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Syrian Refugee Women's Perspectives About Their University Experiences: A Case Study at a University in Ontario

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Abstract

In 2015, the Canadian government announced a plan to resettle 25,000 Syrian refugees (Government of Canada, 2017b). With involvement from community agencies, private sponsors and government support, the initiative resulted in the resettlement of 40,000 Syrian refugees (Government of Canada, 2017b). In this context, many Canadian universities became involved in initiating programs to support the education, sponsorship and settlement of Syrian refugees (WUSC, 2017), with the premise that education plays a role in the settlement of refugees and their economic and social integration (Adamuti-Trache & Sweet, 2010; Brouwer, 2002; Ferede, 2010). What remains unknown are the experiences of these refugees in their transitional period while they are university students. This qualitative case study examines the perspectives of five Syrian refugee women about their university experiences at one university in Ontario through semi-structured interviews. The findings highlight academic, social and emotional challenges that they experienced, with a focus on participants' needs for referral services, representation of their issues and social support.

Keywords

Syrian refugees, women, university, Ontario, challenges, needs.

Dedication

This study is dedicated to Syrian refugee women, to refugees and to people who are working to maintain equity and social justice in this world.

Acknowledgments

In the name of Allah, the most Gracious, the most Merciful. “Allah revealed to you the Book and Wisdom, and He taught you what you knew not. Great indeed has been Allah's favour upon you.” (Holly Quraan 4:113).

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Chapter One: Introduction

The processes of immigration and refuge are not recent compositions of Canadian society. The Government of Canada has historically had continuous implementation of selective, planned, and targeted immigration and refugee policies (Griego, 2014; Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, 2001; Stead, 2016). One of the recent initiatives of the Canadian government was announced in a plan to resettle 25,000 Syrian refugees in 2015 as a response to the global Syrian refugee crisis (Government of Canada, 2017b). This initiative was political in its onset, as the promise to do so was part of the Liberal Party's campaign platform in the federal election in 2015. This initiative resulted in the resettlement of 40,000 Syrian refugees since November 2015, with involvement from government support ranging from the federal to the municipal levels and with community members and agencies involved with sponsoring refugees and assisting in their settlement (Government of Canada, 2017b).

However, the literature reveals the challenges and difficulties that newcomers face in Canada, starting from credentialing of their former degrees, acceptance of their former work experiences, and employment gaps in Canada due to systematic barriers, especially if they are a visible minority (Adamuti-Trache & Sweet, 2010; Houle & Yssaad, 2010; Schellenberg & Maheux, 2008). A recent report from the Canadian Senate indicates that Syrian refugees in Canada experience difficulties such as communication barriers and feeling segregated; Consequently, such experiences lead them to hesitate to participate in community activities, including their children's educational experiences, as revealed in a report by a working group of the Canadian Senate (Munson & Atallahjan, 2016). Additionally, the report indicates that Syrian refugees face "confusion in the post-secondary education system as some students were unable to get a clear answer about how to continue their education in Canada" (Munson &

Ataullahjan, 2016, p. 13). To overcome the challenges that refugees face in Canada, there is a role for Canadian post-secondary education in reducing the employment gap, enhancing settlement efforts and ensuring refugee human rights are upheld (Adamuti-Trache & Sweet, 2010; Brouwer, 2002; Ferede, 2010). In this context, many Canadian universities have shown involvement in refugee sponsorship, settlement and educational support by initiating programs to aid the settlement of Syrian refugees in Canada (WUSC, 2017). What remains unknown, however, are the experiences of those refugees in the transitional period all the while being university students.

I conducted this research at a time when Canadian post-secondary institutions are providing initiatives that align with the governments' orientation to support refugees. Thus, it is timely to overcome the gap in the literature, through exploring the experiences of Syrian refugees in post-secondary institutions. In this research, I employed a qualitative approach to investigate Syrian refugee women's experiences at one university in Ontario. Using interviews with Syrian refugee women enrolled at university, I sought to understand the experiences of these women. Specifically, I sought to know what are the experiences of Syrian refugee women who have arrived in Canada and have taken up enrolment at an Ontario university?

Definition of Terms

In this study I use three terms that need qualifying: refugees, immigrants and newcomers. According to the 1951 Refugee Convention, "Refugees are persons fleeing armed conflict or persecution" (UNHCR, 2016, para. 3), and who "should not be expelled or returned to situations where their life and freedom would be under threat" (UNHCR, 2016, para. 4). I use the term 'immigrant' to refer to people who intentionally choose to settle permanently in Canada (Government of Canada, 2017), and who "choose to move not because of a direct threat of

persecution or death, but mainly to improve their lives by finding work, or in some cases for education, family reunion, or other reasons” (UNHCR, 2016, para. 6). I am also using the term ‘newcomers’ as a category that includes both immigrants and refugees. These terms are not meant to be used interchangeably.

Positionality of the Researcher

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) argue that researchers should critically reflect upon their own assumptions, worldviews and biases that may potentially affect the orientations of the study. Thus, I acknowledge my positionality as a visible minority immigrant, who arrived in Canada and faced challenges in finding employment and university admissions. My research is motivated by my deep understanding of the importance of educational opportunities in the resettlement of newcomers. Although I have been an immigrant of an investor’s family, whom I assume, has had more privileges than most refugee families, I have still faced barriers and emotional stresses that accompanied me as a job seeker and Masters’ applicant in Canada, without realizing at the time, the broader picture of various structural barriers that make life challenging for newcomers. I am interested in researching Syrian refugee experiences at educational institutions and their perspectives on the ways in which university enrollment has influenced their resettlement in Canada. I believe that education is a milestone in the settlement process in Canada, in addition to its integrative results with the Canadian society at social and economic levels.

Statement of the Problem

The Government of Canada has historically adopted policies and implemented programs to support refugees and immigrants, and continues to do so (Government of Canada, 2017a; Griego, 2014; Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, 2001; Stead, 2016). One of the recent

initiatives run by the Government of Canada has been dubbed #WelcomeRefugees, which involved welcoming and supporting the resettlement of 40,000 Syrian refugees who arrived in Canada between the years 2015-2017 (Government of Canada, 2017b). Not only have the Canadian government and private sponsors been leading initiatives to support refugees, but also many Ontario universities have initiated programs to support Syrian refugees, such as providing flexible admissions, scholarships and ESL courses (WUSC, 2017).

One of the difficulties and challenges that refugees and immigrants face in their resettlement process in Canada is the employment gap between newcomers and their Canadian-born peers (Adamuti-Trache & Sweet, 2010; Houle & Yssaad, 2010; Schellenberg & Maheux, 2008). The literature reveals the importance of accessing post-secondary education as a pathway for newcomers to overcome the employment gap and as a natural extension of resettlement humanitarian efforts (Ferede, 2010). If refugees are not able to acquire post-secondary education, they would miss a great opportunity that is considered a gateway to upward economic and social mobility, and that eases access to social networks, higher positions, higher wages, and entering the middle-class (Ferede, 2010). Therefore, the successful integration of newcomers in post-secondary institutions campuses would ease their integration into the community and labour market (Adamuti-Trache & Sweet, 2010).

Additionally, the literature indicates that post-secondary education is a milestone in refugees' and immigrants' settlement processes (Adamuti-Trache & Sweet, 2010; Ferede, 2010; Gilmore & Le Petit, 2008). However, Adamuti-Trache and Sweet (2010) argue that the "lack of awareness of the complex issues that affect immigrant learners during the transition into the host society may diminish learners' chances to reach their educational goals" (p. 23). Adamuti-Trache and Sweet address the challenges that immigrant learners face at university, considering

university experiences that transition into broader societal contexts. Some of the integrational challenges that refugees particularly face are issues of cultural differences, including language barriers, historical and religious differences, and gender issues (Crea, 2016). To further support the successful integration of Syrian refugees into the community through acquiring post-secondary education, we need to know how Syrian refugees live through their university experiences, and the difficulties they face.

Many studies regarding refugee issues are quantitative analyses that focus on quantifying refugee issues, e.g. the numbers of refugees, services provided for refugees, etc. (Schellenberg & Maheux, 2008). In addition, the few qualitative studies that are conducted on post-secondary education and refugees mostly focus on the substantiality of higher education and view it as a milestone for future opportunities (Adamuti-Trache & Sweet, 2010; Brouwer, 2002; Ferede, 2010). Consequently, studies illustrate the importance of higher education in the life of refugees, overriding the difficulties that refugees face in their higher education experiences. To further fill the gaps in exploring refugees' transitional period of life through education, this research digs deep into the overlap between Syrian refugee women students' experiences as refugees and as students.

The need for studying the perspectives of refugee women stems from the fact that women constitute the majority of refugees, while at the same time; their perspectives are often excluded and marginalized (Asaf, 2017). Thus, I am exploring the experiences of Syrian refugee women who have arrived in Canada and have taken up enrolment at an Ontario university. I am exploring the life experiences of Syrian refugee women at a university in Ontario, and the ways in which their university enrollment have affected their resettlement in Canada. There is a further focus on cultural tensions and the ways in which they navigate through these tensions. After

revealing the importance of educational opportunities in the literature review, I aim at exploring the perspectives of Syrian refugee women students about their university experiences, in addition to exploring their needs to improve university programs that support them.

Research Questions

My research addresses the question: What are the experiences of Syrian refugee women who have arrived in Canada and have taken up enrolment at an Ontario university? The following sub-questions guide the study:

- In what ways has attending a Canadian university been important to the resettlement and life experiences of Syrian refugee women?
- Do Syrian refugee women experience cultural tensions during their post-secondary education? If so, how do they navigate through these tensions?
- How have Syrian refugee women been agential in creating and challenging support systems through their university experiences? Which other supports do they envision as being needed?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study draws on the concepts of oppression, praxis and solidarity, advanced by the work of Paulo Freire (2000) to understand the experiences of Syrian refugee women at a Canadian university. The outcomes of the study are intended to assist interested stakeholders, decision makers, and program coordinators in their planning for future programs that support Syrian refugees at post-secondary institutions. The work of Paulo Freire aims to improve educational systems and community participation through creating new awareness by self-reflections and looking critically at social contexts that the ‘oppressed’ experience (Freire, 2000).

Oppression. Freire (2000) argues that the oppressed are people who have been conditioned by unjust contexts in which they, at certain times of their experiences, adapt to the ‘adhesion’ of the oppressive circumstances. In consequence, “their perception of themselves as oppressed is impaired by their submersion in the reality of oppression” (p. 45). Thus, people’s perceptions about themselves as oppressed impact them in a way that they might adapt to prescribed behaviors following the guidelines of the systematic unjust conditions. The unjust conditions that the oppressed might adapt to, result in the distortion of vocation that has occurred historically, and continues to take place within different contexts producing unjust order that increase the oppressive circumstances (Freire, 2000).

Freire (2000) argues that education could either be an instrument of oppression or an instrument of positive change. The prevalence of one of the two aspects would be determined through the way in which education is imposed, as it could be a ‘banking education’ or a ‘problem posing education’. The banking education is an “act of depositing, in which students are depositories and the teacher is the depositor” (Freire, 2000, p. 72). Through the banking concept, knowledge is seen as a gift that is bestowed by privileged people who consider themselves to be knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to be unknowledgeable. Through this notion of education, oppression takes place.

One of the consequences of the banking concept is the arousal of a ‘culture of silence’ (Freire, 2000, p.30). The culture of silence as Freire argues, is a product of economic, political and social domination in which the oppressed are seen as victims and thus are in need of the knowledge imposed on them from the dominant groups and they are conversely required to be obedient and passive recipients to it. Freire argues that educational systems become major instruments of maintaining a culture of silence, when the oppressed are not encouraged to

respond to the realities that they experience in their world, and when the critical awareness is not supported as they are being kept submerged in the unjust situation. The process of banking education and the creation of culture of silence as a result demonstrate the unequal power distribution in the areas of thought and knowledge and, in result, produce more unjust circumstances through ignoring the experiences of the oppressed, their knowledge and their critical reflections, views, and relation to the world around them.

To overcome the deficiency of banking education that views the oppressed as passive objects receiving knowledge and services, Freire (2000) introduces the lens of critical consciousness as a means of understanding the world through an equal relation that recognizes and acknowledges the knowledge of the oppressed and ignites and activates their own sense of the world and the value of their own knowledge. In opposition to banking education, Freire stipulates that the ‘problem posing education’ views the oppressed as knowledgeable experts of their own experiences, and that they are subjects who create knowledge and insightful understanding through reflections on the contexts they experience.

Stemming from the importance of acknowledging the knowledge of the oppressed, my research looks into the perspectives of Syrian refugee women about their university experiences. The perspectives of participants indicate their own reflections on their life as Syrian refugee women attending a Canadian university, with their thoughts on the term refugee and the ways in which the term has affected their experiences. I also focus on participants’ insights about academic, social and cultural aspects of their life as students in a university in Ontario. The findings of my research highlight the sense of awareness that participants share about the unjust situations they have been through, with a strong commitment revealed by participants in acknowledging their own knowledge and the importance of the previous university experiences

they had, with advocacy for their cultural values, knowledge and their strengths in overcoming difficulties.

Praxis. Freire (2000) suggests an act of liberation through the principle of working with, not for the oppressed. This involves reversing the teachers' or investigators' view of the oppressed as objects of study or passive receivers of knowledge, into subjects who reflect upon the circumstances and turn the oppressors and oppressive contexts into objects of their reflections. The understanding of the oppressed as subjects of reflection leads to the concept of praxis, which has two segments, reflection and action. Because the oppressed are the ones who suffered the effects of oppression, they are the ones who can deeply understand its effects and, in turn, the necessity of liberation. Thus, Freire introduces the concept of praxis, which means "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (p. 51). Freire considers praxis an act of liberation through thinking and reflections, arguing that thinking is itself as an act of liberation, thus he encourages the oppressed subjects' reflections on the surrounding contexts. Because oppressive realities absorb the consciousness of those involved in it, Freire advocates that liberation could only happen through praxis, which means reflection on the structures of domination, and then acting upon the circumstances to transform it. The first step of praxis is taking into consideration the oppressed view of the world around them and to the contexts they are experiencing. The notion of praxis is helpful in this study to examine the perspectives of the participants as to the ways in which they have overcome structural barriers and cultural tensions, and the ways in which they have been agential at university.

Solidarity. Freire (2000) precisely urges people to distinguish between true solidarity and false charity. People who want to engage in true solidarity are required to enter the situation and fight with the oppressed, not through holding them responsible, but through understanding that

they have been denied their rights and have been unjustly dealt with (Freire, 2000). True solidarity is an act of love and acknowledgement to the individual personality and humanity of people to transform reality: “Those who show true solidarity must acquire a critical awareness of oppression” (p. 51).

Freire cautions people who are in solidarity with the oppressed from falling into their prejudices and deformations, which results in a lack of trust in people’s ability to think critically, to want and acquire, and to know. He encourages people who are in solidarity with the oppressed to constantly re-examine themselves, their prejudices, and their confidence in the consciousness of people experiencing oppression. This notion of re-examining true solidarity is what I represent through my personal reflections in the last chapter, and through being conscious of my positionality as a researcher. Additionally, the findings examine the perspectives of the participants’ related to the university community’s impact on the resettlement of refugee women through highlighting whether participants found true solidarity in their own praxis, considering how they have confronted oppression and agency in their own lives.

Summary

In this study, I investigated the experiences of Syrian refugee women at one university in Ontario. I used a qualitative approach using semi-structured interviews to collect data to understand Syrian refugee women’s perspectives about how university’s enrollment affected them, viewing both challenges and supports that these women have faced and engaged with during their studies. In this chapter, I presented an introduction to my research, including the definition of terms, my positionality, research questions, and statement of the problem in addition to theoretical framework. In Chapter 2, I review the literature regarding the Syrian refugee crisis, and Canada’s response to it. This includes the responses of post-secondary

institutions in Canada, and the ways in which they provided support to Syrian refugees. In Chapter 3, I outline the methodology that I employed in this qualitative case study, in addition to outlining participants' selection, research methods, and interview questions. In Chapter 4, I present the findings and highlight discovered themes through the collected data. In Chapter 5, I provide a discussion of the findings and a conclusion, including personal reflection on the impact of this research on me as a researcher.

Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

In this chapter, I present the literature review conducted on the historical context of refuge and migration to Canada in relation to the current Syrian refugee crisis. I also present literature on the life experiences and challenges that newcomers face in Canada, and the role of post-secondary institutions in overcoming the challenges. Additionally, I highlight some key aspects of the Syrian crisis and the involvement of Canadian universities in the settlement of Syrian refugee students. I am presenting information on both refugees' and immigrants' life experiences, to present the broader contexts of the challenges and experiences that newcomers in general might face in Canada. I am using the term 'newcomers' to indicate both immigrants and refugees. I also present and discuss newcomers' life experiences and challenges as a broad picture of what refugees might encounter at deeper levels. The aim of presenting the broader picture of newcomers' challenges is to indicate the difficulties that newcomers face in their settlement process, emphasizing that refugees are being particularly disadvantaged (Anisef, Sweet, & Adamuti-Trache, 2008).

Historical and Political Contexts of Immigration and Refuge in Canada

In 1947-48, the Canadian government supported drafting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and, currently, continues in its work with the United Nations to protect human rights locally and globally, including refugee rights (Government of Canada, 2017a). On the immigration side, the Canadian government adopted the first formal immigration policy, known as the Immigration Act, in 1952 (Griego, 2014). It continued to develop immigration legislation, until it introduced the Immigration and Refugee Protection (IRP) Act in 2001. The IRP Act is "an Act respecting immigration to Canada and the granting of refugee protection to persons who are displaced, persecuted or in danger" (Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, 2001). Some

of the objectives of the IRP Act are to support the prosperity of the Canadian economy, to enrich the cultural and social fabric of Canadian society, to assure recognition of foreign credentials, to fulfill Canada's international commitment and obligations regarding refugees, to grant the expression of Canada's commitment to humanitarian ideals including fair procedures that maintain the integrity of refugee human rights, and to acquire maximum benefits of immigration to Canada at cultural, social, and economic levels (Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, 2001). Canada has also provided extra focus on easing the school accessibility for newcomer children to build future generations that would contribute to the work force of the country (Stead, 2016).

A Controversial refugee and migration history in Canada. After tracking the evolution of migration to Canada since Confederation until recent times, Stead (2016) argues that Canada's immigration policies continuously implement selective processes in which only desirable immigrants are prioritized to settle. Those desirable selected immigrants are mostly from populations that would contribute to the Canadian economy through agriculture or domestic work. The selective processes also resulted in historical legislated injustices in Canada, including discrimination against certain ethnic groups who were seeking refuge in Canada. For instance, the Chinese population in Canada faced harsh discrimination through the 1923 Chinese Immigration Act, that aimed at eliminating and excluding the Chinese immigrants in Canada and enforced high taxes for each Chinese person entering Canada between 1911-1947 (Zucchi, 2007).

