Parenting in diaspora: A Japanese case study of sojourners and stayers in Western Australia

Anne Becker*, Ines Tyson

Curtin University, Western Australia, Perth 6102, Western Australia, Australia

* Corresponding author: Anne Becker, anne.becker@education.wa.edu.au

ABSTRACT: This paper examines the child-rearing practices and experiences of Japanese families parenting in diaspora in Western Australia (W.A.). Two groups are interviewed—the sojourners group (residing in W.A. for a short time while maintaining close contact with Japanese culture) and the stayers group (residing long-term in W.A. while assimilating into the Australian lifestyle). Participants in the research are asked about preferred traits for their children to develop while in Australia and the challenges and benefits of parenting in diaspora. The research seeks to illustrate embedded assumptions in child-rearing and how the values of collectivist and individualist communities are reflected in parenting styles. The findings of the study reveal that parenting in diaspora presents a unique opportunity to explore one's parenting practices and values. Implications in relation to worldviews other than English-centric foci are discussed.

KEYWORDS: social psychology; self-regulation; prosocial behaviours; collectivist societies; Japanese parenting style

1. Introduction

Children are acculturated by their parents and significant others who raise them, delivering ideas coherent within their cultural beliefs, while fostering social competence that follows those beliefs[1]. Inevitably, as social change takes place, succeeding generations of parents will care for their children in different ways, and this results in shifts in the behaviour of new generations of children and adults.

Research on the dynamic relationship between parenting and culture tends to focus on the part of culture that moderates parenting practices, parenting cognitions, and practices that influence children's development to be culturally universal or culturally specific[2]. For example, social harmony is highly valued in Japan, and this may involve the inhibition or expression of one's own needs and attuning to the needs of others. Similarly, parents in collectivistic cultures promote these values through parenting practices that encourage children to view themselves as part of a family, community, and society.

There is considerable evidence that humans attribute meaning to behaviour in relation to different cultures and parenting styles from the standpoint of one's own culture[3]. For example, collectivist culture refers to a social pattern in which individuals perceive themselves to have strong interconnections within the community[2], and hence there may be a heightened awareness of the expectations of others as compared to individualist cultures, where this may be viewed as less important.

It is generally recognised that the family environment and parenting practices play a foundational role in the development of mentally healthy children[4], and psychological well-being[5]. Therefore, understanding the parenting styles of non-dominant cultures provides context as well as alternative

perspectives on child development[2,6]. For example, while theory of mind[7,8], has been described as the ability to understand other people's desires and intentions as distinct from one's own from as early as three years of age, there is uncertainty about the extent to which the developmental trajectory of theory of mind differs across cultures[9]. For example, as private (at home) and public behaviour are important in Japanese life, from a very early age, Japanese children are socialised to behave in distinctively different ways according to whether they are with family and friends or with people who they do not know well. For Japanese children, this takes place naturally and is not viewed as a loss of individuality. Interestingly, there is also the belief that navigating the space between private and public supports greater self-regulation (the ability to manage one's own emotions) in Japanese children based on high context sensitivity and awareness of situated meaning[10].

The ability to self-regulate (to manage one's emotions, impulse control, and behaviour inhibition) is frequently thought to be associated with successful developmental outcomes, such as enhancing interpersonal relationships, achievement, and adaptation to situations and life events[11]. Empirical studies reveal that culture-specific views on the self and the world influence socialisation conditions and the development of agency in self-regulation, or the ability to regulate one's own behaviour. Further, regulation in Asian cultures is based on the goal of maintaining harmony and developing a malleable self, that can adjust to the given environment[12,13].

Research focusing on individual differences in parenting style and emotional and behavioural adjustment highlights that parenting is an essential factor affecting child development[14]. For example, positive parent-child support early in life can shield against various forms of difficulties as well as have a positive impact on all areas of development, including language and communication, executive function, self-regulation, relationships with siblings and peers, academic achievement, and mental and physical health[15]. In Japanese culture, for example, emphasis is placed on belonging, and this can be seen in Japanese dependency, or amae, where the child is supported to be dependent on the parent. In this model, Japanese children learn to self-regulate their behaviour in a kind of co-regulation with the parent to assist their development. Amae is thought to be a culture-specific form of self-regulation, a socially adaptive means of dependence that underlies relationships throughout the life course, where a parent meets their child where they are emotionally[16]. This type of intentional self-regulation may also foster the development of self-assurance and impulse control. This implies that Japanese children are socialised to modify their responses to maintain social harmony. In this way, Japanese children displaying amae in their interactions with their parents reflects a culture-specific indicator of intentional self-regulation. Similarly, successful emotional regulation is also thought to comprise emotional, cognitive, and behavioural strategies, including re appraisal of a situation, strategic implementation of one's own resources, and changing one's expectations and evaluations[17].

In the current research, parenting refers to the process of promoting the social, physical, emotional, and intellectual development of a child through adequate attention and sensitivity and is influenced by the culture in which the family is immersed[18]. Parenting styles are defined as the attitudes, expectations, and beliefs concerning the upbringing of a child that result in a set of parental behaviours used in daily interactions, involving the expression of parental sensitivity, affect, and mutual reciprocity[19]. The research defines culture as encompassing a shared set of values and norms the community believes in and practices from one generation to the next[2]. *Acculturation* is the dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place because of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members. At the individual level, it involves changes in a person's behaviours[20].

The current research takes the perspective that every culture is unique, where people engage in a range of social roles that are internalised intuitively[21], and that there is no single correct way of rearing children. Different communities bring up their children in different ways based on values and norms. While the style of child rearing can be seen, the underlying attitudes and assumptions are not always evident. Therefore, it may not be obvious that differences in the treatment of children arise from the different views and assumptions that cultures hold about the very nature of children.

A literature review examining parenting practices in Japan and Australia reveals that comparative literature on Japanese child-rearing practices is non-existent. While there has been some research undertaken on the socialisation process of Japanese infants and children in Canada and the United States[22], attitudes regarding parenting in diaspora have seldom been examined by academic researchers and not at all with Japanese families in Australia. Also absent in the literature is a discussion of specific case studies pertaining to alternative cultural parenting styles and emotional regulation[11].

It is important to note that Japanese culture has changed rapidly over the last two decades, due to social changes in family relations, a decline in birth rates, decreased family size, and an increase in divorce and urbanization. Similarly, parenting practices have increasingly moved away from traditional parenting styles, with a shift from child conformity to the promotion of greater independence and autonomy in children[23].

The diasporic situation for the Japanese families in the current research relates to their lived experience of parenting in Western Australia, in a culture that is not the culture in which they were reared. The Japanese families left impressions on their neighbours, friends, colleagues, teachers, and acquaintances. In the same way, they were also influenced by neighbours, friends, and he community. The insights provided by these parents offer insightful information about their firsthand experiences raising their children in diaspora.

