



Issues in Refugee Adaptation After Resettlement

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Abstract

Refugees are individuals who have been displaced forcefully or are fleeing war and conflict in their home country to find safety elsewhere. Causes of conflict and individual situations vary from place to place, but regardless of the specifics in consequence of these changes, many refugees lose the sense of their identity. This paper will detail the hardships refugees face when integrating into a new culture. Before they leave for a new country, refugees experience trauma, which could be anything from wars, injury, sexual abuse, physical abuse, or political conflict. As they arrive in a new country and are relocated in a city, refugees continue to confront complex challenges such as cultural adaptation, affordable housing, mental health difficulties, integrating into the education system, finding employment, helping their family adapt, and learning independence in an unfamiliar place, all in relation to UN SDG 16, “Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions,” and SDG 4 “Quality Education.” This paper explores ideas concerning refugees adapting to a new country, issues of economic class, and ways to help children continue their education. This paper contains information from peer-reviewed articles, and other scholarly references.

Keywords: Refugees, coping strategies, resettlement, cultural adaptation, family, women and children

Introduction

The term “refugee” comes from the “French word *réfugié* meaning ‘gone in search of refuge’—referring initially to the Protestant Huguenots, who began fleeing France after the 1685 revocation” (Skop et al., 2019, p. 603). According to the Immigration Forum, a “*refugee*” is “a person outside the country of [their] nationality, who is unable or unwilling to return to that country because of a well-founded fear of persecution based on [their] race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion” (2020). Internally displaced people (IDPs) are forced from their homes; however, they choose not to cross the borders and receive aid from their home government. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) IDPs are not able to receive humanitarian aid due to government policy, as a result IDPs are among the most vulnerable ([UNHCR.org/en-es/internally-displaced-people](https://www.unhcr.org/en-es/internally-displaced-people)). An asylum-seeker is someone who requests sanctuary for international protection, they are interviewed in order to qualify for refugee status ([UNHCR.org/en-es/asylum-seeker](https://www.unhcr.org/en-es/asylum-seeker)). In contrast, an immigrant *chooses* to move to another country to make a permanent residence in that country (Nuñez, 2014).

The term “refugee” did not become a legal designation until after World War II. Skop et al. (2019) notes that “[it] was the massive numbers of European refugees, displaced persons, and Holocaust survivors requesting asylum that forced the Western States to reconsider and officially recognize

these individuals” (p. 604). At the time, there was no feasible way of keeping a record of the number of refugees in the world. It was not until the creation of the UNHCR that the UN created a way to keep track of the increasing numbers of refugees (Skop et al., 2019). There are currently 89.3 million displaced people globally, of which are 53.2 million IDPs, 27.1 million refugees and 4.6 million asylum-seekers (UNHCR, 2022), and one percent of refugees are considered for resettlement worldwide (International Rescue Committee, 2021).

This paper features accounts from refugees originating in the Middle East who resettled in Europe, Australia, and the United States, as recounted in academic journals. It also discusses different aspects of Sustainable Development Goal 4 & 16 (SDG 4 & SDG 16). The Global Alliance’s report (2019) is referenced in this work to describe connections to Target 16.2, “Help end abuse, exploitation, and violence against children;” Target 16.3, “uphold the rule of law and provide access to justice”: and Target 16.9, “help provide legal identity for all” (p. 139). These SDG targets demonstrate how each story and subtopic contained in this work relate to anchoring peace, justice, and inclusion with refugees.

In the United States, organizations in each individual state keep track of the refugees and help them throughout the resettlement process. As this research was done in Utah, their organizations include the following: “The Office of Refugee Resettlement, The Utah Department of Workforce Services, Utah State Refugee Services, International Rescue Committee, and Catholic Community Services all partner to provide services to refugees for the first two years of resettlement in Utah” (Colvin, 2018, p. 84). As they arrive in a new country and are relocated, refugees confront complex challenges such as cultural adaptation, affordable housing, mental health difficulties, integrating into the education system, finding employment, helping their family adapt, loss of identity, and learning independence in an unfamiliar place.

