

Resettlement challenges among African refugee women living in Winnipeg

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Abstract

This thesis is a qualitative research on resettlement challenges among refugee women from African countries that have experienced war and civil strife. Recent studies have shown that the experience of being a newcomer in a foreign country tests the individual's resilience and coping resources to the limit. Using Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological perspectives and the Person-in-Environment theories, this research explores resettlement challenges that refugee women from Africa experience in new ecological contexts. Ecological theories stipulate that individuals are engaged in an on-going transaction with their environments; mutually influencing and being influenced, shaping and being shaped by the world around them (Probst, 2012). Using in-depth, semi-structured interviews, five participants were interviewed. The challenges they identified included struggles with language barriers, housing, finances, employment barriers, learning new parenting skills, and dealing with physical disabilities. Recommendations to alleviate the challenges included streamlined, well-co-ordinated services that are accessible and culturally responsive, as well as practices that are based on recognizing the refugee women's strengths and involving them in decision-making processes.

Key words: African refugee women in Winnipeg, Resettlement challenges, War, Civil Strife

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Resettlement Challenges among Refugee Women Living in Winnipeg

There is no doubt that refugee women from Africa experience unique resettlement challenges in their host countries. My interest in this study was generated by the exposure I have had working with refugee women from Africa and their families in formal and informal settings. The very first job opportunity I had when I migrated to Canada more than 17 years ago involved working with newcomers at a Multicultural Family Centre. The center had been established principally to create a safe space where families would get together and begin reclaiming the social capital that the process of immigration had robbed them of. Very quickly, program staff realized that language was a major barrier to any meaningful socialization among themselves and with the wider Canadian society. Even though most families came from Africa, they spoke different languages. Communication was therefore a major challenge due to language barriers. The families needed at least one unifying language, which would be either English or Swahili.

Having taught English grammar in Kenyan schools for 12 years prior to my migration, I was happy to join the program not only as a newcomer participant but a language teacher. I taught English and conversational Swahili to the newcomers and Canadians who were planning to visit my home country as tourists. The need to also introduce English language classes for the children was also identified early in the initiation of the program. Even though the children were already registered in schools, they had challenges completing assignments largely because of language barriers. School tutors therefore became an important part of the program.

What began as a social space for the newcomers to get to know each other and network evolved into a dynamic learning and networking centre with multiple families from different generations and backgrounds. Programs took place on the weekends when most families had some spare time. Running program activities for mothers concurrently with activities for the

children was very significant because child-minding was always a huge challenge to new families (Shiffman, 2013). Exposure to this program was very helpful in my own resettlement journey. Not only did I get the chance to utilize skills that were not readily transferrable to mainstream Canadian society, but I was introduced to a series of short-term certificate courses that finally landed me a job as a program coordinator at an HIV/AIDS resource centre.

For most newcomers, however, the journey was tougher, especially if they did not speak the English language. Among refugee families, the challenges were even more compounded. When I asked some of my colleagues where they came from, most of them indicated a refugee camp before being admitted to Canada, where life was sometimes worse than what they had experienced during the war. If they had families, discussions quickly moved to parenting challenges, child care, finances, where to find work, loneliness, confusion and a distinct longing for home, despite the many years they had waited for sponsorship.

What was unique about the Multicultural Center was the flexibility and fluidity of its programs. Newcomer parents were informed they were welcome to attend the program on whatever weekend they were available. The centre would be open in the morning and afternoon until five on Saturdays. There was food, African dances and poetry, tutorials and leisure activities for the children, language conversations, and whatever else the women and their children wanted to include in the program. That was my first encounter with the term "facilitator"; rather than providing rigidly controlled programs, the staff offered suggestions for various activities, but it was up to the families to decide what they wanted to do. Significant additions to program activities were figured out as the need arose.

Resettlement challenges can be very complicated if ecological systems for newcomers are disrupted (Probst, 2012). However, my initial exposure to a program that seemingly achieved a measure of success in alleviating the challenges of resettlement motivated me to seize every

opportunity to volunteer my services. Also, the closer I got to refugee families through professional or informal interactions, the more sensitized I became to the deeper struggles that may have never been discussed at the lively, informal gatherings we had at the Multicultural Center. This awareness became the chief motivation for me to conduct research among refugee women. Deep down, I keep envisioning a program that would empower newcomer women and their families by facilitating culturally responsive activities that would make resettlement less daunting.

1.2 Defining "Refugee"

Article 1 of the Geneva Convention of 1951 states that a refugee is “someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership to a particular social group, or political opinion” (United National High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2016, p. 3). This definition was expanded during the 1967 protocol to include not only refugees from Europe who were fleeing persecution from events that occurred prior to January 1951, but also refugees from different parts of the world (UNHCR, 2016).

The victimization of women and girls through “systemic rape, sexual abuse and discriminatory traditional customs and behaviours” was, however, not addressed directly in the 1967 protocol, even though the UNHCR had demonstrated that in armed conflict, rape and other degrading forms of gender-based violence is used to humiliate, dehumanize and dominate the communities to which women belong (UNHCR, 2016, p. 4). “Rape as a weapon of war in the third-world context is an organized strategy that uses coercive force aimed at quelling any form of resistance from the oppressed groups” (Hayne, 2014, p. 141). In recognition of this gender-based violence, the UNHCR therefore lobbied for the “Women at Risk” category of refugees so

the unique needs of women asylum seekers may be addressed in the definition of the term refugee (Hayne, 2014).

Tastsoglou, Abdi, Bingham, and Lange (2014) discuss the problematic and stigmatizing use of the term refugee, arguing the term has become a politicized label that suggests “otherness and neediness” and is viewed as “threatening and uncomfortable” (p. 68), by most host countries. Tastsoglou et al. (2014) thus recommend a complete ideological shift that would enable the government and general population to view refugees as assets rather than liabilities to Canada’s social economic status. Echoing similar sentiments, Brown-Bowers, McShane, Wilson-Mitchell, and Gurevich (2014) also observe:

In the present day Canadian context, refugees are positioned in particularly negative ways, as social pariahs. This cultural positioning creates an aversive milieu for refugee women, which may contribute to feelings of alienation, displacement and despair (p. 322).

In his attempt to offer some privilege to the refugee population, the current Canadian Prime Minister suggested the term refugee be dropped from the vocabulary altogether, insisting that refugees should be referred to as “our new community of friends or new Canadians” (Trudeau, 2015). For the purpose of this study, the term refugee will be used without attaching any negative connotation or negative labeling.

1.3 Current Statistics on Refugees in Canada

Statistics indicate that the number of forcibly displaced persons worldwide has risen from 43 million people in 2015 to 65.3 million as of September 2016 (UNHCR, 2016). This figure has risen to 65.6 million forcibly displaced persons, due to protracted wars in Syria, Afghanistan and South Sudan (UNHCR, 2017). Data from Statistics Canada also indicate that Canada receives approximately 225,000 immigrants each year and among this population, approximately 20,000

are refugees (Slobodin & Jong, 2014). In 2016 Canada received over 300,000 newcomers; 46,702 were refugees (UNHCR, 2017). Forty-eight percent of the refugee population were women and 47% were minors. Manitoba received 14,901 newcomers in 2015, 1768 of whom were refugees (Citizenship & Immigration Canada [CIC], 2016).

Refugees are admitted to Canada as Government Assisted Refugees (GAR), Privately Sponsored Refugees (PSR) or on a Blended Office-Visa Referred (BVOR) (UNHCR, Fact sheet, 2017). CIC's monthly updates on refugee admission indicate that in 2017, Manitoba admitted 365 Blended Office-Visa Referred refugees, 4,670 Government Assisted Refugees and 3,385 Privately Sponsored Refugees, bringing the total to 8,420 refugees. Out of these, 6,065 have been resettled in Winnipeg: 185 BO-VR, 2,195 GAR and 3,385 PSR (Monthly IRCC Updates, 2017). Government Assisted Refugees receive financial assistance for one year from the government, Privately Sponsored Refugees receive financial assistance for one year by their private sponsors, and the Blended Office-Visa category obtain government financial assistance for six months and private financial assistance for the other six months (Hyndman, Payne, & Jimenez, 2017).

Hyndman et al. (2017) explain that the legal framework for Privately Sponsored Refugees (PSR) was provided by the 1978 Immigration Act to allow private citizens to sponsor refugees to Canada. However, after 2011 stringent caps were introduced to limit the number of refugees that private sponsors could bring into the country, resulting in major delays and frustrations in the endeavor to assist fleeing refugees. Hyndman et al. (2017) also discuss the Blended Visa-office Referred (BVOR), a recently introduced category that has added more opportunities for refugee sponsorship to Canada. The authors, however, point out that the PSR and BVOR programs should complement government efforts rather than become a substitute for the GAR. As Watkins, Razeq, and Richters (2015) argue, the prolonged flight and protracted confinement that

most refugees experience before they can be assisted through any of the categories above have detrimental effects on their resettlement journey.

1.4 The Gendered Aspect of Refugee Movements

Resettlement challenges affect genders and generations differently (Beiser, 2009). For example, Watkins et al. (2015) observe that “gender factors shape the experience and effects of forced immigration, disadvantaging women, who are at high risk for gender-based violence, exploitation and discrimination during all phases of the refugee journey” (p. 127). The authors explain that women experience this gender-based discrimination from both their countries of origin and in their “second countries”. After immigrating, they are at a disadvantage in the new countries due to “social economic factors, including unequal opportunities for vocational and educational participation” (p. 126).

Tastsglou et al. (2014) also explain how vulnerability is gender-based:

Women are overrepresented in the refugee and internally displaced communities as well as disproportionately bearing the familial and communal care and responsibilities during global disasters and war... in addition to economic, educational, labor, social, and geographic vulnerability, there are physical vulnerabilities from the loss of community protection, sexual violence, domestic abuse, police targeting, and sexual manipulation as they flee and seek refugee status. These vulnerabilities often become embodied in the search for asylum (p. 69).

Brown-Bowers et al. (2014) and Wachter, Heffron, Snyder, Nsonwu, and Busch-Armendariz (2016) further explain that pre-arrival, refugee women are often victims of rape and other heinous acts that include sexual slavery, body mutilation, and coercion for sex in exchange for food, protection and immigration favours. The women may also be forced to witness the torture and death of their loved ones, may have to leave their families behind or are separated

from their children while escaping war atrocities (Brown-Bowers et al., 2014). Such experiences, according to Brown-Bowers et al. (2014) and Wachter et al (2015), negatively influence the post-immigration and resettlement process for the women, causing anxiety, fear and insecurity. The shame, guilt and humiliation that come with brutal sexual crimes against women lead to diminished self-worth and significantly compromises their resettlement process (Bokore, 2015). Other resettlement barriers for the refugee women include “gendered wage gaps, unpaid care work, lack of support for child care, racialization and marginalization in their everyday experience” (Zhu, 2016, p. 144). Overall, Ali (2008) asserts that compared to their male counterparts, refugee women are significantly vulnerable to physical and mental health challenges during resettlement.

In recognition of these unique challenges, the UNHCR has established a Global Strategic Priority, specifically tailored for the needs of sexual and gender-based victims of violence (UNHCR, 2013). Victims in this category, according to Wachter et al. (2015), include “women at risk” who are defined as refugee women with protection problems, including single mothers, pregnant women and unaccompanied women who are often sexually terrorized by warlords who utilize rape as a strategic weapon of war and genocide.

Hayne (2014), however, observes that despite this provision by the UNHCR, women at risk still end up being denied refugee status, sometimes, due to a culture of silence that shames and intimidates those who have experienced rape. Fear of abandonment by their spouses and rejection by other family members and the community at large forces women who have been exposed to sexual violence to remain silent. Shame and guilt, social alienation, language barriers and patriarchal systems that view women as the weaker sex sometimes stand in the way of their successful resettlement (Haffejee and East, 2016; Haynes, 2014; Tastsoglou et al., 2014; Wachter et al., 2015).

That being said, Tastsoglou et al. (2014) observes that women need not be seen as vulnerable social burdens because even in the worst of circumstances, they have proven to be resilient and resourceful human beings who are able to defend themselves and their children.

1.5 Rationale

The process of resettlement is a daunting experience even for the most resilient refugee woman. This study explores resettlement challenges among refugee women from Africa and the impact the process has on their overall well-being for the purpose of advocating for services and practices that promote conducive environments to successful resettlement. As Berry and Hou (2016) assert, successful integration of newcomers is not only beneficial for them, but also significant for the social-economic cohesion of the mainstream society.

The rationale behind focusing on women refugees is because research demonstrates that more than half of the African refugee women live below the poverty line due to limited opportunities to learn English or French, and the burden of care for their men, children and vulnerable family members (Chapra & Chatterjee, 2009). Elabor-Idemudia (1999) also observes that refugee women from Africa face systemic “oppression, subordination, exploitation and discrimination” (p. 40), due to racially constructed cultural ideologies that portray black women as suitable only for low non-skilled menial jobs. Compared to refugee women from European countries and other regions, refugee women from Africa are mostly relegated to the labour-intensive, low-status, low-paying jobs where discriminatory and racist practices afford them limited opportunities for professional development or promotion (Elabor-Idemudia, 1999). Ali (2008) also points out that white immigrant women from European countries are more likely to have well-established communities with well-co-ordinated resettlement supports, compared to black refugees, Muslims or Arabs.

Overall, refugee women from African countries who have experienced armed conflict also form the most marginalized and racialized demographic in Canada (Bokore, 2015). Their unique experiences and vulnerabilities are the focus of this research, with the aim of exploring ways in which the pain of settling in a new country as a racialized minority can be alleviated. Gender, race and class also create barriers to accessing housing, education, employment, health care and other social services (Chapra & Chatterjee, 2009; Elabor-Idemudia, 1999; Haffejee & East, 2016; Haynes, 2014; Tastasoglou et al., 2014; Wachter et al., 2015). The rationale behind this study is to further explore these challenges, with the hope that culturally responsive, competent and relevant resettlement services will continue to be developed by researchers and practitioners.

Another rationale for this study is to inform research on the gendered aspect of resettlement for refugee women and to advocate for policies and holistic practices that will not only focus on economic self-sufficiency but healing from trauma as well.

1.6 Research Questions

The two key questions that guided this study were: In what ways does the resettlement process impact African refugee women in Winnipeg and what can be done to create and promote environments that are conducive to successful resettlement? I explored these two questions through qualitative research methods. I was guided by the ecological systems theories and the Person-in-environment approach. In the process, I identified psychosocial challenges, language barriers, and cultural differences, financial challenges related to unemployment and underemployment, barriers to education, challenges securing adequate housing and challenges in parenting in new ecological contexts. Suggested interventions included accessible well-coordinated delivery of language training programs, supports with employment and education

goals, provision of adequate housing, accessible health services for refugees who have disabilities and parenting supports for newcomer families.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This chapter presents an overview of the literature on the challenges that newcomers experience in their resettlement process. Themes that emerged from this review included psychosocial challenges, language and culture, housing, and barriers to education and employment. The review also examines the challenges that newcomer parents experience as they navigate new ecological contexts.

2.1 Psychosocial Challenges

Beginning from the pre-immigration period, refugee women from African countries that are still experiencing armed conflict are witnesses to direct physical torture, near-death experiences, sexual terrorism, poverty, disease and deprivation. Some of them are forced to watch relatives and friends being tortured and killed in war zones and refugee camps (Bala & Kramer, 2010; Beiser 2009; Bokore, 2015; Brown-Browsers et al. 2014; Dow, 2011; Watcher et.al. 2015). Pre-immigration stressors also include disruption and disconnection from one's individual culture, community and family, leaving the fleeing refugee women with diminished sense of self, shock and alienation (Pieloch, McCullough & Marks, 2016). These experiences increase psychological distress during resettlement and reduce the chances for successful social and economic integration to the mainstream society (Bokore, 2015; Kinzie, 2006).

The painful outcomes of war and displacement translate to loss of family cohesiveness due to the scattering of households across national and international boundaries (Dow, 2011; Falicov, 2007). Other war experiences of torture, including human degradation in over-crowded refugee

camps, harrowing immigration journeys sometimes through perilous seas and forests, and physical and psychological disablement leave the fleeing refugee population extremely vulnerable to the daunting process of settling in a new country (Dow, 2011; Falicov, 2007; Kinzie, 2006; Kirmayer et al., 2011). Because of these war-related experiences, trauma and post-traumatic stress continue to affect some refugee women for many years after resettlement (Beiser, 2009; Bokore, 2015; Brown-Browsers et al., 2014).

