have a central position because of their fundamental knowledge. They

are not the only decision makers, but they are also advisers to other decision makers.”

“There are people who can’t distinguish between religion and culture. An understanding of this is needed if it is to be possible to distinguish between politics, cultural tradition and religion. The imams are here to stay. We have to include the imams because they are the people who can help us.”

Group 2 gives its presentation

Topic: education,
participation in working life

OBSTACLES

- Inflexible system
- Background: no or little education, qualifications not recognised
- Continuing/completing education
- Lack of information on education and rights
- Language courses, courses early in the morning before nursery school open
- Lack of equality targets
- Lack of recognition of qualifications
- Requirements for a perfect command of the language
- Possibility of combining education and work
- Lack of nursery schools and opening hours
- Lack of research and statistics, no comparable studies

- Misconception of what minority women do and want, research is lacking
- Discrimination
- Lack of diversity
- Lack of participation by minority women in many sectors
- Lack of money
- Lack of careers guidance and follow-up
- Male-dominated society with traditional tendencies
- Lack of communication
- Mental and physical abuse
- Health problems
- Lack of individual information, everyone is treated the same
- Exclusion
- Lack of networks
- Lack of motivation from women themselves and the system they encounter

POSSIBILITIES

- Recognising qualifications from other countries
- Adult education for those with few qualifications
- Socialisation through education
- Education, individualisation, teaching in different languages
- Work, equal opportunities
- Differentiating between education on the part of society and privately
- Gender statistics to identify gender differences in education

- Language training during maternity leave, women who have a lot of children do not learn the Nordic languages
- Special schemes are needed here
- Flexibility in language learning
- Info and guidance for male-dominated areas of work
- Public policy against discrimination
- Nursery schools, enough places and flexible opening hours (opening hours far too short)
- Fathers have a responsibility to help, women can't do everything
- Pension credits
- Illiteracy
- Labour market training, flexible hours
- Greater understanding of different cultures
- Workplace culture must be less discriminatory
- Making the language simpler in all information that goes to minorities
- Dialogue seminars to help understand the new society
- Supporting international networks
- Mentors for women
- Starting one's own business, help with this
- Stopping women's education being undervalued. We have the best-educated cleaners.
- How will the pension system work for minority women?
- Keeping one's own culture, despite integration

PLAYERS / PROCESS

- School, teachers
- Parents
- Employers
- Non governmental organisations
- Student organisations
- Local authorities
- Trade unions
- Social services
- Politicians
- Institutions
- Authorities
- Media
- Translators/interpreters

What conditions have to be in place to achieve equality for minority women?

– No discrimination, whether on the basis of religion, gender, colour, ethnicity, nationality or educational background; equal opportunities in general; motivation + information; positive role models; seeing women as an unused resource.

Comments of full conference

“Language is most important, you have to learn the language first.”

“More money is needed for language training. Equality focuses too much on getting everybody into work, when not everybody has to; language has its own value irrespective of social participation. Language training has to be customised.

Mother tongue teaching is important. Everyone who masters it does better."

"Minority men are used as an example, not women."

EXPERIENCE: *"Individual action plans for newly arrived refugees. Introduction programme during which the women's experience and knowledge are charted. Individual adaptation is important – what they can already do and how their knowledge can be put into practice. An introduction programme is a good scheme for men and women. Public authorities are sceptical about this. Private companies aren't sceptical. This measure must be recognised more by the state so that we can get more women into work. What about women who are here already, or women who marry Norwegian men? Why don't they get the same opportunities as refugees?"*

PROJECT IN DENMARK: *"Omar is working now". The project highlights new Danes in the field of work and scholarship, pointing out that it is important to exploit competence and profile people on the basis of their skills and knowledge. The focus is on highly educated people. A magazine provides information and is aimed at the target group: employers."*

"Instead of accepting more immigrants in Denmark, they should use the resources and knowledge already in the country. Highly educated people. I have a proposal for a website for minority women. It is important to highlight female role models who are successful."

"A negative focus in the media, information that misleads. We have to fight together for women's rights, but there's one thing I have to mention – it's better to know something about religion before criticising it. In Islam, as I know, both women and men are mentioned in all contexts, including education. Nowadays religion is often dictated by politics."

“Immigrant women come from a macho society. We come to Norway and encounter a society that is more liberal. This is a problem. Many women opt to sit at home. The family prevents you from going to school and learning Norwegian. All of us, Muslim or not, have to get hold of the women this applies to. Many young people are involved in crime. We have to think of the young people, what their situation is, and the consequences of their mothers not being able to speak Norwegian. We have to enhance women’s self-confidence; I know that there will be change in future. Women influence their children at home.”

“It’s dangerous to tell people that they can’t participate in society before they can speak the language fluently. Why can’t they take the language they have and use it. I don’t believe that language is the ticket to everything. English is the second language of Scandinavians. It’s dangerous to argue that language is the key to everything. You can get a long way with English.”

THE SCHOOL SYSTEM IN NORWAY: *“Studies show that young boys lose out in the school system. Young boys with a minority background don’t finish secondary school. The boys girls find as partners don’t have the same educational background as themselves. I’d like to focus on boys in the context of equality. Boys who don’t succeed in this country have a greater tendency to become more violent.”*

“Stop focusing on religion – veil or not. We’re in the same boat. We’re women. Don’t talk about “them and us”. We have to stand together, not pigeonhole each other. We have to think of concrete proposals, find initiatives for everyone, regardless of their religion. Consultation on Norwegian laws, an introduction programme. All women have to take part.”