Methodology

The method used in this study was phenomenology. Phenomenology is a qualitative narrative approach to data analysis that references real-life accounts of individuals sharing details of their experiences through a series of questions and interviews. Colvin (2018) describes that “it is a philosophical structure that attempts to make sense of interpretation and move beyond the observable to the intentionality of actions. Use of this method focuses less on the interpretations of the researcher and more on a description of the experiences of participants” (p. 90). This method’s purpose is to find a phenomenon within those experiences to demonstrate the findings of the data.

The possible downside and caution for this method is the risk of “researcher-induced” bias. It is the responsibility of the researcher to have clear themes and support from peer-reviewed resources. The challenge for this method is the questions asked to each individual. The questions need to be non-specific to allow freedom of how the participants share their story. The researcher needs to be flexible and let refugees answer the questions freely, allowing individual responses and variability. The limitation of this study is that in order to have in person interviews, researchers need a minimum of five years or more of volunteer work to gain trust of refugees and organizations.

The subtopics were discovered as they were discussed as common themes in various peer-reviewed articles. Those common themes were only a fraction compared to the other topics that could have been mentioned such as sex trafficking, women circumcisions, and conditions inside refugee camps.

Cultural Adaptation

For refugees, their identities are stripped from them, they flee to a new country for safety, and to seek refuge. Once they are resettled, their new life begins. According to McCarthy et al. (2020) “Resettling to a new country is a significant life transition for refugees. The resettlement process involves the admittance of refugees from an asylum country to a host country that has approved their permanent resettlement” (p. 1). This life-changing experience requires them to adapt to new surroundings, systems, and a new culture. Part of that process is learning a new language, adapting to a new socio-economic environment, and feeling the pressure to reunite with their families and start off fresh in a new life (Safak-Ayvazoglu and Kunugroglu, 2021). These pressures include learning new tasks such as: learning to interact with customer service, talking with a doctor or pharmacist, to name a few. With the help of their case worker, refugees will be guided how to navigate their new life during resettlement. This mentorship will help prepare refugees to work on their own.

Being part of the refugee experience is quite complex; some of those challenges include persecution, injustice, and racism. According to Bergquist et al., (2019), “Similar to other groups, the process of managing a contested, marginalized, or misunderstood identity for refugees results in increased vulnerability for negative outcomes. Refugees often face a turbulent transition to a new culture and attaining successful social integration and acceptance is somewhat arduous” (p. 384). The developing ability to integrate into a host culture is challenging at first, and with it comes post-migration stressors.

There is a specific process refugees face when they resettle in the United States. When they arrive, refugees are greeted by their case worker, and they are taken to their affordable new home suited for a refugee family. They get a stipend from the U.S. government that lasts three months—accompanied by a charge to find employment in 90 days (International Rescue Committee, 2021). They need to get help from a resettlement agency to get food, shelter, employment, as well as help with enrolling children into the school system, and enrolling adults in English classes. Utah is the only state that offers agency-led support for two years (Berkley Center for Religion, Peace,

and World Affairs, 2020). After two years—six months to a year in other states—they are then on their own, with assistance of a secondary agency to help these refugees for an additional two to seven years to become citizens of the United States. According to Colvin (2018), “Because Utah and other relocation centers move refugees out of neighborhood centers after two years (other states do so even sooner), identity needs may change over time” (p. 13). Refugees are offered the basic resources needed to adapt to a new country however, they need additional support from their family and community support groups to cope with the challenges they face.

In Western culture, the family dynamic includes the father, mother, and minor children. However, for most refugees, family includes extended members, such as uncles, aunts, grandparents, and cousins. A lot of them take on the responsibility of their parental care. As some refugees and their families get resettled in Portugal from Syria, Barbosa et al. (2019) observe:

Regarding cultural integration, it was interesting to note that most families identified many similar aspects between [the] Portuguese culture and their cultures of origin. [...]. In fact, one of the most salient similarities pointed out was the closeness and hospitality of the Portuguese people and especially within the family, an aspect that was even more stressed by the families who were living in rural areas (p. 74)

These refugee families noticed the importance of family in their new culture, and they felt a glimmer of hope that they could fit right in. Having that knowledge is a way that refugees can start moving forward.

As refugees move forward in their resettlement process, Nurhayat Bilge, from Florida University, notes, “As adaptation occurs, a certain one is losing [their] cultural identity. Certain cultural habits and traditions are altered or replaced, which is the inevitable result of any cross-cultural interaction” (2017, p. 132). With careful mentorship, their case worker will help refugees discover their identity, and work toward their potential.

