

Introduction

In this issue of Educare, the main focus is on living in restrictive societies as an expatriate family, and providing support and advice to those who choose this lifestyle. It is hoped that the material can be used both for training purposes by organisations sending families abroad, and as a resource for member care personnel and team leaders both overseas and in the home country. The main article is adapted by Gill Bryant from a presentation created and kindly made available by Annemie Grosshauser.

Annemie is a psychologist and member care consultant who has lived in East Africa and Central Asia, and has four adult TCKs of her own. Sources quoted or recommended by Annemie are listed at the end.

The TCK poem below is from Hannah (née Grosshauser) who is Annemie's daughter who grew up between the different cultures of Europe, East Africa and Central Asia.

Wings and roots

They recommend
You give a child roots
When young,
And wings,
When older.

You gave us wings
When we were born,
So that we could find our roots
When older.

Yet roots will always beckon
Wings to settle down,
And wings resist
The thought of chains.

So born with wings,
The natural drive to fly
Will always prevent
Roots from growing deep.

© Hannah Tow, née Grosshauser

Family life in a restrictive society, and strategies to provide support

Introduction

The goal of this article is to provide help for parents living in challenging places, and their agencies and supporters. There is a need both to raise awareness as to the scope of the restrictions and the effects that they have, and to give guidance on how parents can best react, so that they can effectively nurture the children entrusted to them by God. Growing up in a different world and a foreign culture can be tremendously enriching, but there are painful aspects of the ministry that need to be faced. Questions such as the following need to be considered.

- Do we honestly look at the scars that have an impact on some children's emotional and spiritual well-being and their search for an identity?
- Do we seriously look at the preciousness of these children that God has entrusted to us and our responsibility before our Heavenly Father?
- Do we fervently look for models and ways that help us to accompany them through the sometimes quite rough waters of overseas ministry?
- Are we sensitive to the challenges and restrictions they are exposed to and the way that they are affected by them?
- Do we as parents set appropriate priorities in our family and ministry life?
- Do we protect those who are entrusted to us??
- During re-entry to the passport culture, do we empathise enough with their situation of being 'hidden immigrants' and lead them compassionately to put some roots down?

The nature of the restrictions - general

Restrictions in day-to-day daily living do not come only from external factors – features such as terrorism, an abusive culture, or constant loss and change. Sometimes they are personal and stem from our own situation. If we have wrong priorities or unresolved issues from our own past, we can create an atmosphere of neglect, demand and conditional love that adds extra pressure on top of external conditions. This article will look at restrictions under three main headings: political/safety; cultural/spiritual; emotional/social. It will consider the effects of these conditions on children and parents, ways in which families can not merely cope but thrive, and ways of helping children to learn lifelong lessons from being in such places.

It is important to grasp the effect of restrictive societies on those who are in their developmental years. The difference between being a TCK and an adult in these worlds is that children and teenagers are still developing their personality and character in a more intensive way than in later years. They are in the process of forming their world view, and absorbing values, ethical standards, and acceptable behaviour, so they look to those around them as role models. Children are more vulnerable than adults and as they are confronted with war and violence or cultural and spiritual practices and values, these things can have a deep impact on them.

The nature of the restrictions – political and safety issues

These include features such as surveillance, political turmoil, lawlessness, terrorism, insurrection, fundamentalism, threats, robbery, visa refusal, evacuation and expulsion, curfew, injustice, poverty, rumours, instability, natural disasters and accidents. We tend to both minimize and dissociate from the threat, which can cause emotional blunting, or we can be overwhelmed by anxiety. Emotional blunting means that the presence of instability becomes normal, and it can numb our feelings and confuse our judgment and sense of reality.

Adults need to monitor their own reactions and emotional responses, especially as they are role models for children and young people. Parents need to be sensitive to their children's reactions, listen and observe well, and give them time and focused attention. They should be careful not to condemn perceived over-reactions. It is important to discuss threatening issues in the family, point out injustice and contrast or balance these distortions with Biblical truth, and God's love for people and justice.

An accumulation of stress factors can be compared with an ongoing traumatic incident (stress factors are often unnoticed but very real and add up over time). Psychologically they can be more damaging in the long term than a short traumatic incident.

Tips for prevention of traumatising in children*

- Create a time and place for children to ask their questions. Don't force children to talk about things until they're ready.
- Acknowledge and support your child's thoughts, feelings, and reactions. Let your child know that you think their questions and concerns are important.
- Provide comfort and reassurance, but don't make unrealistic promises.
- Remember that children learn from watching their parents and teachers. The parents' reaction can be more traumatic for a child than the event itself!
- Let children know how you are feeling. Be real – hiding information causes worries and fears and even guilt feelings. However, do not look to your children for support.
- Help children establish a predictable routine and schedule. Children are reassured by structure and familiarity.
- Give an extra measure of love and security during a critical time.
- By creating an open environment where they feel free to ask questions, parents can help them cope and reduce the possibility of emotional difficulties.
- Take time to think about, and cope with, your own feelings. Your own stability is important to help the kids.
- Monitor what your children see and hear about worrying events through the media to make sure you are comfortable with the messages they are receiving based on their age and maturity level.
- Make sure your children eat well and get enough exercise and sleep.

