Refugee background women, their connections, sense of belonging, acceptance and inclusion in the Greater Wellington region

Draft report

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ALLEN+CLARKE

Cover image with permission from the Wellington based Iranian artist **Sharareh Khojasteh**. Sharareh's art can be found on Instagram: **db.art.gallery**.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the qualitative findings of a research project focussing on the experiences and needs of refugee background women across the greater Wellington region. The research explored refugee background women's experiences of settling in Wellington, or within the greater Wellington region, and sought their views on what changes could be made to improve integrated settlement outcomes.

NOTE: The Executive Summary will be completed after the feedback on the draft has been received and discussed.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Research topic and key research question

The focus of this research is on refugee background women, their connections with local people, and how these connections impacted their sense of belonging, acceptance, and inclusion in the Greater Wellington region.

The key research question: Who are the refugee background women connecting with and why?

1.2. Background

In July 2020, New Zealand's annual Refugee Quota increased to 1,500 places. Between 2011 and 2020 approximately 2,047 refugees arrived in Wellington most of whom are women and their children[1].

The United Nations 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees defines a refugee person as someone who –

> "a refugee is someone who is forced to leave their own country for a multitude of reasons (including persecution or situations of armed conflict and violence). When entering a country, a refugee is considered an asylum seeker before being granted or refused refugee status."[2]

There is a growing body of research about people in New Zealand who come from refugee backgrounds. This research has shown that the experience of adjusting to a new way of life in a new country is shaped by a range of different factors. The dynamics of settlement include language acquisition and language proficiency; culturally defined obligations and expectations of gender and family; age-related issues; socio-cultural histories; religious practices; and different expectations of what constitutes social and cultural capital.[3] While refugees share commonalities with other classes of immigrants, it is important to stress that refugees have been forced to leave their home countries, have greater humanitarian needs, and face significant settlement challenges. On arriving in New Zealand, the challenges they face can relate (in varying degrees of intensity) to all or some of the following:

- Acquiring basic knowledge of English and/or developing proficiency in English
- Socio-economic challenges associated with unemployment and poverty

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[1] New Zealand Parliament (2020). *The New Zealand Refugee Quota: A Snapshot of Recent Trends*. Retrieved from: https://www.parliament.nz/en/pb/library-research-papers/research-papers/the-new-zealand-refugee-quota-a-snapshot-of-recent-trends/

[2] https://www.unhcr.org

[3] Strategic Social Policy Group (2008) Diverse Communities – Exploring the Migrant and Refugee Experience in New Zealand. Ministry of Social Development, Te Manatū Whakahiato Ora.

- Socio-cultural challenges connected with adjusting to a new and unfamiliar environment and society, and possibly also being confronted with hostile and xenophobic attitudes
- Emotional challenges resulting from past trauma and dealing with feelings of fear and anxiety. [4]

Responding to all of the above challenges determines how well refugees can feel accepted by, and integrated into, the new society they live in. That is, the way in which refugees are in a position to overcome these challenges will shape the kinds of connections they will and can make, how they can develop resilience and a sense of belonging, and how they experience acceptance and inclusion within their new society.

A study published in 2009 showed that the experience of settling in New Zealand as a refugee is gendered.[5] For the most part, refugees are women arriving in New Zealand as mothers or primary caregivers of dependent children, women arriving alone, young [dependent?] women, and girls experience a range of gender related challenges. These challenges can impact on the wellbeing of these women and wellbeing is central to successful settlement outcomes.[6] Yet while gender is a common factor, women from refugee backgrounds do not comprise a homogeneous category. Class, education, former work experience, ethnicity, sexuality, and the refugee journey remain key factors which impact on their potential integration. Understanding the factors which shape the experience of settlement as a refugee newcomer, the nature of participation in society, what acceptance looks and feels like, and the nature of belonging and inclusion for former refugees is necessary if programmes are to offer relevant and effective support services.

Changemakers Resettlement Forum identified a need for more research into the resettlement experiences of refugee background women in the greater Wellington area and contracted *Allen + Clarke* to undertake this research.

1.3. Resettlement in New Zealand

The resettlement of refugees in New Zealand has been occurring since the 1940s and has been guided by a range of international agreements and national level policies. Over time these agreements and policies have changed as evidence has challenged assumptions about what successful settlement looks like and how best to support successful settlement outcomes.

The United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) defines resettlement as:

> "the transfer of refugees from an asylum country to another State, that has agreed to admit them and ultimately grant them permanent residence."[7]

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[4] Refer to: Pahud, M., Kirk, R., Gage, J., Hornblow, A.R. (2009) The coping processes of adult refugees resettled in New Zealand. *New Issues in Refugee Research, Research Paper No.179.* UNHCR Policy Development and Evaluation Service.
[5] Ibid.
[6] DeSouza, Ruth (2011) Doing it for ourselves and our children: Refugee women on their own in New Zealand. Prepared for Refugee Services Aotearoa New Zealand. AUT University.
[7] United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (n.d.). *Resettlement*. Retrieved from: https://www.unhcr.org/resettlement.html

The process of resettlement, however, is lengthy and complex and ultimately involves more than simply granting residence. In New Zealand, settlement policy and practice has shifted from emphasising ***assimilation*** (in the post WWII period)**,** where refugees and immigrants were expected to adapt and adjust and change to become like other (mainstream Pakeha) New Zealanders, to a policy and practice which stresses ***integration*** (post significant immigration law changes in the 1990s)[8] where refugee, immigrant and New Zealand society adapt and change to accommodate one another.[9]

1.3.1. The resettlement of former refugees in New Zealand – a conceptual framework

The resettlement of former refugees in New Zealand is guided by the New Zealand Refugee Resettlement Strategy (2013) which has as its overarching vision having refugees ***participating fully*** and ***being integrated both economically and socially into New Zealand society***. When integration has been achieved former refugees are independent and share the same rights and responsibilities as other New Zealanders.[10] The New Zealand Refugee Strategy as with other strategies in like-kind settler societies[11,12]draws on the work of Ager and Strang (2008)[13] who developed a conceptual model comprising 10 core domains central to successful integration. Within this framework there are markers and means which are underpinned by a range of factors which together ensure successful integrated settlement outcomes (Figure 1).

[8] Which saw a shift away from traditional source countries and an entry system that allowed migration from non-traditional source countries. These changes included: the introduction of a points-based system in 1991 which saw a significant influx of migrants from countries in northeast Asia in particular; between 1996-2001 the introduction of more stringent English language requirements.

[9] Immigration New Zealand's (INZ's) *Migrant Settlement and Integration Strategy* ('Settlement Strategy') approved by Cabinet in 2014: https://www.newzealandnow.govt.nz/live-in-new-zealand/strategy-to-support-migrant-settlement

[10] Marlow, J.M., Bartley, A., Hibtit, A. (2014) The New Zealand Refugee Resettlement Strategy: implications for identity, acculturation and civic participation. *Kōtuitui: New Zealand Journal of Social Sciences Online* 2014:9:2:60-69.

[11] OECD (2019) The Road to Integration https://www.oecd.org/publications/the-road-to-integration-d8ceec5d-en.htm

[12] OECD/EU (2018) Settling In: Indicators of Immigrant Integration. The 74 indicators are based on three strands: labour market and skills; living conditions; and civic engagement and social integration. https://www.oecd.org/publications/indicators-of-immigrant-integration-2018-9789264307216-en.htm

[13] Ager, A., & Strang, A. (2008) Understanding integration: a conceptual framework. *Journal of Refugee Studies* 21:166-191.