“I’m worried that not everyone will get the same introduction programme. Everyone is expected to integrate, but there are major differences between groups. Language training is difficult for some because it is not organised flexibly.”

“Language is very important when it comes to participating in society, employers require it, you won’t be employed if you can’t speak the language. It’s as simple as that.”

“About the media. Only we can change the picture. My proposal is that we meet the press and give them the picture we want them to have of us.”

Group 3 gives its presentation

Topic: family sphere and violence against women

Our group wants to go straight to the initiatives, we’ve talked enough about the rest.

INITIATIVES

- Information work on rights and opportunities
- Strengthening reciprocal information work, parents and children, parents have to understand the situation for children and vice versa.
- The integration process: carry out continuous assessments, the authorities must also assess the initiatives they have launched.
- Strengthening reciprocal communication, important to learn the language, but there must be a support system for the weak with fewer skills and difficulty

learning a language. Verbal meeting places important, women can take roles from them.

- Change of attitude: consciousness raising regarding men's new role, many men don't know where their wives stand, but they have to be part of this. Information must be available to both.
- Establishing and strengthening a support system: preventing all fear among men and myths about women's liberation. Men have to know that we women have a right to education, but not because we are going to leave or escape them.
- Recruiting more female interpreters, unaware authorities deprive women of freedom of action and independence when they use a child or spouse as an interpreter, for example. Children lose respect for their parents. Independence, legal status, women live in fear, people have to recognise the mental suffering of women as a result of their husbands threatening to divorce them or send them home.
- Money: A good weapon in lots of cases. The government must budget for women's organisations, earmark money for minority women.
- Media: We have to have a dialogue with the media, dialogue through recruitment, minority women must join the media as journalists and editors.
- Public services: increase the competence of all those working with the target group, social workers and other professionals working with the target groups have to get to know us. Surely it's not a lot to ask. We can't work with incompetent people.

- Prevention: political responsibility for spreading solidarity, if this doesn't happen we get stigmatisation, isolation, ghetto. Spread a joint heritage.
- Recruitment: parents as possible pupil liaisons, recruiting ethnic pupil liaisons.
- Encouraging positive images of both cultures, strengthening mother tongue teaching, empowering people whether it's about eating fish cakes or strengthening their mother tongue.
- Redefining multiculturalism, we have to demand measures where we see it has gone wrong.
- Highlighting "older" immigrants and their influential role.

Comments of full conference

"In Sweden we differentiate between violence in minority and majority communities. We lack places where minority women can go. They are lost in the system and their needs are ignored. They fear being sent back and their children being taken from them. Men know the system better. We need more places where these women can go, places where they can live, access to lawyers, accurate information. Many women are afraid to leave their husbands because they are afraid of losing their children."

"Crisis centres need more resources. How to identify a target group? The right language skills are important in order to disseminate information to as many people as possible."

"Disseminating information on prevention is important. A major problem today is that women are socialised to be more vulnerable than their brothers, and we have to do something about this. We have to run a campaign aimed at parents so

that they bring up boys and girls the same. It is important to develop the concept of parental guidance from the children being born. We have traditions from our home country, but need points of reference for our new country. What to young girls who grow up in Norway need? They're constantly reminded that they are foreigners even if they're not. They say they don't want to be reminded of this, so what can we do? It might, for example, be important to produce literature or videos with accurate information on the country they come from, with the public authorities accepting responsibility for doing this."

"The reasons for violence against minority women are no different to those for violence against majority women. Poor women and rich woman suffer just as much violence. Violence is due to lack of equality between men and women, and it's not true to say that violence is due to culture.

There are no statistics to prove that Muslims hit women more often than Christians. How does the legal system react to violence against minority women? What sort of punishment do the men get?"

"Violence against women has to do with culture in that cultures are patriarchal, and there are patriarchal cultures in the West the same as in the rest of the world; it exists in every culture, at every level of society."

"Many of the women who are subjected to violence can't speak the majority language, nor do they receive important information on how to get help. In Finland work is being done on preventive measures to provide "basic facts"."

"Many problems are common to women not peculiar to women with a minority background. We have criticised the media a great deal for using culture as a causal explanation,

but when it comes to ghettoisation, for example, the problem is the result of an incorrect settlement policy. We don't send problems to the right address, which is a problem for us. But it is important to point out that these problems aren't specific to us."

INTEGRATION AND LANGUAGE: *"Finland has an integration plan. But women come to the country for different reasons, and in Finland the talk is mainly about initiatives for refugee women. Others fall outside this definition, and we need to discuss solutions to these differences."*

"What specific messages can we give to the authorities on equality between men and women?"

We have to talk about race, not just equality. Take trafficking for example; not just anybody becomes the victim of trafficking. White women don't."

"Regarding honour killings, they happen in the Nordic Region too. We have other shared problems, but we also have to realise that there are things that divide us. The question of religion is important in this context, with Islam in particular being an important topic. If we follow religious guidelines, it can lead to a woman who wears a veil being ignored/overlooked more than a woman without a veil, for example."

"We have to look at how our victimisation comes about. Nowadays only positive things happen. We come here with our own values and resources, and they have to be used. It's great that the authorities want me for something, but I'd like a say in the matter too. That's what human rights are about."

We're losing a lot if we differentiate between race and gender. We belong to both."

We experience massive discrimination from the majority, and expend all our energy on it with the result that we don't

get to the differences between women and men. We don't have the space to discuss empowerment. Integration, gender policy and immigration. How can these three policies be coordinated so as to empower minority women? We are constantly faced with dilemmas where we have to take sides – where we can't say what is best for us."

