Refugee youth reflections on their middle school education experiences in Winnipeg, Canada Are they simply left to sink or swim?

by

Aklilu Teferi

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies of
University of Manitoba

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Faculty of Social Work
University of Manitoba

Winnipeg

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ABSTRACT

Refugee children face distinct educational challenges that differ significantly from those experienced by other immigrant groups and mainstream Canadian students. Despite this, limited research exists on the educational experiences of children affected by war-particularly how their pre-migration and transmigration experiences influence their post-migration education in host countries. This qualitative study employed an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach to explore the lived experiences of refugee youth from conflict-affected East African countries who immigrated to Canada as children between 2012 and 2018 and had become young adults at the time of the study. Participants reflected on their middle school education across three contexts: their countries of origin, refugee camps, and Canadian schools. Data collected through semi-structured interviews with nine refugee youths and three middle school educators in Winnipeg, Manitoba. The findings illuminate the educational journeys of these youth, highlighting both the challenges and opportunities they encountered as a refugee child. The study examines how prior educational experiences-whether in their home countries or refugee camps-impacted their academic performance in Canadian middle schools.

Using critical social work and an ecological systems framework, the study explores the interplay of various social and institutional factors that shaped participants' academic and social development. Key themes include experiences of trauma, discrimination, and xenophobia within Canadian schools; the lack of adequate systemic support; and the critical role of after-school programs, parental involvement, faith, and cultural values in fostering resilience and academic success. While participants acknowledged the improved educational resources available in

Canada, they expressed concerns about the age-oriented entrance assessment procedures that do not consider their previous education and experience.

This study offers valuable insights from both students and educators, shedding light on the systemic barriers refugee children face in host country education systems. It also emphasizes the role of social work in facilitating smoother transitions for refugee students and calls for further research that includes diverse stakeholder perspectives and advocates for policy reform.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am deeply grateful to all those who supported and encouraged me throughout this PhD journey.

First and foremost, I extend my sincere thanks to my supervisor, **Professor Michael Baffoe**, for his unwavering guidance, thoughtful feedback, and mentorship from the early stages of conceptualization to the completion of this dissertation. Your support instilled confidence and clarity throughout the process.

I am also thankful to my advisory committee members—**Professor Donald Fuchs**, **Dr. Steven Feldgaier**, and **Professor Tuula Heinonen**—for their expertise, critical insights, and constructive feedback, which significantly shaped the quality and direction of this work. I also appreciate the faculty and staff at the University of Manitoba for fostering an environment of academic growth and resilience.

To my colleagues and fellow graduate students, thank you for your camaraderie, idea exchanges, and solidarity. Your support, whether through peer reviews, late-night discussions, or shared moments of levity, greatly enriched my academic and personal experience.

I am especially grateful to my extended family for their unwavering belief in me. To my brother **Tekalegne** and sister **Meseret**, your encouragement during moments of doubt, your practical support during my time in Ethiopia, and your constant presence made a profound difference. This dissertation would not have been possible without your love, prayers, and generosity.

To my friends—**Mule, Dawit, Addisu, Sami, Merawe**, and others—thank you for your encouragement, humour, and patience. Your friendship helped me maintain balance and perspective throughout this demanding journey.

I also wish to acknowledge the enthusiastic participation of the management and staff at **IRCOM** and **The Hood Fams**. Your contributions were vital to the success of this study.

Finally, to the nine resilient refugee youth and three dedicated educators who shared their stories—thank you. It has been an honour to learn from you and to represent your experiences in this dissertation.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my loving and supportive family.

To my beloved mother, Bezuneshe Mekuria: I have always prided myself on my ability to overcome obstacles and adapt to changes in my life. Nevertheless, none has happened without the consultations and blessings of YOU, my beloved mother. You have made me who I am today. I couldn't have done it without you. You are my inspiration. This is for you, dearest mother - Rest in peace.

To my father, Alemu Teferi: who introduced me to the joy of reading at an early age and taught me the value of continuous learning. - Rest in peace.

To my magnificent mother-in-law, Adeye: I count myself extremely fortunate that I happened to fall for a beautiful wife who also happened to come from a loving and welcoming family-one that I'm now blessed to call my own. Thank you for everything that you do for my wife and me. We appreciate all of it and love you endlessly. I know you have the title of mother-in-law, but you really are like a second mum to me- Rest in peace

To my wonderful wife, Abeba: who has always been there for me and provided unconditional love and support throughout this journey. I am thankful for your countless sacrifices and could not have completed this achievement without your selflessness. This is for you, Abeba, for being both my foundation and my guiding light.

To my amazing daughter, Ruth, who has inspired and motivated me to continue and ultimately complete this work, of course, with some criticism.

To my dearest niece, Beza: who provided constant encouragement and support throughout this process- Distance was not a barrier where true love exists.

Ruth and Beza, may I somehow offer you these same gifts that were passed to me by my parents? May this work inspire you to fan the flames of love for continuous learning- Keep the momentum!

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CHAPTER I: Introduction

1.1 Prologue

He [who] knows the "why" for his existence... will be able to bear almost any "how": Viktor Frankl (1905–1997), in Man's Search for Meaning.

Omar, 16, a refugee who escaped Somalia for Kakuma camp in Kenya and later immigrated to Canada, has set his sights on studying hard and becoming "someone" and prides his country, which is ravaged by armed conflicts. He grew up in Somalia, where innocent people, including children, suffer and are killed because of a senseless war. Omar's family has been living under siege in Mogadishu for more than twenty years. Omar has witnessed snipers shoot from a nearby tower; rockets launched from a mountain top, and suicide bombers detonate bombs in public places. Children were abducted to join Al-Shabab, a militant group in Somalia. Omar has not yet completely built his own identity and was still searching for a set of beliefs to adhere to, but he had been lectured by extremists and armed groups who attempted to indoctrinate him and other children to accept war as a necessary means to collective survival. Though he has lived through turbulence for many years, he does not yet understand why he and many children in his country are suffering when they should be in school. He was confused and frustrated.*

Thanks to the UNCHR and private sponsors from the Manitoba Mennonite community, Omar is now in Winnipeg. When I first met him years ago, he was not yet recovered from the trauma he experienced from eight years of life in Somalia, where he was directly affected by the conflict, and later 4 years of suffering in refugee camps that made him look older than his chronological age. He has a tough, rugged face – cropped hair, defiant eyes and displayed a wide range of emotional and physiological reactions. Nevertheless, despite all the odds, Omar didn't lose hope. He wanted to complete high school and enroll in university. The main driver behind his career choice has been the atrocities he has witnessed in Somalia. "I saw a child shot in the neighbourhood close to our house, and he painfully died from blood loss. The child could have been saved if there were doctors in the area, but no one helped." It became normal to be desensitized and nonreactive when one felt helpless. He resented." I want to be a doctor and save lives". Omar did not want, nor planned, to flee his country, but he had to. He, like many other children of his age, was forced to leave Somalia after his parents were tortured, jailed, and killed. All their belongings were looted, the house was burnt down, and his father was killed. "I too was tortured, and one of my hands does not work now. I could not go to work or school. So, I had to leave my country". As much as he is determined to fulfill his dream of becoming a doctor, Omar is equally worried about the situation in the host country. Despite his resilience, I can vividly see how the struggle to adjust to life in Canada has taken a toll on his emotional well-being. The systemic challenges he is facing in his school, coupled with the presence of xenophobia in the neighborhood, and the multifaceted acculturative stress he endured showed that Canada is not as accepting as it seems to newcomers as one study participant youth put it: "Coming to Canada is half of the battle and the remaining half seems scary –Being in Canada is both a blessing and a curse".

**A pseudonym is used to protect the child's identity*

This is an excerpt from the story of a young Somali boy I met in a Winnipeg school on one spring day of 2015. Sitting under an old thorn tree in the school compound, Omar narrated not only how armed conflict and hopelessness forced him to flee his country of origin, but also the tribulations he endured in adjusting to his new school, surroundings, culture, and language in the host country, Canada. Omar's story is an amalgam of many of the real experiences of children who come to Canada as refugees who have been tortured and abused in their country of origin, as well as faced discrimination and injustices in host countries, which, of course, have affected their healthy growth and development. At times of increasingly concerning refugee crises, half of the world's refugees are children of school age (UNHCR, 2018). Children living in countries at war have come under direct attack, been used as human shields, killed, maimed, or recruited to fight. Rape, forced marriage, and abduction have become standard tactics in conflicts from Syria to Yemen, and from the Democratic Republic of the Congo to Nigeria, South Sudan, and Myanmar (UNCHR, 2018). These children find themselves, through no fault of their own, not only displaced but lacking the opportunity for proper schooling and thus, denied a chance to learn and develop the necessary skills to become fully functional members of society.

Although refugee children from conflict regions are deprived of their fundamental human rights to education, in all stages of their migration trajectory - pre, Trans, and post-migration - it is, however, incomprehensible to see these children fleeing war and immigrating to Canada, the country where they are expected to be safe and thrive, yet struggle to find proper educational opportunities. While the guiding principle of the Canadian immigration policy states that Canada resettles refugees to save lives and to provide stability to those fleeing persecution with no hope of relief [IRCC, n.d.], some argue that, in practice, it is a different reality where refugee children are left in the dark. Indeed, all children in Canada live with a risk. They are susceptible to disease

and injury, and as they grow and learn, they face numerous challenges that threaten their mental and physical well-being. In Canada, 1.3 million children live in conditions of poverty, that is 1 in 5 (Children First Canada, 2021). However, refugee children face far greater risk because, in addition to these adversities, they must cope with unduly negative life experiences, such as racial and ethnic prejudice, inadequate parenting, family violence, and poverty (Williams, 2002). Education is considered integral to increasing social mobility for people from all backgrounds, whether a student begins as a refugee or a member of the privileged upper class. Because participation in Canadian education can be a vehicle for both economic and social integration (Anisef et al. 2010), it merits more attention with respect to this population. However, Ryeburn (2017) argues that schools in Canada do not fully address the needs of refugee children.

In Canada, K-12 refugee students face a multitude of integration challenges, including social, psychological, and academic challenges. In their report on "*Building on What We Have Learned in the Past 20 Years*" Ratković et al. (2017) pointed out that, "there are gaps in Canadian refugee education literature and educational policy (p. 3) and "Teachers, resettlement officers, and policy makers often lack cross-cultural competences, a social justice focus, and transformative leadership skills when working with refugee students" (p. 3). We all agree that education is fundamental to child development, and Canada is a signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which guarantees education for children. However, many refugee children in Canada did not have access to quality education and support. The question then would be - why was it so difficult to implement a progressive education policy that comprehensively addresses the children's needs?

My exposure to such alarming concerns of refugee children's education in general and in Winnipeg, Canada, in particular, led me to open my eyes wider and critically investigate this

social issue. In addition, my occupational role with refugee children in Winnipeg schools, which provided me with the opportunity to access firsthand information from refugee children themselves, like Omar, inspired me to study their educational experiences in Winnipeg schools - an environment different from their own - in a more structured and comprehensive way. As such, this study accounted for refugee youth participants' middle school experience and identified the educational needs, challenges, and opportunities of refugee children from conflict regions, particularly from East African countries, while attending middle school in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

While participants are youth (18-23 years of age), the study mainly focused on understanding their middle school experiences at the time they were newly arrived children in Winnipeg. Middle school children are at the age where they are transitioning from being a child to an adolescent. Generally, students in middle school have different social-emotional, as well as academic needs, than students in elementary or high school. This is a time when students must learn how to manage their emotions to help put them on the right path toward success in high school and beyond. According to the Alliance for Excellent Education report (2019), adolescence is a time of transition characterized by rapid physical, neurological, cognitive, and socio-emotional development. As students move towards adulthood, their bodies and minds change. Those changes affect how they learn and, likewise, should influence how educators interact with them (Loschert, 2019). This milestone can be the turning point for many students in either a positive or negative direction. This is a time in the students' lives where they are trying to find their identity, and educators can play an important role in this. Although rebellion frequently happens during this life stage, this is also where students find out who they are and the different values and ideals that are important to them (Balfanz & Fox, 2011).

Considering the above evidence-based findings for most children in this age group, it certainly is not easy for refugee children of this age to successfully grow up in host countries without additional support. In the subsequent sections, we shall be introduced to participants' real-life stories, the emotional ups and downs that come with being a refugee and a middle school child at the age when they were transitioning from being a child to an adolescent. That same challenging juxtaposition - misunderstood voices of frustrated refugee children contrasted with the complaints of educators that blamed the children for their own despair – has occurred in many schools. Due to the unprecedented COVID-related challenges I had encountered during the data collection stage, regrettably, I was unable to interview children of this age. Instead, all participants in this study are youth who immigrated to Canada when they were children and retrospectively narrated their middle school educational experiences in Canadian schools, sharing their challenges, positive aspects, and strengths. In a sense, it is the children's voice that is channelled to the reader through the means of youth participants.

1.2 Purpose of the research

"Research is formalized curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose. It is a seeking that he who wishes may know the cosmic secrets of the world and they that dwell there in (Zora Neale Hurston, 1996)

While it is a well-known fact that refugee children face unique educational challenges in host countries, much of the existing literature on refugee children's education is general and lacks specificity. Either it is presented as a group with immigrants that does not take account of the unique refugee experience (Canadian Council for Refugees, 2011) and/or focuses primarily on post-arrival experiences, with little attention to the educational experiences in their country of origin and first asylum (Dryden, 2015). Refugee children have unique needs which differ starkly from other immigrants and mainstream Canadians. However, there is little information

about their educational experiences, particularly on how their pre-migration and transmigration experiences are relevant to their post-migration education in host countries. Nichols, Ha, and Tyyskä (2020) pointed out that, although "youth are critical to Canada's goal of recruiting immigrants to expand the economy, there is insufficient information about their school and work experiences and inadequate support to ensure their successful integration into the workforce" (p.172). Hence, the purpose of this study was to learn how refugee children from conflict regions, particularly from East African countries, experienced their primary schooling in their country of origin, at refugee camps, and, most importantly, in Canadian schools. The goal and focus of this study, which used a retrospective data collection method through interviewing youth who were children upon their arrival to Canada, was to shed light on the lived experiences of participants and identify the impact of their pre- and trans-migration experiences on their academic performances at the time they were attending middle school in Canadian schools. The study also collected data from teachers who have worked with middle school refugee children in Winnipeg schools and had gained additional insight into the children's educational challenges and opportunities.

1.3 Background

Every day across the world, people make the difficult decision to flee their homeland for a variety of reasons. War, persecution, environmental disaster, and poverty are just some of the reasons why a person must leave his/her family or country. Those individuals who are fortunate enough to survive their arduous journey and reach another country may become refugees. The 1951 Convention defines a refugee as:

> A person who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being

> outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it… (UNHCR, 2011)

The process of immigration for families and children is often a very difficult and traumatic experience, which involves leaving behind familial support and moving great distances to unknown foreign lands. During the flight and in displacement, refugee children become some of the most vulnerable members of society. In addition to the challenges that accompany childhood and growing up, child refugees have special needs that must be considered - trauma from witnessing violent crimes, language difficulties, family disruption, and adjustment to a different culture (Fantino & Colak, 2001). Refugee children are considered vulnerable for several obvious reasons. Children who are forced to leave their home country due to war or other forms of violence are at an increased risk, as a result of the stressful events they may have experienced before and during the flight and uncertainty about their new home and future perspectives (Fazel, Reed, Panter-Brick, & Stein, 2012). According to a UNICEF (2009) report, during and after armed conflict, the interruption and disintegration of basic services and sources of social protection also led to further violations of child rights (p.18).

While there can be little doubt that refugee children and families experience much stress in their everyday life wherever they may live, the resettlement and integration process of refugees in host countries has become a growing concern in the international community (UNCHR, 2018). Even after fleeing their country of origin, many refugee children are still living in perilous situations or have specific needs, one being education, that cannot be addressed in the country where they have sought protection (Coleridge, 2001; Stewart, 2011). In host countries, refugees face an unfamiliar new life, being subjected to horrific experiences and frequently encountering prejudice and discrimination (McBrien, 2005). Many refugee children have experienced trauma related to war or persecution that may affect their mental and physical health long after the

events have occurred. These traumatic events may occur while the children are in their country of origin, during migration, or in the resettlement process here in Canada.

On the other hand, studies have found that refugee children and adolescents can also exhibit resilience despite a history of trauma. Stamm and Friedman (2000) acknowledge that a traumatic event has many possible impacts and can affect individuals' feelings, thoughts, relationships, behaviours, attitudes, dreams, and hopes. It can also be a source of positive outcomes such as a newfound appreciation of life, spiritual renewal, and personal growth. Tedeschi and Calhoun (1998) coined the phenomenon called "posttraumatic growth," whereby individuals seem to benefit from trauma. Based on their research, they described five categories of growth that occur over time, where survivors of trauma recognize and embrace new opportunities. I could not agree more with this statement, as I too have witnessed many refugee children's astounding resilience to overcome past and present challenges and not only survive but thrive with their education. Lustig et al. (2004) noted that, despite this large burden of social and biological factors, many refugee children demonstrate incredible strength and resilience, which needs further attention by service providers, including educators and social workers (Lustig et al., 2004).

Nevertheless, presently, refugee students continue to experience socio-psychological challenges in Canadian schools, and yet there is a gap in the literature and policy about their educational experiences. While we can easily imagine the multiple traumas of forced migration in children at both refugee camps and host countries, it is crucial to understand contextually how their pre- and transmigration experiences (both strengths and limitations) can have significant implications on their post-resettlement academic performances in Canadian schools. Ratkovic, Kovacevic, Brewr, Ellis, Ahmed, and Brady (2017) highlighted the absence of sufficient studies in Canada focusing on refugee children from conflict regions and their transition to Canadian

schools, stating “Limited research exists on the impact migration and resettlement have on children and their families” (p. 2).

In light of such knowledge gaps, many researchers in the field have recommended the need for further studies in exploring the academic, psychological, and social challenges refugee children face, and the strategies they use to overcome them. To this end, this study can be considered as one of the many attempts to bridge such a knowledge gap.

1.4. The rationale for choosing this topic.

A research agenda is developed from several sources. "Often, a person's own biography will be an influence in defining the thrust of his or her work. Also, particular topics, settings, or people are of interest because they have touched the researcher's life in some important way" (Bogdan, 2007, p. 56). In the previous section, I briefly stated why I am interested in this topic. However, I will explain further how I became involved with refugee studies in order to give a higher degree of transparency and accountability to the analysis that is presented in the following chapters. The reader may then be aware of the range of biases that may impact my motivation and ability, influencing my research work.

As a critical social worker who operates from an anti-oppressive perspective, I come from a position of deep reflection on how I interact with my ecology. I believe that every lived experience has an impact on our consciousness and that the way we interpret that experience will shape how we react to our lived experiences in the future. I have learned great lessons from life by virtue of being a refugee, among other things. I have seen the brutality of war and conflict in Africa, and the many forms of oppression, racism, trauma, and xenophobia in Canada. I was forced to flee my country of origin, opposing the violation of human rights, which aimed at erasing all opposition to the regime’s authoritarian practices. As the oppression and human rights

abuse of the then-repressive administration of Ethiopia continued, and several of my friends were imprisoned and later released with warnings, I decided that it was time to go. Especially when the Ethiopia-Eritrea war broke out and the Ethiopian government indiscriminately jailed and expelled citizens of Eritrean origin out of the country, my wife and family's livelihood was jeopardized. With hesitation and second-guessing of my decision, I, however, joined the many fellow refugees with stories of humiliation, degradation, and torture and left the country.

In 2003, with the help of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), I was able to escape a repressive regime and immigrate to Canada, a more democratic and just country, or so I thought. I arrived in Canada with great hopes and dreams, but it didn't take me that long to witness another form of injustice that put my global understanding of democracy in question. As time went by, I learned the inconvenient truth - that beneath the shallow pretense of democracy, there appeared to be deeper levels at which racism and other forms of prejudice and discrimination express themselves towards refugees in Canada. My hope for a better life through accessing equal employment opportunity was crushed in weeks when I was rejected for a career job by numerous employers for no apparent reason. At that time, I remembered, I couldn't even get a chance for an interview despite my well-written résumé being prepared with the help of a resettlement agency that worked with newcomers. Later, I learned that it was my foreign name that did not sit well with some Canadian employers. It was obvious that employers were overtly biased when evaluating job applications from people with ethnic-sounding names. My employment counsellor at the resettlement agency was very concerned that the repeated rejection might affect my self-esteem and emotional well-being. She then suggested, innocently, changing my name and or putting my name in a smaller font in a less visible location on the résumé to get a better chance. I knew that I was not the only victim of such systemic discrimination in an

employment context. In one study, Oreopoulos (2011) found evidence of substantial discrimination against employment applicants with foreign names in Canada. Because my name was and still is a significant part of my identity, I did not dare to change it, and I chose to pay the price of standing against discrimination. Instead of taking a new foreign name, I kept my name and dignity intact and began life from scratch. I worked in a wood factory as a labourer for a year despite my post-secondary education and decade-plus work experience in management.

Fast forward to 2020, I now have some degree of safety and security in Canada, and I realized it was my personal and professional responsibility to use my relatively improved freedom and position to help other refugees by advocating for policy change. It is still fresh in my memory, the social and emotional challenges I experienced as a struggling refugee student back in 2004 upon my arrival in Winnipeg. "It is a wrench to leave the country of your birth, and the feeling of dislocation never leaves you…To be an immigrant is to constantly reflect on who you are, where you come from, and how you are different from those around you" (Fuentes, 2000, p. 2). Despite the negative effect of the emotional trauma I had experienced over time, I have also developed resilience not only to survive but also to build the capacity to challenge injustices, discrimination and oppression in all its forms. I pledged to be steadfast in standing up and continuing to push for policy changes to improve the quality and accessibility of fair education for refugee children in Canadian schools.

Throughout the course of my involvement with refugee children and their parents in Winnipeg, I have also witnessed newcomer families and children being resilient, who can surpass challenges, acquire knowledge, and reach their ultimate goal, even in adverse situations, with the right support system in place. With that said, based on my personal and professional senses, I can

certainly attest that the following are the main reasons that inspired me to pursue the exploration of refugee children's educational experiences in Canadian schools.

1.4.1. Personal justification

"Where are you from?" – An exasperating question people often ask me since the time I immigrated to Canada. As if finding out about my country of origin provides them with a better context to know me as a person. What they do not realize or purposely choose to ignore, while asking this question, is, their intent for reducing my identity to a social group or a culture which affirms, I am different from them. When people ask me where I'm from, sometimes I answer "Winnipeg," which is true. I have been in Winnipeg for more than a decade now. Nevertheless, by the time they heard the word "Winnipeg" from a person who looked different from them, the obvious look of intolerance and dissatisfaction followed. They did not stop there, they inevitably followed up with "…but, where exactly are you from, I mean…Hmmm?" There is no need to complete the sentence. I later learned "where are you from?" is a loaded question - people are not much interested in knowing who I am; they would rather look for a confirmation for their biased projection. It was a bold statement that communicated a sense of "othering", that suggested I am not "from here". I have been asked this a lot, and no matter how many times it happened, I felt the burden of proving my identity to my Canadian enquirers time and again. Despite my discomfort with the continuous "foreigner" experience, I realized that this question - asked so often - suggested that there was actually a plausible answer that fits the narrative. So, I keep asking myself - Who and what am I? Telling myself, "I must belong somewhere". Could my ethnic background alone fully and completely identify who I am?

Every time I reflect on these ever-evolving philosophical questions, two equally competing thoughts come into my mind. The first, an educator, Calndidn (2013), "to frame our narrative

beginnings, we may reach as far back as our childhoods to understand and, at times, to name our puzzles" (p.55). Second, a social work scholar, Michel Foucault, in his interview with R. Martin, recorded on October 25th, 1982, was asked what it meant to have multiple identities and professions. Foucault said, "I don't feel that it is necessary to know exactly what I am. The main interest in life and work is to become someone else that you were not in the beginning." More often than not, I found myself in the middle of these time-tested thoughts. I have been and always am in the process of learning, growing and developing new identities and embracing them while retaining the previous ones. I have felt my identity has changed many times over the course of my life. I believe that in a sense, I have multiple identities that can explain the different areas of my life. I do not wish to be defined by one aspect of my life, but by the many that are the core of who I am. As such, for those who genuinely wanted to know me, I can proudly say I am a child to my parents; I am a man, straight, a husband, a father, an Ethiopian, a Canadian, a Christian, a social worker, a researcher, an educator, an immigrant and many, many more. Yet, for many individuals I encountered, it seems my other identities are masked by my skin colour and immigration status. I can attest, with certainty, that few individuals in Canada are yet less interested in my other identities and are zeroed in on knowing where I am from. To the many folks who are yet dying to know where I am from, I am telling them, "I am NOT from here". There's a fine line between curiosity and microaggression.

As an immigrant, at times, I faced many struggles from these people in my day-to-day activities stemming from racism, prejudice, and xenophobia amplified by the constant reminder that "I am not from here". Balanced to those struggles was the unconditional love and support of numerous friends and colleagues whom I met in Winnipeg. The latter group created a steady, loving, and cohesive environment out of our mutually respected relationships. It is this support

system from friends and family that empowered me to succeed in my academic and career advancement despite all odds. I am a living testimony to the significant positive impact of the availability of a support system in a refugee's life (education, employment, social integration, etc.) for a smooth transition and effective integration.

That said, I always wonder what life could be like for those refugee children and their families in Canada who do not have the much-needed support system. How could they survive the complex educational challenges they are facing in Canadian schools? Or are they doomed to fail? What could happen to those refugee children who witnessed their marginalized parents juggled between odd jobs and have no time to assist them with their homework? Considering that I, a relatively educated person who immigrated to Canada accompanied by my family and welcomed by the *Habesha* community (a common name for Ethiopian and Eritrean) in Winnipeg upon my arrival, had to struggle with the intersectional resettlement challenges to survive, would ask, what has happened to Omar and other refugee children who were less fortunate than I? What would happen to those who have no parents, family members, or community to support them? What is the future of those children who are unnoticed by the very system that brought them here in the first place?

On any given day, I certainly had experienced a range of emotions - unease, frustration, and disappointment. These are often related to specific events, such as meetings with refugee students at their schools or seeing their parents at the principal's office. My response to these events, besides the immediate reaction to anger, varied based on my frame of mind and the circumstances surrounding the situation. Sometimes, the connection between what was lectured about in Canadian schools and what was happening was not quite as clear, so I decided to do a bit more digging. For instance, there are common misunderstandings between parents and

school staff and ineffective educational involvement practices that continue to be relied on, such as focusing on school involvement while ignoring home involvement (Kanu, 2008). But why was this happening? Rather than ignoring these alarming signs and wondering what to do about them, I instead chose to approach them with curiosity and decided to conduct this study to get more insight into the phenomenon.

1.4.2. Practical Justification

The global movement of people in response to social, political, economic, and environmental unrest is on the rise. The twenty-first century has seen the highest level of increase in the immigrant population in Canada and other Western nations as competition for highly skilled and qualified labour becomes a dominant factor in a knowledge-based and global economy (Healy, 2008). Canada has welcomed 1,088,015 refugees since 1980. In 2015 alone, the Government of Canada resettled 25,000 Syrian refugees, which was applauded internationally. In 2019, Canada provided 30,082 refugees with the opportunity to build a new life for themselves and their families, including through its private sponsorship program, which accounted for 58 per cent over the past ten years (UNCHR, 2020a). These are examples of a great humanitarian gesture that needs to be appreciated; however, many argue, the resettlement process was not as smooth as it should have been (Stewart, 2011; Baffoe, 2011). While Canada's well-intended immigration policy on a humanitarian basis appears encouraging, unless it is backed up by fair and efficient resettlement and integration practices, I would argue, simply bringing refugees and not supporting them can do more harm than good. Normally, these refugees who are struggling here in Canada, before fleeing their countries of origin, relied on the support of friends, family, and neighbours to help them when they needed an extra hand. However, once they are in Canada, they often have no social networks and rely on the

government and social agencies to help them. Researchers on refugee studies pointed out that many refugees needed extra help in getting settled in Canada, and supportive social networks and efficient service providers, including social workers, are a key part of the resettlement process (Stewart, 2011). Paradoxically, it is the refugees and immigrants who themselves do the greatest part of the work of integration, finding a place for themselves with courage, patience, creativity, and hope (Canadian Council for Refugees, 1998).

Working with newcomers has been an integral part of social work since its inception in the late nineteenth century (Sakamoto, 2007). Considering Canada became much more receptive to refugees, largely due to its booming economy and the necessity to increase its workforce, more than ever before, social workers are more likely to encounter immigrants and refugees in their caseloads (Healy, 2008). Recognizing that the rapid growth of the immigrant population in Canada will have important implications for society at large, social workers are highly needed to help newcomers make the transition smoother, as well as advocating for policy reforms. The unavailability and inaccessibility of social services for refugee children and families in Canada are among the many factors for the undesirable integration outcome. The fact that social service programs reflected the current immigration policy of the party in power (Heinonen & Spearman, 2009) indicated that human rights and resettlement programs are political issues that need social workers' relentless advocacy work for positive change. Hence, I, as a social worker, have a crucial role to play in the many areas related to advocating for the rights to equal opportunities and the smooth integration processes of refugee children and families. Social work is considered "a singular vehicle for carrying out critical human service interventions for the well-being and welfare of this client constituency of 'newcomers' or 'newer citizens' (Valtonen, 2015, p. 15).

At the level of practice, social workers should have an adequate understanding of the cultures and the pre-migration experiences of different newcomer populations, as well as their post-migration experiences of isolation, marginalization, and culture shock in Canada (Sakamoto, 2007). Sakamoto (2007) underscores the need for structural change and calls workers to engage in "advocacy and social action toward systemic changes of the society in integrating immigrants" (p. 528). One of the cardinal principles in the Social Work Code of Ethics (2005) is "to respect the unique worth and inherent dignity of all people and uphold human rights" (CASW, 2005, p. 4). I am thus duty-bound to challenge inequality, pursuing social justice as a core objective of the profession. Although the needs of diverse newcomer communities are very similar to those of other minority groups in the country, there are several unique challenges refugees face. I believe social workers need not only to understand the unique experiences and challenges refugees have, but also to play a critical role in challenging the system and advocating for policy changes that strengthen individuals and families in this population.

Since the time I graduated with a social work degree in 2007, I have had numerous opportunities to work with and listen to the incredible stories of newcomer-immigrant and refugee children who immigrated to Winnipeg from various parts of the world. Many of the refugees I met were forced to flee their homelands from war-torn and conflict zones due to perils that included threats to their physical and psychological well-being. Due to my early years' position as a counsellor in a not-for-profit organization that served newcomers, I regularly witnessed the traumatic emotional, mental, physical, and social effects that these newcomers experienced because of unresponsive resettlement services that ignored their needs. I have met refugee children in Winnipeg who have been out of school for years because of war, who felt much social anxiety about coming back into class. They are worried they may not do well as the

teachers do not understand them. The children are also worried about their parents, who are juggling two or more dead-end jobs to make ends meet. Although we all know a significant person who is consistently present in a child's life plays a crucial role in helping them develop resilience, unfortunately, refugee parents in Canada are unable to spend a lot of time with their children. If we need to solve refugee children's educational challenges, we must also address their parents' intersectional challenges as well. Bowen's family systems theory (1966) posits that the family is a single emotional, interdependent unit (Haefner, 2014), and the needs and abilities of one family member will affect all family members.

Because of these practical reasons that required a deeper understanding of the effects of migration and resettlement stressors in refugee children's education, my interest in conducting this study to learn more about the issue became intense. In addition, I am eager to seek to fulfill what has been described as a 'dual imperative' within the social work discipline: to produce rigorous research and highlight the voices of these marginalized children while at the same time influencing policy and practice in ways which ultimately address the ever-growing refugee children's hunger for quality education and peaceful transitions.

1.4.3. Social Justification

This study is also motivated by my interest in understanding how Canadian teachers, service providers and policymakers responded to the cultural challenges of working with a group of students from war-affected regions, and how these students responded to learning in a culture different from their own. As an immigrant researcher, I want to take what I have learned and experienced about refugee families' and children's traumatic experiences over the years and integrate that with a more profound knowledge of evaluation and critical analysis. How does displacement affect the well-being of school-age children who have experienced war? How does

the school system reintegrate refugee children from war-affected regions into school? Who are those refugee children who have succeeded or failed in their education and life? What has contributed to their success or failure? We all agree that schools should be safe havens that embrace all students and families, regardless of race and immigration status. If so, how do Canadian schools and society at large view refugees? Is the public receptive or hostile to refugees?

Statistically, refugees make up a relatively small portion of the newcomer population in Canada, yet the reception of refugees is often the subject of debate. According to the Canadian Encyclopedia (2021), Canadians are somewhat divided in this debate. For instance, while the public and media discourse has been largely welcoming to the Syrian resettled refugees, there have also been troubling instances of violence and Islamophobia in response to Canada's resettlement policies. In November 2015, a Muslim mother in Toronto was randomly attacked while picking up her children from a Toronto primary school and was told to "go back to your country." A mosque was torched in Peterborough, and the Cold Lake Mosque in Alberta was defaced twice. A group of Syrian refugees was also pepper-sprayed at a welcoming ceremony in Vancouver. Most recently, the Québec City Islamic Cultural Centre attack, which resulted in the death of six men, underlined that Islamophobia needs more urgent attention (Canadian Encyclopedia, 2021). Even here in Winnipeg, where discrimination and xenophobia are being expressed in more subtle ways, Islamophobia is real. A study, titled *Friendly Manitoba: Community Experiences with Islamophobia* (2021), reported that sixty-two per cent of the survey's participants indicated they have been subjected to Islamophobia, with the experiences disproportionately weighted toward women and youth. The fact that 43 per cent of respondents reported having experienced Islamophobia in schools is shocking (Sotiriadou and Elbakri, 2022).

On the bright side, there are some individuals and community groups who are working with the Canadian Government to sponsor refugee children from conflict zones. For instance, the Hospitality House Refugee Ministry in Winnipeg is a non-profit organization that has sponsored thousands from appalling refugee circumstances into new hope and productive lives in Canada. Nevertheless, anger, hostility and mistrust towards refugees and immigrants are increasing across most Western societies. Media discourse, tough migration laws, and the escalation of right-wing views across the West all manifest a desire to exclude those who are seen as a threat to national interests and identities. The literature repeatedly confirms that discrimination harms the general well-being of migrants, while often weakening their trust in helping professionals. Social workers are among the professionals most often in contact with migrants, making them important actors in the field of migration (Da Silva et al., 2021). It is abundantly clear that social work and the educational system have important roles to play in promoting the smoother resettlement and integration process of refugee families and children.

Anisef (2005) advocate the need to identify why and how the education system fails to meet the needs of immigrant and refugee children, instead of trying to 'fit' them into the existing educational system. Educators, particularly those who are responsible for middle school students, should understand the traumatic experiences of refugee children. Living through conflict and displacement is traumatic enough for adults. For young children, it can have devastating long-term effects on their development and well-being. Trauma-informed early childhood education (ECE) is a key element in helping refugee children deal with trauma and toxic stress (McConnico et al., 2016). But teachers need much more support to help them deliver quality programs. Trauma-informed programs and policies are important to support teachers who are tasked with supporting the complex needs of children and families impacted by trauma.

There is overwhelming pressure on children and youth to quickly integrate into the new culture, where the children are not yet at the speed the school systems want them to be (Baffoe, 2011). It may be some time before the newly arrived refugee student is ready to share the story of their own journey, where they lived along the way, what they carried with them, how they travelled, and how they survived. They must resume their studies as soon as they arrive in Canada and face a different school system, and in many cases, they must learn a new language. However, they lack the support they need and yet are blamed for their misunderstood silence in classrooms. Additionally, adolescents are under peer pressure to 'fit in' while trying to negotiate their identity between two cultures (Baffoe, 2011). Many youths feel torn between their desire to 'fit in' with their peers and their desire to meet their parents' expectations (Tyyskä, 2008). Due to this, parents, guardians, and early childhood teachers play an important role in developing trusting relationships, fostering safe environments, and supporting the social and emotional well-being of young children exposed to trauma (McConnico et al., 2016).

The curiosity to understand why it was so difficult to address this national issue, listening to and understanding refugee children's needs and implementing a viable plan that promotes inclusive learning, was another reason for conducting this study.

1.5 Who Cares? What is the significance of the study?

Although this study was initiated by my personal experience in working with refugee children in Winnipeg, and as the partial requirement for a PhD award in Social Work, I believe the findings of this study would be a great contribution to the vast cumulative knowledge in relation to refugee studies. As we can see in the next chapters, youth participants' childhood stories and the findings that followed highlighted the educational challenges and opportunities of middle school refugee children and the essential role schools (i.e., teachers, guidance

counsellors, social workers, and policymakers) may play in addressing the needs. It is believed that quality education that focuses on accommodating refugee children's special needs is the anchor that will keep children in the classroom, encouraging them to continue to the end of their primary schooling and transition to secondary and beyond. Education has a protective effect only if it is of good quality (UNCHR, 2022).

Clearly, the findings in this study are essential for the various stakeholders at all levels in the Canadian education system, as they provide a firsthand report on refugee children's issues (strengths and needs) presented by refugee youth and Canadian middle school teachers. The study will also serve as a reference for researchers about research in the field of refugee studies.

1.5.1 Macro level (Federal and Provincial Governments)

Canada has admitted over 1.2 million refugees, of which half are children, since the end of the Second World War (El-Assal, 2015). However, not much is known about their educational achievement. Their educational access and attainment are rarely tracked through national monitoring systems; as such, refugee children are not only disadvantaged, but their educational needs and achievements remain largely invisible (UNCHR, 2016). Indeed, refugees and immigrants are now the driving force of Canadian population growth (CIC, 2015), and a clear understanding of who they are, what their strengths and needs are and how the immigration policy affects their smooth integration is imperative for the nation's social, political and economic growth and the efficient utilization of its human capital.

Canada has an aging population, with the average age increasing from 37.7 in 2001 to 41.0 in 2016. Refugees are on average 11.1 years younger than those born in Canada, which means they are more likely to be working age (Statistics Canada, 2021). The average age of a refugee who came to Canada in 2016 was 28.9 years old. Refugees often come to Canada early in their

lives, with many years to contribute (UNCHR, 2020). According to Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), immigrants contribute to the national economy, not only by filling gaps in the labour force and paying taxes, but also by spending money on goods, housing, and transportation. “Because many immigrants are young and economically active, they contribute more than they receive in benefits over their lifetime. According to the 2021 Census, more than 468,000 immigrants work in health-related occupations alone” (Statistics Canada, 2023). Access to quality education for refugee children and youth is a guarantee for reliable and skilled manpower supply to the Canadian labour market.

1.5.2 Mezzo level (educators and service providers)

Although the needs of diverse newcomer communities are very similar to those of other minority groups in the country, there are several unique challenges refugees face. As such, educators need to understand the unique experiences and challenges of refugee children and play a critical role in promoting more transparency and inclusion and advocating for policy changes that strengthen individuals and families of this population. Unless educators and service providers, social workers included, understand the underlying causes of the children's lesser involvement in classroom activities, it would be a disservice to the children to simply label them as "uninvolved" and "troubled" students. It should be noted that children are fleeing traumatic experiences, which later impact their successful adjustment in host countries (Bates, Baird, Johnson, Lee, Lustre, & Rehagen, 2005). The children presumed “lesser involvement” in class activities should be seen in context. Where there is a clear understanding of refugee students’ cultural and emotional states, trying to accommodate their needs accordingly can benefit both the students and educators. The key to quality lies in sound and inclusive education policies as well as in motivated and well-trained teachers. However, teachers with proper trauma-informed

training are often in short supply where there is an influx of refugees, even in high-income countries (UNCHR, 2022). To this end, I believe the findings from this study can contribute to filling the gap between the policy and the practices of the resettlement and integration strategy in the education system.

1.5.3 Micro Level

The process of conducting this study has helped me along the path of my own immigration story, which thankfully was a positive life path with intermittent struggles that have led to immense growth. Reading participants' transcripts while comparing their adverse experiences with my own immigration story, which was a relatively less challenging resettlement experience than those of these children and youth, made me realize the need to become a better practitioner and a more keenly aware academic on issues that had a significant impact on the lives of marginalized people. It is also assumed that youth participants in this study and current and future middle school refugee students will benefit from the findings, as their voices may be heard a bit louder this time and be able to promote policy changes.

1.6. Positionality

One of the issues debated by the academy and supported by literature is the importance of location when conducting social science research (Absolon & Willett, 2005). Linda McDowell (1992), for example, has written "What is the relationship between our own background, current position and values, and our research agenda? How do we know what we know? Who is included and who is excluded? For whom are we writing?" (p 56). Social researchers must clarify their research roles, especially when utilizing qualitative methodology to make their research credible (Unluer, 2012). It is assumed that researchers who undertake qualitative studies can take on a variety of member roles when they are in the research setting. These roles can

range from complete membership of the group being studied (an insider) to a stranger (an outsider) (Adler & Adler, 1994). While there are a variety of definitions for insider-researchers, generally, insider-researchers are those who choose to study a group to which they belong, while an outsider-researchers do not belong to the group under study (Breen, 2007). In that sense, since I am carrying out this study on a topic which is related to me and to the group I am associated with, I consider myself an insider researcher in this study.

Bonner and Tolhurst (2002) identified three key advantages of being an insider researcher: (a) having a greater understanding of the culture being studied; (b) not altering the flow of social interaction unnaturally; and (c) having an established intimacy which promotes both the telling and the judging of truth. Further, Smyth & Holian (2008) argue, insider researchers generally know the politics of the system, not only the formal hierarchy but also how it "really works". They know how to best approach people of interest. In general, they have a great deal of knowledge, which takes an outsider a long time to acquire (Smyth & Holian, 2008). It is argued that insider researchers always have a passion for the topic they have been working on. Indeed, based on my own experience, I can attest to the fact that my passion for refugee studies and my commitment to this project have contributed significantly to its completion despite all odds. The challenging hurdles I have encountered due to the COVID pandemic that literally stalled this study for nearly two years, and the bureaucratic red tape to get authorization to recruit child participants and secure external ethics approval were sufficient reasons to be discouraged and to totally abort the project. Yet, thanks to my strong commitment to the topic and my supportive advisory committee's ingenuity, I was able to complete the study. McClintock et al. (2003) argue that research should have various positive impacts on the researchers in terms of values and self-development. When I chose to be involved in this topic, which I am familiar with, I knew I could

benefit more at the end by enhancing my knowledge base in the subject matter and, more importantly, experiencing a sense of accomplishment in getting the children's stories out through refugee youth participants' reflection.

While there are various advantages of being an insider researcher, there are also problems associated with being an insider. For example, some authors argue that greater familiarity can lead to a loss of objectivity. Unconsciously making wrong assumptions about the research process based on the researcher's prior knowledge can be considered a bias (DeLyser, 2001; Hewitt-Taylor, 2002). It is not uncommon for insider research studies to be criticized for not conforming to the same standards of rigour because of the researchers' personal position being 'too close' for objectivity (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007), as some researchers consider 'distance' is necessary for valid research. Therefore, in response to the above concerns, I have also reflected on how I, as an individual with social identities and particular perspectives, had an impact on the interpersonal relations of the study's fieldwork. There is no doubt that my upbringing, experience and core values dictated the way I have approached this study using critical social work theory. My personal refugee experience, which is more or less similar to the study participants' experience, helped me in developing the right framework that guided this study. Clandinin (2013) noted, "Although narrative inquiry is about people's experience, to understand each individual's experience one must understand the social, cultural, familial, linguistic, and institutional narratives that shape, and are shaped by, the individual" (p. 33).

Being cognizant of the potential challenges I might encounter as an insider, even before I began to carry out this study, I have reflected on some aspects of the dilemmas that may compromise the validity of the study. During the interviews, transcribing, coding, and interpreting process, I continuously checked and rechecked myself to control the interference of

my biases into participants' stories. Several authors state the potential for the existence of personal biases in doing research as an insider (De Tona, 2006; Brannick & Coghlan, 2007). In general, their assumption can be summarized as: the position of self in researching refugees, while I too am a refugee, may impact the research in three major ways (De Tona, 2006). I have reviewed these assumptions as follows.

First, it may affect access to the 'field' because participants may be more willing to share their experiences with me (fellow refugee) whom they perceive as sympathetic to their situation (De Tona, 2006), and I am more knowledgeable about potentially helpful and informative resources. This assumption has proven to be true at least in my case. A key advantage of insider research is said to be the pre-understandings the researcher brings to the design of the study (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007). Based on my prior knowledge of the various aspects of refugees' life in both pre- and post-migration situations, which provided me rich understanding, I have developed research questions on the issues needing investigation, providing information about what is significant in refugee children's education in host countries. Participants were willing and comfortable to share detailed and personal information and to discuss issues with me, someone who 'understood' them. During the interviews, I remained in a neutral position and resisted the temptation to share my own experiences and kept my personal biases in check.

The second assumption argued that being an insider may shape the nature of the researcher–participant relationship, which, in turn, affects the information that participants are willing to share; thus, an African refugee may feel more comfortable discussing their experiences with me (fellow African refugee) than with a mainstream researcher. This assumption also happened to be true. Most participants were engaged in a meaningful way, sharing their experience without any significant reservation, feeling a sense of purpose, and being able to help other refugee children

learn from their stories. In each interview with participants, I, as an insider researcher, began the interview with a disclaimer, indicating that although their stories may have been discussed previously, they needed to respond as if they were discussing this for the first time (Chavez, 2008). At this juncture, I was cautious not to re-traumatize participants by asking them to repeat some aspect of their traumatic experience. I was aware of the presence of traumatic experiences among some, if not all, study participants who have been victims of war and violence and may suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). I also understand that not everyone in a war environment, however, will experience stress in the same way, nor will they react the same way to the same experiences. Some may be able to deal with their experiences and move on with their lives, while others may still struggle with their long-term effects.

Re-traumatization is possible anywhere, and research interviews can also be a trigger in and of themselves because participants were asked to explore their feelings and memories as part of their migration experience. Asking about trauma can be retraumatizing, not because thinking about trauma is traumatizing, but because the asking or the manner of asking could be insensitive. Nevertheless, as an insider, I have had the benefit of being empathetic - understanding, being aware of and sensitive to the feelings, emotions and experiences of the trauma survivor, their family, and their community. As a trauma-informed practitioner, I demonstrated empathy by communicating an understanding of feelings and willingly connecting emotionally with the participants' stories. This connection allowed participants to feel accepted and genuinely cared for.

In addition, to avert any potential risk for participants, I did advise participants, at the beginning of each interview, "during the interview, temporary distress might occur, and it is acceptable if they do not want to talk about particular events that make them discomfort". I also

provided a list of mental health resources for participants and offered debriefings for those who needed them. Nevertheless, there was no incident of re-traumatization during or after the interviews. Leshner et al. (2012) defined the term "re-traumatization," the "reactivation" of traumatic stress as a result of retelling or emotionally engaging with a narrative of past trauma (as cited in Weiss, 2021, p.14).

As an insider researcher, I should note here, the benefit of conducting sensitive research as an insider enabled me to access information that may be difficult for participants to talk about with an outsider researcher. Researching sensitive issues should be encouraged despite its potential for re-traumatization, "… because it is minimal-risk, and should continue because of an ethical imperative to develop insights that may help future survivors as well as accumulate knowledge (Kelly & Morgan, 2007; Decker et al., 2011; Jaffe et al., 2001 as cited in Weiss, 2021, p.14). The emphasis is, of course, on using a sensitive and responsible manner. Batten and Naifeh note that "as with any study proposal, researchers should clearly specify the precautions that will be taken to minimize participant harm, and how participants will be informed about available mental health resources, should the need arise" (2012, as cited in Weiss, 2021, p.14).

Finally, the third assumption, the worldview and background I hold affect the way in which I construct the world, use language, pose questions, and choose the lens for filtering the information gathered from participants and making meaning of it, and these may shape the findings and conclusions of the study (Kacen & Chaitin, 2006). Here, I consciously determined critical social work theory to be the general framework of the study that asserts all social relationships, whether at micro, mezzo, or macro levels, are political. Critical theory argues "… that everything has political elements: that is, nothing is neutral, everything involves struggle over power, resources and affirming identities" (Baines, 2007, p. 51). As such, my experience as

a refugee and the influence of my social work profession inadvertently positioned me as an insider researcher and an advocate for marginalized groups. Sensoy and Diangelo (2017) state, "Positionality is the concept that our perspectives are based on our place in society. Positionality recognizes that where you stand in relation to others shapes what you can see and understand (p. 15). All knowledge is taught from a particular perspective; the power of dominant knowledge depends in large part on its presentation as neutral and universal (Kincheloe, 2008, as cited in Sensoy & Diangelo, 2017, p. 15). I agree with Sensoy and Diangelo (2017) on their argument that the concept of knowledge is never purely objective, neutral, and outside of human interests, and knowledge is socially constructed. "……By socially constructed, we mean that all knowledge understood by humans is framed by the ideologies, language, beliefs, and customs of human societies" (p. 15).

An approach based on critical theory calls into question the idea that objectivity is desirable or even possible. Sensoy and Diangelo (2017) refer to knowledge as socially constructed, and that knowledge is reflective of the values and interests of those who produce it. This concept captures the understanding that all knowledge and all means of knowing are connected to a social context (p. 29). The values of shared experience, greater access, cultural interpretation, and deeper understanding and clarity of thought are closely tied together and inform one another in a variety of ways. As an insider, having a shared understanding of the normative rules of the community, I was able to interpret the East African social, political, cultural and refugee experience, particularly that of Eritreans and Ethiopians, to its fullest meaning. These, in turn, contributed to a deeper understanding of the nuances of participants' narratives. During the interviews, I created a rapport relatively free from tensions that have contributed to the legitimacy of the research in the eyes of the participants. Ethical issues related to 'power' are

addressed accordingly. I acknowledged the fact that my research participants and I came from different class positions in our respective countries of origin. It is also obvious, here in Winnipeg, there appeared to be an element of power imbalance manifested as a researcher and participant. However, to overcome the power imbalance between researcher and respondent, feminist research suggests that the researcher reveal some aspects of their own identity and story so that the interview is a more reciprocal experience (Nagy & Leavy, 2007). As noted, I have made known to participants my refugee background (without much detail) early on at the beginning of the interview. As such, to a certain extent, we were able to develop an equal partnering relationship that aimed to study a shared interest between two refugees who have similar cultural identities. This situation itself partially erased class within the more general category of 'Other'. There was a shared feeling amongst us that we are all refugees from East Africa. For instance, on one occasion, after the interviews were completed, I encountered a participant in a neighbourhood store while shopping with her mother. This participant did not hesitate to run on to me and greeted me with a wide smile. She was so happy to get this opportunity to introduce her mother and younger brother to me, a fellow refugee who happened to interview her a couple of weeks ago for a "mutual" project.

With that said, as a researcher who shared the cultural, linguistic, and ethnic identities with my participants, I still had to negotiate "objectivity" and accuracy even before I entered the research setting with the same rigour as any other researcher, despite having easier access to the research field. I transcribed and described each participant's interview accurately without any biases or judgment. However, I critically analyzed and interpreted their descriptions using a critical social work lens. The aim of the Interpretive Phenomenological Approach [IPA] is to develop a more overtly interpretative analysis, which positions the initial 'description' in relation

to a wider social, cultural, and perhaps even theoretical context. It aims to provide a critical and conceptual commentary upon the participants' personal 'sense-making' activities (Smith & Osborn, 2003, cited Larkin et al., 2006, p. 104). James Banks is a seasoned scholar in education who has made significant contributions to the understanding of knowledge as socially constructed. Banks (1996) explains that the knowledge we create is influenced by our experiences within various social, economic, and political systems. Thus, who we are (as knowers) is intimately connected to our group socialization, including gender, race, class, and sexuality (Banks, 1996, as cited in Sensoy & Diangelo, 2017, p. 30).

According to Patton (1990) the impact this may have on the interpretation of the research needs to be acknowledged. Hence, I acknowledged the reality that my role as an insider researcher and a critical social worker, as well as my personal relationships within the newcomer community, and my exposure to witnessing their challenging resettlement experience, have shaped my perceptions and behaviours to some extent. Yet, a real advantage of being an insider researcher was during the analysis and interpretation phase of the research process. As an insider, I did not need to spend time getting to know the nuances of the research context (p. 315). Clearly evident in the findings and the discussions that followed, the most significant advantage of my role as an insider researcher was the unique perspective I have in the history and culture of African refugees, which enabled me to have a deep level of understanding and interpretation, which objective approaches (by an outsider) may not be able to uncover.

1.7. Organization of the Study

Refugee children's middle school experience, as expressed by refugee youth participants, forms the basis of the dissertation to elaborate on refugee children's middle school opportunities and challenges in Canada, where they immigrated for a better life.

The chapters of this dissertation are organized into nine chapters.

Chapter 1 -Introduction

The chapter begins with a discussion of the research's background, including its nature and scope, and then proceeds to present an overview of the thesis's structure and the study's purpose. It also clarified the background for choosing this topic of study, which is significant to various stakeholders at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels. It also clarified where I stand as an insider researcher.

Chapter 2- Review of Relevant Literature

In this chapter, I attempted to access and review relevant literature on the educational experiences of refugee children in their countries of origin (pre-migration), in refugee camps (during migration), and finally in resettlement countries, particularly in Winnipeg, Canada (post-migration). I also reviewed literature on the impact of traumatic experiences resulting from displacement and resettlement on children's healthy development and growth, as well as the role resilience plays in children's lives. As study participants are from Eastern African countries (i.e., Eritrea, Ethiopia, South Sudan, and Somalia), an overview of these countries' past and present economic and social status is presented, which has had a direct impact on the children's education and overall well-being.

Chapter 3 -Theoretical Framework

This chapter introduces the theoretical perspectives that inform the analysis of refugee children's educational experiences. It begins by situating the study within the broader discourse of critical social work, drawing on theories that interrogate power structures, social inequalities, and the lived realities of marginalized populations. The discussion highlights the importance of intersectionality, exploring how factors such as race, class, gender, and migration status interact

to shape the schooling experiences of refugee children and youth. Theoretical approaches such as ecological systems theory, trauma and resilience frameworks, and acculturation theory are presented and critically examined. The analysis of the data in the discussion chapter revealed that there is no complete theory that explains everything by itself, particularly on such a complex and dynamic phenomenon of children's traumatic migration experiences. It highlights the importance of combining and integrating multiple theories to mitigate the limitations of a single-theory approach.

Chapter 4 - Research Design and Methodology

This chapter details the research design and the methodological choices that guided the study. It begins by outlining the phenomenological approach adopted, specifically Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), and provides the rationale for selecting this qualitative strategy to explore the lived experiences of refugee children through retrospective narratives of refugee youth. The chapter describes participant recruitment, ethical considerations, and the steps taken to build trust and rapport with youth and educator participants. Further, it discusses data collection tools, including semi-structured interviews and reflective field journals, and explains how these methods supported a nuanced exploration of participants' narratives. Strategies for ensuring authenticity, trustworthiness, and reflexivity throughout the research process are also discussed, emphasizing the importance of transparency and ethical rigour in working with vulnerable populations.

Chapter 5 -Data Collection and Analysis

This chapter introduces the data collection and analysis procedure employed in this phenomenological research, illustrating the iterative and nonlinear process common to IPA studies. Based on the principles of IPA, the seven stages of analyzing data in IPA research was

used to identify each theme; reading and re-reading each transcript, initial noting, developing emergent themes, searching for connection across the emergent themes, repeating the process by moving on to the next case, looking for patterns across all nine participants' stories while considering convergence and divergence alongside shared themes (Smith et al., 2009). Each theme is discussed in the subsequent sections

Chapter 6- Findings

The chapter presents the findings that emerged from the data gathered through semi-structured interviews conducted with nine refugee youth participants and three Canadian educators, as well as recordings from my reflective field journals. It then outlined the findings, divided into four categories and 12 main themes. The findings are supported with direct quotations from participants who shared their experiences at their pre-migration, trans-migration, and post-migration trajectories. Special emphasis is given to their post-migration educational experience in their resettlement country, Winnipeg, Canada. Perspectives from Canadian teachers who worked with refugee children in Winnipeg schools are also included.

Chapter 7 - Discussion

This chapter discusses the study's findings using a critical social work lens and three theories: ecological systems theory, trauma and resilience, and acculturation. It illustrates how the combined effects of relocation, resettlement stressors, racism, and structural barriers negatively impact the social integration, educational adjustment, and outcomes for refugee children. The chapter discussed the findings of the research in light of pre-existing evidence and relevant theoretical frameworks, analyzed participants' descriptions of events and the researcher's (my) interpretations of their descriptions from a critical social work perspective within the micro, mezzo and macro environments.

Chapter 8- Social Work's Role/Implication

This chapter discussed social work's important role in the integration process of refugee children. The discussion highlights how the integration process is central to the settlement of refugees and their adaptation to the host society. It reminds social work of its dual legacy as both a helper and a controller. It suggests embracing a methodology that values reflection, inquiry, and intersectionality, for social workers to contribute to meaningful change and preserve the noble service.

Chapter 9 - Concluding Remarks, Personal Reflection, and Recommendations

In this chapter, I present concluding remarks, discuss my personal reflections, provide recommendations developed in collaboration with participants, suggest areas for future studies, and outline some of the study's limitations.

1.8. Chapter summary

This introduction chapter provided an overview of the structure of the thesis and the purpose of the study. It also clarified the background for choosing this topic of study, which is significant to various stakeholders at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels. Throughout this dissertation, I used the term "*newcomers*" and/ or "*immigrants and refugees*" interchangeably, as many scholars and authors in the field use both terms to refer to individuals and groups who voluntarily or involuntarily leave their country of origin and live in another country. Of course, "*newcomer"* is itself an umbrella term that lumps together an extremely diverse group of Canadians or soon-to-be Canadians (CASW, 2010). I also used the term '*young adults' and 'youth*' interchangeably to describe refugee youth participants. To enhance dependability, I fully acknowledged and described my own position as an insider researcher situated within the context of the study. I have explained to each participant at the beginning of each interview about my experience as a

refugee, and the very reason why I did this study. The goal and focus of this qualitative study using a retrospective data collection method through interviewing young adults was to shed light on the lived experiences of participants' middle school years in Canadian schools and attempt to identify the impact of their pre- and trans-migration experiences on their academic performances when they were children and attending middle school in Canada. In that sense, this study has achieved its primary research objective, which was to explore refugee children's middle school experience vis-à-vis interviewing young refugee adults who have experienced the phenomenon as children at some point in their lives.

CHAPTER II: Review of Relevant Literature

> *By integrating findings and perspectives from many empirical studies, a literature review can address research questions with the power that no single study has (Snyder Hannah, 2019)*

2.1. Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the literature and previous research on migration, refugee movement, and resettlement with a focus on refugee children from war-affected East African countries. Much of the existing literature on the education of refugee children is general and lacks specificity. Either it is presented about immigrants as a group that does not consider the unique refugee experience (Canadian Council for Refugees, 2011) and/or focuses primarily on post-arrival experiences, with little attention to the educational experiences in their country of origin and first asylum (Dryden, 2015). Information on the topic of refugee children in general and their education in particular came, with its limitations, from a wide array of sources and disciplines, including peer-reviewed journals. Some scholars argue that peer-reviewed journals contain relatively little literature on refugee children's education and that much of the information on this topic is found in documents from the United Nations, particularly the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], governments and non-governmental organizations' [NGO] reports. For instance, Janzen et al. (2022) noted that Canada is internationally recognized as a leader in welcoming refugee newcomers. However, there is limited evidence about how well refugee newcomers fare after arriving in Canada, and the effectiveness of resettlement services and supports (p. 11).

Indeed, research on refugee children has grown over the past 20 years while gaining greater momentum with the Syrian crisis from 2010 onwards (Shuay & Crul, 2020). This increasing interest in research on the education of refugee children has been facilitated by the growing number of voices, in particular from humanitarian agencies advocating for the inclusion of

education as part of any humanitarian response in a crisis (p. 3). Arguably, much of the literature in refugee studies came from the United Nations [UN]. For instance, in the last decade, UNHCR alone has published several documents advocating for a framework for the education of refugee children (UNHCR, 2011, 2019). Jacobsen and Landau (2003) noted that "A large subset of the refugee research literature consists of reports by human rights organizations like Amnesty International or Human Rights Watch, which document and expose human rights abuses with the intention of pressuring governments to protect refugees and promote their well" (p. 1).