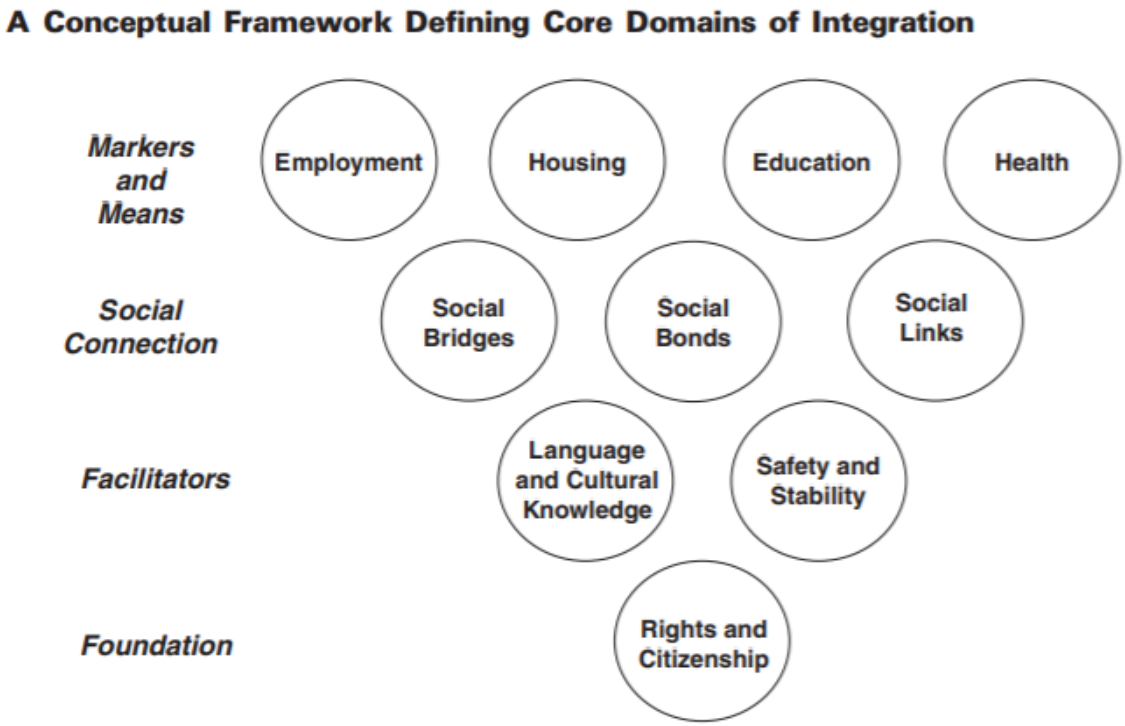

Figure 1 The Conceptual Framework Defining Core Domains of Integration

While depicted as mutually exclusive components, there is a high level over overlap, interdependency, and determination between these components. Successful integration can be measured in terms of hard outcomes (employment, secure housing, equity in educational access and achievement, health equity, participation rates, citizenship outcomes) and it can be measured in more subjective terms: whether a refugee feels that they belong, whether they feel they are able to participate fully, and whether they feel accepted or excluded in the society they have been re-settled to. These subjectivities are also, and importantly, shaped by material realities. The research record demonstrates that patterns of participation are shaped by ethnicity, social status, class position and dispositions that emerge in relation to these material circumstances.[14] There are many factors associated with how people interact in social space – *not belonging or being out of place* – is an outcome of interacting in a social space, the nature of this interaction depends on your position in society. For example, ethnic minorities can experience constraints to participation that are resource-related, constraints can also be a response to a new society.

It has been demonstrated that ethnic minorities tend to interact close to home, and migrants and refugees learn to navigate space, to recognise safe places and spaces and to

[14] Lovelock, Kirsten., Lovelock, Brent., Jellum, Carla., Thompson, Anna. (2011) In search of belonging: immigrant experiences of outdoor nature-based settings in New Zealand. *Leisure Studies* 30:4:513-529.

understand whether they have legitimate or illegitimate access.[15] Social space is not a benign or neutral backdrop against which social interaction takes place; rather it is central to social inclusion and exclusion and is the materialisation of power.[16,17]Access to, and feeling entitled to, being in social space is reliant on a claim to social, cultural, and physical capital which combined provide legitimacy for movement within and between social spaces.[18,19]Refugees bring with them social, cultural, and physical capital that does not always have currency in the settlement country, when currency is not recognised, inclusion is undermined which in turn impacts on a sense of belonging and acceptance. For example, if a refugee's work experience or qualifications do not have equivalent capital to locally gained experience or qualifications, they do not have currency and lack legitimacy. Illegitimate qualifications and experience, deemed so in this new social space, inhibits the refugee's ability to access the social space of employment and a role in the labour market that is commensurate with their previous experience. The outcome for refugees is unemployment or underemployment. Unemployment and underemployment compromise the refugee economically, but it also has psycho-social impacts – loss of self-esteem, depression, and limited social contact.[20,21]

1.3.2. The five goals of the New Zealand Refugee Resettlement Strategy

The New Zealand Refugee Resettlement Strategy also has five goals for integration, which are also integration outcomes[22]. Realising these goals or not, impacts on the kinds of connections refugees make and can make, and impacts on their ability to participate, sense of belonging, acceptance, and inclusion.

1. **Self-sufficiency**: refugees need to have access to resources that allow them to be economically independent (e.g. meaningful work, paid employment).
2. **Participation**: the right to work in New Zealand without discrimination or judgement of their cultural and ethnic backgrounds. This in turn leads to a positive sense of belonging in New Zealand.
3. **Health and wellbeing**: the right to equitable healthcare delivered in a way that is culturally appropriate and accessible to all refugees regardless of their home country or language competency.

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[15] Ibid.
[16]Ibid.
[17] van Ingen, C. (2003) Geographies of gender, sexuality and race. *Intenrational Review for the Sociology of Sport* 38:2:201-216.
[18] Kowles, C. (2008) The landscape of post-imperial whiteness in rural Britain. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 31:1:167-184.
[19] Skeggs, B. (1999) Matter out of place: Visibility and sexualities in leisure spaces. *Leisure Studies* 18:213-232.
[20] Bedford, R. (2004) The quiet revolution: Transformations to migration policies, flows and outcomes, 1999-2004. *New Zealand Geographer*, 60:2:58-62
[21] Ho, E.S., Au, S., Bedford, C., & Cooper, J. (2002) *Mental Health Issues for Asians in New Zealand: A literature review.* Migration research group, Department of Geography, Hamilton New Zealand: University of Waikato.
[22] New Zealand Refugee Settlement Strategy, July 2013:4

4. **Education**: All children have the right to free primary and secondary school education and the competency levels of parents and communities should match that of each child.
5. **Housing:** refugees should be allocated suitable homes that cater to the unique needs of their family. Moreover, they should be situated in areas where there are members of their community in proximity if desired.

1.3.3. New Zealanders perceptions of refugees

Integration is successful when the host society and the refugee have a two-way relationship, each learning, adjusting, and changing through acceptance of each other. The emphasis is not just on the refugee background person's participation and efforts, but also on the importance of the structure, openness, and receptivity to adaptation of the receiving society.[23]

Social connection for refugees is enhanced by social support systems within the community. Access to social interaction across the community is important to ensure that refugees do not feel isolated and or only able to interact with their own ethnic community.[24]

This research project focusses on refugee background women, their social connections, and how these have impacted on their sense of belonging, acceptance, and inclusion in the greater Wellington region. Their sense of belonging, acceptance and inclusion are important indicators of integration and are dependent too on the structure[25] of New Zealand society and how open and receptive to newcomers New Zealand is as a receiving society.

How New Zealanders perceive refugees, therefore, has an important bearing on the refugee background person's experience of settlement. Research conducted in 2020[26] examining New Zealanders perceptions of refugees found that of the 1,005 people surveyed:

- 53% of respondents noted that they had never met or spoken to a refugee before
- 53% agree that the current quota of 1000 people per year is 'just right'[27]

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[23] Klarenbeek, Lea, M. (2019) Reconceptualising 'integration as a two-way process' *Migration Studies* pp1-20.
[24] Spoonley, P., Peace, R., Butcher, A., & O'Neill, D. (2005) Social cohesion: A policy and indicator framework for assessing immigrant and host outcomes. *Social Policy Journal of New Zealand* 24:85-110.
[25] Structure refers to how New Zealand organises itself to allow for inclusion, participatory opportunity and social behaviours that are accepting of refugees. Structure also refers to social status, class, gender and ethnicity shape the dominant forms of inclusion and exclusion in New Zealand society (Lovelock et al, 2011; ibid).
[26] Conducted for Refugee Health and Wellbeing by Colmar Brunton.
[27] Note: Since the publication of this report, New Zealand has increased the refugee quota to 1,500 people per year (July 2020).

- 47% of those surveyed believed that New Zealand should do more to help refugees integrate when they arrive in New Zealand
- While 56% agreed with the statement: "New Zealand should accept refugees", 21% disagreed and 20% were unsure

In 2020, the New Zealand government increased the countries refugee quota to 1,500 people per year. In the same study reasons given for supporting the increased refugee resettlement quota included:

- 43% it is the right thing to do/we should help people in need
- 27% believed New Zealand had the capacity to do more
- 20% believed refugees are good for the economy/society

The key reasons for opposing refugee resettlement were:

- 36% thought we already have a housing shortage
- 25% thought we need to look after our own people first
- 9% thought that refugees don't integrate compared with 40% who thought they will successfully integrate

New Zealanders in this study also thought the following kinds of support were important for refugees resettling in New Zealand:

- 90% thought English language training
- 81% support to find employment
- 80% support with "settling in" to their new community
- 80% New Zealand cultural orientation
- 78% mental health and wellbeing
- 65% computer training.

