

# Parenting support needs of immigrant women



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Study of the informal and formal parenting support needs of non-western immigrant women in three European Countries.

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## **Abstract**

Parents have a growing need for parenting support. However, parenting support services do not reach all parents that are in need of parenting support. Especially immigrant parents are not easily reached by parenting support services, and frequently come under the definition of 'hard-to-reach'. Through the international project 'Integrating Disadvantaged Ethnicities through Adult Learning' (IDEAL) the opportunity was provided to involve in the current study, immigrant women in the Netherlands, Sweden and Denmark who are usually not easily reached by parenting support services. The exact needs of the women for informal- and formal parenting support were examined, in order to make it possible to adapt parenting support programmes to these needs and to therefore make it possible to more easily reach the women, when necessary. From February 2012 to April 2012, semi-structured interviews were conducted with twenty women. All the women were found to have a need for informal parenting support. Especially the need for an informal social network and for information from television programmes was great. In thirteen out of the twenty women this need of informal parenting support was completely met. The need of formal parenting support was found to be much less than the need of informal parenting support, because the women didn't perceive their parenting difficulties as real problems. Women who mentioned to have a need for formal parenting support, had a need for briefings, information sessions, face to face contact with specialists or contact with a group of other parents to share experiences. That need, however, was at the moment mostly not adequately met. Although the needs of the women differed very much, it is clear that, when necessary, the women are best reached through informal parenting support services like an informal social network or television programmes about parenting, provided in their native language. Findings from the Netherlands regarding the need of parenting support were found to be quite similar to findings from Sweden and Denmark.

## **Introduction**

In recent years, the subject of parenting has gained much attention. Many books have been written about the development, upbringing and well-being of children, books like ‘Oei ik groei’ (Van de Rijt, & Plooi, 1992) and ‘Gids voor succesvol opvoeden’ (Adriaenssens, 2007). Also television programmes about parenting, like ‘Eerste hulp bij opvoeden’ and ‘Babyfluisteraar’, are upcoming. This has resulted in more knowledge among parents and in a growing need for parenting support (Möhle, Van Katwijk, & De Groot, 2010). Parenting support services, however, do not reach all parents that are in need of parenting support. In their study, Doğan, Van Dijke and Terpstra (2001) found that especially immigrant parents are not easily reached by parenting support services, and they therefore frequently come under the definition of ‘hard-to-reach’. According to Van Bergen, De Geus and Van Ameijden (2005), one of the reasons that immigrant parents are usually hardly reached by parenting support services is that the supply of parenting support services doesn’t meet their needs. To better adapt the supply to the needs of the women, it is necessary to map out the exact needs of immigrant parents for parenting support. One known project that deals with the subject of parenting and is aimed at the ‘hard-to-reach’ group of immigrant women, is the international project ‘Integrating Disadvantaged Ethnicities through Adult Learning’ (IDEAL, see Appendix I). Through this project the opportunity was provided to involve in the current study, immigrant women in the Netherlands, Sweden and Denmark who are usually not easily reached by parenting support services. The study examined the parenting support needs of the women. For that, the following research questions were formulated:

- 1. Do immigrant women in the Netherlands, Denmark and Sweden who are usually hardly reached by parenting support services have a need for parenting support, and if so, what are their needs?*
- 2. Are the parenting support needs of immigrant women in the Netherlands, Denmark and Sweden who are usually hardly reached by parenting support services met, and if so, how are they met?*

The current study will provide valuable insight into the parenting support needs of a group of women who are at the moment hardly reached by parenting support services. The insight into the needs of these women will make it possible to adapt parenting support programmes to their needs and will therefore make it possible to more easily reach them, when necessary. Finally, the current study also offers the opportunity to compare the parenting sup-

port needs of hardly reached immigrant women in the Netherlands with the needs of hardly reached immigrant women in Sweden and Denmark.

In this report, first the literature relevant to the study will be expounded. Next, a description will be given of the methods used in the current study. The participants, the procedure of the study and the measurement instruments used, will all be described. Also, the reliability and validity of the study will be discussed in detail. Then the most important findings of the study will be presented and in the conclusion answers will be formulated to the research questions. Finally, in the discussion the findings will be linked to the literature and implications for practice and future research will be given.

## **Literature**

### *Parents, children and the environment*

Parenting is a dynamic construct shaped by several factors, including child factors, parent factors, family factors and environmental factors. The transactional developmental model, originally presented by Sameroff and Chandler (1975), describes how child- and parent factors have a role to play in shaping the dynamic construct of parenting. The model describes how individual characteristics of both the child and the parent affect how interactions between them proceed across time and how they respond to each other. For instance, a calm and intelligent girl will respond differently to her mother when she is asked to go quietly read a book, than an active, young boy. Also, a tired and sick father will have less energy to bring up his child, than a healthy father. Furthermore, all aspects of the environment shape the dynamic construct of parenting. This includes the immediate environment of the child and the parents, which contains all the people with whom they have direct contact, all the activities in which they engage, and all the places they go. However, it also includes the broader environment, like the socioeconomic status of the family, mass media, and agencies of government. In his ecological systems theory, Bronfenbrenner (1979) too, describes how all aspects of the environment have a role to play. He describes how four different environmental systems are of influence on the development of the child.

### *Risk- and protective factors*

As mentioned above, the construct of parenting, and therefore also the construct of parenting support, can't be considered in isolation. Child factors, parent factors, family factors and environmental factors can all both negatively and positively affect parenting. Negatively the factors can appear as risk factors and positively they can appear as protective factors. Risk fac-

tors can increase the likelihood of a negative development or negative parenting (DeHart, Sroufe, & Cooper, 2004). For instance, research shows that the 'difficult' temperament of the child is a predictor of negative parenting (Groenendaal, & Deković, 2000). Other risk factors that were determined by previous studies, vary from marital conflicts to stress by poverty (Duncan, & Brooks-Gunn, 2000; Sund, & Wichstrøm, 2002; Aalbers - Van Leeuwen, Van Hees, & Hermanns, 2002). Although the negative effects of individual risk factors are quite small, the cumulative effect can be very large (Appleyard, Egeland, Van Dulmen, & Sroufe, 2005). The more risk factors occur together, the greater the likelihood of negative outcomes.

According to Rutter (1979), the effects of risk factors can be counteracted by the presence of protective factors. Protective factors can promote or maintain the positive development and upbringing of the child in the presence of risk factors. Dixon, Browne and Hamilton-Giachritsis (2009) examined patterns of risk- and protective factors in the continuation and discontinuation of the intergenerational transmission of child maltreatment. In their study, they found that financial stability and social support both can be seen as protective factors for the intergenerational transmission of child abuse and neglect. Other protective factors that were determined by previous studies, vary from a warm and stable home environment to a supportive social network (Cederblad, Dahlin, Hagnell, & Hansson, 1995; Benzies, & Mychasiuk, 2009; Franke, 2000; Dixon et al., 2009). The presence of protective factors can enhance the resilience of children. Resilience refers to the capacity of an individual to effectively deal with the risks and stress in their life (Werner, 2000). A resilient child will have better developmental outcomes than may be expected from all the stress and adversity in his or her life.

When protective factors and risk factors are in balance, there is a great likelihood the upbringing and the development of a child proceeds normally. When the risk factors outweigh the protective factors, however, the likelihood of developmental disorders, behavioural problems and difficulties in parenting increases (DeHart et al., 2004). The balance model (Figure 1) maps out the risk factors and protective factors at the level of the child, the parents, the family, and the environment, and makes it possible to analyse the family situation (Bakker, Bakker, Van Dijke, & Terpstra, 1998). The model makes it clear that many different factors can underlie difficulties in parenting and that each parenting problem therefore is unique.