Bokore (2015) suggests the trauma that some refugee women experience is sometimes so deep that families experience trauma transference, leading to well-documented inter-generational trauma among refugee families that is manifest through increased anger and frustration. This pain and anger may translate to behavioural problems and gang-related crimes among refugee youth, which ultimately lead to involvement with the justice system (Bokore, 2015). Atwell, Gifford and McDonald-Wilson (2009) also argue that the scattering of families, separations and difficulties negotiating the complex government reunification processes “perpetuate and exacerbates depression and grief” post-immigration (p. 680).

Other challenges and stressors involve loss of social and economic capital, role reversal and role shifts, especially in domestic situations where men may find themselves performing tasks that were formerly relegated to women. Such changes in family hierarchies sometimes lead to marital conflicts and domestic violence (Ali, 2008; Dow, 2011; Falcov, 2007). Disrupted family dynamics leave many refugee women feeling helpless and powerless and further compromise successful resettlement. Uncertainty about residency and legal application procedures also lead to vulnerability and the fear of being apprehended and deported when the refugees arrive as asylum seekers (Bokore, 2015). In other cases, accented speech and religious apparel lead to devaluation, prejudice and racism, a factor that heightens the newcomer’s stress and anxiety (Dow, 2011; Kinzie, 2006).

Unemployment, underemployment, difficulties in having credentials recognized, exploitation by employers, discrimination at work, social and economic inequity, loss of culture, culture shock, cultural alienation, and failed dreams, hopes and aspirations have also been extensively cited as acculturation stressors that make resettlement very challenging for refugees (Abebe, Lien, & Hjelde, 2014; Beiser, 2009; Bokore, 2015; Brown-Brower et al., 2014; Cross & Singh, 2012; Kinzie, 2006; Dow, 2011; Kirmayer et al., 2011; Magro et al., 2007; Krahn, Derwing, Mulder, & Wilkinson, 2000; Tastasoglou et al., 2014).

2.2 Language and culture.

Beiser & Hou (2000) point out that language is a “powerful predictor of successful resettlement” (p. 312). Unfortunately, only three out of ten refugees are able to fluently express themselves in either English or French when they arrive in Canada, depending on whether their countries of origin were colonized by the British or French governments (Beiser & Hou, 2000; Jedwab & Wilkinson, 2016). This factor leads to prolonged delays in learning the new language and integrating into the new culture (Atwell et al., 2009; Beiser & Hou, 2000; Bokore, 2015; Brown-Browers et al., 2014). Beiser & Hou (2000) further observe that lack of language skills not only compromises the refugees’ chances of entering the labour market but makes it challenging for them to access available resources and engage meaningfully in their new cultural environments.

Refugee women are also, in most cases, the primary care-givers and nurturers of their families, including the children, the elderly and other vulnerable members, leaving them little room for joining English as an Additional Language (EAL) classes (Bokore, 2015). Many refugee women also come from cultures that value education for boys more than for girls (Bokore, 2015; Brown-Browers et al., 2014; Haynes, 2015; Wachter et al., 2015).

Delays in learning English or French puts the refugee women at a disadvantage compared to the men. For example, their chances for employment or education opportunities are greatly delayed (Beiser & Hou, 2000). Many refugee women also take up menial or domestic work that require minimal language skills, reducing their opportunity to ever rise above the poverty level (Ali, 2008). Besides creating education and employment barriers, the inability to communicate in the host country's language further compounds the refugees' emotional trauma at a time when they are already at an "acute phase of psychological disorganization and negative self-evaluation" related to war experiences (Magro, 2007, p. 33). Atwell et al. (2009) also assert that mastery of the English language increases the refugee families' sense of cohesion, while the inability to effectively use the English language correlates with stress-related symptoms, particularly depression.

According to Magro (2007) and Rivera, Lynch, Li, and Obamehinti (2016), language is a medium of cultural transmission. Without the language of their new cultural environment, the authors argue, the newcomers experience cultural alienation, marginalization, self-doubt and low self-worth. Language also shapes social constructs, creating power hierarchies and social structures, where those with limited English or French are viewed as the underprivileged social class (Brown-Browers et al., 2014). Thus when the women lag behind in their English and French skills, they are relegated to a lower social stratification that further heightens their sense of loneliness, isolation and powerlessness.

Language needs to be taught in safe and supportive environments that transmit social awareness, practical knowledge and problem-solving skills without equating the lack of knowledge of the language of the host country to lack of intelligence (Berry & Hou, 2000; Magro, 2007).

McGoldrick, Goirdano, and Garcia-Pretro (2005) argue that cultural identity has a profound impact on the sense of who we are. Our culture and ethnicity, according to the authors, influence our social location in the society, determining accessibility to resources, and our inclusion or exclusion in the dominant culture's definition of belonging. Since language is the central medium of cultural transmission, EAL environments demand a genuine appreciation for diversity and multiculturalism (Rivera et al., 2016). For example, EAL teachers need to appreciate and respect the cultural values and practices that newcomers bring with them, which could be beneficial to the host countries (Magro, 2007). Rivera et al. (2016) recommend transformative learning, where the EAL teachers seek to understand the cultural, social-economic and political contexts of the newcomers so aspects of those contexts that may enhance learning are incorporated into the learning process. Pieloch et al. (2016) also recommend the use of creative art forms while teaching language to the refugee youth in schools so they are provided space to retell their stories in pictures, words or drama. Retelling their stories enables them to further process trauma and loss as they learn the language and culture of their new environments.

One other challenging aspect of language acquisition for refugee women is the ability of the children to learn the English language much faster than their parents. Atwell et al. (2009) point out that the optimal age for learning a second language in the host country is between eight and eleven years. When children master the language faster than their parents, a power differential occurs as parents begin relying on their children to help them navigate the systems and structures in their new environments (Atwell et al., 2009; Magro, 2007; Rivera et al., 2016). Such role shifts compromise the parents' ability to provide guidance for their children, leaving them feeling helpless and disempowered (Ali, 2008; Atwell et al., 2009). Lack of mastery of the language also makes it very challenging for the parents to influence the learning of the children.

It also hinders their ability to navigate the school system, parental expectations and overall parenting styles in the new environments (Ali, 2008; Atwell et al., 2009; Magro, 2007; Rivera et al., 2016)

Overall, language is the most significant vehicle for social-economic integration in the host countries for refugee women (Beiser & Hou, 2000). It is unfortunate that 90 percent of the refugee women arrive in Canada with very limited French or English language skills, a fact that significantly hinders successful integration in the dominant culture. Despite all odds, Caplan et al. (2013) observe that as part of the acculturation process, newcomers “actively participate in the construction of new identities as they negotiate the intersection between their own cultures and that of the host countries” (p. 71). Such internal construction, however, is sometimes extremely stressful and may lead to deteriorating mental health, decreased physical health, challenges in effective decision-making and compromised functional abilities (Beiser, 2009; Bokore, 2015; Bhugra, 2003, Kinzie, 2006).

2.3 Employment Challenges.

Resettlement challenges also undermine the newcomer's employability and unfortunately creates a self-perpetuating cycle of acculturation challenges. For example, the newcomer is deemed unemployable due to lack of Canadian experience, while Canadian experience may only be gained through allowing the newcomer to join the workforce. Lamba (2003) cites “stringent standards in the adjudication of foreign credentials” as a major barrier to finding suitable employment for the refugee (p. 50).

According to Lamba (2003), some medical institutions in Canada have institutionalized downward mobility for refugees, where newcomer refugees who were cardiologists and surgeons in their countries of origin are fast-tracked as nurses in Canada. Refugees are therefore forced to take jobs they are over-qualified for. On entry into the labour market, most refugees also

experience subtle discrimination where they are rarely considered for promotion and are often excluded from the inner circles in their work environments.

2.4 Housing.

Another major aspect that determines successful resettlement is securing adequate, safe and affordable housing. Unfortunately, due to minimal or non-existent income, unemployment, large family sizes or physical disabilities, finding decent housing becomes very challenging (Brushett, 2007; Distasio, Ervick-Knote, & Gurang, 2015; Silvius, 2016; Walsh, Hanley, Ives, & Hordyk, 2016). Brushett (2007) argue that Canada's housing and welfare policies are so short-sighted that large newcomer families are forced to move into "squalid housing conditions...including hovels that are conducive to every form of mental and moral degradation" (p. 327). Walsh et al. (2016) also observe that researchers and policy-makers tend to sideline the refugee women, by privileging services that favour male-led immigration with women tagging along the family unit.

A more critical examination of the well-being of refugees in Winnipeg by Silvius (2016) indicates that housing for refugees has been neo-liberalized or made a private affair, where the "rights of property owners as holders of homes as financial assets.... eclipse social and human rights to housing as a dwelling and pre-requisite for existence" (p. 30). Silvius (2016) thus argues that when the rights of homeowners are privileged over the need for successful refugee resettlement, housing becomes a "crisis of affordability" (p. 30).

Besides short-sighted housing policies for refugees, researchers (Distasio et al., 2015; MirafTAB, 2000; Silvius, 2016; Walsh et al., 2016) observe that gender, class, and race intersect to further compound the racialized and marginalized refugee women's vulnerability to insecure, unaffordable, crowded and poor-quality housing or hidden homelessness. Walsh et al. (2016) describe hidden homelessness as the situation where refugee women sometimes attach

themselves to men with accommodations or seek shelter with families and relatives, and often end up being exploited and victimized when such arrangements break up.

Racism and systemic discrimination have also been cited as challenges that make securing decent housing difficult for refugee women, especially if they are lone mothers of several children (Walsh et al., 2016). Such challenges are manifest through landlords turning down applications from racialized women, citing not only lack of credit histories but heavy accents and the number of family members. Limited English or French language and a lack of knowledge regarding local housing rules and regulations make refugee women prey to unscrupulous landlords (Brushett, 2007; Distasio et al., 2015; Silvius 2016; Walsh et al., 2016). Wayland (2010) suggests that resettlement services regarding housing integrate information on eviction prevention, information on rental and maintenance costs as well as tenant rights.

Even after housing is secured, poverty, unemployment or underemployment continue to make living standards insecure and precarious among refugees, with 50 percent of the family income being spent on rent alone, in some cases (Distasio et al., 2015; Silvius, 2016; Wachter et al., 2015; Walsh et al., 2016). This is in line with economic researchers' reference to the amount of money spent on rent as the shelter-to-income ratio. Any family spending 30% or more of their income on housing is said to be in danger of poverty, while any family spending 50% or more on housing is said to be in a crisis of affordability.

2.5 Parenting.

One other significant resettlement challenge that literature has identified is parenting in new ecological environments. According to Ali (2008), newcomer parents of young children from countries that were formerly colonized by western countries experience a decreased sense of Parental Self Efficacy (PSE). This is defined as the parents' perception of their capacity to establish concrete leadership roles that will positively influence growth and development for

their own children. Ali (2008) attributes this decline in PSE to resettlement stressors that leave most newcomer parents too “depressed, confused and overwhelmed” to become effective role models, nurturers and protectors of their children (p. 150).

Research has also identified role reversal as a major challenge to parenting for newcomers. In most cases, children of newcomer parents acculturate faster than their parents. They learn the languages of the host countries faster and sometimes become the “cultural brokers” for their families (Ali, 2008; Beiser, 2002; Deng & Marlowe, 2013; Ochoka & Janzen, 2008). Such role shifts challenge the newcomer parents’ leadership roles, rendering them helpless and disempowered (Ali, 2008). The parents’ real or perceived inability to provide leadership for their children leads to feelings of guilt and despair (Ali, 2008). Role reversal leads to marital conflicts in some cases because the well-defined traditional role of men being the breadwinners while the women are minding the household are disrupted by the process of immigration. The men may, in some cases, find themselves minding the children while the women are working, a situation that sometimes leads to resentment and diminished self-worth on the men’s part (Ali, 2008; Ochoka & Janzen, 2013; Warfar et al., 2012). Loss of the extended family networks also leave parents with limited social supports, leading to feelings of alienation and isolation (Deng & Marlowe 2013). Many newcomer families from war-torn countries are also headed by lone mothers who may have to acquire more than two jobs while raising their children. The outcomes are overwhelming stress and exhaustion, which greatly undermines effective parenting (Deng & Marlowe, 2013).

Language barriers have also been identified as the most challenging aspect of effective parenting among newcomer families (Ali, 2008). For example, newcomer parents may sometimes want to advocate for their children in schools, recreational centres, medical facilities and other social establishments, but without the language of the host countries, such endeavors

become very challenging, leaving the parents frustrated and alienated not only from their children but also from the institutions that provide such services and from the society at large (Ali, 2008; Beiser, 2002; Deng & Marlowe, 2013; Ochoka & Janzen, 2008).

Language barriers also hinder or delay the newcomer parents' understanding of the prescribed ways of "good parenting" by their host countries (Ali, 2008). Such lack of understanding and familiarity with expected parenting norms sometimes lead to negative encounters with Child and Family Services, where children may be apprehended and made wards of the government. Service providers, including teachers, have been perceived as unable or unwilling to support newcomer parents because they share different views on what successful parenting entails. For example, different views on how children should be disciplined have led to conflicts between CFS workers and school teachers, leaving the newcomer parents feeling helpless and disempowered (Ali, 2008; Deng & Marlowe, 2013; Ochoka & Janzen, 2008). Deng and Marlowe (2013) recommend a healthy curiosity on the part of the host country's social agents. For example, rather than taking punitive measures on what they may consider flawed parenting strategies, teachers, social workers and other service agents should assume "collaborative and non-confrontational" relationships with newcomer parents to ease the challenges of parenting in the new ecological contexts (p. 427).

Parenting challenges for newcomer families also include inaccessibility for important medical services for the children. According to Ali (2008) and Beiser (2009), newcomer parents struggle to navigate the health-care systems due to language and cultural barriers, despite the fact that universal health care is available in Canada. Newcomer families also find it challenging sometimes, to protect their children from reported bullying and social exclusion in schools (Ali, 2008; Deng & Marlowe, 2013; Ochoka & Janzen, 2008). This is largely due to the "delegitimaization of immigrant families' social and cultural capital by the dominant institutions,

especially schools, which erodes the families' protective potential and creates emotional conflict for children" (Beiser, Hou, Hayman & Tousignant, 2002, p. 226). The majority of newcomer families feel that teachers in their host countries have limited understanding of the beliefs and cultural values of their countries of origin (Ochoka & Janzen, 2008). Such lack of understanding and appreciation leads to tension and conflicts, which is not conducive to learning.

Overall, Ali (2008) observes that "unemployment and the associated mental health problems, marital conflicts, discrimination and intolerance and differences in their own and their children's speed of acculturation" significantly reduce parental self-efficacy among refugee families (p. 154).

Summary

From this review, it is apparent that resettlement challenges are intense and affect the overall well-being of newcomers adversely, mostly because of poverty, language, culture, employment barriers, housing and parenting. The challenges are more pronounced among women due to their vulnerability as victims of gender-based violence, including rape, cultural and religious practices that discriminate against refugee women. The overwhelming burden of care for the children and the vulnerable members of their families also falls mostly in the hands of the women, making them even more vulnerable to the challenges, compared to their male counterparts.

Chapter Three: Theoretical Framework

This chapter discusses the Ecological Systems and Person in Environment theories that were used to guide this research. The chapter also provides the rationale for the choice of the theoretical framework.

3.1 Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

The Ecological Systems Theory postulates that human development and behaviour is shaped by multiple, nested, interacting environments (Probst, 2012). According to Bronfenbrenner (1993), human development and behaviour are shaped by five multi-layered, nested, reciprocal environmental systems: the individual or microsystem, mesosystem, exosystems and macrosystems. The systems are portrayed as being nested in an arrangement of structures, each contained within the next, which must however be examined as an interdependent, inter-related whole, in order to understand the internal and external forces influencing the individual (Probst, 2012; Neal & Neal, 2013).