Despite significant data on migration in general, little exists on the movement of children and young people specifically (UNICEF, 2020). While the number of studies on children's and young people's migration is increasing (Coe et al., 2011; Ensor & Gozdziak, 2010; Hashim & Thorsen, 2011; Ní Laoire et al., 2011; Parreñas, 2005; Tyrrell et al., 2013), there are still very few such studies when considered in the context of the number of books on migration in general (cited in Veale & Donà, 2014, p. 1).

As such, this study is informed by available scholarly literature as well as reports published by United Nations agencies such as UNCHR, UNICEF, UNDP and the Governments of East African countries and Canada, who are the focus of this study. Given their central relevance to this study, the refugee children's migration trajectory – pre-migration, migration, and post-migration features prominently and is presented in this literature review chapter. They are also woven throughout subsequent chapters. One of the major tasks facing the refugee child when arriving in a new country is to adapt to a new school environment. In coming to grips with this task, the child brings many pre-migrations, trans-migration and post-migration characteristics and experiences that have the potential to facilitate or interfere (Hamilton, 2003) and this should be studied and understood.

The literature review is organized into four sections: (1) refugee children's educational experience in their country of origin (pre-migration) (2) refugee children's educational experience in countries of first asylum (trans-migration) (3) refugee children's educational experience in country of resettlement (post-migration) and (4) the role of social work in Canadian middle schools. Despite its limitations, to the best of my ability, I have tried to be accurate in the representation of these authors and voices cited in this document.

2.2 Contextual background

More people are on the move than at any time in several decades, many of them fleeing conflict or the effects of climate change (UNHCR, 2018). While some individuals leave their country because they want to better their life, work or study, others feel they must leave because of war, poverty, political unrest, armed violence, natural disasters, or other serious circumstances that exist there. With a growing global population, combined with human conflict and environmental change, people are becoming refugees for more reasons than ever before. The most common reason people become refugees, however, is persecution, which can take on many forms: religious, national, social, racial, or political (UNHCR, 2018). It is important to note, children are especially vulnerable to abuse, exploitation and trafficking during displacements and armed conflicts (UNHCR, 2018).

The process of migration consists of three major stages. These stages are pre-migration and departure, transit, and resettlement. Many argue that in all stages of migration – pre-, trans-, and post-migration - several barriers are stopping refugee children from getting their basic human rights, including the education they need. "Migration and resettlement create unique developmental challenges. Policymakers and helping professions need to understand what these challenges are, how children and their families respond to them, which responses are successful,

and which are harmful′' (Beiser, 2005). As the situation for many refugees draws out into the long term, and for a few survivors, Canada becomes their home, it is imperative to understand the children's educational experiences at all stages of their migration trajectory to ensure the readiness of the existing Canadian education system to accommodate the unique educational needs of refugee students. To uncover what is already known in the body of knowledge in refugee children's educational experiences, an effective literature review is needed before initiating the study. Webster and Watson (2002) emphasize that "an effective review facilitates theory development, closes areas where a plethora of research exists, and uncovers areas where research is needed" (p. xiii). To this end, I am presenting a brief literature review on previous works on the subject that sets a background for the study. This literature review includes three sections.

In the first section of this chapter, I attempted to access and review relevant literature on refugee children's educational experiences in their countries of origin (pre-migration), in refugee camps (migration) and finally in resettlement countries, particularly in Winnipeg, Canada (post-migration). I also reviewed literature on the impact of traumatic experiences due to displacement and resettlement in relation to children's healthy development and growth, as well as the role resilience plays in children's lives. As study participants are from Eastern African countries (I.e., Eritrea, Ethiopia, South Sudan, and Somalia), an overview of these countries' past and present economic and social status, which has had a direct impact on the children's education and overall well-being, is presented.

In the second section, I critically analyzed multiple theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches that have been used to investigate refugee children's issues. In doing so, I used critical social work theory as a framework and examined three selected theories on

their relevance as tools to explore the educational experiences of refugee children from war-affected regions. The theories included bio-ecological theory, resilience and trauma theory, and acculturation theory. As such, the research design and methodology used to examine the topic is also informed by a critical social work perspective, providing the ontological and epistemological basis for the conceptual advancement of the study.

The third section presented a brief overview of the role of social work in Canadian middle schools in the process of integrating refugee children into the school system.

2.3. Global migration- General

Human migration is the movement of people from one place in the world to another for taking up permanent or semi-permanent residence, usually across a political boundary. The term "migration" refers to patterns of movement of people within but also between different countries for a variety of reasons, mostly to settle in another country (Castles & Miller, 2003). A fundamental characteristic of people is their movement from place to place, and the right to move was recognized globally over half a century ago with the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN, 1948). The declaration states that "everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state" and "everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country" (Article 13). Whether they are forced to flee their country of origin due to persecution, war, and human rights violations, or choose to migrate to the West, seeking economic opportunities, people have been, are and will continue to move from place to place. In recent years, for example, in 2020, eighty million people were displaced worldwide because of conflict, persecution, human rights violations and violence. Forty percent of the 80 million people forcibly displaced were children under the age of 18 (UNHCR Canada, 2020). Sadly, even today, refugee crises around the world

continue to be a major concern. In fact, the number of refugees and internally displaced people worldwide had grown to more than 84 million in mid-2021, up from 82.4 million at the end of 2020. Among them, 35 million are children, 1 million of whom were born as refugees. This means that roughly one in every 97 people in the world is now forcibly displaced (World Vision, 2022).

Immigration is a global phenomenon, the immediate impacts of which are felt on the economic level and in social relations, culture, national politics and international relations (Castles & Miller, 2003). Migration affects population patterns and characteristics, social and cultural patterns and processes, economies, and physical environments (Lee, 1966), and Canada is not immune to this global phenomenon. Indeed, Canada has an insignificant number of emigrants compared to the immigrants it receives. In 2020, the net migration rate for Canada was 6.56 migrants per thousand population. Although Canada's net migration rate fluctuated substantially in recent years, it tended to increase through the 1975 - 2020 period, ending at 6.56 migrants per thousand population in 2020 (The Canadian Encyclopedia, 2021). In 2010, for instance, Canada admitted more than 280,000 immigrants - the highest proportion in over fifty years, which significantly changed the landscape of Canadian demography (Chui, 2011).

While there are different paths to legally immigrate to Canada, this study only focuses on the Convention refugees from East African origin who migrated to Canada in the past ten years. In 2019, Canada provided 30,082 refugees with the opportunity to build a new life for themselves and their children (UNHCR Canada, 2020). These are people outside their home country or the country they normally live in and cannot return because of a well-founded fear of persecution based on race, religion, and/or political views. They flee their country, risk their lives and travel thousands of miles (by foot, on the backs of animals, in boats and other ways),

temporarily sheltering in the neighbouring countries and, through a lengthy process and long wait, immigrate to a "safe" place, one being Canada, and attempt to resettle. In other words, these children and their parents hoped for and rightfully deserve a much better life in Canada than the country they fled from and the refugee camps where they miserably stayed.

2.4. Refugee children from the Horn of Africa

Around the world, nearly 50 million children have become refugees or migrants after fleeing their homes to escape conflicts and natural disasters. More than half of these girls and boys fled violence and instability (UNICEF, 2018). Although refugee children are scattered around the world, this study focused on refugee children who are now youth from East African origin currently in Winnipeg, Canada. In wartime, these children were internally displaced, and some who were able to escape and flee became refugees, with obvious detrimental consequences on their education. Today, according to the Council on Foreign Relations, the world encompasses more than 25 conflict zones, where children are growing up under the shadow of war. While the intensity of conflicts in recent years is lower than that observed in the 1990s, the region remains prone to conflicts, with around 30 percent of the countries affected in 2019 (IMF, 2020). "Overall, about a third of the countries in the region have been affected by conflict in recent years" (p. 3), and children remain the most impacted victims. In general, among all regions, sub-Saharan Africa has the highest rates of education exclusion. Over one-fifth of children between the ages of about 6 and 11 are out of school, followed by one-third of youth between the ages of about 12 and 14 (UNESCO, 2019). According to UNESCO, the Institution for Statistics (UIS) data, almost 60% of children between the ages of about 15 and 17 are not in school. In 2018, 258.4 million children, adolescents and youth were out of school, representing one-sixth of the global population of this age group (UNESCO, 2019). The International Crisis

Group [ICG], which monitored conflicts around the world, projected the ten deadly Conflicts to watch in 2021 that included Somalia and Ethiopia (ICG, 2020). It is evident that war and displacement significantly affected refugee children. War undermines the very foundation of children's lives, destroying their homes, splintering their communities and shattering their trust in adults (Machel, 2001, cited in Stewart, 2007, p. 4).

It is a well-known fact that education is a fundamental human right, enshrined in the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child and the 1951 Refugee Convention. However, refugee children face unique educational challenges throughout their migration trajectories. Many argue that problems faced at each stage of migration are known to have risks of causing lifetime concerns in individuals' lives. It is reported that many refugee children from the region experience frequent disruptions and limited access to schools that later affect their academic performances (Dryden, 2015; Stewart, 2011). To conclude, in the following sections, I highlight some of the numerous challenges refugee children encountered at each stage of their migration trajectory as documented in various literature.

2.4. 1. Pre-migration

The refugee children who are the focus of this study are from the Horn of Africa (HOA), particularly Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, and South Sudan, a region with high volatility for violence that created and inflicted a great deal of suffering on the children. In regional terms, Africa has the largest absolute number of children - 170 million - living in conflict zones (UN, 2020). In other words, one in four African children is living in conflict. War and poverty in East Africa remain one of the biggest challenges, combined with huge structural issues such as the lack, if not absence, of educational opportunities for school-age children. Despite its rich endowment in human, social, and natural capital, the conflict remains endemic in the region,

which causes forced migration (World Bank, 2015). Arguably, because of its potential wealth and strategic location at a crossroads of trade routes, the region has suffered from prolonged conflict and displacement and has long been of interest to major regional and global powers (Hovil & Oette, 2017, p. 8). Eastern Africa is a region that has been tremendously affected by conflict. Sadly, nations like Sudan and Somalia have been torn apart by many years of conflict. This has inevitably led to other societal challenges or difficulties, such as displacements, poverty, and famine. The 2020, South Sudan's peace deal, which was hanging by a thread and new fighting that escalated between ethnic groups was a classic example of how conflicts in the region are more complex to resolve (ICG, 2020). In Ethiopia, Nobel Peace Prize winner and Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's controversial reform project is facing unprecedented challenges, and its greatest threat yet was the various ethnic based political groupings seeking to take advantage of the newly opened political space. This has resulted in widespread communal violence and tensions within the ruling party, with Abiy's government struggling to get a grip on the situation. For more than seven months now, at the time of this writing, an armed conflict has been unfolding in the region of Tigray, northern Ethiopia. The fighting has killed thousands and displaced over 2 million people so far (ICG, 2021). The situation in Eritrea and Somalia is not better either. Eritrea's human rights record is claimed to be one of the worst in the world, and legal movement into and out of the country is tightly controlled and restricted (HRW, 2023). A major consequence of conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa, as well as elsewhere, is the displacement of populations. This carries high economic, fiscal, and social costs for the region involved in conflict, but often also for the nearby regions that host the displaced people. Over time, the number of (United Nations–recognized) persons of concern from sub-Saharan African countries-including internally displaced persons, asylum seekers, and refugees-has more than tripled, rising

from fewer than 5 million in the 1980s to 18 million in 2017, with more intense conflicts generally implying larger displaced populations. As always, wherever conflicts and atrocities occur, it is children and women who are affected the most. To begin with, these children are often exposed to physical violence, chaos, and war in their countries of origin. Many refugees leave behind more than their homes when conflict forces them to flee - they must also abandon their school (UNCHR, 2015).

In 1996, Graca Machel, an advocate for human rights, wrote an extensive report for the United Nations on the effects of armed conflicts on children, urging for better recognition of the violation of human rights of children and young people and the establishment of protective measures in conflict areas. Although more than two decades have passed since Machel warned of the ever-increasing collateral damage of war and conflict, many of the children in the Horn of Africa remain deeply traumatized, suffer from famine, and are displaced (Machel, 1996). Santa Barbara (2006) asserted that war affects children in all the ways it affects adults, but also in different ways. First, children are dependent on the care, empathy, and attention of adults who love them. Their attachments are frequently disrupted in times of war, due to the loss of parents, extreme preoccupation of parents in protecting and finding subsistence for the family, and emotional unavailability of depressed or distracted parents (p. 892). Second, impacts in childhood may adversely affect the life trajectory of children far more than adults. Santa Barbara (2006) illustrates how childhood trauma may have a lasting impact: "Consider a child disabled in war; they may, in addition to loss of a limb, sight, or cognitive capacity, lose the opportunity of schooling and of a social life. A girl who is raped could be marginalized by her society and lose the opportunity for marriage. Long after the war has ended, these lives will never attain the potential they had before the impact of war (p. 892).

The impact of war on children, while known by many stakeholders, has not yet received timely attention to address it. Death, injury, disability, malnutrition and infectious illness, rape and prostitution for subsistence, psychological suffering, moral and spiritual impacts are amongst the many. Devakumar et al. (2014) further argue that harm to health may be long-lasting within an individual's lifetime and is well established, but there is increasing awareness that adverse effects may continue through intergenerational biological mechanisms (p. 3). They may have to change their moral structure and lie, steal, and sell sex to survive. They may have their moral structure forcibly dismantled and replaced in training to kill as part of a military force (Devakumar et al., 2014). Social and cultural losses significantly alter the children's worldview. Children may lose their community and its culture during war, sometimes having it reconstituted in refugee or diaspora situations (Devakumar et al.,2014). Despite global efforts to end the use of child soldiers, girls and boys are still forced into combat - as fighters and in other roles - in at least 14 countries, including South Sudan and Somalia. It is estimated that there are tens of thousands of young people under 18 serving in militias in about 60 countries. They are particularly vulnerable to all the impacts listed above (Santa Barbara, 2006). However, the lack of access to education has more profound damage to a child's healthy growth and development. Many children are forcibly recruited and used by armed forces or groups, but others are pushed into joining armed groups or forces due to socio-economic factors such as extreme poverty or a lack of access to education (Lee-Koo, in Huynh, Decosta, & Lee-Koo, 2015). Armed conflict can lead to disruption of their schooling and everyday practices. Since infrastructure is usually destroyed, schooling is impeded and often halted. The closure of schools not only leaves life-long scars on education but also deprives children of one of the most important protective factors. In a desperate attempt to escape from such a complex web of misery, some are forced to

flee their countries of origin and seek asylum in neighbouring countries. The pre-migration and departure stage involves the decision-making process of who leaves and who is left behind. This stage entails many losses with numerous separations from family and friends. The effect of parents' malnourishment on their children is also another factor: "Malnourished mothers pass on the stress to their children, whose poor nutritional status may affect subsequent generations" (Devakumar et al., 2014, p. 8). Furthermore, refugees do not know when, if ever, they will be able to return to their countries. Thus, leaving behind family and friends is particularly painful, as they know they may never see them again.

The UNHCR identifies three main groups in the global count, which include refugees, or people forced to leave their country because of conflict, war or persecution. The second group, who often get less attention, is designated as internally displaced people (IDPs). These people are displaced within their country and amount to 41.3 million globally (UNHCR, 2018). Most people who are displaced by conflict remain within the borders of their own countries. They are IDPs and globally constitute about 26 million. Some manage to cross an international border and are determined, under international law, to be refugees.

In the region, access to quality education is inadequate for various reasons discussed earlier. Furthermore, teachers in conflict regions are often attacked for being absent from school, for being poorly motivated, and even for lacking basic knowledge about the subjects they teach. Bergin, Hine, and Wagner (2018), in their report for the Save the Children organization, highlighted the dire situation internally displaced children find themselves.

> Being internally displaced is a huge threat to children's education. As with refugee populations, most internally displaced people live in low- or middle-income countries where the education systems are already under significant strain. During displacement, schools that remain open become further overcrowded, while other schools may be occupied by armed forces and displaced communities. Government teachers may leave conflict-affected areas or change jobs. (p. 18)

2.4.2. Country profile – snapshot

Much has been written about the failings of primary education systems in East Africa. The situation in these four countries (Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia and South Sudan) is not getting better any time soon as conflicts keep escalating. In the following paragraphs, I briefly highlight the countries' profiles regarding primary education to help us better understand refugee students' educational readiness when they transit to the neighbouring countries and later to Canadian schools.



Horn of Africa (HOA), region of eastern Africa, is the easternmost extension of African land, and for the purposes of this study is defined as the region that is home to the countries of Eritrea, Ethiopia, South Sudan and Somalia, whose cultures have been linked throughout their long history.: Encyclopedia Britannica Last Updated: May 25, 2024

Eritrea

Eritrea has a turbulent history of colonization, war and conflict. Eritrea became a sovereign state in 1991 after 30 years of fighting for independence against the Ethiopian regimes. Much has not changed since its independence regarding the conflict that makes citizens, particularly the

youth, subject to mass migration. In 1998, a border dispute with Ethiopia led to the infamous Ethio-Eritrean War, in which thousands of soldiers from both countries died. Eritrea suffered from significant economic and social stress, including massive population displacement, reduced economic development, and led to one of Africa's most severe migrations. Human rights organizations have also consistently claimed that Eritrea's poor human rights record is a key reason for the mass migration from the country. Human Rights Watch [HRW], for instance, argued in 2015 that "the desire to escape military service is a primary driver of flight from Eritrea," and a study by Strategic initiative for women in the horn of Africa [SIHA] from the same year similarly found that key push factors include military conscription, early marriage, harsh labor practices, hunger, religious persecution, and the lack of freedom of movement (HRW, 2015). Given that leaving the country legally is usually impossible, many of those who leave Eritrea have to do so with the assistance of a smuggler, which has led children and women to be killed by contrabandists.

According to the Global Partnership for Education [GPE] report, the education sector in Eritrea faces challenges, including disparities in access to education among rural and urban regions, the scarcity of reliable data on education, and education finance. For instance, until recently, children from *Asheti*, Eritrea, had to walk 5 kilometres to an elementary school that operated under a tent, leaving students at the mercy of the weather, which was not always conducive to learning (GPE, 2020). Factors such as disabilities, poverty and socio-cultural norms hinder the participation of many children in schools. Despite efforts to meet national and international commitments and the declaration of free education at all levels, Eritrea, like countries in the region, faces the dual challenge of increasing access to educational opportunities and improving the quality of education at all levels in the school system. The 2016 out-of-school

children study report revealed that over 220,000 children of 5 to 13 years of age remain out of school. The analysis also disclosed that a bulk of these out-of-school children are from pre-primary (73.0%), primary 19.0% and lower secondary school (40.9%) levels of education (Government of the State of Eritrea, 2019, p. 15). Many of these children are from the most marginalized groups: girls, children living in remote or nomadic areas and children with disabilities. Several challenges hindered Eritrean children's primary education, including long-term lack of resources, distances to school aggravated by severe temperatures or strong dusty winds and the ongoing conflicts in the region.

Ethiopia

Ethiopia is experiencing one of the world's most acute displacement crises since the fall of the Monarchy. In addition to the mass exodus during the Military dictatorship regime in the early 1970s, a recent conflict that erupted in late 2020 in the north of the country has also created huge internal displacement and sent refugees into neighbouring countries. As the World Bank has noted, Ethiopia was "one of the most educationally disadvantaged countries in the world" for much of the 20th century, because of armed conflict, famines, and humanitarian crises (Joshi & Verspoor, 2013). Despite the multifaceted economic, social and political turmoil, Ethiopia has made some progress in education, with primary school net enrollment tripling between 2000 and 2016 to the current 100 per cent. However, although most children are enrolled in school, many do not complete their education: 85 per cent make it past Grade 5 and 54 per cent past Grade 8. Sixty-three per cent of students in lower primary school are not achieving the basic learning outcomes needed to succeed higher up the education ladder - 50 per cent and above (World Bank, 2018). Approximately 2.6 million children of primary school age are not in school, of which 43 percent are boys and 57 percent are girls. For children of primary school age in

Ethiopia, the biggest disparity can be seen between the poorest and the richest children, as well as between boys and girls. Nearly 55% of female youth of secondary school age are out of school compared to 46% of male youth of the same age (World Bank, 2018).

Ethiopia is also known to be the second largest host of refugees in Africa, and the educational needs of refugee children who migrated to Ethiopia from neighbouring Eritrea, Somalia and South Sudan, put additional pressure on the country, which already faces challenges in delivering quality services to its own citizens. The country is prone to prolonged and multiple climate-induced and conflict-related emergencies that directly impact children's access to education (UNICEF, 2022).

South Sudan

After enduring decades of civil war, the people of South Sudan have one of the lowest literacy rates in the world. About 1.5 million people have been displaced within the country, in addition to 2.3 million who fled to neighbouring countries. An estimated 80% of the refugees are women and children. It is estimated that only around 8% of women in South Sudan are literate, possibly the lowest female literacy rate in the world (USAID, 2021). With a population of 11 million, South Sudan has a higher proportion of children out of school than any other place in the world. More than half of the country's primary and lower secondary school-age children, up to age 15, are not attending school, according to UNICEF (2021).

Most of the schools have very poor facilities, and anywhere else, they wouldn't even be called schools. Some of the out-of-school children are living in pastoral communities, moving with their cattle and are not able to attend regular classes. The largest group of out-of-school children in South Sudan is girls. Poverty, child marriage and cultural and religious views all hinder girls' education (UNICEF, 2021). Billy Briggs (2017), an Education in Emergencies

writer, observed the sad reality in South Sudan: "Nearly three-quarters of primary school-aged children in South Sudan are being denied an education due to civil war and a food crisis. The world's newest nation has 72% of children out of school at the primary level – the highest rate of any country. And 76% of schoolgirls in South Sudan are currently not in school, also the highest rate globally, according to the United Nations children's agency UNICEF (Briggs, 2017). Relentless ethnic and faith-based conflicts in South Sudan and the neighbouring countries put millions of children out of school, putting at risk their futures and the future of the country.

Somalia

Ongoing armed conflict, insecurity, lack of state protection, and recurring humanitarian crises exposed Somali civilians to serious abuse. According to the 2020 world report, there were an estimated 2.6 million internally displaced people (IDPs), many living unassisted and vulnerable to abuse (Human Rights Watch, 2020). Somalia has one of the lowest primary school enrollment rates in the world. Just 30% of all school-age children have access to learning opportunities, with over 3 million children remaining out of school (2018). Somalia has one of the world's lowest gross enrolment rates for primary school-aged children, with only 30 percent of children at the primary education level and 26 percent for secondary education (Somalia Educational cluster, 2017). The educational deficit in Somalia is one of the most acute in the world. Assessments suggest that even for those children who are in school, they are not actually learning. In an Early Grade Reading Assessment conducted in a limited sample of schools around Mogadishu, testing students in Grades 2 through 4, when Grade 2 students were asked to read a passage, nearly half of the students (47 percent) in Grade 2 could not identify a single word (Somalia Educational cluster, 2017).

A primary cause of the lack of educational resources in Somalia is the civil war that broke out in 1991. This directly impacted on the educational system in the country, leaving many students displaced from the classroom. Further, many teachers are uncertified for their jobs, even over two decades later. Such a lack of resources, compounded by the ongoing war in the region, resulted in putting children not only out of school but also pushing them to join armed groups. In 2016 alone, an estimated 28,000 children in IDP settlements had dropped out of learning centers due to a lack of continued financial support to operate the schools (Somalia Educational cluster, 2017). Al-Shabaab is an Islamic fundamentalist group which is based in Somalia and active elsewhere in East Africa. It has built itself on a clear agenda: ridding Somalia of foreign forces, portrayed as Christians, and implementing the Sharia. These goals implied the need for reform and discipline of Somali society, using all means, including *Dawa* (preaching) as well as violence. Due to its terrorist operation, schools are bombarded, civilians are killed, children are forcefully recruited to fight, and women are abused (Marchal, 2019).

2.4.3. Transmigration

While most people remain displaced within their home country, every year, tens of thousands of East Africans (Ethiopians, Somalis, South Sudanese, and Eritreans) begin the perilous thousands of miles trek to the neighbouring countries and beyond, across mountains, deserts, the Red Sea and war zones. Many do not survive the journey, and only those who survive the atrocities and the challenging journeys and cross the border to another country may become refugees. The above-noted countries' profiles clearly illustrate how life for children in the region is difficult in general, and primary school education is poorly conducted in particular. While multiple drivers may affect all individuals, the price children on the move are paying has become remarkably high in recent years, and many have lost their lives. Disruption and destruction of

education is one of the most damaging effects of armed conflict. Children fleeing their homes and growing up in camps may not have schooling for months or even years. Sometimes, education ends altogether (Hovil & Oette, 2017).

In the region, most children on the move remained in the neighbouring countries. And for those who did decide to move out of the region, the route to Europe is only one of several routes that can be used. The majority of those who leave the region go east, through Yemen to Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states, while others travel south, through Kenya, to South Africa (Hovil & Oette, 2017). Regardless of their choice of routes, the hardships, and the danger they encountered during their flights are almost similar. Those travelling to Europe continued to face considerable dangers on certain parts of the routes, with many refugees and migrants dying along the way. Despite knowing the general risks of travelling to and through conflict areas, for some, the push factors appeared to outweigh these dangers, and they risked their lives.

Most refugees in the region, however, chose to first seek asylum in the neighbouring countries - mostly, in Ethiopia, Sudan, and Kenya. Nonetheless, the country of first asylum that these refugee children and their families arrived at and attempted to find safety after fleeing their home country did not necessarily end their suffering (UNCHR, 2016). Most of these refugees live in a country that borders their own original country, which is also in conflict and experiences precarious conditions. The region has been deprived of economic development for decades. The HOA currently has a population of over 150 million people. As noted above, of that population, many young Africans have struggled to receive a proper education, even at the primary level (UNHCR, 2021). More than three decades of conflict have nearly destroyed the region's educational system, which is characterized by poor quality, insufficient numbers of qualified teachers, and inadequate resources. In Ethiopia and South Sudan, where armed conflict is

present, children's opportunities for education, jobs and even leisure activities are limited for their own citizens, let alone providing services for refugees from neighbouring countries. As noted earlier, Ethiopia is the second largest host of refugees in Africa, and the educational needs of these children place additional pressure on regions which already face challenges in delivering quality services to their own host populations. For instance, in 2017, worldwide, more than 173,800 unaccompanied and separated children fled their homes and sought asylum - more than 43,000 of these children are in Ethiopia. Sudan has also received many Eritrean refugees since the early 2000s. Despite its poor educational infrastructure, at the end of 2016, UNHCR estimated that Sudan hosted 103,200 refugees from Eritrea. Many reported that life in refugee camps is hard. Those who leave the camp for temporary relief risk arbitrary arrest by Sudanese security forces and, in many cases, are returned to their country of origin against the non-refoulement, fundamental principle of international law. The Sudanese government has been repeatedly blamed for deporting Eritreans back to their country in recent years. In some countries, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has worked with local governments to establish UNHCR camps (e.g., Kakuma and Dadaab in Kenya), where refugee children and families are sheltered in makeshift tents. According to a UNCHR (2018) report, out of the 19.9 million refugees under UNCHR care, 7.4 million are of school age, and their access to education is limited, with 4 million unable to attend school. Even when children make it to school, they are rarely able to benefit from it fully. Classrooms are often overcrowded, water and sanitation facilities are inadequate, and trained teachers and schoolbooks are hard to come by. The poor quality of education is reflected in students' results. Children living with disabilities face even more challenges, and adolescent girls are seldom able to complete secondary education (UNIEF, 2019). Out of the 303 million children out of school globally, more than one-third live

in countries affected by conflict and disasters (p. 11). For instance, due to the ongoing conflict and escalating violence in South Sudan, an overwhelming number of children have lost their parents to violence or become separated from them on their journey to neighbouring countries – Ethiopia and Kenya - to seek safety. Most Somali refugees have settled in Kenya, Ethiopia, or Yemen. Some have lived in massive refugee camps for years, escaping the hardship behind and hoping for a better life. Refugees from a neighbouring country, for instance, Somalia, migrated to a neighbouring country - either Kenya or Ethiopia. Once they cross borders, these migrants fleeing the violence in their own country can expect only beatings, extortion, and overcrowded refugee camps in Kenya (HRW, 2010). According to a Human Rights Watch report (2010), as they crossed the border, Somalis encountered the police, who demanded money. Those who cannot pay - women with babies, children, and entire families - face deportation, violent abuse, arbitrary arrest, unlawful detention in inhuman and degrading conditions, and wrongful prosecution for their "unlawful presence" in Kenya (HRW, 2010). Over a period of six days in the Dadaab camps in March 2010, Human Rights Watch interviewed 102 refugees about police abuses and sexual violence in and around the camps. Half of the interviewees spoke about police abuses, including excessive force leading to death and miscarriages, rape, whipping, beatings, and kicking (HRW, 2010).

Although theoretically, UNHCR ensures that at least primary schools are available for all children in camps, education never constitutes a priority; schools are often set up long after a population is well established in a camp (Harrell-Bond, 2000). Schools in refugee camps are overcrowded and struggling to cope with the arrival of so many refugees. Although these camps are designed to offer protection, refugees, especially women and children living in camps, often remain at risk and in danger. Major refugee camps are in relatively poor, underdeveloped, and

economically marginalized areas with limited livelihood opportunities (World Bank, 2015). For instance, the Dagahaley camp in Kenya that provides shelter for refugees from the Horn of Africa (HOA) is under pressure to find enough teachers and space to teach the children living there. The school has 4,036 students and just 25 classrooms. At that time, there was only one teacher for every 168 students (UNCHR, 2016). The situation is even worse in other camps. In 2016, there were around 156,000 Children of school-going age living in the Dadaab refugee camps. Only one-third of those children were receiving any kind of education. Many of the children, especially those from Somalia, have never experienced formal education; they have never seen a school nor know what a teacher is (UNCHR, 2016). These children also encountered additional trauma and hardship while living in a refugee camp (Lustig et al., 2004). Living conditions in refugee camps are typically poor, with inadequate water, food, and medical care (Harrell-Bond, 2000). In addition, refugee camps are often risky; witnessing or experiencing acts of violence (e.g., attacks, rapes, deaths by suicide) is common (Rothe, Lewis, Castillo-Martinez, Busquets, & Martinez, 2002). Moreover, these children also face trauma and conflicts as they often must live with racism and discrimination (Roxas, 2008).

Inadequate humanitarian assistance and educational opportunities in refugee camps in Kenya have increased the number of refugees leaving the camps and settling in Nairobi, Kenya's capital city. Here, they become known as "urban refugees" (Jacobsen, 2006). The Sudanese refugee children in Nairobi, Kenya, face xenophobia and discriminatory urban refugee policies, which preclude their admission into public elementary schools. In turn, these children's enrollment in private schools in Nairobi is hindered by their parents' or guardians' precarious socioeconomic status (Jacobsen, 2006). Even if access to schools was not a problem, some of the children are not attending school, as there are many households in refugee camps where their

child labour is critical to their survival (Harrell-Bond, 2000). As such, many refugee children endure frequent disruptions and limited access to schooling. With the average conflict lasting 17 years, millions of children globally spend their entire childhoods engulfed in conflict with limited educational opportunities (Dryden, 2015).

Despite all odds, refugee children demonstrate resilience and show a great interest in education. Mareng (2010), who studies the quality of education in the Kakuma Camp, asserted that, in general, refugees value education and view it as an important tool for ensuring future success. For refugees at Kakuma Refugee Camp in Kenya, "education in the camp was highly regarded… as a helpful solution for their personal problems" (p. 293). Though children and parents both realize the importance of education, many refugee children, especially girls, are unable to attend school; many have lost parents and need to help care for their younger siblings or prepare meals for their families (Kirk & Winthrop, 2007). In addition to the lack of resources available to refugee schools, teachers are often people who have never taught before arriving at the camp and can be abusive and disempowering (Kirk &Winthrop, 2007). Those who attend school often face upheaval as children and teachers alike join and leave the school due to repatriation or new influxes of refugees, making an educational experience unstable.

2.4.4. The pre- and trans-migration education and its implications.

Being uprooted from one's country of origin has its consequences. Many researchers emphasize the negative impact of traumatic experience on the social and psychological development of refugee children (Coleridge, 2001; Ghazali, 2004; Parkins, 2004). In addition to traumatic events experienced in their country of origin, many refugee children encounter additional hardship and trauma during flight (Lustig et al., 2004). Relocations such as refugee

dispersal movements within countries or transfers to another country impose forced breaks in children's education, as well as many other integration problems faced by these children.

Refugee children of the region come from diverse cultures and backgrounds, each bringing their own unique set of experiences, methods of coping, and meaning attributed to those experiences. However, it is possible to draw some commonalities among these children. While it is not the scope of this study to examine the HOA education system and the problems associated with primary schooling, we however can conclude from the above brief literature and country profiles that children who emigrated from this region have been deprived of access to quality education, particularly those from South Sudan and Somalia.

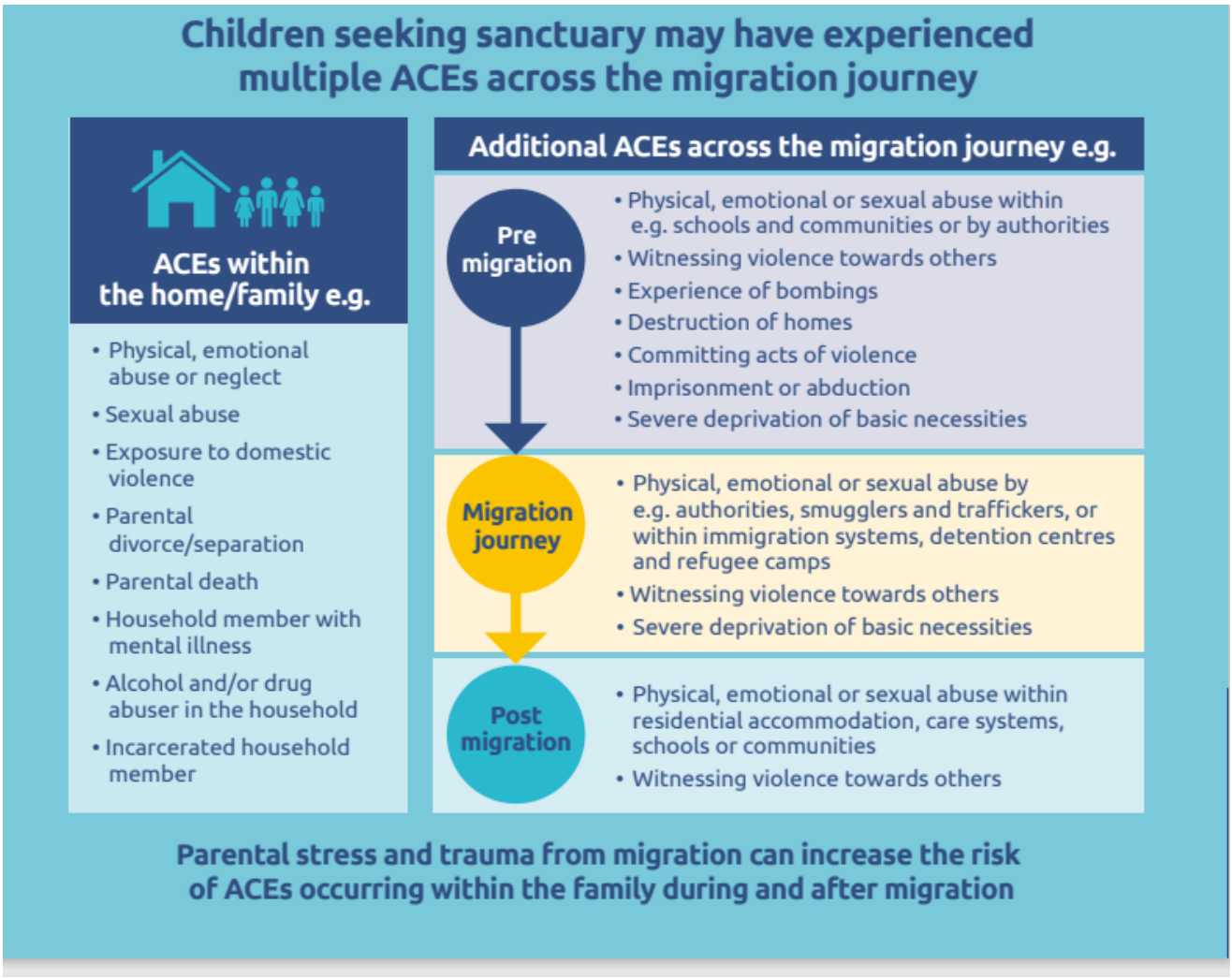
We have seen how war and violence create a vicious, dysfunctional cycle that primarily impacts children. As in many wars, children and young people of the region were not merely bystanders, but targets, as the 1996 Machel study highlighted. “Not only are large numbers of children killed and injured,” the study said, “but countless others grow up deprived of their material and emotional needs, including the structures that give meaning to social and cultural life. The entire fabric of their societies – their homes, schools, health systems and religious institutions – is torn to pieces.” (p. 18). The aftermath of war and conflict in children’s lives is multifaceted. They had a direct and indirect impact as well as short and long-term consequences. To begin with, there was no adequate primary education policy, resources, and infrastructure throughout the region, with minor exceptions in Ethiopia and Eritrea. In addition, a significant number of children who are pushed out of the education system were recruited by armed groups. Thousands of children are either forced or attracted to and used in armed conflicts across the world. Between 2005 and 2020, more than 93,000 children were verified as recruited and used

by parties to conflict, although the actual number of cases is believed to be much higher (UNICEF, 2021). Previous studies (World Vision, 2019) have identified several reasons why children are involved in conflicts. Lack of opportunities, poverty, lack of access to necessities such as food, ongoing insecurity and displacement, community and family expectations, peer pressure, family breakdown and a desire for revenge are all factors for boys and girls becoming associated with armed forces or armed groups (p. 13). The study went on to note that both during and after armed conflict, even those children not suffering as a direct result of conflict often suffer equally devastating consequences (p. 18). Attacks on schools and hospitals that included the targeting of educational facilities resulted in their total or partial destruction. These attacks not only damaged property and harmed the individuals involved; they also incited fear and limited access to these basic services by other children (p. 22).

In addition to the poor educational policy and inadequate infrastructures suffered by poverty, education is severely affected by armed conflicts with generalized degradation of education systems, general state of insecurity, or lawful military operations, but mainly due to the numerous violations of international humanitarian law (IHL) that too often occur during armed conflict (UNHCR, 2020; World Vision, 2019). This, in turn, can significantly affect refugee children's well-being at all stages of their migration trajectory because of their exposure to adverse childhood experiences (ACE). The long-term poor health outcomes in people who have experienced multiple adverse events in childhood have been well documented since the original CDC-Kaiser study in the late 1990s. Those people who have experienced four or more ACEs are at significantly increased risk of chronic disease such as cancer, heart disease and diabetes, as well as mental illness and health risk behaviours (Boullier & Blair, 2018, p. 132). Adverse childhood experiences have been described as potentially traumatic events that can have negative

lasting effects on health and well-being. This includes maltreatment and abuse as well as living in an environment that is harmful to their development (Boullier & Blair, 2018; Woods et al., 2020). Experiencing ACEs increases the likelihood of children adopting risk behaviours and developing mental health problems and chronic health conditions later in life, and the more ACE types the children experience, the greater their risks of poor outcomes.

Although measurement of ACE is originally a Western concept, tools to measure ACEs have been adapted to incorporate other ACE types that can be prevalent among children, such as exposure to violence in the community, persecution, or conflict (e.g. the World Health Organization's ACE-IQ, 2020). No doubt, with such atrocities, children in the region are certainly prone to risks associated with ACEs. During and after armed conflict, the interruption and disintegration of basic services and sources of social protection also led to further violations of child rights – with repercussions that could last a lifetime. To explore these issues, a review of the Machel study (1996) has found that children and young people living in those countries are more likely to be poor, malnourished, out of school or in generally poor health than many others around the globe, whether as a cause or a consequence of armed conflict (p. 18). Armed conflicts in the region have struck children with the worst life can offer. They have seen their homes destroyed and their loved ones murdered. They have forced children into combat and subjected girls to the horror of rape. Watching as a loved one is maimed, raped, or murdered can terrorize and torment a child, emotionally and psychologically. Being separated from parents in the crush of escape from an attack and the elevated, chronic distress of entire childhoods shaped by armed conflict has a significant impact on the children's healthy growth and development. These children have carried their heavy traumatic experiences with them wherever they go, including into Canadian classrooms.



Adverse Childhood Experiences in child refugee and asylum-seeking populations. Reprinted from Wood S, Ford K, Hardcastle K, Hopkins J, Hughes K and Bellis MA (2020). Cardiff: Public Health Wales NHS Trust

2.4.5. Post-migration

For those refugee children from the HOA who sought asylum and live in the neighbouring countries, their despondent journey does not end there. Driven by fear and hope, every year thousands of refugees applied for resettlement from where they were staying temporarily, to another country, hoping for a better life, and if accepted, emigrated to the 'unknown' (oftentimes western countries). The right to asylum from persecution is an international human right,

guaranteed by the Refugee. Article 14 (1). The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states, everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy asylum in other countries from persecution. The United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) leads and coordinates international action to protect refugees and resolve refugee problems worldwide. Its main purpose is to protect the rights and well-being of refugees wherever they may be (UNCHR, 2022). Even before we speak about refugee children's lives in Canada, it would be appropriate to briefly review the often-challenging process of coming to Canada to have a better understanding of how and who is coming in under the Canadian Immigration policy. As discussed in previous sections, refugee children who live in makeshift camps and urban ghettos of first-asylum countries struggle to survive in a place where they have no status and few, if any, rights. As much as they are determined to break away from their miserable conditions and immigrate to Canada, refugees, however, cannot apply directly to the Canadian Government per se. The children and/or their parents must be referred by the UNHCR, a designated referral organization, or a private sponsorship group. As part of its activities, the UNCHR refers conventional refugees to Canada when it believes resettlement is the best solution (UNCHR, 2022). Canada's resettlement program is administered by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC, 2021). Once refugees are referred for resettlement by UNCHR, Canadian visa officers assess whether they need resettlement and conduct medical, criminal and security screenings. Those who fulfilled the screening criteria will then be allowed to enter the country as permanent residents.

Although it is not a focus of this study, the Canadian immigration program has been criticized for its inefficiency and bureaucratic red tape for African applicants. Janzen, Taylor, and Gokiert (2022) argued that Canada's welcoming of refugees is not in fact as rosy as its reputation. Janzen et al (2022) continued their argument stating, "the country's history of being

'unwelcoming' includes examples in which refugees in need of protection were denied" (Scotti, cited in Janzen et al., 2022) and where refugees were selected for economic gain at the expense of the most vulnerable (Canadian Council for Refugees [CCR], 2009, cited in Janzen, et al., 2022, p. 2). Canada's track record for accepting refugees in general and African refugees in particular has not been impressive, to say the least. For instance, in 2018, Canada accepted just a little over 28,000 refugees - a fraction of the global demand - out of the 70 million people fleeing war, persecution and conflict globally (UNCHR, 2018). Canada has fewer refugees per capita than many other countries. Canada, a developed nation, has just about 4 refugees per 1,000 population, compared to more than 20 refugees per 1,000 in South Sudan, one of the poorest countries in the world (UNCHR, 2014). In 2019, Canada accepted over 341,000 permanent residents, of which only 30,000 were refugees (Statistics Canada, 2020). These numbers clearly indicate Canadian immigration is more economically driven with fewer humanitarian and compassionate considerations. Nonetheless, today, Canada, which takes part in UNHCR's resettlement program, continues to receive a small percentage of child migrants from the region who bring with them myriad stressors arising from their migration trajectory, compounded by inefficient receptions and discrimination in resettlement.

While welcoming only a small percentage of refugees in the global crises is concerning, the hardship new refugees encounter during resettlement in Canada is even more concerning. For many refugees, coming to Canada is just winning half of the battle - probably, the end of one challenge and the beginning of many. Hart (2009) describes how many refugee children start out believing that the time before their flight from home was a period of "persecution and danger," and that the time after their arrival would be a "safe haven," only to discover that in resettlement, they are not safe at school and feel threatened by their peers (p. 354). For many children,

experiences of migration are fraught with family separation, trauma, and dislocation. When children move from one country to another, they face many changes. Some immigrate with their families, while others come independently as unaccompanied minors wishing to claim refugee status. They are exposed to a new language, environment, socio-economic situation, and cultural system (Stewart, 2011; Kanu, 2008). In her study with refugee children in Winnipeg, Stewart (2007) confirmed the presence of traumatic experiences in all the children she interviewed. "The references to suffering, loss, and pain were evident in all the student interviews. What became interesting was the seemingly matter-of-fact way many of the students told their stories or parts of their stories" (p. 29). Over the last three decades, research has revealed the frequency of traumatic events and their damaging effects on a survivor's psyche. Mental health professionals have come to understand the connections between unresolved trauma and serious psychological problems (Mollica, 2006; Miller & Rasco, 2004). Given the multiple traumas and adversities faced by many refuge children pre-migration and during flight, it is not surprising that a significant number of them exhibit mental health issues and adjustment difficulties once in Canada (Fazel & Stein, 2002; Stewart, 2011; Baffoe, 2011; Valencia, 2015). When children migrate, they experience many different types of loss, such as the loss of a familiar language or environment (Stewart, 2011). Numerous studies, both quantitative and qualitative, have found that displacement-related stressors exert a profound impact on refugees' psychological and physical well-being (Miller & Rasco, 2004, p. 17). The younger the children, the more sensitive they are to the separation and losses that come with migration. One of the most profound losses children experiences is the loss of the attachment figure. Being stripped of significant relationships causes anxiety, disorientation, and a keen sense of loss in children (Orozco & Orozco, 2009, cited in Valencia, 2015, p. 6).

Education is a basic human right for all children, and it is especially important that refugee children receive schooling because it creates a sense of security and hope, which is often lacking in refugee settings. After times of conflict, educational activities play a very important role in helping to reintroduce a sense of normalcy and routine into the lives of children and adolescents. However, as discussed earlier, there is limited access to education in both countries of origin and refugee camps. As such, it would be fair to expect better access to education in host resettlement countries. Over the last ten years, about 26,000 refugees arrived in Canada annually, half of them children (CIC, 2015), and many of these children experienced trauma and have had little to no formal education. Indeed, all children in Canada live with risk. They are susceptible to disease and injury, and as they grow and learn, they face numerous challenges that threaten their mental and physical well-being. However, some children face greater risk because they must cope with unduly negative life experiences, such as racial and ethnic prejudice, inadequate parenting, family violence, and poverty (Williams, 2002). For most refugee children, schools are the first point of contact with their new world. However, the transition to a new country and new schools for refugee children can be overwhelming and challenging, as they may have little or no formal schooling experience. When students have gaps in their formal education, they are often unfamiliar with the conventions of a school and classroom (Stewart, 2011). In the school setting, refugee children often experience academic and interpersonal difficulties (Kanu, 2008; Stewart, 2011). Many face different learning styles and systems of rules than those they are used to. Refugee children face many barriers, including a lack of familiarity with the school system and a lack of official language proficiency. They also struggle with many of the issues other Canadian youth face, albeit with fewer resources to help them cope: feelings of isolation and loneliness, mental health challenges, bullying, etc. (Valencia, 2015). Although refugee children of all ages

are vulnerable to traumatic experiences, the middle years for children are a particularly important stage in the developmental process. Researchers emphasize the negative impact of traumatic experience on the social and psychological development of refugee children (Coleridge, 2001; Ghazali, 2004; Parkins, 2004). It is that period in life when the child leaves the security of his or her family and independently enters the external world. In Manitoba, the term *Middle Years* is defined as the education provided for young adolescents from ages 10 to 14, usually in Grades 5, 6, 7, and 8 (Manitoba Government, 2016). Adolescence is a critical developmental period, involving rapid brain development and specific physical, cognitive, and social-emotional transitions and challenges that occur in different development stages (Sawyer et al., 2012). Although identity development begins in middle adolescence and crystallizes during the period from late adolescence to early adulthood (Erikson, cited in Cherry, 2024), it can be redefined and reconstructed throughout an individual's adult life, as the individual interacts with the world (McSpadden & Maussa, 1993). Erikson (1968) sees the stage of adolescence as the most critical period for the formation of identity. An adolescent is faced with the identity versus role confusion stage, and refugee youth might not successfully pass this stage as they will be trying to identify themselves as well as establish themselves apart from economic prospects (Rapholo, 2020, p.3). The impact of war, migration and resettlement on refugee children's normal developmental process is significant (Lustig, 2010, p. 239). Refugee children in their middle years are especially vulnerable due to the confusing, overwhelming, and often traumatizing effects of moving to a new country. During this period, refugee children struggle with the usual tensions associated with growing up and struggling with coming to a new country that can be significantly different from their own (Stewart, 2011). Previous experiences of refugee children affect the way they experience school and the relationships they form with teachers and peers

(Dryden, 2015). Hence, educators should notice both the deficits and strengths in refugee children's learning ability and customize the curriculum accordingly, so that the children can retain their mother tongue and learn a new language at the same time.

While refugee children of this age group generally adapt to a new country more easily than their parents, they tend to learn the language more quickly, and schools play a big role in integrating them. Understanding and mastering the English language is important for refugee students in Canadian schools. Acquiring a language at an early age helps children develop better grammar skills, have less of an accent, and be less timid when speaking the new language. However, longitudinal studies have demonstrated that second language proficiency conducive to academic achievement is not acquired until at least 4-5 years following arrival. Schutzenhofer (2018) pointed out the common misconception that younger children are faster to acquire a second language than older children. In fact, in successive bilingual children, the success and rate of second language acquisition are correlated with mastery of the first language, which sets the foundation and structure for learning a new language (p. 5). Although refugee children may lack the English language formal training at pre-migration, the availability of neural tissue for the uptake of new knowledge at this developmental stage would help young children learn the language easily. Children display flexibility in bilingualism as they code-switch, code-mix and translate (Bangma & Riemersma, 2011; Lengyel, 2012, cited in Valencia, 2015, p. 6).

Every child deserves the opportunity to learn in a safe environment and pursue their dreams to the fullest. Once arrived in Canada, the reception and the process of school enrollment for newly arrived refugee children is a major factor that determines the children's smooth integration into the host society. However, the overall organization of the system and the policies, or lack of

polices, on the education of refugee children were noted as challenges at the government, the division, and the school levels (Stewart, 2007, p. 89). School admission policies in host countries vary from place to place, and in some cases, refugee children are placed in a particular grade level based on age and not their actual academic abilities (Kanu, 2008). Commonly, refugee children entering the school system in this new country are placed either in first grade (regardless of their age) or in a class that corresponds to their chronological age (Szilassy & Arendas, 2007). Educators argued that both options present problems. When refugee children are placed with younger classes, they may experience social and emotional difficulties because of the differences that exist in the development of children of unlike age groups (Kanu, 2008). When refugee children are placed with children of a different peer group, these dissimilarities can exacerbate resettlement stress (Szilassy & Arendas, 2007). On the other hand, those refugee children placed in classes with students of their own age are unlikely to be able to keep up with schoolwork without intervention, as refugee students typically do not have the "prerequisite academic experience in the course subject matter" (Roxas, 2008, p. 6). Further, most refugee children do not speak the language of their new country and thus require a course in English as an Additional Language (EAL), which many schools lack the resources to provide (Roxas, 2008). These children face other obstacles, too. If unable to provide evidence of "acceptable" past educational achievements, they are placed in grades lower than their educational levels (Kanu, 2008), which in itself is a problem. As such, contrary to the intended objective of education, schools could be an unsettling, scary, overwhelming, and overstimulating experience for these refugee children who are dealing with recent, potentially traumatic experiences (Stewart, 2007).

The other important point to consider here is the tendency of the school system that generalize all refugee children to be the same. Refugees to Canada come from many countries and many socioeconomic, political, linguistic, and ethnic backgrounds. Every child is unique, and there is no universal refugee child experience per se. For instance, experiences in their country of origin, in periods of conflict and in flight from persecution vary greatly. They may have stayed in refugee camps for months or years or arrive in resettlement countries with family members or unaccompanied. Shields and Lujan (2018) noted that refugee children arrive with important differences related to gender, class, race, language, trauma, education, and family backgrounds. Schools need to acknowledge that there are differences in developmental stages, youth capacities, challenges, circumstances, and experiences within the African refugee children population (p. 2). Studies on education show significant differences in the school performance of immigrant children depending on their country/region of origin (Finnie 2009; Anisef et al., 2010; Hamilton et al., 2011; Odo D'Silva & Gunderson, 2012; Wilkinson et al., 2012). It has also been found that age at the time of migration can have a significant impact on academic outcomes, with younger people generally being able to adapt more quickly and more successfully, as well as learning English and/or French more easily than youth who are older at the time of migration (Valencia, 2015). Individual differences in refugee youth should also be considered because some research has shown differences in resilience based on gender. In one study of asylum-seeking youth, females were more impacted by traumatic events than males, and this resulted in higher levels of PTSD and depression symptoms (Hodes et al., 2008). Research increasingly focuses on strengths and protective factors that bolster resilience in life and puts individual differences as a factor. For instance, Samadi (2021) pointed out that not all children with emergencies, such as conflict and natural disaster exposure, develop post-traumatic stress

disorder (PTSD). It is mainly dependent on the parents' or caregivers' emotional state and availability to their children, among other things (p. 59). Hence, it is critical to assess and understand each child's situation on its own merit before assuming and generalizing refugee children as the same. In general, children's emotional well-being is heavily influenced by the support and care received from families and communities. In the refugees' setting of forced migration due to war and persecution, families' abilities to provide this support for children are challenged by parental distress (Schutzenhofer, 2018, p. 4). In addition to basic human services and needs, there are many individual factors that promote psychological resilience among refugee children. When caregivers and professionals facilitate the agency and autonomy of children, they help promote adjustment and resilience (Hopkins & Hill, 2010).

While their migration paths are unique and reasons for resettlement diverse, refugees, however, have something in common worth noting. Refugees from various places have unique sets of experiences, yet there are commonalities. For instance, most refugees have experienced extended stays in refugee camps or urban areas within countries of first asylum that affect their livelihood significantly (Dryden, 2015). Stewart (2007) stated that children and adolescents, who have been exposed to war and are now attending schools in Canada, represent a particularly vulnerable group of students, although their experiences have been diverse, and many have suffered from severe personal trauma, violence, and loss (p. 5). As discussed earlier, most refugee children's educational background in their country of origin and first asylum countries was precarious, and there is a huge need for additional support to succeed in their education at Canadian schools. For many refugee children, a school is a safe place where they can learn new things and make friends. It is also known to be a place where they become stigmatized as foreigners, face discrimination and harassment due to their different heritage, culture, and

language. Issues related to bullying and racial discrimination were found to be common for refugee students (Rossiter & Rossiter, 2009). Monica Valencia (2015) conducted a literature review that looks at early childhood education and core settlement needs of newcomer children to better understand their experiences. She summarized her findings on language acquisition and its effect on children's social life, which are worth noting. Refugee children have often involuntarily foregone years of formal schooling, placing their education level well behind their peers when they arrive in Canada. This deficit put the children in perilous situations where they could not interact with their peers comfortably. Language barriers and culture shock further compound the challenge of socializing, educating, and integrating child refugees. Valencia (2015) argued that mainstream children might avoid their refugee peers who cannot communicate efficiently. She further stated:

> Even at an early age, children are sensitive to the communication skills of other children. Research has found associations between poor language skills and low peer acceptance. The lack of second language skills can put children in vulnerable situations where they are prone to being bullied and rejected. Peers might see immigrant children as less competent because immigrant children may not show pro-social behaviour (e.g. they have difficulties understanding the teacher's instructions and cannot respond to conflict or react to peers). Being rejected or bullied causes children to become shy and to show less initiative, which hampers their integration and participation in everyday social life. In other cases, rejection might lead children to become more aggressive in an attempt to make their feelings known (p. 8).

In other words, lack of proficiency in one of the host countries' languages (English or French) is not only hurting the children's academic progress but also the many aspects of their life that require communication in school and society.

The reasons why refugee children are out of school are varied. Often, it is because host countries either do not have the space, capacity, or the will to cater to the large number of refugee children who need to return to school and/or to meet their distinct needs. At the same

time, refugee children may be excluded from education due to poverty, gender, disability, age, ethnicity, or legal status (UNCHR, 2018). These intersectional challenges, coupled with other resettlement and acculturation stressors and individual traits, may push some refugee students to hate and eventually drop out of school and join delinquent groups. Rossiter and Rossiter (2009) found that visible minority youth tended to be more unequally represented in Canadian jails, compared to other Canadians. Their research also found that marginalized refugee youth are at higher risk of running afoul of the criminal justice system, becoming involved with gangs, violence, theft, drug use, and other delinquent behaviour (Rossiter & Rossiter, 2009). Hieu Van Ngo et al. (2015) also noted that some youth became involved in criminal gang activity because of an unravelling of their self-conception, sense of citizenship and ethnic identity and their sense of belonging. This unravelling occurred as the youth experienced gradual, cumulative disintegration in their relationships with family, school and community. It prevailed when the young people were confronted with both a wide range and severity of negative life experiences over a prolonged period and was exacerbated by pre-migration trauma and socioeconomic conditions at home and in the community (Hieu Van Ngo et al., 2015, p. 16). Refugee children who are victims of discrimination can experience lasting effects on their self-perceptions, social interactions, motivation, and achievement and affect the process of acculturation (McBrien, 2005). Many struggles with a feeling of non-belonging linger long after they have left their countries of origin (Stewart, 2011).

All children have basic human needs that need to be fulfilled. Some of these needs are physical, such as food, clothing, and shelter, but other needs are social, such as belonging, love, self-esteem, acceptance, and opportunity. Refugee children want to fit into and be accepted into their new social worlds; they do not want to be seen as different or strange (Kanu, 2008). If these

needs continue to go unmet, they may feel pushed to the margins, and some may seek acceptance in the waiting arms of street gangs. Youth who face isolation, exclusion, and discrimination are especially vulnerable to gang recruitment (Rossiter, 2009; Dei & Rummens, 2010; Sersli, 2010). Refugee children share the persistent feeling of marginalization in their new homes, which drives many towards delinquent behaviour. Dipietro and McGloin (2012), for example, examined 1,799 Chicago youth over five years, and they concluded that immigrant and refugee youth were more susceptible to gang recruitment due to an intense desire to belong, at any cost. In his research into gang involvement among refugee youth in Manitoba, Matt Fast (2017) made the same observations. Although the youth whom he interviewed expressed some positive experiences at school, the negative experiences outweighed the positive (Fast, 2017). The 2014 report by Gang Action Interagency Network (GAIN) highlighted the importance of identity and belonging, healing, and expanding programming for refugee youth as the three crucial elements to combating gangs in Winnipeg (GAIN, 2014).

Another challenge the children encountered in resettlement that could be a reason for dropping out of school is their conflict with parents and the community. Refugee families have often survived atrocities beyond imagination, and yet their sufferings do not end with the initial flight. Parents make tremendous sacrifices to escape war and violence and to seek a safe place to raise their family (Samadi, 2021; Baffoe, 2011). However, at times, it seems a paradox to see refugee children blaming and fighting with their parents for bringing them to a country where they have a relatively better opportunity than in refugee camps. Many may assume the children are at fault by disrespecting their parents, but that was not the case. Indeed, parents who are refugees in Canada have accomplished a remarkable task - they have escaped war, persecution, and perhaps death to bring their children to a safe place. However, the abundance of change the

children encounter throughout their migration trajectory causes the children to have trouble trusting their parents since the parents could be seen as the ones responsible for bringing so much change into their lives. This makes it hard for the child to connect with the family and could lead to emotional instability (Ebbeck, Yim, & Lee, 2010, cited in Valencia, 2015, p. 18). As people migrate from East African nations to Canada, localized constructs reveal great diversity in what is considered "good parenting". As refugees navigate new realities, they do so within the context of a host country with greater global dominance. Thus, parents' ideas of values, priorities, belief systems, kinship, and the roles of kinship are challenged (Dumbrill, 2009; Samadi, 2021; Baffoe, 2011). The unrealistic expectation of host countries to assimilate newcomer parents into the mainstream way of parenting without their will is believed to be one of the reasons why parent-teen conflicts in resettlement are high in African refugee families (Samadi, 2021). As parents are forced to remake themselves and their families through processes of immigration to another country, they contend with the hegemony of national and provisional visions of "best parenting practices" that can position them as deficient and "at risk" of failing (Samadi, 2021). Dumbrill (2009) noted that, despite their pre-migration parenting achievements, refugees in Canada come into conflict with child welfare systems over parenting issues (p. 146). One of the most common issues faced by Somali immigrants and refugee families, for instance, is the conflict between parents and children due to differences in values. In fact, it has been suggested that such conflict in immigrant and refugee families may be the norm, rather than the exception (Ahmed & Yusuf, 2012). As Baffoe (2011) pointed out:

> The fundamental conflict was found in the distribution of power and control between the parents and children, the individual and the community. The youth expressed their discomfort and dilemmas of being torn and pulled apart by two different cultures: that of their original culture (which most describe as their "parents' culture") and the culture of their new society, which ironically, is not yet theirs (p. 479).

