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WESTERN SYDNEY
UNIVERSITY

HOST
INTERNATIONAL

CULTURAL TRANSITIONS:

Migrant Youth and Family Stories
of Belonging and Cultural Wellbeing

Disclaimer:

Findings and conclusions presented in this report reflect a summary of research in the target areas and with key stakeholders complemented by a review of the literature. This report was prepared by the authors in good faith, exercising all due care and attention, but no representation or warranty, express or implied, is made as to the relevance, accuracy, completeness or fitness for purpose of this document in respect of any particular user's circumstances. Users of this document should satisfy themselves concerning its application to, and where necessary seek expert advice in respect of, their situation.

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The authors of this report acknowledge the custodians of the lands in which we meet, work, learn and socialise. We pay respect to the peoples of the Darug, Tharawal, Eora and Wiradjuri Nations where we are collectively located. We acknowledge that our work and research undertaken across our locations continues the teaching, learning, support and research that has occurred on these lands for tens of thousands of years. We acknowledge and pay our respect to the Elders past, present and emerging.

In undertaking this work, the authors would also like to acknowledge and thank the following contributors:

FOREWORD

As Chair of Australians for UNHCR, I recently visited the organisation's headquarters in Geneva for briefings. During my week there, meetings were necessarily disrupted by the need for senior officials to address the brutal armed conflict that had broken out in Sudan. Hundreds of thousands of helpless civilians, unwittingly caught in the crossfire, were fleeing across the borders in all directions. Aid and humanitarian assistance were desperately needed.

Tragically, those escapees added to a global challenge, the scale of which beggars belief. Across the world, more than 100 million displaced people have now been forced to flee conflict and persecution. Large numbers wait for long periods in squalid conditions, hoping against hope that they might be successful in their quest for permanent re-settlement in a new country. Others travel the globe in the most dangerous of circumstances, in the unlikely expectation that they might gain asylum somewhere, almost anywhere.

Australia has a long history of accepting such refugees and displaced people. More than 900,000 have made this country their home since the Second World War. Unfortunately, instead of taking pride in this national achievement, governments now tend to focus on the perceived need to "protect our borders". We continue to accept between 13,000-20,000 refugees each year, but large numbers of those who have arrived in Australia outside that formal migration program continue to live uncertain lives on temporary protection or bridging visas. They are able to access few services from the Commonwealth government.

For those fortunate refugees accepted as permanent residents, governments extend a wide range of settlement services, often delivered through community-based organisations. In NSW, as Coordinator General of Settlement, I have recently launched a strategy to better integrate the design and delivery of these programs. But as this study reveals so powerfully, the settlement journey is not easy. Nor is it straightforward.

For the 17,000-strong Sudanese diaspora in Australia, most of whom had fled an earlier civil war, the present conflict not only reinforces deep seated fears for their extended families in North Africa but also triggers deep seated traumas from their own past. This is not uncommon in refugee communities. It makes much harder their full participation in our multicultural society.

The NSW settlement strategy emphasises that if we are to fully comprehend the complexity of the lives of refugees, evacuees and asylum seekers, we need to find ways to listen to and learn from lived (and living) experience. That is what this present study, with its boldly innovative methodology, does so well. It provides first-hand insight into the array of challenges faced by young refugees, as they enter adulthood in a new country, often with different cultural expectations than those brought by their parents.

As I read the report, two things stood out. First, that we need to imagine how to deliver support within a comprehensive and holistic 'cultural wellbeing framework'. It is necessary but not sufficient to improve access to education, employment and health facilities. We need to understand more empathetically the difficult intergenerational journey that young refugees face, made more challenging by barriers of prejudice and misunderstanding.

Second, that the manner in which settlement support is offered is important. Young refugees may be grateful for the government and community help that they receive, but too often they feel that it is delivered in a way that disempowers them. Their sense of agency and autonomy is undermined. They want to take control of their own lives, not to be forever dependent on the assistance of others. Often required to become 'life brokers' for their family, they seek the chance to find their true selves in a period of profound cultural transition.

I commend this important report. It is a valuable collaboration between Western Sydney University and HOST International, a major social purpose organisation. It brings together academic approaches to evidence with community lead practice. I am pleased that it was partially funded by the NSW Department of Communities and Justice.

What makes the study and its conclusions particularly resonant, however, is to hear the voice of refugee youth, mediated by themselves. It is a voice that needs to be heard by policy makers. It demands a considered response.

Professor Peter Shergold

Chancellor Emeritus,
Western Sydney University

RESEARCH PARTNERS

HOST International is an international social purpose organisation making life better for refugees on the move through services that build humanity, hope and dignity.

HOST International and Western Sydney University collaborated to provide support and guidance to the youth peer researchers throughout this project.

HOST International deliver a mix of direct and indirect community building projects that seek to strengthen independence and community inclusion by bringing newcomers and host communities together to co-design localised and sustainable solutions to migration displacement issues. They deliver a range of services throughout Southeast Asia, New Zealand, and Australia with the aim of promoting sustainable social and economic integration. This project is an example of HOST's commitment to innovation and evidence informed, community-led practice solutions.

For more information about HOST visit **www.hostint.org**

Western Sydney University is student-focused and research-led, located in Australia's fastest growing, most economically significant region – Greater Western Sydney.

With campuses throughout Australia's global city, we have more than 50,000 students and a cohort, both locally and globally, of more than 200,000 alumni. At Western Sydney University, more than 60 per cent of our students are the first in their family to attend university and more than 500 arrived in Australia on humanitarian visas. Our university is a positive turning-point in their lives because we provide educational opportunities that may not have been available otherwise. Our innovative teaching and learning bring students, staff, and external partners together to co-create courses that prepare students for employment success in the 21st century.

WSU is ranked in the world's best in the 2022 Times Higher Education (THE) University Impact Rankings. Western Sydney University topped the list out of more than 1,400 institutions for our work tackling issues like sustainability, climate action, equality, inclusivity, and social justice. More than 85 per cent of our research is also rated 'World standard or above' in the Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) evaluation. For example, the 21 C project has created new innovative curriculum based on research findings from socially engaged projects such as this. Click links to find out about our exciting new programs the **SM0334 Creative Living and Cultural Wellbeing Minor** and **TEAC3051 Subject Coordinator Creativity and Cultural Wellbeing in Communities.**

Our Western Growth strategy is co-creating transformative educational infrastructure in partnership with industry, government, and higher education providers. We have world-class vertical campuses in Western Sydney growth centres – Parramatta, Westmead, Liverpool and Bankstown CBD. These campuses offer technology-rich teaching and research spaces, collaboration with industry, and embed the University in the economic and civic life of the Western Sydney region.

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The power to reframe wellbeing: Diverse young people and the complexity of relationships in refugee communities.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Global displacement due to war, conflict, persecution and discrimination has now exceeded 100 million as at 2022 and continues to grow.[1] Within worldwide global displacement, children and young people have consistently represented approximately half of all people and yet programs specifically aimed to support them are lacking.[2]

Australia has had a long history of taking refugees, with post-WW2 refugee arrivals to pass 950,000 in 2023, and the 2022-2023 Humanitarian program has allocated 17,875 places.[3] While Australia has provided comprehensive settlement services, there have been controversial offshore detention policies that remain in place at the time of this report and have led to harm to young people.[4] These strict offshore detention policies influence the way asylum seekers and refugees are portrayed in the general community as being detained illegals and this contributes to experiences of racism and discrimination.[5]

As Australia is a signatory to the refugee convention, Asylum seekers and refugees have the right to seek refuge in Australia due to political or religious persecution. Many refugees have experienced trauma of war, displacement from homelands and separations from family members that can cause an ongoing struggle to their cultural wellbeing. The following research report explores some of the familial and intergenerational effects of displacement as findings highlight challenges specific to young people during resettlement. Specifically, this research aimed to better understand the community and social dynamics at play for young people and their families and how this influenced their cultural wellbeing in everyday life in Australia.[6]

Young asylum seekers and refugees have reported mental health and cultural wellbeing as a significant issue affecting their lives.[7] The rise of mental disorders is a global trend that has significant implications for health reform and service planning.[8] While Australia's chief health officer commented that these global trends are "puzzling people all over the world", community support organisations are calling for policy makers to listen to those with lived experience of mental health so that the underlying issues can be better addressed.[9]

1. George Palattiyil et al, 'Global trends in forced migration: Policy, practice and research imperatives for social work' (2022) 65(6) International Social Work 1111; '2023: A Moment of Truth for Global Displacement', UNHCR (Web Page, 2023) <www.unhcr.org/spotlight/2023/01/2023-a-moment-of-truth-for-global-displacement/>.

2. 'More than half of world's refugee children 'do not get an education', warns UNHCR', UN News (Web Page, 30 Aug 2019) <news.un.org/en/story/2019/08/1045281>; Lana Ruvolo Grasser, 'Addressing Mental Health Concerns in Refugees and Displaced Populations: Is Enough Being Done?' (2022) 15 Risk Management and Healthcare Policy 909.

3. Refugee Council of Australia, 'Post-WW2 refugee arrivals to pass 950,000 in 2023', (Statistics Post, 3 January 2023) <www.refugeecouncil.org.au/950000-refugee-arrivals/>.

4. Michelle Peterie, Visiting Immigration Detention: Care and Cruelty in Australia's Asylum Seeker Prisons (Bristol University Press, 2022) ch 1.

5. Karin Louise et al, Navigating Resettlement: Matched Mentoring and Creative Media Design with Refugee and Migrant Youth in Transition, Greater Western Sydney (Research Report, 2018); Karin Louise, Refugee Youth Voice: Postcards to the Premier (Research Report, 2019).

6. Karin Louise, Refugee Youth Voice: Postcards to the Premier (Research Report, 2019); Karin Louise, The Cultural Wellbeing Framework (Web Page, 2023) <creativeculturalwellbeing.org/>; John van Kooy and Asher Hirsch, 'Destitution by design: The impacts of Australia's in-country deterrence regime on people seeking asylum' in Peter Billings (ed), Regulating Refugee Protection Through Social Welfare (Routledge, 2022) 104.

7. Karin Louise et al, Navigating Resettlement: Matched Mentoring and Creative Media Design with Refugee and Migrant Youth in Transition, Greater Western Sydney (Research Report, 2018); Karin Louise, Refugee Youth Voice: Postcards to the Premier (Research Report, 2019); Karin Louise, The Cultural Wellbeing Framework (Web Page, 2023) <creativeculturalwellbeing.org/>; Cecilie Dangmann, Øivind Solberg and Ragnhild Dybdahl, 'Mental health in refugee children' (2022) Current Opinion in Psychology 101460.

8. Elizabeth Marks et al, 'Young people's voices on climate anxiety, government betrayal and moral injury: A global phenomenon' (2021) Government Betrayal and Moral Injury: A Global Phenomenon.

9. Tory Shepard, 'Almost half of young women in Australia report mental health disorder, study finds', The Guardian (online, 22 July 2022) <www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/jul/22/almost-half-of-young-females-in-australia-report-mental-health-disorder-study-finds>

A driving force of this research project was to better inform settlement service providers and policy makers of the wellbeing needs of young people and their families. It is for this reason that the Cultural Transitions project was designed using The Cultural Wellbeing Framework (CWF) as it provided way to understand the intersection of individual, community, national and global influences on young people's wellbeing.[10] The CWF was also used to assist in the analysis of the interview data collected by peer researchers from the sixty-five participants.

