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Settlement Workers in Schools' (SWIS) Support for K-12 Refugee Students: A Resilience and Compassion-Based Approach

Raghad Ebied,

Supervisor: Dr. Katina Pollock, *The University of Western Ontario*
A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Education degree in Education
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Abstract

The number of refugees worldwide has reached approximately 32.5 million, 41% of whom are children and youth under 18 eighteen years of age (UNHCR, 2022). Between 2015-2021, Canada welcomed 218,430 refugees, with over 87,795 being Syrian (Statistics Canada, 2022). With an estimated 87,000 refugee children and youth in Canada (UNHCR, 2022), I engaged with Settlement workers in schools (SWIS) in Ontario, Canada to explore how they identify newcomer refugee K-12 students' needs, the challenges SWIS experience, and the strategies they draw on to support newcomer refugee students. Settlement workers in schools identified newcomer refugee students had language learning, social, and psychological needs. The challenges SWIS experience include navigating their relationship with schools, resources, intercultural competence at schools, and professional development. The strategies they use to support newcomer refugee students are broadly categorized under individual, family, school, community, and societal supports. As such, I describe the unique role of SWIS as "compassionate connectors" who support newcomer refugee students based on a holistic approach which includes promoting resilience at multiple levels and a compassion-based framework in schools. It is through collaboration with schools, that SWIS play a key role in enhancing intercultural competence of school staff which aids in promoting integration, a sense of belonging, and well-being for newcomer refugee students.

Keywords: students; refugees; newcomers; holistic; resilience; compassion; intercultural competence; settlement; integration; wellbeing; belonging.

Summary for Lay Audience

There are over 32 million refugees in the world, 41% of whom are children and youth under 18 eighteen years of age (UNHCR, 2022). Between 2015-2021, Canada welcomed over 200 000 refugees (Statistics Canada, 2022). My research focused on how Settlement workers in schools (SWIS) in Ontario, Canada identify newcomer refugee K-12 students' needs, the challenges SWIS experience, and the strategies they draw on to support newcomer refugee students. Settlement workers in schools identified newcomer refugee students had language learning, social, and psychological needs. The challenges SWIS experience include navigating their relationship with schools, resources, intercultural competence at schools, and professional development. The strategies they use to support newcomer refugee students are broadly categorized under individual, family, school, community, and societal supports. As such, SWIS support newcomer refugee students based on a holistic approach which includes promoting resilience at multiple levels and a compassion-based framework in schools. By collaborating with schools, SWIS play a key role in enhancing intercultural competence of school staff which aids in promoting integration, a sense of belonging, and well-being for newcomer refugee students.

Dedication

To Palestinian and Syrian refugees,

May this work bring a sense of hope and healing for you and all refugees worldwide.

May our humanity continue to honour your stories, your struggles, and your resilience.

Acknowledgements

I would like to first and foremost thank God for enabling me to take on this rigorous journey through motherhood, a global pandemic, and many other life circumstances. I would like to thank my family for their support, encouragement, prayers and patience. I would also like to acknowledge the support of my supervisor Dr. Katina Pollock, for her continuous guidance, support, and direction throughout this process. I also thank my committee member, Dr. Melody Viczko, for her valuable feedback and support as well as my colleagues and peers in the PhD program. I would like to also acknowledge my friends who supported and encouraged me in the process of my PhD journey. Finally, I'd like to thank my participants for sharing their stories with me.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

In my research, I engaged with Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS) to understand their support for newcomer refugee students in K-12 Ontario schools. As of 2022, the number of refugees worldwide was approximately 32.5 million, 41% of whom were children and youth under 18 eighteen years of age (UNHCR). Syria was the country of origin of the highest number of refugees worldwide, reaching an estimated 6.8 million people (UNHCR, 2022).

Between 2015-2021, Canada welcomed 218,430 refugees, with over 87,795 being Syrian (Statistics Canada, 2022). With UNHCR's (2022) estimate of children and youth at 41% of refugees worldwide, it is estimated that there are approximately 87,000 newcomer refugee children and youth in Canada. Therefore, with a substantial number of refugee students in schools, there is global interest in understanding how to support refugee children to adapt positively to their new environment, taking into consideration the challenges and trauma they may have experienced during their migration and resettlement journey (Pieloch, McCullough, & Marks, 2016). An equitable and inclusive education can increase refugee students' academic achievement, as well as contribute to social cohesion and economic competitiveness (Volante, Klinger, Siegel, & Bilgili, 2017).

An educational environment that is responsive to the needs of refugee students provides a safe space for them to heal after being in conflict regions (Tavares, 2012) and prepares them to transition from refugee to full citizenship and belonging (Taylor & Sidhu, 2012). A leading scholar on refugee education from Harvard University captures the importance of education to supporting refugee students: "Education is important to the life chances of individual refugees; to

the present stability of the nation-states in which they find exile; to the future reconstruction of the conflict-affected societies from which they fled; and to the economic and political security of an interconnected world polity" (Dryden-Peterson, 2016, p. 474). The impact of a responsive education to supporting newcomer refugee students has individual as well as collective implications on the stability of our societies, economically and politically.

To meet the multilayered needs of refugee students coming to Canada after experiences of conflict, multi-level partnerships across agencies must be built based on community engagement through cultivating trust (Ratkovic et al., 2017). One of these important partnerships is the SWIS initiative where community or settlement agencies partner with local schools to support newcomer students. The work of SWIS exists across Ontario and other provinces including British Columbia (Vancouver School Board, 2023), Saskatchewan (Settlement Workers in Schools Saskatchewan, 2018) and Alberta (Edmonton Immigrant Services Organization, 2019). In Ontario, the origins of the SWIS initiative stem from a partnership between the former Ottawa Board of Education and Ottawa Community Immigrant Services Organization to create the Multicultural Liaison Program in 1991. Since then, the program was quickly adapted by other communities in Ontario with high numbers of newcomer students and families, including London, Hamilton, Kitchener-Waterloo, Ottawa, Peel Region, and Toronto (Hildebrant, 2004).

Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) funds the SWIS initiative (Government of Canada, 2022). This funding is granted to local community or settlement agencies to hire SWIS in both elementary and secondary schools; thus, SWIS are not governed in terms of day-to-day operations by a single body across Ontario or Canada. While this allows SWIS to adapt their programming and service delivery according to local priorities, information about the work of SWIS across Canada is dispersed (Government of Canada, 2022).

In schools, SWIS provide orientation and a range of information for newcomer students and their families on education as well as referrals to community and family resources. They support newcomer families with advocating for their needs and facilitate culturally sensitive communication between school staff and newcomer students and their families. Also, they provide school staff with information and orientation pertaining to supporting newcomer students and their families (Cross Cultural Learner Center, 2018).

Research Questions

Some researchers argue that schools in Canada lack sufficient preparedness to manage the socio-psychological needs of refugee students as they enter the school system (Gagné, Shapka, & Law, 2012; Kovačević, 2016). Refugee students may be even more likely than immigrant students to experience academic challenges, in part due to the absence of trauma specific treatment and educators' lack of familiarity with refugee children's migration journeys and resettlement process (Ayoub & Zhou, 2016). As a result, it is necessary for educators to understand the difficult experiences refugees have faced and recognize any barriers to 'social inclusion' (Taylor & Sidhu, 2012).

Also, while the lack of cultural competency training is one concern for teachers (Ratkovic et al., 2017), there is another important concern. Since most Canadian teachers are typically middle class and Caucasian, they may not always have a full understanding of the experiences of refugee students' lives (Guo, Arthur, & Lund, 2009). This lack of familiarity may lead to potential negative attitudes towards students based on stereotypes and to marginalization of students (Kirova, 2019). These concerns in Canadian school systems reinforce the important role of SWIS to bridge the gap between schools and newcomer refugee students and their families.

While there are various educators and school staff members who support newcomer refugee students at schools, such as English Second Language teachers and social workers, SWIS play a critical role in supporting newcomer refugee students. However, the importance of their role is largely missing from recent literature and policy pertaining to supporting newcomer refugee students in schools. In practice, their role is also sometimes misunderstood and under-valued in schools, despite the importance of their work in enhancing school staff and educators' understanding of newcomer refugee students' experiences and needs. They also support students and their families with the resettlement process and connecting to school and community resources; thus, they are the important link between newcomer refugee students, the school, and the community.

Thus, my overall research question focused on "How do SWIS in Ontario support K-12 newcomer refugee students?" My three research sub-questions were:

1) How do SWIS identify the needs of newcomer refugee students?

2) What are the challenges SWIS experience in striving to support newcomer refugee students?

3) What are the strategies SWIS employ in striving to support newcomer refugee students?

In developing these research questions, I reflected on my positionality as a researcher who identifies as a Muslim, Arab-Canadian woman. I also considered my journey as a child of immigrant parents and my experiences as a newcomer student who has been through the Canadian public education system which prepared me to become an educator, community worker, and training professional on equity, diversity, and inclusion. This multi-layered,

intersectionality of identities led me to much introspection and reflexivity in my position as a doctoral researcher.

Positionality

While I was raised in Canada since I was a young child, I am personally connected to the Syrian refugee crisis through cultural roots and the ability to speak the Arabic language. Syria is one of the top three countries refugees have fled in recent years (UNHCR, 2019). Furthermore, my upbringing in Canada provides me with cultural capital, which is demonstrated through my understanding of the dominant culture in Canada and ability to use English proficiently, as a Native Speaker (Sullivan, 2001). I also recognize that I immigrated as a child with my parents to Canada, and experienced some of the challenges with the resettlement process, which may be common to both immigrant and refugee students (i.e. English language acquisition and feelings of belonging). While this enables me to personally connect and relate to the challenges of newcomer students, which I aimed to highlight in my study, I also distinguish that I did not come to Canada under refugee status. Thus, I cannot claim to fully understand the unique challenges and experiences of newcomer refugee students.

I entered the Canadian school system in an English-speaking public school as an English as a Second Language Student at seven years of age and completed my elementary, secondary, and post-secondary schooling in Canada; thus, I am familiar with some of the strengths and needs of the Canadian schooling system. My experience in the public school system as a newcomer ESL student equipped me as a researcher to develop suitable questions to uncover the strengths and needs of the schooling system through my research.

Moreover, I am a visible Muslim woman who has had to navigate my intersectionality as a

Canadian Muslim and the challenges associated, including micro-aggressions, stereotypes, racism, and Islamophobia. While I do not list these experiences from a victimized mindset, I acknowledge that these lived experiences provide me with the ability to relate and identify with the challenges of some newcomer and diverse students. My experiences have cultivated empathy and compassion for the challenges newcomer, diverse students and their families will experience and a passion to support them in cultivating a sense of belonging and empowerment. They have also enabled me to develop a sense of resilience and strength that I also wish to highlight in the journeys of newcomer and diverse students as they strive to fulfill their goals and aspirations. These experiences also led to my interest in drawing on a holistic framework which fosters resilience and compassion in my research exploring support for newcomer refugee students.

Professionally, I started my career as a community worker in a community health center serving under-privileged, diverse youth in schools and in the community, which enriched my experiences and perspectives on understanding how to support diverse populations. I am also an Ontario Certified Teacher who has taught internationally and completed some occasional teaching with a public-school board in Ontario. Additionally, I have served as a training professional on equity, diversity and inclusion with students, educators, leaders and community workers in Ontario. These experiences provided me with an interest in enhancing the educational experiences of newcomer and diverse students since I am familiar with some of the challenges they may encounter in the Canadian education system. I am also aware of the multiple priorities and demands placed upon educators and that while they may genuinely wish to help newcomer refugee students, competing demands along with limited time and resources do not always make it feasible to offer the support required on a regular basis.

After being a newcomer student myself, then transitioning into a practitioner working with

newcomer diverse communities or professionals through my roles as a community worker,

educator and trainer, I came to this work as a researcher. Being a doctoral researcher enabled me

to use research methods to understand at a deeper, more systemic level the needs of newcomer

refugee students and the strategies used to support them through SWIS' experiences. I used an

analytical approach where I collected and analyzed findings from the professionals who are

doing key work in supporting newcomer refugee students in schools. As outlined in the data

analysis, I presented the common themes that emerged from the experiences of SWIS throughout

the interviews. Overall, my positionality gave me the opportunity to examine my identity

critically as I approached my research on SWIS support for newcomer refugee students.

Significance of the Study

While Canada continues to have an aging population that is higher than the level of growth

and with the rise in world conflict, supporting newcomer refugee students will continue to be a

priority. The role of SWIS supporting refugee students will continue to be a priority in Canadian

schools as the surge of refugees in 2017, due to the conflict in Syria, is not a unique or isolated

event. Global trends in forced displacement indicate there are 37000 new displacements

everyday as a result of war and human rights infringements (UNHCR, 2018b). The number of

forcibly displaced people has nearly doubled since 2012 (UNHCR, 2018b), implying that the rate

of refugees is continuing to rise dramatically. In September 2021, Canada's Minister of

Citizenship and Immigration made a commitment to resettle 40,000 Afghan individuals due to

conflict in Afghanistan (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2021). Additionally,

climate change has contributed to the increasing number of forcibly displaced people, with 18.8

million people displaced due to natural disasters in 2017 (UNHCR, 2018c). Also, displacement

occurs when there are limited resources, including drinking water, and changing environmental

conditions and climates which impact crops and livestock negatively. These factors contribute to increased food insecurity which forces people to leave their homes in order to survive (UNHCR, 2018c). The increasing numbers of refugees arriving in Canada makes understanding the role of the SWIS increasingly critical.

This is particularly pertinent in Ontario, which is Canada's most populous and diverse province, and which attracts the largest proportion of newcomers to Canada. Ontario's population has reached over 14.1 million, which accounts for almost 40% of Canada's population (Statistics Canada, 2018a). In 2018, 139,071 people settled in Ontario, representing 46.2% of all newcomers to Canada, including immigrants and refugees (Statistics Canada, 2018a). Currently, Ontario is the most diverse province in Canada, and by 2036, it is estimated that newcomers will make up 68% of Ontario's population growth (Ontario Ministry of Finance, 2011). Nonetheless, although Ontario has an international reputation for prioritizing diversity and equity, up to 40% of racialized youth reported experiencing discrimination from peers (Kaufmann, 2021; Lewis et al., 2018). Therefore, it is important to understand how SWIS can best support newcomer refugee students.

While there is emerging research on the experiences, challenges, and practices of educators supporting newcomer refugee students, little literature is available in education on the role of SWIS, despite their support for newcomer refugee students. In schools, SWIS have direct contact with newcomer students and families on an individual basis as opposed to a classroom teacher who has over 25 students in each classroom or a principal who is overlooking hundreds of students. Thus, my research helps to further understanding of the importance of the role of SWIS by exploring their experiences of supporting newcomer refugee students. Also, with the significant rise of Syrian and Afghan refugees in Canada since 2016, there are increasing

challenges with connecting newcomer families to services and pressure on the education system to support newcomer refugee students.

When it comes to policy, Ontario's Ministry of Education launched the *Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* in 2009, which recognized the rapidly growing diverse demographic and the importance of policy development to meet the needs of our complex society (2009a). This provincial strategy aims to "realize the promise of diversity" by "support[ing] an education system where all students in our publicly funded schools have the opportunity to achieve their highest potential" by focusing on "equity and excellence" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009a, p. 1). Translating the strategy into practice recommends developing partnerships through "training, resources and other activities" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009b, p. 18).

The Ministry of Education (2009) issued Policy/Program Memorandum No. 119, titled "Developing and Implementing Equity and Inclusive Education Policies in Ontario Schools" to provide guidance for school boards to implement the strategy. This included asking school boards to review current community partnerships which support equity and inclusive education. These guiding principles of the strategy apply to the SWIS initiative, which is a school-community partnership to support refugee students in schools; however, SWIS initiatives are an under-researched area that needs further exploration. Thus, understanding how to support newcomer refugee students, through the lens of SWIS who work closely to support their transition, is an important part of meeting provincial goals for an equitable and inclusive education.

Moreover, *Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* specifically highlights the importance of meeting Canada's values of human rights, social justice, and inclusion by fostering 'high levels of student achievement' for minoritized and vulnerable groups including newcomers (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009a). It also stresses the importance of "Ontario being a global leader in building and sustaining an equitable and inclusive education system" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009a, p.1). Scholars have argued that an equitable and inclusive education is instrumental for social cohesiveness and a strong economy (Volante et al., 2017). Also, one of the guiding principles of this strategy is to engage with the greater community as well as to develop and improve past and current initiatives (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009b). Thus, this strategy encourages the involvement of parents in their children's education and the removal of any barriers which can limit engagement (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009b). Arguably, the role of SWIS which support newcomer families and their children is an important one to further explore the engagement of newcomer parents with children in public schools.

Thesis Outline

In Chapter 1, I outline the introduction to the study and the focus of my research on how SWIS support newcomer refugee students in K-12 schools in Ontario, Canada. I explain the main research question and three sub-questions I used to guide my study and discuss my positionality. I also demonstrate the significance of the study given global, national, and provincial trends in forced displacement and refugees' arrival to Canada, as well as the emphasis on equity and inclusion in provincial educational policies. In Chapter 2, I lay a foundation of literature on SWIS supporting newcomer refugee students by first including important definitions related to newcomers and refugees. Next, I explain the role of SWIS and, since SWIS work with newcomer

refugee students in schools to support their resettlement, I provide a review of newcomer refugee students' needs and the challenges professionals, such as educators and SWIS, experience with supporting newcomer refugee students.

In Chapter 3, I outline the conceptual framework I drew on, the "Holistic Framework for Supporting Newcomer Refugee Students" which includes fostering resilience to describe how SWIS support newcomer refugee students at an individual, family, school, community, and society level. At the school level, I draw specifically on a compassion-based approach which details how SWIS work with school leaders to shape a safe and caring school culture, and their work with educators to support effective teaching and learning, as well as offer professional development. In Chapter 4, I describe the interpretivist approach I used to conduct a qualitative study. I describe my data collection method of semi-structured interviews. I explain sample size, selection, and recruitment of participants as well as data analysis and trustworthiness.

In Chapter 5, I report on my findings from the first research question on how SWIS identify the needs of newcomer refugee students which I broadly identified as language learning, social and psychological needs. In Chapter 6, I include the findings from the second research question on the challenges SWIS experience in supporting newcomer refugee students in schools which included their relationship with schools, navigating resources, intercultural competence at schools, and professional development. In Chapter 7, I describe the strategies SWIS drew on to support newcomer refugee students at multiple levels which I categorized according to individual, family, school, community and societal levels.

In Chapter 8, I present a discussion of my characterization of the unique role of SWIS as "Compassionate Connectors". I identified five key areas SWIS demonstrate in their role related

to supporting newcomer refugee students. It is through collaboration with schools that SWIS play a key role in enhancing intercultural competence for school staff, which promotes the integration, sense of belonging, and well-being of newcomer refugee students. In Chapter 9, I outline contributions of my research to theory, practice and policy. This includes the importance of a holistic framework that draws on fostering resilience for newcomer refugee students at multiple levels and a compassion-based approach in schools which draws on working with school leadership and educators to shape a caring and inclusive school culture and effective teaching and learning. In practice, developing and sharing an online, centralized registry of services which SWIS can refer newcomer students and their families to is discussed. In policy, I explain reviewing school-community partnerships and developing policies which specifically target newcomer refugee students can enhance the effectiveness of SWIS' role in Ontario.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this literature review, I highlight the role of SWIS and their support for newcomer refugee students. In order to fully understand the scope of SWIS work and to provide links to literature on the research questions that guided my interviews with participants, I discuss some of the needs and challenges of newcomer refugee students which include language learning, social integration, a sense of belonging, well-being, and barriers to accessing services. Next, I describe some of the challenges schools encounter in supporting newcomer refugee students including integration, intercultural competence, school staff well-being, challenges with SWIS, and policy.

In my thesis, I refer to a variety of terms used in literature and by my study participants to describe newcomer refugees. I begin by providing definitions of these terms in order provide context for my study.

i) Forcibly displaced persons are "those who are forced to move, within or across borders, due to armed conflict, persecution, terrorism, human rights violations and abuses, violence, the adverse effects of climate change, natural disasters, development projects or a combination of these factors" (United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 2018, para. 5).

For my study, I was specifically interested in how SWIS support newcomer refugee students as a subset of forcibly displaced persons. I use the 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees that the Canadian law is based on, and is generally agreed on internationally, as the definition of refugee for my study (Canadian Council for Refugees, 2019):

ii) A refugee is "someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion" (UNHCR, 2020b, para. 4).

Therefore, the main difference between a forcibly displaced person and a refugee is that while the former may be displaced within or across their country's borders, refugees are unable to currently return to their country of origin due to safety reasons. There are three main categories of refugees I refer to in the thesis based on my study participants' accounts of their experiences with newcomer refugee families:

a) "Government assisted refugees" (GAR) are "refugees referred to Canada for resettlement by the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) or another referral organization. Individuals cannot apply directly" (Government of Canada, 2019, para. 1).

b) "The Private Sponsorship of Refugees (PSR) program allows Canadians to resettle specific individuals or families who qualify as refugees under Canada's refugee and humanitarian program" (UNHCR, 2022, para. 2).

c) A "Convention refugee" is a: "person who, by reason of a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion,

(a) is outside each of their countries of nationality and is unable or, by reason of that fear, unwilling to avail them self of the protection of each of those countries; or

(b) not having a country of nationality, is outside the country of their former

habitual residence and is unable or, by reason of that fear, unwilling to return to that

country". (Government of Canada, 2022b, para. 3).

Since my study is specifically about supporting newcomer refugee students, I also define the term 'newcomer' in literature, in policy, and in practice:

iii) Newcomer: refers to both refugees and immigrants who have recently arrived to Canada (Mulholland & Biles, 2004), usually within the last five years (Canadian Commission for UNESCO, 2019).

While SWIS serve all newcomers, including both immigrants and refugees, these are two distinct groups. Thus, I define immigrants below:

iv) Immigrant: refers to "those who are landed in Canada according to the rules or regulations governing immigration to Canada" (Mulholland & Biles, 2004, p.5). They have also "been granted the right to live in Canada permanently by immigration authorities" (Statistics Canada, 2018b, para. 1).

On the other hand, as already cited, refugees were forced to flee for safety reasons and are technically defined as "those individuals acknowledged as Geneva Convention refugees" (Mulholland & Biles, 2004, p. 5). For the purposes of this study, I mainly use the term "newcomer refugee students" when referring to my work on supporting K-12 refugee students who have resettled in Canada since I will be examining this issue from the perspective of SWIS who work to support newcomer students in Canada.

One other term which was referenced by the study participants was:

vi) A person of colour: "a person who is not white or of European parentage" (Stevenson & Lindberg, 2010).

After having laid the foundation of important terminology used throughout my thesis to refer to newcomer refugee students and SWIS from diverse backgrounds, I proceed with describing the work of SWIS in supporting newcomer refugee students.

Settlement Workers in Schools

Due to the large wave of Syrian refugees that arrived in Canada in 2016, the importance of the role of SWIS started to re-emerge, in order to support the resettlement of newcomer refugee students (Kirova, 2019). In some cases, SWIS may be referred to as "cultural support workers, community liaison personnel, and cultural brokers" (Kirova, 2019, p.8). While there are school staff such as educators, including English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers, and social workers who support newcomer refugee students in the school system, SWIS play a critical role. Yet, at the time of conducting this study, the scarcity of education literature in a Canadian context on SWIS implies that their role may be under-valued and not sufficiently understood. In some earlier literature based in the U.S, it is reported that paraprofessionals, such as instructional aides or teaching assistants, whose role was traditionally intended to prepare materials for teachers and support with lunchroom supervision, evolved to a type of 'cultural broker' and liaison role (Lewis, 2004). To support teachers with bridging the gap in language and intercultural communication between school and families, instructional aides, specifically from minority communities which reflect student populations including the Black and Latino community, were recruited (Lewis, 2004). Yet, researchers argue that though instructional aides

were expected to act as cultural brokers and liaisons between school and families, their training

does not prepare them to fulfill this role (Rueda & Deneve, 1999).

Thus, beyond the role of paraprofessionals such as instructional aides and educational

assistants, the role of SWIS in supporting newcomer refugee students and their families is a

unique role that warrants further understanding. While at the time of conducting this research

with participants in 2020, there was no formal evaluation about the role of SWIS, in February

2022, Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) published a report on the

"Evaluation of the Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS) Initiative" (Government of Canada).

This was IRCC's first formal "evidentiary examination of SWIS outcomes....[with a] primary

focus to assess the design, implementation and effectiveness of SWIS, including how SWIS

[work] is delivered across regions (e.g., activity types, delivery models)" (IRCC, 2022, p.4). The

evaluation demonstrated a clear need for SWIS work as they deliver school-based settlement

services to newcomer youth and their families, which are fundamental to supporting their

integration into the education system and broader Canadian society (IRCC, 2022).

As previously cited, some school districts in Ontario, British Columbia, Saskatchewan, and

Alberta have SWIS initiatives which support the positive adaptation and integration of refugee

students and families at both the elementary and secondary level (Yohani, 2013). Immigration,

Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) grants funding to community or settlement agencies

to hire SWIS. Thus, the work of SWIS is led by a steering committee which includes

representatives from IRCC, the school board, and each of the community or settlement

organizations which hire SWIS. There are guidelines which define the SWIS role and a referral

process to SWIS; however, IRCC does not require funding recipients, which are settlement

agencies hiring SWIS in this case, to have agreements with the school boards they serve (IRCC, 2022).