The current research

Investigating the parenting experience of Japanese families raising their children in Western Australia, the current research interviewed two groups of families living in Perth, Western Australia. The stayers have migrated and made Australia their home. The second group, the sojourners, are residing in Perth for a limited period. The research aimed to explore and understand Japanese child-rearing practices for both groups and the way in which cultural beliefs, attitudes, and values influence their parenting practices in diaspora.

The Japanese parents were asked to comment on the kinds of behaviour that they would encourage and discourage in public and in private, as certain traits, such as being outspoken, direct, and using initiative, are not always considered assets in Japan. Additionally, the research examined the value that the two groups placed on different character traits depending on whether they were remaining in Australia or returning to reside in Japan. Experiences and insights that the families found both rewarding and challenging in the process of child rearing in Australia are also discussed.

1.1.1. Population

The Japanese community residing in Perth, Western Australia, was the chosen population for the research. Specifically, the target population were raising children between the ages of 5 and 16 and hence possessed the characteristics that would effectively address the research questions and achieve the desired research objectives.

1.1.2. Target population

The target population fell into two groups: families residing short-term and families who had been living in Western Australia for four years or more with no intention of returning to live in Japan. Specific criteria for including research respondents included raising children of any age in Perth and the parents having grown up in Japan. Criteria for excluding individuals related to factors that did not align with the research objectives (not parenting children in Perth), as this ensured that the sample was representative of the target population.

2. Participants

The participants, ranging in age from 25 to 45 years of age (20 mothers and 7 fathers), were drawn from the Japanese community in Western Australia, a diverse group who had come to Perth to work in Japanese companies, the Japanese school, the Japanese embassy, in private business, and universities. In terms of parenting styles and the socialisation of their children, the two groups had very different needs.

2.1. The stayers group

The Stayer group resides in Perth, with no intention of returning to Japan soon. This group faced the challenge of encouraging their children to maintain an interest in Japanese culture while enabling the children to also act in Australian ways. The stayers work as lecturers, restauranters, university lecturers, travel agents, karaoke bar owners, cooks, researchers, PhD researchers, art dealers, diplomats, and a father who worked in Antarctica while based in Perth.

2.2. The Sojourners group

The Sojourner group works as teachers at the Japanese school, researchers, diplomats, and businessmen. Some members of this group had brought Japanese parenting manuals, attended the Japanese school in Perth, and frequented the local Japanese playgroups, maintaining points of reference to later ease back into Japanese society on return.

2.3. Sample size

20 Japanese families were sourced from the local Japanese playgroup and the Japanese school in Perth. The data from the recordings formed the basis for the discussion section. In total, there were 34 children. The parents ranged in age from 25 to 45 years old. Twenty mothers and seven fathers were interviewed—27 interviews in all.

The sample size of 27 adults was deemed suitable, as research has shown that data saturation is often reached following at least seven one-on-one interviews[24]. Due to the challenges sourcing additional families who were able to meet the inclusion criteria, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of the sampling method and interpret the findings with caution, considering the potential biases inherent in the sample selection process.

2.4. Sampling technique

Due to the difficulty of obtaining a random sample from the population of interest, purposeful sampling, a non-probability sampling technique often used in exploratory research where access to the entire population is difficult or impractical, was chosen for the current research. Purposive sampling involved selecting participants based on specific criteria or characteristics that were relevant to the research questions. The advantage of this sampling method is that it allows the researcher to select families whose experiences are of interest. The disadvantage of the method is that it may not be

generalizable beyond the selected sample, and hence there may be potential for bias in participant selection if the criteria are not applied consistently. The study reduced sampling bias by including two diverse groups in terms of educational background, status, length of time in W.A., and occupation.

3. Aims and objectives

The aim of the research was to explore the experiences of Japanese families parenting in diaspora, including aspects of child rearing through the eyes of the Japanese parents, that Australians may take for granted.

The general aims and objectives of the research included:

- Cultural adaptation—understanding how Japanese parents adapt their traditional parenting practices to fit within the cultural context of Australia.
- Parenting challenges—investigating any challenges that Japanese parents face in raising children in a different cultural setting and how they navigate these challenges.
- Perceptions of parenting—exploring the goals and aspirations Japanese parents have for their children within the Australian context and how these may differ from traditional Japanese expectations.
- Impact on child development—examining the effects of parenting styles on the development and well-being of Japanese children growing up in Australia.
- Cultural transmission—investigating how Japanese cultural values and beliefs are transmitted through parenting practices in the Australian context.
- Integration and identity formation—exploring how Japanese parents balance maintaining their cultural heritage while facilitating their children's integration into Australian society—and Third Culture Kids.
- Support networks—identifying the support networks utilised by Japanese parents in Australia and how these networks influence their parenting decisions.

4. Research goals

The research goals relate to identifying personality traits that are most important for their children to develop. Some of the broader themes that were to form more specific objectives were to examine the challenges of parenting in diaspora. Six hypotheses were proposed.

Hypotheses H1—Given that families tend to socialise their children in the kinds of behaviour that enable their children to function successfully in society, it was predicted that the Sojourner group, compared to the Stayer group, would maintain a closer connection to Japanese culture while in W.A.

Hypotheses H2—It was hypothesised that the Stayer group would be less invested in managing their children's behaviour and potentially enjoy freedoms not afforded in Japan.

Hypotheses H3—As identity is socially constructed, it was predicted that some families would find their sense of self enriched while raising their children in Western Australia.

Hypotheses H4—It was predicted that the stayers, compared to the sojourners, would value traits that are useful for their children in Australia, such as being assertive and forthright.

Hypotheses H5—Considering that an important part of the socialisation process of the Japanese child is not only cognitive development but also social and psychological development (sensitivity to others), it was also predicted that omoiyari, or Japanese empathy, would be equally important for both

stayers and sojourners, as Japanese child rearing fosters a sensitivity and inclination to respond to the subtle states of other people[25].

Hypotheses H6—It was further predicted that the sojourner group would encourage Gaman (self-discipline/perseverance), as this is a foundational goal of the Japanese school curriculum, persisting with patience, and viewing failures as learning opportunities.

5. Data collection

27 questionnaires were completed, 17 by stayers and 10 by sojourners. Interviews were carried out in both Japanese and English by the researcher in the homes of the Japanese participants. The research questions were designed to lead participants to speak broadly on the topics, and one-on-one interviews took between 45 min and 1 h to complete.

To ensure confidentiality, the interviewees were provided with a consent form in both English and Japanese and invited to use a pseudonym. Participants were presented with an explanation of the nature of the research proposal and informed that they could withdraw at any stage. All sessions were audio recorded following receipt of consent and stored for 5 years at Curtin University.

The data from the recordings forms the basis for the discussion section. In total, there were 34 children. The parents ranged in age from 25 to 45; 20 mothers and 7 fathers were interviewed, 27 interviews in all.

6. Methodology

A mixed-methods approach was adopted for the research, as this methodology enables both exploration (qualitative) and explanation (quantitative) and is guided by a pragmatic approach. This approach was chosen to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the research goals and enhance the validity and reliability of the results.