The Cultural Transitions Research project began in 2021 while borders remained closed, and lockdowns were in place. This also meant that resticted entry into Australia due to COVID lockdown policies had a significant impact on refugee communities in Southwestern Sydney. Some communities were at times locked in high-rise buildings with strong police surveillance which highlighted existing persistent discriminatory attitudes towards migrant communities.[11] COVID lockdowns also caused home and community to be more central in people's lives. While this may have been a welcome relief for some young people, existing tensions in other homes were exacerbated.

The timing of the research during this chaotic period meant that the young people who were conducting the data collection were themselves struggling with multiple traumas and emotional anxieties. As the research question was centred on the dynamics between young refugees, their families, and communities, this raised significant issues of cultural safety for young people to speak candidly about such a sensitive topic while at home. This slowed down the research project trajectory. It must also be noted that the challenging and repetitive content of the interviews also took a toll on peer researchers wellbeing with burnout a real and significant issue that cannot go without mention.

Despite the multiple challenges that the ten peer researchers and sixty-five participants were contending with during this project, the research data was rich and illuminating. The interviews confirmed what other research in refugee youth communities have found, namely that a sense of belonging within family and community was crucial to mitigate common experiences of everyday racism and discrimination.[12] The stark reality for young people in the research was that every one of the participants spoke about mental health and wellbeing as a daily challenge.[13] The research also revealed new perspectives on less well researched aspects of young people's lives, like power relations between individual, family and community leaders that were complex, especially when families had weak local support networks.

The following research report details the resilience of asylum, refugee and migrant families who have made Australia their home. Some young people spoke of the considerable strength and cultural wellbeing derived from their close family relationships and connectedness with community cultural groups, while others experienced substantial tensions between their own wellbeing needs and that of family and community. The research has been instigated by young people about issues that matter to them and provides valuable insight for those who seek to support young people and their families in their cultural transitions within Australia.

10. Karin Mackay and Rachel Jacobs, Dance for Life: Expressive Arts for Cultural Wellbeing with Young People: Research and Evaluation Report (Research Report, 2021); Karin L Mackay, 'Cultural Wellbeing: A Nexus Model for Living Well on Our Planet' (Conference Paper, International Conference on Health, Wellbeing and Society, Sorbonne University, 2-3rd September 2021).

11. Coralie Properjohn, Cris Townley and Rebekah Grace, How the Social Care System Coped and Adapted to COVID 19 (Research Report, 2023).

12. Ignacio Correa-Velez et al, 'Predictors of Secondary School Completion Among Refugee Youth 8 to 9 Years After Resettlement in Melbourne, Australia' (2017) 18(3) Journal of International Migration and Integration 791; Carrie Symons and Christina Ponzio, 'Schools Cannot Do It Alone: A Community-Based Approach to Refugee Youth's Language Development' (2019) 33(1) Journal of Research in Childhood Experiences 1.

13. Anna d'Abreu, Sara Castro-Olivo and Sarah K Ura, 'Understanding the role of acculturative stress on refugee youth mental health: A systematic review and ecological approach to assessment and intervention' (2019) 40(2) School Psychology International 107.

PROJECT INTENTIONS AND PURPOSE

This project aimed to gain a better understanding of the unique needs of young people as they settle into Australia. In particular, the intention was to explore these needs and issues within the context of families and their resettlement journey.

The concept for the research was inspired by another youth led study called 'Postcards to the Premier' where young people presented a range of issues representing migrant youth in NSW. [14] Hayat Akbari, one of the youth researchers from that project, was the project coordinator for this research.

In the Postcards to the Premier report there were twelve recommended priority areas identified by the youth participants. Of these, four were particularly relevant to this research topic and formed the basis for further exploration through this project. They were:

Recommendation 1.
An ecological Roots and Branches approach needs to be used to understand the relationship between issues faced and their impacts. Acknowledge and address the root problem that can then impact on many branches of young people's lives, and which can make life hard. For example, the feeling that we do not belong is a common root problem that can branch out to impact on mental health, wellbeing and impact on self-confidence to seek work or pursue study options. The root problem needs to be acknowledged while also implementing a range of strategies to alleviate the compounding issues.

Recommendation 4.
Develop trust through listening and understanding the real and everyday hurdles that must be overcome. Develop better ways to listen authentically to youth from refugee backgrounds and find ways to acknowledge that our points of view have been heard. Leaders and helpers need to take practical action on what young people say to demonstrate you want to make a real change. This will develop trust and signify that policymakers and political leaders genuinely want to help so that young people will be more inclined to want to work together with stakeholders to develop collaborative processes to deal with challenges that Australian youth from refugee backgrounds face. If young people lack trust and feel that they are not listened to, they may disengage and stay silent.

Recommendation 6.
Support parents'/caregivers' dreams as well.
Youth are life brokers for their families and this places a great deal of pressure on them. They care deeply for their parents and caregivers and understand that in coming to live in Australia they have had to leave behind their old way of life including established careers, study opportunities, social status, friends and support structures. Youth appreciate that their families have made great sacrifices in leaving their home country so that they can have a safe life. Youth from a refugee background want to give back to their families and their new Australian communities. However, they want support for their families and especially their caregivers or parents to fulfil their own aspirations and goals so as to take the pressure off youth from having to fulfil their own unmet needs.

14. Karin Louise, Refugee Youth Voice: Postcards to the Premier (Research Report, 2019).

Recommendation 11. Early, sustained and holistic support from service providers and community members.

There is a lack of knowledge about what services are available to youth from refugee backgrounds. The way refugee youth are supported in their settlement is uneven. The experience that they have is often very dependent on what happens in the early stages. If the support offered, means they have someone to call on and ease them into their new life this makes a huge difference and they do well. It can be dependent on how suitable the one-on-one support was and if they feel they can share the intimate and sometimes difficult to ask for needs of early settlement. If early support is missing or not adequate this can compound to create a whole range of interrelated problems that become difficult to address.

By gaining a deeper understanding of the issues faced by refugee youth and their families, it is hoped that services and policy makers will be better informed and therefore better able to adapt services and resources that are available. It was also important that this project was youth led and able to capture the lived experiences of youth settlement in Australia.

SCOPE OF THIS REPORT

The research was youth led and with financial support from the NSW Department of Communities and Justice. It was facilitated through a collaboration between HOST International and Western Sydney University (WSU) between 2021 and 2022 which included in kind contributions. The research data collection was conducted by ten peer researchers (18-25 years) from refugee or refugee like backgrounds and living in NSW.

While the research was scheduled to be completed by mid-2022, COVID restrictions led to several extensions being required. Over this time, the capacity of some of the youth researchers was impacted by changes in circumstances. This led to five of the youth researchers doing most of the interviews and analysis, however all contributed at various stages of the project, and in particular at the project design phase.

The Cultural Transitions project gained HREA research ethics approval H14520 led by Dr Karin Mackay in 2021 and included Mr David Keegan, CEO of HOST International and Mr Hayat Akbari as Co-investigators. Mr Akbari was employed during the project by HOST International as the Project Lead. Kuwthar Aumarah, in addition to working as a peer researcher, conducting interviews, coding and analysing data, also took the role of lead author of the final report. Training and data analysis days were held at WSU with peer researchers and led by Dr Karin Louise, Dr Helen Lelei in collaboration with Hayat Akbari and David Keegan. The report purpose is to present to HOST, other service providers and the NSW Department of Communities and Justice, with quality, youth led research to inform best practice in the settlement and migrant services sector.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The findings of the research are summarised in this report under the following headings:

1. The importance of empowerment and autonomy

2. Walking in two worlds: belonging and identity

3. Experiences of racism

4. Hidden intergenerational trauma

5. The survival mode 'switch'

6. Mental health impacts

7. Community power

8. Culture and gender expectations

9. Impacts of life brokering

10. Challenges to parenting

11. Complexities of shared experiences

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are made in this report:

1. Mental Health services should be equitable in access and costs

2. More support for parents, including with life broking, interpreting and translation

3. Work with services to develop resettlement initiatives that bring individuals and families together

4. Skills and Knowledge Workshops

5. Safe spaces for newly arrived young people to meet with a range of young people

6. Anti-racism work in Australian society and more representation

7. Negotiating cultural relationships training

8. Awareness and education for understanding mental health as a cultural dynamic and reframing as cultural wellbeing

9. Empowerment through naming of issues faced by communities, families, young people and service providers

10. A focus on the triad of power – engagement of community, family and youth

INTRODUCTION

Children and young people under the age of 18 make up about half of the refugees worldwide.[15] In Australia, young people aged 12-24 made up 23% of Australia's Humanitarian Migration Stream in 2021.[16] While Australia has many capable service providers that do important work with new arrivals, including young people and their families, there remains a need for further research to understand the types of support and intervention that are most effective.

The Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network (MYAN) have been advocating on these issues for many years and has been successful in securing a specific focus on youth in settlement planning. This also includes work on a National Youth Settlement Framework to provide guidance on best practice for youth settlement.[17] While such resources are determinantal to highlighting the specific needs and issues of young refugees in the resettlement process, gaps remain as to how to address these issues as policy and practice are missing.

HOST International has been working in this field for six years and has a reputation for innovative practice and contributing to research in relation to refugee protection and social integration. In this work HOST International has noticed that while there was good service provision for youth and supports available for parents, integrated family supports that recognise the intersectionality of needs that youth face during settlement are often missing.

One potential factor that has been identified by HOST is that much of the interventions that relate to refugee youth are based on 'Western' concepts of youth work that prioritise the young person's individual rights as separate from the family. Whilst services attempt to reconcile these issues there is often a conflict between the interests and needs of the young person versus their family and community. As confirmed in this research, young people are often unable to separate from their responsibilities without significant conflict. Further research is therefore needed to better inform practice and perhaps explore more integrated approaches where family, youth and community needs can be addressed concurrently.

15. UNHCR, 'Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2021', Global Trends Report 2021 (Statistics Report, 2022) <www.unhcr.org/62a9d1494/global-trends-report-2021>.

16. Department of Home Affairs, Settlement Reports January 2021 – December 2021 (Statistics Report, 16 March 2022) <data.gov.au/data/dataset/8d1b90a9-a4d7-4b10-ad6a-8273722c8628/resource/db202506-0af3-450c-b5cd-961ba47a01bc/download/settlement-data-reports-january-2021-to-december-2021.xlsx>; the Australian Humanitarian Migration Stream for permanant settlement comprises of Visa-Subclasses: 200 - Refugee; 201 - In-Country Special Humanitarian; 202 - Global Special Humanitarian; 203 - Emergency Rescue; 204 - Women at Risk; 800 - Territorial Asylum (Residence); 851 - Resolution of Status; and 866 - Protection.

17. MYAN, National Youth Settlement Framework (Research Report, 2nd ed, 2020) <myan.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/myan0004-revised-nysf_fa_low-res.pdf>.