The ongoing conflicts between the children and parents can also be explained as intergenerational. On the one hand, families' religious beliefs and values differ from those of these new societal and educational contexts, and parents would like to see their children adhere to their traditions. On the other hand, children crave belonging with their peers in schools and may face rejection and must navigate the mismatch between their home country's values and beliefs and the new cultural norms of schools (Samadi, 2021). They are in constant crisis, struggling and torn between two opposing cultural values. Many have developed "double personalities" as they expressed, one for display at home to please their parents and another outside to enable them to "fit in" and get accepted by their peers (Baffoe, 2011, p. 481). Ahmed and Yusuf (2012), in their study with Somali families, observed how refugee adolescents frequently experienced substantial conflict regarding their ethnic identity since adolescence is a life cycle issue with a major developmental task in identity formation. Essentially, they are caught between two worlds: trying to integrate new customs with old customs and living and thinking in two languages - one for home and one for school (p. 168).

Considering the above-discussed acculturation stressors and other life challenges in resettlement, we can assume the presence of potential triggers to the children's past traumatic experiences could lead to anxiety and depression, which may further push the children into gangs and substance use for coping. Available evidence suggests that the prevalence of PTSD and the adverse emotional and psychological consequences of PTSD are much greater for children emigrating from countries with armed conflicts involving political, racial, or ethnic violence (Kessler, 2000). Several studies have been conducted to better understand the long-term effects of past exposure to war-related violence on the mental health of children and adolescents who were forced to migrate as refugees to various host countries. In general, PTSD is very prevalent

in refugee children from war-affected regions and often harms the children's well-being (Denov & Shevell, 2018).

Nevertheless, in parallel to the vast literature on the negative impact of war-related violence on mental health, some studies show that despite all their psychological symptoms, most severely traumatized children manage to become well-adjusted adults (Dalianis-Karambatzakis, 1994; Lyons, 1991; Sigal, 1998, cited in Rousseau et al., 2003). Positive association was observed between perceptions of children affected by war of their own efficacy and their self-confidence and self-esteem. Macksoud and Aber (1996) observed that different experiences of trauma and loss led to a wide range of emotional and behavioural responses in Lebanese children, including such positive effects as an increase in pro-social and playful behaviour. Traumatized children also have been reported to maintain or improve their academic performance despite their trauma (Terr, 1983, cited in Rousseau et al., 2003, p. 1278). In another study of Bosnian adolescents, Ferren (1999) demonstrated that the self-efficacy of traumatized boys was higher than that of their non-traumatized peers. In war, suffering occurs and is resolved in a social context, shaped by the meaning collectively and individually constructed around events. Graham (2017) argued, while evidence on the impact of trauma on cognition and school outcomes is mixed, several studies indicate that pre-migration trauma (and symptoms of PTSD) has negligible (or positive) effects on school outcomes. The possible explanations for this effect, according to Graham (2017), might be survival of past traumatic experiences contributing to greater resilience (e.g., past trauma becoming part of individual motivational narratives), teachers being more supportive of students who display signs of PTSD, or survival bias (where only the most resilient successfully migrate) (p. 11). Even though a few anecdotal stories highlight refugee children's success in the face of adversity, it is difficult to find comprehensive

data on how many refugee children succeed in their education and what factors contribute to their success/ failure. Research on resiliency has identified several factors that seem to provide a child with greater protection against adverse situations, and having a support system is considered to be the key (Masten, 2011). Although many definitions of resilience exist, resilience is defined in this paper as "the capacity of a dynamic system (individual, family, school, community, society) to withstand or recover from significant challenges that threaten its stability, viability, or development" (Masten, 2011, p. 494). Graham (2017) stated that although the data on refugee children are insufficient to conclude, many of the same resource factors, such as strong family ties, prioritization of education, and possible migration bias toward healthier, wealthier, and more educated parents, applied here (p. 11). In general, educators and staff who are working with refugee children should pay attention to avoiding stereotyping of all refugee children as having PTSD and experiencing depression. Indeed, exposure to conflicts may lead to a wide array of trauma responses, ranging from building up a resiliency that may foster psychosocial adjustment to disrupting psycho-emotional balance for several years (Rahimi, 2003, p. 1278). Therefore, to fully explore resilience, we must look at factors that promote resilience within a child's family (e.g., resources, extended family support), community (e.g., religious organizations, community engagement), school (e.g., school belonging, valuing education), and the society in which the child lives (e.g., cultural values). Having an opportunity to attend school, feeling safe at school, and valuing education are all associated with promoting resilience in refugee youth. One factor that has been consistently associated with promoting resilience in refugee youth is meeting their basic needs, including the need to learn the language of their host country and their need to attend school (Hopkins & Hill, 2010).

2.5. The role of Social Work

Canada has long touted its record for resettling refugees and immigrants through a range of programs (IRCC, n.d.). Yet, the record has always been mixed – on one hand, reflecting moments of heightened xenophobia and intersectional challenges for newcomers and on the other hand, the Federal and provincial governments' positive efforts to create programs to facilitate smooth integration. The challenges which await refugee children and their parents upon arrival in the province of Manitoba, for instance, include an unfamiliar social system in which they need to find housing, medical facilities, employment or income support, and education (Manitoba Education, 2012). As discussed in previous sections, many students with refugee experiences have had their education extensively disrupted in their country of origin, and access has been difficult because education facilities in refugee camps are generally quite limited. In times of war and extensive civil conflict, schooling is all too often one of the first casualties. Considering these experiences and the many transitions these children and young adults have undergone, their learning capacity will be affected (Stewart, 2011; Manitoba Education, 2012). For a refugee child, getting to Canada is only half the battle. Upon their arrival, most newcomers struggle to adapt to the new way of life, a new set of social values, and the new language, while frustrated with dismantled support systems and heightened feelings of anxiety and stress (Stewart, 2007, 2011).

Education is a fundamental right of children. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees recognizes education as a basic human right, enshrined in the 1986 Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCHR, 2011). Therefore, protecting the right of refugee children to education is one of the most important policies and priorities to be applied by host countries. Refugee children's well-being depends to a major degree on their school experiences, successes

and failures. Because they are unfamiliar with the education system, and parents cannot help their children as they would wish, the children may be left to deal with difficulties alone (Stewart, 2011). The integration of refugee students into schools requires knowledge of the challenges and obstacles that are related to each child's micro, mezzo and macro environments. In this regard, social work is one of the professions that can contribute to facilitating the integration of refugees and immigrant children into the educational system through its holistic approach and its dependence on many approaches in intervention (CASW, n.d.). As such, many schools, if not all, have a social work program to support their students' emotional and psychosocial needs. There is no single, internationally accepted definition of school social work. Because schools are small communities, each with unique psychosocial needs, school social work as a discipline differs from generic social work, even though practitioners use the generic social work methods of individual, group and community work. The Encyclopedia of Social Work (NASW, 2012) broadly defines school social work as "…an application of social work principles and methods to the advantage of the goals of the school." A more specific definition is found in the Practice Standards for School Social Workers of Australia (AASW, 2008), where the definition for school social work refers to "…social work services delivered in a school setting, the primary goal of which is the achievement of students' learning potential, and where the methods of working include coordinating and influencing the efforts of the school, family and community to achieve this goal" (cited in Vergottini, 2018, p. 36-37). Despite the lack of a universal definition, school social workers are an integral link between school, home, and community in helping students achieve academic success. They work directly with school administrations as well as students and families, providing leadership in forming school

discipline policies, mental health intervention, crisis management, and support services (NASW, n.d.).

School social work started in Canada in the 1940s, growing out of earlier truancy and school attendance work, but evolving into a complete social work service, in which improving school attendance is still a major function. School social work services vary across the country, both in extent and in the way they are organized, since each of the provinces and territories has autonomy in how education is administered (Huxtable, 2022, p. 8). At the school level, the school is the environment in which refugee children spend most of their time, so school social workers must cooperate with parents and teachers in addressing the problems faced by vulnerable refugee students. In Manitoba, school Social Workers are hired by school divisions to collaborate and consult with students, parents, school administrators, faculty, and the community in the identification of family and student concerns to provide supportive services which will contribute to the success of students in the education system (Government of Manitoba, n.d.). Middle schools in Winnipeg, Manitoba, have no social workers particularly assigned to the refugee and immigrant group; they serve the general student population. School social workers are known for their functions to evaluate students' needs and provide interventions across the ecological systems to remove students' learning barriers and promote healthy socio-psychological outcomes (Huxtable, 2022). Many school social workers use a layered framework known as a multi-tiered support system (MTSS). The MTSS provides a comprehensive social worker intervention plan so that social workers can give targeted support to the students, classrooms, and communities that need it. Manitoba schools use a similar model known as the Response to Intervention (RTI) model, a three-tier service delivery model that represents a continuum of increasingly intense interventions that correspond to the responsiveness of students

in both academics and social and emotional learning (Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning, 2014, p. 60). This approach of assessing and intervening in refugee children's challenges in the same way as mainstream children might pose a question. Indeed, refugee children in many aspects are just like all children. They reflect a similar range of characteristics, needs, and aspirations. In many ways, they benefit from the same programming and instructional approaches that create effective and safe learning environments for children in general (Manitoba Education, 2012). However, while inclusive, welcoming, and positive school experiences will help with the integration of the new students and contribute to the healing, these alone are insufficient for many refugee students coping with the damage caused by war and their migration experiences (Manitoba Education, 2012). These service gaps are noted by several authors who studied the refugee population. Schools have a critical role in the process of resettlement of refugee students, yet numerous reports indicate that schools feel unequipped, and teachers feel ill-prepared to meet the unique and diverse needs of these students (Stewart, 2011; Pashang, 2012; Duman & Snoubar, 2019).

To facilitate the integration of refugee children into schools, the school social workers must intervene at the individual, group and community levels in cooperation with teachers, administrators and families of refugee children (Duman & Snoubar, 2019). However, despite their efforts to include parents in their children's education, schools continue to grapple with how to get parents more involved in the schools and how best to acquire and convey information about the child in a way that is culturally and linguistically appropriate. Huxtable (2022) pointed out, most school counsellors or school psychologists focus solely on serving students, while school social workers may also serve students' parents, which demonstrates how social work has much to contribute to schools. While teachers develop the potential of learners through

transmitting knowledge, skills and values, social workers can provide support for learners' well-being so they are ready to learn (p. 1) In addition, school social workers are an integral part of the school mental health workforce in education settings and often work in interdisciplinary teams that include schoolteachers, administrators, school counselors, and school psychologists (Huxtable, 2022). However, there exist differences in orientations and values between school social workers and other team members. For example, school social workers and teachers have different beliefs about the school's responsibility to address students' mental health and other psychosocial needs Additionally, teachers may lack the training and confidence to address mental health needs in class, leading to a fear of perceived incompetence that may make them hesitant to seek or accept collaborative support from school social workers (Berzin et al., 2011; Mellin & Weist, 2011 cited in Huxtable, 2022, p. 2). Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning (2014) acknowledges that the diversity of student populations demands that teachers use a variety of instructional approaches, rather than a "one-size-fits-all" approach (p. 15). Yet, there is no specific appropriate educational programming that enhances the full participation of refugee students with exceptional learning needs in the classroom. While there is no school social worker specifically assigned to follow up with refugee students, school social workers, however, should acknowledge the unique migration issues of refugee students and their parents and attempt to pay closer attention to customize their intervention plan accordingly.

Although social workers have been working diligently to address newcomers' migration and settlement issues, the predicaments and challenges that immigrants and refugees face are beyond the shallow education challenges. Most refugees experience systemic and racial barriers to settlement (Pashang, 2012, p. 7). The traditional approach to settlement work ignores structural change and does not recognize that individual newcomer needs are rooted in broader

structural issues (Mullaly, 1997). As such, there is a need to understand not only the meaning of migration but also the marginalization often associated with the myriad forms of racism and their intersections with other forms of operations (Pashang, 2012). Sakamoto (2007) underscores the need for structural change and calls workers to engage in "advocacy and social action toward systemic changes of the society in integrating immigrants" (p. 528) beyond the micro-level intervention.

Indeed, social workers are not limited to only assisting refugees in counselling and settlement. They are also known to advocate for policy changes. In 1947, for instance, the CASW provided input into Canada's immigration policy, particularly with respect to displaced people in Europe (Jennison & Lundy, 2010, p. 97). The association (CASW) also raised the concern over adequate social security for vulnerable populations, which included newcomers to Canada. In 1957, in response to the influx of refugees from Hungary, the Toronto branch of the CASW prepared a statement for the association that highlighted important gaps in the social security system that would be potentially disastrous for immigrants and refugees (Jennison and Lundy, 2010, p. 141). The publication '*Settlement of Newcomers to Canada'* (2010), prepared by the CASW, is a notable contribution of the profession towards understanding the myriad settlement issues facing newcomers in Canada. However, despite this long history, there is no adequate social work research focused explicitly on newcomers to Canada and the specific challenges they may face (CASW, 2010).

I would argue that the current environment for school social work presents great challenges and opportunities in its interdisciplinary teamwork at schools. Amid promising shifts in programs and policies, many schools' social workers feel marginalized by the school. Despite sustained efforts at definition, the role of the school social worker remains unclear to many

outside the field. More importantly, this role is often characterized as being peripheral to the core beliefs, goals, and practices of schools (Gherardi & Whittlesey-Jerome, 2022). A core concern that I share with some of the authors in this literature review is how social workers foster advocacy in school settings that advances the human rights of refugee students beyond the immediate micro-level intervention (Pashang, 2012; Sakamoto, 2007). Supporting war-affected children in Canadian schools requires the dedication of school social workers who have the knowledge, awareness, skills, and commitment to addressing issues of social justice. As such, continuing education and training for school social workers is needed to increase their capacity in trauma-related counselling, advocacy, and policy development. These social workers can provide trauma-informed practice and help students develop their ability to manage distress and to enhance their capacity for increased daily functioning (Knight 2014, cited in Thomas, 2016, p. 197). Trauma and learning disabilities may be presented in similar ways in young refugee children, and the earlier they can be identified and the children supported appropriately, the better the long-term outcomes are for the child. But sometimes being able to identify the difference between trauma-related behaviours, developmental delays, and learning difficulties can be challenging because childhood trauma may initially present as a developmental delay, learning difficulty or a behavioural issue (Innovative Resources, 2021). Adolescence and young adulthood are times of transition when many changes take place. Thus, middle school-age refugee children arrive in Canada at a particularly important time in their personal development, and this can contribute to them being a particularly vulnerable group. Their marginalization may lead to negative and destructive behaviours, exploitation by gangs, and other undesirable outcomes (Manitoba, Education, 2012).

In summary, school social workers are expected not only to provide direct services to refugee children who require basic needs or exhibit challenging behavior but also to lead prevention efforts that support children through building the capacity of family members, other school staff, and community agencies to improve student outcomes. Social workers are in a unique position to create an environment of social inclusion where all students are respected and encouraged to meet their full potential (Thomas, 2016). Often, social workers are the bridge to advocate for children and families to work through their crises through their supportive counselling, case management, and policy advocacy functions in schools, communities, and the political arena. Social workers play a key role in developing policies and programs that can influence social inclusion within educational systems (p. 194). While social workers and teachers tend to agree on the need for school social work yet often present with significantly divergent expectations of school social work roles. This is perhaps due to the teacher's lack of clarity about the social worker's role within the school, and a social worker's lack of visibility in day-to-day classroom experiences (Kelly et al., 2016, cited in Gherardi & Whittlesey-Jerome, 2022, p. 3). Given that issues relating to role clarity and history of collaboration are frequently identified in school social work literature as impacting the field broadly, frameworks to describe and improve approaches to inter-professional collaboration in school social work have the potential to benefit the field generally (Gherardi & Whittlesey-Jerome, 2022). Whether or not it is always recognized, the work school social workers do to support students or positively influence school systems largely happens with and through teachers. Effective inter-professional collaboration has the power to amplify the reach of school social work or inhibit the positive impact of services for students (Gherardi & Whittlesey-Jerome, 2022, p. 18).

2.6. Chapter summary

This chapter provided a review of the literature on refugee children's educational experience at the three stages of their migration trajectory in preparation for the subsequent study that examined the lived experience of refugee youth participants from conflict regions, who at one point attended middle school in Winnipeg, with special emphasis on their middle school education as refugee children. While success at school is critical to wellbeing for refugee-background children, published data on educational outcomes and learning problems in this population are limited, particularly for younger children and children in low- or middle-income countries (Graham, 2017, p. 12). However, the available literature review gives a picture of difficulties experienced by refugee children at home, in refugee camps, and during the resettlement process. While these children face tremendous challenges at all phases of their migration trajectory, the post-migration challenges during resettlement are of particular importance for this study, as the challenges in host countries are unique and complex, yet avoidable if there is support committed from key decision makers. Another key point that we can draw from this literature review is that, despite their exposure to various traumatic events during migration and resettlement, many refugee children, if not all, have the capacity to bounce back from adversities. With the right support in place, refugee children tend to have the capacity to learn rather quickly and adapt. For instance, refugee youth in Manitoba, as Fast (2017) observed, lacked essential support not only at school, but also from their families, ethno-cultural groups, their peers, and from service-providing organizations (Fast, 2017). The literature pointed out that due to poverty, inadequate infrastructure, lack of policy and the experiences due to active war and its associated atrocities, many children who migrated from this region to Canada are not well prepared to smoothly transition to Canadian schools. Hence, it would be clear that,

although pre-migration experiences do influence refugee children's learning outcomes, the most important determinants of success are located in the post-migration context, and many of these are modifiable in the country of settlement (Graham, 2017, p. 1). This literature review also presented a brief overview of the role of social work in the process of integrating refugee children into the school system and noted that social work is not as dominant a voice in Canadian middle schools in policy development and/or advocacy work for a better outcome in integrating refugee children into Canadian society.

CHAPTER III: Theoretical framework

"*Nothing has such power to broaden the mind as the ability to investigate systematically and truly all that comes under thy observation in life."*
Marcus Aurelius (121-180) a Roman emperor and Stoic philosopher.

3.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews and critically engages with the theoretical foundation of this dissertation, as well as the relevant theories employed in the analysis. It provides clarity on several key concepts essential to the analysis I present in the following chapters. Migration is a complex phenomenon, where 'macro'-, mezzo'- and 'micro'- factors act together to inform the final individual decision to migrate (Castelli, 2018). Children and their families who have migrated to Canada have a treasury of stories that shape who they are today. I would argue that refugee children's well-being, including their rights to access education, could be a challenging topic to explore if we attempt to only look at their current situation. I alluded to the notion that any attempt to understand refugee children's educational opportunities and challenges should be seen in context. Therefore, to gain the fullest picture possible, this literature review considered the challenges facing refugee children and youth through richly varied academic perspectives that integrate theories from diverse disciplines, including acculturation theory from anthropology, trauma and resilience theory from psychology, while centring the focus on social work theories (ecological perspective, and critical social work). Employing diverse theoretical lenses, this study took insights from one way of knowing, for instance, taking anthropology studies' insights of acculturation theories and applying them to inform social work studies on the refugee population, which might be called a multidisciplinary subject which juxtaposes multiple perspectives on the same topic without integration (Golding, 2009, p. 2).

There are limitations to the tenets of the theories, like many theoretical underpinnings, which will be addressed in this chapter. Nevertheless, there are facets of the theoretical rationale that

are appealing specifically to understand refugee children's resettlement experience because they provide the groundwork for examining the presence or lack of culturally sensitive, trauma-informed, and transactional interactions in multicultural classrooms. In the following sections, I will discuss each theory I used for this study.

3.2. Critical social work theory

Lysaght (2011) highlighted the necessity of identifying one's theoretical framework for thesis and dissertation studies. A researcher's choice of framework is not arbitrary but reflects important personal beliefs and understandings about the nature of knowledge, its relationship to the observer, and the possible roles and tools to be employed by the researcher in their work (p. 572). Since the time I graduated with a Bachelor of Social Work degree, and my career path led me to work with marginalized populations, particularly refugee children and families, I found a critical social work perspective a key instrument to explain and understand the nature of social problems and provide tools to address the systemic discrimination and liberate vulnerable and oppressed people to promote social inclusion. At the time, when I carried out my MSW research project a decade ago and later became involved in other similar social research projects, I, as an avid critical social worker, delved into the topic of global migration and its impact on humanity, taking a critical lens even more profoundly. Furthermore, the long-standing tradition and defining feature of social work is the profession's focus on individual well-being in a social context and the well-being of society (NASW, 2008). Hence, I believe it is a natural path for this dissertation to use a critical social work theoretical framework as its guiding principle, which begins from the premise that society, as it is currently constructed, supports and reproduces inequitable social arrangements (Bohman, 2016; Fook, 2002; Healy, 2001). Critical social work theory, as the phrase implies, is critical of social organization that privileges some at the expense

of others, and the assumption in using this method of inquiry is intertwined with the principle of social work, precisely, advocacy to help marginalized people (CASW, 2005).

In addition, I choose to apply this framework mainly because critical social work theory helps identify sources of structural and environmental conditions that are barriers to achieving refugee children's ultimate educational goal. The general tenets of critical theory are that by understanding social systems with a focus on power and domination, we can become more conscious of the need for change, and in turn work toward that change.

Critical theorists assert that the role of theory is to help us move beyond understanding and explaining society to critiquing and changing society (Bohaman, 2016). Among the many social work theories, the task of choosing a theory that explains the behaviour of refugee children, for example, by describing how children interact or react when exposed to adverse conditions, was daunting. Questions like why some refugee children are more resilient than others, even when they are in the same adverse environment, need critical investigation.

To ensure their usefulness in adequately answering the research questions, the three theories I have chosen for this study are examined through a critical social work lens. As discussed in detail in the subsequent section, the theories proved to be relevant to understanding not only individual challenges and attributes of refugee children but also the impact of the broader social structure on personal problems. Going back to our previous question of refugee children's "unexplained" difference in school performance, how to recognize and validate these differences without discriminating against others, scholars argue, is a central problem for helping professionals, including social workers. To address such problematic practice, Fook (2002), a prominent critical social work proponent, underscores the importance of locating the problem of difference squarely in the relationships which define the difference rather than the difference

itself (p. 83). In other words, rather than focusing on the children's perceived "low educational" achievements, for instance, critical social work theory tells us to examine the underlying intersectional factors that contribute to the differences in performance. With this theoretical lens, I analyze the three different theories in terms of their relevance for addressing the social, political, environmental, and individual factors that underlie the present problems faced by refugee children in Canadian schools. The assumption is that the causes and consequences of, and responses to, refugee children's displacement and resettlement are intertwined with many of the structural and systemic problems, as well as other environmental factors (Bohman, 2016).

3.3. Three theories

The field of 'refugee studies' has grown dramatically over the latter part of the twentieth century, in parallel with the significance of the phenomena of forced migration itself (Black, 2001). As the number of refugees in the world soared into tens of millions, studies on the causes and consequences have acquired global attention in both academic and policy arenas (Black, 2001). Several scholars in refugee studies employ a range of theories to explain how displacement and migration impact the livelihoods of refugees in general and children in particular (e.g., ecology, cultural anthropology, refugee theory, attachment theory, etc.). As a social work practitioner, as discussed earlier, I have a range of options in choosing theories to help me best understand the unique experiences of refugee children's educational journeys. Some authors propose a set of criteria that they believe are adequate for evaluating theory quality and development. Robbins et al. (1999), for instance, proposed criteria for evaluating theory in social work practice. These authors propose three criteria for evaluating theories, which I used as a foundation to select appropriate theories for this study. As Robbins et al. (1999) put it, theories for social work research should be (a) consistent with social work values and ethics, (b)

subjected to scientific scrutiny, methodologically sound research, and (c) be verifiable; and do no harm. This study has a dual focus. First, it aims to highlight the refugee children's educational challenges to influence policy by addressing the social determinants that limit their progress. It also aims to amplify the children's challenges to society as described by participant refugee youth's narratives. One of the central principles on which social work is based is social justice, which gives voice to those individuals and communities that are marginalized and voiceless. Hence, I found the critical theory framework to be the best fit for listening to and capturing the complexity of refugee youth's lived educational experiences in their country of origin, refugee camps, and Canadian schools.

In light of these criteria and social work principles, I chose three theories: bio-ecological, trauma and resilience, and acculturation theories, which I found to be relevant to refugee studies that attempt to explore participants' educational experiences in Canadian schools. As discussed in the next chapter, my goal is not to test the theories; rather, the focus is to introduce the theories briefly and to critically examine the strengths and limitations that exist when it comes to assessing the educational experiences of refugee students from war-affected regions adequately. These three theories, in conjunction with a critical social work lens, are applied in analyzing the participants' interviews.

3.3.1. Bronfenbrenner's Bio-ecological Systems Theory

Of the three, Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory has been the most extensively studied by scholars from various fields and widely used by social work practitioners and researchers (Ives et al., 2015). Urie Bronfenbrenner developed an ecological theory (1979) to explain how influences within a child's environment affect their growth and development. The

model provides a holistic framework in many areas of child development to show the effects on an individual's development. Bronfenbrenner (1999) defines human development as:

> …the process through which the growing person acquires a more extended, differentiated, and valid conception of the ecological environment, and becomes motivated and able to engage in activities that reveal the properties of, sustain, or restructure that environment at levels of similar or great complexity in form and content. (p. 27)

Bronfenbrenner's theory of human development was a theory that, until Bronfenbrenner died in 2005, was continually evolving. In his 1999 version, Bronfenbrenner reiterates the concept that a person is both influenced by their environment and influences it in return. According to this perspective, the environment is not a single entity; instead, it is a compilation of several multilevel environments (systems) and the interconnections between them (Stewart, 2011, p. 16). The theory is based on the idea that a person's development reflects the influence of the environment or context, which involves four interrelated systems with which an individual child or person interacts (Stewart, 2011; Bronfenbrenner, 1999). These subsystems include microsystem, mezzo system, exosystem, and macrosystem.

One of the most critical points in Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological theory, as it relates to any group or class of people, is that human development does not lack perspective. Refugee children, like any other children in the world, are born and raised in an environment where various interconnected layers of ecology dictate their development. As discussed in the following section, it is crucial to understand how these contexts affect the growth of refugee children, as they ultimately influence their outcomes.

In his work, Bronfenbrenner (1999) emphasizes the importance of the social environment in which children are raised, offering a holistic perspective on human psychological development that considers many interrelated factors (Stewart, 2011). Bronfenbrenner argues that development occurs through a process that is progressively a more complex exchange between a

child and its environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1999). Refugee children from war zones have often faced a range of stress factors as well as protective factors that are experienced by no other demographics, which need to be examined contextually. For instance, in their home country, traumatic experiences may have included hunger, imprisonment, torture, and exile. Apart from the events that led to the flight abroad, the journey itself is often fraught with danger, and once in the country of exile, life is often characterized by insecure residency status, poor housing conditions, and the challenges of learning a new language and integrating into a foreign culture (UNICEF, 2016). In resettlement, for instance, in Canada, children and parents are introduced to an environment that challenges their way of life, if not changing it. Bio-ecological system theory recognizes that a child's development occurs in the context of interactions between different layers of their "ecology" - individual attributes, caregivers, family, school, community, and society (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1999). Considering these complex and interconnected series of events, we can conceptualize how an individual refugee child (micro) interacts with various subsystems in the environment (mezzo) and flees to another country and culture (macro), and as a result, his/her whole system (chromo) is developed (Stewart, 2011). From this analysis, we can draw a conclusion that the interaction of structures within a layer and the interactions of structures between layers are paramount to this theory.

Stewart (2007, 2011) argues that, because of the vast array of experiences that characterize the lives of refugee children, and the significance of the pre-migration, trans-migration, and post-migration events and circumstances, the bioecological model provides a framework that supports the investigation of the individual within his or her ecosystem. I could not agree more. Although there are many experiences most refugees share, each child's experience is unique. The pre-migration experience for some individuals might have included witnessing the death of family

members, sexual violence, torture, or other forms of trauma. Some individuals had a formal education, while others had none. For some refugee students, their first experience with formal education in a school setting will occur in their host country. As such, this model could help us understand each child's unique experiences vis-à-vis their positive interactions with the environment or the lack thereof (Stewart, 2011; Kanu, 2008; Lustig et al., 2004).

Stewart (2011) and Lustig et al. (2004), among others, acknowledge the practical usefulness of the model by applying the theory in their work with refugee children. The bio-ecological model is useful for developing an understanding of the variables and factors that affect child adaptation to conflict and resettlement. Lustig et al. (2004) emphasized the application of an ecological perspective in studying refugee children: "the refugee experience is a series of interrelated events, interactions and challenges that Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of development helps to clarify" (p. 242). Some researchers argue that this theory should be used cautiously. For example, Ives et al. (2015) argue that the assumption that change in one part of a system results in changes to other parts overlooks the notion of power. Simply put, some systems (macrosystems) exert more power over other systems (microsystems) than vice versa (p. 43). Refugee children, no matter how they strive to make positive changes in their lives (micro), more often than not are at the mercy of the host government's goodwill to remove the complex resettlement hurdles (Macro). The macrosystem is then crucial for placing this analysis within the context of daily living (Stewart, 2007). I would agree, the pre-migration, trans-migration, and post-migration factors that influence the experiences of refugee children from war-affected regions could be examined with this theory in combination with other critical theories that question and uncover the inappropriate influence of the dominant system (macro) on the child's development. Stewart (2007) attested to the importance of the model despite its limitations. She

argues, “Because of the vast array of experiences that characterize the lives of refugee children, and the significance of the pre-migration, trans-migration, and post-migration events and circumstances, the bio-ecological model provided a framework that supported the investigation of the individual within his or her ecosystem” (p. 49).

3.3.2. Trauma and resilience theory

Children arriving in Canada from countries affected by armed conflict and violence often experience multiple traumatic events and stressful circumstances before, during, and after their arrival in host countries (Lustig et al., 2004). As discussed in previous sections, it is difficult even to describe all the kinds of traumatic experiences the children have suffered because the refugees’ trauma often precedes the primary war-related event that causes them to flee. In dealing with such complex and dynamic issues, many scholars agree that the frameworks of trauma and resilience theories are used as a foundation for emphasizing refugee trauma as a consequence of multiple social and political constraints which are embedded in the personal experiences of refugees (Mollica, 2006). Examining and linking these theories within the refugee context provides diverse perspectives on refugee trauma. Also, it provides an understanding of the complex issues facing refugees and allows the development of appropriate and effective interventions by service providers where refugee children are resettled (George, 2012). The trauma framework, developed since the 1980s, describes a range of impacts that may result from experiencing overwhelming events. Due to the extreme nature of events experienced by many refugees, the trauma framework has come to play an essential part in refugee literature (Mollica, 2006). Perry and Szalavitz (2009) highlight one of the most useful contributions of the trauma framework. According to their findings, the theory helps in the understanding that lower parts of the brain (e.g., limbic, brainstem) are significant in responding to a perceived threat and the

triggering of physiological reactions, so such responses do not operate at a cognitive level or with intention (cited in Nelson et al., 2013, p. 571). They argue that this serves as a highly protective and adaptive function at the time of trauma. However, when the body's responses have become hypersensitive, they can be triggered in situations that are not threatening. The person's ability to function on a day-to-day basis can then be impaired in a distressing way (Cited in Nelson et al., 2013, p. 572). If so, it is imperative to question, for instance, how children with traumatic experiences function in school. Do all children react the same way when experiencing traumatic events, and what is the best way to intervene?

Another theory that goes hand-in-hand with trauma theory and attempts to explain such enquiry is resilience theory. Resilience theory explains that it is not the nature of adversity that is most important, but how we deal with it. It is argued that the development of resilience is a dynamic process that takes place within and through the multiple social-ecological contexts of children's lives (Mollica, 2006). As described earlier, refugee children and their families are exposed to severe forms of stress through their experience of war-related trauma, displacement, separation and loss, and resettlement stressors, among others. While it is essential to understand the nature, scope, and intensity of a traumatic event as well as sources of events that might trigger re-traumatization and the associated resettlement stressors for refugee children, I would argue that studying sources of resilience in the children is equally important, if not more important in promoting the children's healthy growth and development while resettling in host countries. In any given attempt to understand the complex and dynamic nature of migration and its impacts, including trauma, calls for not only examining the risks but also equally highlighting individuals' strengths and protective factors. A proper assessment should address not just the problem, but also the person as a whole (Van Breda, 2015). Although many definitions of

resilience exist in the literature, at its core, resilience involves the favorable adjustment of individuals under conditions of significant adversity (APA, 2010; Mollica, 2006). Within this context, resilience theory describes the remarkable presentation of resilience in many of the refugee children who overcome adversities and lead healthy, productive lives in school, in their families, and in their communities (APA, 2010). Resilience and trauma studies explore the interrelated factors which foster or hinder individual and collective resilience to various forms of harm, and considerable attention centers on understanding children's competence and strengths as well as their deficits. The point is, as Fraser, Richman, and Galinsky (1999) put it, "if we can understand what helps some children to function well in the context of high adversity, we may be able to incorporate this knowledge into new practice strategies" (p. 136). Of the many variations of trauma and resilience theory, this dissertation focuses on Richard Mollica's (2006) adaptation, as his research is directly linked to refugee trauma. Mollica postulates that trauma survivors have an innate capacity to heal themselves in conjunction with medical and psychological intervention. There is a healing force hidden in all of us that is always striving for survival (Mollica, 2006), which undoubtedly many refugee children possess. While any traumatic event experienced before, during, or after migration can negatively affect refugees of any age, the consequences for children in host countries are particularly noteworthy and often under-recognized. Work in refugee studies has verified that post-migration stress significantly influences the emotional well-being of refugees and often provides a risk similar to war-related trauma (Gunnestud, 2006). When refugees settle in a host country, which is most often in a place that is not of their choosing, the refugee must adapt to a new place and language under uncertain circumstances and with uncertain futures. Re-establishing a home and identity, while trying to juggle the tasks of daily living, is yet another significant challenge that the refugee must

undertake. In this regard, understanding the nature and scope of the children's traumatic experiences as well as exploring and capitalizing on their resilience will help to develop and deliver a sound trauma-informed intervention that could avert the negative effects of potential PTSD.

It is an indisputable fact that refugee children's trauma and chronic stress are one of the most pressing issues facing educators in Canadian schools (Stewart, 2007). For schools that are willing to help but lack the perspective on how to handle traumatic situations in the classroom before the children's mental wellness deteriorates, teachers need to have training on trauma-informed intervention and be able to recognize and address the unique needs of their students (CMHA, 2021; Stewart, 2007). Although refugee children may encounter many risk factors potentially affecting their mental health, it is important to remember that many factors can also enhance their mental health. Refugee children are incredibly resilient, and many will not experience mental health problems. Some individual-level protective factors, such as coping strategies and cultural values and practices, should be recognized and acknowledged by school personnel (CMHA, 2021). For the reasons mentioned above, using the trauma and resilience theory in this study helps us understand participants' experiences from an additional perspective.

3.3. 3. Acculturation theories

The global crisis of migration has sparked scholarly interest in acculturation and how it can specifically affect the well-being of individuals and families by altering levels of stress, access to resources, and attitudes from and towards host societies. Not surprisingly, the large flow of migrants around the world has prompted increased scholarly interest in acculturation. At least three edited books on acculturation have been published since 2003 (e.g., Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006; Chun, Organista, & Marín, 2003; Sam & Berry, 2006, cited in Seth et al.,

2013). The studies in social sciences with a primary goal of analyzing culture-related issues often employ acculturation theory as their guiding theoretical framework and use quantitative or qualitative methodology to research refugees' and immigrants' acculturation experiences in host countries (Stewart, 2011; Kanu, 2008). As such, acculturation has become a well-recognized and vital area of study (Berry, 1980; Gibson, 2001). Broadly, as applied to individuals, acculturation refers to changes that take place because of contact with culturally dissimilar people, groups, and social influences. It refers to the process of adaptation, or lack thereof, that occurs when two cultures encounter one another (Berry, 1980). Gibson (2001) defined the concept as "the process of culture change and adaptation that occurs when individuals with different cultures come into contact" (p. 28). The concept has been used extensively to study the experiences of colonized or indigenous people, immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers (Berry, 2006). In Canada alone, many researchers have studied refugee-related issues partially or fully using acculturation theories (e.g., Stewart, 2007, 2011; Baffoe, 2011; Wilkinson, 2001).

In her study with refugee children residing in Winnipeg, Stewart (2011) attested to the framework's usefulness in explaining the impact of contacts between individuals and groups of refugees who have dissimilar cultural backgrounds with Canadians, as well as the adaptation (or lack thereof) that takes place as a result of such contact. In host countries, Canada included, it is expected that access to relatively better opportunities will be available for refugee children (e.g., for their health and education) than in their countries of origin. However, often, there is an equal or even greater amount of adversity for the children's well-being. In such a complex and dynamic resettlement process, acculturation theories could potentially offer insights into the multifaceted and often versatile interactions between refugees and the dominant culture and explain the dynamics involved. It is through acculturation theory that we can understand, for example, that

difficulties at school and in language acquisition have been shown to predict poor adaptation (Rousseau, 1995) in host countries.

While there are several acculturation theories in the fields of anthropology and sociology, acculturation theory and research have been mainly shaped by the fourfold paradigm developed by John Berry (Sakamoto, 2007). Berry, in an especially influential model, describes an acculturation attitude as determined by the extent to which an individual is willing to retain an old culture and adopt a new one (Berry, 1980). These result in four types of acculturation attitudes: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization. According to this model, non-dominant cultural groups and their members decide the degree of cultural maintenance, contact, and participation they desire in their daily encounters (Berry, 1997). The implicit premise of this hypothesis, I would argue, indicates that a refugee child could embrace the dominant culture on his/her free will, which is not the case. For instance, marginalization and integration categories are not strategies preferred by the individuals' free choice (Bhatia & Ram, 2001) as there is always the element of power, covertly or overtly, to push refugee children towards accepting the dominant culture. Sakamoto (2007) pointed out that while acculturation was originally proposed as the mutual change of both parties, the change processes of host societies are often neglected in research (p. 520). I would argue that the power differentials between refugees and host societies might not allow such mutual change to happen, as my personal experience with refugee children confirms. More often than not, refugee children are the ones who are forced to choose to either "integrate" or "marginalize". The dominant culture uses allocative and authoritative resources to exercise power over others, to devalue attributions and contributions of those deemed inferior systematically, and to exclude them from opportunities for material and social resources (Dominelli, 2002). Whether they like it or not,

refugee children at times are caught between a rock and a hard place - assimilation in Canada covertly persists as a social reality. Moreover, simultaneous exposure to multiple cultures has the potential to result in conflicting attitudes, values, and behaviours, which in turn give rise to related issues, including distorted cultural identity, cultural adjustment difficulties, and mental health issues (Bhugra & Becker, 2005).

Sakamoto (2007) argues that although all four acculturation attitudes are supposed to be acceptable, ultimately, the theory does endorse integration-acceptance of both heritage and host cultures- as the most desirable (and healthy) outcome for immigrants, in effect pathologizing others (p. 520). I would argue, to get unbiased and a fuller picture of the experience, there is a need to include critical theories to understand through the lens of intersectionality, which suggests that social identity is constructed of multiple dimensions that may include constructs beyond cultural identification, such as gender or socioeconomic status, and that the intersection of these social identities profoundly shapes individuals' experiences. For instance, the intersectionality report by Ontario Association of Interval & Transition Houses (OAITH, 2018) argues, living in a society and community such as Canada means that certain identities are valued more than others (p. 5) and continues to highlight the importance of a critical approach. “An intersectional lens allows us to understand that characterizing non-Western and non-Anglophone cultures as ‘more’ violent is racist and anti-immigrant and must be avoided” (p. 10). This perspective may be particularly useful for understanding acculturation and adjustment among refugees, where other variables, such as gender roles, are divergent between the culture of origin and resettlement. As described in the preceding discussion section, acculturating away from a culture of origin may have very different implications for stress and adjustment for girls than for boys (Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Many researchers in the field argue that the process of

acculturation is highly relevant to the adjustment of refugee children (Berry, 2006; Stewart, 2011) by highlighting the different outcomes a refugee child may encounter in the process. For example, some research found worse outcomes associated with adolescent refugees who demonstrate a marginalized style of acculturation and more positive outcomes associated with integration, though this calls for further exploration given the complexity and multiplicity of factors involved (Kovacev & Shute, 2004).

In conclusion, I would argue, the fourfold paradigm presented by Berry (1980, 2006) is an important tool for research with refugee children, with its simultaneous emphasis on the individuals' relationship with their heritage culture and the new host country culture. That said, I would also like to highlight the need for a cautious approach when using these theories - how the conceptualization and measurement of the acculturation construct capture the multidimensional experiences of the refugee children, who flee to the "unknown" without their will and yet struggle with resettlement stressors.

3.4. Chapter Summary

Social forces stream refugee children into particular life-paths that differ from other children. The chapter presented a brief review of some of the relevant theories and perspectives that helped us understand the experience of refugee children and youth from conflict regions. The chapter also discussed the importance of these interrelated theories- ecological perspective, trauma and resilience theories and acculturation theory, in combination with critical social work theory, to help us better understand the transitions and integration of refugee children in Canadian schools. While the theories aid in understanding the acculturation stressors and the resettlement process that refugees to Canada experience, but they do not provide adequate explanation for all our questions. As Ember and Ember (2019) argue, "most theoretical

orientations merely suggest where to look for answers to questions; they do not by themselves suggest explanations for particular phenomena (p. 80). As such, in conjunction with critical social work theory, the three theories help identify the environmental, social and structural barriers and/or opportunities that can provide or inhibit equal participation in school and in other aspects of social life. The three theories used in this study have their unique strengths and limitations but using them as a whole provides the synergy to complement each other and explain the participants' experience from various perspectives. They are consistent with social work values and ethics; subjected to scientific scrutiny, methodologically sound research, and verifiable; and do no harm (Robbins et al., 1999). These different theoretical frameworks help to contextualize this study and to describe and interpret its findings.

CHAPTER IV: Research Design and Methodology

"I want to understand the world from your point of view. I want to know what you know in the way you know it. I want to understand the meaning of your experience, to walk in your shoes, to feel things as you feel them, to explain things as you explain them. Will you become my teacher and help me understand?"

James P. Spradley (1979)

4.1. Introduction

This chapter discusses the methodology and conceptual framework used for this study; it describes the study sample, research design, data analysis process, and limitations.

This chapter describes the phenomenological approach used in this study to address the research question: What is the lived experience of refugee children from conflict regions of East African origin in culturally diverse classrooms in Canadian middle schools, and what meaning do they now ascribe to the experience? The research question is addressed through individual interviews guided by carefully developed questions, inductive and deductive probes, and is then analyzed with a phenomenological lens. The chapter begins with a discussion of the background of the research, including the nature and scope of migration, then proceeds to present the selected research approach of phenomenology and finally presents research design details, including the method of participant recruitment, research questions, a guide for the in-depth interviews, the data analysis method, and the timeline of the study. I have conducted the study at various Refugee community centers in Winnipeg within two years of receiving ethics approval, mainly due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, I have also changed the initial demographics of participants from children to youth. Using a phenomenological approach, I explored the participants' middle school pre- and post-migration experiences, identified opportunities and challenges, with the intent of gaining an understanding of the phenomenon of being a refugee child in culturally different middle school classrooms.

4.2. Methodology

Patton stated that the controlling force in research is the purpose of the study, from which all decisions about design, measurement, analysis, and reporting flow (Patton, 2002). As the focus of this study is on exploring the core meaning of participants' experiences in attending middle school in a different environment than their upbringing, a qualitative research method was chosen to best describe the phenomenon. Qualitative methods are useful for exploring people's personal experiences of complex phenomena within particular settings (Croswell, 2007). Padgett (1998) encourages the use of qualitative methodology to explore a topic about which little is known and/or when the research aims to capture the "lived experience" from the perspectives of those who live it and make meaning of it. In choosing qualitative research in general and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) in particular several questions have been explored: what would be the best fit given the aims and objectives of the research study, what would be the best given the practicalities for the role of the researcher and the dynamics of the research, what are the ethical implications and what is the researcher's ontological and epistemological approach (Patton, 2002).

The research design process in qualitative research begins with philosophical assumptions that the inquirers make in deciding to undertake a qualitative study. Researchers bring their own worldviews, paradigms, or sets of beliefs to the research project, and these inform the conduct and writing of the qualitative study (Creswell, 2007, p. 15). This will allow the researcher to explore which research design will be most appropriate for their study. Creswell (2007) asserted that the overall purpose of qualitative research is to uncover in-depth knowledge that comes from participants' perceptions of the world through their words. It is "a means for exploring and

understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (p. 4). I am a social work practitioner, and social work is a value-based profession. As described in chapter three, the philosophical foundation of this study is critical social work theory. A theory is critical to the extent that it seeks human "emancipation from slavery", acts as a "liberating … influence", and works "to create a world which satisfies the needs and powers" of human beings (Horkheimer, as cited in Bohman, 2016).

4.2.1. Qualitative research methodology

Based on the aforementioned reasoning and the philosophical foundation of the study, a phenomenological theoretical tradition was utilized for this study, because it allowed me to approach "[the] phenomenon with a fresh perspective, as if viewing it for the first time, through the eyes of participants who have direct, immediate experience with it" (Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 50). Due to the richness of the data that can be gathered through qualitative research, this type of methodology was chosen for this study as it allowed for an in-depth investigation that could yield extensive data on a topic that is currently scarce in literature. The only way to know another person's experience is to experience the phenomenon as directly as possible (Patton, 2002). In light of this premise, and considering the complexity and intersectional challenges of migration, I believed the lived experiences of refugee children from conflict regions, particularly their educational experiences in their country of origins, refugee camps and Canadian schools, is best explored by using a qualitative approach and interviewing refuge youth participants, those who also have experienced the phenomenon as a refugee child in middle school. While there are various types of phenomenological methods, this study employed the interpretive and hermeneutic method, rather than Husserl's more descriptive and eidetic methods (Smith, 2004).

4.3. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

Understanding the theoretical underpinnings of qualitative research approaches, including Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), is fundamental to any decision about which methodology is the best fit for a particular research study. In this section, I will discuss why IPA is considered the most appropriate methodology in relation to the aims and objectives of this study, the role of the researcher and the dynamics of the research. IPA is often described as double hermeneutic, which is a dual process of exploring the individual's meaning-making and how the researcher interprets the individual's meanings of their world (Pietkiewicz & Smith, cited in Pham, 2016, p. 51). It is a rigorous methodology guided by three theoretical influences: phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiographic (Larkin et al., 2006; Smith et al., 2009). Migration is a global phenomenon typically caused by a variety of factors, both 'push' and 'pull'. The conventional assumption strongly held by Western society for refugees' movement is economic betterment. When nearly a million Vietnamese "boat people" fled their country in the late 1970s and early 1980s and sought refuge elsewhere, they were typically seen as a burden and often turned away (OECD, 2016). However, there are other reasons more significant than economics, particularly for those who live in conflict and war zones. Flight or displacement is a time-tested coping strategy for escaping the effects of conflict. When people do not feel safe in their communities and when other coping strategies (such as hiding or negotiating with warring groups) do not work, they flee (Kanu, 2008). Civilians may be 'caught in the crossfire' of disputes between insurgent groups and government forces (or sometimes conflicts between insurgent groups). They may flee their communities once the bombs start to fall or armed groups attack their village. Or they may flee in anticipation of such conflicts. During wars and conflicts,

a series of atrocious events occur within the blink of an eye, and their long-lasting impact on survivors needs to be understood.

As such, phenomenological methods are particularly effective at bringing to the fore the experiences and perceptions of individuals from their own perspectives and therefore are instrumental at challenging structural or normative assumptions. Adding an interpretive dimension to phenomenological research allows it to inform, support, or challenge policy and action (Lester, 1999, p. 1). For instance, in a simpler intersectional analysis, refugee youth who participated in the study described their experiences of academic challenges in two ways (i.e., as a refugee and as an English language learner). However, when I, the researcher, critically interpreted their description of the phenomenon, I was also able to unmask additional layers of structural barriers (e.g., race, poverty and more). This is discussed in detail in Chapter Six. It is also important to emphasize that the study's central aim, among others, is to provide a voice for refugee children whose disclosures may otherwise remain unheard but are crucial in developing an effective intervention. In this regard, IPA gives a "voice" to many individuals or groups who otherwise may be silenced or marginalized within society (Robson, 2002).

Another key aspect that attracted me to applying the IPA methodology is the role of the researcher in the inquiry. The unique experience of each individual is what characterizes phenomenology as a research method and included in the experience is the unique experience of the researcher. In most qualitative studies, researchers are expected to bracket their previous knowledge from the study (Creswell, 2007). However, IPA challenged this assumption. Heidegger (2002) claimed that a person, as a being-in-the-world, could not separate from the world and meaning co-developed through shared humanness and life experiences. Heidegger believed it was not possible to bracket experiences, but rather, through reflection, we could

become aware of our assumptions (Cited in Pham, 2016). Moustakas (1994) does not reject previous experience, but the bracketing that he suggests is an attempt at setting aside presuppositions to be able to see the phenomenon from a new perspective. This requires putting aside presuppositions and, as much as possible, seeing things "as if for the first time" (p. 85). Bracketing is important for the researcher to prevent personal experience from influencing data analysis and, at the same time, recognizing that it is exactly that personal stance that enriches the study (Creswell, 2007).

I would argue that my prior knowledge of the subject matter provided me with significant insight into the research question, and to bracket this experience, I must shed my experience, therefore losing my capacity to understand through shared experience and meaning (Pham, 2016). Because I have my own personal lived experience of being a refugee, as well as more than a decade of working experience with refugee children from war-affected regions who have special needs, I am knowledgeable about the topic of the study. Hence, IPA would allow me to utilize my previous knowledge of the topic as needed while simultaneously putting my ideas, thoughts, and feelings aside from the phenomenon I am studying. The bracketing aspect is also similar to the art of doing two things at once, where the researcher observes as if for the first time with full awareness of prior experience. Moran (2000) argues that, instead of bracketing off the researcher's subjective perspective, hermeneutic phenomenology recognizes that the researcher, like the research subject, cannot be rid of his/her lifeworld. Instead, the researcher's experiences and knowledge are valuable guides for the inquiry. It is the researcher's education and knowledge bases that lead him/her to consider a phenomenon or experience worthy of investigation (Moran, 2000). To ask the researcher to take an unbiased approach to the data is inconsistent with hermeneutic phenomenology's philosophical roots (Smith, 2004). Instead,

researchers working from this tradition should openly acknowledge their preconceptions and reflect on how their subjectivity is part of the analysis process (Moran, 2000). The approach defined by Smith et al. (2009) enables the researcher to not just "bear witness" to emergent themes, but rather to become an active participant in the discovery of those themes (Pringle, Drummond, McLafferty, & Hendry, 2011). As for the risk of biases due to prior knowledge of the subject matter, the process of bracketing (Smith et al., 2009) argues, will help the researcher guard against any assumptions that their own professional background suggests and also as to whether professional background itself makes a difference. Identity and emotional experience are said to be the main constructs which have emerged in IPA studies to date (p. 205). The selection of IPA as the methodology for the study acknowledges the importance of context and how it can and does shape a refugee student's understanding and recollection of particular situations and experiences. The IPA approach embraces varied contextual understandings of experiences and uses them as part of the interpretative process. Additionally, IPA allows for the recognition of potential perceived "power plays" (Smith et al., 2009) when collecting data and working with research participants.

The IPA approach is flexible and responsive, and encourages an organic flow of questioning, interpretation, and meaning making as the process unfolds, for both the participant and the researcher (Smith et al., 2009); it involves not only examining what is said, but also looking beyond the words themselves to begin questioning what those words might mean in the larger context of the experience. Thus, an IPA approach enabled me, the researcher, to reflect on the subjective nature of reality and thereby illuminated each participant's view of being a refugee middle school student in a Canadian school, while maintaining the validity and uniqueness of the individual's experiences. These detailed accounts of the experiences described by the research

participants helped to create a greater understanding of what it means to be a refugee student, and thus to explore the intersubjectivity of what it means to be a learner in different environments (Smith et al., 2009, p. 17). The final element of IPA that assists in establishing sensitivity to context is the IPA's close adherence to using participants' own words in exploring and describing the phenomena to be studied in order to support the interpretations and claims that are being made (Smith et al., 2009). The researcher took great care in selecting verbatim extracts to support interpretations and highlight unique perspectives and understandings of being a remedial education student.

In conclusion, I have chosen and pursued an IPA approach as I felt an interpretative and idiographic understanding of individual perceptions is the most logical way to access and understand refugee children's educational experience through interviewing refugee youth study participants. This approach proved to be suitable for the study, with its convenient platform to understand and give voice to participants' concerns. It also allowed me to gather information on their lived experience and interpret the common themes while consciously setting aside personal opinions or judgments. In other words, the experience is understood through the lens of both the participant and the researcher (Smith, 2004). First, I positioned the initial description in relation to a broader social, cultural context. I analyzed the data to answer the question of "what it means for the participants to have these claims and to have expressed these feelings and concerns in this particular situation" (Larkin et al., 2006, p. 104). The second aim of the IPA perspective is to develop a more overtly interpretative analysis, which positions the initial 'description' in relation to a wider social, cultural, and perhaps even theoretical context. This second-order account aimed to provide a critical and conceptual commentary upon the participants' personal 'sense-making' activities (Smith & Osborn, 2003, cited in Larkin et al., 2006, p. 104). While each

refugee child has a unique story, each participant's patterns and relationships are discovered and interpreted using a phenomenological approach. It is essential to describe, understand and interpret these common experiences to develop practices or policies or to develop a deeper understanding of the features of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007, p. 60). In summary, I found the best methodological fit in relation to the aims and objectives, the role of the researcher, and the research dynamics for this study to be IPA.

4.4. Social Work and Hermeneutic (Interpretive) Phenomenology

As a branch of the human sciences, social work seeks to understand human beings from a holistic perspective, viewing them as complex, multifaceted beings embedded in a multi-layered network of relations. Because they can be more holistic in their focus, qualitative research methods have recently played an increasingly important role in social work research (Sherman, 1991). Phenomenology, one of the many qualitative methods, has been well documented in the research literature as both a philosophy and methodology (Smith et al., 2009). Emerging in the mid-1990s and owing much to the endeavours of the psychologist Jonathan A. Smith (2009), IPA has a strong research tradition within health psychology but has since been applied to research projects within the disciplines of nursing, education, social psychology and social work.

Hermeneutics can be most simply defined as “a method or principle of interpretation" (Webster's, 1828). Hermeneutic means interpretation or understanding (Zimmerman, 2015). Social work by its very nature is interpretive and so emerges its affinity to hermeneutics and interpretive approaches to knowledge building, such as Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (Newberry, 2012, p. 1). Phenomenology is a comfortable home for social work, which has as its central concern an understanding of the lived experiences of people within their contexts, or what is often referred to as the person-in-environment configuration (p. 5). Houston and Mullan

(2011) also argue that qualitative inquiry in social work can gain a clear-sighted awareness of the social world by aligning a methodological approach, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, with a sociological theory of agency and structure, the theory of social domains (p. i).

As noted, the purpose of this study is to gain insight into the lived experiences of refugee children's education through the youth participants' narratives. This involves more than documenting the children's perspective, although this played a role. The aim of this study is rather to capture the essence and nuances of children's lives as foreign students in a different country and culture. Hence, interpreting the essence of these experiences in parallel to the larger context, I believe it is my responsibility as a critical social worker. Within IPA, the complexity of the relationship between the 'interpreter' and the 'interpreted' is acknowledged. Access to another person's experience is seen as being dependent on and complicated by the researcher's own conceptions. IPA therefore emphasizes the importance of an awareness of a researcher's own bias and preconceptions and maintaining a spirit of openness (Smith et al., 2009).

Hermeneutic phenomenology seeks to go beyond description to discover meanings that are not immediately apparent. By clearly understanding the individual's unique story (micro) and interpreting the meaning in the larger societal context (macro) provides better insight into the phenomenon in question. Social work is itself a constructed (and contested) activity (Payne, 2005), in which practitioners move back and forth between the macro and the micro. Despite its focus on structural issues (Mullaly, 1997), social work is at the same time deeply concerned with the most intimate of human experiences (p. 3). In other words, social construction is a lens that molds individuals' perceptions of the world, and it is through this lens that meaning is created and interpreted. Critical social work perspectives, which are consistent with hermeneutic inquiry, recognize the socially constructed nature of reality and the intersubjectivity of knowledge.

Newberry (2012) further underscores the relevance of IPA to social work research. Interpretive inquiry is highly consistent with social work due to its inclusion of concepts of (situated) agency, closeness to subjects (with subjects understood as human actors), and a critical intersubjectivity that seeks to disrupt oppressive social discourses through a hermeneutic understanding that connects (p. 1). Interpretive approaches allow social workers to appreciate human experiences in all their situated richness, without being compelled to make universal claims about the generalizability of findings. It is the relational, reflexive, artistic aspects of interpretative research that allow the depth and nuances of human experiences and social work interventions to really shine. Scholars who applied IPA encourage social work researchers to consider hermeneutic phenomenology as an appropriate methodology for knowledge building in the discipline. Newberry (2012), for instance, argued that several features of hermeneutic phenomenology seem especially suited to social work research, including its focus on inquiry as application (p. 13). Social work is an applied discipline with a focus on social justice, the pursuit of which is an obligation included in the Code of Ethics for Canadian social workers (Canadian Association of Social Workers, 2005). Therefore, it is appropriate to include a focus on praxis in interpretation in social work research. Madison (1990) stated, “a good understanding will be 'suggestive' or fertile in that it raises questions that stimulate further research and interpretation” (cited in Newberry, 2012, p. 14).

4.5. Chapter Summary

This chapter presents the research methodology and the steps taken to choose IPA among other qualitative methods. I concluded my justification for the relevance of IPA in the study by highlighting Whan’s (1979) observation on his early work. One of the best descriptions of a hermeneutical approach to social work practice has been provided by a British social worker,

Michael Whan (1979). He conceives case narrative to be a central element in direct social work practice, and he contends that the social worker's task in relation to narrative is to enable clients to develop a sense of "their own story." He notes that the importance of such narratives for practice can be comprehended when we consider children who have dislocated life histories because of disrupted or incomplete families, multiple placements, and so on. Practice with such children has shown that they need special opportunities to describe their experiences and impressions to sort them out and reassemble them into some kind of meaningful whole. Whan goes on to say, "This whole is their story" (Whan, 1986). The inter-subjectivity of the social worker and client, in Whan's narrative, is mirrored in the inter-subjectivity of the researcher and participant in this study.

Phenomenological enquiry is based on the premise that all social problems are problems of meaning. It is a powerful research strategy that is well-suited for exploring challenging problems in society. However, the educational experiences of refugee children from conflict regions cannot be analyzed in isolation; they must be analyzed while being cognizant of the intersectional challenges migration and resettlement induce on the children's healthy growth and development. For this study, this meant conceptualizing migration not only as a product of conflict but also analyzing it in conjunction with the sociopolitical and cultural perspectives prevalent in war-affected regions, particularly in Eastern Africa. Using IPA in this study demonstrated its relevance in capturing participants' stories as they described them, as well as the researcher's interpretation of their description in the larger (macro) context (Smith et al., 2009).

CHAPTER V: Data Collection and Analysis

Data are just summaries of thousands of stories – tell a few of those stories to help make the data meaningful." Dan Heath

5.1. Introduction

This chapter introduces the data collection and analysis procedure followed in this phenomenological research and illustrates the iterative and nonlinear process that is common to IPA studies. Data analysis refers to the "process of systematically searching and arranging the interview transcripts, field notes, and other materials that you accumulate to enable you to come up with findings" (Bogdan & Knopp Biklen, 2003, p. 147). The quote from Dan Heath further emphasizes the difference between raw data and insights, and how data alone is rarely ever meaningful. How do we take the data we collect and put it into context? What techniques and tools can we use to analyze the data and draw out the stories being told to us?