Education

One of the ways refugees can succeed in their host country is through education, as noted in SDG 4. Education is essential for refugees, whether it comes from formal or informal knowledge about various topics. Children are obviously and deeply affected by the refugee experience. When children come into a new country, their struggles are similar to those of adults’. Nevertheless, “For many young people their journeys to resettlement have been associated with not only violence and uncertainty but also the trauma of loss and feelings of ‘being cast out’ from their home country” (Picton and Banfield, 2018, p. 842). Picton and Banfield continue, stating that educational opportunities for these children are limited and, in some cases, interrupted; as a result, children become illiterate in their own language. Their recommendation for this problem is to include the refugees in their schools. Picton and Banfield state: “School sites in host countries, can offer important opportunities for young, resettled people of refugee experience to learn the language and culture of their new country but to also make connections with others in their new community” (2018, p. 842). Having children go to school is a way to distract them from the life changes they

are experiencing and for them to continue learning something new. This method helps protect them from some conflicts that may arise while integrating into their new country.

Children who live in war-afflicted countries are at higher risk of not getting the opportunity for education. One of those risks includes child soldier recruitment tactics used by various extremist groups in Africa and in the middle east. The Global Alliance Report (2019) mentions in a section related to Target SDG 16.2 that:

The Committee of the Rights of the Child has reported that the recruitment and use of children as child soldiers has doubled or even quadrupled in certain country contexts. Vulnerable children are recruited and used by non-state armed groups and by groups designated as terrorist (p. 103).

These terrorist groups would wait to kidnap children near schools or theaters and lure them away under the promise of providing an opportunity to attend school, only to later learn those schools were actually military camps (Nicolai and Triplehorn, 2003). The risk of being kidnapped is just as high in refugee camps due to walking a long distance to school; in some cases, it is too far for them to get there safely.

Currently, children are typically enrolled in school before the end of their first thirty days as mandated by the United States government (Bendefaa, 2021). It is one of the ways that children can become integrated in their new home and culture, bringing opportunities to connect with new peers. In fact, SDG 4.7 notes that

all learners [should] acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development (sdgs.un.org/goals/goal4).

On top of learning math, science, and other subjects with their peers, refugee children often struggle through school because they are in process of learning a new language at the same time.

During a refugee student orientation event, a teacher remarked that refugees have a more challenging time understanding school-related concepts. Some have a harder time than American children understanding math, science, and English due to inconsistent preparation from their schooling or lack of schooling in their home country. According to Kiteki (2021), a researcher who focuses on youth refugees, the risks of language deprivation include not being able to integrate into their new culture and exploring new interests:

Youth with serious problems in language proficiency risk exclusion and isolation from peers, leading to identity confusion, disconnectedness, and in some instances, mental health problems. [...] As a result, their educational process is further disrupted. (p. 93)

Earlier in this paper it was mentioned that children are at risk for not finishing their education due to schools not being directly accessible at the camp, requiring them to travel to school. This can lead to possible kidnapping or create problems relating to those mentioned above.

SDG 16.2 and SDG 4 aim to help children stay in school in order to have that distraction from their struggles, and focus on learning new concepts. In order to implement that goal, The Global Alliance advises that “Promoting inclusive and equitable quality education, including early childhood development, has the potential to instill values and behaviours that reduce violence and promote peace” (Global Alliance, 2019, p. 103). When those values are instilled in refugee children, they may have a desire for their own success, however that may look like for them.

One of those successes may include higher education, according to Safak-Ayvazoglu and Kunugroglu as referenced in an Australian study about African refugees who have navigated through their challenges to attain their educational goals. “It is a means of building self-esteem and self-confidence through recognition of their skills in the host country” (Safak-Ayvazoglu and Kunugroglu, 2021, p. 97). As refugees pursue their education, they are able to discover their strengths and passions to reach their full potential.

One of the ways that families are able to support each other through their challenges is having parents be involved in their child’s education; which includes helping children with their homework, attending school events, and communicating with teachers. According to Cranston et al. (2021), “Refugee parents like all parents play a significant role in assisting their children as they begin to trust teachers and principals as guiding adults in their lives” (p. 375). Refugee students are at higher risk of not succeeding in school if their parents are not involved as their child’s voice or not supporting them at home. Cranston et al. observe, “It seems reasonable to conclude that when parents are involved in and with the education system and a particular school’s personnel, their children tend [to] perform better in school and stay in school longer than their peers who do not have such support” (2021, pp. 376–77).

