

# **Understanding the Transitional Experiences of Young Adult Refugees in Canada**

**by  
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## **Abstract**

Young adult refugees experience resettlement challenges in Canada, including insecure housing, financial instability, social isolation, and mental health concerns, all the while navigating personal and emerging identity development. The purpose of this study was to research the lived experiences of young adult refugees resettling in Canada to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the subjective emotional and psychological experience. This qualitative study collected data through in-depth semi structured interviews with 6 young adult and post-secondary student refugees in the lower mainland of British Columbia. The study adopted an Interpretative phenomenological Analysis approach in studying the lived experience which produced in-depth narratives of each interview and captured an authentic lived experience. The interviews were analyzed using emergent coding through thematic analysis and to produced qualitative descriptive results and represented the lived experiences with authenticity and accuracy. Results suggested that personal identity was cultivated through creating community and creating a sense of meaning through their experience and strengthening personal values and beliefs. The findings inform the need to establish belonging and identity beyond “cultural identity” and “refugee-ness” for young adult refugees.

**Keywords:** Young adult refugee; lived experience; resettlement; meaning making; mental health; identity; culture; migration

## **Dedication**

*To my grandmother and my brother-in-law who taught me that displacement is more than a political status, it is an emotional experience.*

*To each individual participant whose voices and stories demonstrate struggle, hope and meaning.*

## Acknowledgements

This manuscript has been a testament of my tenacity and my stubborn will. So, before I thank anyone, I want to acknowledge that I did this. I may not have done this alone, but I did this when it felt like I was alone. I wrote these words and I worked with each person that allowed me to include their voice. I kept going even when my eyes were blurred by tears and my brain was filled with a heavy fog, I persisted.

First, from the bottom of my heart, I thank the participants of this study. They may be referred to “participant” in this manuscript, however to me they are so much more than that. Sitting in front of each individual, there was a willingness and trust awarded to me which was beyond what I imagined when I first started this project. I hold their trust and narratives close to my heart. To sit with each individual and hear a personal journey of migration, discrimination, and deep pain from leaving one’s home is an honour that I will carry with me my entire life.

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## Glossary

### ***Supports***

Supports is used generally to understand what adds value and positive experiences to resettlement for Syrian refugees. Supports include agency programs and services available in the nearby area for refugees though also encompass protective factors, such as social networks, friends, religious involvement, and other meaningful experiences.

### ***Services***

Services primarily refer to agency and non-profit programs, services and assistances that are designed to support newcomers to Canada, such as language classes, employment programs, social programs, and social subsidies. Services may also include mental health counselling and other necessary health related assistances

### ***Barriers***

Barriers conditions or obstacles that prevent refugees from being able to resettle effectively in Canada. This may include barriers from accessing services, supports or general obstacles for navigating Canadian life.

### ***Positive Resettlement***

Positive resettlement refers to feeling at home in Canada. While positive resettlement may vary by individual, general feelings of positivity and hope with regards to their current situation in Canada, feeling as if they have what they need for general wellbeing, health, and happiness

### ***Emotional Experience***

Emotional experience refers to the emotions and feelings of the experience. Emotional experience may include the emotions that arise during resettlement on how they generally feel about life in Canada

***Young Adult Refugees*** For the purpose of this study, young adult refugees refer to the ages between 19-30. This age group is more prone to identity development and personal exploration.

***Refugee-ness*** Refugee-ness will be used periodically throughout this manuscript to depict the notion of persons identifying with the title of refugee and the encompassing experience of being a refugee. Refugees often have a shared experience of displacement, resilience, and trauma and may find kinship with other refugee populations.

# Chapter 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Personal and Professional

Displacement. What does it mean to feel displaced? What does it mean to feel displaced from your own home, and what does it mean to feel displaced in your new home?

Displacement does not only refer to a state of geographic uncertainty; it also refers to a sense of identity displacement and uncertainty in selfhood.

My grandmother was a Lithuanian Displaced Person (DP) during WWII. Her family fled ahead of the Soviet advancement in Lithuania and ended up detained in a DP camp in Germany, held as a forced laborer for several years while trying to keep herself, her sister, and her mother safe. Meanwhile, her home became occupied by Soviet troops and ultimately dissolved. A place she once felt safe in, grew up in, and called home was reduced to contested territory between Germany and Russia, becoming a bargaining chip for political dominion, with no regard for the people in the cities and towns that suffered and lost the most. Years after the war, she and her sister emigrated to Canada, only to return to a very changed Lithuania 50 years later.

The first few years of resettlement on the West Coast of Canada were spent living in a YWCA for women refugees of WWII. Even with her new home, displacement was still evident, and resettlement became her lifelong journey. She rejected her legal title of refugee and always referred to herself as a displaced person, as this felt more representative of her experience and self-understanding.

Her experience with WWII haunted her throughout her life, and she spoke little of her time with displacement. However, even without speaking of her experience, we all knew this impacted her profoundly and traumatically. It influenced how she made sense of her environment and colored how she related to those around her, including her family.

One night in 2001, I could not sleep. My family was visiting my grandfather's extended family in Chur, a small village in Switzerland. As an 11-year-old, disturbed sleep was irregular, and getting up from my bed to wander the house was unheard of. For some

reason on this night, I was compelled to leave the comfort of my bed and wander downstairs. To my amazement, I saw my grandmother at the dining room table, sitting alone. My grandmother had always been a stoic and stern woman but seeing her without her glasses and in her nightdress, looking straight ahead in contemplation, she seemed small and gentle. As she noticed me tiptoe down the stairs, she wiped a tear away and greeted me tenderly, instead of scolding me for being awake and catching her in a moment of vulnerability.

She made me a cup of warm milk with cinnamon, and we played a game of “pigs.” After a little while of silence and without prompt, she slowly began to speak about her time in the war. This was the first time she had ever spoken of that time of her life with me. I was stunned, scared to say anything that would provoke her to change the subject, and knew that all of what she was saying and about to say was important. With tears in her eyes, she recounted the pain she had endured, and with bated breath, I listened.

One year later, she passed away from cancer. The little crumbs of her story she trusted me to hold will forever stay with me. Her lifelong journey of displacement and resettlement was complex and difficult, although at the end of her life, and for the first time in her life, she acknowledged Canada was her home and a place she loved, rather than a place she was forced to resettle to.

Displacement is not just a political and migratory title; it is a personal experience of profound uprootedness and uncertainty. Displacement can live in a person for years, decades after resettlement, and ultimately shape how one interacts with their new home and those around them, like it did for my grandmother.

The resettlement of displaced persons in Canada has a long and mixed history. The resettlement of WWII displaced persons was and is still considered the largest influx of refugees in Canada’s modern history, resettling roughly 250,000 displaced persons (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2016). Since 2015, Canada has pledged the largest number of refugees since WWII, resettling nearly 60,000 Syrian refugees alone, and has announced historical increases in resettling refugees from the Middle East and Africa (Citizenship Immigration Canada, 2016). Syrian refugees represent the 3rd largest resettlement of refugees in Canadian history, and Canada has pledged to resettle more refugees from Afghanistan and Ukraine in the last few years.

How Canada resettles its new citizens focuses on acculturation through employment, language acquisition, and housing (Segattio, 2018). Employment, housing, and language are important aspects of resettlement, though the heart of the feelings of displacement can permeate through the entire process of resettlement and shape how newcomers interact with services, resettlement in general, and experience their new home in Canada.

In my undergraduate degree, I began studying displaced persons and refugees as a matter of policy as an international relations, immigration, and economic problem to solve. Today, I look at it as a human condition and emotional and personal experience that can only be understood through individual narrative.

I hope these stories of uprootedness, grief, courage, and resettlement will shape your thinking about displacement, like it has mine, and transform working approaches with newcomers.

## **1.2. Positionality: Working with Refugees as a White Woman**

Conducting research with refugees, without having experience as a refugee myself makes me an outsider to this research. As a person of European descent who has primarily lived in Canada and has never experienced displacement or uncertainty about my home, I have questioned whether I have the right to work with refugees. I understand that if I had personally experienced displacement, it would impact the way I approach my research, engage with refugees, and formulate research questions. However, I do believe that not having that personal experience does not automatically disqualify me from working with this population. I recognize that my lack of personal experience with displacement puts me at a disadvantage in fully comprehending the resettlement experience. Therefore, I will proceed with extra caution in pursuing this line of research, confronting my preconceived notions about displacement and refugees, as well as my cultural and racial biases. In my work with refugees, I have understood that my role is a facilitator for their narratives. It is vital to represent each participant's narrative accurately and in their own words. I will strive to listen and learn from them to develop a deeper understanding of their experiences and needs.

Displacement has been a major theme within my family, but I have not directly been impacted by the experiences of my own displacement; I have only felt it as an underlying shadow in my family dynamics and witnessed it as my family members tried to make meaning from their shifting identities. I am a white researcher who has had the privilege of experiencing belonging in the country that I have grown up in. I have not been forced out of my home and felt uncertainty about where I will move to and been forced to resettle. I have also not been confronted with the arduous task of making meaning from forced migration and resettlement. My family, to be specific, my brother and my grandmother, who in very different ways have been challenged by displacement, have motivated me in understanding how displacement impacts one's relationship to resettlement, to identity, and to others around them. Their experience shaped my understanding of displacement and motivated my research.

Beginning this research, I surveyed many researchers and refugees their opinions on working with a population demographic that I personally did not belong to, and to which I only had a peripheral connection. I heard generally encouraging opinions about employing cultural sensitivity and demonstrating deep listening and understanding in working with refugees. Many shared with me that not conducting research out of fear of getting it wrong, is equally as harmful. However, there were opinions and questions about whether I am the right person to be conducting this research, and that it would be more meaningful and more authentic to have researchers who have personal experience with displacement and "refugee-ness" to conduct this research. I grappled with the harm that I could cause as someone who does not share the lived experiences as a refugee, and the potential harm that can take place from not conducting research on a population that is underrepresented in literature. I grappled with this dilemma every day while working on this study. This dilemma has been in the back of my mind every step of the way of the research process. It has guided my thinking in centering the research around the participant's narratives and continually checking in with regards to biases or expected research outcomes.

I hold this research and working with refugee populations with the highest amount of care. This research has been my passion and my motivation for pursuing counselling psychology and guided me in becoming a counsellor. I began studying the impacts of displacement and forced migration when I first entered my undergraduate degree at Dalhousie University in 2009. At the time, I was studying international development and

political science. My courses and my research papers were all focused on the displacement that occurred through the Arab Spring and the civil wars that followed. My background knowledge of the surrounding culture within the middle east, displacement, refugees, human rights, and the Arab spring became invaluable as it provided context, understanding of the political landscape that created uprootedness. It also supported my ability to build rapport with my participants as it created a shared understanding.

As a counsellor, working with clients with a variety of backgrounds is common and understood as a practice. Approaching each person as an individual with their own experiences and beliefs and recognizing that as a counsellor, my approach is to learn from each client as they are the expert on their own experience. My voice and my interpretation of their experience can guide building insight and perspective with each client. The counselling process is dynamic and collaborative with the client and the counsellor both playing an important role in building awareness and healing. This practice creates an emphasis on rapport building and trust with all my participants that I worked to create a space where they felt safe and could speak freely.

As a white woman researcher, I can confront my positionality, my assumptions, and my biases but often this goes only so far. Derald Wing Sue (1993) has openly discussed his reservations for white researchers conducting multicultural research in psychology and counselling. Sue (1993) argued that white researchers are often more prone to unintentional micro-aggressions, being oblivious to their racial privileges and biases and are more likely to conduct unintentionally culturally oppressive research. As feminist and critical race theories have increased in the discourse in academia, Sue (2017) has witnessed the shift in the development of true white ally researchers within multicultural counselling. Sue (2017) outlines competency themes for white researchers conducting multicultural research to develop true allyship and states that true allyship is a commitment to ongoing social justice and antiracist approaches in research and a prioritization of centering the racialized experience over the aims of the research. I know that my experience and my positionality will limit me in my research endeavors with this population and demographic, as it should. My aim is to build grassroots research to research my way out of a job. Support individuals in their empowerment that one day more refugee academics emerge that make me obsolete and unneeded. Till then, I persist slowly, likely making mistakes as I go and hold the voices of all participants with the highest value and as the purest form of authenticity.

### **1.3. Rationale & Purpose**

As of 2021, the number of displaced individuals globally has reached a staggering 82.4 million, as reported by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2021c). This includes 26.4 million refugees, 48.0 million internally displaced people, and 4.1 million asylum-seekers. The reasons behind this displacement are varied and complex, ranging from violent conflict to man-made and natural disasters, as well as economic, environmental, and social factors. Over the past decade, there has been a significant increase in the number of refugees worldwide, with millions being forced to leave their homelands due to ethnic conflict, deprivation, war, and political struggles (UNHCR, 2021a).

According to UNHCR (2021c), the majority of new refugees in 2021 came from the Central African Republic, South Sudan, Syria, Afghanistan, and Nigeria. Additionally, two-thirds of people displaced across borders were from Syria, Venezuela, Afghanistan, South Sudan, and Myanmar (UNHCR, 2021c). Forty-one percent of refugees in Canada, at the time of migration, are under the age of 18 (UNHCR, 2022e), which creates the challenge of young refugees undertaking identity development during the stressful period of resettlement.

These statistics highlight the urgent need for support and assistance for individuals who have been forcibly displaced. It is essential to recognize that behind each number is a human being with unique experiences, needs, and challenges. By acknowledging the root causes of displacement and providing effective support, we can work towards creating a more just and equitable world for all.

Research pertaining to refugees in Canada has increased in recent years; however, there continue to be significant gaps (Segattio, 2018). Currently, there is little research regarding the experiences of young adult refugees resettling in Canada (Wong & Yohani, 2016). Research has largely been focused on the experiences of children or adult populations within Canada (Segattio, 2018). A growing number of researchers demonstrate that age-specific factors influence the resettlement tasks of refugees and impact the types of challenges experienced (Yilmaz Zambak, 2021). Young adult refugees address several unique challenges, distinct to the age group between 19-30, such as specific concerns regarding mental health and confusion regarding identity

formation (Copelj et al., 2017). Young adulthood is an essential time for community building and creating a sense of belonging within one's environment. Young adult refugees often experience negative effects on their health and mental health during the stressful experiences of resettlement, which can contribute to identity confusion and a delayed sense of identity formation in adulthood (Ertorer, 2014). Additionally, the stress of migration, previous experience with trauma, and resettlement factors impact a personal sense of safety and can impede successful adaptation (Copelj et al., 2017). Given the unique set of challenges experienced by young adult refugees, it is important to gain a stronger understanding of this group. It is essential to address the specific needs within young adult refugees to understand how resettlement and displacement impact their sense of self and relationship to their environment.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the experiences of young adult refugees resettling in Canada. Specifically, this project aims to understand the experiences that young people, between the ages of 18 and 30, have with displacement and identity development during resettlement. Through understanding refugees' experiences post-migration, the findings will provide insight into the personal experience and shed light on how service providers, counselors, and other helping professions work directly with young adult refugee populations.

## **1.4. Research Questions and Structure**

To better understand the experiences of young adult refugees and guide the focus of the dialogue with each participant, the following research questions were posed:

- 1) How do young adult refugees make meaning from their experience?
- 2) How does the surrounding community impact young adult refugee's sense of belonging in Canada?
- 3) What are the barriers to positive resettlement?
- 4) How does resettlement shape young adult refugee's identity formation?

To gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of resettlement, identity and meaning making in young adult refugees, this manuscript is divided into 4 chapters. The

introductory chapter has outlined the rationale and the positionality of the researcher to establish the context of the study. Subsequently, Chapter 2 explores the literature regarding refugee's resettlement, identity development in young adulthood and how refugees make meaning of their experience to begin to understand the state of research and what exists in relation to young adult refugees experience. Chapter 3 discusses the research methodology and methods used for working with young adult refugees and how the study was designed. Specifically, the notion of lived experience and the advantages of qualitative subjective experience to understand the phenomena. Additionally, the tools, data analysis and a summary of the participants will be included. Chapter 4 presents the themes that emerged from working with each individual participant, as well as a summary of each participant's narratives to situate the themes within the personal disclosures. Chapter 5 discusses the participant's narratives in relation to the existing literature to gain a deeper understanding to the experiences of young adult refugees. The chapter also notes the clinical implications, the study's limitations, and suggestions for future research.

## **Chapter 2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Introduction**

Social environments and political conflicts around the globe have led to an increase in human displacement in recent years. In 2022, there were 89.3 million forcibly displaced persons, encompassing both refugees and internally displaced persons, marking the highest number on record (UNHCR, 2022). Over the past decade, the global refugee crisis has doubled in scope, with a continuous rise in displaced persons. The Syrian civil war, the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan further destabilizing the conflict, and the war in Ukraine account for the three largest refugee crises, collectively representing roughly half of the world's refugee populations (UNHCR, 2022).

In Canada, there are currently over 1,088,015 refugees, with more expected to be resettled in the coming years (UNHCR, 2022). In 2015, Canada pledged to resettle 24,000 Syrian refugees, marking the 3rd largest influx of refugees in modern history. Since then, each subsequent year has seen an increase in the number of refugees resettling in Canada, with a 19.1% rise in refugees resettling in Canada in 2021 compared to the previous year. This surge in refugees both globally and in Canada has heightened interest in integration outcomes in Western countries (Yoshida & Amoyaw, 2020). This interest seeks to better understand the impact of forced displacement, resettlement, and acculturation on refugees and the host countries.

Several factors contribute to the unique needs of refugees. Refugees are more likely to have been exposed to traumatic experiences both pre- and post-migration. Due to their exposure to conflict trauma and forced displacement, refugees are more prone to experiencing PTSD, depression, and anxiety (Kaar, 2021), yet only 1% of this population receive adequate support (Weinstein, Khabbaz & Legate, 2016). Pre-migration, refugees have often endured severe distress, and post-migration, they continue to face stressors such as unstable housing, racism, intolerance, social isolation, and more (Oudshoorn et al., 2020). The government of Canada has introduced incentives and social supports to facilitate healthy resettlement for refugee populations, including one year of social assistance income and tax deductions for hiring refugees (Oudshoorn et al., 2020). However, despite these efforts, refugees frequently encounter challenging resettlement

and barriers to integration into Canada, necessitating further research to better understand their experiences. Current research on healthy resettlement has identified several barriers, including housing instability and unaffordability (Hanley et al., 2018), transportation to access social support services (Oudshoorn et al., 2020), unemployment and labor discrimination (Ugurel Kamisli, 2021), social isolation (Ugurel Kamisli, 2021; Senthanaar et al., 2020), and limited access to mental health support (Oda et al., 2019). Additional research is needed to investigate how refugees experience resettlement from their own perspectives and narratives and to gain a better understanding of the resettlement process.

Research concerning refugees in Canada is an emerging field of study (Yoshida & Amoyaw, 2020). Syrian refugees began arriving in Canada in 2015, and many are still in the process of resettling. Since then, more groups of refugees have begun resettling in Canada. Canada welcomed 28,000 Afghan refugees in response to the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, which further destabilized the political situation and increased Taliban influence (Pardy, 2023). Canada has also pledged to welcome 150,000 Ukrainian newcomers in response to the Ukraine-Russia conflict, which is significantly affecting Ukrainian territory and displacing hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian citizens (Pardy, 2023).

The present literature analysis aims to explore the experiences of young adult refugees resettling in Canada, the barriers to positive resettlement, and the processes of identity development and meaning-making in refugees. The literature analysis will delve into these topics by first providing clear definitions of important terms to ensure consistency and continuity throughout the literature. Secondly, it will introduce the current literature regarding refugee resettlement experiences in Canada. Third, it will narrow the focus to understand the scope of research on young adult refugee populations' resettlement experiences. Lastly, the literature available on young adult refugee identity formation and meaning-making will be explored.

## **2.2. Definitions of Terms: Refugee, Asylum Seeker, Forced Displacement, Resettlement and Acculturation**

**Refugee** has been defined by the United Nations Refugee Convention in 1951 and defined it as:

owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it. (UNCHR, 2011; p.14).

Refugee status protects people from refoulement (forcible returning to unsafe living conditions). The 1951 Refugee Convention was written in the aftermath of World War II to protect European refugees. Upon recognition of forced displacement as a worldwide issue, the 1951 Refugee Convention expanded the scope to include refugees outside of Europe (UNCHR, 2011).

**Asylum Seeker** is a person who is forced to leave their country of origin and who seeks safety and protection in another country. This is based on the principle of non-refoulement, which means that they cannot be returned to a country where they are at risk of persecution. However, an asylum seeker's application for refugee status has not yet been decided, and they are not yet granted refugee status (International Organization for Migration [IOM], 2019) and are subjected to having their original nationality revoked. There are various reasons why a person may apply for asylum status, such as persecution based on their sexual identity, ethnic or racial background, religion, or nationality (IOM, 2019). It can take several years for the asylum process to reach a conclusion. If the application is denied, the applicant must leave the country and may be deported (IOM, 2019).

**Resettlement** is a process in which refugees who are unable to return to their home country or integrate into their country of asylum are offered the opportunity to settle permanently in a third country. Resettlement is typically only offered to a small proportion of the world's refugees, and the process is often lengthy and complex, involving screening and selection (UNHCR, 2021a). According to the UNHCR, resettlement can offer refugees the chance to rebuild their lives in safety and dignity, and can also provide benefits to the host countries (UNHCR, 2021a).

**Acculturation** has been used frequently used in existing literature and many have debated the definition. Most notably and understood, acculturation has been defined as a process of change between two cultures or locations.

Acculturation refers to changes that take place as a result of contact with culturally dissimilar people, groups, and social influences. Although these changes can take place as a result of almost any intercultural contact (e.g., globalization), acculturation is most often studied in individuals living in countries or regions other than where they were born—that is, among immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers, and sojourners (Schwartz et al., 2010).

Acculturation encompasses the process of migrating and assuming the new locations. Acculturation and resettlement have often been used interchangeably. For this study, acculturation will primarily refer to the process of change. Whereas resettlement will be more broadly used to encompass the process of migration and settling in the new location.

