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The Economic Integration of Canada's Refugees: Understanding the Issues with Canada's Approach

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The Economic Integration of Canada's Refugees: Understanding the Issues with Canada's Approach

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Abstract

This paper examines the extent to which Canada's refugee policies have fostered the economic integration of refugees. This paper uses content analysis to examine past research, government reports and news articles, to better understand the effectiveness of Canada's policies on refugee integration. This paper finds that refugees in Canada face severe barriers to economic integration, resulting in high unemployment and a concentration in precarious work. Exploring these issues reveals key limitations within Canadian policies, and the devastating consequences they have for Canadian refugees. Policy suggestions are made based on established international best practices on the economic integration of refugees.

Key Words

Refugee(s), immigration, economic integration, unemployment, Canada, Syria.

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Introduction

Canada has developed a strong international reputation as a bastion of multiculturalism and a world leader in immigration and refugee intake. A large share of this reputation originated with the work of Pierre Elliot Trudeau, who made a strong commitment to intake thousands of expelled Ismaili refugees in 1972 (Enright. 2016). Fourty Three years later, Mr. Trudeau's son, Justin Trudeau, added to Canada's reputation with his own commitment to the Syrian people. In November of 2015, Justin Trudeau committed to a plan that would lead to the intake of 25,000 Syrian refugees in a number of months (Zimonjic. 2016). The movement shattered the former Canadian high for refugee intake within a one year period (McMurdo. 2016). Mr. Trudeau did not waiver from this commitment in the following year, as an additional 15,000 Syrian refugees arrived in Canada in 2016, bringing the total number of Syrian refugees resettled to 40,081 (Citizenship Immigration Canada. 2017). Unfortunately, such headline grabbing commitments have overshadowed serious flaws within Canada's refugee policies. Although Canada does intake substantial numbers of refugees on an annual basis, these refugees are often forced into lives of poverty and disadvantage upon their arrival in Canada. Given the recent influx of Syrian refugees, it is of the utmost importance that academics and policy makers analyze the effectiveness of Canada's policies on the integration of refugees. The quality of life of 48,000 Syrian refugees currently hangs in the balance.

Integration is widely accepted in the academic literature as the best practice and ideal outcome of all varieties of immigration (Kirova et al 2016; Berry. 2011; Agner & Strang 2008; Danso. 2002; Portes et al. 2005; Portes & MacLeaod 1996; Portes & Zhou 1993). It is a dialectical process involving action on both the part of the migrant and the host society.

Migrants adapt their lifestyle to better match the receiving country, while the receiving countries alter their customs and policies to better accommodate the migrant. One of the most important aspects of the integration of migrants, is their economic integration (Carter & Osborn 2009; Agner & Strang. 2008; Lamba 2008; Danso. 2002; Krahn et al. 2000). This paper examines Canada's refugee integration policies by examining the extent to which refugees have experienced successful economic integration upon their arrival to Canada. The employment experiences of refugees will be explored, highlighting the roles human capital, ethnic capital and discrimination play in refugee's experiences of integration. Subsequently, the Government of Canada's refugee policies will be analyzed as the driving force behind the concerning economic outcomes of refugees. Finally, the paper will discuss the international best practices that have been established in the economic integration of refugees. At the very least, this paper hopes to spark discussion and future research into the integration of refugees in Canada, to ensure that the current cohort of Syrian refugees experiences further economic integration than previous refugee cohorts and experience a higher quality of life.

What is a Refugee and Why Study Them?

Refugees are forced migrants who flee their home country to avoid serious and immediate threats to their safety. The United Nations High Commissioner of Refugees (UNHCR), is the world leader in the study and protection of the global refugee population and has developed the internationally accepted definition of a refugee:

“Someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war or violence. A refugee has a well-founded fear of persecution, for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group. Most likely they cannot return home, or are afraid to do so” (The U.N Refugee Agency. 2016). Two central

characteristics of this population give impetus to the study of the economic integration of refugees in Canada today: the rising pressure on governments to assist with the rising population of refugees and the high policy dependence of the refugee population. The total number of refugees seeking asylum in the world has been increasing consistently for the last two decades, reaching 21.3 million people in 2016 (The UN Refugee Agency. 2016). Half of these individuals are under the age of 18 (The UN Refugee Agency. 2016). Unfortunately, the UNHCR projects that the global refugee population will continue to rise, placing pressure on developed nations such as Canada, to increase the yearly commitment made to the global refugee population (2016). While the global pressure on Canada to increase their intake of refugees continues to rise, so too does domestic pressure from within Canada. Canadians began calling for the increased intake of Syrian refugees when photos of drowned Syrian toddler Alan Kurdi reached the Canadian news outlets and social media (McMurdu. 2016). The story of Kurdi gained traction in Canada, when it was uncovered that the boy's family was forced into such a desperate migration attempt after they were rejected refugee status by the Canadian government (CBC. 2015). Alan's death triggered a massive social movement in Canada, calling for the Canadian government to act (McMurdu. 2016). This movement played a significant role in the 2015 Canadian Federal Election and helped lift Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to a majority victory. As the global refugee population continues to rise and gather more attention in Canada, the importance of Canada's refugee policies increases as well. The academic community and the Canadian Government need to collaborate to ensure that Canada's refugee policy is effective at fostering refugee integration and is reflective of global best practices.

Refugees entering Canada are a unique immigrant population who enter Canada with significant disadvantage and high needs (Statistics Canada. 2017; Ghumman et al. 2016; Jackson & Bauder 2013; Sherrell et al. 2007; Yu, Oulette & Warmington 2007). They have minimal choice in their decision to migrate and must leave their homes at a moment's notice to avoid extreme violence, persecution and death. The suddenness of the migration leaves refugees with little time to prepare for their journey. They enter Canada with marginal financial resources, often without important documentation such as birth certificates and proof of education or work experience (Konle-Sedl & Boltis. 2016; Oulette & Warmington. 2007) Additionally, the population of refugees in Canada has much higher mental health needs than other immigrant populations. Refugees have experienced enormous stress in their pre-migration lives. Presse and Thomson suggest that 25% of the refugees entering Canada have personally been the victim of torture, and 70% have experienced a tragic life event such as the death of a close family member (2007). Consequently, this population has high rates of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Clinical Depression (Ghumman et al. 2016; Citizenship Immigratn Canada. 2015; Presse & Thomson 2007). Dr. Jefee Bahloul found that 41% of Syrian refugees in Turkey were in the high-risk category of psychological stress, many of whom had PTSD (2017). Additionally, 62% of refugees reported serious sleep disturbances, 47% reported constant dizziness and 54% suffered from stress related headaches (2017).