This project emerged from these observations and a desire by HOST to better understand the experiences of young refugees during settlement in Australia. It was inspired by the experiences of young people settling into Australia by engaging them directly in the design and implementation of the project. Western Sydney University (WSU) provided academic, and project advisory support based on their previous work with youth researchers and the Postcards to the Premier project from which this project was inspired.[18]

The project aimed to capture these experiences and to explore the issues, needs and opportunities for young people and their families that would best support them during the early years of settlement. The project was led by a group of young people who were paid to lead and collect interviews for analysis. All of them had lived experiences of migrating to Australia as a refugee and contributed these experiences to the research.

The research was supported by David Keegan from HOST International and Karin Louise (formerly Mackay) from Western Sydney University through in-kind mentoring support lending academic research and settlement service guidance throughout the project. HOST International employed the peer researchers and the Project Coordinator and provided administrative support and resources to the team. A funding contribution was made by the NSW Department of Communities and Justice.

This report outlines the background context, research methodology and analysis alongside the key findings of the research. It also aims to make recommendations to service providers in relation to the support needs of young people and their families.

18. Karin Louise, Refugee Youth Voice: Postcards to the Premier (Research Report, 2019).

INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

As of May 2022, the UNHCR reports that the number for forcibly displaced people around the world has reached 100 million people or more than 1% of the global population.[19] 27.1 million of this population have been deemed as refugees, meaning they have fled their country of origin in search of protection in another State. About half are under the age of 18.[20] Many of these children and young people travel with their families, but in some cases, they are unaccompanied by a parent or formal guardian.

Figure 1 demonstrates the rising trends of forcibly displaced people from 2016 to 2021, with almost 90 million people displaced by the end of 2021.[21] As seen in Figure 2, around 41% of those displaced are children under the age of 18, whereas children only make up 30% of the global population.[22]

Figure 1.

Forcibly Displaced Individuals (Globally)

UNHCR Figures briefly (as of 2022)
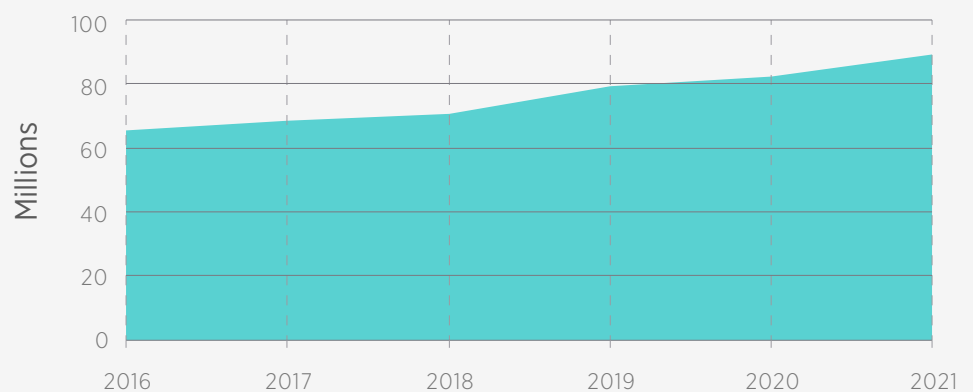
Figure 2.

Demographics of Displaced Population (Globally)

UNHCR Figures briefly (as of 2022)

Female   Male
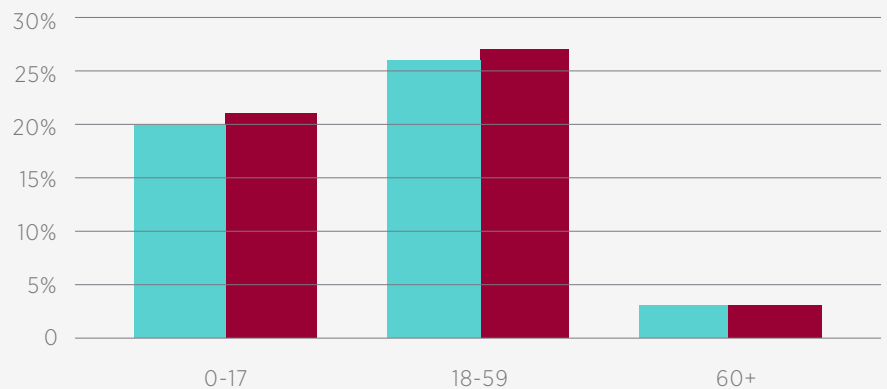
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19. 'UNHCR: A record 100 million people forcibly displaced worldwide', UN News (Web Page, 23 May 2022) <news.un.org/en/story/2022/05/1118772>.
20. 'UNHCR: A record 100 million people forcibly displaced worldwide', UN News (Web Page, 23 May 2022) <news.un.org/en/story/2022/05/1118772>.
21. 'Figures at a Glance', UNHCR (Web Page, 16 June 2022) <www.unhcr.org/en-au/figures-at-a-glance.html>.
22. 'Refugee Data Finder', UNHCR (Web Page, 2022) <www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/>.

AUSTRALIAN CONTEXT

The Australian Government is committed to 13,750 spaces for resettlement through the Australian Humanitarian Program, with 12,000 of those spaces for offshore resettlement.[23] Figure 3 shows the proportion of young people (16–24-year-olds) to adults that were resettled between 2016 and 2021.[24] The average trend was between 14-17% before numbers dropped significantly in 2020 and 2021 due to COVID border closures and travel restrictions. Figure 4 shows that in New South Wales, young people make up about 17% of the resettled population each year.[25]

Figure 3.

Refugee Resettlement in Australia by Age

Data from Department of Home Affairs Settlement Reports on data.gov.au
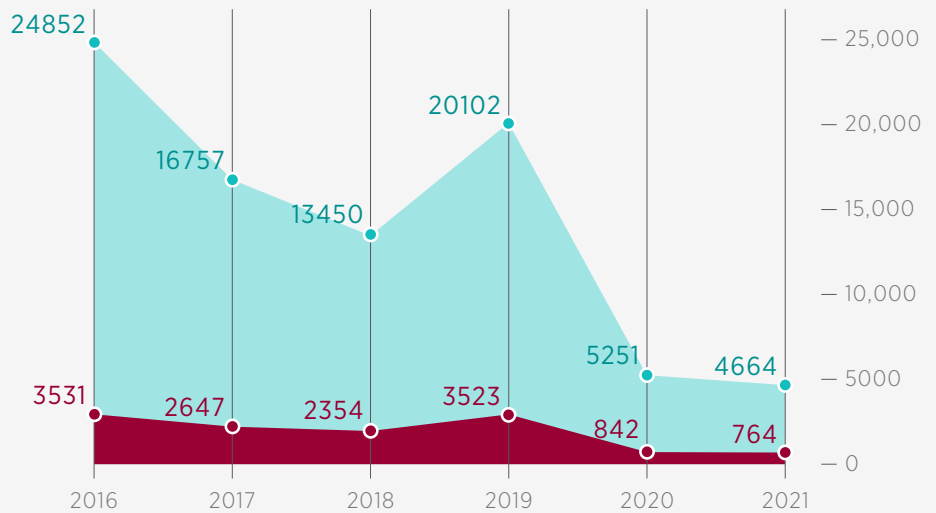
■ All ages   ■ 16-24

Figure 4.

Refugee Resettlement in NSW by Age

Data from Department of Home Affairs Settlement Reports on data.gov.au

■ All ages   ■ 16-24

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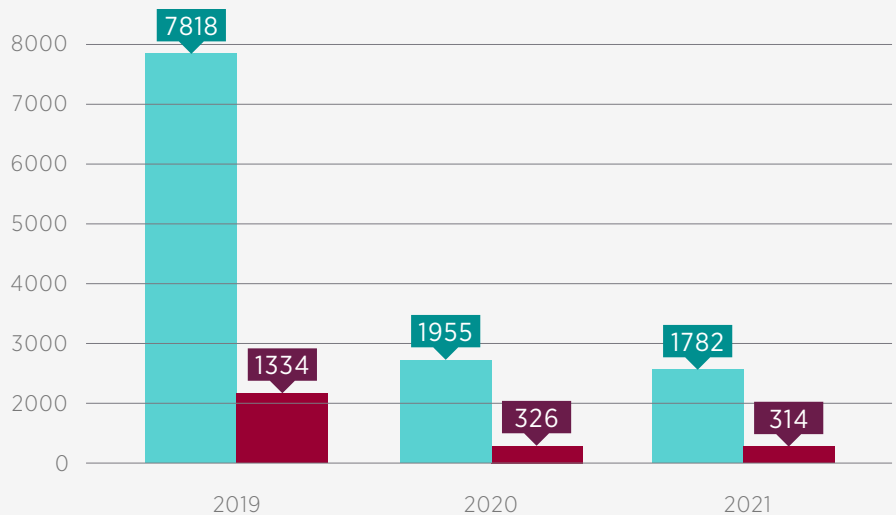
23. Department of Home Affairs, Australia's Offshore Humanitarian Program: 2021-22 (Department Report, 2022).

24. Department of Home Affairs, Settlement Reports January 2021 – December 2021 (Statistics Report, 16 March 2022) <data.gov.au/data/dataset/8d1b90a9-a4d7-4b10-ad6a-8273722c8628/resource/db202506-0af3-450c-b5cd-961ba47a01bc/download/settlement-data-reports-january-2021-to-december-2021.xlsx>; Department of Home Affairs varying settlement reports between 2020-2016 via <data.gov.au/data/organization/immi>.

25. Ibid.

Recent research has found that newly arrived migrants and refugees in New South Wales continue to face significant challenges in navigating the social, cultural, and economic landscape of Australian society.[26] Amongst the challenges of resettlement and integration are difficulties associated with intergenerational trauma and family/community dynamics.[27] In Australia, on one hand, research has found that children of migrants maintained intergenerational mutual understanding, connections, and compromise within their family dynamic, but have integrated faster and easier into Australia's individualistic culture in comparison with their parents.[28]

On the other hand, research has shown that generational and family tensions exist amongst some refugee families, but not others.[29] Two recent studies conducted by Mackay with 431 young refugees, in partnership with Sydwest Multicultural Services (Navigating Resettlement 2018), Multicultural NSW (Refugee Youth Voice Project 2019) and the NSW Coordinator General for Refugee Resettlement, clearly demonstrated that despite the resilience of refugee youth and a strength-based approach, there was a desire from youth participants to explore tensions and challenges that persist between parents, their children and community. While this has been explored extensively on an international level in the US and the UK, there is a gap in the Australian context.[30] More research is needed that specifically addresses intergenerational family and community dynamics, the impact it has on settlement and integration for refugee youth, and the ways in which this could be addressed by government departments and settlement providers.

Research undertaken as part of the Postcards to the Premier Project, a wider project from which this current project stems, uncovered young refugees' need to advocate for their parents and families in relation to settlement issues. This has created challenges in navigating their own aspirations, as well as family tensions caused by life brokering, where the burden of managing life needs like translating, visas, medical appointments, house leases and younger siblings etc are done by young people.[31] Despite anecdotal reports by settlement service providers, there is little research that has explored the family tensions experienced by life brokering on refugee youth, specifically, research conducted by refugee youth themselves.[32] Within the Australian context, while there is strong research on how service providers can support refugees during resettlement, there is a lack of research that deals specifically with the tensions that arise between family and young people and their community.[33] Additionally, there are many gaps within research concerning intergenerational trauma, such as not including the diverse refugee population or centring youth perceptions.[34] This project will investigate from a youth perspective how young people experience having to take on multiple roles during settlement, such as parent and carer, and how these impact on their family and community relationships.