The primary goal of IPA researchers is to investigate how individuals make sense of their experiences. The analytical process in IPA is often described in terms of a double hermeneutic or dual interpretation process, because firstly, the participants make meaning of their world, and secondly, the researcher tries to decode that meaning, making sense of the participants' meaning making (Smith & Osborn, 2008). In other words, I tried to understand what an experience is like from the participant's perspective while at the same time formulating critical questions referring to their narratives, such as: What is the person trying to achieve here? Do I have a sense of something going on here that the person himself or herself is perhaps less aware of? IPA studies may thus contain elements of both types of interpretation, making the analysis richer and more comprehensive (Smith et al., 2009).

Based on the principles of IPA, the seven stages of analyzing data in IPA research was used to identify each theme; reading and re-reading each transcript, initial noting, developing emergent themes, searching for connection across the emergent themes, repeating the process by moving on to the next case, looking for patterns across all nine participants' stories while considering convergence and divergence alongside shared themes (Smith et al., 2009). Each theme is discussed in the subsequent sections.

5.2. Research Questions and Study Protocol

The main research question that guided this study focused on exploring refugee children's educational experience throughout their migration trajectory, with special emphasis on their post-migration experience through interviewing refugee youth who have attended middle school while they were children. This is done by posing the general question: What are the educational experiences of war-affected refugee children, at their country of origin, and at refugee camps, and what was the impact of these pre-and trans-migration experiences on their academic performances while attending middle school in Winnipeg? The study reviewed each participant's educational experiences in his or her pre-migration, trans-migration and post-migration contexts with the goal of gathering general information regarding the psychosocial and educational needs of a larger group of refugee children who share this experience in host countries. This main question was followed by the following sub-questions: (1) What were the youth refugees' perceptions of how they were treated as children in the Winnipeg school system? (2) What are the barriers to and opportunities for refugee children's education in Winnipeg schools? (3) What factor(s) did the youth identify that contribute to the success or failure of refugee children's educational achievement? These questions, as well as the literature review in Chapter 2, helped

to shape and inform the semi-structured interview questions that are the main basis for the data collection phase of the study (see Annex iv for the interview guide).

5.3. Data collection method

Based on the literature review, the main research question, and the purpose of the study, I found IPA methodology, particularly semi-structured in-depth interviews, as the logical choice for the primary data for the study. Smith et al. (2009) reiterated the importance of interviews in data collection: "In terms of a data collection method, an IPA interview is best suited to one which will invite participants to offer a rich, detailed, first-person account of their experiences" (p. 56). Creswell (2014) also states that qualitative research is conducted when a problem needs to be "explored," and that exploration is needed in circumstances in which variables cannot be easily measured, or in which "silenced voices" need to be heard (p. 47). Because this study was carried out to gain an understanding of refugee children's' lived experiences from refugee youth perspective, and shed light on their stories with critical interpretation, I applied (IPA) an approach which enabled both participants and the researcher (myself) to arrive at a co-constructed understanding of the participants' experiences through open dialogue that allowed for the sharing, describing and interpretation of multiple perspectives (Smith et al., 2009). Using a semi-structured interview guide (Patton, 1990) allowed me to identify the topics to be covered and to structure the major interview questions in advance. It also provided flexibility in terms of changing the order of questions and asking follow-up and probing questions based upon participants' responses to the pre-structured questions.

5.3.1. Protocol

In IPA, researchers are aiming to design data collection events which elicit detailed stories, thoughts, and feelings from the participants. As discussed, semi-structured, one-to-one

interviews have tended to be the preferred method for collecting such data (Smith et al., 2009, p. 57). Accordingly, an interview protocol that focused on eliciting information that helped to inform the research questions was developed and implemented. The interview protocol included nine open-ended questions for youth participants and eight open-ended questions for teachers. However, each question often diverged into other lines of questioning, as the protocol was designed to allow participants the freedom to explore their experiences and to create a space for a co-constructed interview in which both the participant and the researcher actively engaged in the conversation. A qualitative research interview is often described as a conversation with a purpose (Smith et al., 2009, p. 57).

5.3.2. Participant selection

The selection of research participants is a very important part of planning a research project. The researcher should meticulously analyze and decide which type of population will adequately answer the research question. It is important to be clear about who your population of interest is so that you can make sure you have an adequate sample of participants in your study (Croswell, 2007; Smith et al., 2009). Since the main objective of this study is to understand refugee children's middle school experience, at the early stage of this study, I asked myself how I would define my population of interest. Am I interested in all refugee children who have ever been in middle school or only children who are presently in middle school? Who could better help to answer the research question? Who can provide the best information? The issue of breadth versus depth is an important aspect in qualitative study; it depends on available resources and the level of interest of the researcher (Patton, 2002). Of all the steps of the study process, in general, I found recruiting participants one of the most difficult stages in conducting the research, particularly during the pandemic time. The unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic inarguably

created significant challenges in recruiting participants for this study. Several ethical and procedural questions have been considered to make a sound decision on how best to conduct data collection during the pandemic. How do I conduct the study without compromising the participants' and my health? Considering the large size of the refugee population in Winnipeg alone, I needed to develop certain criteria to determine who will be eligible for participation in the study, putting the quality of information at the center. Based on the criteria, I concluded that refugee children who at that time were attending middle school in Winnipeg schools, as well as those in East African refugee camps, would be the ones who fit the characteristics I intended to study. However, this initial data collection method, particularly choosing which type of participants were needed for the study and the way interviews should be carried out, has been subjected to multiple changes from its original proposal. Due to the high level of ethical requirements from the Research and Ethics Board [REB], which demanded a plan that mitigates the potential risk of COVID, it was a daunting task to provide on time. This experience, as much as it hurt me, it also made me think about, among other things, the need to be patient, the wisdom of navigating challenges with grace, the art of being creative in looking for other options, using one's intellect and the appropriateness of wearing a critical social work lens.

5.3.3. The original participants' recruitment proposal

The initial data collection method for the study was aimed at engaging in in-person encounters with refugee children from both refugee camps and Winnipeg schools. Teachers and/or key informants who had experience of working with refugee children were also included in the study. It was planned that focus group discussions would be conducted after the in-depth interviews, as it was believed this would stimulate the respondents' thinking by hearing one another's views and opinions regarding the topic. Participants were supposed to be recruited

from Winnipeg schools and UNCHR schools in East African refugee camps. However, at the time of launching this study, due to the quick spread of the COVID-19 virus globally and the drastic changes in the way organizations conducted business, research at my home university, the University of Manitoba, was suspended for most in-person interviews, which significantly affected this initial proposal. In my attempt to proceed with the initial plan, I have modified the in-person interviews modality to include a well-established safety protocol for ensuring participants' safety, which was approved by the Dean of the Faculty of Social Work. However, both the REB and the VPRI denied my request for in-person interviews with children, reiterating the potential risk for exposing children to the virus. Hence, at that time, an essential question for me was whether I had to conduct this study correctly, adhering to the quality of the data and completing the study on time. How was I to reach the most information-rich yet dependent children and interview them without physically contacting them? Was this even possible or effective? Moreover, should I change the data collection method to comply with the current safety measures and compromise the quality of the information collected for the study, or anxiously wait for the recommencement of face-to-face interviews, in an unpredictable COVID-free environment? All possible options were in binaries, and the time was ticking as I was confronted with ethical dilemmas. After a series of consultations with my advisors and analyzing the potential for the negative impact of COVID in the refugee community and myself, I redesigned the data collection method to suspend all in-person data collection tasks in refugee camps and cancelled field trips to East Africa. Focusing only on Winnipeg participants, I redeveloped a safety plan respecting social distancing measure. However, the REB, once again, rejected this revised proposal due to the greater restriction of social distancing measures in Manitoba at the time. In the end, it became apparent that making a complete change in the data

collection method that excluded in-person encounters with child participants was inevitable to complete the study on time. Consequently, an online data collection method that retrospectively explored refugee children's middle school educational experiences through young adult participants was proposed and approved by both my advisory committee and the REB (see Annex iv for details on the initial study plan).

5.3.4. Revised data collection method

Since interviewing the ideal candidates, middle school-aged children, was not possible, and in an attempt to gather the richest possible source of information from participants who have experienced the phenomena, an online data collection method that aimed to retrospectively explore young adults' (between 18-25 ages) educational experiences was developed and implemented. Participants (young adults) shared their educational experience in refugee camps as well as their middle school experience in Winnipeg schools - challenges, positive aspects and strengths. The recollection of the perceptions that these young adults, who once were refugee children, had before and during their middle school educational experiences was explored by a retrospective narrative using the initial phenomenological design. The goal and focus of the retrospective data collection method was to shed light on the lived experiences of these young adults' middle school years in Winnipeg schools and to identify the impact of their pre- and trans-migration experiences on their academic performance at the time they were attending middle school in Winnipeg.

5.3.5. Selection

The selection of participants for the study was based on the following criteria.

1) Refugee young adults (18-25)

- Refugee youth of East African origin, preferably from conflict regions (South Sudan, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia)
- Having arrived in Winnipeg as a refugee from an East African country in the past 10 years
- Having attended middle school (grades 6, 7, or 8) in Winnipeg.
- Comfortable in sharing their school experience.
- Having access to a computer and Internet service.

2) Teachers in Winnipeg schools:

· Teachers experienced teaching and guiding refugee children in Winnipeg, where a historically large number of refugee children have been accommodated (i.e., Hugh John McDonald School and Victoria Albert School)

5.3.6. Sampling

Stratified and purposive sampling were used to select the participants of this study. The rationale for purposeful sampling was to select information-rich cases whose inclusion in the study would illuminate the research questions being examined (Morse & Field, 1995, cited in Soklaridis, 2009, p. 723). While stratified sampling ensured the representation of all study strata constituting the four East African countries, purposive sampling facilitated coming up with equal numbers of participants selected from each of the four strata (though it was not achieved) and representing the gender and nationality of each stratum. While the sampling procedure was carefully administered to ensure that the final study population was representative of the four countries, it was difficult to fully achieve this objective due to COVID-related challenges during the recruitment stage. After receiving approval from the Faculty of Social Work and the REB at

the University of Manitoba, leaders of selected Refugee community organizations and school principals in Winnipeg were contacted to help recruit interested individuals who met the inclusion criteria (via an IRB-approved recruitment flyer, Appendix D). In my letter of introduction, information about the study - including a Letter of Cooperation (Appendix A) to refugee serving organizations, a Letter of Consent (Appendix B) to be signed by the participant, and a Participant Letter (Appendix C) outlining the study, were sent to local community organizations, to introduce the study and request their cooperation to recruit potential and eligible participants. However, as the procedure was implemented, many of the organizations were reluctant to take part in the study because of the pandemic, and others required the researcher to fill out Institutional Review Board (IRB) forms for their specific institution (for instance, Winnipeg School Division) for the research to proceed (a requirement with which I complied). Some organizations I approached, although they agreed to be a part of the study, irrevocably rejected the idea of conducting face-to-face interviews with the youth. Eventually, it became apparent that, due to the pandemic, finding such recruiters was much harder than I had imagined. Finally, two organizations (The Hood Fams, a community development not-for-profit organization, and the Somali Community Outreach Center) actively participated in recruiting participants and facilitated the interviews. Despite its enormous challenge, I was able to recruit enough participants from both the youth group and educators.

5.3.7. Sample Size

There exist differing perspectives within the literature on the ideal scope of sample sizes for IPA and general qualitative studies. Smith (2009) stated that IPA studies tended to be conducted with relatively small sample sizes with an aim to seek a "reasonably homogeneous sample" so that convergence and divergence of insights about a topic could be explored in detail. Smith et al.

(2009) argue the main concern in IPA is to give full appreciation to each participant's account. For this reason, samples in IPA studies are usually small, which enables a detailed and very time-consuming case-by-case analysis. In light of this principle, I interviewed twelve participants (nine youth and three educators), which is in the range of the recommended size in a phenomenology study (Creswell, 2007, p. 126). Although the size of participants appeared to be small in number, I was comforted by the fact that IPA studies focus more on the "detailed account of individual experience[s]", where quality is celebrated more than the quantity (Smith et al., 2009, p. 51).

5.4. Data collection instrument

Primary data was collected through personal interviews with participants. The basic tenets of a qualitative interview, open-ended, neutral, sensitive, and clear to the interviewee (Patton, 2002) are met through a semi-structured interview.

5.4.1 Semi-structured interview

A semi-structured interview format is used in this study to provide the advantages of both structured and unstructured interviews. Semi-structured interviews are considered the "exemplary method" for IPA, offering a focused yet flexible method of data collection (Smith & Osborn, 2008). To ensure I have the right kind of questions to collect relevant data for the study, a pre–test of the interview guide was carried out with two key informants - Eritrean and Somali community members - and then I made the necessary changes. Also, the draft interview guide was reviewed by my research advisory committee members, and amendments were included. This confirmed that the quality of the interview questions was open-ended, clear, and the wording was appropriate for research participants whose first language was not English.

Fetterman (1989) pointed out that words and expressions have different values in various cultures. (See Annex VI, for interview guide).

5.4.2. Participants

Overall, a diverse group consisting of 9 refugee youths and 3 educators participated in the study. University of Manitoba IRB (Appendix E) approval was received before the start of the study, and all participants received and signed Consent to Participate forms. Participants were informed that participation in the study was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any point. Participants were also assigned pseudonyms to help ensure anonymity (see Appendix iii) for consent forms. While an attempt was made to recruit uniformly across ethnicity and gender, unfortunately, that became difficult; instead, I focused on recruiting anyone who fulfilled the inclusion criteria.

Table 3: participants' demographics

Pseudonym	**Age**	**sex**	**Country of origin**	**Time in refugee camps**	**arrived in WPG**	**Age at arrival**	**grade at arrival**	**Grade Placed in WPG**
Jamal *	21	M	Eritrea	14	**2014**	14	4	9
Dawit	21	M	Eritrea	13	**2014**	15	5	9
Esther	20	F	Ethiopia	2	**2012**	8	2	3
Tarik	18	M	Somalia	8	**2018**	14	5	7
Jacob	23	M	S. Sudan	4	**2015**	14	5	5
Sofia	19	F	Eritrea	5	**2016**	15	6	7

Hassan	19	M	Somalia	7	**2018**	15	6	9
Maria*	19	F	Somalia	6	**2014**	7	0	2
Hakim	22	M	Ethiopia	5	**2018**	17	6	10

* Born in a refugee camp

As seen in Table 3 above, I was able to interview nine youth participants who came from four different countries and ranged in age from 18 years to 23 years, 2 Eritreans, 2 Ethiopians, 3 Somalis, and 1 South Sudanese, among whom 3 are females and 6 males. Also, 3 educators, 2 teachers and 1 educational assistant (male) participated. (See Appendix (xiv)for a brief description of each of the 9 youth participants' biographies based on the data collected during interviews and field notes.

5.4.3. The interview

5.4.3.1. Interview Locations

When scheduling the interviews, it was important to find a location and environment that were both safe and comfortable for the participant. Since the initial proposal for an in-person interview with children was rejected by REB, the modality of the interviews was changed to a virtual setting with young adult participants. As such, all but one interview was conducted virtually via Zoom technology. The only interview conducted in person was with Jamal. Jamal requested to have the interview in person because he is not comfortable with Zoom technology. The interview took place at a location of his choosing, at his home, and we selected a quiet area at their backyard for the interview. All COVID screening questions were asked, and proper mouth cover and the standard distance between us were maintained. Jamal seemed to feel comfortable in the setting and did not seem to mind sharing his story in detail. Given the selection of the more secluded space, the conversation with Jamal was able to take place with little to no interruption.

The remaining eight youth participants who were recruited from two settlement organizations agreed to conduct their interviews via Zoom. One organization (The Hood Fams) provided extraordinary help to participants and me by creating a conducive environment for the interviews. A settlement worker who had helped in recruiting five of the participants ensured the availability of a computer and internet access at each participant's disposal and worked with participants to find times that worked with their schedules to conduct the interviews. Again, the settlement worker acted as an intermediary in this process, and all initial contacts with the participants were through him. Additionally, he arranged and presented the initial introduction between the youth and me, the researcher, and helped to reschedule interviews when scheduling conflicts arose. He also helped participants with interpretation when they asked for it. Interviews with the three educators were conducted in-person at the place of their choice, keeping all COVID safety protocols in place. These interviews were conducted in March and April of 2022, when the pandemic was considered less transmissible, but still applying the required protocol.

5.4.3.2. The Interview Process.

As discussed, all the interviews except one were conducted online. For this study, online interviews refer to in-depth interviews with participants conducted via Zoom technology. Participants were informed about the research through an information letter sent to them earlier through selected community organizations, and 12 participants (9 youth and 3 educators) who were interested in participating signed and submitted a consent form before the scheduled virtual interview. A Zoom meeting invitation was generated with a live link to the meeting, and this link, along with an invitation to participate in the meeting, was emailed to each study participant through their respective community organizations. Each participant then entered the online

interview on their specific scheduled date and time. I used the Interview Guide to collect information for the study (Appendix VIII).

The guide begins with thanking the participant for agreeing to participate in the interview and with instructions that will help the recording process. The interview was organized into three stages. In the first stage, for the purpose of establishing an understanding of the interviewees' background, I asked each participant for demographic information. In the second stage, questions about their pre-migration experience at their country of origin and trans-migration experience at refugee camps were asked. For example, they were asked to share their school experience and their relationship with teachers: "What was your student life in your country like? When and how did you come to Canada?" In the third stage, having reflected on their background and experience, respondents were asked to reflect on the meaning of their experience in Winnipeg schools. Typical questions were: "What grade were you assigned upon arrival? Can you tell me about how you felt on your first day of school? What was the difference between the two school systems?" While this was a basic outline for the interviews, it was not always possible to keep to this structure. There were times when some questions were answered briefly in one segment and elaborated in another segment.

At the beginning of each virtual interview, I put forth the purpose of the interview in a friendly manner and plain language. I established the fact that the interviewer-participant relationship should be perceived as "a team working together to complete a common task, much like two strangers collaborating to complete a jigsaw puzzle" (Harrison et al., 2011, p. 221). Participants were asked to review the signed consent, reconfirm their participation, and were asked if they would permit the conversation to be recorded. Three participants, who chose to have the presence of their community center worker during the interview, were also asked for

their consent, for which they all agreed. In two cases, the community center worker who speaks fluent Arabic and Tigrigna helped participants by interpreting the conversation in their native language whenever participants struggled to understand the nature of a question and/ or when they wanted to express their thoughts more fluently. Participants were given time to ask any additional questions, and then the purpose of the study was restated before the interview began. Interviews were semi-structured and were scheduled to last approximately 45-60 minutes. Each of the interviews began by using an interview protocol (Appendix F), but in each interview, additional questions emerged as the conversation progressed. The interviews were conversational in nature, and because of this, the actual interview times varied from 40 minutes to 70 minutes. All interviews took place between March and April 2022. No participants refused to participate after the interview was initiated, and no participants refused to answer any of the questions. There were two incidents where we lost connection due to internet disruptions during Zoom interviews, but reconnected within 5-12 minutes.

At the conclusion of each interview, participants were asked if they would like to receive a summarized copy of the study findings by email. Three participants agreed to this request, and two disclosed their interest in communicating with them through the community center worker's contact address. The remaining four participants declined the offer. All interviews were audio/video taped digitally, except one interview that was recorded with a battery-operated recorder. I made observation notes at each interview and later used them during transcriptions. All communications with participants, identified by code rather than actual names, were recorded in these notes with corresponding dates and the subject of the communication. Youth participants were paid $25 in cash after each interview. There was no honorarium provided for the educators.

5.4.3.3. Observation

Field notes taken during and after each interview, I included my observation of the physical appearance of the youth interviewed and my impressions of the openness and rapport established between the participants and me, the researcher. Observations related to the willingness of participants to answer questions, handling of interruptions and the general comfort level they felt throughout the interview were recorded. Written field notes proved to be helpful as supplemental data, often providing meaning and context to the taped interviews, since "the tape recorder misses the sights, smells, impressions, and extra remarks said before and after the interview…and helps the researcher…remain aware of how he or she has been influenced by the data" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 111). While the interviews, at times, provoked anxiety, stress and sadness, it was also a time participants demonstrated strength in sharing their painful stories without intimidation. In most of the interviews during this study, the participants appeared to be at ease with me once I introduced myself to them. This is because the participants knew not only about my refugee background but also belonging to the same region. It helped to create a good rapport between the participants and me, as they might have felt that they were talking to a fellow African refugee. They were not hesitant to talk about issues in Canadian schools, as many of them appeared to feel that I could help to make their voice heard by the school system.

It's important that I recognize that once a traumatic event has passed, most people can bounce back and move on with their lives. Participants were expected to fluctuate between moments of sadness and mourning, and moments of acceptance or even happiness.

During an interview, I felt comfortable with moments of silence to allow both the participant and I to reflect on issues being discussed. There were moments of silence, and emotional displays (sadness, anger, resentment, and survivor's guilt, nail biting and fidgeting). In each situation, I

just took deliberate pauses and asked participants if they needed to stop the interviews and continue later. At the end of each interview, I also offered counselling services, for which all participants declined and completed the interviews without any problem.

5.4.3.4. Ethical consideration

Given the nature of this study with the emphasis on refugee children, the ethical issues that needed my full consideration within this study - informed consent, confidentiality, reducing participant stress and harm, the right to withdraw, data usage and reducing power differentials between researcher and participant- had been addressed through my ethics approval application, and exercised throughout the course of the study with a high degree of professional integrity. Before every interview, each respondent was asked to read and sign a consent form. As an experienced interviewer who upholds the principle of confidentiality, I assigned each participant a pseudonym in place of their name and removed any information that would identify individual respondents. All respondents were informed that they had the right to withdraw from the process at any time without penalty. As a matter of course, each interview began by letting respondents know that they were not expected to disclose beyond their comfort level. The goal was to provide the respondents in the study with a safe space within which to discuss their educational experiences throughout their migration trajectory. To the best of my knowledge, I have attempted to make the participants in the interview feel as comfortable with me and with the process as possible. For ethical reasons, and because IPA studies are frequently concerned with significant existential issues, I intentionally monitored how the interview was affecting the participant. As discussed in the above sections, I was able to easily determine when the participants avoided talking about certain issues, started feeling awkward, or became very emotional. Although no significant emotional distress occurred that warranted counselling,

during the interviews, I considered all possible risks and developed an intervention plan (e.g., stop the interview and refer the person to a professional in counselling). The University of Manitoba granted ethics approval for this study, Protocol # P2020:075 (HS24319), on January 19, 2021.

5.5. Data organization and analysis

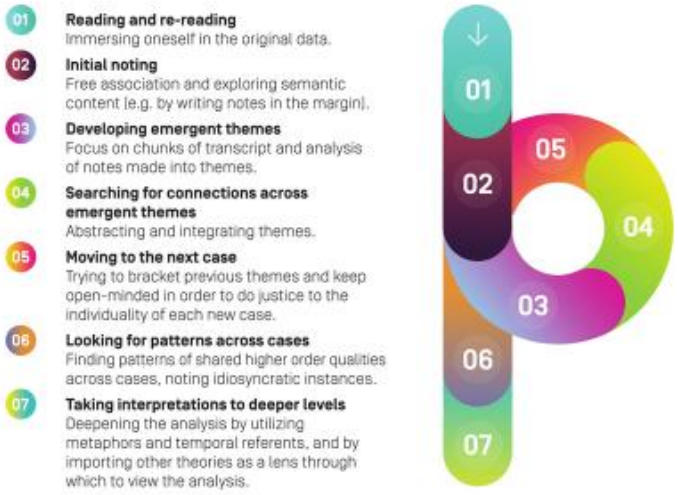
Data analysis in IPA is characterized by a set of common processes - moving from the particular to shared, and from descriptive to interpretive, that include multiple readings of transcripts, and coding that was used to identify emergent themes across cases (Smith et al., 2009). In this study, a commitment to an understanding of the participant's point of view and their personal meaning-making in particular contexts was considered in analyzing the collected data (Smith et al., 2009, p.79). Individual themes, as well as the relationships between themes, were named, defined, and written up in a way that brought together the thematic analysis and data extracts to describe how the research questions were answered (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

First and foremost, even before the analysis began, I took the following steps to keep checking my personal biases, if any. As I have disclosed earlier in chapter one, I was born and raised in Ethiopia, in the Horn of Africa, where conflict and migration are something I have personally experienced. It is also known that this study is focused on refugee children, and the participants are from the East African origin. Apparently, this qualifies me as an insider researcher. There is an argument about the possibility of an insider revealing too much sensitive information in his research because he knows the issue well (Smyth & Holian, 2008).

As such, I must ensure that the chances of my being biased by my own experiences of migration, coupled with my reading and knowledge about the region and my extensive work experience with refugee children in Canada, could have caused bias. For this reason, the

phenomenological reduction description and the search for essences were considered (Giorgi, 1997). This was done by being cognizant of existing personal biases and taking time to address the issue during any interview and analysis. Participants were interviewed individually, and each transcript was analyzed individually. I worked on bracketing findings and initial thoughts from previous interviews with other participants. While careful consideration was maintained not to fall into the trap of bias, I did not shy away from using my previous knowledge of the subject matter during interpretation to enrich the text: "…it is important to realize that bracketing does not mean that we are making the taken-for-granted world disappear (Smith et al., 2009, p. 14).In this methodology, bracketing was done in an attempt to consider each case on an individual basis and in an attempt to refrain from using the themes identified in earlier cases to shade the analysis of a new case (Smith et al., 2009).

After clearing my conscience of any potential biases and focusing primarily on internal self-awareness, I entered the data analysis process with a defined mission to describe and interpret participants' experience following the IPA data analysis approach (Smith et al., 2009).



The seven-steps of IPA data analysis

(Charlick, McKellar, Fielder, &Pincombe, 2015 adapted from Smith et al., 2009)

1. The first step I carried out in the data analysis phase was the process of "immersing oneself in the original data" by reading and re-reading each transcript (p. 82). Transcripts were read in minute detail, a minimum of three times for every transcript, and sometimes more, depending on the quality and nature of the interview. Data from interviews were transcribed by me, and each transcription was double-checked to enhance accuracy. Because analysis in IPA aims primarily to interpret the meaning of the content of the participant's account, it does not require a particularly detailed transcription of the prosodic aspects of the recordings. That is, it does not require a record of the exact length of pauses, or of all non-verbal utterance (p. 74). Accordingly, I discarded part of the transcripts that I found irrelevant to answer the research's main question. Arguably, it is pointless to transcribe information which will not be analyzed (O'Connell & Kowal, cited in Smith et al., 2009, p. 74). I have reviewed the detailed field notes, documented what was said (verbal and non-verbal) during the interview and added them into the transcript. On my field notes I tried to capture utterances, ideas, sentence fragments, phrases, laughs, hums, and silence. They were all included in the transcripts. I complemented this data with another type of data based on my reflections of the interaction. I wrote about my reactions and non-verbal observations I experienced shortly after each interview. This process provided an opportunity to question my assumptions about the content shared between the participant and me and take into account the context and non-verbal communication (p. 82).
2. Initial noting taken by "examining semantic content and language" of the transcript to identify anything of interest (p. 83). I kept noting anything of interest within the transcript as I continued reading and reading, and my familiarity with the transcript increased (p. 88). There were a couple of times I went back to the audio or video recordings to associate the

transcript with the way participants expressed their experience (feeling, facial, tone, gesture, etc.) while narrating that particular event. I noted down a descriptive core of comments while I stayed close to the participant's explicit meaning (p. 83). I explained this in more detail in the findings and discussions sections below.

3. Descriptive comments: In this stage, I analyzed the transcript to describe the context. Key objects and events in participants' experience were highlighted by descriptive assumptions, sound bites and emotional responses. This level of my initial notes was very much about taking things at face value and highlighting the objects which structured participants' thoughts and experiences (p. 84). Next, the text was re-read, and a line-by-line analysis was performed, homing in on particular words or phrases that appeared to stand out in the text.
4. "Analyzing exploratory comments" from the initial level of analysis to develop emergent themes within the case (p. 91). In looking for emergent themes, I performed line-by-line coding of transcripts, creating an exhaustive list of codes. Each code remained true to the respondent's words, and all codes were considered potentially theoretically relevant (p. 91). I then described and fleshed out the themes to make sense of the data and interpret the larger meanings. This final phase, known as "representing the data," involved putting the findings of the analysis into words in the final report.
5. Searching for connections across emergent themes by utilizing abstraction, polarization, contextualization, numeration, and function (pp. 96-98). In open coding, I explored how I could organize the data into themes and categories. I made lists of the lines that pertained to each theme and category, and subcategory. Quotes, field notes, information, and comments that pertained to the theme were inserted under corresponding headings. When new themes arose in the analysis of a new transcription, they were then added to the list. Data analysis

started with the process of making sense and making meaning through the participants' descriptions and my interpretation.

6. Moving to the next case to repeat the aforementioned process, and finally looking for patterns across cases.

Individual themes, as well as the relationships between themes, were named, defined, and written up in a way that brought together the thematic analysis and data extracts to describe how the research questions were answered (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis moves the analytic process to interpreting the significance of the patterns and their broader meanings and implications (Patton, 2002). All these phases were instrumental to deepening my understanding of the data as general themes and trends began to emerge. These initial themes were often supported in the later findings in the more formal coding process.

5.6 Chapter Summary

In summary, this chapter outlined the methods that were used to complete this study, the lived experiences of refugee children from war and conflict regions in their three migratory phases, with special emphasis on post-migration experience in Canadian schools. To address the research question, I implemented a phenomenological approach (IPA) using in-depth interviews. The semi-structured interviewing allowed me to understand the participants' perspectives on a range of their unique experiences. The in-depth interview facilitated meaningful conversations about their lived experiences. Considerations were taken to not being distracted and falling into the trap of bias as an insider researcher. While I did not reject my previous experience, I, however, employed the bracketing that Moustakas (1994) suggests - an attempt at setting aside presuppositions to be able to see the phenomenon from a new perspective. Bracketing is important for the researcher to prevent personal experience from influencing data analysis and, at

the same time, recognizing that it is exactly that personal stance that enriches the study (Creswell, 2007). Once I concluded data collection, I followed the steps of data analysis for an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, as outlined by Smith et al. (2009). Each of the interviews was transcribed to allow for the development of emergent themes from within each case, and ultimately across cases. Having utilized the interpretative analysis of the youth participants' unique lens on the topic, this study yielded rich, in-depth insight into the phenomenon, which will help to highlight and understand the experiences of refugee children's education in their migration trajectory. The next chapters convey the results of the study that were attained using the methods described in this chapter.

CHAPTER VI: Presentation of Findings

> *The people who come to us bring us their stories. They hope they tell them well enough so that we understand the truth of their lives. They hope we know how to interpret their stories correctly. We must remember that what we hear is their story (Bochner, 2001, p.132)*

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapters of this dissertation offered an introduction to the purpose of the study, background on the experiences surrounding refugee children's education throughout their migration trajectory, a review of the literature regarding refugee children and the methodological design utilized for this study, as well as a snapshot of participants' demographic profile. This chapter presents the findings that emerged from the data gathered from the semi-structured interviews conducted with refugee youth about their middle school experience as children and Winnipeg middle school educators, as well as the author's reflective field journals. It then outlined the findings, divided into four categories and 12 main themes.

As seen in their brief biography, each of the nine refugee youths who participated in this study is unique and different. While there are commonalities shared by participants, each participant's experience was specific to that participant. With that in mind, an overview of significant common themes emerging from the Interviews with youth participants at each level of their migration trajectory is presented here. These were identified after examining each participant's description of their experiences and applying an interpretive analysis to the transcripts of the interviews when appropriate. This interpretative analysis is presented in more detail in the discussion section of Chapter Seven. Each theme is introduced and summarized, supported by evidence provided through verbatim quotes from participants as identified by the pseudonyms. Quotes are signified either by indented, italicized text or by the use of quotation marks where they appear in the main text.

The findings are divided into four categories, each with several themes that have arisen as a result of the analysis, as follows:

1. Pre-migration - educational experiences in the country of origin
2. Trans-migration - educational experiences in neighbouring countries/ refugee camps
3. Post-migration - educational experiences in the host country/ Winnipeg, Canada
4. Being resilient - what kept participants moving through hard times.

For this dissertation, the period of pre-migration is referred to as the time that the participant spent in his or her country of origin. Trans-migration is the time spent fleeing war (to the neighboring country) and/ or the time spent living in a refugee camp before immigrating to Canada. Post-migration experiences are those that occurred in Canada, specifically in Winnipeg, Manitoba. The participant sample for this thesis comprised 9 refugee youth (three females and six males), two teachers and one educational assistant (male). Participants (youth) identified themselves as originally coming from Ethiopia (2), Eritrea (3), Somalia (3) and South Sudan (1). While the pre- and trans-migration experiences of the participants are equally important as their post-migration experience, more emphasis is given to the latter, post migration experience in Canada (Winnipeg) schools, in accordance with the main objective of this study - to shed light on the lived experiences of participants' middle school years in Canadian schools and attempt to identify the impact of their pre- and trans- migration experiences on their academic performances at the time they were attending middle school in Canada-.

While most of their stories presented here are crude but accurate, as they were narrated by participants, the report also included, when appropriate, my own understanding and interpretations. All participants' interviews began with a question asking them about their experiences in their respective country of origin, as refugees in the neighbouring countries before

coming to Canada and finally in resettling in Canada. However, please note, during the interview, participants at times talked about their experience in circles, similar to their cultural storytelling traditions. Matateyou (1997) pointed out that African storytellers repeat words, phrases, gestures and verses. The utilization of repetition techniques makes it easier to understand and recall the stories from memory. While the interview questions were structured in four main groups (pre-migration, trans-migration, post-migration, and resilience) and participants were asked to share their experiences at each stage in that order, sequentially, this was not entirely possible in some cases. Participants indeed answered the questions based on their level of understanding, English language proficiency, memory and traditional patterns of expression of ideas. As such, participants recorded talking about, for example, their experiences in their country of origin, mixing with their present-day experience and vice versa. To keep the flow of their story smooth and logical, during the analysis of the transcript, I took the liberty of moving parts of the transcripts from one category to another, to the most appropriate category, without altering their context and meaning.

I also made attempts to ensure every word that came from participants was received with the utmost care and empathy, considering that they came from a war-torn region, and endured multidimensional challenges and acknowledged that the only reason they are here, far from choice, is the pursuit of peace, happiness, and the right to education - everything they previously didn't have.

With that note, I invite the reader to listen to the voices of the voiceless, visualizing their difficult journey, uprooted from countries of origin, surviving the horror of refugee life and making it to Canada. I believe my attempt to capture the essence of their lived experience in conveying the significant features of their story achieved its purpose.

6.2. Pre-migration- educational experiences in country of origin

All participants took time and reflected on what life had been looked like in their respective countries of origin. In general, while describing their childhood memories, I noted a mixed emotion of sadness, smile, nostalgia, a sentimental yearning for the happiness of a former place and time. Once the interviews were transcribed and analyzed it became apparent the experiences of these nine youth participants could not possibly be generalized into a set of characteristics that would adequately describe the pre-migration experiences. As participants' unique stories in their respective countries of origin slightly differ from country to country and in some cases within each country, province and/or town (see country profile), there was no single participant's story that generalized the refugee experience. As such, only themes with similar experiences were clustered together and presented in this report. Three participants disclosed having no recollection of school experience in their country of origin because two were born in refugee camps and one was a mere toddler at the time of migration.

The following are the three theme summaries of participants' pre-migration experience:

6.2.1. Life was hard (poverty)**:** All participants shared being poor. Many have been deprived of necessities such as adequate food and clean wate**r**. Participants in this study have always placed family and relationships foremost. They placed respecting their families' wishes first instead of their individual interests. Consequently, they have missed years of school, to help their parents in household chores and income generation schemes and disrupted their normal development and growth as children, which severely compromised their futures.

6.2.2. Limited access to education: More restrictions and roadblocks to access education: School is far from home, teachers are strict, no time to study (help parents after school),

no role model to motivate students to study hard (Witnessing college graduates do odd jobs. **"**It is common to see graduates with college degrees working as labourers in the construction sector putting cobblestones in the city's sub-streets," as Jamal, one of the participants, shared.

6.2.3. Witnessing traumatic events**:** During the pre-migratory stage, most participants have experienced profound physical and emotional traumas from witnessing violence, in some cases even experiencing violence within their home countries.

We now discuss each theme in detail.

6.2.1. Life was hard in general-

In their respective countries of origin, youth participants from Ethiopia, Eritrea, South Sudan and Somalia shared experiencing difficult life situations for several reasons, mainly due to poverty and lack of peace and stability. Participants shared that either they and/or their family members suffered hardships that included lack of food, water, shelter and sustained physical injuries, infections, and diseases due to inadequate medical care. Participants were hesitant to openly share their private lives with strangers, including me, for various reasons, culture being one.

The following quote from Jacob illustrates both the initial tentativeness in answering the question as well as the seemingly matter-of-fact statement that his father was killed and buried in an illegal landmine while collecting coal. The interview with Jacob began when I asked him to tell me about his experiences in South Sudan

> *I don't know why you are asking me this…. You know…We were extremely poor. The whole world knows Sudan is a living hell…War and draught…. My father has to do anything to feed the family. He even did illegal things to survive.*

Jacob paused for a while, and when he was ready to speak again, his face showed sadness and anger. *"I don't want to talk about it. What is the point? My father did what any loving father has to do for his children. I am proud of him."* Jacob didn't want to go any further…. He paused. After I gave him time to calm down, Jacob told me that his father was killed in an accident while he was in a coal mine. "*He knew it was a dangerous job, but he had to feed the family……I wish he were alive and repay him…."*

Considering the insecurity, life and death situation in Ethiopia, and the brutal treatments in Yemen, where he first migrated, Hakim is grateful to be in Canada and considers himself one of the luckiest. Hakim was 13 years old when he fled Ethiopia with his older brother. He attended school until grade seven with frequent disruptions due to war and conflicts.

> *I am not sure if I would be alive by now if I were in Ethiopia. … Life is difficult over there. We have to work hard to meet our basic needs. My older brother dropped out of school and worked in the farm to help the family…. We were seven children in my family, same father and mother…. but my two older brothers were taken away by the rebels and there is no information about them. My parents are at their old age, and I wonder how they managed to be alive to this date. Everything is against them: no food, work, income support, clean water. Instead, there is war, fight, hunger … Having a full stomach and going to school is like winning a lottery…. (*He made a sarcastic laugh.)

Hakim hopes that his other three siblings are still with his parents, although he has not been in contact with them, so he does not know for sure.

Sara, another participant, shared how the existence of severe poverty significantly hindered her schooling.

> *My parents are so poor and cannot afford to buy us school supplies- I remember attending grades 4 and 5, sharing a pen with my younger brother. We both attended the same school but at different shifts. He attended the morning shift, and he used the only writing pen we shared until he finished his class at noon. I met him at a certain place outside of the school, got the pen back from him and went for my afternoon classes. We did this routine regularly for months. One day, my brother waited for me at our regular meeting spot a bit early, crying. He told me, in fear, that he lost our [only] pen. I was in shock and started crying. My brother, who was so broken, went home, and I stood there alone for a while, not knowing what to do. I then went directly to my classroom teacher*

> *and couldn't stop crying. The teacher, who was puzzled by my emotion, asked me what had happened. "Is your family okay? Did someone hurt you…?" When I told him what had happened, he was so touched and gave me a new BIC pen. I couldn't thank him enough*. (At that time, a writing pen of the cheapest quality cost one Ethiopian birr, which is about ten Canadian cents.)

Esther, another participant, corroborated Sara's experience about the prevalence of poverty in the region vis-à-vis her experience with the lack of medical care in her village.

> *We live outside the city in remote areas. There is one health center about 50 miles distance, and it barely has medicine. We did not go to the center for minor injuries…like wounds, we get used to it. We just cover it with a plant leaf or cloths, and we get better, no medicine, doctor, nurse…local elders are our healers. This is luxury compared with the neighbouring kids suffering from malaria. It was the kind of village where everyone knew everyone. Any parent in the village is responsible for all the children in the village for caring and disciplining. I often get a spank from my friend's father, and there is no complaints. Oftentimes, there is not enough food at home, and I need to go to the farm to help my father. Sometimes, I take the task of taking the animals to the field where there is fresh grass and water. I went for miles to find a good one… we always exchange roles with my brothers and the neighbourhood children – most of us did not go to school. We ate once a day. My mother demanded that all of us be at home for the evening meal together. We ate from one big plate together, whatever was there….*

Dawit remembered that he did not have any education until he was ten years old.

> *Originally, I am from Eritrea- I was born in Eritrea, and then I moved to Sudan as a child. My mother is a single mother. We lost our father long ago. Two of my siblings died during the ongoing war between the two countries [Ethiopia and Eritrea]. There was no welfare in Sudan. My mother had to sell fried foods on the streets, carrying one child on her back and holding the two of us with her hands, left and right… she suffered a lot … the heat, dust and police. Sometimes she didn't sell enough food to bring money home to support us.*

While in Eritrea, Sofia's parents were ordinary village people with very low income. Her mother worked in a home-based business of producing local beer, and her father was a fisherman.

> *My mother worked a home-based business of producing local beer, and my father was a fisherman. It was very hard to raise a big family with such small money. Life was so hard, and my father left Eritrea and attempted to go to Italy via Egypt, but he was arrested in Egypt. Those years were very difficult for us. My mother paid a price to make us survive …. Always …harassed by local authorities for our father's action…because he left the country illegally, he is "criminal" for them… Imagine how difficult it was to my mother to feed us without any support….*

6.2.2. Limited access to schools and Disruptions

Participants shared challenges like under-resourced schools, unprepared teachers, and political instability that interrupted their learning.

Jacob remembered his precarious school life in his country:

> *I was born in Ethiopia. My parents are South Sudanese. The last grade I attended in Ethiopia was grade 5. I was living in a remote village, and going to school was difficult. -- there are no schools in my village-, and I must travel hours, you know, to the next town, to attend school- and usually it takes a couple of hours by foot to get there- it is like a trip. It was difficult to go to school - after finishing grade six, I had to go to another school, which is very far. My marks are not that great because I missed many classes due to the distance and staying at home helping my parents. I thank my family and God; at least I was able to attend school .... I learn how to write and read, with some help. The bad thing about it is that there are not many schools and good teachers.*

Jacob compared the experience with his middle school in Winnipeg. He continued…

> *…… the school is different when compared to this one…. The building here is big, and more resources and nice teachers…The schools. looks similar during the day…, but when school ended and the bell rang, the place became empty … There was no …like library, resource where students go and get help whenever they need anything… no library, gymnasium, study group… so there was none of those things … I just ran home. The school have nothing but a blackboard, broken desks and teachers who are not motivated … The teacher only talks and writes on the blackboard; he sometimes asks questions when he wants but doesn't answer students' questions. … we were about 50 students in my class... I never get my homework marked….. ya, there were also a lot of restrictions…. There are a lot of rules… to follow… one of those rule was, If you come late to school you got punishment--- The punishment usually …… they have to beat you up…they have to whip you … that is one of the bad things happening, beating up, especially as a kid that can give you a lot of flashbacks…..traumatized…right…?*

Esther describes how being a female and poor hindered her opportunity to go to school.

> *Although my mother decided to send me to school in my early years, I was unable to do so because of poverty and a cultural rule that boys should have priority over girls when it comes to school. I was so young at the time, but … I needed to do house chores while my two brothers went to elementary school- Because I am a girl, I should stay home and help my parents with housework.*

Sofia, on the other hand, described having a relatively good opportunity for education at her hometown. She believes her basic education in Eritrea helped her as a foundation to catch up with the Winnipeg school system without much difficulty.

. *In Eritrea, I have learned all subjects in primary school in my language, and I have also learned English lessons starting from the first grade...I was good at Math and science, and my teachers encouraged me to study hard and become an engineer. I could have done better had it not been for the war between Eritrea and Ethiopia. I must join the national service training camp and miss a lot of learning. (Sofia)*

Tarik, another participant, has no formal education in Somalia. He disclosed that he was homeschooled because there was no readily available school in his town.

I didn't go to any formal school. I was homeschooled. I learned how to recite the Quran in Arabic- My grandfather taught me and my brothers how to read and memorize the Holy Quran in the Arabic language.

Hassan, too, has no formal education in Somalia. He disclosed that he went to *Madrasa*- traditional Islamic teaching- basic literacy education in his mother tongue.

I did not complete grade 2 in Somalia. It was always war and terror. Fighters regularly come to school and take older children…. It is the same every day… run, hide, and live in fear. At school, I always heard the gun fires…. and ran away home. The last thing I remember of Somalia, before we left, was when my mother came to the school in a rush and took me to our grandparents. The roads were full of dead bodies. I was shocked …I could not stop crying. To calm me down my grandfather told me the killers are bad people- Those who are killed by the enemy will go to Jannah. -Which means Heaven in the Arabic language.

6.2.3 Witnessing traumatic events.

Many of the participants have experienced trauma related to war, relocation and resettlement stressors that affected their mental and physical health at the time of the episode as well as long after the events have occurred. These traumatic events occurred while participants were in their country of origin, during displacement from their country of origin, and in the resettlement process here in Canada. While I presented here the traumatic experiences of participants that had occurred in their respective countries of origin, I would also like to note the effects of these

adverse childhood traumas, further exacerbated and compounded with additional stressors throughout their migration trajectory (I.e., in refugee camps and resettlement).

In their respective country of origin, participants shared having experienced traumatic events and hardships, including violence (as witnesses, and/or victims), terror, internal displacement and loss of loved ones.

Esther had seen a lot of atrocities that occurred in her neighbourhood and close to home. She recalled the time when her father was killed when she was only five years old.

> *When I was a little child, I remembered my dad would leave us for several months at a time and come back safely. When he stayed longer than expected, adult family members would look for him to make sure he was still alive. You never know what could happen in that country… One day, he didn't make it home. He was killed by militants, and they brought his body to our home. It is still clear in my memory when my mom took me to the funeral. I was four, maybe five years old, and struggling to believe my father is gone forever. I missed my father at an early age…. I am sad.*

Tarik, just 12 years old, was forced to run from his home country with his family due to the social unrest in Somalia. Tarik's father was always on the militants' radar. Tarik remembered.

> *One Friday evening, Al-Shabaab came to the village and searched door to door for boys to take them to fight. I know it was Friday because we all came back from the Mosque doing our prayers…There was a huge bang on our door, and my father opened the door. They asked him to bring out the older boys; he said they were not here. Their leader was mad and slapped my father on his face and started looking all over the house. My mother was crying and begged them to leave us alone. When they didn't find anything, they cursed, and the leader shot my father, destroyed everything in the house and left. My brother and I listened to everything from our hiding place with fear. That night, no one slept. We cried and mourned. It was not easy to accept that. My father was the source of income and protector of the family. Weeks after his death, the rest of the family decided to escape the village.*

Tarik fled Somalia with his mother, siblings, and maternal uncle. He indicated that when they were fleeing Somalia, they were shot at while in the smuggler's car. After a very dangerous escape journey, they ended up in a Kenyan border town. Sadly, his mother was hospitalized for

anemia as she was pregnant with her seventh child. I can see how deeply sad and angry Tarik was when he retells his account of the experience on that horrible day.

> *There are times when I wake up in the middle of the night, shivering and sweating. Even here [Winnipeg], where I cannot hear gunshots, I do not get good sleep…. nightmares, and I am late for school.*

Hakim, another participant, became emotional when he began discussing his family and the situation in Somalia, which is consistent with other participants' reactions before him. After taking a break to calm him, Hakim continued to narrate his experience straightforwardly.

> *My father lived in a village approximately 80 kilometres from a port city in the southern part of Somalia. My father supported the family by transporting goods from the village to the town. During one of his trips, he was threatened by Al-Shabaab. He was accused of providing information to the government. They would kill the entire family if he did not stop working that route,"* Hakim continued. *"My father told the family what had happened and quit the trip for a while. After two weeks of staying at home, he resumed his transportation business as he had no other source of income. I was staying with our grandmother to help her with the cattle. This is something my brothers often did. The following day, when I returned to our home, I found that Al-Shabaab had attacked the family and killed my father and taken two of my older brothers. (*Hakim and some of his immediate family escaped; however, he has had no means of communicating with them since the incident.)

Halfway through the interview, Hakim felt comfortable enough to start sharing memories of different situations and family members who are back in Somalia. This is a list of some of the traumatic events he disclosed and their impact on him:

> *I saw my cousin get shot in the head, and I saw a bunch of dead bodies outside a mosque. Couldn't believe how one person is so cruel to another. I saw a doctor refusing to help a dying man until the family paid him. (*Hakim paused, looking at the ceiling.) *I feel in my heart that my brothers are dead, and I did not know what happened to my sisters... (*He showed a sad face. He can't talk about his siblings without holding back tears.) *I haven't heard from my brothers since I came to Winnipeg… Welcome Place [*a local organization that assists refugees] *helped me to contact the Red Cross and Red Crescent to look them up in missing persons list… No news yet.*

He stated that he cries to sleep every night. "*I have seen a male friend drown to his death while begging to survive,"* so now Hakim refuses to go swimming and cannot have his head or face immersed in water or in the shower.

For several years, violence kept Jacob and his siblings from living a normal life. They couldn't go to school or play outside due to the chaos created by militant groups. The militants' brutal, at times sudden attacks on schools and other civilians' buildings made it too risky for Jacob to attend school. Jacob, then a 10-year-old from a small village in South Sudan, fled to Ethiopia without his parents following a group of caravans when fighting broke out in his village in South Sudan. It was a market day, and he was out to sell a couple of live chickens and dozens of eggs when gunfire erupted in the market.

> *I was confused and scared, stumbled through the crowd and ran away with other people …. I didn't know where they were going, but I followed them…. umm … I didn't know where I ran to. I just followed the people who are also running…* (He finally found himself with a group of people, some he knew, who were headed towards the border.) *I followed them. After several days difficult journey on foot and animals back, hiding from the army, helped by smugglers, we reached the border and surrendered to the Ethiopian authorities*.

A couple of months later, all his family members except his father joined him in one of the refugee camps in Ethiopia. "*Those months,*" Jacob remembered

> *Being alone without my mother and siblings was the scariest time of my entire life. I missed my mother dearly. I was always scared. When I went to bed, I always wondered if I would wake up the next morning to find out something had happened to my mother.*

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Sofia's father left his country of origin, Eritrea, and attempted to go to Israel via Egypt, but he was arrested in Egypt and put in a prison camp. While in a prison camp, he met a young Eritrean woman and got involved in a relationship. This woman helped Sofia's father immigrate to Canada in 2006. Once in Canada, Sofia's father told the mother of his five children in Eritrea to go to Sudan with all the children, including Sofia.

> *We had to take a long, risky journey to survive. Following my father's advice, we left Eritrea and walked to Sudan, hoping to immigrate to Canada later. We walked through the mountains and the desert – a dangerous place…. My foot was dry and hurt…. There was no solid plan about how we were travelling, just going with our luck. We had a lot of fears, caught or killed by the military … walking for more than seven days without enough food and water, and we didn't know what was going to happen to us. We were told some kidnappers would sell us to traffickers, or Eritrean agents who would drag us back to Eritrea to be imprisoned, tortured or killed…. You know… You're putting yourself at risk, but at that time, we are just thinking about how to escape. My mother was sick, and we had to pay more to the smugglers to put her on a horse's back… …. It is a nightmare… when I think about it, my head spins, and I want to vomit….*

We stopped the interview till she once again recollected herself.

Hassan shared that he and his family had fled their home in 2012, after Al-Shabab had threatened to take the boys as part of a forced recruitment campaign, as they were over the age of 14.

I was a school-age child, 12 years old when I left Somalia, but I didn't go to school at all. Attending school has been very difficult for me and especially for my sisters as a result.

His father was killed by the militants in his home because he protected his children from joining the militants. Engulfed with fear and unrest, the rest of Hassan's family had to flee to the neighbouring country, Kenya, when Hassan was eight years old. Little is known about Hassan's schooling while living in Somalia, though Hassan vaguely remembered that he rarely attended school until he began living in a refugee camp in Kenya. The area around his village has been under the control of armed groups opposed to education until recently. Hakim is one of the many Ethiopian children who had to flee their homes when the violence inside the Northern part of Ethiopia was at its peak. Hakim's description of his life in Ethiopia and the boat trip he took to escape to Yemen was difficult, and it sets the context for the fear and trauma he experienced. Hakim shared that he and his older brother left his village in Ethiopia and went to the border city with a group of people, mostly young adults, to meet with smugglers. After paying ten thousand birr (equivalent to 400 CND) per person, Hakim and his brother, amongst others, were put in a

boat and sailed to Yemen, where they were to remain and the family to follow. Hakim remembered:

> *The boat, packed with mostly Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali migrants, reached at Yemen's al-Makha port after struggling with strong winds, rough waves, and security checks. It was a life and death situation. Everyone on the boat prayed to their God."* Hakim added, *"We were in the hands of merciless smugglers who were ready to dump us in the Red Sea if something went wrong. One of them told us that the boat before us never reached the Yemeni shore. The boat overturned off the coast and all the passengers died. I always think, I could have died on that trip……*

6.3. Trans-migration - educational experiences in another country/ refugee camps

Then, this subsection explores the migration and the relocation of the children from their country of origin to the neighbouring countries and how they experienced school life in refugee camps and while living in cities as urban refugees. Many children and parents from conflict regions begin the risky and challenging journeys of fleeing their countries, aiming to immigrate to safety, passing through neighbouring countries. However, many did not make it, as some were cheated by smugglers, caught by border security, killed in the harsh weather and sea storm, exposed to mosquito bites, and separated from their families. Only those who are lucky enough to be able to cross the border and seek asylum in the neighbouring countries become refugees.

Most of the challenges expressed by participants in their pre-migration experience are also repeated [here] in their trans-migration experiences. Because participants for this study are from the East African region, it is understandable to anticipate that their migration destinations would be within the same region. These countries (Ethiopia, Kenya, and Sudan) that granted asylum to participants have similar socio-economic status and repressive administration to participants' countries of origin. According to UNCHR (2022), in recent decades, armed conflict and natural disasters have led to the massive displacement of various population groups both within and between the countries of the Horn of Africa. Despite highly diverse social, cultural, economic,

and ecological characteristics, the countries of the Horn are closely related - not only by their geography, but also by their history and demography. While the experience participants had in countries of asylum (i.e., refugee camps) is almost similar to the experience they endured at their country of origin, in this section, I meticulously selected three main themes that I believe would adequately represent their refugee experience in the neighbouring countries.

6.3.1. Lack of necessities for Life

6.3.2. Lack of proper education/poor school infrastructure, and shortage of teachers

6.3.3. Traumatic events that included Family separation and Fear and worry

6.3.1 Lack of necessities for Life:

Participants reported that they had a very difficult life in refugee camps before arriving in Canada. The stories they shared suggest that children living in these camps struggled to receive the necessities of life. Although refugee camps are established to accommodate, protect, and assist those fleeing from violent conflict and persecution, life often remains difficult in camps. The participants shared limited access to food, clean water, financial support, clothes, shelter, and medical assistance.

> *I have experienced many sufferings in the Sudan refugee camps. I know, I should be grateful to UNCHR for providing us with a canvas shelter and a little food. At least I am alive and able to come to Canada…. Right? Everything was difficult in the camp. There was no clean water and no cleaning supplies. Hygiene is a privilege… Because of this, we get sick …. Living in the camp …. Diseases easily spread through the entire camp. My younger siblings were seriously sick many times. I am embarrassed to talk about it …umm… (S*he stopped talking for a minute, and sigh and said) *I was reusing my ……. sanitation pad multiple times.* (Sofia)

In Kenya, at a refugee camp, Mohammed and his family stayed for two years, just focusing on their day-to-day basic needs, paying no attention to school but anxiously waiting their turn to migrate to their final destination, often to one of the Western countries.

> *School was not a priority for us …I simply went to school for a day or two and stayed home and helped my mother for the rest of the week… brought money home…doing any kind of job…. selling Khat [*local plant chewed for stimulant and euphoric effects*]. I also rent videos from the city and show refugees in the camp for a few shillings. ….. I was not serious about school, nor was my family. Our immediate need was to do whatever job we could get and to eat and survive. UNCHR regularly posted on a notice board in the camp…. Names of lucky refugees who get sponsors in Europe, USA, Canada …, it is like a game… we run to the board with fear and hope ….”*

Maria's parents were known as urban refugees in Yemen and lived in Sana.

> *Life in Yemen is tough- In addition to the dangers posed by conflict amongst tribal warlords, we are also faced with increased hardship to feed ourselves. There was not enough food, and my parents were struggling to cover basic needs. My father worked as a labourer, washing cars, and earned a very low wage- sometimes he came home empty-handed. (*Maria paused, struggling with tears…) *My mother was employed as a domestic servant in a Yemeni's household. She was forced to leave us unattended when she goes to work. I was the youngest, and my older siblings and the neighbours looked after me when my mother is at work.*

She further said that there was no fully functioning school available for the Somali children in Yemen. Even though there are public schools in Sana, Maria's family was unable to pay for uniforms, books, transport and food. Maria also said that Somali students increasingly faced harassment and racially based intimidation by the local authorities. As such, she lost any hope of ever getting an education and stayed at home and helping her mother with small household chores, until she got a break in 2014. She and her family were granted permanent residency in Canada.

Hassan's family had to flee to the neighbouring country, Kenya, when Hassan was eight years old. Hassan vaguely remembered that he rarely attended school in Somalia until he began living in a refugee camp in Kenya. Life in the refugee camp was not something Hassan was comfortable talking about.

> *My mother had to look after us [children] without our father's presence. The food we get from the camp is small is not enough to feed the whole family. Sometimes I only eat once a day… or eat maize sold on the streets…. My mother must go out and find work and*

> *bring money…. and police in Kenya are brutal…. if you don't give them money. She had no money to feed us, let alone to pay bribes and send us to school. She gets arrested many times and pays bribes to the police to get released. We live with fear…I learn a few English words …, here and there… (*Hassan smiled sarcastically- Indicating a feeling of disdain rather than achievement.)

Based on participants' stories, there are two types of living conditions for refugees. For instance, among participants, Sara and Jamal lived in refugee camps, while Hassan and Hakim lived in the city outside of the camps, and participants like Esther have experienced both. Once registered by the UNCHR as a refugee, those who can afford to rent a home in towns choose to escape the relatively chaotic life of camps. However, they need to have some sort of income to afford the expensive life outside refugee camps. Kenya's 2014 law made it a criminal offence for refugees to reside outside of the camps without official permission. This law puts refugees in a vulnerable position as they are subjected to unfair treatment by local police.

Esther fled her hometown in Ethiopia and went to the border city, Moyale, and stayed there for 2 years before being smuggled into Kenya and registered at a UNCHR refugee camp, Kakuma.

> *Initially, we were in a camp for about seven months. But life was hard, and the living conditions were so miserable. We struggled for some time. Later, my cousins who are in Europe sent us money and supported us in getting out of the camp. We then decided to leave the camp and rent a cheaper house in the city. Our cousins continued to regularly send us money that helped us survive the refugee camp life…. But there are other problems in cities…. crime, robbery…and police harassment.*

Participants who lived in cities shared that they faced an array of barriers to housing and services, discrimination, and other threats to their well-being.

> *Rent is expensive…They ask us to pay two, three times more than the Kenyan. They divided the living room into many smaller rooms and rent …. Didn't fix it on time… if police find you in cities, you are in big trouble…they will arrest you, or you have to pay them lots of money….* (Hassan)

Participants and their parents, and for that matter, the entire refugee population, knew that Kenya or Sudan is not their destination, and their lives were in limbo. They do not really feel settled.

They are always ready to pack their small worldly possessions in one bag and fly wherever life takes them. These living arrangements in cities, while being a refugee, have a significant impact on refugees' access to services. Participants overwhelmingly agreed that it would be impossible to live in cities unless they had relatives or friends who sent them money from abroad. For instance, Hakim and his brother stayed in Yemen, working odd jobs and supported by family members in Sweden, who sent them money, until the conflict in Yemen forced them to seek safety elsewhere. Hakim had lived in Yemen for almost two years, and according to his account, was unable to access refugee protection there. Finally, with the assistance of his relative in Sweden, he moved to Nairobi, Kenya, at the age of 15 and immigrated to Canada in 2018.

