Young African Female Refugees' Sense of Acculturation and Community Connection in Western Australia

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Compared to children and older adult refugees, young female refugees experienced different and unique challenges during the transitional phases of resettlement and acculturation. However, there is limited research into the lives of young female African refugees in Western Australia. In this study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight young African women, aged between 19 to 24 years old from Sudan, South Sudan, Uganda, Kenya, United Arab Emirates, Somali and Liberia about their resettlement experiences in Western Australia. Interpretative phenomenological analysis revealed five distinct yet related themes. Diverse supportive social networks, participation in sport, early age of arrival and personal factors such as resilience were identified as catalysts of integration. Small and homogenous social networks, lack of knowledge about services, racism and parental control were identified as barriers to integration. Results suggested that these young female refugees encountered unique obstacles following resettlement because of their age and gender. More importantly, despite negative resettlement experiences, many of these young women remained resilient. Implications for future research and recommendations were discussed.

One of the world's largest challenges today is protecting those who, due to violent conflict, persecution and abuse of human rights, have been forced to flee their country of nationality (Department of Immigration and Border Protection [DIBP], 2011; United Nations Higher Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2013). Unlike a migrant who is able to choose to leave his or her country to seek a better life elsewhere, a refugee is a person who is typically outside of their home country seeking resettlement because of substantial fear of persecution on the grounds of nationality, race, religion, political point of view or membership to a specific social group (UNHCR, 2013). By the end of 2011, the UNHCR estimated there were 10.5 million refugees worldwide with the majority of them originating from Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia and Sudan (UNHCR, 2012b). The UNHCR continues to respond to the global refugee situation by implementing one of three durable solutions: Voluntary repatriation of refugees back to their home country, provision of integration options in countries of refuge, or resettlement in another country (Refugee Council of Australia [RCOA], 2009).

Australia and Refugees

Australia is a humanitarian partner of the UNHCR and remains in the top five countries of resettlement for refugees (UNHCR, 2012a). Over the last decade, between 10,000 and 13,000 people have entered Australia annually through the Refugee and Humanitarian Program – RHP (DIBP, 2011). Between the years 2003-04 and 2008-09, the average age of arrival in Australia for humanitarian entrants was 21.8 years (Hugo, 2011). According to the Refugee Council of Australia (2009), the number of young humanitarian entrants (i.e., those younger than 30 years of age) seeking entry to Australia each year is growing. Despite this, limited research has been conducted on this group of refugees in Australia (Dandy, 2009) and even less is known about young female African refugees or their experiences in Australia. In the following sections, key constructs such as acculturation, cultural distance, gender, social support and connection will be discussed.

Acculturation Process

Cross-cultural researchers have investigated a process that refugees engage in after relocating to a host country known as acculturation (Berry, 1997, 2005). Acculturation is a phenomenon whereby interactions between people of diverse cultures produce psychological and cultural changes to the individuals and groups involved (Berry, 1997, 2005). Through the contact between people, groups, and cultures within a society, change is elicited including modifications to the behaviour of individuals, group social structures and practices over years or generations (Berry, 2005).

Berry (1997, 2005) in his framework of acculturation outlined four change strategies: Integration, assimilation, separation and marginalisation. This bi-dimensional model maintains that acculturation entails two orthogonal behavioural changes, namely: (1) losing customs, beliefs and values specific to minority culture, and simultaneously (2) gaining customs, beliefs, and values of the host culture (Berry, 1997; Birman, 1994). Acculturating individuals can adopt one of the above four acculturation strategies. The most positive result is integration where individuals maintain the values of their old culture but also adopt and value their host country's new cultures (Dow, 2011). Thus, an integrated individual is someone who is positively connected to their cultural heritage and to the broader community that they live in. When assimilation is the preferred acculturation strategy, contact with one's ethno-cultural group is limited and interactions with those from other cultures, in particular the dominant group are emphasised (Berry, 2005). Assimilated individuals tend to relinquish the practices of their original culture and adopt the culture of the host society. Separation, the third acculturation strategy is characterised by exclusive participation with the ethno-cultural group to which one is a member and the rejection of the host culture. Finally, individuals who do not value cultural maintenance or cultural contact are considered to be marginalised individuals who remained unattached to their ethnic group or to the mainstream culture (Berry, 1997; Dow, 2011).

Acculturative Stress

During the process of acculturation, non-dominant group members in a society may experience substantial psychological discomfort when attempting to adjust to their new life in a foreign environment. Integration requires some degree of "culture shedding" in order to accommodate for new culturally "appropriate" behaviours. However, this may create "cultural conflict" within the acculturating individual if they become torn as to which behaviours should be lost or kept. When serious cultural conflict arises, the person experiences great difficulty modifying their behavioural repertoire resulting in acculturative stress (Berry, 1997). Previously termed "culture shock", acculturative stress refers to a stress reaction when one attempts to merge two cultures together (Berry, 2005).

Poppit and Frey (2007) investigated sources of acculturative stress from 20 Sudanese adolescents, aged between 13 and 18 years of age living in Brisbane, Australia. The main sources of acculturative stress for the young refugees were lack of English language proficiency, strict parental control and conflicting cultural rules between the Sudanese and the Australian culture. The female adolescents also reported that they do not enjoy the same degree of freedom as permitted by their parents compared to their Sudanese male counterparts. These findings show that problems encountered by adolescent refugees may be pertinent to younger refugees and less relevant to adult refugees.