The disadvantage and stress refugees face in their pre-migration life is compounded by the terrible situations and circumstances they endure during their migration to Canada. As the global population of refugees increases, so too does the number of protracted refugees. Protracted refugees are refugees who are forced to remain in temporary camps and squatter

settlements for prolonged periods of time, while they wait to be accepted by another country (Presse & Thomson 2007). Due to the lack of refugee camps, 85% of refugees live in non-camp environments while they wait for a durable solution (Citizenship Immigration Canada. 2015). These individuals often live in absolute poverty, living on the streets of urban areas or taking refuge in abandoned buildings, sheds, garages or tent settlements (Ghumman et al. 2016). The conditions are so poor, refugees and their children have been found frozen to death in the urban centres of several asylum countries (Citizenship Immigration Canada. 2015). While refugees wait, they must fend for themselves in an effort to survive and secure basic necessities, such as clean drinking water, for themselves and their families. In order to do so, they deplete what little financial resources they set aside to begin their new life (Krahn et al. 2000). Due to their living conditions during this period of waiting, protracted refugees are also at further risk of violence and sexual assault, and are unable to search for employment or pursue higher education. Sadly, refugees must often endure these conditions for long periods of time, as alarming proportions of protracted refugees wait years for a durable solution or are unable to secure one at all. The stress and hardships these individuals face during migration combined with their already significant disadvantage, further handicaps these individuals in their attempts to begin a new life.

The terrible conditions and disadvantage refugees accumulate before they enter Canada provides them with an extremely low starting point upon their arrival. They arrive with foreign educational credentials and work experience, little financial resources, poor language skills and serious mental health difficulties. However, the population of refugees also has immense potential, they are well educated and bring an incredibly positive attitude and work ethic to Canada (The Government of Canada. 2016; Yu, Oulette & Warmington

2007; Krahn et al. 2000). They are extremely policy dependant in so far as, if these individuals are not provided with effective policy interventions, their immense disadvantage will transfer over to their life in Canada. These individuals will find themselves largely uncompetitive in the Canadian labour market and will enter a life of poverty within Canada. However, if these individuals are greeted with effective policies that even the playing field and provide a fresh start for refugees, they can overcome their previous disadvantage and use their former knowledge, skills and experience to find success in the Canadian labour market. The high dependence of refugees on integration policy provides additional impetus behind the study of Canada's policies. Academics must work to provide a voice to the hundreds of thousands of voiceless refugees in Canada and ensure that Canada's policies are as effective as possible.

Why Study Economic Integration?

The economic integration of refugees comprises the extent to which refugees are able to enter the labour market in their country of landing and secure positive employment outcomes relative to their education and work experience (Lamba 2008; Lamba et al 2003, Krahn et al. 2000; Krahn & Lowe 1998). Economic integration is largely considered the most important element of the integration of migrants. Dr. Abu Laban and his colleagues posit: "Adequate personal income is a key indicator of successful settlement in Canada. Financial security and economic dependence are bedrocks of meaningful integration" (Donso et al. 2001.10). The economic integration of refugees is especially salient, given the policy context surrounding their arrival to Canada. Refugees receive specialized funding from the government of Canada for one year after their arrival in Canada (Citizenship Immigration Canada 2016). After the one year, these individuals are assumed by the government to be

self-sufficient and all federal funding is ceased. If these individuals are unable to achieve integration within the one year period, they must turn to social support (Citizenship Immigration Canada. 2016). Not only does employment and income allow individuals to afford basic necessities such as housing, food and water, but it also has significant effects on health and identity. The literature suggests that income and employment type are strong determinants of physical and mental health (Marmot. 2005 ; Benzeyal et al. 2001). Individuals who are stuck in precarious work and lower paying jobs are much more likely to experience a variety of health issues (Hatch & Schultz. 2003; Benzeyal et al. 2001). Additionally, the inability to secure and keep suitable employment can have devastating effects on the self-esteem and self-worth of individuals (Riach & Lorretto. 2009; Gallie & Marsh. 1998). This is especially true for refugees, who see employment as an opportunity to repay Canada and show their gratitude for Canada's decision to intake them (Jackson & Bauder. 2012). Therefore, through analyzing the economic integration of refugees, it is possible to gain insight into their overall integration into Canada, as well as their health and living conditions.

The Syrian Refugee Crisis

The Syrian refugee crisis was the single largest movement of people in the world since World War II and has considerably increased the global refugee population. The mass movement was sparked in 2011, when the Arab Sheikhdoms rebel group declared war on the Syrian government and President Bashar El Assad (Akbarzadeh & Conduit. 2016). The two sides have since been locked in a violent and remorseless conflict. The civil war has become a matter of international importance, as several first world countries have involved themselves in the conflict. The United States and Turkey have supported the rebel forces,

while the president is supported by Russia and Iran (Akbarzadeh & Conduit. 2016). Further complicating the situation, several Islamic extremist groups such as The Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), have viewed the war as an opportunity to create further destruction and fear. ISIS began the formation of a deadly regime that would eventually control over 50% of Syrian territory. In total, 4.8 million Syrian refugees were forced to leave Syria, and search for a new life somewhere else, while another 6.6 million individuals were displaced within Syria (Akbarzadeh & Conduit. 2016).