The style of interviewing chosen for the research was based on a feminist approach with a focus on cultural sensitivity, involving in-depth interviews, a focus group, content analysis, and ethnographic research (observing life as it happens). The design was supportive of research involving grounded theory, and narrative-style case studies[26–28].

Interviews were semi-structured with a predetermined number of questions, including open-ended questions related to specific questions outlined in the goals of the research.

The interview questions related to the types of behaviours that were encouraged and discouraged, personality traits considered desirable for their children relating to the kind of advice received from West Australia child health nurses, as well as aspects of Australian parenting styles that respondents may have wished to comment on.

Attributes

The parents were asked to rate the importance of a series of attributes that they would hope for their child to develop regardless of where they were reared. These traits were chosen based on the perception of what may have been both important for all parents of any culture and relevant and meaningful for Japanese parents in Australia. The following traits were selected for the research: independence, generosity, compliance, kindness, compassion, self-assertion, initiative, tidiness, intelligence, happiness, industriousness, attitude, helpfulness, awareness of others (omoiyari), competitiveness, and individualism.

7. Data analysis

The research adopted a thematic approach[29,30], in the data analysis to identify any recurring themes in the assumptions and expectations that were held by both groups in terms of their experience of child rearing in Australia. The data is represented in the Appendix.

7.1. Stayers

The Stayer families enjoyed the open spaces and nature that are less accessible in Japanese cities, as well as the less competitive approach to education. Stayer mothers particularly enjoyed the opportunity to spend time with their partners, relaxing and having meals together in the evening, as this was often not possible in Japan.

Stayer mothers rated Independence as vital in Australia and less so in Japan. Generosity and Kindness were also noted as vital. Yasashii (gentle, kind) and omoiyari (awareness of others) were both identified as desirable traits and qualities that are conducive to thinking of others and avoiding trouble/discord or meiwaku, in relations with other people[25].

Stayer mothers held the view that children in Australia are encouraged to think a lot and are better able to accept differences due to the multicultural nature of Australian schools. They were impressed by the opportunities for children in Australia to pursue personal interests and do well, even if they were not academically strong.

Some mothers commented that an enjoyable aspect of raising children in Australia was learning to receive and give physical affection, including hugs and kisses (not a behavioural norm within Japanese culture).

The Stayer group preferred that in public their children used polite language, showed respect for elders, mixed gently with all people, used correct greetings with others, were not a bother to others nor made others feel uncomfortable, and used Japanese language properly (using the more formal expressions for people outside the family and not using language carelessly). The purpose of polite language includes showing consideration for others' feelings, establishing levels of mutual comfort, and building rapport[31].

7.2. Sojourners

Sojourners commented, "At the Japanese playgroup, we tend not to verbally scold the children; rather, we repeatedly explain and model the qualities of sharing with other children or taking care of equipment." The expectation was that the children would eventually do what was expected without a battle and seem to meet the expectations that parents held for them. The approach, which may be seen as a version of behaviour modification, is tied to traditional practices, where there is no need to rebel if the mood is passive.

Sojourner comments included, "My oldest son goes to Japanese school, so it's much the same as in Japan; the moral consciousness is high in Australia, so it suits us; in Japan, people think that it is best to be like everyone else; children that return to Japan after being reared in another culture often suffer culture shock and are afraid of being bullied; in Australia, there are many different children from different cultures, so they are used to being with different children and can join in and mix well with everyone."

In answer to the kinds of behaviours that respondents wished to encourage in their children, the following comments were made by many parents in both groups: "Not to bother other people, not to disturb or make other people feel uncomfortable, not to inconvenience others, and to mix gently with all people."

7.3. General comments

One Stayer father commented that he liked that Australians are direct. A Sojourner mother commented that they admired the way Australian parents encourage their children to be independent as well as develop their imagination. Several respondents commented that "Australian parents are generous in giving praise and compliments to their children."

One Sojouner mother commented, "I like the way that Australian children are raised to be independent individuals, as well as encouraging their children to state their opinions and views."

One mother spoke of the importance of forthrightness in Australia. She commented, "When my son wants to do things in Australia, he knows that if he doesn't put up his hand and say 'yes, [speaking up], he won't be able to do anything. He says that if he does things the Japanese way, he cannot succeed. Usually, in Japan, we must wait until the teacher selects us to speak. In Japan, it is not good to stand out, and we may be teased. For example, 'that kid always has his hand up for everything, and he wants to be the teacher's pet'. We don't speak up about what we can do. From the point of view of Australians, he may be too shy. But if he becomes too strong here, we won't be able to be accepted into Japanese society. In Australia, they say that self-esteem and self-assertion are the most important, but if you are not careful, you can increase your enemies."

In answer to the question relating to the kind of behaviour they wished to discourage in public, stayer mothers mentioned that they wanted to discourage their children from being a nuisance or bothering other people, making others feel uncomfortable, ignoring others, teasing, being pushy, being selfish, making fun of others, overreacting, and getting overexcited. Similarly, Sojourner mothers also discouraged their children from being a nuisance to others, making people feel uncomfortable, being noisy, annoying others, crying, and speaking in a loud voice. The most frequent responses from parents in the study were in the hope that their children would not cause meiwaku, or inconvenience, to others.

When asked about the kinds of behaviour that they wished to encourage at home, stayer mothers mentioned tidying up, looking after siblings, respecting older siblings, following family rules, and being cooperative. Sojourner fathers mentioned initiating help at home, thinking of others, putting up with situations no matter how difficult, and achieving goals. Sojourner parents suggested having good manners, being polite, and being active.

8. Japanese values

Most frequently cited in the literature to describe a 'good' Japanese child were otonashii (mild and gentle) and sunao (compliant, cooperative). Akarui (bright/present) genki (active, spirited, energetic). Other terms include ganbaru (to persist), gaman suru (to endure), and hansei suru (to reflect on one's areas for improvement). The quality of sunao is often translated into English as 'spoilt'; however, the connotation of this word for Japanese is more positive within Japanese culture. It is important to keep in mind that the English translation often merely points to a seemingly apt English version of the Japanese word[32].

In the Japanese view, giving a small child a lot of attention in the early stages is thought to encourage trust and thereby compliance[25]. Hendry suggests that if a child receives enough love from a parent, then it will be sunao, since reliance and trust will be established so that the child will comply with adult directives. To react sunao ni is to react non-critically and to accept a situation as it is.

While the Japanese parents were from different backgrounds in terms of education and profession, interestingly, omoiyari (being aware of others) was selected as the most important trait for their child to develop, consistently across both groups.

8.1. Third culture kids TCKs

Most children spend their developmental years in their country of birth, or at least within a culture and society that determine where home is. However, in today's globalised world, a growing number of children are spending extended periods of time living outside of their home country due to parent employment.

Third culture kids' (TCKs)[33], refer to children that move between cultures, where knowledge is less tied to unique community settings because they switch easily back and forth, developing a sense of empathy for other nationalities. Similarly, TCKs develop cultural adaptability as a tool to navigate the frequent changes in cultures. By spending time observing what is going on, they can easily switch languages and cultural practices to take on the characteristics needed to blend[34].

