Children of War:
An ECIT Study of Resiliency in Young Canadian Refugees

by
Helia Jafari
M.A., Allameh Tabataba’i University, 2010
B.A., Allameh Tabataba’i University, 2002

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Approval

Name: Helia Jafari
Degree: Master of Arts
Title: Children of War: An ECIT Study of Resiliency in Young Canadian Refugees

Examinig Committee: Chair: Michelle Pidgeon
Associate Professor

Patrice Keats
Senior Supervisor
Associate Professor

Adam O. Horvath
Supervisor
Professor Emeritus

Patricia Nitkin
Internal/External Examiner
Postdoctoral Counsellor
SFU Health and Counselling Services

Date Defended/Approved: August 21, 2015
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The author, whose name appears on the title page of this work, has obtained, for the research described in this work, either:

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or

b. advance approval of the animal care protocol from the University Animal Care Committee of Simon Fraser University;

or has conducted the research

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Abstract

There is a limited understanding of factors that contribute to resilience in refugee youth who successfully adapt in Canada, despite multiple traumas and the challenges of acculturation. Using the Enhanced Critical Incident Technique (ECIT), the objective of this study was to answer the question, "What helps or hinders adolescent refugees who have experienced war in their homeland to build resilience psychologically, socially, and academically as they resettle in Canada?" For this purpose, 12 young refugees (between 13 and 19 years of age) from Iraq, Afghanistan, Burma, Honduras, and Congo were interviewed. Findings from this study shed light on personal and contextual qualities that contribute to the young refugees’ resilience (i.e., successful adjustment evaluated from the perspective of age-salient developmental and acculturative tasks) after resettling in Canada.

Keywords: Refugee youth; resilience; immigration; adaptation and acculturation; Enhanced Critical Incident Technique
I would like to dedicate my thesis to the young refugees who contributed to this study with their inspiring life stories. Thank you for sharing your resilience, creativity, and courage with me; I’ve learned a lot from each of you.
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<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ICSEY</td>
<td>International Comparative Study of Ethnocultural Youth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PTSD</td>
<td>Post-traumatic stress disorder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SFU</td>
<td>Simon Fraser University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECIT</td>
<td>Enhanced Critical Incident Technique</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIT</td>
<td>Critical Incident Technique</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CI</td>
<td>Critical Incidents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSHRC</td>
<td>Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RS</td>
<td>Resilience Scale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ORE</td>
<td>Office of Research Ethics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>Doctor of Philosophy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WL</td>
<td>Wish List</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HE</td>
<td>Helpful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HI</td>
<td>Hindering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NBA</td>
<td>National Basketball Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U-Vic</td>
<td>University of Victoria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELL</td>
<td>English Language Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>English as a Second Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAP</td>
<td>Moving Ahead Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PCLS</td>
<td>Project Competence Longitudinal Study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IQ</td>
<td>Intelligence Quotient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glossary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refugee</td>
<td>According to 1951 Geneva Convention, refugee is a person who is “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 unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country…” (As cited in McEwen, 2007, p.4).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resilience</td>
<td>Resilience is “good outcomes in spite of serious threats to adaptation or development” (Masten, 2001, p. 228).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Successful</td>
<td>Refugee youths’ competence in age-salient developmental and acculturative tasks (i.e., school adjustment, successful family and peer relations, community involvement, identity formation, and cultural competence), and the presence of psychological well-being (i.e., absence of symptoms of psychopathology).</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Chapter 1.

Introduction

Two of the most powerful images of a child survivor of war that captures the mixture of the survivor’s terror, resilience, and scarring are the photographs of Kim Phuc, commonly called the “girl in the picture” (Masten, 2014). In the first photograph, the photographer captures 9-year-old Kim Phuc, who is badly burned by Napalm, fleeing in terror down a road with her other siblings. Subsequently, she survived and eventually settled in Canada. After nearly 20 years, in a second evocative photograph, the photographer takes the photograph from behind her, showing her holding her sleeping baby on her shoulder with her badly scarred skin exposed. These two images tell a powerful story of resilience and recovery, but also the terrible cost of war for children (Masten, 2014).

Rationale for the Study

In many places in the world, children are experiencing varying threats to their lives: violent attacks, abduction, sexual exploitation, and loss of relationships due to war and other social unrests. Even when they are able to escape the immediate danger and land in foreign countries (e.g., Canada and the United States) they face an environment with social, cultural, and linguistic features that is often different from their country of origin, as well as complex legal immigration processes (Fazel, Reed, Panter-Brick, & Stein, 2012). Additionally, this new context may result in children suffering from harassment, exclusion, and discrimination (Kirk, 1995). As these challenges accumulate in children’s lives, the likelihood of negative developmental, psychological, and social outcomes increase (Bronstein & Montgomery, 2011).
In their systematic review of literature, for instance, Bronstein and Montgomery (2011) demonstrate that an accumulation of stresses have an adverse effect on the mental health of young refugees such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD; American Psychiatric Association, 2000), depressive symptoms, and emotional and behavioural problems. More specifically, refugees 18 years of age or younger, resettling in western countries, have an 11% chance of developing PTSD (Fazel, Wheeler, & Danesh, 2005). Those under 25 years of age have a 19% chance of developing PTSD, and a 30% chance of developing depression. (Bronstein & Montgomery, 2011). In a similar fashion, Bean, Eurelings-Bontekoe, and Spinhoven (2007) found that cumulative adverse pre-migration experiences predicted increased internalizing disorders (i.e., internal distress such as anxiety and depression), externalizing disorders (e.g., conduct disorder, rule-breaking, aggressive behaviour), and PTSD in refugee youth. In their review of literature, Hansson, Tuck, Lurie, and McKenzie (2012) reported that young refugees have higher rates of diagnosed conduct disorder than the general youth population in Quebec. They also stated that the rate of suicide attempts is high in Canadian refugee girls. Heptinstall, Sethna, and Taylor (2003) also found that post-migration stresses (i.e., marginalization, cultural conflict, and acculturation) have a direct relationship to higher scores of PTSD and depression in the same population. However, research shows not all youth react negatively to these risks or develop psychosocial problems (Sleijpen, June Ter Heide, Mooren, Boeije, & Kleber, 2013). A recent review of United States (U.S.) and European (e.g., U.K. and Netherlands) studies concluded that, “despite multiple traumas and the challenges of acculturation, child and adolescent refugees are resilient, although studies of resilience… are few” (Lusting et al. 2004, p. 32).

In current literature, a small but growing number of studies note the resilience of refugee youth who function at a very high level, despite exposure to chronic, severe stress and traumatic events (Bates et al., 2005; Derluyn & Broekaert, 2007; Ehntholt & Yule, 2006; Jeppsson & Hjern, 2005; Kohli & Mather, 2003). For instance, a study about refugees who have been in Canada between one and two years in 1981 reported the depression rate of 7.5%, while the rate for a similar community sample of native-born Vancouverites was 8.9% (Beiser, 1999). Three to four years after arrival, the above-mentioned depression rate among the refugees decreased to a rate of 4.4% and to 2.3%
in a reassessment after 10 years (Simich & Andermann, 2014). Yet, research has only offered glimpses into a few personal and environmental factors that might explain such resilience, such as cognitive abilities (social and problem-solving skills); personality traits; loving and caring relationships; support and acceptance in the community to name a few. Despite the extreme adversity they experienced from war, determining what differentiates young refugees who adapt positively may help mental health professionals to provide more effective services and prevent some of the long term negative outcomes of trauma that many at-risk children experience.

Indeed, Canada is one of the leading countries to resettle refugees from war-torn countries such as Iraq, Afghanistan, Burma, Honduras, and Congo (23,056 in 2012). Refugees resettling in Canada become citizens and members of Canadian society who have the potential to contribute to shaping Canada’s future (Government of Canada, 2008). Thus, it is essential to attend to those children who adjust well to resettlement in the aftermath of surviving war and its atrocities to become contributing Canadian citizens rather than solely on young refugees who develop major depression, PTSD, conduct disorder, or attempt suicide (Hansson et al., 2012).

**Objective and Research Question**

In light of the presented argument, the purpose of this study is to explore the personal and contextual qualities that contribute to the development of resiliency in Canadian young refugees. The main research question in this study is: What helps or hinders adolescent refugees who have experienced war in their homeland to build resilience psychologically, socially, and academically as they resettle in Canada? Using the Enhanced Critical Incident Technique (ECIT; Butterfield et al., 2005), my three objectives are to: (a) explore the naturally occurring and self-sustaining strategies used by refugee youth who are identified as successfully handling the challenges of resettling in Canada; (b) explore what had helped or hindered their ability to handle the challenges well; and (c) build a composite picture of the approaches they perceive as helping or hindering them in adjusting well.
Significance of the Study

Findings from this research project adds to our knowledge of resilience factors that have helped refugee youth to adapt and even thrive in Canada, despite their past traumatic experiences. This knowledge contributes to interventions that aim to facilitate young Canadian refugee's competence in multiple domains of age-salient developmental and acculturative tasks. Similarly, this knowledge informs mental health professionals’ attempts to promote positive outcomes in refugee youth who are at risk for developing psychosocial problems. Furthermore, this understanding can potentially guide professionals’ efforts to develop parenting practices that aim to promoting resilience in refugee children. Finally, the findings shed light on more effective social and environmental factors that guide future attempts to provide culturally appropriate, accessible, and effective services to refugee youth.

Overview of the Thesis

In Chapter Two, I review the current literature on resilience in young victims of mass trauma (e.g., natural disaster, war). This chapter concludes with a review of the integrative framework used as the scaffolding for the discussion of findings. In Chapter Three, I discuss the history of the Enhanced Critical Incident Technique method, data analysis procedures, and the credibility checks implemented in this study. In Chapter Four, I present the findings of this study, and in the final chapter, Chapter Five, I provide a comparison of the findings with the current literature, discuss the implications of the findings, as well as the limitations and suggestions for future research.
Chapter 2.

Literature Review

In this section, I discuss the origin of the modern concept resilience and the definition of this concept in different areas of research. This part is followed by a critical review of findings with regards to limitations and gaps in the current literature on resilience in children of war. Finally, a discussion on common age-salient developmental and acculturation tasks that signify refugee adolescents’ adaptive function is provided.

Resilience

Definition

According to Masten (2014), the term resilience derives from the Latin verb resilire, which means to rebound. The word resiliency in colloquial English carries a similar meaning and refers to the property of elasticity or springing back, much as a rubber band does after it is stretched and then released. Similarly, in engineering science, materials are said to be resilient when they resist cracking or breaking under stress or return to original form after distortion by stress or load. Masten (2014) explains that in science:

Resilience refers to the adaptation and survival of a system after perturbation, often referring to the process of restoring functional equilibrium, and sometimes referring to the process of successful transformation to a stable new functional state. As a living system, a human individual could be described as resilient when showing a pattern of adaptation or recovery in the context of potentially destabilizing threats (p. 9).
Masten (2014) further explains that in early studies, resilience was often defined in terms of doing well or avoiding mental illness in the context of risk or adversity. In the behavioural sciences of psychology and psychiatry, the concept of resilience continues to refer generally to *positive adaptation in the context of risk or adversity*. This broad term encompasses a range of phenomena, such as the capacity for doing well under adversity, the processes of coping with challenges, recovery from catastrophe, posttraumatic growth, and the achievement of good outcomes among people at high risk for failure or maladjustment. Likewise in developmental research, resilience refers to positive development in a context of high risk for problems or maladaptation.

While many definitions have been offered for resilience, researchers generally agree that resilience refers to “patterns of desirable behaviour in situations where adaptive functioning or development have been significantly threatened by adverse experiences” (Masten et al. 1995, p.283). In this study, I use Masten’s (2001) definition of resilience. She writes that resilience is “good outcomes in spite of serious threats to adaptation or development” (p. 228).

In terms of good outcomes or adaptive function, one thing that can be inferred from the definition above is that one is required to judge, either in the short term or in the long term, how well a person is doing (Masten, 2014). According to Cicchetti (2010), positive outcomes in human beings can be judged in many ways and at multiple levels of analysis, although there has been some controversy about the criteria for defining positive adaptation for resilience studies (e.g., whether to include internal well-being along with external achievements, whether to use global or specific criteria). Two kinds of criteria for judging outcomes in behavioural studies of resilience focus on positive or negative function in terms of (a) competence or success in age-salient developmental tasks, or (b) the absence of symptoms of psychopathology.

Considering that the research on resilience derived from efforts to understand and prevent the development of mental illness, the absence of symptoms related to mental health problems has been popular as a criterion for defining good adaptation. Thus, if children at risk for mental disorders are studied, it would be reasonable to define good outcomes in terms of the absence of mental health problems. Yet, this definition
does not fit well with an ordinary adult’s idea of a person whose life is going well, which usually includes the description of positive qualities or achievements. Therefore, consistent with developmental studies of resilience, good adaptation in this study is also defined in relation to success in age-salient developmental tasks (Masten, 2001; McCormick, Kuo, & Masten, 2011). Developmental tasks refer to the expectations for psychosocial milestones or accomplishments shared by a group of individuals in the same period of development, some of which are so widely held among human societies that they are labeled as universal (Havighurst, 1974). There are some universal developmental tasks for youth (e.g., following the rules of the social group; establishing and maintaining close friendships) that reflect the human-typical aspects of development and are shared across families, cultures, and societies. However, culture highly influences the expectations about what it means to do well in life and the criteria for evaluating positive adaptation or competence in any given period of development (Masten, 2014).

In pluralistic societies like Canada, there are some culturally specific tasks expectations that are often held by subcultures within the society. In other words, immigrant youth, similar to all other children, not only face normative developmental challenges, but they also face the acculturative challenges that come from the necessity of adapting to the realities of at least two cultures (Phinney et al. 2006). “Navigating these cultural differences can be viewed as another developmental task for immigrant youth growing up in multiple cultures” (Motti-Stefanidi, Berry, Chryssochoou, Sam, & Phinney, 2012, p.122). Hence for this population, it is important to judge the quality of their adaptation based on their success in both developmental and acculturative tasks. Research has shown that successful adaptation in both developmental and acculturative challenges is also an indicator of future adaptation that anticipates positive long-term outcomes for immigrant youth in their host country (Masten, Liebkind, and Hernandez, 2012).

In this study, as it relates to resilience, the adaptation of refugee youth as a sub-group of immigrant children will be examined from two interrelated perspectives: developmental psychology and acculturation psychology (Masten et al., 2012). It is noteworthy that each one of these perspectives has a unique contribution to the study of
immigrant youth adaptation in the literature. Nevertheless, I consider an integrative approach that blends concepts, methods, and evidence from these two perspectives for this study, with the hope that an integrative perspective will provide a framework for who will have a successful adjustment among immigrant youth and why (Motti-Stefanidi et al., 2012).

**Historical overview**

The intellectual and practical origins of the current understanding of resilience may be traced back a century ago to what William James termed “strenuousness” or the virtues of activity as a way to resist sickliness and ill health (Simich & Andermann, 2014). From that starting point, there was a thread of theorizing and research related to human strengths and potential. For many years, the thread was prominent in the writings of personality theorists, including Erich Fromm’s (1947) “productive orientation,” Gordon Allport’s (1955) “appropriate striving,” Carl Rogers’s (1951) “fully-functioning person,” Abraham Maslow’s (1954) “self-actualization,” and Robert W. White’s (1959) “competence.” Our current understanding of resilience, however, is shaped by Norman Garmezy (1981), Dante Cicchetti (1984), Emily Werner (1993), and Ann Masten’s (2001) research in the 1980s. More specifically, Garmezy’s (1981) research on schizophrenia initiated the modern study of resilience. In his study, Garmezy noticed that many children of schizophrenic patients who themselves were at risk of developing the disorder were free of symptoms and living reasonably happy lives, and seemed remarkably well adjusted. This observation led him to the question why many of these at-risk children go on to flourish in life. Over time, Garmezy’s work led researchers to study the development of children in high-risk groups with the ultimate goal of informing prevention and treatment. Garmezy, Rutter, and Werner were among the researchers whose works shed light on risk factors, as well as the protective factors that could counter those risks (Masten, 2014). They began to write about their observations on positive development among high-risk children and youth, and inspired other investigators to study the factors that contributes to resiliency in at-risk children. These investigators, according to Masten (2014), pioneered the first wave of resilience research.
Over the past half-century, four major waves of resilience science (i.e., description, process exploration, promotion, and dynamic systems-orientation) have been developed (Masten, 2014; Wright, Masten, & Narayan, 2013). According to Masten (2014), the first wave, descriptive, resulted from scientists’ systematic definition, measure, and description of the phenomenon of good function or outcome in the context of risk or adversity, and their attempt to identify the predictors of resilience. The first wave of research on resilience included both person-focused and variable-focused approaches. Person-focused approaches identified resilient individuals in an effort to determine how they differed from other individuals facing similar adversities or risks who were not adjusting as well. Variable-focused approaches, in contrast, examined the linkages among characteristics of individuals and their environments that contributed to good outcome when risk or adversity was high (Wright et al., 2013). Currently, the first wave of resilience research is dominated by psychosocial studies emphasizing individual behaviour and development, with attention to other aspects such as relationships, families, peers, and schools or other community systems (Cicchetti, 2010). Wave one is characterized by the questions: What is resilience? How do we measure it? What makes a difference? With clues from the first wave work, investigators in the second wave shifted their attention to the processes of resilience and to questions: What are the processes that lead to resilience? Wave two set the stage for the third wave and was focused on promoting resilience through interventions, while simultaneously testing theories from the first two waves about what matters for resilience and how. Advances in technology and knowledge—in genetics, statistics, neuroscience, and neuroimaging—gave rise to the fourth wave of resilience science, which is characterized by dynamic systems-oriented approaches, with a focus on multilevel dynamics and the many processes linking genes, neurobiological adaptation, brain development, behaviour, and context at multiple levels. This wave began to rise as new methods for research became more widely available to study these processes, including the assessment of genes, gene expression, brain structure and function, social interaction, and statistics for modeling growth, change, and interactions in complex systems. Considering the properties of the first wave of research on resilience, I argue that the nature of the research question “What makes a difference?,” as well as the objective of exploring characteristics of individuals and their environments that contribute to the development of resiliency situates this proposed study in the first wave of research on resilience.
Current research findings about resilience

Relevant findings from recent research on resilience focus on three key areas: individual characteristics, family characteristics, and community and culture. In this section, I am going to talk about the evidence and conclusions, as well as the controversies and the gaps that need to be addressed in each of these key areas.

**Individual characteristics**

In studies of mass trauma (e.g., natural disaster, war), several major individual attributes (e.g., cognitive abilities, spiritual beliefs, personal characteristics) have been implicated as important for adaption in refugee children. Firstly, the research on individual cognitive abilities (i.e., language, cognitive control skills, and cognitive attributions and beliefs) shows that they contribute to children’s resilience after a traumatic experience, although findings from a few studies contradict each other. For instance, while greater comprehension of the traumatic situation could increase the effect of the exposure severity of the traumatic experience, problem-solving skills could enhance survival in a novel and challenging context (Masten, 2014). To provide another example, although studies of youth in Palestine suggest that cognitive abilities are protective (Qouta, Punamäki, & Sarraj, 2008), following hurricane Katrina, Sprung (2008) found that children (5- to 8-year-olds) who have advanced cognitive development (i.e., theory-of-mind skills) had more intrusive thoughts that are classified as trauma symptoms. Yet, those same children were more receptive to learning strategies for coping with trauma symptoms. Additionally, good language-learning skills, as another cognitive ability, has been demonstrated to be crucial to adaption of refugees who start a new life in new language environments. In Hubbard’s (1997) study, language fluency was associated with greater success in school, in addition to fewer PTSD symptoms (Halcon et al., 2004).

Secondly, in regard to cognitive control or self-regulation skills (i.e., control of attention, emotion, and behaviour) research is somewhat limited (Masten, 2014). One study using pre-disaster data (Kithakye, Morris, Terranova, & Myers, 2010) found that the greater the self-regulation skills preschoolers had prior to an outbreak of political violence in Kenya, generally predicted better post-conflict outcomes (i.e., less
aggression and more prosocial behaviour). Additionally, better self-control was demonstrated to moderate the effects of exposure severity on prosocial behaviour for children. In a study of sixth graders after hurricane Katrina, researcher found that good cognitive control skills had a protective effect (i.e., moderating the risk of PTSD symptoms) (Terranova, Boxer, & Morris, 2009).

Thirdly, certain cognitive attributions and beliefs (e.g., self-efficacy, perceived agency, competence, higher self-esteem, abilities to cope) have also been studied as potential protective factors in mass-trauma studies (Masten, 2014). In general, these cognitive attributions and beliefs were theoretically shown to be associated with a powerful intrinsic motivation system that drives learning and adaptation in human development (Bandura, 1982; White, 1959). For example, people with a greater sense of effectiveness, agency, control, and self-confidence are more likely to take action and persist in the face of adversity (Masten, 2014). In Betancourt, Brennan, Rubin-Smith, Fitzmaurice, and Gilman’s (2010) study, child soldiers recovering from rape demonstrated greater self-confidence than other child soldiers. The authors attributed this observation to the child soldier’s confidence in their own abilities to endure prolonged hardships during the years of captivity. Likewise, in a study of 9/11-exposed adolescents, Lengua, Long, Smith, and Meltzoff (2005) reported that higher self-esteem was associated with less post traumatic symptoms. In their study after Hurricane Floyd in 1999, Cryder, Kilmer, Tedeschi, and Calhoun (2006) found that competence beliefs were related to posttraumatic growth among children between five and six years of age. Lastly, for Palestinian youth participating in the Intifada Barber (2008) reported on the positive effects of activism.