"In Denmark "forced marriage" is being used to reduce immigration. If the authorities want to tighten up on immigration policy, they ought to come out and say it instead of using arguments like "we want to help women in distress."

"We have to ally ourselves with majority women when we talk about minority problems. We have a lot to learn from each other. Consciousness raising is important; we have to disseminate information, and we have something to learn from the Norwegian women's movement in this respect."

"In Denmark there is a discussion about how Danish feminists were wrong not to include minority women in their equality work. Many women are afraid of being active, of criticising minorities, and of being accused of discrimination.

It is a universal fact that men and women are perceived differently: men are strong and women are vulnerable. We have to try to change that. Women aren't always that vulnerable, and men might be vulnerable in the same way. We have to break with the traditional general roles. That's what is impeding us."

MINUTES OF MEETING WITH
NORDIC POLITICIANS ON 8.10.02

Equality Minister
Laila Dåvøy's reply to
the minority women
regarding
the contributions

WE MUST USE all your input in the ongoing process. In fact, it's a sort of mapping of lots of different needs. In our meeting earlier today it came out that there are differences between the Nordic Countries. Different laws, integration, violence, action plans, etc., which is precisely why this sort of meeting is important so as not to start with a blank page. Good examples are useful. The Nordic Countries aren't so very different.

Regarding the specific initiatives

Forced marriage: From my standpoint as a politician, forced marriage and circumcision are difficult to work with as Equality Minister. We have two different strategies. Mothers thought we were taking the offensive too much this summer when we had a stand at Gardermoen Airport. Young people think we're too slow. I think we need a bit of both. An age threshold of 24 has been proposed for marriage. Legislation differs between the Nordic Countries. In Norway we have not been keen to go in for an age threshold. We want to lay down stricter requirements for family reunification. People living in Norway have to be able to support their new spouse. We're in the process of producing a complete action plan containing lots of initiatives. This was one of them.

Problems such as this that are linked to culture, and not religion, are important. Networking must be supported, and in Norway this is being done in the form of grants to voluntary organisations. We are increasing these grants for next year, but we will never be in a situ-

ation where the organisations say that they have enough money. These funds provide a small amount of support, but a great deal still has to be done on a voluntary basis. And this is the same for Norwegian organisations.

We are very bad when it comes to including minority women in various decision-making processes. We're not good enough either in the workplace or elsewhere. This is an area where we need good guidance. What sort of strategic moves should we make? We have a number of committees in Norway, but when it comes to discussing who should sit on the committees, we never think of minority women. Not a comfortable answer, but I'm trying to be honest. This conference has been a step in the right direction. But it will take time.

I think that the idea of a meeting for minority women and majority women together – a dialogue between them – is a good idea, which can form the basis for the next conference. But we have to be more targeted about what we want from the conference. We might have three or four objectives to start with. I'm not saying that there isn't a lot for us to follow up here. But as you know, we politicians are faced with enormous challenges, and it would have been very difficult if I'd asked you where we should start first. At the next conference we need to set priorities, target the conference and have some specific topics on the agenda.

Discrimination and racism – you have considered all sorts of important topics. It's not something I can start on today, but you have at least shown that integration is not a fact for immigrant women.

I personally have a Kurdish son-in-law, and although we have included him in the family as our son, he isn't integrated in Norwegian society – he just isn't. So we have a long way to go and I hope that those of you who are here will contribute.

This dialogue meeting will form an important basis for ongoing work in this area.

Sweden

We want to draw up a mainstream action plan for equality that will include all the ministers. We hope to enter into a dialogue with all minority women's organisations. How can we include minority women in participatory democracy? We have various councils in Sweden. NGOs are free to take part in these councils. This is a way of bringing in different points of view. We meet four times a year. And then we have Women's Place, a special group that offers another means of getting feedback. They can also get in touch with us to discuss matters.

Forced marriage: We had different age thresholds for Swedish girls and minority girls, which wasn't good. We're going to change this of course.

Awareness development between different groups is important. It's important for schools to be more aware. Schools don't ask about girls who just disappear. We need to be better at observing. Money is important. We have a system in Sweden, and I know that lack of money is a problem. Various activities must be given money. I can see that it's difficult for you to plan for the future with little money. Next year there is to be a conference

in Malmö with the emphasis on minority women in community life, working life and family life.

Denmark

I want to thank the Norwegian Presidency for organising this conference. I think it's important for us to have forums like this where we can meet. It's only when we meet in person that we can understand what is being talked about and arrive at solutions.

In Denmark minority women find themselves at the intersection between the Integration Minister and the Equality Minister. This is a poor excuse for not doing anything. We have raised the age threshold for marriage in Denmark. We don't yet have enough information to gauge how this is working.

We have set aside meetings to see how we can cooperate on integration. But it is a general problem that money often goes to projects and not towards running NGOs. We understand this to be a major problem. Two years ago we set up a project on gender and ethnicity. We appointed a network consisting of ethnic minorities. We put this to the Trade and Industry Minister and asked for a perspective plan. The question is whether we should have problems outside our ordinary work or whether they should be integrated. We succeeded with our action plan on violence against women, with minority women receiving broad attention. Today there is a meeting at the EU at which the Danish Equality Minister is proposing how the marginalisation of minority women can be avoided.

Nordic Council of Ministers

I'd like to say briefly who and what we support. Anyone with an interesting project. It can be a non-organised or an organised group. All sorts of projects and people. We can support networks, seminars, new statistics, research. But we do have some requirements. At least three Nordic Countries must be involved.