The balance model (Bakker et al., 1998), takes not only into account protective factors and risk factors, also the balance between 'burden' and 'capacity' is included in the model. The burden refers to the whole of developmental- and life tasks parents and children have to fulfil, like keeping house, providing basic necessities of life, growing up, etcetera. Risk factors can increase this burden, by causing stress and by making the whole of tasks heavier. The

capacity refers to the whole of competences and skills that enables parents and children to face the burden. Protective factors can make it easier to face the burden and can therefore increase the capacity. The balance between ‘burden’ and ‘capacity’ might predict to what extent the development of a child proceeds well or to what extent parents are able to handle the upbringing of their children. Applied to the parenting situation, the balance model shows that parents can handle quite a lot themselves. However, when the balance between ‘burden’ and ‘capacity’ is disturbed, questions about parenting might arise and support might be needed.

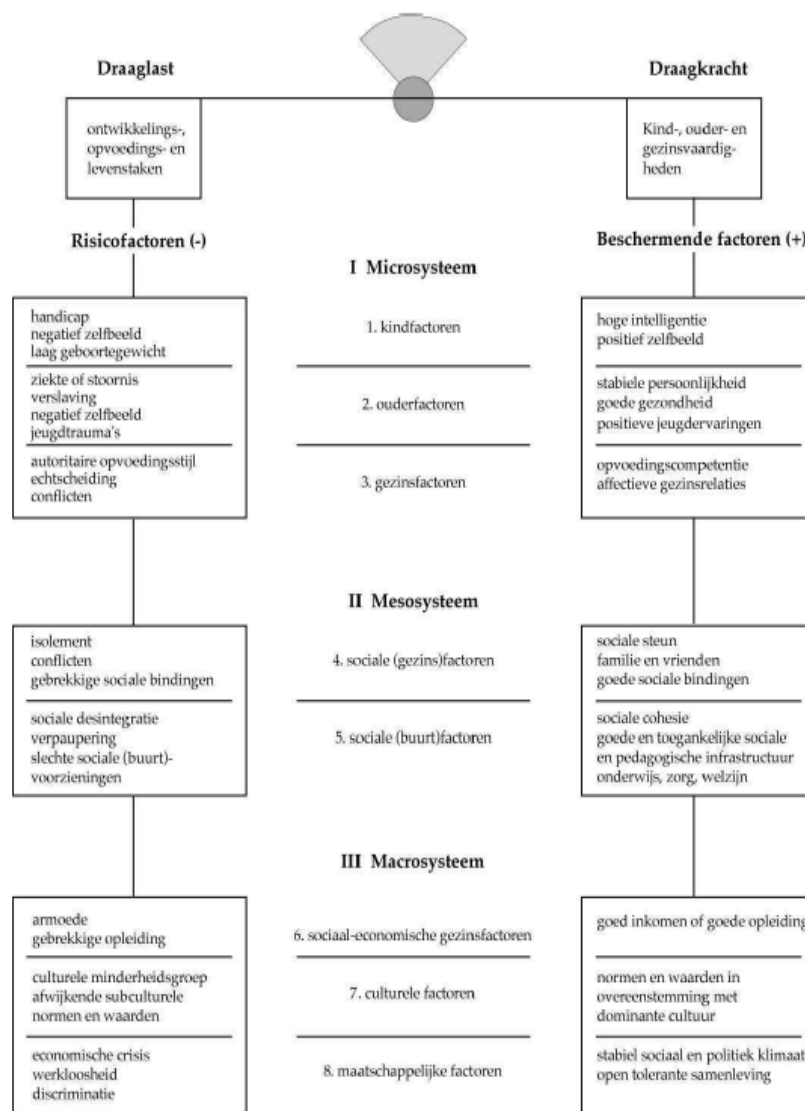


Figure 1. The Balance Model applied to the parenting situation. Source: Bakker et al., 1998

#### Four different parenting situations

Kousemaker and Timmers-Huigens (1985) make a distinction between four types of family situations, dependent on the seriousness of the questions parents might have about parenting. Firstly, they distinguish a normal parenting situation in which the process of parenting pro-



ceeds harmoniously. Within a normal parenting situation there are parenting questions and parenting difficulties, however, the parents feel competent to solve these questions and difficulties in a satisfied way. There are no real problems and slight problems can be solved by the support of the own social network. Next, a family situation is distinguished in which there are tensions in parenting. Within this situation, parenting questions are in danger of becoming real problems and parents may experience uneasiness and insecurity about their own competences. The support of the own social network is not always sufficient anymore. The third family situation, a situation of parenting crisis, refers to a family situation in which the parents have a feeling of incompetence and impotence. Parents can barely handle the situation and problems become acute and might escalate. The support of the own social network is insufficient and help from outside is needed. Finally, the fourth family situation is a situation of parenting distress. Within this situation, problems are dogged, chronic and complex, and the balance between risk factors and protective factors is seriously disturbed. Parents often feel helpless and the situation seems to be unsolvable. Support of the own social network is mostly absent or has a contrary effect and professional help is needed to get out of the negative situation.

From the moment parents find themselves in the second family situation of parenting tension, parenting support can be needed from an experience of uneasiness and insecurity about the own competences (Kousemaker, & Timmers-Huigens, 1985). According to Furedi (2001), there is a growing sense of insecurity among parents. The attention the subject of parenting has gained in recent years has not only resulted in more knowledge among parents, but also in a general loss of confidence parents have in themselves. Indeed, nowadays there is much more knowledge about the subject of parenting than there was in the past, but exactly that knowledge and the awareness derived from it, encourages the insecurity and uneasiness in parents (Geerinck, & Schiettecat, 2009). Problems that were once associated with the failures of society, are now more and more blamed on parents. Furedi (2001) states that parents are put under too much pressure, which makes them anxious to make faults and which makes them feel over responsible.

### Parenting support

The literature cited above, indicates that the difficulties parents might experience in the upbringing are multi-coloured, and that the questions parents might have about parenting differ in terms of the perceived seriousness. The parenting support needs of parents, therefore are unique. Parenting support is a collective term for:

*“alle activiteiten die tot doel hebben de opvoedingssituatie van kinderen te verbeteren. Opvoedingsondersteunende activiteiten zijn gericht op de opvoeders, maar ook op de context waarin de opvoeding plaatsvindt: het gezin, de kinderopvang, de buurt, de media enzovoorts. Kort gezegd heeft opvoedingsondersteuning tot doel de opvoeders te helpen opvoeden” (Hermanns, 1995, pp.28)*

“all activities aimed at improving the parenting situation of children. Activities that support the upbringing focus on the educators, but also on the context in which the upbringing takes place: the family, childcare, the neighbourhood, media, etcetera. In brief, the object of parenting support is to help the educators with parenting.” (Hermanns, 1995, pp. 28)

A distinction can be made between informal- and formal parenting support (Speetjens, Van der Linden, & Goossens, 2009). Informal parenting support is support in the form of, for instance, advices from family and friends, or information from magazines, books, television programmes and internet sites. Formal parenting support is support in the form of, for instance, information sessions or advices and information from a pedagogue or a family doctor.