> *The two years I stayed in Kenya took away my childhood …. I was working in a store for a beer vendor …. An Indian businessman. He paid me under the table …. I load and unload beer stacks. The police knew my paydays, and I must give them some money…, otherwise, they put me in jail… it is not allowed to work without a permit…. My brother and I always pray…to get out of Kenya safe…* (Hakim)

> *The school in the camp is hot and humid…. Early in the morning, the temperature is already high. The air is full of dust, and the shouts and laughter of children in the classrooms drives you crazy…. Then you have to wake up early and wait for hours to obtain water from the well…. the line up is … long…* (Jamal)

Participants, while living in neighbouring countries as refugees, were school-age children who should be in school, but life's challenges for fulfilling necessities forced them to take on adult tasks and responsibilities that could negatively affect their healthy growth and development. Participants' experience demonstrates that life as a refugee-both in and out of camps-significantly affects their education, among other things. While learning in volatile environments, with empty stomachs, poor infrastructure, and lack of support was challenging, the children's dedication and bravery for education is clearly illustrated in the participants' narratives.

6.3.2 Limited access to education

This subcategory included having no formal education and participants' education being interrupted before resettlement in Canada. Most of the participants had limited access to education and missed school years, and in some cases, attended formal school for the first time when they resettled in Canada. Below are some of the examples shared by the participants with respect to their school experiences as refugees. Although all the participants expressed a passion for education, they reported having limited or no formal school experiences in the refugee camps before arriving in Canada. One participant, Jamal, shared,

> *I was in school from grade 1 to 4 in a refugee camp, and I was in grade 4 when I came to Winnipeg. In Sudan, I have learned the same subjects but at different levels…. English, Math, History…., what else (Pause)… Arabic….and Tigrigna …. The class is full of students … we fight to get a seat… You must be there very early to get a seat…. We sit 5 students in one bench…. The noise is huge…..* (Jamal put his two hands on both ears to demonstrate how loud the voices were.) *I didn't know that much… I didn't learn well in the camp…. English is still difficult for me…, when I first came to Canada, I only counted to ten…. I am getting better…. I guess…*

Dawit remembered that he did not have any education until he was six years old. Even then, access to quality education in Darfur's refugee camp was a challenge. Despite his enrollment, the school in the Darfur refugee camp, where Dawit attended, had several challenges, including overcrowding and a shortage of trained teachers.

> *There were about one hundred students in one room, and the teacher was unable to even correct our papers. He simply wrote a question on the blackboard and spent the whole day disciplining us.*

The elementary school Sara attended was a one–room building with broken chairs and desks. Students sit on either side of it to balance its stability. There were no books, only a blackboard that the teacher used infrequently.

> *Most of the school day, we spent playing outside on a wooden swing set,"* Sara recalled. *"We didn't learn anything. It is a very old building, full of dust, cracks and in poor condition. One day, the building collapsed, and we were out of school for months. I was in fourth grade when we transferred to a new building with restrooms inside, and I was*

> *happy by that, but it was not comfortable for girls. In the new school, many students were not reading. But I can read. I somehow improved my reading skills over the years, but …*

Sara paused… and when she continued her story, she disclosed how her education faced a new obstacle. Rather than having Sara attend classes when she was in middle school, her mother insisted that Sofia stay home to take care of her siblings. At the time, she did not believe her mother valued education.

> *My mother's priority was to make sure we were safe and fed regularly. I was more needed to help bring income and support the family to survive than to go to school (Sofia).*

Other participants who experienced going to school in the refugee camps reported that hitting was used as a form of discipline in the school: Mohammed appeared angry when he explained the harsh punishment he received from a frustrated teacher in the refugee camp school.

> *I thought I was back in Somalia, where teachers enjoyed beating students. It is kind of the same with my country …. Asking questions makes the teacher angry…one day, when I asked the teacher to help me read a sentence on the blackboard… because I couldn't read what is on the blackboard…. The teacher was angry and threw a duster at me… the dust from the chalk hurt my eyes, and I couldn't go to school for many days…I didn't like the school in the refugee camp.*

6.3.3. Experiencing trauma

During displacement, refugee children often face many of the same types of traumatic events or hardships that they faced in their country of origin, as well as new experiences such as living in refugee camps, separation from family, uncertainty about the future, and harassment by local authorities, among others. These relocation stressors, along with additional resettlement stressors in host countries, affect participants in many ways that include their learning. Each refugee camp has its unique challenges, but all share the problem of overcrowding, chaos and uncertainty. Esther disclosed how life in refugee camps was traumatic and forced her to be dependent on her siblings living abroad. Esther has three brothers and a sister in Europe who immigrated years ago

and settled in Sweden and Norway. When life in the camp became unbearable due to crime and robbery, she reached out to one of her brothers in Sweden. They were her support system who sent her money:

> *Boys in the camp try to harass you, trying to be friends with you [sexually] without your interest. We need to move out of the camp …otherwise I will get hurt... so I let my brother in Sweden know about it … My brother regularly sends us money from Sweden…. I don't know what kind of work he does, but I know he is not rich. He may skip lunch or dinner to save money to send to us. In our culture… family is always first.*

Dawit is another participant who retold his experience:

> *There was always a fight in the camp…. group fight… Serious fight… with knives and metal objects... I, too, have been involved in some of the fights... I have seen one kid from Congo brutally beaten by the other group and lost his front teeth… the police did nothing about it… No one is safe.*

Jamal also witnessed fights in the camp….

> *I remember that fighting started in the camp. There was a fight between two groups … South Sudanese … that messed up the camp … they used knives and stones…and I was scared … I had sleepless nights……..We are worried about our future- we were told to get ready to relocate to Canada. But the waiting was long- Hope and fear. We don't know where we go… in Canada... We only know we are not staying in the refugee camp… but when? We do not see our future clearly.*

Considering the existence of such challenges in refugee camps, it is no wonder that Dawit immigrated to Canada with only a few years of schooling before he had a chance to develop basic literacy. When they flee, participants and their families lose everything that makes up their world and keeps them rooted and connected. While parents take the heavy burden of the planning and execution of escaping the danger and ensuring their children's safety in refugee camps, youth participants who were children at the time of immigration were particularly vulnerable because they lacked cognitive functioning to understand what was going on. Traumatic events of several participants caused psychological, behavioural, and emotional problems such as depression, anxiety, strong reaction to noise, intense fears and nightmares,

excessive crying, and disobeying teachers and parents, to name a few. Hassan's boat trip experience is an example of how the journey itself can cause trauma and affect his well-being, not just the school. Hassan shared that he and his entourage faced death when crossing the Mediterranean Sea on overcrowded boats, hoping to reach Europe. Because the asylum-seeking process in Yemen goes on for years, he decided to take the traumatic journey that haunts him today.

> *I have nightmares that wake me up during the night …… swimming in a storm and the boat moves from side to side…. I can't forget that journey and what I felt when it happened… There are days when I don't have a good night's sleep. Be grumpy… maybe three- or four-hours sleep …… I have seen a counsellor, but I can't have a good night's sleep… You know what I mean….*

Mohammed, another participant, said…

> *The camp is just a place of survival, looks like a prison… we cannot plan our future. I was discouraged by the lack of good schools… clean water, enough food…. Also, I am still disturbed to go in and out of the downtown library [here in Winnipeg] …. The metal dictator scares me… it reminds me of the Kenyan police checkpoints. They stop you and arrest you when they find you outside the camp….*

As seen in the participants' transcripts, experiencing traumatic events in refugee camps was inevitable. Most of them have experienced it, and the trauma can affect them on an individual, school, and family level. However, just because a student is a refugee, it does not mean he or she has experienced trauma or will exhibit symptoms related to trauma. As seen in the next sub-section, some participants adjusted very well to a new school and picked up language and cultural norms in the school setting with relative ease. In recent years, the field of refugee research has moved from an individual trauma-focused approach to broader ecological frameworks considering risk and resilience factors at many levels, related to the different phases of displacement -pre-migration, transit and resettlement -(WHO, 2022). Individual level factors (age, gender or time since displacement,) family level factors (family functioning, household

economy or parental education), local community factors (camps, institutions, rural or urban environment), social support, school environment and peer relationships, as well as wider societal factors such as acceptance, discrimination and cultural differences are important to determine a refugee child's mental wellness (WHO, 2022, p. 10).

6.4. Post-migration - educational experiences in the host country in Winnipeg, Canada

"Alice: Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?
The Cheshire cat: That depends a good deal on where you want to get to.
Alice: I don't care where
The Cheshire cat: Then it doesn't matter much which way you go.
Alice: ...So long as I get somewhere.
The Cheshire Cat: Oh, you're sure to do that, if only you walk long enough.
— Lewis Carroll, Alice in Wonderland

This section outlined participants' educational experience after they immigrated to Winnipeg, Canada. In the context of their experiences, challenges they encountered, strengths they discovered and opportunities they found in Canada are presented as narrated by participants. This section also includes perspectives from three Canadian middle school teachers who have taught and continue to teach refugee children in Winnipeg, Manitoba. The study findings captured the views and experiences of the teachers who reflected on their classroom interactions with refugee students, the challenges, opportunities, and the ways the school system supported refugee students, or the lack thereof, in the learning process. In doing so, I illustrated teachers' perspectives on the students' experience, pointing out the convergence and divergence of narratives. While there are more similarities, the findings suggested the presence of perceived and factual factors, which produced different narratives of similar experiences, between student participants and their teachers.

In general, youth participants shared that immigrating to Canada offered them new and better opportunities, including integrating into a greater school system, as well as facing

adversities and resettlement stressors. They appreciated the welcoming gesture of many Canadians, the support they received from the community, including teachers and the availability of quality education. However, many participants shared experiencing severe stresses related to their family's adaptation and acculturation, difficulties with learning in a different language and integrating newer concepts, and experiences of social exclusion and discrimination. Despite facing a new set of challenges, most participants shared that they have not lost their faith yet to enjoy the fruits of their parents' sacrifice in bringing them to their new homeland (Canada) - the promised land of opportunities, as one of the participants described it. The following themes were identified by the youth participants and educators as refugee children's resettlement challenges in Winnipeg, Canada.

1. Educational Challenges - language proficiency, being placed in an age-aligned grade level and a newer school system
2. Family resettlement experience – Poverty, feelings of frustration
3. Discrimination – Micro-aggressions, gender, religion and race-based discrimination
4. Socio-cultural experiences - Culture shock, appeasement and feelings of not being understood, limited relations with mainstream students, and clashes with Aboriginal youth.
5. Traumatic experience - re-traumatization,

Below, we discuss each category in detail.

6.4.1. Educational challenges

The school emerged as one of the most important systems for participants as both a protective factor and a source of stressors. While some reported having a smooth transition, unfortunately, for many of these participants, their eagerness for learning was hindered by

numerous personal and systemic challenges. As was revealed in their narratives, participants discussed several challenges and obstacles they faced when attending middle school, language being primary.

6.4.1.1 Language proficiency

The most mentioned challenge, youth participants and their respective teachers alike mentioned, was, by far, English language difficulties. It should be noted that participants in this study are high school students and graduates at the time of the interview, who retroactively reflected on their middle school experience in Winnipeg. While the focus of the interview was about their middle school experience, participants at times talked about their English language challenges, in both middle and high schools as well. In some cases, there was no defined line between the end of their middle school and the beginning of their high school experiences when it came to language proficiency. Even after five years of resettlement and schooling in Winnipeg, I found, most participants struggled to communicate in English to answer the interview questions to the best of their knowledge. This reflects the fact that participants, while in middle school, had experienced serious challenges in the classroom understanding the English language that their teachers used. As seen in the transcripts, participants' experience emphasized their difficulties with language acquisition that negatively impacted their education and social integration.

> *I grew up speaking only my native language and had no English when I came to Canada. It took me two years of EAL class to better my English, even to understand the basics – I took English class every day after school before I began to understand other subjects – I was promoted to the next grade every year, but I was not comfortable, because I did not fully understand what the teachers said. I was embarrassed to say I am in grade 10. In addition, I have a speech problem [stuttering], so I stopped school in grade 10. I did not think I had a choice.* (Jamal)

> *From the beginning, I was struggling with my English. Teachers did not understand my poor communication in class activities. I was scared to speak in front of the class. The*

> *teacher blamed me for not listening. I was pushed from one grade to the next. I graduated from high school. My high school diploma is "M"- The teacher told me I cannot go to college. I know my English is not good enough for college.* (Tarik)

Apparently, Tarik's educational journey ended there, and he is now working in a factory for minimum wage.

> *When I first came to Winnipeg, I spoke a few words but knew zero writing in English. I am fluent in Arabic and did well in Math and sports but failed in English and social studies. In grades 7 and 8, I didn't understand most of what the teacher said in English. I used the help of an EA from Sudan who speaks Arabic and English. That helped me a lot, but it did not go far. I quit school in grade 10 for many reasons, including language.* (Dawit)

The above three participants were not successful in their educational achievements, as one of them completed high school with an "M" designation, and the other two dropped out of school at grade ten.

Two participants referred to the effort they made to study hard to improve their English language proficiency, which eventually helped them to excel in their education. They disclosed facing serious challenges in the classroom, the biggest being not understanding the language teachers were using.

> *I found it very important to have good English to understand all subjects. I was in a better position than many of my fellow refugees in my class, because I knew some English before coming to Canada. In Eritrea's primary school, although I have learned all subjects in my language, I have also learned English lessons starting from the first grade. Later in the Sudan refugee camp, the language of instruction was more commonly English. I was really good at Math and science, and my teachers encouraged me to study English. I also went to after after-school EAL class and improved my English.* (Sofia)

Another participant talked about how he became a member of a church group in the neighbourhood to improve his English.

> *I spoke little English when I came to Winnipeg. I am fluent in Arabic, and thankfully, the EA who also speaks Arabic helped me a lot to learn English and other subjects. He connected me with the Peace Village after-school program. I know if I understand*

> *English, I can also easily understand other subjects. I continue to practice my English in every opportunity. I attended bible study in English at Calvary Temple, which helped me improve my English. My social skills also developed when meeting people. But it was challenging.* (Jacob)

These challenges expressed by participants about the English language as a hindrance to knowledge acquisition are also identified by Educators who participated in the study.

> *I think in general, language is such a barrier for refugee students' learning. It is something children have to come over as well as their parents. We always emphasized that the children here need to be integrated well with the English language. Children are quicker to pick up English than adults. We noticed that it is a huge deal not to be able to understand the content of the subject matter. Imagine a refugee child learning history when they do not even have the basic language to start with.* (Educator 01)

> *I have seen children from refugee backgrounds struggle with communication with teachers and peers... They lack basic grammar, vocabulary and speaking and reading... Even in providing them with new information outside of class, it is a tough conversation to have – especially with the children I worked with at the previous school I worked. They are not articulate enough – the reality is they are not very expressive, understandably, their communication is limited, partly language and partly culture.* (Educator # 03)

While refugee children are struggling with various aspects of acculturation stressors, the Educator # 02 believed language proficiency was the mother of all:

> *Sometimes you can see the educational gap is so big that you are working with grade 7 materials, with a student who still needs to work on grade 1 or 2 levels. Add to this the language barrier. For example, the English language art is not taught like that in those countries…. Here, the component is reading, analyzing and synthesizing the texts. This is very dependent on how much you speak the language. –Literally, reading a book, understanding and explaining about it and giving feedback about it, to meet the criteria for that piece of work and be successful requires a fairly advanced level of language. That is why they have the EAL class. In that case, some students really have even to consolidate basic spelling, which I can say is grade 1 and 2. ...Now, you would have refugee children reading at level E or F, which is below Grade 1. This may not be the same for Math. If they can get language support, they can do their math skill to grade 5, grade 6 level…, some students are slightly better than that. Language is the key to better education.* (Educator 02)

It would be obvious to see the impact of English proficiency on participants' education. Sofia, who is good at Math, could have done even better had it not been for her lack of adequate

English language skills. Furthermore, from the above transcripts, we can see how educators, at times, perceive refugee students as academically challenged, when the students merely lack English-language skills.

> *I know one student who joined the EAL class with pretty much average language skills. She worked hard and moved to the regular class. I remember she struggled to adjust in the regular classroom. She didn't ask questions, and when she rarely did, she didn't speak loudly. Language appeared to be her biggest challenge. Some teachers didn't understand her and thought she had a learning disability…. Regardless, she worked hard and finally graduated from the program, and she went to study a dental assisting course. I remembered her struggle in grade 9, but against all odds, she managed to graduate high school and enroll in post-secondary education.* (Educator #01)

6.4.1.2. Being placed at an age-aligned grade level (Misplacements)

Almost all participants, except one, expressed concern about being "over-placed" in grades that were not a match to their level of educational background they had had upon their arrival in Canada. Consequently, participants shared how schoolwork has been too difficult, especially when compounded by the lack of English proficiency. As seen in their profile, before arriving in Canada, many participants lived in refugee camps and in conflict zones, meaning their education was disrupted. In some cases, they never even went to school. Nevertheless, even though they come with different skill sets, strengths and needs, several participants are not happy about the way they were placed in higher grades upon arrival. Participants unanimously shared a very friendly initial welcome from the school and settlement workers who accompanied them to the school for registration. Settlement workers supported participants with school registration and participated in school intake and orientation meetings to help them gain a better understanding of their school environment and foster confidence, belonging and integration into the school culture. However, participants could not comprehend the reason why the school put them in higher grades than their actual abilities, and the settlement workers who helped them register

allowed this to happen. Educators who participated in the study disclosed that newly arriving students in grades K-8 should be placed in the age-aligned grade level, regardless of the grade level or amount of schooling completed in their home countries. The transcripts below highlighted how participants placed a high value on pursuing education but were overwhelmed by the challenges associated with age–aligned placement, in addition to new language acquisition and navigating the new educational system.

> *I attended school on and off, up to grade 4, in a refugee camp. At times, my attendance was very poor depending on the situation in the camp... In Winnipeg, they put me in grade 9 because I was 14 years old at that time. I was confused and worried about going to class- My English is very poor even today. I even asked the settlement worker from the welcome place to help me place in grade 4 or 5. No one listened to me, and I joined grade 9 students the next day... It was scary when the teacher pointed at me and asked a question ... and I couldn't answer. I remembered when students looked at me, and the teacher patiently waited for me to answer ... embarrassing.* (Jamal)

When asked how he felt about it, at that time, Jamal looked up to the ceiling and ……

> *After two or three days of feeling shame, I refused to go to school. I did not want to go to school at all. My friends (refugees) begged me to go with them, telling me how good it was. I didn't see it that way. Then, after a couple of weeks, I decided to go back to school because I did not want to disappoint my parents. They wanted to see their children succeed in school. I went to the school and gradually felt normal… Because the assistant teacher was from Sudan, He was translating for me … … the other teachers also helped me for the first two years…many subjects, especially English and social studies, were difficult.* (Jamal)

Jamal shared that after struggling for three years in Winnipeg schools that include an EAL class, he had had enough and eventually dropped out in grade 10. He attributed the reason for quitting school so early to the fact that he was placed in a higher grade than he actually was, and to language difficulty.

> *When I was 16, I started slipping, but after a year, I decided it was not for me because I could never understand the idea of staying in school where I did not see any progress. I was older than everyone else in the class, and some students joked about my age and speech challenge. I had lost motivation, which eventually led to missing so many days from school… staying there seemed pointless* (Jamal).

Jamal is now working in a warehouse, earning a minimum wage.

Dawit is another participant who felt the same way when finding himself in a grade that he believed was beyond his ability. He immigrated to Canada with only a few years of schooling before he had a chance to develop basic literacy. In Winnipeg, being placed in grade 9 while he actually was prepared for below a grade 5 level, which was an enormously difficult task, Dawit disclosed

> *When I first came to Canada, they put me in grade 9, but I was in grade 5 in Sudan. I was worried- why do they make me start in grade 9? I did not know the answer– they did some testing and put me in grade nine. It was frustrating….*

How was your first day of school in grade nine?

> *It was difficult- first of all, the language is difficult- and you are in a new country and a new system. You know ... back home you have different teachers for every subject…. not here…everything was different and difficult at the same time--- I secretly wished class ended earlier that day. It was a long day and was tough to get along with the students ----it was a new process in life (*here, he was pausing and looking far in a distance, that shows the toll acculturation stressors and language barrier put on him*) - I didn't feel different from other refugee students- I know I came here to learn and change my life…. but the class I was in was tough to follow through – The language is different not the people* ---. (Here, once again, language acquisition was a concern for Dawit*.) I did not ask and did not know why they put me in grade 9, and I failed.* (Dawit)

Learning a new language and culture with no basic education was, indeed, difficult, hard and frustrating. In addition, learning grade 9 subjects with a grade 5 level of competency was a recipe for failure. After three years of on-and-off stay in school, Dawit eventually dropped out of school, without achieving a passing mark, even in courses from the EAL program.

As the teachers in this study indicated, the most determining factors used in making the grade placement decision are English proficiency and the student's age. One participant teacher (Educator 02), who is experienced with teaching EAL for refugee students in junior high school and high school, shared:

> *I did this for about seventeen years. I have worked with them at the group and individual levels. In the EAL class, their experience is more or less similar, but it is also unique*

> *from individual to individual. There are a few students who have Basic English literacy already and easily catch up with the new learning with some help. There are also students with Zero English at the point of enrollment. There should be some progress they must demonstrate from the time they enrolled to the time they built core skills to be integrated into regular classrooms. What I can allude here is that placing students by age is not working for every child.* (Educator 02)

What about enrollment? How is the school assigning grades at the point of enrollment?

> *Students are assigned to grades depending on their language skills and age. Usually in a school setting, you would have one classroom and one department dedicated to EAL, with one teacher and one or two EAs. Usually, when students come, there is an entry test. The test is English and Math aptitude. The test helps us with registration by identifying what level the student is working at. So, basically, they are given a booklet, numbered pages from 1 to 9. Each child would do the pages, and if they tackled page 1 successfully, they move to the next and ……and the next…if they made it to page 9 tackling each page, then they will be assigned to grade 9. If he only tackled page 1 and stuck there, then it tells us that the student functions at a grade 1 level. They don't need to pass it, but fairly tackle it. These are standard tests in Canada. They will also do the language test.* (Educator 02)

Another educator from a different school division explained:

> *We put them in a regular class. But there is a lot of support we put in- it is one on one- The course is similar with the regular class but adopted to those English is not their first language- In a class size of 10- There are some students who are doing well and there are some who aren't- we use adaptation- if the student in grade 7 for instance reads at grade level 2, we provide them materials at their level but remains in the same class with their peers. We consider the social interaction as well.* (Educator 01)

> *The challenges mostly start with language barriers, and number two, their previous academic experiences, because it may not meet the standard requirement … There is an educational gap that may need to be closed at the time of enrollment. Sometimes their actual skill setting may not match to enter junior high. Another factor is the cultural transition- cultural transition works both ways, from their side as well as how the school community receives and adapts to their needs.* (Educator 03)

We learned from the above transcripts of participants (students and educators) that none of the youth participants were educated at the right Canadian equivalent age level in their countries of origin and/or refugee camps. As such, instead of accommodating their needs for a better outcome, the school system forced participants to fit into the mould. While some of the participants came from countries that have educational systems that are somewhat similar to

Canada, several of them came from countries where education was not a priority or disrupted by war and conflicts.

6.4.1.3. Family resettlement experience

The involvement of refugee parents in their children's education is crucial for academic success and healthy growth and development. However, refugee parents have to deal with numerous challenges before focusing their attention on the children's education. As families immigrate to various countries, family functioning and parent–child relationships undergo potential challenges and adaptations. Especially upon arrival, participants shared that their parents were faced with layers of barriers to managing life in the new homeland, let alone help their children's education. Participants brought up several factors that they believe contributed to their parents' seemingly less involvement in their education. These included poverty, single-parent households, and parents' feelings of frustration, disenfranchisement of parental rights, language, and cultural differences.

a. Poverty

All participants are children of poor refugee parents. Out of the nine participants, five came from a single-parent household, and one had no parents at all. Furthermore, their families have less access to social assistance than mainstream Canadians and Aboriginal people with the same incomes for various reasons. Participants shared having problems with adequate housing, lack of fresh and sufficient food,

> *For the first years, my parents couldn't get a job. I mean any job. They did not know where to get help, but the Welcome Place [*a not-for-profit settlement organization]. The *Welcome Place helped us to find housing and connect us with welfare. That was it. No jobs, no additional income and more arguments and fights in the home. Life was difficult to feed five children. I was sent to the Winnipeg Harvest to bring food several times. No time to study.* (Jamal)

> M*y parents have no education and never worked formally, in paid jobs. They were farmers and daily labourers. Here [in Canada], both my parents are unable to find a job because they don't have the skills for Canadian jobs. They are in Welfare and stay home …. They don't help me with my schoolwork or attend school meetings. I am the one who checked my younger siblings' homework…. Hmmm... Food is not enough... There are times we eat the same boiled potato for days… I am not complaining … it is the fact…*(Sofia)

Participants and their parents face extraordinary barriers to integration upon their arrival in Canada. Most arrive not knowing anyone and face significant barriers in building new social connections, often resulting in social isolation and feelings of exclusion. When parents were cornered, with complicated challenges, including a shortage of food in the household, they tended to look to their older children for help. This strategy is partly out of necessity and partly keeping the tradition alive, as one participant explained it.

> *It is normal for us…. We support each other and stick together. As an older child, I am expected to help my parents in any way I can. Helping with house chores (cooking, cleaning, and taking care of my younger siblings) is a blessing. I know it was difficult for me to study, but it is what it is – In Sudan, I needed to stop school and help my family…but not here. I still attend school while I help them at the same time…challenging.* (Sofia)

Several participants shared Sofia's view. Participants are acutely aware of the challenges their parents face in seeking employment, learning English, or understanding medical, transportation, and school systems, all while keeping the family together.

> *My family's well-being is my priority. Everything else comes secondary. I can only attend school if my mom is healthy and happy. It is difficult for me to see my mother struggling with two jobs, and I sit and read a book. I can't.* (Jacob)

His anger and frustration were noticeable in his tone. He continued…

> *My mother was working two cleaning jobs. She juggled between two office buildings that need her attention every day. One is at the Kenaston area, and the other is in the St. Boniface area. She didn't drive and has no car. She took public buses from one end of the city to the other and got home after 10:00 pm. We waited for her safe return anxiously, especially during winter. She did this to keep us together. I know my study was affected as a result, but… so what?* (Jacob)

> *Both my parents work for a cleaning company, earning a minimum wage. Mom goes during the daytime, and my father works evenings. My siblings and I help with house chores, and there is not enough time to study and do homework.* (Maria)

> *My mother is a cook in an African restaurant kitchen. She works casually and goes to English school in the evening- money is tight, and there are times when I go to bed without eating. I always feel sad seeing my mother struggle with sleep after coming from work and the EAL School close to midnight. She didn't go to bed before she made food for us for the next day. I should help, but I can't. I have classmates who speak about the help they get from their parents. I am jealous.* (Hasan)

The remarkable negative impact of poverty on children's education is also corroborated by educators:

> *Some students come to class without breakfast and a lunchbox. It is very hard for them to focus on their learning on an empty stomach. The school has a hamper program and provides some fresh foods, vegetables ... some students are not comfortable taking them, but have no choice. Many parents have no jobs and are on social assistance. The interesting aspect of these hardships is that despite migration stressors and resettlement difficulties, I have seen many children successfully make the transition once their family lives have stabilized.* (Educator 02)

Even when the school offered hampers, refugee parents are less likely to receive them. There are language barriers, lack of information, fear, mistrust, and, in some cases, pride that prevent them from receiving available help.

> *My father is too proud to go to the food bank and take alms. He prefers to work and earn a living. It was my mother who sneaked behind him and brought food from the food bank. We have no choice.* (Sofia)

b. Lack of communication

In addition to their lack of English proficiency to communicate with the school and, at times, with authorities (child protection, police, social assistance…etc), refugee parents are reluctant to talk about their private matters with strangers. It is not uncommon to see refugee children helping their parents with translations. Participants shared how not understanding and communicating in the English language makes it difficult for their Parents' Day-to-day activities. Since children tend to pick up new languages more quickly than their parents do,

participants disclosed taking on the role of interpreters for their parents. This adds to the pressure participants experience in their schoolwork.

> *I have to always attend important appointments with my mother to interpret for her. Banks, housing, Doctors……I have missed classes to help my mother.* (Esther)

> *My parents are illiterate and do not communicate in English at all. I have to always be with them to any appointments, Doctor, bank, immigration…, I miss school these days.* (Jamal)

While refugee parents paid special attention to their children's well-being and growth, their participation in the children's education seems limited, and they are often blamed for it. Refugee parents, as much as they want to go anywhere to promote their children's wellbeing, including school, unfortunately, they neither have time for attending meetings nor can they communicate well in English. Teachers may come to believe that immigrant parents do not care about their children's education. However, refugee parents have a different perspective on the teacher's responsibility.

> *My mother always reminds us (my siblings and I) that she brought us here [Canada] for a better life. We should study hard and become Doctors or Engineers. But she did not believe she had to go to school and talk to teachers. She asked me – What should I have to say- It is the teacher's job to look after your education.* (Hassan)

> *After I bugged her several times, my mother agreed to attend a school meeting with an interpreter. She was there for an hour, and when the meeting ended, she didn't remember anything. She told me it was a waste of time. That doesn't mean she is not interested in my education. I think she did. If she didn't support my learning, I would not be in Canada in the first place.* (Tarik)

Participants indicated how their parents care passionately about their education.

> *My parents take my education very seriously. They always tell me that I owe them one thing, and that's to graduate from university and get a good job. They never read to me or help in my homework. But they always told me that if I worked hard and studied, it would help me a lot in the future. When it comes to education, my parents support me 100%. But their way of support is different from what my teachers expect.* (Sofia)

> *My parents do support my learning, my mom especially. They buy me books to read and the things I need for school. My parents encourage me …. They are very proud of me*

> *when I get good grades, but they do not have time to attend school meetings; they work long hours to take care of us. I also help with house chores.* (Maria)

As a result, refugee children often assume a more adult role; particularly older and female children and youth appear vulnerable to family pressures. Although refugee parents often place great importance on education, some refugee students may drop out because they feel obliged to help with family expenses. As discussed, most of the participants' parents have very limited English and communicate poorly, work around the clock and are unable to help children with schoolwork. I noted that Sofia's envy over her Caucasian friends' parental help with schoolwork is associated, in part, with their language proficiency. It is known that students' school achievements are consistently connected to their parents' level of education and the support they receive from them. However, lower levels of English proficiency, in some cases illiteracy, and the lack of time make it more difficult for participants' parents to help their children's schoolwork and to attend school to consult with their children's teachers.

> *Most refugee parents cannot help their children with after-school work. To start with, they are not educated themselves and don't know how to help. Secondly, some live with single mothers who are occupied in caring for four or more children. The children participated in cooking, cleaning and other house chores. Those kids with two parents are not doing better either. Parents are working two, three odd jobs and have no time for school meetings….* (Educator 0-3)

Factors such as these create a situation in which participants' parents are less prepared to help their children with their schoolwork. In addition, this low level of involvement with their children's education has been exacerbated during the pandemic (the time this study was conducted), which necessitated online education and required parents to serve as supplemental instructors with digital access. However, parents' lack of skills in computer technology and the lack of internet access make it harder for them to understand the process and provide help. While

online schooling has become a source of significant frustration for many parents during the pandemic, the problem was more significant with refugee parents.

> *I was so happy when I got an IPAD from the school- It was the first time I ever had one. My mother was also happy, but she didn't know how to use it. She only knows how to watch a YouTube video … a song from her country….* (He laughed.) (Jacob)

Parents' lack of communication with the school is misinterpreted by some teachers and considered a lack of interest in their children's education. This assertion is corroborated by teachers in Winnipeg schools.

> *I understand their [refugee parents] situation, and I feel bad when some teachers blame refugee parents. We found it challenging to set up meetings with most of the refugee parents. They did not speak the language, and communication was nonexistent. Furthermore, even those parents who attempt to communicate believe that following up with their children's education is not their responsibility. It is the teacher's responsibility.* (Educator 01)

> *Literally, the children are by themselves. They didn't get any learning support from their parents since most of them are illiterate and cannot help even if they wanted. I have one student who shared that her parents are expecting her to help them with house chores and look after her younger siblings every day after school; she has no time to do her homework, let alone get help from them.* (Educator 03)

6.4.1.4. Racism, Discrimination and Xenophobia

Another theme that was consistent among many of the participants was the impact of discrimination on the participants and their families' livelihoods. In addition to the above-discussed challenges, xenophobia and discrimination play a huge role in isolating refugee children in schools and society. Participants disclosed encountering discrimination, racist remarks and unfair treatment in school, community, police and public transit. While eight of the participants encountered racist remarks and, at times, physical attacks, due to their ethnic, gender and religious backgrounds, only one participant reported not experiencing discrimination of any sort directly. Hassan shared that he never experienced overt discrimination personally but

witnessed it when one of his refugee classmates was confronted by a group of "white dudes" on a basketball court and was bullied.

> *I do not remember having feelings of discrimination at any time in middle school. I get along with my friends and other students in school and the neighbourhood. I live in a Manitoba housing complex entirely occupied by immigrants and Aboriginal people. I never had anyone mean to me. Of course, I hear Aboriginal youth say bad things to other refugees in the building, but never to me. Maybe I was lucky.* (Hassan)

All participants said that people in Winnipeg are friendly and welcoming to them and their families. However, there are a few people who are rude, disrespectful and racist. This is presented in more detail in the following paragraphs. This participant, Esther, remembered what happened one Friday afternoon at the school gymnasium.

> *I remembered, they were three… maybe four…White teenagers, wearing hoods and torn pants……hmm… they are shouting, laughing and cursing …. The music from their headphones was very loud … One of them directly headed to the black student who was dribbling a basketball in the field and asked him to throw the ball to him…. Imagine… Humm…. they are not in the game, but the kid sensed the danger and attempted to divert the situation ……and threw the ball to the guy…… the guy missed catching the ball- he then… he started cursing … F***ing bitch…. The kid was confused, but it was too late… the other three friends came and circled him…. And kicked him …. They beat him everywhere in his body …. They are cursing as they keep kicking him' Get lost ni**er. The poor kid was a new refugee and did not know what to do.* (Esther)

Most of the participants had experienced multiple situations in which they were stereotyped. The acts of discrimination ranged from hateful facial expressions to verbal or physical acts of assault. Many examples of discrimination were presented in their narratives.

> *It was a very cold day, and the snow was high to my boots. I was sheltered inside a bus stop waiting for my bus to get me home from a long day of school. I was with two of my female friends, and the three of us were shivering in the cold. We were happy when our bus showed up, and we walked out of the shelter and approached the bus at the stop sign. But, to our shock, the bus did not stop. I am 100 percent sure the driver saw us but ignored us. We waited for another hour in that cold weather for the next bus to come. The next day, when I shared this story with school friends, one of them told me, the driver did it purposely because of the hijab we all wear. Sad!* (Maria)

Educators also acknowledged the presence of discrimination in the school.

> *…discrimination is real and visible. Of course, the school is trying to be inclusive and put resources to assist refugee students. Training on cultural competence and critical race theory is given to staff. I can vouch for many teachers who are not people of colour do genuinely help without discrimination. On the other hand, some teachers are not yet immune to stereotyping and othering refugees. For example, because they are not fluent in English, some refugee students prefer to communicate with their mother tongue among themselves, but some teachers warned them not to use their language in school…... There are also students from South America who communicate in Spanish. Teachers enjoyed the language and even tried a few words from Spanish to communicate with these students. However, for those from Africa and Arab countries, they are discouraged, even rebuked, when they speak their language.* (Educator 03)

> *Yes, I do see discrimination and racism. Some educators who are less informed about the impact of racial discrimination tend to be stereotyped. Less inclined to support students - sometimes remarks made in classrooms are actually stereotypical - the remarks could go far to put the student down in the classroom. One student who attended a regular class while doing mathematics asked a question in class and the teacher snapped at her… saying, "You always ask stupid questions". She came to me crying …. There was even a recent incident on the news about a teacher at Grant Park who made racist remarks about black students.* (Educator 01)

> *I have such experiences - One example----- There was one Caucasian student who used a YouTube platform to make racial slurs on a Somali girl who wore a Hijab. The girl confronted him, and the school intervened – the boy apologized, and the video was down…. There was also a fight in the school compound between a Caucasian student and a South Sudanese. The white student used the N word and told the South Sudanese to F himself. When asked why he used that slur, he said I just said what I read in the book.* (Educator 02)

The teachers believe that in all these incidents, the bullies didn't get a fair punishment that fit their aggression. It usually gets more attention when it reaches the media.

Three participants indicated that they have had encounters with the police that they perceived to be related to racism or discrimination. Dawit indicated that he had trouble with the police on numerous occasions. He attributed most of the encounters with the police to being racially motivated.

> *I like everything about Canada. People are good, but the police…hmmm [silence and Long pause] hmmm… What you call racism… I have experienced racism many times. One example, I don't use a bus, I walk or bike… But while walking down the street, people look at me like I am from somewhere …you know, calling names (monkey, ni***er, go back to your country). In the beginning, I was angry and afraid, but now I*

> *do not pay attention- I just walk away. One day, I skipped class and went to our regular place to smoke with my friends. We were in a circle, smoking and laughing, when a police car approached us and looked at us up and down. A white officer came directly to me and asked me to go to the car and spread my legs for a search. I did. He found nothing on me, but he shoved me into the car and took me to the police station. None of my friends were searched or taken with me. The ride to the police station was not fun. Both officers insulted me all the way to the police station. Later in the afternoon, they told me to get lost- If they find me again, they threatened to send me back to my country.* (Dawit)

When asked a follow-up question about who his friends were at that time:

> *Oh! I have lots of friends ---- black, white, Aboriginal and Arabs [laughed]. That day I was the only person in trouble …*

Tensions between refugees and Aboriginal youth are another interesting occurrence in the participants' story. It was remarkable to see that four participants reported that there were conflicts that occurred several times with the Aboriginal population, more than with Caucasian students. It appeared that many of these racist remarks and discriminations were a result of two marginalized groups clearly not understanding each other.

> *Two drunk Aboriginal persons in downtown spat on me, "go to your F*** country.* (Jacob)

> *We live in a Manitoba housing complex, and there are many refugee families and Aboriginal families as well. I see them more often, day in, day out; most of them are peaceful, but don't greet you. I have even friends in our group. But there are some rude youngsters. When they drank, they told us to go back to where we came from. Nothing physical, just slurs.* (Dawit)

One participant recalled what he was told about Aboriginal people when he was in a refugee camp.

> *I was afraid of Aboriginal people even before I saw them. In Nairobi, before we came to Canada, the immigration people gave us an orientation. They told us about school, the weather, and snow, the need to wear warm clothes, food and many things. Some people in the orientation told us to be careful of Aboriginal people. These people in Canada do not like working and only get drunk. The government gives them free money every month. So… when I see them on the streets, I remember the orientation…..* (Tarik)

It seems a paradox to see both groups, Aboriginal people and refugees, who experienced the same social and justice issues, hate each other based on misinformation. Tarik's remark about the information he received from immigration authorities is a typical example of stereotyping. There are several negative stereotypes associated with Indigenous people, including assumptions about the pervasiveness and cause of alcohol and drug addiction, unemployment, and violence.

Esther, who shared similar incidents previously, continued,

> *On another occasion…There was a situation where I faced racist remarks, obviously from Aboriginal kids…. there… I was in grade three So, I remember this one time I was with my friends, girls, , and we are all immigrants and there were three other girls from like Indigenous background, and we have this big garbage bin by the playground at our school- And there was a big mark on the garbage bin spelt BFI – we asked each other what it means, and this one girl said " ha! Ha! Ha!… that means black family in; BFI- black family into the garbage bin" and laughed – they a laughed looking at us… We just cannot…. like I didn't know how to react…. Like, I was angry …. I have my friends with me….if I were alone, I obviously would start a fight, but really it just showed me that there are mean kids everywhere … the three of us- we are all blacks- we can't just ignore it …hmm…it hurts.* (Esther)

When asked about discrimination…. Jacob laughed nervously…

> *I know that question was coming….ha… Yes (laughter)…. This is one of the hardest things for refugee kids to attend school… Yeah… I did experience that thing…*
> *That was in grade 6….. yeah, in grade 6 at recess, some of the kids came to me while we were playing games…. they said "Hey ni***er, where did you learn how to play " …… at that time I didn't understand…what they were saying to me… So they said… you know… The N-word "go back to your country." From that day on, the 'N 'word stuck in my mind. So, when those kids said that to me, I did not understand right away… After a month or so, I heard another person used that word… to another kid, and from there, I went to the internet to find the meaning of the word… and it meant something else….* (Jacob)

Did you speak to your teachers about the incident?

> *No, I did not really go to the teachers… because I didn't know what "N" means at that time. That was the first bullying I got in school…. You know… being called the N word… but after I understood what they were saying to me, I was able to understand why people say those things… I knew the meaning of that word after that… it pissed me off when those non-black kids used it against me, but it is very hard for me to accept it when black kids, same as me, use that word against each other…* (Jacob)

> *When we first arrived, the kids in my neighbourhood were mean and hated us. We can't play in the park without a fight or saying bad words to my younger sister. One day after school, I confronted a kid who always bothered my sister...He made fun of her clothing, looks, weight and accent. I warned him to stop what he is doing to my sister. He seems frightened, and I let him go. The next morning, when I woke up to go to school, I noticed our front door was painted with Red spray- you F*** terrorist go back to your jungle....I did not know what to do until a teacher helped me report to the police.* (Tarik)

Another subtheme related to discrimination was the topic of gender discrimination and how it relates to female participants' experiences. There is a visible intersectional identity, such as race, gender, and expression of faith, that puts Maria in a more vulnerable position. Maria, a refugee girl from Somalia who expressed her Muslim faith overtly by wearing her religious attire, hijab, was a victim of multiple visible intersectional identities.

> *I was in a shopping mall with my friend. Both of us wear Islamic clothes, a long gown and hijab. I was interested in one of the sweaters in the rack and asked the woman to show us the fitting room. She said they do not have a fitting room. But I saw two fitting rooms across the hall. She said, It is locked. I can tell from her face and voice; she didn't want us in the store. Another customer [white woman] who listened to our arguments came closer and asked the salesperson why she was reacting rudely. She was fierce and demanded that the salesperson respect and treat us like any customer. They continued to argue back and forth, and I did not want to make the situation worse. My friend and I thanked the woman who stood up for us and left the store. I am wondering, to see two white ladies, one with compassion and respect and the other rude and racist.* (Maria)

Another female Muslim participant who wears hijab in public places reported how her headscarf led to both subtle and explicit negative encounters in public spaces.

> *My time in middle school was not easy -It was tough because you don't know the people, the teacher, the language and culture- Back home, you do the same thing, you speak the same language. Here, some rude students attempted to attack you or bully you. The teachers are very helpful – They sat next to me and explained to me the problem I did not understand. When some students bullied another student, the teacher intervened and addressed the issue immediately. However, they did not get punished, so they will attack you more the next time. I have been bullied many times- I have also seen my people get bullied ...*

Here, you can see how Maria views herself in relation to refugees when she says, "my People," falling into the trap of "us" versus "them."

> *I have many such bad experiences. For example, one day I was bullied by a bunch of teenagers while passing by a neighbourhood park where children and adults were playing. One of the teenagers started to mock me as I walked by. I kept walking faster, ignoring their comments. They followed me, commenting on my dress and my religion. They told me to "take off that F***ing thing," otherwise they will pull it off. They threatened and mocked me, but I didn't do anything. I increased my speed and walked faster. They followed me and said rude names and accused me and my religion of being terrorists ……..There were adults in the park, but they didn't stop the kids from bullying me.* (Maria)

> *I didn't recall the exact incident about my friends, but I know some of my Muslim friends were bullied in school…. Because of their colour, weight, and faith.* (Esther)

> *Actually, I like spending my spare time in the field playing basketball… I joined a couple of sports teams with the XYZ organization [* name changed*], where I met a lot of friends who are Muslims… You know. I do remember we used to be like sisters... Sometimes we go to a tournament, whether that is basketball or soccer, and the refs make a big deal about the hijab and ask the girls to take it off if they want to play. Even though I am not Muslim myself, it boils my blood, you know, when I see discrimination. I confronted the coach. We all should stand up for each other, and you know it should be okay if a female with a hijab plays soccer, and we are a team. I defended her, complaining to the trainer to let her play. But he didn't listen. She was expelled from the game… I do remember hearing stuff like that…" take off your thing (he pointed out at the hijab). I didn't expect such a thing to happen in Canada …. You know, we are in the 21st century, stuff like that is washed away in the past.* (Esther)

Do you remember how your friend felt at that time?

> *Obviously, embarrassment…. You know, this is like everyone is looking at you, something you can't even help - so I think she felt embarrassed and a little bit disappointed in the people…. No one cared. They continued to play without her.* (Esther)

Of all the participants' stories, Hakim's hardships left an especially vivid impression. Although he said he is happy living in Canada and aiming to graduate from university and get a well-paying job, and sponsor some of his relatives to Canada, Hakim did not hide his day-to-day encounters with racist and discriminatory incidents. He struggled to control his anger and tears when he narrated an incident that showcases his frustration with some Canadians in general and the justice system in particular. I have left the following quote in its entirety to illustrate the

consecutive episodes that were discussed when I asked him if there was any racism or discrimination he had witnessed.

> *I was bullied and discriminated against for my colour in school many times. But I will never forget this one [pause]. It was Friday morning, around 10:00 AM, that I first met John, a white teenager in my school. I was rushing to class in the hallway when he pushed me, and I stumbled. I saw his friends laughing as he did so. He then turned back and walked towards me angrily, looking like he wanted to show his friends he was tough. Before this, mind you, I have never met or heard of this kid before, never spoken to him. He did not apologize for what he did, but grabbed my neck on the shirt and shook me. I pushed him away and said, "What is wrong with you?" and went to class. At around 1:00 PM, the same day, during lunch break, he came directly to the table I sat at and then started threatening me, saying things like "I will beat you up if I catch you outside. You F**** terrorist".*
>
> *He jumped on me and grabbed my shirt, and a fight started…." You F***ing n****er, I will beat you up" and continued to punch me. Defending myself, I then went down and tackled him. He then fell on the ground, and I was on top. There were many cheers from the crowd. While we were struggling to punch one another, I remembered when the school police officer grabbed my neck collar and pushed me away from the boy. The officer shouted at me," This is Canada, you stupid…". I couldn't control my anger and cried helplessly. Long story short, I was suspended from school the next day because, according to the police report, I acted violently in the school compound. The boy who started the fight remained in school even without a verbal warning. I lost one semester for nothing. I felt I was a victim of racism because I am a refugee, Muslim and black. But the boy and the police officer who reported me are white. This is not right. Many students watched the fight, and they knew I was defending myself. This is not right!*

Hakim became emotional, trembling, his eyes red and watery. At this point, the interview paused for a while to give him time to regulate his emotions.

Middle-school years are significant periods of physical and social development. Developing positive relationships is crucial, yet several participants shared having difficulties making friends in school. They are teased and bullied for differences in how they speak, dress, look, and for behaviours unfamiliar to mainstream students. Often, such situations can escalate into physical fights or leave refugee students in constant fear. Persistent bullying and teasing are difficult to

endure daily, and lead some participants, like Jamal and Dawit, among other things, to drop out of school.

6.4.1.5. Socio-cultural factors

Refugees often end up here in Canada after being forcibly relocated from their country of origin, leaving their home environment and culture behind, migrating through other countries and living in refugee camps for significant periods amidst hazardous conditions. Drawing on the participants' responses to the interview questions, several socio-cultural factors emerged as challenges to the smooth transition of resettlement and integration into the school system. These challenges include social isolation, cultural differences, language, racism, poverty and discrimination. However, as many of the challenges, such as, language proficiency, marginalization, and discrimination discussed in previous section, this section gives emphasis only on the other factors (social isolation, cultural differences and xenophobia) As seen in the transcripts, participants are extremely vulnerable because of the psychological problems, traumatic experiences and all the challenges they had to face in their triple migratory phases. While individual circumstances and personal responses varied enormously, it was confirmed by participants that all of them went through stages of adjustment in Canada. Fear-induced limited interaction with mainstream students, experiencing culture shock, feelings of not being understood, and clashes with Aboriginal youth are some of the challenges participants encountered. During the early stages of settlement and adjustment, participants encountered culture shock that included many new phenomena, from the harsh cold weather to witnessing new technology of living in a remote-controlled temperature house. This was a time when participants tried to make sense of their new world.

> *Ya! I remember….. Humm…We came during Christmas, and the weather was very cold. Getting out of the airport building and walking to our sponsor's car was difficult. I never*

> *experienced a cold like that, and the road was covered with white snow. After we got into the car and drove to our first home in Canada at IRCOM house [subsidized housing for refugees], I felt warm. I wonder the difference…. You know… cold and warm, at the same time…… I have never seen whether below zero …never…* (Tarik)

> *I didn't see people on the streets… only cars. In Nairobi, every street is full of people… crowded and busy… I asked our sponsor, "Where are the people?" …. It feels strange. It was empty.* (Hassan)

Another challenge that was reiterated by almost all participants in this study was the issue of feeling isolated and lacking community connections at the time of their arrival in Winnipeg. Navigating the host community with little to no community or social support posed a serious challenge to their integration process. Below are statements from the participants that support these feelings:

> *There was no one to greet us at the airport. My father held high the sign "IOM" that showed that we are refugees. People looked at us (8 black Africans, poorly dressed) and walked away quickly. They don't pay attention. After some time, a white lady from Hospitality House (we were sponsored through them) approached us. She asked our names, checked the documents and rushed us to our apartment. It feels scary -... When you didn't see anyone who looked like you, spoke your language…. And welcome you…You know what I mean….* (Jamal)

> *We are thirteen and talk loudly to each other on the plane and at the airport. We were shouting to be heard to each other… and people looked at us differently. At the airport… Everything was new to us, and we looked like fools …… lots of stuff we brought with us in garbage bags. No fancy luggage, and we can easily be spotted as refugees... I was a child at that time and didn't give it much thought…. But … it is clear my grandmother was not happy… we look different.* (Esther)

When asked about the experience after the first few weeks, -Did your relationship with your neighbours and society in general improve? Esther replied:

> *Pretty much the same as the time we arrived. My grandmother and aunts did not speak English at all. They did not even try. We live in a Manitoba housing complex … our next-door neighbours were not friendly….. I can say it is both ways. My grandmother is very reserved in speaking to strangers as well. We are isolated and live in our small circle … but I have friends in school…* (Esther)

For most of the participants, the challenge of smooth resettlement transition in Winnipeg was compounded by the perceived and real differences in the values and cultures between their places of origin and Canada. These somewhat contrasting cultural values were evident in various spheres of their lives.

> *Language (speaking) was not very challenging for me here, because I learned English in Kenya. I can easily communicate with teachers and students. But the challenge for me is reading and writing …. Also, the harsh winter and some of the cultures I see here are contrary to Islam's teachings. Back home, you called your teacher "teacher" or "sir/Madam" and gave respect to them. The school culture is different. Here, students are disrespectful to teachers. I never eat or drink in class. it is disrespectful.* (Tarik)

Building friendships and social networking are such a critical aspect of middle school students. However, their inability to understand and speak the English language makes it difficult for participants to make friends and maintain those friendships. Most participants disclosed having friends only from students of the same ethnic group, and or at least with fellow refugees, particularly of African origin. This is because either the students from the mainstream did not welcome them, or participants did not go out of their comfort zone and initiate communication.

> *I am not comfortable speaking with other students outside Africa, especially white. Even today… I feel embarrassed by my English language. I am worried they judge me….my parents also warn us not to be friends with strangers…they are worried about our safety. (Maria)*

On the other hand, participants shared the pressure from peers that forced them into doing something they are uncomfortable with, such as doing drugs or drinking, and taking dangerous risks. Some participants wanted to fit in and be accepted into the mainstream norms, as they did not want to be singled out. Dawit had that experience- He felt enormous pressure to fit in and eventually found himself at a greater risk of conforming to bad behaviour involving peers who were bad influences.

> *At first, I did not feel comfortable speaking to white students. Maybe I am afraid of my poor English. Later, I met George (white buddy) during break at the smoking area. He approached me asking to light his cigarette, and our friendship started… we used to smoke weed and other stuff…He is a kind of a leader in the group and took me under his protection… I became a member….*

All participants shared that it was difficult for them to make either white or Aboriginal friends when they first arrived in Winnipeg school because they were new, afraid and unable to communicate in English.

> *In the refugee camp, we were told about the snow, the cold and Aboriginal people. Not good things…. They [Aboriginal people] get drunk; they do not work and do not pay taxes. So, I was afraid to talk to them. I was in …… School and this school have many refugee students. There are also some teachers from Africa. There was one particular teacher who spoke Arabic, and he always encouraged me to try speaking English while in school … but I was not comfortable. He then speaks to me in Arabic, and I feel good. I have no reason to look for other friends outside my community*. (Jamal)

> *I was lucky to find two Muslim girls at my first school in Winnipeg. They, too, are refugees who came to Winnipeg a year or two earlier than me. They showed me around the school, the place to pray, and told me how most of the teachers are nice. For the first three years, I didn't have any other friends other than Muslim refugees. I now have one Filipino and Métis friend.* (Maria)

Some schools have a variety of ways to help refugee students' transition be smooth.

> *The school I went to had lots of different kinds of students from all over the world. I remember one day, in one of my classes, the teacher asked us to bring our traditional foods. I did bring my cultural food, but I worried nobody would touch it. When the teacher called my name and asked me to introduce the food, I almost panicked. I cannot say a word. But the teacher keeps encouraging me and said how it looks great even before he tasted it. I reluctantly said a few things, how my mother helped me to cook this food and the things I used to prepare. I was trembling and tried to wipe my sweat with the back of my hand. The teacher thanked me and clapped- I also got cheers from the students, and we started to take the food around the table to eat. You do not believe me - my food was already gone. Every student enjoyed the food and said nice words to me. Since that day, my confidence has gone up, and I have become less concerned about what the other students might think about me.* (Hakim)

Here, we can see how misinformation shaped participants' biases about other students outside of their culture, and low self-confidence hindered their integration. We can also see Dawit and Jacob's experiences, where pressure and a sense of peer belonging put them into the wrong

crowd, and they eventually dropped out of school. These feelings of low self-esteem, fear, and anxiety among newcomer students to integrate were also observed by teachers.

> *In the EAL class, especially in the beginning, there are different groups, and you can see Asian students hang out together. The Indians choose to be with Indians, and the same with Africans. As they moved to regular class, they became less tense and started interacting with other students outside their ethnic circle, including with Caucasians. It all comes to a common interest. Those in sports, say basketball, hang out together despite their ethnic line. I know some kids who joined gangs that were allegedly led by Caucasians.* (Educator 02)

> *The other factor I noticed is that school friendships extended to involve parents. This is common with Filipino children- once they become friends in school, they are invited to the home, go to family picnics together and attend birthday parties. Refugee children have no family structure that is conducive to this kind of relationship, so they avoid having friends outside their comfort zone. School really reflects society. Students who do well academically tend to integrate better. It also depends on the school, the area where the school is and the demography.* (Educator 01)

All participants, but two, felt welcomed by the school environment in general. They felt teachers treated them well and tried to help them when needed. Particularly, teachers from immigrant backgrounds understand them and go beyond their call of duty and help.

> *Had it not been for my teachers in XYZ School [name changed], I could have dropped out of grade 7 long ago and become a burden to my parents. My classroom teacher, who is very nice and understanding, not only taught me English but also guided me through the school system and encouraged me when I made good efforts. How to communicate, how to do shopping, how to use the transit bus…. I always go to her when I have problems, not only school problems but life problems.* (Sofia)

> *My teachers are always there for me. They helped me in many ways …even food,* (Hassan)

In contrast, Hakim and Mohammed had unpleasant experiences with their teachers and principal.

> *I have a sight problem … looking at the blackboard from a distance is a problem for me…I asked my science teacher in grade six to allow me to sit at the front row. "You cannot choose your seat. Sit where you are and focus". He gets mad at me for no reason. He always makes sure I am at my seat. I finished the term with stress and humiliation.* (Hakim)

> *By nature, I am a slow learner, and I do not say much in class. In addition, I was always thinking about my relatives back home. I also did not speak English well. So I kept quiet in class most of the time, and I got in trouble with this teacher. When we handed our class assignment paper to the teacher, she often asked me some additional questions or explanation. But I kept quiet. She gets frustrated and shouts at me … she said I am rude to her. She did not want to take the time to understand my problem and try to help. She instead suspended me from class and told others how I was rude.* (Mohammed)

6.4.1.6. Experiencing Trauma

Children and their families who have fled their home country due to war and conflicts have been exposed to violence that continues to shadow them as they adjust to host countries, including Canada. Participants in this study shared experiencing anxiety and fear similar to signs of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). They think that their life or the lives of family members who are still in their country of origin, and refugee camps, are in danger. They feel that they have no control over what is happening. Indeed, several participants in this study are survivors of war and conflicts; therefore, they were at an increased risk of psychological problems and post-traumatic stress. Nevertheless, interestingly enough, most participants did not know what PTSD is, let alone share the experience of the same. While some shared having emotional moments (feelings of depression, anxiety and helplessness), they never associated the feeling with their adverse experience and didn't use the term Trauma or PTSD to describe it. For instance, it was long after Maria made it to Winnipeg that she understood that she was suffering from PTSD. As such, I needed to find another way to frame the concept of PTSD to their level of understanding, by asking them if there was a time when they felt sad, stressed, worried, missed someone or something, etc.

> *I had never heard the word "trauma" before I came to Canada. I never thought I had one. When I was struggling with sleep and restlessness, my teacher advised me to see a doctor. The doctor asked me many questions, and I told him what I felt. Sometimes I feel sadness, fear and anger. The doctor said it could be PTSD and explained it to me. People with PTSD have strong, disturbing thoughts and feelings related to their bad*

> *experience. He was right; there are times when I talk in my sleep …. My mother told me---- I did not know what I said in my sleep, but I was in the middle of shouting and soldiers' orders. I was in therapy for six months, and it helped me.* (Maria)

Tarik loves his family and speaks highly about his pleasant childhood in Somalia Village, often leaving aside his exposure to war and conflicts. His friends, the soccer ball they played with, made of old socks, the laughter… it is all in his vivid memory. Despite his childhood innocence, Tarik grew up in war-torn Somalia and was not immune to witnessing traumatic events. He, however, does not want to talk about it. But with a looming sense of safety and hope of what was ahead of him, he opened…

> *I am now in Canada. I am safe. No one will attack my family and me. I am not worried that the armies will come and burn our home. You know…, I have mixed feelings. I missed my friends in Somalia and worried about them. I was young when we left everything behind and moved to a refugee camp and later to Winnipeg. I am not sure why these things bothered me. I am safe now, but I never stopped thinking about it. I sometimes smell the smell of blood and dead bodies … (*He closed his eyes.)

These words came as no surprise to me. This fact had become apparent as other participants alluded to the fact that they chose to be alone rather than be around people who did not pay attention to their presence.

> *When nobody wants to talk to me, I feel sad. My English is not good, and I cannot go and talk to them …. When they ignore me, it brings me strong memories. I feel like I am living through it all over again. When I am late to class, and the teacher is mad at me…or hearing sirens from a police car or fire truck… Sights, sounds, smells, or thoughts that reminded me of the war [traumatic event] in some way… Slowly, I get used to it …but it still reminds me of the suffering in my country and the refugee camp….Life in Kassala is a nightmare.* (Tarik)

While each refugee child is unique in witnessing, processing and responding to trauma, some participants are inappropriately assessed by the school system as having learning disorders, when the origin of their challenges is related to trauma or vice versa.

> *I have speech difficulty* (He stuttered). *It took me a longer time to think and answer the teacher* (a longer processing time). *But this teacher did not understand me. At first, he thought I was rude….He then told me to see a therapist for trauma.* (Jamal)

Some participants demonstrated feelings of survivor's guilt. They experienced the feeling of intense guilt for having survived and found safety while others, particularly family members and friends, did not. They think there were things they failed to do.

> *I am glad I am now in Canada. I am safe and have food to eat and a home to live in. But my family in Sudan are always on my mind. There is constant war and hunger, and people are dying. I don't feel happy … knowing they are suffering, while I am safe, makes me sad.* (Hakim)

Participants like Hakim and Tarik often suffered post-traumatic 'intrusions' as they relived the event repeatedly, which reminded them of their families back at home. They felt they could have done more to stay together and accept their fate rather than running alone, even when they had no control over the events.