Fourthly, a few studies have identified hope, a sense that life has meaning, and spirituality as protective influences in the lives of resilient youth studied across diverse adversities (Masten, 2014). Crawford, Wright, and Masten (2006) stated that spiritual beliefs and religious faith, commonly reported in resilience case reports, may afford similar protections. However, in their study of Uganda’s former child soldiers, Klasen, Oettingen, Daniels, Post, Hoyer, and Adam (2010) reported that youth with better mental health also reported more spiritual support. The empirical literature remains quite limited in this area.
Fifthly, according to Masten (2014), different personal characteristics have the potential to exacerbate or ameliorate stress. In general, the research on young children’s risk for mental health problems suggests that negative emotionality, stress reactivity, and the tendency to ruminate on negative experiences are vulnerability factors (Klein, Kotov, & Bufferd, 2011). Here again, research on war and disaster is limited, partly because of the scarcity of pre-disaster information on personality (Masten, 2014). Of the studies available, Weems, Pina, Costa, Watts, Taylor, and Cannon’s (2007) predicted post-disaster symptoms of depressed mood, anxiety, and traumatic stress in adolescents exposed to Katrina in those participants with pre-hurricane-assessed negative emotionality. Conversely, in another Katrina study, Kilmer and Gil-Rivas (2010) suggested that the tendency to ruminate (i.e., repetitively thinking about the various aspects of the traumatic experience) predicted posttraumatic growth. These authors speculated that ruminative style may have facilitated the reconstruction of meaning, processing of trauma, or reintegration of identity following the disaster. This finding also contradicts the studies that introduced dissociation (i.e., detaching painful memories from consciousness) as an effective coping strategy (at least for the short- and medium-term aftermath of catastrophe). In some earlier studies, suppression (leaving dreadful things behind) was introduced to buffer the impact of damaging memory and therefore reduce the risk of depression (Beiser, Devins, Dion, & Hyman 1997; Beiser 1999). Considering the mixed (e.g., the role of the tendency to ruminate) and limited findings on individual difference in personal characteristics, much more nuanced studies are required to understand the role of these characteristics in adaptation during or following mass-trauma situations (Masten, Best, & Garmezy, 1990).

Finally, Masten (2014) argues that recent interest in individual differences in sensitivity to context raised different issues in terms of the functional role of personal characteristics. This line of the work emphasizes the role of the context in determining whether a personal characteristic is favorable or not. For example, in a context full of great danger and adversity, high sensitivity increases vulnerability, whereas in a normal or enriched environment, the same characteristic would have an enhancing function. Therefore, she argues that in regard to a particular context it is the function of the trait that matters. The trait itself, in Masten’s (2014) point of view, is neither inherently a vulnerability nor a protective factor; the interplay of individual and context determines the
function. Another growing evidence suggests that adversity itself can potentially shape personality traits in individuals. Further research in this regard is required.

**Family characteristics**

The significance of family separations and family functioning has been the focus of investigators in recent research on how children adapt after mass-trauma situations. For instance, strong family relationships predicted resilience in Palestinian children exposed to political violence (Qouta et al., 2008); good parent-child relationships moderated the effect of tsunami exposure on PTSD symptoms and depression in Sri Lankan adolescents (Wickrama & Kaspar, 2007); and family acceptance was associated with all of the adaptive recovery indicators in child soldiers (Betancourt et al., 2010). In contrast, preschool children with parents who had mental health symptoms were not doing as well after September 11 attacks (Chemtob, Nomura, Rajendran, Yehuda, Schwartz, & Abramovitz, 2010). Similarly, in a study about traumatic stress in adolescents following a flood disaster, parents who were highly involved in the care of their children were shown to have adolescents with more PTSD risk (Bokszczanin, 2008). Thus, it seems like “too little or too much involvement or protection can be problematic” (Masten, 2014, p. 15). These results call for further research in the area of family influences.

**Community and culture**

Mass trauma impacts the recovery of entire communities of families and individuals; therefore, it is important to consider the role of community and cultural influences on the recovery of families and their children (Betancourt & Khan, 2008; Norris, Stevens, Pfefferbaum, Wyche, & Pfefferbaum 2008). In this section, I outline the impact of community-based protective factors on the resilience of the families and individuals living in those communities.

Norris et al. (2008) have provided a conceptual framework for understanding and promoting community resilience in preparation for possible natural disaster. These researchers define community resilience in terms of a set of existing adaptive capacities, facilitated by resources in the domains of economic development, information/communication, social capital (i.e., relationships and sense of community),
and community competence (i.e., collective know-how and effectiveness). Communities can be prepared to respond with flexible organization, effective communication, physical distribution of essential physical resources (e.g., water, medical care), and activities to support social cohesion. Thus, on top of emergency supplies, safety, and medical care some of the most important functions for children afforded by communities in the aftermath of disasters are restoring community routines and structures central to the lives of children, including child care, school, and safe places to play (Masten, 2014). Almost every review of how children cope in disasters and war, notes the importance of restoring community functions and structures of this kind for children and families (for example, see American Psychological Association, 2010; Betancourt & Khan, 2008; Masten & Obradovic, 2008; Osofsky, Osofsky, & Harris, 2007). One possible explanation could be that the restoration of community-level routines and structures are symbolic of recovery and bring a sense of normalcy for children and their families, providing a sense of hope and efficacy across an affected population (Masten, 2014).

It is worth noting that research on the impact of community-based protective factors on individuals is limited to date, although some studies are consistent with the key role of community resilience for children (Masten, 2014). As an example, Betancourt and colleagues (2010) reported on child soldiers from Sierra Leone who stayed in school as having better recovery from their experiences. They also found that community acceptance was a key factor associated with better adjustment during rehabilitation of these severely traumatized youth. Additionally, community support was suggested as a core theme in a case study of resilience in Columbian child soldiers (Cortes & Buchanan, 2007). In light of these two studies, it might be the case that community acceptance and forgiveness are important for child victims of war who have engaged in behaviour forbidden in their own cultures while they were in captivity or forced service (Boothby, Crawford, & Halperin, 2006).

**Successful Adjustment: Developmental and Acculturation Psychology Perspectives**

In order to address the issues in defining successful adaptation of immigrant youth, developmental and acculturation psychologies propose unique perspectives on
how it could be defined. As mentioned earlier, the theory of developmental tasks puts forward a conceptual framework for identifying positive adaptation in resilient children. According to this theory, success can be defined as competence in age-salient developmental tasks (Masten et al., 2001). More specifically, the answer to the question of whether children meet the expectations and standards for competency in tasks that parents, teachers, and society set for them determines the quality of their adaptation. In this perspective, adaptive success is multidimensional and developmental in nature (Masten et al., 2001). Positive outcomes in adolescent years is defined by success in school, having close friends, recognizing and respecting the laws of society, having self-control (e.g., complying with the rules of the family when parents are not monitoring), and establishing a cohesive sense of identity (Masten, Liebkind, & Hernandez, 2012).

Alternatively, Sroufe et al. (2005) classify developmental tasks into broad domains: individual development; relationships with parents, teachers, and peers; and functioning in the proximal environment (i.e., family, school, and neighbourhood) as well as in the broader social world. They further explain that individual development includes tasks such as self-regulation and identity achievement; reasonable functioning in the proximal and distal environment; school adjustment and academic competence; and political and civic engagement. In their view, the ability to establish and maintain positive relationships with parents, teachers, and peers is an important task throughout development and predicts success in other domains of adaptation (Masten, Liebkind, & Hernandez, 2012).

One important note is that the above-mentioned expectations against which youth’s competence and resilience is judged, reflects values and expectations that are deeply embedded in cultural, historical, and political contexts; hence, calling for a theory to explain the influence of context on youth’s adaptation. Among the current developmental theories, Bronfenbrenner’s (2006) bioecological model of human development offers a description of human development with respect to context (Masten, Liebkind, & Hernandez, 2012). Bronfenbrenner (2006) argues that children’s lives are “embedded in hierarchically nested, multidimensional, continuously unfolding, and changing contexts” (Masten, Liebkind, & Hernandez, 2012, p. 121). Four hierarchically nested levels of environmental influence (i.e., microsystem, mesosystem,
The microsystem includes children’s interaction with the persons, objects, and symbols in their immediate environment (e.g., family, school); the mesosystem refers to the interactions between the different microsystems in children’s lives; the exosystem involves environmental influences that do not directly involve children, yet impact their development; and the macrosystem involves the broader and more distal social and historical context, involving societal, cultural, and institutional-level influences. According to Magnusson and Stattin (2006) the distal context indirectly influences the adaptation through the proximal environment.

In this theory, the proximal processes (i.e., interactions between an active and evolving human organism and people in their immediate environment) are considered the “primary engines of development” (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Also, Bronfenbrenner and Morris, (2006) argue that children are not passive receivers of experience and as a result contexts are not the only influence on their adaptation. Conversely, they exert their own agency and thus impact the course of their own development within the opportunities and limitations of historical and social circumstances. Moreover, individual differences in youth’s personal characteristics contribute to shaping their social environment. For instance, as their ability to self-regulate increases, they can shape their own choices about the activities they become engaged in and the people they connect with (Caspi & Shiner, 2006).

As was mentioned previously, developmental tasks may differ or stay similar across cultures. Although developmental task theory considers and explains the influences of cultural and historical context on adaptation and development, the complexities of adaptation have not been fully explained in a multiple cultural context with potential contradictory developmental task expectations (McCormick et al., 2011). In other words, immigrant children’s lives today are embedded in contexts that represent at least two different cultures. In such contexts, it is possible that the values and beliefs parents would consider adaptive for success in their culture, conflicts with the criteria for success set by teachers in the host culture. Adaptation with regard to developmental tasks may be more challenging for immigrant youth who face contradictory
developmental goals and expectations, especially in comparison to their non-immigrant peers (Masten, Liebkind, & Hernandez, 2012).

Consequently, the successful adjustment of refugee youth may be judged by both the way they deal with developmental challenges and by the way they deal with challenges of acculturating—growing between two cultures. This point leads to the consideration of the significant role of acculturation (i.e., the process of cultural and psychological change that results from the contact between cultural groups and their members) and acculturative tasks that refugee youth face. Acculturative tasks include learning the language, cultural values, societal beliefs, community behaviours, and traditional customs particular to the host country, all in addition to those of their home culture. These tasks also encompass, “making sense of and bridging their two different worlds and developing positive ethnic and national identities” (Masten, Liebkind, & Hernandez, 2012, p. 130). Research shows that immigrant youth adopt a set of attitudes and behaviours, also known as acculturation strategies (Berry, 1980), to deal with these acculturative tasks. The four recognized acculturation strategies are integration (adopting the essential parts of the host culture, while maintaining the essential parts of the ethnic culture); assimilation (adopting the new culture and no maintenance of the old culture); separation (desire to maintain the ethnic culture without an intention to adopt the new culture); and marginalization (no desire to either maintain the ethnic culture or adopt the mainstream culture).

It is worth noting that developmental and acculturative tasks are related (Masten, Liebkind, & Hernandez, 2012). For example, to do well in school, refugee youth will need to achieve a certain level of competence in the host language and other aspects of school life in the host culture (Sauarez-Orozco & Todorova, 2006). Similarly, school adjustment for these youth can be interpreted as their successful adaptation in terms of their age-salient developmental and acculturative tasks. Lastly, the ability to develop a positive relationship with their parents suggest that the refugee youth are able to maintain a balance between needs for autonomy and willingness to adhere to their family values (Masten, Liebkind, & Hernandez, 2012).
Masten and Motti-Stefanidi (2009) argue that to evaluate the success of immigrant youth’s adaptation, their current behaviour and performance should be compared to that of their native peers. For instance, doing reasonably well in school (i.e., receiving grades comparable to the normative performance of native students) and not dropping out early are significant markers of current and future adaptation in society for both immigrant and native-born students. They further discuss another important identifier of positive adaptation in this population as good internal functioning (Masten et al., 2001). They consider self-esteem and life satisfaction, as well as the absence of emotional symptoms in immigrant youth, as the common indicators of their psychological well-being. Lastly, they argue for the interrelatedness of immigrant youth’s psychological well-being and their successful adaptation in developmental and acculturative tasks.

Their argument has been corroborated by a seminal study: the International Comparative Study of Ethnocultural Youth (ICSEY) project. In this 13 country study, Berry and colleagues (2006) examined 5,366 immigrant youth between 13 and 18 years of age and ascertained that, on the whole, the immigrant and national youth were equally well adjusted. In some cases, immigrant youth showed better results in terms of school adjustment and lack of conduct problems over the national youth. However, no significant results were found with regard to their psychological well-being. That being said, “the question how well immigrant children adapt with respect to different developmental tasks compared to their native classmates remains an unresolved issue to date” because of current mixed findings in the literature (Masten, Liebkind, & Hernandez, 2012, p. 132).

In light of the presented argument, I define successful adjustment as it relates to the refugee youths’ competence in age-salient developmental and acculturative tasks (i.e., school adjustment, successful family and peer relations, community involvement, identity formation, and cultural competence), and the presence of psychological well-being (i.e., absence of symptoms of psychopathology).
An integrative model for research on immigrant youth adaptation

In an attempt to achieve a better understanding of who among refugee youth (as a sub-group of immigrant children) successfully adjusts and why, this study is situated in the following integrative model, proposed by Motti-Stefanidi et al. (2012). Figure 1 illustrates the three levels of this integrative framework (i.e., the individual level, the level of interaction, and the social level). Motti-Stefanidi and colleagues (2012) consider these levels as interconnected with no precedence given to the individual or to society as the only determinants of the individual differences in adaptation for immigrant youth. On the contrary, it is argued that both individuals and society (i.e., human agency and sociocultural circumstances) play a vital role in the adaptive processes that leads to successful outcomes for immigrant youth (Motti-Stefanidi et al., 2012).

The individual level of the framework refers to individual characteristics such as personality, temperament, motivation, self-regulation, and cognition. The level of interaction follows the first level and refers to the context in which the youth have an ongoing interaction with other people, (i.e., the proximal context). In the case of refugee youth, the proximal context supports development and acculturation and is divided into those aspects reflecting the home culture and those reflecting the culture of the host country (Berry et al., 2006). This context forms the exosystem (e.g., native peer’s parents, people in immigrant parents’ workplace) in Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Model described above. Likewise, immigrant youth’s home cultures are also represented at this level (Motti-Stefanidi et al., 2012).
As was mentioned earlier, proximal contexts impact the quality of adaptation in refugee children. Proximal contexts function as the primary engines for their development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) and acculturation (Sam, 2006), and are expected to provide refugee youth with normative experiences. These experiences involve supportive and caring relationships with teachers and experiences that address immigration-related issues such as non-differential treatment by ethnicity in schools (Motti-Stefanidi et al., 2012).

The third level concerns the societal-level variables (e.g., cultural beliefs, social representations, ideologies) that impact immigrants’ adaptation. Preferably, in a multicultural society like Canada that values diversity and equity among all ethnocultural groups, immigrants’ ethnic culture and Canadian culture would be represented at the
societal level. Societal-level variables have direct and indirect impacts on immigrant youth’s adaptation. The direct impact happens through mass media (e.g., television, radio, advertising, movies, the Internet, newspapers, magazines) and the indirect influence is filtered through shaping the contexts of immigrant children’s everyday interactions. Schools, as one of these contexts, not only teaches children academic knowledge and thinking skills, but also function as the main acculturative context for immigrant youth (Motti-Stefanidi et al., 2012).

It is important to note the bidirectional influences in this integrative model. In other words, “not only do factors related to the three levels have an influence on the quality of immigrant youth adaptation, but the latter in turn also feeds back and impacts youth’s functioning, besides the functioning of the proximal context and of society” (Motti-Stefanidi et al., 2012, p. 148). For instance, success with regard to developmental and acculturation tasks would be expected to have an impact on individual characteristics (e.g., self-efficacy) as well as on proximal processes (e.g., success in school). Therefore, the quality of the adaptation in the first few years indirectly influences the quality of immigrant youth’s future adaptation (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

Finally, each level of this model may present opportunities and/or challenges for immigrant children’s adaptation. Immigrant youth who live in societies that have a developed multicultural ideology (e.g., Canada) are expected to show better adaptation than their counterparts that live in socialites that hold negative attitudes towards the immigrants in their country (Berry et al., 2006). Immigrant youth with contexts (family and/or school) that deal more effectively with the issues of immigration and adequately meet their needs would be expected to better adapt than peers in less efficient contexts (Motti-Stefanidi et al., 2012). Immigrant youth’s personal resources (e.g., good cognitive capacity, high self-efficacy, easygoing temperament) may also contribute to their positive adaption (Masten et al., 2001).

In the following section I describe the method that I used to address the proposed research question as well as the three above-mentioned objectives. I also provide a detailed explanation of the procedure of this research project.
Chapter 3.

Method

The Enhanced Critical Incident Technique (ECIT) is considered as a qualitative research method that explores what helps or hinders during a particular experience or activity (Butterfield et al., 2005). The term incident represents experience, factors, events, or perceptions that either helped or hindered individuals in the phenomenon of interest. In my study, this refers to all the personal and environmental factors that helped or hindered refugee youth in adjusting psychologically, socially, and academically as they resettled in Canada. ECIT is an outgrowth of enhancements (e.g., addition of nine credibility checks and inclusion of contextual and wish list item questions) made to the Critical Incident Technique (CIT; Flanagan, 1954), which are further described in this section.

Origins of the Critical Incident Technique

John C. Flanagan (1954) developed the Critical Incident Technique while working on the Aviation Psychology program of the US Army Air Force during World War II. He used this technique in the selection and classification of pilots and other aircrew members and candidates. CIT was developed as a series of procedures that assisted in gathering facts in an objective fashion, with a minimum number of subjective inferences and interpretations. Nevertheless, the classification of the critical incidents (CIs) is initially inherently inductive, and only once a system has been developed, is the researcher able to be objective in placing incidents in defined categories (Flanagan, 1954). Overtime, Flanagan and other psychologists have modified and expanded the CIT and it is now applied to other areas of research such as nursing, job analysis, counselling, education, teaching, medicine, marketing, organizational learning, performance appraisal, psychology, and social work (Woolsey, 1986).
CIT was originally developed within a positivist paradigm, with the goal of distinguishing and categorizing observable and measurable behaviours (Flanagan, 1954). The recent process of refining and expanding the technique to explore psychological states and inner experiences demonstrates a shift to the relativist paradigm. The flexibility of this technique is due, in part, to its basic, practical and fundamental approach to research (Woolsey, 1986).

According to Flanagan (1954) there are five steps in conducting a CIT inquiry: (a) ascertaining the general aims of the activity being studied; (b) making plans and setting specifications; (c) data collection; (d) data analysis; and (e) data interpretation and report on the findings. In developing the ECIT, the original five CIT steps were embraced and direct observation was replaced with the retrospective self-report. Similarly, several new components to reflect the current state of qualitative research with respect to data collection, data analysis, and achieving credibility were incorporated (Butterfield et al., 2005; 2009). The current ECIT begins with a contextual section intended to locate the phenomenon in the unique context and experience of the participants, which provides a meaningful setting and background for the helping and hindering incidents that are identified.

In sum, ECIT developed from the following enhancements to Flanagan's (1954) original CIT: (a) inclusion of contextual questions at the start of the research interview in order to provide background information for the CIT data; (b) inclusion of questions regarding wish list items in addition to those that were present that helped or hindered in the situation; and (c) nine credibility checks.

**Suitability of the Enhanced Critical Incident Technique**

Given the nature of ECIT, it is an ideal methodology in my research context as the knowledge I am seeking is particular to a set of individuals (i.e., resilient refugee youth) who have expertise in a particular area (i.e., psychologically, socially, and academically doing well despite the extreme adversity they experienced). Here the underlying assumption is that these resilient youth possess discrete individual and
environmental characteristics that can be elicited through their identification of the successful strategies they used.

Furthermore, ECIT is exploratory by nature and is appropriate to use when the researcher is interested in learning more about little-understood events and incidents, psychological constructs that assist promotion, diversions from effective performance of some activity, or the experience of a specific situation or event (Butterfield, 2009). My research concerns itself with the little-studied personal and environmental factors that lead to resiliency in refugee youth. Lastly, ECIT is developed by counselling psychologists and is designed for practical and clinical application (Butterfield et al., 2009), which aligns well with the potential clinical application of the findings from this project.

**Situating the Researcher**

My position in this study is significant (Patton, as cited in Shenton, 2004) because I have a background that influences how I conducted the data collection and analysis. Following Maykut and Morehouse’s (as cited in Shenton, 2004) recommendation, I describe personal and professional information about myself that is relevant to the phenomenon I am exploring in this study.

Back in Iran, I completed a study with a focus on adolescents’ behavioural problems. During this time, I also gained five years of clinical experience working with youth in Iran. As a result of my own experience of war, immigration, and my previous research experience, I wanted to gain a better understanding of what helped or hindered young refugees coming from war torn countries build resilience as they resettled in a different cultural environment and circumstance. This interest arose because I am a Iranian-Canadian female who was born in Germany, raised in Iran, and immigrated to Canada in April 2010. The early years of my childhood were tangled up in the eight-year Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988); a war that cost a tremendous amount of destruction of human lives and financial ruin for both sides. At the time, I lived in the capital, Tehran, which was least effected by Iraqi invasions. I was also young when the war happened (from five to eight years). In the last year of the war--I was in second grade--we were obligated
to temporarily move for a few months to a rural area close to Tehran. We stayed at a cottage that we owned and where we generally spend the summer months. I was privileged to have my close relatives with me and I continued going to school there. In that rural area, the basic routines were preserved for me; I was no longer exposed to the sounds of sirens and the bombnings that happened in Tehran. We were lucky not to have lost any family or friends during the war and our assets and property in Tehran were left intact.

In addition to this war experience, at the age of 30 years I immigrated to Canada as a skilled worker, and have a personal experience of immigrating and adapting to a vastly different environment in Canada. I have experienced the stress of transition and the challenges of integrating and re-entering my professional field as a foreign-trained clinical psychologist. I came here with a Master’s-level education and extensive research and clinical work experience, yet had the challenge of a devaluation of my foreign-earned credentials. In spite of the barriers and challenges, I believe that I was able to make a successful transition and integrate into the graduate-level education in my field. Having successfully adapted to Canadian life, I also have this personal experience as another key element of the issues I am exploring in this project.

In essence, I recognize that my biases, perceptions, and approaches may have had some influence on the outcome of this study. I believe my personal, educational, and professional experiences in two extremely different cultures have helped me develop my skills as a culturally competent counsellor, and enabled me to build strong interpersonal skills in connecting with people from different cultural backgrounds. More specifically, my abilities as a culturally competent counsellor assisted me in developing trust with my participants, and resulted in deeper levels of participant disclosure. Similarly, I believe that my personal experience of war and immigration helped me to have a better understanding of the challenges that the participants have been through, and the ways they overcame the problems in order to successfully adapted in Canada. That being said, throughout the project, I was aware of the potential influence of my biases, perceptions, and approaches on the outcome of this study. This awareness helped me with my attempts to remain open-minded. I was also cautious about making assumptions about the individual and contextual factors that might have helped the
participants to successfully adapt in Canada. My underlying belief was that each one of
the participants would have their own personal experience that could be very different
than mine. To minimize the influence of my biases, I conducted detailed interviews with
each participant; extracted the critical incidents that were specifically underlined by the
participants as helpful, significant, and life changing; and used their own words to
identify themes and categories. I also double-checked the themes and categories with
my supervisor by providing her with categories, their operational definitions, and the
supporting critical incidents in each category. These steps were all in line with the ECIT
methodology that emphasizes representing the participants’ experience as accurately as
possible and leaves a little room for the researchers’ personal interpretations and biases.