The role of SWIS is to provide information, orientation and referrals for newcomer students and their families on schools, education, and community resources and services; enable newcomer families to advocate for their needs; facilitate constructive and culturally sensitive communication; and provide information and orientation to school staff pertaining to supporting newcomer families (Cross Cultural Learner Center, 2018). Typically, SWIS have qualifications in social work or community development and may be proficient in more than one language (Yohani, 2013). Also, in some cases, they offer a life skills class or after school culture club for newcomer students, which contributes to newcomer students' positive adaptation through providing them with an opportunity to expand their social networks, as well as enhance their confidence and positive decision-making skills (Yohani, 2013). Moreover, SWIS are essential in acknowledging the possibility of post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, and depression in newcomer students and their families and the need to offer culturally sensitive mental health services (Yohani, 2013). In cases of parent-child and family-school conflict, SWIS also take on the role of mediators and advocates by speaking on behalf of and supporting newcomer refugee families and students with skill development to self-advocate with regards to students' assessment and appropriate placement (Yohani, 2013; Howland et al. 2006; Martinez-Cosio & Iannacone 2007).

Moreover, SWIS fulfill the important role of recognizing and communicating to teachers the underlying cultural and historical background of students. Canadian teachers with limited intercultural training (Ratkovic, et. al, 2017; Yohani, 2013) benefit from the understanding that SWIS can bring to the academic or behavioural difficulties some of their newcomer students may

experience. While SWIS arguably have a pivotal role in supporting the positive adaptation of refugee students, due to limited literature available on their role, I sought their participation in my study. In order to fully understand the scope of SWIS' work with newcomer refugee students, I review the challenges and needs of newcomer refugee students and the challenges educators and SWIS experience in their support for students.

Understanding the Needs and Challenges of Refugee Students

Since SWIS are tasked with working to support newcomer refugee students, it is important to understand the challenges refugee students experience. Until recently, literature on migration has not paid sufficient attention to forced migration, thereby undermining the distinct experience of refugees (Pinson & Arnot, 2007). Consequently, the particular needs of refugee students are not always sufficiently recognized by education policy-makers (Taylor & Sidhu, 2012; Ratkovic et al., 2017). Policies and organizational approaches often lack guidance to address the "significant educational disadvantages confronting refugee youth… and that the discursive invisibility of refugees in policy and research has worked against their cultural, social and economic integration" (Taylor & Sidhu, 2012, p. 4). Therefore, it is important to specifically reflect the unique experiences and challenges in refugee students in policy in order to facilitate their integration in Canada.

A review of research on supporting refugee students in Canada over the past 20 years broadly characterizes the needs of refugee students as language learning, social integration and a sense of belonging, and well-being (Ratkovic et al., 2017; Taylor & Sidhu, 2012). Barriers to accessing services (Shields & Lujan, 2019) is also an important challenge which further demonstrates the importance of SWIS to support newcomer students with accessing services. I

use the categories of i) language learning, ii) social integration, iii) sense of belonging, iv) well-being, and v) barriers to accessing services to provide further detail on each of these challenges newcomer refugee students encounter in Ontario.

Language Learning

With the current wave of refugees entering Ontario coming largely from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, including Syria, Afghanistan, and South Sudan (UNCHR, 2018) where English is not a first language, newcomer refugee students need to acquire the English language first. They are therefore considered English as a Second Language (ESL) students or English Language Learners (ELL). The Ontario's Ministry of Education (2008) defines English language learners as:

> Students in provincially funded English language schools whose first language is a language other than English, or is a variety of English that is significantly different from the variety used for instruction in Ontario's schools, and who may require focused educational supports to assist them in attaining proficiency in English (p. 5).

The Ontario Ministry of Education (2008) also recognizes "Newcomers from other countries" as one of the groups which make up English Language Learners, and defines them as:

> Children who have arrived in Canada as a result of a war or other crisis in their home country, and who may have left their homeland under conditions of extreme urgency. These children have often suffered traumatic experiences, and may also be separated from family members. They may have been in transit for a number of years, or may not have had access to formal education in their home country or while in transit (p. 5).

Recent newcomer students who are English as a Second Language (ESL) learners encounter more academic challenges than other students (Dei, James, Karumanchery, James-Wilson, & Zine, 2000). Acquiring a strong grasp of the language supports students with their social, academic, and economic success and is linked to a lower rate of experiencing prejudice (Li & Que, 2020). Newcomer students report the need for formal education to learn English as well as the time to practice in non-academic spaces (Lewis et al., 2018). Also, newcomer youth report the grade and language level they are placed in do not always accurately represent their abilities (Creese et al., 2011; Rossiter et al., 2015). If the youth are placed in a grade and language level that is beyond their abilities, it may lead to lack of engagement and feelings of anxiety. Alternatively, if they are placed in a grade and language level that is below their abilities, it can lead to a lack of motivation and pose a concern for completing secondary school in a timely manner since secondary education is free only until age 19−21 (Creese et al., 2011; Godin et al., 2017). Language learning is therefore a key skill that refugee students must acquire, as it can impact their academic success as well as social integration in schools.

Social Integration

It is important to focus on social integration of newcomer children and youth in order to increasingly support their success in schools as well as their transition to citizenship and leadership roles in the future (Kaufmann, 2021). While there are a variety of definitions of integration, in my thesis I refer to the definition of integration in Canada as newcomers being "encouraged to maintain their culture while forming personal and professional relationships with other cultural groups" (Kaufmann, 2021, p. 2). Integration can increase the likelihood of well-being for newcomers and social cohesion for newcomers and the host country (Berry et al., 2006; Hou et al., 2016).

However, despite Canada's focus on integration, there is an argument that "*assimilation*, in which immigrants are expected to adapt to mainstream Canadian culture" (Kaufmann, 2021, p. 2) often dominates over integration (Hebert, 2016; Naffi, 2017). Assimilation does not promote the appreciation of diversity and may lead to the exclusion of newcomers who do not fit the 'Caucasian Anglo-Saxon' norms that may often be linked with the notion of being a 'Canadian' (Ari, 2019; p. 74). Newcomer students report the pressure to assimilate is linked with "frustration, low-self-esteem, loss of pride in their own cultural heritage" (Makarova & Birman, 2016, p. 8). On the other hand, the opportunity to maintain one's culture, through participating in faith, cultural, or community groups, is linked to promoting well-being and resilience which will be further discussed in a forthcoming section (Creese et al., 2011).

The discussion on assimilation versus integration is an important component of a greater discourse on multiculturalism, diversity, and plurality in the Canadian context. While some researchers may imply a dichotomy between newcomers and born, settled or established Canadians, contemporary researchers recognize the need to navigate the complexity of living in our Canadian context's rich ethnocultural and pluralistic nature (Carignan, Springer, Deraîche & Guillot, 2022). For example, navigating this complexity includes recognizing and working towards truth and reconciliation for Indigenous peoples, engaging in ongoing efforts to counteract prejudice and discrimination, and supporting newcomers and minorities with integration (Carignan et al., 2022).

Supporting newcomer refugee students with integration can be promoted through socialization and building friendships with peers at school to learn about different cultures (Rossiter et al., 2015). While there may be benefits to friendships with peers at school, such as an increase in a sense of belonging and confidence in adapting to a new culture, acquiring the

language more swiftly, and understanding the school system, there are also challenges (Kaufmann, 2021). Intercultural friendships can have concerns related to different cultural values, interests, language barrier, and prejudicial attitudes (Cheyne-Hazineh, 2020). Refugee youth in particular report challenges with developing friendships with students who are not refugees due to social exclusion and discrimination (Li, Que, 2020; Nakeyar et al., 2017). Experiencing exclusion and discrimination can act as a barrier towards fostering a sense of belonging for newcomer refugee students.

Sense of Belonging

A sense of belonging is an important recurring theme in supporting newcomer refugee students, and for the purpose of my thesis, is broadly defined as "the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported in the school social environment" (Ma, 2003). In particular, a sense of belonging promotes newcomer refugee students' positive adaptation and school engagement (Pieloch et al., 2016). Also, refugee students' well-being is connected to their level of social cohesion (Correa-Velez, Gifford & Barnett, 2010), and sense of belonging, which is one of the most important elements in building resilience (Edge, Newbold, & McKeary, 2014). Therefore, fostering a sense of belonging is central to supporting newcomer refugee students with developing increased positive adaptation, school engagement, well-being and resilience.

While there is a focus in some literature on the efforts of newcomer youth to establish a sense of belonging, more 'settled Canadians' such as peers, teachers, and members of the wider community, also play an important part in promoting a sense of belonging by being supportive, accepting, and inclusive of newcomer youth (Kaufmann, 2021). Newcomer refugee students

attending schools with a high rate of cultural diversity contributed to a greater sense of stability, belonging, and mental health (Nathoo, 2017; Scott, 2013). On the other hand, racism, discrimination, and bullying contribute to a lack of belonging by newcomer youth (Nakeyar et al., 2017). Moreover, newcomer refugee youth may experience additional challenges, such as Islamophobia and other types of discrimination (Banks, 2008).

Discrimination can occur based on "ethnicity, race, nationality or region of origin, language, immigration status, religion, non-Western names, residence in low-income neighbourhoods, and socioeconomic status" (Kaufmann, 2021, p. 57). Refugee students may be prone to experiencing increased discrimination due to more limited language ability and a higher rate of identifying as racialized or visibly Muslim (Cheyne-Hazineh, 2020). While not all refugee students will experience discrimination, it is common with up to 40% of racialized youth reporting experiencing discrimination from peers (Kaufmann, 2021; Lewis et al., 2018). Experiencing discrimination acts as a roadblock to promoting integration (Lewis et al., 2018), leads to isolation and behavioural challenges (Cohen, 2016), lowers academic success (Nathoo, 2017), and lowers rates of entering the workforce (Nunes et al.,2018). Discrimination can also impact the important phase of identity formation youth are in (Li et al., 2017) and impact their aspirations for the future (Stewart et al., 2017), and well-being.

Thus, building a sense of belonging requires an effort from both the students and the wider community. A sense of belonging is instrumental for newcomer students' engagement and social cohesion in school. Encountering discrimination in its various forms can lead to many negative consequences for refugee students including a feeling of isolation, lowered academic and economic success, and a reduced sense of well-being.

Well-Being

While there are varying definitions of well-being in literature, I use the following

definition based on the *Province of Ontario's Well-Being Strategy for Education* (2016): "Well-

being is a positive sense of self, spirit and belonging that we feel when our cognitive, emotional,

social and physical needs are being met" (p. 2). Specifically, this strategy cites the importance of

"positive mental health" which will be the focus of this section. While newcomer refugee youth

come with an overwhelming sense of resilience, there are great challenges to the well-being of

newcomer refugee students contingent on their migration journeys (Marshall et al., 2016).

Some of the disadvantages confronting refugee students include experiencing trauma, not

just as a single event, but as a recurring event resulting in "chronic trauma," in the form of

separation from family, death of loved ones, and exposure to violence, including torture and

sexual abuse (Vongkhamphra, Davis, & Adem, 2011; De Deckker, 2018). Many recent refugees

experienced "triple trauma as a result of forced migration, having experienced trauma in their

country of origin, during transition, and again upon resettlement in Canada" (Stewart, El Chaar,

McCluskey, & Borgardt, 2019). Trauma is linked to adverse childhood experiences (Felitti,

2009). An important study on this topic indicated that up to two-thirds of children in the U.S. are

exposed to adverse childhood experiences (Felitti, 2009). Some studies have identified "long-

term relationships between these experiences and a wide array of adult medical issues"

(Wolpow, Hertel, Johnson, & Kincaid, 2016, p. 2). These adverse childhood experiences include

abuse, neglect, and loss of a parent due to death or incarceration (Felitti, 2009). Exposure to

trauma and adverse childhood experiences has been shown to contribute to impaired

neurodevelopment; social and emotional challenges including behavioural difficulties in school

which exposes students to more disciplinary measures; academic challenges which include

language development, poor scores on standardized tests, failing a grade, and being diagnosed with special needs; exhibiting unhealthy behaviours; and an increase in disease and early death (Felitti, 2009; Wolpow et al., 2016; Delaney-Black, Covington, Ondersma, Nordstrom-Klee, Templin, Ager, & Sokol, 2002).

Refugee students who have experienced trauma may become more vulnerable to not only school disengagement, but also unsafe sexual practices, drug use, suicidal thoughts (Allard & Santoro, 2008), and criminal behaviour (Rossiter & Rossiter, 2009). DeDecker (2018) claims that much of the literature on the effect of trauma on children does not pay sufficient attention to the specific context of refugee students with trauma. For example, in addition to the damaging childhood experiences identified in the adverse childhood experiences study which could lead to trauma, refugee students' pre-migration experiences may have included residing in conflict zones or refugee camps where securing basic needs may have been very challenging (Ayoub & Zhou, 2106). It is common for refugees to spend five to ten years in a refugee camp where children may have had no, or uninterrupted, access to education, which can consequently have detrimental implications on educational and academic success of refugee students (Van der Stouwe & Oh, 2008).

Therefore, caring for the well-being of refugee students is one of the needs that must be taken into consideration when discussing how to support these students as they settle and integrate into Canadian society. This is particularly important for refugee students because of the higher likelihood that they have experience trauma, which can have long term negative impacts on their academic achievement, economic success, and health. An important part of supporting the well-being of newcomer refugee students entails addressing barriers to accessing services.

Barriers to Accessing Services

The role of SWIS becomes even more paramount as they connect newcomer refugee students to services in the community. However, a lack of diverse representation among service providers, educators, settlement workers, and lack of linguistically and culturally appropriate services, especially in mental health support and healthcare (Shields & Lujan, 2019; Cheyne-Hazineh, 2020; Marshall et al., 2016) can create a barrier for newcomer refugee students to access services. In their review of current Canadian settlement services, Shields and Lujan (2019) report that newcomer students "often felt misunderstood or judged by service providers in settlement, social and health services due to ethnocultural differences" (as cited in Kaufmann, 2021, p. 56).

Newcomer refugee students may also have challenges with accessing services in an organized and systematic way due to financial or practical constraints, such as unfamiliarity with services, lack of time and transportation (Kaufmann, 2021). For example, the lack of accessible and convenient transportation in particular, was a major barrier for newcomer refugee youth, which impacted their ability to participate in extracurricular activities, as well as the choice of school they attend (Li & Que, 2017). Youth were unable to attend schools further from home, even if those schools had better services to support newcomer students (Li & Que, 2017).

As such, the lack of diversity and cultural awareness among service providers, financial limitations, and access to transportation, represent barriers for refugee students to access services in their community. Addressing these barriers to accessing services is another important consideration in the discussion of how schools support refugee students.

Challenges for Schools Supporting Refugee Students

Newcomer refugee students enter Canadian schools with both an incredible amount of resilience given their difficult migration journeys, as well as a variety of needs related to language learning, social integration, a sense of belonging, well-being and accessing services. Since SWIS are situated in schools to support newcomer refugee students, an understanding of the challenges that schools experience in supporting newcomer refugee students is important. I have categorized these challenges under: i) Supporting Integration ii) Intercultural Competence, iii) School Staff Well-Being, iv) Challenges with SWIS, and v) Policy.

Supporting Integration

A meta-analysis of literature on integration in Ontario school policies found that schools are the "primary institution to integrate" youth and have a "responsibility to promote inclusivity" (Cohen, 2016, p. 25). Schools are largely considered one of the most important settings for newcomer students' integration as they provide an opportunity for language learning and socialization with peers (Pritchard & Ramos, 2018), familiarity with Canadian culture (Marshall et al., 2016), relationship building with mentors (Gallucci, 2016), and upon completion of secondary education, an opportunity to pursue employment or further education (Cheyne-Hazineh, 2020).

The responsibility of integration cannot fall solely on the shoulders of newcomer communities (Hebert, 2016; Rossiter et al., 2015; Shields et al., 2016). Newcomer communities should not be blamed when they "fail to integrate" (Shields, 2016, p. 12). Kaufmann (2021) adds to this important argument by stating integration must be a "bi-directional cultural exchange [which includes] the formation of intercultural social relationships and requires sociocultural

adaptation from both settled and newcomer communities" (p. 52). Thus, the process of integration is a process that necessitates the involvement of both newcomers and their host or settled communities, which in this case are Canadian schools and community settlement agencies supporting schools with newcomer refugee students. Yet, "psychological isolation at school and discriminatory attitudes from some teachers place refugee students' self-esteem, social competence, and academic achievements at risk, hindering the student's social, economic, and political integration in the receiving society" (Ratkovic et al., 2017, p. 3). Therefore, instead of offering protective factors, which support students in the face of challenges, school experiences can contribute to worse mental health challenges for newcomer refugee students (Rossiter & Rossiter, 2009).

Integration is dependent upon collaboration between schools, newcomer refugee students and their families, and settlement and community organizations (Stewart et al., 2019). The role of SWIS is instrumental to supporting partnerships between schools, newcomer students, and community organizations (Stewart et al., 2019), and in particular, with supporting intercultural competence of school staff and community organizations.

Intercultural Competence

A Pan-Canadian research report examining literature and policy from 2007-2017 on support for refugee students states that schools and policy makers continue to lack intercultural competence and a focus on social justice and transformative leadership (Ratkovic et al., 2017). Developing intercultural competence is instrumental in order to address the challenge of discrimination against newcomer refugee students (Theoharis, 2008; Gallucci, 2016; Cohen, 2016). Intercultural competence was also a particularly important challenge reported by the study

participants, which I elaborate on by providing related definitions below, including prejudice, microaggression, and racism, which are all related to experiencing discrimination as a result of the lack of intercultural competence.

i) Intercultural competence is defined as:

a set of knowledge, feelings, and skills that enable a person to communicate, work and function effectively in pluralistic contexts. It involves increasing one's own sensitivity about differences in values, beliefs, and behaviours, and developing skills to determine the most appropriate practices and behaviour to communicate and work effectively and respectfully across cultures (Cross Cultural Learner Center, 2018).

ii) Prejudice is defined as:

preconceived opinion or bias, against or in favour of, a person or thing ... it is characterized by stereotyped beliefs that are not tested against reality, but rather have to do with a person's own feelings and attitudes.… It may be felt or expressed. It may be directed toward a group as a whole, or toward an individual member of that group (Oxford University Press, Dictionary of Psychology 4th ed., 2010).

iii) Microaggressions are defined as:

Subtle insults and small psychological dismissals, found in everyday exchanges, which send denigrating messages to individuals based on their membership in some group that is stereotyped or dismissed based on racism, sexism, ageism and

other 'isms' that are the focus of attention of anti-discrimination law. (Australian

Law Dictionary, 2018).

iv) Racism is defined as:

the ideology and practice of discriminating against someone on the basis of their

race or their ethnic group. Typically, it is based on categorizing people according to

physical attributes such as skin colour, and ascribing negative characteristics to

some categories. These characteristics are then used to justify the unequal treatment

of people who fall into particular racial categories. Racism is normally perpetrated

by a dominant racial/ethnic group over a racial/ethnic minority group. (Heery &

Noon, 2017).

A study of pre-service teachers reported that many teachers do not feel well equipped in

supporting diverse students and are in need of additional training to effectively support

newcomer refugee students (Nathoo, 2017). As a result, refugee students may be at a higher risk

of experiencing academic challenges, in part due to untreated trauma they have experienced and

educators' lack of familiarity with their refugee students' experiences and needs which include a

multi-layered process of integration (Ayoub & Zhou, 2016). As such, Taylor and Sidhu (2012)

emphasize the need for educators to understand the challenging experiences many refugees have

encountered and recognize any potential obstacles to "social inclusion." In addition to concerns

with intercultural competence of teachers, some researchers suggest that some principals may

lack preparation to lead for diversity (Young, Madsen, & Young, 2010). Thus, there is an

argument for the need for educational leaders to develop particular skills and behaviours to

prepare them to navigate challenges when leading for diversity (Tuters & Portelli, 2017). Thus,

the role of SWIS becomes more pertinent to school staff with developing intercultural competence in order to facilitate more effective supports for newcomer refugee students.

Challenges with intercultural competence may also stem from systemic barriers in place which disadvantage minority students: "educational systems have disadvantaged ethnic minority learners with multiple inequalities through institutionalized patterns of norms and routines, manifestation of (dominant) national narratives in structural educational patterns, and segregation and institutional discrimination" (Ngo, 2012, p. 220). There are concerns related to Eurocentric curricula lacking in cultural responsivity and a lack of cultural diversity of administration and staff in Canadian schools, (Egbo, 2009) which can also contribute to a lack of intercultural competence.

School Staff Well-Being

While newcomer refugee students come with a variety of needs related to well-being and common experience of trauma, some educators feared the impact on their own personal well-being in the form of becoming over-invested emotionally and suffering vicarious trauma, due to the lack of training and support they receive (Alisic, Bus, Dulack, Pennings, and Splinter, 2012). Therefore, while educators may genuinely wish to support refugee students, it is suggested that some did not feel prepared or comfortable to support refugee students in managing emotional distress (Szente, Hoot, & Taylor, 2006). The lack of training Canadian teachers generally receive on how to adapt their teaching to the unique needs of diverse refugee students is also cited as a cause (Rossiter & Rossiter, 2009; Ratkovic et al., 2017).

Also, with greater pressures on principals, researchers have started to increasingly consider principal's well-being (Wang, Pollock, & Hauseman, 2018). It is reported that principals

experience feelings of helplessness and self-doubt which demonstrates the need for principals to

model self-care (McAdams & Foster, 2008). Therefore, I argue that frameworks, such as the

resilience and compassion-based framework, which consider well-being for students and by

extension for staff by encouraging professional development on topics related to social-

emotional learning and mindfulness (Lavelle et al., 2017), become increasingly important to

consider.

Challenges With SWIS

As previously noted, there is little research that discusses the importance of SWIS work to

support newcomer refugee students. While there are many benefits to SWIS working in schools

to support newcomer refugee students, there are also challenges. The roles of educators versus

SWIS and different views on school policy and practice are not always clear (Yohani, 2013). For

example, if a SWIS was asked to supervise a student's in-school suspension, it compromised the

important trust and relationship SWIS built with the student through other services they provide,

such as after-school programs (Yohani, 2013). Also, SWIS reported feeling restricted by

institutional policies which may prevent them from visiting family homes (Amatea and West-

Olatunji, 2007).

Moreover, if SWIS were hired by the school in other jurisdictions, as opposed to a

settlement agency, they also reported feeling conflicted if the school's goals were in conflict with

the family's goals due to the advocacy support they usually provide for families (Martinez-Cosio

and Iannacone, 2007). Therefore, while SWIS may be expected to be neutral when supporting

communication between families and schools, they can find this to be a challenge if school

policies are not promoting equity for newcomer students (Martinez-Cosio and Iannacone, 2007).

A recommendation was presented to draft an agreement between schools and SWIS to ensure clarity on roles and expectations (Yohani, 2013). Such an agreement could allow SWIS to carry out their work with more clarity and serve newcomer families more effectively. Yet, as mentioned previously, the IRCC does not require the settlement or community agencies receiving funding to hire SWIS to have agreements with the school districts they serve. While this can allow for some flexibility in SWIS offering support which meets specific needs of particular schools or geographical regions within a school district, it can lead to challenges for "reporting on initiative outcomes, comparing different service providers, and understanding what SWIS interventions work best for whom, and under what conditions" (IRCC, 2022, p.4).

As such, among the recommendations the IRCC's "Evaluation of the Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS) Initiative" identified to address challenges related to the work of SWIS were:

1) "IRCC should confirm and implement a common definition of SWIS with core services/activities supported by clear policy/guidelines" (IRCC, 2022, p.4).

2) "IRCC should: Develop and implement a strategy to clearly capture the core SWIS activities and services and Service Provider Organizations delivering them" (IRCC, 2022, p.4).

3) "IRCC should: Explore SWIS policy changes to ensure more standardized information sharing with IRCC on SWIS clients and activities" (IRCC, 2022,p.4).

These recommendations can help overcome some of the challenges SWIS currently experience on the clarity of their role, by confirming a common definition of SWIS work which is supported by clear policies and guidelines. A strategy to capture the work of SWIS and policies to ensure

information sharing with IRCC can enhance understanding of the SWIS role. A review of federal and provincial policies which considers equitable outcomes for newcomer families would also further support SWIS work with newcomer families as outlined below.

Policy

Ratkovic and colleagues' (2017) pan-Canadian educational policy review indicates that there are disparities in provincial policies specifically for "supporting refugee students' education, resettlement, and well-being through the school system" (p. 19). Yet, they state that since 2015, the three most relevant resources were issued from Ontario, Manitoba, and British Columbia (Ratkovic et al., 2017). The provincial documents contain specific instructional strategies for teachers, reference to research on refugee students, descriptions of the experiences of students coming from post-conflict contexts, and a call for educators to develop partnerships between families, schools, and service providers (which may include community agencies) to support the positive adaptation of refugee students more effectively. As cited, the SWIS initiative is an important partnership between newcomer families, schools, and service providers to support the resettlement of newcomer refugee students. As such, further understanding of the SWIS initiative is important to developing effective policies for supporting newcomer refugee students.