While this may be the case for many TCKs, we cannot assume that it will be the case for all. Stayer Mother Mrs. F discussed the difficulties she has encountered in getting her children to modify their behaviour when they return to Japan, commenting, "because I grew up in Japan, I can easily switch back and forth, but my children have no idea about being Japanese as they were born here. My voice is loud here, as our home is so large compared to Japan. I must shout to the kids. Because my children behave in Japan as they would in Australia, it is a bit strange for Japanese people. I probably wouldn't notice if they sat on the floor in the train here, but because no one does that in Japan, it feels uncomfortable."

Some parents commented, "To have credibility in Japan, my son must know his own culture but also be versed in linguistic and cultural understanding on an international level. I must teach my son to have two faces; for example, in Australia it is important to speak up, but in Japan it is not good to insist on anything."

Mrs. O described the thinking style and creative areas within education as being the most important for her son to develop while in Australia. She stated that her son must master facing the world and that the Japanese way alone would not be sufficient. She commented, "When I am being a Japanese mum, I am quite traditional. When we are in Australia, my son follows the Australian way, and when we go back to Japan, I say, No, you can't do that now." Additional comments included, "Gaining a wider view of the world has been a positive aspect of living in Australia; there are many different people from different backgrounds; my child can hear the opinions of children from other countries and realise that the world is not just made up of Japan nor Australia; my son's self-esteem has become strong."

One Sojouner commented, "My children were required to demonstrate more passive behaviour while in Japan so as not to stand out, and more assertive behaviour while in Australia to succeed in the Australian environment." Some parents were more insistent than others on the degree to which they expected their children to adjust their behaviour; however, in general, the notion of behavioural expectations and loss of face were concerns.

8.2. Child health nurse

Respondents were also asked about visits to the Child Health Clinic. One respondent commented, "The clinic sister spoke about sleeping arrangements, feeding, and not to continually pick the baby up when it cried [not reflective of Japanese cultural norms]."

One Stayer mum commented, "Some Japanese mothers married into Australian families are told by inlaws not to pick up their baby so often when they cry and to have them sleep in a separate room." Keen to meet the expectations of her in-laws and the nurse, the mother adopted an unfamiliar style of parenting, which resulted in depression. This mother was referred by the child health nurse to a Japanese community counsellor. In contrast, one parent commented, "The nurse told me it is important to sleep separately from your children before they become too accustomed to it, but this is a Japanese custom, so I did not follow the advice." For Japanese living in a diaspora, it is often difficult to challenge or ask for what is needed, as they have been socialised to develop a sensitivity to respond positively to the subtle states of others[13,32]. This can result in a loss of one's own innate value system as well as a loss of self-confidence, negatively impacting one's identity.

9. Results

9.1. Addressing the research goals

The main research question asked about the most important qualities for families to develop in their children. Both groups highlighted omoiyari, or awareness of others. The prediction [H5] that omoiyari, or Japanese empathy, would be equally important for both stayers and sojourners was found to be significant. These findings support previous research indicating that awareness of others involves the ability to self-regulate and manage one's emotions, impulse control, behaviour inhibition, interpersonal relationships, and adaptation to situations[11].

It was not surprising that the findings revealed that Japanese Sojourner parents in this study reported a clear preference for maintaining contact with Japanese socialisation practices while residing in W.A. [H1]. This was partly related to parent concerns in terms of their children standing out as different upon return to Japan and potential bullying. The prediction that the Stayer group would enjoy the freedoms afforded in a W.A. lifestyle was supported by numerous examples of the way in which they were less vigilant of their children, leaving them to adjust to Australian life, as they also enriched their own lives with activities [H2]. Similarly, the prediction that traits such as assertiveness and being forthright would be encouraged was also evident from the interview comments.

Interestingly, both groups highlighted gaman, or perseverance to accomplish goals, as highly valued, regardless of where they would remain [H6], suggesting that this deeply valued foundational goal of the Japanese school curriculum, i.e., persisting with patience and viewing failures as learning opportunities, is a valuable attitude regardless of where one ends up.

The stayers, compared to the sojourners, were found to value traits that are useful for their children in Australia, such as being assertive and forthright, as evidenced in the comments in General finding [H4].

Finally, both groups commented on the joy of wide open spaces, the environment, meeting people from all over the world, and more family time due to a shorter working day [H3].

9.2. Discussion of general findings

Areas where parents held different expectations for boys and girls were independence, compliance, and self-assertion. This is to be expected given that the sojourners avoid traits that would be less popular in Japan, where Japanese females tend to be socialised to be more compliant and less assertive and males more independent.

Many of the families commented on feeling relief and freedom from the lack of community pressure to parent a certain way. While some of the freedoms referred to the sense of space and environment,

many respondents commented that they enjoyed the international environment in Australia. A number of the stayers reported that the many different ethnic backgrounds of children in Australian schools are an asset to their children's education.

One Stayer mother commented, "Australian adults say that it is the children's problem to sort out their own differences. Australian adults don't pay enough attention to this aspect of their children's socialisation." This comment was not surprising given that Japanese mothers, and indeed, schools, tend to be hands-on and model interactions for their children to rehearse.

One Sojourner commented, "In Japan, if you can't do Japanese or math well, you can't progress, but in Australia, if you're not bright, you can excel at art and drawing. Is it true? I think this system is great for children's individuality and self-esteem as it encourages and develops their strengths."

While there is the view that student wellbeing/happiness and achievement do not always go hand in hand[35], this view is in sharp contrast with the Japanese view of children's wellbeing and learning, as summed up by Stayer parents. Non-Japanese often see competition and the drive for personal achievement as the most significant elements behind academic success. For the Japanese, however, part of a much broader cultural and psychological environment is that when a Japanese child learns to do something, he or she is taught to do so in tiny steps, each one seen as important and doable. Similarly, in Japan, the development of an individual emphasises the values related to the individual's inner state, including responsibility, daily routine, consistency, and purposefulness[36], and the belief that this is achievable for most students.

10. Significance

In an era where global vision is imperative and skills in intercultural communication, mediation, diplomacy, and awareness of diversity are also important, intercultural studies are of value. There is also the benefit of equipping future generations with the capacity to understand perspectives on the constructs of world cultures to minimise fear and facilitate an awareness of contrasts rather than uniformity[37]. For example, the value that Japanese people place on reserve and humility is important to understand because, when viewed from an English-speaking community perspective, this quality can occasionally be *mis*interpreted as a lack of self-esteem[38,39].

Misunderstandings can occur in relation to cultural norms that value the avoidance of direct speech[40,41]. For example, while confidence and self-assurance are desirable qualities in one culture, they can be viewed as brash, overbearing, and irrelevant in another[42]. Further, Japanese societal norms and cultural conceptions of intelligence emphasise humility and self-effacement, which also involve holding back on one's opinions and deferring to superiors[31].