26. Karin Louise et al, Navigating Resettlement: Matched Mentoring and Creative Media Design with Refugee and Migrant Youth in Transition, Greater Western Sydney (Research Report, 2018); Karin Louise, Refugee Youth Voice: Postcards to the Premier (Research Report, 2019); Jock Collins et al, Settlement Experiences of Recently Arrived Refugees from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan in Queensland in 2018 (Report, 2019).

27. Cindy C Sangalang and Cindy Vang, 'Intergenerational trauma in refugee families: A systematic review' (2017) 19(3) Journal of immigrant and minority health 745.

28. David Ayika et al, 'A qualitative exploration of post-migration family dynamics and intergenerational relationships' (2018) 8(4) SAGE Open.

29. Karin Louise, Refugee Youth Voice: Postcards to the Premier (Research Report, 2019).

30. Cindy C Sangalang and Cindy Vang, 'Intergenerational trauma in refugee families: A systematic review' (2017) 19(3) Journal of immigrant and minority health 745.

31. Karin Louise, Refugee Youth Voice: Postcards to the Premier (Research Report, 2019).

32. Shane Worrell, 'From language brokering to digital brokering: refugee settlement in a smartphone age' (2021) 7(2) Social Media + Society 1.

33. Karen Block, Jeanine Hourani, Claire Sullivan and Cathy Vaughan, '"It's about building a network of support": Australian service provider experiences supporting refugee survivors of sexual and gender-based violence' (2022) 20(3) Journal of Immigrant and Refugee Studies 383.

34. Cindy C Sangalang and Cindy Vang, 'Intergenerational trauma in refugee families: A systematic review' (2017) 19(3) Journal of immigrant and minority health 745.

CHALLENGES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

The challenge for a young person from a refugee background settling in Australia has been described as a 'complex interrelationship' due to the multilayered experience of the young individual as they resettle with their family.[36] Going through adolescence is a significant time in a young person's life as it is a transition from one phase in life to another, as well as a time of development regarding identity, values, and beliefs together with the emotional, mental and physical changes.[37] Therefore, it becomes complex when this transition occurs together with the experience of resettlement and being a refugee. Many young people from refugee backgrounds have experienced traumatic events and discrimination, and whether they made the journey to Australia on their own is another added layer of trauma. Each young individual is affected by these compounded challenges differently as the refugee experience is quite individualised.

Young people from refugee and refugee-like backgrounds experience a myriad of issues in this journey. The 2020 National Youth Settlement Framework identified that young people face additional issues due to their age, development stage and position in the family structure with the role of supporting the settlement process for their family. Some challenges include but are not limited to alteration of life due to the refugee journey, negotiating independence and autonomy, which can be alien to some migrant families, changes in values and beliefs, intergenerational conflict, navigating belonging, socio-economic disadvantage, transitioning to a new culture and world, learning a new language, and trying to adapt to a new education system while also managing parental expectations for academic achievements, among other challenges.[38]
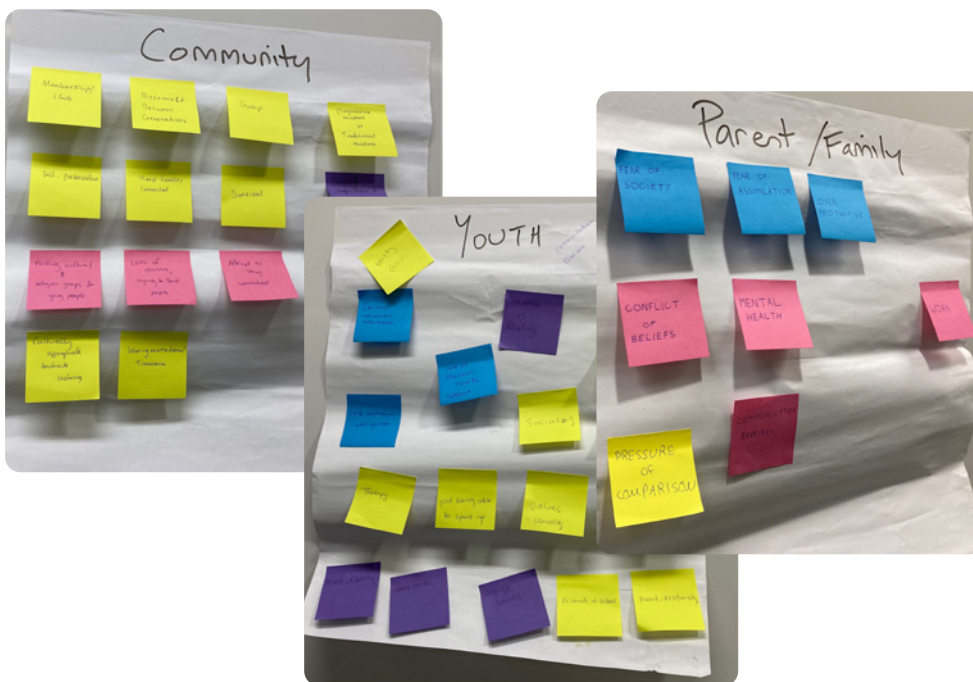
Refugee Youth Peer Researchers identifying challenges for youth, family, and community during initial planning and training sessions

26. Ibid.
27. Ibid.
28. MYAN, National Youth Settlement Framework (Research Report, 2nd ed, 2020) <myan.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/myan0004-revised-nysf_fa_low-res.pdf>.

SUPPORT FOR REFUGEE YOUTH AND THEIR FAMILIES

NSW has established several programs that aim to support young refugees and their families, including in areas of education, mental health, mentoring and advocacy.[39] The main national body for refugees in Australia is the Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) who work with organisations and individuals that support refugee settlement, however, several organisations, including Settlement Services International (SSI), Multicultural Youth Affairs Network (MYAN), Community Migrant Resource Centre (CMRC), SydWest Multicultural Services (SydWest), Western Sydney University (WSU), Macquarie University (MQU), University of New South Wales (UNSW) and the Department of Education have implemented several strategies to meet the needs of young refugees through mentoring and support that targets language, education and employment barriers.[40]

However, most youth services generally only address surface-level issues such as education and unemployment. A gap exists for programs that focus on the holistic challenges mentioned in this report like belonging, family dynamics and general wellbeing.[41] Furthermore, many youth services operate primarily from a 'Western' youthwork framework that is typically very youth centred and does not adequately recognise the complex family and cultural dynamics at play during resettlement.

This research sought to better explore and document these issues and to explore what can be done to better support youth and their families during the early years of settlement from the perspective of youth.

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39. Karin Louise, Refugee Youth Voice: Postcards to the Premier (Research Report, 2019).
40. Ibid.
41. Ibid.

THE CULTURAL TRANSITIONS RESEARCH PROJECT METHODOLOGY

The overarching aim of this project is to investigate family dynamics from the point of view of refugee youth, for the purpose of building capacity in the settlement service sector and build capacity for young people to inform policies and practices that will affect them and their families.

It seeks to build capacity and support young people from a refugee background to have their voices heard by people who can make change happen.

It also seeks to form an evidence base of concerns and opportunities facing young people from a refugee background to inform the NSW Government, particularly, the Department of Communities and Justice, and the broader service delivery sector in the design and delivery of policies.

RESEARCH AIMS

The research aimed to gather evidence and showcase the issues affecting young people from refugee backgrounds in their resettlement journey in Australia. We did this by giving young people a chance to express their experiences of family dynamics during this transition into a new country. The project aims to increase the capacity of services and the support available to young people from refugee and refugee like backgrounds for the purpose of being heard by those in a position to make change happen. It also aims to clarify what it means to become Australian from the view of youth, family, community, and service providers.

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Research has identified that young people from refugee backgrounds in Western Sydney regularly experience issues associated with lack of belonging, tension with parents due to expectations and the cultural transition process.[42] These issues, while known among services and service providers, are not understood to their full impact and there are limited specialised supports available that support the whole family through these challenges and at various stages of resettlement.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The primary research question was:

How are family dynamics experienced by refugee youth in NSW during their resettlement?

The secondary research question was:

Are any particular young refugees experiencing more challenges than others in their family relationships due to factors of diversity such as religion, socio-economic dynamics, gender or others?

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42. Karin Louise, Refugee Youth Voice: Postcards to the Premier (Research Report, 2019).

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

The expected outcomes from this research were:

1 To investigate the main tensions young refugees are experiencing within their family and their community.

2 To understand the ways in which youth-led projects can inform settlement service policies for young people and their families. The project will also allow reporting of issues that are important to refugee and migrant groups, as they will be able to put forward their own ideas for future projects.

3 To develop a video resource from this project, report and suggested intervention strategies created as part of the project to be used beyond the project to inform and educate communities of the complexity of family dynamics during resettlement.

4 To engage young people in the co-design process of the project. This will strengthen links to a range of community organisations and potentially offer future project collaborations. Project activities are also expected to improve service delivery for migrant families to address family breakdown and increase community participation.

5 To develop skills of peer researchers including data collection skills and employability

6 To build social and professional networks for peer researcher youth.

7 To develop a greater awareness of settlement challenges for the broader public, to reduce misconceptions about migrant communities, which often involves compounding factors in settlement.

8 To challenge deficit stereotypes regarding youth capacity to inform decisions that impact on them.

9 Co-written research articles.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design was built upon the needs of young people who were interested in a research approach that was able to encapsulate the complexity of their lived wellbeing. Young people were acutely aware of their own and their peer's mental health and wellbeing challenges but because this was considered common place in refugee and migrant communities was not always something that was openly discussed, but rather talked around. Mr Akbari and Mr Keegan from HOST International approached Dr Karin Louise (Mackay) from Western Sydney University (WSU) to assist with a youth led co-designed academic research approach to enable young people's wellbeing perspective to be better understood. Mr Akbari had conducted previous research with Dr Mackay as a peer researcher and was interested in using a similar research design as it used a youth friendly co-design process and was focused on young people's lived experience of Cultural Wellbeing.

THE CULTURAL WELLBEING FRAMEWORK

Cultural wellbeing is a complex nexus of cultural beliefs, values and lived experiences of places, that influence both individual and community wellbeing (see fig 5). The research was underpinned by the Cultural Wellbeing Framework (CWF) with a focus on social connectedness and belonging. A Cultural Wellbeing approach acknowledges the complex nexus of cultural beliefs, values, lived experiences of place and how this influences individual, community, national and global wellbeing.[43] The Cultural Wellbeing Framework applied in this research demonstrated how young people's wellbeing is dependent on an ecology of twelve interrelated elements with various combinations collectively impacting upon their mental health and wellbeing at different stages of their life. Understanding the way cultural wellbeing is lived using both individual and community perspectives have the potential to mediate the trauma of disconnection from place, help to reimagine new ways of being and offer young people hope towards aspirational futures.[44]

The Cultural Wellbeing Framework was used in this research as a guiding tool for young people to devise questions as well as an analysis tool to contextualise the research data from the interviews. Due to the relational nature of the CWF, it is a holistic approach that seeks to understand what has meaning and purpose in young people's lives, and importantly express their identity in relation to community and be heard on issues that are important to them. A Cultural Wellbeing approach offers a more holistic way to understand how risk factors can interact to influence health and wellbeing. Too often the symptoms of mental ill-health are treated in isolation from other intersecting factors that influence individual experience. For example, understanding what is meaningful, gives purpose and is culturally significant in a young person's life, is critical to understanding their mental health and wellbeing needs.