Cultural Distance

Physical and structural differences or cultural distance (Berry, 1997) can also affect the acculturation process for refugees. It is common for refugees who resettle in a predominantly white, English speaking country like Australia to experience discrimination on the basis of being ethnically or culturally different to the majority of the population (Colic-Peisker, 2009). Physical differences relate to appearance, including skin colour, ethnic facial features, attire, the use of a different language and certain behaviours that

distinguish refugees from the dominant population (Colic-Peisker, 2009). For example, Colic-Peisker's (2009) study on resettlement success and life satisfaction in three refugee communities in Western Australia found that African refugees reported experiencing more discrimination than ex-Yugoslav or Middle Eastern refugees because their skin colour (black) made them more "visible" to others in Australia. These findings suggest the importance of physical differences (e.g., looking black) in the discrimination process and speak to the presence of what is labelled blatant, overt, old fashioned prejudice (Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995) in Australia. Prejudice can also occur between groups (e.g., African refugees and the Australian community) where different gender roles, traditions, cultural norms and belief systems can lead to intergroup hostility (Berry, 1997). These discrepancies can negatively affect people's attitudes and behaviours toward members of the host country making integration more difficult to achieve (Berry, 1997).

Studies in Australia show that refugee youth will, like Indigenous Australians (Guilfoyle & Taylor, 2010) or other cultural groups (Guilfoyle & Harryba, 2009; Salleh-Hoddin & Pedersen, 2012) be subjected to social environments (i.e., within society, community, work, school/University) containing both blatant prejudice and discrimination in systemic, subtle, modern, forms (Guilfoyle, 2006). These "new" forms claim the presence of a reverse discrimination favouring the youth and will question the legitimacy of their own presence in Australia. These discourses create cultural distance which works against acculturation by mitigating the sense of entitlement to access Australia's mainstream scarce resources/services. These discourses are present in everyday interactions, mediated discourses (Hanson-Easey & Augoustinos, 2012), in service provision discourse such as housing (Forrest, Hermes, Johnston, & Poulsen, 2012), rights to work (Hartley & Fleay, 2014) and basic discourse of compassion (Every & Augoustinos, 2013).

Social Support

Social support is an external coping resource that includes the practical assistance, guidance, encouragement and interpersonal contact one receives from a variety of sources in time of need (Smith, 2013; Spicer, 2008). Social support is fundamental in assisting refugees through their resettlement and acculturation journey by enabling integration (Ager & Strang, 2008). Common supportive resources include important individuals (e.g., a close friend or specific family member) and groups to which one belongs (e.g., family, social group, ethno-cultural group). Social support is achieved by first establishing connections or social relations with people, groups and structures. Each social relation between two people is located within a larger system of intertwined social relations (called the social network) in which an individual is firmly suspended (Smith, 2013). It is from the social network that one draws upon various types of social support.

Research has found that the ability of refugees to establish social connections and build their social networks in a host country following forced-migration can largely influence their resettlement experiences (Smith, 2013). For instance, female refugees from Mozambique who resettled in villages on the perimeters of South Africa described a loss of social belonging when the social relationships they used to enjoy back home were not replicated after relocating (Sideris, 2003). Similar findings have also been found among Muslim refugee women living in Perth (Casimiro, Hancock, & Northcote, 2007) and from female refugees from 14 countries living in the United States (Smith, 2013).

Recent work in Perth with refugee women accessing supported playgroups has shown the powerful ways that social connections can form to lessen social isolation by building a sense of social support, belonging and social capital (La Rosa & Guilfoyle, 2013; McLaughlin & Guilfoyle, 2013; New & Guilfoyle, 2013). These findings emphasise the importance of

social support and social connections for female refugees in new host countries.

Social Connection

According to Ager and Strang (2008), social bond refers to the meaningful relationship between two people from the same ethnic, national or religious group. In contrast, social bridges refer to the connections between different groups and communities (e.g., between refugee groups and the host community). Both social bonds and social bridges are characterised as the committed and trusting relationships between people and groups that offer social support (Ager & Strang, 2008). Connections with one's ethno-cultural group are essential so that a degree of ethnic identity and belonging can be maintained (Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind, & Vedder, 2001). Conserving relationships with people from one's heritage also provides resources from which tangible and practical assistance can be drawn when it is required (Smith, 2013).

A social indicator of successful resettlement is cultural contact through the creation of multiple social connections and an extensive network that is inclusive of members from the mainstream society (Colic-Peisker, 2009). This implies that positive "social bridges" with the host society are important because they ensure social inclusion, offer more opportunities for intimacy and interaction, and provide more resources for social support (Ager & Strang, 2008). By interacting effectively with multiple cultural groups, acculturating individuals are therefore more likely to integrate and enjoy positive psychological adaptation (Berry & Sabatier, 2011).

"Social links" refers to ones connections with structures of the state (Ager & Strang, 2008). These structures, such as community organisations, institutions and agencies can amplify a sense of belonging among new arrivals as they offer new sources of information and interaction (McMichael & Manderson, 2004; Spicer, 2008). Studies have shown that social connections and links are extremely important to female refugees as they are often disadvantaged during their resettlement phase (Halcón et al., 2004; Poppit & Frey, 2007). Some of these

difficulties will be elaborated upon in the following sections.