**Forced displacement** is a term used to describe situations where individuals or groups are compelled to leave their homes due to conflict, persecution, human rights violations, natural disasters, or other circumstances beyond their control. Forced displacement can occur within a country (internally displaced persons) or across borders (refugees) (UNHCR, 2021a). According to the UNHCR, the number of forcibly displaced people worldwide reached a record high of 82.4 million at the end of 2020, with 48 million internally displaced persons, 26.4 million refugees, and 4.1 million asylum seekers. Forced displacement can have serious consequences for the affected individuals, including the loss of safety and uncertainty in one's future.

### **2.3. Resettlement Experience in Canada**

Resettlement due to forced displacement in Canada is a complicated experience as it is not simply finding new living accommodations and finding suitable work for refugees, it becomes a process of finding safety and stabilization, belonging, a new routine all the while undergoing grief, loss, and emotional challenges. It has warranted research in recent years with the increase of the global refugee crisis and many scholars have found there are several barriers during the resettlement period. For the purposes of this literature review, the scope of this section will primarily cover literature pertaining refugee resettlement experiences in Canada to gain greater understanding of how refugees experience displacement, migration, and resettlement.

### 2.3.1. Housing

Housing has been reported as a major cause for concern among refugee populations in Canada. Refugee's stress from leaving their home is compounded by the need to quickly find suitable housing in Canada. Refugees are first housed in hotels for the first few months in Canada and have reported racism and stress during this time as they are told to refrain from leaving their rooms regularly as not to disturb the other hotel guests (Oudshoorn et al., 2020). Resettlement workers are often tasked with finding suitable housing for the refugees arriving in Canada though often emerge with inadequately small apartments, basement suites or subsidized social housing. As refugees report this time of migration particularly stressful, they will often quickly take housing opportunities even if it is smaller than what they need or more expensive than what they can afford.

Oudshoorn et al. (2020) interviewed 17 Syrian refugee families living in Canada. They found that a major theme across all interviewed participants was a stressful experience with housing. The most reported stressor with regards to housing was exposure to unsafe and inadequate housing. Refugees spoke in the interviews about their experience with bed bugs, flooding, unsafe neighbourhoods, and small apartments for large families. Ugurel Kamisli (2020) reported on similar themes across her case study of 6 Syrian refugees living in the United States. The participants emphasized the addition of social isolation and racism experience on top of the unsafe and unstable housing. The neighbourhoods that Syrian refugees are rehomed in are often fraught with unwelcoming neighbours and some participants spoke about receiving overtly racist comments such as "why don't you go back to your own country" (Ugurel Kamisli, 2020).

Both Ugurel Kamisli (2020) and Oudshoorn et al. (2020) used semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis to understand the experiences post-migration. While Oudshoorn et al (2020) specifically used housing related questions in their interview guide, Ugurel Kamisli (2020) did not, yet still the major stressor with housing emerged. The qualitative methodology of these two studies allowed for refugees to express their experiences in their words and it would seem that even given minor prompts they felt compelled to highlight their stressful experience with housing. There were limitations of both studies, such as the use a convenience sample, both using mid-sized cities as their location for recruitment and participants did not vary with the refugee program that they came over with. This may skew the data as the samples and the location used for the study may be

particularly plagued with housing challenges. Furthermore, while the results of these studies do focus on housing as a major stressor, there were no recommendation made to combat the issue or how research could target interventions to dismantle this stressor.

Similarly, Hadfield et al., (2017)'s meta-analysis on the existing literature of refugee's resettlement and mental health also reported on housing stressors for Syrian refugees, although approached housing as a complex stressor for family reorganization and less on the unsafe living conditions. Hadfield et al. (2017)'s study focused on children's resettlement experiences, though given how fundamental housing is for any person and family structure, housing also emerged as a predominate theme. One major contributor to housing as a stressor is the reorganization of family systems given the availability of housing for refugees. Indicating that refugees that come to Canada, often come from a countries that prioritize a collectivist and family system over the individual. (Hadfield et al., 2017a) and are used to living in closer proximity to family and their communities. Their surrounding community supports family organization through childrearing, cooking and sharing responsibilities among many. Families report stress from changing to an individualistic organization and report less cohesion among their neighbors and the surrounding community, which was also replicated in Kamisli (2020)'s case study. Less social cohesion and increased social isolation due to housing availability contributed to negative experiences in their resettled country and felt unsafe and unwanted.

In addition, Oudshoorn et al. (2020) highlighted that housing was a major contributor to barriers for accessing programs that are designed to support resettlement. The location of the available housing made it difficult to access programs and connect with the larger community. While housing is a barrier for positive resettlement on its own, it also contributes to the inaccessibility of programs and services available to refugees. This was a unique perspective that was not captured across the other reviewed articles, indicating that refugees recognize the important role housing plays in resettlement, both for living conditions and in the compounding of other existing stressors. Housing plays a role as a basic living necessity and if housing is unstable and unsafe it has profound impacts on health and mental health (Hadfield et al., 2017a; Oda et al., 2019). Employment is often a route out of unsafe and unsanitary living situations and improving mental health, however employment for refugees has its own array of challenges.

### 2.3.2. Employment

Refugees receive a small amount of government assisted income for their first year in Canada (Oudshoorn et al., 2020) to reduce the pressures of needing to find an income stream quickly. However, the small government income is often not sufficient to meet the rising cost of housing and daily necessities. Employment becomes a necessity early on during the resettlement process and many refugees. Many refugees discuss being offered part-time, lower skilled positions and with employers that they have preexisting ties with (Senthanar et al., 2020).

Refugees' access to employment and career development in Canada is a relatively conflicting area of study. Where some studies focus on the benefits of employment for refugees (Weinstein et al., 2016; Yoon et al., 2019) others focus on the barriers preventing access to employment opportunities (Hanley et al., 2018). While there is agreement that employment is essential for positive resettlement, there are many differing perspectives on how to approach employment for refugees. The results of the review demonstrated disagreement for how to approach employment for refugee populations and differed on the barriers for accessing employment.

Weinstein et al (2016) and Yoon et al., (2019) took an experimental design approach by creating an employment and need satisfaction intervention. These studies demonstrated that refugees who had meaningful work felt happier, more hopeful and more settled. Specifically, refugees gain a sense of purpose and identity from employment opportunities during resettlement. However, neither study reviewed potential differences of experience across gender or refugee program. Additionally, neither study addressed the barriers that many refugees face for accessing employment. The studies created interventions that would provide meaningful work but did not address how refugees would find meaningful work outside of this specific experimental design. For instance, many refugee women do not have the ability to secure employment opportunities as they do not have access to childcare and their male partners report unwillingness to share the household responsibilities (Hanley et al., 2018). This results in women reporting fewer opportunities to engage in safe and accessible employment, as well as fewer opportunities for social engagement.

A longitudinal exploratory study by Hanley et al., (2018) demonstrates similar results to Weinstein et al (2016) and Yoon et al., (2019)'s studies and demonstrate that employment can offer opportunities for social connection, higher income earning which in turn supports overall hope and resilience in Canada. Yet Hanley et al., (2018) goes further to research the employment experiences of privately sponsored refugees (PSRs). The PRS structure gives access to social networks upon arrival in Canada. Through the social networks, PSRs can access employment referrals and establish professional to secure employment. Hanley et al., (2018)'s longitudinal study offers a unique perspective of employment outcome. Results suggest that PSR refugees experience with securing employment was easier than refugees coming to Canada in other refugee programs, such as government assisted refugee programs. PSRs still experience challenges with employment, specifically women refugees as they transition to professional spaces from being in childrearing roles (Hanley et al., 2018, Senthonar et al., 2020). The main challenges arise from navigating employment when they secure jobs, rather than in obtaining the job itself.

Senthonar et al., (2020)'s feminist grounded theory study provided an in-depth exploration into the employment experiences for 17 refugee women in Toronto and gives greater insight into the challenges of maintain employment. The results demonstrated the complexity employment plays in refugee women's resettlement experience and suggest an issue of underemployment and misaligned employment. The study used a blended sample of government assisted refugees (GARs), PSRs, blended visa and refugee claimants, which gave a stronger insight into the varied experiences across refugee program. GAR's reported having lower employment rates, lower access to employment given their low language ability and inaccessibility to childcare. This is contrasted by PSRs, blended visa, and refugee claimants who had more access to employment than GARs, although they reported experience with racism, discrimination, and only being able to access low skilled and low paid positions. Regardless of the refugee program, all women reported feeling conflicted with the desire to work. While they wanted to have access to employment opportunities to build social networks, they often felt identity challenges with accessing employment as this was a major role reversal from what they were familiar with.

Several themes are consistent across the articles reviewed: the benefits of employment have been pronounced, employment can offer social cohesion, hope, need satisfaction,

higher income earning, more effective accesses to extended health benefits, such as mental health supports and can offer a sense of meaning and purpose. However, the authors vary on the best ways to address the barriers for accessing employment opportunities. Where Yoon et al., (2019) and Weinstein et al (2016) highlight the benefits, they do little to address the barriers that prevent access. Hanley et al., (2018) and Senthanaar et al (2018) highlight the barriers, do little to address how to reduce access barriers.

### **2.3.3. Social Isolation**

Social support has emerged as a crucial factor in positive resettlement, a concept well-documented in the literature. Social support plays a significant role in enhancing well-being across all demographics, offering numerous benefits. For populations facing emotional vulnerabilities, such as refugees, social networks and support systems become even more vital. These networks facilitate positive resettlement by connecting individuals to friends, religious spaces, and access to services like employment and mental health support, as well as aiding in the navigation of life in Canada (Hanley et al., 2018).

However, social integration has proven to be a major hurdle for Syrian refugee populations. This challenge largely stems from concerns about racism and increased Islamophobia within Canadian communities, making it difficult for refugees to establish connections with Canadians (Oudshoorn et al., 2020; Scott & Safdar, 2017; Ugurel Kamisli, 2020). Additionally, language barriers hinder refugees in their efforts to learn English (Oudshoorn et al., 2020; Ugurel Kamisli, 2020), and accessing employment opportunities for social interaction can be challenging (Senthanaar et al., 2020).

Oudshoorn et al. (2020), Ugurel Kamisli (2021), and Senthanaar et al. (2020) found that refugee women expressed a strong desire to engage with Canadians and build relationships but were often hindered by their limited English language proficiency. Their interest in learning English was often thwarted by competing responsibilities, primarily related to childcare and household duties. Many of the interviewed women connected with Muslim communities; however, these engagements often proved insufficient for fostering strong community ties. The women expressed a keen interest in developing more Canadian relationships to improve their English skills but were frequently stymied

because they did not know where to begin forming social connections. The barriers to accessing social connections and networks were closely linked to existing obstacles such as language proficiency, geographical distance, and limited opportunities outside the household.

Scott & Safdar's (2017) quasi-experimental study delved into perceptions and understandings of prejudice against refugees in Canada. Their results indicated that refugees who experience prejudice and perceived threats face additional challenges in building social networks. Their study utilized a convenience sample of undergraduate students from the University of Guelph as participants, which may raise concerns of potentially skewed data, as these participants may possess more liberal and educated perceptions of race and multiculturalism. Nevertheless, the results underscore the existence of prejudice against refugees, with many individuals believing that refugees pose an economic threat to Canada. These findings shed light on the existing racism and prejudice that may impede opportunities for social connections between refugees and Canadians.

Social isolation is more pronounced among Government Sponsored Refugees (GARs) than Privately Sponsored Refugees (PSRs), primarily due to differences in program structures. PSRs are brought to Canada by volunteer groups that offer support in securing housing, accessing employment, and utilizing social supports such as free language classes, employment services, and religious involvement. PSRs benefit from having social networks built into the structure of their migration, whereas GARs are often left to fend for themselves in navigating access to social supports within their new home. Hanley et al. (2018) identified that the refugee populations in Montreal, which are largely composed of PSRs, have well-established social networks. These networks often give them an advantage in accessing needed support, including employment, health, and mental health services.

Oda et al.'s (2019) exploratory study revealed that, overall, PSRs reported fewer unmet needs during their time in Canada compared to GARs, who identified several areas of need, including a lack of social networks, friends, and community. The authors acknowledged that PSRs enjoy a particular advantage due to the social networks built into the refugee program. However, Oda et al.'s (2019) recommendation that more refugees migrate through the PSR program, favoring it over the GAR program structure,

may not be feasible or fair, as GARs make up over 60% of the Syrian refugees in Canada. Such a recommendation would result in fewer refugees being resettled, albeit with greater social connections and opportunities to access additional resources for employment, mental health, and housing support.

## **2.4. Young Adult Acculturation**

Young adult refugees face risks during resettlement, often encountering emerging mental health concerns. They frequently travel without their families, are more likely to have experienced or witnessed traumatic events such as sexual assault or rape and have likely endured deprivation of basic needs and human rights (Bemak & Chung, 2021). Additionally, young adult refugees grapple with complex developmental tasks during resettlement, compounding the challenges of this already tumultuous stage of life. Acculturation, the process of assimilating one's sense of home, belonging, and identity into a new host country (Asvat & Malcarne, 2008), is a daunting undertaking that can impact various aspects of the self, including the psychological, emotional, relational, and physical dimensions. Refugee youth and young adults are at an increased risk of experiencing culture shock, discrimination, racism, and social isolation, which can have detrimental effects on their well-being, educational development, and sense of belonging (Wong & Yohani, 2021). Given the limited research available on the young adult refugee experience of resettlement in Canada, the current literature review includes studies conducted outside of Canada to begin to understand this experience.

One of the primary concerns regarding the resettlement experiences of young adult refugees has been the increasing prevalence of mental health concerns. Spass et al. (2021) explored the mental health concerns of refugees and non-refugee young adult populations, investigating whether refugees' needs and concerns were higher than those of non-refugee migrants who did not experience forced displacement. In this large sample cohort study, Spass et al. found many similarities between refugees and non-refugee migrants in terms of mental health needs and concerns, with similar rates of PTSD, stress, and anxiety related to language proficiency and social belonging. The main differences observed were refugees' experiences with discrimination and racism and the negative impact that perceived discrimination had on their overall mental health. While non-migrant refugees experienced similar discrimination and racism, these

experiences did not contribute to a negative self-image or increase mental health concerns.

Spass et al. (2021) also found that stress related to family separation was more prevalent in refugees than in non-refugee migrant populations. The study highlights that refugee populations are more vulnerable regarding family separation and experiences with discrimination, and these two areas impact one's sense of safety, belonging, and overall contribute to depression, anxiety, and other mental health concerns. In Canada, young adult refugees often migrate alone, without their larger family systems, either by choice in pursuit of a better future elsewhere or due to the loss of their families in previous conflicts such as war or climate disasters. Young adult refugees who do travel with their families often experience role disruptions and find themselves needing to contribute to their family's economic well-being (Marshall et al., 2016).

Considering the tumultuous period of resettlement, young adult refugees begin to build resilience to navigate this challenging stage of life. Wong & Yohani (2016) explored resilience in young adult refugees in Canada through their multi-case study on the lived experiences of five post-secondary refugees. The study found that developing resilience was connected to familial connectedness and adherence to one's family's cultural values, as well as refugees' connection to religious beliefs and support from their educational institutions to find belonging and purpose. While many young adult refugees do not travel with their larger family systems, embodying their family values and beliefs can support the development of resilience in continuing to navigate challenges. Furthermore, the study demonstrates that while resilience was the primary focus, refugee young adult populations wanted to discuss topics on their minds, such as experiences with cultural differences, identity formation, social isolation, and navigating the Canadian educational system. These areas emerged as important themes within the study, reflecting the priorities of young adult refugees.

Yoon et al.'s (2022) qualitative study exploring acculturation with young adult South Sudanese refugees extends the idea of resilience formation by outlining a three-fold process for positive resettlement and acculturation. The first process emphasizes that strengthening one's identity formation allows for a stronger sense of meaning regarding one's experience. The second process involves claiming a cultural identity and heritage from one's previous home, establishing a connection to one's background. The third

process posits that finding belonging and connectedness with others contributes to a sense of well-being, building resilience and increasing life satisfaction within one's host country. This study aligns with other research as it underscores the need for meaning-making and identity formation during the resettlement process to attain a sense of well-being.

## **2.5. Young Adult Refugee Identity Formation**

Exploring identity formation in young adult refugees is a substantial undertaking. Identity formation has primarily been understood through Erik Erikson's developmental lifespan theory (Ertorer, 2021). Erikson (1968) described the process of identity formation as a demanding endeavor so vast that defining it would be trivial and futile. Generally, identity formation can be broadly considered as the process of self-definition by amalgamating social, cultural backgrounds, social structures, historical events, and political contexts into one's identity development (Ziaian et al., 2021). Young adults are tasked with making sense of self, thoughts, feelings, and actions, which subsequently influence their beliefs and values. Erikson's lifespan theory posits that throughout one's life, there are developmental tasks that heavily influence the outcome of subsequent tasks (Erikson, 1966; Erikson, 1968; Dunkel & Sefcek, 2009). Arguably, Erikson's most crucial stage, identity vs. role confusion, indicates that the task of creating one's identity involves establishing self-continuity and psychosocial strength through fidelity (Erikson, 1966; Erikson, 1968; Dunkel & Sefcek, 2009), in other words, identity formation stems from self-understanding.

Erikson (1968) suggested that a crisis occurs during the stage of identity formation. While identity formation is most notable during adolescence (Erikson, 1968), an identity crisis can happen at any stage of development throughout one's life (Ziaian et al., 2021). The term "crisis" here primarily refers to an important life stage that offers opportunities for personal growth. Failing to work through the crisis at hand can result in adverse short- and long-term consequences (Ziaian et al., 2021). Identity crises can arise during developmental changes and situational changes that challenge existing values, beliefs, commitments, and experiences, and thus can occur at any life stage.

Given that identity crises involve situational changes, young adults are in a constant state of identity development as they encounter developmental changes and novel situations regularly. Further complicating this stage, migration and resettlement can be considered opportunities for experiencing an identity crisis, as they uproot a sense of familiarity, challenge one's understanding of their environment, and may conflict with existing values and beliefs. Young adult refugee populations are in a perpetual state of identity exploration. They employ strategies that allow for exploration, reconciliation, rejection, or compromise within their identities. Ertorer (2014) explored the identity crisis and identity formation in 50 adult Karen refugees in Canada through a multidimensional and quasi-experimental approach. Ertorer (2014) discussed that the refugees did indeed experience a strong sense of identity uprootedness and did not experience a sense of cohesion between past, present, and future selves. Additionally, the results indicated that social identity was connected to a stronger sense of connection to one's host country and made inferences for social and cultural identity formation.

Cultural identity has been a concept that has sparked extensive discussion. Research regarding identity formation with refugees has often explored identity in terms of cultural identity. Cultural identity has largely been equated with a sense of ethnic and national identity and connectedness to one's country of origin (Ertorer, 2021; Groen et al., 2018; Yoon et al., 2022; Ziaian et al., 2021). Cultural identity often encompasses cultural practices, beliefs, values, and a sense of belonging to one's culture (Ertorer, 2021). It can also extend to include a sense of personal culture and connection to subcultures, such as race, religious and spiritual beliefs, language, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic class, and education (Groen et al., 2018), and does not solely entail a connection to one's nationality or ethnicity. However, all research articles included in this search describe cultural identity primarily as a connection to one's cultural heritage, practices, and beliefs (Ertorer, 2021; Groen et al., 2018; Yoon et al., 2022; Ziaian et al., 2021). To maintain consistency in the definitions, this review will primarily refer to cultural identity as one's connection to their cultural heritage, practices, and beliefs.

For young adult refugees, the process of assuming a cultural identity becomes complex, as refugees are tasked with incorporating personal, cultural, host country values, and personal experiences into their own emerging sense of self (Spaas et al., 2021). The added complexity of cultural identity for refugees encompasses elements of heritage and the host country's cultures while also confronting the normative personal identity

exploration characteristic of this developmental period (Spaas et al., 2021). This task becomes challenging, as refugees must understand their personal identity, their cultural identity, while undergoing the stressful transitional stage of migration. Cultural identity has been explored to understand the bidirectional relationship between resettlement and cultural identity formation, how cultural identity changes with resettlement, and how resettlement shapes a sense of cultural identity in refugees (Ertorer, 2021; Groen et al., 2018; Spaas et al., 2021; Ziaian et al., 2021).

In Tonui & Mitshki (2022)'s phenomenological qualitative study, the experiences of cultural identity formation and acculturation were explored with 14 young adult Karen refugees living in the United States. Tonui & Mitshki's results indicate that participants with a strong sense of cultural pride and identity strengthened their sense of belonging and acculturation to their host country. Strengthening their cultural identity and connection to their heritage during resettlement provided them with a sense of connection to a larger group and supported their sense of belonging in the US. It also helped them connect with others who represented them and preserved their culture in their new home.

Similarly, refugees who migrate within a larger system, such as within their family, often have a stronger sense of belonging and cultural identity formation and spend less time in identity confusion. Rabiau (2019)'s multicase study exploring identity formation in refugee youth discusses the role family plays in supporting youth's cultural identity formation. The two participants expressed their confidence in exploring differentiation from the family while maintaining strong familial and cultural ties. Specifically, the participants' experiences with suffering, pain, and trauma heavily impacted their sense of self and cultural formation, as their families and cultures had ways of coping with and processing the suffering. While the participants may not have been able to articulate their sense of cultural identity within the terms of this paper, such as "culture" and "identity," the authors suggest that they had a sense of control over their sense of self.

In contrast, other studies have indicated that biculturalism and a bicultural identity can strengthen one's sense of connection to their host culture. In Ziaian et al.'s (2021) qualitative study, the exploration of how cultural identity was shaped during resettlement for youth and adults revealed interesting findings. Results indicated that participants who identified with being "Australian" as part of their identity had a stronger sense of

belonging and a positive outlook towards their resettlement in Australia. However, young adults, when compared to their parents, were more likely to experience identity upheaval and renegotiations of identity. Notably, a large sample of participants either rejected a sense of cultural identity, with some even rejecting being Australian, and most youth were in a stage of confusion regarding their personal and cultural identities. This study highlights that cultural identity is a complex notion for refugees, and it may offer a limited view of identity and cultural expression for many. The term "cultural" identity carries preconceived ideas within it, and refugees might find that identifying themselves solely in terms of a cultural identity could be limiting and reductive of their self-understanding.