43. Karin L Mackay, 'Cultural Wellbeing: A Nexus Model for Living Well on Our Planet'
    (Conference Paper, International Conference on Health, Wellbeing and Society, Sorbonne University, 2-3rd September 2021); Karin Louise, The Cultural Wellbeing Framework (Web Page, 2023) <creativeculturalwellbeing.org/>.
44. Karin Louise et al, Navigating Resettlement: Matched Mentoring and Creative Media Design with Refugee and Migrant Youth in Transition, Greater Western Sydney (Research Report, 2018); Karin Louise, Refugee Youth Voice: Postcards to the Premier (Research Report, 2019).

Apart from trying to see wellbeing in terms of a person's sense of identity, connectedness and belonging, Cultural Wellbeing recognises external societal factors that may impede a person's ability to flourish fully within the community. These include discrimination, marginalisation, devaluing of cultural practices that differ from those of the dominant culture, insecure and underpaid work, housing stress, underemployment, low income, disconnection from family and displacement from country of birth. What sets the Cultural Wellbeing model apart from more medicalised models of mental health wellbeing approaches is the vital addition of creative expression through arts and heritage that provides space for individuals and communities to be heard, seen, listened to, acknowledged, and become self-determining.[45] In this way Cultural Wellbeing moves beyond a model of treating symptoms to one of critical creative agency and can be seen in the Tri-Menu Model of Education proposed by Louise (2023). Incorporating Cultural wellbeing approaches can remedy the effects of social isolation, displacement, and disempowerment to ultimately bring about positive societal change.[46]

45. Karin Louise, The Cultural Wellbeing Framework (Web Page, 2023) <creativeculturalwellbeing.org/>.
46. Ibid.

Figure 5.

Cultural Wellbeing
Framework:

A Nexus Model
for Living Well
(Mackay 2021)
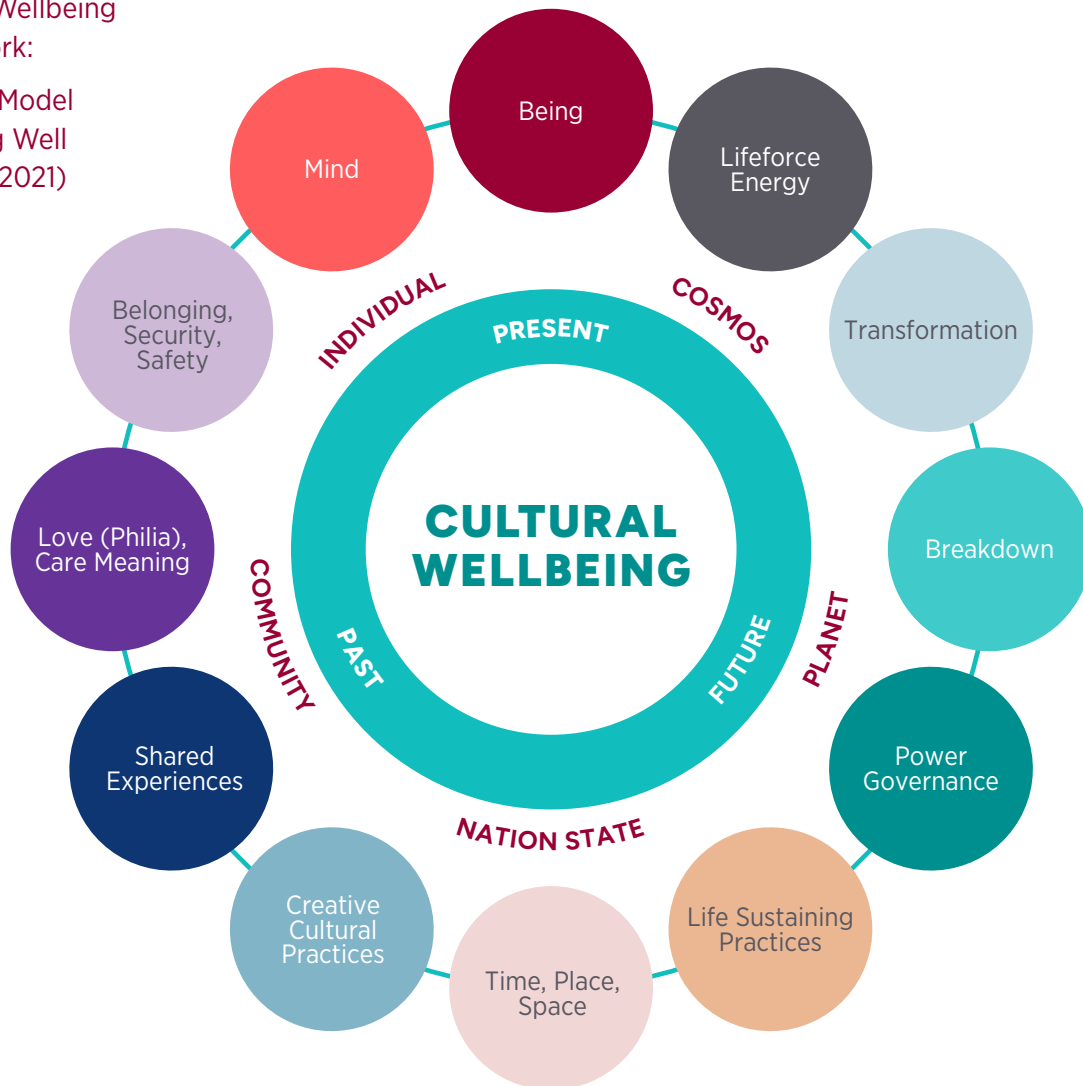
Being: The interplay of Inner and Outer Life. The material physical, embodiment.

Mind: Consciousness, intellect, learning, knowledge and perceived reality.

Belonging: Connectedness to kin, people, nature, home, displacement and networks.

Love (Philia): Caring for and caring about self, others, place, planet. What holds meaning and value.

Shared Experiences: World events, planetary effects, culture, language, ritual and celebration.

Creative Cultural Practices: Creativity, art, culture, museums, galleries, sport and spirituality.

Time, Place, Space: Context, nature, environment, time, ownership, cycles and ecology.

Life Sustaining Practices: Survival, work, money, sustenance, food, shelter, peace and healing.

Power and Governance: Self governance, autonomy, agency, power structures and economy.

Breakdown: Illness, aging, decay, disease, death, war and process.

Transformation: Change, adaption, creative responses, learning, hope and activism

Lifeforce Energy: the force that animates life, the energy to power actions (homes, cars etc).

RESEARCH METHODS

The Cultural Transmissions project had at its core a philosophy that prioritised partnership pedagogy. Co-design has been increasingly used by government led research and NGOs to better involve the end services user in policy decisions that affect them. This way of doing research is concerned not only with the outcome but critically with the research process that privileges working through decisions about the way research questions and the design of the research is conducted with participants and stakeholders along the way. This approach to conducting research is purposely designed so that peer researchers gain important and usable skills in research and benefit through quality training in research data collection, analysis and support to write a research report. Peer researchers were employed and paid for their research work by HOST International thus also providing a valuable work employment record.

The project employed ten Refugee Youth Peer Researchers who were trained and subsequently conducted participatory action research methods to reach young people aged 16-25 from refugee and refugee-like backgrounds in NSW. Each youth peer researcher was to reach out through their network to ethically conduct interviews and focus groups for the collection of primary qualitative data that would be later transcribed and analysed. This collaboration was to ensure that peer researchers drew on their skills and experience to connect to their fellow youth from refugee backgrounds in NSW. This allowed young people to be heard directly, especially those who have not been heard before, such as out of school youth, those without a social connection, those without a family or community connection and youth who have experienced homelessness.

Each refugee youth peer researcher aimed to interview forty people over a twelve-week period between September 2021 and November 2021, with each interview averaging 30 minutes to 1 hour. The peer researchers also aimed to conduct focus groups by partnering up with another youth peer researchers for this task, with each focus group averaging 3-8 people and 1-1.5 hours. These interviews were then transcribed by the youth peer researchers and analysed on several data analysis days using the Cultural Wellbeing Framework. The findings and recommendations in this report are presented to highlight the problems and solutions for young people from refugee and refugee-like backgrounds.

The research project was significantly impacted by COVID. Once the ethics approval was granted, peer researcher training days were scheduled in June 2021. Although the training days were able to be conducted face to face with ten peer researchers, shortly thereafter Western Sydney was placed in an enforced lockdown. This meant that the data collection was hampered as the research team waited for face-to-face options for interviews. This was not to come for months due to the on again off again lockdowns. Combined with this were fear and anxiety in the community surrounding COVID illness. Eventually the research team decided that the research data collection needed to commence despite COVID and so a decision was made to conduct interviews online using the zoom platform. While the research team were initially reluctant to do the research this way there was an unexpected benefit in that more people were able to be involved as it was easier for them to find a conducive time to meet.

47. Colette Einfeld and Emma Blomkamp, 'Nudge and co-design: complementary or contradictory approaches to policy innovation?' (2022) 43(5) Policy Studies 901.
48. Jakob Trischler, Timo Dietrich and Sharyn Rundle-Thiele, 'Co-design: from expert to user-driven ideas in public service design' (2019) 21(11) Public Management Review 1595.

The following outlines the steps that were undertaken with the lead research team, the peer researchers, and the participants in the study.

1 Employment of Peer Researchers by a panel of 3 interviewers using structured interviews and a rating system of 1 through 5. Sixteen applicants were interviewed on the Zoom platform, with ten peer researchers selected using a merit-based system.

2 Human Ethics clearance was sought through the HREA application process at Western Sydney University in 2021 HREA # H14520. Ethic was sought so that the best practice of human research principals was applied. This approval was also sort so that the research team and peer researchers were able to present and publish their research finding in academic papers and conferences.

3 Research design workshop x 2 that covered the basics of ethics, data collections, interview protocol.

4 Design the research questions. Issues were brainstormed on the research training days.

5 Data collection has been mostly conducted online via Zoom between August to September 2021 that included sixty-five interviews and five focus groups.

6 Check in meetings were held regularly during the project with Hayat Akbari leading these and involving the research team when required.

7 One face to face and one online data analysis day with a total of eight researchers and peer researchers. The data analysis days were crucial in understanding the information gained in the interviews.

8 Consult with advisory group to ensure consideration of service provider perspectives and to support information sharing.

9 Drafting and editing of the initial report by Kuwthar Aumarah supported by Hayat Akbari, Dr Karin Louise (Mackay), and David Keegan.

