Settlement and Integration Experiences of Refugee Women in Winnipeg

by

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Table of Contents

Abstract

Women demonstrate remarkable levels of strength, courage and resilience as they persevere; navigating the migratory experience, establishing a new home and embracing opportunities to integrate into their new community. More times than not, this journey requires rising to the many challenges and expectations placed before them including learning a new language; sorting out how to navigate unfamiliar communities and systems such as transportation, education, and healthcare; and becoming financially responsible for their immediate family as well as loved ones back home or still in transition all while maintaining their parental and household roles. All of this is evidence of incredible tenacity and hope for the future, but the ability to endure is not without its challenges.

This study contributes to the field of emancipatory peacebuilding through the investigation of formal and informal resilience factors impacting the settlement and integration experiences of newcomer women in Winnipeg. The purpose is to learn from the wisdom of community through a lens of cultural humility to contribute to the growth of settlement services and empowerment of our community. The research facilitated two focus groups of shared language. Data drawn from the groups was analyzed for themes contributing to strength and resilience as well as challenges to be addressed. Despite the separate groups, clear themes were extracted as the groups shared remarkably similar responses.

Safety, spirituality, family, community, and diversity were found to be leading contributors to resilience. Challenges included barriers and isolation created by language, complexities in daily life including procurement of employment, navigating transportation systems and access to services and lifestyle and challenges to tradition such as parenting in a diverse community, and changes experienced in food and clothing sources. Despite the many challenges, study participants shared gratitude for their new home and for increased

opportunities for themselves and their family. Interest was expressed by all to further integrate by sharing culture and experiences with their Canadian neighbours as they desire meaningful participation and joint community building.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the women who participated in this research project for generously sharing their stories and their time, you are truly appreciated. The stories and laughter were a privilege to be a part of, as was your trust when sharing challenges and experiences of loss.

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Dedication

This thesis is an example of what can happen when you follow your heart and surround yourself with people who support, mentor, and uplift you. I dedicated it to my family Chris, Kristjana, Kailynd, Kadynce, Kye, Andrea, Ken, and Kathleen. Thank you for believing in me.

List of Acronyms

ACOMI - African Communities of Manitoba Inc.

AFTC - Aurora Family Therapy Centre

CMWI - Canadian Muslim Women's Institute

IDP - Internally Displaced Person

IED - Improvised Explosive Device

IRB - Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

IRCC - Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada

GAR - Government Assisted Refugee

KIFR – Kurdish Initiative for Refugees

LINC - Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada

RAP - Resettlement Assistance Program

UNAMA - United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan

UNHCR - United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

WCWRC - West Central Women's Resource Centre

Chapter 1 - Introduction

Over the past decade, the annual data sets from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) have indicated that the number of refugees worldwide has grown from 43.7 million forcibly displaced persons (UNHCR, 2022a) to over 100 million (UNHCR, 2022c), an alarming increase of more than double the number of individuals – men, women, and children – that have been forced to flee war torn milieus. These statistics include 27.1 million refugees forced to flee lands they once called home (UNHCR, 2021). At the time of writing, the UNHCR identifies 15 global emergencies causing immediate distress and upheaval (UNHCR, 2022a). Included are the ongoing crisis situations in Afghanistan where an estimated 24 million people are in critical need of humanitarian aid (UNHCR, 2022b) and Ukraine where are records of nearly 5 million refugees across Europe and more than 7 million people are estimated to be displaced internally (UNHCR, 2022d). These current reports and figures represent a somber reflection of growing conflict and its cost in human capital, disrupted services, and diverted economic spending (Buvinic et al., 2013).

What is not reflected in these statistics is the gender imbalance that exists as women and children make up 80 percent of the global population of refugees and internally displaced persons (Buvinic et al., 2013; Snyder, 2011). This comes because of targeted violence against civilians where women comprise 90 percent of conflict casualties (Snyder, 2011). Gender injustice does not end at the site of conflict, for many women violence and unrest continue in the pursuance of peace whether it be due to post-direct violence or migratory settlement.

For years, Canada has played a significant role in providing a place of refuge for those who have been forced to flee due to war, violence, and persecution (IRCC, 2018) although research scholars suggest its reputation as a welcoming humanitarian country can sometimes be

debatable (Melnyk & Parker, 2021). Canadian attitudes towards newcomers can vary dramatically from those who assert there is a moral responsibility to welcome and support refugees (Ghahremani, & Liew, 2021) to those who live in fear of changing social landscapes and traditions or threats to employment and economic security as was revealed in a 2019 poll conducted by Global News (Vomiero & Russell, 2019). Results from the same poll indicated that 54 percent of Canadians feel that the country is too welcoming to immigrants despite the lack of evidence to support any of these claims.

Refugees arrive in Canada from various countries of origin. In recent years' primary sources have included African countries such as Sudan, Somalia, Eritrea, and the Democratic Republic of Congo; and Middle Eastern countries such as Syria, Iran, Iraq, and Afghanistan (UNHCR, 2020). In 2019 (last year of settlement unaffected by the Covid 19 pandemic) Canada resettled 30,087 refugees, 18,443 protected persons who were granted asylum, and an additional 4,681 individuals for compassionate and humanitarian reasons (IRCC, 2020). Despite the ongoing processing of applications, there continues to be a growing back log as new applications outnumber those that are closed. Data posted by the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRB) states that 87,270 applications were pending at the end of 2019. It is unknown how many of these applications continue to carry forward from previous years, only that the backlog includes all unfinalized claims dating back to 2012. There is no explanation as to why a decade long backlog exists or to the nature of duration for the average claim.

The majority of Canada's refugee and protected person resettlement occurred in Ontario, Quebec, and Alberta. While not the forerunner in terms of numbers, Manitoba continues to welcome refugees to many receiving communities (IRCC, 2018). Settlement data provided by the Government of Manitoba (2020) states the average number of refugees landing annually is

between 1,500 and 2,200. Exceptions to date include 2016, which saw the arrival of more than 3,700 persons in response to the Syrian crisis, and 2020 when there was a significant reduction in refugee landings (600) due to interruptions in flights and services because of the Covid 19 pandemic. Currently, data is not yet available to determine the settlement impact of Canada's commitment to receive at least 40,000 refugees from Afghanistan (IRCC, 2022a) and the development of accessible migration streams for those fleeing Ukraine (IRCC, 2022b) although both initiatives are currently underway.

Between 2018 and 2020, Manitoba received 3,618 refugees from source countries all over the world including Eritrea, Ethiopia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Iraq, Somalia, and Syria. Multi-year patterns of settlement have resulted in a diverse population throughout the province from urban centres to rural towns (Government of Manitoba, 2020). Over time, many newcomers have experienced successful settlement and integration, contributing to communities through the sharing of culture, economic development and job creation, advocacy, formal social service provision, and informal social service supports for incoming and existing newcomers of their respective and neighbouring ethnocultural communities. These informal networks are often critical sources of information necessary to meet the basic needs of newly arrived refugees as they often provide implicit trust because of shared language and experience (Simich et al., 2005). The support provided by leaders and neighbours of shared ethnic backgrounds is an invaluable resource necessary to bridges gaps existing because of challenging systems and language barriers. As a result, improved access to resources and services creates foundational support in rebuilding fractured networks (Hynie et al, 2011).

Despite a broad spectrum of existing settlement support services ranging from employment support, language acquisition, and Canadian system navigation; and the informal

network within individual ethnocultural communities, many families continue to struggle in their adjustment to life in Canada. It should be noted that there is an advantage to transitioning to a multicultural society opposed to a homogenous one; however, challenges may still exist in relation to health, religion, and dietary practices (Pickren, 2014). Access to necessary health services can be difficult due to wait times and difficulties finding appropriate language services. Space for religious gathering or prayer may an issue outside the home and familiar foods can be difficult to locate. Further difficulties might include the introduction of a new language, culture, societal expectations, and often new familial roles as parents often experience a loss of skill acknowledgement and children tend to adapt to their new environment and acquire language at a faster rate resulting in a reversal of roles as they help their parents navigate difficult and confusing systems (Stewart & Martin, 2018). These intense adaptations further complicate traumatic experiences that may have occurred due to conflict in the country of origin, transition struggles during migration, and the complex layers of loss of loved ones, home, and traditions) (Shishehgar, et al., 2017).

Research investigating the impact and importance of social networks reveals that post-resettlement isolation is often felt more profoundly by women (Hynie et al., 2011; Shishehgar et al., 2017; Simich et al., 2005;) resulting in feelings of loneliness and disconnection due to the challenges of navigating difficult systems, coping with loss, and lack of meaningful and consistent social connections. Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) play an important role in providing settlement support to help mitigate challenges that contribute to isolation such as housing, language training, employment assistance and much more (Chung, 2013). Problematic though, is that these supports can be limited due to mandates, funding, and accessibility. Many researchers (Chung, 2013; Shishehgar et al., 2017, Simich et al. 2005) recognize the importance

of informal networks such as religious and ethnocultural communities when it comes to helping newcomers find a sense of belonging in their new home.

This research intends to investigate the local settlement and integration experiences of women with refugee experiences from different ethnocultural communities. The purpose was to identify themes including sources of strength and support provided by formal and informal social support systems, that encourage meaningful engagement in the local community through participation in employment, education, volunteer, or social and recreational opportunities. When considering the experiences of women, it is necessary to consider the gender specific context of women as their experience pre-violent conflict, wartime, and post-violent conflict are generally quite specific and unique to those of men (Sjoberg, 2017). As such, a feminist theoretical framework will be applied. This framework provides a context in which to consider race, class, and ethnicity as well as gender and more specifically how power imbalances exist as a result (Ackerly et al., 2006). Upon analysis, data was considered in in relation to identity and how this is determined in of settlement and the experience of integration in relation to functioning as described in Nussbaum's (2011) capabilities approach. Through this lens, we pose questions of what opportunities are available to women in the community to ensure access to social relations, economic participation, and independence (and are they accessible to women who may not have language, childcare, financial means and/or transportation easily available) and are they being accessed. If it is determined that the opportunities are not available, the follow up query is to determine where responsibility lies for ensuring that these issues get rectified.

Introduction to the Study

This study was conducted through the lens of two sectors, settlement, and education. Many years ago, as I was working toward developing my skills as an educator, I enrolled in a post-baccalaureate course focused on supporting war-affected youth in Canadian classrooms. This was an eye-opening experience that challenged my sense and understanding of social justice and human rights. Since then, I have embraced learning and volunteer opportunities to continue developing understanding of peacebuilding and refugee experiences. In 2017, I joined the research team of Dr. Stewart as a research assistant. Dr. Stewart was leading a study spanning three provinces investigating experiences of Syrian youth and families. Having worked in alternative learning environments in the education system, I understand the importance of working with and supporting the whole family as a unit. As such, stories shared in this project contributed to my desire to better understand the experiences of newcomer women.

Four years ago, I became formally employed in the settlement sector with Aurora Family Therapy Centre facilitating the Vicarious Trauma and Resilience Initiative. In this role, I have been invited to guide and collaborate in leading youth and women's groups focused on wellness through discussion and art. In every case I am humbled in the presence of the women I share space with as they talk about their experiences and hopes while sharing laughter and painful memories. In my vicarious trauma support role, I often witness the struggles of service providers who are deeply affected by the stories and challenges of their clients. Again, these interactions contribute to the hope of developing a deeper understanding of women's experiences so that their stories and recommendations can be shared to effectively support meaningful integration with accessible supports empowering women and their families.

Chapter Overviews

Chapter one begins presentation of the study discussing the precarious nature of human security and ever-increasing number of individuals forced to flee their homes due to violent conflict. Currently, there are estimated to be more than a 100 million people who have lost the place they once called home. It is essential to note that gender imbalance significantly impacts women living in conflict. This chapter discusses Canada's involvement in hosting refugees and some of the misconceptions of public opinion. Looking at the diversity of Manitoba it is clear that the province has become home to many ethnocultural communities working together and alongside agencies to provide welcoming experiences to those who follow in their footsteps. Chapter one introduces the purpose of this research: Exploring the settlement and integration experiences of women from two different ethnocultural communities in Winnipeg.

Chapter two provides context for the gendered nature of women experiencing violent conflict and the impact this has on their experience from fleeing home, moving through transitions, and arrival and settlement in host communities. It begins to explore the many roles' women may play in such conflicts including as participants in activities that support armed conflict or as combatants themselves. The shared examples of conflict demonstrate the impact of violence against women in the current conflicts in Afghanistan and Ukraine as well as the difficulties of reintegrating into home communities after being victimized as a pawn of conflict as in the case of girls in Sierra Leone. This chapter continues by considering a feminist perspective on human security and discussing the importance of including marginalized voices in peacebuilding talks and strategies. Chapter two closes by exploring examples of support provided by settlement agencies and established ethnocultural community organizations.

In chapter three a review of the literature provides focus on the importance and impact of social networks as a key factor in settlement success and navigation. It discusses how the isolation of refugee women is one of the most prominent risk factors for refugee mental health and a reoccurring finding in the research data. Language is identified to be a contributing factor as it presents a multidimensional issue directly affecting access to education, employment, and social opportunities. Without undermining the resilience, adaptability, and sheer determination of women with refugee experience, their knowledge is sought to provide important feedback to address gaps in existing resources and services. Another consideration is the *healthy immigrant effect,* a phenomenon known to impact many newcomers in the early years following their arrival. One consideration for the effect is a lack of social support and community connection. The importance of such social connections is a key consideration as lack of relationships often lead secondary migration to be close to family, friends, or community even if it means giving up other opportunities.

Chapter four discusses the methodology of the study. It explains the positionality of the researcher and the process by which the study was conducted. This is an introduction to the participants and the important role of the interpreters who helped bridge language barriers enabling us all to share together. There are considerations of the difficulties presented by using a virtual platform because of the current pandemic and how those challenges were overcome to create cohesive groups that shared and supported each other. The method of analysis from recording to transcription to theme development is also shared.

In chapter five themes and findings of the study are discussed. This section begins by recognizing how several findings relating to barriers in meaningful integration have been reproduced. Themes identified in the research are discussed including finding refuge in Canada,

the participants appreciation of Canadian diversity, the role of prayer and spirituality in providing internal strength and calm, and the importance of family safety and wellbeing. Challenges that are experienced through day-to-day activities in Winnipeg are also shared. Findings supporting the value and support system provided by community in terms of both location (neighbourhoods and buildings) and culture (language and traditions) are also discussed. This chapter closes with reflections on the limitations of the study and its design.

Finally, chapter six concludes the thesis with final thoughts concisely summarizing key findings drawn from the research. Recommendations for integrative opportunities for newcomers and their Canadian-born neighbours are distributed as well as considerations for the process of information sharing for new arrivals as shared by the participants in the study. Reflections on potential future research are given in a message of advocacy that we continue to strive to learn and do better to support successful integration and participations in our communities as we move forward together.

Conclusion

Over a hundred million people are currently unable to return to the place they once called home. This is an unsettling reality and reminder of the current unrest that exists around the world. While Canada celebrates diversity and has many opportunities to offer refugees finding their way across its borders in pursuit of safety and opportunities, there continue to be many challenges to resettlement including difficulty navigating systems, isolation and concern for loved ones who still find themselves in their country of origin, migrated to a different location, or somewhere in transition.

The impact of the migration experience is felt more profoundly by women who are often targeted and victimized at the hands of perpetrators as they look to exert power and control over the conflict, the women, and the men. Even when fleeing these situations, the challenges, including violence, continue in transition and the pursuit of safety. That said, these women are so much more than the negative and terrifying experiences they have had. This is an important consideration when developing services directed toward resettling refugee women. These women have agency, strength and courage and desire opportunities to engage with the community around them. If settlement agencies and the greater community are to provide the most meaningful and effective support possible, it is imperative that the women's voices be amplified so they can be heard and understood while providing important feedback to service providers, policy makers and funders.

Chapter 2 - Context

Introduction

A brief background of gendered experiences is important to consider as it represents the fear, vulnerability, strength, courage, and perseverance that women experience throughout the many stages of conflict and migration. Equally important is remembering that all women experiencing forced migration are not a homogenous group and no two experiences are the same. For example, some women may choose not to be labeled as a refugee as that does not define who they are while others wear the term proudly as part of their journey, and a notable reflection of their resilience. This is not to say there is a particular way one should identify, only that there is an opportunity for further understanding of how these identities are manifested among migrant individuals or groups.