Parenting support serves three purposes (Nederlands Jeugd Instituut, 2012). The first purpose is to strengthen parents in their own pedagogical handling and to therefore increase their capacity (NIZW Jeugd, 2006). Parenting support is aimed at encouraging the self-help of parents and for that reason it is a form of support that is based on the concept of empowerment. Empowerment is, as described by Van ‘t Rood (2009), “the ability of people to direct and control their own lives”. Empowered people are able to organize themselves and to transform their lives in a caring, responsible and safe way. Through parenting support, parents that are, for instance, experiencing tensions in parenting, will be helped to regain control over their parenting situation and will be helped to transform the situation. The second purpose parenting support serves, is to decrease the burden by early detection of problems and by providing practical help or moral and social support (Nederlands Jeugd Instituut, 2012). Finally, the last purpose is to strengthen the social network around children and families.

### *Forms of parenting support*

As mentioned above, parenting support is a collective term for many different activities that help parents in the upbringing of their children. Different forms of parenting support exist. Hermanns (1995) distinguished, in the first instance, three forms of parenting support: emotional support, informational support and instrumental or practical support. Emotional support is a form of support at which the parents are given the opportunity to express their emotions in

a safe and trustworthy environment. The parents are given the opportunity to tell their story without being judged or sentenced. Next, informational support concerns both helping parents to clarify matters in order to put the problematic parenting situation in perspective, and providing information about, for instance, parenting or the development of a child. Finally, instrumental or practical support refers to helping parents by providing concrete instructions wherever there are concrete questions, and to offering practical assistance. This could, for example, include child care for the children during the day or during a short period of time. Later, a fourth form of parenting support has been added. In this form of support it is about helping the parents to get access to a social network, so they will be able to stand on their own feet again (Ros, 2006). For instance, together with the parents, a social worker can map out the social network of the family, and practice skills to better utilize that network. The fourth form of support fits in the current change that in the Netherlands is being run in the Social Support Act (Vereniging van Nederlandse Gemeenten, 2010). The own strength and resources of parents will be used first, before individual help is brought into action. That way the power and right of self-government remains in the hands of the parents themselves.

#### *The need of parenting support.*

Many studies show that parents of all classes sometimes have questions about the upbringing and the development of their children and are therefore in need of parenting support (Asscher, Hermanns & Deković, 2008; Bertrand, Hermanns, & Leseman, 1998; Leseman, Fahrenfort, Hermanns, & Klaver, 1998; Van den Berg, Van der Gun, Kierczak, Van de Kooij, & Wulp, 2005). However, the extent to which parents from different classes are in need of parenting support, differs. Van Bergen and colleagues (2005) found in their study that women, young parents (from 16 up to 30 years old), highly educated parents, immigrant parents, parents with young children, and parents who often experience problems, are in the greatest need of parenting support. Although, research gives no clear picture of the relationship between the level of education and the need of parenting support or the relationship between the age of the children and the required parenting support (Bot, Adriaensens, Boom, & Breebaart, 2005).

For parenting support to be effective, it is important that it corresponds to the needs of parents themselves. This assumption, which gave rise to the current study, is supported by Hermanns (1995). Previous studies have shown that the form of parenting support which parents of different classes are in need of, differs. Highly educated parents prefer informational support from a professional, like a psychologist or pedagogue (Van Bergen et al., 2005). Immigrant people, on the contrary, prefer support from their own family and friends. According

to a study from Mak and Pels (2005), immigrant people are in need of low threshold care, like advices and information from the own family, friends or other parents. This finding is consistent with what is described in the literature about people from collectivistic cultures (Van den Eldering, 2006). People from collectivistic cultures often have contacts with their parents, married brothers and sisters, nephews, and nieces, even if they already live independently. Family members consult each other and provide each other with help and emotional support.

Besides differences in the need of parenting support, there are also differences in the extent to which parenting support services serve the needs of parents. Research shows that there are large groups of parents that do not receive the support they are in need of (Asscher et al., 2008; Bertrand et al., 1998; Pels, & Distelbrink, 2000). According to Van Bergen and colleagues (2005) the need of professional help is much less served in immigrant parents than in non-immigrant parents. A possible explanation might be that immigrant parents feel a distance with regard to the content of parenting support (Bertrand et al., 1998). Parenting is culture-bound and raising children in another culture might bring difficulties. When the own ideas about difficulties in parenting and about possible solutions to these difficulties do not match the ideas of Western professionals, it can be hard to find adequate help (Van Bergen et al., 2005). According to immigrant parents, in particular professionals in specialized health care often use a too individualistic and child-centered approach.

A problem that corresponds to the aforementioned problem, is that parenting support services do not reach all families who are in need of support (Barton, Roman, Fitzgerald, & McKinney, 2002; Leseman et al., 1998). In a study of Doğan and colleagues (2001) families who are viewed as 'hard to reach', are described as families in a disadvantaged position who are among the lower class of the society. Many risk factors have a role to play in these families, like poverty, unemployment, discrimination and social isolation. Often these families have difficulties in understanding the language, through which it is impossible or hard to communicate. Immigrant families therefore frequently come under the definition of 'hard to reach'. Bertrand and colleagues (1998) found that one of the reasons that immigrant families are hard to reach is that they are not aware of the available parenting support services. They don't know where to find help (Van Bergen et al., 2005). Another reason that immigrant and poorly integrated mothers are hardly reached is, according to Doggen, Van Tilburg, and Van Bergen (2003), that there are many hindering factors through which they can not participate in parenting support services. These factors are, for instance, the many obligations of the mothers, like following an integration programme or a language course, a busy household, the care

of many children, and economical worries. Besides, the resistance of the husband or family in law can also play a crucial role (Doğan et al., 2001).

### *Parenting support in the Netherlands, Denmark and Sweden.*

As mentioned above, the need of parenting support exists in all classes of society. In the Netherlands, however, parenting support is not yet completely accepted. Although the supply of parenting support programmes is extensive in the Netherlands, the use of parenting support is still seen as a sign of incompetence and bad parenting (NIZW Jeugd, 2006). In Sweden, on the contrary, the use of parenting support is almost self-evident. This can be explained by the vision of policy makers on parenting support (Clavero, 2001). In Sweden, there is a lack of specific parenting support programmes, but parenting support is provided by the extensive network of integrated, universal services for young children. Sweden has very extensive early education and child care programmes and parental involvement is high in these programmes. A strong focus is laid on the support for fathers. Besides, in Sweden the maternity and child health care system is also very extensive. As in Sweden, in Denmark parenting support is also more commonly embedded within universally accessible services, like primary healthcare, early childhood education and care, and schools (Boddy et al., 2009). Formal parenting support programmes are only used to some extent. In Europe, Denmark is the country with the highest provision of early childhood education and care for children between 1 and 5 years of age (Clavero, 2001). Ninety percent of all Danish children use some form of local authority childcare. Pedagogues working in early childhood education and care are well-qualified and able to provide parents with parenting support. They are able to intervene themselves with parenting and with parent-child relationships (Boddy et al., 2009).

### *The current study*

In connection with the literature described above, the research questions of the current study are further specified. Both the informal and formal parenting support needs of immigrant women in The Hague (The Netherlands), Malmö (Sweden), and Copenhagen (Denmark) will be examined. A distinction can be made between three groups of women. Women who don't have a need for parenting support, women who do have a need for parenting support and know how to arrange that support in such a way that they can meet their own needs, and women who do have a need for parenting support, but don't know how to arrange that support and therefore don't know how to meet their own needs. The findings of the current study will be structured, using the literature described above. During the interviews the women will be

asked whether they have any parenting questions and whether they perceive their questions as really serious. The findings of this question will be linked to one out the four family situations that can be distinguished: a normal parenting situation, a situation in which there are tensions in parenting, a situation of parenting crisis, and a situation of parenting need. Also the women will be asked about their needs of parenting support. The findings of this question will be linked to the four forms of parenting support: emotional support, informational support, instrumental support, and support to get access to a social network.