The war has had devastating effects on the Syrian state and people, leaving Syrian refugees with especially intense mental health issues and low resources (Citizenship Immigration Canada. 2015; Amnesty International 2015). The vast majority of deaths during the conflict were civilians, as opposed to military and rebel fighters. Both sides consistently targeted large civilian hubs with their attacks and operations. In the city of Aleppo there was attacks on 23 mosques, 14 public markets and 12 hospitals (Amnesty International. 2015). Chemical weapons have also been used on civilians multiple times throughout the war (Ghumman et. Al. 2016). In total 11.6% of the Syrian population has been killed or seriously injured in the conflict (Akbarzadeh & Conduit. 2016). The war has effectively destroyed the infrastructure in the vast majority of the country. 70% of Syrians no longer have access to clean drinking water, and 33% do not have sufficient food. Further, the Syrian pound has lost 90% of its value since the commencement of the war, as the unemployment rate has risen to 58% (Akbarzadeh & Conduit. 2016).

Although the Syrian refugees who entered Canada during the refugee crisis came with considerable disadvantage, they also possess characteristics that make them better suited for success in Canada than many previous refugee cohorts (The Government of Canada. 2016;

Citizenship and Immigration Canada. 2015). The people of Syria are largely educated and skilled individuals. Before the war, 84% of the Syrian population was literate and 72% of the population had graduated high school (Citizenship Immigration Canada. 2015). Syria had a public and private university system that was accessible to many. The vast majority of Syrian refugees were employed in Syria before the war and 66% had received formal job training in their former position (Citizenship Immigration Canada. 2015). The most common occupation for Syrian refugees entering Canada was skilled construction. Before the Syrian refugee crisis, Canada was home to a relatively small number of Syrian individuals. In 2011 National Household Survey, only 40,840 Canadians reported being of Syrian descent (Citizenship Immigration Canada. 2015). Despite the lack of Syrians in Canada, these figures suggest that this well-educated and highly skilled population should be relatively well suited for success within the Canadian labour market, and should experience successful economic integration. Unfortunately, this has not been the case and early on in the process of integration, the talent of Syrian refugees appears to be going to waste.

This content analysis aims to coordinate a literature that is largely uncoordinated and fragmented, to answer two central questions: how successful has Canadian policy been at facilitating the economic integration of refugees in the past and how well have the Syrian refugees been economically integrated within their early years in Canada? The roles human capital, ethnic capital and discrimination play in the process will be discussed. Additionally, established international best practices will be explored to better understand how Canada can improve its policies on refugee integration.

Theory

Multiple theoretical perspectives and theories were integrated together to guide research and interpret results throughout the content analysis. Anthony Giddens' *Structuration Theory* provides a framework through which the interaction between federal level policies and individual refugees can be viewed and understood (1984). According to Giddens, all individual action is the result of the interaction between rational individuals and social structures. Individual agents have knowledge of the social structures which constrain them, making rational decisions within the boundaries of the structures (Giddens. 1984). Giddens identifies two types of social structures: resources and rules. Resources are the basis of power in society and can be mobilized by individuals to secure desired outcomes. Rules dictate how individual agents are able to mobilize their resources in the pursuit of set goals (Giddens 1984). Giddens notes that both rules and resources follow a 'duality in structure' in that they can both constrain and empower individual action (1984). Therefore, individual action is the result of an individual making a rational decision based on the amount of resources they possess and the rules which govern how they are able to mobilize said resources.

In applying Giddens' *Structuration Theory* to refugee economic integration, Canada's policies can be viewed as the rules of society, which act to constrain the ways in which refugees are able to mobilize their resources (or human and ethnic capital). Through this lens, refugees are viewed as active agents, who work within the boundaries of policies to secure the most suitable employment possible (Lamba. 2008). The rules, or Canada's integration policies, can either have an enabling or constraining effect on a refugee's ability to utilize

their human and ethnic capital in the pursuit of employment. If Canada's refugee policies are effective and foster refugee agency, they allow refugees to convert their existing resources into suitable employment, or provide refugees with the opportunity to gain resources. However, if policies are ineffective, they limit refugee agency, blocking refugees from converting their resources into positive employment outcomes and from gaining resources. In this paper, it is hypothesised that Canada's refugee's policies are not effective, and limit the extent to which refugees are able to mobilize their human and ethnic capital in the pursuit of employment.

While *Structuration Theory* outlines the ways in which federal level policies impact the lives of individual refugees, Portes and Zhou's *Segmented Assimilation Theory* provides a framework through which the outcome of this relationship can be interpreted (1993). The two note that integration, or assimilation, is segmented, in that immigrants and refugees can experience varying degrees of successful integration upon their arrival to a new country (Portes and Zhou, 1993). Portes and Zhou outline 3 possible pathways immigrants and refugees may take, with regards to their integration or assimilation. The first pathway, termed full assimilation, occurs when immigrants and refugees abandon their ethnic identities and values to assimilate into the mainstream society of the receiving country (Portes and Zhou, 1993). These individuals experience upward mobility and achieve suitable employment in the mainstream economies of the receiving country. The second pathway to assimilation described by Portes and Zhou is termed partial assimilation (1993). Partial assimilation occurs when immigrants and refugees experience upward mobility and economic success in the receiving country, while deliberately maintaining their ethnic ties and identity (Portes & Zhou, 1993). The final pathway to assimilation described by Portes and Zhou is downward

assimilation. Immigrants and refugees who experience downward assimilation, assimilate into the underclass and urban poor of their receiving society. These individuals do not experience success in the mainstream economy of the receiving country and instead learn how to collect social support and survive with low incomes (Portes & Zhou. 1993) In this paper, it is hypothesised that refugee cohorts arriving in Canada over the last 30 years, as well as recent cohorts of Syrian refugees, have experienced downward assimilation upon their arrival to Canada.

Several different theories attempt to outline the factors and characteristics that predict economic success in immigrants and refugees. One explanation arises from human capital theory, suggesting that the level of human capital an immigrant or refugee poses is the single most important factor in determining their economic success upon arrival (Becker. 1993). Human capital consists of an individual's education, experience, cultural knowledge and skills. The theory suggests that individuals who have higher levels of human capital are better suited for the competitive labour markets of receiving countries and experience successful economic integration (Becker. 1993). Conversely, individuals with lower levels of human capital are unable to compete in the labour market and are unable to secure suitable employment upon their arrival to Canada and are more likely to assimilate to the underclass of Canadian society (Becker. 1993).