A further important step is to provide security training for kids, with parents or in their classrooms, teaching them to be circumspect, and to know safe boundaries.

The nature of the restrictions – cultural and spiritual issues

These include constraints such as dress code, freedom of movement, behaviour, and male/female relationships. The latter has a significant impact on later relationships, for those who absorb the local value system. The cultural norms may include shame messages, such as the idea that women are inferior to men, or that one class or ethnic group exists solely to serve the needs of another. Spiritually the majority religion may be characterised by socio-religious oppression, intimidation and fear. In many countries cultural and spiritual worlds are interwoven and influence practically every aspect of daily life. Religious convictions and culture are mirrored in the way children are brought up, and the value and rights that they have in that respective society. Children are often raised in a context of criticism, fear and shame.

Most Asian, African, and Latin American cultures are based on collectivism and shame, as compared to individualism and guilt in European and North American cultures. For missionaries from the older sending countries, the code of the surrounding culture is usually quite different to that of their upbringing. Many workers are now being sent from places such as Brazil, the Latino countries, South Korea, and the Philippines. They will be familiar with their own shame-based culture, but will still find that in a restrictive society many of the cultural values are worked out differently in practice.

In some shame based cultures there is also a segregation of sexes. In most of these cultural and religious systems women and children are fairly powerless, and have a subordinate role, so they are vulnerable to every kind of abuse. Most non-Christian faith systems are based on fear of the unknown and evil spirits.

What is the difference between guilt- and shame-based societies? **

It is important to be aware that cultures are on a spectrum and are not identical simply because they are in the same broad category.

Guilt orientation	Shame orientation
Based on truth – for example, telling the truth may be more important than sparing someone’s feelings	Based on power – some members of society, or ethnic groups, are more important than others. There may be a caste system.
Things are important – individual property is private.	Relationships are important – things are shared to benefit those whose need is greatest at a particular time.
Courage to admit failure	Fear of losing face, denying mistakes. Leaders especially must be protected from looking bad.
Justice (the deed was bad)	Harmony and honour (I am bad). It is important to keep the good opinion of others about me.
Feeling of guilt after violation – I have done something wrong.	Feeling of shame after detection – I have lost others’ good opinion, they know what I have done.
Peace when mistake is corrected – restitution is made or a punishment served.	Peace when honour is restored – things are smoothed over or dealt with discreetly.

How do cultural and spiritual restrictions affect children?

Physical restrictions, such as dress code, freedom of movement and opportunities are more obvious and can cause a lot of frustration and anger, but they can be dealt with through teaching, cultural sensitivity and creative compensation. The spiritual and psychological effects are much more subtle, often go unnoticed and can cause severe and lifelong damage if not they are dealt with.

Challenges for boys

- There may be a lack of normal and relaxed female interaction.
- The attitude within the majority culture towards women may subconsciously begin to affect the way TCK boys see and treat women.
- There is a risk of sexual molestation and homosexual abuse, as children are less protected and valued.

Challenges for girls

- The general status of women (subordination and ‘objectification’) has a devaluing effect on girls
- Practices such as groping, stalking and verbal sexual harassment are major offences against girls’ self worth and femininity
- Their response can be subordination, in order to remain invisible, or deep resentment: both reinforce their low self esteem
- Constant ungodly and degrading messages about their female identity cause shame.
- Sexual, spiritual and emotional abuse can cause psychological damage manifested as nightmares, sleep disturbances, fear, behavioural problems, depression or self injury.

- Contextualized living might encourage the climate of fatalism (just accept whatever happens) and tend to ignore the violation of their female dignity.

These offences have to be taken very seriously, exposed and dealt with. The silence should be broken – Jesus never minimized the truth about sin!

Challenges for both genders

Growing up in an environment of potential fear, superstition, magic practices and possible curses can cause fear, insecurities and crippling bondages. Spiritual attacks can come through local friends. Parents may want their children to integrate, but they need to be aware of what is going on in homes. Children and young people can experience growing (and often subliminal) anger about the poverty and injustice around them. This gives rise to a sense of powerlessness. As TCKs learn by observation and experience, they absorb a set of different values in terms of their identity, self-worth and rights. This can cause insecurity and inferiority once they return to the passport country. It is particularly observable in girls who have to step into their new role as women.