Participants

In CIT studies, the number of participants is typically determined by the number
of critical incidents that are obtained. As a general rule, Woolsey (1986) recommends
continuing to collect incidents until redundancy appears. A researcher can assume
redundancy has been achieved when only two or three out of 100 collected incidents
have new content. For my project, I recruited 12 participants to guarantee the
achievement of the recommended redundancy. Specific inclusion criteria for participants
were: (a) young refugees between 13 and 19 years of age; (b) having settled in Canada
for at least three years; (c) reporting no serious mental health problems at the time and
prior to recruitment; (d) a willingness to talk about their experience of escaping their
homeland and their resettlement in Canada; (e) personal feelings or thoughts regarding
their adaptive adjustment to life in Canada; and (f) an ability to communicate in English.

The 1951 Geneva Convention defines 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 unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country…” (As cited in McEwen,
2007, p.4) In line with Geneva Convention’s definition, participants in this study were
considered those who have experienced war in their homelands and have been resettled
in Canada under the refugee status. The young refugees who were born in refugee
camps and did not have a personal experience of the war were excluded. Table 1 presents demographic information about the participants.

Table 1. Demographic Information for Participants

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<th>Participant number</th>
<th>Age (years)</th>
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<th>Length of Time in Canada (years)</th>
<th>Country of Birth</th>
<th>Education (grade level)</th>
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<td>7</td>
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<td>Iraq</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note. RS stands for Resilience Scale (Wagnild & Young, 1993)

**Procedure**

**Ethical considerations**

In order to ensure a high level of ethical conduct and to follow the guidelines outlined in the Tri-Council Policy Statement, I filed an application to the Office of Research Ethics (ORE) at Simon Fraser University (SFU) once my proposal was approved. Upon receiving ORE’s approval, I applied for the Surrey school board’s approval and started to recruit participants after I received their permission.

Also, to ensure the psychological wellness of the participants, I was transparent in the informed consent forms about the possibility of experiencing emotional distress, and emphasized how participants have the choice to not answer specific questions, stop the interview, or ultimately withdraw from the study at any time if their recall from the interview becomes too distressing for them. Prior to the interview, I provided the
participants with a detailed list (types of services and contact information) of resources for psychological services as well as self-help tips for relaxation and self-care techniques. During any parts of the interview process, I paid attention to participants’ words and reactions and noticed any symptoms of distress. I was prepared to stop and remind the participants that they have the option of either taking time for a break or terminating their involvement in the research if any of these symptoms were observed, although this never happened.

**Recruitment**

Upon obtaining approval from on-site administration at targeted public schools and refugee service agencies in Surrey, posters and advertisements (Appendix A) located at these places called for young refugees from different war zones (i.e., Iraq, Afghanistan, Burma, Honduras, and Congo) who have personal experience of adjusting well in Canada. I conducted a brief interview with potential participants who responded to the call, to ensure they met the inclusion criteria for the study. To assess the severity of their traumatic experiences, participants were asked to answer the questions: Did anything horrible happen to you during the war? Do you think it is still affecting you, or keeping you from doing well in Canada? Due to safety reasons the assessment of their past traumatic experiences stayed at this level, as I was requested by the Surrey school board to only focus on the participants’ experiences after resettling in Canada and to not put them at risk by inquiring about their past traumatic experiences. All the 12 participants provided an affirmative answer to the first question and denied any effect of their past traumatic experiences on their current life. Also, to reconfirm that the selected youth are resilient, their teachers, counsellors, and/or parents were asked to confirm whether they think participants’ meet the social, psychological, and academic expectations of their own age group (Masten, 2014).

The youth from this preliminary selection were then requested to complete the Wagnild and Young resilience-scale (1993) as a screening tool (see Appendix B). The results of this measure only served the purpose of reconfirming that the selected youth are resilient based on a third independent evaluation.
**Resilience Scale**

The Resilience Scale (RS; Wagnild & Young, 1993) is recognized as a valid and reliable self-rating scale to measure resilience in adolescents (Ahern, Kiehl, Lou Sole, & Byers, 2006), mainly due to its adequate psychometric properties in comparison with other questionnaires and its use in culturally heterogeneous populations (Sleijpen et al., 2013). This feature matches well with my research population, as I recruited participants from different cultures and countries. The RS is comprised of 25 items reflecting five characteristics of resilience (i.e., perseverance, equanimity, meaningfulness, self-reliance, and existential aloneness). First, *perseverance* or the act of persistence despite adversity or discouragement, suggesting a willingness to continue the struggle to reconstruct one’s life and remain involved in the midst of adversity—the ability to keep going despite setbacks. Second, *equanimity* is a balanced perspective of life and experiences and might be viewed as sitting loose and taking what comes, therefore moderating the extreme responses to adversity. Those holding this characteristic often have a sense of humour. Third, *meaningfulness* is the realization that life has a purpose and recognition that there is something for which to live. The fourth characteristic is called *self-reliance* and encompasses youth who believe in themselves. They recognize and rely on their personal strengths and capabilities and draw upon past successes to support and perhaps guide their actions. Lastly, *existential aloneness* is the realization that each person is unique and that while some experiences can be shared, others must be faced alone (Wagnild & Young, 1993; 1990). Wagnild and Young (1993) maintained that with existential aloneness comes a sense of uniqueness and perhaps freedom.

The participants were requested to select a response on a seven-point Likert scale with two anchoring statements from 1 (disagree) to 7 (agree). The possible scores range from 25 to 175 and the higher the score, the stronger the resilience. Scores of 145 and above are considered high, scores from 125 to 145 fall within the mid-range, and scores lower than 120 are considered to reflect weaker resilience. The RS scores of all the participants were 145 or higher. This scale has demonstrated good internal consistency (Chronbach’s alpha = 0.91).
Informed consent

Once the recruited participants confirmed their interest in participating in the study, I invited their parents/legal guardians for an introductory session either at school or at refugee service agencies. Youth workers from refugee service agencies were also invited to join the session to help me with translation. I first started with introducing myself and then outlined the general purpose and nature of the study. Afterwards, I read and explained the informed consent form (see Appendix C) to each participant’s parents/legal guardian. Lastly, I asked them to sign the forms if they agreed to the terms. For those parents/legal guardians that were not able to participate in the meeting, the youth workers asked for their verbal consent after reviewing the forms over a phone conversation with them.

In another meeting with the participants themselves, I provided further details about the study and advised them that they would be required: (a) to complete a brief demographic survey, and (b) to participate in a digitally audio recorded semi-structured interview lasting approximately 60 to 75 minutes. Additionally, they were advised that they might be asked to participate in a second meeting to review the incidents extracted and categories developed if they choose; this may require an additional 30 minutes.

Furthermore, participants were informed that they will not be identified by name but by a numerical code or pseudonym of their choice, their collected data will be completely confidential, and they can withdraw from the study at any point in the process without repercussions. Participants were also advised that the results of this study would be written by combining information from participants, with no individually identifiable data being presented. At the end of this meeting, I answered any questions about this research project or myself as researcher and asked them to sign the assent form (see Appendix D).

Remuneration

An honorarium consisting of a fifteen-dollar gift card was provided to each participant.
Interviews

The recruited participants were offered a choice regarding their preference of interview time and location. All of the interviews were held either at their school, the refugee service agency from which they have been recruited, or in my supervisor’s research office at SFU Surrey campus. My only stipulation for the interview was for a quiet place where our confidentiality would be maintained.

Prior to conducting individual interviews, I prepared myself by role-playing a mock interview with a colleague who has completed a PhD degree in Psychology. To obtain rich data, I also applied counselling interview techniques such as establishing rapport, allowing participants to tell their story during the contextual component, and follow up using probes and questions as needed. Likewise, to facilitate the interview process, I used basic empathy along with other active listening skills, and I was curious while also being greatly respectful, since I was dealing with a sensitive topic.

On the arranged dates, I started by requesting participants complete a brief demographic survey and then continued by conducting open-ended interviews with minimal direction, according to the guidelines presented in interview protocol in Appendix E. The interviews were conducted according to the following three phases using the interview protocol:

**Phase 1: Contextualization of participant experience**

Interviews began with a contextualizing section by which participants were invited to describe their experience as a refugee. They were asked to tell their whole stories. Then the informants were asked to describe their personal definition of adjusting well in Canada.

The data from this phase of the interview led to the creation of *Participants’ Personal Accounts*. This component was added to the ECIT method to appropriately and accurately reflect the richness of the data provided in the interviews (Butterfield et al., 2009). It served to represent the contextualization section of the interviews where participants were asked to talk about their stories as a refugee. The participants’ accounts about their flight from war and resettlement in Canada added important context.
to the remainder of the interview, which ultimately led to a fuller and richer formation of the helping and hindering incidents and their categories.

**Phase 2: Exploration of helpful and hindering incidents**

This part of the interview involved a comprehensive description of the critical incidents (CIs) experienced during their flight from war that contributed to and/or hindered them from adjusting psychologically, socially, and academically as they resettled in Canada. Participants were requested to explain the importance of each factor and provide detailed examples (Zheng, 2010).

**Phase 3: Wish-list items**

The final phase of the interview was dedicated to exploration of behaviours, interactions or other factors that participants believed they would have benefitted them during their experience of fleeing war and resettling in Canada.

**Data management**

I had all the interviews transcribed verbatim by an undergraduate research assistant as soon after the first interview. Audio recordings were securely destroyed afterwards and the typed transcripts of the interviews were de-identified (assigned a pseudonym). A password protected master list was the only place in which a participant’s name is linked with the pseudonym of their choice. The transcripts and the master list are separately kept on a password-protected computer that is not connected to the Internet.

**Retention and destruction of data**

As was mentioned above, audio recordings were securely destroyed soon after transcription. Further digital and hardcopy of the data relating to this research study will be kept until September 2015. During this time no identifying information will be available and only the principal investigator, supervisors (Dr. Patrice Keats and Dr. Adam Horvath) will have access to the data. After this time, any hard copies of the data including the signed consent forms will be shredded, while digital data will be transferred to a
password protected flash drive which will be locked in a cabinet at the principle investigator's home until August 2022. After this time, the digital data will be securely deleted and destroyed.

**Process of ECIT**

In line with Butterfield et al.’s (2005 and 2009) guidelines, I implemented ECIT in the five following steps:

**Step 1: Ascertaining the general aims of the activity being studied**

According to Butterfield (2009) the first step of an ECIT study is accomplished by answering two questions: (a) what is the objective of the activity, and (b) what is the person who engages in the activity expected to accomplish?

To address the first step, I started by restating the focus of the current study. In this study the focus was on the naturally occurring and self-sustaining strategies used by refugee youth who were identified as successfully handling the challenges of fleeing and resettling in Canada. They also needed to be prepared to talk about what had helped or hindered their ability to handle the challenges well. The purpose of the research interview was to elicit the supporting factors and discrete coping of these resilient youth in order to build a composite picture of the approaches they perceived as helping or hindering them in adjusting well, and those approaches they thought would have been helpful but may not have received.

**Step 2: Making plans and setting specifications**

This step in an ECIT study concerns precise and specific instructions to participants to ensure that everybody is following the same set of rules. In other words, consistency across the different participant interviews is ensured. Following Flanagan’s (1954) advice, four specifications below are needed to be decided upon: “(a) defining the types of situations to be observed, (b) determining the situation’s relevance to the general aim, (c) understanding the extent of the effect the incident has on the general
aim, and (d) deciding who will make the observations” (Butterfield et al., 2005, p.478). In my study this involved deciding what to ask about (i.e., creating an interview guide or a set of protocols for myself as an interviewer to follow). The interview guide in my study consisted of a record of the interview (as back-up in case of equipment failure), a way of keeping me focused on the participant’s story, and as a resource for referring back to previous comments made by the participant that required follow-up. The interview guide also served as a tool to ensure that I have asked all the interview questions and participants have responded to them. The format of the interview guide is important in an ECIT study to ensure ease of identifying critical incidents (CIs) and wish list (WL) items, as well as the supporting details for each item is captured during the research interview (i.e., an example, and the importance of the item for the resilient youth being studied). Appendix D provides an example of the interview guide format that I have used for this study.

**Step 3: Data collection**

In line with responsible and credible qualitative research criteria, the data in this study was collected from multiple sources. Data was generated through three sources: (a) Resilience Scale; (b) individual oral interviews; and (c) field notes. Also, member checks was attempted with each participant either via email or during a second short meeting. In qualitative research, multiple data sources help support the credibility and confirmability, as well as transferability of interpretations and conclusions (Morrow, 2005).

**Step 4: Data analysis**

Collected data were analysed in accordance with the ECIT guidelines as outlined by Butterfield et al. (2005; 2009), and Woolsey (1986). More specifically, I followed the three steps: (a) determining a frame of reference; (b) formulating categories; and (c) establishing the level of specificity-generation. First, I determined a frame of reference. This step refers to the intended use of the data and results generated by the study. In this study, the clinical arena of mental health provides the primary context for application of the results. Second, I formulated categories. The three sections (helpful, hindering,
and wish list incidents) of each interview were analysed separately. Within each phase of the interview (i.e., one, two, and three), similar statements were grouped together and coded. For phase two, only the incidents that were referred to as significant and were accompanied by specific details were considered critical. Critical incidents (CIs) were separated into helpful (HE) and hindering (HI) groupings. CIs that were connected or similar were placed into initial categories and checked with my supervisor. Following this, repeated themes were collapsed into categories and this process was repeated multiple times until a level of specificity was reached that suited the frame of reference of clinical application in the realm of counselling psychology. All the emerged categories were subject to the seven of rigorous credibility checks central to the ECIT method that will be described later under ECIT Credibility Checks. Finally, I established the level of specificity-generality to be used in reporting findings. This was determined by examining the degree of usefulness for theory development and clinical application, under the supervision of Dr. Keats.

**Step 5: Interpreting the data and reporting the results**

Inspired by other dissertations using ECIT (e.g., Nitkin, 2014), I created a dated, detailed log of each interview with the participant pseudonym and the extracted CIs and WL items in order to organize and analyze the data. Moreover, I used this log to create CI and category lists for credibility checks with participants (member checks) and professionals familiar with research in the area of children's resilience. Likewise, a part of this log was used in the final presentation of my research to facilitate an “audit trail” (Shenton, 2004, p.72).

**ECIT Credibility Checks**

In addition to above-mentioned strategies of establishing trustworthiness, I implemented the following credibility checks for the interpretation and reporting of data that are recommended by Butterfield and colleagues (2005; 2009).
Independent extraction of critical incidents

This check serves to increase the credibility that the factors extracted are indeed critical elements of the participants’ experiences and refers to the convergence of the researcher’s coding of incidents with another person’s coding familiar with ECIT. For this part, I submitted a portion of my raw transcripts to a researcher with PhD degree in Psychology after every third or fourth interview and asked her to select factors that appear complete (i.e., have a detailed description and are accompanied by an example). The selected factors were then compared to those that have been extracted by me.

Cross-checking by participants

According to Mertens (1998), the member check is the most important criteria in establishing credibility and confirmability. Morrow (2005) refers to confirmability as the confidence that the findings of the study are primarily derived from the source of participants and that the researcher’s interpretations are as transparent as possible.

Upon the completion of initial analysis of the data, I contacted each participant and arranged for a second meeting. In that meeting I handed them a draft report encompassing their brief definition of adapting well to Canada; a summary of the categories and incidents along with their operational definitions; and any of their quotes from the transcribed interviews that will be used for publication in the final report. Then I asked them to assess whether they think their experiences are well represented, whether something is missing or unrepresentative of their experience, and whether or not the categories make sense to them. All the 12 participants confirmed the categories. They also mentioned that this part of the research helped them to understand how others perceive their stories and themselves. A number of them also reported that they learned how to describe themselves and their strengths using some of the terms used in the draft report.

Placing incidents into categories by an independent judge

With respect to this validation check, I asked a PhD research associate at Burnaby Centre for Mental Health and Addiction who also had experienced immigration
to be my independent judge. I presented this judge with the category headings, their operational definitions and a random set of 25% of the critical incidents in each category. Afterwards, I asked the judge to place the incidents in the categories where they belong. These placements were compared with my own. There was an 80% matching rate, which was deemed satisfactory considering Nilsson's (1964) suggestion of 75% or higher agreement.

**Exhaustiveness**

For this validity check, I tracked the point at which exhaustiveness or redundancy was achieved. To do so, I tracked the point at which new categories stopped emerging from the data. Therefore, I used the above-mentioned log to watch as new categories emerged with each interview and determined at which interview the new categories stopped emerging. Exhaustiveness was achieved after the third interview, as no new categories were needed to place the incidents from the remaining nine interviews.

**Theoretical agreement**

This validity check has to do with the presence or absence of agreement within the literature about the descriptive or interpretive terms used (Maxwell, 1992). There are two ways to implement this validity check: (a) researchers scrutinize their underlying research assumptions in light of relevant scholarly literature to see if they are supported (Butterfield, 2006), and (b) researchers compare the categories that are formed to the literature to see if there is support for them (Maxwell, 1992; McCormick, 1997). For my project I followed the second strategy, since due to the exploratory nature of my study I did not have any preliminary hypotheses. Upon scrutinizing and submitting the categories, my supervisor and I made reasoned decisions about what the support in the literature (or lack of it) means and finalized the emerged categories accordingly.

**Descriptive validity**

This check is concerned with the accuracy of the account and the incidents and the emerged categories. The aim is to make sure that the CIs and categories reasonably
represent the participants’ experiences. For this reason, I taped and transcribed the interviews with attention to my observations recorded in the field notes. I directly extracted incidents from these transcriptions and used the verbatim quotes from participants to highlight and represent the findings. Additionally, I ran a participant cross-checking and requested them to confirm the soundness of the category titles, and to determine the extent to which they reflected their individual experiences (Butterfield et al., 2005). Lastly, I asked a psychiatrist who is specialized in child and youth and has a personal experience of immigration in addition to two youth workers from refugee service agencies that the participants were recruited from to review the categories and the incidents. They were then requested to determine whether the categories represent the incidents and their professional experience of working with resilient youth in their fields. They all confirmed the categories, yet suggested a few incidents to be placed under other categories. With respect to the subcategory (i.e., being optimistic and positive) one of the youth workers highlighted that refugee youth come to Canada with huge optimism, but their optimism vanishes when they face the challenges of resettling in Canada. Nevertheless, their optimism bounces back after a year or two when they successfully adapt to their new life in Canada.

**Interview fidelity**

This credibility check ensures consistency is being maintained, confirms the rigor of the research design, and checks for leading questions by the interviewer. For this check, after every fourth interview, I provided the same psychiatrist with the audio of my interviews and consulted with him to ensure that there was a basic consistency in my manner of interviewing and to make certain that the style was consistent with the ECIT method (i.e., I was not overtly leading participants in a particular direction of interest).

**Summary**

In this chapter, I described the method and process of participant collection, as well as analysis and interpretation of data. In the next chapter I will describe in detail all of the findings, with the hope that it will accurately and respectfully represent the experience of participants.
Chapter 4.

Results

Overview

In this chapter, I present an analysis of the findings from the 12 interviews I conducted for the study. After the contextual question at the beginning of the interviews, participants were asked to think of an experience or incident that either helped or hindered them do well at home, at school, and in their friendships. Of the 512 incidents, 465 were identified by the participants as helpful to adjusting well in Canada, 32 incidents were identified as hindering to adjusting well in Canada, and 15 incidents were identified as factors that participants believed would have benefitted them during their experience of resettling in Canada. After an analysis of the incidents, 10 categories and 27 subcategories emerged from the 512 incidents. Participation rates were calculated by dividing the number of participants who mentioned the critical incident in one category by the total number of the participants (Butterfield et al., 2009). According to Borgen and Amundson (1984), a category can be considered viable and reasonable when the participation rate is 25% or higher. In the current study, each of the 10 categories met the 25% participation rate in one or more helping, hindering, and wish list items. Table 2, under the following section, provides a summary of the categories and subcategories; the total number of the incidents in each category; and the participation rate. Please note that in line with the current literature on resilience, the categories are classified under individual qualities and contextual qualities that contributed to resiliency in young refugees in this study.

From the contextual component of the interviews, I begin by presenting the participants’ definitions of adjusting well to Canada. I then present the categories of the
critical incidents emerging from the data with substantial descriptions and verbatim quotes to enrich their meaning.

**Participants’ Definitions of Adjusting Well in Canada**

One of the criterions for participation in this study was that participants had to identify themselves as adjusting well after moving to Canada. At the beginning of the interview, participants were asked to share what ‘adjusting well’ meant to them. The most cited incidents were *learning English and Canadian culture; doing well at school and home; and doing well in friendships*.

For example, the quotes below demonstrate two of the participants’ perspectives of adjusting well. The first participant said:

> [Adjusting well] for me it’s basically understanding what, like trying to fit in Canadian culture a little bit. You can't just keep that away, like keep your own culture. You have to fit in both cultures. So like study hard and do something that’s good for your future. And basically keep your family happy.

The second participant stated:

> When you come to Canada, getting adapted to Canada means to learn the new culture of Canada, what Canadian people do, how you have to be living here, how you have to get used to, how to communicate with people who live here and making close friendships with them.

As was demonstrated in these examples, learning English and Canadian culture was the most frequently mentioned theme by the participants. Similar to the first example, participants’ answers also suggested their adoption of the essential parts of the Canadian culture, while maintaining the essential parts of their ethnic culture (i.e., integration strategy).

Another participant equated being involved in community with adjusting well in Canada and said:
Well yeah I think I am adjusting well. I've been involved in many activities for example. I've been learning how to ice skate, we played baseball, and those are things that get me involved in community. I play in the sports teams and I play with friends on the basketball court. Things like this helped me to get used to the country and make friendships with everyone.

This participant also identified being involved in many sport activities as the mean by which he determined if he is adjusting well in Canada. Lastly, one of the participants defined his understanding of adjusting well with respect to his performance in school and stated, “[I am adjusting well because] my marks are good. I get A or B.” He also said, “I am adjusting well here and I think it is because I was looking for a soccer team to play in and I am now playing in one.” Similar to the previous example, being able to play in a soccer team was another measure of adjusting well. Only these two participants cited their involvement in sport as an indicator of their successful adaptation in Canada.