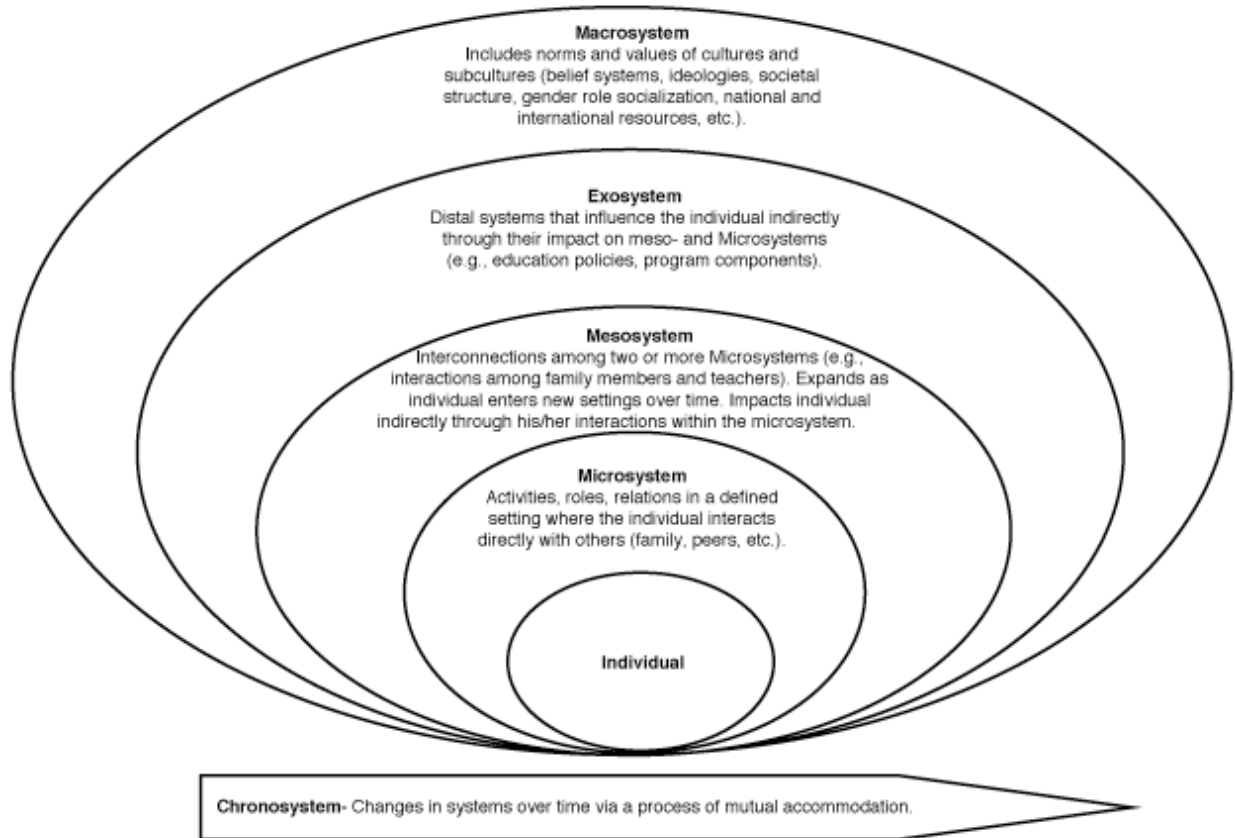
Central in the concentric circle is the micro-system or the individual, with specific roles, patterns of behaviour, interpersonal relationships and experiences in a given setting (Probst, 2012). In the case of my research participants, the microsystem involved their individual experiences within the family unit or the immediate inner circle of friends and relatives. The next layer is the mesosystem or the various environmental entities the individual interacts with and actively participates in, influencing and being influenced by the system (Williams, 2011). Such entities may include the schools, community resources, health facilities, and cultural or religious organizations. The exosystem layer includes environmental entities that do not involve the individual as an active participant, but in which events may occur that directly affect the

individual in specific ways. Such systems include different areas of the government that make policies that may influence development, access and utilization of services over which the individual may have no control. In the case of my research participants, such policies involve decisions such as how long the Government Assisted Refugee program could expect financial support from the government, language acquisition policies, housing and employment issues.

The macro-environments involve broad societal cultural norms, beliefs, values and judgments that have a direct impact on the individual's situation but over which the individual may have little influence. For example, systemic racism stems from cultural beliefs and values that view refugees as having less value. Such views have a negative influence in the social-economic integration of refugees into mainstream society, especially in the workplace environment and schools.

In 1986 Bronfenbrenner introduced the chronosystem as the fifth layer in the ecosystem to represent the continuing evolution of the environments over time, as reflected in the different ways changing environments affect historical cohorts (Neal & Neal, 2013). This fifth layer was used in this research as a separate cohort to examine behaviour among children from refugee families. The way they interacted with their environments was different compared to that of their adult counterparts. Children, for example, acquired the English language faster than their parents and became cultural brokers on behalf of the parents, an outcome that negatively influenced family dynamics (Atwell et al., 2009).

The figure below is a visual presentation of the Ecological Systems Theory as illustrated by McEathron & Beuhring (2011).



Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1989; 2006)

3.2 Person-in-Environment Approach (PIE)

Germain and Gittermen, as cited by Probst, (2012), indicate that the ecological perspective has been further developed into the person-in-environment approach, breaking down environments into social and physical spaces from which the person cannot not be isolated. This approach embraces empathy, recognizes and appreciates the person's strengths, and seeks to empower individuals with whatever positive resources may be available in their environments (Norton, 2012).

Social environments, according to Probst (2012), involve individual relationships as dyads, social networks, bureaucratic institutions, geographic neighbourhoods and cultural communities. Physical environments include geographic locations, climatic and natural events like hurricanes,

earthquakes and tsunamis. Economic and political environments include war, global recessions, exposure to acts of terrorism and the social media impact. Neal and Neal (2013) also describe environments as the political climate the individual is living in and has lived in their past. More often than not, the environments that refugee communities reside in are characterized by a culture of poverty, chronic unemployment and lack of adequate housing, forcing families to live in crowded and unsanitary conditions (Bokore, 2015; Probst, 2012; Rivera et al., 2016). The environments are sometimes rife with racism, power hierarchies, personal crises, exposure to violence, drugs, crimes, discrimination, lack of social supports and marginalization. Utilizing the person-in-environment approach helped me to situate my participants in the environments they described and reflect on the direct and sometimes indirect outcomes the oppressive environments created for them.

Environments, according to Williams (2011), are positive when the individual experiences social support, a sense of belonging and safety, available and appropriate community resources, mentors and positive social networks. Norton (2012) suggests an eco-social approach that emphasizes personal growth and development by fostering a deep connection to the natural world. Re-visioning PIE into an eco-social approach to practice enables social workers to stay away from labels and stereotypes that pathologize clients. Instead, it adopts a strength-based, anti-oppressive assessment of the client's individual capacities, his/her internal and external resources, and a connection to the natural world (Norton, 2012).

Akesson, Burns, and Hordyk (2017) also advocate for rethinking the person-in-environment model so the physical spaces that the clients are living in are factored into the assessment process with clients. Such assessments, according to Akesson et al. (2017), would enable the social workers to move beyond the complex social issues to a better understanding of how specific physical environments help or hinder the well-being of marginalized populations.

As Kemp (2011) asserts, people's physical spaces have a profound influence on their lifestyles with significant implications for social justice.

A critical look at the person-in-environment theory by Kemp (2011) further reveals that the theory ignores the impact gender, race, class, ethnicity and sexual orientation have on how women interact with their environments. Assessments and interventions, according to Kemp (2011), must consider that women-in-environment resources can be developed within the so-called disorganized communities, especially if the women have already established social networks in those environments. For example, moving into some suburban neighbourhood may not always translate to readily available resources for refugee women, particularly if those neighbourhoods are hostile to newcomer families. Also, if the suburbs isolate the women from social and emotional support networks, then they cannot be described as favourable environments. Kemp (2011) thus suggests that racialized and marginalized women should be reached and *supported right where they are at*, a cliché that implies the social work lens of a client-centred, evidence-informed practice.

Philip and Riesch (2015) also argue that social work education needs to expand the person-in-environment perspective to include environmental justice, where social workers are urged to fight against ecological degradation that affects poor neighbourhoods disproportionately. Most toxin-producing factories are located in low-income communities of colour (Philip & Riesch, 2015). Such an approach is in line with the social work lens of fighting for justice for the underprivileged and ensuring that individuals and communities are treated with the dignity and respect they deserve (Canadian Association of Social Workers, 2015).

3.3 The Rationale behind the Use of EST and PIE Theories

The ecological systems theory (EST) and person-in-environment (PIE) approach appropriately guided my exploration of the resettlement challenges that refugee women

experience as they actively interact with overlapping, dynamic ecological processes in their changing world. Williams (2012) describes refugees as ordinary people in extraordinary circumstances that involve ecological conditions which require a major shift from internal control to external social-economic control. The newcomers are engaged in an on-going transaction; “mutually influencing and being influenced, shaping and being shaped by their world” (Williams, 2012, p. 44). Hence, adopting an ecological perspective for my thesis led to a deeper understanding of how environmental systems continue to influence and shape the resettlement process. Such understanding enabled me to see beyond the internal limitations that may have hindered my participants’ successful resettlement and caused me to consider how their external environments affected the process.

Borroto (2013) observes that immigration deprives most individuals of social supports as well as roles that previously provided them with “culturally scripted notions of how to fit in the world” (p. 138). Examining such losses also helped me to address the question of how social environments may be tailored towards helping refugee women cultivate new ways of fitting into their new world.

Conceptualizing women refugees as individuals who are actively engaged in physical, social, economic and political environmental transactions that either promote or compromise their resettlement effort minimized my own personal value judgments (such as the assumption that working hard should get newcomers where they need to be). It also expanded my understanding of their physical settings, the histories they carry, their social roles and activities, and the effect that such transactions had on their overall well-being.

Chapter Four: Research Methodology

In this chapter, the methodology used for this research is discussed. The recruitment process, research setting, data collection methods and analysis are also presented.

For this research, I utilized qualitative research methods. According to Nicholls (2009), qualitative research involves participants who will offer “adequate and insightful information” regarding the research questions and have rich and in-depth experiences of the phenomenon being explored (p. 639). While qualitative research may not yield generalizable results, the participants’ experiences generate theories that can be applied to a certain phenomenon to explain human behaviour (Nicholls, 2009).

Thus, the first task for a qualitative researcher is to clearly identify a phenomenon of interest and develop exploratory, well-focused research questions that will guide the data collection process. The main phenomenon of interest for this study was resettlement challenges for African refugee women. One of the strengths of qualitative research is that the interview questions are open-ended and non-directional, enabling the researcher to elicit in-depth data, including nuances and contradictions (Creswell, 2013; Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest, & Namey, 2011). The participants’ responses provide an opportunity for further probing so that the data collection process becomes iterative, with follow-up questions being guided by any new information and knowledge the researcher may gather (Mack et. al., 2011).

Qualitative research puts a human face to the data, providing “culturally rich and contextual” information, including cultural values, social norms, class, race, ethnicity, gender and religion. Such details enrich the analysis and interpretation of the data. The qualitative researcher thus becomes more of a learner while the research participants are the experts (Mack et. al., 2011).

Ponterotto (2002) also points out that qualitative research is conducted in the participants' natural setting, with the researcher seeking to not only understand the participants' experiences but also the meaning they assign to those experiences. The researcher deliberately seeks to suspend personal biases and prejudices, while becoming a co-investigator with the participants rather than an expert scientist.

Roulston and Shelton (2015), however, point out that the researcher's value judgments, predispositions and assumptions are inseparable to qualitative research, and subjectivity and biases are not necessarily synonymous with poor quality research study. If the researcher acknowledges and manages personal value judgments through critical self-reflection, then qualitative research becomes an emancipation process that may drive social change (Cho & Trent, 2006; Roulston & Shelton, 2015). For this research process, I have included a self-reflection section that points out a few personal assumptions and biases that I carried as an insider researcher. Self-reflection also enabled me to situate myself socially and emotionally in relation to my research participants so I could truly understand and convey what the women shared rather than what I thought and believed (Berger, 2015). Stating my social location through personal reflection also became a means of "disrupting the power imbalances between the researcher and the researched" (Edwards & Brannelly, 2017, p. 272).

4.1 Personal Reflection

Even though this research is not about my experiences, a brief reflection on my own resettlement journey is presented here to further illustrate that service providers need to recognize the role that ecological systems and environments play in the resettlement process. This would assist in supporting newcomers, not just from the individual's faults or weaknesses perspective but from the ecosystem's perspective.

I migrated from Kenya more than 17 years ago at the invitation of a relative who was about to complete her PhD in Curriculum Development at a Canadian university. Having taught English grammar in Kenyan high schools for more than ten years, I decided that pursuing further studies in Canada would quickly earn me a Master's degree and PhD in Education within five years. What I had not considered was the financial burden of paying my way through school as a mature foreign student who had a family to attend to and in completely new ecological systems that were very different from the systems I knew of. Besides the loss of economic and social-capital, the legal implications of changing a visitor's visa to a student's visa in Canada was a huge barrier I was totally unprepared for. All I knew was with my former credentials and work experience, gaining admission into a Canadian university and putting myself through school by working part-time would be challenging but achievable. It took me five years to sort out my immigration status and another one year to apply for and gain university admission. In the meantime, volunteer activities landed me a job in a multicultural family centre, and after pursuing a few short-term certificate courses, I was hired as a program co-ordinator for an HIV/AIDS program.

Relocating to a different province for family reasons forced me to consider a change of career. Rather than pursuing a career in Education, I decided to get into the nursing program to be assured of a secure, well-paying job. Unfortunately, charting an unfamiliar academic territory and raising a family at the same time took its toll on my family. My once-strong marriage caved under the weight of role shifts and the loss of extended family supports. By the third year of university, I was going through a painful separation and a bitter custody battle. Suffice it to say that an enthusiastic, highly motivated career woman was reduced to an academic dwarf, who was slapped with an authorized withdrawal from the nursing program for failure to meet the expected

standards. The anxiety and uncertainty I brought with me to the clinical practice negatively affected my performance.

However, part of me also believes that what I needed to learn was that in my academic and career pursuits in the new ecological transactions, I should have been very careful while challenging discriminatory and racist practices, especially if those practices involved individuals who had the power to not only fail me but also orchestrate my withdrawal from the program. This conviction was affirmed by the fact that once I joined the Inner City Social Work program, where instructors were willing to view the student as an individual who could also be dealing with oppressive systems, relevant mental health supports were provided so I was able to complete my Bachelor of Social Work degree within two years with a 4.05 Grade Point Average.

While my experience may not be comparable to the traumatic experiences that most refugee women experience pre-and post-immigration, they do illustrate the differences between systems that take into consideration the role of ecological factors in influencing mental well-being and systems that put the blame solely on the individual (Probst, 2012). The challenges also demonstrate how the loss of social capital and cultural role shifts, where men may find themselves in kitchens, day-cares and amusement parks while their wives are working, change the dynamics of many newcomer families (Warfa et al., 2012)

4.2 The Research Setting

This study was conducted in Winnipeg, Manitoba, among women refugees from four different African countries which have experienced armed conflict. Statistics Canada (2015) indicates that Winnipeg's population was just over 805,000 in 2015. In 2014 Winnipeg welcomed 13, 811 refugees, 57 percent of whom came from Somalia, Iraq, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia and Eritrea (Manitoba Immigration Fact-sheet, 2014). As of September 2016, 31, 444 Syrian refugees arrived in Manitoba and by September 2017, Canada received 32, 938

asylum seekers from different parts of the world. Of that number, only 10,388 have been granted refugee status (Immigration Manitoba, 2015; Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2017).

4.3 Research Participants

The research participants involved five refugee women from African countries that are still experiencing war and civil strife. The rationale behind this number of participants was to provide space and opportunity for an in-depth exploration of the participants' experiences. The decision to concentrate on women refugees from the African continent was in order to conduct a more in-depth and focused research. Focusing on refugee women from Africa was also based on the fact that there are gaps in research among refugee women of color even though they are among the most marginalized, under-privileged, population in the Western countries (Elabor-Idemudia, 1999).

4.4 Recruitment Process

For this study, criterion purposeful sampling was utilized. According to Parinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan and Hiagwood (2013, p. 1), criterion purposeful sampling involves identifying and selecting “information-rich cases for the most effective use of limited resources.” Participants in criterion purposeful sampling are also selected on the basis of their availability and willingness to take part in the research, and their ability to articulate their experiences and reflect on the common phenomenon of interest (Parinkas et al., 2013).

Prior to conducting the interviews, an ethics application was completed and submitted for approval by the University of Manitoba Research and Ethics Psychology/Sociology Board. Once the approval was granted ten research invitation and recruitment posters (Appendix A) were distributed to community/cultural centres and a few religious organizations. Recruitment also happened through word of mouth during three separate community gatherings and one-on-one encounters with individuals who were deemed eligible for participation.

Eight individuals responded to the invitation posters via emails and phone calls. Three of the respondents did not meet the criteria for my research, which required that participants be refugee women from African countries that have experienced armed conflict. Eligible participants also needed to be African refugee women within the range of 21-65 years, who have lived in Winnipeg for at least five years and are able to express themselves adequately, using the English language (See Appendix A).

Two of the women were at the very early stages of learning the English language. Although they could also speak French fluently, I would have to rely on interpreters since my knowledge of the French language is limited. The criterion for the participants' ability to speak good English was also necessary because the use of interpreters may have involved economic resources that were not available to me as a student researcher. The third woman had lived in Winnipeg for only one year.

The age bracket was my attempt to limit the study to participants who were neither too young nor too old to articulate their resettlement challenges. It was also necessary to recruit participants who had lived in Winnipeg for at least five years so that they would reflect on and articulate their immigration experience more adequately than newer arrivals.