On the other hand, some parents do not respect the teacher’s assessments of their child’s behavior because they see it as disrespectful within their culture. Some subjects may seem to be a controversial topic among the refugee community, as they may disagree with some programs in schools. In Ontario, Canada, they “created a downloadable document titled ‘A Grade-by-Grade Guide for Muslim Parents’ with questions and answers, which is intended to provide Muslim parents with a comprehensive understanding [of specific topics]” (Cranston et al., 2021, p. 395). These sessions are the perfect opportunity to communicate with parents in order to include them in their child’s education (Cranston et al., 2021). With the combination of classes and brochures, teachers would be able to help Muslim parents understand the importance of learning about subjects that may seem sinful or irrelevant in their eyes.

Refugee youth are often “forced to live in dangerous, difficult neighborhoods as the only option their parents can afford. Consequently, their safety and security are at risk as they live in constant stress and fear, often at risk for danger through gang-related [activities]” (Kiteki, 2021, p. 92). They also may be in danger within their own home as their parents struggle with their own mental

health and other issues that may arise. The children may be expected to pick up the slack to help support their family financially. Kiteki mentions that part of the risk in that situation would be children potentially dropping out of school (2021). Clearly, education is one of the main keys to sustainable development, and so SDG 4 offers a framework that applies to global educational concerns, including access to education for all.

Mental Health

Along with the challenges of cultural adaptation come the conflicts of mental health, which are commonly seen as taboo or a weakness. However, once a refugee is in a country where they will resettle, they “are provided with services that aim for refugees to establish self-sufficiency as quickly as possible” (Yalim et al., 2021, p. 199). This is done because when refugees are in limbo, impacts occur to their mental health as they think about what they have lost—their identity, family, culture, social supports, and so on (Yalim et al., 2021). In addition,

Conflicts worldwide have resulted in several people being forced to be displaced from their homes and separated from their families. Refugees, similar to other forcibly displaced people, often experience traumatic events, such as torture, mass killings, [abuse, oppression,] and political victimization. Exposure to these traumatic experiences negatively affects the mental health of refugees. (Ali Shah et al., 2019, p. 2)

These experiences have a large influence on the mental health of a refugee. They may come to believe there is not any good in the world, and worst of all, lose trust in themselves and others. If they do not have a way to cope with their inner struggles, some refugees may experience suicidal ideation.

Part of the reason refugees are at risk for having mental health problems is that when they are fleeing from their home country, they lose their home, family connections, gender roles, and more. According to Goodkind et al. (2014), “Researchers have also found that the loss of valued social roles impacts the health and well-being of refugees. Refugee adults typically experience the loss of multiple social roles” such as “parent”, “spouse”, “child”, and “occupational roles and skills” (p. 334). For example, some nurses and doctors come to the United States as refugees but are not able to practice their profession due to licensing laws. It seems disappointing for refugees to accept underemployment opportunities in order to support their families; whereas in their home country, they worked as qualified medical personnel or other types of professionals.

As mentioned, most refugees come from war-affected countries and, along the way, experience trauma, persecution, and tragedy (Bendjo, 2018). The World Health Organization says mental health is “a state of well-being in which every individual realizes [their] own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to [their] community” (Löbel, 2020, p. 1). The more trauma refugees experience, the more critical it is to help them be aware of their mental health.

Refugees are often encouraged to gain support from those they consider family—a group of two

or more people related by birth or who present themselves as a family (Löbel, 2020). According to Löbel (2020), “[a] basic family unit is the nuclear family, consisting of spouses or partners and any minor children. Yet, this concept of the nuclear family is derived from specifically Western perspectives in the research on cohabitation, which have overlooked family structures in other parts of the world” (p. 2). Löbel analyzes “refugee family networks from both perspectives, looking at the nuclear family comprised of spouses or partners, minor and adult children, and at the extended family comprised of parents, siblings, and other relatives” (p. 2). The more support refugees have from those who are undergoing, or have undergone, similar circumstances will supplement healing and well-being in their experience. The experiences refugees have faced or currently having are challenging, but the coping strategies people choose seem to make the difference in psychological growth and understanding the meaning of life (Frounfelker et al., 2020). Researching those coping strategies helps the stories of refugees grow with meaning.