Finland

The people working on equality are not the same as those working on integration. Minority women are part of our equality work, but I must admit that we haven't done much. We hope to work in that direction. I want to invite the Finnish groups represented here to our office so that we can work with the minister on the matter. And I'm sure that we'll manage to do something.

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Culture, Migration and the Reconstruction of Individual Identity and Family Structure

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THE CONCEPT OF culture has been intensively discussed in recent decades, both among scientists and in society in general. Despite the difficulties in pinpointing the content of this all-embracing concept, it seems that we cannot do without it. In this article I intend to discuss, with reference to my profession as a psychiatrist and therapist, the implications of culture in the process of integration. I will argue for the need among people working with immigrants, integration and, in particular, people in crisis, to see culture as an instrument to be consciously used. We must avoid stereotypical understandings of culture and cultural affiliation, while simultaneously recognizing the limits to cultural explanations, putting them in the framework of the entire social structure of society.

Culture As a Learning Process

Based on my professional and life experiences, I would describe the concept of culture as follows: Culture is a life-learned, and to some level shared system of ideas, traditions, norms, values, knowledge and spiritual matters which transfer, develop and change within the history of an ethnic group or nation.

In this definition I would like to emphasize that what we call culture is actually a learning process that starts when we are born and continues through our whole lives until we die. A way of life, traditions and norm systems that we learn first from our parents and families,

then from the surrounding society and next from the nation to which we belong. This learning becomes a part of our cognitive development of self. It will influence, consciously and unconsciously, our reactions and behaviors in different situations.

The collective character of culture makes the definition difficult. Every individual sees culture from her or his perspective. During different periods of our lives we experience traditions, norms, faiths and values differently. Likewise, we may belong to the same nation but depending on our professional, economic and social class and our ethnic and religious background we make different interpretations of our culture. This means that every group within the society practices its national culture in its own way.

To recognize culture as a learning process still puts us in a better position to understand the mosaic of different traditions and norm systems around the world. This perspective allows us to be more flexible when analyzing the differences between various culturally related phenomena. We do not need to accept every phenomenon; what is important is to understand how and why people do what they do. But, since there is no neutral point of departure – who should be the one to set the norm and to judge others? – it is impossible to describe a culture as being right or wrong. Maybe we can judge some of the norm systems from our own point of view but in general we cannot say that there are right or wrong cultures.

Culture Gaining New Relevance

In the constant process of defining and re-defining culture I see two major reasons for the concept having gained increased significance in recent years.

First, culture is included in our national identity – it is something we need today as the world goes through a globalization process. Technological development, including the IT revolution, has made the world a small village. Through this process nations and people are coming closer together. Many of the traditions that exist in one part of the world quickly become a part of the traditions in another part with the help of satellite television, computers and other communication channels. The globalization process creates politically and economically concentrated regional groups such as the European Union.

Culture plays an important role in this process. Every nation within a group or a union must retain a part of its cultural identity to become an active part of the group. This gives the nation the security and self-confidence to open itself to others in order to influence and to be influenced. Without the culture-based identity it is difficult for nations to have an open exchange of traditions, norms, values and knowledge. Maintaining and safeguarding a certain national individuality may also lead to an enhanced mutual interest among people of different backgrounds.

Additionally, culture, as well as religion, is part of the platform that we as individuals, nations and groups need when we meet a crisis. When encountering a crisis

we make use of different defense mechanisms. One such mechanism is a regression process, helping us to collect our internal resources to recover from the consequences of these crises.

For many immigrants, meeting the new culture of the receiving country is a process that can deepen old crises or cause new ones. In the beginning they have to rely on their native cultural identity when meeting with and adapting to the new country and its way of life. Those immigrants who have a strong cultural identity are able to meet the challenges of this process much better than those who are unclear in their cultural identity. As a part of the integration and adaptation process it is also quite normal for immigrants to initially idealize and emphasize their own culture.

Many different factors, on the individual level as well as on the social, economic, structural and political levels, are important to the length of this phase. For some immigrants it takes longer, due to such personal problems as traumatic experiences, or difficulties being accepted in the labor market, finding a job. During this period, it is quite common that they idealize their native culture as part of a self defense that, consequently, prevents them from moving ahead in the new country and deepens their isolation. In this case their nostalgic fixating on native culture becomes a barrier to integration in the new culture.

It is important for those of us who work with people in crises, to identify which phase our client is in. If we see them using their native culture as a barrier, which isolates them from the new country, we must make it

possible for them to look forward to new possibilities in the new country. For others, the input needed might be to help them to retain their identity and maybe show them ways in which they can use their native culture in the new society. In both cases, to be successful we as professionals must recognize that the instrument we actually are working with is culture.¹

Studying the cultural background of an individual or a group gives us an orientation toward their way of life, communication, work and production. It could help us understand how this particular individual or group expresses psycho-social health, illnesses and primary emotions such as grief, joy, anger, rage, etc. as well as give us some understanding of their strategies to deal with and solve life crises. We might also gain insight into different ways of interpreting the world and organizing social relations in the community, such as ways of building the family, bringing up the children etc. (Al-Baldawi 1996).