Violent Conflict as a Gendered Experience

The experience of women in areas of conflict varies. While overwhelmingly represented as victims of violence, it should not be ignored that women too, are capable of violent engagement and have been known participants as fighters and leaders - should social order allow (Pankhurst, 2003). Cook-Huffman and Snyder (2017) remind us that women throughout history have served as combatants, suicide bombers, weapon makers and distributers, and active perpetrators of discrimination and slavery. In their studies of northern Uganda, Sierra Leone, and Mozambique, McKay and Mazurana (2006) found that girls in fighting forces generally acquired traditional roles of cooking, cleaning, and serving men; however, armed conflict provided opportunity for women and girls to gain new skills and achieve positions of power not otherwise available to them through participation as active fighters. That said, research widely indicates that it is more common for women to work towards peacebuilding and minimizing the impacts of

violence to improve the overall human experience (Sandole-Staroste, 2011). At times, this may include capitalizing on opportunities to break away from the patterns of historical cultural norms conducive to passive or oppressive practices to redefine themselves into roles as active participants and leaders in their communities (Pankurst, 2003). Having said that, their contributions and presence often go unacknowledged or are dismissed post-peace accord as attempts are made to return to what is an often-male dominated pre-conflict social order (Sandole-Staroste, 2011).

Despite the forementioned discussion, women are vulnerable to perpetrators of violence at all stages of conflict (Abuelaish & Godoy-Ruiz, 2019). The safety, security, and movement of women are directly impacted by the existence of armed conflict affecting access to necessities such as food and healthcare (Abuelaish & Godoy-Ruiz (2019). More direct effects are often a result of sexual and gender-based violence such as domestic violence, rape-war, prostitution, and sex-trafficking. In the study previously mentioned, McKay and Mazurana (2006) indicate that nearly all girls who had been abducted or were fighting alongside men reported experiencing sexual violence. Additional examples of such atrocities during violent conflict can be seen in the sexual violence perpetrated in Darfur in an effort to change the colour of children (Price, 2019); the targeted capture, torture and slavery of Yazidi women in the attempted genocide by Daesh (Global Justice Centre, 2016); the trafficking and murder of Indigenous women in Canada (Walsh, 2017); and the brutalization of women in the Central African Republic (Human Rights Watch, 2017) to name only a few. Sexual violence and rape have become known war tactics used in attempts of ethnic cleansing and enemy punishment where they are used as instruments to shame men in cultures where honour is considered of utmost importance (Leatherman, 2011). In circumstances where women and girls continue to live in regions of violence and unrest there are

long-term impacts to safety, physical and mental health, and access to economic opportunities as indicated by the increase of domestic violence, reduced life expectancy of women, and exponential increase of child marriages in Syria (Abuelaish & Godoy-Ruiz, 2019).

Women and children have been significant casualties of war and regression in the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), a UN Special Political Mission established to support sustainable peace processes and development, released a report in July 2021 stating the severe increase in civilian casualties as they had reached an all-time high since recording began in 2009. It stated, "more women and children were killed and injured than ever before…" (UNAMA, 2021). The cause of casualties is said to be attributed to use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) triggered by pressure plates, ground fire, targeted attacks, and air strikes (UNAMA, 2021).

On May 24, 2022, the Security Council released a statement indicating they,

> …expressed deep concern regarding the increasing erosion of respect for the human rights and fundamental freedoms of women and girls in Afghanistan by the Taliban, including through imposition of restrictions that limit access to education, employment, freedom of movement, and women's full, equal, and meaningful participation in public life… (UN Security Council, 2022).

Despite these dangers, women continue to be beacons of strength and support. In an impassioned statement provided by the UN High Commissioner of Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet (2022) declared,

> The women of this country are often portrayed in the international fora and media as victims. In fact, Afghan women have – in the face of war, extreme poverty and

> unspeakable violence and discrimination – been working tirelessly to protect and provide for their families and communities. They have been threatened and attacked for speaking up and denied and excluded from positions of power and decision-making, but this has not stopped them from advocating courageously for their rights and creating networks of support. They are not passive bystanders.

Prior to Russia's attack on Ukraine, women were considered the more vulnerable of the population being most social assistance recipients, providers of unpaid domestic labour and on the losing end of pay disparities because of gender (UN Women, 2022). Conflict in the Eastern region dating back to 2014 had seen more than 1.5 million internally displaced persons prior to recent escalations. It is reported that more than 60 percent of these IDP's are women and children with limited access to necessary services such as health care and housing. While courage, leadership and strength are again displayed with many women choosing to stay and fight or remain at the forefront of humanitarian efforts supporting others, it is estimated that more than 54 percent of individuals requiring humanitarian support are women (UN Women, 2022).

Violence often continues to be experienced as part of the migratory journey as is the case for migrants fleeing the Northern Triangle of Central America by way of Mexico where they are at significant risk of being kidnapped, robbed, or even murdered (McLean, 2020). Threats continue to permeate as surviving the journey to designated displacement camps does not assure safety. Here, once again, women and girls are threatened with the risk of violence, trafficking and exploitation in a space established for refuge (Buvinic et al., 2013; Wilmer, 2019).

Post-direct violence insecurity continues the gendered discourse of women and may be largely attributed to the notable absence of women in peace negotiations. Victims of abduction

who have been impregnated or experienced sexual violence may experience shaming and exclusion upon return to their home communities where they are isolated and receive limited access to medical services and other psychosocial supports (McKay & Mazurana, 2006). Those who have experienced changes in roles and freedoms during conflict may be forced to regress back into pre-conflict gender roles with little to no recognition of contributions as efforts are made to reestablish previous norms. In addition, new tensions may arise as opposing sides attempt to navigate efforts to co-exist (Pankhurst, 2003).

Post-direct violence experiences are further complicated by the loss of men and children, forced displacement, loss of income and assets, and health implications due to increased risks of exposure to disease, malnutrition, and poor sanitation coupled with the limited availability of health services (Buvinic et al., 2013; Snyder, 2011). Such limitations often result in issues to women's reproductive health including gynecological concerns, unplanned pregnancies, preterm childbirth, and maternal mortality.

Loss of men because of conflict creates disruptions in the available workforce and a disproportionate number of women (including widows) in a population (Buvinic et al., 2013) requiring women to take on new or expanded roles as heads of households and sole providers of basic needs including food, shelter, healthcare, education, and care of elderly or ill family members (Snyder, 2011). During post-peace accord settlement, these responsibilities, and the need to procure employment may interfere with opportunities to access resources such as language classes and employment/skills training, that could ultimately improve circumstances. In addition, contradicting expectations, and freedoms of women between traditional culture and that of the host country may create circumstances of moral distress that can be difficult to navigate (Deacon & Sullivan, 2009).

Experiences of racism and discrimination can also be a disproportionately gendered experience. In a 2022 report released by the Manitoba Islamic Association, it was found that 62 percent of 190 people surveyed disclosed experiencing Islamophobia (Sotiriadou & Ebakri, 2022). The gender distribution of that 62 percent was 73 percent female to 27 percent male. These experiences reportedly increased for women who chose to wear cultural clothing such as a hijab. Women participating in the survey reported experiences of verbal profanities, being spat on and encountering other threats of physical harm (Sotiriadou & Ebakri, 2022).

Despite such experiences, women of the past and present continue to show remarkable levels of resilience and perseverance. Many choose to engage in political and peacebuilding efforts to affect change and ensure past (and present) transgressions of violence do not reoccur. Many rise to the challenge of their new roles supporting households, expanded expectations of caregiving in homes and communities, acquiring or further developing language(s), and becoming economically independent. Some do not. For others the loss of loved ones, culture, home, and independence becomes a crippling experience of isolation and deterioration of physical and mental health.

A Feminist Perspective on Human Security

Betty Reardon (2019) identifies four conditions for human security or the "maintenance and continuation of human life" (p. 19). These are a sustaining environment, ability to meet physical needs, respect for individual and group identity, and protection from harm (enduring and impending). Reardon further asserts that existing inequality due to patriarchal practices and systems along with a focus on provision of arms and military readiness which creates a climate of negative peace suggesting an absence of personal violence (Galtung, 1969) yet human security

remains threatened. The same framework visited through a feminist lens indicates the need to include marginalized voices when assessing basic needs and to focus on the wellness of the group over the individual (Reardon, 2019). Such a perspective reflects the need to address power imbalances that may exist in post-peace accord peacebuilding and policy making. Such imbalances carry little logic when we consider the interdependence that exists between men and women, even in times of conflict (Byrne & Senehi, 2012).

Nussbaum (2000) recognizes that women in many parts of the world experience less support than men in terms of primary functions while, at the same time, experiencing increased barriers to active and meaningful participation in the workplace, politics, and social opportunities. Rather than being seen as independent and contributing members of society, their existence may be seen as functional (i.e., caregivers, vessels for sex and reproduction). The capabilities approach (Nussbaum, 2000) applies a feminist framework in key areas: life, bodily health, bodily integrity, imagination and thought, emotion, practical reason, affiliation, play and control over one's environment. She claims it is imperative that societies promote opportunities, significant freedoms, and choice as a way of addressing entrenched social injustice and inequity, particularly when they are a result of discrimination or marginalization (Nussbaum, 2011). A further explanation of functioning within this framework will be provided later as a method of analyzing participation and opportunity in our community.

Refugee Women in Winnipeg and Services

Winnipeg is home to many newcomers support services for refugee men, women, and children. This includes services to support housing needs, language acquisition, employment, parenting, mental health, and wellness and more. Often, refugees are met when they arrive at the

airport by a settlement worker assigned by the Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP) at Accueil Francophone. In addition to a settlement working, government assisted refugees (GARs) are met by a clinician from the Psychosocial Settlement Needs Assessment Program (also called Dove of Peace) from Aurora Family Therapy Centre. Together, this team works to build relationships and provide necessary resources in collaboration with other organizations as required.

For many newcomers, there is an established ethnocultural community in the city that is available for information and support. Some organizations are formally established and provide contact persons and programming for their respective communities. For example, African Communities of Manitoba Inc. (ACOMI) provides support for filing taxes, labour market training for women, youth programming connecting young people with mentors and opportunities, and has a Community Wheels program that helps reduce transportation barriers preventing youth from accessing community programming. Bi-weekly trips to Winnipeg Harvest, a local foodbank are accessible for members utilizing their services (https://africancommunities.ca).

The Kurdish Initiative for Refugees (KIFR) supports newcomer families by providing programming for children and youth, sponsorship support for refugees seeking settlement in Winnipeg, settlement service support to help with information sharing, transition, and volunteer opportunities to further help newcomers meet people and integrate into their new city. KIFR also facilitates annual summer programs for youth to support learning, build skills and enhance relationships. These programs are not only a good opportunity for youth but provide secondary support for caregivers who may be needing childcare for work or other necessary activities (https://kurdishinitiative.ca).

These are only 2 examples of the many community-level non-profit organizations working to build skills and provide resources to improve the lives of newcomers, build community relations and ease the transition experience of those calling Winnipeg home. Their ability to reach community members is remarkable and it cannot be understated that their efforts were imperative during the COVID-19 pandemic. During this time, information was translated and shared through virtual meetings and social media campaigns to ensure accurate information was being received regarding health practices and restrictions. Beyond safety measures, extraordinary measures were taken by community leaders to ensure newcomers in the community were able to access basic needs and vaccination services.

The services benefiting women are many and include programming for children and youth, employment, wellness, and healthcare services just to name a few. In some cases, organizations are focused on providing safe spaces and resources to women while also offering practical services such as childminding while caregivers attend programs. This allows the women to focus on the training or information at hand rather than trying to manage tasks and children simultaneously. A sampling of organizations providing services to support women in the community will be described here.

Aurora Family Therapy Centre

Aurora Family Therapy Centre (AFTC) provides a variety of programs and services including clinical support through the Dove of Peace program and opportunities to engage in

group programming through the Newcomer Community Development Program. This program facilitates groups developed based on the needs and recommendations of the community that focus on information sharing and community building. Intercultural groups provide opportunities to meet a diverse group of people and practice language skills while also receiving important information. All groups are supported by interpreters when facilitators are not able to communicate in the language of the participants. The demographics of community groups are also determined by the preferences of participants as much as possible. Some groups are co-ed while others are for men, and some are for women. Group facilitators often partner with other agencies to cover a variety of topics. Some of these sessions might include storytelling, Canadian law, sponsoring family members, and relationships and sexuality. If concerns arise or are disclosed in a group, facilitators work to make meaningful connections with the appropriate resources. Important and meaningful relationships are established within the groups, increasing the network and circle of support of the participants (https://aurorafamilytherapy.com/).

Canadian Muslim Women's Institute

The Canadian Muslim Women's Institute (CMWI) is a non-profit organization committed to the empowerment of women. Services from this organization include translation and interpreter support; social programs supporting mental health and wellness, peer connections, preschool play, and literacy through family programs; financial empowerment programs; and employment skills training. Women may attend employment programs for training in industrial sewing, culinary skills, and child minding. Additional certifications can be received in CPR/First Aid, Food Handling, Workplace Health and Safety and nonviolent conflict

resolution. Some programs require minimum language skills such as the ability to read and write in English or a language benchmark of 3 or higher. Training programs are offered at scheduled times throughout the year and childminding is provided for women attending the programs.

In addition to these programs, CMWI manages a donation centre where clothing and household items can be procured by clients at no cost. A food pantry that includes Halal options can be accessed for those requiring support. This organization offers services to newcomer women and long-time community residents in an environment supporting diversity and inclusion(https://cmwi.ca).

West Central Women's Resource Centre

West Central Women's Resource Centre (WCWRC) is a women-centred community resource focused on the empowerment and inclusion of women. This organization has a broad range of community support programs assisting with issues related to employment, housing, family support, food security, health, and gender-based violence. They also provide newcomer focused services which will be the focus here. Some of these services include individual settlement support, language classes and conversation circles for practicing English, employment training, access to healthcare, and support for those experiencing gender-based violence. WCWRC aids navigating rental supports so tenants understand their rights and what subsidies might be available to them. There are also supports to help manage income assistance applications. The Centre offers family programs working to build community. This is further amplified by offering volunteer opportunities supporting skill building and connection for the women taking part (https://wcwrc.ca/newcomer-services).

MOSAIC Newcomer Family Resource Network

Mosaic offers language and parenting programs for newcomer families. Language classes are provided for beginner through intermediate levels through the Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) program, a federal program supporting language development in the pursuit of benchmark standards for education and employment purposes. In the beginner classes social networks are developed as students learn language required to meet basic needs such as grocery shopping. Spots in language classes are prioritized for parents and caregivers requiring pre-school age childcare which is provided onsite for those attending the programs.

Parenting programs offered by Mosaic run 8 to 10 weeks on a continuing calendar. Several programs are offered with focuses on parenting in Canada, positive discipline, mental health promotion for children, literacy, and play. In home preschool programs are available for parents who would like to work on literacy development and school readiness skills with their preschool children. These programs provide opportunities for parents to connect with others, enhancing their social network while also building skills in themselves and their children (mosaicnet.ca).

This is a small sampling of services available in the Winnipeg region. Overall, the services available appear to be robust, but considerations of limitations must also be considered. Some limitations may include changes in funding at the federal and provincial levels, high caseloads, strict mandates, service zoning established by IRCC, and knowledge of their availability by the communities they are meant to serve. Although our focus here is the city of Winnipeg, it is important to recognize that there are many centres providing settlement services located throughout the province of Manitoba. A few examples include Westman Immigrant

Services located in Brandon; Regional Connections with locations in Morden, Winkler, Dauphin, and Altona; Eastman Immigrant Services supporting Steinbach and the Interlake; and Thompson Newcomer Settlement Services serving northern regions.

Conclusion

Willingly or coerced, it can be said that women have been participants in active conflict. Most often, those working alongside fighting forces take on traditional gender roles such as cooking, cleaning, and serving men. Sometimes, conflict provides opportunities for women to break historical patterns and traditional gender roles to engage as active leaders in their communities. Unfortunately, when the fighting stops, many are reverted to pre-conflict roles with little acknowledgement of their contributions supporting the community during the war. That said, women continue to be vulnerable to violence when forced to migrate. This may happen during the transitional journey, at established camps meant for safety along the way, and even in the new host country.

Post-peace accord, women may find themselves in new roles, particularly if men have been casualties of violence, where they are primary caregivers to children and other family members as well as the main provider of financial income. Having to work to support themselves and extended family can get in the way of opportunities such as training or language classes that might help better their situation. Feminist perspectives in human security help us understand the importance of including marginalized voices in the process of emancipatory peacebuilding (Reardon, 2019). The inclusion of women's voices in peacebuilding comes at all levels from place of conflict to new host communities where opportunities can be made available through formal and informal settlement and social service institutions.