One of the most devastating discrimination events in the Canadian history is the internment of the Japanese Canadians during World War II when 22,000 Japanese Canadians and Nationals were forcibly uprooted from their homes in Canada (Sugiman, 2004). Japanese Canadian persons in Canada were also subject to curfews, interrogations, confiscation of

property and internments; in addition, Japanese women and children were placed in detention centres. Japanese Canadians were prohibited from their rights to return to their homes and were denied their full Canadian citizenship rights until 1949 (Sugiman, 2004). The Jewish population also faced severe discrimination when they fled the Nazis persecution and “in the 1930s, Canada refused entry to many Jewish refugees fleeing discrimination in Europe” (Grafton, Moss, Hart, Smyrl, & McCormack, 2016). Another example of selective discrimination is the incident known as *Komagata Maru* when 376 persons from South Asia arrived in Canada on a ship, but were forcibly deported to India (Government of Canada, 2016). These devastating events in Canadian history represent political violence against ethnic groups in Canada (Sugiman, 2004).

The selectivity process of refugees in Canada continues to be a controversial topic as it results in current challenges for the refugee population and the decision makers at the Immigration and Refugee Board. These challenges are summarized as: “difficulties in evaluating evidence, assessing credibility, and conducting hearings” (Rousseau, Crépeau, Foxen, & Houle, 2002, p.43). The complexity of the determination process challenges Canada to get more responsive to the international refugees crisis as part of its commitment to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Furthermore, Griego (2014) illustrates that Canada has maintained control over immigration policies and regulations and that it has no enormous problems of illegal entries nor it has massive numbers of foreigners seeking asylum compared to other democratic countries, though the recent influx of migrants from the US to Canada at the Quebec and Ontario borders in 2017 may challenge this finding. Griego adds that to regulate and achieve the benefits of immigration and refuge, Canada’s government prepares annual plans targeting the number of immigrants and refugees who will be accepted by category to enter Canada. An example of the

planned and regulated refugee policy is the government of Canada's response to the Syrian refugee crisis, to welcome 25,000 Syrian refugees in 2015 (Government of Canada, 2017b).

The Syrian refugee crisis at a glance. The United Nations Refugee Agency UNHCR (2017) reports that there are currently over 5 million registered refugees who have fled Syria since 2011, with an additional 6 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Syria, and another 13.5 million are impoverished. These enormous numbers fled Syria in a short period of time because of the bloody civil war that began in Syria in 2011 (Cousins, 2015). Human Rights Watch (2017) and the Violations Documentation Center in Syria (2017) announced that the death toll in Syria since 2015 has exceeded 470,000, of whom 55,000 are children. Due to the risk and insecure life conditions that Syrians faced, over 300,000 Syrian refugees arrived in Europe by the Mediterranean Sea in 2015 (UNHCR, 2015), resulting in 4,176 deaths or missing persons in the Mediterranean (UNHCR Canada, 2016). Much international attention was given through the media to the thousands of Syrian refugees who drowned in the Mediterranean Sea while trying to find their way to Europe. These tragedies attracted the public to act and provide refugee protection and resettlement on both governmental and personal levels.

The growing number of Syrian refugees globally, raised critiques about the response of the Canadian government, as Canada had only accepted a small percentage of refugees in relation to other countries of the world (Tahirali, 2015). To further highlight the numbers of Syrian refugees in Canada and globally, I have conducted a search and summarized the numbers of refugees in the following table. The table shows that although Europe, the U.S.A. and Canada have been engaging in the settlement of Syrian refugees, a lot more must be done considering the numbers of Syrian refugees.

Syrian Refugee Crisis	Estimated Numbers	Other Information
Total Refugees	11 million (Syrian Refugees, 2017) Five million registered by UNHCR (UNHCR, 2017)	
Internally Displaced	6 million (Syrian Refugees, 2017) and (UNHCR, 2017)	4 million are in hard-to reach areas and 13.5 million people are in need inside Syria. (UNHCR, 2017)
Lebanon	1.1 million registered by UNHCR (Cousins, 2015).	25% of Lebanon's population is Syrian refugees (Cousins, 2015). 300,000 unregistered refugees and have no access to health care (Cousins, 2015).
Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq	4 million (Syrian Refugees, 2017)	97% of refugees are in the neighboring countries (Cousins, 2015).
Greece	200,000 through Mediterranean (UNHCR, 2015)	
Italy	100,000 through Mediterranean (UNHCR, 2015)	
Germany	141,000 asylum claims granted (BBC News, 2016)	300,000 asylum requests (Syrian Refugees, 2017). The highest proportion of asylum applications in Europe (BBC News, 2016).
Hungary	4,821 Syrian asylum applicants out of 29,432 from other countries (AIDA, 2016).	The highest in proportion to its local population in Europe (BBC News, 2016). Asylum rejection rate is 91.5% (AIDA, 2016). 1,800 refugees per 100,000 of Hungary's local population claimed asylum in 2015" BBC News (2016).
Sweden	32,000 asylum claims granted (BBC News, 2016)	100,000 asylum requests (Syrian Refugees, 2017). The second highest receiving country in Europe (Syrian Refugees, 2017).
Total Refugees in Europe	300,000 claims granted (BBC News, 2016)	One million asylum requests (Syrian Refugees, 2017).
USA	18,007 (Zong & Batalova, 2017)	
Canada	40,000 (Government of Canada, 2017b).	In 2015 announced for 25,000 Syrian refugees to enter and settle in Canada, 15,000 of these Syrian refugees will be privately sponsored, while only 10,000 will be government-sponsored (Canada's Refugee Plan, 2017).
Mediterranean Sea Crossings	Over 300,000 (UNHCR, 2015)	4,176 deaths or missing (UNHCR Canada, 2016). Over million migrants arrived to Europe by the Mediterranean Sea in 2015, most of these migrants are from Syria (BBC News, 2016).

Table 1. *Syrian Refugees at a global scale*

Canada and the Syrian refugee crisis. After Canada announced its plan to resettle 25,000 Syrian refugees in 2015 (Government of Canada, 2017b), the Canadian community participated in sponsoring and helping settle Syrian refugees through private sponsorship programs. Due to the government's and community's involvement, the latest updates in March 2017 indicate that over 40,000 Syrian refugees have arrived in Canada since 2015; about 22,000 of them are government assisted refugees, and 4,000 are blended visa office-referred refugees. This meant matching private sponsors from Canada with refugees identified by the UNHCR. In addition, 14,000 are privately sponsored (Government of Canada, 2017b). The numbers of refugees who have been sponsored both through private and government programs indicate the active participation of the Canadian community in the global refugee crisis. Harris (2016) illustrates that the private refugee sponsorship system in Canada is being exported as a successful model to the world through the Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative which is led by the Government of Canada, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the Open Society Foundations, the Radcliffe Foundation, and the University of Ottawa. The aim of the initiative is to advise and train other countries on adopting private sponsorship programs to engage local communities in mitigating the global refugee crisis (Harris, 2016).

Although Canada has welcomed 40,000 refugees; the immigration and refugee process in Canada has never been simple (Griego, 2014; Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, 2001; Stead, 2016). Restrictive screening processes are limited to specific numbers of refugees who accompany specific detailed circumstances, illustrating the complexity in selecting refugees prior to their arrival in Canada (The Canadian Press, 2015). The Canadian Minister of Public Safety, Ralph Goodale, announced the robust nature of overseas Syrian refugee selection, through multi-layered security screening before refugees are admitted to Canada (The Canadian Press, 2015).

However, challenges remain after passing the selective screening processes, as refugees face barriers to engaging in the Canadian community, including accessing educational and job opportunities. For example, while many government programs have been developed to support Syrian refugees, a recent report released by a working group of the Canadian Senate indicates that refugees continue to face communication barriers, racism or harassment without knowing how to respond, in addition to feeling segregated, and hesitant to participate in community activities. Indeed, there are hardships for refugees in resettlement (Government of Canada Publications, 2016). In the next section, I explore the difficulties that immigrants in general, and refugees in particular, face after their arrival.

Immigrants' and Refugees' Challenges in Canada

There are several challenges that immigrants and refugees face after their arrival in Canada. I focus on the challenges related to employment and education in this section, because they most closely relate to my study that examines Syrian refugee women's experiences in university and how their experiences influence their resettlement. Additionally, in this section, I generally use the term, 'newcomers' to indicate that hardships exist for both immigrants and refugees, though where the research has delineated these populations, I have reflected so in my writing.

Newcomers and employment. In this section, I highlight information regarding the employment of newcomers in Canada. Although I recognize that refugees and immigrants in Canada have different paths and life experiences, the purpose of focusing on immigrants' employment in this section is to argue that although Canada accepts immigrants based upon their qualifications, certificates and work experiences (Adamuti-Trache & Sweet, 2005), they still face enormous amounts of employment difficulties in relation to their Canadian counterparts (Houle

& Yssaad, 2010). It is important to note that these difficulties are even more apparent in the visible minority immigrants and in the refugee population (Anisef et al., 2008).

Although Canadian immigration policy is predominantly aimed at serving Canada's labour market through recruiting immigrants under the skilled workers category, the integration of immigrants' skilled workers in the labour market after their arrival is still a challenge (Aydemir & Skuterud, 2004 as cited by Adamuti-Trache & Sweet, 2010). Most skilled worker immigrants find their skills underutilized, and so work in low-wage jobs or in jobs that have little to do with their known skills and expertise, due to the lack of accreditation of their previous educational and employment experiences (Reitz, 2007 as cited by Adamuti-Trache & Sweet, 2010). On the contrary, the Government of Canada uses a selective process in choosing who can migrate to Canada and gives preference to educated immigrants (Adamuti-Trache & Sweet, 2005), because education and work experiences are priorities that governments have focused on with the belief that immigrants bring these as assets to benefit labour market of Canada (Houle & Yssaad, 2010).

Although one in five immigrants are skilled-workers and 46% of immigrants hold at least a bachelor's degree (Houle & Yssaad, 2010), the employment rate of recent adult immigrants is 68% as of May 2016, compared with an employment rate of 82% for adult Canadians who were born in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2017). Additionally, only one-quarter of employed immigrants who have foreign degrees, work in occupations that match their fields of study compared to 62% of Canadian born graduates (Houle & Yssaad, 2010).

Another difficulty that faces newcomers in the workplace is low income. Adamuti-Trache and Sweet (2005) illustrate that "recent immigrants with university degrees earned about 31% less than their Canadian-born counterparts, whether or not they worked in highly or lower skilled

jobs” (p. 179). To provide a broader assessment regarding immigrants’ perspectives in their first four years in Canada, Schellenberg and Maheux (2008) find that newcomers praise the human rights and freedoms that they experience in Canada, in addition to the personal safety and security, and the stability of everyday life. In contrast, the authors indicate that new immigrants have difficulties finding employment in their areas of specialization, and have thus, indicated less satisfaction about their employment experiences in the labour markets in Canada.

The reasons behind immigrants’ underemployment and lower income rates are the transitional life difficulties, the insufficiency of the English or French languages, the lack of recognition of their educational credentials abroad, and possibly, discrimination (The Conference Board of Canada 2004, p.15 as cited in Adamuti-Trache & Sweet 2005, p. 179). In other words, Schellenberg and Maheux (2008) demonstrate that employment barriers that newcomers face in Canada are: lack of recognition of their previous credentials and work experiences, language difficulties and the lack of networks in the work force (Schellenberg & Maheux, 2008). These employment barriers result in the underutilization of newcomers’ skills and expertise, and the impediment to their integration into the Canadian community (Houle & Yssaad, 2010), with 77% of immigrants working in occupations that do not require a degree, compared to 57% of Canadian-born graduates (Zietsma, 2010 as cited in Houle & Yssaad, 2010). In addition to employment barriers that newcomers face, visible minority groups face more employment challenges, as they have a lower likelihood of getting their previous work experiences recognized in the Canadian labour market (Houle & Yssaad, 2010).

Credentialing and degree assessments. There are several authorized Canadian organizations that provide the necessary educational credential assessments for newcomers in Canada. One organization authorized by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC),

is the International Credential Assessment Service of Canada (ICAS, 2017), which provides assessment reports for clients to help compare the education a client completed abroad, to its equivalent in the Canadian educational system. The assessment report can be used for employment purposes in addition to program admissions at educational institutions. ICAS (2017) provides assessments for over ten thousand applicants each year; those assessments process technical, post-secondary and senior secondary qualifications. Another organization appointed by IRCC to provide Educational Credential Assessment (ECA) for certificates, diplomas and degrees earned from outside of Canada, is the non-profit organization, the World Education Services (WES, 2017). Through the services offered at WES, international degree holders could gain recognition for their education to use their degrees in Canada. However, applicants must pay fees. For example, a degree assessment for Canadian university registration would cost around \$245 (WES, 2017).

Newcomer students might be referred to assessment centers, which cost them time, effort and money, without even realizing that they might not need the provided assessments for educational or employment purposes, as their websites do not mention that universities might not request assessments for all degrees from abroad. Nevertheless, Houle and Yssaad (2010) find that after four years of newcomers' arrival to Canada, 40% of newcomers did not have their credentials assessed, either because they changed their plans regarding the type of the job they will do in Canada, or because they know that their credentials and foreign experiences and education will not be accepted in the Canadian labour market. This means that even if immigrants have practiced their professions for years abroad, they may find themselves working in low-paid jobs that do not match their credentials. Consequently, governmental support for refugees and immigrants are often not resonating with these populations in their resettlement.

Issues of discrimination against refugees. DeVaul-Fetters (2014) uses the concept of the 'Just World' as a theoretical framework to relate to the hypothesis that everyone's fate stems from their own actions and characters, thus, everyone gets what they deserve. The author examines the perspectives of participants who have strong beliefs in a 'just world' and their reactions to refugees. The findings indicate that those who believe in a just world tend to dehumanize refugees and hold them responsible for their own status, even in high threat conditions. She adds that just world believers tend not to support refugee educational scholarships because they assign refugees more responsibility on their conditions.

In comparing participants' views on immigrants versus refugees, DeVaul-Fetters (2014) finds that believers of a just world dehumanize both immigrants and refugees. The purpose of their dehumanizing reaction is to preserve their own social positioning in society. DeVaul-Fetters' dissertation was an eye opener for me in doing this research on refugees, because it provides background information on what might be happening when refugees interact with Canadian society, including those who indicate they have a strong belief in a just world. From reading this dissertation, I realized my own prejudice first, and thus reflected upon my own beliefs of separating myself from refugees to maintain my own positioning in society. I then realized the extent of the social implications, cultural tensions, and dehumanization which refugees might encounter when they engage with society.

To further explore the origins of discrimination against refugees, Bauman (2016) refers to recent articles, scholarly views, media documents and Western people's reactions to describe the fear and anxiety represented, as he describes, in the 'moral panic' that is taking place in European countries due to the increase of the refugee numbers from the Middle East. The origins of the 'moral panic' in Europe towards refugees, as Bauman (2016) argues, is illustrated in

stereotypical views, such as: “These people have been variously accused of carrying terminal diseases, being in service of Al Qaeda or the ‘Islamic State’, intending to sponge on the European welfare system, or scheming to convert Europe to Islam” (p. 84). Bauman highlights these stereotypes to refer to the role that the media and politics have in effecting public opinion and spreading unrealistic fear and panic.

To overcome panic against refugees, Bauman (2016) urges readers to be conscious of the ways in which separation, stereotyping, and building walls are created through media and politics; being conscious leads to developing inclusive awareness that is essential in this era of mass migration. As a solution, Bauman urges the world population to stand in solidarity with in-crisis nations, and to maintain positive cooperation, represented in bridging the gap between refugees and the hosting community for the benefit of humanity and European communities.

To sum up the challenges that newcomers might be exposed to, Adamuti-Trache and Sweet (2010) demonstrate that,

Immigration is a special life event that touches all aspects of one’s existence. The disruption associated with differences in language, culture, work environment, and social network is likely to increase immigrants’ motivation to engage in formal and informal education. (p. 21)

After exploring some of the challenges that newcomers face in Canada, including refugees, I will provide an overview on the significant influence of post-secondary institutions in providing a sustainable future to refugees and newcomers.

Immigrants, Refugees and Post-Secondary Education

To overcome the challenge of newcomers’ lack of recognition of previous credentials, two-thirds of immigrants indicated that they intend to pursue further training and education in

Canada (Adamuti-Trache & Sweet, 2010). Getting Canadian education is an essential resettlement stage for newcomers to get the credentials needed for employment purposes (Adamuti-Trache & Sweet, 2010). Adult immigrants have a substantial demand for pursuing higher education and training in Canada. This demand is reflected by the fact that “within two years of arrival, 40% of adult immigrants are enrolled in education and training” (p. 21).

The importance of newcomers’ employment is illustrated through Gilmore and Le Petit's (2008) study in which they explored adult immigrants’ participation in training and labour markets in Canada. They argue that: “Canada relies on the education and skills of immigrants to maintain and strengthen our economy. With an aging population and a declining birth rate, immigrants are looked upon to fill in the gaps in our labour market” (para. 1). Therefore, resettlement efforts in Canada focus on the successful integration of refugees into the community and labour market, through having post-secondary education as a milestone in refugees’ integration and participation in the workforce of the country (Ferede, 2010). Consequently, Gilmore and Le Petit (2008) argue that although most recent newcomers have lower employment rates than their Canadian-born peers, immigrants with higher education certificates from Canada or Europe have employment rates in Ontario like their Canadian-born peers.

Post-secondary education plays an essential role in the resettlement of refugees in a few ways: 1) as “a natural extension of resettlement humanitarian efforts” (Ferede, 2010); 2) as a human right and a milestone for social development (Brouwer, 2002); 3) as an integration into the labour market (Adamuti-Trache & Sweet, 2010). In answering the question: “Why Canada should care about the higher education of refugees” (p. 80), Ferede (2010) argues that without access to higher education, refugees miss opportunities for upward economic and social mobility

that eases access to social networks, higher positions, higher wages, and entering the middle class. Additionally, Brouwer (2002) argues,

Education is about more than simply getting a good job; it is a pillar of social and economic development. And it is also a fundamental human right, included in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Domestically, while the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms says nothing directly about access to education, the guarantee of equality under Section 15 clearly requires that access be equally available to all. (Para. 4)

To further illustrate the importance of higher education, Ferede (2010) explains that people who have bachelor's degrees usually have higher self-esteem, more tolerance to others, have more political participation and are more likely to vote and participate in the economic growth of the nation through paying taxes and being part of the skilled workforce that contributes to the local and global markets. Consequently, people with higher education live longer and healthier and are less likely to encumber the criminal justice system or social welfare. For the illustrated positive influences of education on the nation, Ferede maintains that increasing refugees' access to higher education must be a policy priority. In addition to Ferede's argument, Finnie and Mueller (2008) address opportunities and barriers related to refugee access into higher education and compare it to their Canadian peers. The authors argue that factors of accessing higher education start long before refugee students in Canada reach high school; thus, they highlight the need to adapt policy initiatives that start in the early years of schooling to provide equal opportunities in education and that go beyond just making schooling affordable.