Furthermore, in their qualitative study, Groen et al. (2018) explored the connection between cultural identity and mental health within Afghan and Iraqi refugees in the Netherlands. Their results indicated that a sense of cultural identity confusion negatively impacted mental health concerns. Their findings offer a nuanced understanding of what cultural identity entails. Through semi-structured interviews, participants did not explicitly discuss their cultural identity; instead, they discussed their sense of cultural identity within three areas: personal identity, ethnic identity, and social identity.

Groen et al.'s (2018) study provides a broader explanation for cultural identity, encompassing and holding many facets of identity. Similar to Ziaian et al.'s (2021) study, refugees' sense of identity and cultural identity is complex, incorporating various elements of their understanding of culture. This research also underscores that culture is an ambiguous term that requires further individual-level understanding. Personal accounts of cultural identity by refugees suggest a multifaceted understanding of cultural identity.

Refugees often undergo an identity crisis due to forced displacement and resettlement (Ertorer, 2021; Groen et al., 2018; Rabiau, 2019; Tonui & Mitshki, 2022; Yoon et al., 2022; Ziaian et al., 2021). The experience of forced displacement and subsequent resettlement confronts refugees with the need to understand themselves and their cultural ownership. Resettlement disrupts their personal sense of safety and challenges their beliefs, values, and worldviews. Young adult refugees commonly experience a period of identity confusion during the first few years of resettlement in their host country. Developing a sense of identity cohesion and cultural identity typically occurs after several years of living in their new country (Groen et al., 2018). Regardless of the

specific process of identity formation within refugees, cultural identity appears to be a nuanced experience for them and may not be easily expressed solely in terms of "cultural identity." The reviewed literature provides insights into how refugees begin to make meaning from the experience of forced displacement and how the process of meaning-making is integrated into their sense of self, identity, and worldview.

## **2.6. Meaning Making**

Meaning making can be best understood as a process through which individuals cope with and overcome stressful life events (Frounkelker et al., 2020; Park, 2010). It encompasses both an individual process, known as individual meaning, involving the integration of stressful life experiences into one's personal identity, and a global process, referred to as global meaning, which extends to one's worldview. This global meaning provides a sense of order and purpose in one's life and can enhance overall life adjustment (Park, 2010). Meaning making also encompasses how individuals construct their personal identity (Gu, 2021; Mclean, 2005; Rabiau, 2019) and collective identity (Frounkelker et al., 2020). Additionally, it involves how individuals validate their own experiences of hardship and how they relate to others.

Meaning making within the context of refugees is an emerging field of study (Frounkelker et al., 2020) that provides insights into understanding resilience, identity formation, and emotions as part of the process of making meaning from migration, resettlement, and self-understanding in relation to one's experiences. Currently, there is limited research on how refugees make sense of their experiences and the significance they attribute to meaning making. In Frounkelker et al.'s (2020) qualitative study, which examined the meaning-making experiences of 41 Bhutanese adult refugees, it was found that the stressful life events in refugees' lives provided opportunities to create a sense of purpose and strengthen their collective identity. The study revealed that refugees held their collective identity in relation to others and found unity by connecting with those who shared similar experiences. Meaning making was shown to enhance refugees' sense of connectedness to their environment and offered a coping mechanism for dealing with traumatic and stressful life events, as well as a means of using their life experiences to support others.

Furthermore, Mclean (2005) conducted a study that surveyed 185 young adults on the topics of narrative identity and meaning making. While this study did not directly explore the narratives of refugee young adults, it underscored the importance of narratives and memory telling. The findings highlighted how narratives play a crucial role in forming meaning, identity, and coping with stress. Narratives of memory aid in self-explanation and can facilitate connections between the storyteller and the listener. This underscores the significance of storytelling and narratives in integrating stressful life events and deriving meaning from them in one's life and relationships. Working directly with refugees and listening to their stories of displacement, migration, and resettlement can lend meaning to the entire process and support integration.

## **2.7. Conclusion**

The reviewed literature has employed diverse methodologies, including longitudinal studies, qualitative narrative inquiry, experimental research, and systematic literature reviews. This diversity in research methods has shed light on the various challenges faced by young adult refugees during resettlement. Post-migration factors such as housing, employment, social isolation, and mental health concerns have been identified as exacerbating the stress that many refugees experienced pre-migration. These challenges have led to dissatisfaction with Canadian culture and difficulties in forming one's identity. While refugees' express gratitude for escaping direct armed conflict, they often report disappointment with the level of support they receive in Canada (Kuo et al., 2020; Oudshoorn et al., 2020).

There is a need for a more personalized understanding of the lived experiences of young adult refugees. While some barriers they face have been outlined, it remains unclear how these barriers directly affect their mental health, their connection to their new home, and their overall resettlement experience. Environmental barriers and challenges have become apparent, there remains a need to hear from refugees' own perspectives and experiences about how these barriers impact their resettlement experiences. Gaining insight into refugees' lived experiences can help service providers better understand their needs and support their emotional and psychological well-being during resettlement.

The literature review found limited evidence pertaining to young adult refugee populations, particularly regarding identity formation and the emotional experiences of resettlement. While there is some understanding of existing barriers during resettlement, the specific impact on this population remains unclear due to the limited research available. To better support vulnerable populations like young adult refugees, it is essential to directly engage with them and listen to their experiences. They possess the most profound understanding of their own experiences and can provide valuable insights into their needs and coping strategies.

In studies like Senthanar et al. (2020), Ugurel Kamisli (2020), and Oudshoorn et al. (2020), qualitative methods allowed themes to emerge directly from the participants' responses. However, the quantitative studies reviewed did not directly explore the young adult refugee experience. Future research directions are likely to continue with qualitative and exploratory approaches, as there is still much information to be gathered before targeted interventions can be developed to support this specific population. Clear gaps exist in our understanding of young adult refugees' resettlement experiences, and the purpose of this study is to address these gaps to better comprehend the needs and experiences of this population and, ultimately, improve the support provided to young adult refugees as they resettle in Canada.

## **Chapter 3. Methodology**

In this chapter, I have outlined the overall methodology for working with young adult refugees, the posed research question, along with the specific methods used for the study, such as the analysis approach and the procedural elements.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the transitional experiences of young adult refugees resettling in Canada. Specifically, this project aimed to understand the experiences that young adult refugees, between the ages of 18 and 30, who have experienced displacement and identity development during resettlement. Through understanding refugee's experiences post-migration, the findings will provide insight into the personal experience and shed light into how service providers, counsellors and other helping professions work directly with young adult refugee populations.

To better understand the transitional experiences of young adult refugees, the following research questions were posed:

- 1) How do young adult refugees make meaning from their experience?
- 2) How does the surrounding community impact young adult refugee's sense of belonging in Canada?
- 3) What are the barriers to positive resettlement?
- 4) How does resettlement shape young adult refugee's identity formation?

### **3.1. Research Design**

#### **3.1.1. Theoretical Perspective: Lived Experience & Phenomenology**

This research was designed around the concept of "lived experience". Lived experience methods fall under the general category of phenomenological methods, which themselves are a component of the broader category of qualitative methods and methodologies (Van Manen, 2015). Phenomenology describes that those who have the experience of a particular phenomenon can communicate their experience to another and the larger population (Mapp, 2008). Given that I do not have the experience of

displacement and resettlement, this research is committed to giving voice to those who can communicate their experiences with resettlement and displacement. Centering the lived experience within the research methods is part of the tradition of human science where the central aim is to “understand” the individual and social phenomena, in contrast with the natural science’s aim of “explanation” (Van Manen, 2015). I chose using lived experience methods for this study as it is my aim to gain greater understanding of through curiosity, exploration and examination over explanation and incorporates the researcher’s conceptualizations (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2022). The process is similar to a counselling setting, where it is important to approach the counselling interaction with a client with a sense of deep curiosity to gain understanding and meaning into the client’s life. In counselling, the counsellor uses their conceptualizations and understanding the client’s experience to support meaning construction. It was important to keep the same approach in this research and approach the interviews and process with an open mind, leaving behind preconceived ideas that may have arisen and approach each person as their own, with their own experiences and emerged meaning from such experiences. Thus, phenomenology and lived experience, where meaning is at the heart of understanding, forms the foundations for this research. Van Manen (2015) articulates:

*Lived experience is the breathing of meaning. In the flow of life, consciousness breathes meaning in a to and fro movement: A constant heaving between the inner and the outer, made concrete, for example, in my reflexive consciousness of hope for a child and the child as the object of hope. There is a determinate reality-appreciation in the flow of living and experiencing life’s breath. Thus, a lived experience has a certain essence, a quality that we recognize in retrospect.*

The previous chapter gave evidence for the importance of learning directly from young refugees and hearing directly about their experience. Learning from young refugees who describe their migratory and resettlement experience in their own words gave an understanding of their worldview and the challenges that go along with those views. This project took a step back from problem solving the challenge of resettlement to first begin to understand how young adult refugees are experiencing their migration and their new home in Canada. The present study took a qualitative and exploratory approach to investigate the lived experiences and how refugees construct meaning. Through understanding young adult refugees lived experiences post-migration, the findings can provide insight into the types of supports may be beneficial will best serve young adult lived refugees in feeling settled in Canada.

### **3.1.2. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis**

Interpretative phenomenological Analysis (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2022) was chosen as the main methodological approach for the present study. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is concerned with exploring participant's own lived experience through the lens of their own accounts. IPA is committed to the examination of how people make sense of their own experience from major life events (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2022). Additionally, IPA often seeks to give a voice to those who are often underrepresented in literature and research (Larkin et al., 2006) to give a more authentic representation of the underrepresented. Phenomenology, hermeneutics, and ideography are the theoretical roots of Interpretative phenomenological analysis (Smith et al., 2009).

IPA has been noted as being suitable for exploring refugee's experiences (Schweitzer & Steele, 2008) because of the positioning of the participant's narratives and phenomenon above the researcher's voice. The idiographic basis of the IPA approach enables the researcher to be sensitive to the unique experiences and cultural and contextual background of each participant while specifying commonalities between individuals' accounts (Larkin et al., 2006). It enables the researcher to capture the complexity and richness of the refugee experience and gives voice to refugees to express their own accounts of the refugee experience (Schweitzer & Steel, 2008). Young adult aged refugee populations is an underdeveloped area of research. Many studies either focus on adult refugees or child and youth, and not focusing on emerging adulthood as a demographic for research. Understanding that this is a developing area of research, beginning with an exploratory approach over an explanatory approach can lay a foundation for additional research to emerge.

IPA is particularly suited for this study as it aims to explore how young adult refugees make sense of their own migratory and resettlement experience from their own perspectives and how their experiences shape their understanding of themselves.

## **3.2. Participants**

Six 21–27-year-old young adult refugees (2 men and 4 women) took part in this study. The sampling was selected using purposeful sampling. The inclusion criteria were

currently between the ages of 18 – 30 years of age, young adult refugees who have resettled in Canada in between the years of 2015-2023. Of the six participants, only one resettled with family, who consisted of her 2 younger sisters and mother as part of the initial 2015 pledge to resettle 25,000 Syrian refugees, while the other five participants arrived in Canada alone. Of the five participants who migrated to Canada without family, one participant sought asylum protection for fear of persecution of his sexual identity and the remaining four participants arrived through the Canadian student refugee program. One participant who resettled in Canada has one family member that arrived in Canada after his resettlement and the remaining four participants do not have extended family in Canada. All participants had a strong comprehension of English. Pseudonyms are used to ensure confidentiality and anonymity of the participants. To illustrate each participant with more detail and narrative description, a brief outline of each participant’s experience will be outlined in the results section. The demographic of each participant is presented below in table 1.

Name	Gender	Age	Education	Duration in Canada	Country of Origin	Resettled with Family
Kavi	Woman	27	Simon Fraser University, Undergraduate	2 years	Syria	No
Makena	Woman	23	Simon Fraser University, Undergraduate	2 years	Kenya	No
Asa	Woman	20	Simon Fraser University, Undergraduate	7 years	Syria	Yes
Fares	Man	21	Simon Fraser University, Undergraduate	4 years	Iran	Yes

Noor	Man	23	Simon Fraser University, Undergraduate	1 year	Syria	No
Amal	Woman	23	Simon Fraser University, Undergraduate	2 years	Syria	No

### 3.3. Materials

The interview guide was created with the intention to have an open ended semi-structured dialogue that allowed participants to speak about their experience using their own words. The interview guide was created using relevant literature regarding young adult refugees and the researcher’s experience working with refugees in a supporting and counselling capacity. The interview guide was provided to the researcher’s thesis supervisor for feedback. The interview guide consisted of 10 open ended questions that corresponded with the research questions. The questions were narrative, descriptive, comparative, and evaluative in nature (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2022). Within the interview, probes and prompts were used regularly to deepen the narrative and exploration of their experience. The questions were created with the intention to align with the research questions, however, not directly ask the research questions to the participants to create a more authentic and exploratory response (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2022). The full interview guide can be reviewed in Appendix C.

1. **“What have been your experiences with resettlement so far”?**
2. **“What do you think would make your resettlement experience easier”?**
3. **“What barriers have you experienced during your resettlement”?**
4. **“What has been challenging during your resettlement”?**
5. **“What does resettlement mean to you”?**
6. **“How do you think your resettlement has impacted your emotional wellbeing”?**
7. **“How do you generally feel about your life in Canada”?**
8. **“What is your experience of belonging in Canada”?**
9. **“When you think about your future in Canada, what comes to mind”?**
10. **“Has your identity changed during your resettlement, if so, how?”**

### **3.4. Ethical Consideration**

Approval to carry out this study was granted by Simon Fraser University's Research Ethics Board prior to participant recruitment (study number: 30001431). The study deals with sensitive subject matters of "refugee-ness" and resettlement. All participants were given pseudonyms to protect anonymity and confidentiality. Steps were taken to ensure that each participant felt understood and had time to clarify if the researcher misunderstood any disclosures. The study was guided by the principles of phenomenological "lived experience" qualitative research principles of deep understanding and authenticity of themes and narratives. The consent form (Appendix B) was sent to each participant before the interview took place and then consent was reviewed verbally at the beginning of the interview. Consent with each participant was thoroughly reviewed in clear and simple language to ensure that each Individual understood the ethical considerations before participating in the study.

Participant's narratives included sensitive topics such as loss, grief, culture, trauma, war, and personal identity. One of the concerns raised by the researcher was the potential for re-traumatization during the interviews. For this reason, a few precautions were established. First, consent procedures were clearly outlined for all participants, ensuring that participants were informed they were able to withdraw from the study at any time during the interview if they found the subject matter was too difficult to speak on. Questions were designed in a way that did not ask directly about traumatic experiences and participants were informed that they could give as much or as little information as they felt comfortable with. Participants were also informed that if they noticed they were becoming overwhelmed or uncomfortable, the interview would stop, and we would focus on grounding and establishing safety before resuming the interview or deciding to stop all together. Participants were informed they did not have to answer questions they deemed triggering or upsetting and the interviewer would respect that boundary without question in the interview.

Participants were also given the option to receive recommendations and resources for mental health support after the interview concluded. Three participants asked for resources for free counselling and reported that they would like to receive counselling semi-regularly; the other three either had already received counselling or mentioned that

they did not feel it was necessary at this time. Setting up these precautions with each participant was intended to give control to each participant within the interview. During the interview, no participant became overwhelmed by the questions or revisiting their experience. One participant did not want to delve deeper into an experience after the interviewer probed, and the researcher respected that boundary and moved into a different area of the interview. Given the nature of the subject matter in the interviews, the researcher engaged with the participant in an empathetic and sensitive manner and aimed to establish trust and rapport with each participant. After each interview, all participants described the interview as enjoyable and told the researcher they felt understood and heard by the researcher. Some participants mentioned that it was valuable to be a part of this study as it allowed them to reflect on their experience in a way they had not done before, and three participants articulated they felt the interview gave meaning to their experience. All participants disclosed without prompt or probing, that they enjoyed speaking with the researcher and were glad to be a part of the study.

### **3.5. Procedures**

#### **3.5.1. Recruitment**

Recruitment was primarily based on convenience sampling (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2022). Recruitment flyers and notices were sent out to service providers who directly with young refugee populations. Connection was made with service providers first, instead of directly to participants, as service providers have direct relationships with refugees and were able to recommend suitable participants for the study. Recruitment flyers were sent to the International Student Services office at Simon Fraser University (SFU), the DiverCity and Mother's Matter Center. The recruitment flyers informed the service providers and all interested participants, participants would receive a \$50 gift card from one of 4 options (Amazon, Tim Hortons, Starbucks, or a grocery store). Given that the participant sample is considered within vulnerable population demographics, it was important that their story was awarded and appreciated in a way that the participants would feel valued.

Connections were made with all three service providers and after a quick informational call with coordinators at each site, the international Student Services at SFU responded with the ability to recommend participants for the research study. Mother's Matter center declined to recommend participants, reporting that a \$50 honorarium was lower than what they deemed as acceptable and DiverCity initially responded with the ability to recommend participants, however later informed the coordinator they did not have the capacity to circulate the recruitment flyer or recommend participants.

Once a connection was established with the coordinators of the international student services office at SFU, referrals were made for interested participants. My contact information was given to coordinator at the International Student Services office at SFU and interested participants reached out for a screening interview. There were eight participants interested and after a screening interview six were selected based off the inclusion criteria. One participant had arrived in Canada prior to 2015 and another participant was 17 years of age. Six participants were selected and scheduled for interviews.

The inclusion criteria for participants including being in between the ages of 18 and 30. This was selected to target the age range of "emerging adulthood". Defining emerging adulthood within an age range does not have a unanimous age range and largely involves emerging adulthood tasks, which can span a larger age range (Arnett and Mitra, 2020). Emerging adulthood can include the task of identity exploration, self-concept construction, creating hopefulness, experiencing instability, and experiencing a sense of in-between and largely occurs during 18-29 (Arnett & Mitra, 2020). The age range was extended to 30 as the questions were reflective in nature and the participant could speak about their previous experience within emerging adulthood.

The Recruitment Process:

**Step 1**

Contact was made with various refugee organizations and newsletters within Simon Fraser University using a recruitment letter (Appendix A). The researcher's contact information and general study information was given out

to program coordinators and referrals were made.

**Step 2**

Program coordinators identified suitable and interested participants. The interested participant's contact information was sent to the researcher.

**Step 3**

The researcher contacted the interested participants directly with the details of study.

**Step 4**

Participants were screened to determine if they fit the inclusion criteria.

**Step 5**

Participants were scheduled for a 90-minute interview over zoom at a time of their choosing.

**Step 6**

Consent forms were sent to participants electronically through email. Participants were asked to review the consent form in advance to ensure they were informed of the study.

### **3.5.2. Data collection & Interviewing**

The data collection process took three months (January 2022-March 2022). Semi-structured interviews were conducted over Zoom and all, but one participant were audio and video recorded. Prior to the interviews, participants were provided with a clear explanation of the study's purpose and procedures, as well as information regarding the confidentiality of their participation, both verbally and through a written consent form. All

participants were informed that their responses would remain anonymous, and that audio-recordings and written transcripts would be kept confidential. One participant declined being recorded for religious and safety concerns. The researcher wrote out responses by hand, wrote detailed notes and captured quotes by hand with the participant's consent. The notes were repeated to the participant over zoom after the interview concluded to validate the accuracy of the notes and quotes captured.

The interviews were semi-structured and lasted from 60-120 minutes, depending on the depth that the participant wanted to provide. The interviews began with the intention to establish trust and rapport with the participants. It was important to establish connection with each participant to be able to support elaboration within the participant's narratives. The interviews all started with demographic questions, such as "tell me a little bit about yourself" to begin to break the ice and ease into the interview. I was an active listener within the interview, and I listened to understand each participant, rather than to respond and structure the interview in any particular way. Throughout the interviews, I used probes such as "can you tell me more about that" and "How was that for you" to understand the experience more fully.

### **3.6. Data Analysis**

Interviews were analyzed by the researcher using Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) based on the guidelines suggested by Smith, Flower & Larkin (2022). This analysis was adopted to adhere to the IPA structure to both treat each narrative as its own and use interpretative analysis to cluster commonalities from statements. Each interview was analyzed one by one for an in-depth examination. A step-by-step analysis was adopted (Smith et al., 2022). The first stage was to be an active listener in the interview. This stage included taking few notes, and participating as an active listener, using prompts and declarative probes to engage the participant to share and understand their experience. This is included in the analysis process as the researcher was able to maintain an open mind during the interview and allow for more opportunities for authentic themes to emerge during familiarization and coding.

The second stage was to become familiar with the transcriptions of the interviews. Before any notes or themes were identified, the researcher became familiarized with the tone, scope, and the content of the interviews. The researcher read and reread the

transcripts several times to become familiar with the content, statements, comments, questions, and summaries of the narratives. The researcher listened to the recordings and revisited the notes made in the interview without a recording.

Once the researcher felt that familiarization and understanding was achieved, the researcher used exploratory noting in the margins of the transcripts and interview notes. Exploratory noting involved the process of engaging with the transcripts with as much importance as the thematic outcome (Smith, Flower & Larkin, 2022). Exploratory noting incorporated writing notes regarding the participant's objects of concerns such as relationships, values, and processes. Alongside exploratory noting, I used interpretative noting to add a layer of complexity and to help me understand the participant's concern and think about context and abstract concepts. As part of exploratory noting, Smith, Flower & Larkin (2022) suggests organizing the notes by using descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual notes when engaging with the transcripts. Descriptive comments focus on the participant's subjective experience, linguistic comments that focus on the specific language used and infer potential meaning, and conceptual comments to focus on the context of the participant's experience to further understand the participant's accounts (Smith, Flower & Larkin, 2022). As English was an additional language for all participants, linguistic comments have limitations. For this reason, descriptive and conceptual comments were prioritized. Transcripts were noted using descriptive, conceptual and some linguistic notes to begin to identify common themes.