Table 2. Critical Incident Categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Categories</th>
<th>Frequency of Incidents (percentage of total)</th>
<th>Participation Rate (percentage of total)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal characteristics and attitudes</td>
<td>261 (51%)</td>
<td>12 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perseverance</td>
<td>24 (5%)</td>
<td>11 (92%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being ambitious and goal-oriented</td>
<td>22 (4%)</td>
<td>12 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being opportunistic and Hopeful</td>
<td>21 (4%)</td>
<td>9 (75%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-confidence</td>
<td>19 (4%)</td>
<td>8 (67%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a sense of responsibility and supporting others</td>
<td>19 (4%)</td>
<td>9 (75%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong motivation</td>
<td>17 (3%)</td>
<td>8 (67%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curiosity and passion for learning</td>
<td>16 (3%)</td>
<td>8 (67%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being optimistic and positive</td>
<td>14 (3%)</td>
<td>6 (42%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being a hard-worker</td>
<td>14 (3%)</td>
<td>9 (75%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openness to other cultures</td>
<td>14 (3%)</td>
<td>7 (58%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being considerate and kind</td>
<td>13 (3%)</td>
<td>6 (50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-reliance</td>
<td>11 (2%)</td>
<td>5 (42%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being compliant</td>
<td>11 (2%)</td>
<td>8 (67%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being flexible</td>
<td>10 (2%)</td>
<td>5 (42%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-discipline and being organized</td>
<td>10 (2%)</td>
<td>6 (50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Altruism</td>
<td>10 (2%)</td>
<td>6 (50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being resourceful and creative</td>
<td>8 (2%)</td>
<td>4 (33%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being talented</td>
<td>8 (2%)</td>
<td>4 (33%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptive copings</td>
<td>87 (17%)</td>
<td>12 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategies for emotion-regulation</td>
<td>44 (9%)</td>
<td>11 (92%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having hobbies</td>
<td>10 (2%)</td>
<td>7 (58%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a role model</td>
<td>9 (2%)</td>
<td>4 (33%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belief in God and pray</td>
<td>8 (2%)</td>
<td>5 (42%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reaching out for help</td>
<td>8 (2%)</td>
<td>6 (50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humour</td>
<td>4 (1%)</td>
<td>4 (33%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparedness</td>
<td>4 (1%)</td>
<td>3 (25%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social support</td>
<td>54 (11%)</td>
<td>12 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family support</td>
<td>36 (7%)</td>
<td>11 (92%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support from friends and others</td>
<td>18 (4%)</td>
<td>10 (83%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective language-learning skills</td>
<td>28 (5%)</td>
<td>10 (83%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural and language differences</td>
<td>21 (4%)</td>
<td>10 (83%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School climate</td>
<td>20 (4%)</td>
<td>8 (67%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategies for acculturation</td>
<td>14 (3%)</td>
<td>7 (58%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government and community resources</td>
<td>15 (3%)</td>
<td>11 (92%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial resources</td>
<td>7 (1%)</td>
<td>6 (50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusting with the Passage of Time</td>
<td>5 (1%)</td>
<td>4 (33%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Individual Qualities

Individual qualities are identified by the participants in the following four categories: (a) personal characteristics and attitudes; (b) adaptive coping; (c) effective language-learning skills; and (d) strategies for acculturation. The categories are presented in order of decreasing frequency of incidents rather than indicating the importance of certain categories and incidents.

Category 1: Personal characteristics and attitudes (261 incidents, 100% participation rate)

This category summarizes certain personal characteristics and attitudes that participants identified as significant for their competence in multiple areas of their lives (i.e., school, relationships with parents and peers) and their successful adjustment in Canada. This category was divided into 18 subcategories of personal characteristics or attitudes as follows: (1) perseverance; (2) being ambitious and goal-oriented; (3) being opportunistic and hopeful; (4) self-confidence; (5) having a sense of responsibility and supporting others; (6) strong motivation; (7) curiosity and passion for learning; (8) being optimistic and positive; (9) being a hard-worker; (10) openness to other cultures; (11) being considerate and kind; (12) self-reliance; (13) being compliant; (14) being flexible; (15) self-discipline and being organized; (16) altruism; (17) being resourceful and creative; (18) being talented. I describe each of these subcategories below.

Subcategory 1: Perseverance (24 incidents, 92% participation rate)

All of the incidents in this subcategory fell into the helping aspects of building resilience. The incidents in this subcategory highlight perseverance as one of the main principles for success according to participants. The positive impacts of this personal characteristic included helping participants overcome the challenges of resettlement in Canada; grow stronger; improve English fluency; maintain high achievement at school; learn from their failure without succumbing to frustration and despair; maintain their goals, and achieve success.
In essence, the incidents that contributed to this subcategory suggest that the participants’ perseverance is based on their tenacity and resolve. Most of the participants emphasized how, if after several tries they did not achieve the results that they sought, they would stop and evaluate the factors that were not working and pursue a different approach. For instance, one participant stated, “When I fail, I will try to [identify] what made me not reach my goal and I would try to do better next time.” Another participant stated:

I do not give up. For example, before I got on the soccer team, it was very hard to get on the team. I did not even know what I had to do to get on the team. Also, my English was not good. One day I was walking outside and saw the soccer field. I went there and asked the coach with my little English how can I join the soccer team? He told me the team is full. He gave me some information and I searched online and used a lot of dictionary to understand the information and fill out the forms. I filled out the form but I did not get in. But I did not give up. Later, I met a boy in physical education class. That was the first time we met. We went to play soccer outside. Then he said you are good at soccer and I told him my story of not getting into the soccer team and he said if you want I can help you. I asked him to help me and he talked to his father because his father is a coach. Then I got transferred.

This example demonstrates how the participant’s perseverance resulted in achieving his goal to play in a soccer team, regardless of the barriers (e.g., limited English proficiency, unfamiliarity with the system). Likewise, this example showed the participant’s ability to learn from his failure without surrendering to frustration and despair.

**Subcategory 2: Being ambitious and goal-oriented (22 incidents, 100% participation rate)**

All of the incidents in this subcategory fell into the helping aspects of building resilience and illustrate participants’ realistic approach to pursuing the dreams they had of coming to Canada. For instance, one participant said, “I’ve always dreamed of being a doctor. But I have to be realistic, so I want to be a mental health nurse now.” The participant underlined the importance of creating, pursuing, and ultimately meeting her goals. Participants mentioned how this personal characteristic helped them learn new skills to do well academically and socially. They also mentioned that setting realistic goals kept them motivated and gave them energy to get through the challenges. Some of them also stated that having goals gave them a sense of purpose and raised their
hope for their future. This personal characteristic is depicted in one of the participant’s comment where he explained:

I have my whole plan made—started in grade twelve. In college, I will do my bachelor degree; I will be playing basketball professionally, while studying agriculture and food sciences. In my third year, I might be drafted into the NBA, which would be a good thing for me. Then I will start my own business with my agricultural knowledge. I will have my own factory and at the same time be playing basketball. The money that I make from my business and basketball together—I'll take seventy percent and bring it back to my country to help people.

Another participant stated:

I have two goals. I want to be a chemical engineer or a soccer player. My coach says I'm doing very well, so I think I can be both an engineer and a professional soccer player. There are soccer players who have master degrees and are good players.

This quote was an example of a few participants’ ambition to build careers for their future. These comments also suggested that the participants’ choices for their future career matched well with their interests and talents.

Subcategory 3: Being opportunistic and hopeful (21 incidents, 75% participation rate)

The 21 incidents in this subcategory were divided into 18 helpful aspects, one hindering aspect, and two wish-list items that contributed to build resilience. All the incidents illustrate how participants identified Canada as the land of opportunity and expressed their high opinion of this country. For example, one participant stated:

Canada is the best, because I can make my dream come true. There are more opportunities compared to my home country and compared to the way I was living back there. In Canada I have many chances to succeed in life and become a professional basketball player.

Another participant expressed her high opinion by saying, “If you are in Canada you are here to study and succeed; not to do anything else, not to do anything stupid.” The incidents in this subcategory also suggest that Canada is associated with concepts in the participants’ minds such as safety, growth, and success. Participants feel privileged to be here, as was highlighted in one participant’s comment below. She said:
I like Canada; I like it better than Iraq. Here in Canada it is safe. I like the people and I was able to find good friends. The school and teachers are good. Canada feels like my home. I am lucky to be here, so I will do my best to become a good doctor.

Furthermore, the participants in this study mentioned how their need for belonging to a “better place” encouraged them to actively learn English and embrace Canadian culture and values. One of the participants remarked how he thought of Canada as a superior nation, which left him feeling alienated and kept him from approaching people during the first few months of resettling in Canada. He said, “I thought Canadians are more beautiful. That made me nervous to talk to them in the beginning. I used to avoid them and stay by myself, because I thought I am not like them.” The negative impact of his avoidance was a temporary delay in building friendships with Canadians and developing a sense of belonging to Canada. Likewise, his avoidance led to him making contact only with people from his own country. This kept him from opportunities to practice speaking English and to get to know himself and Canadians differently.

Lastly, the two wish-list items in this subcategory represented one of the participant’s thoughts that had he been born in Canada, he would have been more successful as a professional baseball player. He expressed his wish by saying, “I wish, I was born here so my baseball was better…I wish I was born in Canada because I will adapt [easier]. I will have a stronger start.” Although this wish could never be fulfilled, it showed how this participant identified being Canadian as a privilege and linked it to a potential stronger start.

**Subcategory 4: Self-confidence (19 incidents, 67% participation rate)**

All the incidents in this subcategory highlighted the participants’ sense of self-confidence and fall under helpful aspects of building resilience. The positive impact of possessing this characteristic included a positive sense of self and success. The participants mentioned that their self-confidence gave them the courage and energy to take action to deal with challenges in resettling in Canada, because they trusted that they could effectively deal with whatever comes in their way. More specifically, they remarked how their belief in themselves got them through hard times. One participant remarked that, “looking at challenges that I have been through, I think I can handle
anything. This gives me the courage to do my things and I think I'm doing pretty well.” They also emphasized that their confidence in themselves helped them to learn English (e.g., “I believed that I could learn English and I learned it in less than a year.”), build friendships (e.g., “I am good at building relationships with younger people and adults and that has made me quite popular in the neighbourhood.”), and do well at school (e.g., “I have confidence. My self-confidence helps me do well in school.”).

**Subcategory 5: Having a sense of responsibility and supporting others (19 incidents, 75% participation rate)**

All the helpful incidents in this subcategory represent the participants’ sense of responsibility, commitment, and concern for family, friends, and other people who have supported them. Some of the incidents in this subcategory indicated the participants’ attempts to give back to the people who have helped them in the past (e.g., “so one day when I grow up, I will give him [the man who saved my life] something and I will do so.”), or their attempts to give to their community through volunteering (e.g., “we got lots of help so we have to help people back. Now that we don't need help, I volunteer to help others”). For example, one participant said, “We got lots of help so we have to help people back. Now that we don't need help, I volunteer to help others.” Other incidents suggest that these youth have a sense of duty to themselves, and their parents, to work and make money for living. For instance, one participant mentioned, “I help my mom, but not with home stuff; I like helping them with money. I have a job.” According to the participants, having a sense of responsibility and supporting others helped them have a strong relationship with their friends and their parents. It also gave them the satisfaction of being a good child to their parents and a good friend to their peers.

**Subcategory 6: Strong motivation (17 incidents, 67% participation rate)**

Of the 17 incidents, 16 contributed to helpful aspects of building resilience and one of the incidents illustrated the hindering aspects of the participant having a lack of motivation during the first few months of resettling in Canada. For most of the participants, making themselves and their parents proud and happy was their major source of motivation for studying hard and being a successful student at school. One participant identified his Canadian friends as his source of motivation to learn English. He said, “I was the kind of the guy that wanted to understand them [Canadian friends]
when they tried to communicate with me and have fun with them. My Canadian friends motivated me to push harder." Another participant stated:

> Back home really bad thing happened to me and my family; and I use that as motivation for stuff that I do—for school, basketball, everything that I [do]—I use my family problem as motivation to make me succeed . . . I want [my mom] to be proud of me, I want her to come watch my basketball game one day when I am a professional player. And that day, even if my mom passes away, at least I would know I did something for her.

This quote underlined how the participant used the traumatic experience back home as his source of motivation to succeed here and make his mother proud. He further explained that these two sources of motivations are the reason why he is doing well in different aspects of his life (e.g., school, home, friendships).

The example of the hindering aspects of having a lack of motivation may be found in one of the participant's comment where he stated, "When I came [to Canada], I was really lazy; I just wanted to have fun and I didn't have motivation to do anything and that kept me from trying hard." The lack of motivation in this participant kept him from trying his best in school during the first few months of resettling in Canada.

**Subcategory 7: Curiosity and passion for learning (16 incident, 67% participation rate)**

All of the incidents in this subcategory fell into the helping aspects of the participants’ curiosity and passion for learning. More than half of the participants emphasized the significance of their curiosity and passion for learning, and identified it as a characteristic that helped them to become more “sophisticated.” They also identified it as their source of excitement for exploring the environment where they lived and for taking advantage of all the learning opportunities available to them. Similarly, they mentioned how the passion for learning has made it easier to learn English, because they did not look at it as a task, but rather they look at it as satisfying their interests. The participants also thought that possessing this characteristic played a significant role in their success at school.
As an example, one participant commented on his curiosity and said, “A lot of people tell me I am smart but I'm the type of person who likes to learn more. I'm a curious person. I read a lot. I have 50 books at home.” Another participant emphasized on the importance of his passion for learning and stated, “I love to learn more about life. I think when I learn more, life becomes easier and easier. There is a difference between a fool and someone who reads books. I believe knowledge is the power.” The passion for reading was also underlined in another participant’s comment where she asserted, “When I see books that are really interesting I just want to read them. I would stay up at night to read with a flashlight.” This participant also linked her passion for reading to her academic success.

**Subcategory 8: Openness to other cultures (14 incidents, 58% participation rate)**

Of the 14 incidents, 13 contributed to the helpful aspects of participants’ openness to other cultures in building resilience and adjusting well in Canada, and one incident fell under the wish-list item. The helpful incidents all shared ideas such as participants being accepting, respectful, interested in other cultures, and nonjudgmental of people in relation to their race and appearance. The benefit for participants of possessing this characteristic was related to how they were able to make friends with people from other countries and to satisfy their passion for learning about other cultures and religions. Two of the participants indicated how, “culture here is diverse and I very much like it. I'm Evangelic. I'm Christian. I have a friend that's Indian—he's one of my first friends here and we are close,” and “I like to have friends with different religions. They will know my religion or where I'm from and I will know about them. There are so many different religions that I’d like to learn about.” Both participants mentioned how this characteristic satisfied their curiosity and passion for learning, while helping them with building friendships. Other positive effects of the participants’ openness to other cultures were to improve their speaking skills by constantly communicating in English, gaining the ability to embrace Canadian culture, and integrating Canadian values.

As for the wish-list item, one participant reported how she wished, “to know more than one language. It will help to talk to people in different cultures.” This example suggested the importance of connecting to people from other cultures to the extent that
the participant wished to learn more than one language. This incident also indirectly represented the participant’s curiosity and passion for learning.

**Subcategory 9: Being a hard-worker (14 incidents, 75% participation rate)**

All the incidents in this subcategory represented the helpful aspects of being a hard-worker in participants’ building resilience. Incidents in this subcategory show a common belief that living a good life is not easy—people have to work hard to get what they want. For example, one participant remarked how, “good things don’t come just like that. You need to have a war before the victory.” Another participant stated:

> It’s so much fun to work hard and get something you want. At first in high school, I was really bad at math. So, I would stay after school and get help from teachers and I started going to Kumon for one year. In grade eleven I started getting A+ in math. I want to become a pharmacist so I need As.

According to participants, being a hard-worker was the key to doing their best every day and to striving for excellence in all that they do. They attributed their success in learning English and their academic accomplishments to possessing this characteristic. They also stated that this characteristic has helped them stand out as a diligent student in their class and has drawn the attention of teachers. As one of the participants illustrated in the example below, his hard work paid off because he received a scholarship from a local college. He said:

> I worked very hard, day and night, to get into the basketball club team that I play in. I already have three offers of admission: one from U-Vic, one from Douglas, and one from Kwantlen. But recently I found out that I have got scholarship from [a local college] for my basketball and I am deciding where to go.

This participant emphasized on the important role of his hard work in winning a scholarship. He also linked his success in getting admission from different Canadian universities and colleges to being a hard-worker.
**Subcategory 10: Being optimistic and positive (14 incidents, 42% participation rate)**

All the incidents in this subcategory belong to helpful aspects of the participants’ ability to look for the best in any situation and to expect good things to happen, and its contribution to build resilience. These incidents suggest that resilient participants have a tendency to believe, expect, or hope that things will turn out well and this has helped them to see the silver lining. For instance, one of the participants said:

I’m a positive person; always thinking good things will come from bad things . . . maybe if [bad things that happened back home] didn't happen, I would not come to Canada and my life won’t be better. I won't know what's important to me–become a professional basketball player and make my mom proud. I also would not understand how important it is to have a family.

This comment showed how the participant’s ability to look for the best in any situation has helped him to deal with his traumatic experience back home. The ability to see the silver lining in every situation not only helped the participant to deal with his past traumatic experiences, but it also helped him to gain insight into what is important for him in life.

Moreover, some of the incidents in this subcategory indicate the helping aspects of the positive attitude of participants towards Canada in their successful adjustment. According to participants, their positive attitude and excitement of coming Canada made the transition easier for them and helped them to make it through the challenges. For example, one participant commented:

I had a positive idea that I was going to come here [Canada]. It was a dream come true to come here. I was excited to know a new place and not live there [my country] for my entire life. I was really excited to come here. This made things much easier for me.

As was demonstrated in this example, coming to Canada for many of the participants was like dream come true. Examples as such indicated how participants’ positive attitude and excitement of coming to Canada made the transition easier for them and helped them to make it through the challenges.
**Subcategory 11: Being considerate and kind (13 incidents, 50% participation rate)**

This subcategory reflects helpful incidents. These incidents illustrate participants’ tendency to say or do certain things that show how they care about other people (e.g., parents, friends) and want to make them happy. According to the participants in this study, being considerate and kind is important because it helped them to have good relationships with their parents and their friends. For instance, one participant said, “I think the whole thing that is helping me with friendships is about being kind and nice to others.” In this example, “being kind and nice” was presented as an interpersonal skill that contributed to the participants’ success in friendships.

Other incidents in this category reflect the examples where participants showed consideration for the needs of other people. For instance, one of the participants stated, “When I talk to them [parents], I look for the time that they are available. I look for the right time to talk to them.” Using this example, the participant underlined her careful consideration of her parents’ needs and comfort at times when she wanted to discuss a matter with them. She also linked it to the intimate relationship that she has with her parents.

**Subcategory 12: Self-reliance (11 incidents, 42% participation rate)**

All 11 incidents in this subcategory indicate the helpful aspects of participants’ self-reliance as contributing to their resilience and their successful adjustment in Canada. The incidents in this subcategory illustrate participants’ ability to depend on themselves, and to recognize their personal strengths and limitations. Self-reliance included participants’ realization that they were able to depend on themselves more than anyone else, and how they could be on their own, if necessary, and have a sense of security. The examples in this category demonstrate how this personal characteristic helps them engage independently in their efforts to learn English, and their studies in order to receive good grades at school. One of the participants identified his self-reliance with regards to his language learning and said, “I had to learn English by myself just asking people for help with books. I have to deal with everything and 90% is [by] myself.”
On the other hand, one participant commented on her awareness of an experience of loneliness. She stated that this awareness was helping her to deal with life alone and made her feel stronger. As she said, “We always needed someone to be by our side and that is important, but not always. I was born alone. I can deal with myself alone. It doesn’t matter who I am with.” This participant mentioned that her belief of the ability to deal with herself alone helped her to not feel desperate about finding friends during the first few months of their resettlement. She also reported that this belief helped her to wait for the right person to come forward.

Subcategory 13: Being compliant (11 incidents, 67% participation rate)

All of the incidents in this subcategory fall under the helpful aspects of building resilience and share the theme listening to parents and teachers, and obeying the rules. Incidents in this subcategory made it evident that the participants deliberately obey their teachers, follow the rules in class, attend all classes, and do their homework diligently. They also trust and respect their parents as being more experienced so they follow their elders’ advice. For example, one participant underlined how she would, “listen to my parents and do what they say. They lived for forty years; they know . . . It's like if you asked an old man or old lady. They know about life; they had experiences.” With that being said, these incidents did not imply that the participants were submissive. This was highlighted in one participant’s comment. She said, “I listen to my father and I respect his opinions. But sometimes if something doesn’t make sense to me, I tell him and he is open-minded.” As was demonstrated in this comment, this participant emphasized her father’s open-mindedness to indicate that she was not forced to obey her father, rather she had the opportunity to challenge her parents’ requests whenever something did not make sense to her.

The positive impacts of possessing this personal characteristic (i.e., listening to parents and teachers and obeying the rules) on participants’ successful adjustment included getting recognized as “the good student” in the class, having a good relationship with teachers, as well as having a good relationship with parents. This personal characteristic also helped them to make smart choices about friends. For example, one participant said, “My mom told me it’s better to wait because you don’t know what kind of friends you will find, and I listened to her. I didn’t rush and that helped
me to find good friends.” Participants linked their success in life to possessing this characteristic.

**Subcategory 14: Being flexible (10 incidents, 42% participation rate)**

This is another subcategory that only holds helpful aspects of building resilience. Participants emphasized that even though they are ambitious and goal-oriented, they are also flexible about the outcome of their goals at the same time. For example, the participant whose goal was to get drafted into the NBA and had a detailed plan for himself starting from grade 12 remarked, “If I don't get drafted, it's not the end of the world; I will have my degree. That would make my mom happy, too.”

The participants in this study reported that being flexible helped them to recognize and adapt to various situational demands (e.g., learning English, learning the social codes) and to change the attitudes or behaviour that are compromising their personal or social functioning. This was highlighted in one participant’s comment, saying, “I had to change myself: First I wouldn't smile to anyone, since in Afghanistan they smile but they don’t smile everywhere. In Canada even when you walk you have to smile to everyone.” According to the participants, this personal characteristic helped them adjust well and grow in a vastly different cultural environment and circumstance in Canada.

**Subcategory 15: Self-discipline/being organized (10 incidents, 50% participation rate)**

All the helpful incidents in this subcategory reflect the helpful aspects of participants’ self-discipline in building resilience. The incidents in this subcategory suggest the willpower and ability of participants to persist at difficult or unpleasant tasks until they are completed. These incidents also represent the strategies that the participants used to discipline themselves when it was needed. As an example, one of the participants stated:

> When I get lazy to do my homework, I think about my future. I always think about good things that will happen in my future if I study hard now. Then I put hours for myself to study right after school first and then have fun. I make plans for myself and I manage to stick to it.
The participants also reported that the key to their success in learning English and achieving results at school was to “push themselves hard” and be organized. Possessing high self-discipline enabled the participants in this study to overcome their reluctance to begin tasks (e.g., homework) and stay on track despite more appealing distractions. For example, one of the participants said:

I have asked my mom to take my phone away when I go home, especially when I have to do chemistry, because while studying I would look at it all the time. This makes me wanting to finish the difficult chemistry homework without wasting time to have my phone back.