Immigrants and refugees in Canadian classrooms. Although highly educated newcomers who arrive to Canada are likely to pursue post-secondary education, refugees who are least educated upon arrival to Canada, and cannot return to their countries of origin, are less likely to pursue Canadian post-secondary education and have lower rates in higher education than other immigrants (Ferede, 2010). To further understand the reasons behind refugees having lower educational rates, Ferede explores refugees' pre-arrival experiences and their influence on their post-secondary education and concludes that refugees are likely to be of the lower-economical class and thus misperceive the benefits of higher education and be turned away by its tuition costs. However, not all agree with Federe's position. Stermac, Elgie, Dunlap, and Kelly (2010) for example, conducted a study that examines the academic performance of three groups of high school students in Canada: 1) immigrant students who come from war-zone areas and have experienced traumas; 2) immigrant students of non-war-zone areas; 3) Canadian-born students. The authors reveal that the findings of the study indicate that immigrant students from war-zone areas are performing in the Canadian classrooms as well as their Canadian born peers and other immigrants, and in some incidences, they are surpassing them. The results also reveal that immigrant students from war-zones are well connected and engaged in their learning and school environments. Perhaps educators have a crucial role in the success of newcomer students in the Canadian classrooms as Adamuti-Trache and Sweet (2010) suggest, "the response of adult educators is critical to the successful participation of immigrant learners. Lack of cultural awareness may raise communication barriers in the classroom" (p. 22-23).

To further explore the participation of newcomers in Canadian classrooms, Early (2003) examines rhetorical structures in the ESL classroom, by asking students of diverse backgrounds about their opinions, reactions or hypothesis regarding some discussion topics, to explore ESL

students' tendency to articulate claims and to support their arguments with evidence. Early argues that ESL students did not participate fully in articulating their views because they have more need for on-going encouragement to speak up and to participate in social discourse. Additionally, the author urges ESL teachers to provide web-based discussion forums or chat rooms, because many students indicated that face to face discussions might be challenging, and that they would be able to provide their arguments if they had time to think or write it out beforehand.

The need for focusing on refugee women issues. Asaf (2017) argues that “when we look at women just as victims of war, we fail to recognize their capabilities as peace builders” (p. 2). She adds that women are deliberately excluded from representation and formal talks. In consequence, the absence of the representations of their voices leads to a gender-insensitive understanding of issues being studied. She states, “Sometimes issues which women are more likely to raise, are often marginalized and sometimes fully excluded” (p. 2). Thus, the need to study refugee issues from the perspectives of refugee women and to address and understand aspects that matter to their life experiences stems.

Another major aspect that emphasizes the need for studying Syrian refugee women issues, is that they constitute the majority of refugees in general, and Syrian refugees in particular (Miller 2016, as cited in Asaf, 2017, p.4). Especially since are still being underrepresented in post-secondary institutions, “many people — especially girls — are still excluded from education, and many more are enrolled in school but learning too little to prepare them for 21st-century job markets” (Roudi-Fahimi & Moghadam, 2006). Syrian women are also struggling to provide food and shelter for their families as they are the sole providers in everyone in four families (UNHCR 2014, p. 15, as cited in Asaf, 2017). While the work of refugee women

has resulted in decreasing potential gender-based and domestic violence, it is important to consider engaging refugee women in employment and educational programs to create a safe space for their wellbeing so that they may contribute in full to their families and societies (UN Women 2015b, as cited in Asaf, 2017).

The provided studies illustrate the significance of post-secondary education in the resettlement process of newcomers and refugees, the difficulties that they might face in Canadian classrooms, and the need to provide more educational opportunities that grant refugees and newcomer's access to post-secondary institutions. In the following section, I explore the role of Ontario universities in providing access and support to refugees in Canada, as a continuation to government and community support to refugees.

Post-Secondary Institutions and Refugee Support in Ontario

Post-secondary institutions in Ontario have shown significant involvement in supporting refugees through providing sponsorships, resettlement and educational opportunities. Numerous university and faculty initiatives have been propagated through involvement with World University Service of Canada (WUSC). WUSC is an international development not-for-profit organization that works to improve opportunities for youth, women, and refugees in the fields of education, employment and empowerment in over 25 countries (WUSC, 2017). Through fifty years of commitment to youth, women and refugee issues, WUSC has indicated its success at empowering a network that consists of Canadian post-secondary institutions, private partners and volunteers who aim at creating equitable and sustainable realities for youth (WUSC, 2017). WUSC launched the Student Refugee Program (SRP) in 1978 as the only program of its kind that combines higher education opportunities with resettlement. Through partnership with 80 university and college campuses, 130 refugee students from 39 different countries are being

admitted in Canadian campuses and offered resettlement every year (WUSC, 2017). Over 1,700 youth refugees have been provided with the opportunity to settle in Canada and to continue their education in Canadian campuses through the SRP since its inception. As a response to the Syrian refugee crisis, WUSC announced,

In September of 2015, we partnered with Universities Canada and Colleges and Institutes Canada, to reach out to over 200 post-secondary academic institutions across the country. We challenged them to implement or increase their support of the Student Refugee Program on their campus. (WUSC, 2017)

Following this announcement, many universities have shown initiatives in providing scholarships, resettlement and educational opportunities for refugees from Syria and around the world. I conducted a search of the official websites of the top-ten universities in Ontario, according to uniRank (2017), to explore refugee initiatives provided by them. Table 2 presents the contributions of the top-ten Ontario universities to the refugee crisis between 2015-2017. Universities are placed in order, according the ranking of uniRank (2017) website. The ranking is based upon: 1) university accreditation by a higher education organization in Canada; 2) at least four years of undergraduate programs and/or post-graduate programs; 3) face-to-face course format.

After organizing a list of top ten universities in Ontario, I went to each university's webpage to collate its contribution towards Syrian refugees based on the information provided on the website. I found that most of these universities have initiated programs to support Syrian refugees, through scholarships, ESL courses and flexible admissions. I also found that the most significant initiative on Syrian refugee support since 2015 was the Ryerson University Lifeline

Syria Challenge (RULSC), based upon the amounts of funds raised and the numbers of refugees assisted. In the table, the \$ sign represents amounts in Canadian Dollars.

	University	Funding offered by university in \$CAD	Raised funds in \$CAD	Refugee scholarships in \$CAD	Programs
1.	University of Toronto (University of Toronto, 2017).	\$500,000	Goal is to create a \$1 million fund	100 bursaries of \$10,000 each, would be awarded over the next 10 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Scholars-at-Risk program - Partnered with Ryerson University Lifeline Syria Challenge - Research and public education - U of T Medical Refugee Clinic - U of T Dental Refugee Clinic
2.	University of Waterloo	No Info	Goal \$10,000 at Renison Event & \$15,000 personal donation	At least two English Language scholarships at Renison (Renison University College, 2016a).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Renison University College: English-language learning for Syrian refugees (Lindsay, 2016) - Fundraiser at Renison to benefit Syrian refugees (Renison University College, 2016b)
3.	York University	Partnered with Ryerson University Lifeline Syria Challenge			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Research Projects - Partnered with Ryerson University Lifeline Syria Challenge (York University, 2017)
4.	University of Western Ontario	No Info	\$66,000	10 full scholarships to cover tuition and living costs for 10 Syrian students in 2016 (Western University, 2017a)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Refugee Sponsorship Fund: Privately sponsored a family and one in process, in partnership with LCCLC (Western University, 2017)
5.	Queen's University (Queen's Communications Staff, 2015a)	No Info	raised \$17,000 for the local Save a Family from Syria campaign	5 full scholarships to cover tuition and living costs in 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Syrian Refugee Opportunity Awards - Supporting the Resettlement Assistance Program in Kingston - Refugee students are given preference for the Principal Wallace Freedom of Opportunity Award - Flexible admissions timelines for new arriving refugees (Queen's Communications Staff, 2015b) - Refugee Health Initiative (Queen's School of Medicine, 2017).
6.	McMaster University	\$100,000 (Hemsworth, 2015)	(McMaster Alumni Community, 2014)	No info	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Student Refugee Program: Students Union \$1.53 fee that goes to World University Service of Canada (Hemsworth, 2015)
7.	Carleton University	No Info			

8.	University of Ottawa Council of Ontario Universities (2015b)	\$200,000	aims at additional \$200,000 through donors' contribution	At least 5 scholarships	- Faculty of Law launched the Refugee Sponsorship Support Program that matches lawyers with sponsorship groups: 900 lawyers joined, provided free legal advice to over 700 refugee sponsorship groups (University of Ottawa, 2017) - A post secondary certificate program that offers onsite and online learning to Syrian refugees in Lebanon, in collaboration with the American University of Beirut
9.	University of Guelph (University of Guelph, 2017)	No Info	\$54,824.75	2 four years scholarships with two years housing and meal plans	- Fundraising dinner - Student Refugee Resettlement: To provide scholarships for two Syrian refugee students - Providing access to the English Language Certificate Program for two Syrian Refugee students.
10.	Ryerson University (RULSC, 2017).	No Info	\$4 million	Goal is to sponsor 75 families, or 300 individuals.	- Ryerson University Lifeline Syria Challenge: to raise funds to privately sponsor refugees, and to recruit volunteers. Ryerson University, OCAD University, University of Toronto and York University joined. "To date, Toronto's network of universities has raised more than \$4 million, formed 90 teams, and helped 15 Syrian families, consisting of 93 people, to settle in Canada." (RULSC, 2017).

Table 2. *Top Ten Ontario Universities' Initiatives to Support Syrian Refugees*

Initiated by Ryerson University, in partnership with OCAD University, the University of Toronto and York University, Ryerson University Lifeline Syria Challenge (RULSC) is a program aimed at sponsoring Syrian refugees to arrive in Canada, while providing settlement and humanitarian support for refugee families (RULSC, 2018). With the goal of sponsoring 75 Syrian refugee families, or 300 individuals, RULSC formed 90 working teams with over one thousand volunteers including students and alumni, faculty, staff, and community members. This initiative has already raised over \$4 million and helped settle 15 Syrian refugee families consisting of 93 individuals in Canada. Besides its aim to sponsor Syrian refugees, RULSC focuses on providing experiential learning opportunities for student volunteers at the four partnered universities. Although the RULSC initiative does not provide educational scholarships,

promotional material on their website indicate that they have been influential in sponsoring, settling, and providing humanitarian support to Syrian refugees through the use of their 90 teams.

Scholarship and award programs provided by some Ontario universities have been significant contributors to Syrian refugees. For instance, in 2016, Western University provided ten Syrian refugee students, who were admitted in the university, awards that covered full tuition and living expenses (Western University, 2017a); Queen's University also provided five Syrian refugee students with similar rewards (Queen's Communications Staff, 2015a); University of Ottawa provided at least five scholarships for Syrian refugees (Duval, 2015); and University of Guelph provided two Syrian refugees full four-year scholarships as well as a two-year housing and meal plan (University of Guelph, 2017).

One of the programs that works to promote educational freedom and to protect higher educational institutions and threatened scholars is the Scholars at Risk (2009) Program. It works as an international network of support, run by higher education institutions internationally. The University of Toronto has expanded its participation in the program after the Syrian refugee crisis, with a university fund of \$500,000 and a goal of raising another \$500,000 to support at-risk students. In a ten-year plan, the University of Toronto aims to support 100 refugee students from different origins, with a focus on Syrian students who have a refugee status in Canada with \$10,000 each (University of Toronto, 2017).

At the University of Ottawa, the Faculty of Law Refugee Sponsorship Support Program provides free legal advice to private refugee sponsorship groups. It has so far involved the contributions of 900 lawyers who provided free legal advice to over 700 refugee sponsorship groups (University of Ottawa, 2017). Additionally, the University of Ottawa provides a post-secondary certificate program that offers onsite and online learning to Syrian refugees in

Lebanon, in collaboration with the American University of Beirut (Council of Ontario Universities, 2015b). To support the mentioned programs in addition to on-campus scholarships, the University of Ottawa provided \$200,000 in fund for Syrian refugees, aimed at providing an additional \$200,000 through donor contributions (Council of Ontario Universities, 2015b).

Summary

In this literature review, I started with outlining the history of immigration and refuge into Canada, in addition to Canadian policies that support and protect refugees and immigrants. I then discussed the difficulties and challenges that immigrants and refugees face in Canada, and the role of post-secondary institutions in overcoming these obstacles. Information on post-secondary initiatives to support Syrian refugees in Canada was also presented. In the next chapter, I outline the methodology and data collection methods of this qualitative case study.

Chapter Three: Methodology

In order to explore the life experiences and the cultural tensions of Syrian refugees in post-secondary institutions, this qualitative research draws on in-depth interviews with Syrian refugee women who are enrolled at a university in Ontario. Qualitative research produces findings focused on people's lived experiences, emotions, behaviors and relations (Creswell, 1994). The strength of qualitative research is its focus on examining and understanding people's interpretations of their lived experiences and the meanings they attach to their worlds (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Consequently, the richness of qualitative research is found through different findings and new observations rather than one statistical argument (Creswell, 1994). To further enhance the understanding of refugees' experiences, I conducted interviews as the method of collecting data for this research. In this part of the paper, I discuss the methodological approach that guided the study, the methods, and the data collection and analysis procedures, in addition to ethical considerations and trustworthiness.

Case Study as a Qualitative Research

The study of refugees' experiences at a university in Ontario involves a qualitative case study approach because "a case study is an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p.37). A bounded system of analysis is meant to be a unit, a program, or a specific context in which phenomenon or experiences are being studied (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This case study is bound by the involvement of Syrian refugee women at one university, with the unit of study to be the Syrian refugee women's experiences. To further recognize what constitutes a case study, Merriam and Tisdell assert that if there is a limited number of participants that could be interviewed to explore a specific context, then it is a bounded system that qualifies as a case. I consider university enrollment as a bounded system,

where there are limited numbers of Syrian refugees to be interviewed. Thus, the process of collecting data through interviews with Syrian refugee women at a university in Ontario contextualizes a case study. Overall, the total number of Syrian refugees of all ages who arrived in Canada between 2015-2017 is 40,000 (Government of Canada, 2017b). While we do not have precise data about the numbers of Syrian refugees enrolled at universities in Ontario, the numbers indicated in Table 2 at the top-10 universities in Ontario indicate that a limited number of refugees have been offered enrollment. Because of the limited numbers of Syrian refugee students attending universities in Ontario, one of the challenges of this research is the limited numbers of participants, and the limitation of generalizing their university experiences on other refugee populations.

Interviews as Data Collection Methods

An interview is a method for data collection in qualitative research, in which a researcher conducts in-depth conversations with a participant to learn information on a specific topic related to their perspectives and experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). It is necessary to use interviews when the information investigated in research cannot be found through observation or when in-depth meanings are required to understand participants' perspectives (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The main data collection method for this qualitative research is interviews that I conducted with five Syrian refugee women who are enrolled at one Ontario university. The role of the researcher was to prepare and conduct interviews to compound information before analyzing it.

Focus groups as a previous plan for data collection. In the early stages of this research, I aimed at conducting focus groups as the main method of data collection. Using focus group to collect data is a method for organized discussions to create interactions and gain views about a research topic (Gibbs,2012). Thus, focus groups are meant to encourage participants' interactions

and the process of providing reflexivity and meanings to their university experiences. Through engaging in group discussion that allows for individual and group understandings of experiences, participants in focus groups may feel more open to discuss sensitive topics, as they would gain encouragement through a group setting (Gibbs, 2012). For this reason, focus groups in this research were meant to acknowledge unexpected conversations, or unsettled debates on sensitive issues, which would be recognized as topics that participants have had different opinions and feelings toward. In drawing attention to the importance of focus group discussions in building knowledge and creating advocacy, Smith (2012) illustrates that emphasizing people's feelings of injustice is an essential learning experience and a milestone in creating civic engagement.

Although focus groups are used to create a space for discussing sensitive topics that participants may not usually be able to discuss in a more public space (Gibbs, 2012), it was anticipated, though, that some participants may not feel comfortable sharing their experiences with other members, even of the same community. Thus, I added a private interview alternative for participants who prefer to have more privacy, rather than participating in group discussions. Participants who were unwilling to partake in focus groups due to discomfort of a group setting, or unwillingness to commit to three focus groups, had the option of choosing to participate in one interview for approximately 60-90 minutes. As a result, all participants, except one, chose to participate in private interviews, as they expressed their concern about their privacy. Consequently, all data was collected through individual interviews.

Pre-interview activities as data collection methods. To further engage participants in the interviews, I asked them to voluntarily prepare a pre-interview activity and share it with me in the interview. The activities in the pre-interview were aimed at understanding participants' priorities and allowing the participants to have some say in determining the main themes that

they were comfortable to discuss in the interview (Ellis, Hetherington, Lovell, McConaghy, & Viczko, 2013). Although the completion of the pre-interview activities was optional for participants, these activities were helpful for participants and the interviewer to consider the topics participants would like to talk about (Ellis et al., 2013). Each activity took 5-30 minutes to complete. I asked participants to complete one of the following pre-interview activities and bring it to the interview:

1. Draw a picture of what it was like before and after your university enrollment in Canada.
2. Draw a picture that represents your educational experience in Syria and in Canada.
3. Write a reflection about your experience as a Syrian refugee attending a Canadian university, or a reflection that represents a message that you would like the outer community to know about being a Syrian refugee woman student.

Although I had hoped to have more take-up the activity, only three students prepared a pre-interview activity.

Site and Participant Selection

The interviews were conducted at a meeting room in one of the libraries at a university in Ontario, during the period of March-July 2018. The number of participants was initially intended to be up to eight Syrian refugee women who are enrolled at any of the academic programs at one particular university in Ontario, including English as a Second Language. I recruited from across all university programs in this one institution, expecting the numbers of refugee students to be limited. Additionally, the diverse programs and careers of participants would support the difference in views, and the understanding of common concerns and needs that they face through their study and across different study programs. The reason for having chosen the particular university is because it is one of the top ten universities in Ontario, and one of the U15 Canadian

public research universities in Canada. This chosen university has also announced support for Syrian refugees. The name of the university is not published to maintain confidentiality and anonymity of participants.

The following criteria guided the recruiting process. First, participants must be Syrian refugee women; second, they must be enrolled at one of the academic programs at a chosen university in Ontario. Invitation posters were printed and posted on the walls and prayer rooms of the university. Furthermore, recruitment emails were sent to students through the language centre, the Muslim Student Association, and the Arab Student Association at the chosen university. Because the participants contributed their knowledge, perspectives and learnings about their own life experiences, the intention was to compensate each participant with a \$50 gift card if they chose to participate in three focus group sessions as a means of encouragement, but since they decided to participate in private interviews, each of them was compensated with a \$20 gift card.