Although human capital does play a role in the economic integration of refugees, some academics suggest that its impact is limited. Such thinkers have suggested that ethnic capital has an equal or greater impact on the economic integration of refugees. Ethnic capital is defined as the average skill level and strength of ties within an ethnic group in a receiving country (Abada, Hou & Ram. 2009; Borjias. 1995) Ethnic capital theorists posit that the

number of friends and acquaintances refugees interact with within their ethnic communities, has a positive impact on their economic integration (Borjias. 1995; Hein. 1993; Granoyetter. 1973). These theorists suggest individuals belonging to groups with high levels of ethnic capital, utilize these social networks to attain positive employment outcomes and economic integration. However, the literature regarding ethnic capital and refugees is mixed, as dissenting academics have suggested the relationship between ethnic capital and economic integration may not always be positive. The preservation of strong ethnic ties has been shown to have a negative and constraining effect on individuals within certain ethnic groups (Silvus. 2016; Lamba 2008. 2003; Pendakur & Pendakur. 1998). In extreme cases, the preservation of ethnic ties can lead to the ghettoization of ethnic groups within receiving countries.

In addition to ethnic and human capital, it has been posited that the context of reception is a similarly important element in determining the extent to which refugees experience economic success within the labour market (Abada, Hou & Ram. 2009; Donso. 2001). The context of reception is determined by: the integration policies of the host government, public perception of the immigrants ethnic group, and the settlement experiences of earlier generations of refugees (Abada, Hou & Ram. 2009). The context of reception immediately after a refugee's arrival, has long term effects on refugees and impacts the ways in which they are able to convert both human and ethnic capital into economic success (Carter & Osborn. 2009; Donso. 2001). Public perception and discrimination are particularly important elements of the context of reception. Due to the low levels of capital held by refugees, discrimination creates insurmountable barriers for this population (Donso. 2001). Immigrants who are received unfavorably by the government are blocked by these boundaries and experience much less economic integration. However, when immigrants are

received favorably by a country, they encounter minimal discrimination and face limited barriers to economic integration (Abada, Hou & Ran. 2009). It is hypothesised that Canada's policies on the economic integration of refugees can be improved to foster a better context of reception, where refugees have more success in the labour market and face less discrimination.

Methodology

A content analysis will be conducted to examine the experiences of Canadian refugees regarding economic integration and the policies which surround them. There are three main sources of information: academic articles, Canadian policies and government reports, and news articles. These sources of information must be combined because of the fragmented nature of the current literature surrounding the topic. Past research focuses on very narrow elements of integration and specific ethnic groups, failing to integrate policy analysis into research. This content analysis aims to combine many works in the field to provide a more cohesive assessment of the state of economic integration among refugees in Canada that is directly tied to policy. The results of the content analysis will be supplemented with descriptive data analysis conducted specifically for this paper. It is important to note that in this article refugees will be compared with traditional point system immigrants, in order to better understand their relative position in the Canadian economy.

Data analysis was conducted on Cycle 27 of the 2013 General Social Survey (GSS), to provide further evidence for the trends discussed in the content analysis. The 2013 General Social Survey focused on social identity and over-sampled immigrants and refugees, making it ideally suited for the purposes of this paper. Data for the survey was collected between June 2013 and March 2014, across Canada. Of the 27,695 respondents who completed the

survey, 943 individuals reported refugee status and 3,468 individuals identified as point system immigrants. Descriptive statistics will be taken from the data, comparing refugees with point system immigrants to identify various differences between the two populations. Missing Data was dropped from analysis to create a consistent sample of 576 refugees and 2,261 point system immigrants.

Several variables from the 2013 GSS are used in the data analysis conducted for this paper. The household income of respondents is used to provide evidence regarding the differences in income between refugees and traditional immigrants. Respondents were asked what their total household income was during the year 2012. Data was originally coded categorically, with 10 categories ranging from \$0 to \$100,000 or more. In order to conduct data analysis, data was made continuous and the normal distribution was assumed, as the midpoint of each category was assigned to the individuals who reported it. A number of variables were also used to describe the human capital levels of refugee respondents in the 2013 General Social Survey. Education level was coded into four categories: less than a high school education, high school diploma, post-secondary diploma, and university degree. Descriptive statistics were conducted on the data based on these categories. Language ability was measured through the household language of respondents. Responses were coded into four categories including: English only, French only, multiple languages and other languages. Due to theoretical interest, respondents who answered English only or French only, were grouped together. The visible minority status of respondents is also used in analysis, as respondents were coded either as a visible minority, or not a visible minority.

The academic literature provides the starting point for the analysis of the economic integration of refugees in Canada. The knowledge taken from these works will be combined,

to create an inventory of known problems refugees face in search of economic integration. Data from news sources and government reports are used to supplement this information and provide insight into the state of economic integration among the recent cohort of Syrian refugees. Next, the roles human capital, ethnic capital and discrimination play in the process will be discussed. Subsequently, having identified the problems refugees face, an in-depth content analysis of Canada's policies and programs will be conducted to identify the ways in which Canada's policies contribute to the development of these problems. The majority of information regarding Canada's policies and programs are taken from Citizenship and Immigration Canada, the branch of the Canadian Government responsible for the selection and integration of refugees. Finally, international government reports and academic literature will be analyzed to identify global best practices for the economic integration of refugees. Policy recommendations will be made to better align Canadian policies with international best practices.

Results

This section identifies two major problems refugees face with regards to economic integration. The two issues of note are: unemployment and underemployment. In exploring these issues, it becomes evident that refugees do not experience successful economic integration upon their arrival in Canada and are forced into lives of poverty. The roles human capital, ethnic capital and discrimination play are then discussed, followed by an in-depth content analysis of Canada's programs and policies on the economic integration of refugees.