This quote was an example of the strategies that the participants used to stay focused on the tasks that are either difficult or less attractive to them. More specifically, this incident demonstrated how the participant used a preferred behaviour (e.g., using her cell phone) to reinforce the less preferred behaviour (e.g., doing her chemistry homework).

Subcategory 16: Altruism (10 incidents, 50% participation rate)

Of the ten incidents, 9 contributed to the helpful aspects of participants’ altruism and its contribution to building resilience. One incident fell under the wish-list item. All of the incidents in this subcategory reflected the participants’ desire to help other people all over the world; some participants even had a clear image of how they would do it. For example, one of the participants stated, “I want to write a book on my life, my mom’s life, my family’s lives, and a book teaching people steps to succeed. When I die, I will rest in peace because I did something for my country.” The example below demonstrates another act of altruism for another participant who said:

When I get tips I save them and my mom sends them to Iraq to people that needs it. My whole family does it and at the end of the month we send it to people who are poor back home.

The participants reported how they felt happy and good about themselves when they helped other people. They also mentioned that this was their way of returning all the kindness that they had received so far.
As for the wish-list item, one participant said, “I really want to learn different languages. If I can learn every language, I can communicate and help others.” This incident reflected the participant’s passion for helping other people. As a wish-list item for building resilience, this desire for multiple language fluency shows the participant’s culturally curious mindset and her passion for learning.

**Subcategory 17: Being resourceful and creative (8 incidents, 33% participation rate)**

Similar to most of the previous subcategories, the incidents in this subcategory demonstrate helpful aspects of building resilience. The participants who demonstrated this characteristic linked it directly to their success in dealing with their resettlement challenges. For instance, one of the participants stated:

[I was in grade five] when I first came here and didn't know English, [so] I tried to use sign language. I didn't know how to use sign language either, but I tried to show [others] how I feel with that. I was also able to take back a pen that a classmate had stolen it from me. With sign language and crying, I let the teacher know that there is something wrong between me and the other student, and they took me to multicultural worker at school and she translated my problem to them and the principal took the pen from that child and gave it back to me.

In this example, the participant explained how being creative helped her solve a problem efficiently and to advocate for herself. In another example, a participant expressed her creativity in problem-solving by saying, “when I am stressed out in the exam and can’t remember one sentence, I just try to remember what music I was listening to and it helps me to remember what I have learned.” Some of the incidents in this subcategory also reflect teachers comments on the participants’ creativity, “My teachers tell me that I am creative, cause I always give different ideas for the projects.” It appears for some of the participants having the teachers’ comments on their creativity worked as a significant confirmation of possessing this personal characteristic.

**Subcategory 18: Being talented (8 incidents, 33% participation rate)**

This subcategory highlights the talents of participants that helped them build resilience. Incidents in this category include examples of playing sports professionally,
speaking more than one language, having a photographic memory, and being good in math. For example, one of the participants remarked how:

> Being all-rounded helps me. [For example] I am a lifeguard for swimming, I know how to do plumbing and how to work as a cook in a restaurant, and I also speak five languages. For example, speaking French helped me to communicate with a few people when I did not know English yet.

The participants in this study emphasized the importance of being talented and mentioned how this characteristic helped them to standout, to find friends, and to create opportunities for financial support. For instance, one of the participants reported, “I play basketball professionally and it helped me to get scholarship from [a local college].” They also mentioned that their talents in different areas increases the chances of finding jobs and never stay unemployed. Their comments suggested a sense of security and hope for their future.

**Category 2: Adaptive copings (87 incidents, 100% participation rate)**

This was the second largest category with only helping aspects that contributed to building resilience. This category is divided into seven subcategories that represent strategies that helped the participants cope with the challenges of resettlement in Canada, as well as assisted them to tolerate distressful situations. These subcategories are: (1) strategies for emotion-regulation; (2) having hobbies; (3) having a role model; (4) belief in God and prayer; (5) reaching out for help; (6) humour; and (7) preparedness. I outline each of these subcategories below.

**Subcategory 1: Strategies for emotion-regulation (44 incidents, 92% participation rate)**

All the incidents in this subcategory demonstrate the strategies that participants used to feel better in stressful situations and tolerate distress in circumstances where they had no control. Since this was a large subcategory, the incidents were grouped under different types of strategies such as (a) physical expressions; (b) positive self-talk; (c) connections with others; (d) relaxation; (e) leisure activities; and (f) distractions that participants implemented to regulate their emotion.
Physical expressions were helpful strategies that participants used to increase their distress tolerance. They identified such strategies as doing some kind of sport (e.g., playing football, basketball, running), crying in private, or screaming in a deserted place when no one was around. Some participants also identified drawing as a way to express their feelings and reported how they used art as a way to calm themselves down. For example, one of the participants reported:

I also draw. In drawing I can just draw how I feel. When I am depressed, I don't feel like drawing happy stuff. For example, if I am not feeling like opening up to people, I just draw how I feel and it makes me feel better.

Participants also used positive, calming self-talk to encourage themselves in difficult or stressful situations. They mentioned how this was their way of reassuring themselves that everything was going to be all right. For example, one participant stated:

When I am stressed about my presentation, I tell myself, ‘it's your own presentation so you are the one who knows better because they are not doing your project. Just say what you want to say, because they won't know any better about it. You have managed before and you can now.'

Some participants reported how they contacted someone (i.e., parents, close friends, counsellors, and teachers) to let out their emotions in difficult times. This coping helped them feel less stressed and provided them with helpful tips to deal with the situation. Some participants also mentioned how this strategy helped them feel less alone with their problems and made their friendships closer. For example, one participant said, “I told him [my friend] I came to Canada illegally; I told everything I've been through. We became best friends after that… Talking to him helps me because he gives me good suggestions.” Another participant stated how she seeks out trustworthy friends to, “hang out and talk. They help me and support me with their tips. They try to make me laugh. That's what friends do, make you smile, make you happy.”

Another important helpful strategy participants' identified was relaxation through listening to music, doing yoga, sleeping, and taking a bath or shower to help them feel relaxed. For example, one participant stated, “When I am mad, I also take showers to cool myself down,” and another participant said, “[I] listen to music. Music helps me to relax. I listen to music with no vocals and sometimes do yoga.” Connected to this
strategy were leisure activities such as watching movies, reading books, or hiking when they felt bored. They also mentioned how these types of activities boosted their energy to deal with the challenges in their lives because, “watching movies [with friends] makes you think of different stuff.” These types of activities also create a distraction in the situations where participants have no control. Distractions represent attempts by the participants to avoid dwelling on things that they could not control; for example, one participant stated how, “When things are bothering me and I can't do anything about them I will just ignore it,” and another participant who had some difficulties with schoolmates said, “For classmates that don’t talk to me, I don't care about them. They are ignored . . . why should I care if they don't even know me? Why would I keep worrying? I don’t do that; I let them be.” This example demonstrated how the participant distracted herself from a problem that she had no control over by simply ignoring it.

**Subcategory 2: Having hobbies (10 incidents, 58% participation rate)**

The focus of this subcategory was on helping aspects that contributed to building resilience. Particularly, the incidents demonstrate the activities that participants did in their free-time for pleasure. All the hobbies include activities such as sports (e.g., “I play badminton at the Recreation Centre when I am free.”), art (e.g., “Art is one of my favourite things. I love drawing. I draw when I am free.”), and reading (“I enjoy reading books in my free times.”). The participants noted how their hobbies provided them with an outlet for stress; helped them to distract themselves from upsetting thoughts and stay present; and benefited them physically. For example, one of the participants emphasized, “I like nature. I usually walk around and do mountain climbing with friends when I have time.” She further described how mountain climbing helped her to refresh and get ready for another week of school.

**Subcategory 3: Having a role model (9 incidents, 33% participation rate)**

All the incidents in this subcategory show the helpful aspects of participants’ having role models in their lives. The participants emphasized how one of the most significant aspects on the path of self-improvement was to look up to their role models and copy them. For example, one of the participants remarked:
When I watch something really interesting or I hang out with people who are really happy with life, I will start being like them—I ask myself what am I doing differently? And I start trying to do things like them.

Another participant explained that her role models provided a model for living and for getting to the point she wants to be at in her life. She said:

> My cousins are my role models; I look up to them. They became doctors here and I want to be like them and become a pharmacist. I ask how they studied and I do the same thing. I study hard like them to become a pharmacist.

Likewise, the incidents in this subcategory point to the importance of having role models in the process of achieving goals for the future for the participants. For example, one of the participants stated, "I think role models are important because you want to do the thing they are doing. It helps to figure out what and who you want to be and then become it." They also reported that their role models inspire and motivate them to work hard and never give up.

**Subcategory 4: Belief in God and pray (8 incidents, 42% participation rate)**

The incidents in this subcategory show the helpful aspects of the participants’ religious faith and practice, as well as their belief that life has meaning. Some of the participants emphasized how praying in difficult times gave them hope that things would be all right because there was a God who was protecting them. For example, one of the participants said, “I pray. I really believe in power of God. Whenever I feel down–I pray, basically five times a day. Whenever I don't pray, I feel really down. I have hope from someone.” Another participant stated, “God is my friend. I'm Christian. I believe in God and I think God created me for a reason and nothing is accidental.” This incident suggested that believing in God has given the participant a sense that her life has meaning.

**Subcategory 5: Reaching out for help (8 incidents, 50% participation rate)**

This subcategory encompasses the helpful aspects of the participants’ ability to reach out for help and its contribution to building resilience. For instance, one participant explained, "Some students feel embarrassed, but I get tutoring and get help after school
if I don't understand something. If I need something I go to my teachers after school or before school.” The participants reported that putting out the call for help (i.e., in academic, relationship, and life challenges) has made their bonding with their teachers, their friends, and their parents stronger. They also mentioned that their ability to ask for help made them more efficient and successful in overcoming challenges.

**Subcategory 6: Humour (4 incidents, 33% participation rate)**

The helping incidents in this subcategory describe the participants’ sense of humour in different social situations. As one participant highlighted in her comment, “my friends say that I'm funny. If I say something they will laugh. This makes me popular.” The participants in this study thought that humour made them more likable and admired among their group of friends. They also emphasized how it made difficult situations easier for them and less painful. One of the participants remarked that, “I'm funny. It makes people like me, because I always try to find something to laugh about, even in difficult times. It makes it easier.”

**Subcategory 7: Preparedness (4 incidents, 25% participation rate)**

The incidents in this subcategory demonstrate the helpful aspects of participants’ preparedness and its contribution to build resilience. Participants emphasized that being mentally prepared before moving to Canada helped them have a more realistic image of how life in this country would look. They also reported how their realistic expectations helped them to accept and deal more easily with challenges. As one participant described:

We were prepared for five years. I knew how it would be from the beginning. I knew how Canada would look like because I searched for videos of Canada and I watched movies. My uncle would [also] send us pictures. I knew how it would look like before coming to Canada. I always prepare myself.

This example also underlines how access to technology helped the participant mentally prepare herself for a new life in Canada, while living in the refugee camp. In other words, this incident suggests that having access to the technology led to the initiation of the acculturation process even before coming to Canada.
Category 3: Effective language-learning skills (28 incidents, 83% participation rate)

The incidents in this category reflect the helpful aspects of participants’ efforts to improve their English proficiency by adding to the limited resources that were available at school (i.e., English Language Learning and English as a Second Language classes) or in the community. The incidents in this category demonstrate that participants held themselves responsible for learning the host language and actively engaged in ways to improve their English language skills. For instance, participants reported reading English books as the most significant factor that helped them learn and improve their English, especially for those who loved reading. For example, one of the participants explained:

I practiced and tried to listen to what people were saying and I read books as well. Reading books is really helping. Reading [books] is the best way to learn English, and also practicing the sound of the words and spelling.

The second helpful activity that participants highlighted was the importance of actively engaging in the process of speaking English as a means of developing their English proficiency. More specifically, a few of the incidents in this category indicate that participants forced themselves to practice speaking English by making friends with Canadians or making friends with children from other countries. Also, some of the participants mentioned how they deliberately avoided contact with people from their own countries to prevent themselves from speaking their native language. As noted above, very fluent English speaking participants stated how they only had English-speaking Canadian friends and they did not make friends at school with people from their own country. For example, one of the participants said, “In the first year, I tried to be friends with everyone—especially the people who speak English. I don’t hangout much with Iraqis.”

As another active step to increase their English proficiency, participants referred to observing, listening carefully, taking notes, and practicing the new words they learned from their interaction with native English speakers. For instance, one of the participants said, “When the teacher says a new word I keep it and translate it later. I use the dictionary on my phone. When I learn the word I go home and teach it to my mom and we practice together.” Some incidents in this category show how participants actively
took notes of the words that were new to them and either asked for their meanings or checked it themselves using a dictionary. They also mentioned how they would learn the pronunciation of the new word and keep using it in their conversations with other people.

Taking online English courses and using the Internet (e.g., Google) were two other common approaches for learning English. Participants mentioned how online English courses helped them to learn English more rapidly. One of the participants said, “I took English courses online and I Google and search when a word is new to me.”

Almost all of the participants reported how participating in English Language Learning (ELL) and English as a Second Language (ESL) classes at school helped them learn the basics of English, yet they also noted how it would have benefited them to have higher levels of ESL courses to improve their English competency. Some of the participants also specified the role of their ELL teachers in learning English. One participant explained, “When I’m talking to [my ELL teacher] and say something that is not correct, she will correct me. Then I practice it later on.” Additionally, some of the participants discussed the significant role of their parents in their encouragement to speak English at home. One of the participants stated, “My dad told us to speak English at home. We all try to speak English at home. When I learn a new word I talk to my family. I share the word and we practice how to say it.”

Lastly, the participants stated how listening to, and practicing the lyrics of English music; and watching, and taking note of the new slang in English movies helped them to speak more like their Canadian-born classmates. One of the participants also thought this helped her to seem like one of the “cool kids” at school. She stated, “I learn English from music. I listen to it and say the word, I repeat it and practice with the lyrics. The next day when I use it at school, it makes me look cool.”

Category 4: Strategies for acculturation (14 incidents, 58% participation rate)

All the incidents in this category represent the helpful strategies that participants used to facilitate the process of adopting the cultural traits or social patterns of Canadians. Incidents in this category show participants’ active engagement in activities
that helped them connect to Canadian culture and learn how to adjust themselves to it. Some participants recalled getting involved in the community by going to workshops at a local centre for refugees and pushing themselves to make friends with Canadians. Participants also searched online for information about Canadian culture and carefully observed Canadians to learn the social cultural codes. One of the participants mentioned for her was, “participating in programs. There was a program—you get to learn how to cook and sometimes you go on field trips and do sports. I did it to get involved with Canadians and learn about their culture.” Another participant explained, “Reading history helps me to be closer to their [Canadian] culture. I understand their way of doing things.” Participants emphasized the importance of these strategies in helping them to understand Canadians and adjust well to being in Canada.

**Contextual Qualities**

The following six categories describe the contextual qualities that contributed to better social and cultural adjustment, academic achievement, and psychological adaptation for the participants in this study. Once again, the categories are presented in order of decreasing frequency of incidents and this order is not meant to indicate importance of certain categories and incidents. The categories include (1) **social support**; (2) **cultural and language differences**; (3) **school climate**; (4) **government and community resources**; (5) **financial resources**; and (6) **adjusting with the passage of time**. I describe each of these categories below.

**Category 1: Social support (54 incidents, 100% participation rate)**

The incidents in this category were divided into two subcategories of social supports identified by participants: (a) family support, and (b) supports from friends and other people. Incidents in this category highlight the crucial role of support in participants’ resilience and their successful adjustment in Canada.
**Subcategory 1: Family support (36 incidents, 92% participation rate)**

This subcategory includes 31 helping incidents, three hindering, and two wish list incidents. The helping incidents in this category show incidents where participants spoke about their family members (parents and siblings) who provided support and encouragement in helping them adjust well in Canada. Participants discussed the support they received from their parents such as encouragement to study hard and speak English at home; informational support when they listened to them and provided useful information or advice; emotional support when they offered empathy, affection, love, and reassurance; and tangible support such as helping them with homework and providing financial assistance. For example, one of the participants explained, “I spoke a lot of English at home and my mom was proud of me, because when I came to Canada I didn't know how to speak English. This encouraged me to learn more and more.” Another participant stated, “My mom, she does what she can to get us food and clothes. She makes earrings, bracelets, and traditional clothes.” The positive impact of family support were creating positive influences in participants’ lives by ameliorating feelings of loneliness and isolation; giving encouragement and energy to deal with challenges; relieving the stress from transition and changes they experienced; and helping them choose the right friends and do well at school.

The hindering critical incidents in this category were those in which participants expressed frustration around family support, either because their biological parents were not with them or because they experienced a lack of support from their parents and/or siblings with whom they were living. For example, one participant expressed his frustration. He said:

I don't have my [biological] family with me. When you go to school you see the other kids the same age as you; sometimes you get better grades than them, but the difference is those kids have family. Their parents come and are proud of them, but I don't have that here.

Another participant expressed a lack of support from her family. She said:

My dad and I don't talk a lot. I don't really have good relationships with my whole family. My dad does not believe in me and thinks that I will be nobody. My younger sister does not listen to me, so we always get in trouble and fight.
The negative impacts of these instances were emotional ups and downs, and the feeling of loneliness that negatively impacted their transition process.

The wish-list item in this category was the incident where a participant expressed his desire of having his mother here with him. He said, “I wish I could have my family back together. It doesn’t matter how long it takes me; I want them back together–living together in peace.” Although this wish could not be fulfilled, the main outcome of his desire would have been an increased motivation to succeed, better performance at school or in sports, and a sense of peace.

**Subcategory 2: Support from friends and other people (18 incidents, 83% participation rate)**

The helping incidents in this category show how the participants’ Canadian friends, teachers, and strangers provided support and encouragement during their adjustment to Canada. As was mentioned above, the benefits of having good Canadian friends included learning the English language and Canadian culture faster, and a sense of belonging. Two participants commented on life-changing incidents where strangers saved their lives by providing them with information and financial support. One participant described his experience with a stranger. He said:

There was a man that helped me a lot. He’s the one who helped me to register into school and having Canadian documents. He spent hours with papers, finding lawyers, making contact with Immigration Canada. I learned many things from him. He helped me to get my driver’s license. He helped me out with basketball try-outs and the club team. He saved my life.

This participant emphasized on the important role of a stranger’s support in his successful adjustment by calling it a life-saving incident. This incident demonstrated the replacement of a stranger for the participant’s parents, since he was not accompanied with his family. The support of this stranger was crucial in his successful adaptation in Canada.

On the other hand, several of the participants discussed the helpful nature of their friends. For example, one participant stated, “When I am down, I would just tell [my friends]. I feel kind of down today and they will tell me funny stuff and send me funny
pictures. My friends are always there for me in the hard times.” In incidents such as this, friends were described as having dropped everything to help out and be there for participants. Friends cheered them up when they were depressed and provided comfort for them through assisting guidance.

Category 2: Cultural and language differences (21 incidents, 83% participation rate)

Of the 21 incidents, 19 contributed to the hindering aspects of participants’ cultural and language differences in their successful adjustment. Two of the incidents fell into the wish-list items. Participants’ lack of familiarity with Canadian culture and their inability to speak English had negative impacts on their resiliency. These negative impacts included feelings of frustration and self-doubt; lower academic achievement; and social isolation. Some of the negative effects of an inability to speak English were discussed by two of the participants. One of the participants stated:

When I was in Syria and Iraq, I was better in education; I was way better. My marks were only one hundred percent. When I came to Canada, the language is different and that makes me not to get 100% anymore.

Another participant explained,

When I came here I was fifteen—people would not talk to me just because I'm from Africa. Just because I don't speak English they make fun of my accent. They make fun of me and how I spoke. When I went to a Recreation Centre they would laugh at me and my accent.

The negative impact of cultural differences on establishing friendships was underlined by one of the participants. She said:

In my country we say Hi and Bye with a kiss. I did that on the first day at school and felt bad because they didn't do anything. I think they thought I am a lesbian. They stopped talking to me afterwards.

The participant further explained how this incident made her feel embarrassed and contributed to her temporary avoidance of other children in school. She mentioned that if it were not for the support of her teachers, she might have even skipped the classes or dropped out of school.
As for the wish-list, participants’ wanted to speak English fluently, since they believed that proficiency in English would have helped their success both socially and academically. For example, one of the participants stated, “I wish my English was better, cause then I would know how to treat and get close to popular people in my school and I would have all the popular friends. Plus my marks would have been better.” In her mind, speaking English fluently was the key to connecting with “popular kids” in school. This need for fluency points to the importance of English proficiency in participant’s successful adjustment in school.

Category 3: School climate (20 incidents, 67% participation rate)

This subcategory includes 13 helping incidents and seven hindering incidents that demonstrate the role of school climate in assuring that participants could do well at school (i.e., the learning environment and relationships found within a school). In the helping incidents participants described the benefits of a positive, supportive, and diverse school climate. This type of climate resulted in participants feeling safe, included, and accepted. Teachers’ positive attitudes towards diversity and strong support also helped participants to improve academically and encouraged them to practice speaking English in the class. As an example, one of the participants asserted, “My first word of English was toilet. I told my teacher that and the teacher told the whole class that it was my first word ever. They all clapped for me--that was really encouraging. It made me want to work hard on my English.” Another participant highlighted the positive impact of her supportive and diverse school climate. She explained:

Lots of girls in my school they wear scarf. That's what supported me to wear the scarf. I thought I was the only one, but I went to school and lots of girls wore it. I felt comfortable and confident.

This incident suggests that the diverse school climate encouraged the participant to hold on to her religious beliefs and wear her scarf. It also suggests that a supportive and diverse school climate promotes a sense of belonging and boosts confidence in connecting with other children in school.

The hindering incidents in this category represent how a negative school climate impacted the participants’ resilience. For participants, the most frequent experience was
being rejected by other children at school (i.e., other children either looked down on them or made fun of them). This hindered participants by leaving them feeling embarrassed, invalidated, and rejected. For example, one of the participants explained, “other kids at school, sometimes they laughed at me because I didn't pronounce the words well or sometimes I didn't make sense. This made me feel bad for a while and not wanting to talk to other kids at school.” This incident demonstrate how the participant lost her sense of belonging and her willingness to practice English after being rejected by some of her classmates. These types of hindering incidents indicate a need for acceptance in the participants.