Chapter 3 - Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter reviews literature relevant to the settlement and integration experiences of refugee women. A strong emphasis is placed on the social aspect of integration as the importance of relationships and social capacity cannot be understated. Relationships are discussed in terms of formal systems such as settlement service providers and informal systems such as community connections and leaders. The implications of social isolation caused due to language and financial barriers are considered, particularly related to the healthy immigrant effect. Several studies are shared that support the need for connection and access to community services. The important role women play as peacebuilders is also discussed. Frameworks for the research are provided to contextualize the understanding of resilience, social identity, and emancipatory peacebuilding in the experiences of refugee women.

Post-Migration Settlement and Integration

A study focused on the well-being of refugee women in Toronto (Hynie et al., 2011) found that participants were often able to identify at least one person in their lives that could be called upon to provide support and strength (e.g., friend, family member, service provider). Despite this, social isolation still emerged as a prominent theme as interviewees expressed feelings of helplessness and distress associated with levels of understanding in terms of how to access support and services (and what is available), stigma from friends and family associated with asking for help that would exacerbate isolation by reducing immediate network, and loss of extended family supports because of migration. In a review of research focused on the settlement experience of refugee women from 2005 to 2014 (Shishehgar et al., 2017), language was noted

to be a multidimensional factor contributing to social and economic exclusion as proficiency in communicating directly affects women's ability to access education, employment, recreation – all networks providing opportunities for greater involvement and belonging – and general independence. The importance of these implications on people's lives cannot be understated as the World Health Organization (2018) recognizes social isolation in integration amongst the highest risk factors for refugee mental health during integration.

While it is important not to underestimate the resilience and adaptive skills of many refugees (Pickren, 2014), comprehension of such difficulties implies a responsibility to examine the experiences of refugee women and their families to recognize and respond to gaps in services and the need for further development of social support systems with sustainable funding and necessary resources. Successful settlement must promote healthy integration experiences that build on independence, connectivity, and empowerment opposed to relative safety determined merely by the absence of active violence.

Healthy Immigrant Effect

Other notable research includes a critical examination of the "healthy immigrant effect," foundational findings identifying the importance of social supports in the settlement experience and social capital. The "healthy immigrant effect" refers to the phenomenon of a significant decline in immigrant health upon arriving to a receiving country, such as Canada, in as little as two years' time despite landing in an optimal state of health that is often considered better than the Canadian average (McDonald & Kennedy, 2004; Wang & Hu, 2013; Wang, 2014; Vang et al., 2015). The optimal health on arrival may be reflective of selection procedures prior to approval for migration; however, there is little evidence to suggest that immigrants are denied

mobility based on existing health concerns (McDonald & Kennedy, 2004). While the existence of the decline in health status appears to be conclusive, factors contributing to the regressive state of health for newly settled immigrants may be attributed to acculturation – the adaptation of a Canadian lifestyle; experiences of disparity and discrimination in neighbourhoods (Wang, 2014) and barriers to physical health services resulting from inaccessibility, language, and gender safe spaces (Wieland et al., 2011) remain somewhat speculative. In addition, reviewed literature does not take into consideration the differing experience of refugees, specifically those who have experienced violence and trauma or the physical and mental health implications of social isolation.

Implications of Social Support

The work of Simich (2003, 2010) identifies social support from family and ethnocultural communities as a critical determinant of mental health among newcomers. Recognition of the importance of these supports often begins premigration as immigration officers attempt to move individuals to locations of known family support. In addition, these supports are sought out to be networked hubs of information and points of contact for integration and settlement needs as well as sources for belonging and affirmation through shared culture and experiences (Simich et al., 2003; Stewart et al., 2008). Such emotional support in one's life often helps to mitigate the experiences of loss and isolation that often accompany resettlement, particularly when there is not an opportunity to be located close to extended family. Research indicates that a lack of social support and community connection are often the reason for secondary migration within a country of settlement, suggesting several circumstances where the need for connection is even greater

than the benefits of potential opportunities for employment (Simich, 2003, 2010; Simich, et al., 2005).

Social Support and Wellness

Simich et al., (2005) conducted a study across three Canadian cities (Toronto, Vancouver and Edmonton) that sought to find an understanding of the functions of social supports which have been determined to be a source of stress reduction, health maintenance, achievement of self-efficacy, well-being and self-confidence; and the role of service providers in response to newcomer challenges such as stress, employment, loss of social status, isolation, poor housing, lack of service access, and discrimination. Simich et al., (2005) clearly state that social support is a "basic determinant of health, as vital to maintaining well-being as food, shelter, income and access to health care and social opportunities" (p. 259). Service providers and newcomers both indicated the importance of social supports and the shortcomings in terms of accessibility.

Service providers recognized that access to social supports empowered newcomers and increased opportunities to engage with their community while observing that where access was lacking, there were increased indications of loneliness and discouragement. Narrow mandates and insufficient funding and human resources were cited as barriers to adequate social supports. Newcomers also claimed concerns with funding changes that cut previously available social programs. While informal access to supports can be achieved through networks of friends, family, and community, there was a consensus among participants that the existing issues and barriers to supports lay within the system itself and not with newcomers although they may suffer the consequences (Simich et al., 2005).

This study included both refugee and immigrant populations and although the second phase of implementation included interviews with Chinese immigrants and Somali refugees, the findings shared were limited to those representing service providers and policymakers. A distinct absence of newcomer voice is noted in the findings portion of the paper that identifies settlement challenges. Further, the final phase of the study involved groups of service providers and policy makers developing recommendations that would help improve services and the overall experience of newcomers. A critical opportunity was missed to invite community members from the second phase to share their input towards recommendations as part of these groups.

Interpersonal Relationships

In a Vancouver study, Dyck and McLaren (2004) investigated the experience of immigrant and refugee women in relation to one another. Accounts of these women's stories were considered through racialized and gendered lenses where expectations and realities drifted far from one another. Dyck and McLaren's article addresses the issue of social isolation experienced by women because of poverty. An example of overlooked consequences of poverty leading to isolation was disclosed as inviting someone over to visit requiring the social etiquette of offering tea, but one cannot offer tea if there is no milk, sugar, or biscuits to accompany it and if you cannot reciprocate the offer of an invitation, it is best not to accept one from another person. This study represents a common theme as life in Canada does not always deliver on the expectation of hope, opportunity, and freedom. Further, participants in the study indicated difficulty finding employment despite a desire to work and provide for themselves (Dyck & McLaren, 2004) leaving little opportunity or agency to change situations that restrict social interactions. This represents a loss of social capital within the community in addition to

implications for the wellbeing of women who are feeling disconnected and isolated with little available options for change.

Impact of Social Exclusion on Social Capital

Social capacity is the belonging and active network of relationships and social supports one has around them including family, friends, neighbours, and community (Barsky, 2011). Strong and robust social systems support resilience and improve access to opportunities supporting successful settlement. A capacity building approach to peacebuilding (Barsky, 2011) supports the development of social capital through the informal networks mentioned above (friends, family, community) and relationships developed though formal systems such as education, settlement, and social work where service providers can support access to additional resources including language support, peer groups, employment opportunities and financial literacy.

Research focused on the social support of newcomer women in Canada (Hynie et al., 2011) recognizes similar challenges adding social exclusion and limited social capital that must be developed through socially inclusive relationships. Particular attention is paid to the additional deficit of social capital experienced by women because of isolation, language limitations, gender roles and expectations. Findings in this research indicted an affirmed correlation between social support (formal and informal), networks, and wellbeing. A limitation recognized by the authors is that participants were recruited from community centres offering social support services. This indicates women who participated were actively engaged in available opportunities. Further development of this research might include a sampling of

women who are not able to access such resources because of conflicting obligations, family roles, discomfort, or other reasons that may exist.

The development of social capital through social relationships and networks is important to the overall settlement experiences as a study conducted by Lamba and Krahn (2003) found that extensive social capital was essential to settlement success. Further, social capital contributes to the quality of employment opportunities as a result of established social and familial networks. The implication being that loss of social capital experienced because of exclusion or isolation could have profound consequences for the overall settlement success of an individual.

Day-to-Day Settlement Experience

It is in the ambiguity of daily life that routines (or lack thereof) are developing for women striving to achieve economic security, social connection, and control over their own existence. Beyond medical appointments, service referrals, school meetings, and English classes are other everyday factors that contribute to the psychosocial well-being or decline of these women. Here is the space where women are trying to get their children to school, navigate appointments, and engage in daily requirements such as grocery shopping with sometimes limited, if any, understanding of the language, systems, or societal expectations within their host communities. Although orientations take place upon arrival (Manitoba Interfaith Immigration Council, 2020), it is unknown how much of this information is retained during such a physically and emotionally exhausting time. Additionally, support (or settlement) workers are available for Government-Assisted Refugees (GARS) and sponsors may be available for support in other circumstances,

but high caseloads and relationship dynamics may contribute to challenges in accessing this source of support as needed. Further complications arise because of ever changing and precarious funding to social service programs often reducing or altering existing services (Simich et al., 2005). Without clear communication, these can leave those supported by such services without reliable resources or sources of information. Often, community leaders will pick up where formal services leave off. At times, the intrinsic trust within a community that shares experience and/or language will prevail over service providers regardless of availability. It is important to develop understanding of these formal and informal networks of information sharing to understand how needs may be better met within the formal sector, alleviating some of the expectations and time of informal leaders and caregivers.

In her dissertation examining the role of …S*ocial Ties of Migrant Survivors of Political Violence…*, Elez (2015) further developed the importance of social relations by expanding the understanding of social ties to include family that did not migrate, romantic partnerships, children, friendships, ethnic and religious communities, and community service agencies. Elez describes the benefits, challenges, and limitations each of these relationships posits for the settlement experience and recognizes the expressed need demonstrated by her study participants to establish new social ties in Canada. Despite this, trust is an issue due to pre- and trans-migratory experiences resulting in frustration and difficulty developing new relationships. She suggests future research might offer insight as to how connections in receiving communities are built and understood, specifically, what helps and what gets in the way. The overarching purpose of this research was to explore the relationship building dynamics that contribute to establishing social networks, belonging, and meaningful integration experiences among refugee women.

Impact of Social Networks in Host Communities

There continues to be many misperceptions about the impact of refugees in host communities. As mentioned before, 54 percent of Canadians that participated in a *Global News* poll indicated they thought Canada was too welcoming to immigrants. The reasons, which are unfounded, were that Canadians believed they were at-risk of losing jobs to immigrants and that their access to the country was a threat to human security (Vomiero & Russell, 2019). Closer to the truth is the Canadian government's coupling of humanitarian fulfillment with the need for economic development (Melnyk & Parker, 2021). Canadians are not at risk of losing jobs to immigrants, immigrants are needed to support the Canadian economy.

Refugees are often arriving to host communities through complex and uncertain processes that impact their sense of control over their situation. Procuring employment and becoming self-reliant is often a primary goal. That said, refugees may arrive with immediate presenting needs related to unexpected migration or trauma and with less monetary or educational equity than their immigrant counterparts. Needs associated with language and recognizable job skills make the procurement of meaningful employment difficult, with many working multiple jobs while trying to learn English. In Melnyk and Parker (2021) several narratives of refugee narratives are shared. A common theme among them is the desire to give back in their resettled communities. Despite this, accessing reasonable wage employment that aligns with job skills or services supporting skill development and help with finding suitable jobs is precarious at best (Senthanar, et al., 2020).

This lack of easy integration into the existing Canadian economy also creates opportunity driven by the tendency of newcomers to purchase goods and services within their cultural

communities because of familiarity with items and language (Turcotte & Silka, 2008). This not only provides known products but also contributes to the overall feelings of cultural identity. These economic drivers are often made possible by informal loan and money sharing practices that support and uplift newcomer communities while also creating opportunities (Turcotte & Silka, 2008). These practices not only contradict the misconception that newcomers will steal jobs, but they also speak clearly to the contributions newcomers are making to the Canadian economy as business owners, taxpayers and job creators.

Women and Peacebuilding

It has already been established in chapter two that violent conflict and forced migration are gendered experiences for women at all levels: home, during transition and in host communities. What has not been established is the crucial role women have played as peace and community builders post-peace accord or upon settlement. As mentioned in chapter one, the tendency of women is to work towards peacebuilding and minimizing the impacts of violence to improve the overall human experience for themselves, their children, and their communities (Sandole-Staroste, 2011). Even so, this participation in the peace process does not guarantee a better outcome in terms beneficial peace, voice, and continued participation in policymaking (Sjoberg, 2017).

This is also evidenced by the research of Gizelis (2011) that speaks to the social capital and status of women as an indicator toward peacebuilding and economic development. Her findings point toward the variation of representation of women at the local and state levels. At the local levels, women are leading mobilization efforts in humanitarian responses such as building schools to educate the children. She suggests that there is a link between the status of

women and lower levels of violence inter- and intrastate violence as well as reduced likelihood of reoccurring civil wars (Gizelis, 2011).

Justino et al. (2018) echo similar findings maintaining that women are essential to economic and social support when rebuilding communities as, “They provide health services and education, help refugees, and offer counselling, training and psychological support in churches, schools, hospitals, charities, self-help groups and local political organizations.” (p. 912). Further, these services are often contributed on a voluntary basis. Unfortunately, in situations where gender roles were changed to empower women during conflict, little changed once the conflict ended (Justino, et al., 2018). These findings speak once again to the importance and relevance of building and/or maintaining social capital and its cumulative impact on the individual as well as the greater community. We can consider that social networks of similarly driven women will get things done.

If we were to look for examples at the community level here in Winnipeg it would not be hard to find exemplary examples of passionate activist women caring for community. For example, Roselyn Advincula who was recently nominated for a Top 25 Canadian Immigrant Award (https://canadianimmigrant.ca/canadas-top-25-immigrants) in response to her tireless work supporting newcomers in the community. Roselyn immigrated from the Philippines in 2008 and now calls Winnipeg home. She works not one, but two jobs in the settlement sector as a Director of Settlement at Immigrant Centre and as a Community Development Program Facilitator with Aurora Family Therapy Centre. She is an active member of the Ethnocultural Council of Manitoba, often providing translated or video recorded information for her community and planning community building events. In addition, she tirelessly volunteers free time to support connection and engagement in the community. Many newcomers have found

resources and social connection because of Roselyn's passion for helping. Although she is not a woman with refugee experience, she is one woman who has had a direct impact on the lives of so many others.

Elizabeth Aluk is the co-founder and president of Manitoba Women for Women of South Sudan (https://www.women4womenmb.ca/) an organization focused on the empowerment of women locally and around the world. Elizabeth and her team organize training advocating for women's rights and provide wellness and employment training to women across Canada as well as working to support and uplift women in South Sudan. Training in South Sudan focuses on reducing violence and understanding and healing from trauma. All projects are concentrated on building agency in women as they work together toward success. Both Roselyn and Elizabeth provide incredible examples of social capital and capacity for peacebuilding at a local and global level. The reach of the relationships and programs is infinite as the empowerment of women leads to the empowerment of more women, creating a network of mentors, friends, and social supports.

Theoretical Framework

Three theoretical frameworks are considered for the purpose of this study, resilience theory, critical theory, and social identity theory. The recognition of adversity and influence of both controllable and uncontrollable factors offers credibility to the engagement of resiliency theory when considering the settlement experience of women. The primary shortcoming of resilience theory in this research is its limited availability when focusing on refugee experience. As indicated throughout the proposal, the experiences of refugees are unique and complex in

nature. That said, this may create an opportunity for further development of the theoretical understanding of resilience, particularly as it relates to newcomer women's identity.

Resilience Theory

Resilience theory engages a three-part process recognizing adversity, mediating factors, and outcomes (van Breda, 2018). There is some dissention among practitioners in terms of defining resilience as a process by which individuals develop tools helping them manage adversity (Hendrick & Young, 2013) or an outcome. Ungar (2004) suggests being resilient is an outcome or state of being, while resilience is a process. In previous work, Ungar (2000) makes the connection from theory to practice by discussing five relevant principles. These principles are 1) Resilience is nurtured by an ecological, multileveled approach to intervention; 2) The study of resilience shifts our focus to the strengths of individuals and communities; 3) Research on resilience shows that multifinality, or many routes to many good ends, is a characteristic of populations [of children] who succeed; 4) The study of resilience has shown that a focus on social justice is foundational to successful development; and 5) Resilience research focuses on cultural and contextual heterogeneity related to [children's] thriving (Ungar, 2000). Although the principles offered are in the context of children, there is opportunity for further development of this theory in refugees and resettlement. This is discussed further in recommendations for further research.