Refugee Unemployment

Substantial literature suggests that refugees experience an extremely difficult time entering the labour market upon their arrival to Canada (The Government of Canada. 2016;

Carter & Osborn 2009; Lamba. 2008, 2003; Yu, Oulette & Warmington, 2007; Lamba. Krahn. 2000). These individuals enter Canada expecting to find suitable employment, but instead find themselves unable to secure employment of any kind within the Canadian labour market. Only 10% of refugees secure employment within their first 6 months in Canada, while 60% of traditional immigrants secure employment within the same period (Lamba. 2008). The situation remains poor for refugees 2 years after arrival, as their employment rate remains low at 40%. Conversely 70% of traditional immigrants are employed by this time (Lamba. 2008). Unfortunately, evidence suggests that unemployment remains a serious problem for refugees for the remainder of their lives in Canada, as the number of years a refugee has spent in Canada has no correlation with employment rate (Krahn. 2000). Early reports into the economic integration of Syrian refugees reveals equally discouraging results. The Immigration Society of British Columbia found that only 17% of Syrian refugees in the province had secured employment during their first year in Canada (Immigrant Society of BC). The situation is so dismal that Hire Immigrants, a non-profit organization, conducted a meeting with other non-profit organizations, employers and government representatives from the Greater Toronto Area, in an effort to generate more dialogue about the severity of the unemployment rates of Syrian refugees (Hire Immigrants. 2017).

Reports published by the Canadian Government have also highlighted exceedingly low employment rates among refugees in Canada. In a 2016 report entitled: *Evaluation of Resettlement Programs (GAR, PSR, BVOR, and RAP)*, Citizenship and Immigration Canada conducted their own analysis on the prevalence of refugee unemployment. They find that only 12% of government sponsored refugees find employment after one year in Canada (Citizenship Immigration Canada. 2016). After 5 years of living in Canada only 58% of

government sponsored refugees are employed. This percentage reduces to 54% after refugees have spent 10 years in Canada (Citizenship Immigration Canada. 2015). Although privately sponsored refugees experience slightly higher employment rates, their employment figures follow the same concerning trend. The high unemployment of refugees is also a central theme in Statistics Canada's investigation into the early experience of Syrian refugees entitled: *Syrian Refugee Integration: One Year After Arrival*. Only 12% of government sponsored Syrian Refugees and 50% of privately sponsored refugees have secured employment of any kind within their first year in Canada (Statistics Canada. 2017). The concern over the inability of Syrians to secure employment is echoed in the media, as a multitude of news articles have focused on the high unemployment rates of Syrian refugees in Canada (Degurse. 2017; Friscolanti. 2016; CTV News. 2016). One such article interviewed Anis Sabounji, a Syrian refugee living with his family in Calgary. When asked about unemployment, Anis responded "We hope to find a job... Yes I'm worried because I have five Kids" (Labby. 2016).

Underemployment and Concentration in Precarious Employment

Unfortunately, the refugees who beat the odds and do secure employment within Canada are concentrated in low skilled work that does not reflect their educational credentials or previous job experience (Statistics Canada 2017; The Government of Canada. 2016; Lamba. 2008, 2003; Yu Oulette & Warmingotn 2007; Krahn. 2000) They experience downward mobility, as many are unable to secure employment outside of precarious work. Precarious work is defined as: employment in a position with low job security, low autonomy and control of work, low regulation and protection of workers, and low income (Mosoetsa, Stillerman & Tilly. 2016). In a landmark study, Dr. Harvey Krahn and his colleagues found

that 28% percent of refugees who were employed in Canada, were employed in part time jobs (Krahn. 2000). These individuals work few and irregular hours, without access to benefits or sufficient earnings. Subsequently, 30% of employed refugees were employed in temporary positions, which are similar to part time positions, but have a specific end date upon which employment is terminated (Krahn. 2000). The downward mobility of refugees is so prominent in Canada, it has become institutionalized by colleges and universities. These programs recruit refugees and immigrants with foreign graduate and doctorate degrees in a specific field and offer them the chance to earn much lesser Canadian degrees (Lamba. 2008; Krahn & Lowe. 1998). Edmonton's Grant MacEwan Community College, provides a striking example, offering a nursing diploma to former cardiac surgeons, gynecologists and radiologists (Krahn. 2000). Personal accounts from Canadian refugees reflect their frustration with their inability to secure suitable employment. In an interview, one Canadian refugee with a foreign veterinary degree exclaimed: "The veterinary office told me that I must have a Canadian diploma. They recommended I get a meat cutting job" (Krahn. 2000. 76).

Due to their inability to secure suitable employment, Canada's population of refugees is plagued by chronic low income (Lamba. 2008, 2003; Yu Oulette & Warmingotn 2007; Krahn. 2000). One year after landing, refugees have the lowest annual earnings of all immigrant categories, earning under \$20,000 a year, while traditional point system immigrants earn \$30,000 a year (Yu. Oulette & Warmington. 2007). After 5 years in Canada, the average income for Canadian refugees increases to a meager \$25,000, while the average income for traditional immigrants is \$50,000 (Yu, Oulette & Warmington. 2007). The discrepancy in income between refugee populations and traditional immigrants was also observed in data analysis conducted for this paper. The average household income for all

refugee respondents in the 2013 General Social Survey was \$72,361, while the average income for traditional immigrants is 16% higher at \$84,484 (Table 1). These figures confirm the disadvantage refugees face in the Canadian labour market, providing further evidence for their inability to secure suitable employment upon their arrival.

The Consequences of High Unemployment and Chronic Low Income

Canada's population of refugees is particularly vulnerable to the devastating effects of chronic low income, as this population is concentrated in areas of Canada with the highest rental rates and property values. In order to access settlement services and remain connected with other members of their ethnic communities, refugees reside in Canada's largest cities: Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal (Garcea. 2016). These cities are the most expensive Canadian cities to live in (Garcea. 2016). The most overt evidence for the poor economic conditions of Canadian refugees, lies in the population's dependence on social support. Citizenship Immigration Canada reports that 93% of refugees utilize social support within their first year in Canada (2016). Five years later, 41% of refugees rely on social support and 40% rely on social support 10 years after their arrival in Canada (Citizenship Immigration Canada. 2016). Due to low income and high rent, refugees have to spend the majority of their earnings on housing, sacrificing other necessities such as food and clothing (Murdie. 2010; Miraftab. 2000). 66% of Syrian refugees relied on foodbanks to feed their families within their first year in Canada (Immigrant Services Society of B.C. 2016). Additionally, refugees are at increased risk of absolute and hidden homelessness, as many find themselves unable to afford rent after initial periods of federal funding end (Murdie. 2010; Dansa. 2001; Miraftab. 2000). Sadly, refugees in Canada become trapped in the poverty cycle, unable to afford the high costs of education and job training, which provide the best avenue out of poverty.