Helpful ideas for nurture and protection

- Build an atmosphere of trust with your children. Remember that as parents you are their role models.
- Be involved in your child's life, school, friends, and interests.
- Be informed about the cultural and spiritual restrictions of the country you serve in and think through its implications ahead of time.
- Listen well and take any verbal hint or sign of abuse seriously and act upon it immediately, showing anger against the violation and compassion and love for the child. Look for professional help if needed
- Teach children biblical values and culturally healthy and appropriate boundaries.
- In Christ we are accepted and protected, and we can confront all these fears through prayer, promises, deliverance, healing and purpose in life as God's children.
- With girls: boost their female identity as a beautiful and God-given gift.
- Look for good role models outside the family.
- Provide cultural breaks such as weekends away or holidays.
- Fathers: strengthen your relationship with your daughters, affirm them, show them affection, and give your sons a model of godly behaviour towards women and girls.
- Mothers: be aware of your own attitude to the local environment and work on being positive. Daughters will learn from what you model.
- Be cautious with house helpers and babysitters – screen them properly before employing them, and monitor them. This is also an important issue in boarding schools.
- As a couple, live and pray in the power of the Holy Spirit for the protection of your children.
- Raise a strong prayer network at your home base and teach them about the challenges that your children face.
- Create an atmosphere of worship in your home.
- Pray for cleansing from unclean spirits after any abusive experience.
- Pray for cleansing of your home regularly, and be discerning and wise as you live and work with local friends and co-workers (places, shrines, practices, curses, etc).

The nature of the restrictions – emotional and social issues

- Loneliness and isolation can be real or felt, due to lack of social interaction, and feeling like an outsider, without a voice.
 - Support: Be sensitive, listen, acknowledge struggles; when children know that you are looking for solutions, they feel cared for and are less likely to develop resentments
- Emotional challenge comes through loss and change. TCKs often face the loss of friends or home, and frequent change of schools
 - Support: give comfort before encouragement, empathise, and give time and space to express pain and grief. Here is a true life example: a Scottish couple moved to the south west of England when their two boys were small. When the children were in their mid teens, the parents decided to return to Scotland. The boys were very upset as they didn't remember Scotland and did not want to leave their friends. A well-meaning 'auntie' came to see the family and cheerfully said 'Never mind! You are going to have a great time and make lots of new friends!' Her approach was kindly meant, but it did not help the boys as they needed to grieve before moving on.
- Heaviness comes from an abusive environment: girls feel less valued, and both genders may experience stalking and abuse. This affects their identity, dignity, and inviolacy.
 - Support: be alert, be involved in their struggles, take them seriously and take action if needed. Talk with them about the cultural flaws in the local society (and also in your passport country), teach them healthy boundaries, and pray with and for them.
- Social expectations are made based on gender: girls often have limited access to sports and outdoor activities. They are viewed as potential marriage partners at a young age and are expected to behave according to the cultural rules.
 - Support: work with them to find good alternatives (in a home environment), teach them appropriate cultural behaviour for the outside context, but create more freedom within the house. A Pakistani woman in the UK who is known to us has an exercise bike in her home and regularly uses it. Clear a room of other furniture to make space to dance or do aerobics with a DVD. Provide regular time-outs away from the pressures. Discuss the option of boarding school as a place of safety and social development as the children grow up.
- There are limited opportunities to be self supporting through paid work. Once they get back to the passport culture they have to go through a steep learning curve.
 - Support: find ways of earning money through selling home-made items, or doing paid jobs in the home or mission, to give them a sense of responsibility and independence

- Separation from parents occurs due to limited schooling options. They may be home schooled up to a certain age, but will often eventually need to go to boarding school or return to the passport country.
 - Support: discuss options openly, and be flexible if a change is needed.
- Living overseas can lead to an identity crisis. TCKs are foreigners in the host country, but hidden immigrants once returned.
 - Support: help to find ways to integrate, be empathetic even if there is no obvious solution.
- Parents might face overload, stress and compassion fatigue which rubs off on the children.
 - Support: do a regular inventory about your ministry. Is it still honouring to God? Are you providing a healthy role model for your children?

Conclusion

It is possible to raise children to be healthy, well-adjusted adults even in difficult and unfamiliar situations, as Annemie's experience indicates. As with any issue covered in Educare, feedback or comments based on current or past experiences are always welcome and can be included with permission in future editions.

References

*Instructions taken from:

http://www.mediafamily.org/facts/tips_helpingkidscope.shtml

http://aacap.org/cs/root/facts_for_families/talking_to_children_about_terrorism_and_war

["Helping Children in the Midst of Crisis" www.mmct.org](http://www.mmct.org)

**Table adapted and translated from: *Die Persönlichkeit – Eine Funktion der Gewissensorientierung* by Hannes Wiher (in edition afem, mission academics 20)

Helpful reading recommended by Annemie Grosshauser:

Raising Radiant Daughters in Dark Places by Emily van Dalen, in *Fitted Pieces*, by Janet R. Blomberg & David F. Brooks, editors

Families in Restrictive Societies by Steve Bryant, in Educare June 2005 and September 2005 – available on request from mk_tck@yahoo.co.uk

Paper by John and Rebecca Leverington on Child Sexual Abuse Response

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