

Young Adult Women from Refugee Backgrounds and the Role that Barriers Play in their Pursuit of Higher Education in Canada

by

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Abstract

This study aimed to explore the educational and career goals of young adult women from refugee backgrounds in Canada and the barriers they faced in pursuing these goals. Education is a universal human right centrally linked to poverty reduction, stable economic growth, and better overall lives for children, families, and communities. Yet, many young adult women, aged 19-30 years old from refugee backgrounds have missed out on formative years of education because of war and displacement. Improved higher educational access for these women can help them achieve higher-paying employment, contribute meaningfully to their communities, and help support their families. This study aimed to explore how, upon settlement in Canada, these young adult women might continue to be challenged with various discriminatory practices and policies that challenge their ability to pursue higher education. This study was conducted using qualitative methods rooted in constructivist principles. Through an inductive process, data were collected through 18 interviews and four focus groups with 17 participants, which were then thematically analyzed.

Results from this study found that the barriers that participants faced in pursuing higher education were influenced by the method of migration used to arrive in Canada, government or private sponsorship, and therefore the resources they had available to them. Once in Canada, developing academic English language skills; not having previous academic credentials recognized; having limited support networks; and finding affordable housing and livable wage employment further complicated the pursuit of higher educational goals. Gendered responsibilities also detracted from the time and resources they had to pursue higher education.

To best support young adult women from refugee backgrounds pursuing higher education in Canada, an individualized and integrated approach must be considered. Individual circumstances must be evaluated, and pathways must be available to best meet the individuals' unique needs. An integrated approach, which includes the voices of the young adult women from refugee backgrounds, as well as relevant stakeholders, including educational institutions, must also be included to provide the support needed for successful settlement in Canada.

Keywords: education; young adults; women; refugees; barriers; post-secondary transition

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my family for their support, patience, and encouragement, as well as their own sacrifices of time, energy, and resources, throughout this process.

I would also like to dedicate this dissertation to those whose lives have been or continue to be impacted by war and conflict yet continue to strive to make the world a better place than what they have experienced.

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List of Acronyms

CFIAP	Canada developed a Feminist International Assistance Policy
COVID19	Novel Coronavirus SARS-CoV2
DCRS	DIVERSEcity Community Resource Society
ELL	English Language Learner
ESL	English as a Second Language
FFP	Feminist Foreign Policy
INEE	Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies
ISSofBC	Immigrant Service Society of British Columbia
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
UN	United Nations
UNDHR	United Nations Declaration of Human Rights
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (also known as the UN Refugee Agency)

Chapter 1. Introduction

On December 17th, 2010, 26-year-old fruit vendor Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire outside a whitewashed municipal office in the Tunisian town of Sidi Bouzid (Tesch, 2019). Bouazizi's act of political protest was against the autocratic and dictatorial regime that oppressively reigned over the Tunisian people for decades (Tesch, 2019). This act of self-immolation was the catalyst behind the Arab Spring, from which emerged the Syrian civil conflict, one of the deadliest wars of the 21st century (Eight Deadliest Wars, 2019). In 2016, Canada welcomed over 46,000 Syrian refugees escaping the civil conflict, in addition to the thousands of refugees that Canada brings in annually from countries including Somalia, Iraq, Congo, and Afghanistan, and most recently the over 90,000 Ukrainian citizens and returning residents escaping Russian invasion (Figures at a Glance, 2019; Ukrainian Immigrant Measures, 2022). As recently as 2018, the UNHCR praised Canada for admitting and providing citizenship to such large numbers of refugees, yet, as the global number of refugees is anticipated to continue to climb (Refugees in Canada, 2022), Canada must do more to provide the educational opportunities that refugees require to settle in meaningful ways into their new communities. Failure to do so prevents people from refugee backgrounds, and especially young adult women, from gaining language skills, education and training, financial security and a sense of belonging in Canada.

1.1. Context

High quality education is a force in the equalization of opportunities, as well as an important method of social integration (Shakya & Lujan, 2018). Lack of educational opportunities can increase the risks of poor mental health, substance abuse and depression amongst newcomer populations, which places increased strain on existing social systems (Niemeyer, 2015; Shakya & Lujan, 2018; Shields & Lujan, 2018). For young women from refugee backgrounds, lack of appropriate education and subsequently lack of employment, makes them particularly vulnerable to exploitation through precarious and unregulated work (Canefe, 2018). During war, when employment is low and men may be involved in the conflict or have fled to avoid involvement, women become the primary caregivers of children and elderly family members, as well as the

main income earners. They become leaders in their families to provide the fundamentals of life both during war and throughout resettlement (Canefe, 2018). Yet, failure to attain an education limits employment opportunities making young women particularly susceptible to employment in precarious labour, in which they are vulnerable to exploitation through human trafficking, prostitution, and forced marriages in their nation of origin as well as their host communities alike (Canefe, 2018). Young women aged 19-30 years old arriving in host countries as refugees have experienced displacement, conflict, and often life-altering traumatic experiences throughout their migration journeys and often, these experiences can extend into their settlement (Brewer, 2016; Hajdukowski-Ahmed et al., 2008). Many young adult women from refugee backgrounds have had their educational pursuits interrupted, leaving them no choice but to start over upon arrival to their new country (Brewer, 2016; Hajdukowski-Ahmed et al., 2008). This study explores the barriers and types of discrimination faced by young adult women from refugee backgrounds in their pursuit of higher education in Canada.

1.2. Researcher Positionality

My perspective as a researcher has been influenced and shaped by my academic scholarship, my work as an educator, and my own personal background. My academic scholarship began in Political Science and International Relations in which I developed an appreciation for the complexity of government, foreign affairs, and development work. To better understand the impact of conflict on human development, I pursued a Master's degree in Human Rights. Through this scholarship I came to better appreciate the stabilizing influence that education can have on the lives of young people in and from conflict zones. This scholarship also reinforced to me the necessity of education in post-war reconstruction efforts and the importance of education as a means to provide opportunities and alternative pathways for youth and young people outside of conflict and war. I became a teacher-scholar to produce scholarship that reinforced to government, practitioners, and the public, that a strong public education system for all is imperative to a healthy and strong society. I further pursued a second Master's degree in order to better understand how to shape educational communities that are inclusive, anti-racist, anti-oppressive, and culturally sustaining. In doing so, I came to better understand the barriers faced by students, and in particular, students from refugee backgrounds, which motivated me to further scholarship in this area. My perspective as

a researcher has been influenced and shaped by my work as an educator. In this role, I have worked with young women from refugee backgrounds and their families in the public education system and have come to better understand how the daily barriers they encounter negatively impact their pursuit of higher education. My perspective has been further influenced by my position as a second generation Canadian, whose working-class family left dictatorships and post-genocidal societies to resettle in Canada. Unlike the participants in this research, I do not identify as racialized, nor am I from a refugee background, however I do identify as a woman having experienced gender-based biases and discrimination.

1.3. Research Questions

This study examined the educational aspirations of 18 young women and explored how existing educational policy and practice in Canada addresses their specific learning needs. I found that education policy and practice effectively silences the voices of these women whose experiences, both pre- and post-conflict have been uniquely impacted by their gender, race, and socio-economic status (Brewer, 2016; Hajdukowski-Ahmed, 2008).

Three research questions guided this study:

- (1) What are the factors that influence the educational and career aspirations of young women (aged 19-30 years old) from refugee backgrounds who have immigrated to Canada?
- (2) What barriers exist that challenge or prevent the pursuit of these aspirations?
- (3) Do responsibilities related to gender create barriers to pursuing higher education?

Building on existing research, this study explored what is needed to create pathways to higher education for young women from refugee backgrounds so that they might have hope for the future; supportive social networks; fulfillment of personal aspirations; the opportunity to be leaders in their communities (potentially even in post-war reconstruction efforts); and the ability to adequately care for themselves and their families (Brewer, 2016; Hajdukowski-Ahmed et al., 2008; Edwards, 2019). Refugees are at risk of exploitation and abuse, both pre- and post migration, and education is essential to reducing vulnerability, improving job prospects, and strengthening mental health and confidence (Edwards, 2019).

1.4. Rationale

While a growing body of literature explores the hardships that refugees experience upon resettlement in Canada (Beiser, 2009; Lacroix, 2004; Shields & Lujan, 2018), the experiences of young adult women, aged 19-30 years old, who lack English language skills and academic credentials to pursue higher education, have been understudied (Niemeyer, 2015). This population exists in a kind of time-limbo, in which existing adult newcomer programming does not meet their educational needs, but they are too old to reap the benefits of the free supportive programming, including language classes and mentorship opportunities, provided in the K-12 public education system (Niemeyer, 2015; Shakya et al., 2012). Ethnicity and cultural differences play a further nuanced role in the settlement of young adult women who may experience heightened conflict in the home as they navigate their new communities and their familial expectations (Singh et al., 2010). Education enables the development of academic, leadership and entrepreneurial skills and can help young women achieve higher paying employment, contribute meaningfully to their communities, and help support their families (Shields & Lujan, 2018; Singh et al., 2010). However, educational policy has not kept pace with the rapid rate of resettlement of newcomers to Canada (Brewer, 2016). Existing research and policy ignore the unique context and individualized experiences that refugees endure, including the barriers and power imbalances that young women disproportionately face in their settlement journeys (Barber, 2021; Brewer, 2016; Niemeyer, 2015; Shakya et al., 2012; Shields & Lujan, 2018).

There continues to be limited research on the experiences of young adult women from refugee backgrounds (Sirriyeh, 2016). By ignoring the impact of gender in the experiences of newcomers from refugee backgrounds, women's lives remain largely invisible, reinforcing patriarchal power and neglecting dimensions of gender-specific social, economic, and cultural barriers in conflict and post-conflict environments (Canefe, 2018). According to Canefe (2018), there is a continued need to examine how governance and power relationships shape the discourse regarding citizenship, rights, and membership in host countries, and how these areas of life impact women's access to higher education, and subsequently, their employment. Furthermore, despite some shared experiences that refugees may have with immigrant populations in host communities, their experiences of displacement, separation, imprisonment, insecurity,

and trauma influence their learning in unique ways, which must be considered in educational policy construction (Stevenson & Willott, 2007). Homogenizing policy and support is insufficient, inappropriate, and continues to marginalize and exclude young adult women from refugee backgrounds in higher education (Stevenson & Willott, 2007).

Access to education is a universal human right centrally linked to poverty reduction, stable economic growth and better overall lives for children, families, and communities (Bajwa, 2017). Primary education has generally been prioritized by policy makers, yet higher education is integrally connected to future livelihoods and employment, as well as the future stability of home regions (Dryden-Peterson, 2010; Dryden-Peterson & Giles, 2010). There has been very little exploration of the benefits of higher education accessibility in scholarship and policy and very little is known about the experiences of students from refugee backgrounds in higher education in Canada (Brewer, 2016; Dryden-Peterson, 2010; Dryden-Peterson & Giles, 2010; Ramsay & Baker, 2019).

The experiences that young adults from refugee backgrounds have had in their migration journeys must be considered in relation to their previous, interrupted education (Ramsay & Baker, 2019). Ramsay and Baker (2019) also note that it is important to identify what forms of education refugees have already achieved, what type of education is value in their new communities, and how these experiences interact with their new educational environments. Having ways for young adults from refugee backgrounds to have their voices and concerns heard and considered will further reduce the oppression and marginalization they are likely to experience in accessing educational opportunities in their new host communities (Rossiter & Rossiter, 2009; Brewer, 2016).

Gender plays a further, significant role in how young adult women from refugee backgrounds access higher education. These women may experience a continuation of violence from war zone to domestic settlement, especially in countries where women's rights are limited, but also in families that are patriarchal and may continue their traditionalist practices of forced marriages, even in their new societies (Ramsay & Baker, 2019; Sirriyeh, 2010). The experiences of different genders are not equivalent, yet current educational policies treat them as the same (Ramsay & Baker, 2019; Wallin & Ahlstrom, 2005). A genderless depiction of individuals from refugee backgrounds denies and diminishes their unique and potentially traumatic experiences (Canefe, 2018). In a

study conducted by Sirriyeh (2010), young women from refugee backgrounds noted that they wanted to be preparing for their future careers by attending schools, that they wanted to successfully complete their education and gain employment that would help their families, and that these goals were significant to them feeling happy in their lives. According to Sirriyeh (2010), these women believed that education would allow them to make friends, which was important for developing normality, as well as for feeling a sense of support and safety through such social relations in their communities. Globally, the largest percentage of resettled refugees from the recent Syrian conflict, were women and children aged 5-34 years old (Canefe, 2018). Many women have become the heads of their households, the primary income earners, as well as the main child-caregivers, which provides further constraints on time and pose barriers to accessing higher education (Canefe, 2018).

Young adult women from refugee backgrounds experience lower levels of academic achievement compared to those who arrived before the age of 15 years old (Brewer, 2016; Boyd, 2002). This is because younger refugees have more time and exposure to reap the benefits of the support and language integration provided in the free K-12 public education system (Stermac et al. 2010). Young adults from refugee backgrounds are less settled, more transitional, less integrated, and therefore potentially more at risk and vulnerable to exploitation, than younger refugees who may benefit from supportive educational systems (Ramsay & Baker, 2019; Stermac et al. 2010). However, there are also challenges faced by young adults from refugee backgrounds who are able to access higher education. The limited research that exists suggests that young adult learners from refugee backgrounds may experience more difficulty in connecting with other students, balancing their familial responsibilities with their academic obligations, and achieving academic success (Ramsay & Baker, 2019). This may be for a variety of reasons including the continuing psychological and emotional effects of post-conflict trauma, a lack of familiarity with the dominant language, writing and literacy demands, as well as social conventions, poverty, and/or a mix of all the above (Ramsay & Baker, 2019).

Article 28 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child states that countries must “make higher education accessible to all on the basis of capacity by every appropriate means,” (Convention, 1989, p. 8). Yet, during humanitarian crises, food, safe water, shelter, sanitation, and medical care take priority over education (Dryden-Peterson &

Giles, 2010). This is true even though people are now living in increasingly protracted humanitarian crises situations, which on average is 17 years of displacement (Dryden-Peterson & Giles, 2010). Yet, post-secondary educational opportunities remain an under-prioritized service and the limited amount of available funding disproportionately goes towards making primary education accessible, at the expense of secondary and post-secondary education (Dryden-Peterson & Giles, 2010). The Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE, 2019) created through the UN Humanitarian Reform Agenda, advocates for the importance of education in humanitarian response work. This right is further supported by the INEE Minimum Standards for Education: Preparedness, Response, and Recovery document that expresses a commitment that all individuals have a right to education in emergencies through to recovery (INEE, 2019). Yet, globally, less than 1% of resettled refugees access higher education (Dryden-Peterson & Giles, 2010). Subsequently, the educational pipeline, from primary to post-secondary, needs to be examined in regards to enabling access to higher education for young adults from refugee backgrounds (Dryden-Peterson & Giles, 2010; Stevenson & Willott, 2007). For this to occur, potential students from refugee backgrounds must: understand the multiplicity of higher educational courses and programs available to them in their host countries; they must have accurate information on how the application process works; and they must be supported with strategies to be successful in their programs (Stevenson & Willott, 2007).

Resettled refugees have high aspirations to participate in higher education, they are incredibly driven, they are using their own innovative ways to study and connect with peers in institutions around the world, and they see higher education as a route out of poverty and exclusion. Subsequently, an examination of what more must be done to help these students achieve their full potential through higher education is needed (Ramsay & Baker, 2018).

1.5. Study Overview

This study was conducted using qualitative methods rooted in constructivist principles. Through an inductive process, interview and focus group data were collected and thematically analyzed. Participants who had been in Canada ten years or less, who were 19-30 years old and who had a working level of the English language were

recruited for the study. In total, 18 young adult women from refugee backgrounds were interviewed, and four focus groups involving 17 of the participants were held.

The structure of the dissertation proceeds as follows. Upon reviewing the literature, the methodology provides an overview of the purpose of the study and of the research questions. It then describes the design of the study as well as provides a rationale for why qualitative methods were used in this study. Procedures are then reviewed, as well as an explanation of how site and participant selection were conducted. From there, data collection methods are explained, and data analysis procedures are described. My positionality as a researcher is then explored in greater detail, strategies of validity and reliability are explained, and limitations are described. The research findings are then explained, from which a discussion provides a more detailed analysis of the findings and how they relate to the literature. The study's overall significance is then explored, and recommendations are proposed as related to the key findings and primary areas of discussion.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

Nearly half of global migrants today are women and girls who are migrating alone or as heads of their households (Five Reasons Why, 2018). Data from Citizenship and Immigration Canada indicate that the majority of these refugees have less than a high school education and no English or French language skills, which are essential to participating in the Canadian economy (Refugees & Asylum, 2022; Shakya et al., 2010). Access to education enables women from refugee backgrounds to achieve economic independence and empowerment and reduces their risks of sexual exploitation, trafficking, and violence (Alwan & Weldon, 2017; Canada's Feminist, 2017; Five Reasons Why, 2018). Women and girls are especially vulnerable to exploitation during the migration and refugee process because there is a lack of shelter, overcrowding in camps, and the systems of protection and rule of law that break down enable perpetrators to abuse with impunity (Alwan & Weldon, 2017; Canada's Feminist, 2017; Five Reasons Why, 2018). These challenges do not end upon resettlement, where women and girls may be faced with various forms of discrimination, including sexual harassment, while accessing education, participating in the workforce, seeking housing, using public transportation, and/or accessing health services (Alwan & Weldon, 2017; Canada's Feminist, 2017; Five Reasons Why, 2018). Hundreds of millions of women and girls globally face unequal access to resources and educational opportunities because of their refugee status (Canada's Feminist, 2017).

Unfortunately, the research on pathways to attaining higher education in Canada for women from refugee backgrounds is sparse. One reason for this is that neither governmental sectors nor Canadian educational institutions publicly publish data that separate "refugee" from "foreign-born" or "immigrants"; rather, these groups, their experiences, and the barriers they face are combined into a single category of immigrant. Doing so fails to account for the unique challenges faced by people of refugee status and fails to account for the intersections of refugee status, class, race, and gender (Canada's Feminist, 2017; Shakya et al., 2010).

How Canada selects and resettles refugee populations is reflective of the current global climate. In Article 1(a) subsection 2, of the UN Refugee Convention (1951) a refugee is defined as "someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of

origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a social group, or political opinion.” While officially government refugee sponsorship is open to anyone who meets the protection criteria of having a well-founded fear of persecution or who is at risk of torture, cruel or unusual punishment in their home countries, the Canadian government currently prioritizes the settlement of women at risk and those persecuted based on their sexual orientation and/or gender identity (Elgersma, 2015). In 2015, Canada made a multi-year commitment to resettle Syrian refugees. This commitment was designed to enable Canadian service providers to provide more cohesive support to this group and to better tailor support services to their needs (Elgersma, 2015). These criteria and priorities are subject to change in relation to global contexts and circumstances, especially where there is an urgent need or a protracted refugee situation. For example, in 2021 Canada committed to welcoming 40,000 Afghan refugees escaping Taliban rule, and at the start of 2022 Canada welcomed over 6,100 Ukrainian refugees and opened up a number of immigration pathway visas for Ukrainian nationals fleeing the Russian invasion of their country (Canada Expands Resettlement Program, 2021; Canada to Welcome Those, 2022).

Based on the anticipation of the increased numbers of newcomer students to their districts and institutions, some school boards, higher educational institutions, non-profit organizations, and individual educators have initiated programs to better support young people designated as refugees. Such examples include the creation of Welcome Centers within select school districts throughout British Columbia that introduce newcomer families to their communities and help ease students’ transition into their new school systems (Welcome Centre, 2022); the establishment of Refugee and Newcomer Advisory Committees by higher educational institutions, such as Simon Fraser University, to specifically engage incoming refugee communities in research and scholarship (SFU Refugee and Newcomer, 2022); the creation of grassroots and non-profit organizations, such as Fresh Voices, that are led by immigrant and refugee youth to help remove barriers to newcomer settlement (About Fresh Voices, 2022); and individual educators who help facilitate and lead school-based programming for newcomer students, such as the Global Friendship Society, a school-based club aimed at facilitating social networks between newcomer and Canadian-born youth (Global Friendship Society, 2020). These initiatives point to the interest and motivation of local

communities to support young people from refugee backgrounds. Yet there remains an ongoing need for secure and stable funding and responsive curricula that meet the needs of students with interrupted school careers, and who may continue to experience trauma that affects their learning (Neufeld, 2018). As global migrancy related to war, economic crises and climate change become the 'new normal', the learning needs of young people from refugee backgrounds should be taken up as a core concern for education rather than a short-term problem. This premise provides the impetus for the current study.

2.1. Theoretical Considerations

This study was informed by two theoretical frameworks: critical theory as applied to education, and feminist theory. Critical theory is explored through Pierre Bourdieu's understanding of cultural capital and education, as well as Nancy Fraser's work on justice. Feminist theory is explored through feminist literature as applied to migration contexts and Canadian domestic and foreign policy as applied to refugee settlement.

Critical Theory in Education. Using a critical social lens to examine barriers in existing policies and systems is necessary to exposing the challenges that young women from refugee backgrounds have in accessing post-secondary education and pursuing their career aspirations. Critical social theory adopts a critical stance towards assumptions that are "taken-for-granted" about organizations and institutions and aims to expose structural contradictions within existing social systems (Kellner, 2003; Mellor, 2013). Critical theory maintains that people are able to change their material and social circumstances but are prevented from doing so by the prevailing systems of economic, political, and cultural authorities that exist (Apple, 2008; Kellner, 2003; Mellor, 2013). Critical research therefore aims to transform the restrictive social conditions that limit individual ability (Apple, 2008; Myers & Klein, 2011). Critical theories of education are responses to real world circumstances, which work to change the purpose and delivery of education, and to foster cultural and social change through individual growth (Apple, 2008; Mellor, 2013). The philosophical, political, and pedagogic response of critical theories of education focus on oppressed and marginalized groups to challenge the dominant decision-making groups which aim, whether intentionally or not, to reproduce existing inequalities (Kellner, 2003; Mellor, 2013).

French critical theorist Pierre Bourdieu was concerned with equal opportunity and an open education system that emancipated the individual and did not reproduce the existing social order (Dumais, 2010). Bourdieu was critical of the unfair class structures that existed in the French education system, believing that educational institutions maintained and reproduced existing systems of privilege, which unfairly limited social mobility for students not in the dominant class (Bourdieu, 1977). Bourdieu (1977) argued that education was supposed to act as a means by which individuals could improve their social mobility, and where students could develop their natural aptitudes, but that it did not do this. Rather, he saw the education system as limiting to most students. He believed that instead of allowing students to grow and transcend social boundaries, the education system oppressed some students and privileged others in the dominant class. Bourdieu (1977) believed that students not in the dominant class are disadvantaged by the education system because they lack the cultural capital to be successful. Cultural capital is defined as the linguistic, social, and cultural competencies that one possesses and how one is able to use these competencies to improve one's social standing (Bourdieu, 1973). To have strong cultural capital requires one to have been raised in a family that transmits the dominant culture (Sullivan, 2001). For those not in the dominant class, and specifically for those of refugee backgrounds, limited knowledge of the dominant culture places them at a great disadvantage in the education system. Bourdieu (1973) argued that the less cultural capital a student has, the less likely they will be able to attain success through the education system.

Bourdieu (1973) was specifically interested in three forms of cultural capital, which he maintained were essential to achieving academic success: embodied, institutionalized, and objectified forms of cultural capital. The first two, in particular, are relevant here and are considered in the context of this study. An embodied form of cultural capital is apparent in the way one speaks, carries themselves, their cultural tastes, and the knowledge that they have of the cultural values of the dominant class (Dumais, 2002, 2015; Sullivan, 2001). Newcomers to any society would have low embodied cultural capital of the dominant culture, as they are still acquiring the skills, especially language, to settle into their new communities. Refugees would be at a further disadvantage because they would not have had any choice about where to resettle, and therefore their knowledge of the dominant class and new culture may take longer to acquire.

Institutionalized cultural capital refers to educational and professional credentials that are forms of capital which are measured and valued against others and can be converted into economic capital (Dumais, 2002, 2015; Sullivan, 2001). Guo (2009) states that if an individual from a refugee background were fortunate enough to escape with proof of their credentials, and if they were fortunate enough to finish their training, even then, their credentials may not be recognized in Canada. Subsequently, significant re-training, sometimes starting over from the very beginning of their academic careers, is often required to regain the credentials that refugees may have once possessed. This both lowers and discredits any institutionalized capital that newcomers, specifically those from refugee backgrounds, may have.

As a result of these factors, the education system rewards those who exist in the dominant class and disadvantages those who do not, specifically those new to the culture, such as refugees. This form of social and cultural exclusion takes place both in the classroom where the refugee's knowledge and skills may be undervalued and in the policies structuring the educational system where credentials are not recognized.

Justice in Equitable Educational Access. Nancy Fraser's (2007) work on abnormal justice also can be applied to the context of equitable educational access. Fraser explores not just what justice is, but also who it applies to, and how it should be carried out. Fraser (2007) suggests that injustice occurs when an individual's full participation in society is denied by the economic structures that exist; when an individual is prevented from interacting with parity because the institutionalized hierarchies deny them equitable status; and when an individual is impeded from participation because of decisions and rules that deny them an equal voice in deliberations and democratic decision-making. Young adult women from refugee backgrounds experience this injustice by not having access to adequate financial assistance to pursue post-secondary education (Brewer, 2016). They are further denied parity when they are unable to earn the educational credentials they need to fully and positively participate in their new culture due to various challenges, including language barriers, (Hajdukowski-Ahmed, 2008). In addition, if their voices and experiences are rarely considered in the decision-making processes that impact them directly (Mansor & Rahim, 2017), then they fall under the "all subjected principle," (Fraser, 2009, p. 412). This principle suggests that "those who are subjected to a given governance structure have a moral standing as subjects of justice in relation to it" (Fraser, 2009, p. 412).

Meaning, if policies are enacted that impact a specific group of people, then it is only fair and equitable that the voices and perspectives of the impacted group of people get equitable consideration in the decision-making process. For instance, if a group of women from refugee backgrounds is denied educational access because of the prohibitive rules imposed by existing governance structures, then they are considered subjects of justice and are entitled to equal participation in the decision-making processes that impacts their educational access.

2.2. Feminism and Migration

Young adult women from refugee backgrounds have unique experiences based on their gender. The concept of “refugee women” often implies a shared commonality among women from refugee backgrounds, while failing to consider the differential factors of age, class, ethnicity, and experience of these women (Sirriyeh, 2016). However, there is no Universal woman or experience (Sirriyeh, 2016; Zavos, 2010). The issues of women from refugee backgrounds are rarely represented politically and, if they are, often evoke representations of victimhood (Palmary, Burman, Chantler, & Kiguwa, 2010). Current refugee policy has placed refugee women in a position of inferiority and as objects of sexualized exploitation and violence (Gutierrez Rodriguez, 2018; Zavos, 2010). However, it is important to move the discourse regarding these women away from vulnerability and towards the personal agency and resilience that they exhibit in their settlement journey. It is further necessary to understand that the vastly differing experiences of these women in their migration journey and upon resettlement cannot be homogenized (Gutierrez Rodriguez, 2018; Sirriyeh, 2016).

Current Canadian migration policies place refugees, especially those who are racialized, as the Other, the potential worker to fit into a racial, capitalist, and colonial world order (Gutierrez Rodriguez, 2018). Asylum and migration policies objectify refugees by treating them as fundamentally different and inherently inferior to the citizens in the host population— and this is particularly true for women (Gutierrez Rodriguez, 2018). The policies and practices in the developed world tend reinforce an idea of superiority of civilization and a “model” that the developing world should follow (Gatt et al., 2016). This discourse supports the idea that women of colour need rescuing and that women from refugee backgrounds are passive objects or merely victims in war, conflict, and displacement (Gatt et al., 2016; Zavos, 2010). As such, there is an

assumed incapacity of women from refugee backgrounds to be able to participate in political discourse (Zavos, 2010).

In this sense, women from refugee backgrounds are doubly excluded as migrants and as women who are assumed to be able to only talk and share their individualized experiences, but who lack the ability to understand the political and decision-making discourses that exist around them (Zavos, 2010). This reinforces their roles as victimized and/or maternal in nature, framing them as backward, underdeveloped, and disempowered (Anthias, 2002; Lewis, 2006; Zavos, 2010). At the same time, women from refugee backgrounds who are demanding and vocal are often considered disruptive (Anthias, 2002; Lewis, 2006). When this Western sense of moral superiority is challenged, these women are viewed as threats to the political hierarchies that exist (Anthias, 2002; Lewis, 2006). These hierarchies are gendered and aim to exclude new subjects from participating (Anthias, 2002; Lewis, 2006). In this way, women from refugee backgrounds are only welcomed into public discourse if they are subordinate (Anthias, 2002; Lewis, 2006; Zavos, 2010). However, there is a strong desire for migrant women to enter public discourse, as was evident in a migrant panel organized for Greek and migrant women in Athens in 2009 (Zavos, 2010). The women migrant participants went to great lengths to ensure that their speeches were legitimized, for instance by adopting “proper political and linguistic forms,” while simultaneously working to disrupt the current political practices, for instance, by wearing traditional ethnic clothing while participating on the panel (Zavos, 2010, p. 28).

There is also a practical problem when gender equality is equated with women’s empowerment (Cadesky, 2020). Canada’s Gender-Based Analysis Plus Framework (GBA+) understands gender equality as how women, men, and non-binary people experience policy, programs, and initiatives, while women’s empowerment encompasses the resources, agency, and achievements that contribute to women having a voice in decision-making policies and practices (Cadesky, 2020). Yet, current Canadian gender-based policy confounds the two concepts and emphasizes the need for self-improving the individual to achieve women’s empowerment (Cadesky, 2020). Instead, as Cadesky notes, the focus should be on the structural issues of social and economic justice needed to achieve true gender equity. Unless these structural power inequities that produce and reproduce patriarchal systems of discrimination and misogyny in Canada are challenged, gender equity will not progress (Cadesky, 2020; Nagra, 2018).

Canada finds itself in a political and cultural position that legitimizes social stratification and divides, legitimizes exclusion, and denies agency to women from refugee backgrounds, thus requiring a redistribution of resources and power (Indra, 1993; Fraser, 2007; Palmary et al., 2010). Canadian governance structures continue to experience a disconnect between theory-based feminist goals and practical implementation. For instance, when Prime Minister Justin Trudeau was first elected in 2016, he immediately set out to design a cabinet of equal numbers of women to men to reflect the need for increased gender representation in political decision-making (Lyll, 2019; Wilson-Raybould, 2022). Yet, this cabinet failed to adequately represent the diversity of ethnic, class, ability, and age differences amongst women in our society today and in doing so continued to perpetuate a paternalistic governing structure that acts to deny a true representation of women's voices in political decision making in Canada (Lyll, 2019; Smith, 2021; Wilson-Raybould, 2022).

An intersectional feminist analysis that can encompass the complexities of identity and account for the diversity of women, the experiences that they face, and the identities that they hold as political agents, workers, and community leaders is greatly needed in Canada (Carastathis et al., 2018). First coined by Dr. Kimberlé W. Crenshaw (2017), a critical race and Black feminist theorist, intersectional feminism refers to the ways in which women's social identities and the forms of oppression they face overlap with issues of class, immigrant status, race, and/or sexuality. By including an intersectional approach to research based on gender in forced migration, new questions can emerge, and solutions can be found to the unique challenges being faced by women from refugee backgrounds (Carastathis et al., 2018; Crenshaw, 2017; Verloo, 2013). An intersectional approach that reframes, deconstructs, and contests how categories of oppression and struggle amongst women from refugee backgrounds are reproduced is needed to disrupt systems of power and violence inflicted on these women (Carastathis et al., 2018; Crenshaw, 2017; Verloo, 2013).

2.3. Discriminatory Barriers

Young adult women from refugee backgrounds may encounter many barriers in the pursuit of their higher educational aspirations through the discrimination they experience. Two main forms of discrimination will be explored in this study: institutional and structural. According to Pincus, institutional discrimination:

Refers to the policies of majority institutions, and the behaviour of individuals who implement these policies and control these institutions, that are *intended* to have a differential and/or harmful effect on minority groups. A major goal of institutional discrimination is to keep minority groups in a subordinate position within society...sometimes, institutional discrimination is embodied in laws and government policies (p. 121).

Deliberate and legislated forms of discrimination by all levels of government is now illegal. Yet, many forms of institutional discrimination continue to persist and pose as barriers — particularly for minority students who lack the positions of power and decision-making authority to influence policy (Pincus, 2019). While discrimination is intended to keep minority groups subordinate, structural discrimination seems unintentional, but still has negative impacts on minority groups (de Plevitz, 2007; Pincus, 2019).

Structural discrimination refers to the policies of majority institutions, and the behaviour of the individuals who implement these policies and control these institutions, that are *race-neutral in intent*, but have a differential and/or harmful effect on minority groups. The key element in structural discrimination is not the intent but the *effect* of keeping minority groups in a subordinate position (Pincus, 2019, p. 122).

The discrimination that young adult women from refugee backgrounds face in pursuing higher education begins in the displacement process and continues throughout resettlement in their new countries. Presently, the average global rate of resettlement is less than 3% of all refugee applicants annually, which dropped to 1% with the onset of the COVID19 pandemic (Refugee Resettlement, 2021). If women from refugee backgrounds are lucky enough to be resettled and acquire permanent residency status, they may still be confronted with institutionalized and structural forms of discrimination that deny them equal recognition as people under the law and meaningful participation in their new communities (Banks, 1997). Meaningful participation in a society means that individuals feel a sense of agency in their lives and in their communities; they feel that they can participate freely in their society for political, social, cultural, or economic purposes; and they feel that their voices are valued in decision-making processes (Armstrong, 2006). According to Osler and Starkey (2005), education empowers newcomers with the skills, knowledge, social connections, and pathways they need to pursue meaningful participation despite the ongoing discrimination they confront daily. Barriers to educational access deny these women the ability to meaningfully participate in their new societies.

2.3.1. Institutional Discrimination

Institutional discrimination involves the direct procedures and the implementation of policies by the dominant race, ethnic, or gender groups running social institutions that are intended to have differential or harmful effects on a minority group (Braveman et al., 2022; Pincus, 1996; Pincus, 2019). Institutional discrimination involves regular actions based on these policies or organizational routines, which may or may not involve written policies, but directly discriminate against minority groups, such as those from refugee backgrounds (Gomolla & Radtke, 2009; Pincus, 2019). Below is an example of what institutionalized forms of discrimination might look like to students from refugee backgrounds trying to attain higher education in British Columbia.

Table 2.1. Institutional Discrimination Example

Institutional Discrimination	Example: Mandatory English Language Learner Coursework
Institution(s) involved	Ministry of Education, Secondary Schools, Adult Education, and Post-Secondary Institutions.
Dominant group	Educational institutions who make policy guiding program entry requirements, specifically English language credentials.
Minority group	English language learning students, such as those from refugee backgrounds.
Policy/procedure involved	In order to apply to most post-secondary programs, a specific level of academic English language must be attained and proven through specific coursework. In rare circumstances, English language qualifying or equivalency exams can be taken to challenge this requirement.
Discriminatory effects of policy	This is an intentional form of discrimination which privileges English language speakers and those with specific educational credentials because those who lack such academic English language credentials are unable to gain access to higher education. This disproportionately impacts students from refugee backgrounds whose language abilities do not meet institutional requirements. There may also be a lack of alternative options and supports for students from refugee backgrounds to pursue these credentials, such as tutoring, alternative course delivery models and so forth.

This example references the English language level graduation and admission requirements maintained by secondary, Adult Education, and post-secondary

institutions, generally. While these institutions all vary in their English language level requirements, each type of institution requires a certain standard of English language to be attained, as demonstrated through the completion of specific coursework, prior to graduation or admissions. For instance, a grade of C+ in secondary school is required to be considered eligible for admissions to most British Columbian university programs (Education Facts, 2019). Study participants felt that depending on the level of education and type of institution they attended, their English coursework did not prepare them for the academic English language demands required to be successful in higher education. A more detailed analysis of English language requirements in the education system and an analysis of academic English language is provided in the discussion.

Also, necessary to consider is the racism experienced by refugees arriving in Canada which begins in the migration journey with policies that restrict their access to live, work, and study in Canada. Racism is discrimination based on membership in a particular racial or ethnic group, in immigration policy, and through the treatment of minorities (Gulliver, 2018). Despite the noble intentions of Canada's commitment to such protocols as the UN Convention and Protocol on Refugees, Canada continues to demonstrate institutional practices of racism in immigration and refugee policy (Gulliver, 2018; Richmond, 2000). The most recent example of this being the differential treatment that Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) announced in how Ukrainian and Afghani refugees would be able to arrive in Canada and what they would have access to once here. Under the IRCC's Canada-Ukraine Authorization for Emergency Travel program, there are no limits on the number of Ukrainian refugees coming to Canada, visitor visas have been extended from the standard six-months to three years, and work and study permits have been opened free of charge (Canada-Ukraine Authorization, 2022). Some higher educational institutions across Canada created specific programs and initiatives for students and faculty connected to Russia and the Ukraine, including making available emergency funds, providing mental health support, and making higher education admissions more flexible, while the same initiatives were not extended to Syrian or Afghan populations fleeing conflict (Viczkó & Matsumoto, 2022). Marchand (2022) argues that the Canadian government had fewer clear objectives and initiatives to support the Syrian and Afghan refugee populations, than they have for those displaced by the Ukrainian crises. While some higher educational institutions created "global programs" to support any incoming students from refugee

backgrounds, many throughout Canada intentionally created supports specifically for Ukrainian students, staff and faculty indicating institutionalized discrimination (Viccko & Matsumoto, 2022).

There has also been a conflating of terms when referring to Ukrainian populations fleeing war, and the concept of refugee, as defined under the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and as accepted by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC). Whether this obscurity is deliberate or not, is unclear. As previously mentioned, refugee applications must meet a specific criterion in order to be considered in Canada, however, many of the specialized programs created for and extended to Ukrainian nationals fleeing conflict, have not categorized these individuals as refugees. Rather, language (which is constantly changing), such as “temporary residence programs” and “emergency travel authorization” opens up alternative way to provide supports to this population, while not having them need to meet Canada’s strict guidelines for accepting refugees (Canada-Ukraine Authorization, 2022).