These findings highlight important facts related to meaning attributed to character structures that can potentially lead to misconstrual and, hence, have implications for mental health and wellbeing. For example, in some Anglo communities, value is placed on assertiveness, expressiveness, and competitiveness, and shy, inhibited children are thought to be "socially incompetent and immature"[42] In contrast, it was found that shyness as a trait is viewed as less problematic in some Asian and European cultures. Further, passive and mindful behaviours that were displayed by 'shy' children were perceived by peers in Canada as incompetent; however, they were perceived by peers in China as appropriate as well as desirable. Various meanings attributed to these traits included, 'cautious', 'courteous', and 'a desire for social engagement'[42].

The current study holds significant implications for various stakeholders and fields.

Cross-cultural understanding—The research contributes to fostering cross-cultural understanding by shedding light on how parenting practices vary across different cultural contexts. Understanding these variations can promote cultural empathy and appreciation and contribute to social psychology and consideration of the role of culture in understanding universal and culture specific values and the attribution of meaning to behaviour.

Child development and well-being. It is generally recognised that the family environment and parenting practices play a foundational role in the development of mentally healthy adolescents[4]. As such, understanding the parenting styles of families from non-dominant cultures will provide context and insight into values held by non-dominant groups, alternative perspectives on child development, and insight into issues related to parenting in diaspora.

Immigrant integration—The study helps identify the challenges faced by Japanese immigrant families in Australia and how they adapt their parenting styles to navigate cultural differences. This understanding can inform policies and programmes aimed at supporting immigrant integration and acculturation.

Educational and social services—The findings can inform educators, social workers, and other professionals working with Japanese immigrant families about their unique needs and challenges. Although there are many mental health professionals and clinics that are striving to be culturally sensitive, the literature on the effectiveness of health nurses working with families from non-dominant cultural backgrounds is limited.

Family dynamics—Understanding how parents negotiate cultural values, issues of acculturation, worldview and culture-related variables, and parenting practices in a new cultural context—provides insights for all families living in diaspora or managing Third Culture Kids.

Cultural preservation and adaptation—The study contributes to the discourse on cultural preservation and adaptation among immigrant communities. It highlights how immigrant families maintain aspects of their cultural heritage while adapting to the norms and values of the host society.

Policy development—The findings can inform the development of policies related to positive parenting practices, cultural integration, education, multicultural parenting dynamics, and family support services. Policymakers can use this information to design more inclusive and effective policies that meet the needs of diverse populations.

Academic research—The study adds to the body of knowledge in fields such as sociology, anthropology, psychology, and education by providing empirical data on parenting practices within a specific immigrant community. It opens avenues for further research on multicultural parenting dynamics. Considering that the most frequently applied psychotherapy models are the products of Western culture, questioning the extent of these models' effectiveness for people belonging to diverse cultural backgrounds is crucial[43]. A greater understanding of issues of acculturation, worldview, and culture-related variables in general will further contribute to an understanding of the values and challenges experienced by families parenting in diaspora.

11. In summary

The current research aimed to explore Japanese parenting in diaspora and the values and attributes that were encouraged and discouraged depending on where the family would reside in the future.

Researching a section of the Japanese community residing in Perth, W.A., provided an insight into their values and experiences.

The findings suggest that the qualities held to be the most important for the sojourners were consistent with the qualities that are conducive to living within Japanese society. While some of the Stayer families with older children had socialised their children to operate successfully in both cultures, others stated that it was unfair to put pressure on their children to act in different ways when in Japan.

The research highlights the early and persistent effects of culture on personality through the socialisation process, the predictors of child emotional and behavioural adjustment, and child competencies within Japanese culture.

While the aim of the research was to investigate some of the issues for Japanese parents raising their children in Australia, research into this area also contributes to a growing body of awareness of different parenting styles and values and is significant for its contributions to child development, policy development, and the fields of education, psychology, and sociology.

11.1. Limitations

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of the current research. Purposive sampling involved selecting participants based on specific criteria that were relevant to the research questions. The disadvantage of the method is that it may not be generalizable beyond the selected sample. As the sample was comprised of 20 families and 27 surveys, the findings should not be seen as representative of all Japanese families parenting in Australia.

11.2. Recommendations

Several recommendations are made for future research.

Recent research has identified Third Culture Kids as being at risk of increased levels of depression and anxiety, along with identity formation issues[44]. Despite the TCK upbringing becoming more common, this population remains underrepresented in the developmental literature. The limited research that has been conducted thus far, however, has revealed a few positive and negative psychological outcomes. Therefore, it is recommended that research in this area be pursued to raise awareness among parents, teachers, and counsellors about the difficulties that Third Culture Kids might face.

Academic research into the parenting styles of other migrant community groups and families from non-dominant cultures is recommended to provide context and insight into the child development and wellbeing values held by other non-dominant groups parenting in diaspora. These findings can inform educators, social workers, and other professionals working with immigrant families about their unique needs and challenges. This can also be of benefit to policymakers, who can use this information to design more inclusive and effective policies that meet the needs of diverse populations, including positive parenting practices, cultural integration, education, multicultural parenting dynamics, and family support services.

Although there are many mental health professionals and clinics that are striving to be culturally sensitive, the literature on the effectiveness of health nurses working with families from non-dominant cultural backgrounds is limited. Therefore, research and support for child health nurses in the form of a needs assessment and visual materials on different community groups values and practices may be of benefit. Considering that the most frequently applied psychotherapy models are the products of Western culture, questioning the extent of these models' effectiveness for people belonging to diverse cultural

backgrounds is crucial[43]. A greater understanding of issues of acculturation, worldview, and culture-related variables in general will further contribute to an understanding of the values and challenges experienced by families parenting in diaspora.

11.3. Researchers' positionality

As researcher positionality may impact aspects of the research[45,46], fortnightly check-ins with the university supervisor were held to discuss emerging themes. The researcher maintained a reflective stance throughout the interview and research process, mindful of influence and objectivity. The researcher spent four years living, working, and parenting her Australian son in Japan. The researcher also instigated the inaugural Japanese playgroup for her own son on his return to Australia and for Japanese families and those interested in 1992. Members expanded to 40, and in 2024, Western Australia now boasts over 40 Japanese playgroups spread throughout the northern and southern suburbs of Perth, W.A. As such, this topic is close to her heart.