A Ministry of Business, Innovation and Enterprise (MBIE) community perceptions of migration survey in 2016 found that migrants from China and refugees were least positively perceived (both averaging a score of 5.4 out of 10) out of all migrants.[28]

Given the complex nature of the refugee resettlement process it is crucial that the voices of the refugees themselves inform policy and be a part of the discussions focusing on issues that affect them. That is, giving effect to the empowering research practice of: *With us, not on us.*

This research undertaken by *Allen + Clarke* and commissioned by Changemakers, enables refugee background women to share their stories and aspirations for refugee resettlement in New Zealand.

[28] Cited in Malatest (2021) Ngā take o nga wheako o te kaikiri ki ngā manene o Aotearoa, Drivers of migrant New Zealanders' experiences of racism. A report Commissioned by the Human Rights Commission 2021:13.

2. METHODOLOGY

This project adopted a mixed methods methodology. This involved: a review of the relevant literature, multiple workshops with the Changemakers research working group and semi-structured face-to-face interviews with refugee background women.

2.1. Methods

2.2. Review of all relevant literature and documentation

We conducted a review of documentation provided by Changemakers relevant to refugee women's resettlement experiences in Aotearoa New Zealand. This literature provided the context for the design and implementation of the research project. We also reviewed key literature focussing on the settlement of refugees and policies for resettlement that emphasise integration and the components that are necessary to realise successful integration in Aotearoa New Zealand.

2.3. Workshops with Changemakers research group

Prior to the beginning of the interview phase, members of the *Allen + Clarke* team attended multiple meetings with members of the Changemakers team to co-design this study.

In the initial stages of this research project, Changemakers recruited a research working group to work alongside team members at *Allen + Clarke* in designing the methods used in this project. This group consisted of 3-6 women from different refugee backgrounds based in the Wellington region. Changemakers contracted a research representative, a former refugee, who attended all individual interviews alongside *Allen + Clarke* team members.

2.4. Ethics

Ethical considerations were guided by Changemakers '*Guidelines for research with refugees in Aotearoa New Zealand* (2010)[29] and Changemakers '*Standards for Engagement*'.[30] *Allen + Clarke* adheres to the ethical guidelines of ANZEA and AES. The core principles underpinning this work, were therefore:

- Validating participants experiences and worldviews
- Ensuring participation is meaningful and worthwhile
- Transparency through all stages of the research process

Participants names, ethnicities and specific locations have been excluded to protect anonymity. Interview transcripts were reviewed by interviewees and only included for

[29] https://crf.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Guidelines-for-Research-with-Refugees-in-New-Zealand.pdf
[30] https://crf.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Standards_for_Engagement_single-pg.pdf

analysis with their consent. An information sheet about the research was provided and informed ethical consent was sought prior to interviewing.

2.5. Recruitment and participants

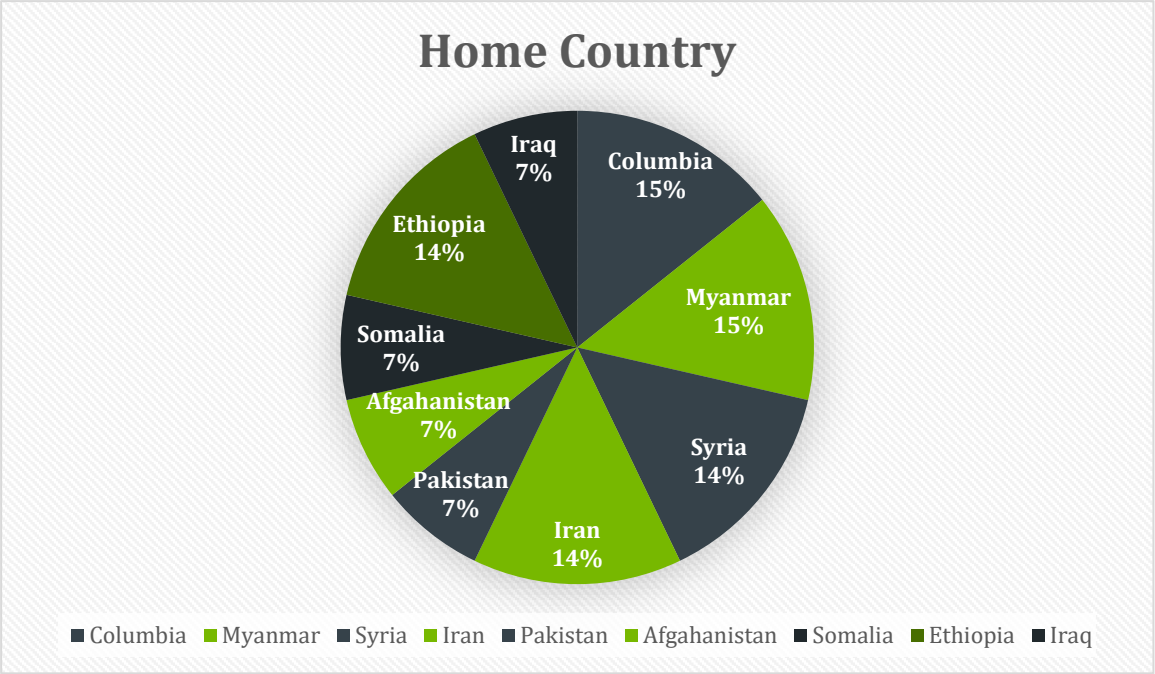
All women were recruited by the Changemakers research team. Fifteen refugee background women were interviewed, fourteen of whom are included in this report[31]. The women were aged between 20-60 years.

Inclusion criteria:

- Had to have resided in New Zealand for at least 3 years
- Had never previously been interviewed by Changemakers for refugee background research

The women's countries of origin are depicted in Figure 2.

Figure 2 Countries of Origin



2.6. Data collection

15 semi-structured interviews with 15 refugee background women aged 20-60 years were conducted. Fourteen of these have been included in the data for analysis. Fourteen of the fifteen interviews were face-to-face, and one was held over the telephone. A broad interview guide was developed consisting of various prompts (Appendix A) with the intention that the interviewee drove the narrative. Interview locations were determined

[31] At the time of writing the transcript for the 15th interviewee had not been approved by the interviewee.

by each woman depending on where they felt most comfortable. These areas included cafés, libraries, universities and within their homes. All interviews were audio recorded though there was an option for those who preferred not to be recorded and each interview lasted between 1 to 3 hours. Interpreters were also available as required to ensure all participants understood the nature of their participation in the project. All participants received a $50 koha for their time and participation.

2.7. Limitations of the study

The limitations of this study are the sample size and highly diverse nature of the participants (age, country of origin, family composition, employment status). This diversity meant that members of the group have commonality of experiences but there is also variability in their experience of migration. While the interviews provided valuable insights, given the diversity of the group we cannot be sure that we have achieved data saturation.

2.8. Thematic analysis

Each interview recording was transcribed, transcriptions were reviewed by the interviewee and only those that have been reviewed and accepted by the women have been included in the analysis (n=14 of n=15 interviews). The 14 transcripts were read and re-read to gain familiarity and to identify emergent themes following the approach used for an interpretivist and narrative enquiry[32]. This approach to enquiry involves a qualitative investigation, representation and presentation of participants lives as they tell it. The dominant themes and sub-themes identified were then analysed employing Ager and Strang's framework (2008) and indicators of integration and participation and against the evidence base on refugee settlement outcomes and experience in Aotearoa New Zealand. The interviews commenced with the women describing their journey, the thematic analysis and report remains faithful to the structure of the journey narrative the women shared with us.

3. KEY FINDINGS

The findings are presented thematically and follow the narrative structure of the interviews.

3.1. The journey

3.1.1. Destination unknown

The women described their journeys which ultimately had them arrive in New Zealand as refugees for settlement. There were strong commonalities with the journey narrative, similar points of intersection in terms of the personal experience and engagement with the new system in New Zealand. There are also differences between the women. Key however to the journey is that the destination

[32] Hendry, P.M. (2007) The future of narrative. *Qualitative Inquiry* 13(4)487-98

is unknown from the moment they leave their country of origin, the journey has many junctures and is not linear, it is traumatic, takes a lengthy period of time, covers vast geographic distance and traverses' significant sociocultural differences. Importantly, this journey and the junctures the women speak of provide the context within which they express their sense of belonging (at a given time and place); why they participate with whom they do (at a given time and place), and what the key issues are that shape whether they feel socially accepted or included, or conversely rejected and excluded. While the journey starts with departure from their country of origin, achieving inclusion, actively participating, and realising a sense of acceptance and belonging is a long and ongoing journey for these women. The journey can, however, be greatly enhanced by recognition of what these women have to offer and the provision of appropriate social support by members of New Zealand society.