Researchers noted a difference when refugees were able to utilize their family network in their new countries. “Family members usually supply the most important resources for mental well-being. They offer care, emotional encouragement, comfort and aid.” (Löbel, 2020, p. 21). “Additionally, studies on social interventions such as support groups, mentoring programs, and initiatives designed to strengthen families have sought to demonstrate a causal relationship between social networks and mental health” (Löbel, 2020, p. 20). Linking back to the family dynamic, Löbel noticed a difference when families were able to support each other throughout resettlement. She noted that “family members usually supply the most important resources for general mental well-being” (2020, p. 21). In addition, families were able to offer safety and comfort through providing encouragement, then finding a solution to the problem. Löbel also noticed that the stronger the social networks of refugees were, the better off their mental health would be: “A more recent strand of literature has suggested that network size is less relevant in providing social support in the specific context of migration. This implies that network size might not tell the whole story” (2020, p. 21). The strength of the family network provides a steadfast consistency of support from those who the refugees care about the most.

Adult refugees seem to find a higher resilience as they use their strengths to persevere through their challenges. According to Walther et al. (2021), “Strength-based views both in clinical practice and in academic research, essentially revolve around the key concept of resilience and have the ultimate aim of promoting resilience” (p. 1). Their study about how refugees have been able to adapt successfully discusses 54 adult refugees who arrived in Germany between 2013 and 2018 (Walther et al., 2021). Later in the study, they mention that refugees demonstrated adaptability by “acceptance, focus on present or future, belief in an internal locus of control, favorable comparisons between life in [their host country] and life in the country of origin, comparisons to peers, and growth through adversity mindset” (p. 4). Their article highlighted different circumstances where refugees were able to adapt by not having to worry about the dangers they faced prior to resettlement. Refugees learned how to write appointments down on a calendar, or mastered specialized training for employment (Walther et al., 2021). They had assistance and support from mentors who have the knowledge to train refugees the essential skills that other people take for granted.

Even though younger refugees have demonstrated ways to persevere through challenges, some still deal with mental illness. According to Im et al. (2021), “Refugee mental health needs are also cumulative and complex. Refugees face dual sources of distress: the strain of past traumas and current factors of acculturative stressors” (p. 2). Research has demonstrated that the sooner refugees can address their trauma, the better they will adjust to their new life. Some sources posit that it is vital to offer mental health services within the first few months of resettlement, as it can make an impact on the rest of their lives and their experiences through resettlement. Yalim et al. (2020) explain, “Scholars have stressed the need for improved methods of collecting and reporting data on this population. Suggestions include increasing cultural sensitivity, [trauma informed practices], and greater research into best practices for screening for trauma and mental health concerns” (p. 201). It also helps when professionals who understand the complexities of being a refugee, which requires patience, time, and relatability.

These suggestions are due to the “increased [data of] anxiety levels and PTSD symptoms among refugees, which can have a lifelong negative physical and psychiatric impact [if not treated]” (Yalim et al., 2020, p. 203). Improvements in assessments and mental health screenings might help future impact, as previously discussed. Jonathan Morgan (2020), a researcher in Sweden, states that in regard to refugees dealing with PTSD, “Although the incidence of PTSD or depression is high and long-term among children who have experienced war, those refugee children who have a strong sense of belonging tend to fare better in and out of school and are thought to be somewhat less inclined toward destructive behavior patterns that can distract them from their studies” (p. 41). As children are taught by caring teachers that recognize behaviors of PTSD, they will be able to help discover their potential.

Women and the Refugee Experience

Utah holds the highest amount of refugee women and children in the United States (Colvin, 2018). Even with this data, the voices of these women are not well known, yet their stories and influence are powerful, and it was an honor to review their experiences during this research. According to Umu Ozkaleli, refugee women “illustrate how after displacement women re-frame their identities differently depending on their past and present experiences” (Ozkaleli, 2018, p. 17). This research has demonstrated that some women came from affluent homes in their previous country, with security that made it unnecessary to worry when their next meal would be. Then all of their securities are taken away when they are forced to leave their homes, country, and life behind. What they used to know is gone, and their identity has to be rebuilt.