Author contributions

Conceptualization, AB and IT; methodology, AB; software, AB; validation, AB and IT; formal analysis, AB; investigation, AB; resources, AB; data curation, AB; writing—original draft preparation, AB; writing—review and editing, AB and IT; visualization, AB; supervision, IT; project administration, IT. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Every reasonable effort has been made to acknowledge the owners of copyright material. I would be pleased to hear from any copyright owner whose work has been omitted or incorrectly acknowledged.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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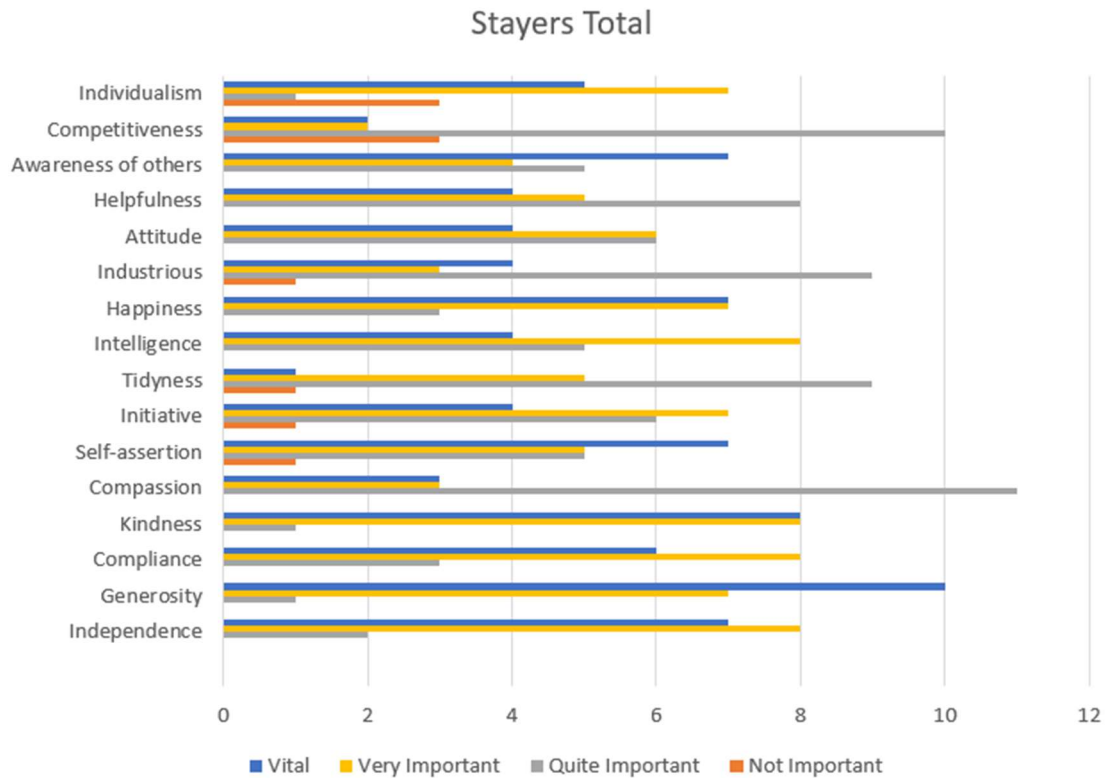
Appendix

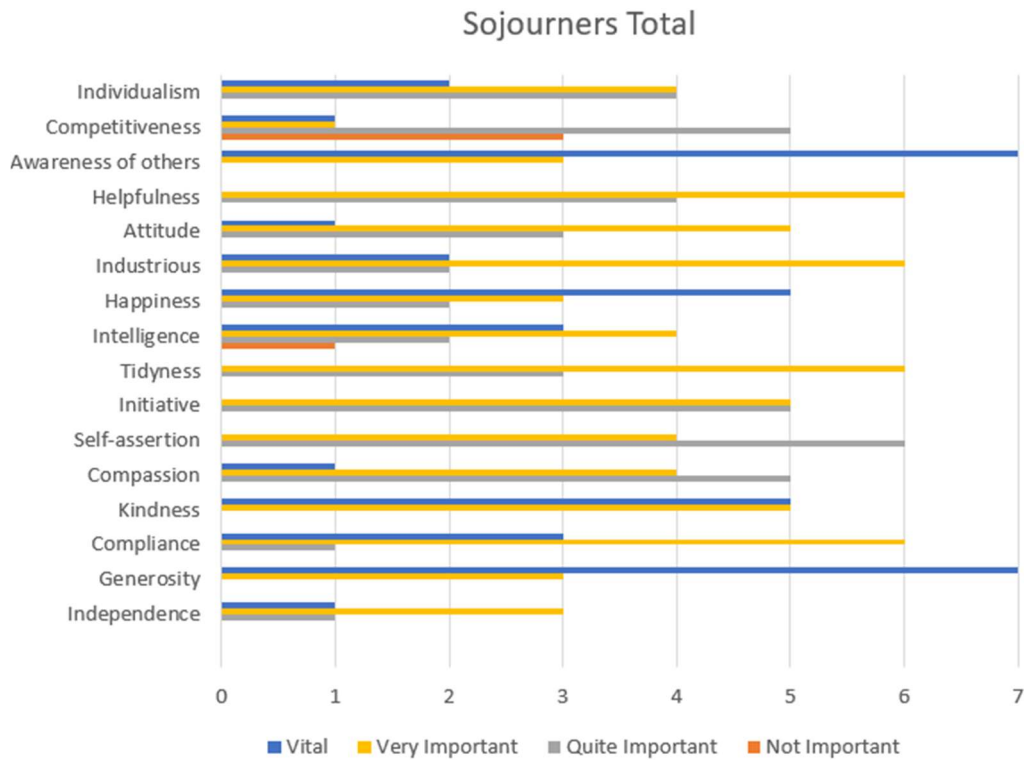**Figure A1.** Desirable traits for stayers (Total *n* = 17).

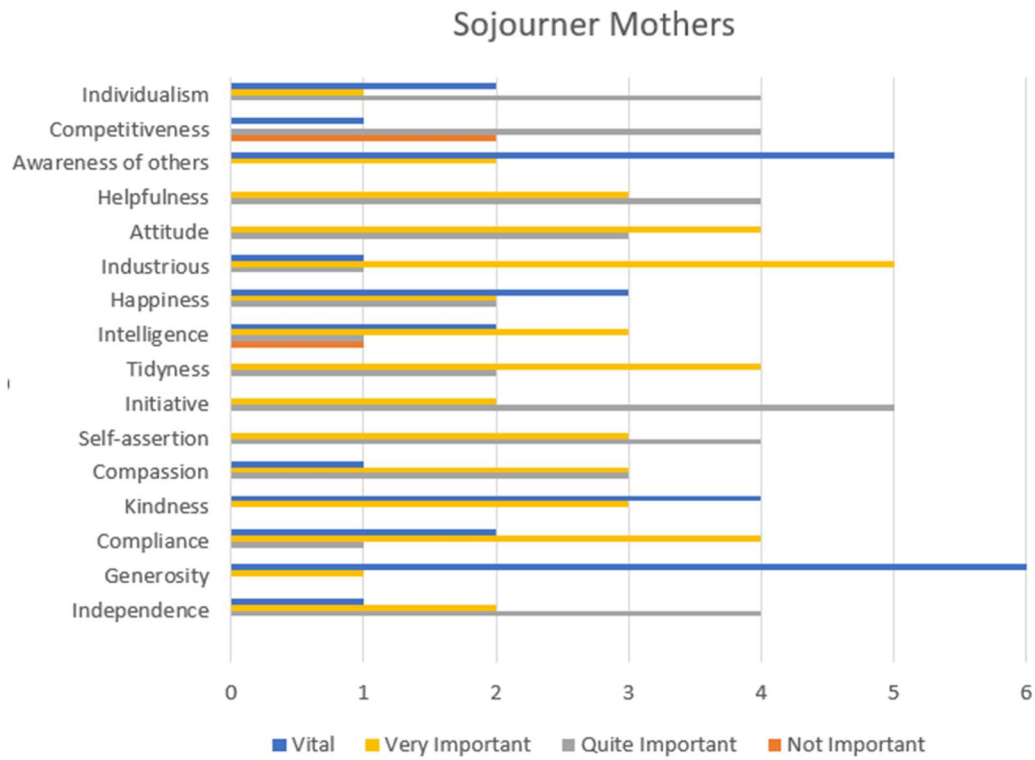**Figure A2.** Desirable traits for sojourners (Total *n* = 10).