3.1.2. Destination is not a choice – it is like a lottery

"…I'd heard about Australia, never about New Zealand. I was then told your file is now transferred to go to New Zealand. Five families had been accepted. My husband didn't like that – the language was a barrier, he was not sure about going to a western country, he was starting to get higher wages and life had started to be better. But in [country in after leaving country of origin] we don't have a future, just enough for food. We could never look forward to a better future."

And another woman recalled:

> *"UN people came and took our photo for the UN to be sent to another country. The people could only come if they had the UN photo...the interview was for different countries, but we didnt have a the right to choose. [did you have any idea about NZ?] No, we never heard about it, we had no phone to search, we were poor, we had nothing.."*

These women did not imagine where they are going to or dream of what kind of life might be possible for them in a particular destination. The lack of choice and need to adjust quickly when they find out where they are going was described by the women as both a positive but equally stressful situation. – *"They just call you and say they've accepted you to resettle".* Living with uncertainty punctuates every aspect of the journey as does an absence of control.

> *"…Migrants have more resources than refugees. Like I remember before we moved here, we've never heard of New Zealand so we didn't know whether we were supposed to be sad or happy and so they gave us a CD but…who has a DVD player? And so, we had to go and buy one from a second-hand shop. We watched the video and that was it. Because we know if we don't say yes, we won't have one for many years [another country/selection] ... But I feel we came without knowing. We just brought winter clothes and when we came it was summer. It's only white people that's what I thought about it. We didn't*

even know there was like Māori or diversity, we just thought of white people, farms everywhere, no major cities."

A number of assumptions are made about how a refugee might learn about the country they have been assigned too. Coming without knowing is a common theme for these women and their ability to prepare was limited by time and resources. It was necessary to draw on their personal strength and resolve, and for some this involved personal resources (family and partners) that this was what they were going to do:

" Because we [were] not younger when we came here, me and [husband] ..it was so difficult. But we made a decision, me and my husband, ..to hold each others hands and start anew".

3.1.3. Loss, Separation, from family, from countries, from each other

The journey is not linear, nor does it include the same people, at various points in time family and friend's part and go in separate directions to different countries and often reunification is not possible. Women's husbands died in refugee camps or at the hands of political perpetrators in their country of origin, some husbands left their wives on settlement. Women were separated from their parents and their children, some permanently and others over a lengthy period. Women bear these separations as they adjust to living in New Zealand, some cannot be redressed, others are still being addressed but remain unresolved.

"…by then my family were scattered round [names two countries] … currently only one family is in a refugee camp…

"at the time that he applied, my husband was still alive, but 2 years before we left [country] he passed away"

"…[my] son very attached to his grandmother, she was there to farewell... I want[ed] to take her in my suitcase. I tried to apply to get my mum here, they said maybe, but it's very hard."

"I got separated from my mum. A friend in Australia told me that my mum passed away."

Some women described this as the past, which they have felt they had to leave behind them so they can move forward in their lives. Others, still vividly recalled fleeing, separating from loved ones and had these memories triggered by everyday events in Aotearoa New Zealand. Simultaneously dealing with loss and grief while settling in a society that is vastly different from their country of origin relied very heavily on personal strength and resilience. After initial arrival, social connection with New Zealanders, as we will see, also played a pivotal role.

3.1.4. Everything is different – in transit

A daughter speaks of her mother's experience.

"My mother's experience .. would have been difficult. [She] came here through [a] paternal aunty sponsoring us. Mother came with her children, by herself,

*dependent on in-laws. She had experienced a lot of things, for example, civil war (in country of origin), fleeing the country she was born, raised in, because of the war. In the process was placed in a refugee camp. She was present [when her husband] was dying, she had to take the responsibility of being a mum and dad as well. Came to NZ, while a new opportunity for me – reality hit her that everything was different, they don't speak your language, [know your] culture, religion different. With limited English she had to figure out herself and children. Then a lot of things that were right back home (e.g. smacking) that was normalised behaviour back home (were different) here. She was aged 36-37 when she came here…she never talks about it…**my aunty was her only support…my older brother took on responsibilities for us, he was father for us, he still is….***

This account of a mother by a daughter encapsulates the experiences of other women whose journey was also punctuated by war, loss, fleeing, displacement, separation from family and familial support and refugee placement in a new and culturally different society. For women with children, they had been living their lives more recently in refugee camps – drawing on their socialisation and cultural knowledge and adapting to these new circumstances while trying to support and raise their children. Once in New Zealand, much of their knowledge and experience is challenged, when attempting to adjust to a new and very different society and life outside of the confines of a camp. Recognising that what you know may no longer be recognised as important or central to any of the new social institutions or ways of interacting is not only challenging, but also another loss that all women grappled with. Retaining their sense of self and community while traversing new terrain was key issue.

As these women describe it, they are in a liminal state[33], they are in transit and their experience is characterised as indeterminant and ambiguous and their emotional response is described as experiencing confusion and as sense of losing their identity. Reaching out for support to cope was common, but seeking support was inhibited or enhanced by the reception they received immediately and following their placement in Wellington. This is discussed more fully below.

3.2. Arrival and settlement experiences

3.2.1. The centre, familiar, also a camp

All women shared the experience of the Mangere Refugee Resettlement Centre. All quota refugees undergo a six-week induction programme which addresses immediate resettlement needs, before they are moved to communities throughout New Zealand.

"…We stayed for six weeks in Mangere resettlement centre. It was a shock, there was a very big gate, it looked like a prison, I thought "what's going on, we're

[33] Liminality is the quality of ambiguity or disorientation associated with being in transition. While in transition tradition becomes uncertain, the future is doubted, and new customs are established to cope with the new. Turner, V.W. (1967) "Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in *Rites de Passage*, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*: pp93-111. Ithaca, Cornell UP.

going to be in prison again? We were all the family put in one bedroom – our first impression was not good. We were told we'd stay for six weeks, there were lots of interviews and meetings and then we thought – ok it doesn't matter. The camp is very old, no toys for the children to play. Now I've heard it's different – there is a tv and things for the children."

And,

"…It was very difficult for me. I didn't know how to take the bus. I didn't want to go anywhere. Just stayed in the camp (Mangere). They provided food. I tried to eat a little bit. They were very nice. Every day they taught us basic English like "hello" and "how are you?" They taught us about New Zealand culture. They also taught us how New Zealand helps people. How many organisations. How police .. help. You are pregnant, how you should go to the hospital. They sent me to the hospital, and they scanned the baby. Everything was different for me. Because we lived in [a] refugee camp in [country] and we couldn't go out. We just stayed in the camp. I didn't know how to talk on the phone. We had no phone. No internet. I didn't know how to use the computer. I have an email now, but I can't check it. I ask my children to help me."

The resettlement centre was still like a camp life for these women. Leaving the Centre was a significant point in their journey in New Zealand. They were leaving structured support and shared living circumstances and for some, again did not have control over where they would ultimately be settled. This impacted on how they felt in this new social space – scared, uncertain and unsure about how this transition would work out.

3.2.2. It was a shock, everything was different – making sense through mediated connection

Adjusting to life in Wellington[34] involved learning how to communicate in English, also via a range of technologies (phone, internet), how to engage with health services and social services and adjusting to everyday life was shocking. Needing to communicate around a range of issues in English, for example, housing, education, and key settlement issues were difficult for all women. Navigating the new system required translators for most women, but as one woman observed about translation:

"We had a lot of interpreters and we got to know them, they were nice, but there's a loss of agency when you have to talk through someone, and you don't always get what's being said and you have to hear it through someone else."

In addition, translation itself was not always a service that worked. For some women their first language could be spoken in up to 135 different dialects and it was difficult to find interpreters for some dialects.

"It is very important that when they bring new people, they get interpreters or train more interpreters that speak the right dialect so they get the right

[34] Wellington here also refers to Greater Wellington.

information…otherwise they don't get the full message, so they might be excluded from the community and all of the services."