## **Method**

### *Design*

For the current study, immigrant women who are usually not easily reached by parenting support services, were approached in The Hague (The Netherlands), Malmö (Sweden), and Copenhagen (Denmark). A total of twenty women who had children living at home, were individually interviewed, using semi-structured interviews.

### *Participants*

In the Netherlands and in Sweden the women participating in the IDEAL project were interviewed. Women were included in the IDEAL project only if they were immigrant women or refugees from non-western countries with one or several of the characteristics mentioned in Table 1. In Denmark no permission was given to interview the women participating in the IDEAL project and therefore women, meeting the same characteristics as the women from the IDEAL project, were recruited outside that project. In the Netherlands a total of thirteen women were enrolled in the study, in Sweden a total of five women were enrolled in the study and in Denmark two women were enrolled. Below, for each country separately is described how the women were recruited.

### **Table 1**

*Selection criteria for the participants in the IDEAL project*

- 
1. none or only a few years of primary education (illiteracy)
  2. very limited knowledge and understanding of the surrounding western society
  3. none or very limited command of the language of their host country
  4. low self esteem and self confidence
  5. suffering from physical, mental, or psychosomatic illness, often resulting in a predominant “illness identity” overshadowing any other possible self-perception
  6. lack of understanding of gender equality, lack of skills as how to adjust traditional ways of child upbringing to gender balanced societies
  7. lack of understanding of their roles, as of how to bring their resources to bear in society
  8. very often social or financial problems in the family
  9. an experience of stagnation and failure, the conviction that a transformation of one’s life is impossible
-

### *The Netherlands*

In the Netherlands all the women participating in the IDEAL project were interviewed. Women from the project were recruited in collaboration with the broad-based school 'De Krullevaar' in The Hague. Women were recruited through flyers posted at the school, through word-of-mouth, through existing social networks, and through advertising in existing activities. Besides the selection criteria for participants mentioned in Table 1, the women were only included in the IDEAL project if they were Arabic- or Berber-speaking, because the teacher was Arabic and Berber speaking. This yielded a possible sample of twenty four women. Eventually ten women dropped out for a variety of reasons unrelated to the content of the project. The fourteen women who were left, all responded positively to the study and all were willing to cooperate. However, one woman aborted the interview because she thought the subject of parenting was too sensitive. This woman didn't differ from the other women with regard to age, origin, level of education, amount of the children and age of the children. The thirteen women in the final sample were predominantly from countries of the Middle East. Eight women were from Morocco, two women from Egypt, and others from Algeria, Sudan, and France. All women in the sample were married. With regard to the age of the women and the total years of education completed, there were differences in the sample. Women ranged in age from 24 to 45 years, and the total years of education completed ranged from zero to eighteen years, with seven women who attended school for six years or less.

### *Sweden*

In Sweden also, all the women participating in the IDEAL project were interviewed. The women from the project were recruited in collaboration with the Social Office in Malmö. During regular contacts with their contact person of the Social Office, the women were informed about the project and asked whether they wanted to participate. Besides the selection criteria for participants mentioned in Table 1, the women were only included in the IDEAL project if they were Arabic-speaking, because the teacher was Arabic speaking. This yielded a possible sample of four women. Additional women were recruited in collaboration with Hyllie Park Folkhögskola, a non profit organisation that has been engaged in a mother tongue based education in Swedish for immigrants. Two women who attended Swedish language classes for several years, but who were moving forward very slowly, were selected. All the women responded positively to the study and they were all willing to cooperate. From the total of six women, however, one was excluded since she had to leave the interview before it was finished. This woman didn't differ from the other women with regard to age, origin, level of

education, amount of the children and age of the children. The final sample consisted of five women, three women were from Iraq and two were from Lebanon. With regard to the age of the women and the total years of education completed, there were differences in the sample. Women ranged in age from 37 to 57 years, and the total years of education completed ranged from zero to eight years. Three women from the final sample were married and two were divorced.

### *Denmark*

In Denmark no permission was given to interview the women from the IDEAL project, since, according to the staff, the subject of parenting was, in this early stage of the project, too sensitive to ask questions about. Therefore women in Denmark were recruited outside the IDEAL project. Women were recruited in collaboration with Københavns Sprogcenter and Projekt Sultana, Settlementet, an innovative project that serves as an external provider of employment oriented training for marginalised citizens. Because of the limited time available and because of difficulties in reaching women, only three women were found who fitted in at least one of the criteria mentioned in Table 1. These women all responded positively to the study and they were all willing to cooperate in the study. From the three women, however, one was excluded from the final sample since she was almost falling asleep during the interview and therefore was too much affecting the reliability and validity of the study. The two women in the final sample were from Iraq and Pakistan. They ranged in age from 30 to 31 years and the total years of education they completed ranged from nine to eighteen years. One woman of the final sample was divorced, while the other was married.

### *Procedure*

In the Netherlands, data for the study were collected from February 2012 to March 2012. In Sweden and Denmark data for the study were collected in April 2012. Before the interviews, the women received information about the study and they were informed that participation was completely voluntary and anonymous. To guarantee the anonymity, all women were given a random number. Permission was asked to record the interview. Half of the women didn't give permission, and therefore notes were taken during these interviews.

Individual appointments were made with the women on a day and a time of their own choice. However, in spite of this, in the Netherlands it turned out to be difficult to make appointments with the women. Often they came too late for their interview or they forgot their appointment. Also, they often brought their younger children to the appointment. During the



appointments, background characteristics were obtained, the interview was conducted and the women were observed. In the Netherlands and Sweden, the interviews were also preceded by a short baseline survey in which the women were asked about their level of participation in the society and about their parenting beliefs and practices. Also, in the Netherlands a small test of the Dutch language skills was taken. The data from this baseline survey, however, were not used within the current study. The duration of the interview, including the baseline survey, was about 90 minutes. The duration of just the interview was approximately 45 minutes.

Interviews were conducted at the broad-based school 'De Krullebaar' in The Hague, at the school 'Kroksbäcksskolan' in Malmö, and at the office of Projekt Sultana, Settlementet and Københavns Sprogcenter in Copenhagen, places that were all familiar to the women. Almost all interviews were conducted with assistance of an interpreter, so the interviewees were able to respond in their native language and were able to express themselves freely. In the Netherlands interviews were translated from Dutch to Arabic or Berber. In Sweden the interviews were translated from English to Arabic and in Denmark from English to Danish. After the interviews were conducted, all the interviews were transcribed and analysed.

### Instruments

During the interviews a topic list was used (see Appendix II). To introduce the subject of parenting, the women were asked about some happy moments in the upbringing of their children. Then, at the first topic the women were asked whether they had any parenting difficulties, -questions or -insecurities. Some very common parenting problems, like sleeping problems and problems at school, were discussed on the basis of pictograms. At the second topic, the women were asked about the seriousness of the reported problems, in order to link the problems to one out of four of the distinguished family situations. To examine the needs of the women for informal parenting support, the women were, at the third topic, asked about what they usually did when they had parenting difficulties, -questions or insecurities and about the kind of resources they usually used. Also, they were asked whether they were satisfied about these own solutions and resources. To examine the needs of the women for formal parenting support, at the fourth topic the women were asked whether they ever had used professional help in parenting. Furthermore they were asked about how they experienced these forms of help. Finally, to get a comprehensive view of the parenting support needs of the women, the women were at the last topic asked whether they would like to get some help in the upbringing of their children.