Sojourner Mothers

Figure A3. Desirable traits for sojourner mothers (Total *n* = 7).
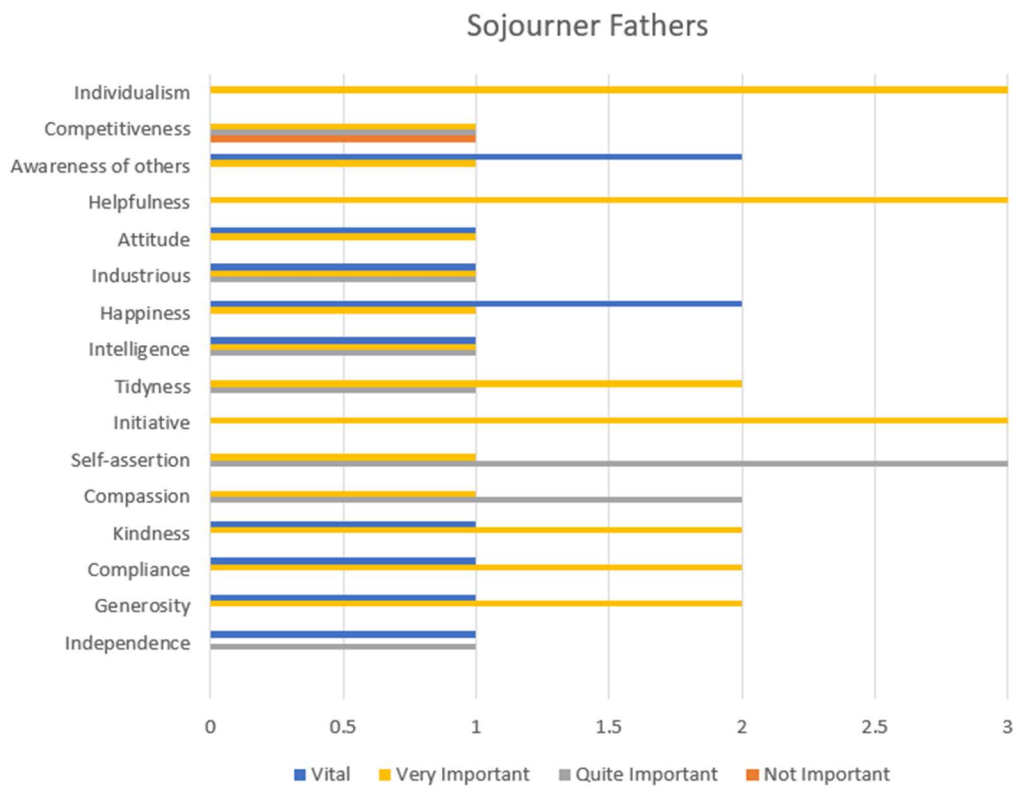
Sojourner Fathers

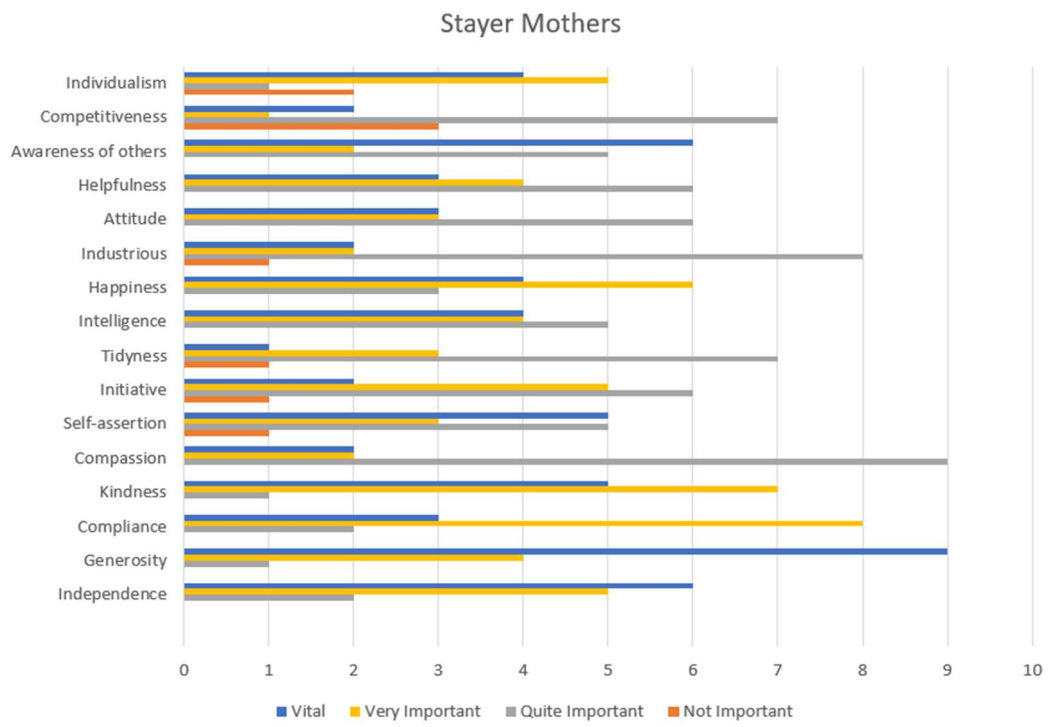**Figure A4.** Desirable traits for sojourner fathers (Total *n* = 3).