Gender

Numerous studies investigating the resettlement experiences of refugees have concluded that gender differences exist, and that women are at greater risk of poorer resettlement outcomes and adaptation (Halcón et al., 2004; Poppit & Frey, 2007). For example, Chung and Kagawa-Singer (1993) researched the indicators of depression and anxiety for refugees from Southeast Asia living in California and found that women from Vietnam and Lao were more likely to experience depression and anxiety than their male counterparts.

Similarly, in their study of a group of young Somali asylum seekers and refugee women (aged 17 – 25), Whittaker, Hardy, Lewis and Buchan (2005) found that young Somali women felt the need to keep some of their feelings and behaviours (e.g., talking to boys which was unacceptable in their culture) secret from their family members or elders because of the fear of disapproval or retribution. The need to keep secrets ultimately affected many of the young women's ability to form successful social relations and social networks. Other research has also indicated the vulnerabilities faced by female refugees as they try to cope with changing gender roles, jobs, and social and personal relationships in their new host country (Poppit & Frey, 2007; Whittaker et al., 2005).

Despite the importance of the above findings, there is a dearth of research in the literature concerning young refugees (Dandy, 2009) and even less is known about the resettlement experiences of young African female refugees in Australia. Therefore, the present study seeks to explore the lived settlement experiences of a group of young African women in Western Australia. This study was guided by the following research questions: 1) What does the experience of resettlement mean for young African women living in Western Australia? and 2) How did the lived experience of resettlement influence their acculturation process and formation of social

connections? In doing so, we hope to learn more about the unique experiences of young female African refugees and the challenges they encountered as they adapt to life in Western Australia.

Method

Research Design

To explore the unique resettlement experiences of young African female refugees in Western Australia, a qualitative methodology of interpretative phenomenology was undertaken via in-depth interviews with a focus on how participants interact with the Australian and their ethnic community. Phenomenological interviewing allowed the researcher insight into the lives and experiences of the young women, as expressed by them in their own words through the use of open ended and broad questions. Interpretative phenomenological analysis allows examination of individuals' lived experience of the phenomenon of resettlement, the meaning they assign to their experiences and how they understand it (Smith, 2011). It also allows researchers to gain important insights into how the decision making processes and behaviours of participants are affected by their lived experiences (Smith, 2011).

Participants

The sample consisted of eight young, Black African women aged between 19 and 24 (the average age of the participants was 22 years). The respondents were born in various countries including the United Arab Emirates, Sudan, South Sudan, Somalia, Liberia, Uganda and Kenya. Some participants arrived in Australia when they were in their childhood whilst others arrived during late adolescence (the average age of arrival was 11.88 years). Time spent living in Australia ranged from six to thirteen years with an average duration of nine and a half years. Half of the young women were Muslims and the remaining four were Christians.

The sampling methods utilised in this project comprised purposive sampling (deliberate selection of participants) in pursuance of individuals with the shared and relevant characteristics considered to be the most informative. The inclusion criteria asserted that the participants be females aged 18 - 25, have entered Australia through the RHP, and have lived in Australia for a minimum of 12 months. The rationale behind the criteria of time spent living in Australia was because the researcher wanted to speak with young adult women who had arrived in Australia between adolescence and early to mid-twenties as there is a current deficit in research on this particular refugee age group. Living in Australia for a minimum period of 12 months was also required so that potential participants had had an opportunity to become stable and to establish some social connections. Respondents were also required to speak and understand English at least at a high school level. Adequate English literacy and speaking ability was determined if no communication problems arose during the screening conversation and if the women were able to read and comprehend the Information to Participants Letter and Consent Form at the time of data collection.

Initially, recruitment was attempted through the distribution of flyers. The flyers were displayed at 16 various refugee and multicultural service providers across Perth. These included multicultural centres, libraries that hosted ESL classes, multicultural women's health centres, childcare centres, community recreation/sport centres, and notice boards in known multicultural suburbs. The method of distributing recruitment flyers was ultimately deemed to be unsuccessful as only one individual responded. It was decided that the flyer be amended to include the provision of a $10 voucher as a token of appreciation for the respondent's time and input into the project. Evidence in the literature has found that it is often difficult to recruit female refugees (Halcón et al., 2004) and the use of incentives is a common method of recruitment when researchers have difficulty recruiting participants (Liamputtong, 2009).

In addition, contact details of potential participants were given to the researcher by a relative who knew ex-students from a high

school well known for its multicultural and ESL students. Five women agreed to participate with one accepting the invitation after receiving permission from her husband. Snowballing also resulted in the recruitment of another three participants after the researcher contacted The Edmund Rice Centre, located in Mirrabooka, a north-eastern suburb of Perth.

Procedures

Upon the University's Human Research Ethics Committee's approval, in-depth, semi-structured face to face interviews were conducted to determine what the experience of resettlement and acculturation meant for the women who lived it. A non-directive interview style was applied, using open-ended questions, reflecting and probing to entice disclosure and aid the communication process so that rich and full data may be obtained to ensure accurate interpretation of the experiences being discussed (Liamputtong, 2009). Prior to the commencement of each interview, participants were provided with the "Information to Participants Letter" to remind them of the nature and objectives of the research and the Consent Form. When obtaining written consent, the young women were assured of their confidentiality and were asked to select a pseudonym for all future referencing to conceal their identity. All of the interviews were completed at quiet cafes apart from one which was held at the participants' learning institution. Each interview was recorded by an audio-recording device. The interviews ranged in length from 23 to 75 minutes and covered demographic information before fully focusing on the research questions. In addition, a reflexive journal which recorded the lead researcher's observations, reflections and interpretations was maintained for the duration of the research process to strengthen reflexivity and to document critical self-reflection (Liamputtong, 2009).