An important distinction in the characteristics of resilience offered by Rutter (2007) is that it must be determined in the processes engaged by people not on the circumstances in their lives (process vs variable). Fergus and Zimmerman (2005) suggest social and individual promotive factors, assets, and resources. Assets are internal factors such as self-efficacy and resources are referred to outside supports (i.e., community, family, service providers). While this

theory creates some difficulties as a result of its fluid and subjective nature (what serves as an asset or resource for one may not be accessible for another), Ungar (2018) offers twelve factors contributing to the process of resilience: structure, consequences, intimate and sustaining relationships, other relationships, a powerful identity, a sense of control, a sense of belonging, rights and responsibilities, safety and support, positive thinking, physical well-being, and financial well-being. Each of these reflects process and growth potentially supported and/or influenced by social identity groups such as family, friends, places of employment, and community. These 12 factors can also be applied within the framework of Nussbaum's (2011) capabilities providing a meaningful lens to observe the stories and participation of women within the existing support structure (real or perceived) offered by the formal and informal settlement community.

Emancipatory Peacebuilding and Critical Theory

A common critique of neoliberal peacebuilding strategies is the top-down approach imposing Western concepts of peacebuilding and democracy firmly focused on an economic ideology that not only dismisses local participation in policy and strategy development, but risks perpetuating ongoing political violence (Pugh, 2011). Mac Ginty (2012) criticizes the technocracy of such strategies as bureaucratic, politicized, and solution focused norms that maintain existing systems within narrowly focused practices established in the global north. He states that, "these norms are bolstered by a mutually reinforcing set of institutions to create an increasingly hegemonic system of peace-building that is intolerant of alternatives and creativity" (p. 288). Concerning for local populations, particularly in times of uncertainty during and post-

direct violence, is the implicit nature by which harm can be done to the local by "helping" practices ultimately focused on the goals of international actors and systems.

Emancipatory peacebuilding engages a bottom-up or grassroots approach to peacebuilding where, "resources are not imported and imposed by outsiders, but draw upon local knowledge and processes" (Thiessen, 2011, p. 121). Where neoliberal peacebuilding imposes ideologies and creates barriers to communication and participation of locals, citing ideas as ignorant and dismissible (Mac Ginty, 2012), emancipatory peacebuilding seeks to empower by focusing on security and emancipation, political transition, and local participation, reconsidering economic and social development, and reconciliation and justice (Thiessen, 2011). Emancipatory security encourages dialogue and negotiation of security as it is relevant to each community and situation. It supports the agency of local actors in determining needs and priorities (Thiessen, 2011) opposed to security approaches that follow a playbook of irrelevant and tone-deaf strategies (Mac Ginty, 2012). Local participation in political transitions makes space for local participation in (re)establishing local governance as it best fits at the local level which may include Indigenous practices along with, or instead of, western style democracy (Theissen, 2011). Reconciliation and justice are encouraged at the community level promoting meaningful opportunities for healing, trust-building, understanding, and unity (Byrne & Thiessen, 2019). Such restorative measures contrast with practices focusing on the rule of law (Thiessen, 2011). The foundation of critical theory informing emancipatory peacebuilding helps to recognize the importance of local knowledge, wisdom, and practices and participation to sustainable peace.

Critical theory originated through the Frankfurt institute in the 1930s and is recognized as a transformative development of modern Marxism (Ray, 2015). Humrich (2014) explains the value of critical theory as it seeks to identify obstacles reinforcing systemic norms conducive of

exclusion and preventing individuals from reaching full potential. Such barriers are not only exposed under this ideology, but also critiqued as flawed and changeable conditions of current societies. This sets this theory apart as it indicates a call to action in favour of bringing equity to current social orders rather than summarizing such societal limitations as a cause-and-effect status quo.

Developing on the Frankfurt School social theory's recognition of conflict between human nature and capitalist societies, critical theory recognizes several factors as relational to the enhancement of human emancipation and empowerment. Such factors include science and technology, authoritarian governance, gender, and culture – which is to include mass media as a method of communication, so it is reasonable to assume this to mean social media as well – in their critique of culture (Humrich, 2014; Ray, 2015).

In the context of this research, a feminist understanding of critical theory identifies the limitations resulting from gender-specific violence and exclusion (Humrich, 2014) because of patriarchal systems (Reardon, 2019) that are identifiable and changeable through the inclusion of women in the peacebuilding process (Cook-Huffman, 2014; Sandole-Staroste, 2011; and Snyder, 2011).

Social Identity Theory

It is anticipated that the primary theory for the thesis is social identity theory as the well-being of a gendered group is determined by self-esteem, positive emotions, life satisfaction, depression, and anxiety (Schmitt et al., 2002). Perceptions of discrimination are harmful to the psychological well-being of disadvantaged groups which is found to be the case among women as well as other identified communities. Schmitt et al. (2002) suggest women compared to men report greater in-group disadvantage, higher group identification and less positive well-being.

Social identity theory was pioneered by Tajfel (1978) who suggested the direct correlation between self-concept and one's membership within a social group or group(s). Rothbart and Korostelina (2011) explain social identity theory in the context of unity derived because of belonging to a group. Such identity overrides individualism as it creates a larger context for belonging and informs identity values through the collective culture. The theory examines aspects of identity within the single group as well as in relation to others (intergroup). This brings an interesting focus to the study when we consider the experience of refugees for two reasons. First, the loss of home, friends, family, and traditions (Stewart & Martin, 2018) may be seen as significant factors affecting previous and current identity as the individual or group that existed pre-migration or pre-conflict struggles to find itself upon settlement. Second, individuals resettling from African and Middle Eastern countries were likely part of collective cultures (Darwish & Huber, 2003) in which the interest and wellbeing of the group is prioritized and looked after as a social responsibility opposed to Western ideology that tends to prioritize individualized ideals of achievement, success, and competition. Informal conversations with newcomers having refugee experience suggest that pre-conflict life in their home country provided much more opportunity for connection with friends and family contributing to an improved quality of life compared to the Western experience of working long hours, overwhelming commitments to school, recreational and community activities, and increased isolation.

Strong group identification has shown to increase self-esteem and improve an individual's ability to manage stress, further evidence of the physical and mental health benefits of social identity (Scheepers & Ellemers, 2019). Further, research suggests that this remains true for a disadvantaged group identifying together. Schmitt et al. (2002) echo this data stating there

are psychological benefits to minority group identification. To take a broader perspective, ascribing a common identity, such as being Canadian, can bring differing groups together and reduce bias among a larger group of separate identities (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000).

Collective cultures present a stark contrast to what we might consider "typically Canadian" where many sought after neighbourhoods require little interaction from house to house and families are less likely to include extended members as a matter of preference and normality rather than requirement (caring for those who are aging or sick). From a perspective of social identity, the individualistic nature of Western societies to live within their walls challenges the collective nature of a newcomer's culture.

McLeod (2008) discusses social identity theory in terms of in-groups (the group to which one belongs) and out-groups (the others) where those identifying within a group will tend to discriminate and find fault with another. In a world where racism is a common minority experience, this must also be considered when looking at a groups tendency to socialize with others within their own cultural community (Stewart & Martin, 2018) rather than participating in more diverse social communities. Such divisiveness takes place because of categorization in which groups are established based on race, religion, and socio-economic status, etc., and individuals sort themselves into the group they most identify with (McLeod, 2008). Following this, social comparisons begin, and groups determine their compatibility or need for competition with other (different) identifying groups (Scheepers & Ellemers, 2019). Such decisions, as suggested by MacLeod (2008), may inform, and establish group relations for the unforeseeable future, contributing to either unity or conflict.

A sense of identity allows individuals to make sense of the world around them and their role within it (Luders et al., 2016, p. 35). Social groups provide a shared identity and

understanding of group beliefs and behaviour (Hoggs, 2016). If we are to engage through a lens of cultural humility, it would be prudent to first understand the potential loss of identity experienced by newcomers and what their expectations and hopes are in terms of settlement and engagement. For example, Simich (2010) explains that finding a home is a critical part of the settlement and integration process. However, understanding the meaning of home through the experience of identity and loss helps us gain a better understanding as often it is not simply a place but a network of relationships, extended family, and social supports. "Back home," a phrase commonly used by Canadian refugees, carries connotations of loss and what is missing from their Canadian experience. If we are to unpack the concept of home, we might consider its many meanings to include the existence of space that provides comfort and safety, a place of belonging and support, a place of relationships, and a place of community (Soto-Parra, 2018). The loss of such a concept signifies loss of various elements of identity that contribute to problem solving, meeting family needs, social connection, and expectation, dignity, and growth (Simich, 2010).

The engagement of social identity theory in this study recognizes the complexity of identity as it relates to the pre- and post-migration concepts of belonging. It will provide a foundation for understanding the contradiction of various identities (parent, neighbor, and community member, etc.) one might experience and how this is affected by laws and traditions that may differ among nations. For example, changes in roles within a household in terms of financial contributions and governance may deeply impact one's sense of identity and contradict previously understood identity roles. Youth growing up between cultures may experience a sense of loss and confusion as they navigate traditions of parents and those of peers (Kilbride et al., 2003).

While the challenges may be considerable and sometimes confusing, social identity may also represent growth. Research indicates that displaced women in some African countries experienced better political engagement, increased skill development, more choice in marriage practices, and more decision-making opportunities because of their new economic position (Snyder, 2011). The improvement of social status and respect women may experience because of changing or developing roles is an aspect of identity important for consideration as it may indicate both growth and empowerment during conflict managing the reality and expectations of additional responsibilities. This may be the experience of a woman who contributes equally (or fully) to household finances but retains most of the domestic responsibility such as household chores and child rearing. Financial empowerment and independence for women can be viewed as progressive movement often supported and facilitated by NGO's; however, the hidden impact of this must also be considered as new vulnerabilities are created because of unexpected and sudden changes in the marital relationship because of power inequalities not experienced pre-migration (Shanneik, 2019).

Conclusion

Although many challenges and barriers contribute to the settlement experience including language acquisition and access to education and employment, social isolation is one of the most significant risk factors in contributing to refugee mental health. It may also contribute to the decline in health experienced by immigrants after arrival in a new country such as Canada known as the health immigrant effect. Being able to identify even one person that can be available for support and connection can have a significant impact on the settlement experience as it helps newcomers to feel less alone as they learn to navigate and adjust to life in their host

country. Social support from friends and family improves this experience while also building an individual's social capital and providing access to opportunity producing networks. This social capital can be considered an indicator of capacity for peacebuilding and economic development. Understanding the implications of social connections is an essential consideration for settlement workers and agencies when addressing gaps in services and developing programs and policies supporting newcomers. It is necessary to listen to the voices of the experts – those with lived experience and perspective

Chapter 4 – Methodology

Introduction

This qualitative research project engaged narrative inquiry through a feminist framework embracing cultural humility. The qualitative design seeks to understand the community integration of participants as they have experienced and interpreted it through their daily lives (Hollis, 1994). This design is representative of ethnographic peace research which encourages a multidisciplinary approach to focus on the everyday experiences of the local (Millar, 2019). This is an important framework contributing to a bottom-up understanding of local participation and impact in the larger context of emancipatory peacebuilding (Mac Ginty, 2012). Focus groups provided opportunities for participants to collectively discuss ideas, opinions, and disagreements (Smithson, 2008). The groups were synchronous and semi-structured for the purpose of observing interactions and gathering data. As more time was spent together, the nature of the group allowed participants to feel more comfortable and connected in their experiences, this resulted in free discussion that continued to develop an intimate sharing of experiences and challenges.

The practice of gaining diverse knowledge through building cultural competence has been gaining momentum in social service fields such as social work, healthcare, and education and is, of course, an important component of professional development. That said, it may fall short of embracing the critical self-reflection and acknowledgment required to understand how imbalances of power, assumptions, and implicit bias affect our everyday engagements and normalize the systemic and social inequalities that exist when examined from a cultural perspective (Fisher-Borne et al., 2015). This study embraced cultural humility through narrative inquiry and intentional effort to minimize interference caused by privilege and bias. Cultural

competence aims to develop cultural understanding of collective traditions and values. Cultural humility goes a step further to recognize individual experience as something unique to each experience rather than a group narrative that risks becoming part of a stereotype. Cultural humility strengthens the foundation with which we work to understand experiences through curiosity, humility, and the recognition of social inequality for which we are all accountable to not perpetuate (Fisher-Borne et al., 2015). Most importantly, it is a fluid and continual practice of open-ended learning rather than a conceptual framework – we do not arrive at cultural humility like we strive for cultural competence.

Sprague (2015) recognizes the efforts of social scientists' diligence to accurately represent social processes, practices, and structures while also acknowledging that this is not always the case. She cautions that "how we develop an understanding about the world is premised on our assumptions about what makes for a competent knower, what the underlying characteristics of the known are, and what the known entails" (Sprague, 2015, p. 391). It is with this in mind that the research engaged feminist methodologies. This included implementing the four guidelines offered by Sprague (2015) in the following manner:

1) *Work from the Standpoint of the Disadvantaged*

   In this respect it will be important to recognize the position of power of the investigator as a white, middle-class Canadian woman, whether it be real or perceived. The women participating in this study were the orators of their stories and experiences and the dominant source of information and conversation during meetings. Senehi (2020) indicates, "storytelling can … be seen in terms of a larger discourse that shapes socially

constructed knowledge" (p. 48). This eloquently summarizes the intent of this research which is to share knowledge acquired by those who are experts in their own lives.

It was the role of the investigator to listen and to be the pen that shares dialogue and stories provided by the participants during focus groups (further focus group details are provided below). As such, guidelines for how the meetings would be carried out were determined in the first meeting. A discussion was had prior to beginning the groups to confirm understanding that they were in control of the space and had choice to participate or withdraw from the study. A commitment to safety was established and agreed upon by all, including an *Oath of Confidentiality*. The structure of questions was not such that compromising discussions were expected, but it was important that space be held regardless. It was not until this foundation was established that open-ended questions to were posed to the group. After a question space was left open for sharing until it was determined that no one had anything to add (by explicitly asking), and a follow-up or subsequent question was not interrupting. Care was taken to create an empowered space by validating responses and continual reassurance when participants apologized for sharing thoughts, they felt may have taken too much time or been off the question. Assurance was given that their experiences matter and expressing gratitude does not mean there are not challenges – both can be true at the same time.

2) *Ground Interpretations in Interests and Experience*

Participants were encouraged to challenge any expectations or requests that are not in line with their values. They were invited to make corrections to their transcribed experiences that were not recorded or represented accurately. The information contained in

transcriptions completed from the first and second meetings was shared and reviewed in the third meeting. This took place with each focus group. The review was broken down into summaries of findings represented in this paper and were given for feedback. It was the hope that this practice would support the transfer of trust gained by engaging interpreters who are members of the participants' communities and taking the time initially (and ongoing) to develop relationships with the participants. The intent was that group members understand and truly felt that they are the ones in control of this project. Without their voice, it does not exist and, as it is their stories that are being represented, they must be accurate. It felt that this had been accomplished as dialogue with interpreters indicated that participants enjoyed the group and expressed gratitude in the group. They shared appreciation for space to share their experiences and be heard. In addition, when challenges were disclosed, the women were asked what they see as possible resolutions. The recommendations provided in this thesis are a direct result of the discussions based on the lived experience. Who better to provide solutions than those navigating the issue?

Community leaders provide a wealth of knowledge and understanding of traditions, conflicts, and relationships unknown to many outsiders. This knowledge was be drawn upon when choosing interpreters for the study to mitigate potential issues or discomfort for participants. The interpreters were required to sign a confidentiality agreement ensuring what anything shared in the group does not extend to the greater community. Thoughtful consideration of interpreters made this an abundant precaution, but procedures were followed just the same.

3) *Maintain a Strategically Diverse Discourse*

Semi-structured focus groups were the method of discovery in this project. The structure offered was to provide a starting point for discussion and leave it open to engagement or critique and restructuring. It was expected that in a group of people, there would be several unique experiences that would open avenues of interest for the group and curiosity of the investigator. Openness to divergences was be embraced and encouraged. It is, perhaps, here that important learning and connection occurred. Although experiences were remarkably similar, there was room for discussion and validation within the group as well as an overall environment of support.