Refugees invest the least in education of all immigrant categories in Canada (Ferede. 2010). As a result, Canadian refugees do not necessarily experience a substantial increase in their quality of life upon their arrival in Canada. The disadvantage and danger these individuals aim to escape, simply take on a new form upon their arrival in Canada.

The inability of refugees to secure suitable employment further damages the mental and physical health of an already vulnerable population. The impacts of chronic low income and poverty on physical health have been extensively analyzed. Individuals experiencing chronic low income are at increased risk of heart disease, diabetes, and a wide range of other physical health issues, as this population has a much lower life expectancy than their wealthier counterparts (Marmot. 2005 ; Hatch 7 Schultz. 2003; Benzeyal et al. 2001). Chronic low income and poverty are also strongly correlated with extreme levels of stress and mental health issues. Refugees are especially vulnerable to this effect, as they enter Canada with extremely high levels of stress and mental health issues (Citizenship Immigration Canada. 2015. Daso. 2002). Refugees in Canada often experience the ‘prisoner effect’, finding themselves unable to succeed and find opportunity within Canada, while having no ability to leave and return to their homeland (Daso. 2002). The poor economic integration of refugees has very serious consequences for this population, putting refugees at increased risk of physical and mental health conditions.

Human Capital

Two distinct narratives exist in the literature surrounding the role of human capital in the economic integration of refugees. Some researchers suggest that the poor economic integration of refugees is the result of lower human capital levels among this population. Data analysis conducted on the 2013 General Social Survey indicates that the population of

refugees in Canada does have slightly lower levels of human capital than the population of traditional immigrants. Only 28% of refugees reported having a university degree or higher, as opposed to 51% of traditional immigrants (Table 1). However, it must be noted that refugees were more likely to have a college diploma than traditional immigrants. Data analysis also revealed that refugees in Canada are less proficient in English and French than traditional immigrants. 40% of refugees spoke English or French at home, while 47% of traditional immigrants did so (Table 1). Finally, refugees were much more likely to identify as a visible minority (73%) as opposed to traditional immigrants (60%) (Table 1). Although dissenting academics do accept that the human capital of refugee groups does play a role in their poor economic integration (particularly language ability), they suggest that other factors such as the devaluation of foreign credentials, ethnic capital and discrimination have a more significant effect.

Overwhelming evidence suggests that refugees in Canada experience high unemployment and underemployment, regardless of their level of human capital (Silvus. 2016; The Government of Canada. 2016; Lamba. 2008, 2003; Yu Oulette & Warmingotn 2007; Krahn. 2000; De Silva. 1997). To demonstrate this trend, Dr. Arnold De Silva conducted an Oaxaca decomposition model on the longitudinal immigrant database. It was found that differences in the human capital characteristics of refugees and traditional immigrants such as age, sex, and education only accounted for 35% of the observed difference between the income of the two groups (De Silva. 1997). Therefore, the remaining 65% of the difference in the income of these two groups is caused by factors unrelated to human capital (De Silva. 1997). The limited utility of human capital is a common theme in the literature, which points out that refugees with the highest levels of human capital,

experience the most extreme underemployment and downward mobility. Of the 39% of refugees who entered Canada having been previously employed in professional or management careers, only 11% of them were able to find a similar position in Canada (Yu, Oulette & Warmington. 2007; Krahn. 2000). Refugees are unable to convert their existing human capital into suitable employment. A significant part of the problem is the devaluation of foreign work experiences and credentials (The Government of Canada. 2016. Lamba. 2008, 2003).

Ethnic Capital

The role ethnic capital plays in the economic integration of refugees remains a largely unknown topic. Although existing research is largely contradictory, multiple common themes can be extracted. In older research, it is posited that ethnic capital benefits refugees in the labour market, as refugees utilize these ties to identify employment opportunities (Hein. 1993; Granovetter. 1973). Specifically, it has been suggested that the number of acquaintances an immigrant or refugee is in contact with has a strong positive effect on their ability to secure employment (Granovetter. 1973). Conversely, more modern research suggests that ethnic connections may have considerable negative effects on the economic integration of refugees (Lamba, 2008, 2003; Pedekur & pedakir. 1998). Refugees who have close ties with large ethnic communities may take on more responsibilities as a result of those ties, leaving them with less flexibility to enter the labour market (Lamba. 2008). Additionally, when refugees use ethnic ties to secure employment, downward assimilation is often reproduced as refugees are connected to low skilled and low paying jobs within their ethnic community (Lamba. 2008, 2003). Thus, refugees who live in ethnic enclaves, with the most connections to their ethnic communities, are often the lowest skilled members of the

population and have the worst employment outcomes. Further research is required to formulate a better understanding of the ways in which ethnic capital effects the economic integration of refugees.

Discrimination

Discrimination also impacts the economic integration of refugees in Canada, limiting the extent to which they are able to convert their human capital into positive employment outcomes. It is important to note that racism in Canada is not as overt as it is in other countries; however, it is still prominent (Henry et al. 2010). Refugees in Canada face discrimination based on a number of axis, most commonly for their status as refugees and their status as members of visible minority groups. Multiple studies into the discrimination faced by refugees have revealed that some Canadian employers attach stigma to individuals with refugee status and are more likely to hire other candidates with equal or lesser qualifications (Danso. 2002). Separate research into the Somali, Ethiopian, Ghanian and South Asian refugee communities have revealed that individuals within these groups experience substantial discrimination in their attempts to enter the workforce (Ellis et al. 2010; Danso. 2002; Beiser et al. 2001). Although all members of visible minorities face such discrimination, it is especially debilitating to refugees, as this population does not have the resources to overcome these barriers.