### Reliability and validity

As mentioned above, almost all interviews were conducted with assistance of an interpreter. Although the interviewer had a number of conversations with the interpreter to discuss the expectations of cooperation and to explain the purpose of the interview, the use of an interpreter had an effect on the reliability and validity of the study, since it was not clear whether the interpreter had summarized or modified the responses of the women. Besides, cultural differences between the interviewer and interviewee have led to different interpretations of questions and responses.

Furthermore, social desirability and distrust have affected the reliability and validity of the study. The subject of parenting was sensitive to talk about and it seemed difficult for some women to admit that they sometimes had problems in the upbringing of their children or that they were in need of formal parenting support. One woman even dropped out the study, because of this reason. Some women were afraid of not being a good mother and therefore they might have given socially desirable responses. By guaranteeing the privacy of the women and by telling them that it is very common to have difficulties and questions in parenting, social desirability and distrust have been avoided as much as possible. The women in the Netherlands and Sweden were also observed during the lessons of the IDEAL project, which made it possible to interpret the answers of the women outside the interviews and which provided additional information. In Sweden the women were on beforehand told that they could maybe help other women with their responses on the questions. However, despite these efforts to reduce socially desirable responses, the reliability and validity of the study has been affected.

To reduce the limitations on reliability and validity, interviews in which the reliability and validity were too much affected, were excluded from the study. For example, one woman who lived in Denmark was almost falling asleep during her interview. Because this possibly had an affect on her responses to the questions, she was excluded from the current study. She could have given different answers, in order to finish the interview quickly.

## **Results**

### Parenting difficulties, parenting questions, and parenting insecurities

Fifteen out of the twenty women reported that they sometimes faced parenting problems. These problems differed from jealousy between the children to hanging around after school and worries about substance use. Problems that all fitted well within the normal development of a child. The problems reported most frequently by the women were problems around meal-time, problems at school, like not getting homework done and not wanting to go to school,

and problems with obedience, both in young children and adolescents. One woman reported about her mealtime problems: *“Eating is like our everyday problem. My youngest daughter doesn’t like chicken. When I ask her why she doesn’t like it she says she doesn’t know and she says she just doesn’t want to eat it. Mostly I give her salad or bread instead, but sometimes I say she just has to eat it. Then she becomes angry and says she is not hungry or pushes it aside. I think it is very difficult and sometimes I just send her to bed. My eldest daughter is always walking circles around the table. She walks one circle and takes a bite, she walks one circle and takes a bite. However, she eats everything and therefore that is not a problem with her”* (Interviewee 23). Raising your children in a foreign country was also found to be a common parenting problem faced by the women. Especially family and relatives who could help with parenting, were being missed in the new country. One of the women reported: *“If you raise your children in Lebanon you have aunties around or grandfathers and grandmothers. Here you actually need more power and energy”* (Interviewee 20).

#### Perceived seriousness of the parenting problems

To link the parenting problems to the four types of family situations that can be distinguished, all the women were asked about the perceived seriousness of their problems. They were asked whether they felt that their daily lives came under pressure because of the parenting problems or whether they felt that the problems would solve themselves. The answers of the women showed that they didn’t perceive their problems as real serious. Almost all the women mentioned that the problems didn’t give cause for concern and that they didn’t cause such difficulties that they affected their daily lives. For instance, one woman mentioned that she didn’t make a problem of the fact that her daughter wouldn’t share her toys. She mentioned that her daughter just had to learn how to share toys and that she would be fine in the end. The problems therefore fitted within a normal parenting situation.

Some of the women reported parenting problems only after being shown some pictures of common parenting problems. This indicated that the problems didn’t really keep their minds. The women mentioned that they had to deal with so many other problems that parenting problems were not at the centre. One woman mentioned: *“My problem is learning the Dutch language. At the moment that is the only thing that puzzles me”* (Interviewee 3). Observations in the Netherlands also showed that the women were occupied by their civic integration obligation and therefore parenting problems did not keep their minds. Only four out of twenty women mentioned that they were dealing with stress considering their parenting problems. *“I think that is really difficult and it confuses me often . . . I just doesn’t know how to*

*handle it . . . It really affects my daily life. I am sitting down whole day, waiting for them to come home”* (Interviewee 16). The parenting situation has come under pressure and the women experienced uneasiness and insecurity about their own competences. The problems fitted in a parenting situation in which there were tensions and parenting support might have been needed.

### *The need of informal and formal parenting support*

#### *Informal parenting support*

All the women reported that they were in need of informal parenting support. Especially the need of an informal social network was great. Apart from their husband, the women wanted to discuss parenting difficulties, parenting questions, and parenting insecurities with their family and friends. *“Yes, I sometimes talk about it with a friend. My friend has a son who is as old as my daughter, so we often talk about the children. Is she crying, why is she crying? Do you think it is because of her teeth. Yes my son also had some problems with his teeth”* (Interviewee 14). Also, some of the women wanted to discuss their problems with their family-in-law, parents of other children, or teachers at school. The women mentioned that they felt the need to share their story and to learn from others. However, four of the women mentioned that they wouldn't take parenting advice from others. In their opinion children were too different and they were not sure if advice that worked for others could be useful for them as well.

In addition to the need of an informal social network, there was also a great need of information from television programmes about parenting. One woman reported that apart from her need to talk to teachers at school, to other parents, friends, and family, she had a need to watch television programmes about parenting: *“When I am too tired to watch, I just record the programme and then I watch it later. Sleep and then I watch in the afternoon. . . . I try to do some things, activities, I try to do the same, my husband thinks it is nothing. But still I stick by it and I try. I really record the programme and then I look for what I can use”* (Interviewee 15). Programmes like ‘Supernanny’ or the Dutch version ‘Eerste Hulp Bij Opvoeden’ were found to be much sought after programmes. Just like Arabic lifestyle programmes in which pedagogues speak about parenting, about why children cry or how children play, among others, and in which advices are given about listening or the learning of social behaviour and respect for example. Seven of the fifteen women who felt the need for information from television programmes, mentioned that television programmes about parenting should be in their native language. They mentioned that they wouldn't watch programmes in a foreign language, because they wouldn't understand them.

The need for information from parenting books and -magazines was much less than the need for information from television programmes or the need for an informal social network. One woman reported: *“I place more value on the experiences of other mothers than on theories about parenting in books from certain psychologists and therapists”* (Interviewee 7). The same applied to the need for parenting information from internet sites and -forums. Only six women mentioned that they felt a need for information from forums: *“I search on French forums . . . I search for tips about what is and what isn’t healthy for children”* (Interviewee 15), or from internet sites: *“I search on websites for information about the development of children and then I compare the information to the development of my own child”* (Interviewee 7). The women who mentioned to be in need of parenting information from internet sites or forums or from books or magazines, were, with a few exceptions, women who went to secondary school, college or university. This seemed logic since the lower educated women mentioned that they couldn’t read or write.

#### *Formal parenting support*

The need of formal parenting support was considerably less than the need of informal parenting support. The women mentioned that the problems they experienced were not that serious and that they therefore didn’t need formal parenting support. They mentioned that they had the knowledge of how to raise their children and that, as long as it was going well, they wanted to be given the necessary space to solve problems themselves. One woman reported that she herself wanted to do it and that she herself wanted to see how her children grew up. The women who reported that they did need formal parenting support, didn’t differ from the women who reported that they did not. However, what was striking was the fact that all three women who were divorced were in need of formal parenting support. Within the answers of the women, no explanation has been found as to why they were. The women all mentioned that they sometimes got help from the father of their children, so therefore that didn’t seem to be a plausible explanation.