Difficulties with English language have a significant impact on a person's ability to connect and participate both informally and informally. Participation includes being able to secure work, but it is also about the ability to build social bridges, establish social bonds and social links which will facilitate connection with formal institutions (schools, health services, employment, housing). Having the agency to connect is central to wellbeing. Being unable to communicate in English is stressful for these women and can lead to social isolation and a sense of 'not belonging'. Interpreters and the need to use them also reflects the ***mediated nature of connection*** these women have when arriving in New Zealand. Sometimes this mediation is compromised when the translator is not able to translate the whole message or convey information fully.

3.2.3. Early relationships, volunteers, neighbours

Volunteers and interpreters were very often the first relationships formed in Wellington. Some had very positive experiences with their volunteers and remained friends with them to the present. Others experienced having a range of volunteers, as they left, or their lives took them in different directions, or the volunteer had many demands on their time and couldn't devote much time to them. For these women the lack of continuity of support impacted on their early settlement and made them feel unsupported.

Speaking of a positive experience:

"I was excited to see the house, but mostly it was the volunteers. They were really helpful, and they've become like family to us. We still have contact with them today and it reflected the goodness of the New Zealand people that you can come to this country and you don't know anything, and they help you so much. They helped us putting our children in school .. because we didn't know anything about the environment."

And,

"*With our volunteers, they gave us love and camaraderie and confidence and I feel like they're almost like brothers and sisters to us…But thank god for our volunteers, we still keep in contact, they come and visit us, we go visit them.*

Neighbours

While volunteers were often the first people they got to know, neighbours also played a part in the settlement experience. Some neighbours were supportive, others were not. The less than supportive are discussed below in relation to feeling safe in the neighbourhood. One participant speaks of a positive experience with her neighbours:

"The first people we got to know after our volunteers were our next-door neighbours and they were really nice and sort of share a back garden, so we got to know them that way which was nice. I also joined a walking group that any can join, it was Kiwis and foreigners, we were the only [ethnic group] for

a little while. We also got to know some [same ethnic group] that live in the area and over time we also got know some Kiwi friends as well...Our neighbours, they're (ethnic group and migrants) have been here for something like 35 years."

The refugee community

While some interacted with members of their ethnic communities and found this provided invaluable support, others chose not to.

"Initially, when we were getting to know other families and other [ethnic group] families, it was difficult because there was a lot of talking and a lot of gossiping, so we withdrew from that and were alone as ourselves as a family. Over time, we started to make friends with other mostly kiwi families. Over the past 3 years, I have mostly been staying at home and not socialising much, only leaving to do errands, I've been concerned with my family. I've been going to the doctor, buying things, and when I'm home and I'm alone, I'll watch TV and it will be in English which is why my language has progressed a little bit."

Withdrawing from the community was in part also a response to her husband not liking her being independent and that socialising was expensive.

3.2.4. Housing, health, safety and being alone with children

Being housed in the community and feeling at home (safe, dry, and warm and well) were important for all the women. Housing raised issues around the standard of the physical structure, the safety of the neighbourhood, feeling at home and social isolation.

"…the house was ok, but the mould was too much; it affected our breathing. After eight months it was affecting the furniture, our health, they removed the wall and put in insulation, but it was still bad. Really affecting me, after eight month we moved next door [to street name].

Rental housing stock in Wellington is known to be of variable standard, issues around poor or no insulation and the health hazards of damp and mould are well documented.[35]

Housing and feeling unsafe

Feeling unsafe in their rental accommodation was an issue for some women, neighbourhood violence, neighbours fighting, violent events and racially motivated attacks on property were all issues experienced and described around "housing".

- [35] Chisholm, E., Howden-Chapman, P., & Fougere, G. (2020). Tenants' responses to substandard housing: Hidden and invisible power and the failure of rental housing regulation. *Housing, Theory & Society*, *37*(2), 139-161. doi: 10.1080/14036096.2018.1538019

"We stuck together. Everything was organised, my first impression was organised, they apply rules, people follow the rules. I felt so weirded out. People were calm. The house was really bad, like really bad, it was bad and cold, and I think in front of us was a playground and underneath the playground was filled with garbage. It wasn't a very positive experience. The Mangere [settlement place] was very nice, the houses, it was perfect and them boom going to that house we felt kind of trapped. Yeah, and like, having a gang member right there was not a good first experience."

And,

I thought ok. But neighbour always fighting when they were fighting and screaming the children were frightened. The police came many times. Neighbour constantly parking on my spot, she was saying "it's not your business".. I was asked to record her, when I tried to do that, she's too big, I'm scared and run away. I complained to Housing New Zealand, but it never helped. Even the police were fed up and didn't know what to do.

When this family were intending to leave, I saw it. I went to Housing New Zealand and told them I want this house if possible. The guy was really good and sympathetic, he said "I feel sorry for you, I will try my best". And that's how I got this place. No more asthma in this house. I have a third baby it was very hard for me especially with a disabled child…[then]my husband left me. I am alone with three children. I studied and now I have a job, I'm a sole mother with three children.

Where the house was located was important, being housed some distance from government agencies and support agencies and language classes was an issue.

"..It took a really long time to travel from [suburb] and KiwiClass. I used to get wet and had to walk, it was really challenging for the first 2 years. I remember one day; it was a strong southerly and it was raining heavily. I was fully wet through all of my clothes and I was walking home. An elderly woman in her car stopped and asked me if I wanted to come into her car. She put the towel down and I sat on it and she drove me the rest of the way home. I really appreciated this; it was a really nice experience. I prayed for her from my heart, I will never forget this.

The kindness of strangers

The kindness of strangers was mentioned by several women when discussing navigating the city, accessing services, and having limited mobility. The above experience demonstrates a local trusting her enough to let her into their car (space). These spontaneous interactions engender trust on both sides of the relationship and are remembered because they are not formally manufactured relationships or relationships that are an outcome of a service. These are spontaneous interactions which demonstrate care and inclusion, they have a lasting impression because they are sporadic demonstrations of acceptance and engender a sense of belonging. Those who have reached out have done so out of their own free will.

Hard to make friends

Social connection is facilitated by good neighbours and volunteers and by New Zealanders reaching out spontaneously. But getting to know people and gaining and being trusted in New Zealand is reportedly not easy.

> *"New Zealand is safe and peaceful. But it is hard to make friends. In [country of origin], everyone is friendly, but here you can't get anyone."*
>
> And,
>
> *"Actually, I have to say, it's hard to get close to kiwi people. They don't like to be very close. But I do make friends with them. I have one good friend that is a kiwi, she is really good, I am really happy to have her. But it is really hard."*
>
> And,
>
> *"Yes, just talking, yes, it is easy to communicate. But there is a space between you, they don't like to be more close to you. Actually, I don't really think about it, because I don't care, everybody has their own feeling about different people. I don't really care what they think about me. For some people they might care, its important but it's a personal thing. You can't judge the people with the personal things."*
>
> And,
>
> *"However, it was and it still is, hard for me to connect to people who speak a different language and have a different culture."*

The difficulty experienced in establishing relationships with "kiwis" means that while experiencing loss and the challenging nature of settlement, these women are not always experiencing a "friendly" reception. The combination of the challenging nature of settlement and experiencing an unfriendly reception impacts on wellbeing – as it can lead to marginalisation and an acculturation to New Zealand society that is associated with poor mental health outcomes.[36]

3.3. Trust

Mutual trust is a key theme across all the interviews. Without this relationship building is compromised and connection to others is compromised. Having trust in government, police and the new systems institutions takes time and is shaped by experiences they had in their country of origin and throughout their journey to and in Aotearoa New Zealand.

3.3.1. Fleeing

The act of fleeing highlights issues around trust, having to bribe to get documents and enable the escape; relying on the kindness of strangers to provide support; not trusting that you will be safe in the camp; and as we will see feeling unsafe and distrustful of neighbours in suburbs in Wellington.

> *"… my area was always bombed, so that is why I went to live in [name of city]. 13 people living in one bedroom. Four brothers and three sisters, and my mum*

[36] Ho, E.S. (1995) Chinese or New Zealander? *New Zealand Population Review* 21:1&2:27-49.

and dad. My extended family, all of us stayed together, around the city was dangerous. I was intending to go back to get my passport and papers but before that could happen the house was bombed. When I fled, it was with my clothes, that is all. I had to bribe people to get another passport, in [country] that's normal."

And,

Some people came and destroyed it [the camp]. There was a fire. I ran. I only had clothes on, no shoes. I didn't have food; I didn't have clothes. I was maybe seventeen or sixteen years old. I ran with people. Some people whose houses were not burning gave me food and clothes. We moved to some place to stay but only for a few months. Again, they came from the mountain, and there was shooting and fire ... that's why I became a refugee in 1997 and never went back to [home country] and never went anywhere. I just stayed in the camp…"

And, not trusting is a survival response when coming from a regime where it is unwise to trust.