As of March 2022, Canada had only resettled 8,580 of the promised 40,000 (a finite number itself) of Afghan refugees fleeing Taliban takeover, and there continue to be strict guidelines to meet in order to be considered eligible for resettlement in Canada if you are from Afghanistan (Sachdeva, 2022). For example, applicants must be part of a specific group, such as women leaders or human rights supporters; they must be an individual who has assisted the Canadian government through interpretation or work with the Canadian Armed Forces; or they must be a local staff member who worked at the Embassy of Canada to Afghanistan (Humanitarian Program, 2022; Immigration Program, 2022). These strict guidelines have precluded many Afghani nationals, who are living in daily danger of persecution, from applying and/or being accepted by UNHCR for resettlement in Canada and are considered a type of institutional racism (Humanitarian Program, 2022; Immigration Program, 2022; Richmond, 2022). If a refugee is able to be admitted to Canada, they may be further confronted with micro-racist aggressions, including stereotypes around security, terrorism, a lack of multicultural perspective, and a lack of gender equality, as they try to settle into their new lives (Gulliver, 2016; Richmond, 2022).

Brown (2015) argues that one reason for the discrepancy in policies amongst refugee groups may be attributable to the neoliberal value of return on investment

placed by the Canadian government and higher educational institutions on immigrants and refugees arriving in Canada. Syrian and Afghan refugees trying to enter Canada and attend higher education are valued not by what they can contribute to Canada and its economy, but rather based on their loss of state protection and their vulnerability. These groups are perceived as having experienced high levels of trauma, stress, and loss of family support, placing Canada as the “saviour” within a post-colonial framework, as further perpetuated by the media (Tyyska et al., 2007). Conversely, displaced Ukrainians have been viewed as a global problem, impacting surrounding communities and in doing so, have blurred the lines between the us versus them dichotomy (Shultz & Viczko, 2021; Viczko & Matsumoto, 2022). As a result of the greater value placed on this crisis to the global community, geographical location has become the main prerequisite for the arrival of refugees to Canada from Ukraine and its surrounding regions, as opposed to the strict guidelines, outlined above, that are required by those from Syria and Afghanistan. Viczko & Matsumoto (2022) argue that such selective support to “globally displaced people” highlights deeply embedded practices of colonialism and imperialism in how the Canadian government and higher educational institutions throughout Canada respond to global conflicts. They further suggest that the responses of higher educational institutions, such as specialized initiatives, to such conflicts are not merely good-natured humanitarian responses but are deeply intertwined with political activities of the nation and the neoliberal agendas of the higher educational institutions themselves - further perpetuating forms of institutional discrimination (Viczko & Matsumoto, 2022).

2.3.2. Structural discrimination

Discrimination in Canadian refugee policy is not new, but rather has evolved from more obvious forms of prejudice, such as the racist policies of the Continuous Passage Act of 1908 which specifically banned immigrants that did not come to Canada by continuous journey from their native lands, most notably South Asian immigrants (Aiken, 1999; Lowry & Nyers, 2003; Molloy & Madokoro, 2017). The Canadian government now adopts a policy of “objective neutrality,” which implies that immigration and refugee policies apply universally to all incoming populations (Kyriakides et al., 2019; Lowry & Nyers, 2003). However, policy is shaped by economic requirements, ideological and political considerations, as well as perceived human rights obligations, which may be

less obvious and overt forms of institutional and structural discrimination, but are still discriminatory in effect (Aiken, 1999; Kyriakides et al., 2019;). Structural forms of discrimination are neutral in intent, but disproportionately impact certain groups over others. The frequent shaping and re-shaping of Canadian refugee policies and laws, as well as the manipulation of language, enables inclusive/exclusive policies to be enacted at the will of the existing government and within a framework that currently supports colonial and racist hierarchies (Viccko & Matsumoto, 2022). Such policies enacted in Canada impact populations both domestically and abroad, and are forms of structural discrimination (Viccko & Matsumoto, 2022).

Structural discrimination can appear as gender and race neutral norms and procedures that seem appropriate but have negative and prohibitive effects on minority groups (Gomolla & Radtke, 2009; Pincus, 2019). Below is an example of what structural forms of discrimination look like to students from refugee backgrounds trying to attain higher education. The example uses English Language Learner (ELL) course content delivery methods. While further explored in the Chapter 5, discussion, in short, specific academic proficiency in English language is required for entry into most post-secondary programs in British Columbia. Proficiency is typically measured through specific coursework and grade attainment. This example focuses on how structural policies and procedures may act to prohibit newcomer success in these courses, which thereby limits individuals from refugee backgrounds the ability to pursue higher education.

Table 2.2. Structural Discrimination Example

Structural Discrimination	Example: ELL course content delivery methods
Institution(s) involved	Federal government; Ministry of Advanced Education and Training; Post-Secondary Institutions.
Dominant group(s)	Government; Educational Institutions; Not-for profit and public organizations that run ELL classes (including libraries).
Minority group	Adult English language learning students, such as those from refugee backgrounds.
Policy/procedure involved (neutral in intent)	Individualized changes made to ELL program delivery model as decided by the institution or organization that has received the funding to deliver programming. Such changes might include changes in language proficiency descriptors and learning standards. There might also be wide variation amongst delivery methods, pedagogical development, course/instructor expertise, and the intended learning outcomes of the programs.

Discriminatory Effects of Policies and Procedures	<p>There is unequal access to ELL programming for students from refugee backgrounds depending on the institution they attend. Community-based ELL programming does not train students in academic English language and does not provide credentials needed for higher education program applications. ELL programs developed in post-secondary institutions are more academically focused, but still might lack the technical content needed for entry into/success in specific programs, for example medicine, law, or engineering. Digital and online learning requirements introduce additional barriers to access.</p>
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To assess whether structural discrimination is occurring in the education system, de Plevitz (2007) suggests applying a four-element framework. This framework suggests that structural discrimination happens if one or more of the following elements occur:

1. *The person aggrieved must comply with a condition to gain a benefit.* This requirement may be unattainable due to factors directly associated with the ethnicity, gender, class, or legal status of the individual. For instance, to meet the entrance requirements for a higher educational program, one must have a Canadian high-school diploma. Young adults from refugee backgrounds may be unable to comply with this condition because of their developing language levels, undervalued foreign credentials, and lack of expendable resources to attend Adult Education courses to attain this requirement.
2. *The person aggrieved must be able to prove that they are unable to comply with the requirement because of their status, in relation to their gender status, socio-economic status, mental health status, citizenship status or other.* For instance, young adult women from refugee backgrounds might be unable to comply with the admissions requirements of certain academic programs because of income barriers - directly related to their refugee experience – which make taking additional pre-requisite courses unaffordable.
3. *In comparing the different proportions of people with or without the attribute, those with the attribute are more likely to achieve success.* For instance, in comparing Canadian-born students with those from refugee backgrounds in secondary school, Canadian-born students who are able to pass all their academic courses, including a senior-level language course, are able to enter post-secondary at higher rates than refugee-background students. This may be because refugee-backgrounds students developing academic English language skills prohibit them from academic entrance.

4. *Inequality exists if the conditions of the requirement are unreasonable and there are no viable alternatives.* For instance, in the context of this study, a post-secondary program requires all students to have a specific level of academic English typically attained throughout a 12-year English-focused public education curriculum, and there is no other viable alternative to attaining this degree of language competency in a condensed amount of time. This creates a situation in which English language conditions for post-secondary access are unreasonable to those from refugee-backgrounds who have not benefited from prior English-language education.

Unfortunately, many of these discriminatory policies and practices have become well engrained within education organizations and are accepted as normal practice. There are more recent studies that address the disempowerment that newcomers experience because they lack a voice and contribution to institutional decision-making (Malin & Maidment, 2003; Smythe, et al., 2021), but as Malin & Maidment (2003) note, most have little choice but to conform to the operating norms of the institutions.

Pincus (2019) suggests that to address discrimination and racism, a society must re-examine its basic cultural values and assess what the fundamental principles of its social organizations are. Doing so requires a questioning of the purpose of the education system, the financial priorities of a government, and the value placed on equity in a society overall.

2.4. The Need for Intersectional Programming, Evaluation and Pedagogy in Higher Education

Higher education institutions need to play a more deliberate role in fostering learning environments that are equity promoting, inclusive, and supportive of all their students (Altbach, 2016; Clancy & Goastellec, 2007). The creation of intersectional programming by higher educational institutions to support students from refugee backgrounds is complex and must consider the broader economic and social circumstances students face, as well as the unique individual needs that exist. Intersectional programming requires that several social categorizes that may overlap or be interdependent, (for example, class and gender) be considered in program planning, as well as pedagogy implementation (McCowan, 2016).

Young adults from refugee backgrounds want to pursue higher education. A qualitative study conducted by Brucker, Roather, and Schupp (2016) involving interviews with 17 refugee students as well as staff from higher education institutions and counselling services, found a high level of educational aspirations amongst refugees. Their study found that individuals from refugee backgrounds view education as a key driver of hope for better employment and higher income as well as a way to overcome poverty and help support their families. This finding is supported by a four-year pilot project conducted by Crea and McFarland (2015) on higher education for refugees, which found that while individuals from refugee backgrounds are motivated to pursue higher education, many are prevented from doing so because of discrimination faced as a result of language skills, race, and poverty.

Such institutional and structural forms of discrimination exist in part because of the policies and practices of higher educational institutions. A systematic review conducted by Arar (2021) that explored 44 studies examining pathways to higher education for individuals from refugee backgrounds showed that there continues to exist gaps between the official policies of host countries and the implementation of support for integrating newcomers from refugee backgrounds into higher education. Significant to Arar's analysis is that there is a continued need for coordinated effort amongst fields, including education, welfare, health, and employment to source funding and establish mechanisms of assessment to ensure refugee policies are effective at supporting incoming populations. Arar's findings reinforce the need for intersectional educational policy that address the practical barriers of structural and institutional discrimination that exist for young adults from refugee backgrounds including the challenges associated with poverty, housing, transportation, and childcare that these women face in their re-settlement.

The need for intersectional programming and support is supported by Ramsay and Baker's (2019) meta-scoping study examining 46 papers on students from refugee backgrounds in international higher educational contexts. The authors determined that the influence of crucial factors such as gender, age, institutional location, and social relations (such as peer friendships and family relationships), influence students from refugee backgrounds experiences in higher education, but are factors that are not currently well understood. According to Ramsay and Baker (2019), research that privileges the voices of students themselves and are participatory in their approaches,

as well as include consultation with people in relevant communities and other key stakeholders, are needed to inform the development of holistic supports for students from refugee backgrounds. Further, they argue that there is an increased need for reflection and evaluation of these supports to better understand the impact of programming and various supports on educational and career outcomes for these students from refugee backgrounds.

One example that evaluated the impact of supportive programming is documented by Morrice (2009), who conducted a qualitative study that explored the levels of success that the British Ways into Learning and Work (WILAW) program had in supporting educational access and workforce entry of newcomers from refugee backgrounds. WILAW was a 60-hour long course that assisted participants with work applications, provided information on the British education system and workplace culture, provided higher-level English language support and preparation for the International English Language Test System (IELTS), and provided non-formal learning activities, including networking opportunities using mentorship and visiting speakers. This study concluded that the most significant benefit of the WILAW program involved the creation of a forum for participants to explore cultural, social, and political values—theirs and those of the dominant culture—over its original goals of supporting participants in making career choices. Morrice found that the original goals of this program were not actualized because of underlying factors, such as racism, discrimination, and poverty, that compounded the challenges participants faced in the education system and the workplace. Morrice's study reinforces the need for programming that addresses the complex factors that influence the everyday lives of students from refugee backgrounds. It further reinforces that there is no one right/wrong way to do this.

Unangst and Crea's study (2020) explored how several selected American universities were creating supports for their students from refugee backgrounds. In this study they determined that despite the method of support, such as workshops, conferences, or programs, there was a need to directly engage the voices of these students to ensure that the initiatives were reflective of, and responsive to, their needs and the greater context of the community in which they were living. Unangst and Crea also reinforced that programs such as these require evaluation and monitoring to ensure they are meeting their intended goals.

Additionally, one of the most significant barriers to educational attainment in Canada is language ability. Language proficiency is complex and impacted by several interconnected factors including cognitive skills, personal attitude, and social practices (Cumming, 2013). A qualitative study on Syrian students from refugee backgrounds in Turkey found that language fluency posed the greatest challenge for young adults to pursue higher education (Aydin & Kaya, 2017). This study found that although students conveyed verbal fluency in three to four years upon resettlement, academic language fluency took four to seven years to attain — and potentially up to ten years for young adult students whose education had been disrupted or who had significantly long gaps in their educational experiences. Academic language fluency refers to the ability to understand and express, both in oral and written formats, concepts and ideas required for academic success (Cummins & Yee-Fun, 2007; Sterzuk, 2005). It differs from conversational fluency as it requires knowledge and understandings of how to apply grammatical constructions and discourse structures —how to organize text in writing (Cummins & Yee-Fun, 2007). Students with weak academic language fluency experience significantly more challenges to their academic success, than those with strong fluency skills (Cummins & Yee-Fun, 2007; Sterzuk, 2015).

Lastly, an important aspect to supporting students from refugee backgrounds in higher education is developing responsive pedagogical approaches to teaching and learning, such as using restorative justice frameworks in the classroom, teaching through culturally relevant curriculum, and embedding inclusive educational and literacy practices into teaching (Arar et al., 2019; Ogilvie & Fuller, 2016; Taylor & Sidhu, 2012; Woods, 2009). Grant and Sleeter (2008) argue that teachers should be educated to understand the intersectional identities of diverse student populations to better facilitate a safe learning community and foster a sense of belonging in their classrooms. This further requires Canadian-born students to learn about their peers from refugee backgrounds, and vice versa, so that different values, traditions, worldviews, and social/political relationships can foster mutual understanding and a sense of community in the relevant learning space (Grant & Sleeter, 2008).

2.5. Goal Setting while balancing Life Responsibilities: The Complex Challenges for Women during Young Adulthood

Forming personal life goals are important to the way young people direct their own growth and development (Heckhausen et al., 2001). This is particularly true for young adult women from refugee backgrounds, who are in a position of making many new decisions that will influence their future life paths. A qualitative study by Sirriyeh (2008) explored the factors that influenced young adult asylum seekers seeking settlement in England. Sirriyeh found that these young adults, many of whom had become separated from their families, were above all else seeking safety and security in their new environment. Unfortunately, many participants shared that they experienced high levels of harassment and discrimination in their new communities, and that their feelings of insecurity were exacerbated by housing policies that placed them with others who had also experienced trauma and harassment, thus worsening their mental health. Sirriyeh recommended that the binary categorization of 'child' or 'adult' refugees in the immigration system needed to be challenged, and that the gradual transition to adulthood must be recognized in research. This is necessary since young adulthood is a transitory time-period and the needs of young adults differ from those of children and adults, as do the needs of women compared to their male counterparts, particularly in regard to educational and career planning (Sirriyeh, 2016, Zavos, 2010).

Roisman, Masten, Coatsworth & Tellegen (2004) argue that young adults are faced with more transitions and life decisions than at any other developmental stage, and that the goals that they set for themselves are dependent on several factors including environment, experiences, and the availability of opportunities. Tanner and Arnett (2009) further suggest that there has been a global shift in delaying the emergence into adulthood, typically marked by such factors as marriage and parenthood, and that this is specifically true for young women. Cross-cultural studies show that increased post-secondary educational opportunities, technological advances and increasing secularization are extending this period of entry into adulthood in many countries; this shift is most pronounced in economically developed countries where there is more access to educational opportunities (Jeffrey & Dyson, 2008; Kroger et al., 2010).

However, Schoon and Schulenberg (2012) argue that young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds may make the transition to employment and parenthood

faster than others, as a result of insufficient alternative options and specifically, resources to pursue higher education. This is supported by research from Osgood, Ruth, Eccles, Jacobs, and Barber (2005) who similarly argue that there are a number of possible pathways in regard to transitioning to adulthood, that are influenced by economic well-being. Similarly, Hendry and Kloep (2010), as well as Silva (2012) argue that the traditional markers of adulthood, as identified by Tanner and Arnett, are changing. They suggest that working-class young people who are denied certain opportunities due to a lack of economic affluence do not mark the transition to adulthood by self-exploration or passing certain social markers as argued by Tanner & Arnett. Rather, they argue that stressful circumstances in early adulthood for young people who lack choice, because of their limited social, relational, and/or occupational opportunities and skills, as well as the structural social factors and external support young people have, contribute to their developmental transitions to adulthood (Hendry & Kloep, 2010; Bynner, 2005). In Silva's research (2012), over 60% of participants who were young working-class peoples marked their transition to adulthood by being able to overcome a painful family past. The complexity of the transition to adulthood, indicates that young adult women from refugee backgrounds will have a wide variety of trajectories that they may pursue in their transition to adulthood. Those who arrived in Canada on academic scholarship, may have more access to higher education, while others, who are struggling to enter into higher education, may be more oriented towards work and employment because a lack of financial means. Those who experienced more trauma in their migration journeys, may experience mental health challenges that further delay their transitions to adulthood. For women from refugee backgrounds who are being resettled in Western countries, these newly available life opportunities contribute to a re-evaluation of their personal goals (Kroger et al., 2010).

Several studies on resilience in the context of poverty, found that racialized young adults in the United States take on more adult responsibilities earlier than their peers and are believed to have closer, more interdependent relationships with their families than their non-racialized American counterparts (Cauce et al., 2003; Fuligni et al., 1999). These young adults, more often of first- or second-generation Americans themselves, are often responsible for helping support their families financially, as well as by acting as cultural brokers, helping family members navigate the education, health care, and social systems that they require access to (Cauce et al., 2003; Fuligni &

Witkow, 2004). Similarly, young adult women from racialized and immigrant backgrounds were also thought to have more responsibility earlier than their peers, as they were more likely to marry and have children younger (Fuligni & Watlow, 2004). Marriage and children, often considered two main markers of adulthood, can result in young immigrant and refugee women experiencing a shorter period of emerging adulthood, in which they had less time and opportunity for identity and self-exploration, limiting what they could do and what they wanted to do (Shakya et al., 2010; Tanner et al., 2009). This observation is supported by Salmela-Arto, Aunola and Nurmi (2007) who argue that refugee women who have more familial obligations in the home and less freedom outside of the home experience less flexibility in relation to their time, personal resources, and finances. In turn, these restrictions negatively impact their ability to pursue their educational and career goals.

These additional responsibilities may further indicate a lack of time to pursue part-time employment or educational upgrading, and less opportunity to save money for their own personal educational pursuits. Following a review of Canadian-based empirical literature on the barriers associated with refugees' post-secondary educational access (Ferede, 2012), individuals from refugee backgrounds are less likely to pursue higher education because of high tuition costs. As a result, refugees in Canada invest in higher education at lower rates than other newcomers to Canada. Ferede's study suggests that this is because they misperceive the cost and benefits of higher education and are deterred by high tuition costs, while failing to fully appreciate the long-term payoff higher education affords. Kanno and Varghese (2010) however, suggest that for low-income earners who have experienced significant economic losses due to migration and are just re-starting their lives, such as refugees, the high costs of pursuing a post-secondary education may be a significant deterrent, with many obligated to pursue a job to earn money to support the immediate needs of themselves and their families instead. The failure of many post-secondary institutions in Canada to recognize and/or accredit foreign-earned credentials, experience, and other forms of knowledge and skills, further contributes to a refugee's reluctance to pursue higher education, especially if the individual is 25 years or older and will have to re-start their education with a high school diploma (Kanno & Varghese, 2010; Naidoo, 2015).

Finally, Aydin & Kaya's study (2019) found that personal challenges experienced by young adults from refugee backgrounds, such as the need for psychological support

for war/trauma were not supported in resettlement. The researchers found that malnutrition and economic difficulties, significantly impacted students' abilities to learn the dominant language, reinforcing the need for an intersectional approach to supporting newcomers access to higher education. An intersectional approach to addressing such personal challenges would include coordinated efforts by diverse health care practitioners, specific refugee serving services, including community-based organizations such as the Food Bank and language services, as well as government agencies creating minimum wage rates, subsidized housing policies, and social assistance support.

2.6. The Impact of Digital and Online Technologies in Pursuing Higher Education

New opportunities available to young women from refugee backgrounds both pre- and post-resettlement are increasingly being supported by digital networks (Dahya & Dryden-Peterson, 2017). Technological connectivity is transforming how individuals communicate as well as acquire information (Connecting Refugees, 2016). According to the UNHCR (2016), digital access enables young people from refugee backgrounds to find opportunities to improve their social connections, which strengthens their well-being, enhances their social capital, and connects them to the resources, people, and services in the local and global community that may otherwise have been challenging to find. This is opening new educational and career pathways for young women from refugee backgrounds, particularly if they are able to access educational scholarships and bursaries online, which can open up new opportunities for accessing education and even resettlement (Connecting Refugees, 2016).

In Dahya and Dryden-Peterson's (2017) study on how social practices and norms are informed by the integration and use of technology, the researchers examined the experiences of students who migrated from Dadaab refugee camp to either Nairobi, Kenya or Canada, and analyzed how specific types of technology influenced their cultural values and expectations, as well as the social, political, and economic conditions they faced in the refugee context. The researchers found that supportive communication over mobile phones and online social networks were important in generating educational opportunities for students from refugee backgrounds, and that peer-to-peer support was also important. Further, access to mobile devices that also had internet connections

increased social networks online and influenced students' abilities to seek out pathways to higher education. The researchers also found that the social networks students engaged in after their migration to their new location provided important networks for their educational pursuits.

A sub-set of Dayha and Dryden-Petereson's (2017) study explored how women and girls are at particular risk of abuse and exploitation when pursuing all levels of education due to ongoing targeted attacks of women attempting to attend educational institutions. A United Nations Human Rights report (*Attack against girls' education*, 2015) found that within a five-year time span, there were attacks on women and girls trying to access education in roughly 70 different countries. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (2015) determined that such attacks, in addition to lack of infrastructure, lack of resources, poorly trained teachers, and a lack of curriculum, act as additional barriers to women from refugee backgrounds wanting to pursue higher education. While technology is allowing education-related activities to find new pathways for transmission, the role of transnational connections to support these students needs to be better understood (Dahya & Dryden-Peterson, 2017).

Online education and such concepts as MOOCS – or Massive Open Online Courses, are often argued to enhance access to educational opportunities for young people from refugee backgrounds and minimize some of the above-mentioned challenges (Halkic & Arnold, 2019). Halkic and Arnold conducted a mixed-method study on Kiron Open Higher Education, a German online academic model aiming to ease refugees' access into higher education. This study analyzed data from 1,375 students from refugee backgrounds to better understand their experiences navigating online higher education. The findings showed that despite access to online education, there was a low rate of completion of online courses and few students finished an online diploma or degree program. They attributed this lack of student academic success to: the failure by other institutions to recognize online education credentials; precarious housing and difficult living conditions (making studying difficult); English language barriers (courses were delivered in English); and the increasingly used model of blended learning (requiring a certain amount of in-person instruction). They also found that males were represented 4:1 over females, suggesting additional gendered-based barriers to accessing education. Halkic and Arnold, however, argued that despite these challenges, mobile technologies did help students build supportive networks and relationships that

“travelled” with them on their migration journeys, from camp to resettlement. This study reinforced that educational technologies are only part of a larger solution necessary to support students from refugee backgrounds.

Increasingly creative approaches to bridging the divide between in-person and online learning, as well as developed/developing country educational partnerships, are being attempted. One such program is the Borderless Higher Education for Refugees (BHER, 2021) project that is a consortium of Canadian and Kenyan universities and non-governmental organizations aiming to make educational programming available for refugees in the Dadaab and Kakuma refugee camps in Kenya. BHER’s goal is to provide internationally recognized higher education to train local and refugee teachers to be leaders in their communities, to contribute to conditions for justice, and to help promote peace in Kenya, Somalia, and the surrounding regions. The BHER program graduated roughly 400 students in the 10 years it was operational (Dippo, personal communication, November 16, 2021). The relative success of BHER has made it a model for other agencies and governments in other regions, including Jordan and Syria (Dippo, personal communication, November 16, 2021). Yet, Dr. Dippo, Executive Committee Member of BHER and Professor at York University, explained that a key factor for the program’s success in graduating students was the trust-based relationships that were built between local populations and the BHER program faculty (Dippo, personal communication, November 16, 2021). In the conversation I had with Dr. Dippo, he reinforced the need for policy makers to understand the complexity of creating accessible, sustainable, equity-seeking higher educational programming for students from refugee backgrounds. He conveyed that there is a failure to consider the multitude of inter-related factors, such as local population engagement and participation, the sustainability of funding, and the on-going need to address safety concerns that contribute to such initiatives.

A qualitative study conducted by Kipng’etich & Osman (2014) on the role of the BHER initiative in improving access, equity, and quality in professional training and education of refugee teachers in the Dadaab camp reinforced the important role that responsive pedagogy plays in determining student engagement, participation, and achievement levels in school. This study found that there is a need for such initiatives as BHER, but that there continues to be significant challenges to such programs, including security threats, gender imbalance due to gender-based discrimination, student retention issues, and a lack of resources including electricity in the homes or equipment such as

Bunsen burners needed to conduct experiments. Such programs as BHER further reinforce the ways in which higher educational institutions have the capacity to support refugee and local students in pursuing meaningful educational and career opportunities (Kipng'etich & Osmann, 2014).

Lastly, poor quality information and misinformation on how to pursue educational pathways can negatively impact the mental health and well-being of newcomers from refugee backgrounds. A qualitative study conducted by Bajwa, Kidd, Markoulakis, Abai, and McKenzie (2017) aimed to better understand the informational barriers students from refugee backgrounds experienced in navigating educational pathways, accessing professional supports, evaluating credentials, financing education, navigating immigration systems, and accessing online technologies. They found that participants lacked appropriate professional supports and information to navigate the educational pathways needed to make informed decisions about what type of post-secondary programs or career training to pursue. This lack of information often meant that participants were relying on unreliable word-of-mouth information which failed to consider the complexity of individual circumstances, such as the need for credentials and finances to be assessed. The researchers also found that newcomers were often frustrated, overwhelmed, and confused by their in/ability to access appropriate, accurate and timely information, which posed further barriers to them pursuing their educational goals.

2.7. Summary

Women from refugee backgrounds are not a homogenous group, and there is no universal experience. Critical and feminist theory aim to expose the challenges faced by these women in seeking higher education. Current refugee policies deny women agency and voice in participating in political and decision-making processes. Larger social and economic concerns must be considered to better address the multitude of institutional and structural discriminatory factors, beginning with policy making, that exist for these women. Higher educational institutions that have the ability to create inclusive programming that addresses the intersectional dynamics of their student populations, as well as consider the complex economic and social conditions that impact student learning, may positively contribute to improved educational access for newcomers from refugee backgrounds. During the highly transitory time of young adulthood, young adult

women from refugee backgrounds are balancing their personal goals with their everyday lived experiences and responsibilities. The ability of policy and programming to address challenging factors, including poverty and language barriers, may increase refugee women's participation in higher education. Some innovative programming, aided by the support of technology is creating new pathways to higher education, yet there remain many barriers in the policies and practices that restrict access to higher education for young adult women from refugee backgrounds.

Since 1980, Canada has welcomed over 1,088,015 people from refugee backgrounds, and this number continues to grow in-light of the ongoing global crises that emerge, including most recently Syrian refugees fleeing civil war, Afghani refugees fleeing Taliban rule, and Ukrainian refugees fleeing Russian invasion; in addition there are thousands seeking asylum in Canada from Venezuela, South Sudan, Myanmar and other areas of the world (Refugees in Canada, 2022). Yet many of the refugees that arrive to Canada come with few financial resources and developing English/French language skills, making it difficult to pursue education and find stable employment to attain self-sufficiency (Refugees in Canada, 2022). Studies on refugee settlement in Canada repeatedly show that people arriving from refugee backgrounds significantly contribute to Canada's economy with over 51% of refugees attaining higher education and working in high skilled jobs, including as doctors and software engineers (Refugees in Canada, 2022; Reports & Statistics, 2022). This success is much more achievable for young people who arrive in Canada early enough to attain the benefits of a strong public education system and to develop the academic language proficiency skills needed to be successful in higher education.

Yet, the high cost of living in Canada makes it difficult for young adults from refugee backgrounds to develop their language skills while also meeting the everyday needs of themselves and their families. There is a gap in understanding how refugee families support themselves in Canada. Generalized statistics on education and employment rates, as well as income levels, do not convey the challenges that most individuals from refugee backgrounds face in Canada in their resettlement journey. Specifically, these statistics ignore the unique challenges faced by young adult women who missed out on significant gaps in their learning and do not have the time or resources to make up for these educational and learning losses.

The next chapter describes the qualitative research methods used to conduct this study, which involved interviews with 18 participant and four focus groups with 17 participants, for the purpose of better understanding the discriminatory barriers that young adult women from refugee backgrounds face in pursuing higher education in Canada.

Chapter 3. Methodology

This chapter begins with an overview of the purpose of the study and of the research questions. It then reviews the design of the study as well as provides a rationale for why qualitative methods were used in this study. Procedures are then reviewed, as well as an explanation of how site and participant selection were conducted. From here, data collection methods are explained, and data analysis procedures are described. My positionality as a researcher is then explored, and strategies of validity and reliability are explained. Finally, this chapter concludes with a discussion on the limitations of this study.

3.1. Overview and Research Questions

This study aims to explore the challenges that young adult women from refugee backgrounds face in pursuing higher educational opportunities in Canada. Canada is a world leader in the resettlement of refugees and in 2019 ranked first amongst 26 countries in providing resettlement opportunities to over 30,082 people fleeing war and persecution (UNHCR, 2022). This number continues to climb as global crises continue to displace hundreds of thousands of people annually, with a worldwide total of 84 million currently displaced people (Refugee Data Finder, 2022). Amongst the regions that have displaced the most people as a result of persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations, or events seriously disturbing public order, including terrorism, are Syria, Afghanistan, Ukraine, Venezuela, South Sudan, and Myanmar (UNHCR, 2022). Adult women make up 25% of those displaced, but data on them is often lumped into a generalized category of 18-59-year-olds, which does not distinguish the unique experiences and the educational needs of young adult women. Available data fails to account for these women having missed out on key years of education and their unique life stage as young adults. These women contribute significantly to their family's well-being and stability. There is a strong need for them to be able to access education and training to make meaningful lives both for themselves and their families in their new countries of settlement (Figures at a Glance, 2021).

The purpose of this study is to examine the barriers faced by young adult women from refugee backgrounds who wish to pursue higher educational opportunities here in Canada. The three main questions this study aimed to explore were:

1. What are the factors that influence the educational and career aspirations of young women (aged 19-30 years old) from refugee backgrounds who have immigrated to Canada?
2. What barriers exist that challenge or prevent the pursuit of these aspirations?
3. Do responsibilities related to gender create barriers to pursuing higher education?

This chapter describes how this study was conducted and provides a rationale for the methods used in this study design.

3.2. Study Design and Justification

This study was conducted using qualitative methodological processes as outlined by Merriam and Tisdell (2016). Qualitative research aims to help the researcher better understand how people interpret their experiences, construct their worlds, and apply meaning to their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This qualitative research design is rooted in constructivist principles and is premised on the belief that knowledge creation is on-going and is co-constructed by participants as they make meaning of their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Constructivist principles maintain that participants make meaning of their experiences through what they already know and the experiences and individuals they encounter (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Richardson, 2003). In this way, meaning and experience are socially produced (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

In this study, a constructivist lens was used in order to acknowledge and honour participants' individual values, beliefs, and experiences, while recognizing that multiple realities may exist through individual participants' experiences and interactions (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Constructivist principles support an inductive method of analysis. Through inductive analysis, I aimed to use detailed readings of the data collected in interviews and focus groups to create themes and categories upon which interpretations were made (Thomas, 2006).

This constructivist lens was further influenced by a critical research perspective. This critical research approach was drawn from feminist theory and critical social justice theory. It assumes that power relations are historically and socially constructed and that there is a need to confront the injustice which, in the context of this study, occurred in the policies and practices that create barriers for young adult women from refugee backgrounds seeking higher education in Canada (Kincheloe et al., 2011). A critical research perspective also aims to answer questions of power – who has it, how it's negotiated, and what structures reinforce it, with the aim of empowering those lacking voice and decision-making power (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

A qualitative methodological approach was considered appropriate to understand the experiences of young adult women from refugee backgrounds as they seek to pursue their higher educational aspirations in Canada because it enables study participants to share their own experiences and apply meaning to them through their own unique lenses. As each individual had differing experiences, this approach enabled me as the researcher to look for themes and patterns amongst participants' stories and experiences; to form interpretations of the experiences that highlighted the barriers and challenges they faced; and to bring to attention the impact that their age, status, and gender had on their experiences. These, in turn, exposed inequitable practices, policies, behaviours, and attitudes in the Canadian education system that act as barriers to young adult women from refugee backgrounds' ability to pursue their higher educational aspirations.

3.3. Procedures

The procedures of this study were completed as follows:

1. Completed, submitted, and received ethics approval from Simon Fraser University and two school districts offering Adult Education programs in Greater Vancouver.
2. Participants were recruited online:
 - a. An introductory email was first sent to 41 refugee serving agencies, organizations, and educational institutions throughout Greater Vancouver (Appendix A). This email included an invitation to participate in the study (Appendix B).

- b. Individuals who expressed interest in participating then received an email that explained the study, reviewed participant criteria, explained the \$50 participation honorarium, and encouraged clarifying questions. If individuals were still interested, they were emailed the participant consent forms (Appendix C). I then explained that the consent forms needed to be signed and returned electronically. No participants who expressed interest and met the participant criteria (see participant selection section below – 3.3.2.) were turned away. A total of 18 individuals participated in the interviews and 17 individuals participated in the focus groups.
 - c. Once the completed consent forms were received, I emailed the individual several options for Zoom time/date meetings, and once confirmed, sent them a private meeting link. I also shared that there would be an optional focus group follow-up if they were interested in participating after their interview.
3. Prior to the interviews commencing, I reviewed the study purpose with participants and reinforced that they were free to not answer a question or end the interview if they felt uncertain at any point.
4. Interviews lasted for 60 minutes – although some went longer with the consent of the participants.
5. Four focus groups (of 4-5 participants in each group) were conducted after the interviews were completed. Out of the 18 interview participants, 17 participated in the focus groups. Focus groups lasted on average 60 minutes.
6. Both interviews and focus groups were recorded on an external-recording device and transcribed. They were then deleted.
7. Upon completion of the interviews, a \$50 honorarium was e-transferred to the participants. Similarly, upon completion of the focus groups, another \$50 honorarium was e-transferred to each participant for their participation. Individuals who participated in both the interviews and focus groups received a total of a \$100 honorarium for their contributions. The one participant who chose not to participate in the focus group, only received a one-time \$50 honorarium for her participation in the interview.
8. Interviews and focus groups were recorded on an external-recording device that at no time was connected to or stored any information online or on the Cloud.
9. Interviews were then transcribed, and the original recordings deleted.

10. Transcriptions were emailed back to participants who had the opportunity to review, edit, and amend them as they saw fit.
11. Digital files of the transcriptions were kept in a password-protected folder on my personal computer with a copy saved to my password protected personal external hard-drive. Neither my computer nor hard-drive left my house and were always stored in a locked cabinet.
12. Hard-copy notes that were printed only used pseudonyms for participants and these documents remained in a locked cabinet my house. After they were analyzed, they were shredded and recycled.

3.3.1. Agencies, Organizations, and Institutions for Participant Recruitment

The study was conducted by contacting refugee serving agencies, organizations, and educational institutions throughout Greater Vancouver. In total 41 agencies, organizations, and educational institutions were contacted. These institutions were selected because of the settlement and educational work that they do with newcomers from refugee backgrounds. The criteria I used to assess the suitability of an institution for participant recruitment included: what kind of work they do with/for refugee communities, who their services are targeted towards, and whether they provide or are affiliated with educational programming. Some agencies were specifically targeted towards providing services for newcomers from refugee backgrounds, while others offered more generalized educational programming, such as ELL classes for all newcomers, but among their students were often found newcomers from refugee backgrounds.

To find these institutions, I first conducted a general online search of refugee serving agencies, organizations, and educational institutions throughout Greater Vancouver. From this strategy emerged several well-known refugee serving services, such as DiverCity and the Immigrant Service Society of British Columbia. I then sent out introductory emails and invitations to these services. To narrow my search to educational programming I also contacted Adult Education Centres, libraries offering ELL classes, and neighborhood houses offering settlement services. If I did not hear back, I followed up with a phone call. If I received an email response, I followed up with an email response. All services who emailed responses back expressed interest in helping connect their clients with the study. It was generally agreed upon that the service

agencies would forward the study invitation to their client lists and that interested individuals would then email me directly. The services that continued to provide support for newcomer refugee populations specifically throughout the start of the pandemic provided the most willing and interested participants. Of the 41 services contacted, nearly 28 services expressed interest in connecting their client base, with participants recruited from 14 different agencies, organizations, or educational institutions, but. Roughly six agencies had temporarily closed due to the COVID19 pandemic and were unavailable for communication.

3.3.2. Participant recruitment

Study participants were recruited through a purposive sampling process, which narrows down participants to a select group of people who fit specific criteria (Clandinin & Connelly, 1999). Study participants included in the study were those who identified as young adult women from refugee backgrounds, who were between the ages of 19-30 years old, who had been in Canada for up to ten years, and who possessed a working level of the English language. This demographic was selected because the specific experiences of young adult women aged 19+ years old, who are English language learners, and lack academic credentials to pursue higher education, have been understudied (Beiser, 2009; Lacroix, 2004; Niemeyer, 2016; Shields & Lujan, 2018). This age group exists in a kind of time limbo, in which existing adult newcomer programming does not meet their educational needs, and they are too old to reap the benefits of the free supportive programming, including language classes and mentorship opportunities, provided by the K-12 public education system (Niemeyer, 2016; Shakya et al., 2012). Individuals who had been in Canada for up to 10 years were recruited for the study because women from refugee backgrounds continue to struggle with similar educational and workplace barriers even after several years of settlement (Shakya et al., 2012). Finally, a working level of English was required to better understand the direct experiences of the women and because basic language proficiency is required to pursue most levels of education in Canada (Cumming, 2013).

Included in the 18 participants recruited for the study and who participated in interviews are a pair of sisters, a separate set of three sisters, and seven individual women. Due to the COVID19 pandemic, participant recruitment and participation were conducted online. During the time the study was conducted, 15 of the 18 participants

resided in the Greater Vancouver area, while three participants had recently moved or were in the process of moving to another province within Canada to reduce living costs and secure affordable housing.