The women who indicated that they did need formal parenting support were in need of different forms of support, like briefings, information sessions, or face-to-face contact with specialists. One woman reported about her need of formal parenting support: *“With specific problems I would prefer face-to-face contact. Then I will be able to relieve my feelings and to discuss certain sensitive issues, for instance about my partner. With face-to-face contact there is more privacy and nothing will be passed on. Then someone will be able to really help me. I also prefer someone to come to my home. At home there is a safe environment and I rather*

*discuss sensitive issues at home than at the office. With small problems, which I think of more people face, I would prefer information sessions. Then the other people will get something out of it as well*” (Interviewee 10). A group of other parents to share experiences was also found to be a much sought after form of formal parenting support. One woman reported: *“I have a need to visit a group in which I can talk about parenting. I really would like to talk to someone to feel relieved”* (Interviewee 16). However, not all women were positive about this form of support. One woman reported: *“Within a group you're not always certain whether you can count on others and whether the matters discussed stay within the group”* (Interviewee 10).

Not all the women were able to mention the forms of formal parenting support they were in need of. The women first needed some examples of different forms of support before they could mention what they wanted. However, it was not clear whether this could be interpreted as if the women were not well informed about the different forms of help available. Especially not because some women mentioned that they did know what forms of support existed. One woman reported: *“That there is help, that there is a number which you can call, I do know. At the moment I just have no problems with the child, but I do know that it [help] is there”* (Interviewee 3).

Except a few women who indicated that support should be given in the native language, most women indicated that the language made no difference as long as they understood what was being told. With regard to the location and the time of support, the opinions of the women diverged. For instance, one woman preferred a moment after school time, while another woman preferred a moment during school time since she otherwise had to spend time with her children.

### *The met and unmet need of informal and formal parenting support.*

#### *Informal parenting support*

In thirteen out of the twenty women who were in need of informal parenting support, the need of that support was completely met. Therefore, in seven women the informal parenting support needs were not completely met. Mostly the women mentioned that their need of information from television programmes was met, but that their need of an informal social network was not, because their family was living abroad or because they had not so many social contacts. One woman reported: *“No, no I do not have much contacts with neighbourhood. Only hi, bye”* (Interviewee 12). Twelve out of eighteen women, however, mentioned that their need of an informal social network was satisfactorily met. They mentioned that it was very pleasing to share experiences and to hear that you were not the only one with certain problems. They

also mentioned that many different persons could meet their needs, like friends, the family and the family-in-law, neighbours, teachers, and parents from other children. However, most women didn't have such a vast social network that they discussed their parenting problems with all the above mentioned persons. Only three women had a social network that was not limited to some friends and family or family-in-law. These women mentioned that they thought it was normal to ask other people when having difficulties.

The need for information about parenting from television programmes was met in fourteen out of fifteen women. In addition to information from an informal social network, many women gained information about parenting from television programmes. They mentioned that television programmes provided them with more information and that they learned a lot from it. The information was also very useful to the women and they were satisfied about the programmes. They mentioned that the programmes dealt with different subjects and that mostly there were some useful subjects between them.

#### *Formal parenting support*

The need of formal parenting support was, in contrast to the need of informal parenting support, in many women unmet. The women reported that the formal parenting support which they were in need of was not available in the surrounding area or was at the moment not satisfactorily met. For example, one woman reported: *“However, I just don't think the advices from the child health clinic [in Dutch: consultatiebureau] are always realistic. They often base their advices on numbers and tables, and on what is normal for a certain group. However, they do not see that each child is different and that each child needs different advices”* (Interviewee 7). Only in a few women, the need of formal parenting support was met. Mostly this was the need for informational support from specialists. *“Checkup, always information, maternity care at home information. Child health clinic [in Dutch: consultatiebureau], information always”* (Interviewee 14).

#### *Reported parenting difficulties and the need of formal parenting support.*

As described above, fifteen out of the twenty women reported that they sometimes faced parenting difficulties. Some of them reported difficulties that were in the opinion of Western mothers an indication of a problematic parenting situation in which formal parenting support was needed. For instance, one woman reported: *“Yes sometimes my daughter, she is small and eh bit difficult. Mama don't want to sleep, mama you come and sleep with me, I go tell a story. Story, story for sleep and sometimes I stay. . . . Yes, yes, sometimes whole eh whole day*

*busy, yes I want some peace and mama no you come and sleep with me, I go sleep ten, ten minutes with her I go sleep and awake, can't sleep whole night. No. Awake whole night. Yes, only ten minutes sleep. All the time.*" (Interviewee 12). However, the women didn't perceive the difficulties as a problem and therefore they didn't have a need for formal parenting support. For example, one woman reported that she prepared at least two different dishes each day, because one of her children didn't like vegetables and another one didn't like meat. Although it was time consuming, she didn't perceive it as a problem and she loved to do it for her children. Another woman reported: *"No, I had some difficulties with the middle child, but now it is going better. He is in his bed at seven o' clock and at half past eight he is totally a sleep. . . . However, he is not really sleeping in his bed, he is asleep, but in the living room. There he thinks it is nice to sleep. . . . He is sleeping on the couch. I put him in bed, but he wakes up and goes back to the couch. And at night I suddenly find him next to me. . . . Sometimes I am upstairs sleeping in the bunk bed with my eldest son and then he comes upstairs with his blanket, his eyes closed, and then he also lies down beside me . . . But that's it, I don't perceive this as a problem"* (Interviewee 15).

#### *The findings from the Netherlands compared to the findings from Sweden and Denmark.*

Findings from the Netherlands were found to be consistent with findings from Sweden and Denmark. Women in the Netherlands as well as in Sweden and Denmark mentioned that they sometimes had parenting difficulties, -questions, or -insecurities. Besides, women in all three countries mentioned that they had a need for informal parenting support. These needs, mostly of an informal social network or information from television programmes about parenting, were to the same extent met in the Netherlands as in Sweden and Denmark. In general, the need of formal parenting support was in all three countries less than the need of informal parenting support. When there was a need, however, that need was the same for women in the Netherlands and Denmark. In the Netherlands the women were in need of either briefings, information sessions or face-to-face contact with specialists. Also in Denmark, there was a need for face-to-face contact with specialists. In Sweden, on the contrary, the women were in need of contact with a group of other parents to share experiences. Within the answers of the women, however, no indications were found to attribute these differences to local arrangements or conditions. Finally, the need for formal parenting support was in the Netherlands to somewhat the same extent met as in Sweden and Denmark.



## Conclusions

Parents have a growing need for parenting support. However, parenting support services do not reach all parents that are in need of parenting support. Parenting support is a collective term for many different activities that help parents in the upbringing of their children (Hermanns, 1995). A distinction can be made between informal parenting support, like advices and information from family, friends, the television or internet, and formal parenting support, like advices and information from a pedagogue or a family doctor (Speetjens et al., 2009). In their study, Doğan and colleagues (2001) found that especially immigrant parents are not easily reached by parenting support services, and frequently come under the definition of 'hard-to-reach'. One known project that deals with the subject of parenting and is aimed at the 'hard-to-reach' group of immigrant women, is the international project 'Integrating Disadvantaged Ethnicities through Adult Learning' (IDEAL). Through this project the opportunity was provided to involve in the current study, immigrant women in the Netherlands, Sweden and Denmark who are usually not easily reached by parenting support services. The exact needs of the women for informal- and formal parenting support were examined, in order to make it possible to adapt parenting support programmes to these needs and to therefore make it possible to more easily reach the women, when necessary. From February 2012 to April 2012, semi-structured interviews were conducted with twenty women, who have children living at home.