At this stage, the researcher began to note themes as trends began to become clear through the exploratory noting within with each transcript. Exploratory noting involved the process of engaging with the transcripts and identifying patterns regarding values, comments on relationships and emotions in the dialogue. Once patterns were identified, themes were grouped together. All themes were noted on an excel spreadsheet and began to be paired down based on the research questions. All themes were given descriptive titles that captured the tone of the theme (Smith et al., 2009). After completing the first analysis, the researcher replicated the process with each subsequent transcript (Smith et al., 2022). IPA holds an idiographic stance, and it is important to treat each participant and case as its own to develop personal experiential themes (PETs) (Smith et al., 2022). Each transcript held its own themes and each transcript's themes were clearly outlined in the excel document. After each case was transcribed, familiarized, and themes were identified, the researcher began to see

commonalities, connections and overlapping themes which became group experiential themes (GETs) (Smith et al., 2022). Each theme was supported with quotes extracted from the transcripts. When reviewing the GETs, some themes became large and processed multiple layers within each theme, the theme was broken into superordinate and sub-ordinate themes (Smith et al., 2022). Additionally, according to IPA, the reader and the audience will form another layer of analysis and interpretation by bringing an alternate perspective to the data through their own understanding (Smith et al., 2022) and this interpretation can add to the organization of the superordinate and the subsequent sub-themes.

### **3.7. Data Validation & Reflexivity**

There has been considerable debate regarding the credibility of qualitative data and studies. Considering that IPA uses interpretation from the researcher (Smith et al., 2022), it was important to use measures to evaluate the validity of the data throughout the process. The notion of reflexivity is particularly important in qualitative research as it involves awareness of the researcher's subjective perspective, values, experience, and beliefs (Watt, 2007). IPA researcher's use of reflexivity is crucial for valid data representation as IPA relies on the researcher to reveal meaning of a given phenomenon from the participant's and researcher's perspective. Therefore, researcher reflexivity allows for greater awareness of any preconceptions during the study (Smith et al., 2022). The researcher engaged with acknowledging preconceptions that were present before the interview, during the data analysis and during the writing of this manuscript. My own experience working with refugees, my previous academic pursuits, and my understanding of my grandmother's experience with displacement have provided me with knowledge of refugees. I have worked with post-secondary refugee students in a counselling capacity and have heard detailed narratives of their resettlement experiences. I have had the privilege to be invited into my client's experience in an intimate manner, however I wanted to ensure that I did not convolute my client's accounts with the participant's accounts and experience, as they are not the same and my position as a counsellor is different than my position as a researcher.

As I started this study, I became aware that there were preconceived ideas of what I would find and learned to put them aside during the interview and the data analysis. Primarily preconceived ideas, such as the types of communities that young adults would

find valuable and the types of supports refugees would like to have access to. Through understanding that as authenticity and accurate representation was my primary goal, my own beliefs and preconceptions were continually reflected on to fully understand the participant's narratives through their own voice and not through my lens, my voice, nor the lens of my refugee counselling clients. I adopted a reflexivity during the data analysis by inspection my interpretation and understanding of the participant's narratives. When I was unsure if my interpretation was fed by my own preconceived ideas, beliefs and understanding I adopted reflexivity as a validation measure to understand if I was representing the data authentically.

Participant checks were also used within the interview as well as after the interview process. During the interview, the researcher asked for clarification and asked participants validate or correct the researchers understanding of the narratives. During the interview when the participant spoke about a particular area of their resettlement, the researcher would often use reflection of meaning and summaries (Hiebert & Martin, 1981) in response to understand if the researcher understood the participant correctly. As well, during the data analysis, the researcher checked with participants regarding their quotes and meaning on a few occasions when the researcher was unsure whether the meaning was properly understood. The interviews were conducted in the participant's additional language and not their primary language, linguistic notes were not used as frequently, and instead descriptive and conceptual notes were prioritized. Although, when linguistic noting was used, meaning is at the centre of these notes and therefore it was important to understand the meaning that the participants reflected in the use of their words. On three occasions during the data analysis, the researcher used participant checks to validate the meaning behind the quotes for clarity and authenticity. The researcher contacted three of the participants to validate the meaning behind their accounts. Each participant that was contacted responded through email and two participants expanded on their meaning from the passage and one participant reported that it was accurate without expanding.

### **3.8. Knowledge Mobilization**

Throughout the analysis process, the research has meticulously engaged with the data, acknowledging the multi-layered nature of human experiences and the significance of context in shaping participants' perspectives. This study has implications for counselling

and other mental health professionals, university administrators and those who work with refugee and newcomer students. Working with university International Student Services office for participant recruitment, an agreement was formed that an infographic of the data found would be circulated. Every participant was also informed that they would be given an infographic to show the resulting themes. An infographic was created (Appendix D) and sent to each participant and service provider that was contacted during the study. This was created as a way to disseminate the study's findings to service providers, which would give them access to information that may benefit their programs, stakeholders and their participants.

This research worked with refugee young adults in a close and detailed way. Therefore, this research has been designed to have both practical and theoretical implications through expanding the existing literature on refugee resettlement and work to build competencies for service providers. Through the rich narratives of the participant disclosures, the data provides in depth descriptions of the resettlement process. The forthcoming results section will offer a deeper glimpse into the diverse ways in which our participants navigated and made sense of resettlement and displacement.

## **Chapter 4. Results**

### **4.1. Overview**

This chapter begins with a brief review of each of the participant's narratives and will then discuss the themes that have emerged from the participants. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) prioritizes the resulting themes of participant's narratives over the participant's narratives themselves (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2022). However, a brief outline of each participant's narrative will be included first to situate each of their idiographic context within which the themes reside. The participant's narratives are a representation of their experience of resettlement and both the themes and narratives can result in greater understanding of what displacement and emerging identity means for the participants. The approach taken was designed to provide as authentic a representation of participant experiences as possible, and for reasons of using reflectivity to reduce bias emerging during the interviews, checking with participants that the disclosure was properly heard and reported and using the participant narratives as data, I believe that the descriptions provided achieved that goal.

### **4.2. Participant's Narratives**

#### **4.2.1. Noor**

Noor arrived in Canada from Lebanon, having spent approximately one year in the country at the time of the interview. Prior to his arrival in Canada, he had lived in Syria until 2015, when the civil war erupted, prompting his family's relocation to Lebanon. Noor's account of his time in Lebanon shed light on the challenges he faced in a country that, while allowing Syrians to enter, did not readily accept them or foster inclusivity. He described this situation as overtly racist against Syrians.

One of the major hurdles Noor encountered was his difficulty in accessing education. Many schools in Lebanon had closed and been repurposed as temporary shelters. In response, Noor made a bold decision. Recognizing that he couldn't pursue his education in Lebanon, he embarked on a journey back to Syria. He recounted a day when he boarded a bus to the Lebanon-Syria border and, armed with his ID and limited funds, spent an entire day making the journey. Finally, he arrived at his grandmother's house

and expressed his desire to stay with her in order to attend school. Noor remained in Syria, completed his high school education, passed his exams, and then rejoined his family in Lebanon.

Despite having finished high school, Noor's opportunities in Lebanon were severely constrained. He explained how attending universities in Lebanon was virtually impossible, and the available work felt exploitative, akin to slavery. Left with what seemed like no other option, he made the difficult decision to leave Lebanon, separating from his family, and seek higher education at a university abroad. This led him to apply for the Student Refugee Program. Noor conveyed that the transition to leave his family was challenging but deemed it necessary for his future and the opportunities he aspired to. He expressed that, in Lebanon, there appeared to be no viable opportunities for his future if he stayed.

Upon arriving in Canada, Noor experienced what he referred to as a "honeymoon period," lasting approximately two weeks. During this time, he was enthralled by the scenic beauty of Vancouver, relished walks along its trails, appreciated the predictability and safety of public transportation, and enjoyed living on campus with access to regular meals. However, as time passed, he began to feel increasingly unsettled, isolated, and frustrated with his environment.

Noor was careful not to fully disclose the extent of his challenges in Canada and consistently emphasized his gratitude for being in the country, expressing hope for his future. Nevertheless, as he navigated life in Canada, it became evident that it was not as idyllic as those initial two weeks. He mentioned having made two friends from his classes but struggled to form connections through other means, such as clubs, his job, or within his network of other refugees who had arrived in Canada through the same program. He described his university as having a cold atmosphere, both physically and socio-emotionally. His sense of hope for opportunities in Canada was relative, primarily compared to the limitations he faced back in Lebanon. Noor also voiced concerns about the escalating cost of living in Vancouver and how he could make a decent living while also supporting his family in Lebanon financially.

### 4.2.2. Fares

Fares, originally from Iran, had been living in Canada for four years at the time of the interview. His journey to Canada was a matter of life or death, as growing up in Iran, he lived with the constant threat to his life due to his sexual orientation. He had few friends he could trust with this information, and even among them, he could only confide in a select few, unable to share this secret with his family.

Things took a critical turn during high school when Fares began dating someone. It wasn't long before teachers at his school began to suspect their relationship, and this became a turning point for him. Fearing for his safety and believing that if his relationship was discovered, it could lead to his death, Fares made the life-altering decision to seek asylum in Canada. His boyfriend, a Canadian citizen, had already moved to Canada for safety reasons, which also inspired Fares to consider relocating to Canada, both for his own safety and the potential to continue their relationship.

A friend, who also identified as gay, made the move to Canada under asylum protection, further prompting Fares to seriously consider this path. When he decided to move, Fares told his family that it was for educational purposes, not disclosing the real reason for his relocation. At the time of the interview, he had not yet revealed his sexual orientation to his family, as he did not feel safe or ready to do so during his resettlement. Fares expressed his intention to disclose this part of his identity to his family in the future but believed he needed to establish a stable and secure life in Canada first. He aimed to secure an apartment, find stable employment, and build a stronger support network before taking the risk of sharing his truth with his family, to better cope with potential negative reactions.

Fares arrived in Canada when he was just 16 years old, traveling alone initially, with his mother later joining him. He described the visa process as highly stressful and uncertain. Unlike the other participants who applied for the student refugee program, were accepted, and had their legal and financial matters sorted before arriving in Canada, Fares experienced what he referred to as a "purgatory" state, waiting for several months while applying for asylum protection without knowing if he would be granted permission to stay in Canada. The possibility of having to return to Iran loomed over him. Despite building a strong network of friends within Vancouver's queer community, Fares had

encountered numerous stressful experiences during his resettlement. He particularly highlighted the financial instability as one of the most distressing aspects, frequently expressing concerns about his current and future financial well-being.

### **4.2.3. Asa**

Asa, born and raised in Syria, had been residing in Canada for eight years at the time of the interview. She arrived in Canada with her mother and two sisters, seeking refuge after escaping Syria to Jordan, where they lived with family friends for two years. During the war in Syria, Asa's father had tragically passed away, and subsequently, her mother applied to bring Asa and her sisters to Canada. When their application was accepted, it was Asa, being the eldest among her siblings, who had to persuade her family to take the courageous step of moving to a new country.

Asa recalled that the initial years in Canada were filled with trepidation. The first time her family ventured outside their hotel after arriving in Canada, they encountered homeless individuals living on the streets. This was a jarring revelation for Asa and her family, who worried that if they did not succeed in Canada, they might face a similar fate. Asa found it perplexing that a "wealthy" country could have such a problem with homelessness.

Her settlement in Canada and adaptation to the school system posed numerous challenges, including language barriers and social isolation. Asa spoke about one of the most challenging aspects of those early years: the low expectations placed on her by various individuals, including teachers and administrators. Realizing that she was not expected to learn English quickly and that graduating on time with her peers was not a given, Asa felt determined to prove them wrong. She worked hard to graduate high school alongside her peers and improve her English skills. The period of high school, spent without many friends, allowed her to introspect and discover herself. Asa drew great meaning from these experiences and emerged from high school as a stronger, more self-aware, and highly motivated individual.

Subsequently, Asa received a significant educational scholarship that covered her entire undergraduate degree. She was a dedicated Muslim, a loving daughter, and harbored aspirations of becoming a therapist after completing her education.

#### **4.2.4. Amal**

Amal, originally hailing from Syria, had been residing in Canada for two years at the time of the interview. She left Syria at the age of 10, along with her family, which included four sisters, one brother, and both parents. Amal reflected on the challenges of living in Lebanon, echoing similar experiences to Noor. She explained that in Lebanon, she lacked access to education and had to return to Syria during the war to complete her high school education. While she aspired to attend university, she encountered the harsh reality that no university would recognize her Syrian high school education. Realizing that the only path to a university education would require leaving her family, Amal made the difficult decision to apply for the Canadian Student Refugee program, hoping to pursue the future she desired. The choice to leave her family and attend a Canadian university was not made lightly, but she ultimately recognized that her prospects in Lebanon were limited.

Amal found the process of arriving in Canada challenging and did not easily adapt to her new environment. The most difficult aspects of resettlement in Canada for Amal included studying at a university in a language she didn't feel confident in and struggling to find friends she could relate to. During her first year of education, Amal worked twice as hard as her peers to achieve half their grades. She pointed out that she had to translate all her study materials into Arabic, study in Arabic, and then translate it back into English. Additionally, Amal found it challenging to connect with those around her. She mentioned her difficulty in relating to other refugees, as they seemed to be adapting more quickly than she was, and she struggled to find common ground with them. Forming connections with classmates was also a challenge. She recounted a conversation with a fellow classmate who was fretting over finding a gift for her boyfriend, a struggle that Amal found incomprehensible given her own life experiences, which involved exposure to war, the struggle to access necessities like water and food and leaving her family. Amal expressed her ongoing difficulty in relating to those around her, whether they were refugees, other Syrians, or students in general.

#### **4.2.5. Kavi**

Kavi, originally from Syria, had been living in Canada for two years at the time of the interview. Her family left Syria during the war and sought refuge in Jordan. Unlike other

participants, Kavi and her family were in Syria during the war and were exposed to numerous traumatic events. She recounted several instances where she would return home from school, only to find buildings just a block away had been destroyed by bombings. Her recollection of these events was remarkably vivid, and during the interview, she conveyed a sense of still feeling the ground shake beneath her feet and hearing the sounds of bombings as if they were still occurring before her eyes. Kavi shared her experiences in Syria with a level of detail that surpassed that of other participants.

Kavi found solace in sharing her story with others, as it helped her find meaning and relieve the emotional burden of the atrocities she had witnessed. She recounted a harrowing event in which she and her family were driving and nearly fell victim to armed soldiers who intended to harm her. She narrowly escaped thanks to her aunt's timely bribe to the soldier. Kavi narrated this story with an even tone and calm demeanor, using poignant words to describe the events. It was evident that she fully comprehended the gravity of her ordeal and spoke with gratitude for her survival. Kavi never downplayed her experiences, accounts, or emotions, instead emphasizing how they had given her life profound meaning and direction for the future.

Kavi's journey of resettlement in Canada had been marked by ongoing struggles. Initially, upon her arrival, she noticed her mental health deteriorating. She found it challenging to attend classes, sleep, concentrate, make friends, and find people she could trust. She attributed this experience to her body's response to the survival mode she had been in while in Jordan and Syria. Kavi recognized that she was no longer solely focused on surviving, which meant her body began to react to the traumatic events and stress she had endured. To address these challenges, she started attending counseling, sought medical assistance, and found both medical and mental health support beneficial. Although Kavi's struggles were not entirely behind her, she maintained a positive outlook and openly discussed her experiences.

#### **4.2.6. Makena**

Makena, born to South Sudanese parents in Uganda, spent her early years in Uganda until the age of 8 when she moved to Kenya. Despite her limited time in South Sudan, Makena identified herself as South Sudanese. Her narrative was marked by complex

family dynamics. Raised by her grandmother in Uganda and Kenya, she grew up believing that her grandmother was her mother. Additionally, her grandmother had a daughter close to Makena's age, whom she considered her sister. It was later in life that she discovered her true biological mother. Although her biological mother and siblings would occasionally visit, their relationship was not as close as Makena's connection with her grandmother and aunt, whom she saw as a sibling. Throughout the interview, Makena referred to her grandmother and aunt several times, expressing her deep affection for her grandmother and her close bond with her aunt.

Makena's journey to Canada was facilitated through the Canadian Student Refugee program, which aimed to provide her with more opportunities and enable her to support her family. However, her resettlement experience was fraught with social and racial challenges. As a black South Sudanese student, she struggled to find peers she could relate to and connect with in Canada. While growing up in Kenya, she never felt different due to her skin color or upbringing. However, upon arriving in Canada, she confronted racial inequities and felt that Canadian students were not accepting or inclusive of her. Makena's experience exemplified the shift from being in a country with a higher number of individuals who shared her background to arriving in Canada, where there were fewer black, African, and Caribbean students. This shift made her feel uncomfortable and led her to perceive herself as different from others.

Makena managed to form friendships through the Caribbean and African student associations, emphasizing the importance of connecting with friends who shared her racial and cultural background. Her narrative was marked by strong ambition for her future and her family's future, underscoring the significance of finding a community where she felt a sense of belonging.

### **4.3. Themes**

Using IPA, the researcher generated seven superordinate themes, and twelve sub-themes through the participant interviews. The superordinate themes were 1) Difficulties starting over 2) Pre & post settlement comparison, 3) Isolation, 4) Seeking support, 5) Belonging & collectivity 6) Expanded sense of identity, 7) Future Aspiration. To protect the participants privacy and anonymity, the researcher has used pseudo names and

changed identifiable information. Table 2 provides a complete list of superordinate themes and the sub-themes.

**Table 2**

*Table of Superordinate and Sub-themes*

Superordinate Themes	Sub-themes	Frequency (N=6)
1. Difficulties Starting Over		6
2. Pre & Post Settlement Comparison		6
3. Isolation	Othered – Discrimination & racism	6
	Challenges making friends	5
	Disconnection from family	5
4. Seeking Support	A loss of support	6
	Relying on self	6
	Learning to receive help	6
5. Belonging & Collectivity	Belonging through purpose	6
	Belonging through community	5
6. Expanded Sense of Identity	Personal Identity	5
	Liminal space between cultures	4
7. Future Aspirations	More Opportunities	6
	Life is more complicated	5

#### **4.4. Difficulties Starting Over**

The superordinate theme, "Difficulties Starting Over," encapsulates the shared experience of leaving behind a familiar life for an uncertain one, the grief, and the instability that all six participants encountered upon their move to Canada. In broad strokes, each of the six participants faced substantial challenges when embarking on their new lives in Canada. While five participants explicitly articulated the challenges of essentially restarting their lives upon arrival in Canada, the sixth participant did not

directly discuss the act of "starting over." Nevertheless, she did describe the challenges of leaving behind a familiar life and the difficulties she faced while in Canada. For this reason, all participants are encompassed within the superordinate theme of "Difficulties Starting Over."

The act of relocating to Canada disrupted established routines, severed close familial bonds, and upended the envisioned future for the participants. Notably, five of the participants did not make a direct transition from their countries of origin to Canada. Instead, they had spent time living in transitional housing or refugee camps in temporary host countries. Consequently, when they made the move to Canada, it represented yet another instance of uprooting their familiar lives.

For four of the six participants, they had spent a considerable amount of time, averaging roughly five years, in these temporary host countries. This duration allowed them to build routines and familiarity within their "temporary" host countries. The move to Canada forced them once again to grapple with the challenges of beginning anew, this time without a community, family, and with limited financial resources and social support systems. The participants shared their experiences of their initial moves from their countries of origin to these temporary host countries as profoundly challenging and destabilizing. They had hoped that relocating to Canada would be easier and more rewarding, but many participants found that moving to Canada and the sensation of "starting over" once more was just as demanding as their initial transition.

For instance, Kavi recounted her experience of moving from Syria to a temporary host country, Lebanon, reflecting on the challenges and emotions tied to that initial transition.

*Oh my God, there's so much bad things though the worst thing is when like my dad already had a lot of things in Syria. When we move out, you lose everything like we had literally nothing when we moved to Lebanon. Just with the clothes that we wore. Like nothing. And then like you know, when we move to the home like we have nothing given there is no pain. No. Nothing. We sleep on the floor. And my dad started just trying to find jobs. It was so hard. There was no work, we had no furniture, we had no money because of the war, we couldn't get access to our money. It was so hard.*

Fares spoke about a sense of vulnerability that came from building a life in Canada. Where folks who have grown up in Canada have families and supports to rely on, he did not have any securities in his life in Canada and needed to build wealth, a home, a

community, friends, and a career without an established foundation. This caused a sense of vulnerability in his life. He discussed how he needed to be connected to his family back in Iran in case something happened where he could not pay his tuition or rent. He stated:

*I still kind of financially by myself right now. And for the most part, it's good to know that if something bad happens, if like an emergency happens, that I'm not financially prepared for, I can ask my dad for some help. And losing that would make me feel kind of unsafe again. So, I'm going to, like, maintain that as long as I can, until maybe I have my bachelor's degree, and I'm like, working full time or something. But whatever money I received from Iran has decreased. And no matter how much my family tries to help me the Iranian currency is nothing in Canadian dollars, especially because of the ongoing revolution right now for women's rights. So yeah, that was part of it. And also, back then, like, when I first started university, in my first year, I had to, like work and handle studying at the same time, and it was kind of jealous people would get to, like, just come and study and go home and stuff like that, it was really hard for me and I did somehow, sometimes, like take on too much work and too many courses and, like burned me out. And not to even like more financials just because I couldn't work as much anymore.*

Fare and Kavi discussed the disadvantages of building a life in Canada without the supports that locals have access to. They articulated the emotional turmoil that it caused and the increased sense of vulnerability that they lived with. Fares articulated that when he experienced burn out from working too many hours and too many jobs, he was upset that he could not continue to work. His emotional state required him to take a break and he had frustration that taking a break meant being more vulnerable to financial setbacks.