Table 3.1 below provides a general overview of the study participants. The chart shows how many years participants have been living in Canada, their region of origin, what immigration pathway they came to Canada through, their previous educational attainment, and which generation of displacement they are (some participants were born into refugee families, while others were not). Generations of displacement are significant to consider because intergenerational trauma is more likely to be transmitted in families with multiple generations of displacement and this can impact everything from poverty level to educational attainment (Sangalang & Vang, 2017).

The participants in this study were at different developmental stages in their young adulthood. Yet, regardless of their age, they were all, except one, pursuing similar goals of higher education. While education is believed to be essential for advancing life opportunities, many participants arrived in Canada already having an undergraduate, and for a few, even a master's degree. Yet, in nearly every case, existing Canadian educational policies did not recognize their educational credentials, forcing these women to have to re-start their higher educational journeys from the beginning, which in many instances included intensive academic language development training.

Study participants arrived in Canada through one of two immigration pathways: private sponsorship, including those sponsored by a scholarship, a community group, or family (6), or government sponsorship (12), including a few participants who initially arrived in Canada as asylum seekers. Most privately sponsored study participants came on academic scholarship through an official Canadian non-profit organization that is considered a Sponsorship Agreement Holder with Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (Private Sponsorship, 2022). The class of sponsorship (private or government) that participants arrived through impacted the availability of resources participants and their families had access to. Those who arrived through government sponsorship were provided one-year of basic financial support, with no support for accessing higher education or additional training (Government-Assisted, 2021). Privately sponsored individuals, particularly those sponsored by organizations and groups, as

opposed to family members, typically had access to both increased financial and social resources, as will be elaborated upon in the findings section (Sponsor a Refugee, 2021).

Pseudonyms were selected for all participants, service agencies, city/country names, and individual support workers names to ensure anonymity and protect the privacy of study participants.

Table 3.1. Young adult women from refugee backgrounds – Study Participants

Name	Years in Canada	Region of Origin	Migration Journey	Previous Education	Generations of Displacement
Aaliya (28 yrs old)	3	South Asia	Government sponsorship - family	Master's Degree	First generation
Ada (30 yrs old)	1.2	Middle East	Government sponsorship - family	Undergraduate degree	First generation
Amaal (29 yrs old)	4.5	Middle East	Private sponsorship - Academic scholarship	Undergraduate degree	First generation
Amira (30 yrs old)	3	Middle East	Private sponsorship –Community group	Undergraduate degree	First generation
Asmaan (21 yrs old)	6	Central Asia	Government sponsorship - family	Some high school	First generation
Calla (20 yrs old)	3	Middle East	Government sponsorship - family	Some high school	Second generation
Chanvatey (24 yrs old)	10	Southeast Asia	Government sponsorship - family	Some high school	First generation
Daiba (21 yrs old)	3	South Asia	Government sponsorship - family	Some high school	First generation
Daleela (22 yrs old)	5	Central Asia	Government sponsorship - family	Some high school	Second generation
Habibah (21 yrs old)	5	Central Asia	Government sponsorship - family	Some high school	Second generation

Name	Years in Canada	Region of Origin	Migration Journey	Previous Education	Generations of Displacement
Hakimah (22 yrs old)	1.5	Middle East	Private sponsorship - Academic scholarship	Incomplete Undergraduate degree	First generation
Iman (20 yrs old)	6	Central Asia	Government sponsorship - family	Some high school	First generation
Nabihah (23 yrs old)	3	South Asia	Government sponsorship - family	High school diploma	First generation
Oadira (28yrs old)	2	Middle East	Private sponsorship - Academic scholarship	Undergraduate degree	First generation
Ojala (26 yrs old)	2	Middle East	Private sponsorship - Academic scholarship	Undergraduate degree	First generation
Olya (24 yrs old)	10	Central Asia	Government sponsorship - Family	Some high school	First generation
Rafeeqah (21 yrs old)	3	Middle East	Government sponsorship - family	High school diploma	Second generation
Uhee (20 yrs old)	3.5	Western Asia	Community group - Private sponsorship	Some high school	Second generation

3.4. Data Collection

In qualitative research, data collection involves collecting data, coding and organizing data, creating categories and sub-categories, and then representing the data and forming an interpretation of them (Creswell, 2011, p. 179). This data collection strategy was structured around open and selective coding. Open coding requires the researcher to label concepts thematically and then create categories based on similarities amongst the concepts (Allan, 2020; Basit, 2003). Selective coding tries to make links between the categories of data and the study's core questions (Allan, 2020; Basit, 2003). Coding is a dynamic and creative process of inductive reasoning, thinking, and theorizing that is important to make sense of the textual data (Allan, 2020; Basit,

2003). When coding, the researcher analyzes phenomena to find commonalities and differences, as well as patterns and structures (Allen, 2017; Basit, 2003). For this study, data was collected through interviews and focus groups.

3.4.1. Interviews

A research interview, in its most common form, is person-to-person, where one person elicits information from another – like a conversation with a purpose (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The specific purpose of conducting interviews in this study was to obtain information from study participants regarding their experiences in the Canadian education system; these interviews were conducted person-to-person virtually through a private Zoom meeting. Virtual meetings were selected because the COVID19 pandemic provincial guidelines at the time were to minimize external interactions as much as possible. Patton (2003) describes research interviews as a means to find out the things that we cannot directly observe, specifically to better understand how others have organized the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world. Interviews were a selected method of data collection for this study because they allowed me as the researcher to best understand how participants interpreted the world around them for both past and present events and through their own voices (Dexter, 2006; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The study used a semi-structured interview method which was guided by a set of questions (Appendix D) that were related to the study's key questions and allowed flexibility in the interview questions and responses. This strategy enabled me as the researcher to respond to the topics raised by the participants and be open to the various ideas and worldviews that the participants might identify. For example, questions asked participants to describe their educational experience prior to coming to Canada and to explain what their educational goals were for the future. In keeping with constructivist principles, members of the same family were interviewed separately to allow each participant to express their own unique experiences. Prior to the interviews, it was reiterated that participants did not have to answer any questions they were uncomfortable with and could stop the interview at any time if they so wished (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

3.4.2. Focus Groups

Four 60 minute focus groups were also conducted. A focus group is a group interview on a topic with a selection of participants who are knowledgeable on the topic (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In addition to interviews, focus groups were selected as a method of data collection because the interactive discussion which creates the data in the focus group changes the type of data that might be available through interviews alone (Hennink, 2017). During focus groups, participants share their beliefs and collective experiences, as well as consider those of others, which may impact their own views and attitudes (Hennink, 2017). Purposeful sampling was first attempted to create the focus groups, where I hoped to group participants with a diversity of backgrounds, experiences, and ages, but due to conflicting schedules, convenience sampling from amongst interview participants was used instead (Krueger, 2014). Those who were able to attend on a certain time/date were encouraged to participate when available. In total, four focus groups were formed with 17 of the 18 interview participants participating in them. The focus groups consisted of three to five participants from a diversity of backgrounds and with a diversity of educational aspirations. Participants were emailed a focus group schedule (Appendix E) if they had indicated an interest in the focus groups. Participants were asked to select a time/date that would be convenient for them to attend.

Focus groups are also useful to encourage people to discuss topics that they “could talk about to each other in their everyday lives – but don’t,” (Macnaghten & Myers, 2004, p. 65). Focus groups are an effective way for people to share common experiences and individuals can benefit from sharing their experiences with others. In all four focus groups, the participants showed great enthusiasm to further discuss and commiserate over several topics raised in the interview questions. As such, focus group questions were also semi-structured but were built from the interview questions and responses (Appendix F). For example, focus groups were asked to describe their experiences with the Canadian educational system and to elaborate on challenges and also supportive practices that they may have encountered. They were also asked to consider whether they felt their experiences had been impacted by their gender. After introducing myself to participants, all participants in the focus groups then briefly introduced themselves using a pseudonym sharing only information they felt comfortable with, such as their educational or career goals and their dreams for the future. Once I

posed the first question, the discussion emerged organically. Participants appeared to enjoy listening to each other and contributing their own experiences to the conversation. To maintain anonymity in the group, participants could choose to turn on/off their video cameras. Only a few participants had their video cameras on, most chose to participate without the cameras.

The COVID19 pandemic and associated social distancing measures made it necessary to conduct data collection over Zoom, which was a relatively new communication platform for myself as researcher and several study participants. There are benefits and drawbacks to using videoconferencing for qualitative research. Some opportunities it provides are that it reduces geographical constraints associated with in-person interviewing and avoids time and expenses associated with travel to/from the interview (Irani, 2019; Saarjarvi & Bratt, 2021). This was supported anecdotally by several participants who mentioned that the Zoom interviews and focus groups were much more accessible and convenient for them than face-to-face interviews or focus groups would have been. They noted the comfort of conducting the meetings online in the safety of their own homes, instead of having to meet a stranger (me the researcher) in a public place. They also noted the time and cost they saved being able to participate in the interview and focus groups from home, rather than having to navigate public transit and meet in a public place. Despite these benefits, videoconferencing limits the researcher's ability to assess the participant's environment; it may limit researchers to interviewing only those who have access to technology and feel comfortable using it; and technical challenges, such as Internet connection problems, may affect the clarity of the voice and of audio-recording (Irani, 2019). The greatest challenge I, as a researcher, had in using online and telephone recruitment methods was accessing diverse participant groups. I was limited to communication online or over the telephone, which potentially limited who I could access for participation. Participants also shared that they had challenges finding a quiet place to conduct the interview, a strong internet connection, limited cellphone minutes, and sporadically, the quality of our voice and image would be unclear, which distracted from the focus and the flow of the interviews.

3.5. Data Analysis

In qualitative research methods, data analysis is the classification and interpretation of data to make meaning of the information (Flick, 2014). Data analysis

should be an ongoing process that begins as data is being collected (Flick, 2014), and my data collection began by participating actively in the interviews and also in the transcription phase of data collection. For each interview, I read and re-read the transcriptions as they were transcribed, writing notes, comments, and reflections on a digital document that I kept on-going memos on. These memos included questions and observations; in some cases, I followed up on these in the focus groups (if they were general) or by individual email, if I needed clarification. If the notes, comments, and memos that I kept raised recurrent themes and ideas, they helped inform the main questions that were raised in the focus groups. After 18 interviews, I felt that I had reached saturation as explained by Merriam and Tisdell (2016) as when analysis does not seem to yield new information or insights; I also felt that I had compiled an abundant number of categories and themes that addressed the main research questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

As the interviews were transcribed, I set up a digital folder for participant to keep their information organized and confidential. These folders contained my memos, reflections, and observations, participant transcripts and pseudonyms, as well as any additional data sources such as social media links, news articles, or writing pieces, that they chose to share with me. These additional sources of data were used only to inform my analysis and are not considered primary data sources. After focus groups were transcribed, a digital folder was set up for each focus group as well, in which I kept the transcriptions, and any memos, reflections, or observations that I had made throughout the process. The transcribed interviews were shared with the participants, who were asked to review them and provide any clarification, corrections, amendments, or general feedback they felt was necessary. Any questions or clarification that I required from the notes I kept were also asked of participants when sharing the transcriptions over email. However, my personal memos, including notes, reflections, and observations, were not shared with participants.

I used the constant comparative method as outlined by Glaser and Strauss to organize data and group them according to themes (2017). To begin, I looked for data that was responsive to my research questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), following Lincoln and Guba's (1986) criteria that a unit of data should be heuristic, in that it should reveal information relevant to the study and stimulate the researcher to make connections beyond that piece of information. Secondly, Lincoln and Guba (1986)

suggest that a unit of data can be as small as a word or as large as a story detailing a particular event or series of events. My goal was to select all relevant units of data and break them down, if necessary, into categories of information that related to my study questions, as suggested by Creswell (2011).

The steps in my qualitative data analysis went as follows:

1. All interview data was transcribed by a professional and confidential transcription service which was vetted prior to use for compliance with internationally recognized, and industry-specific security and privacy standards. All names were changed to pseudonyms prior to being transcribed by transcription service. All transcriptions were then reviewed manually by myself, the researcher, for accuracy and attention to detail. These transcribed and reviewed interviews were the copies that were sent to the participants for review.
2. Upon confirmation by the participants that the transcriptions were accurate representations of their thoughts, ideas, beliefs, and opinions, the transcribed interviews were then read and re-read, by me the researcher, to ensure a detailed understanding of the data. I wrote memos: reflections, notes, and observations while reading the transcriptions.
3. I chose units of data that I turned into themes that I printed out and physically cut up, organizing and re-organizing them by relationships and patterns.
4. I then began the process of open coding where I began to break down the data into key categories, from which sub-categories emerged.
5. I printed out these theme charts and physically cut them up organizing and re-organizing them, looking for relationships and patterns between them (Allan, 2020).
6. The categories were then subdivided into sub-categories. There were 15 broad themes, 56 categories, 87 sub-categories, and 4 general categories that seemed relevant across multiple themes and in differing contexts (Appendix G).
7. I then manually cut up and placed the categories and sub-categories into thematically labelled envelopes which were also identified with participants names, line numbers of their transcripts and dates (Appendix H).

8. I went through the themes, categories, and sub-categories in each envelope one at a time and re-read them trying to make connections and patterns related to the study questions (Allan, 2020).
9. These themes, categories, and sub-categories were then analyzed in relation to the study questions.

Throughout this process, I used the constant comparative method, reading and re-reading the transcripts, the themes, and categories to ensure I had best represented and most accurately interpreted study participants' stories and experiences (Chun Tie et al., 2019). While the process began inductively, throughout the analysis as I collected and analyzed more data, I began to shift to a more deductive process in which I began looking for more evidence to support the main themes that had emerged (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

In order to analyze participant interview data in meaningful ways, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) recommend grouping participant findings together based on the themes that emerged in their stories. Participants were not homogenous, they had a wide diversity of experiences and backgrounds. This was equally true for participants who may have been related, such as sisters or cousins, but had varying degrees of English language, previous education, and even individualized experiences in their migration and settlement journeys. Interviews were analyzed individually, and key themes were then extracted.

Despite some similarities in the backgrounds of participants, such as age, or country of origin, interview data were analyzed based on common themes that emerged through similar education experiences in the British Columbian and Canadian education and social systems. These experiences also fluctuated depending on circumstance. For instance, one participant who had arrived in Canada on an academic scholarship and had been here for less than two-years, had a very different experience accessing post-secondary education than one who had been in Canada for the same amount of time, but arrived seeking asylum with her family. Similarly, one participant who had arrived in Canada with a master's degree from her country of origin, but only had conversational English, experienced different forms of discrimination than did a participant who had arrived in Canada with a Master's degree from her country of origin, but was academically proficient in English.

In addition, Patton (2015) recommends that qualitative analysis should focus on depth over breadth and grouping findings based on significant themes that emerged enabled me to do this. I chose to analyze and highlight the key findings that emerged from participants experiences in-depth, rather than convey many small insights superficially. It was further necessary to keep in mind the purpose of the study and the intended audience of the study, including practitioners, policymakers, the research community, and the participants themselves (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Doing so helped me to maintain the focus of the study while sorting the data into themes.

3.6. Credibility and Reliability

When assessing for reliability, I used the credibility framework as laid out by Merriam & Tisdell (2016) which addresses the question of how closely one's research findings match reality. As well, I used Tracy's (2010) criteria for quality research which explains how the various means, practices, and methods used in qualitative research provide guidelines and best practices to serve as a pedagogical framework that is systematic and structured.

1. From the start of my research, I tried to choose a topic and series of research questions that were relevant, timely, and significant (Tracy, 2010). My study was meant to build upon my previous graduate research in understanding the experiences of female students from refugee backgrounds and to be reflective of the constantly evolving global and local context of migration.
2. I aimed to enhance the credibility of the research through the use of multiple sources to collect data (Tracy, 2010). Data was collected from interviews and focus groups primarily, but memos, notes, reflections, and observations were kept along with way and were constantly reflected upon throughout the analysis process.
3. In having participants review their transcribed interviews for validity, I tried to approach the study transparently (Tracy, 2010). Several participants did add or amend parts of their interview, and I followed up with several participants through email to clarify statements and ideas to ensure I had interpreted their statements accurately.
4. I left an audit trail of my interactions with participants, whether online or over the phone. This was noted in participants' digital folders which also contained

the additional notes, observations, and reflections that I had written to myself throughout the interview and focus group process. This process allowed me to be self-reflective upon my biases and enhanced the sincerity in which I approached the data analysis with (Tracy, 2010).

5. Throughout my writing, I tried to generate the idea of resonance from amongst the reading audience. Specifically, through the incorporation of quotes that share participants stories and experiences in their own voices. In doing so, I aimed to achieve transferability (Tracy, 2010). Transferability is the idea that the reader feels as though the story of the research overlaps with their own situations, and they therefore can transfer the findings to their own actions (Tracy, 2010).
6. Finally, I aimed to achieve meaningful coherence through this study, in which I aimed to use the best methods and procedures to interconnect the literature, research questions, findings, and interpretations with each other (Tracy, 2010). Through my specific recommendations, I aimed to clearly explain to the reader the barriers and discrimination being encountered by study participants and put-forth practical and plausible steps to remediate these problems.

In conducting this research, I drew upon feminist research that puts the social construction of gender at the centre of my inquiry (Lather, 1991). Through this feminist research approach, I attempted to bring into focus specific questions related to the experiences of women from refugee backgrounds and the impact that their gender played in the barriers they faced in pursuing higher education. In this way, my perspective as a researcher was further shaped by my feminist understanding that gender acts as a practice of power and organizing principle that shapes and mediates the conditions of our everyday lives (Lather, 1991). My overarching goal was to aid in remediating existing barriers to pursuing higher education for women from refugee backgrounds by allowing the reader to see the barriers from the participants' perspective, by helping raise the voices of these women and by and by enhancing the existing body of knowledge on the topic (Lather, 1991).

3.7. Ethical Considerations

Throughout the study, I adhered to the following ethical principles and guidelines. First, I adhered to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada core principles of respect for persons, which recognizes the need to uphold the value and respect of human participants; concern for welfare, which recognizes the diversity of experiences of human participants; and justice, or the need to treat participants fairly and equitably (Research Ethics, 2021). I also went beyond these institutional requirements by maintaining a practice of ongoing and informed consent, keeping the participants informed about the research process and building relationships that supported trust while being careful not to share any identifying information.

Ethics approval was also sought and awarded through Simon Fraser Universities Office of Research Ethics (TCPS 2, 2018). Ethics approval was also sought and awarded by two Greater Vancouver school districts, prior to recruiting participants from their Adult Education Centres.

3.8. Positionality

Qualitative research requires that the researcher's personal perspectives, including their philosophical, personal, theoretical beliefs and lenses through which they view the research process, are reflected upon to ensure that factors such as age, social class, race, ethnicity, gender, and previous career, do not potentially influence the research and the interpretation of data (Holmes, 2020). Researchers should adopt a reflective approach, recognizing that educational research cannot be value-free and that it influences both the research process and their interpretation of research (Smith & Dunworth, 2003).

As a researcher, I reflected on the social positions I hold that might influence the research. My perspectives on the study demographic have been influenced by the literature I have read on their experiences and on my experience working with this demographic in an educational context as a teacher. My beliefs are rooted in fundamental value concepts of equity and social justice. My scholarship is influenced by Judith Butler's ideas on how to respond ethically to suffering; the notion that individuals have ethical obligations towards one another;

and that in an increasingly diverse world, we must find peaceful ways to cohabitate with one another (Butler, 2012). I tried to probe to understand participant perspectives rather than using interviews to confirm biases I hold. For instance, a participant shared that she was often responsible for the domestic work in the home, but her brother was encouraged to study. My personal bias towards this was that gender discrimination and cultural privileging of one gender over the other was taking place. To unpack this idea, I asked the participant why this was happening and whether she thought it was fair. In this case, the participant shared that the brother was older, his exams were worth more credit, and that the family was prioritizing his academic success over her own, although she did indicate that she felt it was not entirely fair to her. I reflected on my interpretations of the data in relation to the participants multifaceted experiences and views in the ongoing memos I took throughout the transcription process.

Next, I attempted to reflect on my positionality in relation to the participants (Holmes, 2020). Critical theory maintains that people can change their social circumstances but may face significant barriers in doing so, including the prevailing systems of economic, political, and cultural power (Mellor, 2013). From an emic or insider's perspective, I identify as female who is also in the process of pursuing my own educational and career aspirations. From an etic or an outsider's perspective, I identify as a second-generation Canadian, born to immigrant parents of North African and Western European descent. I am not between the ages of 19-30 years old, I am not from a refugee background, and I am not a racialized woman. As an educator who has taught newcomer students from refugee backgrounds, I have unique perspective into the challenges these women have faced and the stressors they are confronted with on a daily basis as they navigate the policies and practices of the Canadian education system. But I do not experience the same intersecting biases and modes of discrimination that the participants experience.

3.9. Limitations

The following section lists some of the key limitations that this study faced and provides suggestions on areas for further study.

3.9.1. Accessibility of Participants

Participants for this study were recruited during the first several months of the COVID19 pandemic amidst a global environment of uncertainty. Many public organizations that serve refugee populations, including service centres and employment programs, were closed during this time, so participants were recruited via online methods. Those with limited access to support services, settlement agencies, or even the internet may have not been able to access information on this study. Future studies that include the experiences and perspectives of individuals from refugee backgrounds living in extreme poverty and who may be socially isolated, would be particularly valuable to include in gaining a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges they face upon resettlement.

3.9.2. Outliers

There were several young adult women who wanted to participate in the study but did not meet the official participant profile criteria. These women arrived in Canada on work-study permits and were struggling to settle into their lives in Canada. Most of these women had come through a specific migration pathway, either through a private educational institution that promised them work upon graduation, or as a temporary migrant worker. However, several of these women were struggling to survive while waiting for their permanent residency status and/or waiting for work permits to be renewed. As new pathways to migration become increasingly common, future research into those who come on work-study and as migrant worker visas is needed to better understand the challenges that these migration pathways pose for individuals who are not supported by the rights enabled through permanent residency status.

Another outlier group was young adult women from refugee backgrounds who did not want to pursue university or college-level education but rather hoped to pursue a trade or vocation. This study's participant recruitment criteria and recruitment materials, such as the study invitation, did not specify that potentially interested participants must be pursuing higher education. Rather, it noted that participants would be asked about their educational experiences generally. Coincidentally, all individuals who contacted me to participate in the study were hoping to pursue college or university-level academics, none expressed interest in the trades or alternative vocations. Yet, those who do want to

pursue a career through trades, such as in construction, or in alternative vocations, such as in the film industry, experience differing challenges in their pursuits. These programs could require different skill sets and abilities, including in some cases a decreased reliance on English language abilities and an increased reliance on technical skill. There is an increasing demand for skilled trades across Canada (Follow your Passion, 2022). Such jobs as carpentry, cooking, and hairstylists are most in-demand, which highlights the other educational and training options that could provide a stable and meaningful career for newcomers from refugee backgrounds. As many of the trades-based professions have traditionally been unwelcoming to women, particularly racialized women, future research into alternative educational pathways would help generate information useful to newcomers from refugee backgrounds on the various life options available to them in Canada (Block & Galabuzi, 2011; Bridges et al., 2020; Ibanez, 2017).

3.9.3. Reliability of Data

The reliability of the data was impacted by the level of trust established between me, as the researcher and the participants (Labaree, 2009). This was difficult to develop given the short duration of our interactions and the online nature of our communication. Participants may also have been reluctant to share personal stories about their refugee experiences and mental health challenges for fear of reintroducing trauma. Families from refugee backgrounds face extreme situations in which the rule of law often becomes ambiguous, forcing individuals to use human smugglers, bribery, and other forms of potentially illicit actions to protect themselves and their families. Participants may have been deliberately selective about what information to share.

In addition, self-reported data may be vulnerable to selective memory recall. This may be particularly true for individuals suffering from mental health challenges, including anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder, who may unconsciously employ selective memory when recalling specific events (Natale & Hantas, 1982). The inability to recall certain memories accurately is a natural protective measure to prevent re-traumatization (Lee & Fielding, 1996; Natale & Hantas, 1982). Future research that employs ethnographic research or that is collaborative in nature in which trusting relationships are able to evolve overtime may help researchers better understand the

impacts of the migration journey, but also, may help participants to process and make meaning of their experiences.

3.9.4. Longitudinal Effects

Longitudinal effects are limited by the time in which the data was collected (Labaree, 2009). In this case data was collected over a six-month period. On average, after 25 years in Canada, families from refugee backgrounds are earning as much or more than the Canadian norm, largely impart to their children, who if they arrive young enough to reap the benefits of the public education system, have higher completion rates of secondary and post-secondary compared to their Canadian-born children (IRCC Minister, 2021). However, data are much different for young adults, who arrive having missed out on key educational opportunities. Future studies would benefit from following up with this demographic to see if they were able to complete their post-secondary programs and find employment in their desired fields.

3.9.5. Cultural Bias

Cultural bias refers to when a person or thing is viewed in a consistently inaccurate way and in this study, it was important to consider the Western lens through which study participants, their behaviours and decision-making were conducted (Labaree, 2009). This was particularly important when considering barriers posed to participants due to familial expectations. For instance, in some participants families, the distribution of labour in the home may appear to follow cultural ideas around gender norms, but upon deeper analysis have more to do with function, finances, and practicality, rather than culture. To address my cultural bias, I tried to reflect upon the Western values that I have and compare these with differing cultural values and ways of being by exploring cultural notions of family and collectivity, which was written about in the relevant sections.

3.9.6. Fluency in Language

Language fluency may have impacted the participants understanding of questions and the ability of study participants to respond to the questions in detail. Using translators to help facilitate the interviews risked the possibilities of losing the authentic

voices of the study participants, but future studies that use a translator may provide different insight into the experiences faced by young adults from refugee backgrounds.

3.9.7. Summary

This qualitative study aimed to better understand the discriminatory barriers that young adult women from refugee backgrounds face in pursuing their academic and career goals here in Canada. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with 18 young adult women from refugee backgrounds, who had working levels of English and had been in Canada for as short as three-months and as long as ten-years. Basic qualitative research methods guided the data analysis process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Once ethics approval was attained, data was collected, coded, and organized. Categories were created to represent the data and interpretations of these categories were formed.

The onset of the COVID19 pandemic limited the participant recruitment pool to those available online and forced the data collection to be done virtually. Participant recruitment online limited the demographics that I had access to, specifically to those who had internet access in their homes, as public places such as libraries and service agencies were closed. Making connections virtually with service providers, was also challenging, as many were overwhelmed by email and unable to provide their personal phone numbers, which delayed response times. However, service providers who were interested in supporting the research were genuinely helpful, and they demonstrated great sincerity in supporting their clientele. They provided a variety of creative options to connect with prospective participants, including sharing the study invitations on list-serves. Individuals who contacted me to participate were genuinely interested in sharing their experiences, contributing to the research, and conveyed an interest in expanding their connections in the wider community. Additionally, several individuals outside the study criteria, such as migrant workers and work-study students, expressed interest in the study, providing insight and potential areas of future research focus into the challenges faced by these demographics.

The next section will explore the research findings. This section will examine the factors that influence the educational and career aspirations that young adult women from refugee backgrounds have for themselves. It will explore the discriminatory barriers

that study participants faced in pursuing their education in Canada, and it will address the gendered responsibilities that impacted study participants' pursuit of higher education here in Canada.

Chapter 4. Research Findings

This section aims to answer the three main questions that were explored in this study:

- 1) What factors influence the educational and career aspirations of young women (aged 19-30 years old) from refugee backgrounds who have immigrated to Canada?
- 2) What barriers exist that challenge the pursuit of these aspirations?
- 3) Do responsibilities related to gender create barriers to pursuing higher education?

The first section examines the factors that influence the educational and career aspirations that the young adult women from refugee backgrounds in the study have for themselves. It explores how the availability of resources influenced when and if goals were pursued; it conveys how participants were constantly negotiating competing concerns of time pressures and familial expectations on which goals to pursue; and it shares the importance of community involvement for newcomers to build a social network of support that will help guide the pursuit of their goals.

The second section explores the barriers that study participants faced in the pursuit of their educational and career goals in Canada. It assesses the various unique challenges posed at each stage of education necessary to pursue higher education; secondary, adult education, and post-secondary. From these individualized experiences, it draws out common challenges shared by study participants in achieving academically proficient English, securing necessary financial resources, and balancing their mental health needs with their academic and employment responsibilities.

The final section addresses the gendered responsibilities that impacted study participants' pursuit of higher education and career goals here in Canada. It explores the relationship between gender and housing insecurity, which negatively impacts stability and settlement. It also examines how gender-based responsibilities and expectations of marriage influence goal setting and assesses the significance of building a social network — specifically in the lives of women from refugee backgrounds.

4.1. The Factors that Influence the Educational and Career Aspirations of Young Adult Women from Refugee Backgrounds

As young people transition from adolescence into young adulthood, a period of identity exploration, self-focus, and general instability, they are faced with new experiences and shifting priorities (Tanner et al., 2008). I chose this transitional stage to focus on in this study because the developmental life stage impacts how personal goals are set (Tanner et al., 2008). In navigating this transition, the decision-making and goal setting of young adult women from refugee backgrounds are further complicated by the availability of resources and expectations, both of the self and the family. The participants in this study varied in age from 19-30 years old and, therefore, were at different developmental stages in their young adulthood. Yet, regardless of their age, they were all, except one, pursuing similar goals of higher education. This was as true for younger participants, who had no undergraduate degree, as it was for older ones, who despite having an undergraduate or even a master's degree from an international/foreign university, were re-starting their educational journeys because Canada would not recognize their existing educational credentials. The common understanding of young adulthood in the West, which has typically been defined by shared social norms for women around the entry, timing, and sequencing of educational, career, marital and childbearing transitions, did not apply to study participants (Jeffrey & Dyson, 2008). Rather, these young adult women wanted to take advantage of the new social and economic opportunities available to them in their new environment. The major findings related to the factors that influence educational and career aspirations for young women from refugee backgrounds are described in brief here and are elaborated on in greater depth in subsequent pages.

First, the accessibility of resources to support the fundamental aspirations of study participants and their families influences when and if goals will be pursued. These resources may be more or less accessible based on the method of migration to Canada used by a study participant. Study participants came to Canada either through private or government sponsorship. A few arrived as asylum seekers but would later be accepted as government-sponsored refugees.

Second, in determining which goals to pursue, study participants were constantly negotiating competing needs of time and expectations. The time they had available to pursue their educational goals was based on their ability to support their families and themselves first. Compounding the consideration of time, were their own expectations and hopes for themselves, as well as those of their immediate and extended family, who all contributed to decision-making, whether implicitly or explicitly.

Thirdly, in deciding which educational and career goals to pursue, study participants found it particularly beneficial to participate in the community through volunteering, joining clubs, or attending events. Participants often used social media to find information to guide their community involvement and meet others who would provide them with different ideas and perspectives on educational and career pathways available to them.

4.1.1. The Impact of Resource Availability on the Pursuit of Personal Goals

Educational and career goal setting for young adult women from refugee backgrounds was heavily influenced by the availability of resources accessible to themselves and their family’s post-arrival. The method of migration that brought these women to Canada, private or government sponsorship, greatly influenced the types of resources they could access.

Table 4.1. Method of Participant Migration

	Private Sponsorship	Government Sponsorship
Number of participants:	6	12
Method of arrival:	Scholarship Recipients	UNHCR Applicants
	Community/Family Groups	Asylum Seekers
Age of arrival:	Mean: 23 years old Exact age of arrival: 24.5, 27, 21.5, 26, 24, 16.5	Mean: 18 years old Exact age of arrival: 25, 28.5, 15, 17, 14, 18, 17, 16, 14, 20, 14, 18
*Note: The exact numbers for method of arrival were deliberately left out to protect the anonymity of several participants, whose identities would be easily identifiable otherwise.		

Study participants arrived in Canada through one of two ways:

- 1) Private sponsorship (6), those sponsored by a scholarship, a community group, or family; or,
- 2) Government sponsorship (12), including a few participants who initially arrived in Canada as asylum seekers.

Most privately sponsored study participants came on academic scholarship through an official Canadian non-profit organization considered a Sponsorship Agreement Holder with Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (Private Sponsorship, 2022). These participants had the most comprehensive access to resources, which covered their basic needs, including housing and meals, as well as their higher education costs. Study participants who came through government sponsorship had their families' fundamental basic needs covered for the first year of settlement, but no support for accessing higher education and less access to social networks and other individualized modes of support and mentorship that benefit many who immigrate in the private sponsorship program (Government-Assisted, 2021).

The six study participants who came via an academic scholarship had applied to the scholarship program while in their secondary host country and were selected to study at a major university in Canada based on their exceptional skills and qualifications. These prestigious, yet rarely attainable scholarships, generally provided participants with comprehensive living and tuition costs for the duration of their programs, which ranged from a two-year master's program to a four-year bachelor's program.

The majority of participants (12) arrived with some or all of their immediate family members through government sponsorship, which is open to anyone who meets the protection criteria of having a well-founded fear of persecution or are at risk of torture, cruel or unusual punishment in their home countries (United Nations Refugee Convention, 1951). A few participants arrived at the Canadian border with some of their immediate family members seeking asylum. After submitting their claims and receiving a hearing through the Immigration and Refugee Protection Board, their cases were granted approval as meeting the UN protection criteria of refugee, and they were granted refugee status in Canada (Resettlement in Canada, 2021). On average, these participants spent 1-3 years waiting for their applications to be processed. During this

time, they were additionally challenged with having few legal rights in Canada and being ineligible for educational, health, and income support.

The method through which study participants arrived in Canada, directly impacted the resources they had available to them to set and pursue goals. For instance, those who arrived through government sponsorship and were provided one-year of minimal financial support, were less likely to have the necessary financial resources to be self-sufficient and were more likely to pursue part-and-full time employment to meet their basic needs. This was similar for those who were privately sponsored by family, who had limited resources to support them once they arrived here. Alternatively, participants who were privately sponsored by a group or organization, had more resources to support them, as well as a wider social network to draw upon for extra support, whether it be generalized settlement support or more targeted support, such as for mental health.

A common struggle amongst 16 of the 18 study participants was how to balance the resources they had available to them to support their families. Such resources included being able to meet their basic needs for survival, such as food or shelter, as well as additional important needs such as money or technology. These 16 study participants shared the common goal of supporting their family, whether their families were here in Canada or abroad. The most common forms of support provided to their families are conveyed in Figure 4-1 below. Forms of support would often overlap, for instance, while taking family members to appointments participants would have to set up the appointment, drive to the appointment, translate during the appointment, and follow-up after the appointment with medical prescriptions and so forth.

Figure 4.1. Types of Support Study Participants provide for their Family

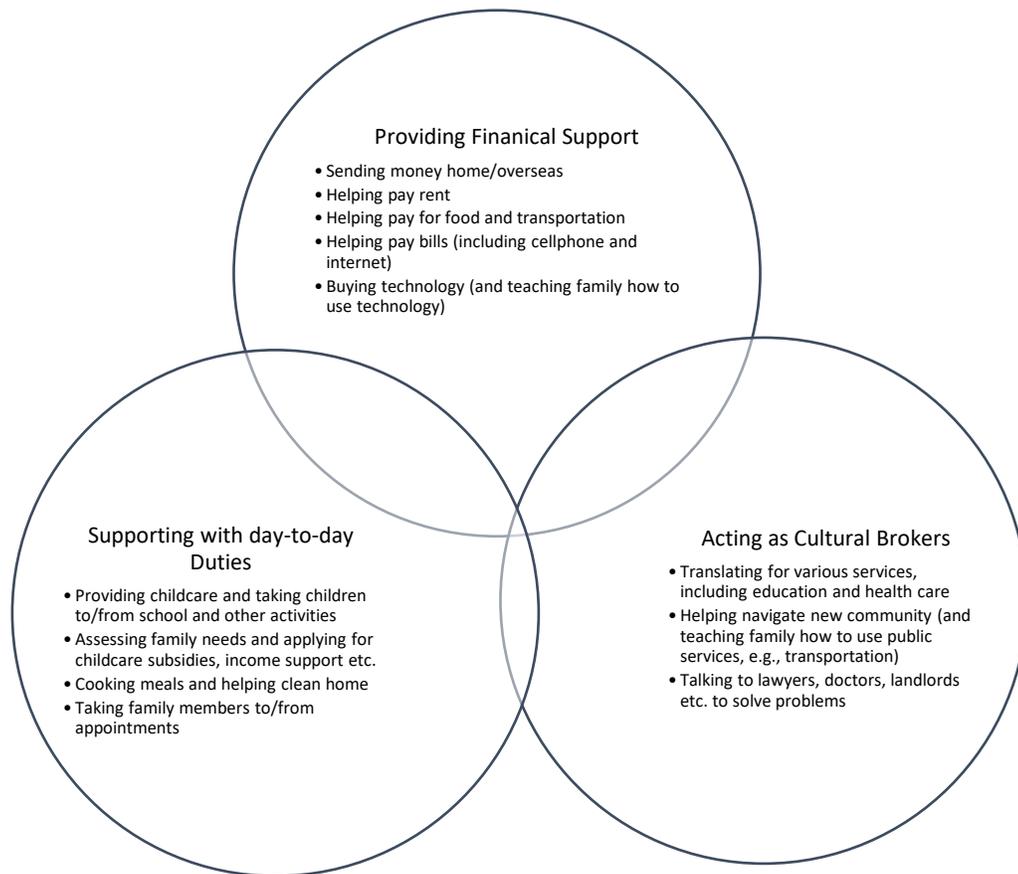


Figure 4.1 reinforces that the families of study participants relied upon them financially, as cultural brokers between families and institutions and services, and in supporting day-to-day family duties including childcare, cleaning and errands. This limited the time participants had available to pursue their own goals. While no participants viewed this as a burden, several did mention that their home environment was too chaotic to focus on studying or that they were taking fewer courses than they would have liked to so that they could continue to work part-time and contribute financially to their household. This entailed continual negotiation between participant's families' needs and the resources participants had to pursue their educational aspirations. While there were some aspects of interdependence in the exchange of supports within the family, for instance, a participant taking a younger sibling to school may have a meal prepared for them at home by a parent upon return, generally, the young adult women's time, energy, and often personal resources (for example, sourcing technology for younger siblings schooling) appeared to be disproportionately relied upon

to provide such supports for their family members, in comparison to other family members,. This was conveyed through the participants stories about the amount of time and energy it took for them to fulfill these responsibilities, in comparison to others in their families.

Academic Scholarships Recipients

The participants who arrived in Canada alone on an academic scholarship were more likely to have their basic financial needs met by the comprehensive terms of the scholarship. For many, a scholarship was their only hope at pursuing higher education.

...the scholarship was the only solution for me...my family didn't have that money to send me to the study abroad...so scholarship was the only hope I had...