Developing effective policies can be informed by Macnevin's (2011) review of policy documents connected to refugee students in Canada. Six common themes were identified in supporting newcomer refugee students in policies: "welcoming new students into the classroom; adapting and modifying programs; teaching the whole student; transitions; reporting and grading students; and communicating with parents" (p. 68). The work of SWIS is specifically connected

to supporting with teaching the whole student by helping educators with understanding the social and psychological needs of newcomer refugee students, as well as communicating with parents. Therefore, an increased understanding of the role of SWIS can inform policy to sufficiently support newcomer refugee students in Ontario.

Chapter 3: Conceptual Framework

In the course of my research, I examined different conceptual approaches which acknowledge the impact of trauma on newcomer refugee students. I explored Lavelle and colleagues' (2017) *Compassion-Based Approach* and Pieloch and colleagues' review of *Resilience research with refugee children* from 2006-2016 in Australia, Canada, Europe and the United States. To reflect holistic support for newcomer refugee students, which reaches beyond only meeting second language learning needs, I merged both the compassion-based framework (Lavelle, 2017) and resilience research on refugees (Pieloch et al., 2016) in my conceptual framework of supporting refugee students in Ontario. Thus, the conceptual framework is titled "*Holistic Framework for Supporting Newcomer Refugee Students*". I merged both approaches because the compassion-based framework describes elements pertinent to supporting students specifically in schools. However, the role of SWIS reached beyond schools to support students on a more holistic level at the individual, family, community, and society level, which was described in the resilience-based approach.

First, I begin by explaining the resilience-based approach and its application to SWIS supporting newcomer refugee students on multiple levels. Then I transition into explaining how the compassion-based approach applies specifically to supporting newcomer refugee students in schools. Pieloch and colleagues' (2016) review of resilience research with refugee children identified "individual, family, school, community, and societal factors fostering resilience" (p. 330) as an important part of supporting refugee students. Through expanding on individual and "contextual" characteristics that support refugee students, they hope to provide direction on the most effective ways of supporting refugee students with programming (Pieloch, 2016).

Therefore, there is a recognition of the multiple levels of support required within a greater context when supporting refugee students.

This approach recognized that while literature on refugee students often cites challenges related to mental health and education (Fazel et al., 2012), it is important to support refugee students "through a lens of recovery and resilience because focusing on risk alone paints an incomplete picture of refugee youth's lives" (Pieloch et al., 2016, p. 331). I found this approach connected to the compassion-based framework which draws on an asset-based perspective that focuses on strength and empowerment (Lavelle et al., 2017), versus a "deficit-based" perspective (Ratkovic et al., 2017; Kovacevic, 2016). Thus, both these approaches merge well together in a holistic framework which supports refugee students through promoting resilience and strengths instead of only the risks they are at and deficits they may carry.

There are varying conceptualizations of resilience in literature, one of which is "resilience is a factor that enables some of us to recover from traumatic experiences and deprived backgrounds and to develop normally throughout our childhood and to thrive in our adult lives" (Miller, 2002, p. 647). There are debates in literature as to whether resilience is considered an intrinsic trait, versus a skill to be learned, the latter of which appears more increasingly in recent literature (Pollock, Nielsen & Singh, 2023). In my study examining how SWIS support newcomer refugee students, I draw on Masten's (2011) definition of resilience as: "the capacity of a dynamic system (individual, family, school, community, society) to withstand or recover from significant challenges that threaten its stability, viability, or development" (p. 494).

Pieloch (2016) and colleagues draw on a multilevel approach that explores resilience developing from a variety of contexts interacting with one another. Specifically, they explain that

resilience reaches beyond an individual's capacity (e.g., grit) and interacts with family (e.g., resources), school (sense of belonging), community (community engagement), and society (e.g., values). Other researchers have supported the view that promoting resilience needs to consider systems-level structural changes (Pollock, Nielsen & Singh, 2023). Thus, there is an important distinction here that resilience is not only about individual characteristics, implying that resilience is left up to the individual refugee student to develop. Instead, resilience is strengthened through connectedness to family and community and drawing on resources available (Landau, 2007). Thus, promoting resilience at multiple levels can contribute to enhancing the positive adaptation of newcomer refugee students.

Resilience of Refugee Students

An awareness of the factors promoting resilience is important in understanding SWIS' support for newcomer refugee students. Resilience of refugee students can be demonstrated through academic success at school and healthy self-esteem, as well as positive adaptation to a new country (Pieloch, et al., 2016). Meeting basic needs is the first step to promoting resilience which includes the need for refugee students to be viewed as children first, and refugees second; to have stable housing; to be able to attend school and learn English; and to have access to health care services such as immunizations (Hopkins & Hill, 2010). Once basic needs are met, the following factors need to be considered when professionals support refugee students, including individual, family, school, community and societal factors.

Individual Factors

Once basic needs are met, there are additional factors professionals need to consider to promote resilience among refugee students which include encouraging autonomy and

empowering refugee students. For example, in Canada, community programs which promote agency and empowerment for refugee students and provide them the opportunity to take a leadership role in these programs promotes positive adaptation (Edge, Newbold, & McKeary, 2014). Other individual level factors that promote resilience are having a sense of hopefulness and a positive outlook towards the future, as well as an appreciation for life, and the willingness to be helpful (Carlson, Cacciatore, & Klimek, 2012; Daud et al., 2008). In these areas, SWIS have can have a direct impact through their support for newcomer refugee students, as will be further discussed. Moreover, meaning making is a characteristic that promotes resilience among refugee youth when they draw on faith, their belief in God's presence and "divine support" (Masten & Narayan, 2012; Kanji & Cameron, 2010).

Family Factors

Family is a foundational resource to draw on in times of stress in order to promote resilience (Landau, 2007; Walsh, 2003; Landau & Saul, 2004). Residing with family members, engaging in healthy communication, and being a part of a positive and supportive family promoted resilience among refugee students (Pieloch et al., 2016). Common themes in relationships and family communication styles with refugee parents and their children included "children's psychosocial adjustment, attachment, and parental mental health symptoms" (Pieloch et al., 2016, p. 331). Supporting families to seek counseling can aid in developing more effective parenting skills, as well as enhance family connectedness. Also support at the family level included considering resources the family has access to which can include language learning, employment, housing, community services, as well as extended family support (Pieloch et al., 2016).

School Factors

For refugee students, the opportunity opportunity to attend and feel safe at school, learn English, and value the importance of education promotes resilience (Pieloch et al., 2016). Having positive school experiences through cultivating a strong sense of school belonging that facilitates school involvement contributed to greater levels of self-efficacy and better overall mental health for refugee students (Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007). Collective pride in school success by graduating from high school and attending post-secondary education in a particular ethnic community, such as a Sudanese community in Michigan, U.S., also promotes resilience (Rana et al., 2011). Refugee students from Afghanistan who resettled in Canada found friendships at school, fulfilling their goals, and school resources provided, such as computers and books, were helpful in promoting resilience (Kanji & Cameron, 2010). Therefore, school-based interventions which promote the value of education, positive school experiences, and collective pride in school success may further support the resilience of refugee students (Pieloch et al., 2016).

Community Factors

Having the opportunity to engage in social activities, receive support from the community, and experience a sense of belonging were also important for refugee students' resilience. For younger students, social activities include a safe place to play in the community (Kanji & Cameron, 2010), while for older students it can include joining sports or religious groups to facilitate making friends and increasing self-esteem (Hopkins & Hill, 2010). Receiving support from the community and experiencing a sense of belonging included finding 'community support networks' through cultural networks with refugees from the same ethnic background. This type

of support offers "a sense of connection, belonging … and shared experience" (Pieloch et al., 2016, p. 335).

Societal Factors

Finally, continuing to connect with the home culture and religion were important factors to promote resilience among refugee students. This occurred through "maintaining cultural practices such as religious beliefs, family values and traditional behaviour" (Pieloch et al., 2016, p. 335). Specifically, a group of Somali refugee students found their faith and spirituality aided in adjusting to a new culture (Betancourt, Abdi, Ito, Lilienthal, Agalab, & Ellis, 2015).

Therefore, promoting resilience for newcomer refugee students included meeting basic needs, facilitating social activities and opportunities for leadership and agency, maintaining a connection to their home culture, faith, and meaning making. The importance of being connected to family, having an optimistic outlook and sense of belonging, and support from the community were also important. Refugee students are a particularly vulnerable group due to their exposure to traumatic experiences during important development stages which could impact their normal growth process. Therefore, considering how to support the resilience of refugee students at multiple levels (including individual, family, school, community, and society) can aid in minimizing impacts on well-being and development (Weine, Ware, Hakizimana, Tugenberg, Currie, Dahnweih, Wagner, Polutnik & Wulu, 2014). While the resilience-based approach provides a larger scale framework for supporting newcomer refugee students, I drew on Lavelle and colleagues' (2017) framework to specifically describe elements of SWIS successfully supporting newcomer refugee students in schools.

Compassion-Based Framework

One of the primary reasons I was drawn to include a compassion-based framework in my study stems from my spiritual and faith tradition. Compassion is a central component of the Islamic faith, as it is central to other faiths and spiritual beliefs. I was drawn to scholarly work that describes compassion in my spiritual tradition as a factor in "healing and rebuilding community…and [promoting] balance, peace, tranquility, fairness, justice, and sustainability" (Alwani, 2019, p.92, 96). In her inspiring work, Alwani (2019) describes cultivating a compassionate community consists of "ta'āruf (getting to know one another genuinely), ta'āluf (building harmonious relationships within the community), and ta'āwun (collaborating with one another)" (p.106). These elements strike me as congruent with calls for integration which are based on building trust, community, and collaboration to support newcomer refugee students.

After participating in a compassion cultivation program at Stanford University's Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education, I applied to a PhD program with an interest in studying how to support refugee students. As an educator, my hope was to integrate a compassion-based lens into schools and into practice, to support refugee students. I resonated with compassion described as a necessary individual and collective approach in education as a result of the highest level of suffering we have encountered since World War II due to the incidence of natural disasters, disease, and conflict, impacting over 70 million people (Peterson, 2017; UNHCR, 2018). Compassion is defined as the ability to "recognize and care about the suffering of others and to take some form of appropriate action in response" (Peterson, 2017, p. 2), and is associated with the field of civic and moral education as an important component of schools' growing emphasis on "character education, positive psychology, well-being, mindfulness, global citizenship ... and values education" (p. 10).

The compassion-based framework stemmed from an acknowledgement of the impact of trauma and adverse childhood experiences (ACE) on children's well-being, which is arguably pertinent to support refugee students who may also have experienced trauma (Lavelle et al., 2017). In some cases, literature may use "compassionate" and "trauma-informed" interchangeably because there are some commonalities; however, there are also some important nuances. One such nuance is research which suggests that viewing refugee students *only* as "'traumatized' impeded a real analysis of their backgrounds and experiences, as well as masked the significance of post-migration experiences such as poverty, isolation, racism and uncertain migration status" (Rutter, 2006, p. 5). Thus, while a trauma-informed approach may be arguably an important *component* of supporting refugee students' positive adaptation, I chose the compassion-based framework as a part of my overall conceptual framework because it provides a more holistic approach on how SWIS support refugee students.

This holistic and asset-based perspective in the compassion-based framework focuses on strength and empowerment as recommended by literature on supporting refugee students (Ratkovic et al., 2017; Kovacevic, 2016), versus a deficit-based perspective which may be the focus of a trauma-informed approach. My study participants also commented on the importance of viewing students from a strength-based perspective. The compassion-based framework is part of a "prosocial education" approach linked to Social Emotional Learning (SEL) which can contribute to greater student well-being by "enhancing the social, emotional, cultural, and ethical aspects of schooling" (Lavelle et al., 2017, p.1). Moreover, taking this increasingly holistic approach to education improves students' academic success and well-being (Brown, Corrigan, & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2012; Wentzel, Battle, Russell, & Looney, 2010) which are important considerations for equity.

A compassion-based framework considers the following six elements (Lavelle et al., 2017, p. 1) which guided my exploration of SWIS support for refugee students as they interacted with the following elements: i) school leadership, ii) a safe and caring school culture, iii) effective teaching and learning, iv) parental and community involvement, v) compassion training programs, and vi) professional development for educators (Lavelle et al., 2017, p. 1). These factors arguably align with recommendations and practices for supporting refugee students which SWIS are involved in as they cultivate an equitable and inclusive environment (Pinson & Arnot, 2007); address the social and emotional well-being of refugee students (Pinson & Arnot, 2007; Taylor & Sidhu, 2012) through cultivating strong relationships; as well as support with meeting language learning needs (Taylor & Sidhu, 2012) in the process of teaching and learning. I describe each of these elements in more detail below with the understanding that the role of SWIS was connected to each of these elements when supporting newcomer refugee students, with the exception of compassion training programs, which were still not present at the time of this study. However, for the purposes of providing a comprehensive description of the framework, I have included a description of compassion training programs.

School Leadership

There is an emphasis on the important role of school leaders to create inclusive and welcoming school cultures that support refugee students' integration (Ratkovic et al., 2017; Taylor & Sidhu, 2012). Leadership is not only important at the system level but also at the school level to promote positive outlooks on refugee students (Taylor & Sidhu, 2012). Cross-cultural transformative leadership can be "a powerful approach to refugee students' education, social integration, and well-being" (Ratkovic et al., 2017, p. 1). The cross-cultural transformative leadership approach, which developed from Shields's (2010) work on transformative leadership,

encourages leaders to critically interrogate the school culture in which they work in, as well as draw on policy and practice to cultivate a culture that prioritizes equity (Nur, 2012).

Overall, the emphasis in this leadership approach is on developing cultural competence in educators and administrators in order to meet the needs of refugee students who may feel a lack of sense of belonging (Peček, Čuk, & Lesar, 2008). The cross-cultural transformative leadership approach also discourages a deficit-based perspective towards refugee students where they may experience a sense of separation or stereotyping by educators (Kovačević, 2016), leading to further marginalization and discrimination (Shields, 2003). These factors align with the resilience-based approach which focuses on a strengths-based perspective versus a deficit-based perspective.

Safe and Caring School Culture

A unique example that draws on a compassion-based framework in order to support students who have experienced increasing levels of stress and trauma (as well as offering support to their educators) is the work of Wolpow et al. (2016) in the U.S. Their work is a unique example of a compassionate, systems-level partnership between public schools, Western Washington University, and the Washington State Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), which reportedly contributed to increased academic success and resilience of students (Wolpow et al., 2016). The collaboration was led by the Washington OSPI to launch a Compassionate Schools Initiative to cultivate Compassionate Schools into a working practice. The initiative led to trauma-informed practices being implemented in eleven school buildings, and the development of a process designed to help schools develop a Compassionate School infrastructure.

This infrastructure included (1) engaging school leadership, (2) assessment, (3) training for school staff and community partners, (4) review of similar "compassionate" care models in other agencies, such as health care facilities and communities of faith, (5) review of school policies and procedures, (6) partnerships, (7) action planning with short- and long-term goals, and (8) reassessment and evaluation (Wolpow et al., 2016, pp. 165–6). This example shows how shaping a safe and caring school culture happens at multiple levels, and within partnerships, such as the SWIS initiative. Overall Wolpow's work emphasized the importance of a "welcoming, affirming, and safe environment, and recognizing that each member of [the] community has unique learning styles, personal strengths, and cultural backgrounds which they strive to celebrate" (Wolpow et al., 2016, p. 18). Also, researchers have shared that a successful trauma-informed approach in schools requires a change of school culture which understands students who have experienced trauma need specialized supports, including mental health resources and supports *in* school, as opposed to referring students to external mental health supports (Gomez-Lee, 2017), which they are less likely to access (Beauregard, Gauthier and Rousseau, 2014).

Effective Teaching and Learning

Researchers explain the unique needs of supporting newcomer refugee students include effective teaching and learning by cultivating an equitable and inclusive environment (Pinson & Arnot, 2007); addressing the social and emotional well-being of refugee students through cultivating strong relationships (Pinson & Arnot, 2007; Taylor & Sidhu, 2012); and meeting language learning needs by considering teaching and learning (Taylor & Sidhu, 2012). Specifically, an ethic of care, coined by Noddings (2002), is beginning to once again become an important part of the discourse on teachers supporting newcomer refugee students (Pelech & Checkley, 2019). While I believe care and education should be naturally connected, Wilde

(2013) argues the importance of care is not always a priority in schools and teacher education programs.

There are three areas that are important for educators to consider in effective teaching and learning with newcomer refugee students which can happen in the form of teacher-student conferences and support from settlement workers in schools. It is important for teachers to understand students' previous experiences, their current physical, emotional and academic needs, and their goals for the future (Pelech & Checkley, 2019). Other recommendations for effective teaching and learning include i) understanding available supports, such as school counselling and wellness services offered by the community; ii) communicating regularly and purposefully with students in order to ensure their engagement in class through asking questions and engaging in discussions; iii) drawing on past experience of students by encouraging them to share their culture and experiences which also allows for both teachers and peers to learn about the newcomer refugees students culture and language; and iv) culturally responsive curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

Parental and community involvement

Researchers share that cultivating welcoming and inclusive schools for newcomer refugee students necessitates engaging stakeholders such as newcomer parents and settlement services staff (Guo-Brennan & Guo-Brennan, 2021). Specifically, drawing on the 'expertise, strength and networks' of such stakeholders can provide 'social capital for newcomers' (Guo-Brennan & Guo-Brennan, 2021, p. 69). Settlement services staff provide newcomer students and their families with expertise, services, and programming to support their understanding of and integration into the school and greater community (Guo-Brennan & Guo-Brennan, 2021).

Parental and community involvement also complements researchers' recommendations to build multiple levels of partnerships to support newcomer refugee students (Pinson & Arnot, 2007; Ratkovic et al., 2017).

Furthermore, researchers state that parental engagement in schools which acknowledges parents' backgrounds and expertise, as well as the importance of their children's learning and well-being, strengthens both home and school contexts (Pushor & Chen, 2023). By engaging parents effectively, it is reported that schools can "mobilize and utilize their knowledge to assist with students' transition, integration, and social inclusion" (Guo-Brennan & Guo-Brennan, 2021, p.70). Specifically, strategies for schools to encourage parental involvement include creating opportunities for parents to volunteer at school related events, offering training for newcomer parents on intercultural differences and reflecting the cultures and knowledge of newcomer parents in the curriculum (Guo-Brennan & Guo-Brennan, 2021).

Compassion Training Programs

Continuous development of the compassion-based framework suggests "systematic methods of cultivating compassion" (Lavelle et al., 2017, p. 5) through participating in different compassion training programs. These programs have been shown to contribute to prosocial behaviour (Condon, Desbordes, Miller, & DeSteno, 2013). While there are a variety of compassion training programs that have piloted in schools, including in the U.S., and in some cases explicitly emphasize equity and system-level shifts, these training programs generally seek to broaden natural capacities, such as "attention, affection, empathy, insight … and courage" to extend beyond one's "in-group" (Lavelle et al., 2017, p. 5). During the course of my study, these compassion training programs were not currently available in the area I conducted my research.

However, I have participated in and see the value of such programs, including Stanford University's Compassion Cultivation Training with the Center for Compassion and Altruism Research in Education. I also participated in the Compassion Integrity Program developed through the expertise of academics and practitioners in the fields of "neuroscience, psychology, trauma informed care, peace and conflict studies, and contemplative science" and draws on initiatives related to Social Emotional Learning (Compassion Integrity Program, n.d., para. 3). This program has been implemented by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization to train both staff and students (UNESCO MGIEP, 2018). It includes ten modules divided into three series: Series I on "Self-Cultivation," which includes modules on (1) Calming Body and Mind, (2) Ethical Mindfulness, (3) Emotional Awareness, and (4) Self-Compassion; Series II on "Relating to Others," which includes modules on (5) Impartiality and Common Humanity, (6) Forgiveness and Gratitude, (7) Empathic Concern, and (8) Compassion; and Series III on "Engaging in Systems," which includes modules on (9) Appreciating Interdependence and (10) Engaging with Discernment (Compassion Integrity Program, n.d., para. 4).

Professional Development

To promote the success of school-wide programs such as compassion training, a compassion-based framework supports professional development for students and educators on areas related to SEL and mindfulness (Lavelle et al., 2017). Such professional development opportunities can contribute to better management of instructional time, improved relationships between students and teachers, as well as lower levels of educator stress and burnout (Jennings, Frank, Snowberg, Coccia, & Greenberg, 2013). In turn, this can begin to address concerns with well-being for educators (Alisic et al., 2012) and students. In my study, SWIS participate in

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offering professional development opportunities for educators, specifically around intercultural competence and refugee students' needs and experiences.

An emerging, compassion-based framework – though requiring multi-year interdisciplinary collaboration, theoretical development, research, and prototyping – "holds promise" (Lavelle et al., 2017, p. 4) for contributing to student well-being. It is valuable for supporting refugee students' positive adaptation. Therefore, while the importance of qualities such as compassion may be sidelined due to school environments increasingly characterized by stress related to supporting students with trauma and academic performance expectations, researchers argue that it is these very circumstances that call for the importance of a more holistic approach which cultivates care and compassion in an effort to contribute to the betterment of our students' well-being, education systems, and humanity (Lavelle et al., 2017; Lampert, 2003; Peterson, 2016; Wolpow et al., 2016). The elements of the compassion-based framework align with cross-cultural transformative leadership, since both focus on equity and system-level shifts through developing specific policies, system-wide supports, and socially just–oriented leadership and values to meet the needs of refugee students (Ebied, 2022).

In conclusion, while the compassion-based approach specifically describes elements recommended for supporting newcomer refugee students in schools, I combined it with the resilience-based approach which described supporting students at an individual, family, school, community and society level. Thus, I named my framework the "*Holistic Framework for Supporting Newcomer Refugee Students".* In combining both these approaches, I found it to be more descriptive of the role of SWIS in supporting newcomer refugee students in Ontario schools.

Chapter 4: Methodology

In the previous chapter, I described the holistic framework for supporting newcomer refugee students I drew on to organize my study. In this chapter, I describe the methodology I used to conduct my study which implemented an interpretivist approach. I conducted qualitative research to study the experiences of SWIS supporting newcomer refugee students by conducting interviews with 11 SWIS in a city in southwestern Ontario. I outline my methods in recruiting and selecting study participants and my data analysis process which included organizing data according to proposed conceptual framework and emerging themes. I also discuss the ethical review process and trustworthiness.

Interpretivist Approach

In the context of this study, I employed an interpretivist approach because it allowed me as the researcher to construct meaning based on understanding people's experiences (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011), whom in this case were SWIS supporting newcomer refugee students. I believe an interpretivist approach which is informed in part by the "subjective, socially constructed, multiple realities" (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 116) of participants was best suited for this study, as opposed to a normative or positivist approach. The latter approaches support the view that "human behaviour is essentially rule-governed" and ought to be conducted using "natural science methods" (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 17), which I did not find conducive to understanding the varied experiences of SWIS supporting refugee in Ontario. In an interpretive approach, context is important since it allows the researcher to situate the data based on what is happening "on the ground" with participants (Cohen et al., 2011). In this case, context is

important because SWIS have a unique role to play and unique experiences tied to supporting

newcomer refugee students in schools.

Qualitative Research

Since an interpretivist approach advocates constructing meaning based on people's

experiences and perspectives (Cohen et al. 2011), I used a qualitative approach. This approach

"provides an in-depth, intricate and detailed understanding of meanings, actions, non-observable

as well as observable phenomena, attitudes, intentions and behaviours… [of participants]"

(Gonzales, Brown & Slate, 2008, p. 3) to be more aligned with the goals of my study. I found

that to be the case since I studied how SWIS identify the needs of newcomer refugee students,

the challenges they experience in supporting newcomer refugee students, and the strategies they

draw on to support newcomer refugee students. This process aligns with qualitative research

which is characterized by "humans actively construct[ing] their own meanings of situations ...

meanings aris[ing] out of social situations and handled through interpretive processes ... and

realities are multiple [and] constructed" (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 219). There was very scarce

literature available on the experiences of SWIS despite their close contact with newcomer

refugee students; thus, such a study provides important contributions for theory, practice and

policy for supporting newcomer refugee students.

Qualitative research also complements an interpretive approach since "qualitative research

begins with assumptions and the use of interpretive/theoretical frameworks that inform the study

of research problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human

problem" (Creswell & Poth, 2017, p. 41). As part of qualitative research, I as a "researcher [am]

a key instrument" (Creswell & Poth, 2017, p. 43); therefore, I personally collected data, which in

this case were interviews with 11 SWIS supporting newcomer refugee students.

Methods

In this section, I discuss my data collection instrument which was semi-structured interviews. I explain who my participants were, the sample size I drew on, and how I recruited my participants. Following that, I detail data analysis, ethical review, and trustworthiness.

Interviews

I selected interviews for my data collection instrument because they allowed me to understand the experiences of SWIS supporting newcomer refugee students. Specifically, in the interviews, I asked questions that explore "experience, opinions, feelings, knowledge, sensory, or demographic data" (Merriam, 2009, p. 114) in order to elicit meaningful data. Using interviews allowed me to respond to any new ideas or topics the interviewee presented during the interview by probing or asking follow-up questions. A semi-structured interview style was employed because it included a list of questions to be explored, yet allowed for flexibility and a mix of structured and less structured questions by probing when needed (Merriam, 2009).

Between August 2020 to December 2020, I conducted in-depth, one on one, one-hour semi-structured interviews in English with 11 SWIS in Ontario, using the phone or the online software, Zoom, due to COVID-19 restrictions. While conducting interviews in person could have potentially lead to developing more rapport with participants, conducting work and research at a distance as opposed to in person became the norm during COVID-19. I found participants to be comfortable with conducting interviews over the phone or online and perhaps it provided

them with the ability to be more transparent since it ensured a certain level of distance which is not available when interviews are done in person.