Data Analysis

Each interview was transcribed verbatim by hand. The conversation in its entirety, including hesitations, silences, tone and laughter, were documented so that

accurate interpretative phenomenological analysis of the participants' lived experiences could be achieved. The interview was then listened to again and checked for accurate transcription. The transcribed interview was read over repeatedly so that the researcher could immerse herself in the text and familiarise herself with the social and personal world of each participant. During this process, a summary of each respondent's interview was created for participant validation. The summary contained the main points discussed in the interview and participants were asked to confirm the accurate meanings of each main point. Marginal notes alongside sections (chunks) of the transcribed interviews were made, thus producing codes so that patterned responses and emergent themes in relation to the research questions could be identified. The codes were developed whilst keeping in mind general categories extrapolated from the literature, as these formed the foundation of the themes and subordinate themes emerging from the data (Miles & Hubermann, 1994) . Recurring codes were then labelled with a descriptive name and then transformed into prevalent themes (Liamputtong, 2009). In accordance with IPA, similar themes were clustered to produce an overarching theme with multiple sub-themes (Smith, 2011). Themes and sub-themes were then labelled, described and quotes that directly represented each were inserted underneath to serve as supporting evidence for the theme. According to Smith (2011), for accurate IPA, the themes must be supported by at least half of the participants with three to four extracts associated with each. Emerging themes that met these requirements were confirmed by the researcher, and those that did not were reassessed and reorganised. Finally, a table of coherent themes that best illustrated the data was constructed.

Throughout the process of thematic analysis, participant validation occurred. In other words, participants were contacted by phone and given a summary of the main points and asked to validate if their stories had been interpreted accurately. All

participants were invited to add or remove information if they wished. Only one respondent asked that one of her personal details be altered slightly. Rigour was also achieved by the extensive provision of verbatim quotations in the findings and discussion sections to show the full and rich experiences of the women and articulated what resettlement meant to them.

Results

The qualitative analysis of the data produced five distinct yet related themes (see Table 1). Each theme reflected the young women's preference of acculturative strategy and symbolised factors that explained why they felt socially connected or disconnected from either the Australian community or their ethno-cultural group. In other words, these extracts reflected how the young women interpreted their resettlement experiences, how these interpretations determined their desire to establish social connections and how they then led to the different types of acculturative strategies being adopted by the young women.

Social Bonds and Social Bridges

Friendship networks. Throughout the interviews, the young women discussed their friendship networks. For most of the women, their social networks were comprised of both social bonds (e.g., friendships with others in their ethno-cultural group) and social bridges (e.g., friendships with Australians or people from other ethno-cultural groups). They most commonly drew upon these connections for support in the form of having someone to talk to or for company. The majority of young women (75%) were able to establish relationships with members of their ethno-cultural group and with members from the mainstream society, displaying the criteria needed for successful integration:

> I have close friends from all different backgrounds – African, Asian, Australian friends. (Amina)

> I have friends from Sudan, from Ethiopia, some from other countries like the Middle East… I have friends from all over the world, the Pacific

Islands - I also have Australian friends. (Medina)

The extensiveness of their social networks indicated resources of support to utilise in times of need. This corresponds with previous research, confirming that by acquiring social bonds and bridges, the young women essentially had two supportive networks when they experienced hardship (Berry & Sabatier, 2011). In addition to describing their friends, the young women discussed the types of support they received from their friendship networks. They described relying on their friends for help when they needed someone to talk to and needed assistance coping:

> I have friends from the community, the church etc…we have this marriage group full of young couples and we just come together for coffee, chats – stress free! The marriage group has been very helpful. (Irene)

> I've got her (Kay) to support me and she's got me to support her. I don't know what I'd do without her! (Hannah)

> I never used to wear the scarf and recently, last year I wore it for eight months and my Australian friend – she actually supported me! She wasn't like "take it off, I'm not gonna be seen with you", she didn't say anything like that. She actually supported me, which is a good thing! (Zara)

However, two of the young women spoke exclusively of their friendship bounded by their ethno-cultural groups.

Jade, a 19 year old woman from Uganda, stated that she only associated with people who were from "my community", namely the Acholi community (an ethnic group from northern Uganda). She ascribed two reasons for her limited social network and feeling of disconnection from Australian society. The first was that she has a busy study and work schedule which does not allow her much time to associate with anyone:

I don't (feel connected) because I don't see anyone. I'm just always at school, work, school, popping out. You know what I mean? (Jade)

Jade also explained that she favoured socialising with other young people from her ethnic group because she is able to communicate and identify with them:

To keep everyone all together… it's only us, only Uganda people, only like, Acholi… because it's easy-going, it's easy to hang out with them because they speak the same language and they're also from Africa. (Jade)

Similarly, Kay, an outgoing Sudanese woman who has lived in Perth for 13 years stated that she is able to open up more truthfully with people from her own culture than with people from Australia because she shared similar culture with her own people:

It's easier if someone's from like, a similar culture, like they would understand a lot more than the mainstream Australian's… For them (Australians) to understand exactly what it feels like to be restricted, it's not the same than from someone who is like actually from a similar culture… you open up with them (Australians), but it's a fake open up. (Kay)

Kay's statement indicated that she considered Australians as acquaintances rather than friends whom she can confide in. This finding is consistent with Poppit and Frey's (2007) study on Sudanese refugee adolescents where homogenous and limited social networks become a barrier towards successful social integration. Smith (2013) also found that having small and homogenous social networks inhibit successful identity re-formation and resource acquisition for refugee women (Smith, 2013).