In our country we don't approach authorities. If we see police in the uniform, we don't approach them. So, if we go to Work and Income and big organisations, we hesitate to approach them. Because, in our country, we don't trust anyone. That's why if they need some help, they don't know who they need to contact. They think if they call the police, they might be in trouble. So that's why they try to solve their problems by themselves. And it's a difficult challenge for them."

3.3.2. Being scared, trauma and driving the roads you know, staying safe

Women spoke of feeling scared and that the new was challenging. Having support around being scared and feeling depressed was necessary for some and provided through the Refugee Trauma Centre, but only five visits are free.

The first three years were really confusing for us. Because we didn't have a car and we had no English. Everything was new and very hard for me. I was very depressed. I was scared of everyone. I stayed home all day. At night-time, I couldn't sleep. I woke my husband and children up. I turned on the lights…. [went to the Refugee Trauma Centre) … I got my full driver's licence because of Changemakers. This program is really good. Many volunteers came and taught me to get my full licence. I did the test four or five times. I failed. But I didn't give up ... The volunteer encouraged me. I wanted to drop off and pick up my children from school and go shopping. I really thank the government in New Zealand and every organisation. They are very good care about others….it took me two years to learn how to drive. I was so scared. I only drive the roads I know..I don't drive the roads I don't know because I don't feel safe…"

The journey to feeling safe for this woman and others was having some control over their life, and one control was over mobility.

The driving programme from Changemakers enabled these women to be mobile, to feel in control and to feel less scared. Gaining a driver's licence and being able to transport family, take children to and from school, provided independence and confidence and widened their social networks. Learning to drive boosted self-esteem and confidence, widened the extent of their networks (as they could go to where they wanted to go) and gave agency and a sense of belonging.

The perseverance shown by the woman above illustrates more generally the perseverance of all the woman in this study to adaption to a very different society.

Connecting with others, speaking English, dealing with stereotypes and orientalism [37]

Forming relationships was very much shaped by the ability to trust (as we have seen above) and to communicate in English.

> *"I think New Zealand makes it easier to participate in society by providing English classes. Learning the language is so important because it allows you to participate more in society and talk to people and get to know things. They make wanting to go to school fun because you can tell they really want you to learn which is important."*

Missing English classes was often because of the need for childcare or lack of transportation.

And,

> *"…It's hard. They are not open to talk to you if they don't know you. They need to trust you to be open. They need to see that you are a good person. The thing with me is, I'm a refugee, I wasn't able to speak English and I am of [ethnic descent]. That's three things you have to deal with to be part of a society which is huge.*

This connection is difficult too when people are ignorant of the culture, share stereotypes and exaggerate and sexualise difference.

> *"…Oh, there is a lot of cocaine in your country. They don't know we have coffee, variety of food, beautiful places and we have lots of good things. Some people think women from the place that I came from are sexy. So, they don't call us beautiful, they use the term "sexy". It feels like they are sexualising us. However, I did not say anything, I came to this country to improve my life, not to listen to what people think about."*

While the women were learning about living in a different society, some of their interactions demonstrated that local people needed to learn about other cultures. Social connection, acceptance and inclusion are dependent on reciprocity.

One husband present at the interview explained about cultural misunderstandings.

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[37] Orientalism is the process by which women and difference is exoticised and often sexualised. A process where (initially about people from the Orient, but can be other regions) difference is exaggerated and distorted. [where has this come from?! We need a source. My understanding of "Orientalism" is the sholarly study of Asian cultures and languages ....

> *"In our culture, men can shake hand with each other, and women just smile (they cannot shake hand with me). In my country, eye contact is not really good. Once I applied for a job. In my culture, if you want to show respect to others, you don't look at them directly in the eye. I never looked at my manager or my teacher in the eye. You have to look down. In the job interview, a guy was interviewing me, he suddenly stopped others and said: "Oh this guy is too shy. How can you work on the construction site when you are so shy? Are you shy? Are you scared? I was a little bit angry. He needed to know my culture. But he said you can't work for us because you are too shy. I didn't explain anything to him. But in my mind, I was telling him that I am not shy, I am not scared, I was just respecting you".*

For successful integration, members of the receiving society need to be culturally aware, meet half-way, and to engage reciprocally.

3.3.3. Faith and gratitude

Religious beliefs and faith played a role in providing meaning to the journey from their country of origin, strengthened those who had suffered significant loss and gave these women hope and the strength to carry on. It also framed how they viewed Aotearoa New Zealand.

> *"Firstly, I thanked God for brining me here. New Zealand is very safe for me. I don't need to worry like before. In the camp, in [country she was in], all the time we worried. Sometimes people talked about "be ready". Bad people came and destroyed our camp. They set the houses on fire. There was shooting and fire."*

And,

> *"I thank my God that we are here and that he bought us here, because New Zealand is a beautiful country, kind country, clean country. It has beautiful people here, they support us, and help us. They did everything good for us."*

3.3.4. Support and inclusivity

There were a range of supports provided for women, from parenting groups, church and community groups and refugee services. Many of the community groups helped women to experience a degree of acceptance and inclusion. When involvement with groups or services were not positive experiences, however, women tended to retreat and disengage socially.

Family support was important for many women, but not all had family in New Zealand to provide support. The role of children and partners is discussed below.

One form of support that a number of women stressed was the importance of employment and inclusivity in the labour market.

> *"...The first thing that I would try to change is the connection thing, the employers should be held accountable to be "inclusive" and if they're actually making it real. They need to understand that second language speakers from other countries can't give you what kiwi and Māori can give you in terms of talking, writing, and thinking. They need to accept us…they need to stop comparing us. New Zealand says it is a multicultural, bi-cultural country, apply it."*

Obstacles to employment were also explained in terms of no rights without residency or citizenship. Poor support for entry into the labour market and gaining meaningful employment was as significant issue.

> *"It is not inclusive to tell someone that they didn't get an opportunity to participate because they are not a permanent resident or citizen. Is that inclusivity? This is one of the main points, it is not inclusivity and one of them says "after all the NZ citizens get a job, they will give you a job."*

For those who did secure employment, the descriptions of this demonstrate the pride that being economically independent provides and the importance of employment to feeling at home and a part of New Zealand society.

The following account demonstrates the importance of becoming economically independent, for self-esteem and social standing.

> *"Very hard. It was hard but we have an understanding with each other and were very organised together. We got our affairs together for our situation. [coming off the benefit] Yes, they treated us well. Because we are good people and had everything in order, they had no reason not to treat us well. It was a fact that when we went and informed them that we had got the job at [name of employer], WINZ thanked us for getting the job and for having everything in order over the period of time that we had been working with WINZ. It was very nice."*

Gender and part time and casual work

Gaining employment was not a priority for all women. Having employment was for some also recognised as an extra stress on their family relationships, partners, and children.

> "*…In my culture, the woman doesn't have a job, she is a housewife. Man works, everything else the mother does. Maybe too much pressure for both of us, until now he comes and helps sometimes if I'm busy. I'm a casual worker when they call me (10-2pm), 2.30pm I pick up my children…Because I don't have a certificate, that's why I work casual or part-time. Don't know if that is the rules here…"*

For women who did work, working was important as it allowed others to show they were respected valued workers, which simultaneously means respected valued New Zealanders.

> *"I think they want to know if we have the skills and we really want to work and we are reliable or not. That's my experience. Although we can't communicate properly, they know that we want to work, and we are willing to work. At work I feel I am well respected and valued. Even though we don't speak a lot, they appreciate what we do. I mostly have good experiences. Maybe only thirty percent bad experiences. But seventy percent good experiences. [any recommendations about the 30% bad experiences?]. It is important that people are aware of what is going on in other countries, not only in New Zealand. Some people they only know about New Zealand. They don't know what is going on around the world. So, for them, they should look and open their eyes and be more culturally aware."*

The women in this study had a range of employable skills and many held qualifications from their country of origin and those that they had gained in New Zealand. These women wanted to share their skills and participate in the labour market. Having the right documents or qualifications has held them up from participating and working is a significant indicator of inclusion and legitimacy.

Others emphasised the need for New Zealand based experience and that internships could help them gain the necessary experience when graduating from their New Zealand courses.

3.3.5. Not every woman's experience of settlement has been the same

Arriving as a couple meant they often had only each other for support, while raising a child.