#### **4.5. Pre & Post Settlement Comparison**

Moving to Canada and “starting over” set the stage for how participants thought of and experienced their life pre and post settlement. Many participants reflected that they had two sets of lives, one before Canada and another beginning with moving to Canada. All participants discussed their lives in Canada in comparison to their lives’ pre-migration. Many of the participants were impacted by civil war or civil unrest in their countries of origin and experienced harrowing adversities. The participant’s narratives of their pre-migratory experiences were filled with descriptions of danger, violence, hardships and often included accounts of what seemed to be insurmountable challenges and limited opportunities or resources. Participants described that enduring the pre-migration traumatic events, expanded their tolerance for hardship and gave them a wider scope of

adversities. All participants described their time in Canada as being challenging, however as their scope of hardship is wide reaching and deep, the hardships in Canada were never described with the same weight. The second superordinate theme, *pre & post settlement comparison* aimed to capture the participant's experiences of hardships and their perception of their migration.

The pre-migratory experiences of each participant were challenging, to say the least. Participants disclosed such experiences as exposure to instability, traumatic events, loss of loved ones, sexual violence, and a multitude of other traumatic encounters. The pre-migratory stressors faced by refugees pose a significant risk for mental health diagnoses and long-term instability (Rasmussen et al., 2012). Migrating to Canada opened up possibilities and opportunities that brought a sense of hope and excitement. All participants described their hopefulness and excitement upon receiving their visas to live in Canada. However, once the participants arrived in Canada, some of the immediate hopefulness and excitement began to wane as they became aware of the challenges associated with migration and resettlement.

Each participant explored how life in Canada was challenging, although it paled in comparison to their experiences in their countries of origin. All participants reflected that coming to Canada never felt like a choice. Once the opportunity arose, it was never a decision between staying or going; it was described as if it were a necessity to leave. The participants' accounts of their hardships pre-migration were harrowing and often traumatic. Life in Canada was also described as challenging, although it was accompanied by a sense of hopefulness. Participants articulated their experiences in Canada as significantly improved. Their lives and livelihoods in Canada were not under constant threat; however, they still faced significant challenges.

Kavi reflected on her experience in Syria during the war before moving to Jordan and provided an example of the level of threat that was present.

*Trying to move between places was difficult. We heard stories of armed groups taking girls and raping and killing them if they didn't have their IDs. I always needed to travel with my documents and IDs, but I didn't have them. At one time, I was driving with my family, and we were stopped by soldiers. When we were stopped, they looked at everyone's IDs and I only had the paper saying that my ID was being processed. They didn't accept it and took me out of the car. I was confused. I didn't know what was happening. My aunt was smart, and she had a*

*little bit of money to bribe the soldier. And then they let me go. This stayed with me when I got to Canada, the memory stayed with me. But I know I am safe now.*

Kavi's described her experience as staying with her in many ways and described how she did not understand the threat at the time. Later in Canada, she recognized the level of threat she was under and continued to feel the residual impact of hypervigilance and sensitivity to stimuli. She recounts that she continued to feel the ground under her shake as bombs would be dropped nearby. She remembered the sound of the airplanes and the noise the bombs would make while being at home. She used few adjectives to describe the impact on her, simply stating that she could still hear it and feel it. Considering the way Kavi described the experience, it could be considered traumatic and deeply unsettling. She relayed a story that encapsulates the magnitude of the experiences that refugees have exposure to. Participants explored the level of threat they had been exposed to and often articulated that being in Canada gives them respite from such a threat.

Noor summarized, that in comparison to what he experienced in Lebanon, moving to Canada was difficult, however there was a sense of opportunities and gain that gave the challenges a sense of worth.

*Leaving family behind does feel hard. But it feels harder to stay there. I mean, when you move as a refugee from Lebanon to here, it's like moving as someone who has lived, or has been living, on the Mega hard level to a medium hard level. It's not easy. It's not easy, in any way. But with respect to what we had there, and what I have here and the potential opportunities, it's easier.*

The threat of being in Canada was not life threatening and not as de-stabilizing as the participant's pre-migratory experiences. This comparison lives within the individual as they navigate their life in Canada. Life in Canada had been less stressful only by comparison as their pre-migratory experience was unsafe, unstable, and filled with little hope for their futures. Life in Canada continued to have stressors and many participants explored that being in Canada had not been as rose coloured as they initially thought. As Fares reflected on his experience being a young gay male in Iran. He stated:

*I think I can look at my life and be like, Okay, this is somewhere that I can spend the rest of my life. But at the same time, there is stuff that as a gay refugee here that I have to acknowledge and sometimes hard to deal with. Looking back at the idea of Vancouver before moving here is a very contrasting image to what I experience on a regular basis here, not that it's a bad thing and it has offered me a lot of freedom and peace or peace of mind, but still sometimes I don't feel*

*comfortable walking down the street if I'm with my boyfriend. And if you asked me when I was 15, before moving to Vancouver if that's something I'm going to experience, I would have said no that's the whole reason that I'm moving to a country like Canada. Overall, I do feel much happier here and I do feel much more safe here and I'm grateful for that.*

The participants lacked opportunities, hopefulness, and safety pre-migration and by comparison, life in Canada offered a stronger sense of safety and stability. Participant's scope for hardships offered them optimism for their life in Canada. All participants recognized that living in Canada had been difficult to navigate and worth the struggle.

## **4.6. Isolation**

As illustrated through the first two superordinate themes, the participants have gone through difficult settlement experiences grieving their life pre-settlement, adapting, and starting a life in Canada post settlement. The third superordinate theme, *isolation*, describes the process of the participants challenges navigating creating a life in Canada and the isolation that goes along with social relationships during the resettlement. All participants disclosed that while they have made some friendships and community, all participants described instances of significant isolation with family, friends and with the larger community. Isolation has been comprised of three sub-themes to discuss how isolation manifested in different ways. The sub-themes include 1) othered – discrimination & racism, 2) disconnection with family, 3) challenges making friends. All participants experienced some type of isolation during their time in Canada and took a substantial portion of the interviews.

### **4.6.1. Othered – Discrimination & Racism**

All of the participants shared accounts of feeling othered at least at one point thus far during their resettlement in Canada. While the accounts of being othered and experiences of discrimination and racism varied by narrative, the range of accounts included physical abuse, to being excluded in social events designed specifically for refugee students. All but one participant specifically disclosed they have experienced at least one experience of overt racism and discrimination through physical or verbal violence. Whereas Noor explicitly noted that he felt othered at times, he has not experienced racism in Canada. Noor noted that his experience of racism in Lebanon was overt, and his family has experienced discrimination on the level of slavery,

impacting his tolerance and scope for discrimination and racism. All other participants had varying accounts of experiences with overt racism. Asa, for instance, describes an instance of being hit by a woman on the bus for being Syrian and wearing a hijab. She stated:

*I got hit by a woman on the bus. The woman went to jail. And then when this happened, I started crying on the bus. My mom was with me, which was really helpful, so I felt a bit more safe. But I definitely cried. And then after that, obviously, that really impacted my sense of safety. After that, it was hard for me to go on the bus.*

Asa described this event of being hit on the bus by an indigenous woman as startling and impacted her sense of safety and avoided the bus for roughly a year afterwards. This event took place in 2019 and since that time, Asa has reflected on that experience many times since the event took place. She spoke of her experience with a strong sense of insight and compassion, she did not feel bitterness or anger towards the perpetrator. Instead, she spoke of deep empathy for the woman. Asa reflected that she felt scared when this happened and hurt, however years later learned about the history of Canada, and understood that immigration is a contentious policy from the point of view of some indigenous folks. Asa did not hold anger towards that instance and no longer felt unsafe taking bus.

Similarly, Amal, who is also Syrian, spoke of an instance of being verbally abused for wearing a hijab and speaking English with an accent. She mentioned:

*One woman told me that if I want to wear this [hijab] 'go to your country and wear it'. I cried a lot, it was really hard especially when I first came here, I already felt like I'm strange. Because everyone here is not similar to me, but they're in my country, everyone wears clothes like mine. Also, the way I speak English because it's not as fluid. So, I feel like I don't want to go outside because they are not similar to me or maybe I feel like they're going to reject me, and I don't feel like I'm similar here. So, these two situations make me feel more strange.*

Amal and Asa described instances of being othered by their appearance. They both wore hijabs, and both described that their hijab and Syrian heritage was a target for verbal and physical violence. Whereas, Makena, described an instance of being othered and stigmatized for being black and feeling othered for the colour of her skin. Makena's account is less of a single event and instead a pervasive and strong feeling of being visibility different. She described the process of feeling different for the first time for

being black and feeling a stark contrast to being in Canada as a black person compared to being black in Kenya. She articulated:

*Canada for the first month was just perfect. When the semester started, I just started feeling all of these things, like, I don't know these people, and I'll be in a class and try to discuss other students and then I don't know, maybe because I'm black or they just see that I don't know anything because I'm black. So sometimes I had problems making groups. And I ended up missing so many tutorials because I felt so stigmatized. I came to terms with the fact that maybe I might be different from people, of which I don't see myself different. But if people take me as a different person, I think it's time for me to come to terms with the fact that I am different, I can do things my own way. And I came to Canada to live my life, I didn't come to make friends.*

All participants shared accounts of feeling different. They mentioned they felt different for their appearance, values, or the social norms they grew up with. All participants varied with how they discussed the impact of these instances. For example, Asa's prior experience with physically violent racism, she had only compassion for the perpetrator. Whereas Amal and Makena described their instances as life-altering and continued to feel the impacts of othering as they navigated making friends. Noor and Fares described instances of feeling othered, however Fares described the instances as more "covert" than overt. And similar to Noor, Fares described how his scope for discrimination and racism is a wide scope and did not feel as othered compared to his experience in other countries, even while experiencing being othered in Canada. Fares' described how his name is Muslim sounding and that he had experienced discrimination due to his name when applying for jobs. Even with experiencing discrimination, he experienced the discrimination in subtle ways and it both surprised him and didn't feel as impacted by it compared to some of his other experiences. He elaborated:

*"because of all that I've been through like, I have thicker skin now. So, I am less sensitive towards it. When I was in Iran, looking at the social media, or like just movies or any other type of media [in the west]. It seemed like a safe haven for like all races and all sexualities. But now that I am actually here. I see that not everything is as good as it seemed. Canada is much more covert, no one has ever called me anything here. But I do you still experience it to some degree.*

It is evident by the participant's account that being othered has been a theme in each the participant's narratives and experience. At times the experience of being othered has been overt and been felt acutely by several participants. Other accounts were a feeling of being different or experiencing microaggressions and "covert" forms of racism and marginalization.

## 4.6.2. Challenges Making Friends

Five participants spoke about the challenges they faced in making connections with friends and peers. These participants emphasized various obstacles to forming connections with others, including not being able to relate to people, being unable to find individuals they could relate to, and feeling that campus life was isolating and unwelcoming.

All participants were connected with a newcomer organization or club, such as a group for refugee students or asylum seekers. However, all participants disclosed that they were unable to establish friendships with other refugee students within these groups. Furthermore, they revealed that they had not been able to make friends or build communities among members of their respective countries of origin. The participants were unable to provide in-depth reasoning for this phenomenon, and many were puzzled about why it occurred.

Some participants, such as Kavi, Amal, and Asa, were able to express that they simply did not find a connection due to differing personalities. The three Syrian women disclosed that they had not formed friendships with other Syrians, even though they were members of groups that connected them with other Syrian women. Each of them expressed that they could not relate to the Syrians they met, attributing this to a lack of common ground or the fact that the others were farther along in the settlement process than they were. Kavi expressed:

*People do not know much about me and Syria. It was hard to find people who understood and I could connect to. I'm also not friends with anyone from Syria, I even felt disconnected from the Syrians I met. They are different now.*

Additionally, Asa, who at the time of the interview, had spent the longest time in Canada, continued to struggle with making friends and spoke about how she became accustomed to being alone. Asa, mentioned she had a few close friends, and found herself more selective in the types of friends she made as she didn't feel that she needed friends for her own happiness anymore.

*In the beginning it was hard for me like, I was just really shy, even though now I'm completely the opposite, I'm now very social. I can talk to strangers. But before that, I wasn't like that. I remember in my high school, there were a lot of like Syrian people, too. I didn't really get along with them. I was just always thinking differently or want to*

*do things differently. So, we didn't really get along. I think I spent this time without really close friends from high school.*

Other participants sought out opportunities to make friends with student clubs or organizations that catered to refugee students. As stated before, no participant felt a sense of community with other members from refugee organizations. Noor mentioned he has not made friends from the international student organization he is a member of. When pressed, Noor articulated that he tried attending social events catered to refugee students, however they did not do a good job in creating a welcoming space. He elaborated:

*One event that I went to was dinner for New Year's Eve. The dinner ended up not being halal. And the thing, it's not hard to actually get halal food. I mean, that that was a big turnoff. And I never went to a single event after.*

This illustrates that there may have been opportunities for social connection between members, however the social events did not create a space that was culturally accessible for Noor.

Furthermore, participants quoted the challenge of relating to Canadians. Participants expressed their dissatisfaction in connecting to Canadian peers as they felt they could not understand their experience, nor could the participants be understood by Canadians. Amal stated:

*When I start to talk to my friends here, they start to have I have less connection with my even my community in Lebanon because there's nothing common like if they want to talk to talk to me about something and they want to talk about something else. There's you know, like there's no connection, no link between our problems.*

Participants experienced hardships in cultivating friendships and relationships in Canada. Their narratives depicted displacement in relational connections, where they could not find strong connections with those from their country or origin, other refugee students or with other Canadians easily. Challenges with making friends was an experience that all participants discussed experiencing during their resettlement, although at the time of the interview, many participants quoted that they were able to create strong friendships and discuss the importance of those relationships, which will be explored in further detail in the theme *Belonging & Collectivity*. Isolation and relational displacement was evident and had varying levels of pervasiveness with each of the participants.

### 4.6.3. Disconnection to Family

Five participants discussed challenges they faced with connecting to their family after the move to Canada. One participant, Asa, moved with her family and found that this process brought her family closer together, whereas the other five participants disclosed they moved by themselves, without their families, and this created challenges for connection. Regardless of how close they were with their family's pre-migration, five participants, Amal, Kavi, Fares, Noor and Makena, described how they felt emotional distance with their families. Each of the five participants, described how they did not feel they could be honest and open with their families about their lives and struggles, either for fear for judgement or for worry of how they would react to their children's struggles. For instance, Amal described how she could not discuss the good or difficult parts of her life with her family as her family continued to struggle with basic living necessities, such as food and running water and did not feel she could be honest about her experiences in Canada. She elaborated:

*The basic things like they do not access to water, electricity, foods, education, like these basic things. And then I have problems that are minor [in comparison]. And then when I talk to my family, I can't even talk about it with them. I don't want to break their hearts like my life is getting luckier and really so good. And they are still suffering from those things. So, I don't feel talking to them. Because I don't want to break their hearts. The good things I can't share, and the bad things I can't share too.*

There was a sense of needing to withhold their struggles from their families out of fear that their problems were not within the same category as their families. Four of the six participants had families living in environments with poor living conditions, economic instability, and threats of war and danger. This created a disconnect in family systems and understanding as their worlds had become different. Kavi disclosed that she did not feel she could discuss her struggles with her family as a way to protect them from worry. Kavi stated:

*I don't tell my family about my problems; they would just worry and I don't want to do that to them. So, I tell them everything is fine. But things are still really hard here. They are getting better, but they are still hard.*

Kavi and Amal's statement illustrates the divergence within the family system as the participants set up their lives away from their families. Participants disclosed that it became easier to withhold information from their families than be honest about the

struggles or their accomplishments. Additionally, other participants, such as Fares, began to feel more settled in his life, his values began to less aligned with his families. Fares, a gay Iranian refugee, had not come out to his family at the time of the interview. As Fares, became more settled in his queer community in Canada, he began to hide more of himself from his family. Fares' narrative expressed that there was a sense of freedom and ease with exploring this part of his identity apart from his family's watchful eye, stating:

*"I preferred to move on my own because I wasn't allowed to explore these parts of myself before and I feel more free and everything here".*

When asked participants about whether they could see themselves connecting to their families later in their lives, all had varied responses. Fares', specifically, expressed that he could see himself coming out to his mother one day, but not his father. And he could only do so when he was fully financially stable, as there was fear of financial retribution from his parents. All other 4 participants, who expressed disconnection from their families mentioned they hoped they could be more honest with their families, although could only see them doing so when things became more stable and when they could support themselves and their families financially.

## **4.7. Seeking Support**

As illustrated through the first three superordinate themes, the participants have gone through difficult settlement experiences adapting and finding a place for oneself in Canada. The fourth superordinate theme, *seeking support*, represented participant's process of learning to navigate the challenges of resettlement by establishing supports for their life in Canada. Moving to Canada created many challenges, such as finding housing, mental health resources, jobs, academic supports, and emotional supports. Most participants moved to Canada alone and without family supports, which created challenges for living without a system that they relied on in their country of origin. Many participants spoke about how moving out on one's own and learning to live without a system they have known, created stressors for not only living alone but also for understanding they at times needed support outside of themselves and accessing and receiving supports. All six participants spoke about the supports they needed and how they navigated seeking and accepting help in a variety of different ways. This

superordinate theme includes three sub-themes, 1) a loss of support, 2) relying on self; and 3) learning to ask for help.

#### **4.7.1. A Loss of Support**

After describing their experiences prior to coming to Canada, participants were asked to reflect on their experiences once they arrived in Canada. One of the consistent observations was that the participants were not initially prepared to seek support and initially did not expect this would be a task they needed to navigate. Participants reflected that leaving their countries of origin, leaving an environment they were familiar with, their loved ones, families, and home, they had a sense they were going on their own and needed to accomplish their goals on their own. Participants spoke about how leaving their families was challenging as they left a system that supported them and then suddenly, they were all on their own. Amal reflected on the challenges of navigating life without her family:

*Because when I used to study back in Syria, I had help from my family. Like my mom always like here is preparing the food and everything is just so I can study, even though the situation was hard, my parents were trying to make as good as they could for us to study. Here there is no one, I am doing stuff, but I am doing all of it on my own. Doing all of it. I have to do the cooking, I have to pay the rent, I have to work, I have to study, I have to file the taxes. Taxes were the hardest. Oh my gosh. So, I have to go to the grocery, I have to do everything. You know, like when people here sometimes blaming me for not doing things. I feel like God, I am already suffering so much.*

#### **4.7.2. Relying on Self**

Amal's disclosure reflects the challenges of relying on herself, while also demonstrating the ability she had to learn to take on new responsibilities that she was not familiar with. Amal's narrative described how challenging it was for her to take on responsibilities that would otherwise be split between her family system. Amal described her experiences with a great deal of heaviness in her tone of voice about how lonely it is having to take on these tasks alone. She had a sense of pride for her new accomplishments, while also being tired that her responsibilities took her away from her studies at times. Amal expressed that at times she would receive negative comments from others for not having a volunteer position or job and felt frustrated by the comments as she recognized that she was doing more than others.

Similarly, Fares described his situation about knowing he was moving to Canada alone and that he would have to take care of himself apart from his family system. While he expressed that he was mentally prepared for the added stress, the reality of his situation caused hardships and financial insecurity for being reliant on himself.

*And to add on to the whole financial instability right now... I work on SFU campus because I'm sometimes like, it helps me focus on work and stuff. And I'm handling like a work project on my own. But I also have two jobs, tutoring and another job at the restaurant. And I also have two volunteer jobs on campus. So, there's a lot going on, but I'm trying to keep myself busy and at the same time, keep my finances on track so I can work towards my PR. But it sometimes gets challenging and overwhelming.*

Fares went on to further express that he began to feel burned out from his effort to keep everything together and from having to manage all his work, financials and responsibilities without as strong of a support system.

*When I first started university in my first year, I had to work and handle studying at the same time, and I was kind of jealous people who would get to just study and go home and stuff like that. It was really hard for me and I sometimes I would take on too much work and too many courses and it burned me out.*

Other participants articulated that learning to rely on themselves was a point of strength and pride for them and spoke with less heaviness and frustration. Makena described her experiences with depression and spoke about how relying on herself, helped her feel as if she could take more control over her mental health and her overall life. She articulated:

*But deep down, I know what I'm doing is right. And I know how to do things. So that's how I decided to rely on myself, and this helped me feel more sure of myself and my life. At first like I didn't like asking for help. I just wanted to keep everything to myself. But I felt like I was going crazy. That's when being hard and like I've had like for my time of my life like on really depressed, but I think I just decided to open to my friends and University supports and talk about what I was going through it and what I was feeling, and how it was giving me mental health issues. So, I had a talk with a support person. And yeah, she made so much time for me. After that, that's when I decided like, seriously, I have to rely on myself and focus on myself.*

Makena describes the process of how seeking support helped her feel more confident in herself. She was able to trust in a support person at Simon Fraser University that ultimately supported her in building a sense of independence. This quote demonstrates that she recognized that seeking support helped her feel surer of herself and more

confident, while also not detracting that seeking support in another person was a necessary component for her confidence building.

### **4.7.3. Learning to Receive Help**

All participants spoke about how seeking supports was challenging for a multitude of reasons. Learning to receive help was cited as a new hurdle as it required finding supports that targeted their needs, finding people they could trust and participating in resources and conversations that addressed and aligned with their needs. Three participants quoted the lack of information available to them was a contributor to receiving help. Asa commented: *“I think in the beginning, it was because we didn’t know much about Vancouver. It’s just lack of information available to us.”*

Additionally, when speaking with Fares about accessing mental health supports, Fares articulated that he tried accessing free mental health services and did not find it was a good match. *“I tried one session and they offered to give six free sessions, but it wasn’t a great match with a therapist, not that they were bad therapists, but I think yeah, it’s sometimes a match thing”.*

When pressed about what about the mental health services did not work for him, he described it as not a good initial “match” with the therapist, the therapist did not know much about LGBTQ+ or refugee issues and given the brief model of therapy, Fares reported that he did not feel it was worth continuing with the therapist.