Kay's view that Australian's are unable to understand Sudanese culture-specific issues is in direct contrast to Zara's view. Zara's White Australian friend's acceptance of her wearing the scarf showed mutual accommodation and understanding. In addition, parental attitudes towards cultural diversity and multiculturalism were also influential in the development of successful social connections and integration:

I was encouraged by my parents to mix and make friends with anyone. (Zara)

My mum has figured out that the only way you can go through this life is with another community. You have to mix it up in order for you to get certain things done… doesn't matter where you're from. (Shahla)

In contrast, 24 year old Somali born, Hannah provided details about her mother who was resistant to socialising with White Australians:

We had a huge fight. A friend of mine came over to the house… and she said "Why are you bringing a white girl to the house?"… and she just flipped out! (Hannah)

The above findings are consistent with Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1963) which posits that the learning of values, beliefs and behaviours comes directly from parents and/or caregivers.

Sport involvement. Participation in sport was discussed in detail by the young women who were currently actively involved or had previously been involved in sporting teams. Medina, Amina and Shahla described their commitment to sport as being one of the most positively significant aspects of their lives. Two of the young women Amina and Shahla not only played soccer and Australian Rules, they also coached others in soccer and were responsible for forming Perth's first only multicultural women's AFL team. Through sport, these young women were able to interact with people from various cultures (within and outside their ethnic groups), establish connections, build relationships, expand their social network and become integrated into the Australian community:

I played soccer at the Balga Soccer Club for 2 years. I had a chance to meet people from

different backgrounds… I enjoyed the training and being at the park with everybody and all the girls. (Medina)

Sport is always a good thing. It's always a good way to connect with people. Because it's flexible, it's getting people out there, getting to know other people. (Amina)

The team was really welcoming. I just felt at home straight away just by the amount of support that was there… the West Australian team had myself and four indigenous girls and it was really multicultural. It was a good feeling just being a part of that. (Shahla)

A substantial amount of research has been conducted on the role sport plays in assisting refugees through their resettlement experiences (Uptin, Wright, & Harwood, 2013). Aside from the mental and physical health benefits of exercise, participating in team sports has been documented to produce social benefits for new arrivals (Uptin et al., 2013). Sport has been identified as an essential social networking domain for African refugee youths elsewhere in Australia (Uptin et al., 2013). The findings from the current study echo the findings from Uptin et al. (2013) and Palmer (2009) who claimed that recreational sport involvement not only strengthens social bonds and bridges, but also provides opportunities for young refugees to socialise, extend their social networks, and to feel more connected to their local community and the broader mainstream community.

Social Links

Organisational support. Social links refers to one's connections to and utilisation of the structures in the community. All the young women had received organisational support from various community organisations in Australia. The young women explained that the services they accessed following resettlement had provided them with ongoing practical assistances such as housing settlement issues, learning English,

finding a job in Australia, enhancing their personal skills and offering opportunities for more social interactions. This is important when you consider that in the past, studies have found that refugees, especially female and newly settled refugees in Australia have tended to under-utilise institutional services due to a lack of knowledge and information about services, poor health literacy, lack of language competency to communicate their needs, cultural barriers, financial hardship, and lack of awareness of their social, economic and legal rights in Australia (Deacon & Sullivan, 2009; Drummond, Mizan, Brocx, & Wright, 2011; Edberg, Cleary, & Vyas, 2011; Henderson & Kendall, 2011). Therefore, these services were highly meaningful to many of these young women:

> The ERC (Edmund Rice Centre) – they really helped us. When I was younger, they would pick us up from our house and take us to the camps and take us to the different activities and programs. I guess that's why I'm here now (working at ERC) to give something back to the people and the place that helped me. (Amina)

> The migrant centre, they were there to help us find our place, take us around, shopping – yeah they helped us a lot, to get us to know Australia… and when you are stressed and need help, ISHAR is there to help. (Irene)

> When I first came, like we were helped, like settling in, finding a house… we were greeted by sponsors at the airport, and then for the first like, four weeks, they worked intensively with us like getting us into schools, into English classes, getting my parents into work. (Kay)

Many of the young women have established various social links since arriving in Australia. In doing so, they have enriched their social networks to include structures of

the state which ultimately reflected their ambition to pursue integration. According to Ager and Strang (2008), a social network inclusive of positive social links depicts a high likelihood that refugees will not only integrate into the host society but that they will also experience the effects of positive psychological and socio-cultural adaptation through accessing a range of available services.