Five participants who were enrolled at one university expressed interest to participate in this study, with four of them deciding to take part in private interviews instead of focus groups. Three expressed privacy concerns and one noted their busy schedule as the reasons to prefer a private interview. As a result, I cancelled the plan to conduct focus groups and conducted one private interview with each of the five participants. Participants were between the ages 18 and 25, with all having completed their first year of university studies in Canada. Some had started their bachelor's degree before their arrival to Canada and could not graduate because of the harsh war conditions, and thus had to start over in Canada. Participants' programs of study were different in science and social science fields.

I acknowledge my positionality as a visible minority immigrant who shares a similar cultural heritage with Syria, speaking a similar accent, and having Arabic as my first language. I continuously reflected upon my judgements and pre-assumptions, as I will discuss in the last chapter. As such, I aimed not to impose my presumptions in directing the interviews but to allow myself to be surprised with emerging findings and differences. My background as a journalist with experience in journalism, facilitation and coaching helped me consider my own biases and how they might influence the research process. I planned on being openly curious and to explore new perspectives and ideas. I intended to use Arabic as an option for conducting interviews, as it is also the first language of the participants. Most participants started speaking Arabic before I could inform them that Arabic was even an option. Many of them indicated their need to express themselves in Arabic, and their passion to use it with people who can relate to it. Only one participant decided to speak mostly in English, combining both languages as she spoke, because she has lived in Canada for a while now. Because most of the interviews were in Arabic, most of the quotes I am using in my findings are translated by me.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Each interview was 90 minutes long. In addition, three participants prepared a pre-interview activity to guide the discussions. To best reveal the experiences of participants in qualitative research, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggest the use of semi-structured interview settings guided by a prepared list of questions about topics to explore, with flexibility to refine the questions, or to change them to track emerging ideas that occur in the interview settings. The use of semi-structured interviews is useful in interview settings because it allows for a space to explore emerging themes and topics and to engage in interactive discussions by giving participants the opportunity to interact and refine their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Thus, I prepared a list of guiding questions for the interviews. The guiding questions I used were based upon the three stages of interviewing suggested by Seidman (2006): 1) focused life history and previous experiences; 2) details of current experiences; 3) reflection on experiences and meaning making. I used open-ended questions, asked for details, clarifications, and examples. I also looked for experiences and stories, and listened with limited interactions (Seidman, 2006).

Interview questions. Interview questions were semi-structured according to Seidman's (2006) suggested order for collecting qualitative data, as: 1) focused life history; 2) current experiences; 3) reflections and meaning making.

First part: Life history.

- 1- The researcher will start with reading through the Letter of Information, asking questions and collecting consent forms.
- 2- Sharing and discussing pre-interview activity, if any.
- 3- Tell me about your life before and after arriving to Canada?
- 4- What was the most memorable situation that you experienced in Canada or in your post-secondary education?
- 5- What was the most challenging situation that you experienced in Canada or in your post-secondary education?

Second part: Current experiences.

- 6- What are the supports you have in your life as students?
- 7- Do you experience any cultural tensions through your education? If yes, what are they?
Do any of these tensions relate to being a Muslim in a society where Muslims are a minority?

- 8- Describe a time when you felt your thoughts and ideas were really appreciated in your education.
- 9- Describe a time when you wanted to express your thoughts about a situation or issue, but you didn't have an opportunity to say it?
- 10- How does being a refugee woman influence your experiences?
- 11- How do you draw on your own strengths to overcome challenges that you face throughout your university experiences?

Third part: Reflections and meaning making.

- 12- Tell me about the way you see your future. What are your hopes for yourself?
- 13- What do you need to achieve your highest potential?
- 14- What would you say to Syrian refugees who are intending to arrive to Canada or to start their post-secondary education?
- 15- What would you say to the universities about what supports are needed for Syrian refugee students?

Data Analysis

Analyzing collected data requires the researcher to be open to different possibilities and unexpected findings through developing categories to manage collected information (Creswell, 1994). After collecting data through interviews, I used Microsoft Word and designed a table in which I manually coded the collected data within ten days of each interview, to enhance the consistency and efficiency of sorting and categorizing information (Creswell, 1994). Using a Microsoft Word table, I transcribed the interviews in one column, while I sorted the findings into categories in another column to form the basis of the emerging themes throughout the process of transcribing (Creswell, 1994).

To further apply a systematic data analysis process, I used Creswell's (1994) eight steps of data analysis: 1) I read through the transcriptions coded in a Microsoft Word column to get a general sense and jot down ideas on the next column; 2) I picked main themes and wrote my thoughts on the second column; 3) I highlighted major topics from the emerging themes and colour coded them; 4) I revised the data to see if there other emerging themes or categories; 5) I combined themes that interrelate with each other and created minor themes under each major theme in addition to any contrasting theme; 6) I organized coded themes; 7) I started a preliminary analysis; and 9) I revisited the data and recoded as needed. After the discussed systematic data analysis process, I analyzed my findings using my theoretical framework and previously conducted literature to create connections and explanations of the patterns found (Creswell, 1994).

Ethical Considerations

The rights, needs, desires and values of participants should be respected and protected throughout the research process (Creswell, 1994). Thus, ethics approval, consent forms, information letter, and invitation letters were prepared before running the interviews. The participants of this research were adults over the age of 18, who voluntarily chose to participate, and had the choice to freely withdraw from the study at any time during the research process, until the thesis was submitted for examination. Consent forms were collected from participants at the beginning of each interview, as I ensured that participants clearly understood the Letter of Information, and they were also informed of the recording device that I used for data collection (Creswell, 1994). I ensured that there was information available for participants about counseling services on campus, if needed.

Trustworthiness and member-checking. Trustworthiness in qualitative research ensures the validity and reliability of the findings through involving conductive research in an ethical manner, following ethical guidelines (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I completed an ethical application and ensured the anonymity of participants in my findings. After transcribing the data, I shared the findings to date with the participants to get their views, thoughts and feedback and to ask them whether they thought the conclusions were accurate (Creswell, 1994). The transcriptions were made available to participants through a university-based secure server and web system, and they had the opportunity to view, comment or withdraw completely from the study before the submission. Only one student asked for the correction of minor information, while two others requested that I remove small details to maintain their anonymity. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) argue that triangulation is a strategy that researchers should use to insure the validity of their findings. The strategy of triangulation suggests the use of multiple investigators, sources of data, theories, or methods (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Thus, I used multiple sources of data including five participants, in addition to multiple data collection methods, including interviews and pre-interview activities. I triangulated the themes that emerged from interviewing participants, with the themes that emerged from pre-interview activities that some participants have shared. While the participant pool was small in numbers (five participants), I saw themes resonating across their experiences. That is, there were common experiences, though they had different opinions on what those experiences meant to them. Although this meant some data saturation was occurring, certainly the findings of this study are not intended to be generalized to other situations.

Limitations and Challenges

Although qualitative research provides in-depth understanding of participants' views, these findings are not intended to be generalized into other contexts (Creswell, 1994) or other refugee communities. Rather, the intention of the research is to provide a deeper understanding of the uniqueness of participants' views and perceptions, and to provide Syrian refugee women at a university in Ontario with a voice to be heard and a space to be represented. The findings of the research can inform interested stakeholders with possible needs that might be met to improve the study experiences of refugees.

This research explores the experiences of Syrian refugee women because, although women constitute the majority of refugees, their perspectives are often marginalized and excluded (Asaf, 2017). Furthermore, the limited numbers of Syrian refugee women who might participate in the study suggest that, while their voices are important, they are from a small population. Overall, there have been only 40,000 Syrian refugees of all ages welcomed in Canada since 2015 (Government of Canada, 2017b). I assume that the percentage of Syrian refugee women who are enrolled at one university in Ontario would be limited. Nevertheless, I believe this research is important to those who consider how more refugees could access local universities and to give refugee women the opportunity to represent their experiences.

Summary

In this chapter, I outlined the methodology and methods of my research, including the rationale behind choosing qualitative research to in-depth explore the university experiences of Syrian refugee women. I discussed the employment of interviews, and pre-interview activities as data collection methods. I have also discussed the process of data analysis, in addition to ethical considerations and limitations. In the next chapter, I present the findings and the themes that

emerged from the collected data with five participants who are enrolled at a university in Ontario.

Chapter Four: Findings

In this chapter, I present findings of semi-structured interviews with five Syrian refugee women who are enrolled at one university in Ontario. The purpose of this study is to provide an understanding of Syrian refugee women's post-secondary experiences with regards to their resettlement in Canada, in addition to their perspectives on their needs to improve university programs that support them. Through the conducted interviews, the participants expressed their perspectives, using the Arabic language for most of the time as it is their mother language. However, they used some English words and phrases. The themes that emerged in the interviews aim to answer my research question: What are the experiences of Syrian refugee women who have arrived in Canada and have taken up enrolment at an Ontario university? In this section, I use pseudonyms that the participants have chosen for themselves.

The thematic coding of the conducted interviews revealed four main themes: 1) the dedication of Syrian refugee women to acquire post-secondary education, in spite of having sometimes to persist admissions gatekeepers; 2) being disadvantaged in accessing university services, as participants did not know whom to ask for assistance and what resources were available for them, resulting in more academic challenges; 3) having to face emotional stresses, including cultural barriers and being left out of society; 4) In spite of having an unclear vision of the future after experiencing sudden war and a change of circumstances, all participants had the goal of continuing their education and improving their academic standing.

Dedication to Education and Persistence in Overcoming Academic Challenges

The first theme that was common in all the interviews was the academic life of the participants, including their commitment and dedication to learning. This included subthemes of

academic challenges presented in language difficulties, adaptation of a new learning culture, in addition to the importance of professors' role in their university experiences.

Education is the reason why we came to Canada. All participants expressed their dedication to university education and indicated that education was one of the most important reasons for their relocation to Canada. To sum up this idea, Aisha wrote a reflection as a pre-interview activity expressing her commitment to education and its role in her family's resettlement as follows:

Applying to university was a hard procedure; too many things to know and to consider individually. My parents never attended post-secondary education in Canada, so they had no experience to be able to help me. Getting accepted to all 3 programs that I have applied to, made the family proud and grateful to God for all the opportunities I have been given. Education was the reason why my parents risked their lives to bring me and my sisters to Canada. Although university is an institution of opportunities, not all of us [students] started from the same level and had the same number of opportunities in life. I am still grateful for whatever I have been through and for whatever I have. I am what I am because of what I have been through and what I have experienced, and I can't think of any other country to call home other than Canada.

Aisha explained why education was the reason for their transition to Canada as she reflected in the interview on how her father made an impression on her about the value of education.

My parents brought us here for education, so I was like yes, I can go to a good university, a respectable university...I think my dad... planted it in me since I was

very young. He encouraged me to go to university; he told me how education is like a treasure and is very important in our life.

Another story of commitment and dedication to education is from Rama, who had to leave Syria because of the danger and high stress levels she encountered after the bombing of her school and the loss of her friend. Rama was frightened to go to school as she indicated that her school was targeted more than once. Her parents recognized her fears and decided to resettle in extremely difficult circumstances in Lebanon. She studied the Grade 12 curriculum independently, without any assistance, and she risked her life to go back to Syria to perform her exams. She explained the motivations that made her insist to do well in the exams even though it meant risking her life.

I studied grade 12 by myself.... I then told my dad that I want to return to Syria to perform my exams, and I did.... I wanted to get an average that allowed me to attend medical school.

Rama's commitment to learning continued after she got a call from the United Nations informing her family about their resettlement in Canada. Even then, university was on her mind.

When we were preparing for our departure to Canada, I used to pray: "Oh God, grant me a good university, and good friends" and thank God, it was granted.

Another story is from Sara, who indicated that she had the intention of continuing her studies before her arrival to Canada; she indicated that being a refugee did not stop her from her commitment to education, as she learnt English in a very short period of time to achieve her goal of attending university.

Since the day we applied to Canada, I have started to study English on my own....

I came to Canada with the intention of continuing my studies.... My decision is to

be a university graduate, I should not have to change my career plans just because I am a refugee.... I want to be an academic and I am not less than anyone.

Sara expressed how proud she was for her commitment to learning English in a very short period of time, and for meeting all the university requirements. She mentioned that she did not get university admissions as a refugee, but as a permanent resident through meeting the university requirements, without being given any exceptions.

I had an average of over 80%, and I filled a normal application form; I got university admissions because I met all the university requirements and I was qualified.... Everyone used to ask me how long I have been in Canada, and when I tell them that it was only 8 months, they get so surprised that I have been able to improve my English skills in a short period of time.... I am proud of myself honestly.... It takes effort to learn a new language.

Rahaf is another participant who, regardless of experiencing severe difficulties and direct threats to her life, continued her academic career and did not stop in her academic path. Rahaf indicated that she was a third-year university student before her arrival to Canada; she was active in her studies, working and volunteering and improving her English language all at the same time. Her commitment to university and improving her English skills led her to pass her IELTS test and to be qualified to gain refugee status and be given an opportunity to study in Canada. "The application was too long but not complicated; if you can fill the application and have English proficiency, it is so easy. I also had to pass the IELTS test before being accepted," she said.

The compelling admission stories of participants, their commitment to education during extreme war conditions, risking their lives to do exams, learning English independently, and

coming to Canada with the intention of attending university, shows how important their academic goals are to them. In the following section, I indicate two stories of two participants who had to overcome admission challenges inside Canada, and the ways through which they stuck to their decisions on attending university regardless of the circumstances further showing their commitment to education.

Persistence and resisting admissions gatekeepers. Maryam and Aisha indicated that they had to face gatekeeping barriers to their admissions. The barriers were either through school teachers who tried to discourage them or service providers who did not inform them deliberately about important information regarding university admissions. Maryam explained the difficulties she experienced because of preclusion from the needed information regarding university admissions.

I was in my third year bachelor's degree, specializing in English Literature when we had to leave Syria.... When I came to Canada, I thought that I was not allowed to enter university. I think it was a mistake by a settlement centre that interviewed me and provided math and English assessments and they said, "You have to go back to high school." They argued that I need to get high school credits from Canada. No one at the centre told me that I can apply to university, and I did not know how the system worked so I felt obliged to attend high school.

Attending high school was a source of depression as Maryam expressed, because she felt that she was not appropriately placed academically.

I returned to high school, attended three semesters, and I got severe depression because I felt that I was not in my place. I had to take grade ten math, a curriculum that I can teach to other students; I said that this is not what I wanted,

but no one heard me.... I felt by the end that I could not continue that way; I did not want to go back to high school. I wanted to join a university or take my things and go back to Syria.... I blamed my parents for bringing us to Canada.... I had confidence and academic progress in Syria, and I felt lost and out of place here.

Maryam wanted to get university admissions wholeheartedly, and this is what was causing her to think of returning to Syria, as she did not know that she was allowed to apply for a university in Canada. Fortunately, Maryam had a family friend who understood her conflict and supported her in getting university admissions. Without having this personal connection, she would have never known that she could apply to university.

One day I met a family friend who had experienced similar challenges. He suggested that he come with me to try registering at the university. The family friend took me to a university affiliate; he suggested that affiliates have easier admissions than main campuses. I applied, got interviewed, and a few days later, I received admissions approval. I was not expecting any glimpse of being admitted to university again.... I was in my high school that day and I took my things from my classroom and said, "I am going". My teacher did not know where I was going but I really wanted to leave that place and just go.

The significance of Maryam's story is her desperate willingness to attend university and continue her career regardless of any gatekeepers. Similarly, Aisha experienced another story about gatekeepers who tried to discourage her from pursuing her academic goals. Aisha came to Canada at a younger age, and she expressed how her elementary school teachers in Canada tried to force her not to attend mainstream high schools, as they doubted her ability to succeed

because she was facing difficulties in learning the English language. Aisha recalled the situation clearly as she said,

Five teachers made a meeting with my mom to try to convince her to make me go to an ESL school.... They thought that I would not be successful in a Canadian high school.... They tried to give the decision for my future to my mom, and my mom was just awesome; she turned around and then she said, "it is her decision". They all looked at me: "What's your decision after all this conversation that happened?" I said: "I'm going to the mainstream Canadian high school, I'm not going to ESL school".... It was very scary as well. I really thought I will not make it, but I did. Although I don't speak English fluently, I got A+; way better grades than most of the students in the class.

The difficulties that Aisha and Maryam overcame reflect their commitment to attend university, no matter what other people of authority told them. Their success in overcoming the barriers they faced, and their commitment to their decision of attending university reflected their main intention of coming to Canada for the purpose of getting higher education, a purpose that for them is inseparable from resettlement.

Academic difficulties. All participants indicated that studying in English was the most challenging thing in their experiences as university students. They expressed language difficulties that made understanding, taking notes, expressing themselves and doing exams, a more challenging process in a second language. Language difficulties expand to the extent that participants would sometimes feel unable to ask or express themselves in front of others, or they would feel embarrassed if they spoke English because they might not pronounce the words

correctly. Also, many participants compared their studies in Syria to Canada, indicating that studying in a second language affected their academic progress. Rama said,

I started learning English as a Second Language (ESL) for one year and I improved my English skills distinctively, but the transition was too difficult... English was too difficult honestly, although I do not have problems with it now; I would still like to be more proficient and I have not reached this stage yet. I sometimes feel embarrassed, or afraid to respond in English, because I might not speak well.

Although she passed the English proficiency tests, Rama indicated that it is difficult for her to keep using it in conversations and agreed that it was embarrassing for her to speak English. Similarly, Sara expressed a concern about feeling inferior when she speaks and listens to her accent. This feeling is brought on by her embarrassment after witnessing students laughing at another classmate's unclear accent and this experience made her take a strong decision: not to participate in class discussions, ever.

I always feel that I am inferior and less than others; maybe because I am still new here or because I am not well versed in the English language; I have an accent and this makes me feel less than others.... Once, I had a classmate who had an accent and who wanted to say something, but the teacher did not understand, so she came near him and he repeated his sentence three times until everyone started laughing. Since that day, I decided not to speak in front of large groups of people, ever. Just because of the accent, I do not want anyone to make fun of me.

Her fear of people making fun of her made Sara choose to be silent even during group work. Rahaf, on the other hand, chose to overcome these challenges and participate in class

discussions, but her need for more time to compose her responses in English made her lose opportunities for participating, leading to her losing marks. Rahaf explained her experience saying,

The most difficult thing in my university was the language barrier; this was especially at the beginning, although, I still face it now. I have good English language skills, but when I talk to people, I feel overwhelmed and I start to forget my English. This is too disturbing.... At group work, I feel that I don't get my turn to speak; while I might need two minutes to form a response, at a time another person would have already spoken.

It can be noticed from participants' experiences indicated in these interviews that the English barrier was the first difficulty encountered. It makes participants feel embarrassed, overwhelmed and disturbed.

New learning style. Sara expressed the difficulty of adjusting to a new learning style; she argued that their learning style in Syria was more focused on memorizing texts, rather than criticizing it.

