



African culture clash hits families

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There are growing concerns in the local African community about the number of children being removed from parents by child protection authorities.

African Women's Council of WA president Casta Tungaraza said yesterday that mothers had approached the group to raise concerns that their children had been taken away by the Department for Child Protection.

She said the issue showed a clash between two cultures where African parents thought they were doing the right thing by disciplining their children but it was deemed to be child abuse by the department.

She said it was one of a number of emerging issues confronting Africans living in Australia, which she hoped a new national African Women's Council would

be able to highlight.

The national council will be launched officially by Governor-General Quentin Bryce at an antiracism national symposium at Murdoch University next week.

Dr Tungaraza said the national council, of which she is president, would ensure African women had a strong voice and could play an active role in finding solutions to problems confronting their community.

A DCP spokesman said yesterday that the number of African children in State care had risen from 26 in June 2008 to 35 at the end of February.

He said a number of factors could have caused the increase, including a reflection in a rise in Australia's African population because of immigration. The department was aware of the

issues raised by Dr Tungaraza.

"However, the department will only consider taking a child into (State) care when the nature of the disciplining results in a child suffering or likely to suffer significant harm and the parents are not able or willing to protect the child from that harm," the spokesman said.

Dr Tungaraza said some single African mothers had also fallen foul of the department for leaving young children home alone, which was normal in African culture but not accepted in Australia.

She had spoken to an African woman who had her four children removed for what she described as "very heavy-handed discipline".

She would not elaborate for privacy reasons.



New cultural challenges: Austin Kimani, left and Tuyisabe Taratara with their mothers and other women from the African Women's Council of Australia.

Picture: Nic Ellis