In contrast, the inability to utilise available and appropriate refugee services due to a lack of knowledge is a well-recognised barrier to integration in the acculturation process for refugees (Ager & Strang, 2008; Whittaker et al., 2005). For example, Whittaker et al. (2005) reported that a lack of knowledge about available mental health services was a contributory factor to chronic psychological problems and low well-being in a group of young, female Somali refugees. This is consistent with the findings from our study. For example, Irene, a proud and gentle Liberian woman expressed feeling lost when she first came to Australia, which caused her to want to return to her home country and to question her identity:

You don't know what to do, you don't know your way around, and you feel like you wanna go back. That's how I felt – I wanna go back home. I don't know what I am. (Irene)

Another young woman, Jade, isolated herself and locked herself away in her house:

You don't know where to go – you just live. You don't know anything, you just come in, lock yourself in your house; you just know how to stay in the home. You don't know anything. (Jade)

One plausible reason may be that Jade was not living with her parents or siblings and consequently may have felt more isolated than young women who lived with their parents or siblings. According to acculturation theory, limited connections with the host community and the structures within the host society increase one's tendency to separate – resulting in poorer psychological and socio-cultural adaptation

(Berry, 1997). This reiterated the importance of cultural maintenance and social bonds to sustain one's ethnic identity which is associated with positive psychological adaptation (Berry, 2005; Phinney et al., 2001).

Benefits of Early Resettlement

Familiarity with the Australian culture. The young women who arrived in Australia when they were in their childhood or early adolescence described how resettlement at a young age enabled them to have more time to familiarise themselves with all aspects of the Australian culture, including multiculturalism:

The people that came here young, we have a different understanding and a better understanding of what a mixture of different cultures is. (Amina, age of arrival 9)

The thing that I remember was just that when we came to Australia, everyone was just nice… I was surprised to see Middle Eastern people here… I was surprised to see Chinese people too and Asians! I had never seen them before (laughs). It was like a vegetable market, you get to know different types of people, it was cool. (Medina, age of arrival 9)

The above extracts suggested that being exposed to a multicultural society at an early age helped develop a general acceptance of multiculturalism for the young women. Age of arrival has repeatedly been found to influence the acculturation and resettlement transitions for refugees and create a greater sense of identification with the mainstream society (Whittaker et al., 2005). Whittaker et al. (2005) also discovered that young Somali refugees adopted new cultural behaviours, norms and identities quicker than Somali refugees who relocated during late adulthood. Similarly, Spicer (2008) found that child refugees in the U.K became attached to their new neighbourhood more quickly, demonstrated higher levels of integration, and adapted to

their new environment more rapidly than their parents.

> I guess it is home because I'm used to it now. I'm used to the environment, the society, everything. (Zara)

> I don't call it (Sudan) home because I didn't grow up there. (Medina)

These statements confirmed that length of time in an environment generates a sense of familiarity, belonging and attachment – as depicted by usage of the term "home". Early age of arrival was therefore identified as factor that facilitated integration for the current sample.

Familiarity with the English language. Many of the participants discussed their ability to learn the English language with ease because they were young and quick to pick it up:

> The younger you are the easier it is for you to experience and learn. So I caught up pretty quickly. (Amina)

> I learnt English in primary school… and I learnt quickly. It was easy because say, as a child, it's easier to pick up things and it wasn't that hard. (Medina)

The finding that a younger age of arrival allows for early exposure to the English language which ultimately results in early English language proficiency is prevalent in the literature (Cameron, Frydenberg, & Jackson, 2011). Being proficient in the language of the host country is recognised as one of the key indicators of integration (Dow, 2011, RCOA, 2009). In contrast, being older upon resettlement has been associated with more language problems (Watkins, Razee, & Richters, 2012) which in turn, acted as a barrier to integration. The latter point is emphasised by Jade, who travelled to Australia when she was 13 years old:

> I can't speak good English. Sometimes like, you start talking, people laugh at your accent and they say, "Oh! What did she say?"

> you know? Some people laugh at you and say "she can't speak English. (Jade)

Education (High school). Most of the young women's recollections about their experiences from high school in Australia were positive. The memories were meaningful and salient in their minds because they were attached to specific people and friends who supported them there:

> At high school, there was my group of five friends, all from different places, and we were all together from year seven to year twelve. We were always together and we would help each other out with anything. (Amina)

> The teachers were really understanding of our backgrounds, where we were coming from… it just made it easy… the support was really great from the teachers. My friend, she's a western girl. She changed my whole image of not only being involved with my own kind, like the African community, but just going outside of that and sort of having sisters from another community… and it was really, really good just going through high school with her. (Shahla)

> High school was really great! I just had so many friends and support you know? I just fitted right in and I knew everybody else. (Kay)

Conflict

Intergroup conflict. Disagreement in beliefs or behaviours between members of different groups is referred to as intergroup conflict. Participants in this study reported that incidences of conflict often exist between themselves, Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. The following excerpts provide examples of the discriminatory comments these young women encountered:

He was getting off the bus and then he's like "go back to your f***in' country if you're not gonna speak our English language. (Kay)

If you walk on the road they call you, "Monkey! Go back to your own country! (Jade)

You see people, random people; just coming up to you… when I first came here they'd come up to you and be like, "Why don't you go back to your country? (Hannah)

Many of the young women also detailed the specific confrontations they had with Indigenous youths:

We always used to get bullied by them (Indigenous Australians). So that was pretty tough…like they'd throw rocks at us and we'd throw rocks back and there was always the comments "go back to your own country… (Kay)

…there were a lot of clashes between the Indigenous people and the African people. And it was really difficult - especially for the young person… Cos we were so young and it was really difficult - we thought violence was the way. (Shahla)

Conflict and tension between African refugees and Australia's traditional land owners is not a new phenomenon. Colic-Peisker and Tilbury (2008) explored intergroup relations between the two communities living in Perth and raised several valid points. Both groups are of low socio-economic status, are highly visible in Australian society, are negatively stereotyped and they occupy common space. Colic-Peisker and Tilbury (2008) asserted that there could be many motives for the hostility and tension between the similar groups, one main reason being the competition for resources such as territory and housing as well as myths such as one group benefiting more than the other group. This may explain the confrontations reported by the young women.