(Hakimah, Interview, October 27, 2020)

These scholarship-sponsored participants noted that because they had their basic needs covered, they were able to better take advantage of the vast number of extra-curricular opportunities available to them on their university campuses. They shared how they were able to explore many different groups, clubs, and committees on-campus, attend several different events weekly, and were able to explore their interests and different aspects of their personal identity through these opportunities. Participants were able to meet many different people within the academic community, including peers and professors, who had varying perspectives, experiences, and life journeys, which provided insight into Canadian culture and enabled them to build a supportive social network. It is worth noting, that several of these women had part-time jobs so that they could send money back home, and several were also active in finding migratory pathways to bring their families over to Canada. However, it was much easier for scholarship participants than government-sponsored participants to explore their identity and interests through the opportunities provided to them through their educational pursuits, simply because of accessibility and more free time. Their ability to explore their identity and interests, in turn, guided their personal goal setting.

Government-Sponsored Study Participants

The resources available to participants and their families who arrived through government sponsorship were significantly less than for scholarship participants. Participants and their families on government sponsorship received a maximum of one

year of supportive financial funding, as well as settlement support upon arrival (Resettlement in Canada, 2021). They are also responsible for reimbursing the Canadian government for their transportation costs, as well as their medical examinations prior to coming to Canada, which adds to their often-large pre-existing debt-load (Refugees Received, 2022). These participants all initially arrived at a Lower Mainland Welcome Centre which covered their immediate basic needs upon arrival (for example, shelter and food), and provided opportunities for them to develop their resumes and connect with career advisors and settlement workers. However, several participants felt that this support did not last long enough. They indicated that it took many months for educational institutions, government agencies, and employers to assess their credentials, read their resumes, or set up language or skill-based exams. During that first year of settlement, many felt that they spent a lot of time waiting, which they could otherwise have been working towards achieving their goals.

Canada is the most kind [country] and they accept people quickly...and then, like, after accepting us, we waited for more than one year to come to Canada, why can't we start learning English and other skills when we knew we were to come to Canada?... [Once we come to Canada] we wait longer, for many months...we wasted money and time...we have already wasted four years...one more month is very hard for us...we want to start [school] as soon as possible.

(Daiba, Interview, November 17, 2020)

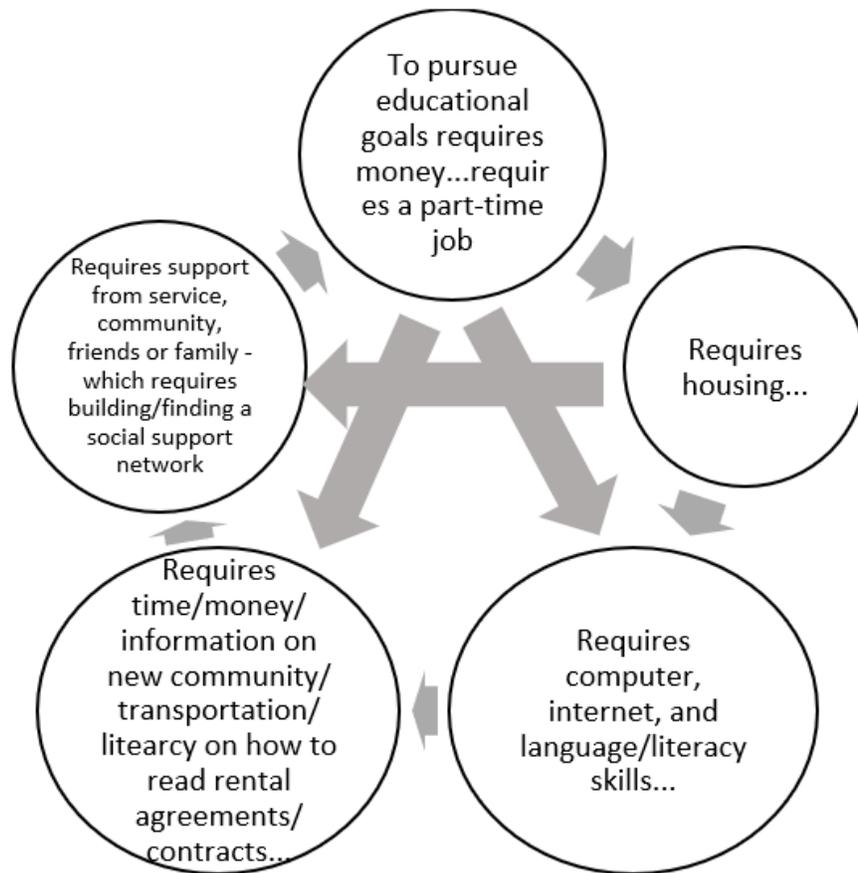
Study participants who had just recently arrived through government sponsorship also noted that they were extremely overwhelmed by all the options available to them. They were constantly negotiating what to do first: get a job, apply to school, or take English language courses. They were trying to negotiate an ordered or logical way to proceed with their goals given the plethora of information they were inundated with.

I support my [family], so I'm afraid about choosing...what I want to study or finding the job first?

(Ada, Focus Group #2, November 21, 2020)

While considering their options, several participants also shared that they were fearful of making the “wrong” decision, one that might be costly or detrimental to themselves or their families. This added an extra level of hesitancy to their decision-making. Figure 4.2 below conveys the complexity in negotiating which needs to prioritize upon resettlement.

Figure 4.2. Prioritizing upon Resettlement



Several government-sponsored participants noted that their first jobs upon arrival were on-call, or had irregular and inconsistent hours, forcing them to take night transit to/from work (which they had varying levels of comfort doing), and that the jobs did not pay a livable wage.

...[my job] was over an hour and a half each way...bus, then sky-train, and then bus again...two buses and the sky-train...I would come home always at like 8-9:00 pm, and I would stay up until like 2-3:00 am to study...

(Olya, Interview, July 28, 2020)

Two participants noted that because of this type of precarious employment, they had significant difficulty making friends with peers their age because they were working with older adults and their peers were at school (so they perceived). One participant even stated that after two years in Canada, she still did not have any friends her age.

The resources available specifically to asylum seeking refugees who had arrived prior to their refugee application being accepted struggled significantly to support themselves and their families. Despite eventually receiving the same amount of aid as government-sponsored participants, this aid may have come after several years of waiting for their claims to be processed. During this waiting time, participants shared the struggles they faced in securing their fundamental needs without work permits, social insurance numbers, and while lacking access to essential services such as education and health care. While the individuals who came as asylum seekers had at least one family member already in Canada, they also had been refugees, with limited resources to share. As a result, these women had to find their own employment and shelter without having any rights in Canada and without access to support services that may have been helpful. They were often left to their own devices to navigate their new environment, which meant they focused on meeting their everyday needs over setting and pursuing personal educational goals for themselves.

I was trying to find a job, make a resume, study English...but I couldn't find a job. Because I'm younger and my English is better than my mom, I have to find a job to support her as well. After they accept us as refugees - it takes one to two years to get permanent residence. At first A, B, C, and D organizations helped us with the first steps, but I want to study, but I don't know how to start and right now we can't pay the rent, so I need a job first.

(Ada, Interview, Nov 17, 2020)

4.1.2. Time and Expectations – Negotiating Priorities in Goal Setting

How study participants set higher educational goals for themselves was a constant cost-benefit analysis: assessing the benefits of their actions in relation to the associated costs with taking that action. This was a shared commonality amongst most study participants. Costs were not just monetary but were also based on how much time a pursuit would take away from the pursuit of other responsibilities, and the costs of expectations, both fulfilling their own expectations as well as meeting the demands of their families and sometimes extended family.

Balancing demands on time

Study participants valued their time greatly. As Nabihah explains below, many participants felt that they had lost a lot of time or had wasted a lot of time, waiting in

refugee camps, waiting for documents to be processed, waiting for decisions to be made that were out of their control, and waiting to access education.

Look, it's difficult, like people are just starting quarantining now, [but] I have for four years of my life, I just stayed in quarantine...so...give us jobs, we want jobs!

(Nabihah, Interview, November 17, 2020)

Participants were eager to get their education started so that they could immerse themselves in their careers. This feeling of having 'wasted time' was especially true for older participants, several of whom had already attained a bachelor's or master's degree and were now being told they had to start their post-secondary education over from the beginning. They shared several common themes in their career goals, including the need to pursue a career that would allow them to contribute positively to society, that would help others and/or make a meaningful impact in society, and that would provide financial stability.

Conversely, the seven participants who had arrived in Canada young enough to have spent at least two years in a Canadian secondary school did not seem as pressured by time constraints. These participants typically had been exposed to several diverse forms of acquiring information about higher education options and career planning, making them confident in their decision-making. Such information came from having taken such classes as Career and Life Education, a mandatory course in the British Columbian Curriculum for secondary students. They may have had a chance to ask questions and discuss their educational aspirations with supportive mentors, including their English Language Learner teachers, their school guidance counselors, and even their Canadian-born peers. Getting advice from multiple sources of information seemed to strengthen the confidence of younger study participants both in setting educational goals for themselves, as well as in better understanding the steps and processes needed to achieve their goals.

I was talking to just my classmates and seeing where they were going. Some people were also applying to West Coast* College, so I was able to have a conversation with them about how they're doing it, the process of doing it, the time needed to do it...it was an easy transition.

(Calla, Interview, November 11, 2020)

These study participants were also more accepting of the time that post-secondary applications, processing, and decision-making would take. One reason may have been that they seemed to feel more knowledgeable about the process overall, but another possible explanation is that they still felt that they had lots of time ahead of them to pursue their educational and career goals. However, some participants felt that the limited amount of time they had spent in secondary school had not prepared them for the demands of higher education and that they needed stronger academic and specifically literacy skills prior to entering post-secondary. These participants worked incredibly hard to meet the graduation requirements of secondary school in a limited amount of time, in order to enter into a post-secondary program straight from secondary school. Typically, these participants had two or less years in public secondary school, before entering directly into a post-secondary program. Yet, despite having worked hard and gained entrance to these programs, three participants failed out of these programs. They attributed their lack of academic success to various factors, including higher workload expectations and their developing academic language proficiency skills, as explained by Habibah.

I wanted to become a nurse, but like when I went to university and took classes I failed those classes because of the environment...everything was new. I didn't have friends...the biggest obstacle was the language...I still have difficulty with saying or speaking or sometimes listening to somebody [else]...I was so depressed [because] I failed those classes... and I realized that I cannot take classes at the university...I'm working on Math now [at the Adult Education Centre]. I want to go back to university...I'm just very lost...I don't want to disappoint my mom and dad.

(Habibah, Interview, September 22, 2020)

Chanvatey shared similar struggles in her attempt to complete both high school and then later a post-secondary program. Chanvatey dropped out of both programs (restarting at different times) because she was unable to meet the program expectations, while simultaneously dealing with the familial and personal mental health challenges both a direct consequence of her refugee experience of war, violence, and displacement.

...I was in grade four when we left [my home country] and [when I came to Canada] I dropped out [of high school because] I would not have gotten full credits to actually graduate because I was doing ESL [ELL] classes...I

earned a few credits in like regular classes...but I wouldn't have gotten enough credits to graduate...I had to pretty much start off over again...there was a lot of problems in my home, you know because of the war and stuff. [After my siblings and I were split up into foster homes] it was my foster mom that encouraged me to go back to school. She took me to school, signed me up, and said, like, 'you have to finish your school'.

(Chanvatey, Interview, September 5, 2020)

Several years later while pursuing higher education, Chanvatey explains how work-life expectations were simply too stressful to manage, which caused her to drop-out of her post-secondary program as well.

I spent three years, working full time, juggling school and work. I would work five days a week...I would get home by 10:30pm. I did that for three years. [When] I started college, I was really excited...but I was only able to finish the first semester...and then I dropped all of my classes because I was struggling with my mental health, working full time, juggling school...I was so stressed out and I'm still struggling from like PTSD...I decided to take a long break...I hope to be back in school again in January.

(Chanvatey, Interview, September 5, 2020)

Throughout the focus groups several study participants shared that they felt an implicit sense of time pressure when comparing themselves to their peers. They saw that their secondary school peers were achieving great success or were embarking on new and exciting educational pathways, while they may still have had to complete secondary school requirements. Participants noted that they used social media to find out what others were up to. One participant noted that such sites as Instagram and Facebook could be particularly detrimental to her personal mental health because she was constantly comparing herself with what she saw others were doing online. There was a sense amongst participants that despite working as hard as, or harder than, their peers, they were still "behind" in their achievement. This was demoralizing, as Chanvatey explained in the quote below.

It's challenging when you look around and you see like your peers that have done well, it's a lot easier for some people... [eventually, I decided that] maybe I shouldn't look at other people...that's when I realized, I'm just going to take a break and actually go to [post-secondary] school when I'm ready.

(Chanvatey, Interview, September 5, 2020)

Expectations

In addition to time constraints, 16 of the 18 study participants noted that they were constantly balancing their own expectations with those of their families, and sometimes, this came at a significant personal cost of strained family relationships or tension in the home. Study participants generally had high personal expectations of themselves. They were enthusiastic to take advantage of the new educational and training opportunities that they found in Canada, and many of their personal goals started to shift and change as they discovered more options available to them. All study participants demonstrated high levels of intellectual curiosity, and many saw a Canadian education as a way out of poverty, a way to contribute positively to their communities, and a way to create a meaningful life for themselves and their families. Despite having to start their educations over again, there was a perception that a Canadian education – a higher education credential attained in Canada — would help them attain their personal goals. Several participants noted that education was a way to make meaning out of their refugee experience and that their academic goals had changed to fields of study that would help them better understand, process, and deconstruct their personal journeys. For instance, one participant chose to study sociology to better understand human social behaviour, which she reflected upon to better understand her personal experiences of conflict and migration, as she shared in the quote below.

I want to like study sociology...I took it because I already had experienced, you know, some of the social issues, that you know, I feel like others wouldn't understand, but we experienced it... your experiences impact you. They can change the direction of what you want to do...

(Daleela, Interview, September 22, 2020)

Similarly, another student was using their academic scholarship to pursue a field of study that would allow them to explore their own personal gender identity and to better understand themselves, an opportunity denied to them in their home country.

However, these goals were in frequent negotiation with the influence of familial expectations. Generally, families conveyed a high level of support for their daughters' educational pursuits. Several participants acknowledged that their parent/s recognized that they had missed out on significant developmental and educational opportunities, sometimes entire childhoods and that they saw great value in pursuing education. Yet, even in families where parent/s tried to encourage their daughters to pursue higher

education, the study participants still carried the weight of familial responsibility with them.

I don't think I have the freedom to do what I want to do, they [my family] are always in the back of my head, even if I'm ignoring it...I want to meet my parents' expectations or my family expectations...I would have to eventually get a good job to be able to help out with my family...I try to ignore it, however, it is always here...something I have to think about and keep in my mind.

(Calla, Focus Group #2, November 21, 2020)

Participants were continually thinking about their families' needs. This was particularly true for participants who had younger siblings or cousins. These participants expressed the pressure they felt to be good role models, while also supporting their younger family members learning, growth, and development.

I'm the oldest of all my cousins and my sister, so I kind of have to be a role model for them in a way...I don't have any other option, I have to be something good. I have to end up in a good place, so I can you know, give them the confidence that they need...I feel like if I fail then they're going to lose hope... I can't ever make mistakes in my life. That's kind of making a lot anxiety [in] my life, but I'm trying to look at it in a positive way.

(Uhee, Interview, November 14, 2020)

These additional familial responsibilities significantly impacted study participants' personal time to pursue their own goals, as well as contributed to significant demands on their cognitive load and general mental energy, increasing stress, and anxiety.

There was also a heightened dynamic of the influence of extended family in decision-making. Participants shared that in many of their families and cultures, it is common to live with and make joint decisions with extended family. Several participants noted that their parents were significantly influenced by the beliefs and values of extended family members. In some cases, the parents of study participants would seek out familial advice just to be confident they were making the best decisions for their children. In other cases, families might have accepted financial support from extended family to help make their journey to Canada possible, or in two cases, family members took the place of other extended family members in the migration journey, and now felt indebted to them, making their parents more likely to accept their advice, whether solicited or not.

Even when we were back home, my uncle was helping us financially, that is why my dad is like so kind-hearted to him, he wants to do everything for him...like I had so many dreams [until my uncle interfered]...but then everything got messed up.

(Habibah, Interview, September 22, 2020)

Study participants noted this was particularly problematic because some extended family members were very influential in their family, yet, had biased perceptions of values and lifestyles associated the West. This created cultural conflicts amongst family members. Several participants commiserated that their extended family overseas would often try to warn them to not fall prey to the corrupting influences of drugs and alcohol abuse that ran rampant in the West. Habibah shared her uncle's thoughts on how she and her sisters should act in Canada.

[He says] "you [girls] shouldn't go to work, it's Canada, you know people...they will try to take [you] away from your cultural life, from [your] family, and ...you can become addicts like you know, drug addicts."

(Habibah, Interview, September 22, 2020)

Participants noted that such ideas generated a misleading sense of fear in their new communities and created a heightened sense of concern in their parents for their daughter's well-being, which was used to restrict their daughter's freedom of mobility. This would cause tension in the households, as study participants tried to advocate for the need to work or study outside the home.

There is a kind of power difference in our [family] relationship...for the one who is under the pressure of their relatives or like their parents...so these kinds of things do not allow one to you know, build upon [your] goals like what you want in life, you always worry about their [family] expectations so that [you] don't hurt their expectations.

(Uhee, Focus Group #1, November 16, 2020)

Adding to this cultural disconnect, study participants observed that they adapted more quickly to their new environment than older family members such as their parents. They noted that they learned English more quickly and became more familiar with the culture, creating a power shift in the family. Study participants who experienced this tension described that over time, as their parents became better acquainted with their new communities and better understood their new environment and Canadian culture, they generally extended more freedom to their daughters.

4.1.3. Community Factors that Guide Goal Setting

Study participants generally agreed that community involvement, through volunteering or participating in community events, gatherings, teams, or clubs, enabled them to become better acquainted with their new culture and meet others in their community, who helped guide their aspirational pursuits. These peers introduced them to new opportunities, including career pathways, that they might not otherwise have known about. In addition to helping inform educational and career pathways, the relationships that they developed with others, through these opportunities, enhanced their mental well-being and their sense of belonging.

Connections are also important to build a support system for yourself here, especially if you're by yourself...I didn't want to fall into depression...[and] you never know what doors they open.

(Hakimah, Interview, October 23, 2020)

Several study participants also mentioned that participating in and contributing to their community was an important way to feel valued in their new country. These same participants noted that they did not feel like victims of war or “helpless refugees,” that they were intelligent, hard-working, resourceful, and capable, and wanted to be perceived as such.

I want to be useful...so many people [have] help[ed] us, I am not used to taking...I want to be valuable in my community.

(Calla, Interview, November 11, 2020)

For study participants who arrived in Canada alone or missing family members, creating their own social support network was extremely important in feeling connected to others, limiting feelings of social isolation, and learning more about Canadian culture and the opportunities available here. Several study participants found themselves volunteering with organizations that they had first used upon arrival to Canada, including settlement agencies and the Food Bank. In these roles, participants met a diversity of people, including youth, as well as settlement-, multicultural-, and case-workers, who, through both formal and informal conversations, helped them better understand their new Canadian culture and provided them a trusting person to ask questions to. Several participants noted they had to make a significant personal effort to participate in and generally just attend these programs, as they felt a certain level of personal risk, both of

the unknown environment they were entering into and of personal rejection. However, these same participants noted a variety of benefits that emerged from their volunteer experiences, including new friendships, mentorship opportunities, as well as free training and certifications. These participants also found part- and some even full-time jobs through these experiences. Participants also noted volunteering as an opportunity to explore personal interests and different aspects of their identity in a supportive environment, strengthening their confidence in their decision-making and ultimately enabling them to take small risks in meeting others, trying new things, and exploring their communities, which contributed to the formation of their personal aspirations.

Study participants generally agreed that stepping out of their comfort zones, being open to meeting new people and having new experiences, was essential to developing a community of support.

Engage in voluntary work, try different things...things you didn't ever try before. I did that...people are very nice here. Be nice, you will find nice people...try to find solutions, don't blame yourself and start to cry and sit down...like start work and be adventurous...there's nothing to be afraid of.

(Hakimah, Interview, October 23, 2020)

Many participants noted the numerous benefits of social media to build a social network. Social media was used to explore different clubs and groups, to find like-minded peers, to search for new opportunities (for example, educational, volunteering, or job opportunities), to connect with family and friends, as well as to assess the safety and reliability of such opportunities. Several participants mentioned that they would be more likely to attend opportunities, such as events, volunteer opportunities, and job fairs, that were posted on social media outlets such as Facebook, if they were recommended by people they knew and trusted, such as friends, support workers, or faculty. This was a way of cross-checking the safety and authenticity of an event, which was important in participants' comfort level and overall willingness to attend an event. Two participants noted that they were even more likely to attend an event, if the person who recommended the event, was willing and able to attend with them or meet them there.

Nearly all study participants used social media and the type of attachment they formed with their online communities shaped their personal goals. The social media apps which were most used by participants are highlighted in Figure 4.3.

Figure 4.3. Social media function and usage

Social Media Application	Function	Purpose of Participant Usage
Facebook	A social networking site that connects friends, family, and acquaintances online, and allows people to share ideas, express values, post images, chat, and more (Investor Relations, 2021).	Connect with new people. Learn about new opportunities. Get real-time advice from educational advisors. Stay in touch with family.
Instagram	A social media platform to share interests, ideas, and values through visual images and video (Antonelli, 2020).	Share interests and hobbies. Explore what others are doing, which may inform personal goal setting.
Twitter	A 'microblogging' system that allows you to send and receive short posts or messages (What is Twitter?, 2021).	Share and express ideas. Read and consider others' ideas. Acquire news.
GoFundMe	A crowdfunding platform that allows you to create, share and raise money for your campaign (Fundraising for People, 2021).	Fundraise for events that they are hosting. Fundraise for personal goals, such as family reunification.
Communication Platforms– for example, Zoom, Skype, Viber, & WhatsApp	Communication platforms offer varying levels of video communication, text messaging, voice-over messaging, and image/document sharing (Beckingham, 2021).	Communicate with others, including educational and career advisors, youth workers, settlement workers, as well as family, friends, and acquaintances.

In navigating these new online communities, participants began to better understand themselves, their interests, and their values. Online communities allowed them to explore different aspects of their personal identity and expanded their awareness of educational and career opportunities available to them, which was a significant factor in their personal goal setting. However, two participants noted that overuse of their social media could be distracting and depressing. They felt that too much time spent on platforms such as Instagram could make them feel depressed or sad as they were constantly comparing themselves to their peers; these sites also made it possible for them to procrastinate, further limiting time for studies. These phenomena

is supported by research that suggests inappropriate and prolonged use, cyberbullying, and constant social comparisons can exacerbate and increase depression and anxiety, particularly in young adults and adolescents (Keles et al., 2020; Lin et al., 2016; Sundvall et al., 2021). More research into the effects of social media on young newcomer women is needed.

The next section explores how discriminatory barriers challenge the pursuit of higher educational aspirations for study participants.

4.2. Discriminatory Barriers that Challenge the Pursuit of Higher Education Aspirations

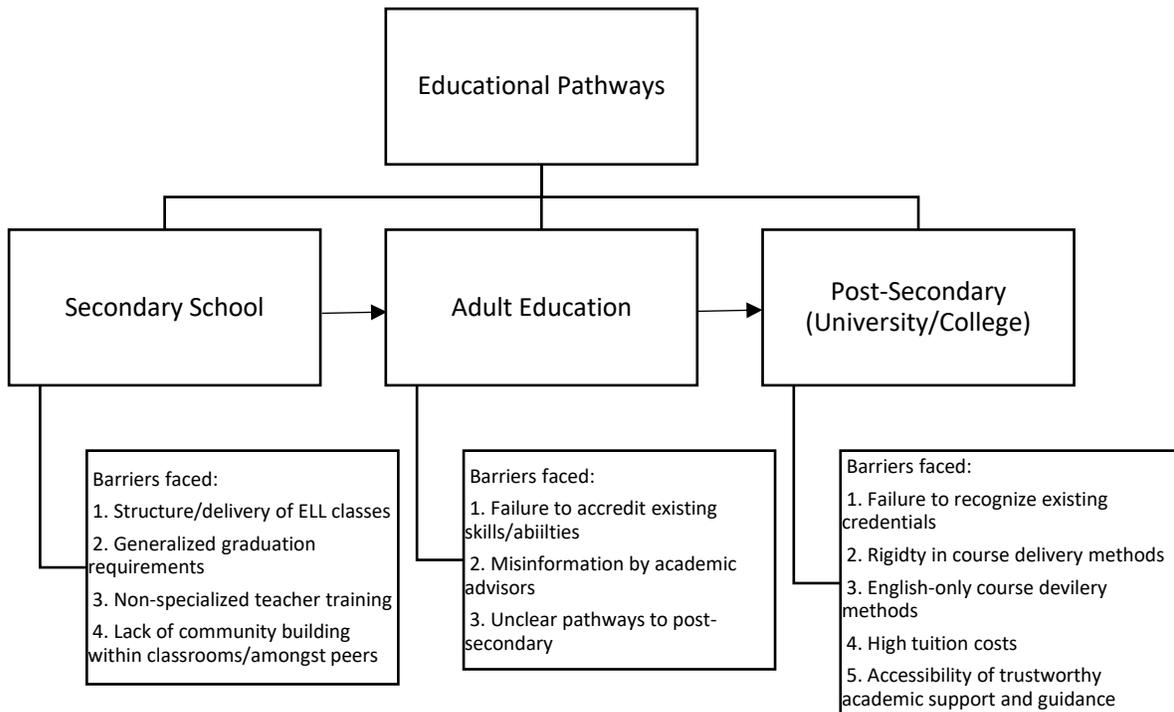
As young adult women from refugee backgrounds migrate to Canada, they are met with multiple forms of institutional and structural discrimination that create barriers to equitable educational access (Korntheuer et al., 2018). Institutional discrimination are the direct policies of the dominant institutions that are intended to have harmful effects on minority groups (Pincus, 2019). Structural discrimination are the norms and procedures that may appear neutral or unintentional in nature but have negative and prohibitive effects on minority groups (Pincus, 2019). As introduced in Plevitz' framework for discrimination in Chapter 2, both institutional and structural discrimination have the effect of keeping minority groups subordinate. Institutional discrimination, while often unconscious, can have the effect to subordinate minority groups (de Plevitz, 2007; Pincus, 2019). Often, these forms of discrimination are first encountered by refugee women in the migration journey. Several study participants shared stories of the dehumanizing mistreatment, including physical, mental, emotional, and sexual abuse that they experienced throughout their resettlement process. These stories reinforced the resilience and determination that is required to persevere through extremely difficult circumstances, rife with mis/disinformation, exploitation, and disingenuous people, and the courage it takes to rebuild a life for oneself in a new society (Gomolla, 2021). The major findings related to the experiences of discrimination that young adult women from refugee backgrounds face when accessing higher education, and the impact of discriminatory policies and practices by decision-makers are briefly described here and are elaborated on in greater depth in subsequent pages.

The types of institutional and structural discrimination encountered by study participants depended on what stage of their educational journey the participant was at and what they still needed to attain, for example, academic language proficiency, or course credits, to pursue their goals in higher education. The findings explore the discriminatory barriers faced by study participants who were pursuing higher education in three stages of their pursuits: 1. while transitioning out of Secondary school; 2. while in Adult Education; 3. while transitioning to post-secondary. Study findings also group participants according to common forms of discrimination encountered, as these experiences transcended more obvious forms of difference, such as age or country of origin. Common barriers included attaining academic English language proficiency (at all levels of their academic journeys), accessing financial resources, and navigating mental health challenges.

4.2.1. The Pursuit of Higher Education and the Barriers faced in Secondary, Adult Education and Post-Secondary Institutions

The majority of study participants believed that pursuing higher education here in Canada was a pathway out of poverty, a way to support their families, and the opportunity to pursue meaningful work. In their educational journeys, participants experienced a variety of institutional discriminatory norms and procedures based on the level of education they were starting at, secondary, adult education, or direct entry into post-secondary. These discriminatory norms and procedures formed educational policy and practice which determined how accessible higher education was to study participants. The three-main educational entry points are illustrated below along with the common barriers participants faced at each level of education.

Figure 4.4. Educational Pathway Barriers



Late Entry: The Secondary School Experience

There were seven study participants who arrived in Canada prior to the age of 19 years old, and who therefore started their educational journeys in secondary school. At the time of participating in the study, these participants were aged 19 years or older and were reflecting back on their secondary school experience. These participants conveyed that the schools they attended had varying degrees of language support for newcomer students. Some schools in Greater Vancouver provided much more/less English Language Learner (ELL) support than others, and this varied even within school districts. Language classes that only teach language and do not prepare students for advancement in education are considered forms of institutional discrimination because they fail to adequately prepare students with the skills and competencies, they need to be academically successful in higher education (Korntheuer et al., 2009). Study participants conveyed that the structure of and support offered through the ELL programming available, significantly impacted both their language acquisition and their academic skill development. They believed that this was because some schools had teachers who specialized in ELL and that the general structures of the ELL programs worked better in some schools than others. Participants felt that ELL programming that

provided teaching in core subjects, including ELL Science, ELL Math, and ELL Social Studies, allowed them to develop their language competencies while simultaneously teaching them academic content, which they believed both helped them catch up on missed learning while developing the academic language proficiency needed to pursue higher education outside of secondary school. The structure and delivery model of the ELL programs differed depending on the year that participants were in secondary ELL classes. This was related to changes in ELL program funding made available by the government to school districts. Olya, who is now a graduate student in university conveyed how her secondary school experience provided essential support to her academic growth.

...because I didn't speak English and also my academic abilities were really low because I didn't attend an official school before coming to Canada...they sent me to a school that had more supports...it had lots of ELL support, or at the time had a lot of ELL support. I had ELL math, ELL science, ELL writing, and all of my courses were in ELL...and then they introduced me to [a] youth worker...so right away, I got a lot of support from the community. Otherwise, I would not have these [academic] abilities if they sent me to another catchment. So...that worked out really well and then I continued going to the same school, even though my family moved to [a new city]. Like we were in [this new city] and I would just make the commute, like almost two hours every day to go...

(Olya, Interview, July 28, 2020)

Olya continued to explain that when her family moved to a different city, she transferred to a school closer to this new home. However, the lack of support and specialized teacher training at her new school led her to return to her first school, despite the lengthy commute. In addition to the specialized ELL programming available at her school, Olya's comments suggest that the supportive networks of professionals provided at her school, including the youth worker as well as her ELL teachers played a significant part of her academic success and her connection to the school community.

For other study participants whose ELL programs were pedagogically structured around reading, writing, and oral language, the acquisition of core content knowledge and skills in specific subject areas was decidedly more difficult to achieve. Participants believed that this structure of ELL programming did not help them meet the *British Columbian Certificate of Graduation* requirements and did not prepare them with the skills and competencies needed to succeed in post-secondary. One participant noted that even though she was able to transition straight from secondary to post-secondary, her content knowledge was so low, that she was not academically successful in post-

secondary, and had to return to adult education to pick up basic content and competencies prior to re-applying to post-secondary. Another participant noted that, while she was placed in a remedial English language course (intended for students experiencing learning difficulties), that had a wide diversity of student abilities, including native language speakers, so the strategies used by the teacher were not necessarily specialized for language learners like herself, but were trying to meet everyone's learning needs, which she did not find useful.

Another example of structural discrimination incurred by participants was when they were placed in classes with much younger students. These participants commented that ELL programming that placed them in multi-age classes was demoralizing. Calla, who entered secondary school at age 18 years old, said that being placed students as young as 12 and 13 years old, made her feel that her intellectual capabilities were weak while at the same time did not allow her to interact within her peer group or make age-appropriate friendships.

...I was not comfortable [in secondary school] because, um, I was taking classes with like grade nine students [aged 14+]...and I always felt like the old person that does not belong.

(Calla, Interview, November 11, 2020)

Participants who had spent longer in secondary school and had had time to adapt to the processes and structures of their new school settings commented that they were able to find some supportive teachers (typically ELL teachers) to whom they could turn for guidance. They also noted that participation in extra-curricular activities helped them acquire the language quicker and that they were introduced to different educational pathways through the course requirements for graduation classes, such as Career and Life Education. Study participants who entered secondary school very late, at the age of 18 or 19 years old, however, felt they were trying to catch up to meet graduation course-credit expectations, which they felt they did not have enough time to meet. For this reason, such students were more likely to graduate secondary school with an Adult Graduation diploma, qualifying them to enter Adult Education, rather than a British Columbian Certificate of Graduation, qualifying them to apply to post-secondary institutions. This had both favourable and unfavourable consequences. On the one hand, entering straight into post-secondary saved time and resources, but many found it was more difficult to succeed academically due to developing academic language

proficiencies. On the other hand, courses taken in Adult Education were perceived as useful for developing academic language proficiencies that they needed to be successful in post-secondary. To the participants, these courses had value in the skills they were teaching, but because they did not contribute to a degree, diploma, or certificate, they were perceived as taking up limited time that could be spent pursuing specific education that would get them closer to their desired career. In this sense, they were considered yet another hurdle to get over before they would be able to pursue post-secondary, rather than a pathway into higher education.

Limbo: Adult Education

Students who pursue Adult Education do so to improve their literacy and skills, to obtain a high school diploma, to upgrade previous marks, or for entrance into a post-secondary program (Adult Upgrading, 2022). Adult education offers flexible course delivery, in the day or evenings, self-paced or teacher-directed courses, the option of online or in-person learning, and is free to permanent residents and citizens (Adult Upgrading, 2022). Students can pursue their course work through one of two pathways, either through the public-school district's adult education programming or through post-secondary institutions offering tuition-free adult upgrading. While study participants understood that they needed to improve their academic language proficiency to be successful in higher education, their primary motivation for taking Adult Education courses was to complete their high school diploma to pursue higher education but were met with structural discrimination in the process of doing so. De Plevitz (2007) argues that where a condition is imposed, even if it seems neutral, such as all students must attain a high school diploma to enter post-secondary, if the condition is unrealistic for a certain demographic of the population, due to inappropriate programming options, poverty, language ability, or other, and there are no other viable alternatives, then that condition constitutes a form of structural discrimination.

There were six study participants who were too old to enter secondary school and did not qualify to pursue post-secondary, so they entered Adult Education directly. While some participants wanted to upgrade their knowledge and skills, most were trying to acquire the credits necessary to pursue post-secondary programs. For this reason, five participants noted their frustration in being advised to take basic coursework like Math and English, in which they already felt proficient. For instance, one study participant who

held a foreign master's degree in a scientific field that required a high level of mathematics was told she needed to take basic math again. She felt the academic advisor was judging her competencies based on her oral language abilities and therefore was dismissive of her academic abilities. Fortunately, the study participant found someone else to talk to and was advised to challenge the test. However, poor information regarding when and how she could register for the test, as well as when it was available, resulted in unnecessary time delays in the process.

...if I know I can pass the test in like a week, why should I go to school for like two-three months? Like, it should be a choice, that if you want to go to adult school or you want to [take] the tests? ...they gave me the date [for the test] but I had to wait a long time. We have already wasted years doing nothing, that one month [extra to wait] is very hard for us...like many months they have wasted and money.

(Daiba, Interview, November 17, 2020)

Daiba ended up passing both the English and Math tests, with exceptionally strong marks, but throughout the process, she felt disparaged and undermined in her abilities. These feelings of being underestimated by academic advisors in this transition from Adult Education to Post-Secondary were shared by several participants. This was also true for Rafeeqah who ended up challenging the university entry English test instead of having to take an entire course, which would have significantly delayed her ability to apply to post-secondary, but which was what she was strongly recommended to do by a post-secondary academic advisor.

...I had a really negative experience with academic advisors just because, they would usually put me down whenever I have questions whenever I [said] like I have [other] plans or like I would ask about alternative ways [to pursue my educational goals]...And she [the advisor] was like, "Well, we have this other way you can try, however, it's really hard, and I don't think based on your English level now you can pass the exam...the passing rate is really low...you need above 90%,"...she really brought me down...[but] I sat the exam [anyway, and]...I passed the exam with a really high score...but I would not have taken the exam if I had believed [the advisor].

(Rafeeqah, Interview, November 22, 2020)

Like Daiba, Rafeeqah felt that the advisor was assessing her academic abilities based on a few informal conversations they had and the strength of her accent, as opposed to having conducted a credible evaluation of her abilities. This type of treatment could be exacerbated by widespread stereotypes and deficit discourses about the

educational potential of women from refugee backgrounds, specifically racialized women (Sirriyeh, 2016).

Several study participants who were in Adult Education noted that the classes themselves were run well, were free, and were typically accessible. However, what they needed was someone trustworthy and knowledgeable of their unique circumstances who could help guide them in their educational journey. They felt that navigating the many post-secondary program options, admissions processes, and so forth were overwhelming and that they needed to better understand the different pathways to higher education in order to feel confident in their decision-making. Participants further conveyed that they needed to better understand the types of post-secondary options available to them, from university to trades and vocational school, as well as the differences between public and private institutions, and how to assess the quality of an institution. Participants wanted more information on the Canadian job market, including updated information regarding in-demand careers and high-need industries. They believed that this information early in their educational pursuits would help inform their educational and career pathways. Aaliya explains the challenges she had in determining which educational pathway to pursue without the support of her settlement worker.

They [the settlement agency]...gave me a laptop and were like, okay, you can have this and now it's like up to you to do it...[but I need someone] showing me the direction, like what to do. After that, maybe I can, do these kinds of things on my own...or I get a detailed understanding of what's going on.

(Aaliya, Interview, November 17, 2020)

Lacking such guidance on a new and complex educational system can lead to unintended but costly mistakes, as both Asmaan and Iman discovered. Both participants bypassed Adult Education because they had been accepted into costly private colleges, requiring them to take out enormous student loans. A few weeks into the first semester, they were advised by a family friend that their job prospects in these industries were weak, and it was suggested they drop out of the program before wasting any more money. The colleges would only refund part of their tuition, causing significant financial stress to them and their families.

... it was so much money, especially when you're a newcomer, in a low-income family. The only person that work[s] in the family is my father and we are big family, seven members, my father, my mom, they were in a stressful position.