Five individuals finally met the recruitment criteria. It is noteworthy that four of the participants who met the criteria for my research were individuals who were previously known to me through community development work.

Participants were contacted by phone and informed that packages that included the researcher's introductory letter (Appendix C) and consent form (Appendix B) would be delivered to them by mail so they would have ample time to read and raise any questions or issues of concern before signing the forms and committing to participate in the research. Each participant would receive \$20 in appreciation of their time and willingness to participate in the research.

4.5 Data Collection Process

Much of the data this qualitative research has generated reflects the participants' subjective and objective experiences of being a refugee woman in Winnipeg. The data collection process took approximately six months. In line with qualitative data collection methods, the following steps were followed:

Semi-structured interviews (Appendix D) were conducted. As Irwin (2008) observes, recursive, iterative, semi-structured interviews create an opportunity for participants to move beyond what is known. Questions were "open, evolving and non-directional" (Creswell, 2013, p. 138), in order to provide opportunities for me to probe and expand on the significant themes and statements that arose during the discourses. The interviews were approximately one hour long and conducted at locations that were identified as convenient by the participants. One interview took place at a public library's meeting room and three interviews were conducted in the participants' homes, when other family members were away at work or school. The fifth interview took place at my home when other family members were away to ensure privacy, confidentiality and avoid unnecessary distraction. As Proterotto (2002) points out, qualitative research mainly takes place in the participants' natural environments.

At the beginning of the interview, participants were given a clear, concise description of the study so they were aware of the nature of the research. Participants were assigned pseudonyms to protect their identity. They were also asked for permission to have the interviews audio-taped and assured the taped information, notes, transcripts and analysis of the study would be held in confidence by the researcher, and later destroyed after the research was finally submitted to the University of Manitoba Libraries as a complete thesis.

Participants were also made aware of the potential for emotional discomfort in describing their experiences and were assured that should such discomfort arise, a list of counselling

services would be provided if they wished to debrief with a counsellor (Appendix F). None of the participants expressed the need to debrief with a counselor after the interviews.

4.6 Data Analysis

Thematic data analysis was used for this research. Crowe, Inder, and Porter (2015) describe thematic analysis as the interpretation of qualitative data in order to identify overriding themes and patterns across the data. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), the three phases of thematic analysis include getting familiar with the data by reading, re-reading and transcribing the data; searching for the themes and organizing them into clusters; and synthesizing the clusters and identifying how they relate to each other. This process enables the researcher to verify whether the findings answer the research question.

4.7 Transcription of Interviews

To familiarize myself with the data, I listened to the recorded data, capturing those elements that gave more meaning to the words, including deep sighs, prolonged pauses, groans, and nervous or uproarious laughter. To fully develop an in-depth understanding of the personal realities of the participants in a study, Van De Sande and Schwartz (2011) suggest reading through all the transcribed data thoroughly in preparation for the analysis, description and interpretation.

Audio-recorded data for this research was transcribed through the use of the Express Scribe Transcription software. The recorded material was transferred to my computer and saved under identifiable titles. The software was equipped with a time-stamp that allowed me to time the transcription; for example, if I chose to transcribe the material in 30 minutes or one-hour segments. Other features allowed me to highlight repeated statements so they were later coded as emerging themes, ideas and issues of interest. The software also came with a stop watch, volume and speed adjuster, all of which were handy in the transcription process. The features were

clearly and conveniently displayed on the software widow, which made it efficient, timely and user-friendly.

During the interview process and analysis of the individual interviews, I deliberately engaged in self-reflection or what Irwin (2008) refers to as “constant interrogation of one’s own understanding and assumptions” (p. 204). I rethought and attended to the social and political contexts the participants presented in their stories, capturing significant statements and reflecting on what those statements invoked in me as an inside researcher. As I retold the stories with as much direct statements as supported the themes, I was aware of the untold stories that were communicated through deep sighs, evident sadness and heaviness, desperate clapping of both fists or literally throwing up of hands in resignation.

Prolonged pauses, as some participants seemed to re-live the sad memories, sometimes led to intermittent pauses. It was also noteworthy that humour and prolonged laughter was sometimes part of these discourses, as participants reflected on the absurdity of re-learning almost everything in their new city. For example, one participant and I shared some hearty laughter as she described the absurdity of waiting for her bus ride on the wrong side of the street. Another participant couldn’t stop laughing at herself when she recalled how she would yell at the automated voice messaging systems that never seemed to answer the questions asked.

Reflecting on my own immigration journey also enabled me to offer empathy to my research participants as I listened to their stories. I was, however, challenged to recognize and acknowledge the significance of allowing the voices of the participants to come through without overly influencing and interpreting the experiences from my own assumptions and biases. As Hanson (2013) observes, though insider researchers can win their participants' trust more readily, they need to think through their findings carefully and ensure their own voices do not emerge more powerfully than the voices of their research participants. Cho and Trent (2006), however,

observe that subjectivity or objectivity cannot be absolute: The researcher needs to “consciously navigate between subjectivity and objectivity in order to demonstrate communicative credibility” (p. 330).

4.8 Developing Clusters of Meaning

According to Carsterle, Gastmans, Bryon, and Denier (2012), data analysis involves making meaning beyond facts. Before the researcher can effectively analyze the themes and concepts, Carsterle et al. (2012) argue that the underlying meanings and perspectives should be grasped through “reading, thinking, reflecting, discerning, imagining, conceptualizing, connecting and condensing the data”, all the while being aware of preconceived notions and personal assumptions (p. 362). In this specific research, clusters and categories of data were identified and underlying themes analyzed.

4.9 Identifying and Integrating Emerging Themes

The final but most significant aspect of the research was the integration of the emerging themes and ideas from all the interviews into a meaningful conceptual framework. This was done through comparing and contrasting overriding themes from all the participants' accounts and linking them to the original aim of exploring resettlement challenges. Throughout the analysis, significant direct quotes and statements from participants were used to enhance validity. Identified themes were then linked to the foundational tenets of ecological theories and the qualitative approach to research. This process was done with individual interviews before all five interviews were finally condensed and integrated into this thesis.

Chapter Five: Chapter five: Findings

I begin this chapter with brief vignettes on the data I gathered as the participants described their very early days of arrival in Winnipeg.

A young mother, roughly 23 years of age, arrives at the Winnipeg airport accompanied by her children; one and three years old. They have been flying for more than 14 hours. The children are tired and cranky; she is also exhausted but glad her journey is over. She has just arrived to what she assumed would be a safe haven from all the fear and persecution she has experienced for the last 14 years as a war survivor in a refugee camp. She could not bring her partner along because he was not part of the government sponsorship arrangement, as he was not a refugee himself but a citizen of her second country. She is hopeful she would be able to sponsor him to Canada within the next one year.

Another family of seven arrives to what they assume is a safe haven from the hunger and other forms of persecution they have endured for more than 16 years in a refugee camp in a second country; their country of origin is still war-torn. They can only utter a few English and French words but they are full of hope and anticipation. They assume their new country will provide peace and prosperity; a new house, jobs, education for the children, and much more.

A young couple also arrive in Canada around the same time, having been sponsored by relatives who had settled in Winnipeg a few years earlier. They are also refugees from a country that is still reeling in war. They have been refugees in a second country for seven years. Along with them is their one-year-old son. They also have little knowledge of the English language but hope their relatives who have sponsored them to Canada will help them find their way around.

One other single mother also migrates to Winnipeg under the Private Sponsorship Program. She has a six-year-old daughter whom she could not bring along because she had been

separated from the child when war broke out in her country. The sponsors have promised to bring the child over as soon as they locate her.

One other mother arrives with her six children, in the company of a visually impaired partner. Her family has survived what she later describes as terrible hunger, disease and deprivation after 12 years in a refugee camp in her second country. She knows it would be difficult starting a new life in a new country, especially because of language and her husband's condition, but she is glad the family has finally found a country they can call home.

These five women are the focus of my research findings. Themes on the resettlement challenges they experienced after migrating to Winnipeg are discussed in this chapter. Such themes include housing, financial challenges, barriers to education and employment, language and culture, parenting challenges and physical disability.

5.1 Finding a Home: Literally and Figuratively

The theme of housing demonstrated how significant the physical ecological contexts are to the resettlement journey. However, four out of five participants presented housing as one major resettlement challenge that caught them off-guard, mainly because of the high expectations they had prior to immigration. The participants were part of communities that were fleeing from war, dire poverty and deprivation. They were hoping to settle in new houses that were not only safe from guns and bullets, but decent enough to be called homes. However, as the following significant statements demonstrate, the type of houses the participants were expected to occupy were, in their view, substandard. Nomi, for example, said the houses a service provider took her family to view when they first arrived in Winnipeg were not only filthy, but also insecure and substandard.

Now from *our resettlement Agency*, *the agency* told us we had to get a house. They

(service providers) got us a house. And now when we went to see where the house was...

oh no no no, the house was *veery bad*, full of mold [...] the basement was like. .I don't know, was *full of filth... like mold*. (Nomi)

Echoing the same observation, Rachel said:

We were really really right in centre of downtown [...] and there is so much noise, so much dirt, like... (Rachel)

Although the participants appreciated that Canada was safe because there would be no gun-trotting soldiers terrorizing villages, they still felt they had the right to secure decent housing.

Sara also wondered whether the service providers imagined they could take whatever was available because they anyway came from refugee camps.

Why, I looked at them (houses) as being very unsafe environment [...] all of my neighbours there are like smoking and I'm like whenever we visited, people are drinking outside and I felt it was not good for security concerns. I remember telling that person, I was like look at me; me being a refugee here doesn't mean that I'm from a forest. Yah? I know what is good and what is not good. (Sara)

Esther expressed concerns regarding the safety of her children in the subsidized housing that she moved to after living with relatives for a while:

Afterwards I stay in subsidy house, but it's a struggle. They have stairs there, one room, then there are stairs and my kids are small and running around, it was not safe. It was very small and then my kids are very very running around, the boys fighting and maybe I was looking after them but then there are stairs, and it's not safe. (Esther)

Sara also shared that for her, the house felt like a prison, particularly because her children did not have the space or freedom they needed to play. The fact that all her neighbours seemed to be too busy also made her feel lonely and isolated.

And now here I am, stuck home with two kids, who cannot even run around in the house because if they do so, the neighbours will come and say you're making noise for us; it felt like a prison. Sometimes I don't even have nobody I say eh: "Do you have some time to show me around?" (Sara)

Four of the participants strongly felt housing was the one major challenge that made resettlement extremely tough for them. In their view, the kind of housing their hosts identified for their families was substandard.

You know like I have been with many families, they have been put in housing, the heating system, is not even functioning, they will get a house during summer time and in winter time, they are calling the landlord and the landlord is not coming, they call somebody from the agency, oh advocate for us, they will say that is the system [...] Like on top of cultural shock, there are those finer details of when it comes to the law; like the way the system works, there are supposed to be workshops for tenants, about your rights [...] It's so overwhelming, it's so overwhelming. (Sara)

This overriding theme of housing and the impact it had on the women and their families demonstrates how placing them in what they considered substandard and insecure environments perpetuated the same fear and insecurity the host countries had promised to protect the refugees from. To most participants, the house symbolized not only a safe place to stay but a sense of having arrived home. The participants, who had been on the run since war broke out, craved nothing more than safe housing. Unfortunately, this feeling seemed to be so elusive for them that even after ten years of living in Winnipeg, they still felt unsettled about one thing or another. As one participant put it:

I have to run home, it was go go go and it is up until now, I feel like it's not a life [...] it was hard, it's hard. (Sara)

Lack of adequate, affordable housing for the participants impacted their overall well-being directly. As pointed out, the neighbourhoods where participants found people smoking and drinking outside spelled fear and anxiety, mostly because the participants had young children.

5.2 Financial Challenges

Another theme directly related to housing was financial challenges. After indicating housing should be safe and up to their standards, the participants realized the financial burden of paying rent and bills and generally running a home was a challenge they were unprepared for. The rent money that was available to them as Government Assisted Refugees (GAR) was not sufficient. However, once they secured jobs to supplement the income the government provided, what was available through the GAR program was terminated.

They pay for the house but once I get my first pay check, I now have to pay house rent.

When I start paying for this house it was \$400 but when I start working, the rent goes up to \$600 and now it is \$1,200 [...] And now, I pay that money and other bills, plus I have to help my husband for everything, everything [...] We wonder, where is the money, where is the money that we need for daily use, And then there is nothing in our savings, all the money is for paying bills. (Nomi)

Sara also shared:

Your job is not your dream job [...] you just do what you need to do. You're there and they are bringing you bills of payments, there is no way [...] you look at your income, the bills and expenses are much higher than the income [...] I remember the first time they brought me my cable bill, it was something like \$400 and I was expecting something like \$170. I was devastated, they were explaining me stuff that I could not understand, they

were beyond my understanding [...] It was so much, the brain had to think over and over again. (Sara)

Nomi, Sara and Rachel were Government Assisted Refugees. They felt the money made available for families during that one year of resettlement is hardly enough. Understanding how money works in Canada, the cost of living, budgeting and negotiating for fair deals, especially when the participants did not have adequate language skills, further compounded the financial crisis.

Rachel explained that the simplicity of life in the refugee camp was almost preferable to the financial hardships that her family experienced. When they realized how much money they needed to survive, she called it a crash, implying that thinking about the rent, bills and other daily expenditures blew her mind.

So in one year they helped you for one year and the money they give you can't pay for your rent and your other bills, that's a crash! Back home you live in really bad situation but you do not have to pay rent, you do not have to pay, hydro, you do not have to pay that and that, you struggle but you know, whatever you get, that's yours, aahh, that crashed me, you're on your own, and you go on welfare, but even that welfare as a single (person) they give you only \$500 and you can't even find a bachelor for \$500, now you don't really speak English, you really struggle. (Rachel)

Financial challenges could be alleviated by accessing welfare but the participants were aware that such money would not be provided indefinitely. They also seemed to associate receiving welfare with laziness and low self-worth.

My husband don't like me also taking money (welfare) like people with disability, he says he don't like it [...] after one year and a half it's enough. (Esther).

Esther felt that even though her family had to take care of two young children, being on welfare for one year and six months was enough. Her husband insisted they both needed to work because they were not disabled. The participants were also aware that financial challenges could be eased by visiting the food bank. However, this was considered to be the last resort because it was associated with begging for food, a behaviour that was not culturally acceptable, according to the participants.

Oh yes, mum had to go to the food bank, but it was not enough [...] but how long are you going to rely on the food bank!! [...] it was tough on us as kids and for mum, that she feels hopeless and useless, that she can't feed her kids anymore; so helplessness [...] So now you're thinking like (*sadly*) I'm going to beg again? And I'm in Canada? To start begging again? No! Like the struggle comes to your head and then you start comparing and then you start to even miss your bad past or whatever it is. (Rachel)

Visiting the food bank was also linked to those struggles that the participants dealt with in the camps. Hunger was so profound in the camps that most participants said looking for food was a major pre-occupation for everyone. In the case of Rachel, her mother worked very hard to ensure that her six children had food in the camp, if nothing else. It was thus unfortunate the family had to struggle so hard to meet such basic needs as food and shelter post-immigration.

5.3 Barriers to Employment

Employment was another strong theme that emerged in all the discussions I had. All five participants came across as hard-working women who were convinced their families would be well-provided for in the new environments because they would start working immediately. However, there were barriers that made looking for work and getting hired a real challenge. One of those barriers, according to Nomi, was the lack of recognition of the credentials the participants brought with them from their home countries.

You come with your qualifications and wherever you come from, they are not recognized. You have to go back to school [...] And when I start to look for a job, no no, I went to University X, I want to study, because me, I was a teacher at home, I bring all my things to show the people who work with that University and they said, No no no, you have to study, we cannot take your documents, you have to go back to school...And I say if I go to school, how about my children, how about my husband? My husband is blind. (Nomi)

Regarding credentials, Rachel observed:

[...] of course when you come here the government help you for one year; believe me, one year is not enough to study English [...]and you won't get a good job in one year [...] no experience [...] even if you came here when you're educated they can't take your education, it's like you didn't go to school. (Rachel)

All the participants indicated they had to return to school to prepare for careers that would make them employable in Canada and also take up whatever menial work was available to meet the financial needs of the family. Such jobs included cleaning dishes in restaurants or cleaning offices.

You are learning English, applying jobs where you end up is in McDonalds and behind, on dishes and back then, when we came, the minimum wage was like what? It was I guess \$8. So \$8 plus they gonna take out their benefits, plus taxes, so it was very tough and we're like back on thinking; what are we going to eat for tomorrow? (Rachel)

Another major barrier to employment was language.