Intragroup conflict. The respondents discussed how conflict within their ethno-cultural group stemmed from incidences of rumour-spreading, gossiping, and "bitching". This sub-theme is only relevant for the Sudanese and Somali women, as the other young women did not discuss this type of conflict.

I don't like the way they talk about other people. Some of them will talk about other people's daughters, so I'm trying to like, stay away as much as I can from that and the Sudanese community. (Zara)

They smile at you but at the back they'll stab you. (Hannah)

I'm aware that they (the Sudanese community) do have events every now and then, but I don't like going there. Cos I don't want to be known by them. They might see me with someone and they would make up rumours and spread it all over the place. Yeah that's why I stay away from Sudanese people. (Medina)

According to Castillo (2009), in-group members often respond with criticism, rejection or marginalisation when one of their own member attempts to acculturate themself into the dominant culture. Other studies have also confirmed that refugee minority groups experience internal social disharmony following resettlement. McMichael and Manderson (2004) found that the social networks of Somali women living in Melbourne were problematic and gossiping was common practice. Similarly, a qualitative research by Salleh-Hoddin and Pedersen (2012) found that in-group seclusion and in-group discrimination were issues many Muslims faced within their own community.

Parental conflict. Another source of stress was intergenerational or parental conflict. It is noteworthy that the women

who disclosed incidences of parental conflict were all Muslim. Overall, parental conflict centred on the young women's desires for autonomy over parental control of their movement and freedom. For many of these young women, religion and trust were the dominant issues, especially when members of the opposite sex were involved:

> It's forbidden in Islam to have a relationship before marriage… my dad is the strictest. He would get really mad if he saw me talking to a boy. (Medina)

> …Because girls have virginity. They reckon when the girls go out they are more tempted, more at risk of losing it, so the guys don't really have a problem because no matter how much they do it, it doesn't really matter. But with girls, they have a bigger reputation, especially for the future. (Kay)

In addition, these young women also discussed their parent's distrust of the Australian culture:

> If you're gonna go out with someone, they (parents) want you to go out with someone– the same colour as you are or someone that you know, but not a white person [because]… they'll do something, they'll put drugs in your drink. (Hannah)

> Their parents will tell them – like "stick to your own people, don't go around with anyone else, they're gonna be a bad influence on you. (Zara)

> Cos there's like other things as well involved, like drugs, alcohol, the society…our families think like that. (Kay)

Consequently, a number of young women rebelled against their parents' strict rules and many hid the truth from their parents – a common method for young refugees who are faced with intergenerational conflict (Whittaker et al., 2005):

> The restriction makes the children rebel more…they make you want to lie, cos that's the only way. I used to go to TAFE in the city. I made up a fake timetable (cos they wanted to see my timetable) and during my "classes", I was out in the city with my boyfriend. (Kay)

> There was a few times my aunty called my work – and I was out with a boyfriend. I said I was working a double shift and she wouldn't believe me so I called my work and told them, "My aunty is gonna call, just tell her I was working". And it was so embarrassing! (Hannah)

Parental conflict has been identified as a significant stressor for refugee youths who are attempting to adapt to an environment that is socially, politically, and demographically different from that which they and their parents are familiar to (Poppit & Frey, 2007). These conflicts were expressed by these young women as having a hard adjustment time:

> Sometimes, like adjusting, it gets to you. It's just too much. (Kay)

> I wish I could just get hit by a car and then not worry about it…You can become very depressed. (Hannah)

Resilience

Resilience has been defined in the literature on refugees and resettlement as an ability to cope, withstand stress and recover from the challenges associated with forced migration and becoming a refugee (Colic-Peisker, 2009; Halcón et al., 2004). Resilience demonstrates personal strength and requires implementing effective coping strategies when faced with difficulty to maintain psychological wellbeing (Colic-Peisker, 2009; Halcón et al., 2004). Instead of dwelling on the past, the majority of young women discussed future goals and

aspirations. Specifically, many of them were optimistic about the role they will play in Australia and how they will integrate their careers and dreams into the Australian way of life:

> I just want my life to be good, so I don't wanna think of the past, I want to think forward, you know, what is good in the future. (Jade)

> I'm gonna make sure that I'm the first African female to make a state team in the AFL and just inspire the other young people to follow that route as well. (Shahla)

> I wanna do more! I really wanna pursue my dreams. (Irene)
> I'm gonna go back to study at Uni and do aviation. (Amina)

Discussion

The main findings from this study indicated that the lived resettlement experiences of young former refugee women living in Western Australia were influenced by their acculturation processes and social connections in a variety of ways. Factors which led to positive resettlement outcomes included: Diverse supportive social networks, participation in sport, engagement in various social structures and support, early age of arrival, and resilience. These factors enabled many of the young women to actively pursue successful integration.

In contrast, barriers to integration included small and homogenous social networks, a lack of knowledge about available supportive resources, racism and strict parental control. In addition, intergroup and intragroup conflict was identified as a stressor by many of the young women. Many of the young women experienced not only racism from the mainstream culture but also from within their own ethno-cultural groups. Social Identity Theory (SIT) provides a useful framework for us to understand how boundary group identification, intergroup and intragroup relations works. According to SIT, people tend to support and evaluate groups that embody relevant aspects of their self and

social identities (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Salient features such as cultural, racial or ethnicity (e.g., skin colour) are highly discriminated against as out-group and treated as out-group members (Loh, Restubog, & Gallois, 2009). It is therefore not surprising that many of the young Black African women experienced blatant racism from white Australians.