10 Sent for feedback to all peer researchers.

Refugee Youth Peer Research
Training Day – 2021

Left to right:

Back row – Dr Helen Lelei, Aish Naidu,
Fatmata Jalloh, Dr Karin Louise,
Parwin Taqawi, Kuwthar Aumarah,
Madeleine Govender, Hayat Akbari

Front row – Marwa Alkasim, Samir
Khattab, Andrew Hanna

FINDINGS

Throughout this research process, we have affirmed that young people from refugee backgrounds lead complex lives and experiences due to multiple existing factors. The 'cultural transition' exists in a space comprised of unlimited unique experiences, only to those who themselves have moved to Australia or are first-generation immigrants. Factors such as language, culture, heritage, community, family, trauma, gender and even the order of birth of the young person, are only some factors that influence the physical and mental state of the individual.

The cultural wellbeing of young people is impacted in both visible and invisible ways. The overarching theme is that while we know of the many challenges faced by young people as they resettle in Australia, we know much less about the multiple compounding challenges that are faced, which significantly impact the mental health of young people. This issue can also be mitigated or exacerbated depending on family and community support factors.

Service providers have an important role in this space. They must consciously work beyond young people's physical and practical needs, such as understanding the foundations of cultural wellbeing. This includes recognition and awareness of the challenges of navigating past experiences, present circumstances and future aspirations to become self-fulfilled. It is essential for settlement support organisations and staff to be trained in the complex experience of resettlement for young people, such as mental health and provision of culturally safe spaces, in addition to facilitating opportunities that enable young people to express their points of view through youth-led activities, research, informed policy and advocacy.

The following findings are just a snapshot of the struggles that young people face in the transition process. The struggle to find acceptance, belonging and healing can be a lifelong journey. The eleven findings are summarised from the analysis of the peer research conducted. Each concept is interconnected, and the themes are all related. Each finding is accompanied by quotes directly from the youth affected by this process of transition to illustrate real life examples.

1

The Importance of Empowerment and Autonomy

Young people spoke at length of their varying experiences with transitioning or growing up in two or more cultures. However, all participants had a particular universal experience regarding the need for empowerment and autonomy. For young people to experience autonomy, their families must be given certain empowerment through adequate supports, such as language and civic services, financial assistance and other supports that target needs at various stages of resettlement. The lack of these supports for empowerment of young people and their families has contributed to a lack of autonomy that is unique to refugee and migrant families. By having their parents rely on them for support with settlement, young people feel a loss of autonomy and feel bound to the needs of their parents or siblings.

"I think even though we all go through these hardships, I feel like because younger kids tend to go through it even harder because they're still trying to find themselves, they're still trying to figure out who they are as people within their family space, but then again, their culture and then moving at that crucial stage into a different, completely different country. And having to redo that all over again is difficult."

– Youth participant

"There should be some help around bullying, new kids are being bullied because they are considered different. We are only trying to study and [succeed] in life."

– Youth participant

"I'm the oldest. I thought I would get more support as a young person but didn't get much. It was very difficult to adapt."

– Youth participant

"But when I came here, I was stuck at home for a while because there was no support. Before coming they told us people there and organizations there will help you settle in the new city and will explain everything to you. I think COVID had a part in it as well. They just left us to learn public transport on our own, we couldn't even learn because we didn't have the language."

– Youth participant

2

Walking in two worlds: Belonging and Identity

Possibly the biggest issue presented by the participants was the confronting nature of having to figure out where they belong and who they are. Young people feel as though they did not have the support or resources necessary to effectively navigate and adjust to cultural differences, especially as each culture does not agree with the next. Many pointed out that this contributes to a sense that they do not belong and that their identity is confused. This then leads young people to not feel very secure or safe, physically and mentally, within themselves and the groups that surround their circumstances. Belonging and identity are both an internal battle for young people that affects their growth processes, especially in the refugee and resettlement space.

Additionally, young people overwhelmingly want freedom from their parents and the community in order to explore and remake their identity and where they belong. However, feeling shame, which stems from community and family pressure to follow their cultural path, causes editing of the self and a loss of a sense of security and safety within. Shame outside of family and community can also occur while trying to figure out one's identity and belonging in a society that is majority white and does not represent refugees or ethnic people in a good light.

"As a young person […] you want to naturally have a sense of belonging. It's difficult when you don't know what other people are saying or the instructions of the teacher […] I think I felt that most at school when I couldn't understand anyone, or no one could understand me"

– Youth participant

"All of us sort of struggle with our self-identity at some point in our life, but I think we get it harder because we've got quite different backgrounds and stuff that we have to deal with and it's more than just one."

– Youth participant

"Looking back at it, I don't understand why I was so embarrassed to say that I was Iraqi, but it just felt always like shameful. I don't know. It's very weird, I think trying to fit in too and be like, no, I'm not like everyone else, like from that community, especially because have such a bad outlook at that at the community and the Arab community, there's always like, you know, in the media, it's always, we're always portrayed badly in films and in the news everywhere."

– Youth participant

"I think the biggest challenge would have been the identity issues that we faced… It was a lot of [conflicting] sort of thing because we grew up in Jordan… which was like a very Islamic, highly populated area. So, we couldn't be ourselves, and we couldn't sort of tell people who we were in fear of persecution… when we came to Australia, that no longer applied, and suddenly, we were Mandaeans… we were Iraqis, and… also Australian… I suddenly had […] three different sorts of nationalities or backgrounds, and I didn't know which one I could sort of fit into. Then I met a lot of people and just… their ideas, or […] their ways were a bit different to what I was used to. And everybody was telling me like, this is how we're supposed to be, this is how we're supposed to act, and I just didn't feel like I [could've] fitted it in."

– Youth participant

3

Experiences of Racism

Systemic and interpersonal racism tends to occur in every space that a young person from a refugee background exists in, whether it is a clear-cut incident in public, or it could be a negative reaction towards the food and culture of the young person. Racism has the power to damage the individual and their self-worth as they are transitioning into a new world. It tends to target the internal tension of 'where do I belong?'. Young people feel frustration, anger, and injustice when they experience these types of incidents, as they are profiled or treated differently just for looking different. Racism experiences challenge the young person's journey with belonging as they are struggling to figure out where to fit in. A different type of racism that participants also discussed is the lack of representation in the media and the prevalent stereotypes of different communities presented in this medium.

"We always even joke about it, about how [we're] stopped, and they think that we're terrorists or that we have bombs in our bags and all that. But it's a harmful issue that is not being addressed on a national level because it is racial discrimination, and nothing is really being done about it."

– Youth participant

"Another thing is seeing how your parents, I guess, or other Arab or Iraqi people are treated kind of hurts. I've seen some incidents where I've seen racism in front of me, and just like, it's difficult to see."

– Youth participant

"… one of the challenges was […] even though I had good English, when we used to go out with family and stuff and the family would talk in Arabic, like, for example, some like people who are born here […] would hear them talk in Arabic or a different language, they'll just make faces and just be like, throw words like, oh, just go back where you came from… Like, I think that's part of the biggest challenges to face because… it just makes you feel like you don't belong here and you're already trying to fit in, like trying so hard to fit in and struggling so hard to settle. I think that's the biggest challenge so far."

– Youth participant

4

Hidden Intergenerational Trauma

Few participants highlighted that tensions occur due to unaddressed intergenerational trauma and its mental and physical manifestations. While it carries a big impact on young people, it is often unacknowledged as it is not always visible. Minority groups that have been persecuted have had to re-learn their culture and language during and after the resettlement period. It is often forgotten that refugee families flee war and persecution and need their trauma addressed, but there are deeper complexities that are carried on through intergenerational trauma due to generational persecution, war and constant displacement, and concealment of religion and culture.

"The generational or the intergenerational trauma that as Hazara's… we feel because of the ethnic persecution in Afghanistan and Pakistan. And so, for us, a big part of being… in a country where… we were given the opportunity to be who we are as Hazaras in our complete selves… and this is not […] when I say opportunity, this is not to give, you know, white saviour undertone. I mean, like the ability to be who we are. So, for me, it was about having to find my own self."

– Youth participant

"I know that generational trauma is a is a very real thing."

– Youth participant

5

The Survival Mode 'Switch'

"Survival Mode", as termed by young people from refugee backgrounds, is an invisible concept that describes a mental coping strategy of refugee families. Simply, those who fled war, persecution, and any acts of conflict or violence that led to their displacement, are only concerned with making sure that their family is settled and established so that their lives are not uprooted again. Parents can sometimes show this through strictness over their children, pressuring them to work and/or seek tertiary education, to buy a house or car, etc.

One of the main detriments observed from "survival mode" is that when parents are only concerned with the provision of physical needs, mental needs such as addressing trauma, parenting, or looking after the mental health of their children, are often not a priority. Survival mode could show through a lack of progress and understanding, such as parents forcing their children to follow strict religious and cultural guidelines.

Survival mode is also affected by financial stress, which is an understated issue affecting refugee families and young people. By not receiving enough economic assistance upon arrival and in the following years, young people might bear the responsibility of becoming providers for their families from a young age. Parents may not be able to find work due to language barriers and discrimination, therefore, it falls on young people to take on such a role in the family out of necessity.

"Cause, like, think about it. Like, you're a kid, you want to fit in. And your parents are saying no. Your parents are saying this is in your culture. Your parents are saying you're not Aussie you're Iraqi and you are just. You just want to fit in. You want to do what everyone else is doing, and you don't understand why your parents don't understand. So, you just get frustrated."

– Youth participant

"You had school and a lot of your parents harp on you to get, you know, a proper education and to become something in the future."

– Youth participant

6

Mental Health Impacts

The mental health impacts on young people were discussed extensively as an unresolved issue in a personal, community, and institutional capacity. Mental health affects all young people, whether they made the refugee journey themselves or were born here as first generation immigrants. Trauma, shame, forced rules, life brokering and tensions in the household and community all reportedly contribute to a decline in mental and emotional health for the young person. Young people specifically mentioned that in some communities, the community itself can damage the perceptions of seeking help. This means that community-run mental health services could be counterintuitive for young people to feel safe in seeking help.

Participants also mentioned that the lack of available or visible services due to cost, inflexibility, or lack of exposure, are also contributing factors to lack of treatment. The struggle with identity and belonging due to the factors mentioned in these findings also have their role in shaping the mental health of young people in the short and long term. Therefore, it is imperative that mental health services are culturally appropriate and tailored to the unique experiences of young people, particularly their cultural backgrounds and resettlement journey.

"It's very taboo, like talking about mental health and like how you're feeling and stuff like that. In Arabic we have a word for it it's called 3eib [shame]."

– Youth participant

"There's such a lack of availability for mental health resources, especially for youth, that not everyone can afford, paying $180 or $220 per session to someone that could help them... I feel like we need to better that. Five sessions are not enough."

– Youth participant

"It's also taken a toll, especially as I said earlier, of the tension that I had created between trying to fit in to Western ideals versus trying to keep my parents happy by fitting into those Eastern ideals as well."