An appendix with interview questions is included. An example of an interview question that was asked is: "Can you please tell me about your role and job duties as a settlement worker?" In asking that question, and in drawing upon the holistic framework which includes resilience and compassion-based approaches to supporting newcomer refugee students, I probed for how SWIS' role interacts with school leadership and culture, effective teaching and learning, parental and community involvement, and professional development for educators. Another example of an interview question I asked was "Can you share with me some of the challenges newcomer refugee students face? And what strategies do you use to address these challenges?" This helped me to probe for how SWIS identify challenges at multiple levels in the holistic framework which includes challenges at the individual, family, school, community and society level. Selecting the participants that I interviewed for my research is discussed next.

Participants

In Ontario, approximately 20 different settlement agencies employ over 200 SWIS in over 20 school boards across the province (Settlement Workers in Schools, 2018, p. 1). By considering that sample size is "based on expected reasonable coverage of the phenomenon given the purpose of the study" (Patton, 2002, p. 246), I interviewed 11 SWIS working in public schools. Five of the participants currently worked in elementary schools, five worked in secondary schools, and one worked in both elementary and secondary schools. Participants working in elementary schools work primarily with newcomer parents, while participants working in secondary schools work primarily with students. Ten out of eleven SWIS voluntarily

disclosed that they were newcomers themselves at one time to Canada. My interview questions sought to capture their challenges, experiences, and strategies when supporting newcomer refugee students in Southwestern Ontario. Inclusion criteria included current SWIS who worked for at least one year in schools with newcomer students, anytime between 2015-current, which was the beginning of the recent surge of newcomer refugees to Canada (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2017).

The Sample

In terms of sampling, I employed a purposeful sampling method which is the primary method used for qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Purposeful sampling is based on the understanding that the researcher wants to "discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (Merriam, 2009, p. 77). In this case, I explored how SWIS identify the needs of newcomer refugee students, the challenges they experience in their role and the strategies they use to support newcomer refugee students, and, as such, I purposefully selected SWIS in Ontario. The SWIS in this study had varying degrees of experience in this role, having worked between one to ten years.

Recruitment

In order to recruit participants, I used phone and email to contact a gatekeeper at a settlement agency who is the director of settlement services and supervises one of the SWIS initiatives in a mid-size city in Southwestern Ontario. This gatekeeper connected me with the supervisors of SWIS in three community and settlement agencies in a city in Southwestern Ontario who collectively employ approximately 30 SWIS to work in schools. I sent out my letter of information to the three SWIS supervisors and asked them to share it with their SWIS in their

agencies. The letter of information invited SWIS to contact me directly if they were interested in participating, so their participation in the study is only known to myself, and not their supervisor. Following that, I followed up with the three settlement and community agencies for interested participants in this city in Southwestern Ontario, and was able to conduct 11 interviews with SWIS across the three agencies.

Data Analysis

For data analysis, I engaged in reflection and critical thinking after each interview by recording comments and memos about learnings related to common themes that I identified from the data. This process helped me to ensure that the data collected were meaningful and the interview questions I asked were well suited to answer my research questions. I organized and managed the data under each research question:

1) How do (SWIS) identify the needs of newcomer refugee students?

2) What are the challenges SWIS experience in striving to support newcomer refugee students?

3) What are the strategies SWIS employ in striving to support newcomer refugee students?

I used the following headings in my data analysis: content, context, and theme. For example, this is a summary of how I organized one SWIS response to identifying needs of refugee students:

Content	Context	Theme
Students' need for English Language Learning	Vast majority of Students who are arriving as government assisted refugees are considered English Language Development Students.	Effective Teaching and Learning

In terms of categories for themes, I drew on the elements of the holistic framework for supporting newcomer refugee students. To describe SWIS support for newcomer refugee students on a comprehensive level, I drew on the resilience-based framework which included support at the individual, family, school, community and society level. For themes specifically related to SWIS work with schools, I drew on the compassion-based framework which included school leadership, school culture, community and parental involvement, effective teaching and learning, and professional development, when supporting newcomer refugee students. For example, based on literature on a compassion-based framework and supporting refugee students, for effective teaching and learning, I examined whether SWIS support teachers with meeting language learning needs of refugee students (Taylor & Sidhu, 2012). I also analyzed how SWIS supported students at multiple levels including the individual, family, school, community and society level. I then formed conclusions or "assertions" (Stake, 1995) by building "patterns" (Yin, 2009) from the data I collected. I searched for common words, meanings, understandings, and themes that arose from the data such as integration, sense of belonging, trauma, and well-being.

Ethical Review

Prior to engaging in my research, I received ethics approval from Western University. Study participants were informed about the study email from their supervisors, and I confirmed that they received a letter of information through email. For those who decided to participate, interviews were conducted by phone or Zoom. At the beginning of the interview, I read the description of the interview being conducted to the interviewees, and that the interviews would be recorded as well as their rights during the research process. Their rights included voluntary participation, their right to withdraw participation at any time during the interview, and the right to refrain from answering any questions during the interview. They were then asked if they gave their consent to participate in the interview process. If the interviewee permitted me to record the interview, which was the case in 10 out of 11 interviews, I recorded the interview on a password-protected laptop. After interviews were completed, I transcribed the recordings using a password-protected laptop. In the case of the one interview where I was not given permission to record, I transcribed during the interview. Therefore, only I, the researcher, has access to the original data in order to protect the privacy and confidentiality of participants.

There is no foreseen risk of harm for participants since I removed variables which can isolate participants by de-identification. I created a version of the dataset where identification information, such as demographic variables and the specific location of their work, was removed. Also, for data analysis, pseudonyms for participants were used and the location of participants were attributed to a general region in Ontario. The research is not foreseen to impact the professional status of participants as data will not serve the purpose of evaluation.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness refers to maximizing the quality of a study. Specifically, it refers to the "rigor of a study [which considers] the degree of confidence in data, interpretation, and methods used to ensure the quality of a study" (Connelly, 2016, p. 435). There are five criteria that are generally accepted which were outlined by Guba and Lincoln (1994) for trustworthiness: credibility, dependability, confirmability, transferability and authenticity.

Credibility refers to how confident we are in the findings of the study. I engaged with 11 SWIS to develop a detailed understanding of their experiences when supporting newcomer refugee students. This makes up approximately a third of the number of SWIS working in the city in which I conducted my study. I also drew on reflective journaling throughout the data collection phase and re-evaluated the meaning of the data several times (Connelly, 2016). Dependability refers to the "stability of the data over time and over the conditions of the study" (Connelly, 2016, p. 435). I increased dependability by completing process logs which note the decisions and events that occurred during the study. For example, I was aware that I was conducting my study during COVID-19 measures in schools, which placed further stress on schools and their partners, including settlement workers in schools. As for confirmability, it refers to the "neutrality or the degree findings are consistent and could be repeated" (Connelly, 2016, p. 435), which once again can be increased through keeping detailed notes about my decisions and reflections as well as peer-debriefing. Presenting my findings at appropriate conferences, and receiving feedback about whether the issues I uncover with SWIS experiences are common to others in the profession, can also be helpful for confirmability.

The next criteria to consider in trustworthiness in qualitative data is transferability.

Transferability refers to the "extent to which findings are useful to persons in other settings" (Connelly, 2016, p. 436). I considered transferability by providing "a rich, detailed description of the context and by being transparent about analysis" (Connelly, 2016, p. 436). For example, I was thoughtful of details related to the school district SWIS are partners with, such as the resources or strategies that the board may have introduced to support newcomer refugee students.

The final criteria to consider in trustworthiness is authenticity. Authenticity is described as "the extent to which researchers fairly and completely show a range of different realities and realistically convey participants' lives" (Connelly, 2016, p. 436). I considered authenticity by selecting appropriate participants for my sample through the methods already described in the 'sample' and 'recruitment' sections above and by providing a vivid description of their experiences (Schou, Høstrup, Lyngsø, Larsen, & Poulsen, 2011).

Given the qualitative nature of my study conducted with an interpretivist paradigm which focuses on a dynamic reality and meaning-making by participants, I did not find triangulation to be necessary. In my study, the focus is on participants' experiences in supporting newcomer refugee students which were varied and unique. Therefore, the elements outlined above as part of trustworthiness were used to ensure a solid study.

Chapter 5: Findings – SWIS' Identification of the Needs of Newcomer Refugee Students

This chapter covers how SWIS identify the needs of refugee students, which were largely in alignment with literature stating refugee students' needs related to resettlement and adaptation are broadly characterized by language learning, social integration, or a sense of belonging and well-being (Ratkovic et al., 2017; Taylor & Sidhu, 2012). Thus, based on my data, I organized newcomer refugee students' needs under language learning, social, and psychological needs. Language learning needs are characterized by newcomer refugee students' placement as "English language learners" in the Ontario education system. Social needs are linked with refugee students' sense of belonging and making friends, while psychological needs are related to students' behavioural challenges and conflict, trauma and mental health. While not all newcomer refugee students will have the same needs, it is important to consider the variety of needs SWIS identified when supporting newcomer refugee students in Ontario schools and the interplay between language learning, social, and psychological needs. I begin by sharing SWIS identifying language learning needs of newcomer refugee students.

Language Learning Needs

Some refugee students arrive in Canada after spending an indefinite period of time in refugee camps or with lack of access to an education, which results in interrupted schooling. Thus, they often lack the necessary English language skills to successfully navigate the education system in Ontario. All SWIS shared the primary academic need of refugee students was English language learning.

Most refugee students arriving in Canada since 2016 are from Syria, Afghanistan, and Sudan (UNHCR, 2020). Since these are not English-speaking countries, refugee students arriving

from these countries are considered "English language learners" as defined earlier in the thesis. Some SWIS reported one of the reasons that led to the need for language learning is newcomer refugee students' experiences of interrupted formal education.

Students with interrupted formal education (SIFE), are considered a specific group of English language learners because their background circumstances in education pose specific concerns for their academic achievement and overall well-being (Hos, 2020). The term refugee "students with interrupted formal education" (SIFE) is used to identify that these students experience challenges with acquiring both language and academic skills (Hos, 2020). Participant 1, who has been in her role as a SWIS for 10 years, expressed a common view among SWIS on the needs of youth refugees in secondary school, specifically those who arrived in the large wave of Syrian refugees in 2016 to Canada. She explains:

> So if you think about the youth refugees, their unique experience, like many have been displaced for a long time ... their schooling has been disrupted. They have limited literacy skills, [and] even numeracy, [since] they're not even educated in their first language. So many have actually had a different way of life, because they have been working in refugee countries to support their families.

For youth refugee students, interrupted formal education leads to a lack of literacy and numeracy in their first language. Also, the financial burdens experienced by their families may lead them to prioritize work over schooling in order to support their families, which can lead to further interruptions to their education. Acquiring the English language is essential to not only enhancing the academic success of newcomer refugee students, but also their social integration (Loi & Que, 2020). Since SWIS are not educators, and the primary mandate of their work is to

support newcomer students and their families with the resettlement and integration process, they reported extensively on students' social needs.

Social Needs

When refugee students arrive in Canada, there is an adjustment phase in which they seek to establish a sense of belonging, generally defined as the feeling of acceptance, inclusion, respect and support in their school (Ma, 2003). As indicated earlier in the thesis, a sense of belonging is connected to refugee students' well-being and social cohesion (Correa-Velez, Gifford, & Barnett, 2010), as well as building resilience (Edge, Newbold, & McKeary, 2014). Furthermore, there is a strong relationship between school engagement, a sense of belonging, and positive adaptation to new cultures (Pieloch et al., 2016).

Refugee Students' Sense of Belonging

A sense of belonging is a common theme among the majority of SWIS when identifying the needs of refugee students, which is congruent with literature on supporting newcomer refugee students' positive adaptation. The data indicated cultivating a sense of belonging is nuanced according to age groups. For example, Participant 2 explains: "When students come at a very young age things are easier for them, they quickly adapt to new community and culture and quickly pick up English." However, when refugee students arrive at an older age, they have a different set of challenges when it comes to a sense of belonging. She adds:

> When students come around 12-14 [years old], it's harder for them to adapt. They feel
>
> connected with their roots and want to be in new culture but want to fit in. That's where
>
> teasing and bullying starts. It's really hard on children. A lot of children say, 'I want to go

back to my country. I don't like it here. I don't want to stay here.'

When some refugee students between the ages of 12-14 years old, considered early adolescence, enter the school system in Ontario, they may have a more difficult time adapting to their new environment. At this stage, students may have already developed a sense of identity and connectedness to their countries of origin, yet they want to fit into their new culture and environment. Unfortunately, at this stage bullying and teasing, which can be forms of discrimination, may be common and refugee children may start to experience feelings of isolation and the desire to return to their countries of origin. Limited language capability and a higher likelihood of identifying as racialized or visibly Muslim can lead to increased experiences of discrimination by newcomer refugee students (Cheyne-Hazineh, 2020). These experiences of discrimination contribute to feelings of isolation (Cohen, 2016) and pose a barrier for the integration of newcomer refugee students (Lewis et al., 2018).

Some SWIS shared there are additional challenges for older refugee youth. Participant 2 expanded on the issue of identity newcomer youth refugee grapple with:

> Older youth, when they come to Canada, they start facing a crisis. Where do I belong to? Do I belong to my culture or belong here and fit in here? They have that internal fight or argument that always goes on and they can never fit in. Both hands [are] being pulled in two different directions.

The challenges of older youth include facing a type of identity crisis where they feel torn between two cultures and are experiencing feelings that they may never truly 'fit in'. While newcomer refugee youth are negotiating their positionality within a new context, experiencing

any type of marginalization can have an impact on the important phase of identity formation they are in (Li et al., 2017).

Expanding on the notions of identity and belonging Participant 2 shared, Participant 4 explains the thought process of some newcomer refugee youth, related to identity, based on her observations and interactions with them:

> They have been raised a certain way and it's challenged suddenly where they didn't have the choice but to leave their countries. [They ask] 'What do I do, how do I fit in? Because there is no language, because I don't dress like them. And I can't be open with my parents because [they have] so much going on by themselves. Where do I bring in my emotions, my struggles? Where am I positioned?' And it could be threatening until they know it's okay, nobody is forcing you. You have your individual choices… until then [they] might feel someone is taking away [their] culture, [and] identity.

Older refugee youth in secondary school will begin to question their values, beliefs, and culture, such as the way they dress and how they adjust to their new surroundings. They may be experiencing a lot of struggles internally and feel they are unable to reach out to their parents since their parents may have other challenges to manage as a newcomer refugee family. The pressure to 'fit in' experienced by newcomer refugee youth highlights that though Canada's focus is on integration, many newcomers still feel expected to assimilate by adapting to 'mainstream Canadian culture' (Kaufmann, 2021). Some of these internal struggles can include becoming accustomed to new cultural norms when it comes to choice of clothing or gender roles in Canada. Participant 4 further shares some newcomer refugee students may feel their culture and identity is being challenged until they begin to understand that each person has their own

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individual choices in Canada, and that their culture and identity is not being 'taken away.' While maintaining one's culture and identity is linked to promoting well-being and resilience among newcomer refugee youth (Creese et al., 2011), they still report the pressure to 'fit in' leads to feelings of frustration, decreased self-esteem and a sense of separation from their cultural heritage' (Makarova & Birman, 2016, p. 8).

While newcomer refugee students grapple with integration by negotiating their cultural heritage and identity in a new cultural context, it is important for more established Canadians to also support with integration efforts (Yan et al., 2012). Some SWIS shared challenges around newcomer refugee students feeling welcome, which is connected to the need for school leaders to create a welcoming school culture. For example, Participant 2 explains:

> I think there's only a certain amount a teacher can do and students do feel that at some point. I sometimes hear parents say, 'my student doesn't like to come to school, my student feels like everybody doesn't like him'. So, I think it does have an effect but not a direct effect because there are teachers in between administration and students.

With the multitude of demands placed upon school administration, it may not always be possible to meet the needs of all newcomer refugee families. This can lead to newcomer refugee parents reporting that their children do not want to go to school or do not feel well-liked; however, some SWIS share that teachers do their best to fill in the gaps with the resources they have. Specifically, participant 2 shares: "Teachers or ESL teachers make them feel welcome and they go over and beyond to make sure they feel supported and welcomed". Some teachers will 'go the extra mile' to ensure newcomer refugee students feel supported and welcomed. Making

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friends is another important element of establishing a sense of belonging for newcomer refugee students.

Making Friends

Resettling in a new country and attending a new school involves meeting new peers and the need to make new friends. Several SWIS identified this need for newcomer refugee families and the challenges associated with it. Participant 5 shares "Having friends for their kids is also something important for the families. They're afraid of letting kids have friends from a different culture". One of the challenges newcomer refugee parents have when it comes to their children making new friends is fear of making friends with children of different cultures due to differences in cultural norms and expectations. This concern highlights that while intercultural friendships with more established Canadian peers can support newcomer refugee students with increasing their sense of belonging (Kaufmann, 2021), there are concerns. Intercultural friendships can pose concerns due to different cultural values and interests (Cheyne-Hazineh, 2020) which may be at odds with newcomer refugee families cultural heritage and values. In addition to social needs, SWIS identified psychological needs related to supporting refugee students' behavioural issues and conflict in schools.

Psychological Needs

As discussed earlier, refugee students may have been exposed to trauma and adverse childhood experiences, which can contribute to social and emotional challenges including behavioural difficulties (Vongkhamphra et al., 2011). Experiencing trauma can also lead to concerns for the mental health of newcomer refugee students. The majority of study participants shared psychological needs for refugee students related to behavioural issues and conflict, as

well as trauma and mental health.

Refugee Students' Behavioural Issues and Conflict

The majority of SWIS participants shared the importance of increased awareness, building understanding in educators, and intervention to address behavioural issues and conflict for newcomer refugee students. For example, Participant 1 shared:

> Definitely, what we experienced was their group dynamics. Just because they come from a collective culture rather than individualistic. Every time there is a conflict, you see it's a whole, the whole group coming into the parts of that altercation by itself.

Participant 1 shares the need to raise awareness and build understanding in educators about some refugee students coming from collectivist cultures, which emphasize the importance of community and viewing oneself as part of a group (Hofstede, 2001). Therefore, when there is a conflict at school, there can be a tendency for entire groups to become involved. While not all cultures in Canada are considered individualistic, in this case, this SWIS shared that her view of the culture of newcomer refugee students is predominantly a collectivist one. This type of awareness and understanding SWIS offer is important for some Canadian teachers with limited intercultural training (Ratkovic, et. al, 2017; Yohani, 2013). Participant 2 shared another example of creating awareness and building understanding on underlying reasons for behavioural issues exhibited by some newcomer refugee students observed at home or school:

> For behavioural issues with students, there is a lot of hands on at the school because this is what they were used to. We also find a lot of behavioural issues within the home.

Parents tell children to do something and kids say, if you tell me to do this and I don't want to do it, I will call the police so parents get scared and kids do whatever they want.

There can be challenges with children's behaviour due to their background which may consider being hands on with others as a norm, causing a gap in understanding what is acceptable in their new cultural environment. Also, there can be an increase in newcomer refugee children's behavioural challenges both at school and home because parents are adjusting to new parenting styles in Canada. In some cases, children will threaten to call the police whenever their parents ask them to complete a task which leaves parents feeling fearful.

Participant 7 further expanded on the differences in children's behavioural challenges based on age:

For kids sometimes each school and each child experience is different. When children are younger, they have more difficulty or show more behavioural issues in my experience. I think my guess is because they experience culture shock but they are not able to express their feelings very well, in either languages, in native tongue or English so they get frustrated….

Participant 7 shared when children are younger, they may have more behavioural challenges due to experiencing culture shock and not having the language to express their feelings in either their native or the English language, which results in feelings of increased frustration for them. This may be related to feelings of exclusion experienced by some newcomer refugee students who are not considered part of the 'Caucasian Anglo-Saxon' norms that may often be connected with the idea of being 'Canadian' (Ari, 2019).

While feelings of exclusion may be a challenge for newcomer refugee students, Participant 7 shared newcomer refugee students may also face challenges related to conflict and bullying among other newcomer refugee students:

> I think there's a lot of conflict among kids and bullying in their language and it's hard to catch for teachers. Teachers are aware when it's really bad but hard to catch those actions because done in their ethnic language and it's hidden.

If bullying is happening among newcomer refugee children from the same community in their native language, it can be difficult for teachers to identify it, unless it is very apparent that a negative interaction is occurring. Another challenge with bullying happening within the same ethnic community she explains: "There's added stress for the kids because when it happens, the bullying, if they're from the same community, the family can get involved so that can be stressful for kids even more." Participant 7 shared that if bullying is happening within the same ethnic community, and parents become involved it can lead to increased stress for refugee students. These findings are important to consider amidst literature that newcomer refugee students attending schools with greater levels of racial diversity can experience a greater sense of belonging, stability and mental health (Nathoo, 2017; Scott, 2013). While having racial diversity can provide opportunities for newcomer refugee students to form friendships with students from similar racial backgrounds, the research data indicates that there can be additional challenges with bullying within friendships within similar cultures.

Finally, some SWIS shared that aggression exhibited by newcomer refugee students may be a result of mental health challenges. For example, Participant 6 shared: "Sometimes they start out the same then they start acting out, [so there is] aggression, bullying or being bullied. Those

things may come out and it's usually because of something that happened before." Thus, behavioural issues including aggression, bullying or being bullied, may be the result of unresolved trauma refugee students may have experienced. A discussion of trauma and mental health of newcomer refugee students will ensue.

Trauma and Mental Health of Students

Refugee students may have experienced trauma in the form of loss of or separation from family members, exposure to violence, and abuse (Vongkhamphra, Davis, & Adem, 2011; De Deckker, 2018). Exposure to trauma can lead to mental health challenges that may impact morbidity and mortality (Gadeberg, Montgomery, Frederiksen, Norredam, 2017). The need to support the mental health of newcomer refugee students due to trauma they have experienced is a common theme among study participants. This is linked to the holistic framework to support newcomer refugee students, which recognizes the impact of trauma on student success and well-being. Participant 1 explained:

> The mental health of youth, this is a huge area that has been my focus in the last few years. Just because of the challenges underneath that we have seen with many of the youth who are struggling to integrate and not having enough support, whether at school or in the community. We do not have enough resources for supporting the mental health of the newcomer youth.

The need to support newcomer refugee students' mental health and their adaptation to their new environment is identified very clearly by SWIS, as well as the lack of resources available to support mental health for newcomer youth. These findings align with some literature indicating that there is a lack of culturally appropriate services, especially in mental health support (Shields

& Lujan, 2019; Cheyne-Hazineh, 2020; Marshall et al., 2016), which can lead to newcomer refugee students often feeling misunderstood or judged when they do seek support from mental health services (Kaufmann, 2021).

When it comes to the particular manifestations of possible trauma and mental health challenges, they include both social and academic challenges. Participant 1 explained:

> Some of them maybe, or many have experienced some kind of trauma. Or they might display traumatic stress disorders and many do not have the social skills needed for their transition into a new culture. Also, they have shown difficulties concentrating or focusing in class. They have not been able to sit in classes for a long period of time. The period is like hundred and 20 minutes. So it's been really hard for them to be contained in a classroom..

The prevalence of possible trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder among refugee students manifests in a gap in social skills which are important for transitioning to a new culture. In this case, some refugee students may also have challenges with concentrating in class and sitting for long periods of time. These findings are consistent with some literature indicating that exposure to trauma has been showed to contribute to social and emotional challenges including behavioural difficulties in school (Felitti, 2009; Wolpow et al., 2016).

Therefore, some SWIS see the need for support on a systems level for newcomer refugee students, in order to meet their complex needs. For example, participant 8 shared:

> So obviously, if they are coming with physical and mental health needs and don't have the language, it's really hard to navigate the system especially for government sponsored

refugees for one year. It's a program [where] a group of people are working with these

families and helping them, but it's not enough, there are cracks in the system. So, I don't

expect and nobody expects that in one year this family will be renewed and ready to start

over. There are deep things in their life that aren't easily extracted in one year of therapy

or counseling and it depends [on] the country they're coming from.

Participant 8 reported that especially with government sponsored refugees, where there

may be support for newcomer families for one year, it is not sufficient for families to understand

how to navigate the system in Canada, adapt fully to their new environment, and be ready to

'start over.' She reported there are deeply embedded challenges that cannot be addressed in only

one year, even with therapy or counseling. These notions of deeply embedded challenges SWIS

recognize are consistent with refugee students' likelihood of chronic or triple trauma as a result

of trauma over their migration journey (Stewart et al., 2019). In this case, SWIS report there are

cracks in the system, which is consistent with newcomer refugee students' challenges with

accessing services due to an unfamiliarity with services, lack of time and transportation, which

leads to newcomer refugee students accessing services in a fragmented way (Kaufmann, 2021).

For example, some SWIS share one of the challenges in dealing with trauma comes from

whether families are familiar with and willing to seek and accept mental health support.

Participant 6 expanded:

Depending on culture, it could be hard to ask for help or mention or acknowledge that

you're having these things and that there's an opportunity to talk about these things.

Some families will accept help and mental health support or counseling. Some are private

and don't accept and want to talk about these things. It's a process, it takes time.