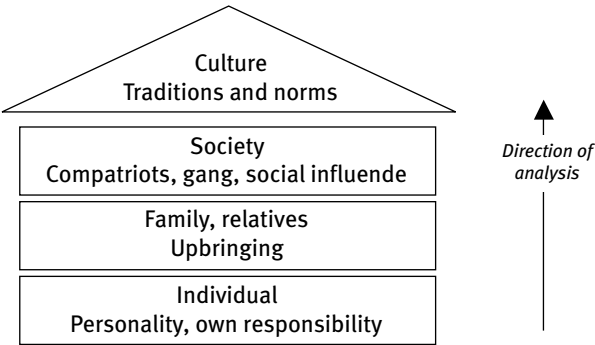
The Limits to Cultural Explanations

As we see above, culture plays an important role in the social structure of society. However, I believe it is very important to recognize culture as one of several dimensions that can explain the life situation and social relations of an individual or a group of individuals. It can be extremely dangerous to explain everything that happens in our life and in our relationships as being culture related. There are many explanatory systems and models such as the biological, physiological, social, philosophi-

cal, cognitive etc., which can contribute to our understanding of a certain situation. While we may recognize the cultural dimensions of a situation, we must also be careful not to use culture as the absolute or ultimate explanation. Sometimes people use culture to justify what they have done and relate everything to their own background and culture. This, however, I would describe as an exploitation of the notion of culture because it implies using culture not as a dimension for explaining the situation but as a model. For example, we cannot use the culture-related explanation for a man who severely mistreats his wife. In this case, using culture does not give a complete picture of why the situation occurred.

I have suggested the following model (*Figure 1*) for analyzing social relations and situations. In this model I have suggested that when we study a situation, we must look at it level by level. As the basis of the problem and central to the situation, I see the individual, his or her

Figure 1. Model for analyzing social relations and situations.

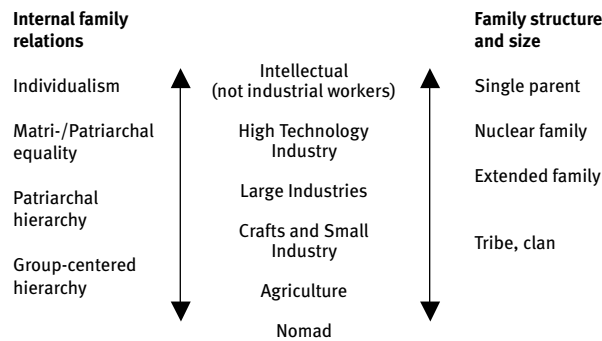


responsibility, (e.g. for a certain act), personality, life history and experiences. The second level of the analysis should be to relate the individual to the family s/he belongs to, what type of internal relations this family has, as well as the ideas and values with which the person was raised. The third level should include the social effects on the individual, i.e. the individual in his or her relation to the mini-society s/he belongs to, the ethnic group, the gang or the community of relatives. Atop these three levels I place culture, traditions and norms, and sometimes religion, as dimensions of importance for the analysis. Having this direction in our analysis, that is, from the bottom upward, helps us avoid too much generalization as we look into an individual case. The model ensures that we see both the personality and the responsibility of the individual, while at the same time placing him or her within a larger framework, vital for our judgment of the situation.

The Family – Cultural and Socio-Economic Perspectives

In different societies we can find different socio-economic groups that belong to and practice diverse methods of production. The individuals who belong to these groups usually interpret and apply their culture, traditions and norm systems in a particular way, which also identifies them in relation to other groups within the same society. Hence, culture as a concept can be applied in a variety of ways among different groups of people

Figure 2. Family size and type of internal relations, depending on the method of production.



belonging to the same nation or to the same ethnic group. One structure that is directly influenced by membership in a certain group, with its particular methods of production, is the family structure.

In *Figure no. 2* I attempt to illustrate this relationship between methods of production and the way people build their families regarding both size and internal family relations.

For example, people who practice a nomadic or agricultural method of production usually belong to a group-centered hierarchy characterized by a patriarchal relationship to the internal family structure (Al-Baldawi 1998). This means that these people have a holistic or (collective) way of thinking where the group is the centre of social structures and relations. The individuals exist only in relation to the group and offer their autonomy in exchange for belonging to a group. The group gives the individual social security while at the same

time forming the rules and functions, and, consequently, the identity of every individual within the society. Born as a part of the group, the individual will grow up indivisible from the group. This means that the individuals follow what the group decides for them, such as when it comes to choosing a partner, building a family, or choosing a job. Within this kind of a system loyalty to the group is much more important than to society in general. In this context the family generally consists of many members and we may also find different forms of extended families, clans, or tribes, in some of the agricultural societies. The relationship between the individual and the group within the holistic way of thinking is very interesting. The individual works hard to make the group stronger, something that then in turn reflects back on the individuals who will feel much stronger in society since they belong to a strong clan or tribe. This creates improved opportunities to find a better job, marry girls from wealthy families or belong to wealthy clans.

As we move up in the system, still with reference to figure no. 2, we move from the group hierarchy's holistic way of thinking to more individualistic ways of thinking. In the individualistic way of thinking the individuals and their autonomy are at the centre of social relations, which means that the collective has to emphasize the importance of the individual's autonomous development. In moving from rural to more urban societies and big cities we find that the internal family relations are characterized by increasingly individualistic ways of thinking. It appears that equal relations

between the sexes within the family is much more important. As to the size of the family, we find that after moving to big, industrial cities and urban societies people tend to have smaller families and nuclear families become a much more popular way of life. In the modern high technology societies we also find that single parent families are more common. The nomadic and the agricultural methods of production call for big families where the members help one another. In contrast to this, in industrial production, methods are based more on the individual. Workers within an industry may organize themselves collectively to fight for their rights, but this co-operation is still based on autonomous individuals.

The category of intellectuals on top of the figure refers to people who are involved in intellectual jobs without direct industrial production. Included in this group are such professionals as teachers, doctors and nurses.