Boundaries (e.g., in-group versus out-group) are created and these boundaries are important because they act as essential medium through which people acquire status and resources (Bobo & Fox, 2003). Studies have found that minority or low-status members may be especially sensitive to how permeable these boundaries are because they convey information about whether they can move up from their low status group to higher status group to obtain resources (Kilduff, 1992; Loh, Restubog, & Gallois, 2010; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Thus, when two minority groups (e.g., African refugees versus Indigenous Australians) come into contact and compete for valuable resources and status, hostile behaviours and attitudes can ensue.

Despite these negative experiences, the majority of the young women interviewed displayed a strong sense of resilience. In our study and consistent with past research, positive personal qualities and the ability to hope for a bright future were important contributors for these young refugees' resilience (Pulvirenti & Mason, 2011; Shakespeare-Finch & Wickham, 2009). Finally, having good social support from social structures, education and friends are critical for successful integration. Thus, policy makers and refugee program developers should take note of these issues as they plan for successful refugee integration programs.

Limitations and Future Directions

Through qualitative design, this study offers important insights into the lived resettlement experiences of young, African refugee women (age 19-24) in Western Australia and partially fills the gap in the current literature on young refugee women, a group that is currently understudied.

Table 1
Themes and Subthemes

Theme	Subtheme and Definition
1.Social Bonds and Bridges	This refers to the connections one has with others from the same ethno-cultural group (i.e., social bonds) or individuals from different groups and communities (social bridges). 1a. Friendship Network 1b. Sport Involvement
2. Social Links	This refers to one's connections to and utilisation of the structures in the community. 2a. Organisational Support
3. Benefits of Early Resettlement	This theme focuses on the advantages associated with being younger when transitioning to a host country 3a. Familiarity with the Australian Culture 3b. Familiarity with the English Language 3b. Education (High School)
4. Conflict	This refers to disagreement in beliefs or actions of one or more members of the group which can come from within members of the group (Intragroup conflict) or between members of different groups (Intergroup conflict). Parental conflict refers to intergenerational disagreement between child and parent/s. 4a. Intergroup Conflict 4b. Intragroup Conflict 4c. Parental Conflict
5. Resilience	This theme refers to the participants' indicators of positive adaptation, as well as their goals and maintenance of strength in the face of hardship.

However, this study is not without limitations. First, the findings were based on self- reports and thus, participants may have provided socially desirable responses. However, steps (e.g., participants' verification and diary) were taken to strengthen reflexivity and to document critical reflection. The researcher also did not explore pre-migration factors (Berry, 1997) that may have impacted the sample's resettlement and acculturation processes. The rational for not asking them about their pre-migration experiences were because (1)

we were interested in their post-migration experiences and (2) asking them about their pre-migration experiences could have induced high distress in some women which would make honest disclosure difficult. Longitudinal studies could be utilised in future study to investigate the process of acculturation over time for this specific refugee population. These studies could explore how young refugee women apply the different strategies of acculturation during adolescence, young adulthood and adulthood to provide a better understanding of the complexities of acculturation. Finally, the restrictions on the length of the manuscript and the absence of detail about the "open ended and broad questions" represents a gap in our documentation. Researchers conducting future study in this area may wish to include a list of the "open ended and broad questions" used in their study.

Conclusions

The present study makes an important contribution by filling a gap in the emergent literature on young African refugee women in Australia in terms of the unique challenges they encountered during the resettlement and acculturation phase. Our findings suggest that young refugee women faced unique obstacles following resettlement because of their age and gender. Despite this, a number of protective factors such as diverse supportive social networks, participation in sport, early age of arrival and resilience were identified as catalyst of successful integration. Evidence from past and present studies suggests that many African refugees in Australian faced a number of barriers such as discriminations, social isolation, conflict and access restriction to important services during their settlement in Australia (Colic-Peisker and Tilbury, 2007; Fozdar & Torezani, 2008). Practitioners and community psychologists interested in this area should aim to develop age and gender appropriate support programs to better service refugee youth across a range of interconnected "ecological" layers such as family, community and clubs (Guilfoyle, La Rosa, Botsis, & Butler-OHalloran, 2014). This is important because past research has found that the resettlement experiences of children, young refugees and female refugees differ to that of adult refugees (Sampson & Gifford, 2010). For instance, a study conducted with 10 refugee families in Melbourne found the importance of conflict mediation between young refugees and their parents. Similarly, Koh, Liamputtong and Walker (2013) found that female Burmese refugee's role within the family changed post-migration and many of them have had to negotiate their expectations in their host country.

The programs' aims should be to facilitate supports, mitigate barriers and evaluate the effects of these on acculturation processes. These need to be developed through consultation with young female refugees and focus on both intragroup support settings and establishing intergroup interactions and "contact" (e.g., Young Women's Association groups, Young Women's sporting club, advocacy group for correct media representation of refugees etc). For us, establishing appropriate state services for these youth is one way to support them and demonstrate that the newer forms of racism premised on lack of entitlement have no merit. In doing so, these programs can, we hope, better focus and promote the specific needs and challenges of young female refugees.

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