4) *Create Knowledge that Empowers the Disadvantaged*

This is the goal of the research. The primary focus is to empower the women in our community who continue to struggle since arriving in Canada. The greater purpose is for women who find themselves isolated and disconnected from the larger community to find a social network where meaningful relationships can be built, and a sense of belonging can be established. It is hopeful that the knowledge shared through the stories of participants will provide insight and expand opportunities for others who are struggling to find meaningful connections and experiences as part of their integration. The intent was to identify and provide themes supporting resilience that can be shared with settlement service agencies and practitioners in addition to academic dissemination. It is hoped that identified challenges, both resolved and ongoing, shared by the community of women will be addressed and responded to in collaboration so we might find ways to problem

solve as we continue to share the responsibility of supporting successful integration, and building strong communities.

In addition to the guidelines offered by Sprague, data analysis was considered in terms of functioning within Nussbaum's interpretation of the *Capabilities Approach* framework drawn from the *Human Development Approach*. In this framework, capabilities are determined as opportunities available to everyone rather than examining a total average that risks silencing marginalized minorities (Sprague, 2015). These capabilities (previously listed) are viewed as attributes of a just and equitable society where there is substantial freedom to choose what to do and be. Functioning is determined by how an individual chooses to engage available capabilities. Although interrelated, the important distinction is that capabilities are fundamental requirements for meaningful human existence and are a societal responsibility while functioning references how the individual chooses to participate. For example, the capability of *Bodily Integrity* can exist in terms of freedom of movement and safety, but it does not determine whether someone chooses to leave their home. The implication for this framework in the research is determining the availability of such capabilities and the supports and barriers that allow for, or hinder, function within them. For reference, accessibility can be an example of a support or barrier when it comes to capabilities. For example, if a program for women is scheduled but there are no considerations for childcare or transportation requirements then for those who cannot access due to these needs, there is no relevance. It is not that they are choosing not to participate (function), the barriers are such that they cannot.

Research Location

This research took place in Winnipeg, Manitoba, home to many diverse communities of immigrants and refugees. That said, the lived experience it represents spans many nations. The women participating in the study came from Somalia, Syria, and Yemen as countries of origin. Prior to arriving in Canada, their migration experience took them to secondary locations that included Ethiopia, Uganda, Lebanon, and Jordan.

The 2016 census indicated that Winnipeg is home to 18,630 resettled refugees (Statistics Canada, 2016). This is representative of a diverse city hosting 61 settlement Service Providing Organizations (SPOs) and 86 ethnocultural groups (Hogue, 2015). An environmental scan conducted by Immigration Partnership Winnipeg in 2015 found that services proved by the above mentioned SPOs included language, education, health and mental health, housing, employment, childcare, recreation, senior support, youth, women, and family support as well as general settlement supports (Hogue, 2015). This speaks to a dynamic and robust system supporting refugees resettling in Winnipeg. Still, there are several areas identified as needing room for improvement including services for individuals who do not qualify because of status (i.e., international students, refugee claimants), mental health, youth support, childcare, interpretative services, larger community integration and connections with Indigenous communities. SPOs continue to address these concerns while also working within the limits of their available resources. This study aims to provide insights that will contribute to meaningful and relevant program development supporting refugee women.

Research Participants

Participants in the study were women with refugee experience living in Winnipeg, Manitoba. In group one, all participants shared Somalia as a country of origin but paths to Canada came by way of Uganda and Ethiopia. The women in the second group were Arabic speaking from Syria and Yemen. These women arrived by way of Lebanon and Jordan. The length of time in Canada varied greatly from one to 14 years. The personal lives of the women varied as well. Some had family here, others did not. Some were single parents while others had grown children. One woman celebrated the birth of a grandchild during the time of our meetings. Some were single mothers and others had partners. What all participants shared was a willingness to share their experiences resettling in Winnipeg.

Recruitment Strategy

Recruitment was conducted through word of mouth and poster sharing. Due to restrictions and limitations because of COVID-19, requests were made to share a recruitment poster on social media platforms of select newcomer serving organizations and through their email networks. The poster was shared through many community organizations including Immigrant and Refugee Organization of Manitoba (IRCOM), Immigrant Centre, Manitoba Association of Newcomer Serving Organizations (MANSO), Sport Manitoba, and on newcomer social media groups including a Newcomer Coffee Club group on Facebook with over 2,000 followers. Ultimately, it was through word of mouth with community leaders that participants were recruited.

Due to the possibility of conflict of interest with the investigator's role in the local settlement sector, refugee women working in IRCC supported settlement agencies were excluded from the study. There is an opportunity here to further develop this research through the wisdom

of those with lived forced migration experience as well as settlement knowledge. This will be discussed in more detail later.

Research Questions and Scope of the Study

The experiences of women are complex at the best of times. When considering the experiences of those whose lives have been interrupted due to conflict and forced migration, it is also important to consider the many interconnecting factors contributing to the resettlement experience, several of which have been discussed in this thesis (Rahman, 2021). Despite the challenges, it is imperative to not make assumptions regarding vulnerability, strength, and agency. This research investigates the local settlement and integration experiences of women with refugee experience from different ethnocultural communities. The purpose is to identify themes and sources of strength and support that may be established through networks of formal and informal social support systems that encourage meaningful engagement in the local community through participation in employment, education, volunteerism and/or social and recreational opportunities.

The questions posed in the focus groups were designed to be open ended and strength-based to draw on the resilience factors of the women's ethnographic experiences. Two groups were established in part limit language and communication barriers as all the women in each group spoke the same language and were supported by an interpreter and in part to compare the experiences of each group and their connection to formal and informal social support systems.

Focus Groups

Data collection for this study was drawn from focus groups conducted with the use of Zoom due to the ongoing Covid 19 pandemic. Focus groups provide a unique opportunity to elicit data from dialogue engaged through group discussion (Bloor, et al., 2001). The intent of this format is to be able to distinguish group norms shared through guided dialogue, while offering everyone the opportunity to speak to their experience without restriction (Bloor, et al., 2001).

Two focus groups that met over a period of three weeks were formed. Groups were determined by shared experience – refugee women – and language that was supported by an interpreter. The first group was Somali speaking. We began the group with eight participants but due to unfortunate issues with technology, proceeded with three. The second group was Arabic speaking women. There were six participants in this group. The purpose of the two groups was to create safe space for discussion with the familiarity of language, and to bring together data that could be compared to determine themes supporting resilience and identifiable challenges. Another curiosity was the impact of ethnocultural communities on settlement experiences. As Winnipeg is host to active Somali and several Arabic speaking communities, including Syrian, these groups would support learning in this area as well.

Prior to beginning the first group, with the support of the interpreter, informed consent was received from each participant along with an *Oath of Confidentiality*. It was important for the women to know that they had autonomy over their stories and what they choose to share. It was equally important to know that they could withdraw at any time from the study should they find any discomfort or simply changed their minds.

Each group followed the same semi-structured interview format and met for a total of three times. Interview questions were prepared beforehand and used to guide the discussion in the first two meetings. Questions were posed to the group and repeated by the interpreter. When necessary, the interpreter helped to explain the question in a more appropriate context. Participants were welcome to choose the language they used, and each took the opportunity to respond. As required, space was given for unstructured discussion of various themes. Often, the thoughts of a fellow group member would activate further response from others, contributing to the richness of the conversation. In some cases, a response would provoke curiosity and further exploration (i.e., this is how the discussion about food unfolded and brought forward energetic responses from everyone in the group). These animated discussions often occurred in Arabic or Somali and would be shared back by the interpreter. The third meeting was an opportunity to summarize findings derived from the two previous meetings. This gave participants an opportunity to address, clarify and add any insights they determined to be of importance.

The groups were held once per week for a total of three weeks. The purpose of multiple meetings with space between was to provide opportunity for reflection and feedback while also building rapport within the group. It was unclear at the onset how the use of Zoom would affect the relationship building dynamic, especially with various levels of comfort associated with being on camera. The benefit was clear as by the end of the second meeting discussion was flowing more freely and organically as relationships and levels of comfort were developing. In the third meeting with the Arabic speaking group (one scheduled for presentation and review purposes) new topics were brought forward as the women wished to share more of their experiences.

Zoom

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the focus groups for this research were conducted over Zoom. While it can be said that ultimately it was successful, challenges were certainly had. From the start, it was shared that some potential participants were leery to participate in an online group. This was not because the idea was foreign, but because so much interpersonal connection has been interrupted because of health and community restrictions over the past two years. To the benefit of the research, participants had been using Zoom for group programming, language classes and appointments and were comfortable and confident with its function. This did not mean that technical issues would not be experienced. The first meeting began with excitement as participants logged in ready to go only to have multiple technical issues result in a significant dwindling of original numbers. That said, meaningful dialogue ensued, and the process continued. It was expressed clearly from all monitors that preference would be to share personal space while engaging these important conversations.

Interpreters

Interpreters where essential to the success and management of this research project. More than simply translators, the interpreters acted as cultural brokers for each group ensuring access to the meeting platform and confirming time and availability. Further, as both women were members of the community, they were interpreting for, there was an established trust and comfort among participants that carried over to the investigator as an outsider. In addition to providing translation services, interpreters were able to address nuances in language that helped participants understand the questions allowing for open-endedness without requiring the investigator to construct questions in a restrictive or leading manner. At the same time, the

opportunity for members of the group to revert to first language provided deeper context and clarification to their sharing. Translation was provided throughout the meetings regardless of who was interacting to ensure inclusion of all participants in all aspects of the meeting including chatter taking place while waiting for everyone to sign in and throughout the thank you and goodbyes when signing off.

Some group members wanted to use this as an opportunity to practice English while others choose to speak their first language. A couple of the women were proficient in English, choosing to participate primarily in this language and even assisting others to find words. In all cases, there was use of first language when excited or wanting to explain something that they did not feel they were able to articulate well enough in English.

Data Collection

Each Zoom meeting was recorded, and the files then played back for transcription. During transcription, the files were anonymized to remove any identifying factors, mainly names. Upon completion, these files were reviewed for themes contributing to the settlement and integration experiences. During the focus groups, field notes were taken to record points of interest and noticeable trends in shared experience as they developed. These notes also provided written memory to return to without interrupting discussion or losing points along the way. A review of themes derived from transcribed files with field notes supplied data ready for organization and presentation back to the third group meeting prior to thesis development. All findings discussed in this paper were presented back to the groups prior to writing for verification of accuracy and authenticity.

As data was collected, it was reviewed as representation of the women's' identities as: newcomers, women, mothers (if this was the case), and members of their respective and collaborative communities. The determination of whether one of these identities takes priority over another, or if they all exist in connection to each other, to be determined by the parts of their stories shared. It was anticipated that this would create a narrative representative of the individuality and complexity of each experience while also drawing connections to common themes in the lived experience. Chapters one, two and three have discussed various hardships that may be experienced as part of conflict and migration. This indicates that an important part of the narratives to be identified is sources of strength.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations in this research include the representation of two ethnocultural groups in a community that is home to more than 80. Although most experiences were shared, it cannot be assumed that this is conclusive to the experiences of all these groups. Language and the formatting of questions may also have limited participant responses as the nuances of language does not always translate directly. The questions were kept purposefully vague to avoid leading the responses. The support of interpreters was very helpful in enhancing understanding of questions but without access to all languages and contextual meanings as a researcher, it is impossible to know if some information was lost in translation. There is blind trust that interpreters are sharing information as it is given to them without bias. There were no indications of concerns shared or perceived but an additional consideration is that shared back information might be censured to limit vulnerability.

The current pandemic required the use of Zoom to facilitate the groups. Although this is understood for the purpose of safety, it must be acknowledged as a limitation as a more culturally responsive practice would have involved coming together in shared space, perhaps even a shared meal or tea. Use of Zoom also required muting and unmuting to prevent feedback and other unwanted background noise which may hinder dialogue as the moments pass. Despite limitations the dialogues were rich and informative.

Ethical Considerations

Assessment of Risks

Whenever we are working with the stories of others, it is important to handle this information with respect and kindness while never making assumptions or questioning validity. When there is potential for drawing from narratives that may have involved traumatic experience, the interviewer must also be aware of potential for harm by activating difficult experiences (Thiessen & Byrne, 2017). This study did not anticipate any elevated risks for participants. That said, it was considered that the women participating have come to Winnipeg with refugee experience. Because it is impossible to determine where a conversation might go, or what could be said that would bring difficult thoughts or feelings forward, measures were taken to ensure accessibility to a qualified therapist (by referral) with experience working with newcomers.

Additional risk considerations come from the format of the research being focus groups. There is an elevated level of cohesiveness that comes from sharing in a group where others have similar experiences but there is also increased vulnerability when sharing information in a group where there are control limitations to what might happen with that information despite

agreements to confidentiality (Bloor, et al., 2001). With this in mind, the questions posed were designed to focus on strengths and elements within the women's control to minimize the risk of participants feeling vulnerable or exposed. Participants were also reminded to respond based on their comfort level to reduce any feelings of vulnerability when the groups closed.

Consent Procedures

Informed consent was established in the Zoom meeting prior to beginning any recording or posing questions. Once all participants had signed in and audio abilities were established, I took the opportunity to introduce myself and reiterate why we were meeting. After this the informed consent form was read through with the support of the group interpreter. Small sections were read with pauses to confirm clarity. The methods of the study were explained including recording and transcription. They were assured the video recording of the Zoom meeting would be kept private and anonymized when transcribed. Upon completion the women were asked if they understood the document including their ability to withdraw if they experienced any discomfort (or any reason) and if they had any questions. Once this was confirmed, participants were asked to provide verbal consent one-by-one. Affirmed consent was confirmed by the interpreter and documented by the researcher. Permission was requested prior to starting recording before each meeting including following formal consent.

Confidentiality and Privacy

Confidentiality was a key consideration in this project as it was important that the participants felt safe and supported while sharing their experiences. Prior to the first meeting

interpreters for each group agreed to and signed an *Oath of Confidentiality*. Because we were meeting in group format, a discussion was held before starting the first group to discuss the importance and expectation for confidentiality (what's shared in the group, stays with the group) and the *Oath* was shared with participants with the support of the interpreters following informed consent. All participants verbally consented to the *Oath of Confidentiality.* Consent was again affirmed by interpreters.

Compensation

The value of time shared by participants and interpreters cannot be understated. Nominal compensation was provided to the women in the form of grocery gift cards. Each participant received a $25 gift card for each meeting for a total of $75. At the end of the first meeting, participants were asked where they prefer to do their shopping so cards could be purchased. Gift cards were purchased and mailed out to participants following the final group. It was made clear in the first meeting that gift cards would be received for meetings attended regardless of return (i.e., anyone choosing to withdraw after the first or second meeting would still receive a card for the meetings attended).

Role of the Researcher and Positionality

My role as the researcher in this project was to facilitate discussion that would draw out the experiences of participants – the experts – without leading responses. The complexity of achieving this, because of language, was significant as further explanation or clarification of a question risked narrowing responses. For example, at the very beginning of the first meeting I

asked participants to introduce themselves and share anything about them they'd like us to know. At a time preceding the development of relationships within the group, one woman said, "if you don't ask me the question you want to know, I don't know what to tell you." This gave me pause and cause for reflection on how the questions could be delivered in clear and comprehensible language without limiting the range of responses.

The positionality of the researcher holds influence over the construction, facilitation, and analysis of a research project (Homes, 2020). Trying to understand what this means and what kind of assumptions might be made when working cross culturally is an important aspect in understanding and discussing the experiences of the women in the study. I am a white, middle-class woman born and raised in Canada without exposure to civil or political violence. I recognize my position as privileged and work to embrace cultural humility in the understanding of peoples' stories and lived experience.

I have worked in the field of education (public then post-secondary) for 18 years and in the settlement sector for 4 years. During my time (10 years) as a program liaison in public education I worked exclusively with youth and families who struggled to find success within the school system due to many barriers including historical trauma and poverty. The impact of these issues was often not considered when working with difficult behaviour and learning concerns or when engaging with parents and caregivers.

In settlement, I work as the Vicarious Trauma Initiative facilitator at Aurora Family Therapy Centre. In this role I facilitate peer support groups and provide consultation and training focused on workplace wellness and vicarious trauma. I have the opportunity to work with passionate and dedicated service providers who put their own wellness at-risk by overextending themselves to help others.