Due to cultural norms, some families will be willing to accept mental health support in the form of counseling, while others may prefer privacy and need time to adjust and accept support.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I shared how SWIS identify the needs of newcomer refugee students, which are broadly categorized under language learning, social, and psychological needs. Language learning needs were characterized by newcomer refugee students being considered English language learners in Ontario schools. Social needs presented as newcomer refugee students developing a sense of belonging and making friends in their new communities. Finally, psychological needs are characterized by newcomer refugee students' behavioural issues and conflict, as well as trauma and mental health. In the next chapter, I describe the challenges SWIS reported on as they support newcomer refugee students.

Chapter 6: Challenges Experienced by SWIS

In the last chapter, SWIS shared their identification of the needs of newcomer refugee students, and in this chapter, I discuss SWIS' responses to the question: "What are the challenges SWIS experience in striving to support newcomer refugee students?". Responses revealed challenges in relation to SWIS' relationship with schools, which included conveying an accurate understanding of the SWIS role to school staff, and of the SWIS-School partnership. There were also challenges with some SWIS feeling accepted and included at schools. This included challenges with SWIS access to physical space at the school, and to school communications, such as emails school administrators send to students and parents, as well as access to student records. Moreover, challenges with navigating limited resources, with intercultural competence at schools, and the lack of time for professional development were reported.

Settlement Workers In Schools' Relationship with Schools

Several SWIS reported on the challenge of the nature of their relationship and role with schools. These challenges presented in SWIS negotiating their role in schools and having access to physical space in school as well as access to school communications and students' records. The first challenge revolved around SWIS establishing their role within the school environment.

The Role of SWIS

Establishing the role of SWIS in the school environment can be challenging since they are externally hired by community organizations. Some SWIS described challenges with being accepted at the schools they work in. For example, Participant 1 shared:

Initially, I had challenges at the school to be accepted as a settlement worker in school or in terms of what my role was, the kind of partnership we've had. And connecting with the staff and teachers and the administration. So definitely, that was a big challenge at the beginning. So, we are support staff in organizations that we are partnered with, and the people perceive us in different way. Some do understand the partnership, but not necessarily every single staff understands the partnership, and what our role is, so it's a continuous education.

In the early stages of SWIS' relationship with schools, there may be challenges with feeling accepted, establishing the nature of the partnership between staff, teachers, and administration, and understanding the role of SWIS. In some cases, there needs to be ongoing education about the role of SWIS with school staff and there may be a lack of clarity on the nature of the role and duties of SWIS. For example, Participant 2 also added:

Some schools think we're translators. They really don't understand our role, so for any little or big thing they will tell us 'can you grab this family and tell them this and this'. This is not settlement work, so it's very hard to show them what our role is or explain what our role is.

Several SWIS reported that many times their role is perceived as that of an interpreter, since they may speak the same language as newcomer students and their families. This leads to a lot of involvement with interpreting for newcomer families in addition to their main duties as a SWIS. Moreover, Participant 10 shared:

Every school is different based on the number of newcomers in their school or their experiences so they may be more or less receptive or reach out for support [from us]

because it's a collaboration. We're not school staff employees, we work for a non-profit organization, and it is part of our role to reach out to school staff and administration to promote our program and to make them aware of type of support that we can offer to families".

Participant 10 shared that it is also their responsibility as SWIS to reach out to school staff and familiarize them with the services which SWIS can offer. These findings are consistent with recommendations for an agreement to be drafted between schools and SWIS to promote clarity on roles and expectations (Yohani, 2013). As previously noted, Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) does not mandate organizations receiving funding which hire SWIS to establish agreements with the school districts they serve (IRCC, 2022). However, in IRCC's "Evidentiary examination of SWIS outcomes" report, in alignment with Yohani's (2013) research, a recommendation was put forth to establish and apply a common definition of the services which SWIS offer which are outlined clearly by policy and guidelines (IRCC, 2022). There is a common understanding among the majority of SWIS participants in my study of their role, as outlined by Participant 1 on the main duties of SWIS: "We have a mandate to provide information, orientation and referrals to help with the integration of newcomers and that could be in different capacities". Therefore, the role of SWIS is not limited to or intended for the primary purpose of interpretation for newcomer families. It is intended for providing information, orientation, and referrals to support newcomers with resettlement in Canada. However, it seems that clarity on the role of SWIS is not always present at schools.

Reconciling School Staff's Roles and SWIS Role

This lack of clarity and the complex needs of newcomer refugee students, which necessitate intercultural competence, could lead to tensions between reconciling the role of school's hired staff such as counselors and social workers and SWIS role (Martinez-Cosio and Iannacone, 2007). For example, Participant 1 further explained this challenge:

> I work closely with the attendance counselor and the social worker at the school. Because sometimes they refer kids to me, or kids don't want to talk to them, they want to talk to me. So that's another challenge, but again, we talked about cultural competency, and how much people are comfortable or how much awareness there is of different cultures and what are the specific needs for those youth. Again, that's another big area.

Participant 1 explained though she works closely with the attendance counselor and social worker at the school, as they will sometimes refer students to her. In some cases, newcomer students prefer to and are more comfortable speaking with SWIS due to SWIS' intercultural competence skills and ability to understand their specific needs as newcomer students. The lack of clarity on the role of SWIS can lead to other challenges related to access for SWIS in schools.

Access to Physical Space, School Communications, and Student Records

Participants shared how the lack of clarity on the importance of the role of SWIS can also lead to other challenges such as access to physical space at the school. For example, participant 2 added access to a physical space for their work will depend on the school: "It's different at each school, so you'll have schools that are so welcoming and really want you there and other schools that don't want to even provide you with space. It really depends on the school." Access to a physical space is important for SWIS in this case because it implies that they are welcome at the school, and their role is valued.

Other challenges related to access for SWIS present in the form of access to student information which is pertinent for their work. Since SWIS are employed by community organizations and are not school hired staff, participant 9 explained: "In [our area] we're part of agencies, but in [other jurisdictions] SWIS are a part of the school board. They're officially part of the school, the board hire SWIS workers so they have access to all student records which we don't". Since in the geographical area the study took place, SWIS are employees of a partner community agency and not of the school board, SWIS do not have access to student records, which can pose challenges for supporting students and families. Participant 11 expanded on the challenge of being an external employee of the school:

> There's a sense of being excluded because we're SWIS and work with a different organization. We don't work under school administration, so sometimes there are things that happen that affect how we serve newcomers because as SWIS, we rely so much on school staff. Sometimes we feel like we're asking too much but don't want to feel that because we're doing that for the sake of students and hope one day, we have a better way of accessing resources within school without making other people feel we're bothering them. As SWIS we don't get access to the school system so if we want to search for a student about their information, we can't do that. We don't have our own computer or account so we have to ask the school.

With SWIS being external employees of the school, there can be a sense of exclusion since they do not have access to the school system, emails, communications, and student records, which can impact their work with newcomers. They hope to be able to access resources and records within the school to support being more efficient at work. A broader discussion on SWIS and their navigation of resources ensues next.

Resources

As discussed, part of SWIS' role is to refer newcomer refugee students to resources both within the education system and in the greater community. These resources can include community programming, services, counseling, and education. The majority of SWIS reported challenges with limited resources and access to resources.

Limited Resources

Some SWIS reported that they find themselves involved in work beyond their scope, due to limited community resources, which poses a challenge to supporting newcomer refugee students. For example, Participant 2 explained:

> We tend to find ourselves trying to navigate parents' marital conflict, so we find ourselves mediating. There is no system or resource here, a lot of job is to do research and find resources and I haven't found one, so we try to support and navigate problems. [We] bring parents and say this is a different culture, we need to think in a different way. There is nobody [in our surroundings] that can do that and if there is someone, an interpreter has to be present to help the family.

This SWIS reports that there are a lack of resources and systemic method to support newcomer families; therefore, she finds herself acting as a mediator between parents who may be having relationship challenges as they adjust to a new culture. Even if a counselor is available to support families, an interpreter is needed and parents do not want to draw on the help of an interpreter due to privacy concerns. Therefore, as some literature indicates, the lack of linguistically appropriate mental health services hinders newcomer families from seeking community mental health resources (Shields & Lujan, 2019; Cheyne-Hazineh, 2020; Marshall et al., 2016). Participant 1 further reported:

This lack of support in the community puts more load at our end, and how do we support

this? And at the same time, we don't want that to conflict with our role and what we do.

Because that needs a little bit more counseling skills. My advantage is I have those skills.

Just because that has been part of my area of study because I took a minor in psychology,

and I did a counseling certification, but this is not a skill that honestly every SWIS

worker would have ... And sometimes I have to deal with complex situations and when it

comes to youth, I've had very, very complex situations where they'd have to leave home

and, I had to be part of the whole process….

Due to limited resources available to support newcomer youth in the community, some

SWIS find themselves involved with counseling youth or navigating complex situations, such as

youth having to leave their home, which can be challenging because counseling and crisis

intervention is not a skill set all SWIS are meant to have. SWIS engaging in counselling students

can pose a potential challenge because it is beyond the scope of SWIS' work and usual expertise.

When asked about referring newcomer refugee students and their families to resources in

the community, Participant 2 commented:

It depends on resources available and it depends on how willing any agency is to

collaborate – if they're not willing, the resources aren't going to really help. A lot of these

programs, we've had families go and unfortunately didn't find success. So, it's a

combination of sending the family to the right resource that will benefit the family

culture.

Referring newcomer students and families to external resources in the community depends

on how willing or available any agency is able to collaborate and on the suitability of that

resource for the newcomer family's cultural background. Participant 2 further explained the challenge with having insufficient resources to support newcomer families and students:

> The problem becomes at a certain point, needing to close the file because there are no more resources and so the family isn't doing great. If resources were ongoing and there's enough resources to get capacity of mental health they have or trauma they went through or understand what they went through and better support them, the kids would do much better. Even though they are resilient, it's amazing how resilient they are but the resources are not there.

The challenge for SWIS becomes needing to close the file for family support at some point because there are no more resources to refer families to. A hope to see more resources available to support the mental health and trauma of newcomer students and their families is frequently expressed, while acknowledging the great resilience they have despite the lack of resources. These findings are in alignment with literature on barriers to accessing resources within the community due to the lack of culturally sensitive services, especially in the field of mental health support, where newcomer refugee families feel comfortable and understood (Shields & Lujan, 2019; Cheyne-Hazineh, 2020; Marshall et al., 2016; Kaufmann, 2021).

Access to Resources

In addition to the challenge of navigating limited resources available to support newcomer refugee students and their families, there is the challenge of access to resources. For example, Participant 11 shared: "It can get frustrating when there are resources that are available only for certain newcomer status because this kind of program is beneficial for youth but unfortunately it only serves certain youth with status." In this case, SWIS report on facing the challenge of supporting newcomer students, when there are certain resources that are only available for a

particular category of newcomers, such as permanent residents, instead of conventional refugees. Next, I discuss the challenge of intercultural competence of school staff which SWIS shared as they support newcomer refugee students.

Intercultural Competence

Intercultural competence is defined as the ability to communicate and work effectively in diverse contexts and cultures by being sensitive to differences in values and behaviours (Cross Cultural Learner Center, 2018). Some research has indicated that intercultural competence can be a challenge for schools in Canada (Ratkovic et al., 2017). The limitations with intercultural competence may contribute to discrimination and oppression of students based on their ethnicity, social class, gender, academic ability, and more (Theoharis, 2008). Some SWIS shared the challenge of intercultural competence, which I broadly placed in two categories based on their responses. The first category is intercultural competence by school staff experienced by SWIS, and the second category is intercultural competence by school staff towards newcomer students as SWIS perceived.

Intercultural Competence and Settlement Workers In Schools

The consequences of limited intercultural competence of school staff may lead to SWIS experiencing stereotypes, prejudice, micro-aggression, or racism. For example, Participant 1 explained her challenge with experiencing racism and microaggression by stating:

> When I first started [my work at the school], I did encounter racism, that was 100% and
> microaggression is something that we encounter on a regular basis really. Especially
> when you're a person of colour.

In this case, Participant 1 shared how she experienced racism and microaggression as a person of colour, especially at the beginning of her work. Experiencing this type of discrimination can negatively impact SWIS and their work in schools. Participant 5 shared a similar experience with stereotyping:

> The biggest thing is stereotypes because I speak Arabic and I have my hijab on. It takes me lots of time to build trust between me and the school. It took me lots of time to let them see how important my role is.

In this case, this SWIS reports experiencing stereotyping due to her ability to speak a different language, and wearing a 'hijab' - the Muslim headscarf worn by some Muslim women. She explained that her experience of stereotyping resulted in a need for extended time to build trust between the school and establish the importance of her role. She also commented: "It's hard to change people, even if they got training on how to communicate, their inside, it's hard to change". This SWIS explains that changing people's perspectives, in this case, school staff, is not easy, even after they attend training. Moreover, SWIS shared the challenge of intercultural competence between school staff and newcomer students.

Intercultural Competence and Newcomer Students

Some literature described challenges with intercultural competence in some schools with educators, administrators, and curricula (Ayoub & Zhou, 2016; Cohen, 2016). In terms of school staff's intercultural competence toward newcomer students, Participant 5 explained that it depends on the educator:

> Some teachers are really inclusive, especially if they [have] traveled, [and] have knowledge about diversity and differences or they [have] read a lot. You feel they deal with kids in a different way. I meet lots of them to be honest and when I talk, I feel

they're not inclusive. Sometimes I see them work with some kids or focus on some kids

in class and don't follow up with the refugee kids. They don't try to manage the class

equally between kids.... I feel it's hard for them, for most of them to understand these

kids have been living in refugee shelters in Turkey or Jordan. It's important for them to

train teachers and staff in how to deal with parents and kids - I feel they stereotype a lot.

In this case, this SWIS reports some teachers are very inclusive, depending on their

exposure to other cultures through travel and reading, which can contribute to increasing

knowledge in diversity and differences. However, other teachers may find it challenging to

follow up with refugee students and understand their background and experiences, such as living

in refugee shelters. Some SWIS relate that there can also be a lot of stereotyping, and once again

emphasize the need for intercultural competence training. These findings align with literature

highlighting that many teachers do not feel well prepared and are in need of additional training to

effectively support newcomer refugee students (Nathoo, 2017). Furthermore, the findings

converge with some literature which notes that schools in Canada continue to lack intercultural

competence and a focus on social justice and transformative leadership (Ratkovic et al., 2017).

With regards to leadership, Participant 4 adds that while school administration may try

their best, there can be a gap in communication with newcomer refugee students and families due

to intercultural education: "I do feel the administration, principal, vice principal and guidance are

very helpful. They really try to give as much flexibility as possible but there is a gap between

both parties in understanding intercultural education". For example, there may be issues related

to students attending school on time or handling incidents related to bullying. In this case, a few

meetings may take place between school administration and newcomer refugee parents to discuss

the issue of tardiness and behaviour management respectively. Some principals may lack

sufficient preparedness to lead for diversity (Young, Madsen, & Young, 2010), which necessitates the need for them to develop relevant skills and behaviours to prepare them to navigate challenges when leading for diversity (Tuters & Portelli, 2017). Navigating the challenge of intercultural competence of school leaders and staff creates an additional burden on SWIS to support newcomer refugee students' sense of belonging, integration and well-being.

With an increasing number of newcomer refugee students in schools, and the need to enhance school staff's intercultural competence, the role of SWIS becomes even more pertinent. Providing sufficient professional development opportunities to equip SWIS with the skills and knowledge they need to fulfill an increasingly demanding role is important. However, SWIS share the challenge of a lack of time for professional development.

Professional Development

Professional development is an important element of enabling more effective work for SWIS, especially as the needs of newcomer refugee students are varied, and complex depending on their migration journeys. While SWIS juggle multiple roles and responsibilities, some share the challenge they encounter is insufficient time to pursue professional development. Participant 2 shared:

> Usually, honestly, there is no time for PD. No time at all. Previously, our agency used to send us to conferences. [We had] a couple of days for PD, but the problem is it talks about resources in [another area], not here. And then when we have PD here in [our city], [the] guest speakers from Ontario Works talk about Ontario Works or mental health and importance of that, but not necessarily resources. There are webinars we go to. I've signed up for and didn't attend because there is no time.

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This SWIS comments on previously being sent to conferences other cities; however, resources shared will be specific to that geographical area. There are also local speakers that speak about Ontario Works or mental health; however, there may not be ongoing resources recommended that are helpful for SWIS' work. Online professional development in the form of webinars is also available; however, it can also be difficult to attend because of a lack of time. These findings are important to consider for Immigration, Refugees, and Citzenship Canada (IRCC) as they plan to implement recommendations which support the effectiveness of SWIS work which should include sufficient time for professional development in order to support the multi-layered process of newcomer refugee students' integration (Ayoub & Zhou, 2016).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the top challenges experienced by SWIS when supporting newcomer refugee students. Responses revealed challenges in relation to SWIS' relationship with schools and limited resources available to support newcomer families. Moreover, challenges with intercultural competence at schools were conveyed, as well as the lack of time for professional development. Despite these challenges, SWIS report several strategies they employ in striving to support newcomer refugee students which are discussed in the forthcoming chapter.

Chapter 7: SWIS' Strategies to Support Newcomer Refugee Students

In Chapter 5, I shared how SWIS identified the needs of newcomer refugee students under the categories of language learning, social, and psychological needs. In Chapter 6, I described the challenges SWIS experienced in striving to support newcomer refugee students. These challenges included their relationship with schools, limited resources available to support newcomer families, challenges with intercultural competence at schools, as well as the lack of time for professional development. In this chapter, I share how SWIS reported on the strategies they employ to support newcomer refugee students. As discussed in the holistic framework for supporting newcomer refugee students, I merged both the resilience research on refugees to describe how SWIS support newcomer refugee students on multiple levels and the compassion-based framework to describe their support specifically in schools. I now draw on this framework when describing the strategies SWIS used to support newcomer refugee students at the following levels: 1) individual; 2) family; 3) school; 4) community; and 5) society. I begin by describing strategies SWIS implemented to support refugee students on an individual level.

Supporting Refugee Students at the Individual Level

Newcomer refugee students to Canada present with a variety of needs. As described in Chapter 5, SWIS identified refugee students' individual needs as language learning, social, and psychological needs. I begin with how SWIS support newcomer refugee students with meeting language learning placement needs since it was the most primary need of newcomer refugee students SWIS identified.

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Meeting Language Learning Placement Needs

As noted by researchers, acquiring proficiency in the English language supports newcomer students with their social, academic, and economic success, as well as contributes to a decreased rate of experiencing prejudice (Li & Que, 2020). The study participants explained the most primary need of newcomer refugee students is language learning. Strategies employed by SWIS to meet this need included supporting the school with placement of students in an English as a Second Language or English Language Development program.

Between 2016-2020, most refugee students who arrived in Canada came from Syria, Afghanistan, and Sudan (UNHCR, 2020). These are not considered English speaking countries, and thus newcomer refugee students from these countries are usually considered "English language learners" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008). In Ontario, two programs are offered for English Language Learners: the English as a Second Language (ESL) program and the English Literacy Development Program (ELD) program.

In this particular region where the study took place, SWIS shared there are three secondary schools that offer these two programs. Newcomer students can complete an initial language assessment at a reception and assessment center, a center where newcomer children who are school age can have education, and language assessments completed before registering at school. Participant 1 described the first program: "ESL is English as a Second Language so it is technically for students who have had their formal education but they lack the language proficiency to be in High School." This ESL program is for newcomer students who have been enrolled in formal education but lack the necessary linguistic proficiency required for secondary school education in Ontario.

Participant 1 explained the second program, English Language Development (ELD) is intended for students who have had interrupted education due to limited, disrupted, inconsistent, or unavailable schooling:

> [The] ELD program is the English Language Development program which is technically to support refugees. So those kids who had interruptions in their education or have been out of school for a couple of years. So, they need literacy and numeracy [support] before they get into the actual high school curriculum.

With SWIS supporting schools to place newcomer refugee students in the appropriate language learning stream by checking transcripts, they may help mitigate challenges students may experience if they are placed in a language level that is beyond their abilities, which can include feelings of anxiety, and a lack of engagement (Creese et al., 2011; Godin et al., 2017). Alternatively, if students are placed in a language level that is below their abilities, it can lead to decreased levels of motivation and start to pose a concern for completing secondary school in a timely manner since secondary education is free only until age 19−21 (Creese et al., 2011; Godin et al., 2017).While SWIS strive to support newcomer refugee students with their language learning placement needs, they also support with facilitating programs and opportunities to meet their social needs.

Meeting Social Needs

In Chapter 5, I shared that many SWIS identified the social needs of newcomer refugee students as developing a sense of belonging and making friends, which SWIS link to the idea of integration. As described in the literature review, integration is defined as newcomers being encouraged to maintain their cultural identity while developing relationships with other diverse

groups (Kaufmann, 2021). Several SWIS shared how they support newcomer refugee students with social needs, in particular integration. For example, Participant 1 shared:

> Definitely, this is part of our vision in terms of integration, because that's part of the IRCC (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada) mandate. We need to help them integrate. So, integration in schools is key for those kids who will have a sense of belonging eventually. So, if they don't start at an early stage developing that, it gets harder with time.

This SWIS explained that supporting newcomer refugee students with integration is definitely a part of the vision and mandate for the Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), which funds the SWIS initiative. These findings are congruent with some literature noting that schools are largely considered the primary setting to support newcomer students with integration since they provide an opportunity for language learning, socialization with peers, and awareness of Canadian culture (Pritchard & Ramos, 2018; Marshall et al., 2016). The focus on integration in the work of SWIS is important since integration is dependent upon collaboration between schools, newcomer refugee students and their families, and settlement and community organizations (Stewart et al., 2019). Strategies described by SWIS to support social needs and integration include participating in enacting a reception plan, encouraging newcomer students to volunteer, planning events for all students to support integration versus segregation, and implementing support groups for newcomer refugee youth.

Participating in Enacting a Reception Plan

To support the integration of newcomer refugee students, Participant 2 explained the importance of a reception plan. She shared that each school should have a reception plan that supports families with feeling welcome, comfortable, and safe, especially if they are coming

from a war zone, and provides them with an orientation to the new school system. Participant 2 explains what a reception plan entails:

> One of the schools I work at is super welcoming so when a new family comes we have a reception plan. Every school is supposed to have a reception plan so families feel welcome and certain things are done to make sure family is comfortable and safe especially if they came from war torn zone. The first contact is [a] settlement worker or secretary. If it's [the] secretary, she asks if [the] family speaks another language and how long they have been here and they assess the need of a SWIS being present. If the family speaks another language, they immediately call [a] SWIS and ESL teacher. The SWIS goes to the office with them and the ESL teacher is present and they fill out registration forms, and ask about the history of the children, any trauma, where they studied…

SWIS participate in enacting a reception plan that welcomes newcomer students and families through supporting school administration and in partnership with the ESL teacher. Participant 2 also explained the second part of the reception plan:

> The second appointment is for the family and students to take a tour to see the school. The administration assigns classes where there may be a peer to speak the same language or feel comfortable in that class where there's multiple ESL teachers. They assign the student to the best class that fits the needs of students, then we take a tour around the school. Then, we go to the classes where students are going to be and introduce them to their friends in the class and then, the student starts next day. So that really helps with welcoming newcomer families.

The second part of the reception plan is where students and families can take a tour of the school where newcomer students may have an opportunity to meet peers that speak the same

language or be introduced to ESL teachers who are available for support. Such a process can facilitate a smoother transition for students into the classroom. Some SWIS noted that this process does not always occur, but when it does, it is very helpful for newcomer students and families. Enacting such a reception plan is an important part of facilitating a process of integration that involves both newcomers and their host communities, in this case the school (Kaufmann, 2021). In order to not leave the burden of starting the process of integration solely on the shoulders of newcomer students themselves (Hebert, 2016; Rossiter et al., 2015; Shields et al., 2016), it is helpful for schools to set up and follow through on this reception plan which involves a school tour and introduction to teachers and peers.

Planning Events for All Students to Support Integration Versus Segregation

Some SWIS shared that when newcomer refugee youth begin attending a new school, they may still feel a certain level of segregation from their peers, especially if they are in the ESL or ELD programs which are specifically for English language learners. Planning events that encourage all students to participate can promote integration for newcomer refugee students. For example, Participant 1 described an important aspect of integration for newcomer refugee students who enter into the English as a Second Language Stream of studies:

We did our best to support integration versus segregation. Because, again, initially the ESL work has been always a separate program where kids are not in mainstream classes, which has been a challenge and still it is. But not as much, because we were trying to develop other programs, which integrate the youth with other mainstream youth. We did a couple of whole school activities in partnership with the school just to make sure that those events incorporate everybody. Newcomers and mainstream families and again, of course, the youth.

In this case, Participant 1 shared to support newcomer refugee students with integration, she planned some whole school activities in partnership with the school, which engaged with both newcomer and mainstream youth and families. Organizing such events is an important part of meeting social needs and social integration of newcomer children and youth which can contribute to supporting their success in schools as well as their transition to citizenship and leadership roles in the future (Kaufmann, 2021). In addition to planning events to support the social needs and integration of newcomer refugee students on a whole school and community level as outlined in the holistic framework, SWIS also implemented support groups for newcomer students as discussed below.