Contrarily, one participant received counselling services and found it helpful on her first try. Kavi received short term counselling on campus with a case manager who specializes in international student supports and mentioned that it was helpful to find someone who understood what she was going through.

*I was just trying to keep it together as much as I could and did not want to share my struggles. At one point, I broke down in front of a friend and she told me I needed help. It didn’t really occur to me that help was available. I got help from a counsellor and it was very helpful. He then got connected to a doctor and I received medication for panic attacks, ADHD, and I was low in iron, low on vitamin D and after that things started to make sense again. There were people in my life that advocated for me and supported me when I didn’t even know that was a possibility outside of my family.*

Furthermore, Kavi's quote further deconstructed the importance of her friend advocating for her to receive and access supports. It was not only the support that she received that was helpful for her, it also her friend who witnessed the need to receive help. Kavi articulated that this moment in her life was pivotal as she was able to connect deeper with her friend and feel supported by someone outside of her family. Kavi later described how this moment reshaped her thinking about accessing and receiving supports from others:

*In Syria, there was more shame to ask for help, I needed to be tough, resilient. There is no talk about mental health in Syria, or within my family. But it was okay because the system is different. Maybe back at home I can do it on my own because I have my family. Here I am alone, and I need to ask for help and I can get help. There is not as much shame, it's easier now.*

Kavi described how the system here in Canada is less reliant on a family system for help and more reliant on social supports, such as resources and supportive friends and individuals. Five out of the 6 participants interviewed, lived without their family and they needed to find supports on their own. This created the challenge of adjusting to a change in lifestyle, while also navigating what supports were available to them. Five participants expressed concern in their ability to access supports, first with the knowledge of what supports are available to them and second that the support would be helpful.

After all interviews, all participants expressed interest in receiving information about mental health supports that would be available to them. The researcher sent out follow up emails with resources tailored to each participant that included, free counselling services and additional refugee supports, such as legal aid and support groups. All participants expressed gratitude in receiving the information and most expressed that they were unaware of the resources that were available to them on and off campus.

#### **4.8. Belonging & Collectivity**

All six participant's narratives included stories of belonging in Canada, whether it was stories of experiencing belonging or a desire to find belonging. All participants expressed their sense of belonging in Canada had been, or continued to be, a journey of understanding what belonging meant to them and how they thought of themselves as part of the social Canadian landscape. The participants expressed how finding strong

relationships with friends, the surrounding community or finding a purpose for their lives created a sense of connectedness to Canada. The ability to create a sense of community was not a ubiquitous experience among participants, rather all participants expressed that this was important for them to create a community to increase their sense of belonging. This demonstrated that this aspect of resettlement was important, although not necessarily established. Many participants reflected that they did not feel they had an established community with others, and this impacted how they found belonging through other means. All the participants reflected that they felt that as their purpose and goals for being in Canada were realized that contributed to their sense of belonging in Canada and that they were able to confidently find a place for themselves. Finding purpose and establishing goals for the future gave confidence to the participants that they were able to feel connected to being in Canada. The fifth superordinate theme is *belonging & collectivity*. This theme describes the participants relationships to themselves in Canada, others and how a sense of community and creating purpose have contributed to their sense of belonging in Canada. This superordinate theme has two subordinate themes 1) belonging through purpose and 2) belonging through community.

#### **4.8.1. Belonging Through Purpose**

All participants expressed their sense of belonging could be attributed to feelings of purpose through building goals for their future within to Canada. Participants expressed that their sense of belonging was supported by the belief that they were in Canada for a purpose and wanted to make the most of it which created meaning for their life. All participants had purpose, whether they had established goals for their future in Canada, all had a sense of purpose through volunteering, future goals, or occupational aspirations. This purpose created connection to their environment, others, and selves. For example, Kavi expressed that after a period of struggling with her mental health and feeling isolated, she found that being connected with others and supporting others like her, gave her a sense of belonging.

*Volunteering helped with my self-esteem, helping with other students, having conversations, and connecting with people helped me feel less alone. I enjoy helping other students seek out supports and being a help to them and mentoring them. Volunteering has helped me, and I recommend others to do it as well.*

Kavi connected with the international student services office, and one administrator recommended that she volunteer on campus. Kavi was originally hesitant, although later found that volunteering was a way to find meaning, connection and belonging. Kavi's disclosure of the meaning volunteering gave her, helped her find a way to support others who had experienced similar struggles to her. Participants who had a sense of meaning and purpose in their lives, expressed this helped them feel more connected to their environments and supported them in connecting with people and establishing communities.

Similarly, Asa expressed that when she first moved to Vancouver, she did not make friends. She was in classes with other Syrian refugees, however, did not find connection with any of them, nor did she connect with other students in her class. Asa disclosed how she would spend large amounts of time alone and thus was able to spend time exploring her own interests. Asa discovered her devotion and passion towards her Muslim faith, which later gave her opportunities for connection with others who had a similar passion and purpose. Asa spoke:

*There's so much lack of information about Muslim communities in the West, so that's what made me so eager to first learn and then convey, you know, what I learned! And after that, I started doing things with them and with different organization's work, like outreach work. We would talk to strangers and just, you know, talk to them about Islam and things like that.*

The amount of purpose varied within each participant, some participants felt that their purpose was to graduate and find a job and was more future oriented, rather than finding purpose in their present routine, as demonstrated with Kavi and Asa. While all participants had a sense of purpose, three participants, expressed that they imagined their sense of purpose and belonging will only increase with time and with a stronger routine. For example, Amal expressed:

*I think of the stronger community that I could have. Also, like I could feel more familiar in the country and everything, know the rules of what I should do and what I shouldn't, how can treat the people here, how and in return should treat me. And, when I have my degree with me, I have your work, I could feel I am stronger here. I think after a few years when I have graduated. Because if I really don't have enough money to feel like I'm strong enough in this country. So, things like graduating, working, knowing more people will help me feel stronger in this country.*

Participants expressed that their struggles with finding a place in their current routine and with others around them, gave them more purpose for establishing future goals.

Fares who was working towards his PR, also spoke similarly, of how gaining his PR would help him feel less worried about his financial instability and the possibility of him having to move back to Iran for financial instability reasons.

#### **4.8.2. Belonging Through Community**

All participants spoke of their challenges making friends in Canada. Those who had been in Canada longer had a stronger network of friends compared to those who had arrived in Canada more recently. Regardless of time, even with a longer time spent in Canada, all participants stated they struggled to find friends in Canada at some point during their resettlement. Five out of the 6 participants expressed they found some friends that supported their sense of belonging and community in Canada and their environment. While all participants struggled, some found it easier than others to establish strong relational connections. Fares expressed how his connection to the queer community created a sense of belonging and friendship. Fares articulated:

*I guess like a community, or an identity that I've been really connecting with is just queer spaces, because I feel like a lot of queer spaces in Vancouver, also are full of refugees or people of color, or people who've gone through the same things that I've gone through, that I can relate to. And most of those experiences are not without fault but are super accepting. And these are the spaces I feel the most comfortable. And I'm also my friends who are also part of the LGBTQ community and we all have connection even saying any words about it, we have this sense of connectedness, because we know that we've been through the same things even though we come from different parts of the world. I have a Kenyan friend here and I know that has been through what I've been through in terms of homophobia growing up some other cities outside of Canada.*

Fares expresses a sense of connectedness through a community who understood his experience. He articulated that this community had a shared experience of living as a queer person with homophobia in their environment. Fares further demonstrated that this community gave him a sense of belonging and understanding that he was not able to receive with other groups that he was connected to. Other participants expressed similar narratives, that their sense of belonging was not simply since they are refugees, rather belonging came from connecting with others who understood their personal identity. Personal identity and understanding of oneself will be further explored in the superordinate theme *expanded sense of identity*.

Additionally, Fare's disclosure of a feeling belonging through a strong community, others did not express being a part of as strong of a community. The four other participants expressed they felt a sense of connection with at least two or more friends who increased their sense of belonging in Canada. Participants made friends from on campus clubs, their surrounding community or through classes. Noor demonstrated that while he continued to find it challenging to connect with others around him, he had made two friends that have connected with him on a shared interest of food and going out to restaurants. He also compared his experience with making friends in Canada, to making friends in Lebanon, which he expressed was easier in Canada due to less overt racism of Syrians.

*I'm a bit social. So, I managed to make a lot of friends here. I do not think making first friends is easy here. I think I have two good friends now. Yeah, I guess here I was able to be more social and more open. It wasn't like that when I was at home [in Lebanon]. I wasn't working on having that many friends, to be honest. Yeah, just like I told you, if I go to work, I'm going to work for nothing. And if I go to socialize, I can't actually socialize with people. Because none of them are nice. And people bully you, or they are racist. I just focus on myself. Here is much more open, I guess.*

Five participants articulated that their understanding of relationships with peers adjusted as they started to make friends in Canada. Makena articulated that making friends in Canada was challenging as she had not found anyone that she could relate to easily and completely. This adjustment came as she had the experience of easily and effortlessly being understood and connecting with those around her while growing up in Kenya and realizing it was not going to be the same in Canada.

*I made friends when I just came to realize that I don't have to please everyone. Not everyone can be my friend and I can be who I am. And I can just hang out with who vibes with me. And sometimes feeling that, at least you're positive about yourself and everything.*

While all participants reported having made a few friends, continuing to make friends remained a struggle. Fares' narrative included the strongest and largest community of people compared to the other participants. The participant's narratives indicated that having a few friends that they considered close relationally, supported their connection to Canada and created a sense of belonging. As demonstrated in Makena's quote, it also supported her in feeling more confident in herself.

## 4.9. Expanded sense of Identity

All six participants explored how their sense of belonging and isolation had begun to impact their identity, both culturally and individually. All participants grappled with their identity during resettlement and most participants clearly articulated how the resettlement process encouraged them to directly confront their sense of identity. The participants spoke about being confronted with their own self-image against the environmental backdrop of the Canadian social landscape, which encouraged them to reflect on their own identities and their own understanding of themselves. Additionally, most participants did not have a strong sense of cultural identity, and many were confused about what cultural identity specifically meant for them. The sixth superordinate theme, *expanded sense of identity*, is further categorized into two sub-themes, 1) personal identity & purpose, and 2) liminal cultural identity.

### 4.9.1. Personal Identity & Meaning

Five of the six participants articulated how the resettlement process expanded their sense of personal identity. The length of time spent in Canada contributed to the participants sense of strengthened identity. Asa, spending the longest time in Canada at the time of the interview, had a confident sense of self, identity, and values. Whereas, Noor, spending fewer than 8 months at the time of the interview did not feel confident in speaking about his identity during the interview and had limited comments in response to the questions. The resettlement process confronted participants with the opportunity to reflect on their belonging, community, culture, and resettlement process and how that contributed to their sense of self. Asa reflected:

*I researched myself, I did everything on online and everything was different. So, I started learning. I spent my art class watching lectures. I spent six hours of lectures a day learning on different topics like religions. So that really made me open my eyes to differences and similarities and just understand more things about other people and about myself. And that in general helped me with my identity.*

Similarly, Kavi found meaning in her experiences which contributed to her stronger sense of self. Kavi reflected on how difficult her pre-migratory and post-migratory experiences have been and found that sharing her story with others contributed to her own ability to understand herself and identity. Kavi used her experiences to support

others like her and found that sharing her story helped her feel more resilient and understood by herself and others. Kavi expressed:

*I needed to tell people my story because it gave me more time to reflect. This also helped me understand that it was okay to struggle, and it was okay to feel sad. I have my emotions; I am allowed to cry. Looking back at my time in Canada and how much I struggled before, I am really proud of myself for not going off the deep end. I don't think everyone can say that.*

Kavi, Asa, Makena, Amal, and Fares reflected how their adversities they had experienced contributed to building resilience, strength which ultimately supported their identity development. Having experienced challenges, they had feelings of pride in their ability to persevere and endure the tough parts of resettlement thus far. While all participants continued to disclose their on-going struggles in Canada with family and friends, all five participants articulated they had created meaning from their previous adversities and that supported them in exploring and constructing their respective identities.

Furthermore, the resettlement experience in Canada also strengthened personal identity through bolstering interests, personal values, and group membership. For instance, Asa, Kavi, and Amal spoke about how their racial identities became important for them and recognized this aspect of themselves as important for how they understood themselves. Similarly, Fares spoke about how his sexual identity gave him a stronger sense of self and supported him in building relationships with others. Amal described the process of strengthening her relationship to her religion and values, as this part of herself was the only part of herself that made sense and connected herself to communities and gave her a stronger sense of meaning overall. She stated:

*Religion is the only thing that makes me feel a sense of belonging and identity. I will stay here in Canada, I love this country, it has given me everything that I wanted. But everything that I love, everything that I belong to, is there [in Syria].*

Thus, the experience of navigating one's identity in relation to the resettlement process engaged all participants in some way. Five participants felt a grappling with their personal sense of identity and explored how they had strengthened certain parts of self and in their pursuit to understand of who they are in relation to others and within Canada.

## 4.9.2. Liminal Cultural Identity

Four participants specifically disclosed they found it challenging to navigate their understanding of their cultural identity. While cultural identity can live outside the parameters for ethnicity, race and nationality, all participants grappled with their cultural identity in terms of their understanding of themselves as Canadian and their sense of belonging to their countries of origin. Four specifically discussed this challenge in their narratives, whereas all participants displayed some confusion about how their culture impacted their sense of self. Four participants, Amal, Fares, Kavi, and Makena, openly grappled with their sense of cultural identity and how this impacted them. Each of the participants discussed their sense of liminal space between their cultural identity, not feeling belonging or a sense of rootedness in any culture. Amal disclosed how she no longer feels a sense of kinship to Syria as she feels disconnected to her country from the war, the displacement, and her family now, while at the same time, not feeling connected to Canada. She stated:

*I can't relate to anyone; I feel like identity in either direction is gone and I don't have the sense of belonging. Neither here nor there. I don't belong to anything. That's really the hardest part. I don't belong here. I don't belong there.*

Additionally, Fares articulated that he had a desire to feel connected to Iran, however, did not feel as if Iran accepted him and did not feel completely safe participating in Iranian events and gatherings being a queer person. He also elaborated that he did not completely feel connected to Canada as a culture yet and felt conflicted about the complex and violent history Canada has with indigenous populations.

*I guess one part that bothers me is that sometimes if I really include myself in Persian gatherings, go to a Persian event for New Years, even though I'm still like, physically located in Vancouver, which is a safer city for gay people, I wouldn't necessarily take my boyfriend to that event and feel super safe. So that sometimes holds me back from feeling really comfortable with my identity as an Iranian person, but I'm hoping that it will improve over time. And most Iranians my age are completely fine and accepting of the LGBT community and everything. But on the other hand, the Canadian part, I don't want to be a part of the complex culture of Canada. And I sometimes don't know if I even want to be called a Canadian because of all the meanings that are associated with Canada.*

Additionally, the liminal space between cultural identities also sparked a sense of personal exploration for some. Asa and Kavi also did not feel a sense of belonging in one direction, Canada or their countries of origin and Asa specifically articulated how this

gave her the opportunity to be curious about herself. Asa reflected that not feeling Canadian or Syrian gave her the opportunity to reflect on how she was different and similar within both nationalities. Asa explored:

*Maybe if I was in Syria, would just be just like everybody else, because everyone is similar. But here the fact that there's so many differences, I can see differences, different people, different perspectives. That really made me want to know who I am. And what really separates me from others, what makes me also like them. But it's so funny, because what is Canadian, also right?*

Participants grappling with their cultural identity did not feel confident in what it meant for them. Fares and Kavi both articulated they did not know what cultural identity was in general and articulated that they believed cultural identity was a misnomer. Fares, felt his identity was more rooted in his sense of community and his queer identity over his cultural identity and for his current understanding of self, he did not want to engage with the idea of cultural identity.

#### **4.10. Future Aspirations**

All participants spoke about their future without prompt or encouragement during their interviews. Each participant carefully considered how their future would look and how they wanted to construct their future goals and direction going forward. The seventh and final superordinate theme was *future aspirations*. This theme captured the participants uncertainty, hopefulness, and beliefs about their future. All participants easily and effortlessly spoke about their understanding and hopes for their future. All participants were university students and four of the six participants arrived in Canada on the student refugee program, giving them a future oriented reflection and perception of their experience in Canada. All participants reflected how being in Canada has a sense of hopefulness, though not without its challenges. There was a sense that participants created meaning from their adversities that they can look forward and feel encouraged that the struggles awarded them a better life. The superordinate theme, Future Aspirations has three subordinate themes 1) more opportunities, 2) complicated life ahead, and 3) hopes for supporting family.

#### 4.10.1. More Opportunities

All participants expressed their optimism for being in Canada and their futures. While the level of optimism varied by individual, each participant discussed that being in Canada provided them access to opportunities that excited them and that they would not have access to if they had stayed in their countries of origin. Makena and Noor expressed that they had access to opportunities at an undergraduate level, where Makena discussed that growing up in Kenya, the level of education that an individual must have to get a job that makes a decent living is a doctorate, and even then, it does not guarantee an affable life. Each participant expressed their optimism and ambition for creating a life they felt was achievable. And expressed their ideas for the type of occupation, lifestyle, and overall life they wanted to work towards. Asa reflected on her ideas for her future and out of all participants, expressed her views with the highest amount of optimism. She stated:

*Honestly, I am so grateful to be here. And I see that there's a lot of opportunities openings for me now. I got into the University I wanted to I get into, I'm doing well in my courses. I'm doing well with the things I want to do. I feel like everything has just been planned so perfectly.*

Fares, Asa, and Kavi all expressed they felt that their experiences of being a refugee influenced their ideas about their future life and occupation. They each described wanting to support others in a way that would be meaningful, Fares and Asa want to explore working towards being therapists for refugees and Kavi expressed wanting to explore international policy and advocacy for immigrants and refugees in Canada. Others expressed how they get access to occupations that they feel excited by through personal interest. Makena describes wanting to be a natural scientist and her optimism for making this type of occupational dream a reality. She stated:

*I want to be a natural scientist. And I just in few years, I'll be one. And that's it right now. But even if I'm in school right now I know it's just for a short period of time. And maybe after I'll be in Natural scientist and just feel really optimistic about my future and my career and it feels good.*

Similarly, Kavi expressed how the prospect of her working in international policy to support other refugees gave her adverse experience meaning. She articulated that she wants to help others and that she can see how her experience can support her aspirations. She expressed:

*I want to work in international relations because I think this can have the biggest impact of refugee's lives and want to actually be a part of something that I can help with. I want to help others and give them something that I needed. And I think I can do that here.*

Other participants, such as Noor, Fares and Amal expressed how they see Canada for giving equal opportunities to its population. Each of them expressed they have witnessed the inequities that are in Canada, they see the social landscape in Canada as more equal and more available to them compared to their countries of origin. Noor expands:

*But with respect to what we were there, and what I have here and the potential opportunities. I mean, the good thing here is that I actually have an equal opportunity. In Lebanon, I would only be allowed to work in three occupations, either a carrier or cleaner. The three jobs are shittier than the others. I'm sorry. But they're all bad, you know? Here, it's like you're equal to everybody and I can apply for jobs. I can apply for everything with everybody. So, the probability of me getting job is exactly the same as everyone else. That's reassuring.*

Overall, the reason that the participants were willing and excited to resettle in Canada was for the access to opportunities that they would not have had if they stayed in their country of origin. All used language to demonstrate they had hope and excitement for the possibilities. The participant's narratives included many exerts of discussing their hope and opportunities for the future and no participant had trouble accessing hope for the possibility of enjoying their future life.

#### **4.10.2. Complicated Life**

Five participants spoke with hopefulness for their future, though all discussed how they viewed their future as being complicated and will continue to experience hardships in the future. The added aspect of complication did not negate the sense of hopefulness for their future, however, did add to an outlook that was less idealistic than they originally thought of pre-migration. Fares, Amal, Noor, Makena, and Kavi's outlook for their future included concerns for finding work, the rising cost of living in an expensive city, losing scholarship or government education funding after 2 years of being in Canada, financial instability and affordability, and legal concerns related to refugee, PR and citizenship status. Noor spoke about his future with optimism and with excitement for the opportunities that are available to him in university and after graduation. Noor spent time discussing how he was concerned about living in an expensive city with a government

that does not seem to consider making housing more affordable for lower or medium incomes. Noor stated:

*I think things are only going great and going in the good direction, Thank God for now. But the rising cost is gives me some apprehension. It's a big concern. I was thinking like, even with my job after graduation, that's \$23 an hour, even if I do this full time, I would barely afford to live. I think this is the third or the second most expensive place on Earth.*

Fares and Amal both spoke of similar concerns they had about affordability and financial stability for their futures. Fares, unlike other participants, came to Canada under asylum protection and has not received the same type of government support for his education as those participants who came under the Canadian Refugee Program. The other 5 participants have their education funded for a minimum of 2 years, whereas Fares must pay high international student fees and wait for his PR to be approved. His financial situation was more precarious during the time of the interview and understandably, his concerns for starting his future were tied into his financial stability and low supports. He expressed:

*I think I can see myself like growing and building a life for myself, at the same time. I'm just starting with no kind of support in terms of family support, and I still even don't have my PR for other governmental support like that. So, it's kind of hard to start from zero. But I know that I have more opportunities here at least compared to the country that I'm from.*

As seen in this quote, Fares had concerns for starting from “zero” and how difficult it is to start one’s life from scratch. Amal had similar concerns to “starting over”. Amal’s experience in Syria and moving to Lebanon, she saw her family lose everything and had to start from scratch, she then moved to Canada and lost everything again. Her fear for graduating and leaving university is that she will then have to start again from scratch and build a life outside of being a student. She saw this transition as being arduous and a fearful experience. She stated:

*I know my neighbors here, I know some students in SFU I work with, and in residence too. So like I know some of my coworkers, so when I graduate, I will leave all of the things and start again. I will have to get an apartment and then must start also living by myself again, knowing no one, needing people, needing a new community. That's kind of still a little bit scary for me to start building in your community again, especially after graduating.*

The 5 participants who spoke about their concerns for their future and the complications that come with setting up a life without their families and being more vulnerable to

financial concerns and setbacks. Each participant discussed the challenges of being alone and creating a life that would make their families proud or making the most of their life in Canada. The added element of future stress and hardship did not seem to detract from the hopefulness and optimism that participants experienced for building a life in Canada, however it did seem to be more weighed down with the realities of what living with minimal supports looks like.