> *The school and everything are very good for us compared to back home. I really like this country, but **I** never slept one night without thinking about my family in the Kakuma refugee camps. I feel I am selfish….* **(**Tarik)

During the interview, I can describe Tarik as being traumatized, very emotional and reserved. He struggled with part of his story, what to share and what to keep silent about. While his resilience and the will to survive are astounding, he is still struggling with elusive memories of the past.

> *When we first came to Winnipeg, I was very reserved and rigid but very curious. Everything was a new learning for me, and it was a complete culture shock from what I was used it. We were placed in a community (IRCOM) housing facility and have been there for nearly two years before they moved us into a Manitoba housing complex. The house is clean; I have my own bed … separate washroom…. But there are times when I struggle to sleep. Small things like a police siren or fire alarm sound give me a panic attack…* (Tarik)

Educators also shared their experience engaging with refugee students who are suspected of having traumatic experiences and how it interferes with their learning.

> *I know another student who had language difficulties as well as some war-related traumatic issues. We referred him to a psychological assessment to help him with anxiety, depression and fear. As he went through the school system, we had several meetings with his parents. However, his parents also need help to understand the school system, among other things. They need help in language, culture, socio-economy… You name it. Let*

> *alone, they tend to help him; they did not clearly understand what the problem was. He was pretty much by himself to deal with all his challenges. Once he did the assessment and the appropriate therapy, he got better and moved to regular classes. However, he was unable to catch up and progress. So, he ended up in the "Modified" program. A student with an M designation may complete high school but cannot be accepted into higher education. Eventually, he dropped out and is now working as a cleaner. When I first met him at EAL class, he told me that he wanted to be an engineer. It could happen one day; I mean, education is a lifelong process.* (Educator # 2)

Another educator remembers encountering a student who was mistakenly taken as having PTSD, where the problem lies elsewhere.

> *Some students are often at a crossroads between peers and parents' influence that may invite them to gang involvement. This student only displayed irritability, with no other emotional responses in class. He sits alone, speaks angrily, and looks at the clock, wishing class would end. ……As much as I tried to get to the bottom of it, I was not successful, as the student was an introvert. Even the school administration and other teachers try to put the pieces together and try to figure out, you know …The reality is this child was very reserved… I wanted to emphasize a lot that every kid comes from a different home life, and we need to understand who they are, where they come from, what they are dealing with and how we go about it. This particular student was struggling with his English and communication, and at times he jumped out of his desk with no apparent reason…We thought he was struggling with PTSD and considered a referral for assessment. Later, we found out that he is at a grade one level but was placed in grade six. So, he remains in the grade six classroom but is doing materials from the grade 1 level. This makes him anxious and apprehensive…… He was misdiagnosed.* (Educator # 3)

6.5. Resilience

One of the issues this study attempted to understand was to identify the factors that made some refugee students perform relatively well in their education compared to others, despite the tremendous challenges they endured. Participants were asked what helped them to focus on their education and overcome challenges to achieve relative successes. Most participants shared experiencing a great deal of adversity, and some have come through it successfully, and they attributed their resilience to one or more of the following factors: Family support, faith and culture, after-school programs and having good teachers.

6.5.1. Family support

Participants identified a supportive and positive family life, and closeness to their ethnic community appeared to promote their resilience. Family, friends, and ethnic-based communities were identified as support systems that provide participants with the much-needed emotional and social boost that keeps them going. Participants acknowledged having their basic needs, such as food, water, shelter, and clothes, met in Canada. Yet, some believe learning in their new home country without adequate support is challenging, and some who are doing relatively better attributed their achievements in school to their family's unconditional love and support.

> *I don't have a shortage of food or clothes here. I mean …I may not eat what I wanted, but…we get enough food for our family. I guess… we escaped hunger, and we are in a better place. We survived the war, hunger and humiliation in refugee camps because we stuck together as a family …. My mother is the source of my strength …when I look back at my mother's sacrifice… I am motivated to do more… to make her happy…proud…...* (Sofia)

> *My parents are not educated, but they put great importance on my education. They make great sacrifices so I can do well in school. Both worked a cleaning job but allowed me to go to school….. I should get a job and help them, but they allow me to go to school…I should study hard and make them happy….* (Maria)

Esther, whose older brother is relatively literate (he was a local bank clerk back home), shared that he helped her check her homework and pushed her to study hard.

> *He acts as a parent, and sometimes it irritates me. But …. In the absence of a father, he is the head of the house. Grandma gave him the authority… he sometimes overdid it…. Especially in involving myself with my friend's choice…. Otherwise, he is very helpful in my study…* (Esther)

> *You need a purpose…. in life… That's what I learned from my mother. Why did I come to another country? You know… to be successful and make my family proud… right? I respect my family a lot… I always go to my mom to look for guidance, and she always gives it to me….I respect her, and one thing she wanted from me was to be an engineer or a pilot. I should study hard to make her wish come true.* (Hassan)

In this regard, performing well in schoolwork can be categorized not solely as individualistic hard work but collectivistic. Participants acknowledged and valued their parents' commitment to

see their children succeed, and the children, in turn, attempted to ensure their parents' wishes were fulfilled. A major reason behind participants' parents' decision to flee their country and immigrate to Canada is to provide their children with a better life and future. Strengthening the will of their parents, participants acknowledged their parents' sacrifice to bring them here and said they are committed to not failing them.

> *My grandmother has never lived for herself. She always protected us. My mother was married to an abusive man who was twenty years older than her, but she stayed in the marriage for our sake. We were supported by Grandma… And when my father was killed, grandma bravely took us out of the danger area…. Be it in Ethiopia or a Refugee camp, and now here (Winnipeg), grandma wants us to have a good education and have a better life. So, [in a sense] I am doing it to make my mom happy. I study hard and have good grades …. This is the only way I can repay her sacrifice.* (Esther)

One phenomenon that stood out from participants' transcripts is that, regardless of their educational background, refugee parents want, support and sacrifice to see their children get an education. Some participants, who did not make it to the end, did not deny their parents' attempt to help. Dawit shared his regret for dropping out of school too early due to his involvement with the wrong crowd, ignoring his parents' advice.

> *I was stupid to overreact to my mother's advice and pretend I know better… I was wrong. It could be different if I listened to her … I don't know…* (Dawit)

Educators agreed on participants' descriptions of their parents' support. Educator #01 believes that parents are strong supporters of their children's education. However, most of them lack the capacity and the resources to help their children achieve the desired outcome.

> *Most refugee parents are not in a position to help their children with after-school work. To start with, they are not educated themselves and don't know how to help. Secondly, some live with single mothers who are occupied in caring for four or more children alone. Day-to-day routines, like cooking, cleaning, and other house chores. Those kids with two parents are not doing better either. Parents are working two, three odd jobs and have no time for school meetings….* (Educator #01)

Despite the many challenges their parents experienced, participants shared stories that demonstrated the importance of the physical and emotional availability of parents, preferably two parents, in their education. The help participants' parents provide for their children's education may not include homework requiring literacy (i.e., helping with their homework), as most of them are illiterate. Nevertheless, the emotional support and the strong faith and hope in their children's ability to succeed, in itself, boosted the children's self-esteem and helped them to do better in their academic endeavours.

Educators also put this reality in perspective.

> *We know refugee parents are struggling with poverty and work many odd jobs to make ends meet…… We also knew they were reluctant to attend school meetings. Yet, we see their commitment to their children's education. They make sure the children are always in school… send them regularly with adequate food and teach them to behave well and believe a teacher can fix their child's problem. They transfer their responsibility to teachers when it comes to education.* (Educator # 2)

> *Let me give you one example –it is my personal experience - In one case, I saw a mother who was called to the school for her son, because he transferred from the EAL class to a regular class. The school was worried that the regular class might be difficult for him unless he worked hard. The problem was that the mother had to go to work in the evenings, the student was alone and free to watch basketball on TV instead of studying … no one was there to watch him and redirect him. So he was behind in all subjects. The school tried to help him by allowing him to come after hours to the library, but the child didn't follow through. The school then decided to put him in a modified class. Although his mother was illiterate, she argued with the school that her son should not stay in the Modified class, as he must go to university. She declined the proposed Modified program and went home, found a private tutor and paid from her low income. The good thing is, the child made it around and passed grade 12 and went to the University of Manitoba. This is a great example of parents' intervention in their children's education. She did what was best for her child with her available resources.* (Educator # 1)

Participants also shared the benefit of living closer to their ethnic community. They are attracted to areas where a community of compatriots or members of their ethnic, cultural, linguistic, or faith group exist, or where other family members have settled. As such, it is

common to see most refugee children attend middle school in downtown areas, Sister McNamara, Gordon Bell, Hugh John, Victoria Albert and Daniel McIntyre.

> *Initially, upon our arrival, we didn't choose where to live. It was the resettlement agency that put us downtown, where other refugees already live. I don't know if this was on purpose or .... But my parents were happy to see people who speak their language and look like them. I was happy too.* (Tarik)

> *I am from Somalia, and when we first came to Winnipeg, the Government gave us a three-bedroom apartment in a community housing. The place seems to have only refugees… Somalis, Syrians, Eritreans… Later, we rented another apartment in an area full of Somali people. It was my parents' choice, but I liked it. Living close to my community gives me a feeling of confidence.* (Hassan)

> *I feel supported to live around people I know… I know they help me when I need... I live around people who speak my language and share my culture and religion. I live downtown, where we can buy our cultural spices and ingredients to cook homemade food… When my mother is short of some ingredients for cooking, she sends me next door and gets them… We support each other… It feels like I am in Africa.* (Jamal)

Unlike most cosmopolitan cities in Canada, downtown Winnipeg and its surroundings continued to be the hub for refugees. Shops, ethnic food deliveries, and restaurants are concentrated in and around downtown. For instance, there are over a dozen restaurants that cater to Ethiopian and Eritrean cuisine in downtown Winnipeg, as well as a few Somali and South Sudanese restaurants. These places not only serve to satisfy refugees' desire for traditional foods but also serve as a networking site for many.

> *I am always happy when I see my people, "Ethiopian" in downtown. It is my culture to eat, play, pray and mourn together. I live downtown. I went to middle school downtown, and my friends are all downtown. There are several Ethiopian and Eritrean small businesses, restaurants. I love to cut my hair at one of the Ethiopian barber shops. It feels like home. If you go around Ellice and Sargent in downtown, you will understand what I am talking about…hmm... People named the area "Little Ethiopia". There is a big sign. (Hakim emanates a huge smile as he speaks). You feel good… when I meet my people after a while and catch up with them on what's happening in life…. You know… I feel proud to tell them I am now in university… some look at me in disbelief… Wow… that motivates me to do more….* (Hakim)

Contrary to participants' perception of positive outcomes from living downtown, their teachers think otherwise. Educator # 02 argued:

> *In Winnipeg, when I think about where lots of refugee kids, Ethiopian and Eritrean, live, I don't need to guess. - They are likely in the inner city, downtown – so, more issues arise from that. Learning from their environment, the kids focused on the immediate gratification of money- to them, that's the goal they should have. So when we have kids who struggle to regularly attend school, we should then go back and check their family life. It is either a broken family or a family that doesn't necessarily have an educational background, or a single parent. And living in downtown negatively affects the children 's healthy integration… Many are lured by the gang life and easily trapped.* (Educator #02)

6.5.2 Adhering to Culture and Faith

Many participants expressed that their religion was important to them, and those who do relatively better in school performance strongly agree that their faith helped them to stay out of trouble and focus on their education.

> *I am a Muslim girl and do regular prayers five times a day. When I am in trouble, it gives me guidance and peace. I am grateful to my school. They provide us with a prayer space in the school, and I never missed a single prayer. It gives me hope and strength in my school and at home, helping my mother. Prayer helped me a lot. I don't drink, smoke or go to clubs like others. You will find me in school, at home, the Mosque or the gym.* (Maria)

Participants, like Maria and Jacob, tended to have cultural practices that help them avoid certain undesirable behaviours, such as drinking and smoking and gang involvement, while simultaneously being more engaged in study and sport activities. For instance, soccer is a popular game played by children across Africa and in many ways is like a tradition. Jacob, who was a second-year university student at the time of the interview, shared:

> *I have been playing soccer since I was a little kid. We make our own balls out of things available, like worn-out socks, rubber bands, plastic bags, strips of cloth… We played day in and day out. Sometimes our parents or older brother came to look for me … because it was so dark. (Shows nostalgic look in his eyes). Here, in [Winnipeg], I played soccer for my school, and it keeps me out of trouble. Football is my culture… I am healthy, strong and always emotionally stable.* (Jacob)

Sofia often found herself in charge of her siblings, trying to help her mother prepare meals for the whole family. In addition, other household chores and schoolwork are demanding.

> *When I am feeling overwhelmed ……., I always sing my favourite Orthodox Church songs, particularly about the Virgin Mary…. I am a devoted Christian and attend church regularly, and participate in the church youth choir. It gives me peace of mind and helps me focus on my studies.* (Sofia)

> *I am proud of my culture … and being Somali…I respect my parents and elders in the community… I get peace when I pray or read the Quran… It keeps me away from negative … gangs … drugs….* (Tarik)

Esther's continued connection to her cultural identity is a source of strength and resilience for her individually and within the family unit. She draws upon her faith and traditional cultural values to navigate situations she faces with stress and the coping process.

> *I regularly pray…. When I am sad, I pray… when I do well, I pray, and thank God for the reward… I even pray during exams… [*she laughed]. I*t gives me strength.* (Esther)

Sofia attributed her source of resilience to the support she received from a local faith community in Winnipeg.

> *it is a small church with a big heart, I would say… It is the Habesha community's Orthodox church (Eritrea and Ethiopia), and the prayers and rituals are in my language. I am eager to go there every Sunday and sometimes on weekdays when I have no class. I do like worshiping God and playing spiritual music. I am part of a choir performing on Sundays. That is why I try to avoid getting stressed and getting into trouble…. Meeting new friends, staying connected with the community … help me stay focused.* (Sofia)

Some participants are not practicing their religion at all but respect their parents' tradition and observe religious holidays with them. This seemingly easy gesture of going to religious places helps participants as providing a venue for connecting with their community and staying grounded.

> *I am Muslim, but I am not practicing…. I mean… I did not strictly follow the rules…like praying five times… or not eating certain Haram foods (not allowed) ….. but whenever I think of my Muslim origin …or see my mother in Hijab (head scarf) …. You know it gives me a kind of calmness… I always promise to seriously follow the rules and practice, but I am lazy … you know ….I don't know how to explain it but seeing my family together during meals and prayers gives me happiness….* (Hassan)

It was also through their church and Mosque that some participants sought to 'give back' by volunteering in the community's activities. Hakim, originally from Ethiopia, described his church as "a safe space to pray and get guidance from the almighty God…."

> *My church gives me strength… when I hear my language, I feel less lonely … the prayers and the rituals and the food and drink after the teachings… people in their traditional dress, laughing and chatting…. I really enjoy Sundays… I also volunteer with the youth group… teach kids how to read books in the Ethiopian language …* (Hakim)

Two participants shared that the Mennonite church of Manitoba sponsored them to immigrate to Canada, and they are grateful for their noble deed. The relationship that developed through this altruistic gesture grows and continues to be a source of resilience for Maria.

> *I am Muslim and my sponsor is Christian… every Christmas, my family and I go to our sponsor's home and celebrate the holiday with them… I wish to be like them… you know… one day I will sponsor someone, be it a family member or a stranger… It's good to do good to another person…. I learn to be a good citizen from my sponsors.* (Maria)

Maria believed her sponsor's selfless act gave her a sense of purpose to help others regardless of creed and race. It changed her perspective on humanity. "*After all, we are all Allah's children,"* she said.

Educators also highlighted the importance of family, faith and culture in refugee students' lives and emphasized the relative advantage of growing up in a two-parent household.

> *Refugee students bring a different perspective into the classroom. Their cultures and customs create a fertile learning environment about the world. When I see, for instance, Muslim students in my class pray regularly, on time and respectfully, I am impressed by how the ritual alone can help them to be disciplined, organize their class schedule well and healthily manage their stress. They stay away from trouble and bad influences.* (Educator# 02)

> *I have one student … She is academically very strong. She works very hard in everything she does. Fortunately, she came from a two-parent household, and this is very significant, quite dramatically, in a child's success rate. Socially very extroverted, also had excellent manners, excellent behaviour, and no power struggle with teachers. She did her assignments on time without any further reminders. You can see that it is again a reflection of the home environment. When I compared her with this other student who is*

> *academically low, unfortunately, his family's home life is unstable and sad. He lives with a single mother, has a few older brothers who acted out and disrespected their mother. He himself has behavioural issues, is very introverted, and doesn't like to communicate with us or his peers. We teachers do quite a bit of work in terms of getting children to a point, but a lot of successes come from home, especially with two parents.* (Educator # 01)

> *I have seen students from two-parent households do well in school and behaviour. Having a two-parent household is so crucial … When both parents are working, at least, they share the financial burden and have less financial stress. The absence of a father … has a huge impact on African children's households. Success in academics is dependent on the child's home environment, his interaction with his parents and how he was raised. Also, the school community has a significant role to play; the school should be more supportive than focusing on disciplinary measures when students get in trouble… It is important to understand and respect their culture and religion….* (Educator #03)

The three educators in this study clearly pointed out how the added emotional and psychological stress of refugee students stemming from their individual situations (i.e., living with a single parent, poverty) can result in specific needs that must be met to focus on their education. As seen in the transcripts, parental support, grounded in traditional and cultural values, and having a sense of faith, is linked to the positive resilience factor. It is also noted that, even with this limited parental support, there are limits to how much parents can do to help their children's learning at home, especially given the circumstances they faced (i.e., working multiple odd jobs, poverty, and illiteracy).

6.5.3. Access to after-school programs and "good" teachers

Outside of family and school, settlement agencies that run after-school programs emerged as an important nurturing space for many participants. Several of the settlement agencies that offer children and youth programming are in the downtown core area of the city, where refugees live in their first 3-5 years of arrival. Oftentimes, newly arrived immigrants and refugees in Winnipeg tend to be resettled in the downtown area, where most resettlement services are located.

Dawit is one of the participants who has accessed services from community organizations.

> *I live in the downtown area. We didn't move anywhere … We find everything closer. School, YMCA, one of my mother's workplaces, churches, Welfare…… Many agencies are helping us: Entry program, Welcome Place, IRCOM, and NEEDS Center. I attended all of them for different services. Having someone to help you when you need them is great. I was in afterschool programs … but I quit...I quit many things… sorry I did not follow their advice.* (Dawit)

Esther and Mohammed attributed their school performance to the after-school program at a community organization. To cope with educational difficulties and other interrelated issues, most participants had accessed after-school programs in the community specifically designed for new immigrants, such as IRCOM and NEEDS Center.

> *Had it not been for IRCOM's afterschool program and the volunteer tutors who helped me with my homework, I may not be here where I am today.* (Esther)

> *The after-school program I was involved in keeps me out of trouble. My life was limited to school, after-school program and home. I attend the Mosque on Fridays and the Holy months. Otherwise, I am always at IRCOM. I was struggling with English, and the after-school program helped me a lot.* (Mohammed)

> *I can't explain enough how the after-school program at IRCOM helped me in many ways, including improving my English and communication skills.* (Jacob)

Participants mentioned their teachers as one of the key support systems for them who have had complicated migration experiences. Participants' experience with their Canadian teachers, in most cases, appeared to be supportive and promoted a conducive learning environment.

> *I was lucky enough to have kind teachers in middle school. They helped me a lot ….. Especially when I first came to Canada…. Had lots of problems … language, culture, everything was different… but the teachers are very kind, understanding…* (Hassan)

> *Many teachers in my school are willing to help…. I was shy to ask, but they asked me if I needed help and they helped… My EAL teacher was amazing …. She helped ease my anxiety, allowing me to feel comfortable and at ease in her presence.* (Sofia)

> *All the teachers in my school are amazing… but there are also bad teachers who really don't care about you.* (Jacob)

> *Of course, there are a few bad teachers… those who put you down, discourage you, and, let alone, help you. I remember this one teacher who thinks refugee students are stupid and disrespectful…. He became mad when you asked a question and angrier when you kept quiet…. he didn't understand me at all…* (Mohammed)

In general, participants who somehow completed high school and made it to post-secondary education, (Jacob and Sofia, in university) and (Hassan and Esther in college), stated that having family support, respecting their traditions, and listening to their parents and community elders, regularly attending afterschool programs, and being lucky enough to get extra help from "good" teachers significantly helped them to enhance their academic successes.

Of all participants, Dawit appeared to be the least successful in his school achievement and social life. Despite his willingness to go to school, attend programs, and engage in other socially acceptable activities, at least in the beginning, Dawit was unable to stay in school. When asked what had happened……

> *I don't know…. I didn't like school from day one… they put me in a higher grade, and it was difficult for me…. the language…. The teacher who didn't understand and help me… students who are mean … they joked in my English …. I can't handle it… and then I found friends who accepted me….* (Dawit)

Considering Sofia's and Dawit's experiences, as an example, it would be fair to ask why one person embraces the tough times and continues to succeed while another crumbles and is doomed to fail. Is this personal? Indeed, resilience is not an individual endeavour. And it is not a skill set that Dawit lacks nor needs to practice. Dawit proved, time and again, his survival skills by escaping danger in his country of origin and the horror of the refugee camps. He made it to Canada in the midst of enormously difficult circumstances. So, what went wrong when it came to his unsuccessful education in Canada? This is discussed in detail in the next chapter.

6.6 Chapter summary

This chapter discussed the presentation of the findings shared by participants from the interviews. I have discussed the twelve key themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data. I supported these themes with direct quotations from participants who shared their experiences at their pre-migration, trans-migration, and post-migration trajectories. Special emphasis was given to their post-migration educational experience in their resettlement country, Winnipeg, Canada. Perspectives from Canadian teachers who worked with refugee children in Winnipeg schools are also included. As seen in the above discussions, of all the nine youth participants, only four of them were in school, and the remaining five participants didn't have adequate schooling while they were at both their respective countries of origin and refugee camps. This explains, among other things, how children of the region [war-affected] are deprived of access to education for reasons beyond their control. As the interviews with the participants revealed, life in refugee camps was accompanied by feelings of insecurity, despair, fear, loneliness, and uncertainty about their future. As such, there was no significant gain in their education that prepared them to further their education to the next level in Canada. The findings also showed that participants have resilience that helped them succeed in their education, and the family environment plays a key role in refugee children and youth's response to acculturation stressors, and they achieved better outcomes in school. Participants, though grateful to have resettled safely in Canada and to have access to education in Winnipeg, expressed dissatisfaction with how their previous schooling was evaluated. Their skills and knowledge often fall below the grade level expected for their age. The data indicate that refugee children are underprepared for Canadian schools, and the school system itself is not fully ready to address their educational needs. This issue is examined further in the following discussion.

CHAPTER VII: Discussion

We are constantly engaged in giving meaning to the experiences we have (Madigan, 2011).

7.1. Introduction

The previous chapter portrayed the voices of nine refugee youth participants in the study as they recounted and relived their experiences of middle school and social lives in their countries of origin, refugee camps and Canada. This chapter analyzed the data and discussed the findings that include insights from three Canadian middle school teachers who worked closely with refugee students in Winnipeg, Manitoba. This is done within a critical social work framework to illustrate how relocation, resettlement, and structural barriers combined and negatively impact the social integration and educational adjustment and outcomes for participants. This chapter discussed the findings of the study, considering pre-existing evidence and relevant theoretical frameworks, analyzing participants' narrations along with my interpretations of their descriptions of events from a critical social work perspective. As stated in the introduction, the purpose of this qualitative, interpretative phenomenological study was to give voice to the educational experiences of refugee children from the war-affected East African region. The study examined youth participants' experiences as children in their countries of origin, refugee camps, and Winnipeg schools, and identified the educational needs, challenges, and opportunities faced by refugee children in middle schools in Winnipeg, Canada.

As Baffoe (2011) put it, "Since the participants were clear about the issues and experiences they were recounting, there was no need to rename or reconstruct those experiences or issues and categorize them to mean something different" (p. 111). As such, this chapter just discussed the main categories of their experiences, as described by participants, and interpreted by me, the researcher. The intention here is to primarily amplify the participants' voices, which may not be heard otherwise, and highlight the identified concerns, described by participants, and interpreted

by the researcher, I, using an interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA). While the findings revealed complex and compounded challenges at all levels of refugees' migration trajectory, this chapter gave special emphasis on the post-migration experience and discussed the main challenges that middle school refugee children face in Winnipeg.

While several theoretical frameworks can be used to understand the experiences of refugee children's education, this study selected and focused on three related theories - the ecological perspective, trauma and resilience theory, and acculturation theory, which I believe best explain the phenomenon. Drawing on results from the significant body of literature on refugee studies (e.g., Stewart, 2007, 2011; Baffoe, 2011; Bhatia & Ram, 2001; Kanu, 2008; Lusting et al., 2004; Mollica, 2006) and participants' personal experiences, in this chapter, I discussed the findings, from a critical social work lens focusing on the current refugee children in Canadian middle schools.

7.2 Theoretical framework of the discussion

Refugee children are considered an extremely vulnerable group because of the psychological distress caused by traumatic experiences in their country of origin, during the flight, and the adaptation to a new life and culture in the host country (e.g., Stewart, 2007). With the never-ending global migration, studying adverse outcomes of these experiences has been the predominant aim of research on refugees for a long time (Lustig et al., 2004). Indeed, several studies have shown that refugee children and youth are at increased risk for a range of psychological problems, including posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression (Lustig et al., 2004). Stewart's (2007) study, which applied the Bio-ecological perspective as its framework to investigate the psychosocial and educational needs of refugee students in Winnipeg, confirmed that the pre-migration and trans-migration experiences of refugee children

are unique, diverse, and not always fully understood by others. The study revealed that the educational system played a pivotal role in the lives of the students; however, the students' adjustments were complicated by numerous barriers that impeded their progress. The psychosocial needs and challenges for war-affected children living in Canada appear to be difficult to identify, complicated to understand, and even more troubling to address (p. ii). What I understand from Stewart's conclusion, among others, is that a single theory alone is unable to explain the complex and dynamic challenges the children experience at each layer of ecology. As such, I have applied a few selected theories- Ecological, acculturation and trauma and resilience theories- to better understand participants' experience holistically from a critical social work lens. For instance, one of the participants in this study, Jamal, had experienced traumatic events (this can be explained by trauma and resilience theories), encountered resettlement stressors (can be explained by acculturation theories) and was exposed to the daily doses of overt and covert racism, prejudice and discrimination (can be explained by critical social work theories). Many scholars agreed that individual, family, school, and community factors influence the psychosocial adjustment of refugee children who came from conflict regions (Beiser, 2005). As Bronfenbrenner (1999) describes in his model, these systems of social ecology do not function independently of each other; instead, they work transactionally. That is, they are parts of the child's world that are dynamically intertwined and that interact with one another, with each transaction potentially influencing the child's adaptation and functioning in one or another system. For example, the post-migration experience, which is the focus of this paper, is characterized by four prominent categories of challenges: educational, economic, environmental, and psychosocial (Stewart, 2007). This may also be understood through the lens of intersectionality, which suggests that the interconnected nature of social categorization, such as

race, gender, and class, creates an overlapping and interdependent system of discrimination or disadvantages. Refugees' experience is constructed of multiple dimensions that do not exist independently of each other, and that each informs the others, and the intersection of these social forces profoundly shapes individuals' experiences (Crenshaw, 1990). The resettlement processes of refugee children in host countries are deeply influenced by race, gender, and the power status of a refugee child, both before and after migration to the host country (Bhatia & Ram, 2001). In light of a critical theoretical approach based on such a premise, I discussed how these intertwined factors and systems in participants' ecology – micro, mezzo, and macro - affected their educational outcomes.

7.2.1. Micro Level environment - Individual factors

While participants in this study are refugee youths from conflict zones, as seen in their transcripts, each one of them has unique experiences, strengths and needs that enhanced or hindered their educational journey. Acculturation is often operationalized through different constructs such as language use and proficiency, social contacts and relationships, cultural participation and activities, perceived discrimination, and sense of belonging (Berry & Sam, 1997). Inarguably, not every refugee child acculturates at the same pace, as their experiences, needs, and strengths are not alike. Participants shared their experiences on how they responded to school and their new environment differently depending on a variety of individual and contextual factors, including country of origin, family dynamics, religion, culture, and socio-economic and educational background before migration. These are relevant for understanding the particular needs of refugee students and developing appropriate educational support (Rutter, 2006, p. 11). However, refugee students have often been treated as a homogenous group, which

has prevented detailed examinations of pre-migration, trans migration and post-migration factors (McBrien, 2005, p. 41) that could hinder or promote their integration process in the host society.

> *There is a tendency in the school system to see all refugee students as the same. Assessment is done based on age, which doesn't focus on individual differences… Among these refugees, I have seen many bright students and some with no basic literacy. They are all in the EAL class. Each of them has a different story, but all went through adverse conditions, marked by war, violence, and displacement. Their schooling, therefore, poses immense challenges.* (Educator # 03)

> *They put me in grade 9, and I don't know anything …. It was difficult, and I didn't like it.* (Jamal)

> *I feel good to make it to grade 7. In fact, it was difficult for me, but I made it because of my previous basic education in Eritrea …* (Sofia)

As seen in the above quotations, individual differences are not considered. For instance, some participants transited through refugee camps for periods that vary greatly from one individual to another. During their stays in refugee camps, some had some education, but the conditions in which this schooling took place vary enormously. The pre-migration experience of a child, which is significant and yet often overlooked, differentiates the level of education among refugee students to place them in the appropriate grade upon registration. Before they arrived in Canada, Participants like Hakim and Jacob had formal education, whereas others, such as Tarik, had none. Some children, like Mohammed, never had the opportunity to attend schools in their hometown, and some, like Jamal, attended school in makeshift tents in refugee camps. For some refugee students, their first experience with formal education in a school setting occurred in their host country, and some went to traditional faith-based schools. School also has a different meaning to each participant. Miller, Mitchell, and Brown (2005) pointed out the cultural difference in the concept of schooling: "the norms of school behaviour and the knowledge of how to be a student might be different from those experienced in their home countries" (p. 93).

Furthermore, the individual-level factors that exist before acculturation (demographic, cultural, economic, personal, migration motivation, expectations) and those that exist during acculturation (acculturation strategies, participation, cultural maintenance, social support, coping strategies and resources, prejudice and discrimination) should be taken into consideration (Berry & Sam, 1997). For instance, language is one factor that can promote or hinder the smooth integration of refugee children since language skills are not only crucial for academic achievement but are essential for refugee students to develop a sense of belonging at school. Depending on the level of language skill participants acquired before immigrating to Canada, we have seen each participant have a different level of needs from other participants in this study. For example, Sofia and Jacob speak relatively better English than Dawit and Tarik, yet they were all placed in the same EAL class.

The nature, scope, time, and frequency of the traumatic experiences a child may have through the disruption of their environment during the war may thwart the normative tasks of individuation and development of autonomy that characterize adolescence in many cultures (Miller et al., 2005). Stewart (2007) argues that the level and intensity of traumatic experience each child may be exposed to could make a difference in their readiness for learning. Although people come from countries affected by war, some individuals might not have had as much direct contact with violence as others. Some children, Hakim, for instance, have suffered extreme violence, while others, like Ester, have witnessed violence against others at various degrees of severity.

As seen in participants' unique and shared experiences, obviously, refugee children are a heterogeneous group with different skills, experiences, and backgrounds. With all the psychological, emotional, social, and physical issues that each child experiences, school systems

must be aware of the unique needs and be prepared to assist them, rather than putting all refugee students in one category and forcing them to fit into the mould. Masten (2011) asserted that development is one factor within a child's complex individual system that interacts with other system components (e.g., gender, intelligence, physical capabilities) as well as other larger systems (e.g., micro system, mezzo system, macro system). Simply put, the assessment and intervention to address the educational needs of refugee children should be tailored to include individuals' unique acculturation experiences within the context of the individuals' immediate and larger environments. This includes other important factors such as age at the time of flight, migration, and resettlement, personality characteristics, and the level of family support and sustenance (Stewart, 2007).

As evidenced by the study participants' accounts, each refugee child in Canadian schools has a variety of unique learning, social and emotional needs that must be addressed before integration to the school system can be successful. I would argue that school personnel should realize that being a refugee does not define an identical educational trajectory for all children identified under this status. As these nine participants came from four different countries, having multiple cultures and upbringings and diverse experiences, the importance of assessing and addressing everyone's unique strengths and needs is inevitable. The intervention should begin with acknowledging that children who are refugees come from a variety of cultural backgrounds and diverse experiences (Rutter, 2006, p. 33).

7.2.2 Mezzo Level environment

In light of the Bio-ecological perspective, the mezzo system includes interactions between various aspects of the micro system. A relationship between a child's family and the child's

school can be considered part of the mezzo system, as these two have direct influences on parts of the micro system (Brofencher, 1999).

7.2.2.1. Family

Parents are the epicentre for a refugee child's healthy growth and development, or the lack thereof. Gunnestad (2006) describes that the success of refugee children depends on family resources and support, the family's capacity to translate traumatic experiences into motivational narratives, school approaches to inclusivity and cultural appropriateness, and broader social support and community attitudes. Participants unanimously reported that their parents (both single and couples) made and are still making huge sacrifices to see their children succeed in life. However, parents' commitment to support their children's education is hindered by complex individual and systemic challenges of parents themselves.

As discussed in the previous chapter, refugee families in Canada face and cope with a variety of acculturation challenges, and the impact on participants and their families that was reported is immense. It is noteworthy that refugee parents must negotiate to cope with issues of resettlement at various levels. For instance, parents who are unable to meet their financial needs and struggle with poverty appear to be emotionally fragile, tormented with guilt and shame, believing it is their fault for not getting employment and being unable to support the family. The internal or emotional stressors that involve cultural adjustment often lead to intergenerational conflicts with children and domestic violence between spouses. The external or practical level, which involves finding employment and a lack of language fluency, may break down the harmony of family dynamics (Stewart, 2007). Let us further illustrate the complexity of this type of challenge on children's education using one of the participants', Sofia's, stories.

> *My father was so depressed for many months because he could not get any kind of job. To make things worse, my mother got a cleaning job and started bringing money. This*

> *doesn't sit well with my father's self-esteem. During his stay in the home, ideally, my father felt hopeless and became argumentative. There was always tension in the home, and it was hard for me to focus on my studies.* (Sofia)

Sofia's father, who came from a patriarchal upbringing, believes that men are the head of the house and breadwinners. For that matter, any money his wife can bring from work is not considered normal, and it makes him a weak person in his community. As such, instead of enjoying the hard-earned money, the situation created stress in the household. From our modern perspective, we might assume Sofia's father is a fool who doesn't appreciate his wife's support. However, even today, despite a trend towards greater equality, some countries still discourage, if not ban, women from working outside, and it takes time for Sofia's father to change his attitudes. With unemployment came loss of status and identity, which led to frustration and depression. Sofia's father, who once was the breadwinner of the family, also embraced a cultural expectation that informs traditional Eritrean men as the breadwinners of families, despite economic exigencies that force women to enter the job market. In such cases, a man may be considered a failure in the community. He was constrained by cultural attitudes of women as housewives, who do not work outside of the home, as their role is caring for children, and his role is to go out and work. These post-migration circumstances posed great challenges for refugee fathers. This is not an isolated incident, and many participants' households have similar experiences from time to time. When refugee fathers do not have the necessary support mechanisms, the risk is that the magnitude of challenges that they face might undermine their ability to cope and could lead to family disintegration (Rezania, 2015, p. 6). That was what happened in Sofia's case.

> *Our father began drinking and arguing with all of us over everything …. I was halfhearted to confront him… in one hand, I know him well in good times when he works, and I understand his frustration. But…the fight continues, and the police came to our home several times….* (Sofia)

Sofia's parents were not only adjusting to the financial aspects of life in Canada, but with the whole gamut of human emotion associated with the resettlement and acculturation process. While the challenges are complex and multilayered, the stress associated with social isolation and the alteration of their roles within their families is paramount. Parents, particularly men, have family adjustment issues with cultural changes and loss of traditional identity associated with language, traditional cultural practices, re-education, re-skilling, and a shift in family dynamics (Fantino & Colak, 2001).

The other key issue participants shared is the existence of parent-teen conflict in the household. When children move to a new country, they are often faced with roles and expectations differing from those in their country of origin. Several studies reveal that children often adapt to a new language and cultural norms more quickly than their parents, leading to intergenerational misunderstandings, tensions between old and new cultures, and challenges to identity development (e.g., Suárez-Orozco, 2001). In my work with the child protection agency, on numerous occasions, I have witnessed parent-child conflict as one of the major reasons why refugee families are involved with the child welfare system. The children often struggle with being 'between cultures'– balancing the 'old' and the 'new,' while essentially belonging to both, whereas their parents often belong predominantly to the 'old' culture.

> *I love Bob Marley and listen to reggae music… but my mother didn't like it … she wants me to attend church with her … and if I have to listen to music, it should be traditional…. The more she bothered me… I stopped coming home.* (Dawit)

> *We always fight … my parents did not understand …I need to be with my friends and spend time with them…. They are worried I could be in trouble… At one time, I came very late, and my father didn't open the door… my mother was begging him to open, but he refused……I continued to bang the door, and my father came out to hit me…. neighbours called the police…… It was ugly……* (Jemal)

Participants of these families faced a complex developmental task, that of growing up within the context of their heritage culture while adapting to the values and expectations of mainstream culture (Cole, Hakkarainen, & Bredikyte, 2010). Refugee parents had high expectations for their children that contributed to parent-teenager conflict. Participants faced more difficulties in dealing with the expectations of the two cultures and experienced more conflicts with their parents. Dawit is a typical example to illustrate the challenge he encounters in falling between two cultures. According to Berry (1997), integration is considered to be the most beneficial strategy, associated with positive psychological, sociocultural, and economic outcomes, and is promoted in Canada (Rasmi et al., 2010). However, integration is not happening in a vacuum. It is a two-way process that involves both the newcomers and the host. Some participants (i.e., Dawit and Jemal) shared that they feel unaccepted in school and at home, and desperately joined a group that led Dawit to become involved with the justice system.

Another acculturation stressor that affects participants' educational outcomes is the additional tasks the children are subjected to. Refugee children take on roles and responsibilities beyond their years and are burdened with leading their families in navigating the resettlement process as a result of greater communication skills. It is often children who are helping their parents build cross-cultural community and social networks, who serve as their interpreters, and who translate documents and correspondence for parents (Cole et al., 2010).

That was what happened with Sofia and her parents.

> *I am the oldest and the better English speaker in the house. I am the one who always goes with my mother to translate my parents' appointments with the medical, bank, welfare… of course, my study suffers.* (Sofia)

> *My older brother, who is fast and active, takes my mother to a doctor's appointment, bank, and welfare… help in translation… I, too, have done it sometimes, and I missed classes.* (Mohammed)

Children learn the language and integrate faster than their parents, and it would be appropriate if a child could help their parents. Nevertheless, this practice at times becomes a source of conflicts and distress for parents. When children are required to do translation, unless service providers are careful, communication might involve confidential and adult-related information. There is no more embarrassing and deflated self-esteem moment for a proud Somali father than to be forced to discuss his confidential marital issue with a service provider in the presence of his child as an interpreter (author's personal experience, 2020). This can lead to children's and parents' compromised perception of the caregivers' ability to parent and difficulty in managing children's behaviour. These barriers and responsibilities adversely affect refugee students' skills to adjust and integrate successfully into a new schooling environment. Depending on their histories of trauma, anxiety, depression, and the stresses of seeking employment, managing a household with fragmented social networks can impact each parent's capabilities as responsive caregivers. In addition to the emotional toll participants experienced, the fact that their parents have difficulty accepting or understanding the Canadian culture makes them unable to help with their children's school problems.

> *Despite the school's relentless effort to invite parents to parent-teacher meetings, they often don't come. There are many reasons, like language barriers, not finding time due to work and attitude. One refugee parent from Africa once told me, "It is the teacher's job to teach, guide and punish students, not my job."* (Educator #01)

Many argue that parents' active involvement in schools is a desired task expected of parents. However, parental involvement is mainly a North American concept. It is neither expected nor practiced in many immigrants' countries of origin (Ogbu, 1995). Many refugee parents believe it is primarily the teachers' responsibility to handle children's academic and behavioural concerns at school, while parents focus on home-based responsibilities like manners and providing for the family. Nevertheless, some teachers come to believe that immigrant parents do not care about

their children's education. Regrettably, these teachers incorrectly interpret a lack of parental involvement as a lack of interest and concern (Delgado-Gaitan, 1990; Guo, 2006). This perception can lead to misunderstandings, as schools expect more parental involvement beyond just behaviour, which is crucial for student success and integration. Even if refugee parents want to be part of their children's education, they often lack time for school meetings due to the immense pressure of economic survival, acculturation, and adapting to new cultural norms, which leaves them with limited energy and availability. In a recent anti-oppressive conference in Winnipeg, Dr. Funke Oba presented her findings about refugee parents' mistreatment by school personnel. She pointed out that schools do not embrace black parents as partners with social capital. They are harassed and ridiculed in parent-teacher meetings if they ever make it (Oba, 2023).

7.2.2.2. Schools

Education is one of the significant factors in determining a child's success in life. It is a pearl of conventional wisdom that proper education is essential for a child; it is the process of achieving knowledge, values, skills, beliefs, and moral habits, and moreover, education can be a healing process for refugee students (Matthews, 2008). Many participants shared how they found a welcoming environment in their schools. They also mentioned having challenges for a seamless transition to the new school system.

> *Being in school for the most part gives me peace of mind. I go to school for many reasons… I study hard, get new skills and graduate with good grades… I am hoping to get a good job and help my mother... I also have a good time with my friends in school…. it keeps me from going to bad places… school life is good.* (Jacob)

For participants who have experienced conflict and crisis, starting school in a new place with different languages and cultures is daunting. Further to the formal academic knowledge they

provide, schools are considered to be a stabilizing feature in the unsettled lives of a refugee child by supporting refugee students and addressing social exclusion, mental health problems, and poor educational outcomes (Matthews, 2008, p. 28). Schools can create safe spaces where refugee children can express their concerns, feelings, and silences, as well as discuss their shared experiences. Sleijpen et al. (2017) pointed out, access to school and the possibility to integrate well into a new school system can mitigate the trauma's effect on young refugees. Sullivan and Simonson (2016) noted that schools had been proposed as critical sites for mental health interventions, especially for refugee children (p. 227). Schools can foster social-peer relationships and encourage a sense of belonging to the school community and the broader culture; these can likely play important roles in preventing mental illness (Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007, cited in Sullivan & Simonson, 2016, p. 242). Montgomery (2010) asserted that the entire education system should stimulate refugee children and not hinder their development (cited in Sleijpen et al., 2017). Most participants reported that, as much as they are happy and feel lucky to be part of the Canadian school system, they, however, did not hide their disappointment about the arbitrary age-oriented grade placement and misstatements by some teachers. They were often placing a notch or two above the grade they thought they should be.

> *They put me in grade 9, but I was in grade 4 in my country... I didn't like it. The students in the class laughed at me ... when I didn't answer a question correctly or struggled with my broken English ...* (Jamal)

As seen in the findings, being in grade 9 while they actually were at grade 4 and 5 levels was a difficult task for both Jamal and Dawit. It would be interesting to look into this practice of grade placement in detail using Jamal and Dawit's testimony as a point of reference. Jamal, a 14-year-old refugee student, was in 4th grade in a refugee camp school and considered himself an average student. Dawit was also 14 years old, but, in contrast, had not been attending school

regularly and immigrated to Canada with only a few years of schooling before he had a chance to develop basic literacy. Although both are refugees from the same country of origin, each had unique experiences and possessed different skill sets. However, both were placed in grade 9 regardless of their individual experiences and unique traits. While we need to examine the educational implications of placing them in grade 9, ignoring their individual ability, it is, however, clear that placing the two participants several grades above their ability and comfort level demonstrated how the school system set them up for failure. Sadly, their case is not isolated.

Despite their multifaceted challenges, these participants brought practical life skills shaped by years of exposure to war, survival and resiliency, which are not credited in the types of knowledge that the Canadian school system values. Based on participants' school experience in Winnipeg, it would be safe to conclude that, by placing Jamal and Dawit in a higher grade level than they qualified for, without considering their unique skills acquired through life experience, and not providing adequate support needed, the school system let them dive into uncharted water to sink or swim by themselves. Sadly, they both have sunk to the bottom of the sea.

Several reports have revealed that the school system is not responding to the needs of these students and, as a result, they are not being provided with an appropriate education (MacKay & Tavares, 2005, cited in Stewart, 2007, p. 11). As pointed out, school integration of refugee children can take place if all their learning, social, and emotional needs are addressed. However, when students' needs are not being met by the system, they often leave it, either reluctantly or voluntarily. This often results in the exacerbation of social issues and the further marginalization of the individual (Stewart, 2007, p. 5). But when refugee children are provided with the right support, school can be a safe place to heal from the trauma and hardship they may have faced

after being forced to flee home. Apparently, meeting students' needs begins at the time of initial assessment and registration.

> *I quit going to school because two of my friends also stopped going…… nobody cares… I choose to be with my friends out in the community smoking weed….* (Dawit)

Wilkinson (2002), in her study, highlighted the concern. While the variable "grade placement upon arrival" has not been systematically examined in the immigration literature, it is reasonable to suspect that students' perceptions of the appropriateness of grade placement upon arrival would be an important indicator of educational success. For many of the participants, however, placing them in grades based on their age creates mixed feelings (p. 68).

> *I mean, it is good to be in grade 7 with others, but…… I struggled a lot.* (Jamal)

> *I believe this is one of the reasons that makes me hate school… being in a grade above my level.* (Dawit)

> *I was confused …. When they put me in grade 9, I think it was a mistake…. They didn't talk to my mother or me… The settlement worker was with me but didn't say anything. The teacher spoke fast, and I didn't understand a word. There are many students in the class. I looked around and saw a few Somali students, and I feel good.* (Hassan)

We have seen in the findings section that the educational barriers, such as English literacy and the inappropriate grade placement based on age rather than competency, have a significant impact on the children's feelings of depression, isolation, and not 'fitting in' locally (Kanu, 2008; Macdonald, 2007; Shakya et al., 2010). The school acceptance assessment focuses primarily upon the barriers, challenges, risks, and vulnerabilities of refugee children, such as a lack of language proficiency, without recognition of their strengths and resiliencies. Scholars such as Mollica (2006) and Lusting et al. (2004) highlighted the strengths and resiliencies of refugee children and youth, critiqued existing oppressive structures, and advocated for assessment criteria that incorporate each student's unique abilities. However, teachers and other settlement

workers are also shaped by these deficit discourses as they often look for "the typical psychopathologies experienced by immigrants without mentioning the strengths that immigrants possess" (Potocky-Tripodi, 2002, cited in Sakamoto, 2007, p. 518). Tarik, one participant, was labelled as a child with ADHD because he was anxious and hyperactive in the classroom, but no one formally diagnosed him. Participants reported that at times, they were misunderstood by their teachers, and their questions were lost in translation and that they were ridiculed.

> *I am a very slow learner…. I am also stuttering… it takes time for me to ask questions, to understand what the teacher said…..in the beginning, my teacher sees me as a troublemaker, and lazy... but later he tries to be more patient…. But some bad kids in class keep bullying me …* (Jamal)

These findings are corroborated by many researchers in the field. For instance, Wilkinson (2001) illustrates that the unjust response of the school system when refugee students perform poorly in school is often blamed on the "refugee experience." Rousseau, Drapeau, and Corin (1996) find that grades are negatively correlated with previous trauma. They also find that even when refugee students excel in school, they are more often assigned to remedial classes than are their Canadian-born counterparts. It is a presumption of many school administrators that refugees invariably encounter integration problems in the education system. Such assumptions can perpetuate unequal treatment that may hinder refugee youth's future education (cited in Wilkinson, 2001, p. 35).

Many participants also pointed out a difference in teaching method (pedagogy) and school culture between their old schools in the country of origin and refugee camps, and the new school in Winnipeg was a big challenge. Mohammed, a participant of this study, remembers, in Africa, students place a high value on teachers and always respect them, and the teachings of parents and elders have a place in the holistic education of students. However, he found it different here.

> *Students call their teacher by names…. We don't... We call Sir or Madam… we don't come to class after the teacher starts teaching…. Here, students eat, drink, talk… when the teacher is in the room, they can go out before class ends… the teachers think I am rude because I don't answer questions right away…..I am afraid to see the teacher directly in the eye… but he doesn't like it… he is more friendly with the students who disrupt the class… I don't get it.* (Hassan)

> *I don't think teachers understand me.* (Dawit)

The formal school setting presents a dispirited picture of teachers seeing refugee children through a primary deficit lens and perpetuating the single story of being troubled and needy (Kanu, 2008). Despite such evidence-based findings and recommendations, schools continue with their traditional way of teaching without genuine consideration of the refugee students' emotional and academic needs. For instance, this finding by Kanu (2008) was published about fifteen years ago, and yet the situation has not changed at all. This study, conducted by me in 2022 -2023, also found similar concerns about the practice of grade assigning at the intake level. Teachers have been reported to overlook the children's traumatic experiences, and, for example, interpret Jamal's behaviour as being inattentive, though the behaviour could be a direct manifestation of posttraumatic stress disorder. On the other hand, a teacher attributed Dawit's behavioural issues solely to the trauma Dawit has experienced and neglected to examine the relevance of the school curriculum for his cultural/ethnic identity or make efforts to engage Dawit in understanding the issue (Mollica, 2006). Other researchers, such as Stewart (2007) argue that instead of pathologizing the children as recipients of trauma, we need to turn our attention to understanding how these children make sense of or construct their experiences (p. 10). What we are witnessing in present-day schools is, refugee students often struggle to adapt to Canadian education systems, and for their part, educators also face challenges when developing effective strategies to help these students make smooth transitions to their new country (Brewer & McCabe, 2014).

Ratkovvic et al. (2017) pointed out that discrimination in schools as well as with the broader community could be connected to the oppressive nature of the educational system. They further argue, “Psychological isolation at school and discriminatory attitudes from some teachers place refugee students' self-esteem, social competence, and academic achievements at risk, hindering the student's social, economic, and political integration in the receiving society” (p. 3). Such unresponsive educational settings, as Gay (2010) pointed out, may further perpetuate the cycle of achievement gap based on the benchmark set predominantly by the White middle-class students in schools with “Eurocentric orientations and emphasis” (p. 143). As Stewart (2007) noted, students whose needs are not being met by the school system drop out of school or are pushed out of school. This pattern is referred to by Portes and Zhou (1993) as the downward spiral, which needs to be more thoroughly investigated and subsequently eliminated in this generation of refugees (p. 22). Ratkovvic et al. (2017) also supported the need for research and policy development to explore and implement holistic approaches to education and resettlement (p. 27). As seen in the previous chapter, despite their futile effort to stay afloat in the school system, two of the participants dropped out of school, and one became a casual worker. and Dawit, the other participant, ended up getting involved with gang-related activities and is in and out of prison.

7.3. Macro-level factors

Further to our discussion on the hardship the children experienced at micro and mezzo levels in accessing education, the intersectional perspective would help us understand how gender, race, poverty, and ability affect refugee children's integration and access to services at the macro level environment. A child's life experience is not a single entity; instead, it is the compilation of several multi-level environments and the interconnectedness between them (Stewart, 2007). The basic premise of the bio-ecological theory states that development is a function of the forces

emanating from multiple settings and from the relations between these settings (Bronfenbrenner, 1999, p. 17). In this regard, from all settings, the most notable of environmental changes for participants was the transition to a new country. Participants have been uprooted from their birthplace, fled to the neighbouring countries in haste and went on dangerous journeys, suffered in refugee camps and finally immigrated to the unknown. Coming to Canada was not the end of their sufferings, as all participants and their parents had hoped for, but the beginning of another set of challenges that included culture shock, marginalization, and several acculturation stressors.

> *It is a complete change for me to see students disrespect their teacher…* (Sofia)
> *Sometimes, I wish if I could go back to the desert… the cold is brutal in Winnipeg* (Tarik)
>
> *I always feel I am different….* (Hassan)

As the following discussion revealed, the macro-level environment significantly influenced the development of each participant. While multiple intersectional macro-level factors could potentially determine participants' success or failure, I presented here a discussion on the impact of race, gender, and poverty on participants and the larger refugee children's education.

7.3.1 Race

The discussion of the relevance of race in participants' education in Canadian schools can start at the underachievement and complete withdrawal from learning by many refugee children like Jamal and Dawit. Padilla and Perez (2003) note that an individual's perceptions of acceptance and stigmatization within the dominant community influence their level of acculturation. While Canada has accepted refugees for many years and prides itself on its immigration policy as fair and inclusive, researchers indicate that evidence of racism still exists in Canadian schools (Baffoe, 2011). Agyepong (2010) also observed that after decades of multiculturalism, schools may act like racism does not exist, but it does. The literature on race

and ethnicity identifies structural barriers and discrimination in Canadian society that can inhibit equal participation in school, the labour market, and in other aspects of social life (Wilkinson, 2001, p. 42). Another recent example that demonstrates the prevalence would be the 2015 report on the well-being of students in one Toronto school, which found that black youth struggle with low expectations from teachers and administrators, stereotypes about their commitment to the school, and intellectual inferiority (James & Turner, 2015). The researchers concluded that one thing that cannot be denied is the fact that racism, particularly anti-blackness, not only lives in Canada, but it also thrives (James & Turner, 2015). The quotations from participants' transcripts in the previous chapter highlight the severity of the concern.

Further to the direct impact of racism and xenophobia in hindering access to resources, there is a demonstrated relationship between racial discrimination and psychological distress, low self-esteem, internalizing and externalizing behaviours, and poorer school performance among children of colour (Sellers, Copeland-Linder, Martin, & Lewis, 2006). Also, perceived racial discrimination constitutes a significant stressor that can jeopardize the mental health of refugees who are resettling into new communities (Beiser, 2005).

> *I am not comfortable being around white students. They showed me how they hated me… they don't see me as a normal student…. I feel they do not need me in their circle. I was bullied by students, but the school and the police didn't help me… They instead hurt me. When I am around them (Caucasian students), I feel …….* *(He* raised his two hands and held his neck tightly, trying to show me a sign of suffocation) …. *(Hakim)*
>
> *My English is broken, and there is one white classmate who always mocked at me. There are a few names I can't pronounce correctly, and he laughed …. When I try to answer a question and see this guy looking at me …. I lost it …. I can't speak, and the teacher was confused… His laugh was hurting … It reminds me of the police in Yemen.* (Maria)
>
> *Bullying is normal… especially, I remember the attack on one of my friends…. a Muslim girl …. There were a few white dudes who said mean things to her… teachers knew who they were but didn't do anything… I get angry…and sometimes raise my voice…. When I was angry and spoke to the vice principal, he thought I was crazy and told me to see a*

> *therapist… Instead of talking to the bullies, she warned me to shut my mouth……..*
> (Esther)

In most such instances, participants reported the incident to the school authorities, hoping the school would correct the individual who made the mistake, but their complaints did not go very far to correct the person responsible for the bullying, as seen in Ester's case. Instead, there are times when victims are re-victimized physically and emotionally by the school system. Participants like Hakim and Sofia had experienced learned helplessness and felt unsafe to speak out, and silently boiled with anger. Consequently, they learned to distance themselves from the mainstream children and society, which led to their inadequate integration. One important point to note here, when the police officer referred to Hakim, "this is Canada," it was a coded message delivered to Hakim and other newcomer students that implied a white student never starts a fight. Repeatedly encountering derogatory remarks like *"You are uncivilized - it is in your culture to fight, where you came from, but not here*", it is no wonder Hakim and other participants became resentful.

Indeed, experiences of discrimination are strongly associated with symptoms of PTSD and depression among refugee children (Sellers et al., 2006). Maria's classmates' discriminatory remarks and gaslighting had a significant impact on Maria's education. When he laughed and mocked her, it made Maria doubt her ability to speak English and made her feel alone and powerless. She was intimidated by his bad gaze that felt like breaking all her bones, and she stopped participating in class activities. The repeated insensitive and discriminatory remarks that the teachers were unable to stop also triggered her traumatic experiences with the Yemeni police. Ratković et al. (2017) argued "even today in the 21st century, refugee students continue to experience socio-psychological challenges in Canadian schools because teachers, resettlement

officers, and policymakers often lack cross-cultural competences, a social justice focus, and transformative leadership skills" (p. 27).

> *Some teachers (Caucasians) are not aware of the traumatic experience these children went through… and unknowingly provoke them and trigger bad memories. Of course, we take cultural competency training from time to time…. But it is not enough… we need more tools.* (Educator# 03)

Several participants mentioned how they had experienced discrimination from other students while in school and were not able to do anything about it, and so "suffered quietly." They shared upsetting expressions of discrimination and prejudice experienced at the community and systemic levels. It is worth noting here, Hakim's experience, as captured in the previous chapter, reinforces the fact that individual and systemic racism exist in Canada. Hakim's experience of being an innocent victim of blind justice showed how racism is deeply entrenched in Canada. The racially motivated fight by a white student who attacked Hakim was strengthened by the school staff and police, and, as a result, Hakim, the victim, was suspended from school while the perpetrator, the white student, went free. A seemingly minor fight between two students that could have ended with a disciplinary measure by a fair and accountable school system went beyond its scope and added extra layers of complexity. It is just one classic example that demonstrates the unfair treatment of refugee students because of their colour and social status.

Despite all the overt and covert racism in full display, some still talk about how good Canada and its multiculturalism policy to refugees is. At the policy level, multiculturalism refers to the management of diversity through formal initiatives in the federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal domains (Brosseau & Dewing, 2009). While the significance of multiculturalism in Canada is to ensure that all citizens keep their identities, take pride in their ancestry and have a sense of belonging, many argue that refugees are not immune from discrimination. For instance, Mahtani (2002) argues that multicultural policy can serve to camouflage and veil underlying

racial animosities. Mahtani concludes that the policy of multiculturalism may serve to reinforce stereotypes rather than decrease racism in Canada (cited in Shakya et al., 2008, p. 75). While the debate for and against multiculturalism continues, I would argue, contrary to the public discourse and the Government's image-building narratives, racism in Canadian schools is real, and its impact on refugee children's well-being is visible and needs a closer look.

7.3.2 Gender

Refugee girls endure trauma as any other refugee does during their pre-migration, migration, and resettlement period, in addition to the traumatic experiences unique to women. Studies of gender in war-affected, refugee and immigrant children suggest several differences in girls' and boys' war trauma experiences. Girls and women are more likely to experience sexual trauma, including sexual enslavement, mass, and repeated rapes, and forced acts of sexual violence with family members (Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children [WCRWC], 2006). This makes integrating into a new environment difficult as there are often trust issues, along with fear of further violence, abuse, and trauma (Guterres & Spiegel, 2012). Female participants in this study shared some of their sufferings in their countries of origin and refugee camps that happened because of their gender and how those incidents eroded their trust in strangers.

> *My mother always tells me stories that happened to her and her siblings when she was in Somalia. One day, she was with her family celebrating a wedding, filled with joy and laughter. Then, suddenly, armed men intrude upon the gathering, threaten their lives, and change everything in an instant. They fired bullets through the air, and when everybody was in panic, they selected the girls, maybe 20 of them, and left in a hurry. My mother survived only because she was too young to be taken. Two of the girls taken were her cousins.* (Maria)

This is the harrowing reality that Maria was told from an early age, which led to her developing a fear of men.

> *I am always careful to meet with male students and teachers. I make sure there is another person in the room. It never happened to me, but I heard so many bad stories in the refugee camp. My mother also warned me not to trust boys.* (Esther)

Growing up in such a hostile environment where women are targeted by men for possible forced marriage, rape, and/or slavery, it is no wonder refugee girls like Maria and Esther have an omnipresent fear of being attacked by men, so they always try to be nicer to them and/or pacify them to reduce the risk of harm. While refugee girls, at least the three participants in this case, have valid reasons to be apprehensive of boys, ignoring their concerns in class activities that involve male participation would be contrary to the trauma-informed practice. A study shows that a traumatic experience of a female with a male during childhood may trigger androphobia, a fear of men. According to Dr. Sharma, Androphobia is an irrational and persistent fear of men. While it is not a widely discussed phobia, it can have a significant impact on an individual's daily life, relationships, and overall well-being (Sharma, 2023). I would not say most refugee girls are genuinely afraid of men in general, no. They know that most men are not a threat to them, but they are also aware of the risks of being in the wrong place with the wrong man. In such situations, they show an instant, intense fear, anxiousness or panic when they see or think about men. Maria, a participant in the study, developed this fear after hearing secondhand about a negative experience with men from her mother and may take time to avoid, as this should be addressed with professional medical help.