But whatever the method of production, we find that not every individual follows the agenda characteristic of his or her method of production. For example, being a doctor does not necessarily mean that the person has to build a nuclear family, or have individualistic relations within the family. Many people who move between production levels can mentally belong to a method other than the one in which they are currently living. For example, the doctor working in a big city, or the teacher teaching in a big school in the big city, can still, through their own families, have a mental connection with the principles of a nomadic or agricultural way of life. We

may also find individual families with an agriculturally based life that have developed a more equal relationship between the sexes than other individual families living in the big cities. Hence, the system has to be accepted as a flexible one.

According to the discussion above, we may conclude that when we speak about immigrants, it is necessary to identify people not as categories of nations or ethnic groups but in relation to socio-economic groups and methods of production that they have previously experienced or belonged to. For example, people in the Arabian Gulf countries may have a very high economic standard; they have a highly developed technology and a modern infrastructure. Nevertheless, many of these people still use these resources with a mentality that belongs to the nomad culture that still exists in people's relations within the family and society. They still have patriarchal family relationships and follow the traditions and roles dictated by the group. We can find this discrepancy between the way of life and the mentality all over the world.

Another conclusion from this discussion is that knowledge about socio-economic levels and methods of production is indispensable when working with people of different cultural backgrounds. We have to see people not as Arabs, Kurds, Swedes or Latin Americans. It is important to identify what kind of Arabian culture the person belonged to before migration and which kind of production method this Kurd practiced in her or his native country, etc. This will minimize the stereotype

thinking and give a more thorough identification of the person and the family background.

Migration and the Challenge of Reconstruction

Migration is a dynamic process during which the individual and the family goes through many changes that force them to reconstruct both their individual cognitive structures in particular and the family structures in general.

In international migration the dilemma of time is a huge problem. I call it a dilemma because the immigrants have to make this reconstruction in a very short time. Today's technology, though not the legal system, allows us to travel from one part of the world to another in a very short time. A new socio-economic system and new traditions and norms in the receiving country, represent a huge challenge to the immigrants, both as individuals and as families. All these dimensions of the new society – the legal system, traditions, norms and even the history of the new country – must be dealt with by the newcomers. Many of the newcomers, however, meet the new society without any relationship to or knowledge of the historical processes that enforced these changes. This means that people who move to the new country have to reconstruct their own lives to adapt to the new norm system without any background information on the norm systems, laws or traditions. In spite of this, and in a relatively short period, the individual immigrant has to accept and identify him/herself

and adapt to the new system in many different ways and on different levels.

The adaptation to a new country represents a challenge and its outcome is influenced by several factors. One factor is the background of the individual immigrant; the educational and the socio-economic level and production method they belonged to in their country of origin. Another factor of importance is the level of meeting and interacting with the indigenous population of the receiving country. A third important factor is the possible opportunities open in the new country, in particular when it comes to finding a job. A generous attitude towards immigrants in the receiving country, the possibility to work, study and develop relationships on equal terms with the indigenous people, all help the immigrant to overcome the challenges of the migration process.

A substantial number of families that have migrated to Sweden are from countries where the patriarchal type of relationship dominates the relations within the family. Consequently, many families are structured within themselves along principles that give priority to the group over the individual.

In the following I will concentrate on the changes made necessary in these families as a result of the migration process itself and as the outcome of the in-depth interaction with Swedish society. I choose to dwell on the patriarchal family not because all families that come to live in Sweden share this background, but because experience from the Orient Health Centre² supports the claim that re-establishing an equilibrium in the

family, as well as for all its members, is more demanding for this category of families. I also intend to show that, independent of the shared point of departure, it is not self-evident that all families respond in the same way to the stress and the challenges of migration and re-adjustment. My discussion is based upon a study conducted among 28 families with the above-mentioned characteristics, referred to the Orient Health Centre Family Team by different social service authorities in the Stockholm area.³

The stressful waiting period

All families included in our study had stayed for a time in a third country on their way to Sweden. In those cases where this stay lasted a month and more, it had been very painful. During this period the family members felt insecure and were without many of the defenses to which they had access in their own country. Social and financial problems, however, brought the family members closer to each other and the family experienced a consolidation in its internal relations. The father and the mother became more dependent on each other to solve problems, including the isolation that followed due to the lack of connections and the lack of knowledge of the language spoken around them. They were also afraid that the authorities would find them and send them back to their country of origin. The children too, felt insecure, many of them missing their relatives, school and friends. This situation brought them closer to their parents, and the family noted a harmony in its internal relations. If this period became longer (more

than 1 year) it gave rise to new problems, which usually had a negative effect on the family's internal relations. Many family members in our study reported that the effect of this period of insecurity on their way to Sweden affected them for a long time after their final settlement in the destination country.

In Sweden, the process of acquiring a residence permit was very time-consuming for all families, in some cases taking more than 2–3 years. During this time many families lived in uncertainty and insecurity. This situation had a negative influence on the family members' mental and physical condition (*cf. Ekblad et al. 1996*).

The children usually suffered a lot during this period. It was only a few years ago that Sweden gave migrants' and asylum seekers' children permission to go to ordinary school during the time their family was waiting for a decision about their residence permit.

Although many of the families stayed at the refugee camps to which they had been sent on arrival, some found apartments for short-time rent with the help of friends. These families had to move frequently from one place to another, which had a detrimental influence on the children as they were unable to establish continuity in their lives with schools and friends, etc. (*cf. Nyberg 1993*). As a result, the children were forced to break off relationships with new friends, which undermined their trust in each other and the system in general.

Many of the adults were unable to work. They usually spent this waiting period passively. A few Swedish lessons were not enough to occupy their long days of wait-

ing. This passive life could be a negative factor making it difficult for them to be active again when they finally received their residence permit (*cf.* Tham 1994).