Studying in Canada is not easy to adjust to. While in Syria, we just had to memorize and go to exams, in Canada there is a lot of understanding and critical thinking all together. My average here is not high enough because of the different learning style here.

I asked her if she finds that the learning style in Canada is more difficult than that in Syria and she answered,

It is not more difficult, but we are not used to it; this semester I am doing better than the first semester because I understood the learning style here... I have a

memorizing ability, but I am not able to use it here, and I need to replace this skill with critical thinking in different ways. I have the critical thinking ability, but I find it difficult to express it, especially if I used a second language and put under pressure because of the limited timing of exams.

Sara thought that the understanding of texts and critical thinking are not difficult learning styles; she only needed time to replace her old learning style focused on memorizing with the new style focused on critical understanding. Similarly, Rahaf added that she was unable to get higher marks because of the differences in the learning styles.

The educational system is very different here, while back home I used not to attend all lectures, but I had a chance to study easily because all the lecture materials were written, and I could buy, study and memorize it. I learn more here for sure, I make more research, I write, and study more, but I take less marks.

Regardless of getting lower marks and having to study more and to adjust to a new learning style in a second language, Rahaf was satisfied that she was leaning more.

Another academic difficulty was expressed by Rama, as she argued that she was not familiar with class materials because she did not have the same background of the students who finished their high school in Canada.

Some students have taken the same subjects we are studying in their high school and have a background about what we study, but it is more difficult for me because I came from a different country and had no idea about the curriculum here.

Similarly, Sara added that living and studying in a different culture, causes a difficulty in understanding the textbooks or lectures' examples.

I do not understand the examples provided in our textbooks as they include terms, conceptions and ideas that are familiar to the Canadian culture; I have to google and search to know what they talk about, like for example, I am not familiar with the names of companies or banks.

The academic difficulties that Syrian refugee students faced due to the language barrier forced the participants not to participate actively in class discussions. Consequently, they lost marks and could not benefit from new learning strategies such as critical thinking, as participants had to catch up to the topics and examples that they did not understand because they did not study them in high school.

Professors' role. Although participants expressed having difficulties while using the English language and adjusting to new learning styles, most participants indicated that their professors had a very helpful role in their academic progress and in enhancing their comfort levels. Rama expressed how glad she was because of her professors' academic and emotional support.

I noticed that in Canada my professors recognize their students and appreciate their questions. They give time to explain whatever you don't understand, even if the question is simple. I had conversations with professors in their offices for over an hour, and they were so helpful in answering me and explaining things to me. Rama was also delighted when she told me about her professor's acknowledging her efforts and the emotional support given, regardless of not getting high marks.

Yesterday, I told my professor that I failed his course last year and he said: "Fine; I recognize your regular attendance and I see that you are committed to learning, that you ask and try to understand everything, and that you are hardworking; I

also recognize that the subject is not easy.” His response was so empowering, and I appreciated his recognition.

Rama’s delight with her professors’ support made the academic experience more encouraging to her. Similarly, Rahaf indicated that her professors were helpful and supportive, “My professors are really understanding; I am fortunate for the people who taught me; a lot of them provide so much support.” Sara also expressed her satisfaction with her professors’ support, stating, “Honestly, university is not easy, but professors help a lot, they help and answer every question I ask, and they give me self confidence; they are kind and helpful.” Participants’ satisfaction with professors’ help was also expressed by Aisha, who indicated that the relationship with professors is friendlier and more casual than just a professional relationship between a teacher and a student. She said, “I think it is a friendly relationship, like I can ask them even few questions about my future goals Professors are very open minded.”

I noticed participants’ delight when they talked about their relationship with their professors who provided constant help and support at academic and emotional levels, easing their academic experiences. One different experience was for Maryam, who stated that her professor at main campus did not allow questions and did not answer or respond to any concerns she had. Her professor justified their actions indicating that there are large numbers of students and that it was not their responsibility to answer questions or provide clarifications. This caused an additional disadvantage for Maryam, adding to her language barrier as well.

One of my professors used to lecture and she refused to answer any questions; she argued that it is not her responsibility to repeat anything. It is ours. I was unable to follow her, because my English was not as much... I used to get A’s in Syria, but I would barely pass here.

Participants' experiences show that the help of professors is represented in encouragement, acknowledgment, and the answering of their questions during their office hours, which delighted the participants and eased their university experiences.

Feeling uncomfortable while speaking English was the main academic difficulty for the participants. They felt embarrassed when speaking in front of other students. They also needed more time than other students to be able to create sentences, take notes, and do the course requirements. Another challenge was the new learning style represented in critical thinking to which participants had to adjust. Yet, all of these challenges did not prevent participants from continuing their education, because getting university education was one of the reasons why they came to Canada as they indicated.

Being Disadvantaged in Accessing University Services

Although participants expressed their astonishment about the number of services provided by university, there were real barriers preventing them from getting needed services. In this section, I summarize the reasons for not getting access to the services. The first reason for being precluded from accessing services was because the participants did not even know about the services available, and in what ways they can benefit from these services. Second, the services were not specified for refugees, so participants did not feel comfortable joining. In the following sections, I highlight the experiences of participants with university services, the difficulties they faced in getting needed services, and finally, their suggestions about needed services. Rama summarized these available services as follows:

Generally, there are many resources to support students here in developing their personal and learning skills. Also, there are many activities that support students. Their supports

are so helpful here, especially volunteer students who answer your questions and provide assignment help.

Similarly, Aisha expressed her astonishment about mental health services at university.

I was surprised that there are such things at university; they really care about the mental health; they really focus on taking care of your mental health, exercise, and teach you how to manage your time and get rid of stress during the exams.

Although there are plenty of services available, most participants indicated that they did not get access to them; one of the reasons is because there are no specified services for refugees.

Sara said,

There are supports for students in general but not for refugees particularly. If you ask any university office about specific information, they help you, but you need to know what to ask.

While not all students got the same opportunity, Sara was lucky enough to get directions from an Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) officer, who directed her to some financial services she was eligible for.

When I applied for OSAP, the OSAP worker was so nice and told me that there are bursaries and scholarships I could apply for, he helped me to know things I have never known before.

Without the help of an officer who provided information, Sara would have never known about the financial opportunities available to her as a student. Thus, regardless of the amount of services available to support students, most participants indicated that they did not get the assistance of available services: "I have not tried a lot of university services, so I cannot evaluate them." Rahaf said.

Lack of information about university life and available services. Although all participants expressed their astonishment about the large sector of diverse university services, they stated that they were disadvantaged since they did not have any family members who went through these experiences at a Canadian university before. Moreover, they did not have a background about university systems and the extent to which university services could be helpful. Aisha felt lost and disadvantaged comparing herself to other students who had family members who had experienced university before.

I didn't feel that I was so disadvantaged until I came to the university; most students had a good background about university, especially those whose parents already know about university systems: how much they should earn, they already have figured it out before they came to university. I felt very disadvantaged because I didn't know what to do.

Aisha's feelings of being overwhelmed about university systems and lack of awareness about where to go for help affected her deeply. She did not know what a laboratory was, and how it was linked to her courses. She thought that labs were just activities that she would go to during class time, with the professor and classmates. Attending her labs was a major challenge Aisha faced in her first year of the university study as she did not have any idea about the labs.

I chose my lectures, but I was wondering: what's the lab? I thought that maybe I don't need lab; I thought that we would go to the lab with the class during some lecture times and it is not separate...in fact, I did not have a background about university systems.

After discussing being overwhelmed about university expectations and lab attendance, Aisha indicated her need for direct support from university, regarding providing awareness sessions for newcomer and refugee university students in particular.

I think that university should consider that we as refugees might not even have parents' university experiences to learn from, or any one to direct us to information regarding university life, expectations and available services; we must figure it all by ourselves. I really wish that the university make small seminars for students just to tell us about what to expect at university and what is expected from us, this would make our life so much easier.

Similarly, Maryam was very overwhelmed about university systems in Canada and what was expected from her as a student. She connected her confusion to the differences between university systems in Syria and those in Canada.

One of the differences of university systems between here and Syria is that in Syria, if we did not do well at a course, I could just stop attending and doing exams, and then I could retake the course without it affecting my average. I have never known anything about 'dropping' a course. This previous perception caused a trouble for me in Canada, as I stopped attending two courses, and I did not think that the system here is different.

Maryam indicated that her ignorance about the difference between the two dropping systems in Syria and Canada caused her real trouble in her university life.

I failed two courses just because I did not know the 'dropping' system, and I was surprised by the consequences of not continuing the courses that I stopped attending. OSAP (Ontario Student Assistance Program) requested justifications

and sent me a lot of documents and questionnaires about my life goals and the reasons for failing the two courses. I became too stressed and I was about to lose my university admissions or OSAP funding.

She also provided some examples that describe how her unfamiliarity with services and expectations caused her challenges and much stress.

I knew about the writing centre and the academic counselor after failing and getting questionnaires from OSAP. I heard about the writing centre before, but I did not know what kind of help they provide, I did not know that they could help me in writing an essay and answering my questions. I did not know that I could even get their services. Because of my unawareness, I lost a lot of marks that I could have prevented losing.

Maryam explained the reasons why she did not get help before being in trouble. She said,

If I had known what to do, where to go, and who to ask, I would have never failed the two courses. The system in Syria is so different; universities here should recognize that a student coming from another country, a totally different culture might not know how to get assistance. In Syria, we did not have an academic counselor, we did not have TAs, OSAP, nor did we have dropping deadlines. All these differences created a challenge for me to understand the system here. I did not know that I could go to a counselor and tell them that I am unable to continue attending a course because of emotional stress. I have never expected that the university provides all these services.

Similarly, Maryam had also never known what a lab was; she did not know that a lab is a helpful resource that gives her an opportunity to raise her marks and improve her academic success. She

had never attended one till she OSAP questioned her about the reason for her failing. Only then did she know that labs would have been a helpful resource if she had used them.

I knew that labs are helpful resources I could attend to enhance my academic standings just through OSAP investigations and questioning about my failure.

Without going through this challenge in OSAP, I would never have known that I had to attend labs and participate in courses. I did not have any information about where to go and what my university requirements are. I knew that there were projects I had to work on, but I did not know that I had to do them in the labs, or how to do them.

Maryam explained that the reason she was overwhelmed was because she did not even know who to ask, nor did she know exactly what the job of teaching assistants (TAs) was. It never occurred to her to ask because she has not heard about this title in Syrian universities.

I heard that there were TAs, but I did not even know what the TA's were. I mean I understand the term, but I did not know that TAs would help me and to what extend I could ask them for help. I have never experienced getting the help of a TA, or going to a lab in my life, so how would I know?

Maryam added that the period when she had to justify to OSAP why she failed her courses, was the most stressful time in her university experience. Having a sponsor who was communicating with her and helping her, she was finally able to overcome the challenge.

The period of my life when I had to justify for OSAP why I failed the courses was the most stressful university experience.... My Canadian sponsor helped me to overcome this obstacle; she asked me for what happened and wrote a letter for

OSAP explaining the issue to them. After her help, OSAP accepted to continue funding my education.

Through that challenge, Maryam understood many expectations she has never known before, and due to her new-found knowledge, she ended up getting an A. “After knowing how the system worked, I got an A average in that course. I became very confident and now I assist other students in lab work and assignments,” she said.

Aisha was similarly overwhelmed about university and how things work. She did not know about available services, and how to benefit from these services.

When I went to my academic councilor, I didn’t know what to ask because I just did not know anything. The councilor asked me: “What is the conclusion of your research?” and I said: “I’m not even familiar with the university life; I don’t even have any one to tell me what to research for.”

Being disadvantaged in asking the appropriate question or getting to the needed resource was the main hidden reason behind the preclusion of participants from accessing needed services. Aisha expressed this clearly when stating, “Service providers assume that you know what you are doing, and you know what university life is and how things go. I really don’t have any experience at university; they just assume that I know”. Even after going to the academic counselor, Aisha was given a pamphlet about skills counseling, and about mental health services, but she did not have any prior knowledge about these services, so she did not know what to do about the information she received. Aisha just needed more details and clarifications about available services and in what ways each service could help. She needed someone to communicate and explain to her.

A worker gave me the pamphlet for the second time. I read the pamphlet and I was thinking: mmm, should I go? Should I ask? Or what should I do? Could I ask the skills counselor about my chemistry or calculus test that I had? What is the skills counselor for? Another person was working at the development centre, recognized my confusion, so she took an action and said: Let us go and make an appointment with the skills counselor right now.

After the overwhelming feelings and challenges she faced, Aisha was finally able to get referred to the service she needed, which was 'skills counseling'. She would have never been there if she was only given a pamphlet. The person who recognized her confusion, explained to her about how skills counseling would help, and scheduled an appointment with her to provide her with the information she needed. After going to the skills counselor, Aisha expressed how satisfied she was.

The skills councilors were so helpful; they don't just give you pamphlets. They tell you what the services are, what they do, what you can ask there, what help you can get in there, they tell you specific details.

In contrast to Maryam's and Aisha's experiences and their confusion regarding basic information on university procedures, services and expectations, Sara expressed her confidence about being at university because of the help she received from family members who already knew about university life.

I learnt about OSAP because my brother and aunt were studying here, so they told me about everything. Without having my family members attending university before, I would have not even been at university now. I would have gone to English as a Second Language schools and stayed there forever.

The experiences of Syrian refugee women indicate that they were precluded from accessing services because of the lack of information about what was available for them and where they can ask for help. They also indicated that having family members or a sponsor to resort to when they need help was of great benefit. After highlighting the issues regarding access to university services for Syrian refugee women students, I asked participants what their needs are; they mentioned the following needed services.

Referral services needed. Maryam also indicated that after getting in trouble, her sponsor connected her and provided her with a referral list including all the services available, with giving her a detailed explanation about each of them. She urged the university to provide similar lists to students, along with support services to explain each item on the list.

My sponsor knew the problem I was facing, and she sent me a long email that includes information about where to go if I needed help in different areas: e.g. where to go when I need math help or writing help. She referred me to student services, counselors, TAs and where to go if I have questions about a certain subject or course. Providing newcomers referrals would be so helpful.

Maryam indicated that she started to notice the announcements on the walls after her sponsor had informed her about them.

After a while, I started to be aware about the announcements on university walls, the referrals about stress relief, human rights, assaults, and all other services. Maybe I started to recognize these announcements too late because I was too overwhelmed at the beginning. Maybe if someone had personally directed me to these services, my position would be much better.

Aisha also suggested that the university should provide seminars or short announcements at the beginning of lectures to spread awareness about services. She said that she knew about mental health services at university through a short seminar at the beginning of one of her classes. She suggested that it is helpful if universities employ this method in providing awareness for students about services.

Sometimes mental health officers make short five minutes seminars at the beginning of a lecture. I ask service providers to communicate with students. Five minutes talks before a lecture would be a good eye opener for students.

Aisha indicated that she applied for orientation week and paid \$90, but it was less than what she expected.

I have applied for orientation week.... although it costs \$90, it was useless to me as I expected more. I expected someone to tell us for example how to use the library: the rooms available, the silent floor, the conversation-friendly floor, the print station, and the services we could get.

Refugees specific mental health services. Rahaf had known about mental health services at university but pointed out her discomfort in using these services because they take into consideration normal exam stresses, without considering refugee issues or traumas. She was also hesitant to talk to someone who has never experienced war and who speaks another language.

I know about the psychological services here, but I have never been to it.... I have never felt comfortable to talk to someone who has never lived any of the circumstances I lived through, in addition to the language barrier.... I would ask universities to provide something that takes into consideration the mental health of those who came as refugees. There are mental health services for students who

have anxiety due to exams for example, but the case is very different for someone who has anxiety because they witnessed a massacre.

Rahaf also explained that refugees might be combined with international students in certain activities. She criticized this notion and differentiated between activities provided for international students and the needs for specifying events for refugees.

At our university, we have activities for international students, but I have never loved to attend their activities. Their activities are for people who came to Canada for studying and tourism, which is so different from people who had their life turned upside down and are starting their life over, and in a new place. These things are not taken into consideration; universities relate to refugees in the same way that they relate to international students, but our needs and life experiences are so different.

Experiencing Social Difficulties, Loneliness and Cultural Barriers

Although all participants expressed their commitment to university education, and that education was one of the main reasons they came to Canada, all participants indicated that they experienced social and emotional difficulties resulting in depression and loneliness in their university life. Some participants have also experienced discrimination, an unwelcoming community and cultural tensions resulting in stress and anxiety.

Comparisons between university life in Canada and Syria. To compare and summarize the social experiences of her life as a Syrian refugee woman at a Canadian university, Sara drew this drawing in her pre-interview activity.

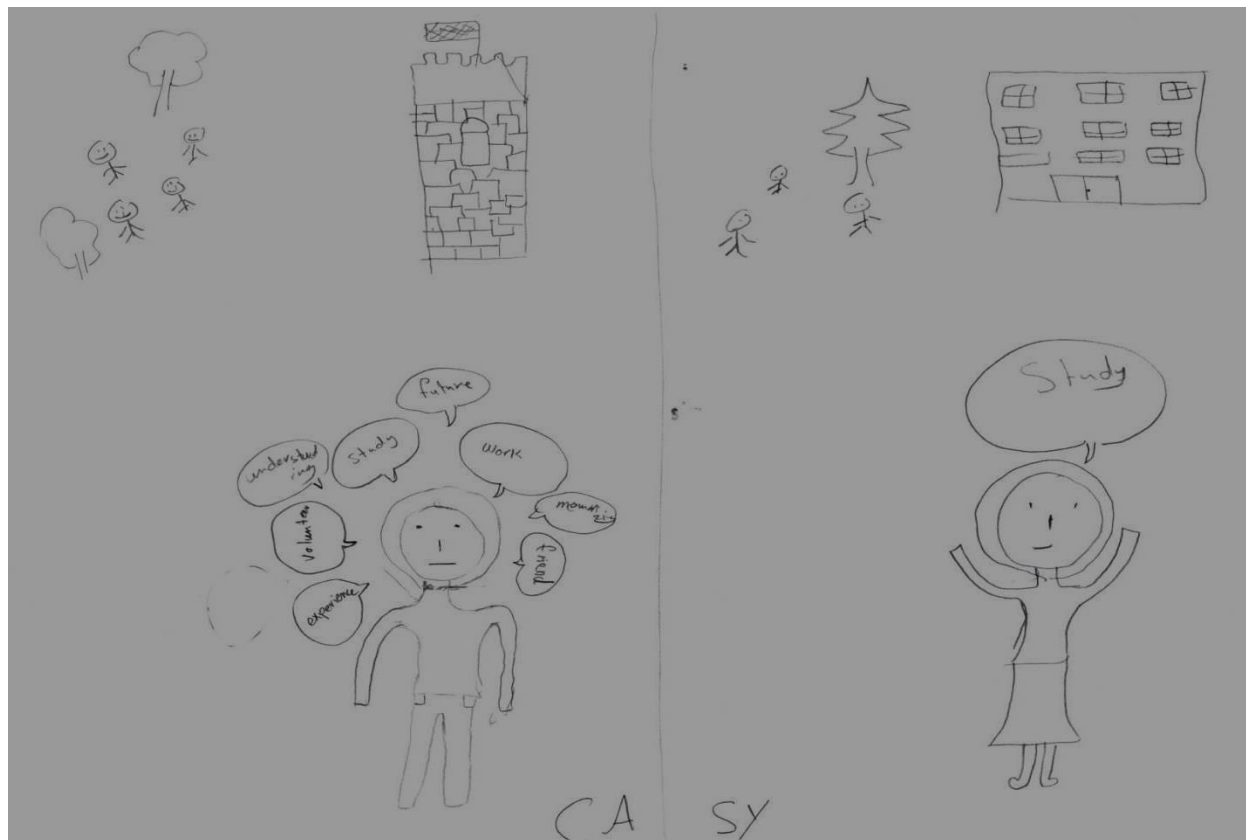


Figure 1. Reflection on university experiences in Syria and Canada.