(Asmaan, Interview, November 10, 2020)

It should be highlighted that both Asmaan and Iman made notable efforts to research their colleges and programs prior to following through with their applications. This experience reinforces how complex and misleading navigating the public/private education industry can be. As a result of these experiences, study participants conveyed the need to have a trusted advisor, friend, peer, or mentor, with a strong understanding of the Canadian-based education system to help guide them in their decision-making and avoid exploitation. The absence of this constitutes a significant structural barrier to pursuing higher education. Participants routinely suggested that they would benefit from someone who could help guide them in their pursuits, but that this person must be someone they trusted, could have ongoing communication with throughout their educational journey, and who did not have an alternate agenda, such as to promote a specific program or fulfill a student quota.

For others, time spent in Adult Education requires additional time attached to one's academic journey, turning a four-year degree into a six-year pursuit. Participants commented that this type of institutional discrimination posed significant barriers to deciding which educational and career paths to pursue after their secondary school credentials are met.

Challenges in Post-Secondary University and College Programs

The six study participants who were currently pursuing post-secondary were attending large, public universities. The challenges they encountered generally differed depending on whether they were attending post-secondary on a comprehensive scholarship or were working at part-time jobs while pursuing their post-secondary education. Lacking financial resources to pursue higher education is a form of institutional discrimination because it denies a merit-based system which places barriers for many students from refugee backgrounds in attending higher educational institutions (Korntheuer et al., 2009).

The four study participants who arrived in Canada on university scholarships said that they generally felt they had the resources they needed to succeed in their programs, although they mentioned that new teaching expectations and different methods of learning took time to adjust to. Three participants described the course expectations as

being lower in Canada, which they attributed to the increased focus on critical thinking, rather than on memorization and testing as was the case in their home countries.

...the quality of education [in Canada] is low...so I was really shocked that I'm doing my masters and it's much easier. Of course, I encountered some difficult courses, but overall, when we do the finals or we go to the exams, I didn't feel like I'm doing a master's exam.

(Rafeeqah, Focus Group #4, November 22, 2020)

...[education] here doesn't put much of a burden on students like it's easy-going...I feel it's a very lazy process in the education system here.

(Aaliya, Focus Group #4, November 22, 2020)

These students also had strong academic English abilities (as assessed by the academic scholarship program that sponsored them) and higher educational credentials (typically some undergraduate work or a completed undergraduate degree), prior to their arrival in Canada, which they felt had prepared them well for the academic expectations of higher education in Canada. Several scholarship participants noted that receiving the scholarship positively impacted their self-esteem and increased their motivation, citing that they were encouraged by knowing that someone believed in their abilities enough to invest in them and that without the scholarship, they would not have been able to pursue higher education or even come to Canada. Olya noted her scholarship provided new opportunities through a mandatory mentorship program, and that it also introduced her to many other high achieving students, which increased her motivation.

... the people around me who also got [the scholarship] were people, young people who were very driven, very strong, very like, um, community-oriented and wanting to give back to the community. And that, for me, that I was able to, you know, just be around people who had these...mindsets [was]...motivating...

(Olya, Interview, July 28, 2020)

Study participants who had entered but had attended limited amounts of secondary school or adult education were struggling to complete their programs. One reason was that in-person learning was prohibitive to many students who lived far away, were working part-time jobs, and were commuting on public transportation. Several study participants were traveling upwards of 100km per day, to attend class, by public transportation, which they cited as unreliable, inconsistent, and liable to lengthy traffic congestion delays. Several study participants noted that class delivery models that were blended or online, as well as specific instructors who made themselves available to support students online and through social media, were particularly useful and made learning more accessible.

Another reason study participants noted that they preferred online/blended class options was because there was often an option to record these lectures, which allowed them to re-listen to lectures as well as look up and revisit new concepts and ideas as the course progressed. This was particularly important to study participants who were still developing their academic English competencies and in courses that required significant reading because it provided them more time to work diligently work through course material. This suggests a form of structural discrimination in which the educational institutions assume that one pedagogical delivery model is equally beneficial for all students. Educational institutions that assume the quality of their educational programming provides the same standard of education to all students regardless of background is a barrier to equitable access to learning (de Pelvitz, 2007).

4.2.2. Three Common Barriers experienced by Study Participants: Language, Financial, and Mental Health Barriers

Transcending the barriers experienced at each level of education, study participants typically experienced barriers in one or more of the following areas: academic language proficiency, adequate financial resources, and managing their mental health.

Language

The generalized language requirements to attend post-secondary assume that all prospective students have had training in and access to developing the specific academic language proficiencies required for success in higher education and that they are all able to participate equally in-class discussions and assignments (de Pelvitz, 2007). While over half of the study participants arrived in Canada with some level of English language ability, there was great variation in fluency and academic proficiency. Academic language is the oral, written, and auditory language proficiency needed to be academically successful in school (Schleppegrell, 2012). Study participants noted that because all post-secondary programs were offered in predominantly English, their language level posed significant challenges to their academic success, a form of structural discrimination. Study participants who had particularly low levels of academic English abilities upon arrival to Canada conveyed that they were unable to pursue higher education until they had strengthened their language abilities significantly, which was a timely pursuit. They noted that the English language classes that they found in the community, such as through the library or through refugee serving agencies, were more informal and conversational, not specifically providing them with the academic language practice they needed.

Study participants shared that through these classes they formed friendships with others who had experiences of migration and with whom they could share their struggles and concerns and became better acquainted with their community. These participants noted that while the in-person English classes were a good introduction to the language, they felt that community involvement through working and volunteering taught them more technical language skills, which they believed to be more useful in pursuing their career goals.

ELL classes are insufficient...you need to get out in the community and practice and meet people.

(Calla, Interview, November 11, 2020)

It is worth noting that this study, conducted during the COVID19 pandemic, meant that many of these classes had shut down during this time. As a result of these closures, several study participants noted that their English language abilities

significantly declined as their outlets for social interaction closed and they were unable to practice their English communication skills.

Study participants communicated that English language abilities were essential to pursuing higher education, as well as employment. Several mentioned that they felt their self-esteem was negatively impacted by the communication barriers they encountered, and that this was a result of how others reacted to their speech. Several participants noted that Native English language speakers, who spoke too quickly, looked confused, or sounded frustrated while communicating with them, hindered their ability to understand others, communicate clearly, and in some cases caused anxiety.

...like, I get so confused [talking sometimes], like, what am I saying? I don't know...I used to be okay, first when I came, but then like later...this created some kind of anxiety in me.

(Habibah, Interview, September 22, 2020)

Overall, participants shared the necessity of learning English at an academically proficient level in order to pursue their academic and career-related goals. They felt that being able to communicate with others was essential to community-based participation and felt that strong English skills were essential to succeeding academically at all levels of education, but that acquiring these skills took many years and deliberate investment of their time and resources.

Balancing Financial Priorities

Another common barrier amongst most study participants was financing. The in-person attendance requirements necessary to succeed in higher education assume that all academically qualified students will be able to attend higher education and that expense, transportation, childcare, work et cetera. will not interfere with this requirement (de Pelvitz, 2007). Such requirements fail to consider where, how, and on what governments spend their education budget on. It also does not consider who benefits most from this directed spending, which is a form of institutional discrimination. Most study participants were trying to find the balance between part-time employment, paying for their post-secondary pursuits, and supporting their families. Even participants on academic scholarships were often sending money back home to family members in war-torn countries or refugee camps. Participants were not looking for a hand-out or free money. Rather, they were looking for opportunities to earn their own income and greatly

desired to be self-sufficient, which they viewed as their individual responsibility and a significant source of pride.

...we don't have a penny here, we have to earn first, we have to work for it also...
much more hard work is required...

(Nabihah, Interview, November 17, 2020)

The second most expressed concern, after worrying about supporting the basic needs of themselves and their families, was finding ways to finance their education. There were varying levels of comfort with taking out student loans. These reasons included: not wanting to owe “anyone” anything; not having debt when their academic future was uncertain, and not feeling financially pressured by anyone when their mental health stability was uncertain. As Chanvatey conveys:

I didn't want to take student loans...I can be very unpredictable at times. Like, you know, one minute I'm very motivated, I'm going to school and everything and the other minute...especially with my depression and everything, I just want to drop it. I can't do that with student loans...it's government money, you can't play with it. Like when it's your own money, you can do whatever you want.

(Chanvatey, Interview, September 15, 2020)

Other study participants who did take out student loans were extra vigilant with them. Rafeeqah explained that despite having student loan money, she would work and not spend her loan money unless absolutely necessary. Rather, she would use the grant that comes with the loans to pay for school and save the rest, to repay the loan. Calla explained that she decided to pursue a program at a less-costly college, to take out as little student loan debt as possible.

I started with taking student loans because that paid for my first semester. But then, I was able to manage every semester on my own since...I now can manage my tuition fees [with my part-time work].

(Calla, Interview, November 11, 2020)

Study participants were strategic and smart with how they spent their money, yet financial struggles were a daily concern for most participants, and this factored into many of their decisions, from which program or institution to attend to which career to pursue.

Managing Mental Health

A third common barrier amongst participants was how to maintain strong mental health while balancing several stressful circumstances. The lack of distinctive support and programming for incoming students from refugee backgrounds who may experience higher levels of mental health challenges than their peers (Cole et al., 2013), and for those whose low socioeconomic levels may prevent them from accessing necessary mental health services to best support them are forms of institutional discrimination (Flitner, 1987). Balancing existing mental health challenges, with the constant demands of school, work, family, and having a limited social network negatively impacted participants' well-being and the ability for them to achieve their academic aspirations.

I was like, so excited to start my first year in college, but, I was only able to finish the first semester classes and then the second semester I decided to drop all of my classes because I was like struggling with my mental health. I was working full time and then I was juggling school again and I was just so stressed out. I'm still struggling from like PTSD...

(Chanvatey, Interview, September 15, 2020)

Chanvatey continued to express that dropping out of school was needed for her to support her well-being but devastating and demoralizing personally. She had high aspirations of being the first woman in her family to attain a post-secondary degree, and saw education as a pathway out of poverty, but was concerned that her mental health challenges would prevent her from returning to school in the future, which she desperately wanted to complete.

Several other study participants noted how difficult it was during stressful academic times to have limited access to close family and friends to help support their mental health. Participants noted that while social media and online platforms like Zoom, help with overseas communication, they do not replace in-person communication and were often challenged both by time-zone differences and internet reliability. They noted that lacking a supportive social network negatively impacted their mental well-being.

Another study participant noted how fortunate she felt to be part of an academic community where the costs of mental health support and counseling were covered in her tuition fees. She explained how important the access to reliable, high-quality, free mental health support on her campus was. She credits these supports with her ability to persevere in her academics, particularly when her mental health challenges became

overwhelming. This participant was at a specific institution where these services were available, whereas others attending different institutions did not have the same access to these supports.

The next section explores how gendered responsibilities impact the pursuit of participant aspirations of higher education.

4.3. Do gender-based responsibilities create barriers to pursuing higher education?

This section will explore the role that gender-based barriers have on the ability of young adult women from refugee backgrounds to pursue their educational and career goals. It is necessary to explore the experiences of women in the settlement process because although there is no Universal woman or experience, the issues and challenges experienced by women during war and throughout the migration process differ from those of their male counterparts (Sirriyeh, 2016; Zavos, 2010). Gender plays a significant role in the way women are treated throughout the migration process and in the policies and procedures that guide these processes (Gutierrez Rodriguez, 2018). Existing migration policies tend to ignore the specific experiences of women from refugee backgrounds and further deny them a voice in decision-making that impacts their resettlement, often placing them in a position of inferiority and as objects of exploitation and violence (Gutierrez Rodriguez, 2018).

These findings will discuss how gender impacted the settlement experiences of the young adult women in the study and influenced their personal goal making. Specifically, the study found that access to safe and affordable housing is significantly influenced by gender and that the denial of this right place's women from refugee backgrounds in a position of heightened precarity and instability, negatively impacting their ability to pursue other life goals. This section will continue to explore how specific gender-based familial responsibilities impacts the time and resources women have to pursue their personal goals. The findings further examine the significance of social relationships in the lives of women, specifically newcomer women with few social connections and limited social networks.

4.3.1. Housing: A Gendered-Issue

The most significant daily stressor faced by study participants was finding safe, affordable, and accessible housing. Many study participants moved on average three or more times prior to settling in Greater Vancouver. Constant moving was in direct relation to income affordability, and the ability to secure livable wage employment. These women found it difficult to find part-time jobs that paid more than minimum wage and believed this to be in relation to their lack of Canadian-based work experience, their emerging language skills, and their gender. Asylum-seeking participants initially stayed with family members but were also significantly challenged in finding stable and affordable housing, both before and after they attained permanent residence. Study participants who arrived on privately sponsored scholarships did not face the same housing challenges, at least upon first arrival, as the terms of their scholarship included accessible, on-campus, paid-for housing.

Government-Sponsored Study Participants Challenges with Housing

The twelve women in the study who arrived through government sponsorship lived in a variety of residences, including basement suites, apartments, townhouses, and single-family homes. These women overwhelmingly ended up in low-income neighbourhoods. They shared stories of how these neighbourhoods were often rife with open drug use, homelessness, and exposed them to the sex trade, which was unexpected, and initially shocking. Participants noted that these neighbourhoods could sometimes be unnerving when navigating access to public transit in the early/late hours of the day to get to/from work or school. Habibah shares how on the first night at their new home, some children's items that had been donated to her family were stolen from their porch, and how her mother was too afraid to leave the house for the several months they lived there.

I kept thinking, like this is Canada? I didn't know Canada looks like this...my mother was too scared to leave the house, so we had to take the younger children, to school, everywhere. Still, my mother and father did not want us to leave the house though.

(Habibah, Interview, September 22, 2020)

Habibah continued to explain that her mother had lived her entire life in/out of war zones and conflict areas that were unsafe for women to travel alone, and that these

experiences further heightened her uncertainty in her new community. This fear to go outside, placed significant stress on the family, as Habibah had to take on parental responsibilities, such as navigating the new community and services within it, for her family members.

Several participants shared housing concerns over the lack of affordable and accessible rental housing in Greater Vancouver, the long waitlists for British Columbia Housing subsidized housing accommodations, which develops, manages, and administers subsidized housing options in the Lower Mainland, and the disruption that constant moving caused in their lives. Affordable housing was particularly difficult to find for participants with large families, as many affordable options such as apartments and basement suites were too small to host their entire families. Another participant shared that they had lived in a two-bedroom apartment with five-to-seven family members illegally over the allowable rental occupancy rate, but that the landlord shared their ethnicity and was trying to “do them a favour”. In return, however, this participant felt that they were at the mercy of the landlord who could decide to raise the rent or evict them whenever he pleased.

Daleela shared that even after several years of moving and renting within one low-income community, her family was being forced to move again. As a result, her family had started to look at moving to a different province, with a lower cost of living.

...the landlords don't accept large families and you know, the house rent, for the two-bedroom house it's going to be like \$4-5,000 and above, it's just like, so expensive.

(Daleela, Interview, September 22, 2020)

Participants who had moved several times continued to share the challenges of doing so while trying to hold down a part-time job, take courses, and maintain social networks. Olya who had to move with her family several times, shared how doing so increased her school commute to over four hours a day, roundtrip, but that she continued to do the commute because she wanted to maintain the social connections with support services and agencies that she had first established. This sentiment was shared by other participants who asserted that moving often was disruptive to their settlement.

...you know, you get to know the space...the people, schools and universities and everything, right. You have your own work here...if we move again, it will be another challenge, you know, trying to find work, trying to get it into another university - and then it's not like one or two members that [need support] it's like the entire family.

(Habibah, Interview, September 22, 2020)

Furthermore, several participants noted that there was little to no help for them to find affordable housing. Amaal, a study participant with a Canadian master's degree, said that she tried to move to a smaller community but felt so socially isolated from her peer group that she began to experience depression. As a result, she decided to move back to a larger city but found it difficult and frustrating to find affordable housing on her income. Similarly, Iman shared how the long waitlists at British Columbia Housing left her own family scrambling to find much-needed housing.

...we have applied for BC housing and we're hoping that we find the BC housing in [a specific city], because right now, as we don't have car...[the location we are currently in] is perfect for us, because the Walmart, Save on Foods and a doctor, a hospital, everything is near to us...there are some, homeless shelters nearby our home that caused a bit of an issue, but like they're not...they're not making any problem for us. It's just that we are not used to this.

(Iman, Interview, November 10, 2020)

Iman's experience also highlighted the importance of housing options that are accessible to public services, as families from refugee backgrounds may be limited in their transportation options and have to rely on public transportation to fulfill everyday activities such as grocery shopping or health care.

Study participants also cited that developing English language skills and new cultural expectations challenged their ability to fully understand everything from their tenancy rights to their housing contracts, to where to turn to for support if needed. The lack of affordable rental housing made it more likely that these women would be forced to stay in unsafe living environments that may heighten their risk of exploitation and abuse.

Privately Sponsored Scholarship Participants Experiences with Housing

The six participants who had arrived through privately sponsored scholarships did not face the same amount of housing instability as government sponsored participants because their accommodations were initially found by their institutions and

were located on university campuses. However, two of these participants did change residences on the same campus, for instance from an international student residency to a more integrated student residency. Others moved from one campus residence to another residence on a campus located in a different city. These study participants moved residences within or between campuses to find new friendship groups, be closer to part-time jobs, or live in more diversified neighbourhoods – which was particularly important to several older scholarship students. However, several of these women were forced to find housing with roommates that they found online, to subsidize the cost of their accommodations. While these women were strategic and cautious about who they shared accommodations with, the reliance on sharing costs with a stranger can place women in a vulnerable position. Olya explains that when looking for accommodations without having met her potential roommates in person, she felt confident that her experiences of migration and moving, had provided her the skills to confidently assess peoples' character, but that a little bit of luck and hope are also involved in the process.

We have to arrange accommodate and everything ourselves...I will be sharing with four other people...I have had a few call with them, so we'll see, fingers crossed.

(Olya, Interview, July 28, 2020)

4.3.2. Familial Responsibilities

Familial responsibilities impacted the personal aspirations of young adult women in several ways. The gendered responsibilities that disproportionately impacted study participants on the basis of their gender were childcare, domestic duties, mental health support, and expectations of marriage. These responsibilities were particularly significant for large families, in which there were several school-aged children, siblings, and/or cousins, experiences with mental health challenges, and limited educational opportunities.

Childcare

Limited childcare spaces and costly programming prevented many of the study participants' families from accessing childcare for the out-of-school-aged children, living in their homes. While none of the study participants disclosed that they had any children of their own, many of them found themselves living in cramped quarters sometimes with several young infants, and toddlers who were most commonly siblings, cousins, and

family friends. Western socially constructed views of mothering constructs biological and adoptive mothering as specific roles played within the nuclear household, limit our understanding of the types of child-rearing and care responsibilities that these young women were and are responsible for (Glenn, 2016). Approximately nine of the study participants cited that they had additional childcare responsibilities, including supporting education, providing financial support, and helping access medical care for the children in their homes, that required significant time and energy to fulfill. Several study participants noted that this was particularly disruptive to their attempts to focus on their educational goals because of the constant distraction but also because of the expectations that they participate in childcare responsibilities. Additionally, the closure of public libraries and other communal public spaces due to the COVID19 pandemic further prohibited study participants from finding safe and quiet places to study. Daleela reinforced that childcare in the home, especially for young children, continued to be the dominant responsibility of women.

I am like so tired of, you know, dealing with my siblings...there is always noise [when studying], we want them to go to like a preschool or daycare or somewhere. So, I filled out the forms, then I just needed the doctor's note, you know, like the signature to apply for the subsidy, and then from there, I can send the forms...and we can get a subsidy and they can go to the preschool...and then [my mom] can continue with her English classes.

(Daleela, Interview, September 22, 2020)

Daleela's experience also showed that because her English skills were stronger than those of her mother, she became responsible for registering her siblings for childcare, organizing forms, medical authorization, and proof of low-income status, so her siblings could qualify for preschool or daycare. She spent further time placing her siblings on childcare waitlists, due to the lack of childcare availability that existed in her community. Other participants noted that they brought their siblings to free-childcare programming, but that they were expected to stay for the duration of the programming, which detracted from their ability to take English courses or pursue employment. One participant also noted that she felt ignored by program staff, and unwelcome, treatment that might be further attributed to race and ethnicity based social stratification harboured by program staff and amongst community members (Palmary et al., 2010). Based on this experience, Daleela decided to not return.

Domestic Responsibilities

Generally, participants had varying experiences with gender-based domestic responsibilities. Several participants perceived gendered differences in their domestic responsibilities compared to their male counterparts but did not necessarily view this as unfair; rather they saw this as a role that everyone was expected to contribute to the family in some way. One participant mentioned that her family was more comfortable with her brother working outside the home.

When I arrived here, we all wanted to work because we knew that in order to learn more about the Canadian culture, you can work and talk to people and gain more confidence...but my uncle was like 'Oh, you [girls] shouldn't go to work,' ... if someone asks, your son works, not your daughters.

(Daleela, Interview, September 22, 2020)

Daleela justified her uncle's perspective by noting that his primary reason for not wanting the girls to work outside the home was in wanting to keep the girls in the family safe from a new and unknown environment. However, the high cost of living in Canada, compounded by her father's inability to secure full-time employment, put pressure on Daleela and her siblings to find jobs.

Conversely, another participant mentioned that her father would take on more domestic responsibilities, such as vacuuming or cooking so that she could go to school. She believed that her dad was only relying on her to help domestically when he was unable to do so because of his work schedule, which she felt was fair. However, because her dad could only get precarious and unstable employment, that often included fluctuating hours, Uhee's help in the home was more often relied upon than not.

...my dad supports me...my dad is very helpful...like he's a good cook, so I don't have to worry about the food, I don't have to worry about cooking...if my dad and my uncle are in the house [not working] they stay with the kids...and I can just do my own thing.

(Uhee, Interview, November 24, 2020)

Study participants' varied experiences with domestic responsibilities were impacted by the size of the family, the age of the young children in the family, the employment hours held by family members, and the adherence to gendered expectations held by the individual's family.

Providing Mental Health Support

In addition, playing a supportive role in the mental health challenges faced by family members was mentally and emotionally exhausting for several study participants. Those whose family members were particularly in need of mental health support found they were taking on significant additional responsibilities while trying to navigate the health care system for their family. They often found themselves taking on the traditional responsibilities of parents, including organizing the children for school, helping with homework, implementing disciplinary measures, making appointments, liaising with teachers, in addition to navigating the health care system. Some found they were also navigating the foster care system and trying to keep their family together, while they and their parents struggled with mental health challenges related to war-related traumas. Still others were monitoring the physical and mental health of siblings, calling ambulances, communicating with doctors, paying specialized medical bills, and so forth. There was a desire by participants for their family members to become self-sufficient, but they were often negotiating the time it would take to teach their family members these skills, compared to what they needed to complete in their own time.

...for an appointment for my mom, I could make it in two minutes by phone call or a quick email, but my mom took the whole day to figure that out. That made me feel very guilty. At the same time, because of me being away [at school] and my mom having all that responsibility...[it] actually pushed her to do those tasks herself and to learn. Like now, she's able to do all her banking herself, she's able to do appointments herself, she's able to go to talk to the teacher herself and got that confidence back herself....it was like tough for both of us, for her, it was tough for me to accept, but it's a good thing, we don't have a dependency. I think that's healthy.

(Olya, Interview, July 28, 2020)

Olya also explained that it was sometimes tricky to find the balance between providing family support and encouraging self-sufficiency.

Expectations of Marriage

Gendered expectations around marriage significantly influenced and impacted the ability to pursue the personal goals for a few study participants. These participants noted that traditionally the lack of educational opportunities in their home villages meant that women were encouraged to marry early and bare children. These marriages often involved a level of arrangement and lack of choice, based on family connections and reputation. For some, coming to Canada was a way to pursue new opportunities and avoid marriage.

...your role as a woman is to get married, have kids, have a husband...like that's the greatest achievement that you can have. I mean, that's how it is for my people.

(Chanvatey, Interview, September 15, 2020)

Chanvatey expressed how the pressure to marry young is both culturally rooted and a result of opportunity. The less opportunity there is to pursue other life goals, the more value is placed on marriage and child-rearing. Similarly, another study participant who eventually did get married shared how she was disappointed about the arrangement, and that she felt stuck between her father and her fiancé's expectations of women and their role in the home and community. Her father, who wanted her to acquire an education, was at odds with her fiancé, who wanted her to stay at home. Yet, her father ultimately left her to figure out her own goals with her fiancé.

...like I have demands from husband...and like in my home, there are like other demands. Like I get so confused...I get so confused and stressed out...I [am] just like in the middle, I get lost and I cannot even help myself.

(Habibah, Interview, September 22, 2020)

Habibah's experience conveys the lack of decision-making and voice she felt in the process, and the tension she felt between her new culture and more traditional values. Like other study participants, Habibah's experience reflects that she was also trying to navigate the expectations of others around her, at the expense of her own needs.

4.3.3. Supportive Relationships Among Women

The young adult women in the study shared many examples of the positive impact that other women have had on their settlement experience and in the pursuit of their personal aspirations. These women came from a variety of backgrounds – some were peers, some employers, and some strangers met on public transit. Friendships and relationships developed with community members played a significant role in the building of social networks for the women in the study and helped them navigate their new communities safely. However, several young adult women in the study found it challenging to meet trustworthy and supportive people, willing to take the time to befriend them.

Friendships

There was a strong desire amongst study participants to develop friendships with other women close to their age and with whom they could ask questions, turn to for advice, and explore their new environments generally. Yet, many found it difficult to make Canadian-born friends, particularly if they were not in school and were not immersed in a community of their peers. For those who were working to save money for school, they found it particularly difficult to form friendships with age-appropriate peers. For study participants who arrived in secondary school, many felt socially isolated from their Canadian-born peers. They shared that in classes, their peers tended to ignore them and several thought this was because of language barriers. Ada conveyed how difficult it was not having any friends in Canada to provide social support, but that social media provided new ways to make and sustain friendships.

Most of the people I know are immigrants, when we moved, we didn't have any friends...maybe on a Facebook group or like a Persian group...I still don't have many friends.

(Ada, Interview, November 20, 2020)

Building friendships and relationships with people in the community made study participants feel like they had a social support network and people they could turn to for advice and guidance. Several participants noted the importance of avoiding social isolation, and one way of doing so was by building new friendships. Several other participants who were in later adulthood noted that it was difficult to make friends with

Canadian-born peers and that friendships could be superficial and fleeting. Amira conveyed how friendships in Canada were fleeting.

...I got to learn that friendships in Canada are not like friendships back home...all the neighbours would know each other...you would just go and have a coffee with your neighbour...for me, it definitely has been one of my culture shocks coming here.

(Amira, Interview, November 13, 2020)

Similarly, Oadira conveyed how her interaction with Canadian-born peers has been very limited, even three years into her settlement.

...it was always a battle to find people who I could interact with...my interaction with Canadians was very limited. I didn't have interaction at a friendship level with people my age, I was a little disappointed just because I love experiencing new cultures...that's still the case after three years now. So, my main interaction is just finding international people who don't have any family here and are willing to spend time with me.

(Oadira, Interview, November 10, 2020)

Several study participants mentioned that developing deeper friendships with Canadian-born peers would help them better understand Canadian culture, increase their sense of belonging, and may even provide peer-based advice and guidance more specific to their unique needs, as newcomer women trying to pursue education and employment.

Community Relationships

Developing a strong support system with trusted people was important to the young adult women in the study. Being able to meet new people with diverse perspectives and different networks opened new opportunities for them and encouraged them to explore different aspects of Canadian identity and cultural life that they otherwise may not have access to. This in turn encouraged them to think about different educational and career pathways. However, many found it challenging to meet trustworthy people, and were more likely to trust someone if they had been introduced or recommended by someone they already trusted, such as a teacher or settlement worker.

Community relationships were often formed with supportive teachers, community groups – including religious organizations, settlement agency employees, youth workers and mentors met through scholarship opportunities. Study participants noted that

instructors, teachers, and instructors were the most accessible resources of support, and provided detailed guidance on their educational pursuits, which they found helpful. Other participants found support from religious community members, even if they were of a different religion. Several participants received guidance and even financial support from community faith-based groups, despite differing faiths. In addition, specific individuals met through settlement service agencies, helped provide several participants with ongoing settlement guidance and advice.

Through [this settlement agency] I got to know one other person...she is a fricking angel. Seriously, she helped me a lot...I sat with her for two hours, she would just talk to me and ask me what I was doing in my life, and then she would write down the notes and then she showed me how to put it in my resume. She was like, you use this word and this one, and you do that, right in front of me.

(Amaal, Interview, October 27, 2020)

Study participants noted that it was a specific teacher, youth worker, or settlement worker, who provided them extra attention and focus, that made a significant impact on their lives. These impactful individuals were identified based more on their personal characteristics, than on their specific roles. The qualities of patience, clear communication, ability to teach skills, general availability, and responsiveness to questions, were important for many study participants in the personal qualities of the individuals with whom they felt most connected and whom they felt were most supportive. Focus group two reinforced that they connected easily with youth workers, who they felt closer to in age and life experience, and garnered similar advice and guidance as they might from a Canadian-born peer.

I got a lot of support from youth workers. Sometimes I would have a complete mental breakdown and I'd call my youth worker, and even if she's not at work, and she's at home, she would pick up and talk to me. This was really helpful.

(Hamida, Focus Group #2, November 21, 2020)

Furthermore, the post-secondary setting offered unique opportunities to meet supportive people outside of settlement services, including mentors and student ambassadors. Scholarship-provided mentors enabled study participants to meet people whom they otherwise would not have necessarily, simultaneously expanding their social support network.

4.3.4. Summary

Below is a chart summarizing the main findings of this study as separated by core research questions.

Research Findings		
4.1. Factors that Influence Educational and Career Pursuits	4.2. Discriminatory Barriers that prevent the Pursuit of Aspirations	4.3. Gendered Responsibilities that limit the Pursuit of Aspirations
Participants goal setting was in frequent negotiation with their families needs – prioritization based on fulfilling immediate needs (for example, food and shelter) was necessary.	Discrimination and dehumanization treatment occur throughout the migration journey. The lingering mental health challenges that develop from these experiences can pose significant challenges to the pursuit of personal aspirations – particularly if trauma within the family is on-going.	Accessible and affordable housing was a significant barrier faced by participants in having the means (time/finances) to pursue higher education.
Participants goal setting was limited by the resources they had/did not have access to. Resources included financial supports, language training, access to reliable employment, stable housing and so forth.	The structural policies that govern the Canadian education system that do not recognize foreign credentials pose significant challenges to participants pursuing/completing higher educational programming and perpetuate the denigration of newcomer education as inferior and deficient. These policies work to uphold colonial foundations of class and power in Canadian society (Foster, 2008; Guo, 2009).	Gender-based familial responsibilities, including childcare, domestic work, and support for dependent family members, took significant time/resources to accommodate. (for example, teaching elderly members how to navigate public systems, acting as a translator, liaising with younger siblings' schools/teachers et cetera.)
Developing language skills (specifically academic language abilities) posed significant challenges to academic success.	The institutional practices that structure ELL programming do not prepare students adequately for the academic demands of higher education. This poses further barriers to higher educational access.	Expectations of marriage posed challenges to pursuing higher education for some study participants.

Mental health challenges created barriers to managing complex work/life/study schedules.	Misinformation and a lack of a trusted academic networks caused many study participants to make costly errors in their pursuit of higher education, for example, paying for costly/unnecessary programming, entering into the wrong programs (and failing), or feeling forced into certain industries that made it difficult to fulfill their familial responsibilities.	The development of a social network with Canadian-born individuals, specifically women, were significantly beneficial for study participants to navigate their new communities.
Community events, volunteer opportunities and social media, contributed significantly to building important social networks needed to help navigate educational pathways.	Securing financial resources needed to pursue higher education while trying to meet their basic needs, was highly demanding and unsustainable long-term.	

Many of the factors that influence the educational and career pursuits of study participants are common amongst most young adults transitioning to adulthood. For instance, the need to balance family expectations and needs, with personal goals; the need to assess limited individual finances to determine how and which personal goals to pursue; and the use of community events, including social media to build new social networks, are all common ways that young people explore their identity, personal values, and beliefs. However, navigating these factors are made more difficult for individuals from refugee backgrounds who are also navigating a new language, culture, and community, while struggling to support both themselves and their families' diverse needs. Individuals from refugee backgrounds are also more likely to feel a lack of belonging and support in their new communities, which may be further compounded by the daily experiences of sexism, racism, ageism, and classism that they encounter. These stressors are exacerbated in the discriminatory barriers they may be faced with. For instance, for those who have worked hard and overcome significant barriers, including threats to personal safety, to attain higher educational credentials in developing countries and unstable regions of conflict, only to arrive in Canada to have their educational credentials denied legitimacy, can be both disheartening and denigrating. This common Canadian policy reinforces a perception of Western

superiority and non-Western deficiency and inferiority, as well contributes to the notion that learning and experience can be universally measured (Guo, 2009). Yet, these young adult women demonstrate great tenacity in starting their educational journeys from scratch, investing time, energy, and resources, often at the expense of their own health and well-being to pursue a Canadian education. For these reasons, the information that they receive on how to pursue higher education in Canada, must be trustworthy, reliable, and accurate. They cannot afford financially, timely, or otherwise, to navigate mis/disinformation. They must also be provided the appropriate resources, skills, and training, needed to pursue higher education.

The next section will discuss the themes and patterns that emerged in the findings. This discussion will analyze and relate the findings to both the literature and the study's core questions.

Chapter 5. Discussion

The educational and career aspirations of young adult women from refugee backgrounds are influenced by a multitude of factors. Personal and cultural values can change and shift, depending on the context that individuals find themselves in, which may influence their motivation to pursue specific goals (Boer & Boehnke, 2016). Study participants' values and motivations to pursue specific goals changed and were influenced by their family, friends, and community, as well as how they were able to negotiate the education system. This study explored three questions:

1. What are the factors that influence the educational and career aspirations of young women (aged 19-30 years old) from refugee backgrounds who have immigrated to Canada?
2. What barriers exist that challenge or prevent the pursuit of these aspirations?
3. Do responsibilities related to gender create barriers to pursuing higher education?

The themes that emerged from these study questions, as well as related themes and outcomes, are elaborated on below.

5.1. Factors that influence Educational and Career Aspirations

The educational and career aspirations of study participants were greatly influenced by the resources they had available to themselves and their families; the time and expectational demands placed on them; and the social networks that they were able to build for themselves here in Canada.

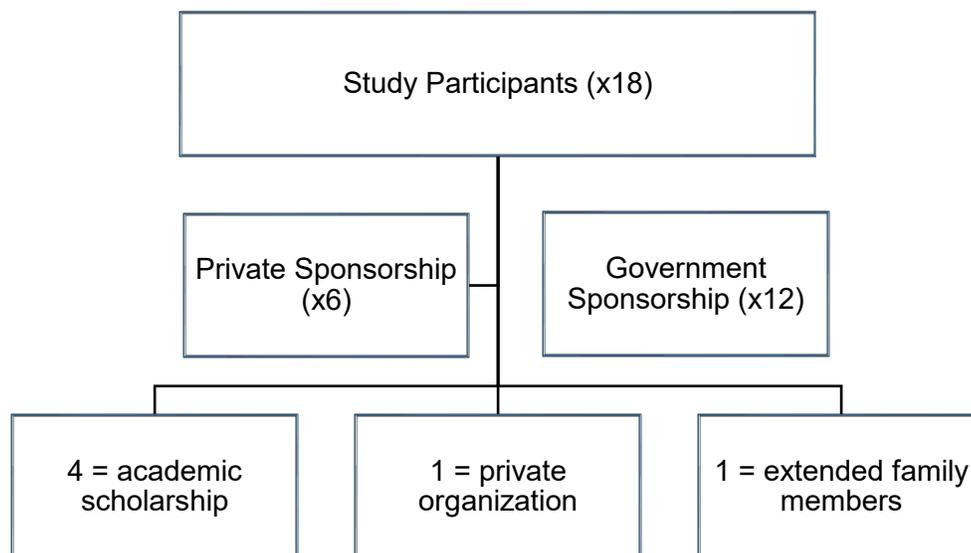
The young adult women from refugee backgrounds in this study set ambitious academic and career goals for themselves, including those of pursuing education and careers in medicine, law, neuroscience, diplomacy, social work, and software-engineering. Like other adolescents and young adults in their 20s, the study participants were searching for meaning and purpose in their lives (Tanner et al., 2008), which were further impacted by their lived migration experiences. For instance, the mistreatment incurred at refugee camps, or the support received in settlement services, influenced

participants' feelings of fairness and justice and shaped their perceptions of certain career paths and industries. As well, personal goals were influenced by the new, but also limited, opportunities that were available to study participants in Canada, such as specific academic programs of study that they may not have had access to in the past.

5.1.1. Factors in Goal Setting: Resources, English and the Family

The resources available to study participants were significantly influenced by the method of migration that brought them to Canada. This is consistent with the literature reviewing the experiences of refugee migration pathways to Canada, which shows that sponsorship groups provide uneven support to refugees resulting in differing resettlement outcomes (Reynolds & Clark-Kazak, 2019). As introduced in Chapter 4, study participants arrived in Canada via the following pathways:

Figure 5.1. Migratory Pathways



In this study, the four study participants who arrived with an academic scholarship had their basic needs supported through the terms of their scholarships and were more likely to pursue ambitious educational degree programs because they had the time and financial resources to do so. However, it is important to remember that less than 0.5% of the annual incoming refugee population in Canada will arrive via these

comprehensive academic scholarships, which make them highly competitive and a rare method of migration (Finding Hope, 2022).