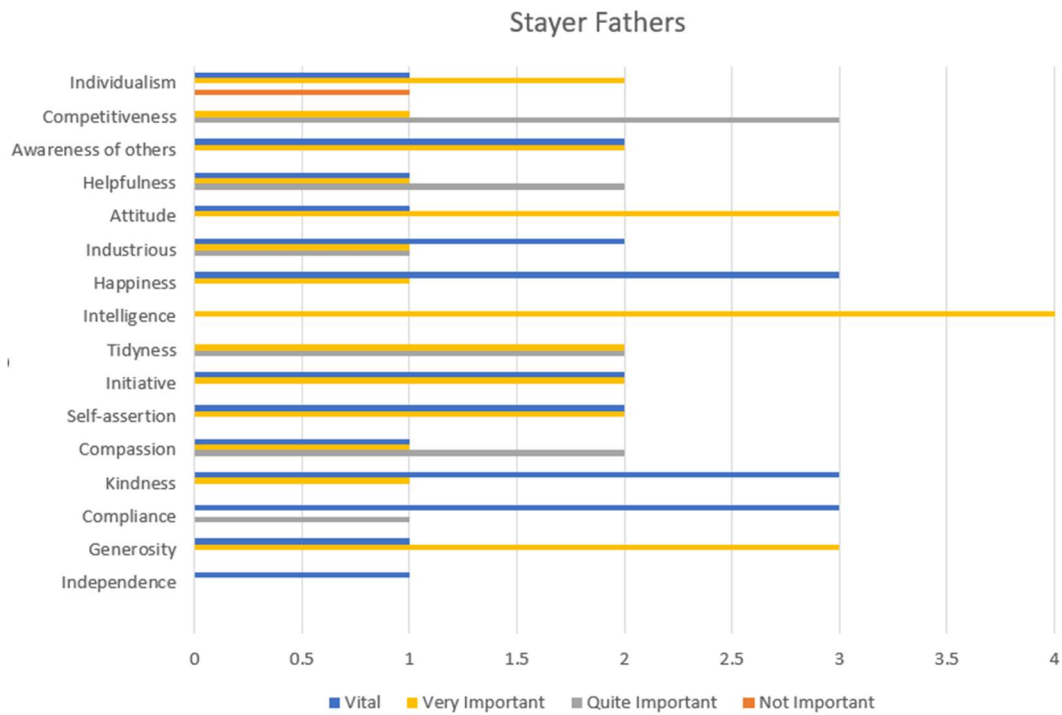**Figure A5.** Desirable traits for stayer mothers (Total *n* = 13).

Figure A6. Desirable traits for stayer fathers (Total *n* = 4).
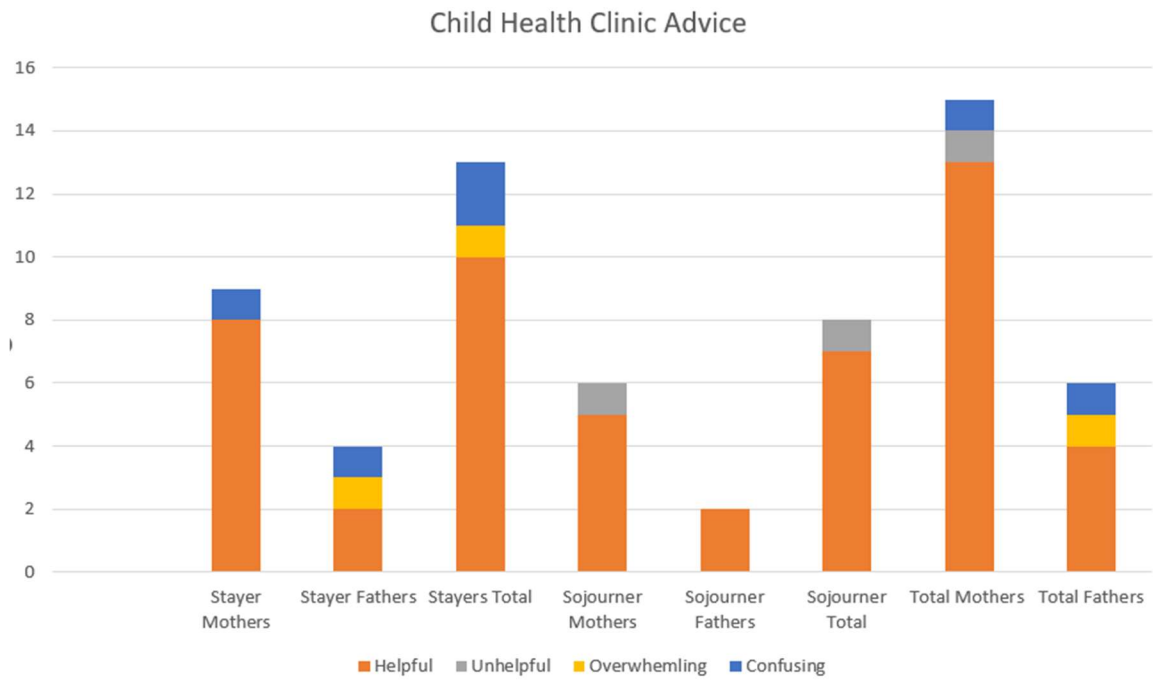
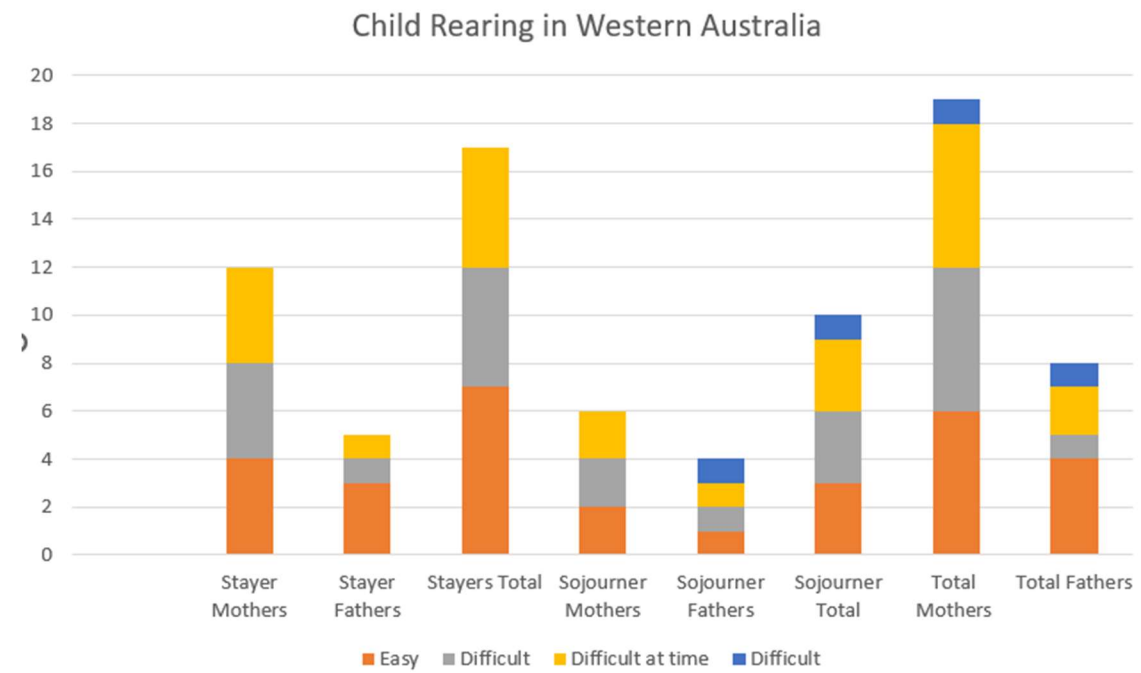**Figure A7.** Child health clinic advice (Total *n* = 27).

Figure A8. Child rearing in Western Australia (Total *n* = 27).