> *"… we were alone here. It was a very hard experience for me when my little baby [arrived], I didn't have any of my family here to look after us. We were alone.*

But without extended family parenting was very difficult for most. The women with children played a central role in raising their children, for those who were solo mothers it was particularly challenging. As sole carers the family reunification programme was important to these women as this was a means of ensuring additional family support. But the process of reunification was lengthy and expensive, and prohibitive for some.

Thinking and worrying about their children was raised by some mothers.

> *"…I only worry about my children's future and what they are going to do. In [the] refugee camp, we had no right to study. There was not hope. If we don't study and work hard, I show them pictures of other refugee camp to remind them of their great opportunities here…Now back in the same camp [country name] the fighting is happening, and people have to run. … [shows video] Its happening now ... My life was like this in the past, we had to run away, we had no house, no food. Here are the shootings. They have big weapons. Do you hear*

the shootings? That's why they cannot stay in the village and they are running away from the village…"

Women were connected to schools, usually initially through their volunteer. This was one important link to the wider system, outside of Work and Income and language lessons. While they recognised that their children adapted more quickly than they did, they also recognised that they had to adapt to help their children. Children were a motivator for gaining acceptance, as mothers wanted their children to succeed in this new environment.

"His mind was like a clean sponge, he received everything so fast, not like us, so he received everything perfectly… His dialect is the NZ dialect, so when he speaks you wouldn't know he wasn't born in New Zealand.

But having young children can prevent women from attending English lessons

"We went to MClass for English language. But I stayed at home, because [young child's name] was still too small to go to kindy."

And having children can lead to a reliance on children to translate from English into the household language.

3.3.6. Being socialised in New Zealand and parental protection from both cultures

"Mum had her reasons for being protective. Most Muslim were going to the mosque to learn the Koran. Majority of the city would go to the mosque, be surrounded by a group of kids. But for her, making us do things individually within our sibling group was to protect us from getting led astray. Of us becoming westernised, she was cautious of that. [She was worried about] young people acting quite westernised. She wanted the good westernised. We turned out quite alright, but with a consequence, it took us longer to figure out our identity…I'd go to an event, the two celebrations of the year, Ede day, see all the little girls engaging with each other. I felt like, mum it's your fault. You're keeping me away from your community. Her mentality was I'd rather have white friends than Muslim friends. White person is quite educated, will support my child to succeed."

Navigating the space between assimilation and integration is not easy and, in this instance, according to this daughter, her mother believed that to be successful when integrating with the New Zealand system "white educated friends" would be more able to facilitate this than would Muslim friends. This mother believed that "white educated friends" would provide the necessary support for her children to connect to others and to succeed. Perhaps consequently this daughter currently has friends that are ethnically diverse, but not predominantly of her ethnicity.

"important as young people especially different migrant groups that we have our support network"

Women described how they navigated the space between New Zealand culture and their own.

An example is when my son wanted to have a sleep over at his friend's house, about a month ago. I said that that is not something that is allowed in our culture, it is not what we do. He started to cry and said that that is what you

do here, it is part of the rules of what is allowed. But I said that we are from [name of country], I am [ethnicity], you are [ethnicity] we do not do this in our culture. I am the one that is raising you, the country is not raising you."

And,

"A couple of weeks ago, my eldest son was angry about something, we were having a disagreement. My husband took him aside and spoke to him sternly and my son said: "I am 16 and the law says that I am allowed to move out of home, if I want to, I can take my things and leave" and we know this is the law and it made us a little uneasy. This is very hard for us. In my country and culture, we don't accept a person to go out of home until they are married. When they are married, that is ok – they can go to another home with their husband or wife. It is only for this reason. So, it is very hard for us.

Navigating this space is done alone. There are no parental support services that help parents in the cross-cultural space, or services that are culturally appropriate for these women and their families. In addition, while parenting, these parents are finding their own place in New Zealand society.

3.3.7. How to be part of society

Women without children also described how they became part of New Zealand society, started to feel that they belonged and were accepted.

"[I felt more adjusted] when I started to do things to be a part of the society, after I finished my English course. I used to hang out with my best friends from [country of origin]. But if you don't take time to be part of society, they won't help you. In the English course the teacher was talking about adjustments about how to be part of the society and immerse yourself in Kiwi culture. She was saying that we won't learn English until we decide to be part of the society. We need to start thinking in English. Kiwi jokes are hard to understand. I tried to open myself up to have different friends so I could immerse myself…that helped me to be more confident in terms of my English. So, I started with my people like my workmates, volunteers, class-mates which helped me a lot to understand everything …"

3.3.8. When New Zealand became home

Going back to where their country of origin after some years provoked a sense that New Zealand was now home for some women.

Feeling like New Zealand is home now, I went back to [country of origin] for my daughter's marriage. I felt like a visitor there. I like New Zealand and I'd like to stay here – I don't want to go anywhere else. I visited Australia last year, it was ok, but not like New Zealand.

And, reflecting on challenges and what might be improved.

Has been lots of challenges, most of them I have not mentioned today. It has been hard here; it is not easy to start a new life. I am a bit more settled now. Challenges for children growing up, challenges with faith ... Now we use more English language, I worry that they will forget their mother tongue. Keep the language alive. As a parent, it is very important that they grow up in the faith, scared of seeing children growing up and not accepting [faith]. Biggest concern travelled so far and started new life, you need to be true to yourself.

3.3.9. Victimhood vs empowerment

Women expressed the need to be empowered, to be perceived as people who had something to give, who had skills and particular strengths. After a journey that is punctuated with no control or choice, for people who have many things to offer, once in New Zealand empowerment is about being able to exercise choice and to have a society that trusts them enough to include them.

"... it would be better if the refugees [that] came to new places had an opportunity to share their abilities. What they can do – I know that sometimes it will take time for people to trust in what they said, but sometimes this is not possible. Like me, I have the ability to do some things that could be really good for me and the government too, but nothing. I don't have the documents to prove what I do and my abilities. I don't know why, maybe I did a mistake; it is not possible to have trust in people they say. The ability that they have could really help the government and themselves, but they do not get the opportunity.

"...if you can trust me and give me a chance. I will prove myself to you...you just need to trust me, and I will prove myself to you [reference to all she has, had to leave everything behind – documents, qualifications)

3.4. Prejudice, racism, and ignorance

Experiences of prejudice, racism and ignorance were common. Prejudice, racism, and ignorance are significant indicators that the members of the host society is not being accepting or inclusive; racist behaviours signal very clearly to these women that "they do not belong", and sadly, that is the intention behind these behaviours. This involved experience of overt racism, where they were on the receiving end of emotional and verbal abuse and experienced damage to their property. Less overt racism included people patronising them and treating them as "other".

"When a person comes with culture and background to a new place, they bring their whole selves to this new place. I'm sure that it happens, when it is a new name and different colour of skin, different face, different process – people treat you differently. As an example, my husband changed his name, he

was then successful in getting a job. It is really hard to explain, but it happens" [he chose a western name]

New settlers of colour have been doing this for more than 150 years in New Zealand. Name changing is a response to xenophobia and racism and an overt demonstration of what some feel is necessary to 'belong' and be accepted. The discrimination is warded off by a familiar name, which makes a claim to sameness. When applying for a job, it is in writing and immediately removes racist bias. If shortlisted for an interview it is too difficult to retreat from the person in the waiting room as it would declare the discrimination. But in changing their name, a response to discrimination, they also loose part of their identity – it is a loss

"…New name, new life. Everything is new but it's hard because it's always something in your heart. Why did I have to change my name? If it is not their choice, why do you let yourself judge people by their name? As a result [of the name change] we can see that we are more successful in the community."

It is also a way of managing questions about the "whole self"

It stops people from asking you about your culture or your background. If they're interested, we'll introduce ourselves by our previous names…"

The women described what are referred to as racial microaggressions[38], more subtle forms of racism which contain negative messages or stereotypes about ethic groups. These microaggressions include:

- Micro-insults: Rude or insensitive statements or actions that undermine individuals on the basis of their ethnic or religious identity
- Micro-validations: Statements or actions that negate the experiences, emotions, and thoughts of people of colour
- Micro-assaults: Conscious and explicit racially aggressive statements, which can be either verbal or non-verbal.

There is a large body of international literature which attempts to explain why people are racist and xenophobic, with explanations that range from people feeling threatened to people having limited experience of interaction with people who are culturally different, which leads to "othering" groups and exclusion. Research does demonstrate that inter-group fear is reduced with greater interaction.[39]

Being socialised by parents and family members who have racist attitudes is key to how racism becomes intergenerational and is also linked to children learning to group and discriminate and assign negative judgement to perceived difference.