The situation described above had a negative influence on family life and on the relations between the family members. Many in our study still felt subjected to the same unstable and insecure conditions as before, making the family structure weak and the internal relationships unclear.

The strong relationship between experiences during the waiting period and the smoothness of the adjustment process is a factor of major importance that must not be neglected. It has been shown elsewhere (Minuchin 1978) that the future organization of the family structure is very dependent on the social and economic conditions and the problems that family members encounter and live with during their waiting period. The more stressful a waiting period, the more the family members (both adults and children) need to be close to each other in order to find ways to solve problems and to survive. We may speak of this as a continuous consolidation of internal family relations during a period when the external relations still have no clear structure and are dominated by fear and insecurity. In this process, of course, relatives or friends play important roles and many families try to move to an immigrant dense area to feel more comfortable and secure.

Re-organizing the family structure

The 28 families in our study developed different types of family structures; integrated, assimilated or, as in the

majority of cases, a kind of re-established traditional, patriarchal family structure.

The *integrated model* was prevalent among those with a relatively high level of education and cultural openness. In these families we found a balancing between elements of the old and new structures. The relations between parents and between parents and children were more open with a tendency towards enhanced respect and equality. At the same time, the parents still used many firm restrictions and old rules in relation to their children, particularly the teenagers. Many of these parents still skeptically look, for example to the male-female relations in general and to the sexual relations before marriage in particular. For these parents the balance between the old (patriarchal) way of life and the new is very important in order to maintain the family's good relations and social role within their ethnic group as well as vis-à-vis the new society.

A minority of the families developed a *pseudo-assimilated model* of family structure. This type of family tries to dissociate itself from the old patriarchal structure in which they lived in their home countries. On arrival in the new country the parents try to build a family structure they think resembles the family structure of the receiving country. But since they have no in-depth knowledge of the new country this decision is associated with many problems both within and outside the family. Conflicts arise with relatives and members of their own ethnic group, and contacts with the local inhabitants are limited. This dilemma causes the family to fall into a social vacuum, which influences all of the

family members. Some of these families try to break their isolation by moving from an immigrant dense area to a predominantly Swedish area. This may make it easier for them to practice their new way of living. They escape the rigid control of their relatives, and they may encounter positive reactions from the host society, where assimilation is, in practice, an appreciated attitude.

Within the re-established *traditional model*, the father together with other adult males, sometimes the parents together, endeavored to maintain a rigid structure, resembling the one they had in their native country. This could be attained in the new country by creating a kind of protection system around the family, which enabled them to maintain patriarchal relations within the context of the new country. One step in this process might be to move to an immigrant dense area in which the majority of inhabitants would belong to cultures accepting this type of relationship. This gave the male part of the family (particularly the father) the legitimacy, support and the power he needed. Some fathers also obtained their power by becoming an active member within the most traditional and rigid national groups, through which their roles as patriarchs were confirmed. For these fathers, to maintain the old and rigid type of family structure tended to become a goal in itself in their new lives. The old model represented the stable and safe way of avoiding the many problems and changes facing the family in the new country. This strategy may be the norm for many immigrant families at the beginning of their life in a new society and may be

seen as a part of their adaptation process. For the traditional families this strategy became a life style as well as their identity in the new society.

To live according to this model often implies some kind of isolation from the rest of society, since it represents a life style that is not anchored or accepted among the majority of the people in the new country. In many highly industrial countries (such as Sweden) the nuclear family structure is the predominant and accepted model within society. In this model the family usually consists of the parents and their biological or/and adopted children. The family relations assume (at least according to the law) equal responsibility and obligations among family members and parents in particular. Laws and authorities, such as the social services and schools, are aimed at protecting these forms of relations. This also explains why traditional families in the new society have many problems and conflicts with institutions and the indigenous population. Most likely this is also one reason for families to withdraw from participating socially and to live isolated within their area, avoiding as much as possible the influence of the new society and its institutions.

Still, the longer the family lived in the new society the more difficult it became to keep this form of family structure intact. They could be influenced by various factors, some of which are mentioned below:

THE CHILDREN • The children, through their studies at school, had the opportunity to become involved in the new society much faster than their parents. The children learned the new language more quickly as well

as much of the new society's code system. This gave them a new position within the family, becoming stronger over time. The new situation offered more possibilities for the children to protest against the old roles and to show resistance towards the parents' (particularly the father's) traditionally dominant role within the family.

THE PARENTS • The parents had varying degrees of difficulty being active and finding suitable jobs in a modern and high technological market. They were often obliged to live off the support program provided by the social services, or by the help of the national health insurance in the new country. This resulted in these parents becoming, again to a varying degree, socially isolated and passive. They usually lived on the periphery of society and failed to identify with the life style of their new country. They were also poorly motivated to learn the new language or to embrace other cultural aspects. This made them feel all the more isolated and marginalized in the new country. Much of their life experience was of no use and this led to them losing their social status. This may in turn have led to a fixation on the culture, traditions and life style of their native country.

THE FATHERS • The situation described above made the father lose his classic function as head of the family and undermined his responsibility of representing the whole family in its external relations with society. The social security system in the new country, taking economic responsibility for this kind of immigrant family, thus greatly threatened the role of the father.

THE MOTHERS • The mother's role was also changed. The regression of the father's social role placed a new responsibility and challenge on the mother. This new situation forced many women to find new ways of playing their role in the new country. The women were usually more open to establishing social contacts with neighboring families. The mother also had to establish good relationships with many institutions in the new country, such as schools, social services and others, in order to keep the family life running. This gave the mother a greater opportunity to become involved with the new society's social life, at least in comparison with the father. Her traditionally closer relationship to the children also facilitated an adaptation to the new social codes.