Implementing Support Groups for Newcomer Refugee Youth

In addition to participating in events planned for the whole school, providing specific support to meet the social needs of newcomer refugee youth was another strategy shared by some study participants. In this case, it included running support groups for newcomer refugee youth to support their integration. Participant 1 explained:

> So, on top of providing one on one support, I do run a group once a week throughout the school year. It's called "Let's Get Talking." with this group. It's more like coming to connect and [be part of a] group. So, it started as information sessions for the kids on information they need to know about the school system, things specific to the daily schedule, at school, or things related to exam preparation, lots of things. Generally, kids would need to understand about their pathways, whether it's the ESL pathway or whether it's a post-secondary pathway, how long it's going to take them to finish high school or to get their high school diploma, things more specific to education.

Such a program may be similar to the life skills group which can contribute to newcomer students' positive adaptation since it provides them with an opportunity to increase their social networks, confidence and good decision-making skills (Yohani, 2013). Confidence and good decision-making skills are connected to meeting psychological needs of newcomer refugee students as discussed next.

Meeting Psychological Needs

In Chapter 5, I reported on the psychological needs SWIS identified for newcomer refugee students which were behavioural issues and conflict, as well as trauma and the mental health of students. Many recent refugees experience "triple trauma" due to experiences of trauma in their country of origin, during their migration journeys, and upon resettling in Canada (Stewart et al., 2019). The study participants explained how they drew on different strategies to support students with meeting psychological needs related to trauma, which included engaging in a multidisciplinary team approach, referrals to resources, and using forum theater.

Engaging in a Multidisciplinary Team Approach

Due to the complex needs of newcomer refugee students, one person cannot possibly meet all of the students' needs. A multidisciplinary team approach, which engages with multiple individuals to support students is required. For example, Participant 6 explained that to support newcomer refugee students with psychological needs, the multidisciplinary team typically includes the school principal, learning support teacher (LST), classroom teacher, ESL teacher, SWIS worker, parents, and if necessary other specialists such as an educational assistant, social worker, or school psychologist. Participant 6 shared:

If kids are acting out, strategies are school based, so normally teachers [are provided] with educational assistants (EA). So, if a child needs an EA, they might get one assigned to them for a short period of time or referred internally to a psychologist if needed. Or the school may request mental health support in which case I will help them find [support] in the community. But it depends on each specific child and it really depends on the team meetings where a strategy would be discussed and we come up with some plan.

Participant 6 shared if students are involved in behavioural issues at school, strategies may include the support of an educational assistant for a short period of time or referring the student to a psychologist or for mental health support in the community. Describing this multidisciplinary team approach is important because while there is an increasing amount of literature describing the trauma experienced by refugee students (Vongkhamphra, Davis, & Adem, 2011; De Deckker, 2018; Stewart et al., 2019), there remains a need to further understand the supports in place to address trauma experienced by students, such as this multidisciplinary team approach. This strategy also emphasizes the importance of the SWIS role in mediating the relationship between the school staff involved in this approach and parents. Beyond SWIS involvement in this team approach to meet psychological needs of newcomer refugee students, they are also a key part of referring newcomer refugee students and their families to resources.

Referrals to Resources

If sufficient resources are not available to support newcomer refugee students' psychological needs in school, SWIS can make referrals to external resources. However, there is a stigma associated with seeking mental health support among some newcomer families. Participant 4 shared how she addresses this challenge:

There can be so much stigma about mental health. Kids are not allowed, parents may be

very particular about grades and certain things and kids' emotions are not taken into

consideration. So, kids suppress and become withdrawn or rebel. If it is mental health, I

may share some website to go on and I keep eyes and ears open if there is [specific

language] phone counseling or person to support.

The stigma with seeking mental health support may once again, as previously noted, be

linked to the lack of culturally responsive mental health services, which lead newcomers to feel

judged or a lack of understanding due to cultural differences (Shields & Lujan, 2019; Cheyne-

Hazineh, 2020; Marshall et al., 2016). Therefore, SWIS are instrumental in acknowledging the

possibility of mental health concerns related to trauma in newcomer students and their families

and the need to offer culturally sensitive mental health services (Yohani, 2013). Drawing on the

arts is a helpful tool for supporting students psychological needs related to behavioural

challenges and mental health. An example of such a strategy is discussed in the next section.

Using Forum Theater

Participant 1 described another strategy to support newcomer refugee youth with meeting

psychological needs, which draws on the arts.

This is where my work complemented the work of the teachers. So, we did forum

theater, it's an interactive way of acting, where we look at scenarios, and what's

happening. So, if teachers are complaining about a specific situation in class, we take that

and we put it into a scenario. And I engage kids in a volunteer capacity and engage the

audience to give their own insight on finding solutions for the problem instead of telling

them this is what you need to do. So, our programs change based on the need. Every time

we see there is a need in some area, we create something new to support teachers.

Participant 1 explained forum theater is an innovative way of supporting newcomer refugee students with behavioural challenges, which she believes complements the work of teachers. She explained that programming changes based on the need, and they strive to create programs that support teachers. This strategy is aligned with the compassion-based framework which supports effective teaching and learning (Lavelle et al., 2017), by having SWIS communicate regularly and purposefully with students in order to ensure their engagement in class through asking questions and engaging in discussions (Pelech & Checkley, 2019). This was one of the only SWIS that described drawing on this type of arts-based program to support newcomer refugee students with psychological needs. Further exploration of the impact of these types of programs and whether they can be adopted on a district wide level to support newcomer refugee students who have experienced trauma is worth considering. Further to supporting students' individual language learning, social, and psychological needs, SWIS also support newcomer refugee families with resettlement.

Supporting Newcomer Refugee Students at the Family Level

Since SWIS working in elementary schools support parents of newcomer refugee students, and in alignment with the resilience-based framework which includes supporting families of newcomer refugee students, I describe how SWIS support newcomer refugee families. This re-affirms the multilayered approach of SWIS supporting newcomer refugee students and their families. Working with newcomer refugee families has an indirect influence on newcomer refugee students. Several SWIS identified the needs of newcomer refugee families most relevant to students include meeting newcomer families' basic needs, language barrier, and technology competence.

Meeting Newcomer Families' Basic Needs

When it comes to supporting newcomer refugee families with meeting basic needs, Participant 6 shared that families receiving government financial support may not find it sufficient to meet the demands of housing, food, clothing, internet, etc. Therefore, SWIS drew on referrals to community agencies, foodbank, and school drives. Participant 6 explained:

> [We use] community agencies, foodbank - my own [agency] helps a lot of families in our area so depending on where they live in the city, you find local resources. [My agency] offers support with basic needs, small foodbank and some clothing we can give. I [also] have a school that made a winter drive for families. Those kinds of things are good - the schools are amazing - the support we get from schools is really good.

Therefore, Participant 6 reported drawing on community resources, such as the local food bank or local community agencies, as well as asking for support from the school to manage a winter drive that collects gently used coats and winter gear for families in need which has been very helpful. These findings are congruent with literature which suggests that supporting families with gaining access to basic resources, in this case food and clothing, is an important part of promoting resilience for newcomer refugees (Pieloch et al., 2016). Also, supporting newcomer families with language learning was another important aspect of fostering resilience.

Addressing Language Barrier

Many SWIS reported that learning English, both written and oral, as one of the top needs of newcomer refugee parents in relation to supporting their children's education. Participant 5 describes the importance of language learning for parents:

Language is a very important issue for them. It's crucial because even if they know how to use technology, they don't understand how to record [a] video to submit an assignment for their kid because they don't understand [the] words on [the] screen. So language is [a] crucial issue.

Language learning is important for newcomer refugee parents in order to support their children with completing schoolwork such as submitting assignments online by understanding instructions provided. One of the challenges with learning the English language for families is accessing English Second Language (ESL) classes depending on their immigration status. As Participant 3 shared:

The services that are available for refugee claimants are not as broad for PR [Permanent Resident] or someone who has an immigration hearing and moves from refugee claimants to conventional refugees. So, one of the struggles is refugee claimants. Most of the cases, they have a lot of needs but not too many places I can refer them to. For example, there are ESL classes available but the ones that PR and refugee claimants are eligible for are different. The waiting list is long [for refugee claimants].

If newcomer refugee parents are entering the country as refugee claimants instead of conventional refugees or permanent residents, they will not have the same level of access to services, such as ESL classes. This brings us back to the discussion of a lack of resources available to support newcomer refugee families which has been a consistent theme throughout the findings sections.

Since accessing language learning for parents may be difficult, the following strategies were used to bridge the language barrier between parents and SWIS or school staff. First, in some cases, additional funding is available to hire additional SWIS who have specific language

requirements to meet the needs of a large incoming newcomer community, as was the case with the influx of Syrian refugees to Canada in 2016. In this case, a SWIS who spoke Arabic was hired in order to support newcomer refugee Syrian families. SWIS who speak the same language as newcomer families may be called on for support by colleagues as outlined by Participant 4, or use tools such as "google translate":

> I can ask another colleague who speaks that particular language and explain to [a] parent or student. I will call this person if it's ok, I will talk to them and they will help us communicate. We use google translate sometimes, parents use google translate to translate from English to Arabic.

In addition to drawing on support from colleagues who speak the same language as newcomer families, and using online translation software, Participant 7 shared she draws on online resources in different languages to use with parents to increase their understanding of the resettlement process. Finally, when it comes to parent teacher meetings or workshops, SWIS report that an interpreter can be hired for support:

> For parent-teacher meetings, the school gets an interpreter. Any important meeting, [the] school ensures if [an] interpreter is needed for the session or workshops. Also, if there's a major demographic in which people speak, we can also book our own interpreters.

Participant 7 shares booking interpreters for school workshops or meetings between SWIS and families is another strategy they draw on. Therefore, SWIS draw on a few different strategies to overcome the language barrier between them and newcomer parents. They also supported parents with information sessions on important aspects of being involved in their children's education, such as technology competence.

Supporting with Technology Competence

In order for parents to effectively support their children in school and access important communication channels such as a parent portal, technology competence is required. Participant 5 shared how using technology for newcomer refugee parents can be a challenge and COVID-19 exacerbated the challenge. She explained: "These days they're suffering from technology, [even] before COVID. Technology is hard before and after for them". Parents may have challenges using the parent school portal or other digital communication tools to convey messages to teachers and principals. These tools require usernames and passwords and families may forget such information which makes it difficult to use these tools. To address this challenge, some SWIS shared they deliver information sessions for parents. For example, Participant 5 shared how she organized several information sessions on using digital communication tools for parents such as parents' online school portal and school messenger:

> I arranged for five information sessions on parent school portal and school messenger to communicate with teachers and the principal and school cash online. I try to help a lot for families to know how to navigate and how to set up accounts. They choose username and password and I take a picture and I keep sending them instructions as a picture or as a narrative in their language.

In this case, Participant 5 drew on different strategies to support newcomer refugee parents with technology competence by using a visual through taking a photograph and sending instructions in the parents' language. Participant 2 also shared other topics she has delivered workshops on include report cards, gardening, fire safety, immunizations, recreational programs, and social assistance. All of these information sessions can be instrumental to supporting newcomer refugee students at the family level by familiarizing them with the

education system and resources they can tap into at school and in the community (Pieloch et al., 2016).

Supporting Newcomer Refugee Students at the School Level

In continuing to draw upon the holistic framework to support newcomer refugee students, after explaining how SWIS support the individual needs and family needs of students, I describe how they work in schools to support newcomer refugee students. Strategies that several SWIS drew on in schools were also aligned with the compassion-based portion of the holistic framework, which included collaborating with school leadership, teachers, and staff and engaging with parents. Also, SWIS supported effective teaching and learning through offering professional development and training for educators. In Chapter 6, SWIS shared their challenges included their relationship with schools and a lack of resources available to support newcomer families. Moreover, challenges with intercultural competence at schools were conveyed. First, I begin by describing the strategies SWIS drew on to address their relationship with schools, then the strategies they employed to enhance intercultural competence of school staff.

Addressing SWIS Relationship with Schools

In Chapter 6, several SWIS reported on the challenge of the nature of their relationship and role with schools. These challenges revolve partly around establishing the nature of the partnership and understanding of the SWIS role. In order to address the SWIS relationship with schools, SWIS established their role as a liaison.

The role of SWIS is to act as a liaison between newcomer students and their families and school staff. When SWIS shared their collaboration with school staff, they mainly spoke about

their interactions with school administration, school teachers, guidance counselors, and English as a Second Language teachers. Participant 1 explained how she establishes her role as a liaison between school staff and newcomer refugee families:

So it starts with basic things, especially when we have suspensions at school and when we are connecting with a parent. So technically, I'm the liaison with the parents - the link between the parent and the school. So definitely, that's the key for sharing information. I usually have a very strong relationship and partnership with the Vice Principal. Whenever there is a family meeting, I'm part of those meetings, whether it's communication, dealing with the conflicts and altercations at school, connecting with a parent, being there when there is a conflict with the youth as well.

This SWIS explained the importance of her role as a liaison between school administration and parents which is consistent with literature that in cases of parent-child and family-school conflict, SWIS may take on the role of mediators and advocates by speaking on behalf of and supporting refugee families (Yohani, 2013; Howland et al. 2006; Martinez-Cosio & Iannacone 2007). Serving as a liaison between school staff and newcomer parents indicates the importance of strengthening intercultural competence of school staff.

Enhancing Intercultural Competence of School Staff

In Chapter 6, SWIS shared challenges with intercultural competence of school staff which included experiencing prejudice, microaggressions, and racism, especially if the SWIS identified as a visible minority. In the literature review, I defined intercultural competence as a set of knowledge, feelings, and skills that equip a person to communicate and work effectively in diverse situations and which are instrumental in addressing the challenge of discrimination

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against newcomer refugee students (Theoharis, 2008; Gallucci, 2016; Cohen, 2016). When it comes to enhancing intercultural competence of school staff, SWIS report facilitating culturally sensitive conversations between newcomer students or their families and school staff in order to make certain accommodations. For example, Participant 10 shared:

> In one of my schools, the school made some accommodations for children during Ramadan, so they do not put them together with other kids eating their lunch. They offered a different space, and a teacher supervises them. The school will [also] ask if they want prayer time. So we had a conversation with some parents and the principal, 'do you want this or not want this'…it was a good conversation between school and families and my role there was asking families 'do you want to have this conversation with the principal' and that was very reassuring to my client that the school is willing to make some accommodations.

Participant 10 shared part of her role is to support newcomer students and their families with conveying their needs to school administration, such as a separate space during lunch time in Ramadan for students who are fasting or accommodating prayer time. Another common strategy to support intercultural competence of school staff included offering training sessions on the topic. Participant 1 explained:

> With time, lots of work has been done at the school in terms of cultural competency. At sessions, I did present for the teachers on different topics related to newcomers, whether it's information on their challenges, or the barriers toward their integration at the school, their complex needs and cultural transition, mental health. And I felt it was a good partnership with teachers to understand or to highlight what the needs of those kids are and how to support them the best. So we developed programs in partnership with the

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teachers. At the beginning it was a one way so it was only me doing all of that, but really, as I said, it's been 10 years so…

This type of partnership between SWIS and school staff to develop professional development training for school staff on intercultural competence is important in supporting the academic success of newcomer refugee students by addressing educators' lack of familiarity with their refugee students' experiences and needs which include a multi-layered process of integration (Ayoub & Zhou, 2016). Furthermore, Participant 1 shared that when there is conflict in the school between students, she steps in to help teachers understand the root causes and enhance their intercultural understanding:

> I'm there every time there is a conflict, or an altercation. I'm there to deal with those situations because we know the background, we know what they went through, and we know their challenges. And not everybody can see it, like teachers on the other side cannot, do not understand those [challenges]. They see them as aggressive kids. They see them as lack[ing] the social skills they need to adapt. So that's why I was actually invited through the principals to do those sessions, just because we have to alleviate some of the stress of the teachers in helping them understand why those kids behave this way or react this way for certain situations. And help them look at it from a different angle. I take the list of the things that teachers said to me about the kids, like they're aggressive or they don't know how to socialize. And then I flipped them into a positive thing to look at in terms of, those kids are resilient. Like, they might be impulsive, [but] rather than [saying] they're just aggressive because that's their fight or flight kind of reaction, when they are threatened or feel in danger, and this is what they've learned this from living in refugee camps for years. [I reframe it into] they have a lot of survival skills. It's not that they don't

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have the skills, they have a different set of skills, which they needed to survive, but now

we have to support them to learn the new skills they need to adapt. And that was really

helpful. Like it definitely helps teachers to look at those behaviors from a different

perspective.

Participant 1 shared, during instances of conflict involving students, she drew on an asset-

based approach to reframe the view of teachers on newcomer refugee students from lacking in

skills to having a different set of skills which enabled them to survive and that students need

support to develop a new set of skills to help them adapt to this new context. This type of

approach aligns with the holistic framework which supports refugee students through

promoting resilience and strengths instead of only the deficits newcomer refugee students may

carry (Pieloch et al., 2016). The SWIS approach to highlight strengths of newcomer refugee

students is also connected to the compassion-based component of the holistic framework to

support newcomer refugee students which focuses on strength and empowerment versus a

"deficit-based" perspective (Ratkovic et al., 2017; Kovacevic, 2016). Enhancing the

intercultural competence of school staff through SWIS delivering training sessions for teachers

can begin to increase school staff's understanding of the challenges newcomer refugee students

encounter and address concerns related to discrimination against students (Gallucci, 2016;

Cohen, 2016).

Supporting Newcomer Refugee Students at the Community Level

In addition to SWIS supporting newcomer refugee students at the individual, family, and

school level, they engage in support at the community level by connecting newcomer refugee

students and their families to social and recreational activities in the community that enable

them to feel a sense of belonging. The strategies they drew on at the community level included

encouraging newcomer students to volunteer. During summer holidays, SWIS also fulfill the role of Community Connectors and Integrators.

Encouraging Newcomer Students to Volunteer

In secondary schools, SWIS connect newcomer students to volunteering opportunities so they can complete their required 40 hours of volunteering to graduate, as well as promote greater participation in the community to promote integration. For example, Participant 4 shared: "[We have] lots of volunteering opportunities to connect students to", so she connects newcomer students to these opportunities in the community in order to provide them with experiences to develop agency and a sense of empowerment by taking on leadership roles, which can promote their positive adaptation (Edge, Newbold, & McKeary, 2014). Also, SWIS play the role of community connectors and integrators during the summer for newcomer students and their families, in order to facilitate further connections to the community.

Playing the Role of Community Connectors and Integrators

While SWIS work in schools during the school year, they also have an important role to play during school summer holidays. In the summer, Participant 2 shared they become community connectors and developed an innovative way to support newcomer families during the pandemic:

> In the summer we become community connectors and we still support families we work with. This summer for pandemic, because families were isolated [with] nowhere to go at the beginning during lockdown, my coworkers came up with an idea called cup of coffee with SWIS podcast - kind of like a radio show. Once a week, a different guest speaker talks about resources and things they should do during COVID. So we had a dietician, fire department, librarian on the show, somebody from sun safety and provided them info

through radio show. A lot of newcomer families are illiterate in their own language to read or write in English and [have] no computer literacy so they can't navigate a lot of programs so we tried to think of the simplest way. [We] uploaded [the] podcast on the internet and all they had to do is click the button to listen to the show and the [show] was in both Arabic and English because most of the families speak Arabic. [We] find ways to connect newcomer families to the community and other resources in the community as much as possible.

Participant 2 shared she and her co-worker came up with an innovative idea to have a weekly podcast called "Cup of coffee with SWIS" where they would have different guest speakers to discuss important topics in both Arabic and English since many newcomer families are Arabic-speaking. This is an example of an innovative strategy employed by SWIS which facilitates opportunities for newcomer families to learn about resources and services they have in the community, which can foster connection and a sense of belonging (Pieloch et al., 2016).

Additionally, Participant 3 described her role as a 'community integrator' in the summer where she delivers special programming:

In the summer, we are called community integrators so for example we run programs like English conversation circles for adults [and], literacy fun programs for children. So those are the programs we run and there's also the NOW program - newcomer orientation week. We come together and support the delivery of the NOW program in the summertime for newcomer students that are starting high school in Canada.

These strategies align with once again promoting a sense of belonging for newcomer refugee students and their families by offering programs which facilitate 'community support networks' where newcomers can meet other newcomers (Pieloch et al., 2016). In turn, this

facilitates a sense of connection and shared experience among newcomer students and their families. Finally, in addition to supporting newcomer refugee students at the community level, SWIS offer support at the societal level as well.

Supporting Newcomer Refugee Students at the Societal Level

Beyond supporting newcomer refugee students at an individual, family, school, and community level, SWIS also work on a societal level. Pieloch et al. (2016) described supports which promote resilience at the societal level as connecting newcomers to their home culture and religion. While SWIS did not explicitly describe how they may support newcomer refugee students to maintain connections to their home culture and religion, since it may fall outside of the scope of their role, I found SWIS supported at the societal level by raising awareness and acting as advocates. In particular, more seasoned SWIS raised awareness about supporting newcomer refugee students' needs to various stakeholders and attempted to reshape public discourse on refugee students.

Newcomer refugee students come with unique needs which may not always be readily visible or understood by the greater society. Therefore, Participant 1 explained the importance of raising awareness to different stakeholders including social service providers: "So I am involved in raising awareness through cultural competency workshops, whether it's for social service providers or college students". She also points out: "We've done a lot of projects in the last couple of years for welcoming newcomer youth. We don't call our kids refugees, we do always call them this term: 'newcomer youth'". In this case, Participant 1 indicates that she refers to newcomer refugee youth as "newcomer youth" instead of refugees since there may be a negative connotation associated with the term "refugees". This nuance in language used to

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describe newcomer refugee students is an important consideration in how public discourse is shaped and impacts support for newcomer refugee students.

As noted in Chapter 6 with challenges for SWIS, when newcomers arrive to Canada, they may not be aware of how to communicate certain needs or access specific services. Thus, further to the importance of raising awareness, some SWIS explain the importance of advocacy work that communicates needs of newcomer refugee students and supports them with accessing important services. Participant 11 shared the importance of her role as an advocate in this case for newcomer refugee students: "Part of our role is to advocate for students. This is a huge role for us because we're not part of the school system". Participant 11 understands that since she is not part of the school system, she may have more agency to advocate for newcomer refugee students and their needs. These findings are congruent with some literature which indicates that in other jurisdictions where SWIS are hired by the school, instead of by a settlement agency, they may experience challenges with remaining neutral if the school's goals or policies conflict with the family's goals and promoting equity for newcomer students (Martinez-Cosio and Iannacone, 2007). In the case of SWIS in this study, since they are not hired by the school, they may be in a more suitable position to advocate on behalf of newcomer students and their families in order to promote more effective support from the school.

Participant 1 also shared that her role in supporting newcomer students is very much an advocacy role:

> Well, it's definitely advocacy first. Because when you're providing service on the ground, and you're the frontline, we know the barriers, we know the issues, and we always face those concerns. [Change] definitely should come at a system level, but it definitely starts from us advocating and saying those kids need to be more integrated into regular classes,

or at least have the opportunity to be exposed to mainstream kids so they can build that

understanding of each other and feel comfortable dealing with others and practice their

language skills.

While Participant 1 believes change should be at a systems level from the top, she also

sees the importance of advocating on the front lines for newcomer refugee students to feel

integrated at school. This approach represents an understanding of systemic barriers which may

be disadvantaging newcomer students, such as inequalities resulting from institutionalized

segregation and discrimination (Ngo, 2012). The complex, multi-layered work of SWIS

necessitates that they continue to receive professional development in order to meet the needs

of newcomer refugee students, families, and educators in the Canadian public education

system.

Strategies for SWIS Professional Development

Several SWIS in Chapter 6 of findings also reported having insufficient time to engage in

professional development. When there is an opportunity, SWIS shared they usually strive to

participate in online professional development. For example, Participant 6 shared:

Now, online we have partnerships with a couple of agencies that work with mental health

and/or work with refugees or immigrants. We are doing them online – one of them is

called 'Achieve'. [There is training with the] Crisis and trauma resource institute (CTRI),

Canadian association for mental health (CMHA) and specifically there is the immigrant

and refugee mental health project, they are amazing - they are the best ones. There is a lot

about Syrian refugees.

There are partnerships with agencies that work with mental health or work with both

newcomers and mental health which offer online professional development training which

SWIS participate in. Questions about the effectiveness of completing individual professional development online versus professional development in a group in person remain outstanding. Participant 11 also shared attending professional development training on serving youth in newcomer communities, difficult conversations, practical intervention strategies for anxiety, and diversity and culture.

Conclusion

The varying and complex needs of newcomer refugee students necessitate that SWIS support provide support on multiple levels. On an individual level, SWIS supported students by addressing their language learning placement, social and psychological needs. Also, SWIS supported newcomer refugee students' families to meet basic needs, overcome the language barrier and develop technology competence. At the school level, SWIS collaborated with school leaders to shape a safe and caring school culture by establishing their role as a liaison between school staff and parents. They also worked with teachers to promote effective teaching and learning, through offering professional development and training for educators on intercultural competence and refugee students' needs and experiences. At the community level, SWIS supported newcomer refugee students by encouraging newcomer students to volunteer and playing the role of community connectors and integrators. Finally, at societal level, SWIS raised awareness about newcomer refugee students' needs and served as advocates. In order to continue to meet the needs of newcomer refugee students at multiple levels, SWIS explained their current strategy for seeking professional development which mainly entails attending online training.