In each position I respect, appreciate, and value the work being done to support and educate others but must also admit to having criticisms of both systems. It is my perception that both education and settlement are underfunded and that these shortcomings have the most negative impact on frontline workers and those they serve. I recognize that this creates a bias that may influence data analysis without intention.

Conclusion

The design and implementation of this research study presented many opportunities for learning. The concept for the study came from witnessing first and secondhand stories of women experiencing isolation in the community. Volunteering to help facilitate community groups designed to build interpersonal connections and promote integration provided an opportunity to observe the interactions of women in recreational, familial, and creative settings. It was intriguing to watch interactions flow between shared languages that changed as needed to support communication. While it was a privilege to be a part of such dynamic interactions, it raised questions as to why some women were able to find engagement and others continued to be isolated. The intention of this study was to create space where I could begin to understand what supports the settlement experience and building of relationships and what gets in the way. As stated, the study's focus was designed to be strength-based, looking for what was good and right, but it also made space for the discussion(s) of challenges.

Chapter 5 – Findings

Introduction

The most notable part of this study may, in fact, be its lack of remarkability in terms of new findings and timely response to existing challenges refugees experience upon resettlement in host communities. This is deeply concerning. As a country that has been engaging in immigrant and refugee settlement and integration for decades, it is disturbing to note that we continue to be addressing the same issues and that they permeate throughout the experiences of many who choose to immigrate or are forcibly displaced. This is not to say that there are not members of the community, settlement agencies and other organizations volunteering, advocating, and programming to best meet the needs of those they serve, or that newcomers do not thrive, but it is to say that we continue to experience gaps in services, information sharing and resource provision.

Equally notable is that this is not a Canadian, or even North American, issue. Studies in the United States (Edward & Hines-Martin, 2015) and Sweden (Bucken-Knapp, et al., 2019) shared findings of similar challenges affecting the integration experience of refugees as those found here. Edward and Hines-Martin (2015) found that despite programs being available in cities with refugee citizens, there continues to be difficulty with accessibility. They went on to find that the most significant needs of this population were due to a lack of social integration into the community as a result of language and cultural barriers. The cyclical nature of immediate needs to acquire sustainable employment challenged by language barriers and access to transportation were also noted (Edward & Hines-Martin, 2015). The work presented by Bucken-Knapp, et al. (2019) speaks to frustrations with language programs, skill recognition and employment acquisition. Themes shared in both studies are found to be consistent with this study

as an ongoing part of the integration experience whether newcomers arrived two years ago or ten.

Themes presented between both groups regarding settlement and integration experience in Winnipeg were remarkably consistent. Although each of the women had a different arrival story such as country by which they arrived, time spent in transition country or how long they had been in Canada (Winnipeg) to date, with few exceptions, they shared very similar experiences, challenges and hopes. The findings are presented in four primary topic areas: finding refuge; strength and resilience; challenges to integration and hopes for the future. Each of these topics is broken down further to express the shared experiences discussed in the focus groups.

Finding Refuge

Safety

Galtung (1990) states, "When a basic human need is not satisfied, some kind of fundamental disintegration will take place." (p. 304). Physiological (food, water, shelter) and safety (freedom from violence, physical harm, and discrimination) needs create the foundation of Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs as the most fundamental requirements for human survival and primary to all other needs being met. In discussing John Burton's human needs theory, Galtung (1990) suggests that creating a hierarchy limits the possibilities and restricts the group from assessing their own priorities. He goes on to provide a working list of examples that include security needs (i.e.., to be safe from individual and collective violence), welfare needs (i.e.., food, water, breathable air, health, education), identity needs (i.e.., self-expression and actualization, purpose) and freedom needs (i.e.., communication, movement, expression,

lifestyle). The suggestion is that – in line with freedom needs – individuals or collective groups have autonomy over what they determine to be foundational to their immediate needs.

In the H5 Model developed by Mollica, et al. (2015), while intended to supply a model for healing in all populations, focuses specifically on refugees living in camps around the globe. This model includes human rights, identifying safety and security as foundations of care; and habitat, used intentionally to choose a term that includes the interconnection between physical and social environment as contributing factors to safety and fundamental needs (Mollica, 2019).

Every single participant expressed gratitude to be in Canada with its offering of safety, security, and appreciation of humanity. One shared, "I like the equality and that they [Canadians] value humanity." Although challenges are experienced (and will be shared), it was agreed that Canada offered opportunity no longer available in the *motherland*, or in the transition country where refugees experienced costs of daily living but little in terms of opportunity for settlement and sustainability. Women coming from Syria by way of Lebanon and Jordan spoke of how they would have to find ways to make money "under the table" as they were not considered citizens and therefore, could not legally seek employment. This made the experience very difficult when trying to meet daily needs as life was not free, everything had a cost. One participant shared that she was in Jordan prior to Canada and sending her kids to school was problematic due to cost, "In Jordan you have to pay for the books if you're not from there, everything you pay. Here you don't have to pay."

Safety was also discussed in terms of no war. Aside from one story of a local home where safety was questionable (the participant had since moved), all the women felt that they, and their families, were safe in their homes and community. There were no disclosures of issues with neighbours, in fact interactions with Canadian-born community members were said to be very

pleasant and encouraging. Several women expressed their appreciation of Canada's support of humanity, that everyone was considered equal. One participant share, "Everyone is open minded, they welcome me. They give me good advice, how to get things, how to get a job. They give me what they know." This description of Canada as a welcoming place of safety tied directly into discussions of home.

Home

The question of home elicited a variety of responses. For these participants, home took on multiple meanings. It was clear that home is many things including memories we hold within us. For some this these memories can be sources of pain.

When asked, "What does home mean to you? What does it look or feel like?" responses were varied. At first, there were questions as to what was meant. Home here, or back home – a common reference to country of origin. With the question left purposely vague and open to interpretation, home came to be described by some as the *Motherland* and by others as a place where comfort and safety are found. Most found both to be true although order varied between the two focus groups with one stating the motherland is where they think of first and the other identifying first with a place of safety or a place where one can rest in comfort, "home is where it's safe and warm, not just where you are born." This complicates the identity of home as for many of the participants, family remains a world apart – some still in the motherland, others enduring the wait for migration in transition countries. For others, it is here where children have opportunities for education and safety. For one participant, home was a painful memory of loss and suffering said to be ruined by the heartbreaking experience of having a loved one taken from her because of the ongoing war in Syria. She shared, "Syria is a feared place for me because I

lost my young son. Even in my dreams, I don't like to remember Syria." In this case, it was not as simple as now calling Canada home, she continued, "Canada is still not safe, my other son is in Jordan with his family. I'm waiting for him to be here to help with everything and then I will be safe." Home is where your family is, "If my family is safe and good, I will be safe and good." If we consider the context of safety in the expression of home, and the unanimous agreement that Canada has offered safety, we can lean into the concept of Canada as home.

Strength and Resilience

Spirituality

Spirituality and faith have been key factors in supporting coping and healing in many cultures (Marshall, 2012; Pandya, 2018). Although spirituality defies simple definition, the nuances suggest it is our connection to ourselves, our faith, each other, and the world around us (Fernando, 2018). A study on healing after torture (Isakson & Jurkovic, 2013) found that participants named faith as the most important part of coping and moving forward as they were comforted by trusting themselves to a higher power. Pandya (2018) suggests spirituality, along with appropriate support and programs can help coping and promote positive mental health outcomes.

The women in this study where no exception as they identified faith and spirituality as a source of strength. Prayers were said to be an important and accessible connection that could be done at the mosque, or church, or alone at home. "I go to the mosque and do it with others and when I am at home, I do it myself. It's the same" responded one participant. Another shared with me that, "I feel calm when I pray."

There is an understanding that there are many things beyond our control and trust that faith and prayer will provide what is necessary, or that there must be a reason if that is not the case. Asked specifically to identify sources of strength, spirituality was universal, yet prayer was also included in response to what kind of social activities participants took part in. When asked what activities were enjoyed for fun, one woman said, "Spirituality is my fun. The mosque makes me happy when I go there." That it was practiced alone or with others speaks to the ingrained nature of prayer as a practice in daily life as well as the important space and community that places of worship provide for people.

Barsky (2011) states, "Spiritual capacity provides people with strength to cope with conflict, loss, and other forms of stress … and the ability to grow from it." (p. 221). The process of settlement has been hard. Several times, there was a declaration of "it's hard." Even when things are good, or safe, or better, they are still hard – especially in the beginning. Spirituality, faith, and prayer provide opportunity to draws strength and guidance from beyond oneself while also while also strengthening it within.

Family

Family, particularly children, was another source of strength identified by the participants. A participant shared, "when my family is safe, I am good, I am strong." While almost every participant identified future goals for themselves, the mothers in the group identified the wellbeing of their children as sources of strength. Children learning the language and doing well in school, attending university, or upgrading previously certified occupational skills to gain employment were all examples of thriving that brought strength to the mothers. A mother shared, "All my kids are happy here and doing well. They like Canada very much so it is

good." Care and dedication to family not yet able to migrate from their transition country brought a very intense focus to the group. Participants stated they must bring those family members here and recognized that there were steps to be taken to make that happen. This conversation displayed a palpable strength and determination to do whatever it takes to bring their family together regardless how long it might take. In this case, family referenced included children but also parents and siblings. It also demonstrated experiences of pain as one participant shared that her son (adult) was in Jordan and didn't have enough food. As a result of this knowledge, she has difficulty eating and said this was even the case after fasting during Ramadan.

The research of Stewart et al. (2018) found parents claiming they were not concerned about hopes for their own future, but specifically for the future of their children. Participants in this study did declare future goals that will be discussed later, but the children were their priority. Individual goals of the women were discussed as something that could wait until others in their family were taken care of first. One participant proudly shared the success of her children and their primary school and post-secondary accomplishments, "My son has a job in security, my daughter is in university and another one in school, we are good." Her pride was evident as was the support and joy shared by the rest of the group as they shared encouraging and congratulatory comments.

Community

Community was disclosed as a source of strength, support, and information. All women identified their ethnocultural communities as a source of support. When asked where they go for information related to resources and events, community was a shared response. When asked

where they go if help is needed, the common answer was again community. There were other sources of information and sources for help shared including schools (where language classes are offered as well as children's schools), and family (arguably still part of the community), but community was foundational for the Syrian and Somali participants as a reliable source of support. There was strength in the understanding that community was available if needed but also the importance of having shared language.

Participants spoke of language being a challenge and the difficulties experienced with that. They also spoke of their ease experienced when speaking with those that share language. The women explained that when they are speaking their language, it is easier to understand feelings and emotions that they might not have words for, or ways to describe, in English. In their language, these things are understood and there is no need to try to explain. This commonality and belonging are provided within their ethnocultural communities. As stated by a participant, "Communities need each other, understand each other. The language barrier gets in the way of creating those positive relationships."

Diversity

When asked what surprised them the most upon arrival in Canada, diversity was the first topic that came up in both groups. It was one of the things that many found surprising upon arrival as many participants shared that they come from homogeneous countries like Somalia, for example, where everyone is Somali, and the religion is Islam. Although a new experience, participants claimed intercultural exposure to be advantageous in their settlement experience as it offers opportunities to know and understand others. One participant shared, "Here I learn more to accept people different - from country, language - accept all cultures. I can start to have

relationships with people from different countries and try to find something the same with each other." It was said that coming to Canada has provided the chance to spend time with and learn about many different cultures, this was particularly the case for those who participate in intercultural groups facilitated by local agencies. The women shared how this was especially helpful for practicing language. They appreciated the encouragement they received from Canadian-born community members to practice their English skills and felt this was the best opportunity to learn, practice, and acquire the language. It was also stated that diverse language groups and formal classes were more beneficial as it forced the groups to practice a common language rather than slip into a shared language other than English.

For one participant, the unshared experience of her Canadian-born neighbours – having not experienced war – provided an environment where she could be heard and felt sympathy because of her loss. She shared, "When I speak to them [Canadians] they listen to me and give me sympathy and it helps me. If I speak to people from Syria, maybe they've been through the same thing, it doesn't help." She felt this was important to her healing as when she spoke to people with shared experience who had gone through similar things, suffered losses because of war, they didn't engage in a way that she felt gave her space to grieve. The opportunity to share her story and feel supported was appreciated and sought after.

Challenges to Integration

The focus of this research was to identify strength and resilience factors and the questions posed in the focus groups were designed to be strength-based except for one explicit question regarding experienced challenges. The purpose of this was to position the participants as

empowered and autonomous in the sharing of their experiences. It might be considered; however, that there would be no need to discuss resilience in the absence of challenges.

In our first meeting, when the question of challenges was posed, the responses were quite short and, perhaps, even polite. As the groups continued, more disclosures came forward in this area, many expressing confusion over systems and processes. As we continued, participants asked if they could share more challenging and frustrating experiences. Some of the findings shared in this section are representative of current life situations and others are more representative of ongoing concerns.

Language

Research has demonstrated time and time again that language is a significant barrier to successful integration (Shishehgar, et al., 2017). Acquisition of language helps us to access services, manage our day-to-day lives in the community, gain employment, further education and training, participate in the larger community, and engage with our neighbours. Language was a reoccurring theme identified as a challenge in many discussions that occurred in the groups despite there being no questions that explicitly brought it up. Language was identified as a means of participation or isolation. Without it, there is a lack of belonging as it was stated that one cannot fully participate and integrate into the community without speaking and understanding the language. Further, difficulties finding and maintaining employment because of limited language were also shared by the participants with me.

As previously stated, simple interactions with neighbours allowed opportunities to practice and were encouraged by English speaking counterparts. The women also spoke of how they can get by with hand and body gestures to communicate and claimed they are able to

generally able to manage. Their desire to learn English went beyond these interactions. Language is experienced as a limiting factor. One participant summarizes this situation well by stating that, "Now I am in isolation, if I speak the language, I am part of society. Right now, I am not a part of it. I want to be a productive part of society." Body language and hand gestures are a creative way to bridge barriers in language and are important for navigating day-to-day life when the words are not available, but it is not a replacement to sharing a common language which helps build relationships and promotes understanding of context and emotion in communication.

Daily Life

Transportation

Transportation and driver's licensing were shared by the research participants as frustrating challenges to address. Winnipeg's public transportation systems and reliability is stated to be a limiting factor in procuring employment while opportunities to obtain a driver's license were said to be equally as frustrating. Learning how to use the transit system poses a challenge, although it did not stop several women in the group as they stated they taught themselves how to navigate the system. Participants shared that in their home country, they were able to walk onto the street and flag a car without issue, calling for a taxi wasn't something one had to do. Buses also create a challenge as service can be unreliable in terms of time schedules and limited routes on weekends, holidays and evenings can make it difficult to rely on this mode of transport to get to work. In some cases, bus routes were not compatible with available employment opportunities. Some participants noted how there would be transit available for workers during peak hours back home but that does not exist here in Winnipeg.

Many declared that the issue could be resolved if they could obtain a driver's license. This too, is said to be very challenging. To pass a driving test, lessons are needed. Money and availability become restrictive factors when seeking to obtain driving lessons. Participants reported that getting private lessons is very expensive and not something they can afford. Finding community programs that offer driving lessons as a service was also proving difficult. It was disclosed that an agency that once offered lessons no longer provides these services. A quick internet search found one non-profit organization indicating that it offered classes but, at the time of writing, confirmation has not yet been received.

Employment

Sustainable employment is yet another challenge that continues to be experienced by newcomers arriving in Winnipeg. It was made clear that having a job was a priority and next to language, is the answer to many of the issues the participants experienced in the city. "Little or no money, need a job. Want to sponsor family members to come to Winnipeg, need a job. Want to explore more of Manitoba and Canada, requires money, need a job." Participants were clear they did not want to rely on government programs for financial support. Most wanted to work, others were taking care of their families while their partners worked.

Difficulties finding and keeping employment were discussed as issues with language, skill recognition, and discrimination. At the time of the focus group discussions, one participant had lost her job due to language issues and was struggling to navigate the Employment and Income Assistance (EIA) program on her own with rent due in the coming days. Others also claimed language to be a barrier acquiring sustainable employment.