Unfortunately, it is likely that the cohort of Syrian refugees will experience more discrimination than their predecessors. 87% of the Syrian refugees who entered Canada are practicing muslims, a group which has faced well documented discrimination in Canada (Citizenship Immigration Canada. 2015. Litchmore & Safdar. 2015; Reitz et al. 2009; Beyer. 2005;). In 2001, Statistics Canada found that the unemployment rate for muslim individuals

was double that of the Canadian average, despite these individuals having equal educational attainments to the Canadian population (Litchmore & Safdar. 2015). The muslim community has voiced serious concern over the discrimination they have faced. In one study, 80% of respondents indicated concerns regarding prejudice against muslims in Canada, and 45% reported personal experience with discrimination (Kirova et al. 2016). Even individuals holding the highest offices in Canada have actively participated in discrimination against muslims, as former Prime Minister Stephen Harper made the banning of civil servants wearing the niqab (a headscarf worn by muslim women), one of his largest campaign promises (Brewster. 2015). Such discrimination creates additional barriers between refugees and economic integration.

Canada's Refugee Policies

A thorough content analysis of the Government of Canada's policies and programs regarding refugee integration reveals that a lack of effective policy is responsible for the poor economic integration of Canada's population of refugees. The Government of Canada does not have a coordinated plan to ensure that refugees secure employment upon their arrival to Canada. Instead, they delegate the responsibility of refugee employment to small community based employment agencies who are already backlogged with high numbers of clients (Citizenship Immigration Canada. 2016; Garcea. 2016; Krahn et al. 2000). These organizations are unable to address the systematic discrimination and disadvantages refugees face, as they work with refugees on a case to case basis, helping with interview skills and resume writing as opposed to actively finding refugees employment (Citizenship Immigration Canada. 2016). Further, these community organizations, such as the London Cross Cultural Learning centre, are largely underfunded and understaffed (Garcea. 2016;

Krahn et al. 2000). Academics have suggested that refugee integration and well-being in Canada has become privatized, as community based organizations depend on market processes and voluntary contributions to aid refugees with integration (Silvus. 2016). This represents a profound departure from the traditional viewpoint of refugees as a national level social responsibility (Silvus. 2016). Frustration with the government's lack of a plan has been expressed by multiple community groups and organization, most notably The Federation of Canadian Municipalities. The Federation of Canadian Municipalities is a national organization that advocates for the interests of municipal regions across Canada. In a report focusing on the integration of Syrian refugees representatives of the federation wrote:

“The Federal Government must collaborate with the municipal governments and settlement organizations to develop a plan to expand newcomer settlement services in urban and rural regions. A robust plan must include employment.” (Garcea. 2016.9).

A significant element of such a plan must be the recognition of foreign credentials in Canada. The government currently, has no system to evaluate foreign credentials, leaving their recognition up to private occupational organizations and unions (The Government of Canada. 2017. Citizenship immigration Canada. 2016. Lamba. 2008; Yu, Oulette & Warmington. 2007). These groups create labour market shelters within Canada, rejecting the validity of foreign credentials, to ensure that the wages of domestic workers remain high. The Canadian government does acknowledge this issue in a Statistics Canada article on the integration of Syrian refugees: “Refugees outside of Quebec have reported difficulty having their education, employment and professional credentials recognized. We are working to address both of these challenges” (Statistics Canada. 2016). The lack recognition of foreign

credentials is especially damning to the refugee community, as they receive no widespread funding from the Canadian Government for the pursuit of Canadian education (Citizenship Immigration. 2016). The government explicitly states that refugees must finance their own education in a pamphlet handed out to refugees before their arrival: “After they finish high school, some may go to university or college, if they can afford it. College and university cost money in Canada” (Citizenship Immigration Canada. 2016. 2). As a result, these individuals are not able to utilize their existing human capital, and are unable to afford new Canadian focused capital. The Government of Canada’s lack of effective policy and programming regarding the economic integration of refugees is irresponsible and unacceptable. Instead of helping refugees experience success in their new home, they set refugees up for lifetimes of chronic low income and poverty.

Discussion

Although Canada likes to be perceived as a global leader in the integration of refugees, further investigation reveals that this is far from the case. Interpreting the results through Anthony Giddens’ *Structuration Theory* confirms the first hypothesis made in this paper: Canada’s policies regarding refugee integration do not create an environment in which refugees have the ability to seek out and secure suitable employment. Instead, Canadian policy leaves refugees unable to mobilize the resources they possess upon arrival and unable to gain new resources. As a result, refugees experience Portes and Zhou’s downward assimilation, confirming the second hypothesis made. The downward assimilation of refugees is so prevalent in Canada, that it has become institutionalized in the ‘labour market re-entry programs’ of Canada’s colleges and universities. The result, is a population that does not receive a fresh start

upon their immigration to Canada, but rather sees their disadvantage follow them to their new home.

When the government of Canada agrees to intake refugees, they promise these individuals a fresh start and a fair chance at success within Canada. Unfortunately, the government has not kept this promise made to refugees and has treated them with an indifference that is decidedly un-Canadian. The importance of Canada's obligation to refugees is summed up perfectly by Dr. Beiser and Hou:

“although it is neglected, the commitment to provide the tools that enable to people to participate in the wider society through language training, job training and special school programs is as intrinsic to Canadian multiculturalism as ethno cultural retention” (Beiser & Hou. 2006. 5).

By failing to provide refugees with these opportunities, the Government of Canada effectively sentences these individuals to a life of poverty and continued disadvantage.

In addition to the ethical concerns, the Canadian Government has significant economic motivation to ensure that refugees in Canada are integrated into the economy. The widespread reliance of refugees on social assistance acts as a significant tax base drain for both the federal and provincial governments (Canadian Electronic Library Firm. 2016). This population consumes substantial social support, without being able to contribute to the tax base through income tax, as they remain unable to find suitable employment. Although the initial costs of more effective policies and programs regarding refugee integration are significant, the long-term savings would be enormous (Canadian Electronic Library Firm. 2016). Further, by refusing to allow refugees to integrate into the Canadian economy, the Government of Canada misses an opportunity to reduce labour shortages within Canada. Many have suggested that

Canada is going to experience a shortage of skilled labourers, especially high-level construction workers, within the next 10 years. In 2014, Canadian employment minister Jason Kenny proclaimed: “Skills shortages are looming... The construction, mining and petroleum sectors are examples of industries that will face serious shortages of skilled workers over the next decade” (The Financial Post. 2014). However, the vast majority of the population of Syrian refugees, who were largely employed as high skilled construction workers, remains unemployed and unable to help fill this labour force gap. By failing to integrate these individuals into the Canadian economy the Canadian Government is missing out on the immense potential of the refugee population.