### **4.10.3. Supporting Family**

This subordinate theme described 4 participant's accounts of their desire to support their families in their future. For 4 participants, Noor, Amal, Kavi, and Makena, they chose to come to Canada to have access to more opportunities for themselves and for their families. Each of the 4 participants highlighted their desire to support their family and to ensure their family benefits from their position in Canada. When asked about their thoughts about their future, each spoke unprompted about wanting to send money to their parents to improve their livelihoods as well. Noor elaborated that he views the best thing he could do for his family is to try to reduce how much his father works under "slavery" conditions in Lebanon and support his siblings to access private education. He stated simply:

*The best thing that I could do to my family is that maybe sending them money. Every month a little bit. But I cannot actually bring them here. It's kind of hard right now.*

Similarly, Makena and Amal spoke about how they want to support their families by sending money and doing what they can do support their wellbeing. Makena elaborated that she believes her position in Canada has benefited her and she wants to use those benefits to help build a better life for her siblings and parents. She explores how she views a sense of responsibility to use her advantages to increase the wellbeing's of her family and help them in any way that she can.

*It was a hard situation. Sometimes when you look at life and anything of the cost and the benefits of something and if this will change my life, and maybe my future, that means I can also change the future of my siblings and maybe my family's future. Because like, sometimes I don't feel it's good for them to be working there, everything is so difficult for them right now in Sudan. There are a lot of political wars and everything insecure. So, I would love for my family to live in a place where they will also be secure. And I don't feel like I'm the only one who should be securing myself well, when my family is unsafe, I cannot. Because*

*I'll be thinking about their situation and their well-being. Well, we all stay as one. Like if someone moves on, then if they will make a change for the whole family, I think that's beneficial.*

Beyond the desire to support their families financially, Amal, Kavi and Makena all expressed a desire to eventually reunite with their families and had some hopefulness for bringing their families to Canada on a family reunification visa, however they did not articulate that this would be a probability for their future, only a dream they had that would increase their sense of optimism, belonging and connection in Canada.

Overall, the six participants rich narratives shed light on the young adult refugee experience and the meaning they are making from their adversities. In their voices, the narratives included deep emotion, reflective thoughts and individual perceptions of their experience and their hopes for their futures. The findings illustrate how they have constructed meaning from their migration and resettlement experiences and that it has impacted their sense of understanding of who they are in relation to their background and their future.

## Chapter 5. Discussion

### 5.1. Overview

The primary objective of this research has been to gain a deeper understanding of resettlement through the personal narratives of the participants. It contributes to the limited body of research on refugee young adults and forced migration by exploring how participants understand their own experiences. This research can provide valuable insights for counseling, clinical psychology, and other service domains that work with refugee populations by offering in-depth narratives regarding resettlement.

This study specifically delves into the lived experiences of young adult refugees in Canada. However, due to the sample used, it became a targeted population focusing on the experiences of post-secondary young adult refugees. While the study did not initially aim to solely focus on post-secondary students, all the participants ended up being young adult post-secondary students from SFU. Currently, there is limited research available regarding the experiences of post-secondary refugee students in Canada, with one study (Wong & Yohani, 2016) being the researcher's sole knowledge in this area. Although there has been emerging research on refugee children and families in Canada, as well as adult refugee populations, understanding the unique challenges faced by young adult refugees in the context of migration and displacement is crucial.

There exists a gap in the literature concerning young adult refugees and post-secondary refugee students in Canada, particularly in exploring their lived experiences, identity formation, and the meaning-making processes related to their transition to Canada, utilizing qualitative methods.

The primary research questions of this study were as follows:

1. *How do refugees derive meaning from their experiences?*
2. *How does the surrounding community impact refugees' sense of belonging in Canada?*
3. *What are the barriers to positive resettlement?*
4. *How does resettlement shape refugee identity formation in young adulthood?*

Focusing on the meaning-making processes of displacement and forced migration, six young adult refugees shared their experiences pre- and post-migration, their encounters with war and displacement, and their experiences of resettling in Canada. Through

interpretative phenomenological analysis, seven overarching themes emerged from the interviews and data collected: difficulties in starting over, comparisons between pre- and post-settlement experiences, seeking support, feelings of belonging and collectivity, an expanded sense of identity, and future aspirations.

This chapter will commence with the researcher's perceptions and understanding of the interviews. Subsequently, it will provide a summary of the implications of the study in relation to broader research. Finally, this chapter will also include proposed applications of the study's findings within the realms of counseling, clinical work, and other service domains involving refugees. It will also address the study's limitations and suggest potential avenues for future research.

## **5.2. Witnessing**

During the interviews with the participants, it was paramount for me to establish a sense of presence, trust, and rapport with each individual. I made a conscious choice to refrain from taking detailed notes during the interviews to prioritize being fully present and engaged in a dialogue with each participant. As an outsider to this research, my intention was to position the participants' narratives as central, using my interpretation to highlight common themes that emerged while creating an environment where they felt comfortable sharing as much or as little as they wished. My background as a counselor equipped me with the skills to be an active listener, to demonstrate curiosity, to show empathy and compassion for each person in front of me, and to hold space for their emotions. Engaging in conversations with each participant, I noticed the openness with which they shared their stories. I felt a profound privilege in being invited into their experiences, and a strong connection with each of the participants emerged as a result.

Trust and rapport were established easily with each participant, and they expressed feeling heard, understood, and recognized the importance of the research for themselves and other refugees in Canada. They conveyed their gratitude for the research, seeing it as an opportunity for service providers to better support refugees. They emphasized the need for SFU, Vancouver, and Canada to gain a more nuanced and personalized understanding of the refugee resettlement experience. After the interviews, participants spoke about how the process allowed them to reflect on their experiences in a way they had not done before. They found meaning in this reflection, in

sharing their stories, and in the prospect of their stories being shared widely to offer support to others. Expressing one's story to another person plays a crucial role in the meaning-making process, as it validates the significance of their story to someone else and acknowledges its value (Barth & Scholl, 2021). This sharing of experiences provides a voice for their journey and facilitates the process of coping and understanding their challenging experiences from a different perspective. Some participants were at the beginning stages of this meaning-making process, while others had already constructed deep and expressive meanings from their experiences.

The importance of sharing personal stories and having them witnessed cannot be overstated. It's not just about speaking; it's about being heard and understood. I observed that, in these conversations, my role as a listener was more critical than being a contributor. Demonstrating empathy and curiosity played a significant role in establishing connections and trust, but it was arguably even more essential to be a witness to their stories and be invited into their narratives. Sharing stories and having them heard added significance to their experiences. Bearing witness to a story is a potent process that validates their experience and allows them to reclaim ownership of their narrative. One participant emphasized how crucial it was for her to share her story with those around her. She spoke about potentially traumatic experiences with thoughtfulness and clarity and found relief in articulating experiences that had been bottled up for a long time, allowing another person to hear them.

The interview process, surprisingly, turned out to be the most significant aspect of this study. Contrary to expectations, I encountered no difficulty in finding participants; in fact, there was more interest than I had capacity for within the study. This illustrates the profound need for personal narratives to be shared and witnessed in a meaningful way. The act of bearing witness to these personal narratives is integral to the process of creating personal meaning, integrating these experiences into one's identity, and forming connections with oneself and with others. I could clearly see how meaningful it was for the participants to have someone genuinely care about them, their stories, and their experiences.

## **5.3. Implications of the Findings**

### **5.3.1. Pre & Post Migration Comparison**

Similar to prior research involving other refugee groups (Kaar, 2021), the present study revealed the profound challenges faced by young refugees, including the loss of homes and families, grief, displacement, and the deprivation of basic necessities and human rights. These experiences expanded the refugees' capacity to tolerate hardships and broadened their ability to endure challenges and adversity.

Furthermore, when discussing their struggles in Canada, participants shared experiences that have been well-documented in the literature. These challenges encompassed difficulties with language comprehension, financial instability, mental health concerns, making friends, finding employment, and social isolation (Marshall et al., 2016; Ugurel Kamisli, 2021; Senthonar et al., 2020), among others. While these challenges are significant on their own, participants reflected that their understanding of these difficulties in Canada was more manageable and had greater worth when compared to their experiences in their countries of origin. It was evident that their perception of life in Canada was always framed in relation to their pre-migration experiences. Despite the uncertainty, challenges, and ongoing struggles in Canada, it was consistently viewed as less tumultuous than their pre-migration life.

This finding broadens our understanding of the challenges faced by refugees and the difficulties of life in general, as it situates these experiences within the context of comparisons. Life in Canada appeared easier by contrast, as it did not involve human rights abuses or barriers to accessing necessities. Nonetheless, the challenges in Canada were still significant, with social isolation being a major concern that can increase the risk of morbidity and mortality (Christiansen et al., 2020; Marshall et al., 2016; Valtorta et al., 2016). When interacting with refugees, it is crucial to validate their self-perception of their experiences and acknowledge that their struggles are challenging, regardless of the adversity they have previously faced. Both types of challenges can coexist and can impact one's sense of safety, belonging, and contribute to mental health concerns.

Surprisingly, perceptions of struggling did not differ significantly based on the length of time spent in Canada. Noor, who had the shortest duration of residence in Canada, was careful not to divulge the extent of his challenges and often contextualized his difficulties in Canada by comparing them to his experiences before coming to Canada. In contrast, Asa, who had spent the most time in Canada, spoke about how the challenges of being in Canada were worth it considering the outcome of building a life in a safe country.

The findings of the hardships experienced by young refugee adults align with existing literature (Asvat & Malcarne, 2008; Oudshoorn et al., 2020; Spass et al., 2021 Scott & Safdar, 2017; Ugurel Kamisli, 2020; Wong & Yohani, 2021). However, this study emphasizes the importance of considering these hardships in relation to the spectrum of adversities shaped by individuals' unique experiences. The participants perceived the challenges of life in Canada as comparatively easier than what they had experienced before migrating.

### **5.3.2. Seeking Support**

The study underscored the considerable challenges that young adult refugees face when seeking support. These challenges encompassed various barriers, including establishing trust in services and individuals, being able to ask for and receive help, limited access to information about available supports, and the need to reconfigure their support systems.

Notably, five out of the six refugees in the study arrived in Canada without their families, which presented the challenge of reorganizing and rethinking how to seek and accept assistance. Refugees often originate from non-westernized and less individualistic societies that prioritize the family unit over individual needs. This family-centered approach can reduce the necessity to seek support outside the family, as each family member works collectively towards the family's well-being (Senthanar et al., 2020). However, it's important to recognize that the distinction between individualistic and collectivistic societies can oversimplify the social organization between Westernized and non-Westernized countries (Sagy et al., 2001). Both community and individuality can coexist within any cultural and social context.

The study participants explained that they grew up in a system that prioritized the family, which reduced their perceived need to access additional supports and services beyond their family circle. Leaving their family organization behind meant they had to become more self-reliant while also seeking support from service providers and other forms of assistance.

Refugees who migrate without their larger support systems are often at a disadvantage compared to those who resettle with their families. They are at greater risk for mental health concerns, social isolation, and adjustment challenges in their host country (Im et al., 2021; Marshall et al., 2016). The refugees in this study described how the process of migrating to Canada reshaped their understanding of support. Initially, during their first year of resettlement, most refugees did not seek support or reveal their struggles to friends, as they did not participate in organizations for refugee students. However, as time went on, they came to realize that they couldn't rely solely on themselves for all aspects of resettlement and needed assistance, either in the form of emotional support or practical help.

Participants shared that seeking support, particularly mental health support, was highly stigmatized in their countries of origin. Without their families in Canada, many participants found that there was less shame and stigma associated with reaching out for help, and it was more socially acceptable to accept assistance from service providers and friends. It became a process of relearning that seeking and accepting help was not only acceptable but necessary for independent living apart from their families. This finding aligns with existing literature on resettlement challenges, which highlight difficulties in accessing information about available supports, increased stigma surrounding mental health, and the challenges of resettling without one's family. However, this study goes further by providing a deeper understanding of the resettlement process and the need to reduce stigma around seeking and accepting help outside of the family system. It underscores that seeking help and accepting support are essential aspects of the resettlement process because relying solely on oneself can increase autonomy but can also lead to isolation and overwhelm.

### 5.3.3. Belonging & Collectivity

Similar to previous research, the study identified that creating a sense of belonging and collectivity was a major theme and challenge among the participants (Oudshoorn et al., 2020; Scott & Safdar, 2017; Ugurel Kamisli, 2020). Building friendships and forming a community, which contributes to a sense of belonging in their host country, proved to be a significant challenge for all participants. However, the study also revealed that the journey to belonging is ongoing for refugees in Canada, and a sense of belonging begins to emerge when they establish strong friendships and find a strong sense of purpose.

Khan et al.'s (2023) study on the occupational transitions of Syrian refugee youth in Canada also noted a similar phenomenon, where belonging was intertwined with finding a sense of purpose for their future. While existing studies have highlighted the connection between belonging, acculturation, and identity transformation (Ertorer, 2014; Tonui & Mitschke, 2022), the present study delved deeper by uncovering a link between belonging and identity formation. The findings demonstrate that social belonging significantly impacts one's identity formation, fostering a connection to their new home. Moreover, a sense of purpose and social belonging play pivotal roles in shaping one's identity, ultimately establishing a positive connection to the broader environment, and positively influencing the resettlement process.

One of the most significant findings was the impact of meaning-making on a sense of connection and purpose. Refugees who found a sense of belonging through community and purpose also developed stronger meaning-making abilities. Participants who discovered purpose in helping others, connecting with their religion, and feeling motivated for their future were able to integrate their previous experiences into their motivation for the future. This aligns with the findings of Frounkelker et al. (2020), which demonstrated that meaning-making in refugees was closely linked to a sense of collective identity, unity, and helping others. Their sense of belonging and connection to their purpose allowed them to perceive their experiences as making a difference in their lives and the lives of others around them. Those with a stronger sense of purpose also exhibited a greater integration of their trauma, stressors, and past life experiences and were able to articulate the importance of their experiences for their sense of purpose.

### 5.3.4. Isolation

The present study illuminates the experiences of isolation among the participants during resettlement, aligning with prior literature on refugee integration and resettlement which has documented experiences of discrimination, racism, and feelings of being marginalized (Marshall et al., 2016). While the nature of discrimination and racism varied among participants, ranging from physical abuse to microaggressions, all participants reported experiencing it. These experiences encompassed discrimination based on factors such as sexual identity, skin color, or religious choices, such as wearing a headscarf. The encounter with discrimination contributed to a disrupted sense of belonging in Canada and fostered negative self-perceptions and attitudes toward the country. It left participants feeling different, unsafe, unwelcome, and as outsiders.

The experiences of discrimination propelled participants to seek out spaces where they could feel a sense of belonging, often gravitating towards spaces where they felt they shared commonalities with others, such as queer spaces, religious spaces, or racial spaces. The discrimination they faced intensified their need to find places where they would not feel othered or subjected to discrimination. Some participants expressed that their experiences with discrimination made them feel distinct and as if they did not belong in mainstream spaces, motivating them to seek out those who shared similar backgrounds or experiences.

A surprising finding was that none of the participants reported feeling a sense of belonging or connection with other refugees or individuals from their country of origin. All participants explicitly stated that they had interacted with other refugees or people from their countries of origin but did not feel a sense of connection with them. This contradicts the common resettlement practice in Canada, which often focuses on connecting refugees with others who share similar experiences and backgrounds (Segatto, 2021). Weinfeld (1996) has advocated for connecting refugees with peers who have comparable experiences to foster the building of communities among those who feel represented by each other. The present study offers an alternative perspective on how refugees form connections and social relationships, in line with Anstiss et al.'s (2019) qualitative study in South Australia, which found that young refugee populations did not necessarily connect with their ethnic sub-groups during resettlement but found stronger connections within their families.

Furthermore, the study raises questions about identity and the connection to "refugeeness," especially among young adults who migrated for educational purposes. Although the wider community might label them as refugees, these individuals primarily identify themselves as university students actively pursuing education for their future. Interestingly, the participants did not provide specific details regarding why they could not relate to other refugees or individuals from their country of origin; they simply reported a lack of relatability. Some participants, upon reflection, noted that the other refugees they encountered were at different stages of the resettlement experience, which hindered their ability to connect. Many refugee programs in Canada aim to create communities based on relatability and shared experiences (Oudshoorn et al., 2020). However, given that none of the participants felt a connection or relatability to other refugees, it may be important to encourage connections among those they perceive as having similar backgrounds or experiences.

The present study corroborates the findings of Anstiss et al. (2019), which suggest that connections are not necessarily formed with other refugees or ethnic subgroups during resettlement. However, it contrasts with Anstiss et al.'s findings regarding stronger familial connections. Since the participants did not travel to Canada with their families, most of them experienced disconnection from their family systems. They often articulated this disconnection as a reluctance to express the extent of their challenges to their families. Young adult refugees did not feel comfortable sharing their emotions or struggles with their families, either to protect them from worry or due to the fear of being judged for not enduring hardships as severe as what their families were experiencing. Studies by Spaas et al. (2021) and Wong & Yohani (2021) suggest that family connection serves as a point of resilience during resettlement. Therefore, this finding contributes to the literature on refugees and resettlement by highlighting the complexities young adult refugees face when connecting with their larger family and outlining how the resettlement process can create a gap in relatability to one's extended family.

### **5.3.5. Expanded Sense of Identity**

The present study highlighted how the resettlement process had a profound impact on the refugees' sense of identity and self-understanding. An unexpected finding was that refugees did not feel a strong sense of cultural identity; instead, cultural identity was largely undefined and a source of confusion for many participants. This finding

challenges the notion of bicultural identity as a form of healthy resettlement and acculturation, which has been suggested in previous research (Bemak & Chung, 2021; Tonui & Mitschke, 2022). In this study, refugees did not feel that they could claim either cultural identity as their own, and many even spoke about rejecting the idea of cultural identity altogether. Many participants had left their country of origin at a young age and spent numerous years in refugee camps in Jordan or Lebanon. This disrupted their sense of cultural identity during their formative years. Instead, participants expressed that their sense of identity was rooted in their values, beliefs, community, and personal interests, such as food, rather than in a broader cultural or ethnic identity.

Interestingly, many participants explicitly rejected a Canadian identity. They did not feel comfortable affiliating with a country known for its mistreatment of indigenous populations. Young adult refugees in the study constructed their sense of identity through their own evolving values, beliefs, and interests, actively choosing elements of identity that resonated with them during the resettlement process. This process of identity development aligns more closely with general identity development in young adults, such as shedding the beliefs they grew up with and forming their own beliefs and self-understanding in relation to their environment (Ertorer, 2014).

The existing literature on refugee identity often discusses identity formation in the context of confusion (Erikson, 1966; Erikson, 1968; Ertorer, 2014). The present study contributes to this literature by providing a broader explanation of the elements contributing to identity formation beyond the binary concept of cultural identity. While previous research suggests that adolescent refugees experience identity confusion until their early 20s (Ertorer, 2014), the participants in this study did not express confusion about their sense of self or identity. Instead, they rejected the idea of cultural identity and expressed confidence in their identity based on values, beliefs, interests, and purpose. They selected elements of culture that interested them and integrated these aspects into their personal identity. The idea of cultural identity may be imposed on refugees to help outsiders understand their cultural background and adaptation to their host country, while refugees may prefer to be viewed in terms of their individuality and personal identity.

This study addresses a gap in the literature on the identity development of young adult refugees in Canada. It expands our understanding of how refugees construct their

identities, adding nuance to the concept of cultural identity and suggesting that it may not be a fitting label for many refugees. The findings align with research on young adult identity formation, demonstrating that identity development involves challenging one's upbringing, family background, and cultural origins to construct an identity that aligns with one's individuality (Erikson, 1966; Erikson, 1968; Dunkel & Sefcek, 2009; Ziaian et al., 2021).

### **5.3.6. Future Aspirations**

The present study contributes to the existing literature on future aspirations within refugee populations. It found that refugees have a multitude of ideas and goals for shaping their futures, reflecting a strong sense of hope and optimism about what lies ahead. This aligns with previous research that has indicated that refugees often harbor a sense of hope for their futures, driven by the opportunities and access they have in their host countries that were unavailable in their countries of origin (Khan et al., 2021; Marshall et al., 2016; Yoon et al., 2022). What this study adds to the literature is a deeper understanding of the specific elements of hope and optimism that refugees hold for their futures. Refugees in this study not only expressed hope but also had clear occupational goals and aspirations for providing and supporting their families. This finding enriches our knowledge by emphasizing that refugees not only hope for a better future but actively plan for it by setting career goals and family-related aspirations.

Furthermore, the study highlights the perception among refugees that Canada offers a sense of equality and equity, despite the existing socio-political disparities in the country. Refugees felt that they had access to opportunities that were more readily available in Canada than in their home countries. This sense of equality and access to opportunities was a driving force behind their hopeful outlook and future aspirations. The study's findings also align with research linking career development to mental health and well-being. The idea that having clear career goals and aspirations can promote happiness and well-being is consistent with the participants' attitudes. They viewed their future as a source of motivation, purpose, and self-efficacy, which contributed to their overall sense of well-being and resilience.

In summary, this study provides valuable insights into the multifaceted nature of hope and optimism among young adult refugees, emphasizing their proactive approach to

shaping their futures and their perception of Canada as a place of opportunity and equity. This aligns with research highlighting the connection between career development, well-being, and a sense of purpose.