– Youth participant

7

Community Power

The community was noted as having control and power over families, which has a flow on impact on young people as they face pressure to conform to community expectations and avoid family shame. Young people felt that the community, whether it be the institution, leaders, or members who make up the community, seek to control young people through direct means or through family and protection of 'reputation.' Other instances of community conflict appear when young people break away from their community as they develop their own personal beliefs and values that do not align with their community. Young people feel more disconnected and unwelcome from their community when they do not meet the expectations of the community by not complying with the traditional standards. As a lot of communities are resistant to evolving and progressing with modern society, this causes a strained relationship between the young people who grow and identify with more than just their own community and culture, and their community leaders and members.

"People from the community think they are doing this to help us. But really, they are not helping us and causing us to withdraw from that community. Even our leaders want to interfere with our decisions."

– Youth participant

"The community has nothing to do with our career choices, but they still like to talk bad about how we are not 'doctors'"

– Youth participant

"My parents supported it, but we know the community keeps judging so you can't really do it. They don't even care."

– Youth participant

"...when you start developing, you know, your thinking, your morals, your ethics... they're still stuck kind of in the past or in their own ways, and they're not changing. So, you become [...] sort of an outcast [...] You become like ostracized from the community, in that sense."

– Youth participant

"Even though my parents are fine with so many things I do, the community wants to have a say."

– Youth participant

8

Culture and Gender Expectations

Culture and community tend to dictate gender and role expectations on young people. In some communities, gender inequality is a prevalent issue where women and men have unequal power, in others, the eldest born child, especially a female, is expected to take on the role of life broker and role model to the rest of the younger family members. Young people that do not uphold these expectations can face certain problems such as shame and difficulty from relatives and the community in general. Without effective communication and understanding between all parties, these expectations can lead to much pressure on the young person.

"....one would be studying abroad, overseas. This is one thing that I really wanted to do for a long period of time, when I first turned 18, that was one of my tensions. I really wanted to do it and study inter-state as well, for example, studying Tasmania, like another state. However, but because stereotypically, you know, I'm a girl. In Arab society, I must be at home, you know, I must be with my family, that sort of thing. So, I felt like gender did play a lot in that sense. But however, as the time went on, I'm 21 now, my parents became a little bit more open minded"

– Youth participant

"I was still the oldest daughter, so I had to be a role model to my siblings"

– Youth participant

9

Impacts of Life Brokering

A 'Life Broker' for the context of this study is a young person that takes on adult responsibilities for their families, such as handling bureaucratic processes like forms, translating, interpreting and dealing with different services on behalf of their family. This impacts young peoples' autonomy to live more independently, alongside affecting their mental health due to the pressure of the responsibilities placed upon them. This immense feeling of responsibility is an accumulation of both the need to complete all tasks as they pertain to the function of the household, as well as the importance of not making any mistakes on government and medical forms as they can be very costly mistakes in immigrant households. Most of the participants described this issue as one that made them grow up earlier than their non-refugee and immigrant counterparts. They also identified the hardships of this role as they described that they had no choice but to take it on for their families due to the inadequacy and unavailability of services.

"Yes, like a lot of pressure, especially like you are being younger, your way younger than your parents. You're just a child and you're taking to like serious places and you're expected to understand what's going on and then translate that to your parents. Yeah, there's a bit of pressure."

– Youth participant

"I thought I would be able to focus on my studies and someone else would help my parents with translations and English, but it's my full-time job now."

– Youth participant

"Once you get here, you have to mature faster and carry more responsibilities at an early age."

– Youth participant

10

Challenges to Parenting

Young people also recognise the struggles that their families face in resettlement. Parents face challenges while raising children with an identity crisis, children who start to pull away from community and their strict cultural practices, and those who start to transition into a western culture over a purely community-based culture. It is difficult for parents to understand their children's needs and changing views and beliefs, leading to challenges between the parties regarding trust and lack of cohesion. Parents are not well equipped to deal with children who are impacted by the transition journey in this way, which causes many tensions between the parties. Families need the assistance and skills relevant to deal with this issue as early mitigation would help with the transition to a new cultural landscape and social norms.

"Parents should be mindful of what their kids are experiencing, and the emotional stress they are causing"

– Youth participant

"I think here in Australia, we as young adults have to educate our parents on many topics"

– Youth participant

"Our parents are different. They think differently. We see things in new countries they are not seeing every day. So, in our eyes it is normal. They are still parents and are more experienced and only want good for you."

– Youth participant

11

Complexities of Shared Experiences

Shared experiences of cultural transitions can be a double-edged sword. Sharing these experiences has many positives and finding individuals with similar exposure allows the young person to feel less lonely and permits them to express their feelings to other individuals that understand the journey. However, young people also feel that this could serve to be a limiting aspect in that it can keep them in their own bubble and take them away from interacting with the Australian community. For some young people, being involved in community youth groups helps foster a connection of shared struggle, belief and understanding, however, for others, they found that the separation between refugee and non-refugee students for English intensive programs like IEC to be isolating and a negative aspect of transitioning.

"I feel like [...] focus groups with other people who have gone through the same thing or people from my community too [because] we're all experiencing the same thing, the same transition. That would have been a really good, helpful tool."

– Youth participant

"I was not admitted to IEC either and I felt isolated. The school tried to help us engage in the community with other students who are around the same age, which was very helpful."

– Youth participant

"I think I find a lot of like happiness in the connections that we're able to make, and I feel like it's quite different connections than just connecting with a human being with like people that have gone through the same experiences are from the same culture and religion, you know, it just hits different."

– Youth participant

"In IEC we were put with students who speak the same language, we should have had more interactions with Australian students that would have helped us fit in so much more. We stay with the same people for the whole day for over a year in English classes. This does not help improve our English in any way."

– Youth participant

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this report is to showcase the complex and difficult journey that young people from a refugee background face during cultural transition in the early stages of settlement to Australia. The findings we noted in this report present some of the most pressing issues and experiences for young people and have emerged using the Cultural Wellbeing Framework to guide the analysis.

Most participants flagged mental health, trauma, relational tensions, racism, life brokering and belonging as the central points affecting their transition process. All findings were interconnected to some degree; trauma affected mental health, mental health affected relationships, and relationships affected the sense of belonging. In most instances, young people felt that they could not be their true selves due to the multiple factors discussed above. Literature has suggested that the success of the resettlement process is the responsibility of the individual and community due to the link between transition and pre-immigration factors such as socioeconomic background, language, and ethnic and cultural barriers.[49] This is problematic as it has been shown that this approach to resettlement is not working for young people and their families. Through the participants, we observe that it creates a strain on the community, families, and young people as they figure out their transition process in a complex manner.

Multiple participants spoke at length of their experiences of racism and micro-aggressions as they resettled or grew up in Australia. This issue has had a significant effect on the young people in this study. Racism from community, media, institutions, and individuals that is experienced during resettlement was found to have a negative impact on the belonging, identity, wellbeing, and mental health of young people.[50] Society tends to underestimate how much of an impact racism has on refugees, and particularly refugee youth who pick up language and culture quicker. Young people are generally aware of racism and the impacts it has on their lives. While the Australian public likes to deflect, deny and justify attitudes of racism and racist acts, studies have shown consistently that racism occurs in multiple ways and has detrimental effects on people, mainly through built up intolerances presented by multimedia outlets.[51] Moreover, discrimination and racism affect the young person's journey to self-identity as they reconstruct their lives in a new and sometimes hostile country that does not accept them as a whole. [52]

Refugees fleeing from conflict and displacement have higher rates of mentally ill health compared to normal immigrants.[53] The trauma arising out of these lived experiences is compounded by the negative attitudes of Western society towards refugees. It presents an added stress to young people from refugee backgrounds and their families.[54] For young people in particular, the experience of a so-called 'culture clash' during the resettlement process, alongside any trauma they may have, creates a serious cause of concern for their mental health.[55] The structural issues of resettlement, combined with lived trauma, inter-generational trauma, and the complexities that accompany the transition process, can contribute to significant challenges to the lived wellbeing of young individuals from refugee backgrounds.

49. Ravinder Sidhu and Sandra Taylor, 'Educational provision for refugee youth in Australia: left to chance?' (2007) 43(3) Journal of Sociology 283.

50. MYAN, National Youth Settlement Framework (Research Report, 2nd ed, 2020) <myan.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/myan0004-revised-nysf_fa_low-res.pdf>.

51. Laura Moran, Belonging and Becoming in a Multicultural World (Rutgers University Press, 2019).

52. Tahereh Ziaian et al, 'Identity and Belonging: Refugee Youth and Their Parents' Perception of Being Australian' (2021) 56(2) Australian Psychologist 123.

53. Anna-Clara Hollander et al, 'Gender-related mental health differences between refugees and non-refugee immigrants- a cross-sectional register-based study' (2011) 11(180) BMC Public Health 1.

54. Cécile Rousseau and Melanie M. Gagnon, 'Intervening to Address the Impact of Stress and Trauma on Refugee Children and Adolescents Resettled in High-Income Countries' in Suzan J. Song and Peter Ventevogel (eds), Child, Adolescent and Family Refugee Mental Health: A Global Perspective (Springer Nature Switzerland, 2020) 151.

55. Laura Moran, Belonging and Becoming in a Multicultural World (Rutgers University Press, 2019).

Intergenerational trauma has been uncovered in this research as an unaddressed multilayered issue that affects the community, families, and young individuals. It refers to how the negative experiences of trauma in one generation affect the wellbeing of the next generation and their descendants.[56] Trauma researchers have identified that refugee families carrying trauma can affect their children's wellbeing in various ways, such as PTSD, anxiety, and mood swings.[57] Manifestations of trauma within refugee families might also be exacerbated by parental trauma and lead to physical burdens such as abuse, neglect, or other unconscious harm.[58] There is limited research in the area of intergenerational trauma within refugee families, as it is a sensitive and complex area of study. However, there is critical need for further research into the effects of intergenerational trauma on parental and family wellbeing.

The findings show that tensions occur between young people, their parents, and their community. This complex relationship could be explained as a relationship triangle within a cultural wellbeing framework that draws on the interconnectedness of applicable elements.[59] The elements of 'being' and 'becoming' encompass the senses and feelings of the individual and community. Young people pointed to the fact that they must perform a certain role, their parents try to preserve their culture, and the community acts as the moral guide. The following elements of belonging, security and safety are a bit more complex. Young people yearn to belong in spaces when they face conflicting choices and cultures, and belonging is indicated as one of the most important needs in life. Yet, belonging may also constrain an individual, with each culture (new and old) pulling against each other, causing ongoing tension, and withholding the security and safety that comes with belonging. Additionally, a lack of effective communication between parents and children on issues of culture also leads to not knowing what is acceptable, which impacts that sense of belonging, security, and safety.

Shared experiences are another element that emerged through the analysis. This occurs when people of similar backgrounds and circumstances have similar stories to share; the drive is to share and learn about language, life, culture, and people. Young people had two clear thoughts on shared experiences. Some wished to have other young people around them with similar experiences as a support mechanism, while others wanted to explore new experiences with non-refugee individuals. Shared experiences also refer to the unique experience of one community. For example, among Mandaean youth, while each young person has paved their individuality and where they belong, the community as a whole share the experience of persecution, being an ethno-religious minority, and facing copious amounts of racism and discrimination both in the Arab and Western world.