Another noted challenge for female participants is the cultural norms their parents imposed on them. Being female in most African cultures has distinct traditional expectations from their male counterparts. For instance, girls and women are generally expected to dress in typically feminine ways and be polite and limited in household chores. Men are generally expected to be strong and the breadwinners. Acculturating away from a culture of origin may have very

different implications for stress and adjustment for girls than for boys (Suárez-Orozco, 2001). This perspective may be particularly useful for understanding acculturation and adjustment among refugees, where gender roles are divergent between the culture of origin and resettlement. Once they are resettling in Canada, cultural expectations from both countries of origin and the host society may further differentiate the experience of refugee boys and girls. Participants experienced more family pressures related to changes in family roles, acculturation, and sexual norms. For example, in many of the participants' cultures, girls play key roles in caregiving and household duties that include cooking food, cleaning the house, babysitting the younger siblings, and running errands in the community.

> *I am like a mother to my younger brothers and sister. When they came from play and were hungry, they didn't even ask me for food; they demanded as if it was my duty to feed them. I do all the house chores without complaint. I grew up this way, and I cannot change it now.* (Sofia)

As we can see, these roles and traditions created tension in Sofia's household when expectations of the household chores blocked her from attending school regularly and studying hard to pursue higher education. Maria, another participant, was not immune to her traditional role expectations at home.

> *I do not have time to study. Of course, I go to school every day, but with low energy. Not enough sleep and I get tired…. I have to finish cleaning the dishes from last evening's supper and help my mother prepare another meal for tomorrow. No time to do homework. My teacher, who is concerned about my low grades, encourages me to call Child and Protection. He said this must stop … it is child abuse... I won't do that. No way to report my parents to the authorities. This is how I was raised, helping parents with house chores.* (Maria)

Another social aspect that female participants shared was the problematic discussion they encountered with the topic of sex and dating. Refugees in Canada come from many different countries and represent a range of cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and religious heritages. In some cultures, premarital dating, sex, and talking about marriage are taboo topics, especially in many

Muslim communities. There is great reluctance among Muslim participants to discuss these issues openly.

> *In school, my friends talked about dating and having a crush on one of the boys… something like that…. I was embarrassed to talk about it… ……it is strictly haram (forbidden) … My family put a strong value on staying away from men until I get married. I didn't date anyone….* (Maria)

> *Dating is forbidden in our home…no connection before marriage. I have to protect my sisters from making mistakes.* (Tarik)

Participants' parents would like to see their children carry their cultural practices with them, including abstaining from sex before marriage, and to what extent they integrate into the Western lifestyle. Tension developed for refugee girls navigating Canadian adolescent activities such as dating, which may conflict with their family or cultural expectations. In response, families may monitor the activities of their female children more closely (Suárez-Orozco, 2001) and put sanctions on those who do not follow the traditional roles.

> *My brothers have more freedom than me. After school, they eat their snacks and run to the field and play and do whatever they want. No one asks them. I was told repeatedly to come early from school and help…be a nice girl. My mom always refers to how she is happily living by obeying our father. If my brother sees me with a boy, I am done…. imagine, I am the oldest…but he is the one who controls my relationship (she laughed).* (Sofia)

In general, participants, especially Muslim refugee girls, shared facing multiple and complex challenges that include acculturation stress, discrimination and bullying. None of these can be examined in a vacuum. They all intersect not only with each other but also with the oppressed nature of the dominant culture. The three girls in this study were subjects of racism and discrimination, just because they were female, black, Muslim and had a different culture than the mainstream Canadian. Gay (2010) further argued, refugee women of colour resettling in Canada may also find themselves caught in the intersection of racism and sexism that promotes

assumptions of deficiency, which could reduce their passion, self-esteem, and thus motivation to pursue post-secondary education (Gay, 2010).

7.3.3 Poverty

Another concerning and frequently overlooked aspect of refugee children and their families' resettlement challenges is poverty. Child poverty is at an alarming level in Canada, where refugee children are affected disproportionately (The Canadian Teachers Federation, CTF, 2009). It is a well-established fact that many refugees have uniquely complex circumstances (e.g., systemic barriers, language proficiency, and poor social support), which predispose them to poverty (e.g., Stewart, 2007; Lusting et al., 2004). The Canadian Teachers Federation (2009) reported that children in racialized groups, new Canadian and Aboriginal families, as well as children with disabilities, are at higher risk of living in poverty (p. 2).

Participants also shared their experience with poverty.

> *There are days when I go to school with an empty stomach and with no lunchbox.* (Hassan)

> *The school offered hampers (some fresh vegetables, fruits, and canned rice). I feel ashamed to be in line to take the hamper, but I did take it anyway.* (Dawit)

> *It is difficult for my parents to feed us. There are times we skip meals.* (Jamal)

Several researchers found the existence of a direct link between poverty and school outcomes. Miller, Votruba-Drzal, and Coley (2019) argued, poor children begin school with fewer academic skills than their non-poor peers, and these disparities translate into lower achievement, educational attainment, and economic stability in adulthood (p. 106). When students come to class hungry, it is obvious their minds are not on education. Their minds are on where the next meal is going to come from, and this worry interferes with their thought process. The strong correlation between socio-economic status and children's academic performance is

well established. In analyzing five-year-old children's readiness to learn based on gender, level of household income, and a child's home environment, researchers concluded that children from lower-income families were less ready to learn than children from more affluent households (Statistics Canada, 2006).

All participants in this study came from poor parents and still live in poverty, and because poverty affects the development and well-being of children and families, it is safe to conclude that most, if not all, participants' academic achievements have been significantly affected. Studies revealed that the multiple risk factors associated with poverty, including stress and chaos, interfere with effective proximal processes. According to a recent survey by Kellogg Canada, the vast majority of teachers report significant differences in a child's behaviour, depending on whether they have had breakfast. According to the report, 93 percent of teachers agree that hungry children are more disruptive in class (Kellogg Canada, 2017). On average, teachers estimated that children who come to school hungry lose up to two hours a day due to lack of productivity- that is, one-third of the school day or almost four months in a school year. This equates to more than four years of a child's school career from kindergarten to Grade 12 (CTF, 2009).

Decades of research have demonstrated the seriousness and range of the effects of childhood poverty in Canada. In 2021, almost 1.4 million children under 18 in the ten provinces lived in a food-insecure household, and this situation is likely even worse now, given the unprecedented inflation in costs of basic needs (Campaign 2000, 2022). In such times of challenges, Canada has a long history of using cash transfers and tax credits to support families. The Canada Child Benefit (CCB) is the primary federal government transfer supporting low-income families and one of the key elements of Canada's Poverty Reduction Strategy. The Canada Child Benefit

(CCB) is a tax-free monthly payment made to eligible families to help with the cost of raising children under 18 years of age (Government of Canada, n.d.). The two-fold purpose of the CCB is to reduce child poverty and to recognize the contribution parents make in raising children.

There is a controversy over the degree to which the CCB has contributed to poverty reduction. Many questions were raised regarding the policy. Such as does the benefit help stabilize families, particularly marginalized groups? A Report Card on Child and Family Poverty in Canada (Campaign 2000, 2022) stated that from 2019 to 2020, every province and territory saw a reduction in child poverty due to increased transfers from governments to families and individuals. Manitoba saw the largest decrease of 7.7 percentage points, falling from 28.4% in 2019 to 20.7% in 2020 (p.19). While a few factors likely contributed to the reduction in child poverty, the CCB was a key reason. On the other hand, critics like Campaign 2000 (2022) argue that the CCB is losing its power to sustain an ongoing reduction in child poverty. Despite the statistics documenting reductions in child poverty in recent years, progress has stalled. Monitoring of household food insecurity in Canada has shown that many families with children are still unable to afford basic needs like adequate food. The Canada Child Benefit (CCB) has failed to insulate many low-income families from poverty and food insecurity (p. 2). Statistics are even more discouraging when it comes to refugee children and families. More than one in five children who have been in the country five years or less lived in poverty (21.8%). This rate was more than double the rate for non-immigrant children (10.7%). The overall poverty rate for immigrant children (18.8%) was higher than the national average (11.8%) (p. 9).

According to Campaign 2000 (2022), the problem is two-fold: 1) the CCB is not providing enough money to enable families to be food secure, and 2) there are barriers to accessing it for

families from systemically marginalized communities (p. 6). I would argue the CCB is a significant policy imitative and could be a more effective tool to protect vulnerable families from food insecurity and support poverty alleviation obligations by increasing the benefit size for the lowest-income families while ensuring its accessibility to marginalized families. It is worth mentioning here, the Manitoba Government's new initiatives to address the problem. In addition to CCB, the Manitoba Government is attempting to reduce child poverty by providing food for students. Students in Manitoba can get a nutritious meal or snack when they need one, with the universal school nutrition program now available in every school in the province. The Manitoba government committed $30 million in Budget 2024 to make a meal or snack available to students across the province (Manitoba Government, 2024). Similarly, the federal government must ensure that all children have the right to the same services and standards of care, regardless of race or immigration status, and that these rights are realized (Campaign 2000, 2022, p. 28). Refugee children may overcome poverty or hunger and succeed in their studies if supported by all the systems in their ecology.

7.4. Integration/Acculturation

Refugee children face challenges when adapting to Canadian society, which has different norms and values compared to their home countries, as they must navigate conflicting expectations from their family, peers, religion, and the larger settlement society. For a refugee child escaping atrocity and fleeing to a host country, like Canada, it is just like winning half of the battle. Unlike the conventional public discourse that prides Canada as a cultural mosaic where all cultures live in harmony, refugee children are hunched over with the burden of intersectional challenges in Canadian schools and the community. Once resettled, many refugee students encounter academic, economic, and psychosocial difficulties (Kanu, 2008; Stewart,

2011; Baffoe, 2011). Smooth and successful integration is the key to refugee children's school achievement and social contribution, and the UNHCR (2002) defines integration as:

> a mutual, dynamic, multifaceted, and ongoing process. From a refugee perspective, integration requires a preparedness to adapt to the lifestyle of the host society without having to lose one's own cultural identity. From the point of view of the host society, it requires a willingness for communities to be welcoming and responsive to refugees and for public institutions to meet the needs of a diverse population. (p. 12)

This definition highlights integration as a process that occurs at both the level of the individual refugee and the level of the receiving community. However, Sehermerhom (1970) argues that it is the dominant group in a society that sets the tone and determines the nature of the integration activities and objectives. The dominant group sets the integrative agenda and typically determines the desirable long-range goals for the subordinate group(s) as well as for itself (cited in Baffoe, 2011, p. 31).

> *I do not have many white friends, maybe one … she is a very nice girl…. I am not comfortable around others. Most of them are mean. They bullied us [Refugee students], made jokes about my English and food. I don't think they will accept me even if I wanted to, and I don't really care anymore. I have lots of friends from my community.* (Esther)

Here, Esther's reluctance to meet strangers out of her comfort zone, coupled with the mainstream children's avoidance and at times combative attitude, makes it difficult for Esther and other refugee children to integrate. Though multiculturalism focuses on the recognition of cultural and ethnic identities as a means to facilitate integration, it seems that it has not yet hit its mark, at least in Esther's case. Moreover, the policy presents multiculturalism as a positive instrument of change that aims to remove barriers that preclude the involvement, equity, and representation of all citizens in Canada's institutions (Brosseau & Dewing, 2009). Moodley (1995) critiques multicultural education for its lack of addressing issues of inequality, power, and racism. He argues that the problem with the integration policy and its implementation is that they

contradict each other by ignoring differences and implicitly imposing the dominant culture on refugees (p. 808). Participants' real and perceived marginalization and discrimination in schools, neighbourhoods and in society at large, as exhibited by participants' narratives, show the need to review the unsuccessful multiculturalism policy despite its thirty-plus years of existence. While it is not the scope of this study to discuss multiculturalism in depth, I should at least highlight one fact to clarify what it means to refugees. As much as we like to think of multiculturalism as a celebration of differences, sadly, that is not the case. According to Statistics Canada, the number of hate crimes reported by police in Canada rose from 2,646 incidents in 2020 to 3,360 in 2021, a 27% increase. This finding follows a 36% increase in 2020. The number of police-reported hate crimes rose by 72% from 2019 to 2021 (Statistics Canada, 2023).

Studies reveal that the mass integration process did not consider the uniqueness of each child and deemed the children to be failures. As a result, refugee children are at higher risk of school dropout. In one longitudinal study, fewer than two in three refugee youth graduated high school, with the age of arrival and experiences of discrimination as factors associated with dropout (Correa-Velez, Gifford, McMichael, & Sampson, 2017). Baffoe (2011), stating his many years of experience with refugee children, attested " … ironically, that it is instead the same system that accelerates the youth's descent into more difficulties with the integration into their new society…. Many thus end up on the wrong side of the law from which they never recover" (p. 11). This statement is also confirmed to be true in this study, as only four of the nine participants completed high school and moved to post-secondary education, which means over 50 % of them were not successful in their learning. I would like to highlight that success is not dependent only on individual traits but on the overall function of the child's environment. The ongoing implicit push by Canadian society, coupled with the explicit lack of willingness by policymakers to

respect refugees' traditional values, puts refugee children in a precarious situation for successful integration. For example, on October 3, 2016, the Angus Reid Institute and CBC released the results from a national polling partnership that revealed 68 percent of Canadians surveyed wanted minorities to increase their efforts to assimilate into Canadian society. Furthermore, as Sakamoto (2007) pointed out, immigrants are often compared to the 'cultural' standards held by the native-born as if that is the natural developmental trajectory of being a cultural person.

> *We attempt to participate and be happy in Halloween and Christmas celebrations, but no white kid cares to celebrate or even appreciate Ramadan with us. They even see Islam as uncivilized.* (Tarik)

Indeed, providing prayer spaces for Muslim students in some schools is encouraging. However, I would argue that considering the stereotype and generalization of all Muslims as one culture is disrespectful and makes the school accommodation effort less significant, but rather tokenistic. Bissoondath (2002) argues that cultures are very complex and must be transmitted through close family and kin relations to the child. The liberal view of cultures, as being about festivals and cuisine, such as an annual Folklorama festival in Winnipeg, and schools asking students to bring their cultural food in a potluck, is a crude oversimplification that leads to easy stereotyping. Promoting and/or luring a refugee child to assimilate into the host culture without helping them retain their culture has more harm than good in the long run. Each refugee child should have the right to choose whichever culture to embrace and or retain freely. In addition, while acculturation (Berry, 1997) was originally proposed as the mutual change of both parties, the change processes of host societies are often neglected in research (p. 520). Hence, controversies, contradictions, and core differences of refugees' cultural backgrounds are evaluated based on whether they are compatible or incompatible with the values of the majority culture (Moodley, 1995). It is worth noting, refugee children's parents' undesirable involvement with the child protection system,

mainly due to their adherence to their traditional parenting styles, is one example of the assimilation problem. I have witnessed when these disfranchised and disrespected refugee mothers are mandated to attend the mainstream parenting classes by a very young child welfare worker, to correct their "inappropriate parenting" practice. This is because their parenting methods were not adequate from the Western perspective, despite this particular refugee mother having already raised six adult children successfully, and the children became parents themselves. This is another paradoxical example of multiculturalism that pledges to respect other cultures (Author's personal note, 2021).

For a smooth transition and successful integration, the children's ecosystem (micro, mezzo, and macro) must be in equilibrium and work in tandem. One of the things I learned from participants' stories is that refugee children are capable of change and have the capacity to bounce back from adversities, especially when they are supported. We have seen that the various themes discussed (i.e., poverty, lack of access to education, and experiencing trauma) are not mutually exclusive occurrences. They are interconnected and intertwined with a direct causal link. For instance, Jacob, whose parents were poor and unable to generate sufficient income to feed five children (poverty), struggled to send Jacob and his siblings to school. School was also far from their home and required uniforms and school supplies (lack of access). Seeing his children starved and having no education to secure decent employment, Jacob's father was forced to engage in illegal business and was killed (trauma).

7.5. Resilience

We have seen in the previous sections that relocating to a new country and changing schools is hard enough for children without the added obstacles of having to learn a new language, adapt to a new culture, move to a new home, split up from family, and cope with the fact that their

home country is in conflict. Participants shared about the challenges they encountered throughout their migration trajectory, which included experiencing acculturation stressors after they arrived in Winnipeg. Some, at the time of their arrival, were mentally stable and healthy, and some struggled with a little anxiety and distress so that they needed help from the school and settlement workers to overcome bumps in the road. However, schools, at times, are found to be sources of stress and anxiety instead of being a safe place for refugee children. Ramos and Ungar (2017) confirmed this fact, stating that refugees look to schools as institutions to help children and families form friendships and social networks. At the same time, and unfortunately, schools are far too often the first place where children and youth experience bullying, discrimination, and other setbacks (p. 4).

All participants shared experiencing a great deal of adversity, yet some have come through it successfully, and some have not. Taking the two participants' experiences (Sofia and Dawit) as an example, it would be fair to ask why one person embraces the tough times and continues to succeed while another crumbles and is doomed to fail. Is this personal? Is resilience an individual endeavour? If so, is it a skill set that Dawit lacks or needs to practice? Dawit proved, time and again, his survival skills by escaping danger in his country of origin and the horror of the refugee camps. He made it to Canada in the midst of enormously difficult circumstances. If resilience is a personal trait, what went wrong with Dawit when it came to his unsuccessful school achievement in Canada? Let us have a closer look at the two participants' experiences (Dawit and Sofia) to investigate whether a personal trait alone is good enough to overcome resettlement stressors and the impact of having a support system in enhancing resilience in individuals.

Dawit immigrated to Canada in 2014 from Sudan with his single mother, 2 sisters and a brother. He is originally from Eritrea and immigrated to Sudan when he was a mere toddler. Dawit remembered that he did not have any education until he was six years old. Even then, access to quality education in Darfur's refugee camp was a challenge. Despite his enrollment in the school in the Darfur refugee camp, he encountered a number of challenges, including overcrowding and a shortage of trained teachers. Considering the challenges of living in refugee camps with a single mother surrounded by tumultuous relationships and minimal support, it is no wonder to see Dawit immigrate to Canada with an inadequate educational background for his age. Sofia, on the other hand, is a female participant from Eritrea who immigrated to Canada in 2016 from a refugee camp in Sudan. While in Eritrea, Sofia's parents were ordinary village people with a very low income, where life was so hard, yet Sofia had her primary education while living with a nurturing family. Later, Sofia's father left Eritrea and attempted to go to Europe via Libya and later immigrated to Canada in 2010. Once in Canada, Sofia's father told the mother of his children in Eritrea to go to Sudan. Soon after, the mother, along with her seven children, including Sofia did immigrated to Sudan and waited in the refugee camp for five years till they got sponsored to Canada in 2016. Sofia's family remained united during their challenges. Later in Canada, Sofia lives with her two parents and several siblings in a loving and caring environment despite their meagre financial income. She also attends her church regularly, which provides her with emotional support.

As we can see from the two youth participants' experience, although each participant underwent similar atrocities in their countries of origin, Eritrea, and Sudan refugee camps yet the support system that came from family members, friends, community was different. Does this matter? Savazzi (2018) stated that no two refugee experiences are the same, but when families

are forced to flee from their home country, it's common for them to have spent months-or even years-in countries of asylum where access to shelter, food, water, work, and education were limited or non-existent, and daily life was a struggle (p. 5). Indeed, both Dawit and Sofia have been through a tremendous amount of adversity and experienced a great deal of change and loss. However, there are differences in handling the effects of the traumatic experiences that led me to wonder why some children like Sofia seem to thrive, even dealing with very stressful situations and adversity, while others, such as Dawit, failed to successfully manage and recover from similar challenges. What are the factors that contribute to Sofia's academic success and Dawit's relatively low achievement, while they both are of Eritrean origins and have experienced traumatic challenges and continue to be filled with upheaval and change in Winnipeg? It needs to be acknowledged that refugees from Eritrea, let alone the larger East Africa, are not a homogeneous group, and diversity exists between individuals and groups with respect to culture, religion, and educational and socioeconomic background. As such, by focusing on the two participants' experience, we hope to strike a balance between overgeneralizations across cultures and contexts and a too-narrow focus on individual resilience.

What does resilience mean in such stressful resettlement environments? Resilience has taken on the appeal of a buzzword in recent social sciences literature. In the past, resilience was described as patterns of desirable behaviour in situations where adaptive functioning or development has been or currently is significantly threatened by adverse experiences (Masten, 1999). In that sense, the term resilience has come to mean an individual's ability to overcome adversity and continue his or her normal development, but some argue it is not the only trait. Ungar (2008) has suggested that resilience is better understood as follows "In the context of exposure to significant adversity, resilience is both the capacity of individuals to navigate their

way to the psychological, social, cultural, and physical resources that sustain their well-being and their capacity individually and collectively to negotiate for these resources to be provided in culturally meaningful ways (p. 225). Indeed, on the one hand, resilience is a proactive response to adversity that can be learned individually. This places responsibility for the individual refugee, with less attention paid to how institutional support (i.e., schools) can be an essential component in supporting individual refugee children's efforts. On the other hand, several authors in the field argue that resilience emerges from multiple processes. It is not one trait; it is not one thing. Many systems contribute to an individual's resilience (i.e., Mollica, 2006; Ungar, 2008; Masten, 2018). An interesting fact that supports that resilience is not a one-variable factor, it rather is multifaceted, is a comparison of math performance levels across countries in Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa, conducted by Kotzé and Berg (2020). The finding revealed that the poorest children in wealthier countries with more income inequality had lower levels of educational achievement compared to the poorest children in poorer countries. This finding indicates, among other things, that refugee children would have performed better had they been in their impoverished country of origin in a nurturing environment with their family and community than being in the wealthiest country like Canada, experiencing marginalization. From this fact, we can safely infer that Sofia's resilience is the dynamic ability of her to adapt and thrive despite the significant trauma and hardship of war, displacement, and resettlement, fostered by factors like faith, family, social support, and school engagement. Interestingly, participants of this study who have come through challenging situations successfully attributed their resilience to one or more of the following factors: Family support, faith and culture, after-school programs and good teachers.

> *We survived the war, hunger and humiliation in refugee camps because we stuck together as a family …. My mother is the source of my strength …when I look back at my mother's sacrifice… I am motivated to do more… to make her happy…proud…... (Sofia)*

Sofia also mentioned the support she received from a local faith community as a source of resilience in staying focused on her education in Winnipeg

> *It is a small church with a big heart, I would say… It is Habesha's (Eritrea and Ethiopian) community orthodox church, and the prayers and rituals are in my language…. I am eager to go there every Sunday and sometimes on weekdays when I have no class. I do like worshiping God and playing spiritual music. I am part of a choir performing on Sundays. That is why I keep myself from being stressed and getting in trouble…. Meeting new friends, staying connected with the community … help me stay focused. (Sofia)*

> *I was stupid to overreact to my mother's advice and pretend I know better... I was wrong. It could be different if I listened to her… I don't know…(Dawit)*

Masten (2018) emphasized that resilience is not a personal trait of the individual. Children can do well despite risk because of various assets -many external to their own personalities -such as supportiveness from parents, grandparents, or well-functioning, close-knit communities. When a person or a family manifests positive adaptation (defined by some criteria) in the face of significant challenges, we infer that the individual or family had (and likely still has) the capacity for resilience (p. 16). Ungar (2013) also pointed out that resilience is the process by which individuals and groups of individuals (e.g. families, peer groups, communities) secure for themselves the psychological, social and physical resources that make human development more likely to succeed in contexts of adversity (p 349).

In general, the difference in school achievement between the two youths suggests that, in addition to individual strengths, the presence or absence of external support can impact individual functioning in society. Ungar (2012) argues that while the resilience of individuals is a result of a combination of personal and environmental factors, "resilience is as, or more,

dependent on the capacity of the individual's physical and social ecology to potentiate positive development under stress than the capacity of individuals to exercise personal agency during their recovery from risk exposure." (p. 15). Within the social ecologies of resilience, then, emphasis is given to family relations, social structures, services (e.g. welfare, health and education) and culture as the central and most powerful resilience resources (Bottrell, 2008). As a result, resilience-building interventions focus not on the individual, but on the social environment (Ungar, 2013). It makes it explicit that resilience is more likely to occur when we provide the services, support, and health resources that make it more likely for every refugee child to do well in ways that are meaningful to the individual, their family, and the community. In this regard, social workers, educators and settlement workers need to acknowledge first that there is a limit on individual resilience and a refugee child and youth's capacity to manage resettlement-related emotional distress. Efforts must be made to create an environment that not only supports individual resilience but also school system resilience. To foster and preserve the school-level institutional resilience, educators, settlement workers, and social workers must ensure that school structures and processes are in place and, if they are not, advocate for them. Savazzi (2018) argues that refugee children need supportive relationships, a safe space, and opportunities to nurture and regain their confidence and competence. They need to be reminded that they can do things that are hard, overcome challenges, take age-appropriate risks and have a positive impact on outcomes (p. 37).

In summary, participants who somehow completed high school and made it to post-secondary education, (Jacob and Sofia, in university) and (Hassan and Esther in college) stated that having family support, respecting their traditions, and listening to their parents and community elders, regularly attending afterschool programs, and being lucky enough to get extra help from “good”

teachers significantly helped them to enhance their academic successes. Of all participants, Dawit appeared to be the least successful in his school achievement and social life. Despite his willingness to go to school, attend programs, and engage in other socially acceptable activities, at least in the beginning, Dawit was unable to stay in school. When asked what had happened……

> *I don't know…. I didn't like school from day one… they put me in a higher grade, and it was difficult for me…. the language…. The teacher who didn't understand and help me… students who are rude … they joked in my English …. I can't handle it…… and then I found friends who accepted me…. (Dawit)*

Dawit was suspended from school several times for behavioural issues and was blamed for being "lazy and a troublemaker", while he was struggling with anxiety, depression and feelings of abandonment. That means he did not get the support needed from family, friends and most importantly, the school system to boost his resilience. Dawit is a living testimony that proves the fact that one individual cannot bounce back from tough situations all by themselves. While asking for help is critical, it does not always come naturally, especially for a refugee child who is afraid to ask for many reasons. In this way, school educators, settlement workers and social workers should play an important role in setting the tone to create favourable learning conditions for refugee students to enable them to succeed in their education. Schools and settlement workers must avoid placing the onus on the individual refugee student to improve their resilience, thereby making it a personal issue and shifting institutional accountability away. When school social workers and educators recognize that both personal and environmental factors contribute to refugee children's resilience, they are better able to assertively and collaboratively solve problems. To be resilient requires a balance of internal strengths and access to external resources and/or support (Ungar, 2012, p. 19). People can survive the most challenging ordeals - some even thrive. And yet, they may be unaware or unclear exactly how they got through the challenges they faced (Neenan, 2018). That is what has happened to some of the participants,

such as Dawit, who I believe would be a good example to illustrate participants' experience of the same.

Dawit, who immigrated to Canada, crisscrossing a couple of countries, and overcoming a very dangerous journey inarguably is a survivor who has the capacity to be resilient. He arrived in Winnipeg with the utmost hope and optimism to access one of the best education systems in the world, study hard and change his life for the better. However, driven by loneliness, marginalization, and feelings of being misunderstood, he instead joined an antisocial group and ended up getting involved with the justice system. From a critical social work perspective, one can understand that Dawit is affected by the impact of intersectional adversities that led him to embrace an unhealthy coping strategy for survival. The intersectional factors associated with relocation and resettlement, compounded by a lack of support and barriers to resources in the host country, pushed him away from his original objective and ultimately pulled by gang members with negative influences, which provided him with the most needed feelings of acceptance. The question is what has happened to Dawit's individual level resilience ability that has helped him in the past to get out of the most dangerous places in his country of origin and refugee camps. According to Hou and Bonikowska (2015), refugee children are a resilient group, and most of them are well integrated into Canadian society and do relatively well in their education. Nonetheless, other studies show that many young refugees like Dawit need additional resources to succeed and take advantage of the opportunities for quality education (Arvisais, 2016).

7.6. Chapter summary

This chapter discussed the findings from the study using a critical social work lens in combination with the three theories- ecological systems theory, trauma and resilience, and

acculturation- and illustrated how relocation and resettlement stressors, racism and structural barriers compounded to negatively impact the social integration and educational adjustment and outcomes for refugee children. Considering the high value of education, the academic challenges refugee students face in Canada, including a biased skill assessment at the time of initial enrollment, call for a critical look. The chapter discussed the findings of the research in light of pre-existing evidence and relevant theoretical frameworks, analyzed participants' experience of events and the researcher's (my) interpretations of their descriptions from a critical social work perspective within the micro, mezzo and macro environments. Despite the mainstream discourse that views the integration process as a fast and short–term process, which focuses on immediate needs, such as housing, school and income support, this study has shown that many of the issues addressed require a long-term approach. We have seen how participants' limited to no access to quality education in both countries of origin and refugee camps impacted their education in the host country, Canada. The compounded effect of culture shock, language, trauma, and experience of discrimination, among others, is identified as a huge obstacle to successful school integration. This chapter also discussed how participants demonstrated a remarkable ability to adjust to the new school system, that is, a different environment and set of ecological systems than their country of origin. Despite numerous challenges, they were attending school while many of them were helping their parents with house chores at the same time. They have exhibited resilience and demonstrated that, despite the situations they have endured and the adversity that they have encountered, they have persevered to make a better life for themselves. Research recognizes that many factors come into play regarding how resilient we are, including our traits, environmental factors, and a learned capacity associated with experience (Pemberton, 2015).

CHAPTER VIII- Social work's role/implication

I saw the angel in the marble and carved until I set him free (Michelangelo)

8.1. Introduction

Grace Coyle (1935) observed that social work has always been shaped by two dominant forces: the social climate in which it operates and the state of the sciences upon which it relies. Social work is, indeed, both an art and a science. As Sheppard (1995) notes, the connection between social work and social science lies in a shared methodology for understanding and reflecting on situations-an approach that, over time, evolves into what is known as practice wisdom. Sheppard argues that social workers, particularly when conducting assessments, often function like practical qualitative researchers (p. 265). In other words, social work involves not only studying, understanding, and reflecting on social issues, but also plays a vital role in helping service recipients address their challenges. Hence, as a social work practitioner, I am expected to critically examine how refugees are constructed and understood in society at large and within social services specifically. This includes paying close attention to how intersecting oppressions-such as race, gender, class, age, sexual orientation, health status, and ability-impact immigrants and refugees in Canada.

In Canada, working with immigrants has been a foundational aspect of social work since the late nineteenth century (Sakamoto, 2007). Social workers have long been at the forefront of welcoming immigrants and refugees, supporting their integration, and promoting their full participation in society. The profession's roots in this area can be traced back to the establishment of settlement houses in urban neighbourhoods during the late 1880s, which were designed to serve new immigrants (Heinonen & Spearman, 2009). Today, social workers continue to play a unique role in fostering social inclusion, ensuring that refugee children have

access to basic needs, including education, and are respected and supported in reaching their full potential. However, social workers also operate within a social paradox: we must remain vigilant in our daily practice to ensure that we do not become oppressors ourselves, especially when working with refugee children and their families who are already marginalized.

8.2. The role of social work

Social work with refugees and immigrants in Canada is a complex and evolving practice rooted in both historical commitment and contemporary challenges. By embracing a methodology that values reflection, inquiry, and intersectionality, social workers can contribute to meaningful change. It is difficult to ignore social work's dual legacy as both a helper and a controller—a complex dichotomy of noble service and a troubling history of complicity in oppression, such as the Sixties Scoop. Social workers wield significant power, often shaped by their job titles and institutional roles. Yet, they frequently grapple with the ethical implications of the power differential inherent in social worker–client relationships. How, then, can a social worker-particularly one acting as an agent of the state, such as in child welfare-practice anti-oppressively while remaining true to their ethical responsibilities? I recognize that while social workers hold power and privilege by virtue of their education and professional status, this power need not be oppressive. When critically examined and ethically applied, it can be a tool for advocacy and social change. Social workers must ask themselves whether their actions reinforce or challenge systemic inequities, and whether their interventions empower or silence those they aim to help. This paradox is not easily resolved, but it can be navigated through a commitment to anti-oppressive practice, cultural humility, and collaborative engagement with service users. Critical social work theories provide a framework for such analysis (Mullaly, 1997). Social workers must strive to be allies, not gatekeepers, and to center the voices and experiences of

refugees in all aspects of their work. They must remain vigilant against becoming agents of oppression and instead use their position to advocate for equity, inclusion, and justice. In doing so, they honour the dual nature of their profession as both art and science and uphold its ethical foundations.

As part of my professional responsibilities, I have engaged in various social research projects, including this study, which seeks to understand the educational experiences of refugee children in Canadian schools through refugee youth participants and their educators. In doing so, I have applied selected social work theories that I believe best explain the complexities of these experiences. While many theories guide social work practice, the three discussed here are among the most frequently used in the profession- Ecological perspective, Acculturation theory and trauma and Resilience theory. As previously noted, the resettlement process and the acculturation stressors faced by refugees cannot be fully explained by a single meta-theory. Critics argue that much of the research on immigrant integration focuses on assimilation, often implying that conformity equates to successful integration (Li, 2003; Alba & Nee, 1997, as cited in Sakamoto, 2007, p. 519). Potocky-Tripodi (2002) notes that acculturation theory is one of the most cited in social work literature on immigrants, although in Canada, assimilation has historically been viewed as the desired outcome (p. 129).

The bio-ecological perspective, expanded within social work, emphasizes that individuals are constantly interacting with and adapting to their environments (Ungar, 2002). This theory underscores the importance of individual differences in child development and informs how we support refugee children facing educational barriers. The ecological perspective—often referred to as the "person-in-environment" concept—requires social workers to consider both the individual and their surrounding context (Gitterman, 2008, p. 51). Social work is grounded in the

understanding that individuals, families, and communities are shaped by their environments and do not exist in isolation. Trauma and resilience theories have also become essential in studying refugee experiences. Refugees respond to trauma in diverse ways; not all develop post-traumatic symptoms, and some may experience delayed reactions due to ongoing stressors. George (2012) critiques traditional psychiatric assessments, arguing that they can obscure the broader political injustices that cause trauma. Mollica's trauma theory reframes symptoms as "normal responses to abnormal situations," challenging the dominance of the medical model in refugee interventions (George, 2012, p. 432).

While these theories offer valuable insights into migration and resettlement, social workers require additional tools to uncover the structural issues that cannot be fully explained by these theories alone. Participants shared the discriminations they faced that are rooted in societal norms and invisible pressures that affect their emotional well-being. Pashang (2012) emphasizes that the challenges immigrants face extends beyond housing and employment; many encounter racialized and systemic barriers to settlement (p. 7). The findings may be used to assist refugee service organizations and social work as a profession in selecting appropriate intervention tools that focus on both individual and structural issues. The findings also reveal that the intersectional issues affecting refugee children require an awareness of structural racism, political oppression, and the enduring impact of colonialism. Through both professional experience and this research, I have learned that AOP, while not the sole path to social change, is a vital theoretical stance that must be integrated into everyday practice. Baines (2006) describes AOP as an approach that embeds the struggle for social change directly into the social work experience (p. 4).

George (2012) also highlights the biases that some social workers bring to their work with refugees, warning that uncritical adoption of acculturation theories-rooted in liberal

multiculturalism—can lead to complicity in oppression (p. 428). Many immigration policies, including those in Canada, are Eurocentric and fail to reflect the diverse social, cultural, and political realities of newcomers. These policies must be reimagined to honour human experiences (George, 2012, p. 429). To deliver equitable and meaningful services to refugees, social workers must deepen their understanding of the traumatic migration experiences of their clients. This requires moving beyond narrow frameworks and embracing anti-oppressive practice. Sakamoto (2007) argues that social work with refugees must emphasize structural change alongside individual support—not just in theory, but in practice (p. 528).

Another important aspect of concern observed in this study was the practice of a deficit model in the school enrollment assessment of refugee children. Participants and their respective teachers reported that the assessment is done to see where students are at the time of registration. Most traditional intervention strategies focus on problem identification rather than simultaneously recognizing the strengths of these individuals in overcoming their pre-migration traumatic events and post-migration stressors (Mollica, 2006). Contrary to the practice of the social work's strength perspective, ignoring refugee students' strengths, gained through formal and informal learning, and focusing only on their deficits, did more harm than good. Until recently, the explicit objective of intervention techniques has been the imposition of the cultural norms of the dominant society on minority clients (Sodowsky et al., 1997, cited in George, 2012, p. 433). The traditional approach to settlement works also ignores structural change and does not recognize that individual refugee needs are rooted in broader structural issues – the "personal is political" (Mullaly, 1997). As such, there is a need to understand not only the meaning of migration but also the marginalization often associated with the myriad forms of racism and their intersections with other forms of oppression in host countries (Pashang, 2012). Valtonen (2001)

points out, the reception and resettlement of immigrants have become part of the social work agenda. Social workers need to understand each individual's issues separately, as people move for a variety of reasons with unique and complex needs. Sidhu and Taylor (2012) also urge educators to regard refugee children as a unique, targeted group, and not to merely put them into a "homogenized migrant pool (p. 43).

While the social work profession has the responsibility of advocating for change in addressing the macro-level policy issues, equally important, school social workers at the micro level are at the forefront of the resettlement process for refugee children, as school is their first place of contact with the new society. Education is a way for refugees to become integrated into a new culture, and it is a process involving social inclusion through which they become "accepted in society" (Thomas, Chiarelli-Helminiak, Ferraj, & Barrette, 2015). The school social worker's role involves having many hats, including case manager, student and parent advocate, student mediator, counsellor and distributor of resources. However, they often struggle to critically analyze refugee children's situation using an AOP in the school system that does not endorse the practice. Typically, they are the only professionals on sites who attempt to address children's challenges from a structural perspective, yet they have not gone far. They often encountered barriers and power over to challenge the status quo and were silenced by the school system. Sociologists who work from the conflict perspective assert that educational institutions and school curricula are products of the dominant worldviews, beliefs, and values of the majority, which typically produce educational experiences that marginalize and disadvantage those in the minority (Ballantine & Hammack, 2012).

When asking if it is possible to bring "about social justice in an unjust environment," Fook (2002) claims that such a question implies that our social work practice is determined by the

organizational context in which we work. She suggests that, if we experience our environment as hostile, then part of our work is changing the environment (p. 161). Social workers are thus duty-bound to challenge inequality, pursuing social justice as a core objective of the profession. Although the needs of diverse newcomer communities are very similar to those of other minority groups in the country, as discussed in the previous chapters, there are several unique challenges refugee children face. Hence, I strongly believe, social workers need not only to understand the unique experiences and challenges refugees have, but also to play a critical role in challenging the system and advocating for policy changes that strengthen individuals and families of this population. Lobbying for policy change and challenging policymakers when they deviate from their commitments is also a fundamental action that social workers can undertake. Li (2000), for example, doubts that those in power may uphold the principles of equality and non-discrimination entrenched in the Charter and the multiculturalism policy. "The question facing Canada's future is how to bridge the gap between what it commits *de jure* and what it does *de facto"* (p. 19). It is social workers' responsibility to challenge authorities and demand practical actions that uphold the principles of the Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which includes the children's right to quality education.

Considering such a broad perspective and practical challenges, I contend that, if refugee children are to fully settle, integrate, and become productive members of Canadian society, taking an anti-oppression approach to settlement work is the way forward. Social workers, instead of only focusing on dealing with a micro level intervention, it is equally important that they address the macro level policy issues by lobbying, advocating and criticizing the status quo to facilitate the children's education and smooth resettlement in the new host country. Anti-

oppressive social work pays closer attention to understanding individuals' intersecting identities and multiple oppressions than earlier models of social work (Sakamoto, 2007, p. 528).

One aspect of the refugee child's life, and by far the most comprehensive in the refugee resettlement process, is resiliency. A refugee's life is most often marked by pain and oppression. Refugee resiliency serves to counter the social construction of forced migrants as victims without agency, and enables refugees, despite their traumatic experiences, to succeed in the new society (George, 2012, p. 429). Despite the horrific and devastating stories I heard from refugee children, including study participants, I have also participated in some life-changing moments and witnessed incredible stories of resilience and hope. One of the defining features of social work is the strengths-based nature of the field as it pertains to all parts of practice, including social justice issues, and I urge practitioners to focus more on the children's strengths instead of deficits that come along with prejudice and stereotypes.

8.3. Chapter summary

This chapter explored the multifaceted challenges faced by refugee children during displacement and resettlement, confirming through multiple sources that these experiences are deeply intertwined with structural, systemic, and environmental factors (Bohman, 2016). Using a critical social work framework, this study integrated several theoretical models-including the bio-ecological theory, Mollica's trauma and resilience theories, and Berry's acculturation model—to examine the complex realities of refugee children from diverse perspectives. The impact this study may have on social work and refugee studies could be its underscoring the importance of a broader perspective on both study and practice. The analysis revealed that no single theory can fully explain the dynamic and traumatic migration experiences of children. Therefore, the integration of multiple theoretical approaches is essential to address the

limitations of relying on a singular framework. Social work plays a vital role in the integration process, which is central to refugee settlement and adaptation. As Valtonen (2001) emphasizes, integration is influenced not only by the personal skills of refugees but also by the institutional structures of the host society. Social workers, guided by a strength-based and solution-focused approach, are tasked with identifying needs and implementing interventions that foster sustainable change. This requires a holistic assessment of both individual stressors and environmental factors that either support or hinder adaptation (Gitterman, 2008). The challenges faced by refugee children are not merely individual concems but are rooted in broader structural issues that demand collective and systemic responses.

Social workers should know they are situated within a social paradox: they are tasked with supporting marginalized populations while operating within systems that may perpetuate oppression. This tension demands ongoing self-reflection and ethical vigilance. I am cautiously optimistic that social workers in the school system would learn from participants' experience and enhance their practice of working with refugee children, as their teammates from other disciplines (i.e., teachers) might not be on board. As Douglas Adams (1985) noted in his novel, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, human beings, who are almost unique in having the ability to learn from the experience of others, are also remarkable for their apparent disinclination to do so.

CHAPTER: IX. Concluding remarks, personal reflection, and Recommendations

> *'There is no justification for studying, and attempting to understand, the causes of human suffering if the purpose of one's study is not, ultimately, to find ways of relieving and preventing that suffering' (David Turton, 1996, p. 96)*

9.1. Introduction

The discussion in the previous chapters has merely retold various aspects of refugee students' educational experience that have come to prominence in academia and public discourse. I cannot determine whether these are the only challenges the children encountered, as well as the opportunities that existed. Some general themes, however, run across many of the interviews dissected here, and give cause for concern. It's important to name and highlight the different intersectional challenges that exist and have ways to explain and understand how they function to understand the core reasons and recommend possible remedies. In this chapter, I discussed my personal reflection, presented recommendations co-developed with participants and explained some of the study's limitations.

9.2. Personal reflection

I began my personal reflection and concluding remarks with mixed feelings of learned helplessness and undying hope, not surprisingly, though, after I knew the findings in this study appeared to be more or less similar to previous studies of the same category (i.e., Baffoe, 2006; Kanu, 2008; Stewart, 2011). While the objective of this study was not to test any theories or prove previous study findings in the subject, it validated refugee children's entrenched challenges in accessing education throughout their migration trajectory and shed light on the pervasive and systemic discriminations experienced by the participants despite Canada's huge potential to provide an inclusive environment and access to quality education to them. In doing so, I have listened to participants' stories to summarize, interpret, present, and disseminate the

findings beyond the reach of their respective schools and communities. Nevertheless, I am not acting as a "voice for the voiceless" and placing myself at the center of their story. The youth participants, whom I have interviewed about their childhood education, have already voiced and articulated their experiences to the level of their understanding. Some had even shared their stories with the school and community organizations, yet it seems no one listened to them. It became obvious, the problem was not the refugee youth and children's lack of interest in asserting their concerns, but the lack of listening ears from stakeholders. As such, I, once again, echoed the stories they retold me, stories they have already told to others on more than one occasion. This time, I am hoping someone from the stakeholders, with the power to act, may listen. As much as I hated to admit, I would say that the challenges I revisited in this study have been, are, and will continue to exist, unless there is a political will from policymakers to address them fundamentally. More importantly, I would also like to reiterate how many participants in the study viewed this process as an opportunity that provided them with a platform to let their story, once again, be retold and hope to see changes.

One may question here, the paradox of productivity in dealing with the same issues time and again, where no one seems to have cared to change the status quo. This type of paradox is observed in refugee studies where academics and society invest heavily in researching the causes and effects of migration, but the returns on these investments are not as significant as anticipated. This encapsulated the core of the paradox - the visible presence and perceived benefits of conducting research and disseminating findings in academia and the daily politics and public discourse contrasted sharply with the lagging implementation of recommendations that could have alleviated the children's educational challenges long ago. I have acquired a significant amount of information about refugee children's life experiences through readings, community

engagement forums, and personal experience. In addition to the United Nations-affiliated organizations' reports (i.e., UNCHR, UNICEF) about the fragmented school systems and inaccessible resources in war-torn regions, refugee children's challenges in accessing education in Canadian schools have been studied by several scholars, and recommendations have been presented, at least to my knowledge, since as early as the 1960s. However, even today, as seen in this study, we are talking about similar issues, and I am wondering where the disconnect that hinders progress is and how we may attempt to bridge the gap. I would assume two hypotheses may explain the dichotomy of welcoming refugees to Canada and not supporting their smooth integration. Either both the studies and the recommendations presented by the scholars did not reach the right person(s) with the right will and power to make tangible policy changes, or these people with the power to make decisions already have the knowledge but choose not to act. Either way, it is the children who are the victims of these bureaucratic loopholes. So, what is next? Am I repeating the same pattern and presenting the findings of this study in a vacuum, knowing it will never get the attention it deserves?

Bear in mind, I am neither delusional nor naive about the main objective of this dissertation. I know it is a partial fulfillment of the requirements for my PhD, and I also know the readers, my advisors, and the external examiner, are mandated to evaluate the merit of my work in light of its academic research and writing skills, among other criteria. Nevertheless, as many researchers would agree, I seek to fulfill what has been described as a 'dual imperative' in social science. Jacobsen & Landau (2003) explained the concept of dual imperative "to produce rigorous research, while at the same time influencing policy and practice in ways which ultimately improve the lives of refugees and forced migrants" (p. 1). Inspired by the participants' stories, as an avid social worker working from a critical social work perspective, I am attempting to take

the value of this study above and beyond the objective of achieving my professional aspiration of receiving a PhD while at the same time advocating for children's basic human rights. David Turton (1996) once argued that 'there is no justification for studying and attempting to understand the causes of human suffering if the purpose of one's study is not, ultimately, to find ways of relieving and preventing that suffering' (p. 96).

For a very long time, human beings have told stories to make sense of the world since time immemorial. Every individual has their own stories, which may be shared as a means of education, cultural preservation or instilling moral values. As Okri eloquently puts it, "We live by stories … we also live in them" (Okri, as cited in Clandinin, 2013, p. 21). For study participants to speak is one thing; to be heard and be validated as being heard is yet another. These are stories from their lives, told the way they remember them. They tried their best to share their memories of the details, even when they were difficult to remember and opened a floodgate of emotions. Some details of participants have been omitted, and the flow of discourse has been adjusted approximately to keep the pace, but never at the cost of the originality of participants' narratives. Some names, places and times have been changed to preserve anonymity. Throughout the interview process, I have maintained the necessary active collaboration with participants and created a safe space for them to tell their stories. I have outlined and discussed the participants' experiences, reflected on their personal and social experiences and validated their narratives. Moosa et al. (2017) argue that society usually focuses on refugees' physical needs, overlooking their mental health and psychological trauma. The wounds experienced due to violence and displacement contribute to post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and anxiety. I did my best not to ignore their traumatic experiences and make them re-traumatized by asking insensitive questions that may give me richer information,

but at the expense of their re-traumatization. I upheld the principles of trauma-informed intervention and attempted to understand and acknowledge their feelings, fears, and hopes, needs and strengths, resilience and vulnerability that helped them share their stories with confidence and feel validated.

Below are some of the things the youth participants and refugee children would like to see changed for better access to their basic human rights, which include access to quality education, at all places, especially in host countries.

9.3. Recommendations

Some may argue that statistically speaking, twelve participants (nine students and three educators) do not seem high enough to draw attention to the issue of refugee children in host countries. I would argue, though, that the experiences shared by participants were sufficient to warrant attention from stakeholders who are responsible for caring for these children. In social work, one child's problem is too many. Furthermore, while findings are not to be considered exhaustive, this study provides an additional reference for refugee students' middle school experience in Winnipeg and highlights the concerns. Based on the youth participants' stories and their respective educators' accounts, the analysis of the data gathered, and the review of relevant literature on the subject, led us to the following recommendations that I would argue, if implemented, could promote more meaningful and effective support to enhance refugee children's educational accessibility and smooth integration into Canadian society:

9.3.1. Countries of origin

While it is beyond the scope of this study to suggest recommendations to improve the inadequate educational polices and infrastructures in the East African region (i.e., Governments, UNCHR and refugee camps) without an in-depth study, considering the children's challenges

and their low academic achievement in Canadian schools, prompted me to suggest some recommendations to seize stakeholders' attention for further considerations. Moreover, unless we can address the root causes of the problem from the starting point, the environment where a child is born and raised, only talking about host countries' challenges would just be like redressing the symptoms. It is also a social work core principle to voice the concerns of the vulnerable group, refugee children in this case, by assessing their strengths and needs at each ecology and advocating for policy change wherever the problem exists.

It is highly problematic to center narratives of the refugee experience and where people go without highlighting why they flee. Refugee contexts are symptoms of a global humanitarian problem with historical, economic, and socio-political roots that must be analyzed and researched if we wish to mitigate the problem (Samadi, 2021). Refugee education is of low and uneven quality in the East African region. As a result, even those resettled refugee children and refugee youth participants from the region have skills and knowledge far below the expected grade level for their age. Given the complexity of today's conflicts all over the continent, which is the leading cause of migration, peace processes require different initiatives to address multiple conflict dynamics and causes. Besides formal peace negotiations and mediation between warring parties, broader peace processes encompass dialogues at various levels of society and sitting government heads of East African nations should take the initiative. Unless peace is restored in the region, the children's well-being, which includes education, is and continues to be at risk. Because this study didn't even scratch the surface, further studies are needed to disentangle the effect and examine the extent to which growing up in conflicts impacts the cultural values and socioeconomic characteristics of refugee children from war-affected regions.

9.3.2. Refugee camps

In refugee camps across the globe, the responsibility for primary and secondary education for refugees lies with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR); however, their primary mandate is protection, not education. As a result, accessibility and quality of learning are inadequate, to say the least, throughout the region. According to a UNCHR report, close to half of all refugee children, 48%, remain out of school. Although UNHCR works to ensure refugee children can access quality education, schools in refugee camps face a number of challenges, including limited funding, overcrowding, a lack of updated learning materials, insufficient teacher training, and poor technology. Student-teacher ratios are very high in most refugee schools, and in some countries these ratios are nearly twice the UNCHR guideline of 40:1 (Dryden-Peterson, 2015, p. 2). A comprehensive evaluation of the current UNCHR mandate and its educational policy, as well as a strategy for securing a stable funding model, is needed to improve infrastructure in refugee camp classrooms, to ensure that the needs of children are adequately met. Future research should examine the dynamics of school settings in more detail to identify effective strategies to provide quality education and avoid disruption in the children's education. Governments of the region that receive refugees and UNCHR should work in tandem to fundamentally change the existing poor learning environment in all refugee camps in the region. Education offers a stable and safe environment for refugee children to pursue productive, meaningful lives.

9.3.3. Host countries - In Canada

1. By understanding refugee children and families' strengths and needs, developing progressive resettlement policies can allow Canada to tap into the rich skills and knowledge base that refugees brought with them to this country. Turcotte (2019) argued that when resettlement hurdles are removed, refugee children perform as well in school as Canadian-born children,

and their knowledge and skills contribute greatly to Canada's workforce. There are many refugees who arrived in Canada and have a higher completion rate of high school, college, university, and graduate degrees compared to children who were born in the country (UNCHR, 2020). As seen in the findings, given the chance, refugee students could have a better educational outcome. This is confirmed by previous findings, for example, from a national Canadian survey of 15-year-old students and their parents. It indicated that immigrant and refugee students have higher educational aspirations than Canadian-born students. Hence, contrary to the conventional way of portraying refugee children through the prism of being burdensome and undermining their value, it would be a worthwhile endeavour to invest in these children's future (Krahn &Taylor, 2005). Educational attainment in the context of a stable, empowered community is a key factor to lasting change in the cycle of poverty among marginalized groups, and Canadian policy makers are bound to commit to the improvement of refugee children and their families' successful resettlement through amending existing polices and/or creating a new one that reflects the reality on the ground.

2. A striking lesson from this research is that the narrowly defined resilience and our understanding of it as only a personal trait should be reexamined. We now know that resilience is a dynamic process that is influenced by accessible support systems and changes faced over time (Sleijpen et al., 2017). Therefore, the need for a paradigm shift by schools' personnel is essential and giving the children more help, for example, by understanding and supporting their needs that include language accusation and, more importantly, cultural safety, may help them to mobilize their energy and achieve a better outcome. A child's success or failure is not determined only by the child's ability; it is a function of the child's ecology that includes parents, neighbours, school, and society at large. Refugee children

often have mastered many challenges in their short lifetimes and demonstrated tremendous stamina and courage. Such attributes should be harnessed by educators and kept strong, so they can benefit refugee children in their roles as students.

3. More and more, refugee children in their middle years are coming to Canada in great numbers and will continue to do so steadily. These children often find themselves in levels of poverty that directly interfere with their education. As the middle years are a particularly important time in the development cycle of children, refugee children are especially vulnerable due to the confusing reality between what they had hoped for when they came to Canada and what they really get into - trapped in a cycle of poverty that impacts them and their families. To mitigate the risk of children failing in schools, parents should be financially supported and/or their barriers should be removed for access to meaningful jobs and equitable hiring practices that consider refugee parents' formal and informal knowledge and skill sets should be in place. Although some refugees are fluent in the language at workplaces, they may be more likely to experience discrimination during the hiring process (e.g., Oreopoulos, 2011, cited in Turcotte, 2019). One of the fundamental impacts on a child's well-being is their family's income. The family income directly influences a child's living conditions and their active participation in school and community.
4. Many children transited through refugee camps for periods that vary greatly from one refugee camp to another and from one individual to another. During these stays, some will have had some education, but the conditions in which this learning took place vary enormously, and the children's basic literacy competence reflects this fact. Instead of bundling all refugee students as one and treating them the same, sometimes even with immigrants, the school system in Canada should use an empirically sound assessment model

and work with each student's unique strengths and needs. It is important to understand that refugees are a heterogeneous group with diverse backgrounds and needs, and that they do not all go through the same process. Their displacement and resettlement experiences and structural barriers are therefore different. The internal diversity of refugees should be recognized, and accommodation should be tailored according to the individuals' unique needs. A better coordinated support system is needed in all subject classes for refugee students who are learning EAL. This may include better mental health supports, help to afford participation in sports, and facilitate activities for more interactions with other students to feel included and learn about Canadian cultural norms. There is also a need for revising the current "initial grade assignment protocol" that aims to contribute to accurate grade placement, acknowledging cultural and linguistic heritage, valuing past and educational and life experience.

5. The teaching medium in Canadian middle schools is in the English language, and most refugee children come from countries without any or very limited English language acquisition. Proficiency in English language while it is very helpful for the learning process in many areas, other subjects are equally important and can be conducted with basic English (i.e., Math, science, sports, handicrafts, home economics) It would produce a better outcome for refugee children if teachers focused on their strengths and taught them for instance, vocational subjects that match their interest and skills, instead of solely focusing on teaching them EAL and courses like Canadian history that require a well-established English proficiency. This can be given while simultaneously teaching them EAL. Also, pairing up children with educational assistants (EAs) who speak their language could help them understand the subject matter more clearly, not only from the linguistic perspective, but also

the emotional connection of culture and sense of belonging. This has been seen in some schools and should be encouraged.

6. Racism is on the rise. A recent national survey finds racial bullying is a daily reality for Canadian children (Angus Reid Institute, 2021). Despite its prevalence, among students who participated in the survey, a quarter reported learning "a lot" about racist events in Canada, but nearly as many - 21 per cent - said they hadn't learned anything (Angus Reid Institute, 2021). This figure speaks volumes and calls for creating awareness in schools about anti-racism and anti-oppressive practices. Participants in this study also disclosed facing racism and discrimination daily from society, including their peers and adults in school and the community. The children are therefore struggling with emotional turmoil that can negatively affect their mental and physical health and impair their smooth integration process in the host societies. While refugee children have the right to practice their religion and deserve to feel safe when doing so, the current trend of violence and hatred growing from xenophobia and islamophobia has become a concern that needs to be addressed. There is an earnest need to address the concerns through specific legislative and policy changes that protect refugee children's human rights, supplemented by awareness training to enhance cultural humility for school personnel. Proactively addressing bullying and racial discrimination in schools should be part of the strategy. Children cannot express their trauma in words. A mind that is not free of worries and fear of others cannot be free and able to process and retain information and pass skill tests, and get promoted to the next grade.
7. Teachers working with refugee students who have suffered trauma need training to cope with challenges in the classroom. Teachers are not and should never be considered as mental health specialists. Randomly diagnosing and labelling, for instance, an emotionally disturbed

refugee child, with some aspects of mental illness, is a dangerous practice, whereas the problem may arise from the teacher's misunderstanding of the real problem. Teachers need to update their cultural competence training that include the importance of inclusive language in the school and how to identify and recognize their own cultural biases. Western models of illness commonly frame refugee children and youth's responses to stressors in terms of psychopathology (Sleijpen et al. 2016, p. 158). School personnel should acknowledge the importance of the concept of PTSD in understanding and treating refugee children in their classroom and use a trauma-informed intervention.

8. Schools should encourage the occurrence of a more robust, transparent, and cordial community and parental engagement. Parents' involvement in their children's education, regardless of their English language proficiency, should not be neglected. Facilitating meetings, including the presence of interpreters, as needed, and having the meeting when and where it is conducive for parents, is an important aspect of building a working relationship. Indeed, parent-teacher meetings should absolutely be respectful and culturally sensitive to build trust, foster family involvement, and improve student outcomes by creating an inclusive environment that values diverse perspectives.
9. African refugees and Aboriginals who live in a shared geographic area (e.g., downtown, Manitoba housing, and Central Park) often misunderstand and are hostile to each other. While these groups are minorities and are targets of the dominant system, the misperceptions that both groups have of one another hinder meaningful connections amongst themselves, and it would be helpful for community organizations and elders to facilitate meetings and attempt to understand each other. Ethnic-based community organizations and not-for-profit settlement organizations that support refugee children, such as IRCOM, could help bridge the

divide as well by integrating refugee youth and Aboriginal youth into some of their initiatives. Moreover, the Federal and provincial governments should revise their mediocre practice to facilitate dialogue between Indigenous and newcomer communities and come up with robust programs through funding for community-led initiatives and engagement processes.

10. Refugee children should be expected and supported to achieve school outcomes comparable to those of their peers. This should be supported by creating and funding more accessible after-school programs. After-school programs proved to be the most important key aspect of refugee children's educational success by addressing educational gaps in the public school system. After-school programs offer targeted activities and tutoring in key subjects like reading, English, and math to ensure students receive personalized, comprehensive support.

9.3.4. Future studies

I am hesitant to suggest further studies on the topic as there has been a plethora of studies, findings and recommendations that are not yet implemented. This learned helplessness stems from a history of ineffective attempts at policy change that consistently disregard public input, resulting in a generalized sense of powerlessness. In this context, the failure to change policies isn't due to a lack of possibility, but rather a learned passivity that accepts the status quo, even if undesirable. I, however, believe there is always room for improvement and merit in trying for new empirically proven interventions. Hence, I believe there is a need for additional research to develop culturally appropriate initial school entrance assessment tools that address language difficulties and indicate alternative learning methods for those refugee students who find communicating in English challenging.