Category 4: Government and community resources (15 incidents, 92% participation rate)

The 15 helpful incidents in this category were those in which support and encouragement was offered by government, communities, and immigrant service agencies. More specifically, support came from programs and organizations such as Alternative Education programs (i.e., a combination of academic and recreational activities), youth support programs at the Surrey Youth Resources Centre (e.g., Moving Ahead Program), the Welcome Centre in Surrey, and immigrant service agencies (e.g., Pacific Community Resources, Options, S.U.C.C.E.S.S., and Guildford Youth Resource Centre). Participants specifically emphasized the important role of youth workers and settlement workers in immigrant service agencies. For example, one of the participants explained, “A [settlement worker] from MAP [Moving Ahead Program] program helped me a lot to get my scholarship from [a local college] and he is still helping me.” This example demonstrated the significant role of a youth worker in the participant's access to post-secondary education.

The positive outcome for participants of utilizing resources from communities and government were their feelings of being welcomed while getting connected and familiarized with their communities. They also learned English and different aspects about Canadian culture. This quote from one of the participants demonstrated these two outcomes. She said, “At the Welcome Centre they teach you everything about Canada – government and all those things. Welcome Centre helped me a lot with learning the
culture and English." Additionally, the participants received financial and academic support giving them a feeling of increased energy to deal with the challenges of resettlement.

**Category 5: Financial resources (7 incidents, 50% participation rate)**

Of the seven incidents, one incident demonstrated the hindering aspect of a lack of financial resources, and the rest of the incidents created the wish-list items. The hindering aspect of not having enough money was identified by one of the participants. He stated, “When I got here, at first I had nowhere to live, nowhere to stay and nothing to eat.” This participant, who was not accompanied by his parents, described how not having enough money and support made the first few months of his resettlement challenging (e.g., not having enough money to buy winter clothes).

As for the wish-list items, the common issues participants identified included a lack of financial resources and the wish to have more money. For instance, one of the participants said, “There are basketball camps that I would love to go to, but for me it is kind of impossible. Money will make it possible.” This comment highlights the positive impact of having more money, and thus, a more comfortable life.

**Category 6: Adjusting with the passage of time (5 incidents, 33% participation rate)**

This category encompasses four helpful incidents and one wish list item. All the incidents in this category suggested the participants’ awareness of the effect of time on their resettlement in Canada. Four of the participants commented on how time lessened the challenges of resettlement. For example, one of them explained, “I think with time it gets easier. In the first week everything was difficult. But day after day it got easier.” Another participant said, “As time passed, in grade twelve, English wasn't that hard because I had improved a lot.” These two examples underlined the contribution of the time to the participants’ improvement of their language proficiency and adjustment to their new life in Canada.
The wish-list item expressed the participant’s wish to have moved to Canada at a younger age and its positive impact it would have had on his learning. He stated, “I wish I was here at younger age. When you are here and older, it is harder to learn.” Although this wish could never be fulfilled, it shows the participant’s awareness of the significant role of the age at the time of immigration in his successful adjustment in Canada.

Summary

As was presented in this chapter, participants provided a great deal of valuable information on what they perceived to be helpful and hindering in their process of building resilience. In the following chapter, I discuss the findings in light of related literature and implications for theory, research, and clinical practice.
Chapter 5.

Discussion

In the literature on youth resilience in mass trauma or extreme adversities, the majority of studies are focused on factors that contribute to resilience in young victims during and after the disaster. My study departs from these other studies by adding to our knowledge about the individual qualities (e.g., personal characteristics, adaptive coping, strategies for acculturation) and contextual qualities (e.g., social support, adjustment with the passage of time, school climate) that contribute to the young refugees’ resilience after resettling in a Western country. Therefore, the findings of this study are compared to both the current studies of mass trauma (e.g., natural disaster, war) and to the broader extant literature on resilience in at-risk youth in the general population to determine where they coincide or diverge. Additionally, I highlight results that are unique to this study (e.g., having a role-model, adjusting with the passage of time).

I begin by describing the importance of participants’ perception about what was important for them in adjusting well in Canada. I then explain my findings using the integrative framework as the scaffolding for my descriptions. I start with the individual level to outline the personal characteristics that contributed to resilience in participants. Then I explain the findings related to the level of interaction (i.e., context in which refugee youth are in an ongoing interactions with others) that helped participants adjust well in Canada. This part is followed by explanations for the findings at societal level and their contribution to participants’ resilience. Lastly, I discuss the implications of these findings for counsellors and educators who are involved with refugee youth. I conclude by describing significant limitations of the study, and outlining possible future research directions.
Participants’ Definition of Adjusting Well in Canada

The participants’ descriptions of adjusting well suggested three key aspects: cultural (e.g., trying to fit into Canadian culture, while keeping parts of their ethnic culture), interpersonal (e.g., “basically keep your family happy and making good friendships”), and academic (e.g., “study hard and do something that’s good for your future”). The critical incidents related to the most cited key aspect (cultural: 100% participation rate) suggested that all but one of the participants had adopted the essential parts of the Canadian culture, while maintaining the essential parts of their ethnic culture (i.e., integration strategy). The lone participant insisted on adopting Canadian culture and did not wish to maintain his cultural heritage, reflecting an assimilation strategy. The majority of the participants identified the integration of both cultures as the key to their successful adjustment in Canada. The identified connection between cultural integration and successful adaptation is supported by Berry and colleagues’ (2006) study that ascertained learning and maintenance of both cultures promotes better developmental outcomes and psychological well-being in immigrant youth. Bicultural orientation was also linked to better school adjustment in a couple of studies (e.g., Berry et al., 2006; Phinney et al., 2001).

Furthermore, the three key aspects identified by the participants match with the age-salient developmental and acculturative tasks that researchers (e.g., Berry et al., 2006; Masten, 2001) have considered central for successful adaptation of immigrant youth. This link between what the participants said and what researchers suggest, highlight the key criteria for refugee youth to adjust well in Canada. However, further research is required in this regard.

Integrative Framework: The Individual Level

In this section, I explain the findings that encompass the individual qualities that participants highlighted as important for resiliency in their adaptive processes during their resettlement experiences. I include current literature that is relevant to the findings of this study to establish relationships where applicable.
Individual Qualities

Participants identified certain personal characteristics and attitudes (e.g., perseverant, strongly motivated, openness to other cultures, self-confident), as well as strategies (e.g., adaptive copings, effective language learning skills) that contributed to their successful adjustment in Canada. The personal characteristics reported by participants do not imply features that inherently create vulnerability, or secure protective factors, but rather, they reflect certain adaptive functions that result from possessing these personal characteristics. Consequently, participants showed a heightened resilience during their resettlement in Canada. As I describe these personal characteristics below, I compare my findings with current research on these aspects.

Personal characteristics and attitudes

Findings from this study demonstrate that well-adjusted resilient participants believed that having such characteristics as curiosity, a passion for learning, perseverance, self-confidence, and ambition helped them to do well at school, maintain good relationships at home, and establish good friendships. This finding is consistent with longitudinal studies that looked at the connection between personality and resilience (i.e., competence in age-salient developmental tasks) demonstrating that children high on mastery motivation (e.g., being curious, creative, imaginative, persistent, confident, competitive, and striving to meet high standards) did well in school and also predicted that they would do well in the future domains of achievement, both in school and at work (Shiner, 2000; Shiner & Masten, 2008; Shiner, Masten, & Roberst, 2012). This finding also fits into a broader area of research in the literature that links personality traits to competence in multiple domains within and across time. For example, in Shiner and Masten’s research (2012), conscientiousness predicted positive changes in achievement over 10- and 20-year spans of time, and childhood agreeableness predicted positive changes in rule-abiding conduct from childhood into emerging adulthood 10 years later.

Furthermore, by grouping together some of the personal characteristics reported by participants, it is possible to see how they represent the two out of five main factors of Goldberg’s (1981) Big Five model of personality traits (i.e., openness, conscientiousness, extroversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism). For instance,
participants' reported characteristics such as perseverance; being ambitious and goal oriented; being compliant; being a hard-worker; having self-discipline; and strong motivation. These match well with the sub-traits of the conscientiousness factor in the Big Five personality traits (e.g., being conformist, being hard-working and reliable, very organized, demonstrating self-discipline and aim for achievement, presenting goal-directed behaviours). Likewise, other reported personal characteristics such as having a sense of responsibility and supporting others; as well as being considerate and kind; fit into agreeableness factor of Big Five (i.e., personality traits such as being altruistic, kind and sympathetic, as well as warm and considerate). Consistent with findings from this study, high scores in these two factors of the Big Five model (i.e., contentiousness and agreeableness personality traits) differentiated the competent and resilient homeless children from the maladaptive homeless children in the Project Competence Longitudinal Study (PCLS; Shiner & Masten, 2012). Likewise, the protective effect of conscientiousness (equivalent to self-discipline in this study) was consistently reported by the research on children’s resilience in the context of high adversity (Shiner & Masten, 2012; Lengua & Wachs, 2012). In PCLS, Shiner and Masten (2012) also reported that when children are struggling with adversity (i.e., homelessness), agreeableness has protective effects on social competence.

In a similar fashion, pioneers in resilience research (e.g., Garmezy, 1981; Masten et al., 1990) noted that possessing an appealing, agreeable, or easy-going personality was often associated with resilience. In their studies, resilient children were described as more cooperative, positive, self-confident (self-efficacy, an internal locus of control), and emotionally stable (Masten, 2014). Two of the subcategories: being optimistic and positive (i.e., participants’ ability to look for the best in any situation and expect good things to happen) and being compliant (i.e., participants’ ability to deliberately follow the rules and obey their teachers and parents) in this study are similar to the definitions of being cooperative and positive in the above-mentioned study. In another study, Magro (2009) reported how flexibility and intelligence were two personality traits often associated with resilience in his sample of young Canadian refugees. Magro defined intelligence as possessing which matches the incidents that represented the subcategory, being talented, in this study.
**Self-confidence, self-reliance, and related reward systems.** Participants also identified possessing self-confidence and self-reliance as significant in their successful adaptation in Canada. This finding is consistent with Betancourt, Brennan, Rubin-Smith, Fitzmaurice, and Gilman’s (2010) study that reported child soldiers recovering from rape, demonstrated greater self-confidence than other child soldiers. The authors attributed this observation to the recovered child soldiers’ confidence in their own abilities to endure prolonged hardships during the years of captivity.

Furthermore, participants’ accounts under self-confidence and self-reliance subcategories proposed a link between their perceived agency or competence, high confidence in their own abilities to cope, and their successful adjustment. According to Masten (2014), perceived agency (e.g., ‘I did it’) by children in the process of overcoming a challenge is often accompanied by a positive emotion that rewards the effort involved in meeting the challenge. The experience of overcoming the challenge raises self-efficacy, which in turn fosters persistence in the face of adversity and is more likely to result in success rather than giving up. This theorem can be used to explain the presence of perseverance, self-confidence, and self-reliance in the participants’ accounts. It can be argued that the participants’ experience of overcoming the challenges of successfully adapting in Canada resulted in their sense of self-efficacy, which in turn led to their perseverance in the face of difficulties. Taking action and being persistent were suggested by the incidents under the perseverance category in the present study. This finding is also supported by the Cryder, Kilmer, Tedeschi, and Calhoun (2006) study that found how competence beliefs were related to posttraumatic growth among children between five and six years of age after Hurricane Floyd hit in 1999.

Additionally, having a sense of responsibility and supporting others (i.e., participants’ sense of duty to themselves and their parents to work and contribute money to the family) was also reported to enhance resilience in participants. It could be argued that taking responsibility helped the participants recognize that they can make a difference and increased their self-efficacy (i.e., I can do it). It is possible that taking age-appropriate and manageable responsibilities helped raise the chances of adaptive adjustment here in Canada (Masten, Liebkind, & Hernandez, 2012).
**Self-discipline and self-control.** Self-discipline was reported as another personal characteristic that helped build resilience in the participants. This finding is consistent with studies that have shown self-control skills to be important for human adaptation, development, and resilience. Self-control skills described in these studies are conceptually equivalent to incidents under the self-discipline subcategory that demonstrated the willpower and ability of participants to persist at difficult tasks and/or postpone a pleasure seeking behaviour when it was required. For instance, results from a classic study about self-control showed that children who resisted the temptation to eat a marshmallow now in order to wait for a larger reward a few minutes later, demonstrated more competence and less problems in adolescence and early adulthood (Mischel et al., 2011).

However, research is somewhat limited in looking at the role of self-control skills in building resilience for children from war zones (Masten, 2014). In a rare study on young victims of December 2007 political conflict in Kenya, self-control and self-regulation skills in preschoolers measured prior to the incident were shown to predict better post-conflict outcomes in the children (e.g., less aggression, more prosocial behaviour).

Findings from this study also shed light on the strategies that the participants used to discipline themselves when it was needed. More specifically, participants described incidents in which they intuitively implemented the Premack’s principle: performing a less desirable activity to get at the more desirable activity in order to reinforce themselves to do challenging activities (e.g., chemistry homework). The advantage of possessing self-discipline is also demonstrated in studies that linked developmentally appropriate self-control skills to both concurrent adjustment (i.e., competence in developmental task domains and fewer mental health problems) and future adjustment in children (Carlson et al., 2013; Rothbart, 2011).

According to Masten (2014), developmental psychologists have observed that as individuals develop, they acquire the skills to direct their capabilities toward achieving their goals. They often refer to these self-control skills as self-regulation and show how some of these functions occur automatically (out of conscious awareness) while others
require voluntary effort. These scholars refer to “cognitive control processes” (p. 89) as the voluntary management of one’s own mental and physical capabilities in order to meet a goal. “Cognitive control processes” were suggested by some of the incidents under the self-discipline subcategory that reflected the participants’ abilities to delay the instant gratification for a greater reward; make themselves do something less desirable when necessary; in addition to voluntary organizing their mental and physical capabilities to achieve their goals. Masten (2014) argues that cognitive control encompasses a variety of skills essential to success in everyday life and over the longer term (e.g., paying attention, suppressing an impulse or automatic response in order to make a preferred or novel response that is more adaptive, inhibiting short-term impulses for long-term gains, making yourself do something boring). Incidents in this study showed that cognitive control skills contributed to the participants’ academic competence.

In line with this finding, two studies have shown that cognitive control skills have a key protective influence for high-risk children, enabling them to succeed in a context of severe adversity or poverty. More specifically, in a research on families in shelters, cognitive control skills were reported to be broad predictors of positive school function such as academic achievement, getting along with peers, relationships with the teacher, and prosocial behaviour in children (Masten et al., 2012). Also, in a study of natural disasters, Terranova, Boxer, and Morris (2009) ascertained the protective effect of cognitive control skills (i.e., moderating the risk of PTSD symptoms) in their study of sixth graders after Hurricane Katrina.

**Adaptive copings**

Participants also identified strategies that helped them cope with challenges and made them feel better in distressing situations. The findings imply that participants in this study were able to moderate the negative effects of stressors and experience positive adaptation by implementing healthy coping and effective emotion-regulation strategies. They used strategies such as physical expression, positive self-talk, connections with others, relaxation, and leisure to regulate the negative emotional experiences in stressful situations. This finding is in line with Masten’s (2000) theoretical conception of the ability of resilient individuals (a) to identify the effects of stressful situations, and (b) to experience positive outcomes despite sources of adversity. She argues that resilient
individuals use coping strategies that elicit positive emotions in order to regulate negative emotional situations. They engage in relaxation (i.e., activities that provide them with an opportunity to interpret and assess problems), exploration (i.e., using their creativity and problem-solving skills to brainstorm alternatives) and hopeful, optimistic thinking (i.e., maintaining hope and faith to overcome adversity) as ways of regulating negative emotional experiences during high levels of stress. One important finding about the participants in this study was that they were very creative and resourceful in regulating their emotions (e.g., soft pinches to tolerate distress) and using problem-focused strategies (e.g., using sign language to communicate) in order to overcome challenging situations. The generation of these protective and creative mechanisms may be the outcome of the participants’ successful engagement with adversity (Rutter, 1985). The importance of this personal characteristic is also argued by Beasley, Thompson, and Davidson (2003) who ascertain how the development of protective mechanism (such as coping and emotion-regulation strategies) “is associated with key turning points in an individual’s life, as the negotiation of these turning points can alter developmental trajectories from risk pathways to protective ones” (p. 78). It is possible that previous adverse experiences have increased the participants’ personal resources to draw on (e.g., coping resources) in times of need, and which have important value in their coping processes (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2007).

Belief in God and prayer. Findings under this category underline the helpful aspects of the participants’ religious faith and practice, as well as their belief in the meaning of their lives. This result is consistent with case reports and studies that demonstrate resilience to be associated with hope, religious faith, and the belief that life has meaning. For instance, Viktor Frankl (1959), in Man’s Search for Meaning, described the power of perceived meaning during the overwhelming suffering in his harrowing story of life in a concentration camp. In a similar fashion, the participants’ reported capacity for meaning making during overwhelming situations suggests that personal or shared systems of belief may be important for building resilience, especially in situations of great suffering and loss of control (Masten, 2014). This finding is supported by a few researchers who have identified hope, a sense that life has meaning, and spirituality as protective influences in the lives of resilient young victims of mass trauma. For instance, Boothby, Crawford, and Halperin (2006) stated that spiritual beliefs
and religious faith, commonly described in resilience case reports, may afford protections for children with experience of war. In their study of Uganda’s former child soldiers, Klasen, Oettingen, Daniels, Post, Hoyer, and Adam (2010) reported that youth with better mental health also reported more spiritual support.

According to Alba, Raboteau, and DeWind (2008), religion and spirituality function as a critical and vital context for developing children, and has played a significant role in the history of American immigration. These authors argue that religion and spirituality provide institutional resources during social adaptation, and give personal meaning to young American immigrants interpreting their immigration experiences. Likewise, spirituality and religiosity have explicitly been identified as individual and community-level assets that promote positive development features such as healthy identity formation, civic engagement, and sense of purpose (Dowling et al., 2004; Lerner, Roeser & Phelphs, 2008). Religiosity in participants could possibly be accounted for from a developmental perspective where religion is seen to play a crucial role in many adolescents’ lives (Pearce & Denton, 2011). Results from the Gallup Youth Survey also demonstrated that adolescents are at their most religious in their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviour during their early teen years, but that religious fervour begins to decline as they enter adulthood (Gallup International Institute, 1999). Also, compared to adolescent boys, adolescent girls reported higher levels of religiousness, positive religious coping, and daily spiritual experiences (DesRosiers & Miller, 2007); there was, however, no support for gender difference in this study.

**Humour.** Many anecdotal accounts from the participants in this study, suggest how there is some role for humour as a protective factor because it helped them be more likable and admired among their group of friends. This finding is congruent with a study that reported having a reputation for “a good sense of humour” as one of the items strongly correlated with popularity in the classroom for resilient children (Masten et al., 1985). Likewise, Shiner and Masten (2012) found that for children in normal circumstances, humour was associated with IQ scores, social problem-solving skills, personality, and creative thinking. Resilient children scoring high in different aspects of humour were viewed as leaders with good ideas for things to do, were more popular, outgoing, and considered happy by their peers. Also, their teachers viewed them as
more engaged, attentive, cooperative, responsive, and productive students (Masten, 2014). The reported positive impact of humour mentioned by participants in this study is a unique result that was not reported by studies on resilience in children of war and massive trauma (Masten, 2014).

**Having hobbies.** As another helpful factor, participants in this study listed the activities they did in their free-time as pleasurable (i.e., sport, art, and reading activities). The participants remarked how their hobbies provided them with an outlet for stress, distracted them from upsetting thoughts, helped them stay present, and benefited them physically. This is in line with the earlier discussion about resilient children’s ability to regulate their emotion as an adaptive coping strategy. It also is consistent with Alvord and Grado’s (2005) finding that resilient children take part in extracurricular activities that enable them to be a part of prosocial groups and receive recognition for their efforts.

Playing sports was one of the most oft-mentioned activities by participants in this study. Eight of 12 youth in this study repeatedly emphasized the significance of sport in their successful adjustment in Canada. It is noteworthy that five of these young participants played for their school sports teams and were seriously considering it as a possible future career alternative. Resilient refugee youths’ involvement in sports has been reported in a few studies in Canada. Similar to participants in this study, McEwen’s (2007) study on risk and resilience in refugee children in Canada, reported how playing sports provided youth with an opportunity to develop their social competence by learning the mannerisms and language of the host culture. Research in general shows that physical activity is known to enhance mental health, particularly when it is enjoyable and tailored to the specific goals and needs of youth, as opposed to activities that are only based around skill development (Keleher & Armstrong, 2005).

**Reaching out for help.** The findings of this study shed light on participants’ ability to reach out for help when necessary. The participants reported how their ability to ask for help made them efficient and successful in overcoming challenges. These findings were congruent with Werner’s (2000) view that resilient children have the ability to combine their sense of autonomy with the ability to ask for help when required. Even when their parents were not able to help, resilient children were able to find others to
provide them with the help they needed in order to develop into competent individuals. Hence, it could be argued that reaching out for help raises the participants’ chances for successful adaptation, especially in a novel environment, by receiving support from family, friends, and spiritual or cultural groups. This personal characteristic also had the potential to provide participants to seek opportunities for access to services and supports from community resources.

**Having a role model.** This subcategory was one of the unique results in this study. It underlines the helpful aspect for participants’ in having role models in their lives. The participants emphasized how one of the most significant aspects on their path of self-improvement was to look up to role models and emulate their behaviours. It could be argued that having a positive role model demonstrates the participants’ creativity in their attempts to achieve their goals. The mechanism of how a role-model can positively impact participants can be explained using Bandura’s (1982) social learning theory. Bandura argues that human beings can learn new information and behaviours by watching other people around them. This type of learning, known as observational learning or modeling, can be used to explain a wide variety of participants’ behaviours, such as carefully monitoring the people who have reached the goals that they intend to achieve and following their steps.

**Effective language-learning skills**

Similar to adult Vietnamese refugees in Vu’s (2014) study, young participants in this study reported how they held themselves responsible for learning English and actively engaged in ways to improve their English proficiency (e.g., reading English books, making friends with Canadians, taking online English courses). Good language-learning skills can be vital to adaptation for refugee children who start life in a foreign country with a different language (Masten, 2014). Research has highlighted the association of language fluency with greater success in school in studies of war refugees (e.g., Hubbard, 1997), and fewer PTSD symptoms (Halcon et al., 2004). In a similar fashion, Sack et al. (1996) demonstrated that greater English skills were associated with lower rates of depression among the Cambodian adolescent refugees. English-language skills were also linked to greater competence — academic and job, as well as romantic
and social competence — in Cambodian refugee youth in the United States (Hubbard, 1997).