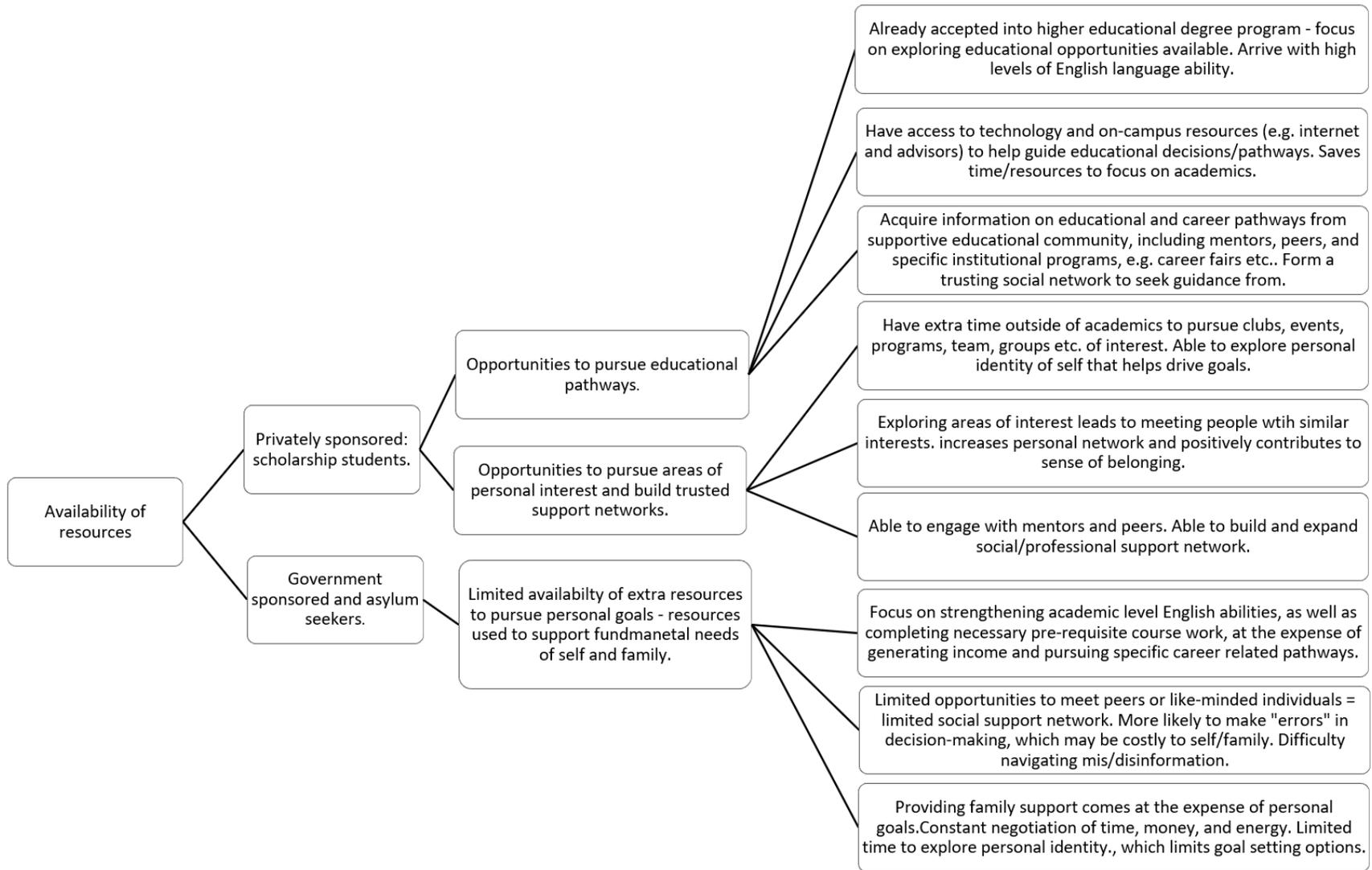
Privately sponsored participants who were sponsored by larger established groups, such as non-profit organizations or educational institutions, had more support and resources to help with their settlement than privately sponsored participants who were sponsored by other newcomers who also may have had limited social networks themselves. In the context of this study, participants who arrived privately sponsored by larger institutions, came individually, and were sponsored on the basis of higher education or by organizations fighting persecution based on sexual orientation. Larger, established sponsorship institutions, that are supported through diverse means, including educational institutions, government, and businesses, were able to provide a diversity of opportunities to the refugees they sponsored, which often extended far beyond the 12-months of financial support available to government assisted refugees. Participants in this study who arrived through private sponsorship by small groups were typically sponsored with their families by other family members and their own social networks, such as mosques or churches. These supports included guidance and often mentorship in the pursuit of educational and employment pathways, expanding their social and professional networks, connecting refugees with other community members and groups of interest, helping arrange safe and stable housing as well as employment, and generally ensuring fundamental needs, such as food and health care, were attained.

While there has been limited literature on the 40-year initiative to enable private refugee sponsorship in Canada, that which does exist indicates that privately sponsored refugees maintain higher employment rates and earnings compared to government assisted refugees for up to 15 years after arrival (Hynie et al., 2019; Kaida et al., 2020). This is considered to be the result of several factors, including the increased availability of support through the larger social networks they arrive through, as well as an increased sense of belonging, by entering into communities which are generally more welcoming and socially receptive to incoming refugee populations, helping connect them with employment, housing and so forth (Kaida et al., 2020). The privately sponsored participants who were sponsored by other migrant family members had more limited access to resources, possibly because their family members were still establishing their own lives here in Canada.

Participants who arrived through government sponsorship lacked access to many fundamental resources and spent most of their time trying to secure them, which left them little time to pursue their personal goals. Study participants who had families that were experiencing several concurrent challenges (for example, poverty, lack of English language proficiency, mental health challenges) were further limited in the time they could use to pursue their personal goals as they spent much of their extra time supporting their families. The support they provided their families most significantly impacted their personal time, as the young adult women often acted as cultural brokers, translators, negotiators, childminders, income generators and more. This finding is consistent with the literature that reinforces the “maternalizing” of women from refugee backgrounds and the multitude of supportive roles that these women take on in caring for their families (Canefe, 2018; Gatt et al., 2006; Gutierrez-Rodriguez, 2018; Martin, 2004). It also reinforces that poverty and limited language abilities significantly hinder access to educational opportunities available to individuals from refugee backgrounds to pursue (Brewer, 2016; Boshier & Rowekamp, 1992; Hanmer et al., 2020).

The figure below shows the impact of the availability of resources on study participants’ abilities to pursue their personal goals.

Figure 5.2. Impact of Resources on Goal Setting and Attainment



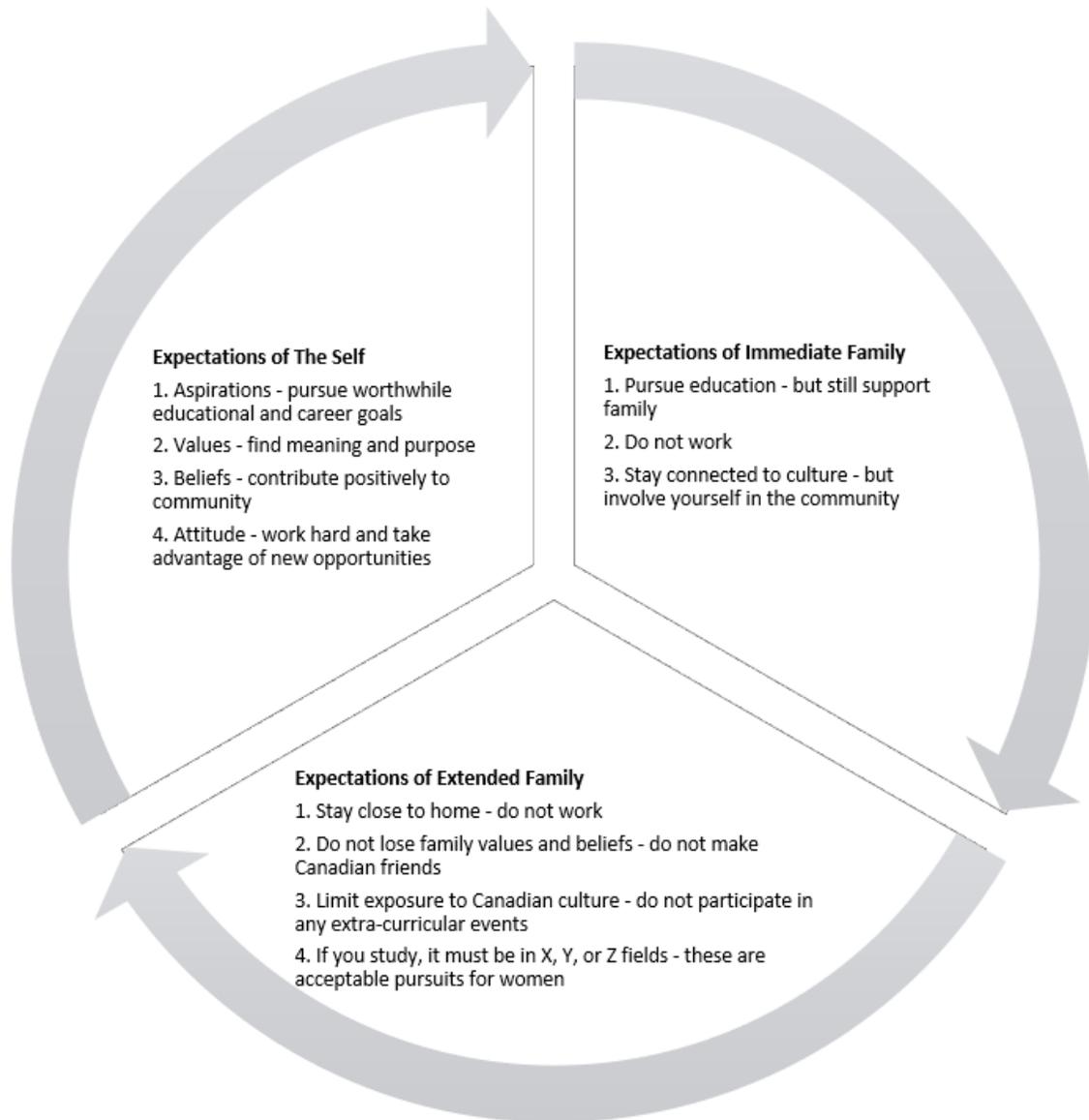
This figure aims to highlight how participants were trying to balance the availability of their time with realistic personal ambitions. Furthermore, despite literature suggesting that young adult women from refugee backgrounds may be concerned with timing around family and childrearing (Jensen and Thornton, 2003), this did not seem true for study participants. Rather, study participants were primarily concerned with how to balance the pursuit of their personal goals with the needs of their immediate families. This was as true for 19-year-old participants, as it was true for 30-year-old participants.

5.1.2. Navigating Competing Expectations

Common amongst most participants was the influence of implicit and explicit expectations that placed pressure on the personal goals they set and pursued. Study participants had high expectations for themselves. This is consistent with the literature, which conveys that individuals from refugee backgrounds view education as a pathway out of poverty (Crea & McFarland, 2015; Lenette, 2016; Ramsay & Baker, 2018). Study participants also reinforced that their experiences of migration and forced displacement impacted the educational and career goals they were setting for themselves. These experiences caused them to reflect more introspectively on their personal goals and pursue educational paths that they believed could create meaningful impacts and change in their local and global communities. This is significant in considering the leadership roles that young women from refugee backgrounds can have in leading positive, transformational change in their communities, and is supported by literature that says that individuals from refugee backgrounds can play a significant role in post-war reconstruction and repatriation (Black & Koser, 1999).

In spite of the challenges described above, most study participants expressed confidence in their academic abilities and set high goals for themselves. This was demonstrated by their willingness to challenge literacy and numeracy exams and to enter challenging fields of study despite developing language skills and sometimes prolonged educational absences. However, external pressures from immediate and extended family factored into participants' daily decision-making and long-term goal setting. Study participants were often being "pushed-and-pulled" in different directions by expectations that they had for themselves, and that others had of them. The chart below demonstrates some of the expectations placed on some study participants, which were in constant negotiation with their personal aspirations.

Figure 5.3. The Push-Pull Influence of Expectations



The young women who experienced tension in the home over their freedom of mobility outside the home, largely argued that it was fear and uncertainty of Canadian culture that led their parent/s to limit their freedom outside the home, not religious and cultural beliefs or values around the role of women. This finding contradicts existing literature that suggests that refugee women may experience more limited freedom because of certain cultural and religious beliefs around the role of women in the family (Franz, 2003; James, 2010). More than stereotypical traditional family roles or

expectations, limited freedom outside the home that study participants experienced seemed to flow from fear on the part of families resulting from ongoing violations to personal safety and rights that they and others in their family experienced during their migration and settlement journeys. This analysis is supported by Bartolomei et al. (2013) who argue that resettlement does not ensure the restoration of rights and safety to women from refugee backgrounds, and that upon resettlement many will continue to be at risk of ongoing violence, human rights abuses, and threats to their safety and well-being. Existing feminist research highlights that women from refugee backgrounds continue to be viewed as inferior, objectified, and sexualized upon resettlement, and therefore are at risk of ongoing exploitation in their new countries (Gatt et al., 2016; Gutierrez-Rodriguez, 2018; Zavos, 2010). Many participants families felt a heightened sense of vigilance and maintained an ongoing need to help protect the women in their family, which resulted in inter-family tensions around safety and freedom, continuing into the settlement journeys.

It bears remembering that refugees usually have no choice in which country or city they are relocated to. The lack of detailed information provided to them by receiving countries and communities may further limit their knowledge of their new environment, resulting in them seeking out information through online sources, with few opportunities to verify their new knowledge (Cadesky, 2020). This insight indicates a contradiction within existing government policy, which encourage newcomers to change their material and social circumstances independently, but fails to provide the support and accurate information necessary to do so (Cadesky, 2020). In some cases, biased perceptions by extended family members who both were not living in Canada and had also never lived in Canada, influenced the parent/s' perception of safety in their new communities. In other families, the low-income housing that they could afford on the limited government support provided resulted in multiple moves upon resettlement. Study participants and their families moved on average three times, prior to finding stable housing in Greater Vancouver. Many of the housing options available to study participants with large families on low-incomes placed them in transient communities in which they were exposed to high levels of crime, the sex-trade, and substance abuse from the moment they arrived (Carter & Osborne, 2009).

Yet, it was generally agreed upon by participants that the longer time their family spent in Canada, the more familiar they became with the culture, and the more freedom

they were allowed outside the home. Often, the study participants were the ones who encouraged their family members to participate in the greater community, by bringing them to events and introducing them to specific services.

Furthermore, existing literature suggests that specifically newcomer families with limited or no experiences in the higher education system themselves, may be unprepared for the commitment it takes to succeed in higher education (Baum & Flores, 2011; Haveman & Smeeding, 2006; Sheilds & Behramn, 2004). Understandably, study families may have had unrealistic expectations of the time, energy, finances, and commitment needed for their daughters to succeed academically. This suggests that the information made available to these families by Canadian post-secondary institutions, the government, and settlement agencies has not been comprehensive enough in establishing realistic expectations of the time, resources, and energy required for a newcomer to succeed in higher education in Canada. Study participants noted that the information they received on how to pursue higher education in Canada was often limited or inaccurate, it did not clearly explain the financial investments (formally, such as tuition, but also informal costs of technology, resources, transportation et cetera.) that would be required by them, and the pathways to success in higher education were not outlined to them. The expectations set out in Canada's Resettlement Assistance Program aim for individuals from refugee backgrounds to attain self-sufficiency in Canada (Resettlement Assistance Program, 2022), but this cannot be achieved if access to reliable, accurate, and realistic, information is not made available to newcomers. Rather, this constitutes a form of institutional discrimination in which accurate, detailed, and honest information on pathways to pursue higher education is withheld from newcomers and their families, at the expense of their limited time and financial resources. This leaves newcomers navigating different educational pathways, independently and without trustworthy support.

Despite an increase in the past twenty years of diversity in Canadian post-secondary institutions, specifically by women, and those from non-English or French heritage, students from wealthier families and whose parents attended university continue to be more likely to attend university in Canada (Bastedo & Jaquette, 2011; Gamoran, 2007). This suggests that the current delivery model of higher education continues to reproduce existing social inequalities in our society, by continuing to

privilege Canadian-born, higher income, and educated families, over newcomers (Mellor, 2013).

One reason why immigrant and refugee students may be underrepresented in higher education may be that the resources, time, and expectations that impact young adult women from refugee backgrounds' ability to pursue their academic goals are disproportionately higher than what educational and government institutions may perceive them to be (Bastedo & Jaquette, 2011; Davies & Zarifa, 2012; Gamoran, 2007). Universities and governments typically calculate the costs of higher educational programs based on marginal costs, or how much a program will cost to run and therefore how much each credit will cost each student (Lewis & Dunbar, 1999). This pricing strategy is neutral in intent, as the costs per credit should apply equally to all students. However, it is discriminatory in practice, because for some students, the investment to take that program will be higher than for others. Students from refugee backgrounds may have to further calculate the cost of additional language courses, transportation, loss of part-time wages and so forth, into their program costs. These women are left with inadequate support to pursue their academic goals, indicating that class stratification continues to exist in accessing higher education in Canada.

Nancy Fraser (2005) argues that there are three dimensions of justice: redistribution (economic), recognition (cultural), and representation (political). Redistribution of economic resources and wealth suggest the need to reallocate wealth from the wealthy to the poor (Fraser, 2005). Politics of recognition suggests the need to have historically oppressed groups recognized within the institutional structures within our society, such as educational institutions. And, the politics of representation, aims to increase the voices of marginalized groups in decision making (Fraser, 2005). Within education, a redistribution of resources is required in both institutional and structural forms. Institutions must be provided more funding and economic resources to create systems that are more supportive of newcomer student populations needs, such as more specialized academic English language support. Structurally, newcomer populations who require additional funding to support their pursuits of higher education, must have access to them in order to enable the pursuit of such higher educational pathways. This would require a re-evaluation to the way tuition, fees, scholarships, bursaries, student loans and other sources of higher educational funding are made available and allocated.

A more equitable allocation of financial support specific to the pursuit of higher education is needed for young adult women from refugee backgrounds who hope to pursue higher education in Canada. An increase in the availability of bursaries, scholarships, work-study, and co-op programs would be a start. A holistic and individualized approach taken to assess the resource needs of these women and their families would also be useful. For instance, if affordable housing is the most pressing issue in a family of refugee background, then support with affordable housing may free up time for the student to work and pay their own way through post-secondary. Or, if the program that the student wants to take is too inflexible to allow for concurrent part-time employment, which may be the case in certain cohort programs, such as engineering, then the student should be able to access tuition support that does not add to their potentially already large migration debt-load. Furthermore, providing able family members with extensive language and skill-based training would significantly contribute to overall family stability and reduce the demands on the study participants. Similarly, support in helping these families navigate the community, from children navigating the education system to the elderly navigating the healthcare system, would free-up much needed time for study participants. Study participants also mentioned that settlement programs that involve the entire family, would speed up settlement for all family members, by familiarizing them with everyday tasks like navigating public transportation, grocery shopping, and banking. This would both free up young adult women's time, as well as empower families with knowledge of their new communities, which would significantly contribute to their own settlement.

5.1.3. Community Involvement and Social Media Usage

Community involvement has been shown to support positive health and well-being, in addition to helping orient one with their new community (Stukas, Snyder, & Clary, 2016). As presented in Chapter 4, this is particularly important to newcomers from refugee backgrounds, who may be struggling with mental health challenges, and social isolation, especially if they arrived in Canada alone. Community involvement, by participating in events, clubs, or programs, and through volunteering, shaped the personal aspirations of study participants by introducing them to new ideas, new people, and opening them up to new opportunities. Study participants met a wide variety of people, peers, and mentors through these opportunities who made them feel a part of

and connected to their new communities. These opportunities further built participants' social support networks and provided them with people they could talk to if/when they had questions.

Canada's Resettlement and Assistance Program (RAP) recommends that refugees seek out programs to enhance their self-sufficiency and minimize their social isolation (Resettlement, 2021). Study participants were exploring different online communities to minimize their social isolation and expand their social networks, important processes in developing their self-sufficiency and belonging. In doing so, they expressed excitement at these new opportunities, and an eagerness to get involved in a diversity of groups. To ensure newcomers safety in online communities, these women must be informed on the Canadian context of exploitation and be equipped with the skills to recognize disingenuous opportunities and know where to turn in case they need help. It is often difficult to assess the trustworthiness and credibility of information posted on social media (Wu et al., 2019). While study participants demonstrated high levels of awareness and "social media smarts" in navigating online information, often verifying information with friends or third parties, not attending events promoted on social media alone, and not providing personal or confidential information online, it is important for young adult women from refugee backgrounds to be aware of the dangers of social media use in a Canadian context to avoid potential exploitation or scamming. Cybercrime, including cyberbullying, and cyberwarfare, are increasing globally, and there is a need for increased vigilance in using social media safely (Dwivedi et al., 2018). Such risks may include sexual exploitation through fraudulent communication and false relationships or being defrauded financially (Cross, 2019). For victims, online exploitation can have life-altering impacts, including monetary loss and detrimental impacts on physical and emotional well-being, as well as mental health (Cross, 2019). For those with developing language skills, such as those from refugee backgrounds, this may open new areas of miscommunication and misunderstanding. Heightened safety measures and increased public information on how to safely navigate social media in Canada is one way refugee serving agencies, as well as Canada's Resettlement and Assistance Program, can help provide newcomers with practical information needed to safely navigate life online.

5.1.4. Developing Social Networks through Volunteerism

Volunteer work introduced participants to important aspects of Canadian culture and expanded their social networks. Volunteering was important to building new skills, learning about different employment sectors, better understanding the services and supports available in new communities, and providing Canadian-based work experience, which was believed by participants to be important to getting a job. Many study participants found part-time and full-time jobs through their volunteer network. Volunteering also provided a way for participants to practice their English language skills with native speakers and help serve others in their community which they were eager to contribute positively to. Many felt that giving back and helping others was an important personal value and volunteering enabled them to do so. These findings were consistent with the literature that suggests that reasons refugees give back to their communities include enhancing their sense of belonging, out of a feeling of duty and reciprocity, and to feel empowered to help others as opposed to constantly being the one receiving support (Weng & Lee, 2016).

The benefits of volunteering have been well-documented and include positive impacts on one's psychological well-being (Piliavin & Siegl, 2007). Volunteering also provides unintended consequences of behaviour, including increased intrinsic based motivation towards helping others and is believed to be a way in which individuals can express their identity and explore their values (Wilson & Musick, 1999). Through volunteering, individuals can better understand what is important to them and this helps them to discover who they are, which shapes their goals and aspirations. The study participants who had volunteered overwhelmingly expressed interest in a career path related to some aspect of their volunteering experience. Volunteering provided more insight into the type of work that study participants thought was important and enabled them to consider different educational and career pathways. This is significant because the more diverse volunteer experiences that are available for young adult women from refugee backgrounds, the more opportunities they will have to pursue meaningful employment.

However, there are several gender-based concerns about women volunteering. There continues to be a gender gap in volunteering globally, and women continue to make up more volunteers than men (Banerjee & Mustafi, 2020). The type of volunteer

work that women do differs from their male counterparts, as is the levels of responsibility women take on in their volunteer work (Borromeo, 2021). Women generally volunteer in informal sectors of social and health-related work, which has traditionally been feminized, and globally underpaid (Borromeo, 2021). This is compared to men's work which tends to be more formalized and positions men in higher leadership roles, reflecting the gender-based inequalities in volunteering that exist globally (Borromeo, 2021). Women must get the same benefits from volunteering as men do. Volunteer opportunities must be made available to women from refugee backgrounds that increase their skills, strengthen their training, and provide them with the resources they need to settle in Canada. There must be more opportunities for young women to participate in paid internships and co-ops and not just unpaid volunteer work. Opportunities for young adult women to participate in experiences that are diverse and provide meaningful spaces for leadership development to occur are necessary aspects of meaningful work. These opportunities would also be a step towards supporting the Canadian government's agenda of encouraging women's leadership and economic participation locally (Canada's Feminist, 2021). Young adult women from refugee backgrounds noted the great benefits they derived from volunteering, but they already contribute significant amounts of unpaid labour to their families. Therefore, volunteering should not be another source of unpaid, undervalued work, rather it must be a means to expanding opportunities and learning to settle in one's new country (Miranda, 2011).

5.2. Discrimination creating Barriers to achieving Personal Aspirations

The barriers that challenge the pursuit of aspirations for young adult women from refugee backgrounds begin in the institutionalized and structural discriminatory policies they face in their migration journey. Throughout their migration journey, these women were continually denied a voice and decision-making power in their own lives, by international organizations, who decide if they qualify for refugee status, by host country policymakers who decide where they will live and what resources they will have access to, and by refugee serving agencies who decide what type and amount of support they will receive. If these women settle in Canada, they are encouraged to pursue self-sufficiency through generalized educational pathways that make little accommodation for the unique circumstances they have endured. Depending on whether study participants

were transitioning from secondary to post-secondary, were pursuing missed credentials in Adult Education, or had already entered post-secondary, influenced the types of barriers and the forms of discrimination they encountered in pursuing their personal aspirations. Regardless of age or level of education being pursued, study participants experienced several similar forms of discrimination, and this was particularly true for those arriving through government-sponsorship. They included institutional and structural discrimination in their pursuit of academic English proficiency, securing financial resources, and in the management of their mental health.

5.2.1. Discrimination in the Education System

Canada has affirmed the right to education as a ratified member of the UN Declaration of Human Rights (UNDHR) (Universal Declaration, 2021). Article 26 of the UNDHR specifically outlines the right to higher education for all in Canada as:

Everyone has the right to education... Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit," Article 26, UNDHR.

Yet, just how to ensure, implement and measure how accessible higher education is and what is meant by merit in a Canadian higher educational context, is unclear. Study participants entered the Canadian educational system at three-key entry points: secondary school, adult education, and post-secondary. All participants pursuing post-secondary were pursuing either college or university, no one was pursuing a trade. Each level of education had institutionalized and structural discriminatory policies, guidelines, or rules, that posed barriers to study participants pursuit of higher education. Government, education, and institutional policy that create prohibitively high tuition costs, that fail to accredit previous education and experiences, that structure graduation and program requirements in a homogenized way, and that require academic English language proficiency, fail to consider the distinct needs students from refugee backgrounds. These are forms of structural discrimination, in that they seemingly apply neutrally to all prospective students, but they discriminate against certain populations, such as students from refugee backgrounds who are less likely to have the financial means, specific educational pre-requisites, and the academic language proficiency to meet these graduation requirements.

Furthermore, the institutionalized cultural capital, specifically the educational and professional credentials, that many study participants arrived in Canada with often went unrecognized by educational institutions, government, and employers. Participants who arrived with a bachelor's or master's degree often wanted to continue to pursue education and/or employment in their trained fields. In this sense, participants possessed the institutionalized cultural capital, as argued by Bourdieu, that should have helped facilitate educational and workforce entry. However, the denial of their credential worth and the vague and constantly changing understanding of the criteria for "Canadian-based" work experience, rendered their institutional cultural capital seemingly void. This was greatly frustrating to participants, several of whom changed their educational and employment goals, to pursue fields well below their skill level, in order to simply be able to participate in education and employment in their new communities.

5.2.2. A Low Minimum Wage in an Expensive City limits Options

Many participants not on academic scholarship discussed how financial barriers where prohibitive to pursuing higher education. For many low-income earners, such as refugees, who were struggling to cover their basic needs, extra income to pay for access to higher education is a luxury that they struggle to afford. According to Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA), a current livable wage in British Columbia depends on the cost of the city you live in, but in Vancouver begins at \$19.50/hour, compared to the current minimum wage of \$15.20/hour (Ivanova and Saugstad, 2019; Minimum Wage, 2021). This calculation is based on the fundamental needs to survive and does not factor in the need for skills training or additional education (Ivanova and Saugstad, 2019). Financial independence and self-sufficiency is difficult to achieve for newcomers from refugee backgrounds if they are denied the educational opportunities needed to increase their employability and find higher-wage jobs. Study participants found it difficult to move beyond entry-level jobs when they worked full-time, or 30+ hours/week, and still lacked the additional funds, as well as expendable time, to pursue courses or academic programs necessary to pursue higher wage careers.

5.2.3. Merit: Who decides the Quality of being Worthy?

Educational institutions in British Columbia use a merit-based system to assess graduation and program requirements, which are largely based on the knowledge,

competencies and skills believed to be necessary to demonstrate competency in a field and or preparation for workforce entry (British Columbia Graduation, 2022). But the concept of merit in education is a subjective term, that is based on how individual institutions and agencies define and operationalize “academic worth,” (Baez, 2006). Baez (2006) suggests that merit in education is used by educational institutions to assign individuals to hierarchically ordered social classes. This understanding reinforces Fraser’s (2007) argument that merit in education is actually a larger political question of how and to whom societal resources will be allocated. This becomes particularly problematic for students from refugee backgrounds who are expected to complete generic core courses and generalized graduation requirements at various levels of their education, regardless of their previous education. The skills, competencies, knowledge, and pre-existing credentials that young adult women from refugee backgrounds arrive in Canada with are undervalued, if they are even recognized in the Canadian educational system. This places these women at a significant disadvantage in pursuing higher education, as the time, and financial costs of starting from scratch are significant, and often deterrents (Hatoss & Huijser, 2010).

This understanding of merit also reinforces a privilege experienced by Canadian-born students, who have the “right” set of abilities, as measured by specific achievement tests, and the “right” level of effort, as assessed by test scores, grades, and academic activities, that create a Western valuation of their educational attainment, and in doing so, denies value in the education, skills, and knowledge possessed by students from refugee backgrounds (Baez, 2006). In this sense, students from refugee backgrounds are lacking the cultural capital, education, intellect, speech and so forth, argued by Bourdieu (1990) needed to attain educational parity, in this case, with their Canadian-born peers. These newcomer students will struggle to improve themselves through education if the purpose and delivery of educational programming continues to reproduce existing social inequalities in our society (Mellor, 2013).

It is further necessary to consider the ways in which Bourdieu’s forms of capital interrelate. Hughes and Blaxter (2007) argue that it is the interrelationships of different types of capital, including economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital within which inequalities are reproduced. They suggest that the relational aspect of these various forms of capital are capable of sustaining or diminishing the advantages that a group may have in a specific area. For instance, a student may be advantaged if their family is

highly educated because they may support one another in the pursuit of higher education through habitus (socialized ways of doing and being), solidarity of interests, as well as economic (financial), symbolic (family legacies), and even social (networking) capital (Hughes & Blaxter, 2007). Conversely, students without a family possessing such forms of capital, may have less opportunity to succeed in higher education. Young adult women from refugee backgrounds may be challenged by the various ways in which capital interrelate when pursuing higher education. For instance, they may first have to learn how the new education system works and develop the culturally appropriate attitudes and habits to be successful in it. They might also struggle to attain the economic resources necessary for pursuing higher education, and a lack of social network may further limit their ability to develop and pursue academic goals.

A system that holistically evaluates a student's skills, competencies, and experiences, to determine strengths and weaknesses in their skill sets and abilities, as well as to contextualize their unique circumstances is needed to make more equitable higher educational access for students from refugee backgrounds (Hatoss & Huijser, 2010). Higher educational institutions must continue to work towards more holistic approaches to student admissions when considering program entry requirements. Presently, post-secondary admissions are seemingly ambiguous and arbitrary (Bastedo et al., 2018). In order to reduce stratification in higher education and support students regardless of class, more transparent and clear admissions language and practices must be made to best reflect fair and equitable access to post-secondary.

5.2.4. Program Delivery connects to Academic Success

The structure and delivery method of courses and programming at all levels of education also needs to be reconsidered to better reflect students from refugee backgrounds academic language proficiency needs. At the secondary level, the specialized ELL programming in which some study participants were taught ELL in core subjects, is no longer a program delivery model supported by the British Columbian Ministry of Education, which is why not all study participants had the same type of ELL support in secondary school (A 'Crisis in ESL' Education, 2012). In response to the growing number of newcomers arriving in British Columbia in the past fifteen years, ELL programming in schools have been standardized into a series of supports and strategies divided by levels, and into generalized academic skill sets of reading, writing, and oral

language (ELL Standards, 2017). This has been applied provincially to all districts, regardless of the student population, levels, or ages of ELL student populations that might exist in the specific region (A 'Crisis in ESL' Education, 2012). These new ELL standards often do not prepare students, particularly older, late-entry students, to meet the academic requirements needed to graduate with a British Columbian Certificate of Graduation, and therefore they cannot apply to university, rather, they are directed towards Adult Education to upgrade their skills (Education Facts, 2019). Furthermore, these classes are multi-grade classrooms. For older students, the perception of being placed with younger students to learn implicitly conveys to them that their intellectual capabilities are weak, and this can be discouraging and demoralizing for older students from refugee backgrounds, who already may feel insecure in knowing that they have significant gaps in their learning (Johnson, 2014). It also does not allow them to interact with and make friends amongst their peer age group, which can decrease feelings of belonging, and decrease their ability to create an important social network necessary for settlement and support. Furthermore, language abilities must be academically strong to succeed in post-secondary, and study participants noted that their emerging academic language skills were highly prohibitive in their academic pursuits and caused several of them to fail secondary courses or drop out entirely of post-secondary programs.

In addition, the traditional in-person delivery model of most post-secondary programs was found to be restrictive to study participants who were not living on/near campus, and who had competing work-life demands. While there are many benefits of face-to-face learning, including social interaction (Dolan, 2014), study participants noted that the most accessible class structure would combine in-person and online learning methods. Pedagogically, the debates over the benefits of blended learning range but focus on aspects of student social isolation and the general impact on learning and retention (Dolan, 2014). Yet, throughout the study, as the COVID19 pandemic forced many in-person classes online, study participants noted that online learning saved them time, allowed them to revisit lectures, and better understand key points and concepts, picking up nuances in the material that they might have previously missed, and allowed them to engage more with instructors, who they could connect with more directly online. In-person delivery models privilege students living on/near campus, as well as those with the financial means to focus on taking advantage of all the diverse and enriching opportunities being present on a university/college campus affords, while denying the

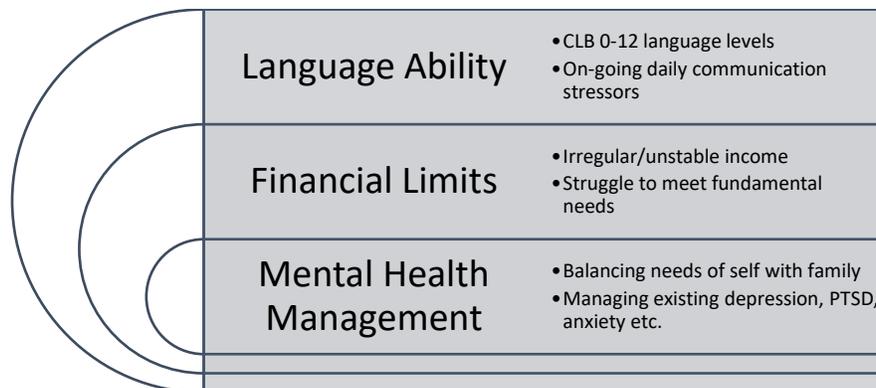
same opportunities to other low-income students, such as those from refugee backgrounds, whose time spent commuting, could be spent working, and who live too far away to benefit from the supports, including events important for social integration that are available on the university campus.

While there was no one universal experience of discrimination faced by all participants, there were some common barriers that many of the participants raised. These barriers were posed by academic language proficiency, financial barriers, and mental health management. They will be explored in the next section.

5.2.5. Common Barriers: Academic Language Proficiency, Financial Barriers, and Mental Health Challenges

Academic language proficiency, financial challenges, and mental health management were three intertwined barriers that posed on-going concerns for many study participants, particularly those who had arrived through government sponsorship as demonstrated in the figure below.

Figure 5.4. Common Barriers of Concern



While study participants had varying degrees of English language ability upon arrival, academic language abilities posed significant challenges for study participants navigating the educational system. These challenges varied depending on the level of language ability the participant arrived in Canada with.

The Canadian Language Benchmark (2022) levels provide a scale for English language proficiency. On this scale 0, 1, 2 are minimally proficient up to 12, which is advanced proficiency in the workplace and community contexts (CELP, 2022). While

language assessments were not required for this study, participants' academic progress provided some indication of their language level. Participants who self-identified as having arrived in Canada with a high level of English language ability, could carry on a conversation fluently and had strong literacy skills, still faced language-related challenges navigating their new environments, sometimes even years into their settlement. Such daily language challenges that they shared included processing and understanding high volumes of academic literature in a timely way and communicating in specific technical language, for example, negotiating housing, cellphone, or credit card contracts.

Participants who identified as having intermediate levels of English were particularly challenged because both in-and-out of class learning was more time-consuming. These participants noted that they spent many extra hours completing homework, looking up words and concepts, re-listening to lectures (if available), and re-reading text to ensure understanding. This significantly impacted the amount of material they were able to get through and influenced the amount of time they could spend on studying, also limiting the number of courses they could take.

Study participants who had beginner language skills, often those who had just arrived in Canada from a non-English speaking country, struggled daily. Many of these participants were overwhelmed by the amount of information available to them and often sought out in-person support from settlement and multicultural workers, to help guide their decision-making and to reinforce that their understandings were correct. This level of English language skill made participants particularly vulnerable to misunderstandings and miscommunication, opening them up to exploitation and missed opportunities. Within this group, several study participants were financially exploited by for-profit academic institutions, various companies, and organizations, as a direct result of developing language abilities and miscommunication. Such participants were also more likely to have been taken advantage of or experience conflict in the workplace. Several participants mentioned that their beginner language levels resulted in them pursuing the "wrong" educational pathways, reduced their ability to advocate for themselves in the workplace, for instance, to negotiate hours of a shift, and negatively impacted their relationships with peers as well as colleagues, as they felt that they were often ignored or overlooked due to their inability to communicate clearly and efficiently.

Consistent with the literature, language challenges impact individuals from refugee backgrounds at all levels of ability in their daily lives (Bajwa et al., 2017; Ghahari et al., 2020; Shakya et al., 2010; Watkins et al., 2012). Language classes were thought of as only partially helpful in acquiring language proficiency, and many participants stressed the importance of community involvement and interaction with native speakers to speed up language acquisition (Shakya et al., 2010). While nearly all participants shared language related challenges that they experienced in pursuing education, four participants mentioned that their self-esteem was negatively impacted by the reactions they received from others in trying to communicate. They stated that these negative interactions eroded their confidence and made them less likely to try and speak with others. Low levels of academic language proficiency directly impacted several participants post-secondary success. Four participants failed or dropped-out of post-secondary due to a poor understanding of course material and misunderstood or unclear teaching expectations, while two more entered costly post-secondary programs, not fully understanding the tuition structure, program goals, or potential industry prospects post-graduation, until after they had already made significant investments in the program and were then advised by friends to drop out. Even amongst study participants who had arrived on academic scholarship, and therefore already had a high level of English language ability, three shared that the reading expectations and the pace of the courses in their university classes were fast, making it difficult to follow along in English. Other study participants noted that in order to understand a topic, such as math, they had to spend time translating the instructions first, which further limited the time they had to focus on the development of that specific skill.