The drawing has two sides, one is about Sara’s life in Syria, represented by the letters (SY) and one is about her life in Canada, represented by letters (CA). On the Syrian side, there is a simple school and a happy woman, raising her hand with joy and having only one responsibility: studying, with no other worries. While on the Canadian side, Sara portrayed an elegant building, and an overwhelmed woman, who has many worries in her mind as a student. In her drawing, Sara summarized all the worries and responsibilities that overwhelmed her during her life as a student, using the words: “experience, volunteering, understating, study, future, work, memorizing, and friends.” To be more specific, Sara explained what she meant in

using these words in the drawing. She stated that she faced many difficulties as she had to get Canadian work experiences and volunteer positions while studying, understanding class materials in a different learning style, plan and work for the future and be worried about getting a job all at the same time. She added that her experience was difficult because she was not able to use the memorizing abilities she had learned previously in school. Furthermore, she could not make friendships easily.

I represent a comparison of the responsibilities that a student might take in Syria and in Canada. In Syria, students' responsibility is just to study and memorize... They are granted a job opportunity after graduation. However, in Canada, you do not only need to have a certificate, but you also need to have a certificate with high average, volunteer experiences and work experiences before you graduate.... These requirements made me stressed and worried about the future.

Her worry about getting a job and volunteer experiences while studying, and not being granted job positions, resulted in stress and anxiety in Sara's life as a student. Another issue that affected the social life of Sara's university experience is the lack of relations. I pointed to the drawing and asked, what does 'friends' mean in the Canadian section of your drawing? Sara expressed the disappointment of the social life she has at the university.

I mean even my social life through my university experience is not rich enough. I thought that university life would be more enjoyable, but I got disappointed. University experience is kind of boring, I am not feeling that it is joyful, maybe because I am still in the first year and things might change next year.

Her expectations about university were to have more fun and more possibilities to build relations and friendships; the lack of this social life disappointed Sara, as she found herself

lonely and isolated. Similarly, Rahaf expressed the aspects of her social life in her Canadian university in relation to her life when she was a university student in Lebanon.

I was in Lebanon before coming here and I was enjoying my life there, I was working, had a lot of friends; I had life and excitement as a young lady experiencing a wonderful stage of her life.... I was supposed to graduate from university this year.... Then I felt that my life has been cut from its half.... I had to leave and start as a first-year student here.

Having to leave her third-year university, work, volunteer and active life and start all over again, caused Rahaf to experience social difficulties at a personal level. She summarizes her life here as follows:

One of the things I did not like when I came to Canada, is that I had a busy life before coming here. I used not to come home except for sleep, while here I only study, and even in studying I am not getting good marks; there is no social life, and no job opportunities.

Similarly, Maryam was also a third-year university student and had an active social life before coming to Canada; she experienced social difficulties at her Canadian university.

I came here as a refugee, not knowing anyone, or anything about educational systems, and I am building and raising myself from the zero, and I returned to university while I should have been graduated a year and a half ago... I came here and was denying the idea, I did not even know where I was, I did not want to come, and I wanted my friends.... I have never been out of Syria in my life, so I was too shocked, and I did not adapt to the new place easily. I was still thinking

of returning to Syria, but the only thing that prevented me was the idea that I might never see my parents in my life again if I return.

Missing her friends and her active life in Syria were making Maryam's emotional health worse, to the extent that she experienced severe stress and had to get medication. She highlighted the social aspects of her university life in Ontario as follows:

Entering university was for me like an anesthetic needle, or like a push that someone had pushed me then I returned to my previous state of being stuck....

My life in Canada as a student was way more difficult than in Syria; I was a very happy, enthused and funny person, but the first months here were killing. My family doctor was following my stress consequences and my mom told me that I am not the daughter she knew, she used to say to me, "Go to Syria and bring me back my daughter". I became nervous most of the time and could not talk to people. I blamed my parents for bringing us here, life was too difficult.

The high stress levels Maryam was experiencing due to homesickness and lack of a social life affected her relations with her parents and people around her. She developed health issues and had to receive medical care for her distresses. Another insight on social experiences at university was provided by Aisha, who acknowledged the difficulty of being a university student without finding assistance to overcome university difficulties.

I am so glad that I'm done with first year. It was too hard, and I didn't receive any assistance.... My parents didn't know anything about university in Canada, so I didn't have a good idea about what university is in Canada, or what Canadian university experience would be like. When I came to university, I was shocked. I didn't know who I am; I didn't know what to do, and how to manage my time.

Her overwhelming feelings about how to relate and adapt to university life were because she did not know what to expect at university, as her parents had not studied in Canada. Aisha also indicated that she usually experiences depression and flashbacks during exam times.

In the exam time, I get really depressed, and I remember all the hard times I have been through, like the war I have seen in my eyes. These flashbacks still come back, especially in the hardest times of exams, when I get fatigued after studying for long hours; I just feel that I cannot do it and start crying. But I always remind myself that I have been through a lot and this is just nothing compared to what I have been through.

These difficulties indicated by the participants at the beginning of university life led to emotional difficulties such as isolation and loneliness.

Isolation and loneliness. Being overwhelmed about adjusting to a new social life and university experience in Canada caused most participants to feel some depression, loneliness and isolation. Sara expressed how lonely her life at university is,

Since I entered university, I have been isolated. I am always alone at school or studying at home; I feel depressed. So far, I don't like my university experience.

Although it is stronger as a global university ranking, I am not enjoying it or liking my social life.

Being lonely and isolated were the reasons that caused Sara not to like or enjoy her life as a student. Similarly, Rahaf said that her first year at university was not easy and she noticed a difference between her life as a refugee and the life of other students.

A very touching situation for me was when we had the orientation week at university and all students attending the events were enjoying it. I was unable to

enjoy it, because I am 23 years old now; the new students are mostly 18-19 years old, and when I was at their age, I did not have such a life, not even a similar life.

I feel that I am in a place where it is impossible for anyone to understand me.

The difficulties that Rahaf experienced before coming to Canada, grieving the years she lost without a certificate, and comparing her life to when she was at the typical student age, caused her to feel lonely and that no one would understand her. I was touched by what she said, so I asked if she tried to talk to anyone, and she answered,

The people whom I told about my personal experience are very limited; I don't prefer to say details about my life, because their reactions differ.... Some people exaggerate in their reactions, like they pity me. This feeling is too disturbing for me and I don't accept it. It is especially hard to talk about it to people who have never experienced war; they will not understand me.... I have isolated myself from people for a period of time, and I was unable to talk or express myself, just for personal emotional reasons.

The extreme war conditions that Rahaf experienced were the reason why she decided to isolate herself from people around her. Similarly, Maryam decided to isolate herself even from her family members.

I have an extended family here, but I isolated myself from my family because I did not want to disturb them. I wanted them to keep remembering the old me that was lovely, without being nervous, so I decided to step away. I also felt embarrassed from speaking English in the presence of my extended family; what if someone talked to me in English in front of them and I did not know what to answer or answered incorrectly? These were also reasons for my isolation.

Although some participants decided to isolate themselves from the surrounding people for personal and emotional reasons, another participant indicated the lack of relations for different reasons such as culture shock and difficult beginnings. Rama argued,

Everything at the beginning is difficult, especially language. It is also hard to create relations with people, because I feel that everyone cares about themselves only. There is also a culture shock at the beginning.

The cultural barrier was not only expressed by Rama, as most participants found themselves having only professional relations with their classmates as it was difficult to speak about their life issues. Sara said,

I did not have a chance to have a Canadian friend.... the relation is restricted within university. Even within university, they have their own ideas and culture and the things they talk about are so different.... It is not easy to have Canadian friends, their life is different, and I will need to justify myself a lot, or I might get in embarrassing situations, and I will not be totally comfortable.

To prevent herself from being put in embarrassing situations or having to justify herself, Sara decided to keep her relations professional, not wanting to share personal things about herself. Similarly, Rahaf reflected upon friendship and isolation, arguing that she sometimes feels that she is from a different world.

I only have professional relations with most people. The topic of friendship is somehow complicated, and as you grow, it gets more complicated... Many students are still young, and they do not know what is happening in the world out of Canada; I feel that I am from a world and they are from another world.... There is nothing in common to talk about other than what happens in our classroom.

Sara explained a certain type of hierarchy that she experienced with the Arab community in Canada. She indicated that people usually seemed to have known each other for a long time and would not engage new people in their groups.

They [Arab community] are still kind and friendly, but I mean you feel that they have their own groups that they had known for years, so they don't engage new people in their groups.

Additionally, Aisha experienced the same difficulty, as she expressed having cultural tensions as a refugee with the Arab community.

There were some cultural tensions with the Arab community, because I am a refugee and there are a lot of people in the Arab community who have been here for generations.... Sometimes I feel left out from the Arab community.

Although Sara and Aisha indicated feeling left out of the Arab community, Rahaf indicated that she has not tried to engage with the Arab community because she felt some differences that she was unable to articulate.

I also feel that the Arab community is different here. I have not understood it yet, they are not so open and not so conservative, I could not understand it, but it is different from the community I came from. I think that my community was more open and diverse, but I can't fully explain it because I did not engage in depth with the Arab community here.

Whether this social separation was a personal decision, or a feeling of being left out even from people whom they expected to be potential colleagues or friends with whom they could connect, the social and emotional challenges that Syrian refugee women faced at university were clearly represented in the lack of social life and loneliness. To further understand the reasons behind the

feelings of being left out of the community, I asked participants if they faced cultural tensions or discrimination throughout their school years.

Cultural tensions. All participants argued that they had not encountered overt discrimination or major cultural tensions, as Aisha explained, “I never felt any cultural tensions at university, I felt some in high school and the worst in elementary school but in university it was a very fine experience.” However, they did talk about situations where they did not feel comfortable. Sara and Rama focused on an aspect of cultural tensions that have put them in several embarrassing situations. Shaking hands with men contradicted the way people greet each other in their culture and religion, as Sara explained,

A man wanted to shake my hands, and I said I cannot, so he apologized. I was so glad that he did not take it personally.... Usually, people understand and start to ask more questions about Islam. I say that we do not shake hands with the other gender, so some people think that I am lesbian, but I explain to them that we avoid any situation that could engage attraction between men and women. So, we don't shake hands, that is it. I even had an Arab Christian friend in the same class and she did not shake hands with men as well.

Similarly, Rama expressed her continual embarrassment with the controversy of shaking hands with men. She said,

The shaking hands thing is very embarrassing to me, and it happened with me a couple times... While I do not accept to shake hands with men because of my religious commitment, sometimes I do not know what to do and I shake men's hands just out of embarrassment. I try hard to avoid being in a situation where I have to shake hands with men because I can't argue or justify myself every time.

Also, the “high five” thing happened with me twice, and I did not know what to do.

Sara talked about an incident in which she learned that some of her peers thought that she must have different entrance requirements because of being a refugee. She expressed how she refused this idea, saying, “I remember one person told me that refugees get admission because admission averages for refugees are less than other people, and I said, ‘No! I got admission because I had high grades in my high school.’” Sara later recalled a situation that she felt represented some discrimination.

During a lecture, a classmate said something about refugees disrespectfully, and got stopped by the professor. I was glad that the professor stopped him, because I would be embarrassed to speak up in front of the professor and other students.

On the other hand, Rama said that she has never experienced overt discrimination in her university life; explaining only one situation she could recall was about impatience from a lab partner.

I have never experienced discrimination at all, but I had someone working with me at the lab, and because I am not skilled in lab work, and not fluent in English, he was fatigued by me. So, he started to depend on another Canadian student.

This disturbed me, but I keep saying to myself that I have to improve my English skills to get better.

Similarly, Rahaf said,

I did not see any discrimination. Sometimes people do things with good intentions, but their acts might be disturbing, like if they try to help while having some pity, it is a ‘no’ for me. One time someone offered financial assistance; I

know that it was with a good intention, but it seemed that the person did not know me enough. If they had known me, they would realize that I do not ask for this kind of assistance, even from my parents.

While most participants said that they did not face overt discrimination at university, however, Maryam said that she experienced discrimination as follows:

Many students were too rude with me. They were too competitive, and unhelpful. Sometimes, I did not have the hastiness to record everything from the board, because I was still not so familiar with English. I used to ask students to see their notes but they refused. Some of them did not even answer me, and some indicated that they do not have notes, although they do. This was too shocking and emotionally stressful. In Syria, if I asked anyone, they would help. I got depressed and decided not to talk to anyone. This caused me to lose my ability to study as I became depressed and my stress levels increased even more.

Sara talked about an experience when a teacher said that refugees were lucky to come to Canada. She responded that refugees did not choose to leave their country, and that they have also benefitted the new society.

Our teacher once said that Syrian people are lucky to come here, and that we, as Syrians, are gaining by being in Canada, not losing. I said, 'True, but also Canada is gaining by having us. If Canada does not see a benefit thorough welcoming Syrian people, it would have never brought us. This is politics; everything is a win-win.'

These incidents expressed by participants highlight an aspect of why they might not feel comfortable engaging with the community. Being perceived as different was not a pleasant

experience through university life and caused them to have some feelings of loneliness at university. I am now highlighting some examples of stereotypes that participants also had to deal with throughout their university experiences, adding a heavy load on them as refugees.

Confronting stereotypes about Syrian refugee women. Participants also reflected upon some stereotypes that they faced during their experiences at university. One of the stereotypes is about being a Muslim woman. Participants highlighted the role of their families in supporting their studies as Muslim refugee women, indicating that they sometimes encountered people in the community who had different perceptions about their families, assuming that women were oppressed without access to education. Aisha explained that some people were shocked when they knew that her father supported her education, assuming that Muslim women are oppressed by their families.

Sometimes it's a shock when I tell my friends who lived their life in Canada that my dad really valued education for me. They assume that because I'm a Muslim female, my dad doesn't want me to get educated. They think that he would have made me marry someone when I was 18. I get this perception a lot from my friends.

Similarly, Rahaf expressed that her family valued education for women. "I came from an open society, I do not know but we as women in the family were living more at ease, especially in education; we are all educated". It was important for participants to express themselves and to advocate for the values that their culture holds and are misperceived by people of different cultures. Their reflections on valuing education and the support they receive by their families were emphasized by most participants. Participants indicated that the main support for them was their parents. For example, Rama expressed that she had some social support helping her in

university life, “My parents, especially my father, give me the right information and emotional help. For example, yesterday before meeting with my professor, I asked my dad what I should say in the meeting and we discussed it together.” Similarly, Aisha illustrated that people sometimes assume that she is oppressed by her family as a Muslim woman. She advocated against this stereotype indicating that her parents encouraged her to be educated and provided her with continuous emotional and mental support.

The support I have is from my parents; when I have exams till night, my dad would give me a ride and my mom would always prepare my lunch, snacks and my dress.... I also had a problem with time management, so my sister would do the chores and other responsibilities at home and leave me study. Especially during exams, my dad and my mom would make sure that they do not talk about anything that might discomfort me; they really care about my mental health.

Rahaf indicated another type of stereotype she had encountered, where people who were raised in the West consider their knowledge and their culture more valuable than other places.

People in the West assume that I must already know everything about how life here works, or that the way they live their life is the standard that we have to follow. It is OK, just come and live two days in an alien place and see how you will fit in. An example is when my classmates were talking about the European history and someone said, ‘Everyone knows this. It is axiomatic that university students know it.’ I just wanted to say that other people have other histories.

Rahaf advocated for the knowledge and experiences she had before coming to Canada and argued that having a different background is an asset that makes her able to articulate different ideas to people around her.

No one has the right to consider themselves more informed than me just because I came from another place. People around me get astonished about what I say, the knowledge I have and the perspectives I bring... Because my experience is different, I feel that I can provide insight in a way that others have not seen, and this might be a strength I have. I can convey ideas to people about things they have never known about.

Rahaf faced some misperceptions about being from the 'third world' and she shared that it disturbed her to see people believe in this notion without appreciating the culture and knowledge that people of other places have.

I love people to know more about what is going on in the world around them, and to care to know. When a bombing happens in France, everyone cares. Why is it so normal then when in Syria or other countries massacres happen? Why does it pass as if nothing has happened?... Everyone has a responsibility in this world.

Everything that happens is connected in a way to other parts of the world.

Work, Possibilities and Reflections on Being Refugees

Working while still being students was one of the social experiences upon which participants reflected. Sara explained that having to work while still being a student was a cultural difference that her family and she had to accept. She expressed that working as a student had its pros and cons.

In Syria, people work after finishing university; no one works before having a degree. Even financially, we had a better life in Syria, so we did not need to work at a young age. Maybe here we need to work. My parents are responsible for my life basics, but I am responsible for affording extra things I need... I felt it is hard

and kind of weird to work while still at school, especially because I am not used to this lifestyle.

While Sara found it weird to work while still studying, Maryam aimed at getting a job to help keep her busy and engaged with society. She was able to find a job easily in Canada, and work was for her a positive transition in her life as a student. She overcame her depression, gained confidence, and started to engage with the community. Even her university success improved, as she said, “To get rid of my state of depression and my continuous comparisons between here and Syria, I decided to get busy day and night, and started looking for a job. I got a job and started going to the gym, then I started to meet with good people, especially at my job.”

Maryam also indicated that having a job improved her emotional health, her engagement with the new community, and her confidence at university.

My confidence improved, as I felt that I am good enough.... I started to become more comfortable, and more engaged with university life. I made friends and reached a stage where I am not embarrassed of who I am. This is me, and I am learning more.... My marks at university improved as a result. I became able to overcome and ignore any situation that disturbs me. People started to come to me for assignment help. I have my community and my friends but still not as much as in Syria.

Finding a job was the reason why Maryam felt more confident of the skills she could offer, and this resulted in improving her university experiences at academic, social and emotional levels. Similarly, Sara noticed the positive effects of working while still being a student, although she did not prefer the idea of working and studying together when she was still new to Canada.