One of the reported effective strategies for learning English was to make friends with Canadians or with children from other countries to force one to practice speaking English. Some of the participants, particularly the ones who were more fluent in English, stated how they only have English-speaking Canadian friends and they do not make friends at school with people from their own country. This finding contradicts the notion that immigrant children only choose friends who can speak their native language and avoid those who do not to protect their psychological well-being by avoiding embarrassment and the potential harassment by non-immigrant friends (Garcia Coll, 2013). The Phinney and colleagues’ study (2006) showing how immigrant youth’s choices of friendships are influenced by the length of their residence in the new country and ethnic composition of the neighbourhood in which they reside, demonstrates that a longer residence in the host country or living in more ethnically diverse neighbourhoods are related to having more contact with national peers than with peers from the immigrants’ own ethnic group. That being said, since the participants in this study claimed independence in their choices of friendships, I argue that their friendships were necessary and adaptive so participants could perform competently in school, fit into the culture, develop broad social connections, and connect to Canadian culture (Masten, Liebkind, & Hernandez, 2012).

Within the integrative framework, there is a fundamental role of friendships from one’s own ethnic group or from the national society, as influencing the process of acculturation; the association with national peers introduces immigrant youth to the new culture (Motti-Stefanidi et al., 2012).

**Strategies for acculturation**

Results of this study highlight the importance of the strategies that participants used to facilitate the process of adapting to the cultural and social patterns of Canadians. The critical incidents provided a snapshot of actions that participants took to facilitate the acculturation process and build resilience (i.e., getting involved in the community; going to workshops at the Welcome Centre; pushing themselves out of their
bubbles and making friends with Canadians; searching on YouTube about Canadian culture; carefully observing Canadians around them and learning the social codes). The salient role of acculturation strategies was also emphasized in the Abubakar and colleagues study (2012) where acculturation strategies were linked to optimal psychological well-being among people with immigrant or minority backgrounds. They reported how studies in the literature illustrated that adaptive acculturation strategies were positively associated with educational achievement, psychological adjustment, self-esteem, and life satisfaction for immigrant adolescents.

The participants also expressed a positive attitude towards Canada and identified it as the “land of opportunity.” They described how their need for belonging to a “better place” encouraged them to actively learn English and embrace Canadian culture and values. This finding is supported by Garcia Coll’s (2013) view that the positive attitude of immigrants potentially facilitates the process of acculturation and ignites their motivation to successfully adjust to the host country.

Participants also reported how being prepared was another helpful factor in the process of their resettlement in Canada. They explained how having access to technology made it possible for them to watch videos about Canada and learn about the culture, language, and weather. The participants emphasized how having themselves mentally prepared before moving to Canada helped them have a more realistic image of how life here would look. It appears that access to television, Internet, and other media made it possible for participants in this study to be a part of a new global generation who can become both comfortable and familiarized with North American ideals and culture before setting foot in Canada. For this new generation of young immigrants, the transition process start prior to arriving to Canada, which means they come here with already developed basic cultural competencies that may enable them to transition with ease, something that would not have been possible a decade ago (Garcia Coll, 2013).

As another strategy for acculturation, participants pointed to their active involvement in the community. This involvement included volunteering in their community and participating in workshops or activities to connect with Canadian people. It was evident from the identified critical incidents how participants initiated activities with
an intention to enhance their opportunities to practice English, get engaged in the society, and find friends. In support of this finding, Motti-Stefanidi and colleagues (2012) argue that youth who engage in civic activities are more likely to be successful in other domains of their lives. In general, being civically engaged is an indication of youth’s interest in their society; for participants in this study it could also have been an indicator of their inclusion in the society (Masten, Liebkind, & Hernandez, 2012). Furthermore, I argue that because of their biculturalism, participants in this study have civic assets that allow them to contribute to both cultures, and their civic activities could be recognized as an indicator of how they negotiate the relationship between the two cultures (Jensen, 2008). It is possible that civic engagement enhanced participants’ development by giving them “positive motivation, beneficial peer networks, feelings of worth and longer time horizons” (Masten, Liebkind, & Hernandez, 2012, p. 136).

Lastly, participants stressed the positive impact of making friends with Canadian children, or children from other countries, on learning Canadian culture and integrating well in Canadian society. These findings echo the results from a study that demonstrated having cross-racial friends as having positive effects on psychological and sociocultural adaptation of young immigrants (Lease & Blake, 2005).

**Integrative Framework: The Level of Interaction and The Societal Level**

Based on the contextual qualities identified from participants’ critical incidents, the level of interaction in the integrative framework involves the role of social support and positive school climate in participants’ successful adjustment in Canada. The societal level in the integrative framework includes the protective role of government and community resources in participants’ successful adaptation. Also, this level involves the impeding role of cultural difference and lack of sufficient financial resources in participants’ success in school and establishing friendships. I first outline the contextual qualities identified by the participants and then explain their contribution to resilience during participants’ resettlement experiences.
**Contextual Qualities**

Participants reported certain contextual qualities that contributed to their better social and cultural adjustment, academic achievement, and psychological adaptation. The contextual qualities that built participants’ resilience were: (a) social support; (b) school climate; (c) government and community resources; and (d) cultural differences. I explain each of these findings in terms of their relation to the level of interaction and the societal level in the integrative framework below.

**Family, friends, and social support**

Findings in this study shed light on different forms of support that family provided to participants and were identified as significant during their successful adjustment in Canada. These forms of support included: receiving encouragement from parents (e.g., study hard, speaking English at home), informational support (i.e., parents listening to their stories and providing useful information and advice), emotional support (i.e., parents offering empathy, affection, love, and reassurance), and tangible support (i.e., helping them with homework and providing financial assistance). The family support created positive influences in participants’ lives; ameliorated feelings of loneliness and isolation; provided encouragement and energy to deal with challenges; relieved the stress from the transition and change that they were going through; helped choose the right friends; and improved scholastic outcome. The protective function of parents for participants is congruent with the views of other scholars (e.g., Masten, 2014) who highlight the parents’ central role in their children’s development of adaptive systems such as cognitive development and related problem-solving skills. They also consider parents to be “cultural conduits” (Masten, 2014, p. 126) where they transmit cultural practices that may foster resilience, take an important role in predicting dangers, prepare their children to deal with expected challenges, and actively seek help for their children as needed (McCormick et al. 2011; Masten 2014). Due to their multifaceted function, it may not be surprising to find that the presence of effective caregivers had an important and pervasive impact on resilience in participants in this study.

This finding is consistent with a study that linked resilience to strong family relationships in Palestinian children exposed to political violence (Qouta et al., 2008).
Similarly, another study reported that the quality of the parent-child relationship moderated the symptoms of PTSD and depression in Sri Lankan adolescents exposed to the 2004 tsunami (Wickrama & Kaspar, 2007). Family acceptance was also shown to be associated with all of the adaptive recovery indicators in child soldiers (Betancourt et al., 2010). However, my findings contradict studies that reported highly protective parents were shown to increase the risk of PTSD in adolescents following a flood disaster (Bokszczanin, 2008). This contradictory result highlights the importance of further research on this topic.

Similar to the participants’ reported helpful support from peers in this study, Hutchinson and Dorsett (2012) showed that support from peers help refugee youth cope with resettlement and predict higher levels of well-being in different domains of their lives (i.e., psychological, social and environmental). Apart from receiving support from friends and family, participants in this study also pointed to the benefits of receiving support from the community (e.g., teachers, youth workers). This finding is congruent with a study on social support in unaccompanied asylum-seeking boys that highlighted the importance of a supportive community network for refugees, and identified the staff of the asylum centre and community as the most significant resources for support (Mels et al., 2008).

**School climate**

Results from this study also emphasized the significant role of school climate in the participants’ successful adaptation in Canada. The participants in this study remarked how a positive school climate promoted positive behaviour and interactions and resulted in their feeling safe, included, and accepted. According to the integrative framework, schools serve as one of the main acculturative contexts for immigrant youth because, “they represent and introduce the immigrants to the culture of the receiving society” (Motti-Stefanidi et al., 2012, p. 133). Hence, school can be viewed as the most important developmental and acculturative contexts for participants in this study, which also represent the impact of proximal context on the quality of participants’ adaptation. Similar to findings in this study, certain school characteristics have been demonstrated to predict positive school outcomes for immigrant children (Fuligni, 1997) such as:
nondifferential treatment; support from teachers; and support and acceptance from peers.

On the other hand, a negative school climate was mentioned as a hindering factor for a few participants at the beginning of their resettlement in Canada. This finding emphasized the strong influence of teachers and immigrant students' beliefs about immigration on a school's educational and social climate (Vollmer, as cited in Garcia Coll, 2013). For example, in a culturally diverse classroom, teachers’ preferences for the way students' think and behave in relation to their own ethnicity and the dominant culture may impact immigrant students in several ways. Teachers who are not aware of immigrant students’ cultural background, or who expect them to assimilate to the national culture as fast as possible, may contribute to a high risk of stress or stress-related health problems. (Masten, Liebkind, & Hernandez, 2012). These attitudes from teachers may also make it difficult for immigrant students to establish friendships with national peers as a result of ignoring behaviours that are prejudicial and discriminatory from students from the dominant culture (Garcia Coll, 2013).

The findings of this study also highlight the hindering effects of peer rejection, such as feelings of embarrassment, invalidation, and dismissal. The perception of not being accepted by some of their classmates impacted a few participants resulting in their avoidance of speaking English in class; avoidance of other children in the class; and feeling shy and alone. These experiences negatively impacted participants’ sense of belonging and their willingness to practice speaking English. This finding supports other studies that identify negative school climate and peer rejection as barriers to school success and the healthy acculturation of young immigrants (Berry et al., 2006).

**Protective role of government and community resources**

The developers of the integrative framework argue that the communities’ capability of effectively addressing the immigrant youth’s needs and effectively dealing with the issues raised by immigration contribute to the successful adaptation of immigrant children (Motti-Stefanidi et al., 2012). In a similar fashion, findings from this study showed the benefit of attending community programs such as alternative education programs (a combination of academic and recreational activities) and youth
support programs (e.g., Moving Ahead Program); and receiving assistance from government resources such as welcome centres and immigrant service agencies like Pacific Community Resources, Options, S.U.C.C.E.S.S., and the Guildford Youth Resource Centre. Utilizing resources from communities and government, participants felt welcomed and connected; familiarized with their community; more competent in speaking English; educated about the local culture; supported financially and academically; and had increased energy to deal with the challenges of resettlement. The significant role of settlement agencies for participants supports other studies that focused on the role of settlement agencies in promoting resilience in Canadian refugees. For example, similarly to the participants’ descriptions, Simich and Andermann (2014) described settlement agencies as having “deep concern for the wellbeing and successful integration of new comers to Canada and a set of shared practices to help accomplish this mandate” (p. 167). These authors argued that settlement agencies impact the refugee youth’s resilience both directly via services that they provide and indirectly via their influence on the quality of service that the resettlement workers provide. They explained that settlement agencies’ contextual factors (e.g., low pay, heavy case-loads, precarious contract work) negatively affect the settlement workers’ ability to properly address the refugee youth’s needs, which in turn impact the refugee’s adjustment in Canada.

The important role of youth workers and settlement workers in young refugees’ adjustment is also supported by the findings from this study. According to Simich and Andermann (2014), settlement and youth workers play a crucial role in providing individual support and in supporting refugee communities to become resilient in Canada. These scholars have argued that factors such as settlement workers’ experience and their ability of making a personal and trustworthy connection with refugee youth are related to resilience in this population.

Lastly, findings from this study contribute to the limited existing research on the impact of community-based protective factors on resilience in refugee children. Congruent with findings from this study, Cortes and Buchanan (2007) suggested that community support was a core theme for recovery in a case study of resilience in child soldiers in Columbia. Also, Betancourt and colleagues (2010) found that community
acceptance was a key factor associated with better adjustment during rehabilitation of the traumatized child soldiers from Sierra Leone.

**Cultural differences**

A few participants in this study described their lack of familiarity with Canadian culture as impeding their social and academic success during the initial phase of their resettlement in Canada. This finding underlines the host culture as having a potential to function both as a source of risk and adversity, as well as a source of protection and resilience (Masten, 2014). Some participants noted how they faced discrimination and threat in Canada due to cultural differences. As reported by a few participants, clashes in cultural values created stress and imposed pressure on them while navigating their multicultural host country. Serafica and Vargas (2006) have argued that perceived difficulties in dealing with cultural differences led to “acculturation stress” (p. 68), which was reported as a hindering factor for a number of participants arriving in Canada.

Finally, participants’ discussed a lack of financial resources and the wish to have more money because limited financial resources influenced their lives in significant ways. It is important to pay attention to this impeding factor, especially when financial security was identified as one of the contextual and institutional factors that influenced resiliency in Anderson’s (2004) study.

**A Unique and Important Finding**

The critical incidents in this study also suggested that participants were aware of the effect of time passing as they resettled in Canada. They expressed the importance of both the age at immigration and years spent in Canada. More specifically, participants emphasized the role of time passing as decreasing the challenges they experienced in resettlement, including their wish to move here at a younger age so that it would be easier to learn. From the participants’ point of view, passing of time involved inevitable personal changes that facilitated their successful adaptation in Canada (e.g., learning to smile and greet with other people in the street, learning to speak English). The identified cultural and personal changes over time helped the participants to build friendships and succeed in school. This finding is unique to this study and adds to the existing literature
on possible factors that may contribute to resilience in refugee youth. In a similar fashion, Berry and colleagues' (2006) view how years spend in a new country has an important influence on immigrant youth’s adaptation. They argue that with more years spent in a new country, young immigrants progress in acculturation and move away from the diffuse profile (characterised by uncertainty about their place in society and lack of commitment to a specific culture), which may be the same reason why participants in this study experienced fewer challenges with the passage of time. Additionally, in their study of the degree to which the second language is spoken with a foreign accent, Masten, Liebkind, and Hernandez (2012) ascertained that the capacity to speak English with a native-like accent declines linearly with age. Berry and colleagues corroborate these findings by showing how children who immigrated prior to starting primary school had a smoother adaptation over time than children who immigrated later.

**Resiliency and a Lack of Focus on Hindrances**

In reviewing the hindering incidents and wish-list items, the number of critical incidents in these sections was surprisingly low (with 6% hindering incidents and 3% wish-list items). One possible explanation could be that only focusing on present (i.e., here and now), as well as positive aspects of life, are characteristics of being resilient. This observation is similar to Beiser’s (1999) study, where he found how under conditions of extreme adversity, victims of overwhelming stress split the three spheres of time (i.e., past, present, future) apart and only concentrated on the present. This may also explain another surprising observation that none of the participants mentioned the memories of their past traumatic events as hindering incidents. This is similar to Hutchinson’s (2012) observations that most refugee people prefer to talk about the present and the future. He further explains that even if refugees wish to talk about some of their past experiences, it is often framed within the context of strength (i.e., the strength and competence they developed through their past experiences helped them build resilience). Another argument could be that refugees have a cognitive style of focusing only on the present and seeking positive aspects as a way of coping. Another possible explanation could be that participants suppress traumatic memories in order to cope with emotional and psychological impacts of trauma (e.g., depression, anxiety, social isolation, survivors’ guilt feeling). In Beiser’s (1999) study, suppressing the
traumatic experience was shown to be effective, at least for the early years of resettlement for Southeast Asian refugees, as opposed to their counterparts who admitted the past trauma into their present life, which increased their risk for PTSD and depression (Beiser 1999). Lastly, the low number of hindering incidents might be because talking about the past traumatic experiences and/or negative aspects of resettlement in Canada was not encouraged by the participants’ parents at home, or was socially unacceptable in their communities. Further research, however, is required in this regard.

Last thing noteworthy in terms of the findings is that I observed no salient cultural differences in resiliency for this small number of participants. The results demonstrated how participants shared similar individual characteristics and attitudes that contributed to their resiliency, even though they were called from a variety of cultural backgrounds. May be this was partly because different cultures and people around the world share many of the same biological and social functions, potentials, limitations, resources, vulnerabilities and adaptive challenges (Masten, 2014). Additionally, the participants in this study were thriving for a successful adaption in the same Canadian context.

Implications and Recommendations

Findings from this study shed light on some of the personal and contextual resilience factors that have helped participants to adapt and even thrive in Canada, despite their past traumatic experiences. Therefore, the results can potentially guide the efforts of mental health professionals, educators, youth workers, and policy makers to promote resilience in refugee youth. The implications and recommendations informed by my study are divided into three areas: recommendations for mental health professionals, recommendations for schools, educators, and school counsellors, and recommendations for policy makers. Below I discuss each of these recommendations respectively.

Recommendations for mental health professionals

Findings from this study inform us of refugee youth’s personal strengths and capabilities that helped them to build resilience. For example, incidents in this study
represented the participants’ ability to implement creative and adaptive coping strategies in the face of challenges. One implication of this understanding for mental health professionals is to consider strength-based models of intervention in their attempts to facilitate a successful adaptation for this population. To put this model into practice, it might be beneficial for practitioners to identify and validate refugee youth’s adaptive coping strategies, in addition to encouraging them to continue applying these strategies to overcome their challenges of resettlement in Canada. This approach would empower refugee youth to identify their own resources for coping and encourage them to utilize them for solving problems. Therefore, it is important for mental health professionals to recognize the adaptive individual strategies that young refugee clients have used to help them to get through difficult times and to build upon them when necessary. The strength-based approach is empowering for refugee youth because it helps them to uncover both internal and external factors that contribute to resilience (Hutchinson, 2012).

Furthermore, results from this study draw our attention to the contribution of spirituality and religion to resilience for some of participants in this study. This finding suggests that mental health professionals who work with refugee youth will benefit from having knowledge about different religions and practices. By demonstrating a genuine interest in refugee’s spirituality and religiosity, and actively engaging in nonjudgmental conversations about it, mental health professionals can improve their knowledge of their client’s religion based on the personal experience of their client. Familiarity with different religions will help mental health professionals to better identify and validate refugee youth’s adaptive religious practices and encourage them to keep using them in order to cope with difficult situations. Encouraging refugee youth to practice their cultural and religious rituals after resettlement can potentially facilitate their adaptation through restoring or mobilizing these traditions. Additionally, having sufficient knowledge about the client’s religion can help mental health professionals to better appreciate their clients’ perspectives.

Findings from this study also emphasized that resilience in refugee youth is not limited to personal qualities and strengths, but also includes the individual’s external environment. Accounts from participants shed light on more effective social and environmental factors that can potentially guide mental health professionals’ attempts to
provide culturally appropriate, accessible, and effective services to refugee youth. Culturally competent and sensitive practice requires practitioners to challenge their own assumptions, values, beliefs, and biases. It also demands mental health professionals who work with this population to gather knowledge about different cultures and learn from their interactions with clients, which in turn leads to gaining skills to connect and engage more effectively in a culturally sensitive practice (Hutchinson, 2012). Thus, mental health professionals in this field will benefit from periodic reflection on how cultural differences influence their sessions and interactions with the clients.

Our knowledge about contextual qualities that contribute to participants’ successful adaptation also advocates mental health professionals for targeted efforts to promote resilience through adding resources or assets to the lives of refugee youth. For example, the findings from this study demonstrate the benefits of attending alternative education programs, youth support programs at the Surrey Youth Resources Centre. Therefore, efforts such as informing mental health professionals of the resources and services available to refugee youth in the community results in the referral of those who are in need for additional support. To facilitate their successful adaptation in Canada, helping youth access inexpensive and available resources through immigrant service agencies can provide them with services such as skills training, support with homework, English learning opportunities, or field trips that familiarize them with the area where they live. It is worth noting that for some of the refugee children the problem is not the availability of resources, but gaining access to existing resources. Young refugees might have barriers to accessing financial and educational resources, or lack the knowledge of how to gain access to resources that may be available to them in their community. Thus, mental health professionals can work closely with case managers or settlement workers to help facilitate access to available resources and to connect refugee clients to the extra help they may need.

**Recommendations for schools, educators, and school counsellors**

Findings also identified bicultural orientation as an important factor in participants’ successful adaption (i.e., adopting the essential parts of Canadian culture while maintaining the essential parts of their ethnic culture). Berry and colleagues (2006)
ascertained that learning and maintenance of both cultures promotes better developmental outcomes and psychological well-being in immigrant youth. Thus, I recommend that teachers and youth workers promote bicultural orientation through the practices of diverse cultures and religions (both the ethnic and the host country) in school and in the communities. For example, teachers can identify the cultural and religious celebrations that are significant to refugee students from different cultural backgrounds and work with their students to plan an event with series of activities representing what that particular celebration mean to a particular group of refugees (e.g., Eid at the end of Ramadan for Iraqi refugees).

In this study, I showed how participants’ attempt to achieve belonging within Canada by making connections to their community. The participants recalled taking actions such as volunteering and going to workshops at welcome centres, among other activities to be in direct contact with Canadians. To facilitate the acculturation process, school counsellors and teachers can assign tasks that engage the refugee youth in age-appropriate activities in the community. This engagement can also develop a sense of agency and efficacy in this population by contributing to their resiliency. School counsellors can also indirectly facilitate the process of connection by offering training to refugee youth with respect to effective and culturally sensitive interpersonal skills. Moreover, school counsellors can encourage refugee youth to engage in their communities through social activities (e.g., attending community events, recreation centre) and civic participation (e.g., volunteering). As another example, school counsellors and educators can prepare refugee youth for civil engagement by encouraging them to participate in choosing their student council to provide them with an experience with the electoral process.

In a similar vein, findings from this study highlight the significant role of peers in participants’ adjustment to school. To facilitate this process, refugee youth may benefit from education on how to promote positive peer relationships in a vastly different environment such as Canada. By developing programs and trainings that address this issue, school counsellors can potentially contribute to the successful integration of refugee youth in schools, and build a foundation for them to become accepted and fully participating citizens in Canada.
Additionally, in order to facilitate refugee youth’s transition, school counsellors can also educate parents of refugee youth about their children’s needs, how to effectively address these needs, and how to provide effective support for their children. School counsellors can also educate parents about parenting practices in Canada that directly address the needs of refugee youth and build resilience for themselves and their children.

The participants in this study remarked that a positive school climate promoted positive behaviour, positive interactions, and feelings of safety, inclusiveness, and acceptance. Based on the reported impact of schools on the participants’ adaptation, it is important for teachers to promote nondifferential treatment and support through the practice of diverse cultures and religions. The promotion of nondifferential treatment in classrooms can facilitate the acceptance of refugee youth by their peers and contributes to their feelings of inclusiveness. The participants also highlighted the significant role of the teachers (especially the English Language Learning and English as a Second Language teachers) in their successful adjustment. Thus, teachers’ establishing a supportive and caring relationship with refugee youth will also facilitate their positive adaptation.