I don't have a job myself, I'm studying English [...] I haven't finished my Grade 12, I haven't finished my high school, so it's like; wow you go back and you're like: "What am I gonna do now?" (Rachel)

The participants shared that the helplessness they felt due to language barriers made them long for their former life in the camp. It seemed like no matter how difficult life was in the camp, the frustrations of not having the language to communicate or find work was too overwhelming.

One of the participants shared that even after taking a course in French, she was still required to return to school and study English in order for her to find work.

But the co-ordinator said no, you, you speak French and we have people here who speak English and she said and your English is all down. And I said madam, how is that? I just finished school here [...] Why *Kwa nini munitie kwa hii shule, kama mulitaka nijue English* (Why did you recommend the French program if you wanted me to learn English?) *Hayo ikanitia uchungu mwingi rohani* (Such things left me bitter and really discouraged my heart) but I go back to school, I entered Winnipeg Technical College, I go there for one year and now I got level 5 English [...] And they say okay madam, you can now start to work; but I had to go to another place, since the first job didn't have enough hours for me. (Nomi)

Sara also commented on how confusing it was to be assured she would readily find work so long as she was fluent in either French or English, only to discover this was not the case

And you come here and you're only speaking French and they tell you that Manitoba is bilingual but, is it really?? Tell me those places that you go and say the job is done in French? No! It's not there. I still had to learn English [...] People are so frustrated, so frustrated, it's another hustle. (Sara)

The observation here is that participants who were fluent in French were advised to take their training in French, with the assurance they would be able to work with French-speaking clients. To their shock and dismay, they still had to go back and learn English before they could

find work. The long process of becoming employable in Canada was described as overwhelming, frustrating, confusing and very discouraging indeed.

Another barrier to employment was the lack of Canadian experience. Even after going back to school and completing training and being assured that would land them jobs, some employers still claimed the participants did not have enough “Canadian experience” to perform to the required standards. Sara wondered at the absurdity of this requirement:

I find Winnipeg so annoying when it comes to jobs [...] there are jobs but they will give you age range (referring to the requirement that employees have to be within 25-35 years, for example), you find this advertisement and they will tell you; “Canadian experience”[...] How on earth am I supposed to get “Canadian experience” when I am not employed?? I need a job in order to gain Canadian experience. (Sara)

Esther also observed:

We’re willing to work but no one is willing to take us (Long sad pause) [...] At least create some jobs for immigrants, jobs that will give them experience. That way, they have more jobs, and at least get a job to help themselves with. (Esther)

Sara also mentioned that the environments that most newcomers have to work under are not safe.

So you’ll find most of the men; they are obliged to only work in factories. You’re working in this place without much help, may be you make a mistake, you burn something, you’re lucky if you don’t burn your hand, it’s so risky, you come here and you’re 65, it’s hard [...] and with that you find people start talking to themselves (meaning that due to joblessness, poor work environments and all the challenges associated with under-employment, people go crazy). (Sara)

5.4 Language Barriers

Language was not only a barrier to employment but to all other aspects of life affecting my research participants. Most of them shared how challenging it was to find their way around, do grocery shopping, enroll children in schools, and access health and other services without the English language.

Yes the language was the most difficult one and because you couldn't speak to anyone, even if you find other people speaking; they are so fast and they are young people and you feel left out and ashamed that they will laugh at me. [...] so I was so stiff to even practice my English; it took me a while. (Rachel)

For Rachel, failure to speak English translated to feelings of shame and social alienation.

Even when interpretation was provided, the interpreters did not seem to be well conversant with the needs of the newcomers. According to Kim, the newcomers were expected to request an interpreter, but they did not realize such services existed and did not know how to ask in their own language.

They (service providers) say oh, they didn't ask for the language (meaning translation and interpretation services) [...] and I say, they don't know the language, they don't ask for what they don't know [...] They actually hear you but they do not understand and you have to sit back and be in their shoe; if you went to their country, would you be expected to speak the language right away? (Kim)

Regarding interpretation, the participants observed it was sometimes disempowering for the parents when the children become the "official" interpreters. Yet this is normally the situation in most newcomer homes because the children pick up the language faster than the parents.

The system wants children to interpret for parents. That is a very dangerous situation. Because there are things that parents don't want children to know or situations that parents went through and are not supposed to be exposed to the children because it will be a trauma to the children, so my fight is that we have services available for interpretation. Yes, please, leave the children to be children, when the time will be right that the parents want to share, they can share, but you take away that right [when the children act as the interpreters], the children become providers, and it is disempowering. (Kim)

Sara makes the same observation and suggests that rather than having the parents struggle to help the children with homework in a language they have not yet mastered, some after school programs could help out.

The kids are learning the language so fast than the parents and the kids are somehow losing that first language, how will the mother and the child communicate? I think there needs to be a place where kids can go to get help with their homework. (Sara)

Rather than expecting the children to interpret for the parents, Esther suggested newcomers who have learnt some English be supported to help fellow newcomers with interpretation.

I have a little bit of English [...] and I ask people where to go but if you have no English, it can be very very hard, sometimes I help some people from my country or even from another country and then I help them. I go with them for English classes to help them to interpret, even immigrants I help them because if I don't help them it is very difficult. (Esther)

Language as a barrier to education was illustrated extensively as the following statements from three of the participants indicate.

I study English, for at least two years before I went to study because in adult education, you really have to know English in order to succeed (Rachel).

I could not speak English, so I had to work almost four times double (as a student) what I could have worked back home, finding a new job, having accommodation, by myself, with no family. (Sara)

So it took me well, in school I did good because you start with immigrants learning in new language, you could whatever, make mistake in practice, and do whatever; you're all learning, but then you hit high school and that's where the struggle starts; new words! New words and ooh you're like, ooh I didn't learn that in class (ESL class). (Rachel)

Overall, language was clearly a significant barrier to every aspect of the participants' resettlement journey. Limited language skills hindered the participants' efforts to join the workforce or gain education. Without an income, taking care of basic needs became very challenging. Access to health and other social services was also difficult due to inadequate language skills.

5.5 Parenting in New Cultural Environments

Parenting is one poignant theme that was extensively discussed by all my research participants. Apart from Rachel, the other four participants had raised and were continuing to raise children in a culture that was considered different from everything they had known previously.

Sometimes I could feel like my brain is going to explode! I didn't know how to express myself to the kids when they make a mistake, I shout! And the kids look at me like a strange person. Slowly by slowly, they started getting distant from me. I came with my kids when I was so close to my kids, they always run to me even when they have a challenge, but because of my attitude, they started running away, like I'll scream, I'll

shout and they run in the bedroom, and I started getting off my frustrations on the kids and when I explain the situation to my partner who remained in Uganda, it didn't make any sense, you know, we are now in two different environments. He does not understand what is happening because I am here and he is there. (Sara)

This young mother, who had migrated to Winnipeg with two small children was so overwhelmed by the burden of raising the kids by herself that she felt like her brain was going to explode. What is also noteworthy is the estrangement she felt from her kids. Securing school and day-care for the children did not make life easier.

Every day I cried; sometimes I would be overwhelmed [...] I have to take care of the kids, get my big one, put him on the school bus, my young one I had to take him to the day care. I have to take 2 busses, if I miss the first one; I have to walk for 30 minutes (Sara)

Kim described the same emotional challenges that parenting without any supports inflicted on the participants: "I could cry when she was sleeping, and I cry and bore my eyes out and then wake up smiling, to go face tomorrow."

Kim had been separated from her child for more than five years when they were finally reunited. She shared how painful it was for both the mother and child to learn to know each other all over again:

Yes, both of us are getting to know each other [...] and she knows my people, she knows my parents more than she knew me; it was a big, big gap that she missed. She didn't even know why, why did we come here? Why didn't we bring my grandmother here? Why isn't my grandfather here? Why are my uncles not here? Like I had to [...] it was a big problem and it took a long time. She used to cry every Easter, every Christmas, every public holiday, because children at school talk about their parents, their grandparents,

then she comes home, and she says, why are we the only ones here? And she could bore and cry like [...] all my sponsors could come to support me. (Kim)

Kim's struggles reveal the all-pervasive loneliness and isolation that children of immigrants feel after being cut off from families and relatives who could not be part of the immigration process.

Another major challenge that participants discussed with regard to parenting was the unexpected role shifts between newcomer parents and their children. Role changes occurred when children took over such tasks as language interpretation and performed other leadership roles that parents could no longer engage in due to language and other barriers. One participant, who was only 17 when her family arrived in Winnipeg, shared:

[...] look at, having a family, big family and you're almost the older one who's *chap, chap!* (more street smart or skillful) [...] And who could get to know the city and go to different areas so you could train the other siblings with your mum, it was...very very hard [...] I was in charge!! I was the mother, I was the kid, I was the father, and I was everything! (Rachel)

Role change also made one of the participants helpless in the hands of her children and also very sad, because needing the children to translate for her exposed them to issues they were not yet ready to deal with. Kim, for example, said that exposing the children to the challenges of immigration made them lose their innocence and forced them to "grow up fast".

Rachel explained she not only took charge of everyone else but also had to grow up fast. She had no time to fool around as teenagers do:

[...] so now I can help out family but the previous years were tough on us as kids and for mum, that she felt hopeless and useless, that she can't feed her kids anymore [...] So I was so tired mentally, physically like I was like oh how am I ever gonna do this; I didn't

feel like a kid, I had to be a mother; but it kept me strong though, thinking that even though I am a kid, teenager, I came here as a teenager. And teenagers here are like kids, fooling around everywhere, but me I had to think, okay, the money is coming next month, what are we going to do? Ya, now we have TV but then we didn't have TV but you want your other kids to feel like everyone else, but then we didn't get TV, so that was my hurt; I was like, I want my siblings even to have a better education than I never did, to have anything that I did not get a chance to have [...] I never experience teenager life... Yes, my sisters say, ya I'm only a kid. Yes you can say that because you have a choice!! (Emphatically) I did not have a choice! So as, I grow up close to my mum and my other sisters helped but they lived their lives, they're older than I am, so aah, so I took charge of the whole family; my mum plus my older family, my older sisters and their kids because they couldn't speak English. (Rachel)

Rachel had to take over the role her parents should have played in the resettlement process and thus was pressured to grow up very fast. She felt responsible not only for her mother's welfare but the welfare of her younger and older siblings, and worked hard to help them experience the kind of pleasures other children their age were having. Even though she is now a grown woman with a family of her own, she expressed a longing for her lost teenage years, and lamented that her mother was made to feel so "hopeless and useless".

Parenting in different cultural contexts was also a major theme of this research. All the participants expressed frustration with what seemed to them like flexible parenting rules that left parents at the mercy of their children.

[...] here there are so many rules, and there is so much freedom [...] you can't shout to someone! Back home, there in Africa, if I make a mistake, mum will shout at me, even like, won't beat me, but like, she will spank, and here you can't spank, you can't, shout!

Sooo it was veeery difficult [...] back home, mum teach us, you go wherever you go you come back early, but here is what? The lights are still on, so you go you forget about it and then you come home, mum is mad but she can't say anything because you'll end up calling 911! (Rachel)

The fact that children were made aware they could call the police or Child and Family Services if they did not like the discipline they were receiving at home added to the frustration.

I was that kid who will come back at ten, and mum is like: "you know you shouldn't come this late." But I know inside she is like, "What are you doing?!!!" (Laughter) It is very hard and kids here have so much freedom [...] the parents really don't have a say in anything. (Rachel)

Sara echoed the same sentiment that the perceived flexible parental rules seemed to leave newcomer parents powerless and frustrated: "And the kids here, it's like, there are so many rules about the kids, it's like I don't have any power over my kids, not a bad power but as parents, there's so much to learn, so much."

This real or perceived loss of parental authority and the fact that she had to do so much besides parenting the children adversely affected Sara's mental well-being.

There was so much to learn; a lot and sometimes I felt like my brain was going to crash. It was like a computer that was processing information so quickly, it was like go go go you don't have time to rest and I started developing headaches and they put me on these pills and they were not working, until one time I was like, I'm not sick of anything, I'm just stressed, I cannot go to school and concentrate. But it is like I don't have a choice. I need to get a job, I don't have the qualifications, therefore I have to go back to school. How do I do this? (Sara)

This theme on parenting evoked a discussion on the role of Child and Family Services (CFS). All five participants mentioned CFS, indicating that the system does what was considered a great “de-service” to newcomer families.

[...] *because* the newcomers feel like it’s the police. They don’t want anything to do with the CFS and yet, they have taken their children [...] part of my work is to inform and educate and make them aware why CFS is there, it’s not there to break the families [...] They are not doing their good job to actually come in when the situation has not escalated; they come in when the situation has escalated [...] newcomers must have a way of bringing up children, they have to make it meet together; learn and teach; both sides; and the service providers can teach so that when they learn from each other, it’s a middle point. Otherwise, right now, newcomers are running away because they don’t want nothing to do with CFS [...] Yes and if they don’t change, the system [...] if they don’t teach it, if they don’t make people know why, what, how; they are not helping.

(Kim)

The argument here is that CFS workers need to recognize that different styles of parenting may not always translate to child abuse. Kim actually suggests the workers could learn a thing or two from the newcomer parents. Rather than engaging in power dynamics that intimidate and threaten newcomer parents, thus alienating them from those services, there should be some power-sharing where service providers become willing to learn from and understand the newcomers' point of view.

While the participants admitted that the frustrations they went through could sometimes force them to be overbearing, they insisted they could never intentionally hurt their children. Thus they suggested that CFS would do a better job of supporting them with parenting expectations in their new environments, rather than apprehending the children. Although none of

the participants admitted their children were apprehended, all of them said they knew families who were struggling very hard to regain custody of their children from the CFS system.

Sara indicated parenting struggles were even more complex for newcomer parents who had teenagers because during the acculturation process, some youth ended up joining gangs and getting involved with the justice system or abusing substances, behaviour that, according to the participants, was not as common back home. Most of the participants blamed these negative outcomes on what they perceived to be “flexible rules and too much freedom” associated with the Canadian culture and a lack of parental involvement in the youths' lives because of all the other responsibilities the parents have.

Many youth, they make mistakes because they are also overwhelmed and they don't have anybody to talk to them; to enlighten them; the parents themselves they are overwhelmed; they don't have that time. As I said, I'll come home with all my frustrations, those kids they come to me I'm not holistically okay. I've got to be fine myself to guide my household, the right direction you know, it's a hustle. (Sara)

One other major struggle was the bullying of newcomer children in schools. Kim indicates that the struggle she went through on behalf of her child was intense. Besides the mental and emotional challenges that bullying inflicted on herself and her child, her experience with the teachers was very disappointing. Her plea for help was minimized or ignored. From the classroom teacher to the school counsellor and the principal, she was made to understand that the behaviour would stop and anyway the kids were just being kids. However, the emotional pain her child experienced was so great, Kim was determined to fight for her child, even if it involved the police:

And my child used to cry and cry and then I went back; I went to the teacher three times and I say hey! This is my own child that is being destroyed; I said, I must explore this,

now I'm growing very strong. I went to the principal and I said, there is a problem, my child comes home crying; there's someone in the class: two girls who are making her life miserable, the principal said "Ya, some children are like that; I'll talk to them." I gave him twice; the third time I went to the school; each time I went to the office I was so mad, I would cry all night and say [...] the child was also like "Mum I'm not going to school, I'm not going to school!" And I say, let's go to the principal. And I say, I want to meet the parent! I want the parent and the child! If you don't bring them here, I'll call the police and I'll meet them with the police! The principal said, "I'm sorry Kim" [...] and I said "No! I'm not leaving the office! My child is being destroyed completely" [...] you know how a child cries, and turns colour and loses weight because she is scared. So the principal, when I said I'm calling the police, right away! Snap! Calls the parent, calls the child, and he said, "Kim, don't call the police; I'm going to deal with it!" And that is the day it ended; from then afterwards [...] my child was never exposed to racism in the class, to bullying again in the classroom. And you know as a parent I was encouraging my child, you know what, focus on your school. But you know when a child experiences this bullying, her mind and her personal identity is taken away. (Kim)

Kim felt this kind of bullying was the worst form of racism that newcomer children experience in schools and suggested that parents be assertive enough to confront the bully.

Kim also observed that newcomer parents may want to be assertive but if they don't have the language, they don't know what to do.

We need to support our children, it can be very very damaging and when the parents don't even have the language, they don't know how to address it; they get angry, they get very angry, and they don't know what to do. (Kim)

It was fortunate that Kim had migrated from a country that uses English as the official language, as that enabled her to advocate for her child until her voice was heard.

Overall, it seemed the participants were willing to put up with lots of social injustices, but when it came to the welfare of their children, they were ready to fight to the very end. Even when they were too overwhelmed to parent, they called their sponsors or utilized the few resources at their disposal to ensure the well-being of their children.