The element of power is strict. For young refugees, they require and yearn for autonomy and control of self, however, this power usually rests in the hands of society, parents, and community leaders. Young people develop their own power and autonomy slowly, though community governance can impede on their journey of identity and belonging. In this study, young people indicated that the community at times has more power and influence over their families, which impacts on the young individual's freedom and movement. Relationship breakdown is one of the possible consequences of unequal distribution of power. Relationships, cultural pathways, familiarity with the home country, and an absence of physical, spiritual, and mental needs are all potential sources of breakdown.

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56. Cindy Sangalang and Cindy Vang, 'Intergenerational Trauma in Refugee Families: A Systemic Review' (2017) 19(3) J Immigr Minor Health 745.
57. Ibid; Anna d'Abreu, Sara Castro-Olivo and Sarah K Ura, 'Understanding the role of acculturative stress on refugee youth mental health: A systematic review and ecological approach to assessment and intervention' (2019) 40(2) School Psychology International 107.
58. Cindy Sangalang and Cindy Vang, 'Intergenerational Trauma in Refugee Families: A Systemic Review' (2017) 19(3) J Immigr Minor Health 745.
59. Karin Louise, Cultural Wellbeing Framework in Community Practice (Research Paper).

This study has clearly shown that almost all young people who arrive to this country with their family must take on the role of a 'life broker' for their families. This requires interpreting and translating information regarding health, education, housing, employment, shopping, Centrelink and other government and non-government services. Children as young as eight years old can pick up this role due to the inadequacy of services provided by the government, as shown in one participant's experience in this study. The impact of this role on young people is beyond detrimental and damaging as it means they would take on the role of an adult or parent, leading to tensions to occur when they try to juggle those responsibilities.[60] Compared to non-refugee individuals, young people who take this role, whether they are happy with it or not, have more stress as families become dependent on their child as a 'third parent'. It permanently alters the young person's maturity and permits them to grow up earlier than most.[61] Most participants in this study have indicated that they have experienced these difficulties by life brokering for their families. Lack of available and inclusive services, are significant contributors to this issue. Racism and acceptance were flagged as experiences that impact the journey of young people and their families as they transition.

Settlement and transition services are not only 'first responders', but they are, or should be, advocates for refugees. Their response to the needs of refugees and young people should be informed by the experiences of young people, such as the participants of this study. This could allow service providers to reach beyond the immediate response period, to the medium-term and long-term experience and transition of young people and their families. However, the role of service providers is not an easy one, as we recognise that resources to support the specific needs of youth and families are limited.

As services are in the process of re-design for the future of resettlement, it is imperative that they implement ideas and changes that focus on the long-term effects of resettlement. This research has made it evident that support for young people, families and communities is greatly lacking from arrival up to 15 years after resettlement, and has contributed to many challenges, including mental health, relationship breakdown, isolation, etc. Services should co-design with communities to help address the short and long-term needs of young people and their families that recognises the unique complexities and prepares them for the challenges ahead.

60. Anne-Marie Taylor and David Keegan, Keeping Their Hopes Alive: A Good Practice Guide to Case Management with Young People from Refugee Backgrounds (Research Report, 2012).
61. 'Issues for Young Refugees [2012]' Youth Action <www.youthaction.org.au/issues_for_young_refugees>.

CONCLUSION

This study has explored cultural transitions and tensions for young people from refugee backgrounds with their families, community, and wider Australian society. Mental health, trauma, the relationship triangle between individuals, families and community, life brokering, and racism profoundly impact a young person's identity and sense of belonging.

Young people who make cultural transitions due to their refugee backgrounds have more complex and difficult lives due to this process compared to young people from non-refugee backgrounds. To address these difficulties and help young people, action must be taken by communities, organisations and governments and be informed by the experiences of young people.

This research clearly identifies the need for targeted approaches to support the unique needs of refugee youth and their families both during early settlement and beyond. Further research is also needed into the most effective intervention approaches that will support the holistic needs of families and the individuals within, whilst also working with communities to support the integration of cultures and norms.

In order to avoid harm and ensure best use of resources, the young people who participated in this study strongly recommend that Settlement Services work closely with young people and community to co-design service delivery models and seek to monitor gaps in the system that place additional demands on families during early settlement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations encompass the possible solutions to the issues presented by young people, participants, and peer researchers, who contributed to this research.

1 Mental Health services should be equitable in access and costs

Mental health services as they currently stand in Australia are inadequate. Medicare allows for only 6-10 free therapy sessions per year with every additional session costing between $90-$200. To address the mental health needs of young people in cultural transitions, psychological treatments should be better visible, more accessible, and less costly so that individuals on welfare are able to access such important services. While services like STARTTS target mental health for refugees, these services usually cap access at five years since arrival and are very trauma focused. Young people need consistent, available, and less costly options that would address the long-term and short-term impacts of cultural transitions and minimise stigma.

As each individual's journey differs from the next, the consistent availability of mental health services is an adequate mechanism to address not only complex trauma, but the resettlement and transition processes. While the transition process itself causes mental health issues in young people and families, of which physical manifestations can show up in later years, a more open and available mental health service is required. It is important to recognise that advocacy on this front is essential.

2 More support for parents, including with life broking, interpreting and translation

Most of the tensions between parents and young people arise out of the role that is imposed on young people, which carries with it significant responsibilities and pressure. Bureaucratic processes that are handled by young people for their families often cause stress, anxiety, and take away a certain part of childhood from the young person. It leads to young people having much more responsibility than their non-refugee counterparts.

A better and more easily accessible translation and interpreting service would alleviate some of the responsibilities on young people. The current services lack patience and enough personnel to assist a lot of families with their forms, doctor visits, house bills and Centrelink appointments. Service providers can hire more staff from linguistically diverse backgrounds, as well as advocate for more funding into the interpreting and translation services that are more in demand than they are available. While community organisations assist individuals through volunteers, there should be funding allocated to community and religious organisations to support wider access to language and service system support.

3   Work with services to develop resettlement initiatives that bring individuals and families together

Bridging the gap between young people and their families can contribute to better family dynamics, communication, understanding and respect. It is imperative that while this should be a goal, cultural sensitivity and awareness should be the main element in planning, implementation and evaluation.

Service providers could develop multiple initiatives, in educational and practical ways, that bring families together by targeting issues such as survival mode, gender and cultural expectations, domestic laws and norms, skills and knowledge workshops. A few initiatives can include family-run discussion groups regarding resettlement and parenting issues, as well as the possibility of supplying mentors for parents so that young people do not face as much pressure as they currently do.

4   Skills and Knowledge Workshops

A part of co-design for resettlement initiatives should be workshops that focus on the skills and knowledge needed to resettle in Australia. These workshops should be strongly encouraged for newly arrived families and address norms, customs, differences, family relations, expectations, and the cultural wellbeing relationship triangle through several activities. These activities should be available for all ages and in all languages, and set through a collaboration with community, services and mental health advisors.

The aim of these workshops is to ensure that families, especially the parent and child dynamic, are not in for a big shock in the process of resettlement over the next few years and decades. It is beneficial to set up the expectations of the changing dynamics within the family, as well as the expected roles that young people will take on in the process. The workshops should provide enough tools to allow parents a 'roadmap' of where to seek specific help and assistance pertaining to many services, how to address mental health and trauma, and most importantly, how to deal with the inevitable changes in the family dynamic while adhering to cultural wellbeing.

5   Safe spaces for newly arrived young people to meet with a range of young people

The study identified that young people both needed to be surrounded by other young people of similar complex experiences and be in the company of those that are not like them to improve on language and cultural awareness quicker. Service providers could arrange for spaces that enable such meetings so that young people feel less alone in their journey and so that they learn from others who know the system well. Possible activities to reach this outcome can include one on one or group mentoring, youth led initiatives or gatherings, and additional learning experiences during resettlement.

6 Anti-racism work in Australian society and more representation

Racism, microaggressions, intolerance and lack of representation all affect the sense of belonging and identity of a young person in their cultural transitions. To address this issue, participants indicated that education from a young age could be the key. Anti-racism campaigns could also be strengthened, as well as implementing a quota for representation and fact-checking in media platforms and certain institutions that make decisions regarding refugees and immigrants.

Australia, at the time of conducting this research report, does not have a national anti-racism strategy. Racism must be addressed across a national, state and local setting, both in government and non-government organisations, and various businesses, corporations, media and other organisations that impact our lives every day. Society should follow a set of standards regarding anti-racism, as it would ensure inclusion, inclusivity, tolerance, acceptance, and understanding towards those that are forced to resettle in a country that has shown various forms of racism and microaggressions towards them.

It is also important to note that many refugees arrive to Australia from places that have been devastated, particularly, some countries where the Australian government has contributed to such devastation. It is quite traumatic for resettled refugees to go through this process, and the aggressions displayed against them as they live here only contribute to increasing the trauma. Therefore, education is the key factor to address such complexities among the refugee and resettlement experience.

7 Negotiating cultural relationships training

As young people develop and try to find their identity and belonging, tensions with their family can lead to relationship breakdowns. Many immigrant families struggle to raise their children in Western countries that have a lot of opposite aspects to their own culture. A provision of a service that enables relationship training for young people and their families, with the inclusion of a community element, could help avoid relationship breakdowns.

Relationship training is a need that transcends the first five years of resettlement. Many young people and their families struggle in their relationships upwards of 5-15 years after resettlement. Therefore, services should address long-term needs as well. This particular service could be provided through the current established settlement services, or it may be a new design that only focuses on family dynamics and relationships, in partnership with communities and young people.

8 Awareness and education for understanding mental health as a cultural dynamic and reframing as cultural wellbeing

Communities and society struggle to view mental health services as an essential issue that needs to be addressed. Awareness and education campaigns by service providers, as well as working closely with community leaders to redefine the issue as cultural wellbeing, could open new avenues and mindsets to prioritise mental health in the sense of cultural wellbeing.

Mental health has been a recurring theme throughout this research. It has affected young people, their families and their communities to varying degrees, whether due to the trauma of war, the journey of immigrating to a foreign country, intergenerational trauma, raising children/being raised in conflicting environments, cultural clashes or the identity crisis. It is important to educate communities and individuals on the significance of addressing mental health issues as a priority in order to live a fulfilling life.

9 Empowerment through naming of issues faced by communities, families, young people and service providers

Each group, community, family, young person and service provider, has a different experience in the resettlement journey. Services and policies often lack the input of real-life experiences from these groups. To empower them, consultations are a must as it enables them to name the issues they face during and after resettlement, and within the cultural transition period. This mechanism would also permit the response and services to become much more efficient and targeted. Beyond this, it is also just important for each affected group to feel heard and consulted with, and for their experiences to be taken into consideration when necessary.

10 A focus on the triad of power – engagement of community, family and youth

The traditional resettlement process neglects to consider the integrated dynamics and power between the community, family and the young person. Leaving this unaddressed within the resettlement process has led to the various tensions discussed earlier in this report. There must be a balance of the interconnected nature of family, community and youth in a much bigger picture, alongside services. The Cultural Wellbeing Framework could be utilised within services and policy to aid in the understanding and working of the triad of power. The process of co-design with the affected groups could be utilised in this space to inform more specifically on the power dynamics and their effects on each group mentioned.

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