Fortunately, other nations around the world have developed innovative programs and best practices for the economic integration of refugees. Norway has implemented a program designed specifically to ensure that the devaluation of foreign credentials does not burden refugees in their attempt to enter the labour market (Konle-Sedl & Boltis. 2016). Through this program, representatives of the Norwegian government meet with refugees to learn more about their educational background. The investigators then come to a conclusion as to whether the degree of the refugee is to be accepted or not (Konle-Sedl & Boltis. 2016). If the degree is accepted, the refugee is treated as they would be with a Norwegian Degree or diploma (Konle-Sedl & Boltis. 2016). The program has experienced great success and has resulted in much higher numbers of refugees securing suitable employment upon their arrival (Konle-Sedl & Boltis. 2016).

Additionally, Denmark and Sweden have both implemented new and innovative ‘Step Programs’ designed to ensure refugees secure suitable employment upon their landing. These programs take an active role, seeking out employers on behalf of the refugees. The process

begins as the government reaches out to employers in various industries across the country to gain employer participation (Konle-Sedl & Boltis. 2016). Once refugees enter the country, they undergo an in-depth skills assessment, where government officials work with the refugee to identify a sector or position that best matches their previous employment and educational experiences (Konle-Sedl & Boltis. 2016). When a position is identified, the refugee begins a government subsidized placement with the employer (Konle-Sedl & Boltis. 2016). During Placements, refugees receive language and cultural training from experts, in addition to learning how to complete their new job. After one year the employer has the option of retaining the refugee at their own cost. Early results show that these systems have been incredible effective at increasing refugee integration into the labour market (Konle-Sedl & Boltis. 2016).

It appears as though some of these programs and best practices are slowly making their way into Canada. A new pilot program in B.C has been instituted that is similar in nature to the ‘step programs’ implemented by Norway and Sweden. In the pilot program, which is funded by the province, organizers recruit employers who are willing to take part (Boynton. 2016). Refugees who enter the program are matched with jobs and employers based on their education, skills and previous work experience. Once an employer and refugee are matched, the employer provides the refugee with 8 weeks of intensive training covering health and safety regulations, language skills, and cultural lessons (Boynton. 2016). After the training is complete, the employer offers the refugee a job. This program has also shown signs of success. However, it is important to note it has not been implemented for long. 75% of refugees who completed the program have been able to keep the job they had received through the program (Boynton. 2016). Securing meaningful employment has had a significant and positive impact

on the refugees, such as Ahmad Hwachshan who explained: “When I came to Canada I had lost my confidence, this has given my personality back. I’m Happy!” (Boynton. 2016).

The Canadian Government needs to work to incorporate these ideas into their own approach to the economic integration of refugees. Although the initial costs of the implementation of such programs are undeniable, the Canadian Government would save enormous amounts of money over the long term. More importantly, these programs would allow the Canadian Government to better keep their promise made to refugees and ensure these individuals are given a fair chance upon their arrival in Canada.

Suggestions for Future Research

It is exceptionally important that Canadian and international academics continue to study refugees and refugee integration. One of the common themes the academic on the subject is a frustration with a lack of research on refugees and their economic integration. It is routine to come across lines such as, “Our literature review revealed that national scale empirical studies on refugees in Canada are extremely scarce” (Yu. Oulette. & Warmington. 2007. 5). Academics need to increasingly consider refugees in their work and provide a voice for this voiceless population. Specifically, more research is needed to examine the role ethnic capital plays in refugee employment outcomes. Although some conclusions can be gained, the data is extremely limited. Finally, researchers should take more advantage of the stellar databases that are available for the study of immigrants within Canada. The Immigrant Longitudinal Database is an extremely valuable resource that has been underutilized by academics in refugee studies.

Conclusion

Canada currently stands at a pivotal point in the development of their social policy. The influx of Syrian refugees provides the perfect opportunity and justification for the Canadian

Government to bring its policies on the economic integration of refugees up to date with international best practices. It has been shown that Canada's policies, as currently situated, are highly ineffective at fostering the economic integration of its population of refugees. Instead refugees in Canada are left to experience high levels of chronic unemployment and downward assimilation. This occurs, as refugees are unable to utilize their existing human capital in the pursuit of employment, and cannot afford to upgrade that capital in Canada. Further research is required to better understand the role ethnic capital plays in the process of the economic integration of refugees. Research also suggests that refugees in Canada face considerable discrimination from employers in their attempts to enter the Canadian labour market, based on their refugee status and status as visible minorities. After a in depth content analysis of Canada's policies, it is clear that they play a significant role in the development of the problems refugees face. Fortunately, several countries have developed new programs and policies that are much more effective at fostering the economic integration of refugees. The Canadian government should work to implement similar policies to ensure that the recent influx of refugees and all future cohorts experience successful economic success upon their arrival to Canada.

Appendix

Figure 1: Frequencies and Bivariate Descriptive Statistics of Human Capital and Social / Ethnic Capital Measures Among Refugees and Point System Immigrants in the 2013 Canadian General Social Survey

	Immigrant Status	
	Refugees (N = 575)	Point System Immigrant (N = 2,261)
Household Income	\$72,361	\$84,484
Age	44.2	44.9
Years Spent in Canada	20.3	18.2
Level of Education		
Less Than High School	9.04%	6.5%
High School Graduate	26.8%	16.2%
Post-Secondary Diploma	35.13%	24.9%
University Degree	29%	51.93%
Gender		
Male	58.6%	50.2%
Female	41.4%	49.8%
Language Spoken at Home		
English or French	40.3%	46.6%
Other	42.4%	39.3%
Multiple Languages	17.3%	14.09%
Visible Minority Status		
Visible Minority	73.1%	60.2%
Not Visible Minority	26.9%	39.8%

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