The conditions forced many mothers to quickly learn (passively, by talking with people, and/or actively by attending special courses) the new language. Some of them tried to find a job outside the family, in order to give themselves and the family better financial security. This also contributed to the women's ability to integrate. All these factors together gave the mother a new position and role within the family, thus contributing to many changes in the old patriarchal system.

The structure turned upside down

All these changes in the family turned the structure upside down. The father found himself at the bottom of the structure and the children took on new leader roles in the family. The mother usually found herself between these two powerful subsystems. It is difficult to

decide which of these two sides she would support in the case of a conflict. If she took the father's side she could lose the trust of her children, and if she supported the children she would stand the risk of losing her husband. Furthermore, no one in this system, which had been turned upside down, knew how to function in his or her new positions and roles.

The family members reacted differently in meeting this new situation. Many strategies with social, physical or/and psychological symptoms were manifested as a reaction to the changed structure.

THE FATHERS • The fathers could react in both constructive and destructive ways depending on their level of education, social flexibility and their job status in the new country. Constructive strategies included, for example, studying the language, finding a job and developing a more open attitude towards the new social conditions. Some of the fathers unfortunately chose destructive strategies by adopting a hard attitude and aggressively confronting the rest of the family in order to remain in control of the family system. Some of them set unacceptable rules and limits for the family members, which made many of the latter, in particular the teenagers, protest. Other fathers chose to abdicate (physically and/or mentally) their family responsibilities by such things as actively involving themselves in the social and political life of their native country and becoming an active member of various conservative, nationalistic societies and groups. Some fathers exhibited destructive behavior such as playing cards for days or using various drugs. A general attitude accompanying

the destructive strategies was to idealize the old country's rules and way of life, proposing them as a model to be followed in the new country too.

Psychiatric problems, such as depression and anxiety, as well as different somatic symptoms such as headache, high blood pressure, etc. were other possible ways for some of these fathers to reduce their feeling of shame at the loss of their traditional role. Referring to their poor health status made it easier to escape the feeling of shame.

THE MOTHERS • The mothers too, met the changed family structure in a variety of ways. As mentioned earlier, some mothers adopted an active attitude in compensating for the reduction of the father's role. Another choice was to use divorce as a way to escape the problems within the family. In Sweden during the past ten years we have noticed a dramatically increasing number of divorces among immigrant families in general, and among those of Middle Eastern origin in particular. The financial independence, which the women are able to achieve in the new country, helps them to take this opportunity to have another way of life and to free themselves from increasing problems within the family. Unfortunately, many of these women are still treated with skepticism and are socially isolated by their relatives and friends. This makes them feel alone and uncomfortable. To be isolated can be a stressful situation for the woman since belonging to the group and the family is often an integral part of her social identity.

Some of these mothers tend to become high consumers of health care, displaying all kinds of psychiatric

problems, such as different sorts of depression with high suicide risk and/or somatic problems.

THE CHILDREN • The children also met their new role in the family in different ways. The reduction of the parents' social role generally (particularly the father) made it difficult for them to be a role model for their children. In this case many of the children tried to compensate for this gap by finding a role model outside the family, such as a good teacher or a sports coach, or by doing well at school. Some of the teenagers unfortunately found a role model within the criminal fraternity or in drug user gangs, which had a detrimental effect on their studies and situation in general. Others chose to deal with the conflict with the parents by leaving the family (*cf.* Person 1992). In some cases the conflict became so bitter and intense that it forced the children to seek help at school and from the social services. The reaction from these institutions varied. In some cases they tried to find ways to improve the relations within the family, in other cases they were forced to remove the children and take them into care, according to the temporary custody law, to minimize the risk of physical or mental damage. Various psychiatric and/or somatic problems such as depression, anxiety, attempted suicide; bulimia and anorexia have been noted among the teenagers, particularly the girls (Johansson 1997).

Concluding Remarks

Integration is a two-way process involving both the immigrants and the indigenous people. By studying the

immigrants' background we may identify background factors of importance for the integration process, such as socio-economic situations, production methods, education levels etcetera. This information should give us the possibility to develop individualized integration programs.

The background of the individual immigrant plays an important role for the time needed in the integration process. It is however not the only factor of importance. The general attitude of the indigenous population, the flexibility in understanding as well as the access to a job equal to the one's education and experiences as well as the possibility to be accepted as a part of the new country are all very important factors which can help this process of change go faster and with less pain and tragedies.

Whatever the reactions may be from the family members due to the changed family structure, we must acknowledge them as signals which need a very active intervention, not only on the individual level but, even more important, on the family level. To regard the family as a system and to treat family problems (even those which are manifested individually) together gives much better results on both an individual and family level.

NOTES

1. For various aspects of the relation between culture and mental health see, *e.g.*, Kleinman (1996), Helman (1994), Fernando (1991) Spradley & McCurdy (1974), Brody (1964).

2. Orient Health Centre is a multidisciplinary and multicultural clinic working with clinical investigation, treatment and rehabilitation of individual's and families' psychosocial problems.

3. In working with these families, the centre used consultation teams of two or three persons, with at least one member having good command of the family's native language. Usually, each family was given 3–4 sessions and, depending on the character of the problem, also individual sessions. Only one member of the consultation team conducted the latter. In cases of generation conflicts parents and teenagers were offered separate sessions. Family and network maps were used with all families. These instruments helped the team to see how the family members related to each other and how distribution of power and decision-making was structured within the family.

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