## **5.4. Applications for Counselling and Working with Refugees**

Important applications for working with young adult refugees in a clinical, counselling and helping capacity have emerged from the study. Young adult refugees would benefit from 1) engaging with a supportive individual that advocates for their wellbeing, 2) sharing their stories with others in a way that provides narrative meaning making, 3) strengthening a sense of personal identity to be able to connect with other's they relate to and 4) to experience validation from others for their previous traumatic and stressful life events. The study's findings indicate more nuanced understanding of what cultural competency looks like for refugee young adults. This section will outline what cultural competency means for refugee young adults and outline how counsellors without refugee experience can work with refugees through integrating advocacy, meaning making and strength-based approaches.

***Engaging with Supportive Advocacy:*** Young adult refugees often face barriers to seeking and accepting help. It's crucial for professionals working with this population to serve as advocates for their well-being. This involves not only offering counseling services but also actively connecting with refugee service providers and the refugees themselves to demystify the counseling process. By establishing visibility and trust, professionals can help refugees overcome their initial hesitations and reservations about seeking professional support.

As demonstrated in the study, seeking support was a major challenge for refugees and many did not trust seeking counselling. While those who had attended counselling, found it helpful, many did not fully trust counselling or know what to expect. It would be helpful for counsellors to be visible to refugee service providers and begin to make connections with refugee services, service providers and refugees themselves to begin to demystify the counselling process. Bhui (2022) argues that cultural competency with refugees also incorporates social justice elements, meaning that advocacy can be an important aspect. Some participants reflected that they needed advocacy to accept and

seek help from professionals and service providers, this would demonstrate the need for counsellors to participate with more visibility to refugees, so they can begin to deconstruct their preconceived ideas of counselling and counsellors can support them in seeking help from professionals.

***Narrative Meaning-Making:*** Sharing their stories in a supportive and therapeutic context can provide young adult refugees with a powerful tool for meaning-making and healing. Counselors can create a safe and empathetic environment where refugees can share their experiences, reflect on their journey, and find meaning in their past and present. This process of storytelling can contribute to identity formation, resiliency, and connection with others.

***Strengthening Personal Identity:*** For many young adult refugees, the process of resettlement involves navigating complex questions of identity. Counselors should recognize that cultural identity may not be a straightforward or dominant aspect of an individual's self-concept. Instead, it may be a more nuanced interplay of values, beliefs, community, and personal interests. Helping refugees explore and strengthen their personal identity, independent of cultural labels, can foster a sense of self-understanding and empowerment.

***Validation and Resilience:*** Acknowledging the hardships and trauma that young adult refugees have experienced is essential. At the same time, it's equally important to emphasize and support their resilience, hopefulness, and the opportunities that lie ahead. This balanced approach validates their experiences while reinforcing their capacity to overcome challenges and build a better future.

Cultural competency when working with young adult refugees goes beyond a one-size-fits-all approach. It involves a dynamic and individualized understanding of each person's unique background, experiences, and aspirations. Working with refugees often requires knowledge of cultural competency (Cadenas et al., 2022). Cultural competency to work with specific populations will look differently depending on the needs of the individual or population (Bhui, 2022). When discussing cultural competency, most frameworks discuss the need for counsellors to acknowledge their own biases, cultural understanding of the subgroup, adopt reflexivity and understand cultural views of health and healing (Solveig Duden, 2021). Considering the findings of this study, young adult

refugee's cultural competency should integrate many aspects such as the understanding of the background of the person's migration, country of origin and adopting flexibility and cultural humility (Solveig Duden, 2021), centering the individual above the understanding of the culture, and view the person beyond "refugee-ness" and towards a young adult who has experienced trauma, displacement, uprootedness and is working towards a more hopeful future. And lastly validating the hardships and trauma, while also emphasising and supporting resiliency and hopefulness (Wong & Yohani, 2021).

To effectively support this population, professionals should:

***Acknowledge Personal Biases:*** Professionals should be aware of their own biases and cultural assumptions. Self-reflection and ongoing self-awareness are vital in fostering a culturally competent approach.

***Practice Flexibility and Cultural Humility:*** Recognize that each young adult refugee's journey is unique. Cultural humility involves an openness to learning from the individual's perspective rather than imposing preconceived notions or stereotypes.

***Prioritize the Individual:*** While cultural understanding is important, it should not overshadow the individual's personal experiences and identity. Young adult refugees are more than their refugee status; they are individuals with diverse backgrounds, beliefs, and aspirations.

***Advocacy and Psychoeducation:*** Professionals can play a role in advocating for refugees within the community and connecting them with necessary resources. Psychoeducation can help demystify the counseling process and normalize seeking mental health and therapeutic support.

Additionally, once refugees do seek out help with counsellors, advocacy, psychoeducation, and transparency can be adopted into practice. Psychoeducation can begin to destigmatize seeking support outside of oneself and family and normalize seeking mental health and therapeutic support. Educating on the purpose of counselling and deconstructs the fear of seeking support outside of oneself and one's family. The participants who sought counselling, found it helpful when the counsellor explained how counselling can help in general and that the process of talking to someone can be incredibly healing. And as seen in this study, the sharing of one's story is a meaning

making process that can support identity formation, resiliency, and relational connection. Counsellors can also continue to use advocacy in counselling to support their clients in getting connected with resources, community building initiatives and other helpful supports.

**Trauma-Informed Approach:** Professionals should be well-versed in trauma-informed practices. However, they should also understand that safety and stabilization may take longer for refugees due to their unique experiences. Flexibility in the application of trauma-informed care is essential. In counselling, there is regular use of approaches for trauma informed counselling. Using trauma informed approaches with refugee is certainly important. It is also important to understand how these approaches are defined with regards to working with refugees specifically and to demonstrate flexibility when integrating commonly used counselling approaches. For example, trauma informed practice requires the need for safety and stabilization before memory processing (Harris & Fallout, 2007). Safety and stabilization in refugees are likely to look different and incorporate the need not to explain one's culture and background to the counsellor. Safety and stabilization would involve normalizing the counselling process over time to support the individual to feel comfortable to share their narratives. It would be important to understand how the individual applies to the counselling frameworks, rather than the reverse. Safety and stabilization may take several years for refugees to develop with a counsellor. As was seen with a few of the participants, they were in a state of survivorship, and it took several years post-migration to begin to feel stability with their environment and to recognize they were not under constant threat. One participant in particular spoke about how after a year of being in Canada, she noticed that many mental health concerns were surfacing. She was able to feel a sense of stabilization, and this allowed her to become more aware of her perceptions, emotions, and bodily sensations. The experience of being under constant threat had impacted her mental health which then surfaced years later. She was later diagnosed with ADHD, depression, anxiety, and PTSD. Counsellors working with refugees would benefit from the knowledge that safety and stabilization is a lengthy process and even the process of experiencing stabilization may allow for mental health concerns to have greater awareness within the individual.

In addition to these principles, incorporating self-disclosure can help build trust and rapport with young adult refugees. Sharing some aspects of the counselor's background,

values, and experiences can help create a more open and collaborative therapeutic relationship. However, this should be done judiciously and with sensitivity to the individual's comfort level. Ultimately, the key to cultural competency when working with young adult refugees is an individualized, flexible, and empathetic approach that centers the person above all else. It involves actively listening, adapting to their unique needs and experiences, and providing the support and advocacy necessary for them to thrive in their new environment.

Conducting this research as a white researcher and an outsider, I found that I was able to create rapport and trust with each of my participants. I, myself, do not have lived experience with displacement and yet I was able to connect with each participant in an intimate way. My approach to working with each participant included, 1) self-disclosure, 2) a strong understanding of the refugee process, political structures and non-western religions, 3) centering the relationship above the need to gather information, and 4) flexibility and openness to their stories and personal accounts and allowing their accounts to contradict my understanding of refugee experience, or to say it another way, understanding the nomothetic view of refugee experience and holding that knowledge lightly, all the while prioritizing the idiographic and personal account.

Using self-disclosure has been long debated in counselling, yet using small elements of self-disclosure at the beginning of the interview gave each participant an opportunity to understand my perspective and begin to feel connected with me. When I first spoke with each participant, I spoke about how this study is meaningful to me and self-disclosed my background, my education, my work and how my family's experience with displacement has impacted me. My self-disclosure supported trust as it provided explanation for the value I put on their personal accounts and my own personal understanding of displacement. This self-disclosure also assured each participant that they did not have to explain refugee migration processes or educate me on their background if they did not want to.

The knowledge of a person's culture and background can provide confidence in their ability to trust a counsellor to understand them with greater detail. My knowledge of the refugee process, political structures, non-western religions, and geography also gave participants confidence in my ability to understand them. I did not need to provide a lengthy disclosure about my educational background, only an outline of my background

to begin to establish confidence. Additionally with my Syrian participants, I was able to speak a few words of broken Arabic. I cannot converse fluently in Arabic, however I put the effort into saying the few phrases and words that I do know to connect with the participant. This small effort made an impact with one participant in particular and she noted that it was a nice touch to feel as if her language was important that gave her confidence in my ability to understand her. She reflected that it felt as if she mattered to me.

Overall, cultural competency for working with young adult refugees requires the centering of the individual above all else and learning about what is important to them, how they understand themselves in relation to their background and identity. It's important to hold all the knowledge that has been mentioned above, however it is even more important to work to connect with each individual in a way that is meaningful to them. Cultural competency can be much more flexible than adopting an approach that centers the culture over the individual.

## **5.5. Limitations & Future Directions**

There are a few limitations to the present study. The first limitation is that I, as the researcher, am an outsider to this area. Not being a refugee, myself creates a disadvantage in fully understanding the lived experience. While techniques were put in place to understand, validate, and authenticate the data, it's important to acknowledge that in Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), the interpretation of the researcher plays a significant role, thus introducing an inherent limitation. It's worth noting that a researcher with shared experiences of displacement and marginalization may interpret the narratives differently and uncover more nuanced themes.

Additionally, the sample and its size limit the development of the resulting themes. The sample size provides indications of some emerging themes and understandings regarding the experiences of young adult refugees. However, having a larger sample size would be beneficial to validate the emerged themes and further explore the experiences of young adult refugees in Canada. Furthermore, the present study utilized a sample consisting of university students, all from the same institution. While the study aimed to explore the young adult refugee experience more broadly, rather than focusing solely on the university experience, it would be valuable to expand the sample to include

non-university populations. University samples can be skewed as they tend to be more privileged and homogenous. Smith et al. (2009) advocated for purposeful sampling when using IPA methodology to prevent introducing bias into research. Although the study aimed to select samples representative of a larger refugee demographic, relying on service providers for recruitment limited the diversity of demographics. The study included a heterogeneous sample of young adult refugees with diverse migration experiences, ethnic backgrounds, and refugees from various countries. While this approach was chosen to capture a broader perspective on the young adult experience, it may also be worthwhile to explore differences among refugee groups within this age range.

Furthermore, this study opens avenues for future research. Given the surprising findings that refugees often do not strongly identify as refugees, struggle to connect with other refugees or individuals from their country of origin, experience challenges with cultural identity, and may feel disconnected from their families, further investigation into these topics is warranted. While this study highlights the existence of these phenomena within the resettlement process, understanding why these phenomena occur could provide greater insight into the connections refugees establish with themselves, others, and their environment during resettlement.

## **5.6. Conclusion**

I will conclude this manuscript by revisiting the aim and research questions. The research questions are as follows:

- 1. How do young adult refugees make meaning from their experiences?*
- 2. How does the surrounding community impact young adult refugees' sense of belonging in Canada?*
- 3. What are the barriers to positive resettlement?*
- 4. How does resettlement shape young adult refugees' identity formation?*

This study delved into the experiences of young adult refugees concerning displacement, migration, resettlement, and identity development. During interviews with the participants, surprising results emerged from their narratives, with one of the most significant findings being how resettlement shapes young adult refugees' identity

formation and sense of belonging. Beyond the labels of 'refugee' and 'refugee-ness,' each individual is seeking their place in the world. While it may seem obvious when written out, it challenges prevailing perspectives on refugees and displacement. Instead of solely viewing themselves through the lens of displacement, refugees are striving to find their place and construct their identities based on their values and interests.

Their experiences of displacement impact how they construct their values, inform their identity, and give meaning to their lives. While the migratory experiences inform their identity development, they also play a significant role in shaping how young adults make meaning from past hardships. Further exploration in this area is needed to fully understand how young adults construct meaning from previous hardships.

This study illustrates that young adult refugees derive meaning from their migratory and resettlement experiences by finding hope for their future opportunities in Canada. Despite experiencing great loss, trauma, uprootedness, and adversity, they also express remarkable resilience, growth, and hope. Their outlook is more future-oriented than past-oriented, and they seek to find significance in their past experiences, allowing them to access a life they did not have before. Participants who spend time reflecting on their hardships are more likely to speak openly about the grief and loss experienced. This process of reflection supports their ability to construct meaning from their past and envision a hopeful future.

In conclusion, resettlement creates a profound process for meaning making among young adult refugees through grief and learning about oneself and finding a purpose and others to connect with. By understanding their experiences and working to validate their ongoing resettlement, we can better support their psychological adjustment and foster a sense of belonging as they continue their journey of identity formation and adjustment to life here in Canada.

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# Appendix A. Recruitment Letter



## **Recruitment Letter** The Lived Experiences of Young Adult Refugees in Canada

### **Are You or Have You Ever Been a Refugee?**

**Study for young adult newcomers who have experience with forced migration.**

**We're looking for individuals who have come to Canada as a refugee to participate in a counselling psychology study. The study is exploring migratory experiences, including resettlement and personal identity.**

**Participants must meet ALL the following eligibility criteria:**

- Forced migration to Canada (due to war, conflict, asylum seeking or displacement)
- Migrated to Canada as a refugee (*You do NOT need to have current refugee status*)
- Moved to Canada between 2015-2022
- Currently between the ages of 18-30
- Currently living in British Columbia
- Can converse in English

**Participation:**

- 1 one-two hour in person semi-structured interview with a Counselling Psychology Graduate student at SFU (SFU health and counselling).

**Participants will receive:**

- \$50 dollar giftcard to Amazon, Starbucks, Tim Hortons or Safeway. Participants can choose a head of time.

**Please email [REDACTED] for any information or inquire about participating.**

# Appendix B. Consent Form



## Consent Form The Lived Experiences of Young Adult Refugees in Canada

**Student Lead:** Caleigh Kind  
Masters of Counselling Psychology  
Simon Fraser University  
[REDACTED]

**Principal Investigator** Dr. Masahiro Minami  
Assistant Professor, Faculty of Education  
Simon Fraser University  
[REDACTED]

### INTRODUCTION AND STUDY PURPOSE

You are being invited to take part in this research because you are a refugee who has moved to Canada as part of their resettlement process. The purpose of the overall project is to begin an inquiry into your resettlement experience, what supports and hinders positive resettlement. Your experience will become valuable to understanding how to better shape the resettlement process for refugees and how to increase hope and positivity in Canada. The hope is that this will allow therapists and other service providers to better support clients who share similar experiences to you.

Simon Fraser University and Caleigh Kind, the researcher conducting this research study, subscribe to the ethical conduct of research and to the protection at all times of the interests, comfort, and safety of participants.

### YOUR PARTICIPATION IS VOLUNTARY

Your participation is entirely voluntary, it is up to you to decide whether or not to take part in this study. If you wish to participate, you will be asked to sign this form or give verbal consent. If you do decide to take part in this study, you are free to withdraw at any time during the interview and up to 4 weeks after the interview, without giving any reasons for your decision.

### WHAT DOES THE STUDY INVOLVE?

This study will involve answering a few questions based off your personal and unique experience.

- The nature of the questions will be focused on resettlement in British Columbia, your emotional experience, how you experience services related to resettlement and your overall experience of living in BC.

Ethics #30001431  
Version 1  
December 5, 2022

- The amount of time for each question will vary, we estimate roughly 1 – 2 hours per interview.
- The location of each interview will take place over zoom.
- The interviews will be audio- and video recorded.

#### **WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND INCONVENIENCES OF PARTICIPATING?**

It is not anticipated that there will be any risks from your participation in this study. At times, interviews and personal disclosures may increase emotional distress, in that case, we will pause and focus on emotional regulation. We will only resume the interview if you feel ready to resume.

#### **WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?**

Participants will be awarded a \$50 honorarium of an e-giftcard for participating. Participants can choose from an Amazon, Starbucks, Tim Hortons or a Safeway e-giftcard. E-giftcards will be emailed to participants after the interview within 4 hours after the interview. Participants will speak with a counsellor trainee and may experience therapeutic benefits, such as emotional regulation and having their story witnessed. The study also aims at benefiting the refugee community at large as a result.

#### **WHAT HAPPENS IF I DECIDE TO WITHDRAW MY CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE?**

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may withdraw from this study at any time during the interview. If you decide to enter the study you can decide to withdraw at any time in the future, there will be no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You will have 4 weeks to withdraw your data from the date of your interview. Withdrawing your data will not result in the loss of your honorarium.  
Compassionate

If you choose to enter the study and then decide to withdraw after the interview, all data collected about you during your enrolment in the study will be destroyed.

#### **WILL MY TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?**

All identifying information will be kept confidential. Audio and video recordings will not be shared beyond the student lead and the principal investigator. All recordings will be [transcribed](#) and participant information will be coded to maintain confidentiality.

You will be assigned a unique study number as a participant in this study. Only this number will be used on any research-related information collected about you during the course of this study. Your identity [[i.e.](#) your name or any other information that could identify you] as a participant in this study will be kept confidential. Information that contains your identity will remain only with the Principal Investigator and the student lead. The list that matches your name to the unique study number that is used on your research-related information will not be removed or released without your consent unless required by law.

**Confidentiality: How will your privacy be maintained?**

- Your confidentiality will be respected. Information that discloses your identity will not be released without your consent.
- All documents will be identified by a unique participant code.
- All data from your participation will be stored in the secure SFU OneDrive and an encrypted USB drive.

**AFTER THE STUDY IS FINISHED (if applicable)**

The results of this study will be reported in a Master's thesis and may also be submitted for publication in academic journals. The eventual aim is to publish and present the research with the local and broader community. Specifically, opportunities will be sought to present at Education and Counselling conferences.

After the study is complete, the results will be shared with you. If you would like to receive the final results, please indicate yes or no here.

- No
- Yes

**Photography, Audio/Video Taping**

The interviews conducted will be audio and video recorded to ensure accuracy and authenticity of results. Each interview will be stored securely on a password protected drive and will only be accessed by the principal researcher and student lead. After the study has concluded, the data will be stored for no longer than 4 years, after which it is destroyed.

**WHO DO I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY DURING MY PARTICIPATION?**

If you have any concerns about your rights as a research participant and/or your experiences while participating in this study, please contact the Director, SFU Office of Research Ethics, at [dore@sfu.ca](mailto:dore@sfu.ca) or 778-782-6593.

# Appendix C. Semi-structured Interview Guide



## Semi-Structured Interview Guide The Lived Experiences of Young Adult Refugees in Canada

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Name:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Start Time:** \_\_\_\_\_ **End Time:** \_\_\_\_\_

### Introduction:

I want to sincerely thank you for participating in this study. I hope that this study and your answers will help give more insight into how to better support refugee populations. For this reason, please do your best to answer the questions as honestly as possible.

You are also welcomed to ask questions or clarification at any time through the interview. And as a reminder, you may choose not to answer any of the questions.

Throughout the interview, I may ask to follow up questions to your responses for clarity and authenticity. If at any time through the interview, you need a break or emotions are arising, please let me know and we will pause and adjust the interview.

### Background

**1. “Tell me about what yourself”?**

Follow up questions and prompts:

- *Who is in your family, who do you live with? (Family context)*
- *Are you in school? (Academic context)*
- *Are you working? (Work context)*

### Resettlement Experiences

**1. “What have been your experiences with resettlement so far”?**

Follow up questions and prompts:

- *How have you found the transition to your new home been?*
- *What have you found to help your resettlement?*

**2. “What do you think would make your resettlement experience easier”?**

Follow up questions and prompts:

- *What types of services would help?*

**3. “What barriers have you experienced during your resettlement”?**

Follow up questions and prompts:

- *Accessing services, language barriers, housing costs, racism, access to education etc.*

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# Appendix D. Knowledge Mobilization Infographic

## REFUGEE STUDENTS IN BC

### 6 KEY FINDINGS AND THEIR APPLICATION

#### PRE & POST SETTLEMENT COMPARISON

100% of participants articulated that they were in a better position than before they had come to Canada, however also articulated they continue to face major stressors and find it challenging to be in Canada. Many participants made the comparison, that being in Canada felt easier only by comparison as they had experience a wide range of adverse experiences.

#### SEEKING SUPPORT

Students needed to find people they could trust to ask for help. 57% of participants reported they did not know they could ask for help or who they could trust. It took someone in their lives to advocate for them to access mental health supports and other emotional supports.

#### BELONGING & COLLECTIVITY

Refugees spoke of how they found belonging through a shared sense of purpose of goals. Some refugees also found belonging through their sense of identity and a community that shared that sense of identity, such as racial and LGBTQIA+ communities.

#### ISOLATION

Isolation was a concern for most participants. 100% of participants reported not developing friends to other refugees or people from their country of origin. All participants articulated they had 1 or more friends although found it challenging to connect with others. Those who had stronger relationships also had a stronger sense of hopefulness for their futures.

#### EXPANDED SENSE OF IDENTITY

Refugees who had a strong sense of personal identity felt more hopeful and connected to their life in Canada.

#### FUTURE ASPIRATIONS

All participants had a sense of purpose for their futures. Student felt somewhat hopeful about their lives in Canada. Some expressed concern about housing affordability, cost of living and reunification with family. While they expressed hopefulness about their lives, it was mitigated by the current stressors they were facing.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Support refugees in constructing purpose and hope through constructing a life they feel excited and motivated by.
- Counselling can strengthen a sense of personal identity and give opportunities to connect with others who understand their identity.
- Connect refugees beyond refugee and cultural communities. Support them in connecting with communities they identify with.
- Support advocacy and psycho-education on the importance of getting connecting with helping professionals