Colvin interviewed women from the Middle East who shared common experiences as mentioned above: “I had a job like normal life before the war. [...] Both me and my husband worked and my kids went in school. After the war, everything changed and it’s so hard to live there then we moved in Turkey” (2018, p. 8). Ozkaleli defines identity as a way of “becoming, rather than being” (2018, p. 18). These quotes were a beautiful way to describe the journey of refugee women adapting to a culture and growing into a new and better life. In Ozkaleli’s article (2018), one of the interviewees mentioned all she wanted was to keep her son safe, and continue his education. She had no desire to leave Syria, but she left just for him. “In Sha’allah [God Willing], we are going to go back

stronger than before and rebuild Syria. [...] We lost every demand that we had for life with dignity, even memories. Even the family gatherings [we have lost]" (p. 22). Even though the narratives and stories are different in each situation, Colvin noticed a similar circumstance among the women from the Middle East. Those women from Africa were grateful to be out of danger, despite the conditions they had dealt with at the refugee camp, and they were grateful to have shelter and a better life within the United States.

Another factor in refugee women's experiences is their need for family solidarity. Colvin interviewed newly arrived refugee women and notes that "newly arrived refugee women felt most comfortable having their children or other family members [present to] facilitate the interview experience" (Colvin and Munz, 2020, p. 5). This was in contrast to women who had been through some independent growth after living in the United States for a few years, and were comfortable enough to be interviewed alone without any others present. Colvin and Munz (2020) state that these women opted to be interviewed alone, which led them to have sitters or lead their children out of the room for privacy. "For many of the women, the interview process was also deeply moving and emotional as they told stories of personal and family tragedies, experiences of violence and civil war in their home countries, and the seemingly never-ending search for stability and resources in the U.S." (p. 5).

As observed in Colvin and Munz's article, time was the factor in helping refugees feel more comfortable sharing their stories. They had that time to adapt, focus on raising and supporting their families, and mentally reach a place where they felt comfortable sharing their experiences.

Women refugees are also able to use religious opportunities for support and continue the effort to see the bigger picture within their situations. Shaw et al. (2019) did a study with the following places: Brigham Young University, Dhi Consulting & Training (in Penang, Malaysia), and Howard University. This study included some of the issues that Muslim women refugees experienced—mostly referred to as "forced migrant" (2019) women. Their research mentions that religion was understudied but seemed to be a crucial influence in cultural adaptation. One of the challenges in a host country such as Australia or the United States was that it could be hard for women and other forced migrant people to adapt to their host country due to assumptions, prejudice, and discrimination regarding their religion. One of the aspects they researched was identity shifts through feminist theory, noting that, "After migration, women identified as refugees or asylum seekers experience this new identity alongside conceptualizations of what it means to be from a particular ethnic, religious, and linguistic community within the broader host country" (Shaw et al., 2020, p. 520). Along with that identity shift, they found an influence in their Islamic beliefs. Shaw et al. (2020) found that all of the participants found comfort within their religious beliefs and recognized the challenges in being able to participate in religious practices after resettlement. They all acknowledged trusting in God, being able to practice their religion to enable their coping mechanisms, and their fear of being persecuted and discriminated against, which limited those very practices they valued for healing trauma and encouraging personal growth (Shaw et al., 2020).

Religious Persecution

In other instances, religion is a way for refugees to find support and gain connections to get to know people within their own religion. They can reach out to those communities in the process of adapting. Shaw et al. (2019) discusses how forced migrant people use their religion or a new religion to find cultural acceptance and support within religious sectors as part of their cultural adaptation: “Religion and spirituality are situated within social and cultural contexts that include environmental changes for forced migrants[...] Religious involvement may serve to promote bonding or bridging (across groups), forms of social capital within the host country” (p. 520). Frounfelker et al. also state that those who did not have a coping strategy had a more challenging time through their experience and had the challenge to find the meaning of life.