**Recommendations for policy makers**

As another contextual factor, financial resources and the wish to have more money is an important aspect for policy makers to attend to, especially when financial security was identified as one of the contextual and institutional factors that contributed to resiliency in this and other studies (Anderson, 2004). According to Canadian Council for Refugees (2013), resettled refugees receive very limited income assistance from the government of Canada. Most refugees come to Canada with a significant debt burden, as they are supposed to repay the Canadian government for their transpiration to Canada and the costs of their mandatory medical examination. Hence, refugee families often begin their life in Canada with thousands of dollars of debt. Because of this debt, they are also often refused bank loans or even a credit card, among many other discriminations in accessing financial resources. These financial barriers can impede the successful adjustment of refugee youth in Canada. Therefore, it is important to pay
attention to refugees’ financial restraints. For example, by taking actions such as increasing the current limited amount of income assistance, facilitating the process of accessing governmental loans, and providing job opportunities for refugees, the government resources can support successful adaptation in Canada.

I urge policy makers to consider the important role of youth workers and settlement workers, as well as government and community resources in the process of refugee youth’s successful adaptation in Canada. According to participants in this study, youth workers and immigrant services agencies helped them to feel welcomed and connected; get familiarized with their community; learn English and the local culture; and receive financial and academic support. With that being said, within the past two years, structural changes happened in settlement sector in Canada due to funding cuts, which resulted in fewer number of settlement agencies, acceptance of lesser number of clients, a lack of autonomy in designing and delivering programing (Simich & Andermann, 2014). Therefore, introducing new policies that aim for efficient use of the limited resources, and improvement in refugee youth’s access to services would raise the chance of successful adjustment in this population, which appears crucial for the host countries.

Finally, findings from this study highlight how civic engagement can help refugee youth to develop positive motivation, beneficial peer networks, feelings of worth, and feelings of belonging. This result advocates for policy makers’ consideration of public organizations that promote the integration and well-being of refugee youth by ensuring their effective participation in and contribution to society. These organizations will need to aim for integrating the refugee youth into civic and educational institutions, in addition to facilitating their access to public and private resources and services, while securing their cultural heritage and religious freedom (Masten, Liebkind, & Hernandez, 2012). For example, organizations such as 4-H clubs (a global network of youth organization that aims to prepare youth for their future as adult citizens) and Scouts Canada (the country’s leading youth organization) provide Canadian youth with opportunities for public speaking, fund-raising, and volunteering to promote civil engagement in this population. By supporting the development of such organizations to include policies that connect these organizations with resettlement agencies, policy makers can indirectly facilitate the refugee youth’s civil engagement.
Limitations

Certain facts limit the generalization of the findings of this study, although participants were collected from a variety of cultural backgrounds. First, due to safety concerns, the Surrey School Board personnel did not permit me to conduct a thorough assessment of participants’ past traumatic experiences. I was requested by the Board to focus only on the participants’ experiences after resettling in Canada and not to put them at risk by inquiring about their past traumatic experiences. Additionally, as one of the main criteria for recruiting the participants in this study, participants were screened for mental health issues. Hence, results from this study apply to refugee youth who have no history of mental health disorders or post-traumatic stress from their past traumatic experiences. Lastly, a Western theoretical framework was used in this multicultural focused study.

Furthermore, the use of the English language for conducting interviews could be considered as a limitation of this study because English was the second language for all the participants. It is possible that since English was not the participants’ first language, it prevented them from articulating a full and complete picture of their successful experience of adjustment in Canada.

The presented findings were derived from memories and recollections of participants that are based on self-reporting not observation. This limitation was addressed by Flanagan’s (1954) recommendation: “if full and precise details are given [by participants], it can be usually assumed that this information is accurate. Vague reports suggest that the incident is not well remembered” (p. 340). Following his advice, I asked participants to provide detailed information such as the significance or examples of incidents that were identified as helpful or hindering during the interview. Those incidents that were lacking examples or importance were marked down for further clarification with participants. In a few cases where participants were not able to support an incident with further information or examples, the corresponding incidents were excluded from the data pool.

Lastly data collected by the ECIT method has a reputation for being complex and difficult to manage (Zheng, 2010). The large volume of data gathered by this method can
potentially be interpreted in many different ways and to some extent involves personal judgement. To address this, a series of credibility checks were implemented to ensure results were representing the participants’ experience as accurately as possible. Although I endeavoured to include inspections of credibility such as participant checks, expert reviews of categories, and views from independent judges, the categories remain subjective interpretations of the critical incidents that participants described.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

Some of the findings in this study may be pertinent for future studies on resilience in mass trauma and extreme adversities. For instance, although the findings of this study add to our knowledge of personal characteristics that contribute to resilience in refugee youth, it is not yet clear whether these characteristics are innate or are simply the outcome of surviving through extreme adversity. Hence, in another study participants and their parents can be interviewed to find out whether the participants possessed these personal characteristics prior to the disaster or not. Likewise, the reported positive impact of humour mentioned by participants in this study (e.g., humour making them likable and popular among their group of friends; humour making difficult situations easier and less painful) replicates the findings of the research on humour that currently exists in the literature on war and massive trauma. However, it would be worthwhile to study the functions of humour more closely.

It might also be valuable to study the individual differences between the refugee youth who demonstrate resilience after being severely affected by their past traumatic experiences (e.g., experiencing mental health problems) and those of the current study. Likewise, it might be useful to measure the kind and intensity of the experienced trauma and compare its impact on resilience across different young Canadian refugees. Finally, comparing the resilience in young refugees from two different countries can examine the potential influence of refugee’s cultural backgrounds on resiliency.

Last, but not least, with a better understanding of what makes a difference, it would be extremely useful to identify some of the processes that contribute to resilience and posttraumatic growth in this at-risk population. It might prove interesting to explore
how resilient young refugees, who have experienced trauma and war in their homeland, adapt positively and achieve productive lives as they resettle in Canada.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore the factors that resilient refugee youth recalled as helpful or hindering to their adjustment in Canada. More particularly, the three objectives of this study were to: (a) explore the naturally occurring and self-sustaining strategies used by refugee youth who are identified as successfully handling the challenges of fleeing and resettling in Canada; (b) explore what had helped or hindered their ability to handle the challenges well; and (c) build a composite picture of the approaches they perceived as helping or hindering them in adjusting well.

The findings of my study suggest that resilience in refugee youth is typically associated with the availability of human and social capital, more specifically in the form of personal qualities (e.g., adaptive copings) and contextual qualities (e.g., positive relationships with peers, parents or other caring adults). It appears participants in this study, who have high-adversity backgrounds, showed the same personal characteristics, attitudes, context, or relationships as the well-known predictors of positive development in children; their resilience represented an “ordinary magic” (Masten, 2001, 2007). This was partly because different cultures and people around the world share many of the same biological and social functions, potentials, limitations, resources, vulnerabilities, and adaptive challenges (Masten, 2014).

The results from my study also offer an important opportunity for empowerment of the refugee children by highlighting their personal strengths. Refugee youth from war zones face many challenges, but they also bring with them much strength. As young survivors of war, as well as family and cultural losses, they are motivated to succeed and create a better life for themselves. Hence, it is of great significance to see refugee youth not as passive victims with no capacities, but as survivors with the social potential to inspire Canadians with their ability to “bounce forward” (Sleijpen et al., 2013).
References


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Appendix A.

Recruitment Poster

Study number: 2015s0126

Do You Think You are Adjusting Well in Canada?

Researchers at Simon Fraser University (SFU) are interested in hearing about your experience of adjusting well after moving to Canada. Participate and receive a fifteen-dollar gift card!

**Who**: Youth (between 15 and 19) who are refugees resettled in Canada for at least three years, are able to communicate in English, and adjusting well to Canadian life.

**What**: If you are a youth refugee, we are interested in talking to you about what helped you to do well at home and at school after immigrating to Canada.

**How**: If you are interested in speaking with us, please call or write to:
- Helia Jafari by email: @sfu.ca, or phone: , or
- Dr. Patrice Keats by email: @sfu.ca, or phone:

*As SFU researchers, we will keep your information confidential.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Helia Jafari</th>
<th>Hela Jafari</th>
<th>Hela Jafari</th>
<th>Hela Jafari</th>
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Version 2, March 30, 15
Appendix B.

Resilience Scale (Wagnild & Young, 1993)

1. When I make plans I follow through with them.
   - Strongly disagree
   - Disagree
   - Somewhat disagree
   - Neither agree or disagree
   - Somewhat agree
   - Agree
   - Strongly agree

2. I usually manage one way or another.
   - Strongly disagree
   - Disagree
   - Somewhat disagree
   - Neither agree or disagree
   - Somewhat agree
   - Agree
   - Strongly agree

3. I am able to depend on myself more than anyone else.
   - Strongly disagree
   - Disagree
   - Somewhat disagree
   - Neither agree or disagree
   - Somewhat agree
   - Agree
   - Strongly agree

4. Keeping interested in things that are important to me.
   - Strongly disagree
   - Disagree
   - Somewhat disagree
   - Neither agree or disagree
   - Somewhat agree
   - Agree
   - Strongly agree

5. I can be on my own if I have to.
   - Strongly disagree
   - Disagree
   - Somewhat disagree
   - Neither agree or disagree
   - Somewhat agree
   - Agree
   - Strongly agree

6. I feel proud that I have accomplished things in my life.
   - Strongly disagree
   - Disagree
   - Somewhat disagree
   - Neither agree or disagree
   - Somewhat agree
   - Agree
   - Strongly agree

7. I usually take things in stride.
   - Strongly disagree
   - Disagree
   - Somewhat disagree
   - Neither agree or disagree
   - Somewhat agree
   - Agree
   - Strongly agree

8. I am friends with myself.
   - Strongly disagree
   - Disagree
   - Somewhat disagree
   - Neither agree or disagree
   - Somewhat agree
   - Agree
   - Strongly agree

9. I feel that I can handle many things at a time.
   - Strongly disagree
   - Disagree
   - Somewhat disagree
   - Neither agree or disagree
   - Somewhat agree
   - Agree
   - Strongly agree

10. I am determined.
    - Strongly disagree
    - Disagree
    - Somewhat disagree
    - Neither agree or disagree
    - Somewhat agree
    - Agree
    - Strongly agree

11. I seldom wonder what the point of it all is.
    - Strongly disagree
    - Disagree
    - Somewhat disagree
    - Neither agree or disagree
    - Somewhat agree
    - Agree
    - Strongly agree

12. I take things one day at a time.
    - Strongly disagree
    - Disagree
    - Somewhat disagree
    - Neither agree or disagree
    - Somewhat agree
    - Agree
    - Strongly agree

13. I can get through difficult times because I’ve experienced difficulty before.
    - Strongly disagree
    - Disagree
    - Somewhat disagree
    - Neither agree or disagree
    - Somewhat agree
    - Agree
    - Strongly agree

    - Strongly disagree
    - Disagree
    - Somewhat disagree
    - Neither agree or disagree
    - Somewhat agree
    - Agree
    - Strongly agree
15. I keep interested in things.
   - Strongly disagree
   - Disagree
   - Somewhat disagree
   - Neither agree or disagree
   - Somewhat agree
   - Agree
   - Strongly agree

16. I can usually find something to laugh about.
   - Strongly disagree
   - Disagree
   - Somewhat disagree
   - Neither agree or disagree
   - Somewhat agree
   - Agree
   - Strongly agree

17. My belief in myself gets me through hard times.
   - Strongly disagree
   - Disagree
   - Somewhat disagree
   - Neither agree or disagree
   - Somewhat agree
   - Agree
   - Strongly agree

18. In an emergency, I am someone people generally can rely on.
   - Strongly disagree
   - Disagree
   - Somewhat disagree
   - Neither agree or disagree
   - Somewhat agree
   - Agree
   - Strongly agree

19. I can usually look at a situation in a number of ways.
   - Strongly disagree
   - Disagree
   - Somewhat disagree
   - Neither agree or disagree
   - Somewhat agree
   - Agree
   - Strongly agree

20. Sometimes I make myself do things whether I want to or not.
   - Strongly disagree
   - Disagree
   - Somewhat disagree
   - Neither agree or disagree
   - Somewhat agree
   - Agree
   - Strongly agree

21. My life has meaning.
   - Strongly disagree
   - Disagree
   - Somewhat disagree
   - Neither agree or disagree
   - Somewhat agree
   - Agree
   - Strongly agree

22. I do not dwell on things that I can’t do anything about.
   - Strongly disagree
   - Disagree
   - Somewhat disagree
   - Neither agree or disagree
   - Somewhat agree
   - Agree
   - Strongly agree

23. When I am in a difficult situation, I can usually find my way out of it.
   - Strongly disagree
   - Disagree
   - Somewhat disagree
   - Neither agree or disagree
   - Somewhat agree
   - Agree
   - Strongly agree

24. I have enough energy to do what I have to do.
   - Strongly disagree
   - Disagree
   - Somewhat disagree
   - Neither agree or disagree
   - Somewhat agree
   - Agree
   - Strongly agree

25. It is okay if there are people who don’t like me.
   - Strongly disagree
   - Disagree
   - Somewhat disagree
   - Neither agree or disagree
   - Somewhat agree
   - Agree
   - Strongly agree

Appendix C.

Informed Consent Form for Parents

Study Title: Children of War: An ECIT Study of Resiliency in Young Canadian Refugees

Simon Fraser University and the project researchers subscribe to the ethical conduct of research and to the protection at all times of the interests, comfort, and safety of study participants. This form and the information it contains are given to you for your own protection and full understanding of the procedures. Your signature on this form will indicate that you have received a document, which describes the purpose, procedures, possible risks, and benefits of this evaluation research project, that you have had adequate opportunity to consider the information in the document, and that you voluntarily agree that your child is able to participate in this project. You can refuse to have your child participate or withdraw from the study at any time.

Who is Conducting This Study?

This study is being conducted by Ms. Helia Jafari and Dr. Patrice Keats. Ms. Jafari is a graduate master’s level Counselling Psychology Program student in the Faculty of Education at Simon Fraser University. Dr. Keats is Ms. Jafari’s Senior Supervisor and an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Education.

What is the Purpose of this Study?

I am interested in learning about the experiences that may contribute to better social and cultural adjustment, academic achievement, and psychological adaptation for Canadian refugee youth. By talking to successful refugee youth, I want to get a better understanding of what helped or hindered them from doing well at home and school after immigrating to Canada.

What Happens if You Agree that your Child can Participate in this Study?

With you and your child’s consent, your child will complete paper and pencil questionnaire during school/group hours that will take approximately 15 minutes. The questionnaire includes questions about your child’s personal strengths and capabilities that have helped him or her adapt well in Canada. Also, by agreeing to participate in this study you agree to allow your child to speak with the researcher for approximately a one-hour interview. At the beginning of the interview the researcher will ask your child to provide some information that will include age, and cultural/ethnic background. We will then talk about the story of your child coming to Canada with specific questions about anything that what helped or hindered him or her from doing well at home and school after moving to Canada. This interview will take place either at your child’s school or the refugee service agency from which he or she has been recruited.
For the purpose of this study, the researcher will audio record the interview. To keep the information confidential, the recording will only be used to generate a written transcript. The hard copy of recording will be kept on a locked cabinet in Dr. Keats’s research office at Simon Fraser University. Only Ms. Helia Jafari and Dr. Keats will be able to access the transcripts. After this study is completed, by September 2015, the audio recording will be deleted.

**Your Child’s Participation is Voluntary**

Your child is under no obligation to participate in this study and is free to withdraw at any time without any consequences. Participation in this study is in no way related to your child’s academic standing.

**How will your Child’s Identity be Protected?**

Your child’s identity and all the provided information will be confidential. Your child’s name will never be recorded on any document aside from this consent form. Your child may choose a pseudonym to place on any documents if he or she desires. After your child signs the consent form, I will detach his or her signature from the questionnaire so that his or her name will not be associated with responses. Audio recording from your child’s interview will be securely destroyed soon after transcription and the typed transcript of the interview as well as the questionnaire will be de-identified (assigned a pseudonym). A password protected master list will be the only place in which your child’s name is linked with the pseudonym of his or her choice. The transcript and the master list will be separately kept on a password-protected computer that is not connected to the Internet and is in a locked cabinet in my supervisor’s locked research office at the SFU Surrey campus. The only people who have access to this data are the principal investigator and co-investigator, as well as the professional coder. Finally, any published document disseminating the findings of this study will not include any participant’s names.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that there are legal limits to confidentiality. Please be advised that, at any point in the study, if your child reveals that there has been an incident that involves abuse and/or neglect of a child or an elderly person (or that there is a risk of such occurring) I must, by law, report this information to the Ministry of Children and Family Development, who may choose to intervene and report the incident to the appropriate authorities.

**What will Happen after the Interview?**

Following the interview, I will be looking at what all participants in the study are saying about their resettlement experiences. I may contact your child to ask if what I learned from him or her is accurate. The information provided by your child will be combined with the information from other participants for the requirements for a graduate-level thesis. If you are interested, I will give you the results of this study.

**Is There Any Risk to Participating in this Study?**

Before beginning the interview, I will provide your child with appropriate supportive resources in the unlikely event of anything upsetting arising during the interview. Although your child will be talking about the positive experiences that helped him or her do well, your child might feel upset when talking about the story of escaping from his or
her home country and resettling in Canada. If this were to happen, your child will be reminded that he or she does not have to talk about anything that may cause discomfort. Your child can also take time for a break or stop the interview at any time. Even if there is no difficulty, I will give you and your child information on how to receive further support if needed in the future.

**Will your Child be Paid for Taking Part in this Research Study?**

Upon the completion of the interview your child will receive a fifteen-dollar gift card.

**Who Can You Contact if You Have Questions about this Study?**

If you will have any further questions or need any additional information, you can contact Helia Jafari: […]@sfu.ca, or […], or Dr. Patrice Keats: […]@sfu.ca, or […].

**Who Can You Contact if You Have a Compliant or Concern about the Study?**

If you have any concerns about your child’s rights as a research participant and/or your child’s experiences while participating in this study, you may contact Dr. Jeffrey Toward, Director, Office of Research Ethics: […]@sfu.ca, or […].

**Consent to Participate in this Research Study**

Your child’s participation in this study is entirely up to you and your child. Your child can withdraw from the study at any time. If he or she decides to withdraw, any and all existing documentation will be destroyed. Your signature below also indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records.

By signing this form I consent for my child, ________________________________ to participate in this study.

______________________________
Printed name of parent or guardian

Date (yyyy/mm/dd)

______________________________
Signature of parent or guardian

For the follow up meeting, we prefer to be contacted by: Phone ☐ Email ☐

Phone or email: ________________________________

We would like to be contacted to receive the results of this study: Yes ☐ No ☐
Appendix D.

Informed Assent for Participants

Your parents have consented for you to participate in the research project I am conducting. Even though you have consent, you can choose not to participate. By signing this form, you are indicating that you are voluntarily agreeing to participate in this study, which entails completing the attached questionnaire and an interview with me. Upon the completion of the interview you will receive a fifteen-dollar gift card.

After turning in your consent forms, I will detach your signature from the questionnaire so that your name will not be associated with your responses. Also, I am going to ask you to choose a pseudonym for yourself so that all your information from this point on will be identified with it. A password protected master list will be the only place in which your name is linked with the pseudonym of your choice. Audio recordings from our interviews will be securely destroyed soon after transcription and the rest of the data that are only identified with the pseudonym of your choice will be destroyed right after I defend my thesis on September 2015. During this time your data will be kept in a locked cabinet in my supervisor's locked research office at the SFU Surrey campus. Only my supervisor, my research assistant in coding, and myself will have access to the data. Digital data (i.e., typed transcripts of our interview and the master list) will be transferred to a password protected flash drive that will be locked in a cabinet at my home and will be destroyed after August 2022.

The attached questionnaire to this form asks about some of your personal strengths and capabilities that have helped you adjust well in Canada. It is important that you know that your information will be confidential to the full extent permitted by law. Please note that, at any point in the study, if you reveal that there has been an incident that involved abuse and/or neglect of a child or an elderly person (or that there was a risk of such occurring) I must, by law, report this information to the Ministry of Children and Family Development, who may choose to intervene and report the incident to the appropriate authorities.

I understand that I may withdraw my participation in this study at any time with out any consequences. If you do choose to withdraw before completing the questionnaire or interview, your information will be deleted.

I also understand that I may register any complaint I might have about the study with the researcher named above or Dr. Jeffrey Toward, Director, Office of Research Ethics [...]@sfu.ca or [...].

I may obtain copies of the results of this study, upon its completion, by contacting: Helia Jafari at [...]@sfu.ca.

NAME                       SIGNATURE


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Appendix E.

Interview Protocol

Research Question: What helps or hinders adolescent refugees who have experienced war in their homeland to build resilience psychologically, socially, and academically as they resettle in Canada?

I. Study Information and Consent Script

As we discussed, the purpose of this study is to explore participants’ experiences that may contribute to better social and cultural adjustment, academic achievement, and psychological adaptation for Canadian refugee youth. I will be asking you some questions in order to get a better understanding of what helped or kept you from adjusting well at home, at school, and friendships after immigrating to Canada.

Sometimes when people talk about the story of their escape from war and resettlement in Canada they can become upset or emotional. If at any point you find yourself getting uncomfortable, please let me know and we can pause the interview and have a conversation about what would help you feel better.

Instructions: Review consent form with participant and answer any questions that they may have. Have participant sign consent form before turning on the audio recorder. When recording has begun, state the date, location, and participant ID number before proceeding.

II. Interview Questions

• As a way of getting started, please tell me a little bit about your story of coming to Canada.

• You volunteered to participate in this study because you identified yourself as adjusting well after moving to Canada. What does “adjusting well” mean to you?

• Tell me about an experience/incident that helped you do well at home, at school, and friendships?
  o What about this experience/incident helped you to do well at home, at school, and friendships? Can you give me a specific example that shows how it helped?
  o Is there any other helpful experience/incidents that I haven’t asked you?

• Tell me about an experience/incident that made it difficult for you to do well at home, at school, and friendships?
  o What about this experience/incident made it difficult for you to do well at home, at school, and friendships? Can you give me a specific example of how it made things difficult?
• Is there any other experience/incidents that made things difficult for you to do well that I haven’t asked you?

• Are there other things that you think would help you to continue doing well? I wonder what else might have been helpful to you that you haven’t had access to?

  o In what way would this help you do well?

III. Check-in and Conclusion

How was the experience of participating with me in this interview? How are you doing right now?

In case participant discloses they are upset:

Do you have anyone that you would like to call for support?

If not then,

Would you be willing to contact any of the resources provided?