All twenty women indicated a need for informal parenting support. Especially the need for an informal social network was great. This need could be met by many different persons, like friends, the family, the family-in-law, neighbours, teachers, or parents from other children. However, most women had a network that was limited to some friends and family or family-in-law. In addition, there was also a great need of information from television programmes. Therefore, the women were in need of both emotional- and informational support. The need of formal parenting support was found to be considerably less than the need of informal parenting support. The women mentioned that their parenting problems were not that serious and that they therefore did not need formal parenting support. Women who indicated that they did need formal parenting support were in need of different forms of support, like briefings, information sessions, face-to-face contact with specialists, or a group of other parents to share experiences. Forms of support that meet the need of either informational support, emotional support or support to get access to a social network.

The informal parenting support needs were, for most of the women, completely met. Only a few women mentioned that, mostly their need of an informal social network, was not

completely met because family was living abroad or because they didn't have many social contacts. However, when this was the case the women mentioned that other informal parenting support needs were met. The need of formal parenting support, on the contrary, was in many women unmet. The women reported that the formal parenting support which they were in need of, was not available in the surrounding area or was at the moment not satisfactorily met. Only in a few women, the need of formal parenting support was met.

Conclusions of the current study regarding the informal parenting support needs, have not been affected by limitations on reliability and validity. Next to being interviewed, in the Netherlands and Sweden the women were also observed during the lessons of the IDEAL project, which made it possible to interpret the answers of the women outside the interviews and which provided additional information. The additional information provided during the lessons of the IDEAL project, was consistent with findings of the current study, which indicated that conclusions regarding the informal parenting support needs have been unaffected.

On the contrary, conclusions of the current study regarding the formal parenting support needs, should be taken cautiously given the limitations on reliability and validity. Almost all interviews were conducted with assistance of an interpreter. Although the interviewer had a number of conversations with the interpreter to discuss the expectations of cooperation and to explain the purpose of the interview, the use of an interpreter had an effect on the reliability and validity of the study, since it was not clear whether the interpreter had summarized or modified the responses of the women. Besides, cultural differences between the interviewer and interviewee have led to different interpretations of questions and responses. Conclusions regarding the formal parenting support needs, therefore have been affected. Furthermore, social desirability and distrust had an effect on the reliability and validity. The subject of parenting was sensitive to talk about and it seemed difficult for some women to admit that they sometimes had problems in the upbringing of their children or that they were in need of formal parenting support. One woman even dropped out the study, because of this reason. Some women were afraid of not being a good mother and therefore they might have given socially desirable responses. By guaranteeing the privacy of the women and by telling them that it is very common to have difficulties and questions in parenting, social desirability and distrust have been avoided as much as possible. In Sweden the women were also on beforehand told that they could maybe help other women with their responses on the questions. However, despite these efforts to reduce socially desirable responses, the reliability and validity of the study have been affected. Conclusions regarding the need of formal parenting support therefore should be taken cautiously.

In the current study only a limited group of twenty women is interviewed. In the Netherlands interviews were conducted with thirteen women, in Sweden with only five women and in Denmark with only two women. Therefore the results can't be generalized to the Dutch, Swedish or Danish population, let alone to the European population or even the world population. Besides, the women were not representative of immigrant women in general, since the women were all from the Middle East. Also, the observations and interviews were locally conducted in three large cities in the Netherlands, Sweden and Denmark. Therefore the typical aspects of both these cities and these welfare states have to be taken into account. However, because of the fact that the findings from the Netherlands show quite some similarities with the findings from Sweden and Denmark, conclusions from large general themes might be cautiously generalized to other immigrant women from the Middle East who are living in a highly developed European welfare state. Individual results, however, can certainly not be generalized.

## **Discussion**

The findings regarding the need of informal parenting support, are consistent with findings in previous studies. Mak and Pels (2005) found in their study that, in the first instance, immigrant parents rather seek support from their own family and friends. They are in need of low threshold care in the form of sharing experiences with other parents. Also, literature provides support for the finding that, besides women who are experiencing tensions in parenting and who are experiencing uneasiness and insecurity about the own competences, parents within a normal parenting situation might have a need for informal parenting support from the own interest (Kousemaker, & Timmers-Huigens, 1985). Translated into practical applications, it therefore is clear that, although exact needs of the women vary widely, they are all best reached through informal parenting support services like an informal social network or television programmes about parenting provided in the native language.

Furthermore, previous studies have found that the need of formal parenting support was great among immigrant parents (Van Bergen et al., 2005). The question arises how this relates to the current study, in which most women mentioned that they did not need formal parenting support. Several possible explanations or answers to this question exist. First, it might be that the women did not have a need for formal parenting support because they have enough experience with parenting. One woman mentioned that when she was younger, she already brought up three children of her brother and that she therefore knew a lot about parenting. Also, it might be that the parenting problems of the women, and therefore also the

need of formal parenting support, are not at the centre because the women have to deal with a variety of problems in other areas of life, like family problems or cultural problems. This explanation is also supported by findings of previous studies (Van den Berg, 2005). Finally, it might have to do something with social desirability and distrust of the women. Because of the limited time available, interviews in the current study were conducted in a very short space of time and extensive trust building wasn't possible. Therefore, women might just not have wanted to admit to the interviewer that they were in need of formal parenting support. Longitudinal participatory research is recommended to examine the need of formal parenting support more in-depth.

Previous studies paint the picture that there is a problem that immigrant parents are hardly reached by formal parenting support services, not because one should be able to reach them if they need it, but because one should be able to reach them in view of the problems they have (Betrand et al., 1998; Doğan et al., 2001). The findings from the current study, however, make this picture subject to questioning and critical evaluation. In the current study it was found that, even though they reported parenting difficulties that are in the opinion of Western people an indication of a problematic parenting situation in which formal parenting support is needed, the women didn't perceive their parenting difficulties as real problems and they didn't have a need for formal parenting support. Therefore, the question arises to what extent immigrant parents must be reached by formal parenting support services, just because, in the opinion of Western people, they should be? From a preventive perspective it is important to intervene as soon as possible, before problems become any worse (Ministerie van Volksgezondheid, Welzijn en Sport, 2004). This implies that the women should be reached, even if they themselves did not yet acknowledge their parenting problems. However, on the other hand, within the context of the current change that in the Netherlands is being run in the Social Support Act, the control and autonomy should remain in the hands of parents themselves (Vereniging van Nederlandse Gemeenten, 2010). Before individual help is brought into action, the own strength and resources of parents should be used and therefore the women shouldn't be reached if they did not perceive their problems in such a way.

Finally, the few women who did have a need for formal parenting support, mentioned that their needs were unmet. The explanation found in previous studies that this is because their ideas about parenting problems and possible solutions do not match the ideas of Western professionals, is not supported by the current study (Van Bergen et al., 2005). Most women reported that their need was unmet because the form of formal parenting support they were in need of was not available in the surrounding area. The women in the current study were able

to exactly indicate what forms of formal parenting support they did and did not want. Therefore the women seemed to be self-reliant. However, what they wanted wasn't available, which indicates an undersupply of the local parenting support services that these women want. It is not clear whether the support was really not locally available or the women just weren't aware of the availability. Anyhow, there is room for improvement in this.