Participants also found the lack of skill recognition frustrating as it was difficult for them to understand why it was so arduous to have skills and credentials received in the country of origin recognized in Canada. It was understood that language was important but not to the extent to which some professions did not value training received elsewhere. This topic really struck a nerve with everyone. The interpreter of one group who came to Canada as an immigrant asked to share something. She said, "even as an immigrant, I know is not refugee, I come as immigrant, when you apply you are asked what are your skills, if you go to university. Why do they ask if they are not going to count?" Although the context of this study is refugee experience, her question is very valid. Another shared, "We need more time. Some of us have certificates from collage but we need to finish. We need time. It's very hard."

Education and healthcare were specific examples shared with me as one participant was a teacher in Syria, and another had a daughter who was a nurse. Neither were eligible to work in their fields without significant additional schooling in Manitoba. She explained, "I had university degree. But here because it's different I need to start again; it takes a long time. But my daughter she goes to school, so it is good." At this time another offered, "Yes, we are not looking for us, we're looking for child now. For us, *tout fini*." The expression here was not that there was no desire to return to school for upgrading or retraining but there was frustration that it was necessary and several mentions of it being too hard.

Employment was the only topic that alluded to as issues of discrimination. Two of the women claimed that they were not hired or were fired because of their dress. The women are Muslim and wear a hijab and abaya. No further details were shared with me. Another concern was having access to space for prayer. Participants noted that there was no place to pray in the workplace. This was one of a few challenges they experienced with Islamic practices.

The interconnected nature of the previous three challenges needs to be addressed as they exist in a web that makes procuring employment that much more difficult. To obtain a desirable job, one must have language proficiency and a means to get to the job (reliable transportation). If we are going to have means to transportation (ability to afford bus tickets, get a driver's license or purchase a vehicle), we need to have financial means – employment. If life's needs (bills to pay) and access to English classes are getting in the way of acquiring language, employment remains obscure. It is a difficult and frustrating cycle for them to navigate.

Access to Services

All the women indicated that they access settlement services for a variety of reasons including housing, employment, language classes, information groups, finances and more. It was interesting that many were named however, most individuals only accessed one or two. What was remarkable was the inconsistency in which services were accessed. It was discovered that experiences from the same agency could be drastically different despite the same service being sought after. For example, one participant recognized the assistance she received from an agency providing housing support, while another said she tried to get help from the same organization for the same purpose and did not receive any support. It is undetermined what the factors may have been to create these circumstances but the same inconsistency in degree of helpfulness was indicated by the participants seeking employment and language services. Some had very positive and helpful experiences, others felt they were on their own.

A lengthy discussion ensued about how important information was (or wasn't) shared regarding navigation of their new community. This was quite specifically directed to two areas, orientation information upon arrival and sponsorship information for family members. They

reported that there is an abundance of information shared upon arrival in the form of orientation sessions, but it was too much, too soon. At the time of the sessions, the information held little relevance to their current experience and needs. By the time there was a need for the information that had been shared, it had been long forgotten if ever retained at all. Making things more complicated, there was little idea as to how to access the information once it was needed. The women said they knew there were settlement services out there, but they did not know who did what or how to access them outside of those they were already familiar with. They were very clear that the approach to orientation needed to change to make the information more palpable, durable, and obtainable.

Another area where information was unclear to them was how to bring family still in transition to Canada. There were bits of information shared by each participant such as needing to have a minimum income and parts of the application process demonstrating it had been talked about somewhere along the way. An assumption is that there may have been conversation upon arrival or during orientation sessions as the question would likely have been front and centre on the minds of those who had just arrived. It was unknown what the different methods are and exactly what is required. Where to go for such information was also unknown. Bringing family members left in countries still experiencing conflict and those holding in transitions countries is a priority for the women. Understanding the process to do so would be helpful to recognizing the steps they can take to be purposeful in moving toward reunification.

Timely access to healthcare was another challenge and adjustment to the logistics of accessing the Canadian system providing free services for residents versus a private pay-as-you-go system. Participants shared that back home when they wanted to see a doctor, they just call the medical centre and go. There were fees associated with the visits but there were no long wait

times for appointments. Here in Manitoba, they noted that one doesn't have to pay but can wait weeks or months to get in to see a doctor. Language was yet again an issue for medical appointments as appropriate interpretation can be difficult to access. Several women highlighted that they had experienced difficulties communicating with doctors and staff, sometimes resulting in appointments that did not tend to, or even discuss, the presenting issue(s).

Lifestyle and Traditions

Parenting

In our third and final Arabic speaking group (summary and feedback), the participants were asked if there were any other challenges, they'd like to share that had not been discussed. Perhaps attributed to the familiarity that had developed, the topic of parenting arose. More accurately, interference in parenting became the topic of discussion.

The women discussed fear of interacting with Child and Family Services (CFS) and concerns that if they did or said the wrong thing, they were at risk of being reported and having their children apprehended. One participant stated, "We had no issues with parenting back home but now we are afraid of loud voices." Another shared, "Schools teach kids they can call CFS. This breaks something between kids and parents." None of the women had direct experience with CFS yet the fear was there. They shared that many Syrians see videos from Sweden and Denmark about kids being apprehended.

One woman indicated that she wanted to teach her children cultural and religious traditions and practices such as Ramadan, saying she wanted the children to practice a little bit of fasting (not a full fast). However, she was scared if the child went to school without food or told the teacher that her mom had told her not to eat, she would be reported for not feeding her. She

indicated that this pains her as she wants to teach these practices to her children. Other women in the group agreed with her comments.

Another example of parental interference in the school was their children's hygiene practices when using facilities at school. It was explained within the group that water is the appropriate way to clean oneself after using the lavatory. This is what the mothers are teaching their children and how they want them to look after themselves. Given that water is not readily available in most Canadian public bathroom stalls, the children are using toilet paper and being told by school staff that this is appropriate and gets them clean. Participants indicated that it is not fine, and it does not provide the preferred level of hygiene for their children (they instruct their children to take a water bottle with them). Their children were said to side with school staff, ignoring the parents' instructions, "teacher is right, mom is wrong." The feeling expressed during this part of the discussion can only be described as disempowerment. It is possibly the only time participants claimed frustration with a lack of control in their lives, stating they don't know what to do because the children listen to the teacher and say the teacher knows best. There was no disrespect indicated towards school staff, but acknowledgement that there is a lack of understanding between cultures. This speaks to the women's desire to share stories and "touch" upon the lives of others. If there were opportunities for school staff to learn about cultural practices in a way that supported building authentic relationships, they might be more embraced and supported rather than seen as an inconvenience or brushed off. At the very least, we might consider this an overstepping on the part of school staff if in fact there is a contradiction or overriding to a parents request for their child's hygiene and wellness.

Clothing

Clothing was another challenge discussed by the women in both groups but perhaps not in the way that might be expected. The women reported that the challenge is finding affordable and desirable Islamic clothing for their families. A search for relatable academic or anecdotal articles found several referring to discrimination experienced because of the modest attire and headwear worn by Muslim women, but very little represented the challenge of the availability of Islamic clothing for women and their families.

Not entirely without options, some clothing can be found in stores or ordered online. They reported that options available in shops or by individuals who bring clothes to sell online can be quite pricey and choices remain limited. One participant stated, “you wear what you get rather than what you like.” Traditional clothing for children is also difficult to acquire and the additional challenge of young ones rapidly growing requires the mothers to purchase larger sizes in hopes they may continue to fit for upcoming celebrations.

Clothing may be purchased from online stores, which can be more cost effective, yet it is difficult to know what one is going to get in terms of style, fabric, quality and fit and there is no opportunity to touch the items let alone try them on. Another option may be to have items sent from connections overseas, however the cost of shipping can be restrictive. As with the food, travelling friends and family members visiting Islamic countries are leaned on as a source of clothes supply.

Food

Over the years, we have witnessed the emergence of internationally focused grocery stores in Winnipeg sourcing products from all over India, Africa, Asia, South America, the

Middle East and beyond. These shops are a direct reflection of the increasing diversity in our country as well as the integrity and ingenuity of our newcomer populations. There is clearly an appreciation for the availability of such products through these shops as well as neighbourhood grocery stores; however, it was determined that not all are not created equal.

Food and groceries became an unexpected topic of interest and humour, albeit with some disdain for the climate impacted prairie market. When discussing the biggest change experienced because of coming to Canada, one response was, “the food, it was hard.” Nostalgia was evident among the women as they spoke of food from back home. The taste, smell and overall quality of meat, milk and daily bread all coming into the discussion alongside fruits and vegetables. The lack of freshness of food in Canadian groceries was agreed upon by each participant in each group. It was noted that in some cases a significant amount of individual’s weight was lost on arrival to Canada because of not being able to stomach the food. In one case, a participant highlighted that her husband will not eat any food other than what she prepares for him so there are no opportunities to go out or to try new options. Ultimately, the issue was the freshness of the food. They noted that back home one would purchase food every two or three days directly from the farmers or the market. One woman shared, “We buy it fresh, milk, fruit meat, is fresh. We don’t use a fridge.” Always fresh, never frozen. The mention of frozen meat brought some laughter to the group in concern about how long it has been that way. Meat, dairy, fruit, and vegetables were flavourful and aromatic unlike their Canadian counterparts that can often lack taste and scent. Further, in some cases, customary bread could not be made as it requires a particular type of oven used outdoors. As many women live in apartments, this is not an option. Comments and gesturing appeared to bring participants to a place of happy memories as they discussed how the bread was made and the smells that would permeate the yard.

Participants indicated that they learned to work with the food that was available to them and that although it is not the same, they are able to access the ingredients required to prepare traditional foods. They also highlighted that many ethnic grocers in Winnipeg import seasonal fruits and vegetables so there are opportunities to acquire these products through them and, at times, from others who are travelling and can bring items back to Canada with them.

Hopes for the Future

Safety and wellness of family are the primary hope of the participants. For some that means being reunited with (adult) children here in Canada. For others, it is continued safety and opportunity to go to school, be that k-12 or post-secondary. The hope is for their children to thrive in Winnipeg. Beyond that, several of the women indicated their own hopes to go to school once their children were settled and they had acquired enough language to be able to do so. There were no immediate plans to begin their education journey, or even knowledge of what program they were interested in, as they simply expressed a desire to go to university when time allowed. Some women shared their hopes to find sustainable employment that met their needs and allowed for a reasonable schedule that was conducive to more participation in the community rather than working night shifts.

The women spoke at great lengths about how they would like more opportunities to engage with Canadian-born members of the community. They felt this would be beneficial for everyone as it would offer an opportunity to share stories and learn about each other. The wish is for “programs where Canadians and newcomers come together to share experiences and communicate, understand each other and build together.” It was universal that programs such as these would help newcomers to integrate and acquire language while also building community overall.

Discussion of Findings

The study set out to identify support structures contributing to resilience in the integration experiences of newcomer women with refugee experience. It was an intentional strength-based approach that summoned critical theory in the exposure of several challenges that have been long existent but are certainly changeable. In the case of forced migration, peacebuilding takes place far beyond the site of conflict. These women have demonstrated it takes place within themselves through their faith and spirituality, in their homes and immediate family as new routines are established in the hopes of creating safety and wellness for their families, and in the greater community through volunteering, education and employment. While most of the women were not yet where they hope to be in terms of life goals, they had a clear vision of what it was they hoped for and how they might get there.

The question was, what makes these women resilient? Is it the support offered by settlement agencies, ethnocultural communities, or internal fortitude? In short, yes. All the above, and so much more. Using environment disaster as an example, Eadie (2019) affirms the term resilience has been used carelessly in media and policy as it refers to the strength of individuals rather than responsiveness to damaging and oppressive systems. In a famous quote provided by Jon Kabat-Zinn (1990), “You cannot stop the waves, but you can learn to surf.” There is again an indication that the onus to “surf” or survive is on the person experiencing adversity. Often, this is followed by accolades for the individual and avoidance of necessary issues and changes in policy that might prevent further harm. In conflict, much like waves in the ocean, there is little control over what external forces are imposing on civilians. Ungar responds by suggesting, “But . . . it’s easier to learn to surf if you have a surfboard, a coach, and a

lifeguard" (resilienceresearch.org) expanding the responsibility beyond the individual to the environments they live in and systems they navigate.

If we consider the resources supporting resilience discussed in Michael Ungar's (2018) book *Change Your World*: *The Science of Resilience and the True Path to Success:* structure; consequences; intimate and sustaining relationships; lots of other relationships; a powerful identity; sense of control; sense of belonging; rights and responsibilities; safety and support; positive thinking; physical well-being and financial well-being we see a contradiction to the narrative of internal perseverance and grit in response to adversity and implications for the environment and support system surrounding the individual – means to surf. We also see the context for emancipatory peacebuilding as there is autonomy, voice, and action in these resources.

Structure presents our lives with some amount of predictability through a sense of routine and purpose (Ungar, 2018). It also brings about a sense of control as we choose to establish what that routine looks like. Having experienced upheaval and transitions, this normalcy can provide needed familiarity whether it be through daily routines of going to work or school or managing a household. Women in the study who were not employed (but wished to be working) indicated they found ways to volunteer at organizations such as Mosaic, that provides parenting classes and child minding for group participants and Winnipeg Harvest. These activities provided a sense of fulfillment and purpose while also offering skills training and social interactions. Volunteering is another means that brings purpose to one's life contributing to a sense of fulfillment and purpose while engaging with community institutions.

The idea of consequences seemed like a ridiculous resource to consider when we are discussing the experiences of refugees who have endured the consequences of other people's

choices and actions. However, if we apply consequences to Nussbaum's (2011) functioning and abilities, it takes on a different context. Pursuing opportunities to participate or not, especially when experiencing (safe) discomfort will have consequences to whether opportunities are available. Assuming there is opportunity to attend language classes, obtain employment, and have social interactions (i.e., there is *ability*), the function of participation is where there is consequence (Note - It is important to note that this function should be supported by a broader system of health and wellness before making assumptions about one's choices to participate or not). If a system supports participation and ensures that accessible opportunities remain available than enrolling in language classes, for example, may be considered at a time when it is more in line with an individual's capabilities or priorities rather than restricted to arbitrary scheduling and limitations that do not account for the many interconnected challenges and needs one might experience upon resettlement. This is just to say that the lack of accessibility should not be experienced because of the individual navigating life's challenges.

One woman noted how a mentor with shared experience in the community told her she had to get out and interact with all the different people, practice her English as it was the only way to really start to integrate. The choice remained with the individual. The consequence, in this case, was exposure to the diversity of the city and developing many new relationships. The consequence to not engaging with others may have been a longer, even lonelier, integration experience for some women.

Relationships include the intimate familial relationships and the need for opportunities to reunite loved ones and the wellness and success of those already here in Manitoba. It also includes the greater network of relationships including those within shared ethnocultural groups and the more diverse neighbourhood communities, as well as communities of shared faith.

Religious institutions such as churches can support relationship building and community connections by bringing refugees together with the broader community. Community events, information sessions and other gathers provide opportunities for dialogue and interaction. Each of the relational networks described here can contribute to resilience and thriving through meaningful connections, support systems and networks for information sharing.

Social identity theory was discussed along with the nuances of the well-being of a gendered group being determined by self-esteem, positive emotions, and life satisfaction, etc. (Schmitt et al., 2002). While there was sharing of pain and loss, particularly due to missed loved ones, there was also gratitude, self-assuredness, and a positive outlook toward the future. The women, in the context of our groups, did not identify as victims of their circumstances despite their challenges. If anything, they demonstrated great courage and tenacity, finding their way through the shortcomings of our local systems to learn how to navigate and meet their immediate needs.

An interesting discussion about the perceived difference between the experiences of newcomer men and women disclosed that the women felt they, for the most part, had the same opportunities as men. Speaking on employment, they indicated there is an opportunity to do anything desired here and employment is not restricted to roles for men and women. If it was necessary to summarize the identity of the women, it would have to be said they were autonomous women within the systems of their families and shared communities. Their experiences were not described as gendered aside from their roles as mothers.

A sense of control is found in personal autonomy, applied structure of day-to-day living and greater participation socially, politically, and economically. It implies we have choice in the trajectory of our lives. It is also one of the pillars of trauma-informed practice (SAMHSA, 2014),

essential for any system seeking to provide support and avoid causing harm. In the case of refugees, control has been taken away at some point as forced migration begins. This may continue throughout the transition experience. Feeling a sense of control in our lives where we have opportunity to make decisions impacting both the present and future of ourselves and our families is an important part of building resilience. Working in structured systems may support or hinder further control (i.e., getting to choose a house or neighbourhood upon arrival) depending on available resources. This resource, along with each person's financial well-being, may be among the most precarious when specifically addressing this group as the previous discussion regarding challenges to employment has indicated.