Chapter 8: Discussion – The Role of SWIS as "Compassionate Connectors"

My interpretivist, qualitative study examined how 11 SWIS identified the needs of newcomer refugee students, the challenges they experience in their role, and the strategies they draw on to support newcomer refugee students in Ontario. My research enabled me to identify the role of SWIS as "Compassionate Connectors" since they drew on a compassion-based framework to connect school staff, newcomer students and families, and the community. Supporting connections at these multiple levels contributes to increased resilience (Pieloch et al., 2016; Landau, 2007). Based on my analysis, the unique role of SWIS as compassionate connectors presented in five key areas, which capture the most important aspects of SWIS work in supporting newcomer refugee students. By collaborating with schools, SWIS play a key role in enhancing intercultural competence of school staff which aids in promoting integration, a sense of belonging, and well-being for newcomer refugee students. In this chapter, I draw on the research questions, literature review, findings and the holistic framework for supporting newcomer refugee students to discuss the five key areas which describe the role of SWIS.

As mentioned before, with the number of refugees worldwide continuing to increase, reaching approximately 32.5 million, nearly half of whom are children and youth under 18 eighteen years of age (UNHCR, 2022), an understanding of how to support newcomer refugee students becomes ever more pertinent. With an estimated 87,000 refugee children and youth in Canada (UNHCR, 2022), leading scholars advocate that promoting environments which encourage refugee students to succeed is instrumental for their academic success, social cohesion, economic competitiveness, sense of belonging and transitions to citizenship (Ratkovic et al., 2017; Volante et al., 2017; Taylor & Sidhu, 2012). Yet, some researchers argue there are concerns that schools in Canada are not adequately prepared to support the socio-psychological

needs of refugee students as they enter schools (Gagné, Shapka & Law, 2012; Kovačević, 2016).

Therefore, the complex needs of newcomer refugee students necessitate forming school community partnerships (Ratkovic et al., 2017), such as the SWIS initiative where community hired staff, SWIS, support newcomer refugee students and their families in schools. The role of SWIS is unique in that though they work in schools and support the education of newcomer refugee students, they are not educators. Also, though they support the socio-psychological needs of newcomer refugee students, they are not social workers. The role of SWIS is unique since they act as liaisons and connectors between newcomer refugee students, the school, and the community by supporting school staff and educators with understanding newcomer refugee students' needs and experiences. They also support newcomer students and their families with connecting to school and community resources which aids with the integration process. Despite the importance of SWIS' role in supporting newcomer refugee students, the significance of their role is largely missing from literature and policy. Also, in practice at schools, their role is sometimes misunderstood and under-valued. Thus, my research focused on contributing to a growing and imperative body of literature to inform policy and practice on how SWIS support newcomer refugee students.

My research sub-questions were: 1) How do SWIS identify the needs of newcomer refugee students? 2) What are the challenges SWIS experience in striving to support newcomer refugee students? 3) What are the strategies SWIS employ in striving to support newcomer refugee students?

The needs SWIS identified for newcomer refugee students related to language learning, social needs and psychological needs demonstrate how meeting these needs contributes to promoting integration, a sense of belonging, and well-being for students. The challenges SWIS experience in their role provide new perspectives on the importance of enhancing the partnership between schools and community agencies that employ SWIS, providing additional resources to support their multilayered work, and continuing to develop intercultural competence for school staff. Through my data analysis, I found the strategies SWIS used to support newcomer refugee students aligned with the "Holistic Framework for Supporting Newcomer Refugee Students" I discussed in Chapter three, which draw on compassion-based and resilience-based approaches.

SWIS as "Compassionate Connectors"

This holistic framework I drew on merged Lavelle and colleagues' (2017) *Compassion Based Framework* and Pieloch and colleagues' (2016) review of *Resilience research with refugee children* from 2006-2016 in Australia, Canada, Europe and the United States. To reflect the multi-layered support SWIS offer for newcomer refugee students, I merged both these approaches because the compassion-based framework described SWIS' compassionate support for students in schools through collaborating with school leadership and teachers to shape a safe and caring school culture, promote effective teaching and learning through offering professional development on intercultural competence and refugee students' needs , and engaging with parental and community involvement. Furthermore, the support SWIS offered reached beyond schools to support students on a broader and more holistic level at the individual, school, family, community, and society level, which was described in the resilience-based approach. Enhancing connectedness to family and community resources is suggested to be an important contributor to promoting resilience (Landau, 2007).

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In Chapter 7, Participant 2 referred to her role in the summer as a "Community Connector" where she facilitates opportunities for newcomer families to learn about resources and services they have in the community, which can foster connection and a sense of belonging (Pieloch et al., 2016). However, as described in the holistic framework, the role of SWIS reaches beyond community connector in the summer, to acting as a compassionate connector for students at the individual, family, school, community and societal level throughout the rest of the academic school year. Supporting individuals to develop a sense of connectedness with one another, and their community contributes to increased resilience (Landau, 2007). SWIS contributed to promoting resilience for newcomer refugee students and their families by supporting them to develop a sense of connectedness with one another through programming at schools and in the community. In the forthcoming sections, I describe how the role of SWIS as compassionate connectors manifested in five key areas. Through collaboration with schools, SWIS offer important perspectives and education on intercultural competence for school staff, which in turn promotes the integration, sense of belonging and well-being of newcomer refugee students.

SWIS Collaboration with Schools

The SWIS initiative is an important collaboration between schools and community agencies. In schools, the work of SWIS draws on the holistic framework, specifically from the compassion-based lens. This occurs through SWIS collaborating with school leadership, teachers, and staff, such as guidance counselors, to shape a safe and caring school culture and promote effective teaching and learning. Also, SWIS encourage parental and community involvement and offer professional development for educators. Thus, SWIS are involved with practices for supporting newcomer refugee students which include collaborating with school

staff to cultivate an equitable and inclusive environment (Pinson & Arnot, 2007). Furthermore, SWIS help to address students' language learning needs (Taylor & Sidhu, 2012) by supporting effective teaching and learning. Also, SWIS address the social and emotional well-being of refugee students (Pinson & Arnot, 2007; Taylor & Sidhu, 2012) through cultivating strong relationships with newcomer students and their families, and offering information and referrals to relevant services.

Developing a strong collaboration with schools can have challenges such as establishing the nature of the collaboration and understanding of the SWIS' role with school administration and teachers. The primary role of SWIS is that of a liaison, in which they act as the link to connect newcomer students, families, school staff and community involvement. Therefore, according to my analysis and interpretation, their role as compassionate connectors is key in cultivating support at multiple levels on the individual, family, school, community and society level, in alignment with the holistic framework.

First, collaborating with school leadership lays an important foundation for the partnership between SWIS and the school. For example, SWIS explain the importance of having a strong partnership with the vice-principal who usually manages student conflict and suspensions. In the case of conflict or a suspension related to newcomer refugee students, school leadership will usually ask SWIS to communicate with parents, as well as invite them to family meetings with the school for discussion. Therefore, by collaborating with school staff to facilitate parental and community involvement, SWIS act as compassionate connectors by providing newcomer parents with information on education in Ontario and schools, in addition to referrals to community and family resources to support students and their families (Cross Cultural Learner Center, 2018). In cases of parent-child and family-school conflict, SWIS also took on the role of

mediators and advocates for newcomer students and their families (Yohani, 2013; Howland et al. 2006; Martinez-Cosio & Iannacone 2007). In this case, SWIS assist school staff with understanding the underlying reasons of behavioral challenges for newcomer refugee students, such as aggression.

Through ongoing education and professional development using an asset-based approach, SWIS strive to support school leadership and staff with reframing a deficit-based view of newcomer refugee students that labels them as 'aggressive' or lacking in 'social skills'. This once again draws on the compassion-based framework which emphasizes an asset-based lens to supporting students (Lavelle et al., 2017). For example, SWIS strive to support the view that newcomer refugee students have acquired great resilience, and it is not that they do not have skills, but that they have had to develop a different set of skills which allowed them to survive living in refugee camps. Therefore, SWIS encourage staff to understand newcomer refugee students need support to develop a new set of skills to help them adapt, and report it is very helpful when staff adopt this new perspective.

Since Canadian teachers are largely from middle class, Caucasian backgrounds and may have limited intercultural training (Ratkovic et al., 2017; Yohani, 2013), SWIS play an important role in recognizing and communicating to teachers the underlying sociocultural and historical background and experiences of students who may be having academic or behavioural challenges (Yohani, 2013; Guo, Arthur & Lund, 2009). This in turn can support teachers with more effective teaching and more effective learning for newcomer refugee students. Supporting school staff with understanding the unique needs and challenges of newcomer refugee students can contribute to less stereotyping and marginalization of students. Therefore, SWIS play a key role

in enhancing the intercultural competence at schools in order to support newcomer refugee students more effectively.

Intercultural Competence of School Staff

Intercultural competence, the ability to communicate and work effectively in diverse settings by being culturally sensitive to differences in values and behaviours (Cross Cultural Learner Center, 2018), is an important theme emerging from the literature and data in supporting newcomer refugee students. A Pan-Canadian research report examining literature and policy from 2007-2017 on support for newcomer refugee students describes intercultural competence as an important area of growth for schools and policy makers (Ratkovic et al., 2017), in order to address the challenge of discrimination against newcomer refugee students (Theoharis, 2008; Gallucci, 2016; Cohen, 2016). The challenges SWIS experience with intercultural competence in schools were described on two levels.

The first level is SWIS' experience with limited intercultural competence from school staff which resulted in some SWIS experiencing prejudice, microaggressions and racism. This was particularly reported among SWIS who identify with a Middle Eastern and or visibly Muslim background. Experiencing this type of discrimination can contribute negatively to SWIS feeling welcomed and supported at the school such that they can adequately support newcomer refugee students. There is an understanding among SWIS that changing attitudes and perspectives towards diversity, equity and inclusion is a process that takes time.

The second level SWIS describe is limited intercultural competence toward newcomer refugee students and their families, depending on each teacher and school environment. Therefore, some SWIS shared some teachers may be more interculturally competent given their

experiences with travel and reading which familiarizes them with diversity, while other teachers

may find it more challenging to understand and relate to newcomer refugee students'

experiences. Thus, some SWIS explained these limitations with intercultural competence can

contribute to some school staff having challenges with sufficiently meeting the needs of

newcomer refugee students as well as lead to stereotyping of students. As a result of limited

intercultural competence of school staff in some cases, SWIS shared that they were often directly

involved in supporting newcomer refugee students to great extents with transitions, settlement,

social and emotional well-being, and conflict resolution. Several SWIS shared the importance of

their role as a liaison between school administration, teachers, students and parents in order to

facilitate culturally sensitive communication between all parties involved.

These challenges SWIS reported on with intercultural competence in schools align with

research indicating that refugee students are at higher risk of experiencing academic challenges,

due to educators' need to further understand refugee students' experiences and multiple needs

related to integration (Ayoub & Zhou, 2016). It was common for SWIS to identify the need for

teachers to receive intercultural competence training which can prepare them to support

newcomer refugee students and their families more effectively. Once again, this converges with

research stating many teachers do not feel well prepared in supporting diverse students and are in

need of additional training to adequately support newcomer refugee students (Nathoo, 2017).

Also, SWIS explain the challenge of intercultural competence between school

administration and parents due to cultural differences and expectations. A lack of cultural

diversity of administration and staff in Canadian schools (Egbo, 2009) can contribute to

limitations with intercultural competence. Moreover, some scholars indicate that principals still

need to develop particular skills and behaviours which are required when leading for diversity

(Young, Madsen & Young, 2010; Tuters & Portelli, 2017). In her important work on "Becoming a Transformative Leader: A Guide to Creating Equitable Schools" (2019), Shields explains important tenets to create welcoming, inclusive, and equitably just schools, which are becoming increasingly important with the rise in newcomer refugee students. Throughout my study, I reflected on how SWIS' holistic, asset-based approach to support newcomer refugee students draws our attention to the importance of tenet two of "changing mindsets" in Shield's work (2019). Specifically, Shields (2019) explains "tenet two of transformative leadership theory emphasizes the need to deconstruct beliefs, assumptions, and mindsets that perpetuate inequity and to reconstruct them in more equitable ways" (p.31). This includes deconstructing concepts such as "racism, implicit bias, deficit thinking" (p.31-32) and understanding the longstanding impact of systemic structures which have disadvantaged and led to the marginalization of racialized populations (Shields, 2019).

In order for school staff to address deficit thinking towards students, Shields (2019) proposes eliminating blame of students or their families for the lack of academic success. Instead, educators need to take responsibility to learn about students and their interests as well as familiarize themselves with how to teach students with a variety of social, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds. This echoes SWIS reporting the need for school staff to further acquire intercultural competence which could aid in supporting newcomer refugee students and their families.

As indicated in the compassion-based framework, professional development can contribute to improving relationships between students and teachers (Jennings et al., 2013). By offering professional development on topics related to intercultural competence in order to enhance teachers' ability to connect with newcomer refugee students, SWIS once again

exemplified an important aspect of being a compassionate connector. SWIS delivered training sessions to school staff on topics such as challenges, barriers and complex needs of newcomers, as well as successful integration, cultural transitions, and mental health. It was reported by SWIS that these trainings are best delivered in partnership and collaboration with administration and teachers to ensure they are meeting their needs on how to understand and support newcomer refugee students best. This strategy aligns with the holistic framework which promotes supporting newcomer refugee students at the school level through partnerships with school staff. Through promoting intercultural competence and SWIS partnership with school staff, SWIS are able to support the integration of newcomer refugee students and their families.

Integration

The primary mandate for SWIS is to promote the integration of newcomer refugee students and their families through information, orientation, and referrals to community resources. Connecting families to community resources is an important component of promoting resilience (Landau, 2007). Thus, SWIS serve as compassionate connectors in supporting newcomer refugee students towards integration, which encourages them to maintain their cultural identity while developing relationships with other cultural groups (Kaufmann, 2021). Some researchers argue developing friendships with peers at school, including Canadian-born students, to learn about different cultures, is an important element of supporting integration (Rossiter et al., 2015).

However, SWIS shared a contention for newcomer refugee parents when it comes to forming friendships for their children, which was also reported by some researchers. There may be cases where newcomer refugee parents are concerned about their children making friends

with peers from diverse cultures due to differences in values and interests (Cheyne-Hazineh, 2020). While there can be value in forming intercultural friendships such as acquiring the language more swiftly, and understanding the school system, there are also challenges (Kaufmann, 2021). Differences in cultural values, interests, language and prejudicial attitudes (Cheyne-Hazineh, 2020) may be a contributing factor to refugee youth reporting challenges with developing friendships with students who are not refugees due to social exclusion and discrimination (Li, Que, 2020; Nakeyar et al., 2017).

Newcomer refugee parents and their children may need time to adjust and feel welcomed in their new schools and communities in order to start to develop friendships with diverse cultures. In order to facilitate feeling welcome and integrating in the school and community for newcomer refugee students and their families, SWIS supporting with enacting the school's reception plan for newcomers, planning events for all students to support integration, and implementing support groups for newcomer refugee students. This type of programming demonstrates SWIS' role as compassionate connectors as they strive to connect students and their families to the school context, as well as to other newcomer students. A reception plan at schools, with the participation of SWIS, supports newcomer families and students with feeling welcome and comfortable by supporting them with completing registration forms, and giving them a tour of the school where students can meet their teachers and peers. While this process may not always occur, possibly due to time constraints, when it does occur, SWIS share it is very helpful as it provides students with an opportunity to meet their teachers and peers ahead of time. This type of support aligns with both the individual and family level support suggested by the holistic framework for supporting newcomer refugee students.

Once newcomer refugee students are in classrooms, SWIS shared that they may still experience a level of segregation from their Canadian-born peers. These findings converge with claims that newcomer students may experience inequalities as a result of systemic barriers such as institutionalized segregation and discrimination (Ngo, 2012). Thus, SWIS shared the strategy of planning events that engage with the entire school to encourage both newcomer and more established students and their families to participate. This approach to support integration also aligns with research which promotes increased integration efforts from more established Canadians is necessary (Yan et al., 2012).

For example, peer mentorship opportunities which form a partnership between a newcomer youth and an established member of the community provide a space for practicing English in a non-academic setting and mentorship on navigating a new system in Canada (Godin et al., 2017; Rossiter et al., 2015). Also, encouraging newcomer refugee youth to participate in leadership and volunteer programs, such as planning school and community events, supported their ability to gain Canadian experience, practice English, and can facilitate future opportunities to join the workforce (Marshall, 2016). Such opportunities also provided newcomer refugee youth with mentors who could act as supports and advocates for them as they learn to adjust to the Canadian system (Kaufmann, 2021). The importance of engaging more established Canadians to support integration is congruent with the need to support newcomer refugee students at the societal level as suggested in the holistic framework.

In addition to planning whole school events to support the integration of newcomer refugee students, SWIS were compassionate connectors by implementing support groups for newcomer students in secondary school. This type of support group once a week provided newcomer refugee students with an opportunity to connect with other newcomer refugee students

and learn about topics related to the school system such as exam preparation as well as post-secondary options. Such opportunities to connect with other newcomer refugee youth are also important, since in addition to intercultural friendships, friendship within similar cultures of newcomer communities can promote mental health for refugee youth (Godin et al., 2017). While newcomer refugee students may be coming from different sub-cultures within a culture, these friendships can provide a sense of mutuality and community with peers who have similar experiences and challenges related to migration, such as culture shock and nostalgia for their home countries, as well as similar values and culture (Kaufmann, 2021). This type of programming can promote a 'sense of connectedness, hope and resilience' (Landau, 2007) for newcomer refugee students. Thus, this connection with other newcomer refugee students can provide a sense of validation for their common experiences, values and challenges, which can aid in the integration process. I believe these types of smaller groups can provide more consistent support to newcomer refugee students at the individual level, which is the primary level of support in the holistic framework.

As discussed earlier, in addition to SWIS' role during the academic school year, they described the importance of their role as "community connectors and integrators" during school summer holidays. This work corresponds with the holistic framework which supports newcomer refugee students at the family and community level. For example, SWIS found innovative ways to continue to support the integration of newcomer refugee families during the summer 2020 lockdown caused by COVID-19 by having a weekly podcast, "Cup of coffee with SWIS". In this podcast, different guest speakers, including a dietitian, member of the fire department and librarian, discussed relevant topics and community resources. A podcast format that was

delivered in both English and Arabic was found to be particularly helpful and accessible for some newcomer refugee families who may have low literacy.

Also, SWIS supported newcomer refugee families to remain physically active during the summer by meeting at nearby parks to facilitate physical activity, which is another strategy that aligns with literature noting safe spaces to play for newcomer young children can promote a sense of belonging (Kanji & Cameron, 2010). Furthermore, SWIS delivered other special programming in the summer including English conversation circles for adults or literacy fun programs for children. They also facilitated "Newcomer Orientation Week", which is a program for newcomer students who will be starting secondary school in Canada in the public-school board. These strategies are important in connecting newcomer refugee students to cultural clubs, sports and recreational activities and other extra-curricular activities which can increase their confidence and sense of belonging (Godin et al., 2017).

Therefore, the role of SWIS as compassionate connectors plays an important part in promoting opportunities to aid with integration for newcomer refugee students by providing them with orientation, information and referrals to both in school and community resources and opportunities for extra-curricular involvement. While SWIS support the integration of newcomer refugee students, it is suggested that policy, research, and practices in settlement services on integration of newcomers in Canada focuses on efforts required by newcomers while not paying sufficient attention to the mutual responsibility required by more settled Canadians in inclusion and 'cultural adaptation' (Kaufmann, 2021). These calls for increased efforts to support integration on behalf of more established Canadians are also important for SWIS who support school staff and educators with encouraging a sense of belonging for newcomer refugee students.

Sense of Belonging

Promoting the integration of newcomer refugee students is related to encouraging a sense of belonging for students, which is defined as the student's feelings of acceptance, respect, inclusion and support at school (Ma, 2003). A sense of belonging was an important recurring theme that arose from the data on supporting newcomer refugee students. Refugee students have nuanced experiences of a sense of belonging depending on their age. For example, SWIS explained that younger students may adapt more quickly since they are usually able to acquire English more readily, while older students may have additional challenges. Also, SWIS explained that newcomer refugee students between the ages of 12-14 years old, considered early adolescence, may have a sense of cultural identity connected to their countries of origin, yet they want to also feel a sense of belonging with their peer group in their new host country.

However, some SWIS explain the bullying and teasing which may be prevalent at this stage can result in feelings of isolation and exclusion, leading newcomer refugee students to feel a lack of sense of belonging. These findings align with some literature which reports that racism, discrimination and bullying contribute to a lack of belonging by newcomer youth (Nakeyar et al., 2017). To address these challenges with identity development for newcomer youth, some researchers report that encouraging intercultural competence among school staff, incorporating cultural perspectives from families, and supporting intercultural exchange and acceptance among peers is helpful (Gonzalez, Eades & Supple, 2014).

In some cases though, SWIS explain the multiple demands upon school administration, makes it difficult to meet the needs of all newcomer refugee families, which may lead to a feeling of not being welcomed by newcomer refugee parents and their children. Nonetheless,

SWIS report that some teachers and ESL teachers will go beyond regular expectations to support newcomer refugee students and their families with feeling welcome. These findings converge with some literature which though largely focuses on the efforts of newcomer youth to establish a sense of belonging, states that settled Canadians, including peers, teachers, and the wider community, also play an important part in promoting a sense of belonging by being supportive, accepting, and inclusive of newcomer youth (Kaufmann, 2021). This reinforces the importance of a holistic framework which focuses on support at multiple levels, including school, and community for newcomer refugee students.

Another interesting pattern for newcomer refugee youth over 14 years of age was shared by some SWIS noting that students at this stage may experience a type of identity crisis as they straddle two cultures and negotiate with, and if they ever will, 'truly' fit in. Some youth will begin to question their beliefs, values and cultures as they experience many differences around them and experience an internal struggle that may be difficult to articulate to others. In this case, SWIS shared it takes time for newcomer refugee students to understand that differences in values, beliefs and cultures do not mean they need to assimilate, and that they, like all Canadians, can retain their culture, and have their individual choices and freedoms, within the laws of the country. Supporting individuals to connect with and have pride in their cultural history is conducive to promoting resilience (Landau, 2007), which interacts with enhancing a sense of belonging. Thus, SWIS demonstrated their role as compassionate connectors by facilitating a sense of belonging for newcomer refugee youth, where youth feel connected to their cultural backgrounds, which is important for contributing to social cohesion and building resilience (Correa-Velez, Gifford & Barnett, 2010; Edge, Newbold & McKeary, 2014).

Furthermore, a sense of belonging evokes an important discussion on the distinction between assimilation and integration (Kaufmann, 2021). While Canada's focus and the work of SWIS prioritizes integration, some researchers argue that assimilation often dominates, in which case newcomers are expected to "adapt to mainstream Canadian culture" (Kaufmann, 2021, p. 2). Perhaps in this case, attending schools with higher levels of cultural diversity, as some literature suggests, can be helpful since schools with a high rate of cultural diversity contributed to a greater sense of stability, belonging and mental health for newcomer students (Nathoo, 2017; Scott, 2013).

While integration and a sense of belonging have some nuances, many of the strategies SWIS used to support integration, including enacting the school reception plan, planning whole school events, and support groups for newcomer refugee students also support promoting a sense of belonging for newcomer refugee students. One of the SWIS described supporting integration in schools as "key for kids to have a sense of belonging" and that it is important to start with developing that sense of belonging at an early stage of newcomer refugee students' arrival. Supporting the integration and sense of belonging of newcomer refugee students is an important aspect in promoting the well-being of newcomer refugee students (Creese et al., 2011) as discussed next.

Well-being

The concerns with trauma, mental health and well-being for newcomer refugee students as a result of their migration journeys is well-documented by several researchers. Refugee students may be exposed to chronic or triple trauma as a result of trauma in their country of origin, during their transition in other countries or refugee camps and upon their arrival and adjustment to life in

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Canada (Stewart et al., 2019; Vongkhamphra et al., 2011). The need to support the mental health and well-being of newcomer refugee students due to experiencing trauma is a common theme among study participants. The theme of trauma and well-being is linked to the holistic framework which acknowledges the impact of trauma on student success and well-being and the importance of promoting resilience at multiple levels.

In many cases, SWIS described the possible trauma and mental health challenges newcomer refugee students may experience can manifest in social, academic, and behavioural challenges. For example, SWIS explain their observations that experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder can impact newcomer refugee students' social skills development which are important for integration in a new environment. Academically, experiencing trauma can impact students' ability to concentrate in class and focus for long periods of time, which can be up to two hours. Finally, SWIS report on issues related to aggressive behaviour, bullying or being bullied, which may be the result of unresolved trauma refugee students may have experienced. This data aligns with some literature that exposure to trauma can affect neurodevelopment, academic success, social and emotional well-being as well as behavioural patterns in school (Felitti, 2009; Wolpow et al., 2016; Delaney-Black, Covington, Ondersma, Nordstrom-Klee, Templin, Ager & Sokol, 2002). The data also converges on how essential SWIS are in identifying the possibility of mental health concerns for newcomer students and their families and the need to offer culturally sensitive mental health services (Yohani, 2013).