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## **Appendix I: The international project ‘Integrating Disadvantaged Ethnicities through Adult Learning’ (IDEAL).**

The international project ‘Integrating Disadvantaged Ethnicities through Adult Learning’ (IDEAL) is a project aimed at the empowerment of disadvantaged, non-western immigrant women in Europe. For the period from October 2011 to September 2013, a Grundtvig grant from the European Union is awarded to a Dutch, Swedish and Danish organization, to test, evaluate and improve the IDEAL project and to make the IDEAL project applicable to all countries of the European Union. The three organizations to whom the Grundtvig grant is awarded are Themis in The Hague (The Netherlands), Hylliepark Folkhögskola in Malmö (Sweden), and Projekt Sultana, Settlementet in Copenhagen (Denmark). Organizations that all have extensive experience with the target group of the IDEAL project, which consists of marginalized women who are barely able to participate in the society and who are therefore very often dependent on social benefits. Themis is an effective and efficient integration approach for immigrant women who had little or no education. The approach is aimed at an active participation in society and at strengthening the self-confidence and empowerment of the women. Hylliepark Folkhögskola is a non-profit organization engaged with learning the Swedish language to marginalized immigrants. Finally, Projekt Sultana, Settlementet is an innovative project for Pakistani, Turkish and Arabic female immigrants. The project is aimed at reducing the distance to the labour market, by offering a training that takes the women out of isolation and that increase their self-esteem.

### **Background for the IDEAL project**

In Europe, there are many non-western immigrant women who barely participate in their country of residence. They often suffer from low self esteem and low self confidence, and from physical, mental or psychosomatic illnesses, which makes it only more difficult for them to fully participate in the society. The non-participation of these immigrant women gives them a disadvantaged position in society and causes social, cultural, economical and political frictions in the European societies. Many among the immigrant women also miss the understanding of gender equality in the upbringing of children, and miss the skills for democratic based parenting. This results in a future generation of children, raised by disadvantaged, immigrant women, with limited skills and competences as how to act appropriately in the country of residence. Therefore, the full participation and active citizenship of non-western immigrant women is very important. The IDEAL project contributes to a solution for this.

## **A new innovative learning approach**

Themis, Hylliepark Folkhögskola and Projekt Sultana all have experienced how traditional learning approaches fall short when applied to the target group of the IDEAL project. Therefore, each have developed alternative learning approaches that have been proved effective. Within the IDEAL project, the participatory approach of Themis, the mother tongue based approach of Hylliepark Folkhögskola and the solution focus approach of Projekt Sultana, Settlementet will be fused into a new innovative approach, that fits the target group.

- The participatory approach of Themis is based on the constructivism of Vygotsky, the psychosocial and activating educational methodology of Paulo Freire, the ideas about empowerment of Schrijvers, and the GRAAP approach of the 'Groupe de Recherche et d'Appui à l'Autopromotion des Populations'. The participatory approach involves the women in the learning process by having them define the content of the curriculum and by having them define their own needs. The participatory based approach takes the background and the own experiences of the immigrant women as a starting point to acquire new skills and knowledge. Various participatory methods from adult education in Third World countries are used within the participatory approach. These methods differ from methods used in traditional, literacy-based language programmes. Memorization techniques, pictograms, illustrations, and palpable symbols are used to reach all types of learners, like visual-, auditory-, tactile- or cognitive learners.
- The mother tongue based approach of Hylliepark Folkhögskola is based upon the pedagogical principle that the best way to teach new things is through building upon something already known and familiar. When a curriculum is being taught in the second language, while that second language is also the central part of the curriculum, the immigrant women are confronted with a double challenge. The women first have to concentrate on the translation of what was being said into their native language, before they can concentrate on the central content of it. The mother tongue based approach therefore always first uses the mother tongue to explain new things.
- The solution focus approach of Projekt Sultana, Settlementet supports the participatory based approach mentioned above. The solution focus approach is based upon the principle that every person has strengths that can be brought into action to make changes and improvements in life. The approach therefore focuses on the existing strengths and competences of the immigrant women, instead of on previous defeats and failures. Problems are

divided into small, clear and manageable pieces, that can be controlled and improved step-by-step by the women themselves.

**The expected impact of the IDEAL project.**

The final impact of the IDEAL project is expected to be a greater participation of previously disadvantaged, non-western immigrant women in European societies, and an improved active citizenship. By answering the needs of the women and by encouraging the women to make use of existing competences and skills, the IDEAL project is expected to transform the situation of the women. The command of the target language is expected to enhance in the women, just like the competences to participate in the society. Also, because of the experiences that the women themselves can transform their lives, self esteem and self confidence are expected to increase. Finally, child upbringing skills and competences are expected to improve, which will, on the longer run, result in an active citizenship of immigrant youth and a reduction in tensions in European societies.

*Information about IDEAL retrieved June 5, 2012, from <http://ideal-eu.dk/index.php?mode=read&m=9&t=9>.*

## Appendix II: Topic list used in the interviews.

*Interview conducted by: Anouck Zaadstra*

*Number of the interviewee:*

*Date of the interview:*

*Time of the interview:*

### Introduction

- *Thank you for your cooperation*
- *Explanation of the purpose of the interview*
- *There are no right or wrong answers*
- *The interview will be processed anonymously*
- *Ask for permission to record the interview*

By permission of you I would like to record this interview. The record won't be provided to third parties, it will only be used to analyze the data. Afterwards it will be deleted.

- *Duration and structure of the interview*

### Background information

- *May I ask about your age?*
- *Can you tell me what country you come from?*
- *How long have you been living in the Netherlands / Denmark / Sweden?*
- *Can you tell me something more about your family situation?*  
(married / living together / single / children (age and gender of the children))?
- *What is the highest level of education you have completed?*  
(kindergarten / compulsory education / senior secondary school / higher education).  
*How many years of education have you completed?*
- *What is the highest level of education your partner has completed?*  
(kindergarten / compulsory education / senior secondary school / higher education).  
*How many years of education has your partner completed?*

## Parenting questions

You told me you have ... children. Now I would like to expand further on your own experiences in the upbringing of your children.

- *Can you tell me something about what's going well in the upbringing of your children?*

Examples of situations in which you are satisfied of your own upbringing.

Examples of situations in which you enjoy your children most.

- *We have talked about the things that are going well in the upbringing of your children, can you now tell me if you have any difficulties in or questions about the upbringing of your children or about the behaviour of your children?*

*If so, what are the most common questions you have?*

Certainly discuss the following common problem behaviours, using the pictures:

- Eating behaviour
- Sleeping behaviour
- Bedwetting
- Temper tantrums
- Obedience
- Having trouble relating to peers (Sharing toys / Bullying)
- Having trouble going to school (Separation anxiety)

Or when the children are older:

- Substance abuse, hanging around after school, and playing truant from school.

- *How do you experience the difficulties you sometimes have in the upbringing of your children? Do you think they really affect your daily life?*

(Normal parenting situation, Parenting tension, Parenting crisis, Parenting distress)

### **The own solutions and actions undertaken**

- *When you have these parenting difficulties or -questions (use the difficulties and questions mentioned before) what do you mostly do? Can you give some examples?*  
(Own solutions, Magazines or Books, Television, Internet, Family, Friends, Husband)
- *Have you ever brought into action professional help?*  
(A family doctor, Pedagogue, Social worker, Etcetera)  
*If so, how have you experienced this kind of help?*

### **The need of parenting support**

- *Would you like to get any help in the upbringing of your children?*  
*Why would you like it or why wouldn't you like it?*
- *If you could get any help in the upbringing of your children, what kind of help would you prefer?*  
(Emotional support, Informational support, Instrumental/Practical support or support to the access of a social network)  
If they don't name the categories by themselves, then ask for them one by one.
- *Do you know how you could reach this kind of support?*

### **The supply of parenting support**

- *What do you think is practically seen important in the supply of parenting support?*  
(place, time, language, costs)

This is the end of the interview. Thank you very much!

Do you have any further questions?