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[38] Sue, D.W., Capodilupo, C.M., Torino, G.C., Burcceri, J.M., Holder, A.M.B., Nadal, K.L., & Esquilin, M. (2007) Racial microaggressions in everyday life: Implications for clinical practice. *American Psychologist,* 62:4:415-507.

[39] Pettigrew, T.F. & Tropp, L.R. (2006) A meta-analytic test of intergroup contact theory. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 90:5:751-783.

Intergroup rivalry is also cited as a driver of racism – especially when groups are competing for scarce resources (housing, employment) and perceive "newcomers" as those who will take opportunity away from them. Social hierarchies built on numerical dominance, where "white" is dominant and has greater status and access to resources is how racism becomes systemic and institutionalised.[40] Importantly, when privilege is pointed out, the privileged feel attacked and in contrast to those who experience racism every-day, the privileged have poor resilience to racial discrimination, and are likely to respond with, denial (or "I was just joking") and hostile defensive behaviours to protect their self-image, status and power. Until some New Zealanders accept that there is nothing funny about racism, ethnic minority groups in this country will feel excluded, will be marginalised, and will experience significant impact on their health and wellbeing. Racism is a manifest example of control over social space where colour determines legitimate access to resources or not.

Politicians and the media have an important role to play in challenging racism, through addressing biases and not employing racial hierarchies and marginalising minority groups in their political rhetoric. What is clear for refugee resettlement is that racism in Aotearoa New Zealand can function to exclude and to group refugees who are members of ethnic minority groups as "outsiders".

3.4.1. Being humble in the face of discrimination

Responding to racism

> *"… sometimes when my children went to play in the playground. Other kids swear at them, they used the F word [daughter then said] They judged us by how we looked ... They thought we were Chinese. [mother] We couldn't understand everyone. Only some people. When I was taking my children to school, they showed us the finger. My son felt very angry. He was very young at that time and he felt very angry. I told him that because we are from refugee background, we have to be humble. We don't need to fight back to people and we should not talk badly. Because we understand our own situation and that we are from refugee background. I asked him to be humble and forget these bad things and not keep it in his mind…Because we are from a different country, we should be humble…"*

Being humble in the face of disrespect

> *"…We should be humble. This is what I keep teaching to my children that don't compare yourself with the people here. Now we are citizens, but we are not born here. We cannot hundred percent feel like New Zealanders. Not everyone but some people when they know you are from refugee background, they don't show lots of respect. Sometimes, we feel that others don't respect us because of our difference. But we respect everyone because we are all human beings.*

[40] Curllin, A., White, A.M., Thomas, C., Poweski, J. (2019) Unpacking reactions to white privilege among employees of an academic medical center. *Journal of Cultural Diversity* 26:1:28-37.

Not fighting back as it is not safe

> *"…I still don't want my children to fight back. Because last time a person came and smashed my son's car window. It was in the daytime. We called the police. They found the person who did it ... I was so scared. Usually, I am at home by myself all day. I closed all the curtains. I didn't feel safe... turned on all the lights ... when we were in refugee camp they always came back and destroyed our houses …"*
>
> *The counselling helped…But if something bad happens to me or my children I cannot control myself. I ring my Doctor and they give me medicine to help me sleep. If something happens, it makes me very sad, and I can't sleep. I cry. Now that I compare my life with past, I appreciate my life and every day I appreciate the government. Many people in New Zealand are really kind and they care about each other…"*

In the face of racism, many women followed their accounts with an expression of gratitude to New Zealand and New Zealanders who were not racist. Being able to be open about racism it seems raises concerns that they will seem ungrateful. Racism is well documented in New Zealand, Māori, immigrants, and refugees all experience microagressions in their everyday lives, and institutional racism is also well documented, as are the poor health and wellbeing outcomes for those who experience racism over a lifetime.[41] While their ethnic communities provide support in the face of racism, the mother who wanted her children to have "white friends" demonstrates how networks and connections are experienced as ethnic pathways.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Recalling the research focus on refugee women and the need to understand their social connections and how these impact on their sense of belonging, acceptance and inclusion, these women illustrate who they connect with and why.

Social connection initially is very much facilitated by the women interacting with formal social support provided for refugee settlement service providers. Volunteers played a key role in welcoming these women and their families. Neighbours and neighbourhoods also play a key role in connection, interaction, and perceptions of being safe and belonging. The kindness of strangers was also significant and recalled by these women, as these are instances of spontaneous caring which engender immediate acceptance and unquestioned inclusion. It is this kindness that is arguably the most important form of support, as it is inclusive and unquestioning and not bound by duty.

Employment remains a significant issue for some of these women, many of their partners and for their children.

Housing has demonstrably been a challenge with respect to housing quality but also the neighbourhoods these women were relocated too. Placement into rental housing needs to factor in the safety of the neighbourhood and how unsafe neighbourhoods (high rates

[4141] Malatest International (2021) Ngā take o nga wheako o te kaikiri ki ngā manene o Aotearoa: Drivers of migrant New Zealander's experiences of racism. Wellington: New Zealand Human Rights Commission.

of crime or where there is antisocial behaviour) can trigger re-traumatisation for refugee background settlers.

Access to education for women with children is more difficult, due to childcare and their child raising responsibilities. It is also challenged if they have transportation issues. The Changemaker driving courses for these women were a significant route to empowerment and mobility is crucial factor in facilitating access to services, the education of their children, getting to and from work, and societal inclusion.

For those who need mental health support, five free consultations at the Refugee Trauma Centre are not enough. Once they have used the five appointments, they no longer seek support, even if they need it. Racism impacts on people's wellbeing. All these women have and do experience racism. In the face of exposure to racism, however, many of these women demonstrate considerable resilience which is supported by engagement with support organisations such as Changemakers and community groups. There is, however, a need for significant change in New Zealand where people understand the impact that racism has on people's wellbeing.

Social connection for these women was uneven both on arrival in Wellington and for some continues to be so. While there are cultural reasons at times for not engaging, English language proficiency or lack of, remains a significant factor. While this is a facilitator, without this it is very difficult for people to establish social bridges, form social bonds with people outside of their community and to have enduring social links.

All these women have worked towards gaining English language proficiency and have in an immersive and educational way worked toward building their cultural knowledge. Their experiences suggest that the host society has some way to go in terms of meeting them on either a language journey or in terms of cultural knowledge. Reciprocity on this journey will facilitate safety and stability for these women and their families.

While belonging is facilitated by all these structural and socio/psychological factors, being recognised as a New Zealand citizen significantly reduces the stigma they feel as refugees and the ongoing stress associated with uncertainty around rights and a secure future. Without citizenship they are vulnerable to discrimination in the labour market (at least).

5. THE WOMEN MADE A NUMBER OF EXPERIENCED BASED RECOMMENDATIONS:

- More provisions around providing culturally appropriate parenting support for refugee background mothers.
- Active outreach services to support refugee background women to engage with the full range of social services and participatory events that would highlight their skills and contribution to the Greater Wellington area.
- Support for refugee background children entering the New Zealand schooling system (awareness around support groups, counselling, and educating all New Zealand students about global migration patterns and multi-cultural New Zealand).
- In home counselling (free) for mothers and their families.

- Development of a programme designed specifically for those engaging in the family reunification programme including a qualified support person assigned to each family, courses explaining the role of each agency involved in the process, support around hiring a lawyer if necessary and the general immigration interview process.
- More awareness of community support groups available to women with a trusted, culturally appropriate facilitator available to accompany those who are hesitant to engage by themselves.
- Adequate provision around the assignment of refugee service workers and consistent follow-up with families regarding engagement with services and staff.
- Subsidised childcare and transport options for women wanting to continue their English learning courses.
- Digital English learning options set up alongside in-person courses as an alternative for those who struggle to find appropriate transport.
- Scholarships for those wanting to gain higher qualifications.
- Internships for refugees studying at tertiary institutions to ensure they have an opportunity to work and gain experience in fields relevant to their degree.
- Incentive refugee placements for business owners and promote the many skills refugee background women possess that are beneficial to businesses.
- Strengths based reporting of the achievements of refugee women and their families in mainstream media.

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APPENDIX A

Interview guide for the research team.

Can you start by telling us a little about yourself and your journey to Wellington [context setting question – part of whakawhanaungatanga at the start]

> Prompts: Where were you before you arrived in New Zealand? Length of time in New Zealand? Have you always been in Wellington? How long have you been living in this house?

Tell us more about what it was like for you when you got here?

How did you feel about this?

(Inductive technique – this is their story, their narrative]