9.4. Concluding remarks

One key takeaway from this study would be highlighting the importance of the all-around support for refugee children in host countries. All stakeholders, especially policymakers, need to take full responsibility for ensuring refugee children have access to quality education by addressing systemic and individual barriers. Social workers, educators, social support agencies, and policymakers play crucial roles in providing the individual, family, community, and structural support necessary for these children to thrive. Ratkovic et al. (2017) criticize teachers, resettlement workers, and policymakers for lacking cross-cultural competencies, a focus on social justice, and clear policy guidance when working with refugee students (p. 18). Some argue, the school system tends to favour discussions on multiculturalism over critically addressing the inequities faced by immigrants in Canadian education (Brewer & McCabe, 2014). We certainly are not out of offering remedial solutions for a collective concern of such magnitude, except for our lack of commitment to act. I would still have my reservations about it. I would, however, argue that these recommendations stem from the findings, which include the participants' voices; while they are very important, they should be interpreted carefully, as refugees are not homogeneous, and more studies are required to make a general conclusion. I would argue, contrary to the public discourse and the Government's image-building narratives, that racism in Canadian schools is real. Efforts aiming at reducing discrimination and enhancing social support and developing policies that promote inclusivity for refugee children should be priorities to help with maintaining and protecting the children's education, health, and well-being. Research shows that a positive racial and ethnic identity boosts self-esteem, which can serve as a protective factor against the stressors of discrimination against ethnic minority children and adolescents (APA, 2008). I sincerely hope this study serves as a platform to amplify

refugee children's voices, which might otherwise go unheard, and to drive change. The participants' stories could inspire other refugee children in Canadian schools, showing them that it is possible to move forward. I sincerely hope this study serves as a platform to amplify refugee children's voices, which might otherwise go unheard, and to drive change.

Canada, with its humanitarian tradition of welcoming refugees, has both the responsibility and the means to help refugee children and their families resettle smoothly in this land of opportunity. I firmly believe middle school is a critical period for refugee children in Canada, shaping their future paths. During this stage, children begin to navigate societal structures, discover their talents, and form aspirations for the future. With the right environment, support, and guidance, they can achieve the next milestones successfully. I am optimistic, as refugee children possess remarkable resilience and a strong passion for learning, while Canada has the resources, ability to address discrimination and an accessible education system to support them. Certainly, with the right support in place, refugee children in Canada can face challenges with confidence and thrive.

9.5. Limitations of the Research

This study contains limitations related to the nature of the qualitative research method and to the redesign of the study due to the unprecedented COVID-19 epidemic that occurred throughout the globe at the launch of this study. Some of the limitations of the research are as follows:

1. One weakness of the phenomenological approach was that it was difficult to generalize because it does not claim objectivity, and therefore, results are generalizable only to a certain extent (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Since the study was conducted with few (9) participants from one region (i.e., East Africa), the study was therefore limited to providing only one brief snapshot of middle school students lived experiences in one spot (Winnipeg) from the

millions of refugee children across the continent. The information obtained from the participants was based on nine refugee youth and three educators' recollections during a one-time, 45-60-minute interview, adding a limitation to the study.

2. The study did not go well as planned with the initial data collection design, and this, in turn, affected the quality of the data. The initial data collection method for the study was aimed at engaging in an in-person encounter with refugee children from both refugee camps in Africa and Winnipeg middle schools. It included a focus group discussion that would be conducted after the in-depth interviews, as it was believed this would stimulate the respondents' thinking by hearing one another's opinions regarding the topic. Refugee child participants were supposed to be recruited from Winnipeg schools and UNCHR schools in East African refugee camps. However, at the time this study was launched, the COVID-19 virus became a global pandemic, and as a result, research at my home university, the University of Manitoba, was suspended for most in-person interviews, which significantly affected the study protocol and process. Since interviewing the ideal candidates, middle school refugee children, was not possible, at both locations (refugee camps and Winnipeg schools), in an attempt to gather the richest possible data from potential participants who have experienced the phenomena, I redeveloped and implemented an Online data collection method that involved refugee youth (between 18-25 ages) to retrospectively narrate their middle school educational experiences in Winnipeg schools. This step, while it produced a solid account of the essence of the opportunities and challenges of refugee students in middle school, it however, has its limitations:

    - Retrospective reporting of participants was also noted as a limitation, particularly due to the differing lapses of time between encounter and time of interview. Having to

rely on the participants' recollection of the event versus immediate recall relatively close to the time of the interaction likely impacted the content of what was reported. As Norris and Sawyer (2012) noted, although the story remains intact, the point of view changes drastically; so, too, with all stories. Researchers, informants/participants can never really make a truth claim. Recalled stories are always susceptible; they are recollections of past events in the present (p. 20).

- More importantly, had I had the chance to interview refugee children who at the time of the study were in middle school, in refugee camps and in Winnipeg schools, I believe the study could have been more accurate and obtained deeper information on the subject matter.

3. Some study participants voiced signs of fear and hesitation to express their feelings and share their experiences with me during the interviews. This could be because of the traumatic events they experienced in the past that might have led to not trusting strangers, and perhaps due to previous experiences with researchers or authorities who interviewed them without a positive outcome. Although participants attempted to share their stories broadly, there were subtle hints that led me to think that there was more information than what the participants shared.
4. Because English was not the first language of participants, language was another limitation in this study. Although there was a translator to assist participants, as needed, some participants still could not express themselves well.

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Appendices

Participant youth recruitment poster Appendix (i)

University of Manitoba

Participants Needed For New Study



- **Did you come to Winnipeg as refugee from an East African country in the past Ten years?**
- **Did you attend middle school (grade 6.7, or 8) in Winnipeg while you were between the ages of 11-13**
- **Have you been in Canada for less than Ten years?**
- **Are you legally residing in Canada?**
- **Are you comfortable sharing your middle school experience?**
- **Do you have access to computers and internet?**

If your answer is YES to all, you are eligible to participate in a study entitled:

Exploring the educational experiences of refugee children who came from war-affected regions and attended middle school in Canada

This is a qualitative research project that will be conducted by Aklilu Teferi (Ph.D. Candidate) under the supervision of Professor Michael Baffoe at the University of Manitoba Social Work Faculty.

This study aims to identify the educational needs, challenges, and opportunities of refugee children from conflict regions, particularly from East African countries, while attending middle schools in Winnipeg, Manitoba. The study attempts to identify the impact of their migration experiences on their present academic performances. What are the factors that contribute to the students' school achievements?

Through participating in this study you may:	**Your participation in this study is <u>Voluntary</u> and will be kept <u>confidential</u>**
• Help to raise awareness on issues affecting refugee children's education who are transitioning from refugee camps to Canadian schools • Enable Canadian teachers and school personnel to better understand the educational needs of refugee children who are coming from conflict regions	Your participation will involve one virtual interview, which will take about 60-90 minutes , and a virtual focus group discussion (about1-2 hours) Depending on the need you may also be invited for a second interview at a later time In appreciation for your time, you will receive a $25 Gift certificate

Where:

Your participation will take place in a virtual setting via Zoom technology.

When:

January 20- February 28 2021 at a time convenient to you

Contact

If you are interested in participating in this study, and would like more information, please contact the researcher **Aklilu Teferi** and or the supervisor **Professor Michael Baffoe @ (204) 474- 9682**

This research is approved by the University of Manitoba, Psychology/Sociology, Research, and Ethics Board, on_____

Faculty of Social Work – University of Manitoba, 521 Tier Building Winnipeg, MB R3T 2N2 Canada (204) 474-7050

University of Manitoba

Recruitment Letter to Organizations **Appendix (ii)**

Faculty of Social Work

Date January 5, 2021
Mr. Chuks Ojidoh,

Director of Community Programs
The African Communities of Manitoba Inc (ACOMI)
Winnipeg, MB.
101-421 Kennedy St. Winnipeg, MB.

RE: **Cooperation for recruiting youth participants**

Dear Mr. Ojidoh

Further to our phone conversations, I am writing to you to request your cooperation in disseminating information to the youth with a refugee background who may be interested in participating in a new research study. No one knows the value of research that aims to explore refugee children's educational experiences in resettlement than your organization. Your reputation in working with African refugees and immigrant children, youth, and families facilitates smooth transition and integration to a place where the culture is quite different from their countries of origin.

As I have briefed you in our phone conversation, I am a Ph.D. Candidate in the faculty of social work at the University of Manitoba, currently engaged in a research project. In partial fulfillment of the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Social work requirements, I have designed a research project to explore the *"Experiences of Refugee children from conflict regions in the Canadian education system*." This study aims to identify the educational needs, challenges, and opportunities of refugee children from conflict regions, particularly from East African countries, while attending middle school in Winnipeg, Manitoba. This study aims to shed light on the lived experiences of refugee children's' academic performance in Canadian schools and attempt to identify the impact of their pre-and trans –migration experiences on their present academic performances.

As your organization provides services for refugee youth, I hope you will help me recruit (12-15 refugee youth between the ages of 18-25) who are eligible to participate in the study(a recruitment poster is enclosed). To recruit interested youth to participate, I am asking for your kind cooperation in placing the attached recruitment posters in strategic places on your premises, website, and other social media platforms (i.e., Facebook, emails).

I want to ensure that participants will not unfairly be advantaged in any way because of taking part in the research. Participation in this study is voluntary, and there is no need for you to promote this study and attempt to convince/coerce the youth to either participate or not.

Your cooperation in disseminating the information about this study is much appreciated. I will follow up with a telephone call next week and be happy to answer any questions or concerns you may have. You may contact me at my email address: umteferi@ myumanitoba.ca

If you have any comments or questions about this research, you may contact my supervisor, Professor Michael Baffoe @ (204) 474- 9682or email: Michael.Baffoe@umanitoba.ca. The University's Research and Ethics Board has approved this research. If you wish, you can contact the University of Manitoba Ethics Committee by telephone (at (204) 474-7122or by email (humanethics@umanitoba.ca) if you have any concerns about this research.

Many thanks in advance for your consideration of this project. Please let me know if you need more information.

Sincerely,

Aklilu Teferi Dr. Michael Baffoe

Researcher- Ph.D. Candidate Principal Advisor

Appendix (iii)

Research information and consent form for youth participants

Title of Research Project: Exploring the Experiences of Refugee children from conflict regions in the Canadian education system

Researcher*:* Aklilu Teferi
PhD Candidate
Faculty of Social work
University of Manitoba
Email: umteferi@myumanitoba.ca

Principal Advisor: Professor Michael Baffoe
Faculty of Social work
University of Manitoba
Email: Michael.baffoe@umanitoba.ca Phone: (204) 474- 9682

Purpose of the research

I am a Ph.D. Candidate in the faculty of social work currently engaged in a research project. In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Social work, I have designed a research project to explore the *"Experiences of Refugee children from conflict regions in the Canadian education system*". This study aims to identify the educational needs, challenges and opportunities of refugee children from conflict regions, particularly from East African countries, while attending school in Winnipeg, Manitoba. This study attempts to shed light on the lived experiences of refugee children's' academic performance in Canadian schools and attempt to identify the impact of their pre-and trans -migration experiences on their present academic performances.

Procedures:

If you agree to take part, your participation involves two individual interviews and one focus group discussion with me. Both the interviews and focus group discussions will take place virtually using Zoom Pro version. The privacy policy for Zoom can be found here: https://zoom.us/privacyand I encourage you to read the information.

The interview will take approximately 60-90 minutes and the focus group will take 60-90 minutes. If you agree to participate, you will receive further instruction via email how and when these Zoom interviews and discussions takes place.

During this study, you will be asked a number of brief questions concerning your personal experience in relation to your middle school education in both your country of origin and or refugee camps as well as in Canadian school. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions. You can skip any question you do not want to answer. The interview will be audio recorded so that we do not miss anything that we talk about. Names mentioned on the recordings will be replaced by pretending names (pseudonyms) so that typed information will be confidential. I will not identify you by name in any reports using information obtained from this interview, and that your confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure. Subsequent uses of records and data will be subject to standard data use policies which protect the anonymity of individuals and institutions.

You may also participate in a virtual focus group discussion with other participants (refuge youth) to discuss the main themes of the interviews. Please be advised that although I will take every precaution to maintain the confidentiality of the data, the focus group setting's nature prevents me from guaranteeing confidentiality. You are required not to share and or discuss any of the focus group discussions, including the identity of participants to anyone outside the focus group setting.

Potential Harms

There are no known harms associated with your participation in this research. However, if you feel emotionally upset or any distress from taking part in the interview, I will refer you to the below counselling service, which offer confidential personal counselling:

- Mount Carmel Clinic, 886 Main Street, Winnipeg, MB, 204-589-9429

Alternatively, you may contact one of the services of your choice from the attached list.

Potential Benefits

You will receive no payment or reimbursement for any expenses related to taking part in this study.While there are no known immediate benefits, you may benefit from the knowledge created by the research and your input may help inform changes in addressing concerns raised in the study.

Compensation

For participating in this study, you will receive a $25 gift certificate. This money is not payment for agreeing to take part in the study, but rather a token of our appreciation and to compensate for your time.

Confidentiality

All records of participation will be kept strictly confidential in a locked secure area such that only my advisor and I will have access to the information. It will be kept in a locked filing cabinet and password protected computer. The only person, beside myself, allowed listening to the audio-recorded interviews and focus group discussion is my principal advisor Professor Michael Baffoe. Data will be destroyed by shredding two years after the end of the project, approximately on or before June 30, 2023. I will do my best to make sure no one outside the study will know that you spoke with me. I will not record your name during the focus group. Instead, a code or a pseudonym of your choice will be used to identify you.

While I will make every reasonable effort to implement technical security measures that reduce risks of a confidentiality breach, please be advised that any Internet-based communication is not 100% guaranteed to be secure and confidential.

Maintaining anonymity in this study is challenging as at least my advisor and I, who conduct the interviews and other participants in the focus group have the opportunity to know you. However, your personal information including the experience you share will not been known to anyone in a way that could identify you.

The results from this study will be reported in a written research report to the faculty of social Work and faculty of graduate studies at the University of Manitoba. A summarized copy of the final report will also be provided to you and other individuals and organization who participate in the study.

Withdrawal from the Study

Your decision to take part in this study is voluntary; you may refuse to participate without facing any penalty. Once in the study, you may also withdraw from the study by informing me at any time, for any reason, without explanation, and without penalty, if you so decide. There will be no consequences for refusing to participate or withdrawing. You have the right to remove your data from the study at a later time, should you choose to do so. Once the data is collected, aggregated and analyzed, approximately by June 2021, it would be difficult to single out and remove any data from the final report.

Contact

This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the University of Manitoba Psychology/Sociology, Research, and Ethics Board, on_____.

If you have questions, at any time, about the study or the procedures (or experience adverse effects as a result of taking part in this study), you may contact The University of Manitoba Human Ethics OfficePh: 204-474-7122, Fax: 204-269-7173 ; email humanethics@umanitoba.ca

For all other questions please feel free to contact my supervisor, Professor Michael Baffoe, at (204) 474-9682 Email: michael.baffoee@umanitoba.ca or me, Aklilu Teferi; Email: umteferi@myumanitoba.ca

Statement of Consent

I have read this consent form. I have had the opportunity to discuss this research study with Mr. Aklilu Teferi. I have had my questions answered by him in language I understand. The risks and benefits have been explained to me. I believe that I have not been unduly influenced by anyone in the study by any statements or implied statements to participate in the research study.

I understand that I will be given a copy of this consent form after signing it. I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and that I may choose to withdraw at any time. I freely agree to participate in this research study. I understand that information regarding my personal identity will be kept confidential, but that confidentiality is not fully guaranteed.

I understand that other people may know that I am participating in this study and anonymity is not possible, and I willingly waived my rights for full anonymity.

I have read the privacy and encryption information for Zoom and I agree that the researcher, Aklilu Teferi, and the University of Manitoba should not be held responsible if any outside party gains access to Zoom account information or transaction by bypassing online security measures

My signature on this form indicates that I have understood to my satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject.

Participant's signature_____ Date _____

Witness's signature_____ Date _____

Requirement Letter to middle school educators **Appendix** (iv)

Faculty of Social Work

January 5, 2021

Mr. Matthew Adkins
Principal
Hugh John Macdonald School
567 Bannatyne Ave
Winnipeg, MB, R3A 0G8

RE: **Cooperation for referring middle school teachers for a study**

Dear Mr. Adkins

I am a Ph.D. Candidate in the faculty of social work at the University of Manitoba currently engaged in a research project. In partial fulfillment of the Doctor of Philosophy degree requirements in Social work, I have designed a research project to study "Experiences of Refugee children from conflict regions in the Canadian education system." This study aims to identify refugee children's educational needs and challenges from conflict regions, particularly from East African countries, while attending middle schools in Winnipeg, Manitoba. This study aims to shed light on the lived experiences of refugee children's' academic performance in Canadian middle schools and attempt to identify the impact of their pre-and trans -migration experiences on their present academic performances.

I am writing to ask your kind cooperation in referring qualified yet interested teachers in your school who have experience working with refugee children (African descent from war-affected regions) for more than three years. Every year, I understand that your school enrolls a relatively large number of refugee students from various countries, including Africa. It is assumed that the teachers working with these refugee children create safe spaces in schools where children can

express their concerns and feelings and discuss shared experiences, and I would like to hear those stories from teachers' perspectives.

No one understands better than educators about refugee children's school experiences. Considering your expertise in this area of the field, I am requesting you to refer me to a qualified teacher(s) who you think can help me best understand the experience. Interested teachers may share the children's middle school academic and social life(i.e., challenges, opportunities, and strengths) and their teaching perspectives.

I have attached an information sheet about the study for your reference and discussion with potential participants. Participation in this study is voluntary, and interested teachers may contact me directly or give their permission to call/email them.

If you have any comments or questions about this research, you may contact my supervisor, Professor Michael Baffoe @ (204) 474- 9682or email: Michael.Baffoe@umanitoba.ca. The University of Manitoba Research and Ethics Board approves this research. If you wish, you can contact the University of Manitoba Ethics Committee by telephone (at (204) 474-7122or by email (humanethics@umanitoba.ca) if you have any concerns about this research.

Many thanks in advance for your consideration of this project. Please let me know if you need more information.

Sincerely,

Aklilu Teferi
Researcher- Ph.D. Candidate

Dr. Michael Baffoe
Principal Advisor

Appendix (v)

Letter of information for Educators

Re: Invitation to "qualitative research with refugee children".

Dear Mr. /Ms.

I am a PhD Candidate at the University of Manitoba faculty of social work. You referred to me by _____

In a partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Ph.D. in Social work, I am conducting a qualitative research project under the supervision of Professor Michael Baffoe at the University of Manitoba Social Work Faculty. This is an invitation to participate in the research. The purpose of this study is to identify the educational needs, challenges and opportunities of refugee children from conflict regions, particularly from East African countries, while attending schools in Winnipeg, Manitoba. This study aims to shed light on the lived experiences of refugee children's' academic performance in Canadian schools and identifies the impact of their pre-and trans -migration experiences on their present academic performances.

Dear Mr. /Ms.

Considering your role as an educator being well connected with refugee children and their families, your participation and contribution to this study is crucial. Participation in the study is voluntary. Your participation involves one virtual interview with me that will take approximately 60-90 minutes .The interview will follow by focus group discussions with other teachers who are participants of the study. Both the interview and focus group discussions will take place using

Zoom Pro version. Please read the privacy policy for Zoom, which can be found here: https://zoom.us/privacy. During this study, you will be asked a number of brief questions concerning your personal experience and refugee students' view in relation to their middle school educational experience in Winnipeg. The interview will be audio-recorded to allow me to listen carefully to what you have to say. Names mentioned on the tapes will be replaced by pretending names (pseudonyms) so that typed information will be confidential. Once data are collected, your result will form part of a larger database, from which only group data will be reported. Your decision to take part in this study is voluntary; you may refuse to participate without facing any penalty. Once in the study, you may also withdraw from the study by informing me at any time, for any reason, without explanation, and without penalty, if you so decide.

You will find detailed information about your role as a participant on the consent form. Given your significant role, I thank you for your anticipated commitment to actively contribute to this research study. Please contact me at the address listed below to discuss the details of your participation.

With kind regards,

Aklilu Teferi Professor Michael Baffoe

Researcher Research supervisor

Tel;(204)204) 474- 9682

Email: umteferi@cc.umanitoba.caEmail:michael.baffoe@umanitoba.ca

Appendix (vi)

Research consent form for educators

Title of Research Project: Exploring the Experiences of Refugee children from conflict regions in the Canadian education system

Researcher*:* Aklilu Teferi
PhD Candidate
Faculty of Social work
University of Manitoba
Email: umteferi@myumanitoba.ca

Principal Advisor: Professor Michael Baffoe
Faculty of Social work
University of Manitoba
Email: Michael.baffoe@umanitoba.ca Phone: (204) 474- 9682

Dear Mr. /Mrs. _____

You are being asked to participate in a research study .This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the informed consent process. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

Purpose of Research

I am a Ph.D. Candidate in the faculty of social work currently engaged in a research project. In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Social work, I have designed a research project to explore the *"Experiences of Refugee children from conflict regions in the Canadian education system*". This study aims to identify the educational needs, challenges and opportunities of refugee children from conflict regions, particularly from East African countries, while attending middle school in Winnipeg, Manitoba. This study aims to shed light on the lived experiences of refugee children's' academic performance in Canadian

schools and attempt to identify the impact of their pre-and trans -migration experiences on their present academic performances.

Procedures

If you agree to take part, your participation involves one individual interview that takes 60-90 minutes and one focus group discussion for 60-90 minutes. Both the interview and focus group discussions will take place using Zoom Pro version at the time and place convenient to you. The privacy policy for Zoom can be found here: https://zoom.us/privacy

During this study, you will be asked a number of brief questions concerning your personal experience in relation to refugee children's educational performances. The interview will be audio-recorded to allow me to listen carefully to what you have to say. Names mentioned on the tapes will be replaced by pretending names (pseudonyms) so that typed information will be confidential. I will not identify you by name in any reports using information obtained from this interview, and that your confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure. Subsequent uses of records and data will be subject to standard data use policies which protect the anonymity of individuals and institutions.

You will participate in a virtual focus group discussion with other participants (teachers) to discuss the main themes of the interviews. Please be advised that although I will take every precaution to maintain the confidentiality of the data, the focus group setting's nature prevents me from guaranteeing confidentiality. You are required not to share and or discuss any of the focus group discussions, including the identity of participants to anyone outside the focus group setting.

Potential Harms

There are no known harms associated with your participation in this research

Potential Benefits

While there are no known immediate benefits, you may benefit from the knowledge created by the research and your input may help inform changes in addressing concerns raised in the study. You will receive no payment or reimbursement for any expenses related to taking part in this study.

Confidentiality

All records of participation will be kept strictly confidential in a locked secure area such that only my advisor and I will have access to the information. It will be kept in a locked filing cabinet and password protected computer. The only person, beside myself, allowed listening to the audio-recorded interviews and focus group discussion is my principal advisor Professor Michael Baffoe. Data will be destroyed by shredding two years after the end of the project, approximately on or before June 30, 2023. I will do my best to make sure no one outside the study will know that you spoke with me. I will not record your name during the focus group. Instead, a code or a pseudonym of your choice will be used to identify you.

While I will make every reasonable effort to implement technical security measures that reduce risks of a confidentiality breach, please be advised that any Internet-based communication is not 100% guaranteed to be secure and confidential.

Maintaining anonymity in this study is challenging as my advisor and I, who conduct the interviews and other participants in the focus group have the opportunity to know you. However, your personal information including the experience you share will not be en known to anyone in a way that could identify you.

The results from this study will be reported in a written research report to the faculty of social Work and faculty of graduate studies at the University of Manitoba. A summarized copy of the final report will also be provided to you and other individuals and organization who participate in the study.

Withdrawal from the Study

Your decision to take part in this study is voluntary; you may refuse to participate without facing any penalty. Once in the study, you may also withdraw from the study by informing me at any time, for any reason, without explanation, and without penalty, if you so decide. There will be no consequences for refusing to participate or withdrawing. You have the right to remove your data from the study at a later time, should you choose to do so. Once the data is collected, aggregated and analyzed, approximately by June 2021, it would be difficult to single out and remove any data from the final report.

Contact

This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the University of Manitoba Psychology/Sociology, Research, and Ethics Board, on_____.

If you have questions, at any time, about the study or the procedures (or experience adverse effects as a result of taking part in this study), you may contact The University of Manitoba Human Ethics OfficePh: 204-474-7122, Fax: 204-269-7173 ; email humanethics@umanitoba.ca

For all other questions please feel free to contact my supervisor, Professor Michael Baffoe, at (204) 474-9682 Email: michael.baffoee@umanitoba.ca or me, Email: umteferi@myumanitoba.ca

Statement of Consent

I have read this consent form. I have had the opportunity to discuss this research study with Mr. Aklilu Teferi. I have had my questions answered by him in language I understand. The risks and benefits have been explained to me. I believe that I have not been unduly influenced by anyone in the study by any statements or implied statements to participate in the research study.

I understand that I will be given a copy of this consent form after signing it. I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and that I may choose to withdraw at any time. I freely agree to participate in this research study. I understand that information regarding my personal identity will be kept confidential, but that confidentiality is not fully guaranteed.

I understand that other people may know that I am participating in this study and anonymity is not possible, and I willingly waived my rights for full anonymity.

I have read the privacy and encryption information for Zoom and I agree that the researcher, Aklilu Teferi, and the University of Manitoba should not be held responsible if any outside party gains access to Zoom account information or transaction by bypassing online security measures

My signature on this form indicates that I have understood to my satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. Participant's signature_____ Date _____

Witness's signature_____ Date _____

Appendix (vii)

Interview Guide

The interview has two parts:

1. Refugee youth in Winnipeg
2. Educators /key informants in Winnipeg

1.1 . Refugee youth in Winnipeg

This interview is conducted online- For the purpose of this study, online interviews refer to in-depth interviews with participants conducted via Zoom technology.

Participants will inform about the research through an information letter sent to them earlier through selected community organizations (youth) schools (teachers) and those who are interested to participate will sign and submit a consent form prior to the scheduled virtual interview.

A Zoom meeting invitation will be generated with live link to the meeting and this link along with an invitation to participate in the meeting will be emailed to each study participants. Participants will enter the online interview with one click of this link.

Hence, at the beginning of each individual virtual interview, I will put forth the purpose of the interview in a friendly manner and plain language. I will establish the fact that the interviewer-participant relationship should be perceived as "a team working together to complete a common task, much like two strangers collaborating to complete a jigsaw puzzle" (Harrison et al. ,2011, p.221).

Here is how I proceed with each interview

I am……..

- My thanks for interviewees time
  - My background and current role
  - Clear restatement of purpose- emphasis on confidentiality- ethics with regard to ending the interview etc. explanation regarding right to withdraw anything that is said during the interview if they are uncomfortable with it

- Re-state what will happen with this information
- Ask for the participant's permission to record the interview, so I can transcribe the interview and refer back to it in the future
- For example, if participants do not want his or her face video-recorded to protect their privacy or for personal reasons, an audio only option for the participant records the interview between the participant and me. The simultaneous audio and video recording of the interviewer, with audio only recording of the participants, maintains the in-person connection between the interviewer (I) and interviewee(participants) while respecting their wishes
- I will remind participants that I will phone them if problems arise such as an unreliable Internet connection, technical difficulties such as loss of Internet connection, and freezing
- I will treat the interview as I would a regular phone call or in-person chat. I will give the participant(s) plenty of time to gather thoughts and answer my question completely.
- Before starting the interview, I will review the information letter and consent form (even if already signed and returned) to invite questions and ensure participants understand the research processes. I will also record the participant's verbal consent

Conducting the interview

I will start by asking initial background questions (name, age, sex, country of origin,etc.)
I would then move to ask participants questions necessary to obtain specific aspects of their experience. As this is a semi-structured interview, I may not ask every specific question below, but I will make sure to cover all of the topics. Other questions that emerge from the dialogue between the interviewee and me will be included.

These are the anticipated questions:

- Would you please tell me about yourself - when and how you came to Canada?
- What was your student life in your country like?
- What was your student life in a refugee camp?
- Tell me about the last time you were in school before you came to Winnipeg. How did you feel about leaving your school in country X?
- Tell me about your first day at Winnipeg school. Can you tell me about how you felt on your first day of school? (Happy, sad, anxious, fear……..) What did your teacher say or do to help welcome you? What did your classmates say or do to help welcome you?

- How did you feel about the first three months in Winnipeg?
- What did you feel about being a student in a different country and culture? Can you tell me about how you feel at school? What is the biggest difference between your school in country X and your school in Winnipeg?
- What was your middle school life in Winnipeg look like? Can you tell me more about the class you were in (friends, teachers, and social life …. etc.) who were your friends? How do you end up being friends with them? Do you have any Canadian friends? (Tell me about them. Or – Why not?)
- Is learning an easy task or difficult in a Canadian school, or is it the same as Country X? How? Tell me more about the subjects you score high grades and not so high while you were in middle school?
- What makes you achieve such high/low grades?
- What do you think is the difficult part of being a refugee student in a Winnipeg classroom?
- What did you like best/ least about middle school in Winnipeg
- Was it the subject matter of the course, the language, or the social environment that was difficult to be successful in school? Can you tell me more
- What kind of help did you get in your middle schoolwork? in school /at home?
- Tell me about your relationship with teachers. (Were they support you? Is there any specific thing you would like to see improved?)
- Tell me about how/if your teachers or school staff were specifically helpful to refugee students (special things that they did or services that they offered to refugees that they don't offer other students)?
- What kind of support did you want or need in your middle school years?

- What do you think your teacher(s) treated you compared to other students? (how and why)
- What was your relationship with your classmates and other students in the school?
- What needs to be done for you to be successful in middle school?
- Do you have any advice for teachers and Canadian students about how to welcome new students? What would you do to welcome a new classmate from another country?
- What did you miss most in your country of origin?
- Were your parents involved in your education? (How so?) How much contact or interaction did they have with your school? Give some examples. What did your parents understand – or not understand – about school here in Winnipeg? Why/How so? What did your school expected of your parents? What did your parents expect of the school?
- Can you tell me about any times that you may have felt unsatisfied with your experience at your school

To conclude

- Is there anything else you would like to add to what we have discussed?
- Would you like to clarify or change anything you have said?
- I would like to thank you for taking part.
- Then, I click End Meeting in Zoom. The recorded video file will automatically generate.

1.2. Teachers in Winnipeg schools

This study also considers the perspectives of Middle school teachers on the education of refugee children. I will do all steps taken on part 1.1(with youth participants) regarding the procedure for conducting virtual interview and consent before moving to the following questions.

- Can you tell me about a refugee child you have worked with within this school- their background perhaps, the context, how did you feel, how did you perceive they felt?

- Can you walk me through the enrolling policy and process? How is a refugee child get accepted in the school? How do you determine which grade he/she starts?
- Can you tell me about the experiences of refugee children within your classroom - for example, your relationship with them and vice versa or their relationships with other children, classroom dynamics?
- What kind of supports refugee children receive in the school? In your perspective is there adequate support? Why / How?
- From your perspective, can you tell about the experiences of refugee children within the wider school- school procedures, ethos, and values?
- Can you tell me about your experiences of the wider school community - for example, contact with parents, groups?
- From your perspective, how are refugee children viewed within the school staff team? For example, as a challenge, moral responsibility, sympathy
- In your experience, what more could be done to support refugee students within school settings and the wider community?
- In your experience, do you think refugee boys are more vulnerable/resilient than girls or vice versa? How and why?
- How well are refugee students able to perform within your course, comparing to other children? What kinds of difficulties do they have?
- In your experience, what kind of subjects are refugee children do better? Struggle with?

To conclude

Is there anything else you would like to add to what we have discussed?

Would you like to clarify or change anything you have said?

Do you feel that you have given a fair reflection of your perceptions in relation to refugee students? I would like to thank you for taking part.

Appendix (viii)

FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL &DISCUSSION GUIDE

Following the preliminary analysis of individual interviews, to further elaborate on the common themes- challenges/opportunities refugee children are exposed to and identified needs that would affect their learning process in Winnipeg schools-, participants in the study would also participate in two focus group sessions.
These will be held with youth participants and teacher participants separately.
Although focus groups can be highly structured, this study uses a semi-structured approach, so a list of pro-forma questions will guide rather than rigidly structure the focus group. Questions that lead the discussion will be developed at a later time (After the first individual interviews with participants conducted, data is reviewed and themes emerged).
I will ensure the questions are as open as possible and questions might not be asked directly (or at all) or in the order written (as this can affect the nature and quality of the conversation).
Procedure

I will use Doodle's meeting scheduler to schedule the focus group meeting. I will create a poll and send it off to participants to let them choose the best time to meet online.

Then, a Zoom meeting invitation will be generated with live link to the meeting and this link along with an invitation to participate in the meeting at best time that works for all will be emailed to each study participants. Participants will enter the online interview with one click of this link.

. I will start with an introduction about its purpose and process.

- Explain the general purpose of the discussion and why the participants are chosen.
- Explain the structure of the focus group, the duration and outline ground rules and discussion guidelines. These might include the importance of hearing everyone, speaking one at a time and that the moderator might interrupt to assure that all the topics can be fairly covered.
- Ask for the participant's permission to record the focus group discussion, so I can transcribe the interview and refer back to it in the future
- I will remind participants that I will phone them if problems arise such as an unreliable Internet connection, technical difficulties such as loss of Internet connection, and freezing

- Before starting the group discussion, I will review the information letter and consent form (even if already signed and returned) to invite questions and ensure participants understand the research processes. I will also record the participant's verbal consent to participate.

Here is how I will proceed,

Good morning/ evening and welcome to our session. Thanks for taking the time to virtually join us to talk about refugee children's educational challenges and opportunities. My name is Aklilu Teferi and I am the one who conducts this research project. You are invited because you have participated in the initial interview, so you're familiar with what this study is, and you all are knowledgeable about refugee children's educational experiences. We will discuss some of the common challenges/opportunities that most of you shared in our interview. There are no wrong answers but rather differing points of view. Please feel free to share your point of view even if it differs from what others have said. I am recording the session because I don't want to miss any of your comments. People often say very helpful things in these discussions, and we can't write fast enough to get them all down .I will use this recording for our analysis. When I write about our findings I might use direct quotes from this focus group but I will not identify with you individually and any quotes that I do use are will be attributable to an individual or to a role.

Maintaining anonymity in this study is challenging as my advisor and I, who conduct the interviews and other participants in the focus group have the opportunity to know you.

Please be advised that although I will take every precaution to maintain the confidentiality of the data, the focus group setting's nature prevents me from guaranteeing confidentiality. You are required not to share and or discuss any of the focus group discussions, including the identity of participants to anyone outside the focus group setting.

You should all have an information sheet that describes the research, if after today you have any questions about what we are doing, this information sheet contains our contact details and we welcome you to get in touch

Well, let's begin.

Appendix (ix)

Consent form – Focus group discussion

Your consent in writing is needed to confirm your involvement in this study. Signing this form confirms you have agreed to be a part of the research but does not stop you from changing your mind at a later time. You can withdraw from the research at any time and doing so will not affect your child's school or community standing. To withdraw from the research please contact the Researcher at the address shown on the Information Sheet.

Please tick box

I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions, that has been answered to my satisfaction ☐

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving reason. ☐

I agree to the focus group discussion being audio recorded ☐

I understand that other people may know that I am participating. In this study anonymity is not possible, and I willingly waived my right for full anonymity ☐

I agree to maintain confidentiality of information shared in this focus group. ☐

I have read the privacy and encryption information for Zoom and agree that the researcher, Aklilu Teferi, and the University of Manitoba should not be held responsible if any outside party gains access to Zoom account information or transaction by bypassing online security measures ☐

I have received a copy of this information letter. ☐

I agree to participate in the research study. ☐

Participants (consent)_____ Date: _____

University of Manitoba

Appendix (x)

Referral list of counseling resources in Winnipeg

CHILDREN & YOUTH Emergency/Crisis Services	• Call 911 for immediate mental health help or transport to Health Sciences Centre Children's Emergency Department for medical intervention • Macdonald Youth Services Youth Mobile Crisis Team and 24 hour Provincial Crisis Line 204-949-4777 or 1-888-383-2776 • Manitoba Suicide Line: 1-877-435-7170
AURORA FAMILY THERAPY CENTRE University of Winnipeg, 515 Portage Avenue, Winnipeg, MB R3B 2E9 Phone: (204) 786-9251	Aurora Therapy Program for Immigrant and Refugee Families provides culturally responsive therapy to immigrant and refugee individuals and families, focusing on issues of war-related trauma as well as on the impact of migration on family, relationships, and parenting issues.
FAMILY DYNAMICS #401-393 Portage Ave, Winnipeg, MB R3B 3H6 Phone: (204) 947-1401 Email: info@familydynamics.ca • Website: www.familydynamics.ca	Family Dynamics provides: • Family supports and resource centers • Counseling and parenting help • Programs for refugee families
KLINIC COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTER Address: 870 Portage Avenue (Drop-in counselling now available at this	The Klinic Community Health Centre offers: • Free community health, education, and counseling services • 24 hour crisis telephone help: 204-786-8686

Location and at 845 Regent Avenue West • Phone: 204-784-4090 Website: www.klinic.mb.ca	
MOUNT CARMEL CLINIC Address: 886 Main Street • Phone: 204-589-9447 or 204-589-9426 Email: cross_cultural@mountcarmel.ca • Website: www.mountcarmel.ca	Mount Carmel Clinic – Multicultural Wellness Program offers Provides counseling services to newcomers who are experiencing mental health difficulties and stress from culture change or traumatic events before coming to Canada
NOR-WEST Co-op/Community Health Contact/Address Information: Address: 785 Keewatin Street • Phone: 204-938-5900 Website: www.norwestcoop.ca	The Nor-West Co-op/Community Health provides: • Medical care and counseling • Programs for families, youth, parenting, and newcomers
WRHA Child and Adolescent Mental Health Centralized Intake 204-958-9660	Centralized Intake provides a central entry point into mental health services as well as facilitated redirection to Winnipeg community agencies. Centralized Intake can provide consultation and support to service providers, including rural and northern service providers.

Appendix (xi)

University of Manitoba | Research Ethics and Compliance

Human Ethics - Fort Garry
208-194 Dafoe Road
Winnipeg, MB R3T 2N2
T: 204 474 8872
humanethics@umanitoba.ca

PROTOCOL APPROVAL

To: **Aklilu Teferi** **(Advisor: Michael Baffoe)**
Principal Investigator

From: **Jonathan Marotta, Chair**
Research Ethics Board 1 (REB 1)

Re: **Protocol # P2020:075 (HS24319)**
Exploring the experiences of refugee children from conflict regions in Canadian schools

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Effective: January 19, 2021 **Expiry:** January 19, 2022

Research Ethics Board 1 (REB 1) has reviewed and approved the above research.

REB 1 is constituted and operates in accordance with the current *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans – TCPS 2 (2018)*.

This approval is subject to the following conditions:

i. Approval is granted for the research and purposes described in this application only.

ii. Any changes to this research must be approved by the Human Ethics Office (HEO) before implementation.

iii. Any deviations to the research or adverse events must be reported to the HEO immediately.

iv. This approval is valid for one year only. A Renewal Request Form must be submitted and approved prior to the above expiry date.

v. A Study Closure Form must be submitted to the HEO when the research is complete prior to the above expiry date, or if the research is terminated.

vi. The University of Manitoba (UM) may request to audit your research documentation to confirm compliance with this approved protocol, and with the UM *Ethics of Research Involving Humans* policies and procedures.

Funded Protocols: Email a copy of this Protocol Approval, with the corresponding UM Project Number, to ResearchGrants@umanitoba.ca

Appendix (xii)

University of Manitoba | Research Ethics and Compliance

Human Ethics - Fort Garry
208-194 Dafoe Road
Winnipeg, MB R3T 2N2
T: 204 474 8872
humanethics@umanitoba.ca

RENEWAL APPROVAL

Effective: January 18, 2022 New Expiry: January 19, 2023

Principal Investigator:	Aklilu Alemu Teferi
Advisor:	Michael Baffoe
Protocol Number:	HS24319 (P2020:075)
Protocol Title:	*Exploring the experiences of refugee children from conflict regions in Canadian schools*

Jonathan Marotta, Chair, REB1

Research Ethics Board 1 has reviewed and renewed the above research. The Human Ethics Office is constituted and operates in accordance with the current *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans*- TCPS 2 (2018).

This approval is subject to the following conditions:

i. Any changes to this research must be approved by the Human Ethics Office before implementation.

ii. Any deviations to the research or adverse events must be reported to the HEO immediately through an REB Event.

iii. This renewal is valid for one year only. A Renewal Request must be submitted and approved prior to the above expiry date.

iv. A Protocol Closure must be submitted to the HEO when the research is complete or if the research is terminated.

Appendix (xiii)

UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

Administrative Use Only
Pledge #:

PERSONAL HEALTH INFORMATION
PLEDGE OF CONFIDENTIALITY

Please read the statements below and indicate if you acknowledge/understand your responsibility under PHIA and University of Manitoba policies and procedures.

	DECLARATION
☑	I ACKNOWLEDGE that I have completed ***The Personal Health Information Act*** (PHIA) training offered by The University of Manitoba ("the University") and I am aware of my obligations under PHIA.
☑	I ACKNOWLEDGE that I am aware of the University's policy on confidentiality and security of personal health information as described in the Access and Privacy Policy, which is in accordance with ***The Personal Health Information Act.***
☑	I ACKNOWLEDGE that I am aware of the University's procedures on confidentiality and security of personal health information as described in the Access and Privacy Procedures, including procedures relating to collection, access, use, disclosure, retention and storage, and destruction of personal health information.
☑	I UNDERSTAND that in consideration of my association (including as a student, if applicable), appointment, employment, or contract with the University ("my relationship"), and as an integral part of the terms and conditions of my relationship, I hereby agree, pledge and undertake that: • I will not at any time, during my relationship with the University, access or use personal health information; • I will not reveal or disclose to any persons within or outside the University, any personal health information; EXCEPT as may be required in the course of my duties and responsibilities, in accordance with applicable laws, and pursuant to University and departmental policies governing proper release of the information.
☑	I UNDERSTAND that my obligations concerning the protection of confidentiality relate to all personal health information in the custody or under the control of the University that I may gain access to, directly or indirectly, as a result of my relationship.
☑	I UNDERSTAND that the obligations outlined above will continue after my relationship with the University ends.
☑	I UNDERSTAND that unauthorized use or disclosure of personal health information may result in disciplinary action being taken, and/or legal action at the discretion of the University.

Full Name: Aklilu Teferi **Position:** Researcher- PhD Candidate

Date: December 30, 2020 **UM Unit/Organization:** Graduate studies- faculty of social work

Access and Privacy Office Authorization: Karen Meelker
(Administrative Use Only)

Submit your completed form to fippa@umanitoba.ca as an attachment.
Issued by the Access and Privacy Office, University of Manitoba on September 14, 2017

Appendix (xiv)

Youth Participants' brief biographies

The following is a brief description of each of the nine youth participants based on data collected during interviews and field notes. The purpose of the participant profiles is to allow the reader to gain a better understanding of each refugee youth's unique perspective and provide space for each of their voices and experiences to be acknowledged and honored. These diverse individuals that belong to the refugee children group from East African countries, where each participant is unique, came from a different background, and with various expectations, yet, as seen in the findings chapter, with notable convergences amongst participants experience in a number of areas shared as refugee children. Please note, the participants I interviewed for this study do not speak for everyone but speak to their own experience. To keep participants' personal information confidential, in addition to assigning pseudonyms, all and any identifiers, including names of specific places and dates where events occurred, are altered when deemed appropriate, without compromising participants' authentic narratives.

Participant 1- Jamal- Eritrea

Jamal, originally from Eritrea, came to Winnipeg from Sudan in 2014. He was born and raised in Kassala refugee camp where restrictions on movement and access to resources including education were a significant constraint. His parents, both illiterate, fled Eritrea during the Ethio-Eritrea War, a major armed conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea that took place from 1998 to 2000. They met in a refugee camp in Sudan, married and his wife gave birth to Jamal and his 4 siblings. "I have never been in Eritrea, and I feel Sudan as my country. I was schooled in refugee camp on and off. I would say I was an average student. I was in grade 4 when I came to Winnipeg". After grade 4 in a refugee camp, he did not go on to middle school right away and

instead attended class in junior high school upon his arrival in Winnipeg. “It was difficult to be placed in grade 9 with my level of understanding” he said. In addition to low school performance, Jamal has some speech difficulties – he not only stutters but takes time to process information and express himself. The interview for this study took more time with him compared with other participants. Jamal shared that after struggling for three years in Winnipeg schools including EAL class; he had had enough and eventually dropped out in the 10th grade. “When I was 16, I started slipping but after a year, I decided it wasn't for me because I could never understand to the idea of staying in school where, I did not see any progress. I was older than everyone else in the class and some students joked on my age and speech challenge. I had lost motivation that eventually led to missing so many days from school… that it seemed pointless.” Jamal is now working in a warehouse earning a minimum wage. He hopes that he will, one day, return back to school. His siblings continued attending school though.

Participant 2-Dawit- Eritrea

Dawit immigrated to Canada in 2014 from Sudan with his single mother, 2 sisters and a brother. He is originally from Eritrea, born in Eritrea and then immigrated to Sudan when he was a mere toddler. Dawit remembered that he did not have any education up until he was six years old. Even then, access to quality education in Darfur’s refugee camp was a challenge. Despite his enrollment in the school in Darfur refugee camp, where Dawit attended, he had a number of challenges, including overcrowding, and shortage of trained teachers. “There were about one hundred students in one room and teachers were unable to even correct our paper. They simply wrote a question on the blackboard and spent the whole day disciplining us……” Considering the challenges in refugee camps, there is no wonder that Dawit immigrated to Canada with only

a few years of schooling before he had a chance to develop basic literacy. In Winnipeg, being placed in grade 9 while he actually was at a grade 3 level was an enormously difficult task - Dawit disclosed " yes, it was difficult - learning a new language and culture with no basic education was hard and frustrating". After three years of on- and -off in school, Dawit eventually dropped out of school, without achieving a passing mark even in courses from the EAL program. Dawit's withdrawal from school was not only attributed to academic challenges that pushed him away, but there was also a "pulling" factor that attracted him. Dawit was a troubled kid in school, who had been involved with the justice system due to his affiliation with local gangs. "I am here (Winnipeg) for six years now, and it feels like I am stuck - because I made a bad choice in making friends. I was in a lot of pressure in the school and the community… no one understand me and support me, even my teachers". Dawit is working in a night shift at a furniture manufacturing company. He has no plan to return to school any time soon.

Participant- 3 Esther- Ethiopia

Esther fled her hometown in Ethiopia and went to the border city, Moyale, and stayed there for 2 years before being smuggled into Kenya and registered at a UNCHR refugee camp, Kakuma. As her father was killed in a conflict several years ago, it was Esther's paternal grandmother who took care of the family and orchestrated the flight to the neighboring Kenya leading a family of thirteen- composed of her mother, aunties, cousins, and Esther's two brothers. They crossed the border on foot and horseback, paying smugglers to lead the way. Esther's father died when she was only five years old. Although her mother decided to send her to school in her early years, she was unable to do so later because of poverty and a cultural norm that dictates boys should have priority over girls when it comes to school. Esther, so young at the time, was much needed

to do household chores while her two brothers went to elementary school. "During my childhood, I remembered my dad would leave for several months at a time and come back. Family members would look for him to make sure he was still alive. However, one day he didn't make it home". Her father was killed, and they brought his body to their home. "It is still vivid in my memory when my mom took me to the funeral when I was about 5 years old". Esther went to school for two years in a Kenyan refugee camp and immigrated to Winnipeg in 2012 when she was 8 years old. A Winnipeg church group sponsored her whole family of thirteen and she is grateful for that. She started school in Winnipeg in grade three. Despite the ups and downs, she managed to successfully complete high school. Currently she is attending a two-year diploma program at Red River College. "I wouldn't be here where I am today if it wasn't for XYZ- a community resource center-XYZ basically started their after-school program while me and my family live there. So, going to the program, getting all the resources, and using it and …. just taking advantage of what they gave me; it was what really helped me other than school". Esther would like to see more of community organized programs… "you know it helped me stay out of trouble. They helped us doing that our families weren't able to provide to us."

Participant 4 –Tarik- Somalia

Tarik, just 12 years old, was forced to run from his home country of Somalia with his family due to the social unrest in Somalia. Tarik's father was always on the militants' radar. They warned him either to abandon his government job, or to spy for them (he used to work at a local tax office). Since he was not cooperating, one day, the militant group al-Shabab visited their home. They took him with other men in the village to an unknown location. Tarik remembered "The next day they killed him. That night no one slept. We cried and mourned. It was not easy to accept that." Weeks after Tarik's father's death the rest of the family decided to escape-Tarik

fled Somalia with his mother, siblings, and maternal uncle when he was 12 years of age. He indicated that when they were fleeing Somalia, they were shot at while in the smuggler's car. After a very dangerous escape journey, they ended up in Kenya, and his mother was hospitalized for anemia as she was pregnant with her seventh child. In a Kenyan refugee camp, they stayed for two years just focusing on their day-to-day basic needs other than school. "School was not a priority …I simply went for a day or two and stayed home for the rest of the week…. I was not serious about it, neither my family". They finally immigrated to Winnipeg in 2018 when Tarik was 14 years of age. In Winnipeg school, weeks after his arrival, Tarik who was placed in grade seven, was told he presented with symptoms of and behavioral issues which are consistent with a diagnosis of ADHD. Tarik acknowledged that he had some academic challenges, but he also felt that the teachers did not understand his real problem "I would like to see teachers more open…. Because some teachers assume that all students in the room understand the subject. I was afraid to ask questions in front of other students. So, I kept quiet even when I don't understand". Tarik did graduate from high school with some "M" designated courses (*curriculum in Manitoba that has been modified for student with significant cognitive disabilities*). He currently works at a local bakery earning a minimum wage with no plan to return to school.

Participant 5- Jacob- S. Sudan

Jacob grew up in Ethiopia but self-identified as South Sudanese and is proud of his heritage. His first language is Dinka. For several years, violence has kept Jacob and his siblings, from living a normal life. They haven't been able to go to school or play outside due to the chaos created by militant groups. The militants' sometimes brutal sudden attacks on schools and other civilians' buildings made it too risky for Jacob to attend school. Jacob, then 10 years old from a small village in South Sudan, fled to Ethiopia without his parents, following a group of caravans when

fighting broke out in his village in South Sudan. It was a market day, and he was out to sell a couple of live chickens and dozens of eggs when gunfire erupted in the market. Jacob, who was confused and scared, stumbled through the crowd and ran away with other civilians to the unknown. He finally found himself with a group of people, some of whom he knew, who were headed towards the border. He followed them. After days on the tedious journey, they reached the border and surrendered to the Ethiopian authorities. A couple of months later, all his family members except his father, joined him in one of the refugee camps in Ethiopia. “Those couple months” Jacob remembered “being alone without my mother and siblings were the scariest time of my entire life. I missed my mother dearly. I was always scared," said Jacob "When I went to bed, I always wondered if I would wake up the next morning to find out something has happened to my mother." Jacob is glad that he is now with his mother though no one knows where his father is. Jacob and his family immigrated to Winnipeg in 2015. Upon arrival he was placed in grade 7 which he thinks was fair. Jacob has a relatively well-established primary schooling while he was in Ethiopia and didn’t encounter significant challenges in Winnipeg schools. He hopes to study Law and become a lawyer so that he can help people, especially immigrants, to have a better life in host countries. He is determined to study hard and get good grades to write the Law school entrance exam. Currently he is a 2nd year student at the University of Manitoba. Remarkably, Jacob looks much older than his chorological age. He is a very thin young adult, with sullen eyes and seems alert and on edge.

Participant 6- Sofia-Eritrea

Sofia is a young Eritrean woman who immigrated to Canada in 2016 from a refugee camp in Sudan. While in Eritrea, Sofia’s parents were ordinary village people with a very low income.

Her mother worked at a home-based business producing local beer and her father was a fisherman. Life was so hard, and Sofia's father left Eritrea and attempted to go to Europe via Libya, but he was arrested in Libya. He then paid a local broker who helped him get out of prison and register at the region's UNCHR office as a refugee. He later immigrated to Canada in 2010. Once in Canada, Sofia's father told the mother of his children in Eritrea to go to Sudan. Soon after, the mother along with her seven children did immigrate to Sudan and waited in the refugee camp for five years till they got sponsored to Canada in 2016. Sofia stated that the family came to Canada five years ago through a government program. This is a family of 9 who according to Sofia is struggling with language, housing, and food for the most part. Although her parents have been in Canada long enough, they are struggling to adapt to the new culture. Her parents do not speak English and appeared to be overwhelmed with the issues that had occurred in their life since they fled their country. "There was no one at home to help me in my schoolwork. I regularly attended after school programs in one refugee organization. It really helped me a lot". Sofia and her siblings are attending school in Winnipeg and Sofia is excelling in her studies. She believes her basic education in Eritrea helped her as a foundation to catch up with the Winnipeg school system without much difficulty. "In Eritrea although I have learned all subjects in primary school in my language, I have also learned English lessons starting from the first grade. Later in Sudan refugee camp, the language of instruction was more commonly English. I was really good in Math and science and my teachers encouraged me to study science". Currently, Sofia is a first-year university student with a career plan to be a nurse. "I like helping people, especially, the elderly," she said.

Participant 7- Hassan – Somalia

Hassan and his family had fled their home in Somalia in 2012, after Al-Shabab had threatened to take his older brothers as part of a forced recruitment campaign because two of Hassan's

brothers were over the age of 14. A month earlier his father was killed by the militants in his home because he protected his children from joining the militants. Engulfed by fear and unrest, the rest of Hassan's family had to flee to the neighboring country, Kenya, when Hassan was eight years old. Little is known about Hassan's schooling while living in Somalia, though Hassan vaguely remembered that he rarely attended school until he began living in a refugee camp in Kenya. Life in a refugee camp, in Kenya, was not something Hassan is comfortable to talk about. "My mother had to look after her six children without our father's presence and the authorities in Kenya were brutal if you didn't give them money. She had no money to feed us, let alone to pay bribes and send us to school". Hassan and his mother immigrated to Canada from Kenya in 2018, when Hassan was fifteen years old. Hassan remembered the month and the year when he immigrated to Canada "it was in the holy Month of Ramadan in May 2018. This is one of the reasons why I like Canada- the school I attended upon my arrival, allowed us (him and other Muslim students) to practice our religion by providing us a quiet room to pray." During Ramadan, Hassan fasts, even giving up water from dawn to dusk. He proudly said, "Prayer and faith are what kept me alive" and provided him with strength after he left Somalia. Hassan attended several schools in Winnipeg (three schools in 2 years) from grade 7 to grade 9 with behavioural concerns. His behavioural and learning difficulties are not solely explained by being a newcomer as his communication skills with his peers, even within the Somali community, were a significant deficit compared to others his age. Hassan does have a few friends that he enjoys spending time with, but he said that he will often become upset when they are not available or didn't agree with him. He is also quick to get angry. He had no idea why he reacts this way. Hassan believes teachers in Canada should be supportive and help him communicate better in addition to helping him with schoolwork. Hassan is currently enrolled at a Technical Vocational

school to study a one-year program in which he is learning the skills that will lead to a career in the Aerospace Industry.

Participant 8 Maria- Somalia

Maria, originally from Somalia had been born in Yemen to refugee parents. She was born from her Somali parents who fled their country and settled in Yemen in the early 1980s following the outbreak of civil war in Somalia, with many fleeing violence and individualized fear of persecution. It is noted that Yemen hosts the world's second largest Somali refugee population, around 250,000 refugees. Maria's mother, Nasra, the only daughter in a family of seven children, was born in rural Somalia to poor nomad parents. At age 15 Nasra was married to Maria's father, a man from her tribe, but conflict drove them from their home at a moment's notice and fled to Yemen. Maria's parents were known as urban refugees in Yemen and lived in Sana. "Life in Yemen is tough. In addition to the dangers posed by conflict amongst tribal warlords we are also faced increased hardship to feed ourselves. There was not enough food, and my parents were struggling to cover basic needs. My father worked as a laborer, washing cars, and earns a very low wage - sometimes he came home empty handed". "My mother employed as domestic servant in a Yemeni's household. She was forced to leave us unattended while she went to work. I was the youngest and my older siblings and the neighbors were looked after me in my mother's absence". There was no fully functioning school available for the Somali children in Yemen. Even though there are public schools in Sana, Maria's family was unable to pay for uniforms, books, transport, and food. Maria also told that Somali students increasingly face harassment and racially based intimidation by the local authorities (i.e., police stop and frisk them at anytime). As such she lost any hope to ever get an education and stayed at home and helped her mother with small household chores, up until one Sunny afternoon in 2014 when she got a break. Thanks to a local church initiative in Winnipeg, Maria's family's sponsorship application was approved;

and news arrived at their home that Maria and her family were accepted to immigrate to Canada. Maria and her family - father, mother and three siblings - immigrated to Canada in 2014. Despite its hardship, she still missed Yemen. “There is a lot of things I missed in Yemen because here is different than Yemen. Back in Yemen, I could go to the neighborhood and play with my people. There are many Somalis in Yemen. Everybody knows each other, speak same language, and understand each other. It is like a community. Everybody knows you and your family. Here it is mixed and challenging to fit in. You did not know the language; you don’t know the culture…….and the cold is terrible.” However, she continued, “comparing to the opportunity I am enjoying in Canada- education, safety, and not to constantly worrying for food and medicine, I would say, I am lucky to be here, although there are some racist people”. Maria graduated from high school and currently works as a cashier in a local department store. She has no plan to further her education.

Participant 9- Hakim – Ethiopia

Hakim is one of the many Ethiopian children who had to flee their homes when the violence inside the Northern part of Ethiopia was at its peak. Hakim had resided in rural village in the Northern part of Ethiopia, his entire life, up until he was forced to flee when he was thirteen. Hakim’s description of his life in Ethiopia and the boat trip he took to escape to Yemen was difficult and it sets the context for the fear and trauma he experienced. Hakim shared that he and his older brother left his village in Ethiopia and went to the border city with a group of people, mostly young adults, to meet with smugglers. After paying ten thousand birr (equivalent to 400 CND) per person, Hakim and his brother, amongst others, were put in a boat and sailed to Yemen where they were to remain and the family to follow. Yemen is viewed by many migrants as a gateway to the Middle East or Europe. The boat trip to Yemen was not a pleasant story. Hakim remembered “The boat, packed with mostly Ethiopian, Eritrean, and Somali migrants,

reached at Yemen's al-Makha port after struggling with strong winds, rough waves, and security checks. It was a life and death situation. Everyone on the boat prayed to their God." Hakim added, "We were in the hands of merciless smugglers who were ready to damp us in the Red Sea if something went wrong. One of them told us that the boat before us never reach the Yemeni shore. The boat overturned off the coast and all the passengers died". Hakim's account of the perilous journey to Yemen in a crowded boat has been corroborated with various reports from the UNCHR. Tens of thousands of Africans attempt to cross the Red Sea into Yemen every year, often in rickety, overcrowded vessels. Hundreds have died making the journey. In October, the UN refugee agency said that more than 200 people had died at sea in 2014 while attempting to reach Yemen. "There have been frequent reports of mistreatment, abuse, rape and torture, and the increasingly cruel measures being adopted by smuggling rings seem to account for the increase in deaths at sea," (UNCHR, 2014).Hakim and his brother stayed in Yemen, working odd jobs and supported by family members in Sweden, who sent them money, until the conflict in Yemen forced them to seek safety elsewhere. Hakim had lived in Yemen for almost two years and according to his account, was unable to access refugee protection there. Finally with the assistance of his relative in Sweden he moved to Nairobi, Kenya at the age of 15 and immigrated to Canada in 2018 at age 17. Hakim has mixed feelings about life in Canada. Considering the insecurity, life and death situation in Ethiopia, and the brutal treatments in Yemen, Hakim is grateful to be in Canada and considered himself as one of the luckiest. "I am not sure if I would be alive by now if I were in Ethiopia. ……. We were originally seven children in my family, but my two older brothers were taken away and there is no information about them". Hakim assumes that his other three siblings are still with his parents, although he has not been in contact with them so does not know for sure. "Life in Yemen was also incredibly difficult.... They make you

feel that you don't belong there, and I do not have a refugee protection... Kenya was relatively a better place." Although he is happy living in Canada and hoping to sponsor some of his relatives to Canada, Hakim did not hide his day-to-day encounters with racist and discriminatory incidents in this society. Hakim was placed in an adult EAL class and stayed there for two years. Currently he is working full time in a meat processing factory. "I need to work hard and save money to regularly send a portion of it to my family in Ethiopia and refugee camps. I will hopefully continue my education at some point in the future .... but not now. My priority is to primarily support my scattered family. I also felt I am too old to start school all over again."