Nearly all participants shared that their language skills further negatively impacted their ability to find and secure employment. For roughly six of the participants who arrived with stronger language skills, they felt challenged to seek employment in the areas that they had been studying in or had previous work experience and/or education in – these were specific technical fields, such as engineering and psychology. Approximately ten other study participants, arriving with weaker language skills, were also challenged to find employment, but this was typically in part-time fields where their goal was to attain part-time work with reasonable hours, in accessible locations, and that had convenient schedules. Lack of access to or inconsistent finances, from precarious, irregular, or on-call work, added significant daily stress to study participants' lives, not

knowing if/when they would work again, or if/when they would have the resources needed to pay for fundamental needs, including rent, food, and public transportation. This constant stressor negatively affected the mental health and well-being of several study participants, who noted that this ongoing instability, compounded pre-existing health challenges because of their refugee experiences, including depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and anxiety, making it difficult to focus on pursuing their educational goals. This finding is consistent with the literature which reinforces that language ability may limit employment options for newcomers from refugee backgrounds and create ongoing instability and uncertainty in their lives (Shakya et al., 2010; Verweibe et al., 2019).

Academic language literacy courses and on-campus supports could greatly aid in the development of academic language proficiencies for young adults from refugee backgrounds. They could also provide a venue of support for language learners to bring their academic questions forward and work through them with a specialist educator. Admitting students to post-secondary without the support for their language needs is a form of institutional discrimination and can be “short-sighted and counter to equity principles,” (Klinger & Murray, 2012). Higher education institutions must ensure their academic staff are equipped with understanding and skills to support students with developing academic language skills (Klinger & Murray, 2012). This, however, should not be the sole responsibility of the teacher or instructor, rather this requires an institutional strategy to assess the needs of incoming refugee student populations, and determine ways to best support these needs.

5.3. Gender Roles: Responsibilities and Impacts

When examining the role of gender in refugee experiences, it is necessary to understand that there is no one Universal woman or experience and that “woman-ness” is a social, political, and cultural construction (Dağtaş et al., 2018; Indra, 1993). The experiences of women from refugee backgrounds must be considered in the broader context of patriarchy, racism, colonialism, heterosexism, and other forms of oppression, as well as in relation to the interdependencies of systems of oppression based on ethnicity, language, and socioeconomic status (Dağtaş et al., 2018). The gender-based barriers faced by the young adult women from refugee backgrounds in this study were intersectional and varied based on individual circumstances. The main gender-based

barriers faced by participants were finding safe and affordable housing, navigating familial responsibilities, including childcare, and developing supportive social networks.

5.3.1. Safe and Affordable Housing

Housing stability is essential to health and well-being (Decter & Rogers, 2018). Accessing safe and affordable housing was a significant challenge for most study participants and their families. Safe and affordable housing is a gender issue because safe and affordable housing prevents violence and reduces poverty for women and their children (Decter & Rogers, 2018). Over half of all homeless people in Canada are women and girls (Berman, 2009; Decter & Rogers, 2018). Disproportionately represented in this group are racialized and newcomer women, as well as women with disabilities, including mental health challenges, who experience high levels of domestic violence, which places them at a heightened risk of homelessness (Berman, 2009). Single mothers from refugee backgrounds are five times more likely to live in poverty in Canada than non-single mothers and seven study participants were living in single-mother-headed households (Decter & Rogers, 2018). Housing instability can exacerbate mental health challenges, worsen chronic health conditions, and heighten crime (Dohler et al., 2016). For young adult women, a lack of safe housing can result in exploitative situations and increases in domestic violence if they are forced to live in substandard housing or under the control of an abusive landlord (Dohler et al., 2016). The high costs of housing in Greater Vancouver and the limited rental supply are institutional forms of discrimination where housing and settlement policies have not kept pace with the number of newcomers needing to meet basic housing needs in British Columbia (Decter & Rogers, 2018; Francis & Hiebert, 2013).

Eleven study participants shared that they and their families of five or more members were living in 1–3-bedroom apartments or basement suites. These precarious living situations are concerning because they place families at constant risk of eviction and expose them to the potential exploitation of their landlord. The lack of appropriate living space also meant that there was little adequate working space for participants trying to study, which was made more difficult with the closure of public spaces, such as libraries, throughout the COVID19 pandemic. During the course of this study, two study participants and their families were evicted from their homes, as the landlord(s) needed to move back into their suite and homes to recoup their own missed income because of

the lost wages due to the COVID19 pandemic. Access to safe and affordable housing in Greater Vancouver has been worsened by the COVID19 pandemic. Overcrowded housing has caused the COVID19 virus to spread in several study participants' homes rapidly, infecting several if not all, family members. The rapid transmission of the virus in several study participants' homes prevented family members from working and therefore reduced earning income. It subsequently placed a heightened burden on the young adult women in this study who were further tasked with additional domestic responsibilities, in addition to working, sometimes while ill with the COVID19 virus. This is consistent with the literature that supports overcrowded residences in low-income communities as sites of increased transmission of the COVID19 virus and that the experience of individuals from refugee backgrounds in the Greater Vancouver housing market further contributes to marginalizing social networks, increasing unemployment, and delaying the settlement process overall (Francis & Hiebert, 2013; von Seidlein et al., 2021).

Housing instability and constantly moving also negatively impacted study participants' quality of life by eroding social connections (Francis, 2010; Francis & Hiebert, 2014). Participants found themselves having to build new social networks, navigate new communities, commute long distances, find new jobs, and enter into new courses and programs at new educational institutions with nearly every move. This resulted in longer commutes on public transit, where young adult women were often leaving in the early hours of the morning and returning in the late hours of the night. It was also difficult for many family members of study participants to find work in the same city as they lived. In families that had children of varying ages, it was a challenge to find childcare and schooling in a walkable distance for young and older children alike. Study participants found themselves having to navigate multiple communities to ensure their siblings attended school, to ensure they got to their part-time jobs, to ensure their family members had access to essential services such as health care, and to attend their own classes and part-time employment. Doing so took a significant amount of time. This constant uprooting of stability was determinantal to settlement, mental health, and a sense of belonging which is consistent with the literature that suggests that poor housing conditions and generalized housing instability negatively impacts mental health and increases rates of depression and anxiety in women (Francis & Hiebert, 2013; Suglia et al., 2011).

Valuable to consider in this discussion is that Canada is a member of the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, and has also ratified the UN Declaration on Human Rights, both of which affirm that housing is a basic and fundamental right for all people living in Canada, regardless of citizenship status (International Covenant, 1966; UN Declaration on Human Rights, 1948). As rising living costs continue, there is considerable need for a National Housing Strategy that ensures housing is a legal right entitled to all people residing in Canada, including the most vulnerable, such as women from refugee backgrounds (Housing Eligibility, 2020; The Right to Adequate Housing, 2021). Such legislation must be intersectional and gender responsive. It must include the voices and decision-making leadership from women and vulnerable groups, such as refugees, who are least likely to have the financial means to find safe and affordable housing, and it must address discriminatory barriers, disproportionately faced by those from refugee backgrounds, such as low income in relation to rents (National Housing, 2018). Frequently, women from refugee backgrounds are viewed as incapable of participating in and understanding the decision-making and political discourses around them (Zavos, 2010). This is a result of gender, race and class-based stereotypes which view refugee women as inferior and underdeveloped (Anthias 2022; Lewis, 2006). Therefore, training and education are required for policymakers on the lived realities of vulnerable groups, specifically refugee women and their families, and on the intersectionality of their circumstances accessing safe and affordable housing so that more equitable policies can be created (National Housing, 2018).

5.3.2. How Gender impacts Familial Responsibilities

There are several familial responsibilities that study participants feel are influenced by their gender roles and social positioning within their families. These include: supporting the learning of younger children in the home, domestic duties such as cooking and cleaning, and marriage-based expectations.

In examining the role familial responsibilities play in the lives and goals of study participants it is essential to consider the Western lens through which family and responsibilities are understood. The Western world is increasingly believed to be individualistic, compared to other cultures, and specifically to Arab cultures, from which many of the study participants originated (Becker et al., 2012; Buda & Elsayed-Elkhouly,

1998). Western culture tends to uphold individuals and the right to be independent, the right to privacy, autonomy, and individual decision-making (Becker et al., 2012; Buda & Elsayed-Elkhouly, 1998). Conversely, Arab cultures are more collectivist and identity is more likely based around social systems, including family and friend networks (Azevedo et al., 2002; Buda & Elsayed-Elkhouly, 1998). In countries such as Canada, where the welfare state is more developed, it is believed that there is less dependency on the family and fewer feelings of obligation towards the family (Daatland et al., 2011). Rather, there is increased demand for social services available in the welfare state to provide the support (for example, child or senior care) that family members might in other cultures take responsibility for (Daatland et al., 2011). Therefore, when examining the familial responsibilities that study participants took on, it is important to note that these duties were not necessarily viewed negatively by participants themselves but may have been understood as a typical role within the family. As there is no universal woman or experience (Sirriyeh, 2016), differential factors of age, and ethnicity will further influence the individual perception of their roles within the family, specifically within childcare and domestic duties, as will be further discussed below.

Childcare

Childcare was a significant challenge for young adult women in the study. None of the study participants disclosed that they had any of their own children, but ten participants were responsible for the childcare responsibilities of their younger siblings/cousins who lived in the home.

Many of the pre-school-aged children in participants' homes were not in any form of early childhood education programming, due to prohibitively high costs, inaccessibility (for example, inconveniently located far away), or lack of availability (for example, waitlisted). Yet there is a significant desire on behalf of women from refugee backgrounds to have their children in early childhood education programming and vast appreciation for the benefits of this type of programming (Eastern, 2021). Childcare affordability has been a federal government recommendation dating back to 1984 in Canada but has yet to be acted upon (Hibbs, 2021). Despite the 2021 federal government proposal to invest over \$30 billion in childcare in the next five years, there has to date, been little action on this front (A Canada-wide Early Learning, 2021). Despite ample evidence existing to convey the many economic, cultural, and social

benefits of universal childcare and early childhood education, there has been little follow-through with past plans to provide subsidized high-quality early childhood education and to open more childcare spots in British Columbia (Our Plan: Childcare BC, 2021). As a result, several study participants took on the responsibility of applying for government subsidies for childcare and for finding childcare in their neighborhood for their younger siblings and cousins.

However, waitlists, high costs, and long distances to travel by walking (as many newcomer families' only mode of affordable transportation is walking, particularly during the COVID19 pandemic when many were hesitant to take public transit), prevented many participant families from enrolling young children in childcare programs. This is problematic, both for the young children not receiving an early childhood education, which is essential to long-term equitable educational access, brain development, and economically provides substantial returns on investment for society, but also for the young adult women and their mothers, who are unable to pursue educational and language training, because of childcare responsibilities (Elliott, 2006; Mitchell, 2009).

There is an implicit expectation in Canadian society that the support and care of dependent family members, such as children or the elderly, be done outside the home by professionals, while women work outside the home (Turcotte, 2014). Yet, women continue to maintain the dominant care roles in the home, creating a double-work day for many, in the public and private spheres (MacDonald et al., 2005). Repeated studies on the economic benefits of women participating in the workplace (Ince Yenilmez, 2015), the economic impacts of educated mothers on their children (Baum et al., 2013), and so forth, make it very difficult for women to work both fulltime within and outside the home, particularly if there many dependent family members for which they provide support. Study participants worked hard to support their mothers and, in some cases, take on maternal responsibilities if a mother figure was unavailable and/or unable to do so. If it is an underlying premise of women's evolving roles in the Canadian economy that their domestic responsibilities, such as child and elderly care, are outsourced, then subsidies and other economic incentives to low-income earners, such as refugees, must be made available to support work and study both inside and outside the home.

Domestic Duties

Study participants were also more likely to take on several traditional domestic responsibilities in their homes, such as cooking and cleaning, to support their families. However, there was considerable variability as to what this looked like amongst families. Roughly twelve study participants acknowledged that everyone played a role in their family home and in the domestic duties of the home. While four participants noted that their male family members were responsible for generating an income, roughly six participants shared that their fathers or other males in the home would also engage in domestic responsibilities if they had the time outside of work. This is inconsistent with the literature that portrays certain cultures, specifically Arab Middle Eastern cultures, as patriarchal and portrays Arab women as the “other” to be confined to the home and subjected to the demands of the males in their family (Afshar, 2004). Rather, study participants conveyed that while they did have domestic responsibilities, they were a normal part of their collectivist culture, that everyone in the family had a role to play, and that they would help each other out if/when needed. This is consistent with literature acknowledging the changing roles of both women and men in refugee families upon resettlement (Asaf, 2017).

Marriage

Two study participants noted they felt pressured into marriage. These women noted that in their home countries it was a common traditional practice that women marry young in an arranged union. However, these women also expressed that this was largely a result of a lack of alternative opportunities and a means to secure their future. For one participant, the educational and career opportunities presented to her in Canada opened new pathways for her and her family, which virtually eliminated the pressure to marry. For this participant, pressure to marry was based on the availability of opportunity. This finding was consistent with a study conducted by Lipson and Miller (1994) on the changing roles of refugee women in the United States. Lipson and Miller’s study reinforced that marriage expectations are changing amongst younger generations. With differing access to education and the increased availability of career opportunities, there is less pressure for young adult women to marry, and more support for them to pursue higher education (Foner, 2012).

However, another participant, noted that the pressure to marry was in relation to extended family pressures, to whom her immediate family felt indebted. This participant was uncertain that marriage was the path she wanted to pursue yet had little say in the matter. The literature on arranged marriages in the West is somewhat inconsistent. On the one hand, arranged marriages are portrayed as being based on reputation building, the desire to strengthen kinship, and often based on economic pressures, which can leave women without choice and voice in the matter (Pryor, 2003). On the other hand, an argument can be made that many women in the West also enter into marriage for similar reasons. Despite Western women having a perceived ability to be more selective in their marriage process, such considerations as the high cost of living reinforce the economic pressures that many feel to marry or stay married (Pryor, 2003). Subsequently, while arranged marriage was a vast exception amongst study participants, the pressure to do so was largely to assure economic security for the young woman and/or to strengthen kinship ties. Making sure that these young adult women from refugee backgrounds who may feel obligated to marry for external family pressures are aware of their rights as Canadian citizens, and under Canadian law, is important to them feeling empowered to assert their own voices in decision-making processes around their own marriage status.

5.3.3. Social Capital

Building one's social capital through friendships and community connections was significant to women from refugee backgrounds. Fostering friendships with Canadian-born peers was important to study participants to alleviate social isolation, enhance their sense of belonging, and build a support network. Lacking social connections for women from refugee backgrounds is also believed to negatively influence their ability to integrate into society (Goodson & Phillimore, 2008). Friendships in the lives of women can positively impact their mental, physiological, and sociological well-being, the absence of which can contribute to depression and psychosomatic illness (Goodson & Phillimore, 2008; Knickmeyer et al., 2002).

Study participants were actively involved in various forms of community, online, and in-person work through which they met many people. However, they noted that it was difficult to develop genuine friendships with people whom they trusted. Those who were able to form these friendships noted that the support they felt from peers, friends,

and mentors, was based on the specific qualities and traits of individual people, rather than on types of jobs. For instance, individuals in roles that were meant to provide a specific service, such as settlement workers or educational advisors, were not necessarily supportive. Rather, it was a select individual and personality type across a diverse spectrum of fields with whom study participants built trusting relationships. For instance, considerate teachers who took the time to get to individually know participants, patient advisors who sat down and helped participants apply for specific jobs, and inclusive youth workers who took participants to community events, were examples of supportive individuals found in the community. This is consistent with the literature, which conveys that individuals from refugee backgrounds may engage with a social network but not necessarily a trusted social network (Dunwoodie et al., 2020). If trusting relationships are able to be formed, these social networks become beneficial to women from refugee backgrounds in their settlement as they help provide mutual support and help work through conflicts that may arise in these women's lives (Dunwoodie et al., 2020; Schultz, 1991).

Building a social network is not easy to do. The young adult women from refugee backgrounds in the study were looking for other young women in their peer group, which they could turn to to ask questions and help navigate their new experiences in Canada. For study participants, these individuals were most often other newcomers, who were also looking to build their support network. Yet, many study participants noted the vast benefits of having individuals in their social network who were Canadian-born. The knowledge and experience of Canadian-born friends from whom they could seek advice and guidance on the local system and new culture was found to be very helpful. This is consistent with literature that reinforces that specifically combining newcomers with locals through such initiatives as mentorship programs, can have vast settlement benefits for both groups (Mansson & Delander, 2017). For young adults from refugee backgrounds, these opportunities can positively impact academic success and can help them integrate into their new labour markets (Mansson & Delander, 2017; Vickers et al., 2017). With the right training and support, mentors themselves also benefit from getting to know the newcomers in their community, which can build compassion, empathy, and support, inadvertently addressing potential issues of racism, discrimination, and social isolation (Clinard & Ariav, 1998). As mentioned in the literature review, there are many different mentorship models that higher educational institutions, government agencies,

and workplaces are developing to meet the specific needs of their newcomer refugee populations (Connecting People, 2021). Such models must be developed with the support and input of young women from refugee backgrounds so that they can reflect and be responsive to their specific needs and goals.

This discussion provides an overview of the main factors prohibiting young adult women from refugee background accessing higher education and highlights the structural and institutional policies and practices of discrimination that contribute to various barriers they encounter. The implications below broadly review how effective the theoretical and methodological frameworks used in this study have been to answer the studies main questions.

Chapter 6. Conclusion

Access to education is a universal human right centrally linked to poverty reduction, stable economic growth and better overall lives for children, families, and communities (Report on Education, 2019). This study aimed to explore three guiding questions:

- (4) What are the factors that influence the educational and career aspirations of young women (aged 19-30 years old) from refugee backgrounds who have immigrated to Canada?
- (5) What barriers exist that challenge or prevent the pursuit of these aspirations?
- (6) In what ways does gender and gendered responsibilities limit the pursuit of these aspirations?

This study found that the educational and career aspirations for young adult women from refugee backgrounds are influenced by many intersectional factors, that are in frequent negotiation with one another, including the need to balance practical concerns of everyday life, such as housing and food, with the high expectations they have for their personal educational and career goals. Transitioning from adolescence to adulthood is a time in which many decisions must be made that will shape the direction of a young person's future. Participants' goal setting was often competing with their families needs, and the resources participants had available to them to pursue their goals, were impacted by their method of migration to Canada: government or private sponsorship. Study participants were often managing time pressures, as well as expectations to both self and the family, as they navigated their personal goals. To better understand the opportunities available to them, participants engaged in community-related events and pursued volunteer opportunities when available. This enabled them to become better acquainted with their community, to meet like-minded others, and to build their own support systems, which exposed them to new educational and career pathways that they may not have previously considered. Social media played a significant role in building community connections, meeting others, accessing information, and feeling safe to attend events in person.

The institutional and structural forms of discrimination faced by young adult women from refugee backgrounds when pursuing their higher educational goals posed significant barriers to their academic success. These forms of discrimination started by overcoming the vast challenges they experienced in the migration journey. Upon resettlement, participants were then placed in an academic setting, based on their age and sometimes their previous academic credentials where they were tasked with acquiring the “right” credentials to move forward in their educational journey. In secondary school, extensive ELL supports helped facilitate this process in some cases, but a lack of academic support hindered this process in other cases. For those who entered straight into adult education, assessing one’s own abilities in relation to a new system posed a challenge. Misinformation from academic advisors who are unprepared to support the unique circumstances faced by students from refugee backgrounds further delayed the process and wasted valuable time. Pathways into higher education was smoother for those on academic scholarships than for those who were not. Common amongst many participants were the barriers they faced in acquiring academically proficient English language, securing the financial resources they needed to pursue higher education, and balancing their mental health needs with their academic and familial responsibilities.

The gendered responsibilities that impacted study participants’ pursuit of their personal goals were significantly influenced by the practical reality of the high costs of living in Greater Vancouver. Accessible and affordable housing was a significant barrier faced by study participants. Study participants also had several gender-based familial responsibilities including childcare, domestic work, and for some, expectations of marriage. While friendships were difficult to form with Canadian-born peers, relationships that provided support and guidance, from specific teachers, settlement agencies, employment workers, and scholarship-provided mentors, were found to be highly beneficial and useful for study participants in their goal setting and in solving everyday problems.

Young women from refugee backgrounds who have immigrated to Canada are highly capable and motivated. These women view education as a pathway out of poverty, a means to support their families, and an opportunity to contribute meaningfully to their new communities. Study participants worked to balance many competing expectations as determined by themselves, their immediate and extended families, and

society around them. Poverty, and the availability of resources, significantly impacted what study participants were able to accomplish and which goals they could pursue. Those who had limited resources, often government-sponsored, spent most of their spare time securing them, which left little time to pursue higher education or career goals. Study participants who arrived through private sponsorship as organized by a group, or organization, including those who received comprehensive academic scholarships, had more academic success and appeared to settle easier, with more stable housing, secure employment, and social networks to draw upon. Yet just what percentage of these participants complete their degree programs and are able to find employment in their chosen field requires further follow-up. The overall significance of this study will be explored in more detail in the next section.

6.1. Study Significance

The findings in this study demonstrate that despite the challenges faced by young adult women from refugee backgrounds throughout their migration experience and into resettlement, they remain hard-working, dedicated to pursuing higher education, and committed to making a positive impact in their new communities in Canada. These women often missed out on educational opportunities in their most formative developmental years, which places them at a heightened disadvantage in pursuing their educational and career journeys here in Canada. Compounding these gaps in learning, are educational policies and practices that are generalized and do not specifically acknowledge the individual and unique circumstances faced by women from refugee backgrounds, by not taking into account their experiences and the various forms of discrimination they encounter daily.

This study is further significant because immigrant and refugee migration to Canada continues to grow at rapid rates in response to global events (Annual Report to Parliament, 2020). As Canada continues to search for ways to fill an increasing labour shortage, newcomers play a significant role in the ongoing growth and prosperity of Canada. During the time this study was conducted, Afghan refugees escaping Taliban rule, Colombian refugees escaping a deadly civil war, and Ukrainian refugees fleeing Russian invasion, were amongst the thousands of people seeking asylum in Canada (Canada Welcomes, 2021). In 2021 alone, Canada welcomed over 401,000 new permanent residents, which is the most newcomers to arrive in Canada in one year - in

Canadian history (Canada Welcomes, 2021). As Canada welcomes more refugees every year, there is a responsibility to provide these newcomers, specifically those from refugee backgrounds, with the skills training and resources they need to be independent, to ensure that Canada's public sector, including educational and health services, remains strong, healthy, and resilient, and to build a strong economy, with skilled workers and employees who feel a sense of belonging and a commitment to positively contributing to their new country. This will require an intersectoral approach where public and private institutions, organizations, government, and industries in Canadian society work together to support the needs of these newcomer populations. The theoretical and methodological implications of this study are elaborated on below.

6.2. Implications

The implications of this study are informed by the theoretical and methodological frameworks that were used to frame this study. Critical and feminist theory were used as lens through which to examine current educational and government policies and practices that impacted the experiences of young adult women from refugee backgrounds pursuing higher education. A qualitative methodology rooted in constructivist principles, as outlined by Merriam and Tisdell (2016), was used to co-construct knowledge with participants as they made meaning of their experiences pursuing higher education here in Canada. Through these lenses an understanding of how educational and government policies, and practices perpetuated forms of discrimination that impacted participants aspirations in Canada. The impacts of these policies and practices have implications for study participants, higher educational institutions, and government policy. These implications will be explored in more detail below.

6.2.1. Theoretical Implications

This study was informed by two main theoretical frameworks. First, critical theory was explored through Bourdieu's understanding of cultural capital and social reproduction in education, as well as Fraser's notions of abnormal justice as applied to equitable educational access. Second, feminist theory was explored as applied to migration.

Bourdieu (1973) believed that education should act as a means to improve individuals' social mobility, but that the lack of cultural capital, specifically embodied forms (for example, knowledge of the dominant culture) and institutionalized forms (for example, educational credentials) possessed by some students, limited their success for social mobility through education. However, this notion of cultural capital does not account for other valuable forms of knowledge, knowing, and competence, including technical skill, the specialized knowledge or expertise to perform specific tasks, and human capital, the personal skills, knowledge, and experience that brings added value to a country or organization (Lareau & Weininger, 2003). Both technical skill and human capital are highly valuable ways of knowing that many individuals from refugee backgrounds bring with them, through their prior education, work, and lived experiences. For instance, in this study, one participant had specific software development skills, a highly valued and in-demand technical skillset in Canada's job market today (Lach-Aidelbaum, 2022), while several others had significant experience acting as translators between governmental organizations and local government, a form of human capital that requires specialized language, knowledge and experience to do successfully (Translation Bureau, 2022). These forms of knowledge need to be fostered and developed upon settlement— a process which can be facilitated through education (Lareau & Weininger, 2003). Doing so can bring valuable learning opportunities for local government and educational institutions, contribute labour and expertise to in-demand industries, while also positively impacting individual earnings of those from refugee backgrounds, needed for financial stability and social mobility (Lareau & Weininger, 2003; Kingston, 2001).

This study explored young adult women from refugee backgrounds ambitions to pursue university-based education, with the hope that doing so would provide financial stability for their futures, advancing their social mobility, and enabling them to pursue meaningful employment. Bourdieu argued that for certain minority groups, such goals may be unrealistic because of the barriers that exist in traditional forms of university education. Applied to a Canadian context, where there is a growing trend towards vocationalism in higher education, policy makers are increasingly viewing university as an instrument for labour force development (Danic, 2015; Fisher et al., 2009; Stauber & Parreira do Amaral, 2015). In Canada, provincial and federal government roles support of higher education is increasingly focused on research and development, as influenced

by market-driven and commercially oriented agendas (Kirby, 2007; Shanahan & Jones, 2009). Whether newcomers from refugee backgrounds should be pursuing “traditional” forms of higher education in a university setting given the restraints on time and resources that they are disproportionately faced with, should be left open for individual decision-making (Kirby, 2007; Shanahan & Jones, 2009). In order to support informed decision making, information both on higher educational pathways, as well as labour market demands must be made accessible and available to these individuals to enable them to consider their options in relation to what they think is reasonable within their own personal educational and career goals.

The insights from this study suggest that a university degree does not guarantee entry into the middle-class or above, rather, increasingly diverse forms of education, training, and skills, are proving to be of equal or more financial value in the current Canadian marketplace (Berger & Parkin, 2009). Canada ranks amongst the top countries in the world for higher educational attainment, the result of high participation rates in colleges, trade institutions, and other vocational educational institutions, not necessarily because of participation in traditional forms of university education (Boothby & Drewes, 2006). Over a twenty-year time span, Census data shows the high value of these types of training and suggests that economic and social mobility can be attained through these non-traditional higher educational pathways (Berger & Parkin, 2009; Boothby & Drewes, 2006). This data further suggests that newcomers need to be aware and informed of the opportunities available to them to use pre-existing skills, or build upon lived-experiences and knowledge, that will help facilitate workforce entry into a diversity of in-demand, stable, and reliable industries, other than those which traditional university prepares students most readily for.

This study further explored ways to support Nancy Fraser’s argument of the “all subjected to principle,” (2007). This principle suggests that woman from refugee backgrounds must have a stronger voice in the policies and decision-making that influence them directly (Fraser, 2007). In order to fulfill this principle, these women must have increased access to accurate, timely, and clear information, in order to best inform their personal decision making. Women from refugee backgrounds are often portrayed as vulnerable as opposed to capable, which detracts from their empowerment and facilitates conditions of paternalism (Klassen, 2022; Palmary et al., 2010). This study has highlighted how accessible, accurate, and reliable information, as well as peer

mentorship and social networks empower women from refugee backgrounds with the knowledge of new systems and the ability to contribute to decision-making within these new systems. Accurate and detailed information and support navigating educational pathways must be made available early in the migration process so that there is time to consider, navigate, and question the multitude of educational options that will become available to them upon resettlement, and the skills they will need to be successful in their pursuits. This will enhance their capacity and empower them to participate in meaningfully informed ways in policy and decision-making that most directly impacts them.

Furthermore, current feminist policy in Canada emphasizes that it is up to the individual woman to improve her own circumstances (Cadesky, 2020). This suggests that self-improvement and social mobility are individualized pursuits and failure to improve one's own circumstances is solely the fault of the individual, ignoring the greater context in which they are existing. However, discrimination and patriarchy that exist within Canadian educational and political systems work against these women, making it more difficult for them to achieve many of the educational and career goals they have for themselves. An intersectional feminist analysis of migration that is based on the relationships between gender, class, race, age, and ability, and how these categories interact to encompass the complexities of identity and experiences of women from refugee backgrounds needs to be applied within a Canadian context (Carastathis et al., 2018; Crenshaw, 2017; Verloo, 2013). This approach must consider the systems within which these women are navigating their educational and career goals, including consideration of how policies and practices passed by government interact with one another and impact the ability of newcomers from refugee backgrounds to pursue their higher educational ambitions. For instance, if the Canadian government grants Ukrainians from refugee backgrounds free work and study permits but then denies the same rights to incoming Afghans from refugee backgrounds, then a condition of inequity is being created from the very beginning of the migration process, which continues well into settlement (Canada-Ukraine Authorization, 2022; Humanitarian Program, 2022; Immigration Program, 2022). The impact of these policies are then exacerbated by unaffordable and unavailable housing, unavailable childcare and other essential services, which places newcomer women in a position of having to navigate the private/public sphere, without the supports to adequately do so.

Critical theory and feminist theoretical frameworks should be more comprehensive and specific in their approaches to accurately frame and reflect the experiences of women from refugee backgrounds trying to pursue higher education in Canada. They should take an intersectional approach to understanding the individualized experiences of these women, considering the ways in which multiple systems and policies interact to create barriers to educational and career success, and recognizing the difficulty in surmounting these systems through individual effort alone.

6.2.2. Methodological Implications

This study was conducted using qualitative methodological research methods rooted in constructivist principles (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This method is premised in the belief that knowledge creation is on-going and co-constructed by participants as they make meaning of their experiences. This approach was selected for this study because much of the research conducted on refugee populations settlement in Canada has been conducted quantitatively through Statistics Canada and other government branches which have grouped newcomers by immigrant status, regardless of the diversity of individuals within this category, including refugee status, and with the overarching goal of understanding the economic impacts of newcomers on the Canadian economy (Asylum, 2019). Through inductive analysis, I aimed to better understand the unique experiences of women from refugee backgrounds specific to their educational pursuits in a Canadian context. Yet, study participants were from a very select group of women, those who were pursuing higher education in Canada, who had a specific level of English language ability, and who were willing and able to participate in the interviews and focus groups online. This potentially left out many diverse perspectives of women who were not privileged in meeting these criteria. These criteria also did not include the voices or experiences of family members. The context of family, including ongoing negotiations, and sometimes tensions, influence the decision-making in the lives of young adult women (Foner, 2012; Robinson & Segrott, 2002). Case studies which further analyzed family dynamics and experiences, would provide a more nuanced understanding of how decisions and goals were set and pursued.

Furthermore, a phenomenological approach in which individuals and family members actively interpreted their own first-person lived experiences, perception of events and existing conditions (Husserl, 2012), would have provided a deeper

understanding of participant behaviour and decision-making both pre- and post-settlement. Phenomenology likely would have provided more insight into how participants pre-arrival circumstances and experiences influenced their perceptions of Canada and their decision-making once in Canada. To prevent the re-emergence of potentially traumatic experiences, I kept my interview and focus group questions focused on experiences here in Canada. However, in doing so, I may have missed out on some valuable parts of participants personal stories, which would have provided further insight into their experiences here. I also found that many participants were eager to share their lived experiences throughout their migration journeys, and sometimes even those of their families. For instance, several participants wanted to talk about the conflict in their home countries, they wanted to share why and how they were displaced, they told stories of specific events that influenced their perceptions of safety, security, justice, and fairness, and they wanted to share the stories of their family members. Providing an opportunity to share some of these experiences would have provided further insight into the perspectives, attitudes, and goal making behaviour of participants upon settlement in Canada.

Restricting and often failing to consider dialogue, discussion, and research into the academic success of young adults from refugee backgrounds arriving in Canada, ignores a large incoming percentage of highly capable and motivated young people arriving in Canada. There is limited research understanding how successful young adults from refugee backgrounds are in completing their higher educational degrees. Following up with study participants to see if they had met their short-term academic pursuits, such as passing pre-requisite exams, or attaining language certificates, would provide more insight into how well they were meeting their goals.

6.2.3. Implications for Higher Education

In 1985, The Plaut Report was released as the latest of three reports commissioned by the Canada Employment and Immigration Commission, which made 89 recommendations for reform to the refugee determination process (Plaut, 1985). This report was created in order to fulfill the humanitarian ideals entrenched in Canadian immigration law and to reflect the dominant public discourse at the time - which viewed a fair and just pathway for refugees to settle in Canada as a way for Canada to reinforce its international reputation as a nation premised on humanitarian ideals (Adelman,

1985). While outwardly the aim of this report was to reform or improve the refugee claimant system in Canada to be more fair, implementation of the report by policy makers highlights that these recommendations were to be upheld in a way that was expeditious and would place minimal impact on the financial and human resources existing in the Canadian public sector – as opposed to funding new sectors of support for these incoming populations (Adelman, 1985; Plaut, 1985). This suggests a pre-existing tension between Canada’s humanitarian and peace-keeping reputation that emerged from the First World War, specifically the influence of the Canadian Red Cross as a leading wartime humanitarian organization (Glassford, 2020), and the Second World War through the liberation of various Allied nations under Nazi rule (McAndrew et al., 1995), with the neoliberal capitalist ideals that guide Canada’s economy in our modern government today (Kubat, 1993; Mahon, 2008; Minns & Rizov, 2005). This tension has shown up in higher educational institutions, where the notion of “academic capitalism” has no longer become an exception, but rather seems to be leading the way in policy making (Metcalf, 2010; Slaughter et al., 2005). There is an increasing recognition that post-secondary research interests are moving towards revenue-generating areas (example, technological development), and away from “curiosity-driven” research, as well as faculty and institutional autonomy (Metcalf, 2010; Slaughter et al., 2005).

Such capitalist restructuring of the higher-education system in Canada has become reflected in the policies and practices of these institutions – one of which aims to attract international students primarily as a form of foreign investment with little supports in place for their success and settlement in Canada (Brown, 2014; Stein & de Andreotti, 2016). If this is becoming the trend in higher educational institutions, then where is the incentive to provide supports for incoming refugee student populations - many of whom struggle to afford even domestic tuition fees?

6.2.4. Implications for Canadian Government Policy

The Canadian population seems to be divided on how to support both Canada’s humanitarian agenda and uphold the neoliberal direction of Canada’s current governments (Mahon, 2008). Despite the fact that over 54% of Canadians have direct experience with immigration or refugee experiences, as being first- or second-generation immigrants or refugees themselves, there is a constant tension within Canadian public

discourse around immigration and refugee policy (Esses et al., 2013; Immigrants, 2022; Hardy & Phillips, 1999). Can Canadian values be both humanitarian and liberally capitalist?

Humanitarian values bring together political and economic systems to create a type of political economy, in which the goal is to alleviate the suffering and protect the lives of civilians in conflict (Donini, 2010; Fox, 2001). However, in the Global North/West the values and aid associated with humanitarianism has become a multi-billion-dollar industry rife with contradictions and struggles over resources (Donini, 2010; Fox, 2001). While some of this tension is fueled by media portrayal of newcomers as threats, enemies, distrustful, et cetera, other tension comes from the divide between neoliberal capital goals and humanitarian ideals (Esses et al., 2013; Hardy & Phillips, 1999). Canada ranks amongst the top ten countries globally with the highest number of foreign-born residents in relation to population size (Pison, 2019). Yet, many citizens struggle with many of the everyday challenges that this study has highlighted as significant in the lives of newcomer women from refugee backgrounds, such as affordable housing and livable wages. Canada has not yet figured out how best to support its current population and is still trying to decolonize and reconcile its relationship with Indigenous peoples – both in everyday life and within the education system (Cote-Meek & Moeke-Pickering, 2020; Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018). There is a need to redesign the Canadian welfare state to better align the tensions which lie between the postwar humanitarian ideals of Canada with the current neo-liberal, capitalist trends that have been guiding current policy and practice, both in government and education policy (Mahon, 2008; Phillips, 2012).

The recommendations below explore possible ways for how to best address the discriminatory policies and practices that pose barriers to young adult women from refugee backgrounds pursuing higher education.

6.2.5. Recommendations

Justice for young adult women from refugee backgrounds in Canada requires a redistribution of resources and recognition of the significant impact that gender has in the refugee experience. Resources need to be made available to support the educational and career aspirations of these young women. These resources begin with safe and affordable housing. To reiterate the study participants' sentiments, they want to

work hard, contribute to their new community, and settle into Canadian life, but they cannot do that, if there are not enough hours in the day to work a minimum wage job that still does not pay enough to cover basic survival needs, or the cost of part-time post-secondary tuition. The young adult women in the study conveyed that they work hard to support their families, and that they want to be independent and self-sufficient, but such barriers as developing academic language skills and the devaluing of foreign credentials, make it increasingly difficult to do so. A redistribution of material resources that contribute to participants' self-sufficiency and that recognize and value their voices requires rethinking the economic structures that specifically guide our educational systems in Canada today.

Fraser's theories on recognition and misrecognition indicate that there needs to be a recognition of the politics of poverty, specifically of *who* experiences poverty and *to whom* is a redistribution of resources needed (Fraser, 2005). Misrecognition refers to a social process in which a situation or process goes unrecognized for what it is; it is a form of social subordination in which "institutionalized patterns of cultural value," (Fraser, 2008, p.84) deem one group as unworthy of respect. It further works to deny the opportunity to that group to participate in decision-making and in social life. Newcomer populations from refugee backgrounds are denied participation in various aspects of social life as a result of poverty, particularly if they arrive in later stages of their lives (Refugees in Canada, 2022). The impacts of poverty can extend into mental health and well-being, domestic violence, malnutrition and so forth. Poverty, and its associated challenges must be recognized by decision-making bodies as a barrier to higher education and there needs to be a commitment to addressing how to improve the economic conditions of newcomers from refugee backgrounds in order to develop adequate supportive programming for resettlement in Canada.

There is also a greater need for recognition of cultural and gender differences to be able to understand and redress class, race, and gender-based injustices in Western society (Crenshaw, 2017). The experiences of young women from refugee backgrounds must be recognized and the barriers they face in pursuing their academic and career goals must be acknowledged in relation to the patriarchal structures that continue to dominate our decision-making bodies.

Recognition within the education system for young people from refugee backgrounds requires a change to both “what” is taught and “how” is it taught (Fraser, 2003). Improving the quality of instruction and curriculum would require the recognition and inclusion of individuals from refugee backgrounds within the school curriculum, including instruction on their cultures, ways of knowing, and ethnic backgrounds. Justice in recognition politics would also require further support to those who work directly with newcomer populations, such as advisors and teachers, to enhance their understanding and improve the support they are able to provide these groups.