5.6 Culture

Cultural differences, cultural shock, alienation, isolation or exclusion seemed to be the underlying explanation why the challenges that participants dealt with were complex. As already alluded to, parenting issues arose because the cultural expectations about disciplining children seemed to clash directly with what my research participants were used to. If they found themselves in lonely houses that felt like prisons, it was because back home neighbours said “hi” to each other, went out and borrowed whatever they needed from next door and sent their children out to play together; here the social contexts are different.

[...] here everyone is busy, there is no time to sit down and have a cup of tea and talk about the challenges with anyone; coz like back home, I know, we have stress, we have worries and whatever, but one way of like winning it over is like you sit, you talk, you share stories, kind of share in a joking way, but here no; when you think to learn the do’s and don’ts; sometimes I think, did I make the right decision to come here? (Sara)

As Sara argued, the “do’s and don’ts” of the new culture could be so overwhelming that she questioned the decision to migrate to Canada. More often than not, the theme of cultural differences was introduced with the statement “back home”, and then the *shocking, alienating* or sometimes positive cultural difference would be shared. Most of the differences left the participants feeling confused, frustrated and downright angry. For example, Rachel was

convinced that no matter what struggles her large family was experiencing, splitting up the family was not an option.

To keep everyone under the same roof, Rachel's family opted to rent a large house that would accommodate her seven family members: her mother and three siblings who had kids of their own. Everyone was expected to work at paying the rent, but at some point, footing the rent and bills, buying food and keeping the children in school proved to be too overwhelming for Rachel. She admitted she was so down she went to her mentor who happened to be a Canadian church minister. First, the mentor said he had been wondering why Rachel had chosen to take up the burden of her family's survival in Canada. His suggestion was Rachel was already over 18 and should therefore be thinking about moving out and living on her own. Rachel thought that was the most culturally offensive advice she had ever heard.

So he was like, "Why do you still live with your mum? You're old enough! Why does your family's problems keep weighing you down? You can move out." Holy that's a pastor?! My head is just a SPIN!! (*Demonstrating with finger going around her head.*) What is this!..I was like Holy Jesus [...] I really took a very deep breath otherwise I was gonna shout!! I'm like culturally, we're supposed to look after and take care of our elders, not like here you guys just put them in nursing homes [...] You don't even stay in the same city. So I was like, "If my mama took care of me and my siblings when she could have just abandoned us and lived her own life, why would I abandon her here?" She doesn't speak English! She has enough stress of not helping her kids as she used to; that is enough!! [...] So he's like, I don't get you people. (Rachel)

Rachel shared that if there was a cultural difference that sent her head spinning, it was the expectation that she needed to move out and start a life of her own. To her, that was tantamount to abandoning her family when they needed her. It's surprising how an obvious cultural

expectation like children being encouraged to strike out on their own so they may develop independent living skills can be interpreted as the most irresponsible cultural behaviour.

Expounding on this theme of a culture of family ties and collective living versus individuality, Rachel observed, “Like they say, one finger can’t do much, you need more fingers.” This cultural expectation that families need to stick together made Kim turn down sponsorship until her four-year-old daughter was sponsored too.

The child had to be part of my resettlement, being part of my life, being connected [...] and knowing that a piece of me was with me. (Kim)

Participants therefore shared that cultural differences permeated every aspect of their lives, beginning with language, religion, the way children were raised, taught in schools, service delivery and social-economic status. Kim seemed to summarize the participants’ overall attitude towards their new culture when she said: “Everything is all so different here! It’s like you don’t know anything anymore and you’re desperately wondering or lost or feeling so much racism.”

5.7 Disability:

Disability was one unique theme I had not expected to encounter in my research. Yet two of my participants’ narratives were dominated by their unique struggles as newcomers who were living with a physical disability themselves or were accompanied by family members who had a disability. Nomi arrived in Winnipeg with six children and a husband who was visually impaired. She shared that despite his disability, her husband was a teacher and a dependable provider before war broke out in her country. Unfortunately, in Winnipeg he has not been able to work, and according to Nomi he has not had any access to disability services or benefits after being here for more than eight years.

My biggest problem is about my husband, sometimes when we’re here, I go to work and when he starts to think about how he was before and how he is now [...] Sometimes he

may stay in the room and not open the door to anyone, you tell him, open the door; you can open the door but he is stressed and sometimes all he does is to cry and cry, and say when I was in my country, I could provide for you but now I have to ask for money, and it was me who was providing [...] That is the main problem we have here, we look for many people to give us some address, go here, go there, go to knock at this office, and every time they say we cannot help you because your wife, she has a full time work [...] he cries, and cries, mourns that he has to beg for everything here [...] Like depression, but even after opening the door and talking to him he is still too stressed [...] Everything is me, to pay the house, the bills, everything. (Nomi)

Throughout the interview, Nomi kept returning to the struggles she has had with her husband, right from the day they set foot in Winnipeg. His disability determined the kind of housing they got and many other aspects of Nomi's large family. Joblessness has not only plunged her husband into depression, but he also has heart problems and the overall feeling that he would be better off going back to his country of origin.

Kim migrated to Winnipeg after spending more than one year in a hospital recovering from a gun-shot wound. Her request for government sponsorship was met with a categorical "no" and an explanation that Canada does not sponsor people with disabilities. Fortunately, an officer with the UNHCR offered to support her to get private sponsors. The process took a long time but because a team of faith-based sponsors had volunteered to take care of her medical needs, she was able to migrate to Winnipeg. However, she indicated her situation was more challenging than that of other refugees:

So I was fighting my battle as a disabled person, but I was also fighting my child's battle, but then being a mum, I remember times when I could come to my house wanting to cry but I don't want to cry in front of my child because my child depends on me; for her to

see me breaking down; It was something that I wouldn't (*at the brink of tears even now*) would never expose her to [...] I could cry when she was sleeping, and I cry and bore my eyes out and then wake up smiling, to go face tomorrow. (Kim)

Kim was referring to the tough struggle she had when her daughter was being bullied. However, her disability was a recurrent theme throughout the interview, including when her sponsors had to form a committee to co-ordinate her transportation for medical appointments, grocery shopping, school and other errands during the first year of her arrival in Winnipeg.

You know, my sponsors provided for me in every way, and they took me in. To them I was their first disabled person; I was their first single parent, so I was learning from them, as they were learning from me. In fact, they had a committee that was just there ready waiting for me. (Kim)

Thus Kim was able to cope with her disability more positively than Nomi's husband who seemed to be constantly depressed. The difference between these two individuals who were allowed into Winnipeg despite their disability was that while Kim had a strong support network, Nomi's husband was a Government Assisted Refugee who could not access the Community Living disAbility Services (CLDS), because such services must be applied for before individuals turn the age of majority (Age of Majority Planning, 2015). One reason why her husband had not been able to access disability services was that Nomi had a full-time job herself and was therefore expected to provide for the family without any subsidy from social welfare. The reality is that Nomi's husband could access Community Living disAbility Services if reliable service providers could help the family navigate the system. Also, when service provision models are designed only from the perspective of the host country's policies, accessibility becomes a major challenge for newcomers (Walker, Koh, Wollersheim, & Liamputtong, 2015). Accessibility to

services is largely influenced by the service providers' willingness to familiarize themselves with the language and culture of their clients (Atwell et al., 2009).

Nomi's husband also seems to have not had a chance to upgrade whatever credentials he had prior to immigration. He therefore has not been able to find work, a factor that seems to have accelerated his apparent bouts of depression: "All he does is lock himself up in his room and cry and cry" (Nomi).

Sara has a physical injury to her leg that did not seem to hinder her acculturation process. Despite her physical challenges she was determined to work hard and create the opportunity for her children to achieve what she did not have a chance to achieve. I did not feel compelled to explore how she had sustained the injury because her disability did not seem to influence her resettlement process in any apparent way. A possible reason for her not wanting to share this part of her life could be the trauma is still too deep for her to share. The only reference to the injury was it had been war-related and she had spent much of her childhood in the hospital.

Overall, these research findings demonstrate how challenging the resettlement process can be to newcomers, especially if they are refugee women, lone mothers who are raising children, attending school or work and looking after vulnerable members of their families. Most of the challenges combined to cause frustrations and sometimes profound pain to the newcomers, right from the moment they arrived in Winnipeg through to the time of our interview. Lack of adequate housing made it challenging for the newcomers to settle down. When decent housing was secured, the reality of rent and bills destabilized some families even further. Employment and education opportunities were not readily available either due to limited language skills, lack of Canadian experience, discrimination or lack of recognition of prior credentials. Then there were the children and vulnerable members of the families to take care of, without the social capital the participants enjoyed previously. The challenges were sometimes so overwhelming

that three of the participants repeatedly said, “All I could do was cry and cry.” It was however noteworthy that the crying happened secretly, away from everyone, especially the children. The women had to remain strong to prevent their children from witnessing their anxiety about the problems of resettlement.

The crying also brought out the all-pervasive theme of nostalgia. Participants seemed to live for that one single day when they could return home. All of them had felt that despite the real war threats, hunger, poverty and other forms of torture, returning home was a risk they were willing to take. However, resilience, hope, sheer hard work and a conscious choice not to look back seemed to have moved them from the nostalgic feelings for home to some appreciation that the struggle was all worth it. They emphasized that for the sake of the children and their loved ones, it was necessary that they endured the challenges.

6 Chapter Six: Discussion

I begin this chapter by restating the focus of my study and presenting how qualitative research methods guided by ecological systems and person-in-environment theoretical frameworks helped me arrive at my findings. The findings are also discussed and linked to the existing literature.

The main focus of my study is resettlement challenges among refugee women from African countries that have experienced war, and the impact those challenges have on their overall well-being. Using the qualitative research paradigm, I engaged my participants not just at the level of a mere description of their challenges but dug deeper into the meaning and interpretation they attributed to those challenges. When Sara described the overwhelming struggle to find basic housing, she attributed part of the problem to the service provider's assumption that because she was a refugee, she should be prepared to take whatever house was available, no matter how substandard it was. Real or perceived racism and other forms of discrimination have been cited as factors that impede successful resettlement for refugee women, especially in the challenge of securing affordable housing (Silvius, 2016; Walsh et al., 2016).

The ecological systems theory, which posits that human development and behaviour is shaped by multiple nested and interacting environments, enabled my participants and I to walk through the new environmental transactions, showing how the microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems and macrosystems that were meant to enhance the women's resettlement journey were often times very disruptive to their equilibrium.

At the individual (microlevel), lack of language, inadequate housing, financial struggles, parenting challenges and cultural alienation made the participants feel hopeless and helpless. The family that the individual would find strength from was deprived of basic needs at times, as they struggled to decide whether they would first pay the rent or purchase food for the children. What

was viewed as “permissive parenting” in the new ecological contexts made parents feel too disempowered to instill discipline in their children. The daily hustling and glide as the participants juggled parenting, work and studies left them tired, angry, frustrated and overwhelmed. The family was no longer the social, psychological or emotional support system that it was meant to be. The microsystem for most families had failed to be a buffer from the challenging experiences of the day.

At the mesosystem and exosystem levels, schools were hostile to both parents and children as racism and bullying went unchallenged. The justice system also turned on newcomer youth sometimes as parents became too busy or too disempowered to provide the right leadership to their children. The CFS as a mesosystem became more of a threat than a support system, because children could be apprehended without considering whether the newcomers' parenting styles were indeed abusive or different. Services like Community Living disAbility were not readily accessible for newcomer families due to immigration policies that mainly relegated the care of disabled immigrants to their own family members or private sponsors.

The employment sector, institutions of learning and other mesosystem layers had erected barriers that seemed insurmountable to the participants, mainly due to lack of readily accessible language training programs, lack of recognition of prior credentials and experience, and culturally inappropriate delivery of services.

At the exosystem level, the women seemed too removed from the political systems to influence policy in any meaningful way. However, when policy-makers limited access to basic resettlement services to one year, the integration process became very challenging for the families. As one participant stated, one year did not provide enough time for newcomers to learn a new language, find work, and begin paying rent and bills.

At the macrosystem level, the new social-economic and cultural environments seemed to have conspired to frustrate the hopes and aspirations the refugee participants had when they first settled in Winnipeg. From the language, religion, racism, discrimination and an overall culture that viewed the “other” as less than, my research participants’ resettlement journey was reportedly, very challenging indeed.

Incorporating the person-in-environment theory enhanced my understanding of the different ways the environments shaped my participants’ resettlement journeys. For example, the five participants arrived in Winnipeg ready to accept whatever jobs were available in order to feed their families. However, their social environment required they learn a new language, have their former credentials evaluated, and register for courses to upgrade their qualifications to meet the job requirements. They also had to gain some Canadian experience before they could be absorbed into the workforce. The process of rising from poverty thus became far more challenging than they had anticipated.

Probst (2012) observes that resettlement challenges for refugees are compounded by “the culture of poverty, chronic unemployment, lack of adequate housing, forcing families to live in crowded and unsanitary conditions, racism, power hierarchies, personal crisis, exposure to violence, drugs, crimes, discrimination, lack of social supports and marginalization” (p. 16).

My research participants discussed environments that were characterized by poverty, financial struggles, challenging barriers to education and employment. Racism and discrimination were also experienced in schools and the workplace. The women in my study felt that their teens faced increased risks for gang activities and drug-related crimes as the newcomer families struggled to make ends meet. Loss of social capital and a clash of cultural values led to loneliness and isolation.

Environments were, however, deemed supportive when the participants were discussing private sponsors, individuals or faith-based organizations that were kind enough to provide practical help and emotional supports. This is in line with William's (2011) observation that environments are positive in cases where newcomers experience social support, a sense of belonging and safety, availability of appropriate community resources, mentors and the experience of connectedness. Atwell et al. (2009) also point out that environments that are stable, consistent and predictable are key to successful resettlement.

One significant feature of the person-in-environment theory is its emphasis on empathy and understanding, so service providers are able to acknowledge and affirm their clients' strengths and empower them with available resources, rather than blaming their failures on personal weaknesses or pathology (Probst, 2012). This was echoed by my research participants when they discussed the role of CFS, the justice system and schools. Sara, for example, stated that if newcomer parents seem to have lost control of their children, it's not because they are irresponsible; it's because the overwhelming demands of work, school, lack of social supports, cultural alienation and other environmental factors beyond their control leave them too distraught to manage the children. Rather than apprehending the children, service providers should "sit down with me" and explore what resources are available (Sara). As Bala and Kramer (2015) observe, service providers need to provide holistic services that put the overall well-being of the refugee women into consideration. Practicing from a social work perspective also means offering personal worth, autonomy and self-determination to newcomers, rather than simply telling them what to do (Canadian Association of Social Workers, 2015). Echoing the same argument, Ali (2008) asserts that instead of issuing directives and unsolicited parental advice, staff who work with newcomer parents should ask themselves: "How can I help parents become more confident

about the decisions they are making?” and positively influence their parental self-efficacy? (p. 149).

The key areas in which the women had lost their equilibrium in their new environments are discussed further, indicating how the loss negatively affected their sense of well-being.

6.2 Housing and Finances

Right from the start, my participants realized their dream of finding a permanent home was not going to materialize any time soon. Worry, fear, and anxiety due to lack of safety for themselves and their children made the first months of arrival very trying indeed. Then the economic struggles - a direct result of paying rent and other bills for what they thought were more decent houses - drove some of the participants “crazy, crashed them, frustrated and overwhelmed them” (Sara). As research has extensively documented, finances and lack of adequate housing are two major resettlement challenges that refugees contend with (Beiser, 2009; Brushett, 2007; Distasio et al., 2015; Dow, 2011; Falicov, 2007; Khawaja, White, Schewitzer, & Greenslade, 2008; Kinzie, 2006; Kirmayer et al., 2011; Silvius, 2016; Walsh et al., 2015).

Challenging the neo-liberalization concept of housing for refugees, Silvius (2016) argues that ethno-cultural entities, religious institutions, friends and relatives, and other community-based associations may mitigate housing challenges for the refugees by enhancing stronger social networks. However, Silvius (2016) observes, without sufficient and timely supports from the three levels of government, available resources become too stretched to compete with the ever-increasing housing market. Hyndman et al. (2017) also observe that Sponsorship Agreement Holders need support from the federal government to provide on-going integration supports for the refugees. If the resettlement process becomes the sole responsibility for the SAH, there is the tendency for refugees to join the labour market prematurely, a phenomenon that is viewed as

decreasing their chances of learning English or French. Delays in language skill acquisition jeopardizes the newcomers' chances of finding jobs and securing descent housing.