A sense of belonging was discussed in several contexts in this thesis. The women indicated belonging in several areas (family, religious community, shared ethnocultural community) as well as the preference for a greater sense of belonging in the diversity of their Canadian home. The desire to acquire language and interact with Canadians in a way that promotes learning and understanding by sharing culture, experiences and stories represents intent to belong outside of immediate newcomer communities, increasing community participation. A sense of belonging further contributes to group identity shown to support stress management and increase self-esteem (Scheepers & Ellemers, 2019).

Positive thinking, like resilience, can come under fire as putting the responsibility of those experiencing adversity to just *think positive* and potentially promotes victim blaming while ignoring very real hardships (Ungar, 2018, p. 77). This can be very dismissive and cause further harm and isolation as an individual feel's unseen, unheard and invalidated. In the *Community Resiliency Model* (CRM) developed by Elaine Miller-Karas of the Trauma Resource Institute, the question of *What else is true?* is posed to participants, drawing attention to existing, and even

imaginary, resources available to us in times of hardship. This practice maintains space for difficult feelings and emotions while offering helpful strategies in the way of coping skills. Positive thinking should not be a replacement for processing difficult experiences and emotions yet can offer hope as we look ahead. As we shared in the groups, we can have gratitude for safety and frustration with challenges or pain from loss. All these things can be true at the same time. Being able to access some amount of positivity, or even neutrality, can help support resilience.

Finally, physical wellbeing is impacted by several factors including our mental health and levels of stress (APA, 2018). Other considerations such as a sense of belonging, access to appropriate housing, nutrition, and health care, etc. also have great impact on our physical wellbeing. Having the necessary resources to care for ourselves is an essential component toward supporting resilience that is impacted far beyond individual integrity. In a personal interaction contributing to the development of this research, observation was made during a meeting between a clinician and client. Upon arrival at the client's home, she appeared from her bedroom looking quite distressed. As the clinician began to inquire as to how she was doing, she shared with her several discomforts as well as her isolation. Although the interaction was brief, there was a noticeable difference in posture and energy as the they continued to speak and we all shared tea. She began to sit a little taller and her voice got a little bit stronger. This opportunity for social interaction and time to talk about what she was experiencing appeared to be having an impact. This will forever be engrained as a moment of the (assumed) impact isolation can have on physical and mental wellbeing as well as acknowledgement that we must continue to assess our approach to settlement and community services to continue to do better.

Through this discussion we can see the interconnectedness of social supports and identity and how they impact resilience. Resilience is so much more than internal fortitude that we are born with or without. We can also derive the benefit of collective communities where we work to support and uplift each other creating an environment where everyone benefits, and no individual or group need be left behind.

Conclusion

The discussions in each focus group were rich and insightful. In no way did the women present or refer to themselves as victims of circumstance. Quite the opposite, they articulated a keen interest in integration with a desire for opportunities to interact with their Canadian neighbours in a meaningful way. The women made it clear that they would like support from others in the form of teaching or direction but not in a manner that creates dependency. They wish to be taught how to find and access resources so they can go forward independently. A common phrase was, “I don’t know how to do that, tell me how to do that” or “how can I find out how to do that.” Never was there a reference to having something done *for* them. This is an important distinction as it speaks to the autonomy and agency of the women and their desire to develop social capital that will help them take care of themselves and their families.

Chapter 6 - Conclusion

Introduction

This final section will summarize the key findings of the research and provide final insights regarding contributions, recommendations, and potential for future research. As was shared with the Arabic speaking group when discussing the difficulty of obtaining information regarding sponsorship, it is my hope that the findings of this study be reviewed and taken into consideration by those developing programming as well as policy for newcomers in our community. This study has been a reminder that what we do, or don't do, as service providers has real impact and consequences on people's lives. If we can put one recommendation into practice, we will have done something that will continue to benefit newcomers to our community for the foreseeable future.

Overall Key Findings

Several themes and sub-themes were developed over the course of six focus groups. As more time was spent together, the depth of the conversations continued to increase. We have a lot to learn from the lived experiences in our communities. Here are the study's overall key findings in this study:

1) Family, spirituality, and community were found to be key factors supporting resilience. Family is a driver of happiness and heartache. More support and opportunities need to be available to help people understand the processes that will help them reunite with family. Spirituality and faith support inner calm and a belief that things will be okay. This helps reduce some of the impending stress during the challenges of settlement. The social

capital provided by community is invaluable. Community is a source of connection, support, and information. Accessible ethnocultural communities provide appreciated connections due to shared language and traditions.

2) The interconnectedness of employment, transportation and language create a significant challenge. More work needs to be done to break down these barriers making each component more accessible while, at the same time, not losing sight of the impact each has on the other (i.e., a person needs transportation to get a job but needs money to improve access to transportation or the person needs acquisition of language to improve employment opportunities but cannot access classes due to needing to work to meet basic needs).
3) Programs and other opportunities need to be developed that support interactions between newcomers and Canadian-born citizens. Specifically, Canadians generally do not interact with ethnocultural populations in a consistent way. This provides opportunities for newcomers to share their stories and experiences, practice language and dispel misconceptions. It also provides them with an opportunity to learn about Canadian culture. For Canadians, it provides an opportunity for learning in a spirit of cultural humility and provides opportunities to do better in terms of establishing a more inclusive environment.

There is a need for more cultural competency and responsiveness in our schools and other institutions as well as continuing evaluating practices of service delivery and environments for inclusivity. This can be done through formal training but may be more effective if done as a commitment to relationship building. Engagement through transcultural stories (Senehi, 2008)

would be an ideal way to bridge understanding of cultural traditions and practices and improve respect overall.

Contributions to the Discipline

The experiences of newcomer women integrating into Canadian communities' matters. Too often, assumptions are made about the experiences of refugees and quality of life pre-Canadian context and the agency of individuals is undervalued. This research sought to shed more light on the courage, intelligence, and integrity of newcomer women as they navigate new experiences and expectations. There is a need to recognize that lives that have their course altered by conflict may have once been thriving with fulfilling careers, family support, and community connections. We must also recognize the significant contributions that are made by new Canadians as formal and informal networks of supports, job creators, and general citizens paying taxes and contributing to local communities.

The outcomes of this research will be used to promote awareness for service providers in the settlement community and to advocate for training in culturally responsive practices grounded in cultural humility for service providers in intersecting fields such as education and health care. Findings may also provide information that will assist agencies to recognize and fill gaps not currently addressed by existing programming. Should services already exist to support research participants, efforts to improve awareness of such resources will be encouraged in hopes of reaching a wider audience that may share the same, or similar, needs.

This research reflects the importance of emancipatory peacebuilding through the understanding of local knowledge, ethnocultural diversity and community building. The experiences of participants have demonstrated the desire for local participation through economic development by way of employment and social development through true integration

in their communities (Thiessen, 2012). Not without agency, they clearly articulated the needs and priorities necessary to support such transition through language acquisition and opportunities to engage with Canadians outside the settlement and immigration communities to truly support integration opposed to settlement. Building these suggestions into accessible and sustainable programs would continue to support the agency and empowerment of this group of women as well as others with similar experiences.

Recommendations for Future Practice and Policymaking

The recommendations shared in this section are not formed by the researcher (although they are agreed upon) but directly from the reflections of the research participants. Their thoughtfulness, intent and relevance are a direct reflection of the personal experiences of the women and were agreed on unanimously among the group. Two recommendations are offered in the areas of orientations and information sharing for new arrivals and integrated programming for newcomers and Canadians.

Considerations for New Arrival Orientations and Information Sharing

It is recommended that the policy and practice approach to new arrival orientations sessions be reconsidered. Participants were clear most of the information received was of little use to them as they received it all at once, and there was no further program sharing when they were in a better position to absorb essential information. This is a known issue in the settlement sector and agencies that have the capacity (human and financial resources) to try to address it. For example, during the pandemic, Manitoba Interfaith Immigration Council (MIIC) scheduled

online information sessions on a variety of topics using Zoom (meeting presentation, MANSO Mental Health Working Group, 2022). Aurora Family Therapy Centre (AFTC) partners with other community agencies and invites guest speakers to groups in their Newcomer Community Development Programs addressing topics such as sponsorship, parenting, and Canadian law as requested by group participants (personal communication, 2022).

Presumably, these sessions are helpful to those who attend as they can ask questions for further clarification, and it is information being sought at the time it is needed. The issue becomes accessibility. Review of MIIC's website found brief information pertaining to their group sponsorship program and a current special sponsorship project for Afghan nationals but did not give any indication as to whether any other virtual information sessions were continuing. AFTC's informational programming is provided to meet client needs as requested but availability is limited to those attending the group. These examples are not provided in criticism, but to recognize the limitations because of resources, mandates and funding. This is also not to say that these are the only two organizations addressing the issue but to provide examples of the limitations and reach.

During an update session at the 2021 PNT (Prairie and Northern Territories) Summit it was shared by IRCC's interim director that due to COVID-19 public health requirements new Afghan arrivals were isolating in hotel rooms. Because they could not attend group information sessions and were in the rooms for two weeks, they were provided with tablets that were preloaded with video information sessions in accessible languages. Long term use of such devices or development of multilingual apps that can be uploaded on smart phones may be a long-term solution to making such information available as settlement support workers could assist in loading the app to a phone and making sure it is set to the appropriate language and

regular updates could be applied. There would still be limitations including making all required languages available and literacy skills, yet combinations of video, image and text features could address this significantly.

Essential requirements, of course, are funding and human resources. A partnership between IRCC and the Ethnocultural Council of Manitoba (ECCM) could be a good place to start. Throughout the pandemic, ECCM provided up to date information about restrictions, vaccinations, and safety precautions. This information was made available in posters, videos, and virtual information sessions in many languages in a remarkably timely way. This organization could increase reach through community leadership as well as the collective knowledge of formal services, limitations of access and current trends/issues from its extensive membership and governance.

Integrated Programming, Learning and Sharing with Canadian Neighbours

There are notable projects facilitated by agencies such as Immigration Partnership Winnipeg's *Healing Hearts through Discussion and Action* project working to bring Indigenous people and newcomers together to share experiences, learn histories and dispel misconceptions developed through media and learned stereotypes (https://www.ipwinnipeg.org/indigenous-newcomer-bridgebuiding). Aside from open invitations to upcoming community events, there appears to be very little purposeful engagement between newcomers and Canadian-born citizens, specifically those not connected to the newcomer community in any sort of way. Some of the benefits of this to the newcomer community have already been discussed, but what about benefit to the greater community?

This project has not sought out or discussed issues of racism and discrimination (aside from one mention of experience in the workplace); however, we know it is an issue in our country and in our city as was cited by a 2015 MacLean's article in response to the death of Tina Fontaine and the previously mentioned report published by the Manitoba Islamic Society (Sotiriadou & Elbakri, 2022). To further elaborate, this study drew from the experiences of Muslim community members and leaders with 62 percent of participants reporting experiences of Islamophobia. These experiences primarily took place in public spaces (73 percent) followed closely by school and workplaces (each claiming 43 percent of experiences). These experiences came in the form of verbal attacks, racial profiling, and physical assaults. When asked if they felt safe wearing religious or cultural clothing, 29 percent of participants said no, they do not feel safe (Sotiriadou & Elbakri, 2022).

Often, these issues are a result of ignorance and fear and demonstrate the need for exposure for something different as we do not know different from what we have learned until presented with new opportunities and information. Stories present opportunities to learn about each other in a way that humanizes each other and builds compassion (Senehi, 2019). Spaces that support this kind of sharing (i.e., the significance of the hijab) could prove to have significant benefits for all communities and the future of our country in kinship and reconciliation. Critical to building meaningful groups in this manner is the shared vulnerability and power dynamics that are created in the group. For example, if a sharing were to be focused on the meaning of religious or traditional clothing, at no point should those sharing feel like they are in a position of feeling like they are defending themselves. This requires an intentional effort in building group safety and forming relationships that develop into a community of support.

Future Research

This study excluded service providers from participating due to potential conflict of interest with the investigator. Many service providers indicated they would be interested in taking part and shared that they have an informed perspective due to having refugee experience, being a part of ethno-communities, and working in the settlement sector. This knowledge could provide important insight to the development (or possibly regression in some areas) of the sector. A more comprehensive study of various ethnocultural community members aligned with groups or interviews of the service providers could provide value to the community members and leaders as it would contribute to the ongoing development of formal resources.

In the literature search for resilience theory resources, most sources were focused on child and adolescent development. While this makes sense considering the context of the need for supportive environments and theory informed practices for social workers, youth psychologists, and other care providers supporting youth, there appears to be a glaring opportunity for considerable contributions toward research and application as we continue learning from our newcomer communities. Although Ungar recognizes the need to assess the framework of resilience within specific cultures, the references are still focused on youth (Ungar, 2008). If we were to apply the existing findings from this research to the *Five Principles of Resilience Relevant to Practice,* we can see themes emerging from this existing small subset of data. There is room to continue to develop resilience theory in the stories of newcomers.

Conclusion

The intent of this thesis research was to understand resilience factors contributing to the settlement and integration experiences of the women who participated in the project so that, as a

sector and community, we might continue to learn and grow to better serve those here today and those who will join our community in the future. The remarkable women who contributed to the study have demonstrated that to do this we need to understand the interconnected nature of formal (settlement, education, healthcare, etc.) systems of support and informal (community leaders, ethnocultural communities, neighbours and families) alongside the shared experiences of those arriving in our city.

As a formal sector, we need to stay intentional in our efforts to promote integration through opportunities for participation economically, politically, and socially. We can do this by supporting the acquisition of language, education and employment and seeing this as an investment toward the future. The participants in this research indicated their desire to participate and contribute alongside their Canadian neighbours. All that is required for them is an opportunity to share experiences with their Canadian neighbours, have access to education and/or training that leads to meaningful and sustainable employment and opportunities to practice language in both formal and informal shared environments.

As a country that offers hope to those escaping violence and persecution (IRCC, 2018), Canada must do more than simply open its borders to survivors. Canadians must be aware of the dispossession, forced displacement, and violence survivors have experienced in war torn countries especially in the Global South as these resettled refugees, including Government Assisted Refugees (GARs), and Privately Sponsored Refugees (PSRs), make Canada their new home (Rahman, 2021). Consequently, all Canadians must all take responsibility for uplifting and nurturing our diverse communities through meaningful integration that transcends mere existence, so we can all share in the richness of our neighbours, community, and country.

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Appendix I

Focus Group Questions

Meeting One

Q1. Please introduce yourselves.

Q2. What would you like us (the group) to know about you?

Q3. How long have you been in Canada?

Where were you before coming here?

Q4. How would you describe your experience from when you arrived until now?

Can you give an example of something positive you've experienced? What is a challenge you have experienced?

Q5. What is something that has surprised you about Canadian culture?

Can you give me an example of that?

Q6. Can you tell me about your neighbourhood?

Can you tell me more about that?

Q7. Do you interact with people in your neighbourhood?

If yes, How often? In what kind of ways?

If no, what prevents you from interacting?

Q8. What do you do for fun?

How often do you do this? Who are the people you do this with?

Q9. What kind of social things would you like to do if you had the opportunity?

What might that look like? What is needed to make that happen?

Q10. Where is your favourite place to go in Manitoba?

What do like about it? How often do you go?

Q11. Do you have any questions you'd like to ask me?

Meeting Two

Q1. Can you tell me what home means to you?

Can you share more about what that looks and feels like?

Q2. What has been the most significant change for you since coming to Canada?

Can you give me an example of that?

Q3. Who are the people you are most connected to in the community?

What makes these relationships important to you?

Q4. What is your main source of information in the community? How do you find out about events that are happening or services that you may need?

Can you give me an example of that?

Q5. What kind of support system do you have? For example, if you need help, who do you ask?

Can you give an example of a time you had to reach out to someone?

Q6. Are you part of any community groups or organizations?

Can you tell me more about that group/organization? If yes, what kind of activities or projects do you engage in?

Q7. Have you received support from settlement agencies?

Can you give me an example of that?

Q8. Do you feel that there are adequate opportunities available to you?

Can you say more about that? What would you like to see change?

Q9. Do you feel the experiences of women coming to Canada are different than those of men and children?

If yes, why do you think that is? Can you give an example of that?

Q10. What is your greatest source of strength?

Can you share an example of that?

Q11. What are your hopes for the future?

Can you say more about what that looks like? What is needed for that to happen?

Q12. Do you have any questions you'd like to ask me?