In terms of the strategies SWIS drew on to support newcomer refugee students' well-being, they demonstrated their capacity as compassionate connectors by engaging in a multidisciplinary team approach to support refugee students with psychological needs, using 'forum theater', and referrals to resources. The use of a multidisciplinary team approach, which

includes connecting with several professionals to support the complexity of newcomer refugee students' needs was an important strategy. This team typically includes support from school leadership, such as the school principal, specialist teachers, such as a learning support teacher (LST), classroom teacher, ESL teacher, educational assistant, SWIS worker, parents and other specialists if needed such as a school psychologist or social worker. Usually, to support students with behavioral challenges, a plan is discussed on a case-by-case basis and specific strategies are recommended such as the support of an educational assistant for a certain period of time or referring the student to a school psychologist or for mental health support in the community. Connecting newcomer refugee students to these different resources and services is an important part of SWIS' role as compassionate connectors.

A creative strategy used by one SWIS to support newcomer refugee students' well-being in secondary school, which drew on the arts and complemented the work of teachers, was forum theater. In this case, if a teacher shared a concern about a specific challenge with students in class with SWIS, the SWIS engages the concerned students as well as student volunteers in forum theater. This strategy empowers students to find their own solutions to their challenges by acting out scenarios based on difficult situations in the school and then asking the audience for feedback on possible resolutions to the conflict. This type of programming can change based on student needs and SWIS explain that they strive to create programs to support teachers. Supporting teachers in this way was also consistent with the holistic framework which recommended effective teaching and learning.

The final strategy SWIS drew on to support newcomer refugee students' well-being was referrals to resources. When there are insufficient resources to support newcomer refugee student's needs related to well-being in schools, SWIS make referrals to community resources,

which is an important aspect of promoting resilience (Landau, 2007). However, there remains a stigma with seeking mental health support among some newcomer families. To address the stigma, SWIS share they try to provide students with websites, or a phone counseling line with staff who speak the same language as the students.

While experiencing trauma can impact multiple areas such as the social, academic, and behavioural aspects of newcomer refugee youth's well-being, SWIS very clearly identified the lack of resources available to support newcomer refugee youth in this area, both at school, and in the community. This is consistent with some researchers' reporting that newcomer refugee students face barriers to accessing mental health and community services due to a lack of diverse representation among service providers and a lack of linguistically and culturally appropriate services, especially in the field of mental health (Shields & Lujan, 2019; Cheyne-Hazineh, 2020; Marshall et al., 2016).

In supporting the well-being of newcomer refugee students, one SWIS vocalized the need for a systems level trauma-informed approach. These findings concur with some literature which cites the importance of drawing on a 'trauma-informed' lens in programs and services available for newcomers. It is important to note that while a SWIS commented on the value of a trauma-informed systems approach to support newcomer refugee students, I drew on a holistic framework that considers the impact of trauma on students. However, the holistic framework does not only view students as 'traumatized' or from a 'deficit-based' perspective. It draws on a compassion and resilience-based approach that supports newcomer refugee students from an asset-based lens on a more holistic level.

Overall, SWIS drew on several strategies in their role as compassionate connectors to support students with well-being and addressing concerns related to trauma and mental health. However, there were no reports of supporting newcomer refugee students to participate in their respective faith groups, where youth may have more opportunities to draw on their faith and spirituality, which some literature suggests is conducive to promoting resilience and overall well-being (Creese et al., 2011; Masten & Narayan, 2012; Kanji & Cameron, 2010; Pieloch et al., 2016). Perhaps this may have been due to the expectation of work being done at a secular level in the public school system, which may not fully recognize the importance of faith in promoting the overall well-being of some newcomer refugee students.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the unique role of SWIS as compassionate connectors as demonstrated in five key areas which capture the importance of their role, beyond the role of educators and social workers, in supporting newcomer refugee students. It is through SWIS collaboration with schools that they can enhance intercultural competence of school staff which aids in fostering integration, a sense of belonging, and well-being when supporting newcomer refugee students. The collaboration between SWIS and schools draws on the holistic framework since SWIS collaborate with school leadership, teachers, and staff to shape a safe and caring school culture and promote effective teaching and learning. They also act as the link between newcomer students and their families, the school, and the community; thus, they are a key part of promoting parental and community involvement.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

As the number of newcomer refugee students continues to be on the rise in Ontario, it becomes even more pertinent to further understand how to support this group of students in schools. While school staff play a role in offering support, the role of Settlement Workers In Schools (SWIS) is instrumental, yet under-studied and under-valued, in understanding how to support newcomer refugee students. Thus, my study explored how 11 SWIS in Ontario support newcomer refugee students in schools by investigating how they identify newcomer refugee students' needs, the challenges SWIS experience in their work, as well as the strategies they use to support newcomer refugee students.

The most pertinent needs of newcomer students identified by SWIS were language learning, social, and psychological needs. Acquiring English language proficiency fell under language learning while social needs were described in terms of newcomer refugee students developing a sense of belonging and making friends in their new environments. Finally, students' behavioural challenges and conflict as well as trauma and mental health were identified under psychological needs. The challenges SWIS experienced in their role were tied to establishing their relationship with schools and navigating limited resources available to support newcomer families. Moreover, challenges with intercultural competence at schools were conveyed, as well as the lack of time SWIS have for professional development. Despite these challenges, SWIS drew on a variety of strategies to support newcomer refugee students.

The holistic framework which merged the compassion-based framework and resilience-based approach describes the multilayered support SWIS provide to newcomer refugee students at the individual, family, school, community and society level, which led to my identification of

their role as compassionate connectors. This included promoting resilience for newcomer refugee students and their families by supporting them to meet basic needs, facilitating social activities and opportunities for leadership and agency, and cultivating a sense of belonging and support from the community. Researchers state refugee students are a particularly vulnerable group due to their exposure to traumatic experiences during important development stages which could impact their normal growth process (Stewart et al., 2019; Vongkhamphra et al., 2011; De Deckker, 2018). Therefore, considering how to support the resilience of refugee students at multiple levels (including individual, family, school, community, and society) can aid in minimizing impacts on well-being and development (Weine et al., 2014). My study participants, SWIS, were directly involved in providing support to newcomer refugee students at all of these levels.

Supporting The Role of Settlement Workers in Schools

My data indicated that through collaboration with schools, SWIS play a key role in enhancing intercultural competence of school staff which aids in promoting integration, a sense of belonging, and well-being for newcomer refugee students. In order to continue to support the role of SWIS, strengthening the partnership between schools and community agencies which hire SWIS is important through orienting school staff on the role of SWIS. Also, regular opportunities for follow up between school administration and SWIS management, in order to continue to enhance the partnership between schools and community agencies hiring SWIS is helpful. There is also an opportunity, similar to other jurisdictions in Canada like British Columbia, for the school board to hire SWIS so they are considered internal school staff. If SWIS become internal school staff, they will have access to all school communications, such as emails sent to teachers and parents about school updates, as well as access to student records.

This could aid in SWIS not being viewed as 'outsiders' by school staff and enable SWIS to support students more effectively since they are informed about important happenings in school through school communications and have more information to support their work with students through access to student records. Hiring a greater number of SWIS with languages and competencies to continue to meet the needs of a growing population of diverse refugee student populations in schools and providing them with opportunities for professional development, particularly in how to promote intercultural competence at schools, is beneficial for SWIS, students, and school staff.

Further Research and Contributions to Theory, Practice and Policy

As described earlier, SWIS provide direct support to newcomer refugee students and families with resettlement, integration and referrals to services. With an understanding of the needs SWIS identified for newcomer refugee students, the challenges SWIS experience and the strategies they draw on to support students, I describe areas for further research and contributions to theory, practice, and policy. Since SWIS' work is specifically about supporting newcomer refugee students and their families, a discussion of theory, practice, and policy linked to supporting newcomer refugee students is important for further contextualizing SWIS' role. Some research on theory, practices and policies for the education of refugee students has recognized inclusion, care, encouraging hope, and the celebration of diversity as important supports for these students (Pinson and Arnot, 2007). I begin with a discussion of theory followed by further areas of research and contributions to practice and policy.

Theory: A Holistic Framework to Support Newcomer Refugee Students through Fostering Resilience and Compassion

The holistic framework for supporting newcomer refugee students in schools I employed in my study merged both the resilience review of research on supporting newcomer refugee students (Pieloch et al., 2016) and the compassion-based framework in schools (Lavelle et al., 2017). Through my analysis of the data, the resilience-based component of the holistic framework highlighted how SWIS provide support for newcomer refugee students and their families at the individual, family, school, community and societal level. Therefore, this approach does not view resilience solely as an intrinsic trait, such as grit, refugee students are expected to have. The resilience-based approach also recognized that while literature on refugee students often acknowledges challenges related to trauma and mental health (Fazel et al., 2012), in order to capture a more holistic view of refugee students' lives, it is important to draw on a resilience and recovery-based lens (Pieloch et al., 2016). Thus, the resilience-based approach reaches beyond focusing only on trauma and risks newcomer refugee students may have (Pieloch et al., 2016).

This approach is connected to the compassion-based framework which encourages an asset-based perspective that prioritizes strength and empowerment of students, instead of a 'deficit-based' perspective linked to only focusing on trauma students have experienced (Ratkovic et al., 2017; Kovacevic, 2016). I strongly agree with calls for compassion to be a necessary individual and collective approach in education due to the increasing levels of trauma and suffering experienced by our students as a result of conflict, natural disasters, and disease (Peterson, 2017). While the compassion-based framework originated from an acknowledgement of the impact of trauma on students' well-being, it reaches beyond the prevalent "trauma-

informed" framework schools are currently adopting. My data indicated that many SWIS distinguish the importance of not viewing refugee students *only* as 'traumatized' due to having experienced conflict in their countries of origin, since this can mask the impact of post-migration experiences refugee students may experience such as discrimination or a lack of a sense of belonging.

Instead, the work of SWIS drawing on a compassion-based framework to support newcomer refugee students in schools demonstrates their role as compassionate connectors for students who have experienced trauma. This compassion-based framework promotes greater student well-being by working to enhance the social, emotional, and cultural aspects of student' schooling (Lavelle et al., 2017). This occurs through SWIS collaborating with school leaders and teachers to shape a safe and caring school culture, enhance effective teaching and learning, foster parental and community involvement, as well as offer professional development for school staff. However, at the time of conducting this study, I was not able to readily identify compassion training programs in schools, which is an element of applying a compassion-based framework, as described by Lavelle and colleagues (2017). These compassion training programs are perhaps not present yet in the region where my study took place due to the early emergence of these types of programs. Yet, I believe in the value compassion training programs can bring in infusing a compassion-based framework in schools that supports the academic success and well-being of students (Brown, et al., 2012; et al., 2010). Further research on the impact of a compassion-based framework and compassion training programs in supporting newcomer refugee students is needed.

Overall, the holistic framework I employed in this study which drew on promoting resilience at multiple levels and fostering a compassion-based lens in schools, contributes to

theory and literature on effective support for newcomer refugee students. Supporting students at multiple levels including the family, community and societal levels entails having sufficient information and availability of services which SWIS can refer students and their families to. A discussion of implications of this research on practice of SWIS referrals for newcomer refugee students to services ensues next.

Practice: SWIS Referrals for Newcomer Refugee Students to Services

As compassionate connectors, SWIS fulfill a vital role in connecting newcomer refugee students to accessing services in the community. Newcomer refugee students may encounter challenges with accessing services due to their lack of familiarity with services available as well as the lack of diverse linguistic and cultural representation among service providers and lack of culturally responsive services (Shields & Lujan, 2019). Overall, both service providers and newcomer refugee students report there is a lack of sufficient awareness of services for newcomers, such as translation, and general services such as health clinics (Cheyne-Hazineh, 2020).

To begin to overcome these barriers, I agree with developing an online, centralized registry of all services provided for newcomer refugee students (Karky, 2018), which is developed in partnership between school boards and community organizations or service providers (Kaufmann, 2021), which hire SWIS. This online registry of services should be available in different languages, specifically the languages most spoken by newcomer students and their families. Information about this online registry should be regularly disseminated at school to school staff, SWIS, students, and their families through email communications, the parent portal, announcements or school newsletters. To support with accessing services, schools can also be used as the central space for community referrals, basic health screening, and

recreational programs (Li & Que, 2017), career guidance (Stewart et al., 2017), and gaining Canadian experience through volunteer and internship opportunities (Marshall et al., 2016). Further research would aid in understanding the impact of increasing access to services on SWIS support for newcomer refugee students. Access to services is an important consideration when considering policy and programming that impacts newcomer refugee students and SWIS who work directly to support their integration.

Policy & Programming

When there are policies in place which can strengthen school-community partnerships, such as the SWIS initiative, it can enhance the support SWIS can provide for newcomer refugee students and their families. Also, when there are policies which specifically support newcomer refugee students, this can further enhance the effectiveness of SWIS work. Therefore, there is a reciprocal relationship between policies which support school-community partnerships, such as the school-SWIS partnership, and policies which support newcomer refugee students. I begin with discussing policy and programming related to school-community partnerships, then transition into the importance of policies targeting refugee students.

School-Community Partnerships

According to Policy/Program Memorandum No. 119, titled "Developing and Implementing Equity and Inclusive Education Policies in Ontario Schools" (Ministry of Education, 2009), school boards were asked to review current community partnerships which support equity and inclusive education. The SWIS initiative is a type of school-community partnership where SWIS as compassionate connectors facilitate support for newcomer students and their families within the school and community. It would be helpful to determine which

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school boards have reviewed school-community partnerships such as the partnership between SWIS and schools. Such a review can further enhance the effectiveness of such a partnership in supporting SWIS as they fulfill their role of supporting newcomer refugee students.

Furthermore, *Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* (2009), aims to prioritize equity in order to meet Canada's values of human rights, social justice, and inclusion for minoritized and vulnerable groups including newcomers (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009a). It also acknowledged the importance of cultivating partnerships in order to translate the strategy into practice by developing partnerships through "training, resources and other activities" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009b, p. 18). Further exploration of the types of programming through training, resources and activities is warranted. For example, the need for intercultural competence training at schools was a recurring theme SWIS expressed, and though they are sometimes involved in offering such training to school staff, the responsibility of enhancing the intercultural competence of school staff should not fall solely on their shoulders. There needs to be an ongoing, evidence-based, systems-level approach and programming which develops the intercultural competence capacity of school district leaders and staff as well as individual school leaders, staff, and educators. Such training on intercultural competence could enhance educators' abilities to relate to and respond to the needs of newcomer refugee students, which could also contribute to decreasing the incidence of discrimination and marginalization newcomer refugee students may experience. Offering training can be considered a type of resource and navigating limited resources was another common challenge expressed by SWIS; therefore, a review of the type of training, financial and human resources available to support the school-SWIS partnership is also important.

Also, collaboration between provincial policy makers, such *Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* (2009), and federal representatives from IRCC can further strengthen school-community partnerships such as the SWIS initiative in order to support newcomer students and their families. Implementing recommendations from IRCC's (2022) report on "Evaluation of the Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS) Initiative" can be particularly helpful. These recommendations included the need for IRCC (2022) to establish a clear definition of the role of SWIS and develop a strategy to encapsulate their work with schools and their community agencies. Also, developing an agreement between schools and SWIS to ensure clarity on SWIS roles and expectations is helpful in strengthening the school-community partnership (Yohani, 2013). My study provides important insight on the scope of SWIS' role in supporting newcomer and refugee students with resettlement and integration through the holistic framework. Next, I transition into the importance of policies targeting refugee students which would further enhance the effectiveness of SWIS in their school-community partnerships.

Policies Targeting Refugee Students

Some research indicates that until recently, literature on migration focused on immigrant students, which does not capture the distinct experiences of refugee students who may have fled from conflict zones (Pinson & Arnot, 2007). Consequently, the particular experiences and needs of refugee students are not sufficiently reflected in educational policies, which can lead to a lack of appropriate educational support that promotes the overall integration of newcomer refugee students (Taylor & Sidhu, 2012: Ratkovic et al., 2017). Such gaps in policy have an impact on the work of SWIS whose primary mandate is to support the integration of newcomer refugee students. Therefore, there is a need to develop targeted policies to support the specific social and emotional well-being needs of newcomer refugee students (Taylor & Sidhu, 2012). While there

are policies to support English language learning for newcomer students through the availability of programs such as English as a second language and English language development, there seems to be a gap in policies which specifically address the socio-emotional and psychological needs of newcomer students.

Such policies should draw on an asset-based approach, emphasizing refugee students' strengths, assets and empowerment, as well as understand the distinct nature between immigrant and refugee student experiences (Ratkovic et al., 2017). I believe the holistic framework I described in my study which draws on an asset-based lens can provide some value to education policy-makers on supporting newcomer refugee students and SWIS who work directly with them.

Final Thoughts

There are many factors necessary to support newcomer refugee students and SWIS play a key role as compassionate connectors between newcomer refugee students, their families, school staff, and the community. Supporting the work of SWIS is instrumental to promoting the integration, sense of belonging and well-being of newcomer refugee students and their families. Therefore, in theory and literature, it is important that the value of SWIS work is highlighted and valued through understanding the holistic support they provide for newcomer students and their families which fosters resilience and compassion-based approaches. In practice, increasing the effectiveness of SWIS referrals for newcomer refugee students to services by encouraging school districts and community organizations to develop and regularly share an online centralized registry of services with school staff, SWIS, students and their families is helpful. Finally, in policy and programming, reviewing school-community partnerships, developing systems-level

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programming to promote intercultural competence of school staff, and developing policies which

specifically target newcomer refugee students is conducive to further promoting the effectiveness

of SWIS' role in Ontario.

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Appendix A: Research Ethics Approval

Western Research

Date: 15 July 2020

To: Dr. Katina Pollock

Project ID: 115562

Study Title: Settlement Workers in Schools' (SWIS) Support for Newcomer Refugee Students in Ontario

Short Title: SWIS' Support for Newcomer Refugee Students in Ontario

Application Type: NMREB Initial Application

Review Type: Delegated

Full Board Reporting Date: August 7 2020

Date Approval Issued: 15/Jul/2020

REB Approval Expiry Date: 15/Jul/2021

_____

Dear Dr. Katina Pollock

The Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (NMREB) has reviewed and approved the WREM application form for the above mentioned study, as of the date noted above. NMREB approval for this study remains valid until the expiry date noted above, conditional to timely submission and acceptance of NMREB Continuing Ethics Review.

This research study is to be conducted by the investigator noted above. All other required institutional approvals must also be obtained prior to the conduct of the study.

Documents Approved:

Document Name	Document Type	Document Date	Document Version
Interview Guide_PhDStudy	Interview Guide		
Raghad's Research Proposal_Final_Apr 2020	Protocol	29/Apr/2020	2
Raghad's Study Email Script for Participants_june 18	Recruitment Materials	18/Jun/2020	2
email script for director_june 18	Recruitment Materials	18/Jun/2020	3
Telephone script_raghad's study_june 18	Recruitment Materials	18/Jun/2020	2
_Letter of Information and Consent Form_Raghad's study_V0.3_verbal consent_june29	Verbal Consent/Assent	29/Jun/2020	3
_Letter of Information and Consent Form_Raghad's study_V0.3_written consent_june29	Written Consent/Assent	29/Jun/2020	3

No deviations from, or changes to the protocol should be initiated without prior written approval from the NMREB, except when necessary to eliminate immediate hazard(s) to study participants or when the change(s) involves only administrative or logistical aspects of the trial.

The Western University NMREB operates in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2), the Ontario Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA, 2004), and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario. Members of the NMREB who are named as Investigators in research studies do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on such studies when they are presented to the REB. The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00000941.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Kelly Patterson, Research Ethics Officer on behalf of Dr. Randal Graham, NMREB Chair

**Settlement Workers in Schools' (SWIS) Support
for Newcomer Refugee Students in Ontario**

Principal Investigator:
Dr. Katina Pollock, Faculty of Education, Western University

Additional Research Staff:
Raghad Ebied, Faculty of Education, Western University

Dear *(insert participant's name):*

This letter is an invitation to consider participating in a study I am conducting as part of my PhD degree in the Faculty of Education at Western University under the supervision of Professor Katina Pollock. I would like to provide you with more information about this project and what your involvement would entail if you decide to take part. If you choose to participate, a $15 Amazon gift card will be available for each participant as a form of compensation and it will be provided at the beginning of the interview.

Between January 2015 to July 2017, Canada welcomed 84 000 refugees, 43% of whom are school-age (17 years old and under) children and youth (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2017). With this substantial number of refugee students in schools, researchers state there is global interest in understanding how to support refugee students who may have experienced trauma as a result of political conflict as well as in their migration and resettlement journey (Pieloch, McCullough & Marks, 2016; Ayoub & Zhou, 2016).

Researchers also discuss the importance of partnerships in order to support the current vast number of refugee students more effectively. One of these important partnerships is the settlement workers in schools' where SWIS workers support refugee students and families at both the elementary and secondary level on the school site (Yohani, 2013). The purpose of the study, therefore, is to explore how settlement workers in schools support newcomer refugee students.

The study will focus on understanding the work of settlement workers when supporting newcomer refugee students. Therefore, the benefits include producing knowledge on the role of partners such as SWIS Workers supporting newcomer refugee students and the needs and challenges of newcomer refugee students. This knowledge can assist educators and policymakers with improving support for partners working with newcomer refugee students and may also benefit you and newcomer refugee students and families by providing insight into understanding how to further support the resettlement process. I believe because you are involved in supporting newcomer refugee students and their families with information on schools, community services, employment and resettlement that you have a unique perspective to share on supporting refugee students' adaptation in schools and in the community.

Participation in this study is voluntary. Participants are settlement workers in schools who have worked for at least 6 months with newcomer refugee students between 2015-2020. It will involve an interview of approximately 60 minutes in length to take place virtually. You may decline to answer any of the interview questions if you so wish. With your permission, the interview will be audio recorded to facilitate collection of information, and later transcribed for analysis. If you do not wish for the interview to be recorded, then only notes written down during the interview will be used for analysis.

All information you provide is considered completely confidential. A list linking your study number with your name will be kept in a secure place separate from your study file. The study file will include your pseudonym and study number. If the results of the study are published, your name will not be used and your identity will remain confidential. If quotes are used in the dissemination of results, your identity will remain confidential and a pseudonym will be used.

The data will be stored on Western University's server on a private computer protected by a password for a minimum of 7 years. Only myself and the Principal Investigator associated with this project will have access. All consent forms, audiotape records and interview notes will be filed and kept in a locked safe throughout this study. The names of the school board or schools you work with will not be shared - a pseudonym will be used. Also, the study will refer to the location of SWIS Workers as a general region such as Southwestern Ontario, as opposed to a specific city. There are no known or anticipated risks to you as a participant in this study. Participants will be provided with a copy of the final thesis upon request.

Further, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences by advising the researcher. If you decide to withdraw from the study, you have the right to request withdrawal of information collected about you. If you wish to have your information removed please let the researcher know and your information will be removed from our records. If you choose not to participate or to leave the study at any time it will not be communicated to your supervisor and it will have no effect on your employment.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or the conduct of this study, you may contact The Office of Human Research Ethics (519) 661-3036, 1-844- 720-9816, email: ethics@uwo.ca. This office oversees the ethical conduct of research studies and is not part of the study team. Everything that you discuss will be kept confidential.

For all other questions or if you would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please contact me, Raghad Ebied. You can also contact my supervisor, Professor *Katina Pollock*. You will be given a copy of this Letter of Information once it has been signed.

I very much look forward to speaking with you and thank you in advance for your assistance in this project.

Yours Sincerely,
Raghad Ebied
PhD Candidate, Western University

CONSENT FORM

**Settlement Workers in Schools' (SWIS) Support
for Newcomer Refugee Students in Ontario**

Principal Investigator:
Dr. Katina Pollock, Faculty of Education, Western University

Additional Research Staff:
Raghad Ebied, Faculty of Education, Western University

I have read the Letter of Information and have had all of my questions answered. I agree to participate in the research.

With full knowledge of all foregoing, do you agree, of your own free will, to participate in this study?

☐YES ☐NO

Do you agree to have your interview audio recorded?
☐YES ☐NO

Do you agree to the use of anonymous quotations in any thesis or publication that comes from this research?
☐YES ☐NO

Appendix C: Interview Guide

1) Can you please tell me about how you came to be a settlement worker in schools (SWIS)?

      -Probe for: past experience, years of SWIS experience, motivation, training

2) Can you please tell me about the school(s) you work in currently?

      -Probe for: proportion of newcomer refugee students, would you consider the school culture you just described to be one of an inclusive, safe and caring school culture? Why or why not? Can you give me an example?

3) Can you please tell me about your role and job duties as a settlement worker?

      -Probe for: how does your role as a SWIS interact with (examples)

- school leadership and culture
- teaching and Learning
- parental and community involvement ?

What other ways can SWIS support school leadership, teaching and learning and parental and community involvement for refugee students?

4) Can you share with me some of the challenges newcomer refugee students face? And what strategies do you use to address these challenges ?

5) Can you share with me some of the challenges you encounter in your role as SWIS? And what strategies do you use to address these challenges ?

6) In your role as a SWIS, does professional development for settlement workers and educators play a role in improving their ability to support refugee students? Why or why Not?

7) What key skills do you think would help school educators, administrators and community partners to better understand, relate to, and support newcomer refugee students?

      -Probe for: What skills would they need to better understand refugee students'

      needs and challenges, and be motivated to help refugee students in a sustainable

      way? How would you describe these skills in one word?

8) Do you have any recommendations for what can support you further in your role as SWIS?

9) Would you like to share anything else with me that we haven't discussed?

10) Can I get back to you if I have any follow up questions about our discussion?