In September 2016 one major policy declaration during the United Nations Summit on Refugees and Migrants was the provision of safe affordable housing. The need to come up with multilateral financial solutions that would close the gaping funding gaps identified by delegates from all nations who have opened their doors for the current influx of refugees was emphasized (United Nations, 2016). Adequate housing and finances are two basic but very significant environmental needs that must be addressed to ensure successful resettlement. As Brushett (2007) asserts, failure to adequately address the housing and financial needs of newcomers has a detrimental effect to not only their physical well-being but their mental health as well. The author associates dilapidated housing with mental and moral degradation. Brushett (2007) findings were confirmed by my research participant's experiences with housing. For example, substandard and insecure housing environments evoked fear and anxiety among my research participants. Some of them felt so lonely and isolated they equated such housing environments with prisons. The challenge of maintaining the homes, paying rent and other bills was also overwhelming for the participants in my study. Most of the houses they secured in their early resettlement years were too expensive for their minimum wage salaries. Landlords were also found to be unscrupulous and neighbourhoods were reportedly hostile and unsafe. The need for well-co-ordinated preparation for housing for the newcomer families cannot be overstated.

6.3 Barriers to Education and Employment

Faced with dire housing and financial crisis, my research participants went out to look for work only to realize they were not readily employable in Canada because their credentials were not recognized. They enrolled in schools and training programs to overcome these barriers, but without the language, how were they going to learn? Even if they worked hard enough at their

language skills and completed training, who was ready to hire them without some Canadian experience? The self-perpetuating cycle of unemployment due to lack of education or recognized credentials was well demonstrated in the interviews. Coupled with the challenge of lack of Canadian experience was racial discriminatory practices at work and education institutions. All five research participants felt like they were dealing with visible and invisible barriers that made their success in institutions of learning or the workplace very difficult to achieve. Abundant literature has demonstrated that lack of education opportunities, unemployment, underemployment, difficulties in having prior credentials recognized, exploitation by employers, discrimination at work, and social and economic inequity are huge challenges that disrupt newcomers' ecological contexts in almost every aspect of their resettlement journey (Abebe et al., 2014; Beiser, 2009; Bokore, 2015; Brown-Bowers et al., 2015; Cross & Singh, 2012; Kinzie, 2006; Krahn et al., 2000; Tastsoglou et al., 2014).

6.4 Parenting in New Ecological Environments

The phenomenon of mothers juggling parenting, work, school and other responsibilities is a global challenge (Shiftman, 2013), but for refugee women, who are stripped of whatever social-economic capital they ever had by displacement, the challenge is too complex to be put into words (Levi, 2014). The women found it very challenging to work and go to school, parent their children and take care of the extended family. Zhu (2016) blames the complex “work-life balance dilemma” on the systemic oppression of neo-liberal policies that have shifted settlement services from nation building to swift economic adaptations for immigrant mothers, and in the case of this study, the refugee women (p. 144).

Williams (2011) asserts that ecological environments have a direct impact on child development, arguing that children who spend a good proportion of time with their parents in positive environments are more likely to develop healthier relationships with their peers in and

outside school environments. One of my research participants argued that part of the reason why children from refugee communities get involved with the justice system is that their parents are too busy working, sometimes more than two jobs, while attending school to upgrade their skills. Such juggling leaves the parents very little quality time with the children. As Critelli (2015) observes, pre-immigration and post-immigration stressors are sometimes so overwhelming for the parents that their ability to deal with the children's behavioural issues is diminished.

The children themselves are, more often than not, victims of terrorism, hunger, disease and other forms of human degradation in the course of their immigration journey. One of my participants described life in the camp where hunger, disease, and other form of deprivations forced parents to send their children outside the camp to beg and sometimes indulge in prostitution in exchange for food. Such children may arrive in their host countries when they have already become hardened victims of crime. Their trauma experience is sometimes expressed through behavioural problems, including petty or capital crimes, truancy and open defiance (Bokore, 2015; Critelli, 2015).

Parenting also becomes a real challenge for mothers who are separated from their children for prolonged periods during the immigration process. As Falicov (2007) observes, family relationships are redefined by the immigration process when children are left under the care of their grandparents or other surviving family members by fleeing parents. When the children are finally reunited with their mothers, like in the case of Kim, it becomes a struggle for the mothers to explain to the children why they were left behind and could not go back home. The reunion that's supposed to be a healing experience for both mother and child thus becomes excruciatingly painful and the emotional disconnect can sometimes take years to heal (Falicov, 2007).

To ease the pain of separation between migrating parents and their children, Falicov (2007) argues that service providers should consciously explore the ties and family dynamics between newcomers and the families they left behind. Such family connections could be fostered through phone calls, letters, emails and other social media outlets. This argument is further echoed by Bacigalupe and Lambes (2011) and Walker et al, (2015) when they refer to the mobile phone as a “social amenity” and unifying medium of communication that connects people across continental boundaries. Walker et al. (2015) suggest that since social exclusion and isolation are significant determinants of health that exacerbate mental illness and some chronic illnesses, mobile phone-assisted peer support networks could be implemented as a health promotion endeavor among refugee communities.

Critelli (2015) recommends wrap-around services for refugee families with children who are in danger of conflict with the justice system or apprehension by the CFS. Such services could include extensive cultural orientation regarding schools and parental involvement, expectation from teachers, the justice system and health care system. Refugee communities should be supported to do self-advocacy. They should also be provided with relevant education on legal matters, domestic violence services, EAL classes, translation and interpretation services, and other instrumental supports (Critelli, 2015).

Zhu (2016), however, observes that the endeavor to support refugee families should not lead to devaluation and exclusion of the newcomer mothers’ knowledge, identity and experience. As my research participants argued, what the refugee families need is not punitive and sometimes patronizing measures; what they need is exposure to the parenting culture of the new country through culturally responsive instructions and supports.

Williams (2011) also argues that providing parental supports through strengthening their cultural networks, plus early childhood intervention programs, has been shown to promote

growth and protective factors for refugee children and their families. My research participants called for intentional collaboration between the refugee parents and CFS workers, rather than abrupt apprehensions and painful disruptions. Likewise, Levi (2014) advocates for consultation with the parent refugees, so culturally relevant interventions are developed and delivered at the community level, rather than the individual level.

Describing Child Protection Services in Australia, Levi (2014) calls the services a “specter of loss” that re-traumatizes parents and intimidates them to accept new parental practices that may not necessarily yield positive outcomes (p. 493). As a CFS worker myself, I strongly advocate for the use of every means possible to provide supports and resources to the families so they can parent their children. This approach reflects the social work lens that empowers clients with internal and external resources, rather than pathologizing and dwelling on individual weaknesses (Bisman & Bohannon, 2014).

One other aspect that complicates parenting after immigration is the isolation and exclusion that newcomer children are sometimes subjected to in a society where the “other” is treated with hostility or indifference (Bokore, 2015; Brown-Bowers et al., 2014). Høglund & Hosan (2013) and Vitoroulis, Brittain, & Vaillancourt (2016) describe bullying as peer victimization that involve consistent and repetitive physical or relational aggression that is intended to hurt and humiliate, in contexts where evident power imbalance exists. Such power imbalances at the classroom level lead to real or perceived feelings of victimization of children of immigrants, especially the social form of aggression where children from minority groups feel left out and alienated from their peers (Høglund & Hasan, 2012; Vitoroulis et al., 2016). In this research, Kim expressed how difficult it was for her to challenge the relational aggression that her daughter experienced when she was first enrolled in school. As a newcomer mother, she felt that if the parents and teachers did not proactively and intentionally confront the bullies,

relational aggression would continue to negatively affect her child's personal worth and lead to adjustment problems. In their examination of the relationship between bullying and adjustment problems, Høglund and Hasan (2012) established a correlation between depression and anxiety among Asian and Aboriginal adolescents who reported bullying from their peers.

6.5 Language and Culture

Learning the new language within a new culture was one other major challenge that all my participants discussed at length, pointing out the shame and social isolation they experienced for not knowing how to communicate even the simplest thoughts or ideas. One participant said she felt like a child trying to learn everything all over again. This also reduced the participants' confidence and self-worth.

Watkins et al. (2012) singles out language as an all-pervasive barrier to social, economic, political and cultural integration, and as all five of my research participants indicated, without the English language, there was no way of learning the new culture, getting a job, registering children to school or attending school themselves. Research among the Indigenous peoples of Canada also confirms that language and culture are two significant human rights that promote a person's sense of personal worth and dignity (Holder, 2008).

Watkins et al. (2012) assert that language is a gendered issue that directly impacts refugee women, putting them at a disadvantage, "including unequal social-economic, educational and vocational training participation" (p. 126). Without an understanding of the new culture and language, the research participants felt lost, poor, alienated and ashamed at times. Critelli (2014) also observes that lack of language makes it very challenging for newcomer refugee women to get involved with the school systems despite the expectation that parents play an active role in their children's education. This inability to assist their children with school challenges, including bullying, leaves the parents feeling helpless and disempowered (Bokore, 2015; Critelli, 2014).

It's such helplessness that Kim described extensively when her daughter was bullied at school. Ramos and Ungar (2017) also observe that social integration and family stability gets disrupted when children from refugee communities acquire language faster than their parents and become the cultural brokers between their parents and public institutions. The destabilizing effect of such role shift, according to Ramos & Ungar (2017), could be alleviated through implementing evidence-informed practices that include refugee-focused language learning interventions in schools and community resource centres.

Language and culture also has a direct impact on the mental well-being of the newcomers. As the literature indicates, effective mental health services should consider the language and idioms that newcomers use to describe psychological distress, rather than assuming the terminology used by the host countries is universal (Beiser, 2009; Briggs & Mcleod, 2006; Shaun et al., 2014). My research participants described periods in their lives when they would cry for weeks on end, when they felt crushed, when they almost thought they were going crazy as their heads "spun round and round". Sara even referred to community members who ended up in the streets "talking to themselves". While the scope of this research did not afford me enough time to probe the deeper meanings of these references, I could not rule out depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress as the participants navigated the overwhelming challenges of learning a new language, finding work, and parenting children in completely new and sometimes hostile cultural environments. As Ramos and Ungar (2017) observe, the "disorienting dilemmas" that many refugees face due to loss of culture and language requires that individuals develop new ways of learning the language of the host country in order to successfully adapt to the unfamiliar cultural contexts.

Research also indicates that newcomers prefer culturally defined ways of managing mental health issues through supports from the extended family and community leaders (Falicov

2007; Kinzie, 2006). My research participants' help-seeking behaviours confirmed these findings. When Rachel was extremely overwhelmed by the huge responsibility of taking care of "everyone even though I was a kid myself", she went to her pastor. Kim and Sara relied heavily on their sponsors during those times when all they could do "was cry and cry", and Esther depended on her community members. Even when professional helpers were consulted and medications prescribed, Sara felt they were not helpful and eventually threw away the prescriptions. Evidence-informed interventions that are geared towards strengthening communities reflect the social work lens that encourages autonomy and self-determination and appreciates that communities have resources and insights that may be hidden to the mainstream service provision models (Agllias, 2011).

While it's very significant to have intra-psychic pathologies addressed and treated by professional clinicians, my research participants' reluctance to use mainstream mental health services remains an area that warrants further investigation so other alternative "healing" methods may be integrated. Critelli (2014) suggests approaches that are more familiar to most refugee women from Africa, such as traditional talk therapy, storytelling, conversational circles, drama, art, expressive movements, African poetry, music and dance. Such approaches could be implemented through cultural events, community potlucks, dance performances and other passion projects. As Critelli (2014) aptly observes, maintaining a "connection to one's original culture promotes resilience" (p .887).

Other reasons why refugee women may underutilize mainstream mental health services include the stigma associated with mental illness, limited language or idioms that articulate distress and the low priority that mental health may be given, considering all the other overwhelming needs (Critelli, 2014). My participants constantly reminded themselves that no

matter how stressful and overwhelming some situations were, they had to be strong for the children and other vulnerable members of the family who heavily depended on them.

6.6 Physical Disability among Refugee Women

Disability was another theme that emerged in my research. Three of my research participants live with significant physical disabilities: Nomi's partner, Sara and Kim. Sara and Kim seemed to have learnt to adapt to their limitations considerably well. Nomi, however, expressed dire frustration at the pain and heartache her husband has endured due to his visual impairment. She felt like he was a forgotten case, totally neglected by the very host country that had promised to resettle him.

My experience as a service provider has exposed me to significant barriers to services that make it very difficult for non-Canadian-born individuals to access disability benefits. Such barriers include not being a natural citizen and the age limit for applicability. In CFS, for example, some families are forced to make their vulnerable children permanent wards of the government agencies if they expect those children to access CLdS. Also, if those children's case managers do not apply for the services when the children turn 15, then the assessment and admission process may take as long as three years after the age of majority. Overall, the burden of care-giving for families with disabled members is overwhelming, especially to refugee families who have to contend with other unique resettlement challenges.

Hane (2009) and El-Lahib and Wehbi (2012) observe that while there has been significant activism challenging discriminatory immigration policies based on race, ethnicity, religion, class and sexual orientation, there has been very little activism on behalf of immigrants with disabilities. The researchers argue that government policies perpetuate the long-held stereotypical view of immigrants with disabilities as being the least deserving people who would cause excessive demand on Canada's health and social services. For example, when Kim

claimed she was informed she was inadmissible to Canada unless she had private sponsors, it was because immigration policies on disability were predominantly based on ableism (El-Lahib & Wehbi, 2012). For example, immigration policies indicate that individuals with a disability could be admitted to Canada only when adequate arrangement for their care and support are made by family members or if the immigrants are wealthy themselves (El-Lahib & Wehbi, 2012; Hane, 2009). Refugees with disabilities, according to the policy, may also come to Canada under private sponsorship.

Social work practices and policies should challenge ableism as manifest through discriminatory immigration policies. The selection process that is biased against people with disabilities need to be challenged, especially because Canada prides itself for being a land of opportunities and humanitarian policies (El-Lahib & Wehbi, 2012).

To summarize this discussion, it was clear these complex social-economic, emotional and psychological challenges compromised the mental well-being of my research participants considerably, leading to heightened stress, anxiety, fear, depression, lethargy, hopelessness and despondency. Their stories, however, depict resilient women who experienced these fluctuating emotions but also confronted the challenges with sheer hard work and an unrelenting determination to make things work. As Atwell et.al (2009) observe, despite the disappointment and disillusionment that most refugee families feel as they navigate a new culture, language and social bureaucratic systems, they are propelled forward by a strong sense of purpose and ambition on behalf of their children.

It could also be said that the women's capacity to overcome adversity is the hallmark of resilience. Rivera et al. (2016) describe resiliency as the ability to maintain competency, self-efficacy, agency, passion, and purposefulness in the face of risks and threats. The resilient individual is able to regain equilibrium after traumatic events, develop problem-solving skills

and remain persistent in the face of real or perceived failures (Rivera et al., 2016). My research participants exhibited resilience by turning adversity to strength; the same factors identified as the most challenging issues evolved from disempowering challenges to unstoppable driving forces towards successful resettlement.

For example, Nomi decided she was going to make sacrifices in order to provide for her family and her visually impaired husband. Sara determined to do everything possible to ensure that her two small boys achieved what she knew she would never achieve. Rachel decided she would never abandon her mother and older siblings who could not speak English. Kim did not let her disability stop her from working hard and confronting racism and bullying on her daughter's behalf, even when teachers turned a deaf ear to her plea. The strong bond the participants had developed with family members in the course of fleeing their countries, surviving the camps and now navigating landscapes that were completely unfamiliar seemed to become a deep motivation to succeed. It's evident that my participants fulfilled that cliché: "What doesn't kill you makes you stronger."

In order to enhance resiliency, it's arguable that effective service delivery models should identify the "it factor" that will propel the resettlement process forward and implement measures that would privilege and support the "it factor". In therapy practice, this has been theorized through the strengths perspective, where individuals or families are supported to identify those intra and external resources they have, which can be utilized to bring about positive change to the presenting problem. As Agllias (2011) observes, all human beings have strengths, capacities and abilities for growth in the face of adversity. It is unfortunate the mainstream therapeutic approaches are still too "expert-centred" (Hein, Rober, Adrianssens, & Verschueven, 2012).

Other factors that promote resiliency include social supports through community networks, family cohesion and positive peer relationships (Rivera et al., 2016; Walker et al.,

2014). My research participants identified community networks that had proved instrumental to their resettlement journey. It was noteworthy that even the two participants who had been sponsored by the government had developed strong connections with a faith-based community of friends who were pivotal in their resettlement, and who were fondly referred to as “sponsors.” The family re-union programs that have been implemented by Citizenship and Immigration Canada have their roots in the recognition that strong family ties play a significant role in successful resettlement (Hyndman et al., 2017). Governments should, however, not shift the burden of care to individual families or private sponsorship programs (Hyndman et al., 2017).

6.7 Study Limitations

This study underwent a significant shift from mental health coping strategies to resettlement challenges faced by African refugee women in Winnipeg. This shift was necessary in order to make the research more focused.