My life changed for the better, I became more mature and responsible. I started to think of my responsibilities. In our Arab societies, parents are responsible of everything. The father is always responsible for providing finances.

After experiencing work, I asked Sara what she thinks about this new lifestyle, and she answered,

Every tiny situation that happens to you would teach you. Therefore, I think it is good to depend on one's self. It is also good to feel the importance of money by working hard to get it. And this way, we remove a load from parents' shoulders. I am creating my own path and building my experience step by step.... In Syria, even my parents would help in everything including finding a job. Life there was easier. Here, you need to do everything on your own, even finding a job, and it is hard to find it.

Although Sara expressed her weariness of working while still studying, she advocated for the importance of getting a job to build her experience, raise her sense of responsibility and support her parents. For Maryam, work was a necessity to regain confidence in her abilities, social responsibilities, and sense of empowerment. On the other hand, Rahaf highlighted the difficulties of finding a job, and her need to use previous experiences and to find a position that matched her qualifications.

I love to work in something that matches my experience, I had years of experience and I do not want to pour it in the sea. I tried to find a job. I applied for about twenty job positions in different sectors including retail, but none has responded.

Although the participants highlighted the benefits of having a job, such as improving their emotional wellbeing, their confidence, their engagement with society and even improve their university experiences, the down side was that they could not obtain a job without previous work experience. To move forward and understand what participants plan for their future and where they would like to take their education, I am highlighting their dreams and plans in the next section, and the ways in which education has helped in establishing a ground for future possibilities.

Reflections on the term ‘refugee’. After discussing the experiences that Syrian refugee women at a Canadian university had, the participants reflected upon the term ‘refugee’. Sara said,

We are not happy that we were forced to come here or to take assistance from anyone. We were happy in our countries. We had a good life, studying at our universities without problems, but the war situation is what forced us to leave our country.... This is the situation that we found ourselves forced to be at.

Sara was proud of her strength being a refugee who has been able to overcome challenges and reach a stage where she is content.

If I am a refugee, I am with you in the same classes, and I have accomplished what you have accomplished. This is by itself is enough. We are people who have been forced through life circumstances to be called refugees. Refugees are people who have countries, identities, and they would have continued their lives in their countries if they could.

Similarly, Rama said that she is proud to be a refugee, because she is succeeding in spite of all the difficulties she faced.

I am proud to be a refugee, because I might become more successful in life than you, who knows? I am also studying at university, and without me having the capabilities, I would have never been given admissions. I am proud that I am a refugee and that I overcame all the difficulties. People who come with an immigration visa mostly have families, language skills and more resources of success than refugees. Refugees certainly have more difficulties.

Maryam also expressed her pride to be a refugee who overcame many challenges in life. She meditated upon her life and how she reached the stage that most other people have reached despite herself being a refugee.

I do not mind being known as a refugee, because when I reflect on it, I say: I am refugee who came here without knowing anyone, or anything about the country, and started from zero. Being a refugee and having done all of this and overcame all the obstacles? What would I do if I am not a refugee then? This way of thinking is encouraging to me.

Rahaf expressed her opinion about being called a refugee, providing a critical insight on the political paradoxes.

A refugee is someone who was compelled to leave their place because of difficult circumstances. This is different from someone who has never left their home, or who left their home for tourism or to improve their life conditions. Some people do not like to be identified by the word 'refugee', but for me it is normal. I do not feel that being a refugee is a bad characteristic for me; if someone needs to be ashamed, then it is the ones who caused us to become refugees.

Advocating for their cultural values. Maryam highlighted her belonging to the Arab culture. Her love of the Arabian values made her think of raising her kids the way she was raised through keeping her connections with Syria. She refers to this sensibility as an “Arabian print”,

I was raised in an open society in Syria, but still we had differences about the way we were open. I do not want to raise my kids here and find them telling me one day that it is not my business to mind their life. I have heard this from children, who were raised here telling this to their parents. I did not like it that their parents were unable to teach them our beautiful values; I want to plant in my children the Arabian values that I have learned.

Maryam added her insights on the values of her culture,

We still have many beautiful ways of living in our Arab culture, especially as a woman, the way of speaking. I mean the modesty and bashfulness, and the way men relate to us is so appreciative. I think that Arab women gain great respect and appreciation by men in their society. I am not generalizing, but I feel a special kind of respect Arab women get from their men.

Maryam argued that if Middle Eastern people are given the same life opportunities as the West, they would add more to the world.

I think that we, as an Arab population, have a lot to offer to the world; we are hardworking, very intelligent, responsible and practical. I think that if we, as Arabian mentalities, are given the same life opportunities that are given to the west, we will add a lot more to the world.

Similarly, Rahaf illustrated that the unfair distribution of resources in the world is what creates global hierarchy and the notion of developed versus developing societies.

People from the West used to come to our place, work in air-conditioned offices and take double my salary, while I used to work with thirty children in a small room in the refugee camp without air conditioning, nor electricity, nothing. In my opinion, this is one of the reasons how economics are distributed in the world and why we are not developed. In addition to the political matters, the people who come to develop our countries are noncitizens. Some of them are very good people, but if you are part of a society, you will understand what they need more than someone who has read about it in books.

Hopes and dreams. Although they are studying at a high-ranking Canadian university, experiencing war and transitioning to another society changed the way participants planned for their future. They indicated that after having their long-term goals corrupted by war and transitioning, it became harder for them to plan for anything other than short-term goals. The short-term goals were all focused on graduating from university and getting a job. When I asked Rahaf about her future dreams, she replied with a question: “How many years are we talking about?”, then she said,

After experiencing war, I started to think of the future for two to three years maximum; then I plan the next few years. At the university level, for sure, I want to improve my studies and to be more active. I am trying to find and do things I am interested in. This helps me mentally more than any other thing: the feeling that I am achieving.... I am still not able to think of the future, because I am not used to think of future.

To a similar extent, Maryam also revealed that she had many plans for her life, but after the war, it became harder for her to plan. She said,

Future? I still cannot see the future in the way I wanted. I had many things I wanted to do, and great plans in my life for coming years, then at a sudden the war came, everything changed, and my affairs got mixed up. As a result, I stopped planning for the long term; I only expect to graduate with a university degree, whatever the program is, then find a job in a career I love. I think that this is all that I am planning for now.

Similarly, Sara indicated that her plans for the near future are focused upon her graduation and getting a job.

I see myself graduating and having a good job. This is my goal at the moment, a high job position to pay back to my parents as they have raised me, supported me till this stage and brought me here. This is alone is enough.

For Rama, dreaming for a better future was a motivation after the stresses she faced at war; she imagines herself a successful member of society.

When I face a hardship, I start to imagine that I graduated, that I have an office, and people come to me for services. This is how I overcome any disturbance.... I imagine the day I will graduate with a high average and make my parents proud of me.

Using her degree to be of service to others was not only expressed by Rama. After avoiding thinking of the future, Rahaf and Maryam contemplated their willingness to create positive change, without knowing exactly what the change would be. Maryam expressed that she wants to create change and to use her stability in Canada to help people.

Maybe God chose me to leave my country and move to Canada to be of help for other people one day. I started to think differently. I feel that I might be in the right place to be able to do something of help to people one day.

Similarly, Rahaf indicated that she wants to participate in creating change. Although she does not know what her role would be and what she would do, she wants to use her stable life in creating a difference.

Many things are related to me as a person, might be called political, but for me are humanitarian. I would like to change something, I am thinking of taking another major and to convey ideas through my career. I would like to work on Middle Eastern issues; not just to show people what is happening, but I want to be able to create change.

I asked her what she needs to reach her highest potential, Rahaf answered,

To an extent, I already have a lot of it. My studies are providing me with a chance to reach higher potentials, a chance to study and to learn English language. And these two things would have been a barrier if I did not have them. Also, stability and peace are very important for people to be able to give. Having a secure place, a financial stability, are all available essentials. Other things I need just come through building my experiences.

Although they had a sense of being overwhelmed about thinking of the future after their plans changed through war conditions, participants implied that they would like to focus on their education, and to then use it in creating a positive change, though the path of this change is still unclear. Maryam indicated that she feels strong about the stage she is at regardless of these difficulties.

I love life, the simplicity of life. After the extremely difficult situations and the persecution of family members, I was able to overcome the difficulties and to start my life all over again. And being still able to continue? This is a strength I recognized, and I

started to overcome the emotional difficulties, and the difficult stages I experienced, and keep walking. I am so satisfied with what I have accomplished.

Sara also understood the difficulties refugees face and she wanted to encourage her fellow refugees to follow their dreams. She said,

Just be yourselves, don't let the circumstances change your aspirations. Follow your dreams. Wherever you are put, in any country, in any corner, build yourself and go ahead. If you are in Canada, use the opportunity that you are in a country that respects you and appreciates your capabilities. Appreciate yourself and do not let anything stop you. Even if the language is difficult, take your time, and continue. It is only one life. There is stress, there are difficulties. Sometimes I feel that I can't stay in Canada and I want to return to my home, but then I feel thankful that I got an opportunity that not everyone has received. Even the language we are learning is English, a global language that would help us wherever we go. We are learning language, meeting cultures, and getting life experiences.

With her words of inspiration, I would like to end this findings chapter.

Summary

In this chapter, I illustrated the findings of my study represented in four different themes. First was the immense dedication of the Syrian refugee women to pursue their post-secondary education despite the admissions' gatekeepers. Second, they faced difficulties in accessing university services, as the participants did not know what the available services were, and whom to ask if they experienced any difficulty. Third, emotional stresses felt by participants for being left out of society because of cultural tensions, and in spite of this, deciding to move forward.

Fourth, the unclear possibilities of the future as the participants experienced sudden war conditions in their countries and changes to their life plans; nevertheless, they each had a goal of continuing their education and improving their academic standing. In the next chapter, I provide a discussion of the emerged themes, in addition to recommendations and conclusions.

Chapter Five: Discussion and Conclusions

The Canadian government announced its initiative to resettle 25,000 Syrian refugees in 2015 as a response to the global Syrian refugee crisis (Government of Canada, 2017b). The initiative resulted in the resettlement of 40,000 Syrian refugees, with involvement and support from the government, community agencies, and members involved with sponsoring refugees and assisting in their settlement (Government of Canada, 2017b). In this context, many Canadian universities have shown involvement in refugee sponsorship, settlement and educational support, by initiating programs to support the settlement of Syrian refugees (WUSC, 2017). What remains unknown, though, are the experiences of these refugees in their transitional period while they are university students. The purpose of this research was to provide an understanding of Syrian refugee women's experiences at a post-secondary institution in one university in Ontario, with attention to their perspectives on how university experiences influence their resettlement, the tensions they faced related to cultural experiences, in addition to their suggestions for improving university programs. In this chapter, I provide an analysis and a discussion of the significance of research findings that emerged from the themes of the collected data with Syrian refugee women students at a university in Ontario. I also suggest recommendations for future research and practices in the studied area.

'Praxis' in Participants' Awareness about Their Positioning and Choosing Education

The first question that guided the study probed the ways in which attending a Canadian university impacted the settlement of Syrian refugee women. It was astonishing to me to know, that for many participants, education was the reason they came to Canada. A participant, for example, indicated that she was willing to return to Syria if she had not received admission to university in Canada. Additionally, some participants also had to overcome and resist

gatekeeping challenges posed by some teachers or service providers who tried to prevent them from accessing university. The persistence of these students to pursue their educational goals, regardless of the difficulties and barriers was astonishing in terms of the extent to which education was a reason for them being in Canada, and that their educational goals are not negotiable.

The concept of praxis, as Freire (2000) argues, consists of two principles, reflection and action. Reflection is apparent when participants highlighted the meaning of being labelled refugees, and the political, systematic systems behind the term. They talked about being forced to 'become' refugees. However, they find themselves having to and wanting to claim the label 'refugee', to live with it, and to experience prejudices and hierarchal acts that sometimes prevent them from engaging fully with the community and this sometimes acts as a barrier to their access in education. Participants' reflections on the challenging structures led them to claim the label 'refugee' with pride as they revealed that the concept carries the number of challenges they had to overcome to be at the same educational, and societal levels of their student peers.

The second segment of the concept of praxis is action. The findings indicate that participants chose to acquire higher education regardless of the gatekeepers who made access challenging. They also faced language difficulties and challenges in adapting to new learning styles. The understanding of the challenges, and the choice of continuing their education, required them to overcome issues of structural gatekeeping, dealing with difficult stress levels and adapting to new language and learning styles all at the same time. They not only talked about the challenges, but also expressed how their own reflection propelled them into action. They were aware, through their educational experiences, how they have been categorized and cast as

refugees, but sought to continue to pursue their education, for their belief that it was important to be able to thrive.

‘Solidarity’ in Relation to Participants’ Social and Cultural Experiences

The second question that my research addresses is about the cultural tensions that Syrian refugee women experience during their post-secondary education and the ways through which they navigate through these tensions. Freire (2000) argues that true solidarity is an act of love that requires being aware of the injustices, feeling with the oppressed and acting with them, not for them. Thus, people who show solidarity must have critical understanding of the oppressive realities. Solidarity is clearly represented by many professors who supported the success of their refugee students, acknowledging the commitment of their students through being aware of the challenges they had to overcome and, then, providing them with extra time to answer their questions.

On the other hand, while most Syrian refugee women in this study indicated that they did not face discrimination, they argued that they felt left out of the society because of cultural differences. In response, acts of action were represented when some participants chose to withdraw from activities and not to engage with the community. Freire (2000) refers to the decision of separateness from the surrounding world as an act of not accepting the limiting situations that they face through the oppressive situations. In this case, some participants chose not to engage with the community as a personal choice of action, in response to engagement challenges and discrimination they faced. And here I ask: How has the institution changed by having these Syrian refugee women attend? The findings indicate that other classmates were lacking understanding of what was going on in the world, and that participants felt underrepresented through cultural stereotypes or through lack of public events and societal

awareness about the humanitarian realities in Syria. Participants advocated for knowledge, the lifestyles they enjoy as Muslim women and for Arab values. They clearly stated that not being from the dominant culture does not mean that their knowledge is less important. On the contrary, they have knowledge and values to add to the world. Thus, more work on solidarity, and representation, and removal of stereotypes about Arab and Muslim women needs to be initiated as participants advocated.

‘Oppression’ Precluding Participants from Accessing University Services

The last research question was about the university services needed by Syrian refugee women and the way the women have been agential at the university. One of the most surprising finding of this research to me is the participants’ lack of understanding of what the university provides and how to benefit from the available services. Participants indicated that they had no idea about what the university provides, as they constantly asked: How would we know about available services if no one told us what to expect and what is expected from us?

Participants argued that university service providers simply assumed that by entering university, all students are aware of the services available to them. Unfortunately, participants demonstrated that they had no idea about where to find what they needed and illustrated that it did not even occur to them that services required to support their university success might be available. Thus, participants did not even ask for help because they did not anticipate support and assistance. For example, it never occurred to the students to ask for a counselor’s help, because in Syria, they never had the experience of having one available. These previous experiences and the lack of clear guidance on university services were barriers to even try to ask. This lack of information about university life, services and expectations resulted in extreme difficulties at all levels. Participants asked questions: How would we know? How would it even occur to us that

this kind of services might be available when we have never had it before or linked it to the university? These questions indicated that they have been disadvantaged in accessing services, and they felt that this had caused some of them to fail courses.

Participants' reflections on being unaware about access to services indicated that people around them in general and service providers at university were not aware of the different experiences that Syrian refugee women have been through. It is not that participants were new to university life; many of them had previous university experiences. However, what they knew about university did not help them to be able to access services or programs that they needed. There is a kind of systemic oppression of their previous knowledge, whereby it is not recognized here nor applicable in the new system they are experiencing in Canada. Through this lack of information on supports and university systems, some students were being disadvantaged due to the lack of information, the lack of channels to access information about services available, and not knowing that such information/services could even exist. Freire (2000) argues that the oppressed are people who have been conditioned by unjust contexts in which they, at certain times of their experiences, adapt to the 'adhesion' of the oppressors or the oppressive circumstances. In these terms, I consider the lack of clarification about available services a form of oppression in which refugee women were left out from available supports because they were not apparent or clarified to them.

Recommendations for University Programs

I have chosen to present the recommendations from the data using the participants' explanation of what they believed is needed for improvement at the university level. These excerpts are some key examples from the transcripts that illustrate how clearly the participants described the ways through which services and programs can be improved.

Access to information and referral services. The first recommendation that participants indicated is the need for referral services at university where they can express any overwhelming concerns and get recommendations on available services, with information on what to expect. Feeling overwhelmed about what to expect from a service was clearly identified by participants in the findings. The Participants suggested that the most pressing need is referral services directing them to available recourses and service providers. Maryam indicated that she did not get the services she might have needed, not because the lack of services, but because she did not expect to have such services at university.

I do not think that we need more services; I think that the services provided at university are way more than what we expected. I did not get their help at the beginning, because I did not expect that to this extent, we could get help at Canadian universities.

Maryam did not expect that there are services that help her when she needs help, or when she feels she is not doing well at school, simply because this is not the way her previous experience at Syrian universities worked. Maryam argued that her main concern was to get general knowledge about course requirements, averages needed, and what is expected from her as a student. She suggested that universities provide sessions for newcomer students about general expectations.

We need awareness sessions to clarify information about the university community, university systems and what is available for us. For example, what to do if I did not like a course, or if I did not get a high mark? How to pass courses and what are the failure marks? Just general guiding information about courses, services, and systems is needed. I think that this is the only thing that was

missing.... I could not ask these questions because I did not know whom to ask or who would help. I did not even expect that the systems are different from Syria; I did not know that I might get in trouble if I did not know the systems.

Aisha also indicated her need for more details about the available services, not just through knowing what is available, but information about the extent to which these services would help her, and what exactly she could ask from them.

I really wish that there are referral services that explain to us in detail the resources and services provided: how to access it, how to get successful in academic life or mental health. When I entered university, I needed to know what mental health services do. Is it sort of typical to the movies when people sit on the chair and start talking? If I do not know what to expect from mental health services or any other service, I will not feel comfortable going there.

Aisha also stressed the importance of having referral services in each department.

I really wished the university had this service: like you go and someone who is representative of a department, for example, the science department.... someone who gives me a heads-up of what to expect in my academic life, in my future life.

I really wish that the university has something like this, someone who talks to us in small groups and tells us about what is expected from us, how much effort we must give, etc.

Participants indicated a need to know who they could talk to in case they needed help, assistance, referrals and clarifications on available services and on university expectations. They illustrated incidents on how they failed courses, lost marks, and developed increased stress that could have

been prevented had they known the support services available, what they are specified for and to what extent these services might help direct and answer their uncertainties.

Representation, community support and solidarity. The second recommendation determined by participants is to educate the community about refugee issues through awareness sessions. For example, Rahaf reflected on the importance of representing refugee issues and clarified that the best days of her university life were when she participated in a conference about refugees from all over the world.