On the other side of finding meaning and growth, is the misunderstandings of religion(s) and persecution. Jonathan Morgan did a study in Sweden interviewing some unaccompanied refugee minors (URM) who arrived in Sweden fleeing from religious persecution from their families and countries. Many of the participants in his study had a Muslim upbringing and converted to Christianity as active members in their congregations. According to Morgan (2020), “Religion, in this paradigm becomes an important psychological coping strategy that URM use to bring a sense of balance and continuity to their otherwise traumatic and unstable lives. On the other hand, religion has been understood to operate as an “engine of adaptation” to a new social context” (p. 41). Since refugees had a religious aspect, they noticed something far bigger and more beautiful than what lay in front of them. They were able to see an influence of a higher power that led them to who they are today.

According to Morgan, his participants had experiences in their conversions to Christianity. Some had positive experiences, where their families still accepted them for who they were and kept them part of the family. Others had a different experience; as Morgan (2020) states, “the participants faced an added layer of complexity in their relationships [...] making a decision that many in their homelands view as apostasy” (p. 44) In addition, Morgan explains that “this subverts the trope that all Muslim families are intolerant and willing to break ties (or worse) with their family members if they leave the faith” (2020, p. 45). In some cases, refugees end up in prison due to their change in religious views. In that situation there would be need for a voice to dispute the charges.

One of the Targets in SDG 16, discusses the rule of law (16.3) that was not referenced in detail in the Global Alliance report; however, one article discusses why Target 16.3 was not slated for implementation by 2030. Steven Malby (2018) is a legal advisor and head of the Commonwealth Office who discusses Target 16.3 as a starting point for different countries to implement and monitor the rule of law. Malby writes: “Governments may also set their own national targets ‘guided by the global level of ambition but taking into account national circumstances” (p. 2). Malby also mentioned that the methodologies were dependent on how the data was collected in each country and their priorities for implementing SDG 16.

Yet according to Malby, there was a crucial factor that explains. A country could have legal

frameworks in place that align with the sustainable goals, yet “Even a well-functioning judiciary and government administrative system may not have the legal tools needed to promote the investment and socio-economic environment necessary for sustainable development” (p.11). With this factor in place, it would make sense that representation would be needed for those serving time in the name of persecution. They would be able to help refugees get through the loop holes and have access to freedom.

In addition to religious persecution, many refugees face discrimination based on assumptions about religion, anti-Black, anti-Arab racism. As Kiteki, notes, “Identity with the Muslim religion has contributed to acts of discrimination toward African refugee youth, most particularly toward the young women who are often sent for disciplinary action for wearing their headscarf and long skirts” (Kiteki, 2021, p. 92). This example is in relation to what SDG 16.9 discusses. The Global Alliance report states “Discrimination and inequalities, including those related to gender, [and religious persecution] have a large and wide-ranging impact on society, particularly with respect to the justice and inclusion aspects of SDG 16 +” (Global Alliance, 2019, p. 106). Discrimination, persecution, and inequalities lead into another challenge mentioned a few times in this work is a loss of identity.

Kiteki (2021) also writes about a common struggle among youth refugees. Part of the struggle talked about in the article was concerning loss of identity: “Loss of status begin in refugee camps and continues in resettlement countries” (p. 92). Along with that loss of identity, the youth deal with discrimination because of their religion. Particularly after the 9/11 attacks, refugees were often persecuted for how they dressed; people believed they were terrorists, and had joined Al Qaeda or the Taliban, and they would attack America again.

Conclusion

While refugees are displaced from their homes and country, their loss of identity will give them an opportunity to grow years after they get settled in their new life. As Utah was the location for this research, where most of the refugee population are women and children. Those women were able to learn independence by getting a job, becoming resilient to raise their families on their own, and supporting their children in school activities. Women who lived in the U.S. for more than five years showed a type of confidence in themselves and were comfortable to interview alone. Even among new refugee women, their husbands supported them to choose to be interviewed in a study.

Refugee experiences look different for everyone, based on the circumstances making them refugees, issues regarding women and family, the pervasive problem of mental health stigmas, and experiences with religious persecution. SDG targets 4.7, 16.2, 16.3, and 16.9 were referenced in connection to subtopics and refugees referenced in the articles.

The processes that helped refugees cope and adapt to their culture looked different for each person involved in the studies. The phenomenology method demonstrated perspectives relating to each subtopic mentioned in this work. It is important to note that their perspectives are not

universal, as each refugee has their own experiences, point of view, and growth within their story. These factors would leave opportunities for further research.

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