Young people from refugee backgrounds must be represented in the educational policy and decision-making that impacts their experiences. In order for this to occur, they must also be represented within the educational institutions that they wish to attend and must be included and able to participate in the educational community in which they are a part of. For instance, they must be able to (made accessible) and encouraged to (welcomed) participate in groups, committees, boards, panels, task forces and so forth that make decisions about projects, programming, initiatives, and the spending of resources within that educational community.

Misrecognition of the value and worth of all women leads to exclusion and marginalization of women from the public sphere and results in the perpetuation of male dominated decision-making bodies (hooks, 2000).

Throughout this study, I was surprised to find that gendered responsibilities were not based on the stereotypical feminine roles that one might assume were held in participants households. Rather, women in the study supported their family in various ways and identified the differing responsibilities their family members had to support the collective family as well. The older youth and young adults in the family took on more of the settlement responsibility, and this was largely because they seemed to settle into the culture, through learning English, finding employment, building a social network, and so forth, more quickly than their parents. Similarly, families were not bound to religious or traditional ways of thinking or doing. Rather, they were flexible and reactive to the new communities they found themselves in, negotiating new ways of living, expectations, and shifting roles within the family as needed.

In addition, while the influence that media has in the formation of stereotypes and stigmas, is well documented, it is surprising how little accountability media has to the stories and narratives that they create that contribute to shaping understanding in the public domain. The internet and social media have changed the types of information that can be shared, and who does the sharing, which is allowing everyday people to access multiple sources of news to find their information and shape their own narratives of the world. However, mis and dis-information are increasingly weaving into the public's everyday understandings of what's happening in the world and can be a dangerous source of information upon which to base understandings of the world and other people in it. It was surprising and disheartening that even people working the field of settlement support, such as advisors and teachers, were believed, by participants, to be judging them based on stereotypes and stigmas that were societally constructed and informed by biased media.

Below is a list of specific recommendations based thematically on the topics addressed in this study. They are largely intersectoral and require multiple agencies to work together to achieve the desired outcome. Proposed interventions should include the voices of young adult women from refugee backgrounds, as well as the employees of the partnering agencies they may be working with. Recommendations are divided by the key finding, the desired outcome, and the recommendation or potential intervention that may begin the process of ameliorating the given barrier.

Table 6.1. Recommendations

Desired Outcome	Recommendation (Potential Intervention)
Key Finding: Resource availability: poverty prevents pursuit of higher education.	
To have more financial resources to be applied to higher educational pursuits.	Educational institutions and the DX Ministry on Advanced Education and Skills Training to create more scholarships, bursaries, work-study, and co-op options for newcomer students available in diverse industries and sectors (including trades/vocational training) and provide guidance on how to pursue these pathways.
Key Finding: Time barriers: lengthy waits for credential assessments and fulfillment of generalized graduation requirements are inequitable.	

<p>To fast-track required processes for higher education entry, for example, educational credential assessments.</p>	<p>For educational institutions to take a more personalized approach to program entry, completing free and timely credential assessment, and evaluating academic potential based on specific candidates' unique experiences and skills. This process may start once refugees have been accepted to Canada but are still waiting in to come to Canada.</p>
<p>To re-assess generalized secondary school graduation requirements in relation to specific learning skills/gaps.</p>	<p>For the Ministry of Education to re-evaluate generalized graduation requirements to better meet the specific learning needs of refugee students. To create bridging programs from secondary to post-secondary, which include specific higher education preparation courses.</p>
<p>Key Findings: Negotiating expectations: making informed decisions based on credible information is imperative to goal setting. There is an increased need for holistic family support.</p>	
<p>To uphold high personal expectations, but to help shape individualized/realistic educational/career pathways.</p>	<p>For educational institutions to coordinate with settlement agencies in creating educational and career pathway information that is realistic, accessible, and constantly evolving with new information. Includes academic/career mentorship opportunities. Reflective of refugee students' needs.</p>
<p>Immediate/extended family – to maintain family support, while providing a realistic understanding of the many demands placed on students pursuing higher education, and to help orient families with educational culture in Canada.</p>	<p>On-going initiatives by educational institutions to coordinate with settlement service agencies to provide informative programming to families about higher education and Canadian culture. These should include the voices of refugee women and be reflective of their needs. Programming must be accessible, free, and consider providing onsite childcare and family meals, transportation subsidies and other financial incentives to attend. May consider virtual programming.</p>
<p>Key Findings: Building Networks: social networks are essential for settlement and professional networks are necessary for workforce entry.</p>	
<p>To build newcomers' social networks and strengthen connections within the community.</p>	<p>Educational institutions to coordinate with settlement service agencies to create mentorship programs that are accessible and that focus on building community and facilitating an environment of trust amongst participants. Mentorship programs should have members from diverse backgrounds, including being of different ages, genders, and ethnic groups. They should also receive mentorship training to be best supported. Mentors/mentees should be able to choose each other based on self-selected traits. Voices of both mentors/mentees should be considered in the programming constructed.</p>

<p>To build newcomers' professional networks and strengthen connections within the workforce.</p>	<p>Educational institutions to coordinate with workforce agencies, as well as the public and private sector to facilitate networking opportunities, co-ops, and internships that provide meaningful experiences and connections for refugee students. Measures should be implemented to mitigate barriers of sexism and racism. Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada should provide subsidies and other financial incentives for employers to participate in such programs.</p>
<p>Key Findings: Educational Transitions: there is a need to make pathways to higher education more accessible from secondary, to Adult Education, to Post-Secondary Education.</p>	
<p>For late entry secondary students to catch up on missed skills and knowledge, in order to best prepare them for post-secondary.</p>	<p>Ministry of Education to re-evaluate the graduation requirements for late-entry refugee students. To work with school districts and Adult Education Centers to create programming that helps prepare students for the transition to higher education, with a specific focus on academic language abilities. Consider specialized programming, specific teacher training, and creating individualized graduation plans for students.</p>
<p>To better prepare students for the transition to higher education.</p>	<p>For Adult Education programming to include post-secondary preparation courses and skill development. To work with higher education institutions to create bridging programs that help refugee students transition to higher education easier. To consider Capstone-type projects that refugee students can work on to demonstrate their pre-existing skills/knowledge and acquire academic credit for.</p>
<p>To help students from refugee backgrounds process their experiences while learning and acquiring academic credit.</p>	<p>Adult education to consider ways of working with counseling, psychology, or other relevant disciplines to create programming that helps refugee students make sense of their experiences, process their new lives while acquiring academic credit and set new goals for themselves (perhaps in combination with course credits available in Psychology, Social Studies et cetera.).</p>
<p>To help students from refugee backgrounds be academically successful in their higher educational pursuits.</p>	<p>Post-secondary institutions re-consider program delivery methods as equitable. Consider increasing options for blended and online learning opportunities. Consider ways to enable professors/instructors/TA's to build meaningful relationships with students from refugee backgrounds, while respecting their time and effort. Consider programming that supports academic language development and skill-building.</p>
<p>Key Findings: Mental health management: individuals from refugee backgrounds are more likely to experience mental health challenges, and therefore, accessible and affordable mental health support must be prioritized in settlement.</p>	

To empower students with the resources they need to manage their mental health challenges.	Educational institutions, settlement service agencies, health care agencies, and the British Columbian Ministry of Health to coordinate efforts to provide free, accessible, and translated (if necessary) mental health services for young adult women and their family members.
Key Findings: Academic English language skills: are required for academic success in higher education and can take years to develop. Specialized training is necessary.	
To provide students a foundation of academic English that will help them be academically successful.	For ELL courses at all levels of learning to provide specific teacher training, and deliberative course programming that will build the necessary academic language skills to be successful in higher education. This may also benefit from coordinated efforts between specific educational institutions and higher educational programs, including trade and vocational programs.
To establish an English language foundation that will help support refugee students throughout their settlement.	Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada to coordinate efforts with post-secondary institutions to create ELL programming available to refugees once accepted to and while waiting (in camps or secondary host country) to come to Canada.
Key Findings: Settlement is an on-going process. Settlement skills require life-long learning opportunities so they can be taken advantage of when individuals are ready. There is an increased need for supports to balance work-life demands.	
To provide ongoing, life-long learning and skill development for newcomers from refugee backgrounds that are available for use when they are ready to access it.	Refugee serving agencies to coordinate with the Ministry of Education for skills, language, and educational training that is accessible to newcomers on-going - after the initial few years of resettlement – once newcomers have the time, resources, and stability to access such training.
To support students in balancing work/life demands by ensuring that housing, childcare, and other social services are readily available and accessible.	Coordinated efforts between the provincial/federal governments, including the British Columbian Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure and British Columbia Housing, to address the high cost of living in relation to low-income earners' wages, housing, childcare, transportation, food, and other basic needs.

6.3. Conclusion: Towards a Justice of Common Humanity

In conclusion, this study sought to bring awareness to the lifeworld's of young adult women from refugee backgrounds who are resilient, inventive and are the cornerstones of their families. War, conflict, economic collapse, and climate change among many other factors are generating a refugee crisis globally that will only intensify. Women from refugee backgrounds desire to pursue higher education is not just for their own benefit, but for the well-being and prosperity of their families as well. Empowering

these young women with educational opportunities, supports families with settlement, and helps rebuild lives that were divided by war, conflict, and violence. This study aims to highlight that upon settlement in Canada, these young adult women are further challenged with a host of discriminatory practices and policies that challenge their ability to pursue higher education and entry into the workforce.

There are many different factors that can influence people's experiences with higher education. Ethnicity, and first-generation student status have all been shown to contribute to student engagement, retention, and persistence (Manokore, Mah & Ali, 2019). Specifically, ethnicity influenced student retention where racial minority students were less engaged, more likely to withdraw from their programs, feel a lack of belonging, experience decreased self-esteem and happiness, and in some cases an increase in stress (Levett-Jones et al., 2009; Manokore, Mah & Ali, 2019). Similarly, students who were first generation in their family to attend higher education were more likely from low-income families and more likely to lack support in navigating post-secondary options, placing them at a greater risk of dropping out (Choy, 2001; Demetrious & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011).

Compounding the individual student factors that influence student retention in higher education, a study by Tomalin (2007) suggests that staff within higher educational institutions are concerned about their ability to support students from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds. They are worried that they might unintentionally religiously or culturally discriminate against these students and have indicated that they are in need of more training and support to better inform their practices (Tomlin, 2007). Increased training on culturally responsive teaching, in which teachers, instructors, and professors use cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students to create inclusive communities of learning within their classes would contribute to more positive experiences within the education system for culturally diverse students (Gay, 2002; Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 1995).

Anna Triandafyllidou (2022), Canada Excellence Research Chair in Migration and Integration, and Professor at Ryerson University (now Toronto Metropolitan University), argues that global migration is changing, it is disorderly, unsafe, and often unauthorized. Yet, the way these challenges are addressed by the policies and practices employed by governments and relevant institutions and agencies emphasizes order,

safety, and regularity, which does not fit with the complex, ever changing dynamics of migration. Triandafyllidou's (2022) research questions whether a "messy" approach that is reflective of the context of global migration is possible. To best support young adult women from refugee backgrounds pursuing higher education and careers in Canada, an individualized, dynamic, and integrated approach must be considered. Individual circumstances must be evaluated, and pathways must be available to best meet the individuals' unique needs. A dynamic approach which ensures that information is constantly being updated and is evolving to meet the changing circumstances of individuals must be considered. Further, an integrated approach, which includes the voices of the young adult women from refugee backgrounds, who represent both themselves and often their families' best interests, as well as a variety of stakeholders including educational institutions, government, and the public/private sectors, must be included to provide the support needed for successful resettlement in Canada.

If Canada continues to uphold a Feminist International Assistance Policy (Canada's Feminist, 2021), then we must reconsider the structures and practices in our society that reinforce the barriers of gender, race, and class. As one study participant, Amaal so eloquently reminds us, perhaps in doing so, we can move towards justice that does not recognize the socially constructed differences of people, but rather that recognizes our common humanity.

...it's a traumatic experience to uproot yourself, your whole life and just move to another place...know [refugees] whole lives have crumbled apart and nothing is what they used to have before...have patience, listen more than try to force your perspective of what a refugee should look like, or feel like, or sound like, just listen to them instead. They're scared. They're homesick. They're overwhelmed. They went through traumatic experiences if they were from a conflict zone. Offer support. They are going through the experience...they know what they're looking for, they just don't know how to articulate it yet.

(Amaal, Interview, October 27, 2020)

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Appendix A: Refugee Serving Agency Contact List

SCRIPT: Hello, my name is Sonja. I'm a doctoral candidate at SFU and a Surrey secondary teacher. I'm conducting a study on newcomer women (aged 19-30 years old) and the challenges they face in pursuing their goals (career and educational) here in the Lower Mainland. I'm recruiting participants who would be willing to share their experiences with me over a Zoom meeting. I was hoping to share this study invitation with some of your members/students, through email, in hopes that they might be interested in participating. I've attached an invitation and the consent form for more information, but I would be happy to discuss the study with you in more detail should you wish.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Kindly,

Name of Organization	Name of Contact	Notes
EdMeCo	Jennifer Reddy	Email communication over several weeks – May-Sept 2020
DiverCity	Adrienne Bale – Manager Settlement Services	Emailed Sept 28th 2020
DiverCity	Stephen Boyd – Manager Language Programs	Emailed Sept 28 th 2020-Did not leave ph msg
DiverCity	Skills Training	Emailed Sept 28 th 2020-Did not leave ph msg
DiverCity	Youth Programs	Emailed Sept 28 th 2020-Did not leave ph msg
DiverCity	Youth Employment	Emailed Sept 28 th 2020-Did not leave ph msg
DiverCity	Rise Referrals	Emailed Oct 5 th 2020
DiverCity	Skills training classes	Emailed Oct 5 th 2020
DiverCity	Language classes - Called Crystal McFeeder	Emailed and called Oct 5 th 2020-Called Crystal McFeeder

LINC	LINC	Called, didn't leave message b/c they are closed due to Covid
MOSAIC	ELL Classes	Email and left phone msg Oct 12 th , 2020
MyCircle Tri Cities (ISSBC)	Jellini	Called and left msg Oct 12th 2020
MyCircle New West (ISSBC)	Brenda	Called and left msg Oct 12th 2020 (I talked to Lynn at Settlement services, who forwarded me to Brenda 604 522 5902)
ISS of BC	Spoke to secretary	Oct 12th 2020- Emailed Settlement Services settlement@issbc.org careerpaths@issbc.org sparkandignite@issbc.org
ISS of BC Surrey	Kathy Sherrell associate directory of settlement, Jennifer York, division manager of settlement Diana Smolic, division manager, LINC	Emailed Oct 13 th 2020
ISS of BC Surrey	LINC ISS of BC paid ELL classes	Sent email and called (did not leave msg) Oct 13 th 2020
Invergarry Adult Ed Centre	Tara Holt	Emailed Oct 13 th 2020 and responded – will email teachers...I followed up, she never got back to me.
Surrey Libraries	Digital branch	Called and left message about digital conversation circles Oct 13 th 2020
Surrey Libraries	Digital branch	Called Oct 13 th 2020 spoke to librarian who told me to contact teacher directly
Alexandra House	Neil Fernyhough, our Manager of Community Programs,	Called and was directed to Neil's email – Oct 13 th 2020
English Conversation Programs @ Surrey Recreation		Not taking calls

English Conversation Circle @ Mosaic Surrey Newcomers' Centre		Called and sent email request. Oct 16 th 2020.
MOSAIC	Michelle Park	Emailed Oct 16 th , 2020 then called -they are closed due to COVID
LINC Engage Youth Program @ Douglas College Surrey		Emailed Oct 19 th 2020
SFU Radius		Emailed entire staff individually Oct 19 th 2020
Burnaby Schools	Ethics approval sought-awarded	Emailed: Oct 19 th 2020
VSB Adult Ed	Ethics approval sought-awarded - D.Morita	Emailed Oct 19 th 2020
YMCA Refugee Hub (ISSof BC)		Emailed Oct 19 th 2020
Kinbrace		Emailed Oct 19 th 2020
YWCA Aspire Program		Emailed Oct 19 th 2020
UVic WUSC	Trisha Best Dr Watson	Called Oct 21 st 2020
MOSAIC		Called Oct 21 st 2020
Surrey libraries Conversation Classes Digital		Called Oct 28 th 2020
ISSof BC		Emailed teachers Oct 29 th 2020
SFU WUSC	Titilayo Abioye Oyefi	wuscfsu@gmail.com Emailed Oct 23 rd 2020
ISS		Emailed Oct 28 th 2020
Service agencies list		Emailed all applicable Nov 2 nd 2020
Jumpstart	M.K.	Emailed Nov 3 rd 2020
Alexandra House	Doris	Called Nov 3 rd 2020
DCRS		Called Nov 8 th 2020

Appendix B: Study Invitation



Participants needed for a new Study...

You are being invited to participate in a study to better understand what the challenges young adult women from refugee backgrounds face in trying to pursue their educational and career goals in BC.

The study will be conducted by Sonja van der Putten, a doctoral candidate at SFU, and teacher in the Surrey School District.

Study title: Young Adult Women from Refugee Backgrounds and the Role that Systemic Barriers in the Canadian Education System play in the pursuit of their Educational and Career Goals.

Study purpose: Young adult women from refugee backgrounds who have accessed, or who are trying to access post-secondary education may encounter various challenges in doing so, including institutionalized discrimination and/or financial constraints. They may be further challenged in having to balance their familial responsibilities with the need to support themselves and their families. This study aims to better understand what the educational and career aspirations of these young women are and what obstacles they face in pursuing them.

Criteria:

Interested participants must be...

1. Young woman between the ages of 19-30 years old
2. Have a working level of conversational English

How long it takes

If you fit the criteria above and are interested in participating, you will be asked to participate in a 60-minute one-on-one virtual interview AND a 60-minute virtual focus group. You can choose to participate in one or both, it's up to you. During the interview and the focus group, you will be asked about your experiences in the education system here in Canada. Everything you say will remain confidential and anonymous.

Compensation

You will be paid \$50 to participate in the 60-minute interview.

You will be paid another \$50 to participate in the 60-minute focus group.

**You do not have to participate in both the interview and the focus group. If you choose to do both, you will receive \$100.*

Appendix C: Participant Consent Form



SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
ENGAGING THE WORLD

Principal Investigator: Sonja van der Putten

Supervisor: Dr. Wanda Cassidy / Committee Member: Dr. Suzanne Smythe

Department of Education

Contact: Sonja van der Putten

Hello, my name is Sonja van der Putten. I am a Surrey secondary school teacher and a PhD candidate in Education at SFU. I am facilitating a study to better understand the challenges young adult women from refugee backgrounds face in trying to pursue higher education in BC.

Title of Study: Young Adult Women from Refugee Backgrounds and the Role that Barriers in the Canadian Education System play in the pursuit of their Educational and Career Goals.

INVITATION

This study would like to hear from you, in your own words, about what your educational and career goals are, and what challenges you may be facing in pursuing them. If you choose to participate in this study, you will participate in a 60-minute virtual interview and a 60-minute virtual focus group, both conducted through the online platform Zoom, to share your thoughts and experiences in pursuing your educational and career goals here in Canada. I am recruiting 10-15 participants for the interview, as well as roughly 10-15 participants for two focus groups. Interested individuals will receive a \$50 honorarium for participating in the interview, and another \$50 honorarium for participating in the focus group. This study is funded by a Joseph-Armand Bombardier Scholarship.

DO I HAVE TO BE IN THIS STUDY?

You do not have to participate in this study if you do not want to. Even if you choose to participate now, you can stop being in the study at any time. There will be no negative consequences of dropping out of the study, should you wish to no longer continue at any time. I will not enroll you in the study unless you agree to do so.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO ME IN THIS STUDY?

Participants will be asked to participate in a 60-minute virtual one-on-one interview, and (at a later time) a 60-minute virtual focus group (through the online platform Zoom). During the interview, you will be asked questions like: what are your educational goals? Or what career do you want for yourself in the future? You will also be asked to share a few of personal photographs (that you select), to tell me a little more about yourself and your goals. If you are willing to share one of your photos with me, I will keep a temporary copy (such as a screenshot) and will delete this photo once I have written about the interview. Providing a photo is voluntary, if you do not want me to have a copy of your photo temporarily, you do not have to share it. There will be no negative consequences to your participation in the study if you choose not to share a photo.

Later, you will be asked to participate in a 60-minute virtual focus group with other young adult women from refugee backgrounds. During this focus group, I will ask you a few questions and encourage you and your peers to discuss them. These questions will be similar in nature to the interview questions. For example, I might ask you to discuss what your experiences have been like in the Canadian education system so far?

Both the interviews and focus groups will be audio recorded on a device that is external to the Zoom platform. The researcher will keep the recordings long enough to transcribe or write them out, and then the recordings will be erased. Before conducting the interviews and focus groups, I, the researcher will ask you if you want to be audio recorded, but you do not have to be audio recorded if you do not want to be.

CAN ANYTHING BAD HAPPEN?

This study is meant for you to explain your experience here in the education system in Canada. There is nothing in the study itself that would cause anything bad to happen to you. There is nothing in this study that will risk your residency in Canada, your family,

your safety, your hopes for future post-secondary study, or your future employment. Your information will be kept confidential and your real names will not be used. You will not be made to talk about anything you don't want to discuss, and you can stop participating at any time should you feel uncomfortable. If at any time, you decide to drop out of the study, your data will be confidentially destroyed and discarded.

PRIVACY

Your privacy will be respected and no information will be released to anybody else that could be used to identify you from this study. In order to protect your privacy, I will remove any information that maybe used to identify you from any study documents, and instead of your name appearing on them, you will be asked to choose a pretend name. Only one hard-copy document that links your real name to your pretend name will be kept by the researcher, in a private locked cabinet in my office. Your personal data will not be used or shared with other researchers, organizations, or institutions. You will receive a copy of the study upon completion and will have access to the results should you desire them. Results from this study will also be shared with EdMeCo, and potentially other refugee serving organizations. However, your responses and personal information will remain anonymized and the organizations that read this study will not know what you personally have said.

Your responses in the interview and in the focus group will be stored on my, the researchers, personal computer and only myself and my supervisor, Dr. Wanda Cassidy, will have access to it. In accordance with SFU's research data management suggestions, your data will be stored confidentially for seven years.

Should you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to sign this consent form and return it to me through email. (Please note that email is not guaranteed to be always fully secure). Also, to ensure your privacy and that your responses remain anonymized, please do not share study details with others.

Should you have any questions regarding this study, please contact: Sonja van der Putten (Principal Investigator). If you have any concerns about this research, please contact the Simon Fraser University (SFU) Office of Research. For an inquiry related to

conflict of interest (COI) or an adverse event related to completing this study, please contact Dr. Jeff Toward.

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

My signature on this assent form means:

- I have read, understood, and had time to consider this participant information and assent form.
- I understand that all of the information collected will be kept confidential and that the results will only be used for research purposes.
- I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and that I am completely free to refuse to participate or to withdraw from this study at any time
- I understand that I will be provided with a \$100 honorarium as an acknowledgment of my time (I will receive \$50 for participating in the interview, and \$50 for participating in the focus group)
- I understand that my interview will be audio recorded and then transcribed or written down. Once the interviewer transcribes (or writes down) the audio interview, the recording will be destroyed permanently.
- I understand that if I sign my name at the end of this form, it means that I agree to be in this study.

If you agree to participate in this study, please sign below (an electronic signature is fine) and return to me through email:

Participant's Signature

Printed name
(YYYY/MM/DD)

Date

Appendix D: Interview Questions

Interview Overview: Interviews will be conducted with young adult women from refugee backgrounds between the ages of 19-30 years old who have a working level of English and have been in Canada two years or less. Interviews will take roughly 60 minutes and will be audio recorded and then transcribed. Upon completion of the transcriptions, participants will have an opportunity to review the interviews to ensure their voices are being accurately represented.

NOTE: *The questions in italics are optional follow-up questions, that may be used to generate further discussion if needed.*

Researcher Script: “Hello, thank you for coming. My name is Sonja, I’m going to be conducting this interview. First, I brought a few personal photos that I would like to use to share a bit more about myself.” (Discuss the photos I show and how they are relevant to me, my life, and my educational and career aspirations).

Now that you know a little more about me, I would like to get to know you a bit better. Please tell me a little bit about yourself.” *Follow introductory questions below.*

Introductory Questions & Photo Discussion

1. Where are you from? *Did you know much about Canada before you arrived?*
2. Where do you live now? *Who do you live with now? Are you finding Canada (people, laws, culture) to be the same/different than your home country? Explain.*
3. How long have you been in Canada? *What was the application process like to come to Canada? Did you have to wait a long time for processing? Did you have a choice about where in Canada to move to? Did you live anywhere else in Canada before coming here?*
4. Who did you come to Canada with? *Did you come with family members? If so, who? How old are you? Are you married? Do you have any children?*
5. What languages do you speak? *Have your language skills been useful in Canada? Did you speak English or French before arriving? Have you been*

learning English/French? If yes, where are you learning the language from and how has it been going?

6. How did you become involved with this (for example, EdMeCo) organization? *Where did you hear about this organization? Did you have anyone helping you when you became involved with this organization?*
7. Did you bring any photos to share? If so, please tell me about them. *Who is in your photo? What is happening in the photos? Why did you select these photos to share? Are these photos related to your goals or aspirations? Why are these photos important to you?*

Education

1. Are you in currently in any education program here in Canada? *Are you pursuing an education currently? If yes, what are you pursuing (certificate, diploma, degree et cetera) and with which institution? How did you learn about this program? How have you been finding this program? Is it meeting your expectations?*
2. Explain what your educational experience was like before coming to Canada. *What grade of education did you receive? Was education in your community/family encouraged? Did gender impact who was able to be educated? How/why did your education stop?*
3. Describe what your educational experience has been like since coming to Canada. *What types of educational opportunities have you accessed since being in Canada? What types of educational opportunities would you like to access? How are you finding out about these educational opportunities and the different educational pathways that exist for you?*
4. Explain what your educational goals are for your future. *Do you want to pursue an education? What kind of education? Why do you want to pursue this opportunity – for example, are you hoping to get a specific job? Do you want to learn more about a topic? Et cetera.*

Where do you find information about the educational opportunities that exist for you? Have you been working with anyone to learn more about the educational opportunities that exist for you here in Canada? If yes, who or what organization? Has this information been useful? Has this information met your expectations?

Career

1. Are you working right now? If so, where? *How did you get this job? Describe the type of work you are doing. Are you enjoying your work? Would you like to continue with this work or would you prefer to do something else?*
2. Describe what your career experience was like before coming to Canada. *Did you work before you came to Canada? If yes, explain. If no, were you planning on working? Explain.*
3. Describe what your career experience has been like since coming to Canada. *Have you been working here in Canada? If yes, explain – where, for whom, how did you get the job et cetera. If no, explain why not.*
4. Explain what your career goals are for your future. *Do you want to have a career? What type of career do you aspire to have? Explain.*
5. Describe how you think your chosen field of education will help support your career goals. *Do you think education will help you attain the career you want? Explain.*

Goals and Aspirations

1. What were your life goals and aspirations before coming to Canada? *How did you see your future playing out before you came to Canada?*
2. Have your goals/dreams changed since coming to Canada? *Explain if your goals/aspirations have changed since coming to Canada? If yes, how. If no, explain.*

Challenges and Barriers

1. Have you experienced any challenges in pursuing your educational/career goals since coming to Canada? *Describe them.*
2. Do you think your gender, being a woman, has made any impact in the way you are treated here in Canada? *For example, do you have more familial responsibilities at home because you are a woman? Do these additional responsibilities take time away from your studying or working?*
3. While trying to learn more about the education system, have you found people in Canada to be generally helpful or supportive? *For example, have there been people to provide information on educational opportunities? To answer your questions? To help you find more information? To help you access funding?*

Do you feel you know someone you can ask questions to if needed?

4. While trying to get a job in Canada, have you found people to be generally helpful and supportive? *For example, have there been people to provide information on job opportunities and/or the process of applying for jobs, including resume creation and interview skills? Do you feel you know someone who can help you answer questions you may have if needed?*

Moving Forward

1. Thinking back on your experiences trying to access education and/or get a job, did you have any experiences that were not helpful, or maybe were more confusing than helpful? *Did you ever receive the wrong or misleading information? Explain how that happened.*
2. Thinking back on your experiences trying to access education and/or to get a job, what information would have been helpful for you to make better decisions for yourself? Or, do you think you made the right decisions? *About your educational opportunities? About career pathways?*
3. Any additional thoughts, recommendations, or comments on how to make the process of learning about the education system and/or pursuing a career easier or better for others?

Researcher Script: “Thank you for your time today. I really appreciate your thoughtful discussion and all the ideas that you shared with me. Based on our discussion today, I will write up the ideas that were discussed, and I will email you a copy of what I write. You can read over the copy and let me know if you agree with everything that was said in the interview. If there is something that you disagree with, I will take it out. Your answers and insight today will help me to explore ways to improve the ways in which young adult women from refugee backgrounds are able to pursue their higher education and career goals in Canada. Thank you again.”

Appendix E: Focus Group Schedule

Date	Time	Participant(s)
Monday, Nov 16th, 2020 FG#1	6:00-7:00pm	Habibah, Daleela, Hakimah, Uhee, Amira
Saturday, Nov 21 st , 2020 FG#2	5:00-6:00pm	Calla, Ada, Ojala, Chanvatey, Asmaan
Sunday, Nov 22nd, 2020 FG#3	5:00-6:00pm	Amaal, Nabihah, Iman, Joy*, Lana*
Sunday, Nov 22nd, 2020 FG#4	6:00-7:00pm	Rafeeqah, Oadira, Aaliya, Daiba

Appendix F: Focus Group Questions

Focus Group Overview: There will be two focus group sessions, that will run for 60-90minutes each. Approximately five participants will be invited to each session. The focus groups will be facilitated through an online platform such as Zoom.

Researcher Script: “Hi everyone, thank you for coming. You have all met me already, so as you know, my name is Sonja, I’m the main researcher in this study. I would like for us first to introduce ourselves to each other, and then have a chat about our experiences in the education system here in Canada. If you feel uncomfortable answering any questions, remember, you don’t have to.

I’ll begin by reintroducing myself and the study. I am a high school teacher in Surrey and a doctoral student at Simon Fraser University. I have taught many students from refugee backgrounds and what I found was that they have a lot of support in high school, but when they graduate, or if they’ve arrived in Canada at an older age, around 19 years old, where they don’t have a lot of time to spend in high school, then they don’t necessarily have the same level of support to help them decide what to do with their futures. So, I wanted to conduct this study to better understand what your experiences are in trying to get an education and start a career here in Canada, in order to try and find solutions to problems that you may encounter along the way.

I’m not sure that everyone knows each other here, so if you wouldn’t mind, please introduce yourself to the group. You can explain who you are, where you’re from, and briefly explain what your educational and career goals are for the future.”

Group Question #1:

Describe what your experience in the Canadian educational system have been like so far. *Are you currently in an educational program? If yes, please describe it. If no, are you hoping to get into one? Why or why not?*

Group Question #2:

While pursuing education in Canada, have you encountered any challenges? (*For example, many students say that it's very competitive to get into school in Canada or that school in Canada is very expensive*).

Group Question #3:

Being a woman means that we experience life differently than men. *For example, we can have children. Sometimes, being a woman means we get treated differently as well.* Can you think of any experiences you have had when trying to pursue an education or a career here in Canada, in which you were treated differently because you are a woman?

Group Question #4

Do you have any additional thoughts, recommendations, or comments on how to make the process of pursuing an education or a career easier or better for others in Canada?

Researcher Script: "Thank you for your time today. I really appreciate your thoughtful discussion and all the ideas that you came up with. Based on our discussion today, I will write up the ideas that were discussed. I will use this information to try to explore ways to improve the way in which young adult women from refugee backgrounds are able to pursue their higher education and career goals in Canada. Feel free to contact me, or stay now to discuss further, if you have any questions or comments that you would like to add. Thank you again."

Appendix G: Coding Categories

Study Core Questions:

1. What are the factors that influence the educational and career aspirations of young women (aged 19-30 years old) from refugee backgrounds who have immigrated to Canada?;
2. What barriers exist that challenge the pursuit of these aspirations?;
3. In what ways do gendered responsibilities limit the pursuit of these aspirations?

Theme	Transitioning to Adulthood	Setting Education and Career Goals	New Opportunities	Time	Community Involvement	Building Social Networks on Social Media
Category	An emerging adult Markers of adulthood	Factors that influence goal setting Previous education Dreams vs Reality	Changing opportunities Barriers to accessing opportunities New aspirations Assessing priorities Changing family contexts	Social constructs of time Gendered expectations of time Bureaucratic time – (government/educational institutions) a land of their own	Community engagement Volunteering	Connecting with new people Finding social groups/communities Negative side
Sub-Category	Decision making (what influences how decisions are made?) Responsibilities Expectations (self, family, society, other) Role modeling	Cost-benefit analysis Expectations (self, family, society, other) Practical concerns: language skills, finances,	New programs/courses, avenues for financing etc. Exploration of self- and identity Time and language limits	Where are my peers? Am I behind? And how/can/do I need to catch-up? Self-reflection: Marriage and kids? Is this	Getting to know community Involvement in social action Contribute and give back to the community Gratitude	Connecting safely from home Stepping out of comfort zone in a calculated way Finding new groups or

		housing, transportation	Priority to self, or family, or other? Influence of extended family Increase cultural divide within families	important to me? Accreditations, exams, documents, housing, jobs etc. – what are we waiting for?	Meeting peers Developing skills Growing social network – finding mentors Better understanding Canadian culture	making my own Missing out on family and friends and comparing myself with others
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Theme	Migration Journey	Secondary School	Adult Education	Higher Education	Canadian Life	Career Barriers
Category	Experiences Resiliency Loss of agency Mis/disinformation Lessons learned	Instability of schools Variation in ELL programming and support Academic expectations of self, of school, of educational policy Belonging and relationships	Information access Costly risk-taking	Differing experiences if scholarship student vs adult student Academic expectations Adjusting to new system Lack of flexibility in program delivery methods	Experiences Challenges Unmet needs Feelings of “newness” Supports Loss of personal agency	Navigating career options Evaluating credentials and need for more education Acquiring Canadian work experience Gender barriers Career advising
Sub-Category	Age and sex-related social positioning in migration journey	Families moved often = new schools = new relationships to form ELL difficulties	Poor/limited academic advising Disconnect between academic evaluation of	Scholarship students were well supported in academic success	Loss of power/privilege Lack of decision-making power - being made	Opportunities through volunteering Gendered opportunities How to get “Canadian

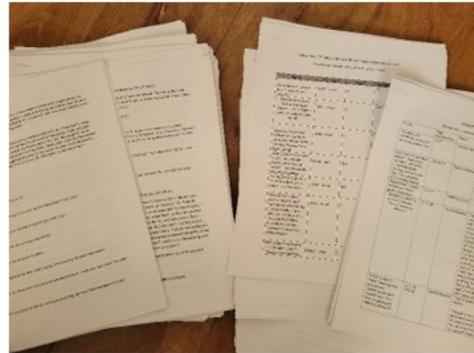
	<p>Loss of power/privilege (for some)</p> <p>Resiliency required for: dehumanizing treatment, including denial of personhood, repeatedly starting education over (2/3rd countries)</p> <p>Best decisions with poor information</p> <p>Missed opportunities</p> <p>Personal treatment changed throughout migration journey, from “exile” to “refugees” to “citizens”</p>	<p>ELL success</p> <p>Communicating across language barriers</p> <p>Devaluing of ability by school system (Adult ed vs Dogwood)</p> <p>Impacts of self-efficacy</p> <p>Struggle to develop friendships with peers – social isolation and lack of belonging</p> <p>Lack of supportive teachers</p>	<p>skills and ability</p> <p>Need for informed decision-making</p> <p>Financial risks involved in making higher ed decisions</p> <p>Self-esteem risks of failing</p>	<p>Adult entry students were not holistically supported, perhaps a teacher or peer, but not the institution</p> <p>Adjusting to new expectations and ways of learning (e.g. inquiry vs rote)</p> <p>Prohibitive in lack of flexibility of program delivery options</p>	<p>by someone else (UNHCR)</p> <p>Financing post-secondary</p> <p>Financing everyday life</p> <p>Financial stressors</p> <p>Financial support</p>	<p>work experience” – why international experience is not valued?</p> <p>Devaluing of skills and training through advisors</p>
<p>Sub-category relevant to multiple themes</p>		<p>Language development as a barrier to academic success – negatively impact self-esteem and self-efficacy</p> <p>Financing education as a barrier to accessing opportunities – student loan system</p> <p>Supportive relationships – peers, faculty, teachers etc.</p>				

Theme	Gender and Social Positioning	Gender-Based Family Responsibilities	The Role of Social Support
Category	Gender-based treatment Gender and Canadian culture Gender and policy Explicit bias Implicit bias (1-3)	Mental health Settlement experiences Familial support Familial responsibilities On-going challenges	Supportive relationships Community-based support
Sub-Category	Migration journey and upon settlement Gender-based employment discrimination – sexism 1. Stereotyped thinking about nature and role of women 2. Devaluing what is perceived as ‘women’s work’ 3. Lack of knowledge of the social and economic realities of women’s lives	Childcare Technology Reunification Marriage	Individual support Social support network Foster care Housing

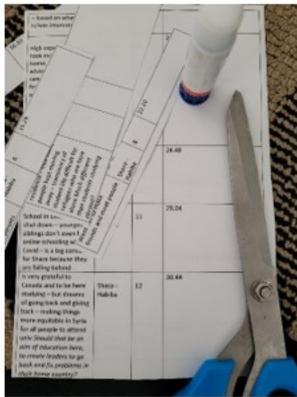
Appendix H: Coding Data



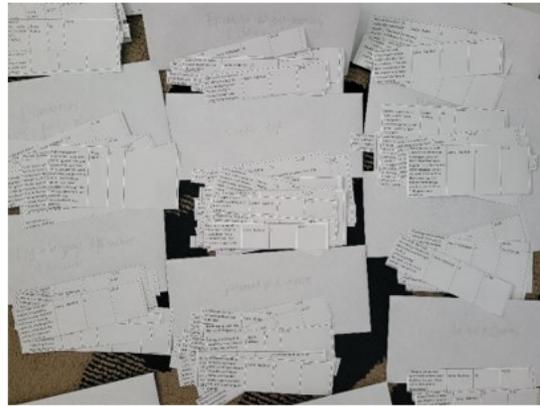
Step 1: Transcribing interview & focus group data



Step 2: Extracting themes from the transcription data



Step 3: Organizing themes into categories



Step 4: Organizing categories into sub-categories