The days when I felt comfortable, were the days I attended a three-day conference for refugees from different countries. There was a feeling that we were all comfortable, each of us has lived similar difficulties with totally different stories; some people came from extreme poverty, some came from war zone areas, some people lost their families, some did not lose anyone, but the general sphere was some similarities combining us that we could all understand.

Furthermore, Sara also requested that the university provide more awareness sessions for the student population about refugees and the difficulties they have been through. She justified her need by arguing that people would relate to refugees differently and become less judgmental when they knew more about their lives.

We need awareness sessions about refugees. We need the society to know that we might have experienced some life difficulties. This awareness might change the way people treat refugees... For instance, some refugees might not behave as expected by the society sometimes. However, if people understand the hardships they have been through and the background that led them to behave a certain way, they will become less judgmental and would understand.

In addition, it was important to the participants to organize public events regarding the awareness about refugees' issues. Rama expressed her delight when an article was published about her life as a refugee, acknowledging the difficulties that she has been through. These inputs from participants highlight the need for more political representation and community awareness to increase solidarity with refugees. Increased solidarity could be represented in mutual support at personal levels as Rahaf indicated.

Although I know that things and services are available when I request, I do not feel comfortable to keep asking, but if people contacted me, they would know that I need certain things.... I just love the presence of people and their interest, nothing more specific. We need others to contact us at a personal level.

Academic accommodations. The third recommendation is to provide more exam time for refugees and immigrant students as they need more time to read, understand and express themselves in a second language. Additionally, these students need more clarifications for class materials and they also need professional Teaching Assistants. For example, Rama requested that her professors provide more details at lectures.

I need professors to provide more details in lectures for students who speak English as a second language, because we do not have the same educational background and familiarity with subjects as people who studied high school in Canada. I also request to have professional TAs, because sometimes my TAs don't know how to explain a topic, or they might not even be familiar with it.

Most participants highlighted the need to have more exam time, as it takes them more time and effort to read, understand and answer in a second language. Sara said,

Not only for refugees, but anyone who speaks English as a second language, would need more time during exams. If university takes this into consideration, it would be great. Students might need more time to read, understand and translate things in a second language so we might need extra half an hour; this would really help.

Rama suggested the exact same request, as she said,

I want to ask universities to allow English as Second Language speakers to have more time in the exams. We sometimes need to use the dictionary, and it takes us time to read, write and understand in a second language.

Rama also expressed other needs regarding exam scheduling and accommodations.

I need the university to acknowledge if I am tired, sick or having a problem, and to provide me with the opportunity to delay the exam. Having two exams at the same day is too difficult. I know that the university does provide permission if we have three exams at a day, but even having to do two exams at a day is too difficult. I cannot study and sleep. I want more balance in the way university arranges exam times, in addition to my need to have 10 minutes break during long exams that last about 3 hours.

Taking into consideration the academic needs of refugees is crucial in their academic success, decreasing stress levels, and enhancing their integration into society. In the following section, I explain what was not studied in my research, and highlight recommendations for future research.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

When I started recruiting participants using snowballing, most people who responded to the recruitment asked why I did not include men, refugees at colleges, and refugees who are not enrolled at university because they have been denied admissions. A limitation of this study is the handful of participants who participated through the selection criteria. I intended to narrow my selection criteria as much as possible to provide a deeper understanding about the experiences of Syrian refugee women who are enrolled at a university. The focus of this master's research and the precision of the participants' inclusion criteria provided results that specify the needs, challenges and experiences of Syrian refugee women. Thus, I would advocate for conducting future research on the experiences of refugee men, on refugees who were denied access to educational opportunities, on refugees studying at colleges, and on the experiences of refugee students before and after graduation. I would also recommend taking the results of this research forward and studying the effect of refugee education on the emotional and social stability of refugees after graduation.

Strengths of the Research

Providing the option for participants in choosing to either participate in focus groups or in private interviews was a strength that allowed participants to express their need for privacy as they chose private interviews. Additionally, providing the option of speaking Arabic or English, allowed participants to express their emotions and perspectives in their mother language; participants indicated a need and a preference to use the Arabic language. Being a researcher who had a similar cultural background was a strength that enriched the emotional and cultural representation throughout the interviews. Even though the number of participants was only five, the interviews offered an insight to the experiences of Syrian refugee women at academic,

cultural, social, emotional, and ideological levels. The participants indicated by the end of the interviews that the interviews helped them reflect on all aspects of their life after arrival in Canada and being from angles they have never thought of before.

Personal Reflection on the Impact of this Research on Me

I recall when I first started my master's studies, my supervisor suggested that I study the university experiences of Syrian refugee women students, and I answered: "They are thankful for sure! Thankful for being privileged enough to get refuge to Canada and to get educational opportunities; there is nothing to investigate in this". My supervisor smiled and said: "Do your research and then get back to me". I started to do the literature review and found unbelievable information on the Syrian crisis and the numbers of people who were killed, missing or had fled and were able or unable to make it safely to a new country. I started to have an alarming sense of reality that I had never had just by watching the news. I was still prejudiced, however, as I am a daughter of an investor who through this privilege, received Canadian citizenship. Being a visible minority, I did not want to define myself as a researcher doing something 'about' refugees, at first; I did not want people to mistake me for a refugee. Perhaps part of this feeling is because I have been violated verbally by some people who thought that I was a refugee, assuming that I came to this country to get its benefits without paying back to the community. My feelings remained unconscious until I read DeVaul-Fetters's (2014) dissertation which says that believers in a 'just world' tend to dehumanize refugees and hold them responsible for their own status, even in high threat conditions. The reason why people have this dehumanizing reaction, as DeVaul-Fetters's (2014) explains, is to preserve their own social positioning in society. This dissertation made me recognize my privilege and become aware of my prejudice and my unintentional willingness to preserve my own positioning in society by thoroughly

separating myself from refugees. Through this recognition I started to become more open to continuing my research, and to become aware of my previous unconscious thoughts and prejudices.

In the first stages of my research, I had to acknowledge my positionality as an immigrant who faced a lot of challenges in finding employment, getting access to education, and even engaging in the society. Although I knew that refugees face more difficulties in transitioning than immigrants, I still had a feeling that refugees are thankful for their safety, and for receiving education in one of the best universities in the world. My lack of empathy was unconscious and was stemming from the assumption that refugees are simply lucky to be in Canada, without recognizing the overall oppressive picture that refugees have to face and experience. Before each interview, I had moments of mindfulness and being aware of my positionality and subjectivity as a person and a researcher. Freire (2000) argues that “those who authentically commit themselves to the people must re-examine themselves constantly” (p. 60), so I reminded myself constantly to keep a space for astonishment and for exploring new ideas without my previous judgments or expectations. And this is what happened; I was surprised in each interview.

Every stage of the interviews was surprising to me. Each interview, each personal story, and each finding was a thrilling exploration. I was grateful for having the opportunity as a researcher to meet with each student for 90 minutes, and to ask and listen to their stories. Without being a researcher, I might never have taken a chance to listen to the intensity of Syrian refugee women’s life experiences and ask questions. One of the assets that enriched the interviews, in my opinion, was speaking the same language and sharing the same culture of participants, as most of them illustrated that they feel more comfortable speaking Arabic and to someone who understands their culture. As a result of listening to the thoughts and emotions that

participants expressed, I can simply state that the process of interviewing participants changed me in a way I never imagined or expected. The uniqueness of each participant's story, the different paths they took to arrive to Canada and the difficulties they faced before and after their arrival were chilling.

The findings were humbling to me. I learnt not to make judgments or previous expectations and to listen to people's emotions, thoughts, ideas, and allow myself to get surprised from the differences, and the similarities. I cried after some of the interviews and I realized how hard it was for Syrian refugee women to re-settle in a new society, especially after the traumas they experienced. I realized the overwhelming situations they had to overcome alone without having enough mutual supports to ease the process for them, as each participant had a different story, and had to face it by themselves. Their experiences before coming to Canada, including witnessing extreme war conditions, experiencing bombings or the loss of family members, had also affected their current life as students. Each participant had to go through a different path and to face different challenges before and after her arrival to Canada. Thus, I learnt not to generalize, not to judge, and to remember at each moment, that any person I meet will have a different story that, if I have a chance to listen to and to be open to, I would empathize, change my perspectives and be in solidarity with.

After conducting the interviews, I had a feeling of human responsibility that was beyond research. I felt responsible, touched and overwhelmed by the realities and so I volunteered for international organizations, and visited refugee families in Canada to show compassion and support. I still believe that after what I learnt I have a larger responsibility to help others, and to be more compassionate to people even if they are living in a developed country and have an

opportunity for education. I do not think that I will have the same life, thoughts and emotions that I had before this personally humbling and transforming research experience.

Conclusion

This study explored the experiences of Syrian refugee women at a university in Ontario and highlighted the effects of their experiences with their resettlement, in addition to their needs of improving university programs. The results of the study were intended to fill the gap in the literature regarding university life of refugee students, to explore the tensions, challenges and strengths of their experiences. The study used the theoretical framework of Paulo Freire's concepts of oppression, praxis and solidarity to highlight the systematic oppression and the larger context of difficulties that refugees experience. I conducted a qualitative case study approach to explore the university experiences of Syrian refugee women through semi-structured interviews. I then used thematic coding to summarize and organize the findings that emerged in three main themes: academic, emotional experiences and services needed. The most significant limitations of the study were that the findings are not generalizable to other populations or circumstances and that the narrowed selection criteria resulted in a small population sample. I recommend for future research to include wider criteria and to investigate the admission difficulties in addition to the effects of university experiences on the settlement of refugee students after graduation.

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Letter of Information and Consent

Project Title: Syrian Refugee Women's Perspectives about Their University Experiences: A Case Study at a University in Ontario.

Document Title: Letter of Information and Consent – Student

Principal Investigator + Contact: [REDACTED]

Additional Research Staff + Contact: [REDACTED]

1. Invitation to Participate

You are being invited to participate in this research study aimed at exploring the life experiences of Syrian refugee women who are studying at a university in Ontario. You are invited because you are a female Syrian refugee student enrolled in an academic program at one specific university in Ontario.

2. Why is this study being done?

This research explores the life experiences of Syrian refugee women in a university in Ontario with a focus on cultural tensions they might encounter at university and the ways in which they navigate through these tensions. The purpose is to understand how universities can better support Syrian refugee women students.

3. How long will you be in this study?

It is expected that there will be 3 focus group sessions for you to participate in during the research project from March to July 2018. Each focus group session will take approximately 90-120 minutes. Also, if you choose to do so, you can complete a short 5-30 minute pre-focus group activity on your own time before each focus group session, to bring with you to the focus group. If you are not able to participate in the focus groups but would still like to participate in the study, you can participate in one private interview with the researcher during March to July 2018. The interview will take 60-90 minutes. Completing a pre-interview activity that should take about 5-30 minutes is preferable, but not required to participate in the study.

4. What are the study procedures?

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to take part in confidential discussions with other group participants in a meeting room in one of the university libraries. You will be asked to share your thoughts about your university experiences as Syrian refugee women, and to respond to up to ten questions in semi-structured focus groups. You will also be asked to participate in a short pre-focus group activity of up to 30 minutes to do before the focus group. This pre-focus group activity is not obligatory, but it will help to initiate the discussions in the focus group. The focus group sessions will be audio recorded for accuracy. Participants cannot take part in the study if they do not wish to be audio recorded. All participants' names and identities will stay confidential. After the completion of the third focus group, participants will receive an email that has a debriefing/member-checking form attached to it. The member checking form would

include a secure link that has the transcripts of your interview. This would be a process of member-checking that you can use to make any changes within one month of receiving the email. Due to the nature of focus group activities, the transcripts will contain the data from all participants.

If you choose to participate in one private semi-structured interview instead of the focus groups, the interview will take 60-90 minutes in one of the university meeting rooms. You will also be asked to complete a pre-interview activity that will take up to 30 minutes; this activity will help to direct the interview, but is not obligatory. The interviews will be audio recorded for accuracy. Participants cannot take part in the study if they do not wish to be audio recorded. All participants' names and identities will stay confidential. After completing the interview, you will receive an email that has a debriefing/member-checking form attached to it. The member checking form would include a secure link that has the transcripts of your interview. This would be a process of member-checking that you can use to make any changes within one month of receiving the email.

5. What are the risks and harms of participating in this study?

Although there are no known or anticipated risks associated with participating in this study, there might be some discomfort in discussing challenges and tensions that you face as a refugee student. You can always choose not to answer a certain question, and in case of emotional discomfort, here is a list of wellness support services at your university and in Ontario:

Mental health resources at [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

6. What are the benefits of participating in this study?

You will be given the opportunity to represent your voices, share your experiences and reflect on them. Personal benefits would be an increased awareness on your own experiences and having the opportunity to discuss it with other Syrian refugee women students. Your perspectives on

your university experiences would benefit the community through informing stakeholders and community members with your own perspectives, strengths and needs as Syrian refugee women students. Sharing your perspectives would possibly result in an increased community awareness on your issues, and possibly, improved supports. Additionally, your experiences might provide other refugee students with awareness on some potential challenges in university life and ways to negotiate through them.

7. Can participants choose to leave the study?

If you decide to withdraw from the study, you have the right to request withdrawal of information collected about you at any time before the final submission of the study. If you wish to have your information removed, please let the researcher know.

8. How will participants' information be kept confidential?

The data set will be stored on a secure university server. Electronic copies of the audio files will be saved on a password protected USB stick, and transcripts will be kept on the university's server, which is protected by password. The stored transcripts will only have pseudonyms. All research data will be destroyed in seven years, as per Western University's policy. If the participant chooses to withdraw from this study, her data will be destroyed and removed from the server. Representatives of The University of Western Ontario Non-Medical Research Ethics Board may require access to the study-related records to monitor the conduct of the research.

If the results of the study are published, your name will not be used. However, the researcher might use and publish quotes which are not directly attributable to an individual. Please be advised that although the researchers will take every precaution to maintain confidentiality of the data, the nature of focus groups prevents the researchers from guaranteeing confidentiality. The researchers would like to remind participants to respect the privacy of your fellow participants and not repeat what is said in the focus group to others.

9. Are participants compensated to be in this study?

If you participate in all three focus group sessions, you will be compensated with an honorarium of one \$50 gift card. However, if you decided to withdraw before the completion of three focus groups, you will be compensated with \$15 gift card for each focus group you attended. Payment for participation in the focus groups will be made at the conclusion of the third focus group. If you withdraw prior to the third focus group, compensation for participation in the first two focus groups will be made at a mutually convenient time arranged by you and the researcher.

If you choose to participate in one private interview, you will be compensated with one \$20 gift card.

10. What are the rights of participants?

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may decide not to be in this study. Even if you consent to participate, you have the right to not answer individual questions or to withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose not to participate or to leave the study at any time, it will have no effect on your academic standing. We will give you new information that is learned during the study that might affect your decision to stay in the study. You do not waive any legal

right by signing this consent form.

11. Whom do participants contact for questions?

If you have questions about this research study, please contact:



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, email: ethics@uwo.ca.

This letter is yours to keep for future reference.

APPENDIX B

Consent Form

Project Title: The Perspectives of Syrian Refugee Women on Their University Experience: A Case Study at a University in Ontario.

Document Title: Letter of Information and Consent – Student

Principal Investigator + Contact: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Additional Research Staff + Contact: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

I consent to the use of unidentified quotes obtained during the study in the dissemination of this research

YES NO

I consent to the use and publishing of any unidentified items from the pre-focus group or pre-interview activities obtained during the study in the dissemination of this research

YES NO

I have read the letter of information, have had the nature of the study explained to me and I agree to participate. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

Print Name of Participant

Signature

*Date (DD-MMM-
YYYY)*

My signature means that I have explained the study to the participant named above. I have answered all questions.

Print Name of Person

Signature

*Date (DD-MMM-
YYYY)*

Obtaining Consent

APPENDIX C

Ethics Form of Approval

Date: 18 April 2018

To: Dr. Melody Viczko

Project ID: 111084

Study Title: Syrian Refugee Women's Perspectives about Their University Experiences: A Case Study at a University in Ontario

Application Type: NMREB Initial Application

Review Type: Full Board

Meeting Date: 02/Mar/2018 12:30

Date Approval Issued: 18/Apr/2018 10:12

REB Approval Expiry Date: 18/Apr/2019

Dear Dr. Melody Viczko

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.

Document Approved:

Document Name	Document Type	Document Date	Document Version
Debriefing Form	Debriefing document	16/Mar/2018	2
Email_Recruitment	Recruitment Materials	02/Apr/2018	3
Focus_Group_Guide	Focus Group(s) Guide	13/Feb/2018	1
Interview_Guide	Interview Guide	13/Feb/2018	1
Letter of Information	Written Consent/Assent	17/Apr/2018	4
Poster_Final	Recruitment Materials	02/Apr/2018	2
Pre-Focus_Group	Other Data Collection Instruments	13/Feb/2018	1
Pre-interview activities Guide	Other Data Collection Instruments	13/Feb/2018	1
Reminder Email Script for Recruitment (1)	Recruitment Materials	02/Apr/2018	2

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,

Katelyn Harris, Research Ethics Officer on behalf of Dr. Riley Hinson, NMREB Vice-Chair

Note: This correspondence includes an electronic signature (validation and approval via an online system that is compliant with all regulations).

APPENDIX D
Curriculum Vitae

Name:	Huda Ghadban
Education:	
2016-2018	Master of Arts in Education in the Field of Critical Policy, Equity and Leadership Studies. Western University, London, Ontario, Canada
2014	Graduate Certificate in Community Development Brescia University College, London, Ontario, Canada
2012	Bachelor of Arts, Honors Specialization in Journalism University of Sharjah, United Arab Emirates
Scholarships and Awards:	
2018	Canadian Research Centre on Inclusive Education Research Award (Merit Based) Western University, Faculty of Education, London, Ontario, Canada
2016-2018	Critical Policy, Equity and Leadership Studies Entrance Award (Merit Based) Western University, Faculty of Education, London, Ontario, Canada
2008-2012	Princely Scholarship: Full Four Year Bachelors Scholarship (Merit Based) University of Sharjah, United Arab Emirates
2008	High School Excellent Student Competitive Award (Merit Based) Al-Noor International School, United Arab Emirates
Related Experience:	
2016-2018	Research Assistant Western University, London, Ontario, Canada
2015-2016	Facilitator and Public Educator John Howard Society, London, Ontario, Canada
2014	Community Service Club Coordinator Investing in Children, London, Ontario, Canada
2013	Crisis Line Recruiter Sexual Assault and Crisis Line, London, Ontario, Canada
2012-2013	Coach/Mentor Future Possibilities for Kids, London, Ontario, Canada
2012- 2013	Disaster Management Member Canadian Red Cross, London, Ontario, Canada