Language also limited the recruitment criteria and data collection process. I am aware that rich data could have been obtained from refugee women who were still learning English. However, engaging competent interpreters would have been a challenge due to limited resources. My research also proved to be too broad to be exhaustively handled. I still feel like I needed more than one interview in order to better understand the coping strategies and develop suggestions for future research. Availability for such extended interviews was, however, hampered by scheduling issues related to lack of time on the part of my participants.

Despite these limitations, my study findings are consistent with the existing literature. This is well demonstrated in the extensive literature I have used throughout the discussion.

7 Chapter 7: Recommendations and Conclusion

This chapter presents four main recommendations and implications for further research. The four main recommendations were made by the research participants. As a social worker and researcher, I affirm these recommendations in line with the social work lens which asserts that clients are the experts of their own circumstances and the helpers' task is to facilitate the process of identifying that expertise (Agllias, 2011).

From the findings and discussion, it was clear the participants were aware of services and practices that policy-makers could implement to alleviate the pain of resettlement for refugee communities. Nomi felt that since the refugee women are the experts with regard to their own needs, policy-makers needed to find creative ways of consulting with them, to discover the uniqueness of their needs and how they could be more effectively addressed. She suggested that planning a conference for and about refugee women, complete with workshops where refugee women could share their ideas would be a great way to empower the women of Winnipeg.

Sara emphasized the need for consistent follow-up with the newcomer families, especially in the first year, preferably by service providers who are culturally responsive to their needs. Rachel also agreed that one year is not enough for newcomers to learn English, find work and begin sustaining themselves. More preparation needs to go to the resettlement process if policy-makers want newcomers to succeed. Otherwise, as Sara observed, families will be coming to Canada and will experience significant resettlement difficulties if they are left to their own devices.

Kim indicated that policy-makers must hire people who are culturally competent with the ability to speak the language of refugees. For her, language was the main stumbling block to successful resettlement for refugee women. Interpretation needed be done by the right people,

and certainly not by the children, because, according to her, that practice is absolutely disempowering to the parents.

In summary, the recommendations included consistent and well-co-ordinated follow-up on the welfare of the refugee families; comprehensive preparation for the arrival of the refugees, including information on what to expect regarding housing, budgeting and employment; empowering refugee women through involvement in the policy-making decision process; and delivering services in culturally sensitive ways. Each of these recommendations is discussed below.

7.2 Streamlined, Well-co-ordinated and Timely Evaluation of Services

The suggestions the participants had on what could be done differently stemmed from their own experiences and their observations of other refugee families. This included the need for consistent follow-up on the newcomer families' progress by the service providers. Participants felt that assistance with housing, school registration for the children and other initial supports was helpful but not enough. The loneliness and isolation they felt after initial contact could have been eased by continued engagement with case managers or service providers. However, the participants emphasized this follow-up would be more helpful if a deliberate attempt was made to engage service providers who were familiar with the culture of the families they would be seeing. Sara, for example, insisted it was critical for service providers to follow-up with families after the one-year mark, especially if the family had children.

Other participants felt families should be given more information before they arrive in Canada, especially on the economic implications of housing, employment, and learning a new language and culture. Such information packages are provided, sometimes in languages that the migrating families are not familiar with. The support the government provided during the first year was not enough, according to the participants. All five women reiterated that service

provision, especially for language and interpretation, needed to be done by individuals who were culturally sensitive to the newcomers' needs. As Atwell et al. (2009) observe, the key to successful resettlement is the provision of “refugees with an understanding of the social and bureaucratic systems in their new environments in consistent and comprehensible ways” (p. 691).

7.3 Refugee Women and Empowerment

Empowering policies should be developed through deliberate consultation with refugee women in Winnipeg to understand and meet their resettlement needs. Such consultation, could happen through community forums with refugee leadership and cultural gate-keepers. Refugee women are also the best experts of their experience. Providing a forum where they would be supported to share ideas on best practices on resettlement makes sense. Echoing this argument, Walsh et al. (2016) emphasizes that “inclusion of vulnerable groups in the policy process sends the message that they matter, they have a stake in the society, and they have a voice and the right to be heard” (p. 892). Rivera et al. (2016) point out that such empowerment enhances self-efficacy among refugees, particularly when service providers incorporate the use of community elders as mentors and gatekeepers. As Philip and Reisch (2015) assert, environmental justice is the “fair treatment and meaningful inclusion of all people regardless of race, color or nationality in the development, implementation and enforcement of environmental laws, regulation and policies” (p. 474). Overall, social work practices need to embrace an empowerment, strengths and assets appreciation model of practice (Walker et al., 2014).

7.4 Use of Culturally Relevant Service Delivery Models

My research participants eloquently discussed the importance of cultural environments that support successful resettlement and integration of newcomers into the Canadian society. They pointed out incidences where cultural incompetence had negative outcomes to their resettlement

process, particularly in the area of housing, language and interpretation, and parenting. It is therefore clear that despite the abundant literature that has identified this significant need, service providers are still not fulfilling this important core value of social work practice (Canadian Association of Social Workers, 2015). In order to provide responsible and sustainable services, service providers need to integrate social-cultural theories into practice when dealing with newcomer families (Stewart, 2009).

Beiser (2009) also observes that culture has a lot to do with identifying service needs and determining what is (or what is not) included in articulating the core experience of suffering and distress in the process of resettlement. For example, the service providers who assisted my research participants with housing should have explained in a culturally responsive manner, that what was available within the participants' budget determined the kind of houses that were shown to them. Such sensitivity would have alleviated the feeling that participants were being offered housing in the poorest neighbourhoods because they were refugees from Africa.

Language use and interpretation services also need to be evaluated so refugee parents do not have to endure the disempowering impact of having their children interpret sometimes deep family secrets to school authorities, hospitals, courts and other institutions. Making more resources available for language interpretation would also prevent parents from exposing children to traumatic information in the processes of interpreting for their parents.

In summary, the recommendations on how the disrupted equilibrium could be restored included empowering resettlement policies that recognize the contribution the refugee women would make if included in decision-making processes. Services to the refugee women and their families need to be well-co-ordinated and outcomes evaluated in culturally responsive models. There is also the need to recognize and, where possible, incorporate services from informal

community support networks and gatekeepers who are sometimes more trusted by the newcomers than professional service providers.

7.5 Conclusion and Implications for Further Research

More research needs to be undertaken on how best to consult with the refugees themselves on effective ways of creating conducive environments to effective resettlement. This suggestion is well documented in the literature review, but as my research participants were very clear on the need to recognize them as the experts of their own needs, it is imperative to involve them in the implementation of culturally relevant interventions. Research on parenting programs has mushroomed in many sectors and disciplines (Shiffman, 2013). However, there is paucity of research that is focused mainly on refugee women and their parenting struggles even when there is evidence that most refugee families are composed of multiple, multi-generational members, which are mostly headed by lone mothers (Hyndman et al., 2017).

Further research also needs to be done on how services could be effectively implemented so CFS, schools and other social agencies do not inadvertently perpetuate the very challenges they are meant to protect the refugee parents from (Levi, 2014). Participants in this study suggested intentional collaboration with the newcomer parents and a healthy curiosity on the part of the CFS workers, teachers and health-care providers so they may discover ways of learning from other cultures, as long as those ways do not compromise child safety.

There are also research gaps on the impact of disability on newcomers, despite the fact that war trauma causes permanent disabilities to many refugees. Three out of the research participants are living with significant physical disabilities that are directly linked to war.

This research demonstrated that the same struggles that made resettlement very challenging for my participants were ironically turned into precipitating and perpetuating factors for successful integration. Therefore, there is need for further research on how such factors may

be privileged. For example, rather than viewing refugees as vulnerable individuals who need long years of experience before they can be integrated into the Canadian workforce or academia, the strength and resilience markers that propelled them forward through perilous times should be identified, dignified, affirmed, validated, honoured and supported. Such recognition would mitigate the pain of displacement for the refugee women and enhance successful social-economic integration into the mainstream society.

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Appendix A



Faculty of Social Work

Research Recruitment Poster

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR RESEARCH ON MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES AMONG REFUGEE WOMEN IN WINNIPEG AND THE COPING MECHANISMS THEY USE TO DEAL WITH THOSE CHALLENGES.

My name is Jane Kamabu. I am a Masters student in the Faculty of Social Work, University of Manitoba. I am seeking refugee women from Africa, who would be willing to share their experiences of being a refugee woman in Winnipeg. The discussion will be approximately one hour.

Please note the following criteria:

- Refugee women from African countries that have experienced armed conflict
- Ages 21-65
- Refugee women who have lived in Winnipeg for at least five years
- Interviews will be conducted using the English language

You will receive \$20.00 as a small token of appreciation for participating in this research.

Appendix B



Consent Form

Research Proposal: Exploring mental health challenges among refugee women in Winnipeg and the coping mechanisms they use to deal with those challenges

Researcher: Jane Kamabu

Research Supervisor: Dr. Regine King

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more information on the project, than what is included here, feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully.

You have been invited to be interviewed by the above researcher regarding your experiences as a refugee woman in Winnipeg and the effect the experience has had on your mental well-being. You will also be asked to discuss the mental health coping mechanisms that you use to deal with any mental health challenges you may have experienced as a refugee woman in Winnipeg. The primary goal of this research is to better understand the experience of being a refugee woman in different environments, discuss the mental health challenges that the experience presents and the coping mechanisms refugee women use to deal with the challenges. Such knowledge and understanding, the researcher hopes, might positively influence mental health services and promote policies and practices that are more inclusive, competent and culturally responsive. This research is in partial fulfillment of the degree of Masters of Social Work, under the supervision of Dr. Regine King at the University of Manitoba.

Interviews will be conducted mostly in the evenings, weekends or week days; depending on your availability, at a time and location that is convenient for you. The interview will be approximately forty-five minutes to one hour long. You will be asked to describe your experience of being a refugee woman in Winnipeg, and particularly the impact that the immigration journey has had on your mental well-being. You will also be asked to talk about the coping mechanisms that you may have used to deal with any mental health challenges that you may have experienced. Beside these two core questions, follow-up questions may be asked, related to how your surrounding social-economic environments have influenced your mental well-being or how such environments could be improved in order to promote and facilitate mental wellness. You are encouraged to speak freely and share your thoughts in any manner you see fit. You are also free to end the interview at any point or withdraw your consent without any fear of negative consequences.

With your consent, the interview will be audio recorded and notes will be taken. If you do not consent to being audio recorded, the interview will simply be hand-written.

Please note that sharing your experiences on the immigration process and the impact the experience has had on your mental well-being may lead to emotional distress. This researcher will be attentive to such discomfort and will be more than willing to halt the interview and allow you to either reschedule or withdraw from the research. On the other hand, it is possible that discussing the experiences, through this interview process may help to provide a safe space for you to reflect on your resettlement journey and provide more clarity on ways that mental health service providers and policy-makers can help create environments that are more conducive to mental-wellbeing. Another possible benefit of reflecting and sharing your experiences will enable you to identify triumphant moments in your journey that may have heightened your resilience and resolve.

On completion of all the interviews, a summary of the research findings and data analysis will be presented to my Research committee. Please be assured that no personal names, addresses, or identifying details will be revealed about you. Other research participants will be expected to commit to confidentiality. To help ensure anonymity, quotations will only be used in the study after removing names, addresses and other identifying details.

Besides this researcher, the only individuals who will have access to information collected from the research are the research supervisor and my examining committee. All information will be kept strictly confidential. Documents and audio recordings related to the interviews will be kept in a securely locked cabinet in this researcher's office. Electronic file versions of the transcripts will be stored for four years in this researcher's pass-word protected personal computer and destroyed thereafter. When transcribing and analyzing the interviews, the researcher will remove all personal identifiers. As a research participant, you have the option of receiving a copy of the final research findings through e-mail, fax or surface mail.

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding this research and freely agreed to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researcher from her legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and/or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or fear of consequences. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification on any new information throughout your participation.

The University of Manitoba may look at the research records to ensure that the research process is being done in a safe and proper way.

This research has been approved by the University of Manitoba Psychology/Sociology Research Ethics Board. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project please feel free to contact the Human Ethics Secretariat at the University of Manitoba. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

If you agree to each of the following, please place a check mark in the corresponding brackets. If you do not agree, leave the box blank:

I have read or had read to me the details of this consent form. ()

My questions have been addressed. ()

I, _____ (print name), agree to participate in this study. ()

I agree to have the interview audio-recorded. ()

I agree to be contacted by phone or e-mail if further information is required after the interview ()

I agree to have the findings (which may include quotations) from this project published or presented in a manner that does not reveal my identity. ()

I agree to be contacted for future research by this researcher should any other research opportunities arise ()

Do you wish to receive a final summary of the findings in approximately eight months?
() Yes () No

How do you wish to receive the summary? E-mail () Surface mail ()

Address: _____

E-mail address or Fax # (optional) _____

Participant's Signature _____ Date _____

Researcher's Signature _____ Date _____

Appendix C



Faculty of Social Work

Scripted response for research participants.

Hello and thank you for your interest in this study. I will take this time to tell you a little bit about myself and why I want to do research on this topic: but first, do you have any questions or issues that you might need me to clarify? (Questions and concerns will be addressed as they arise)

I am a Masters of Social Work research student seeking to understand more about the mental health challenges that you may have experienced as a refugee woman in Winnipeg and the coping mechanisms you may have used to deal with those challenges.

I welcome you to participate in the study with the hope that our time together will deepen my understanding of the challenges of becoming a refugee woman in Winnipeg. I am also interested in discussing any coping mechanisms you may have used as well as your views on how living environments could be improved to enhance the mental well-being of refugee women in Winnipeg. You will receive a \$20.00 honorarium as a token of appreciation for participating in this study, whether you answer all the questions or whether you withdraw from the research. The interview will be approximately one-hour long.

I am therefore requesting that we set up a date, time and venue that would be convenient for you? (Meeting date, time and venue that are convenient for the participant will be established).

Two days before our meeting, I will contact you to confirm our appointment. Please feel free to call or email me, should any questions or changes to our plan arise.

Once again, thank you very much for your interest in this study. Looking forward to meeting with you

Appendix D



Faculty of Social Work

Interview Guide

1. **Introduction and Housekeeping;** ensuring that the participant is comfortable. Brief description of the study; the rationale, goals and objectives. Clarifying issues or questions that the participant might have regarding the study and the interview process as well as providing practical information regarding time.
2. **Consent forms:** Discussing confidentiality and anonymity. Ample time will be provided for the participants to read through their copy discuss or ask questions till they are ready to sign the consent form.
3. Talking about the experience of being a refugee woman in Winnipeg, the mental health challenges and coping mechanisms that participants may be using to deal with the challenges.

A) How best would you describe the experience of being a refugee woman in Winnipeg?

B) Describe the impact that the experience has had on your mental well-being

C) What coping mechanisms have you utilized to deal with the challenge of leaving your country and beginning a new life in Winnipeg?

Ending: Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your resettlement journey here in Winnipeg? Do you think anything can be done to make the experience less challenging for the refugee women in Winnipeg? Any other final thoughts or concluding remarks?

Appreciation: Expressing gratitude and payment of the \$20.00 honorarium.

Follow-up: Offering to make a brief follow-up phone call the day after, to debrief on the interview session (This follow-up call or e-mail will also provide an opportunity for the

researcher do a quick well-being check related to potential for emotional distress after the interview).

- How best would you describe the experience of being a refugee woman in Winnipeg?
- Describe the impact that the experience has had on your well-being

Appendix E



List of available counselling services in Winnipeg (MH Resource Guide for Winnipeg, 2015)

Frequently Called Numbers

CMHA Winnipeg Phone Line a **204-982-6100**

- Information and Referral a
- Rights Consultant

WRHA Mobile Crisis Service a **204-940-1781**

TTY Deaf Access Line **204-779-8902**

Crisis Response Centre – 817 Bannatyne Ave. 24-hour walk-in

Klinic Crisis Line a **204-786-8686**

Klinic Sexual Assault Line **204-786-8631**

Manitoba Suicide Line a **1-877-435-7170**

Seneca House **204-231-0217**

Seneca Help Line (7 pm – 11 pm only) **204-942-9276**

Mood Disorders Association of Manitoba a **204-786-0987**

Anxiety Disorders Association of Manitoba a **204-925-0600**

Manitoba Schizophrenia Society **204-786-1616**

WRHA Community Mental Health Services **204-788-8330**

Health Links **204-788-8200**

Family Doctor Connection a **204-786-7111**

Addictions Foundation of Manitoba a **204-944-6200**

Employment & Income Assistance – Main Line a **204-948-4000**

Employment & Income Assistance – After Hours Emergencies **204-945-0183**

Youth Crisis Stabilization System **204-949-4777 or 1-888-383-2776**

