



Stressors and Coping Skills Strategies among New Settlement Rohingya Refugees in the United States

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The purpose of this study is to explore and understand the experiences of the new settlement Rohingya refugees who migrated to the U.S. in terms of the stressors faced and the strategies used to overcome those stressors. This study used a qualitative phenomenological method design. Data was gathered from the lived experiences of the participants by giving them opportunities to tell their stories using their own words and feelings. This study also used a purposive sampling method and semi-structured interviews to gain in-depth understanding and to obtain as much information as possible from the participants. The following themes were identified for the stressors they faced: 1) language barriers, 2) living far away from families, 3) opportunities to get jobs that were compatible with their skills, 4) difficulties to get religious education and practice, 5) difficulties in getting halal foods, 6) expectations from families back home, and 7) acculturation stress. Four themes were identified for the strategies used to confront these stressors: 1) religion, spirituality, and belief system, 2) social support from families and friends, 3) formal support, and 4) strong personality traits. This study will prepare mental health professionals to understand the uniqueness of this ethnic group as well as prepare them to be more alert and sensitive toward cultural difference.

Key words: *Refugees, Rohingya refugees, new settlement refugees, refugees stressors, refugees coping skills.*



Introduction

According to United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS; 2012), a refugee is a person who fled from his or her country and cannot return to that country because of persecution. Basically, this persecution occurred due to their political opinion, religion, race, or nationality (Drennan & Joseph, 2005; Guruge & Butt, 2015). Every year, thousands of refugees are resettled in the United States (Keddie, 2012) and Rohingya people are among the refugees who have obtained protection from United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

The Rohingya people are a Muslim ethnic minority who live in what is now called Myanmar's Rakhine state (previously known as Arakan). In Myanmar, the Rohingya people are not recognized as Myanmar citizens by the government. Indeed, they do not acknowledge the word "Rohingya" at all, but claim this ethnicity as Bengali (Bangladeshi people) who came to Myanmar as illegal immigrants after Bangladesh's war for independence in 1971. Under a law enacted in 1982, the Rohingya were successfully stripped of citizenship (Balazo, 2013). Since then their citizenship and basic rights have been denied. They have suffered a lot of oppression such as forced labour, discrimination, and campaigns of violence largely imposed by government security forces (Zarni & Cowley, 2014).

According to Zarni and Cowley (2014), the Rohingya can be considered as the world's number one stateless ethnic group. Since the Rohingya are not recognized as citizens by the government of Myanmar, they face many barriers inclusive of their movement such that they were confined to their villages or in displacement camps and were segregated from other communities. Their access to education, health, economy, freedom, and other human rights were also restricted. Since 1977, the oppression has caused almost one million Rohingya to flee into Bangladesh, and thousands of them sought protection as refugees in other nations such as Thailand, Saudi Arabia, and Malaysia (Balazo, 2013).

Every year, the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) provides opportunities to thousands of refugees who have fled their countries due to life-oppression, to build a new life in the United States (Henley & Robinson, 2011). The Rohingya people are among the refugees who receive this chance and many of them immigrate to the United States to start a new life. Although this may avail them a better life, this new life is accompanied by numerous difficulties. This experience of stress happens not only after they are in a new place, but also before they came to a new country. Refugees who come from countries that have experienced war or oppressive political regimes have often suffered traumatic experiences and this trauma still haunts them despite them living in a new country. This situation puts refugees at high risk of mental and physical health problems (Guruge & Butt, 2015; Kinzie, 2004).



Yakushko, Watson and Thompson (2008) state that “migration can produce profound psychological distress among the most motivated and well prepared individuals and even in most receptive circumstances” (p. 170). Refugees may experience numerous psychological disorders and adjustments including mourning and grief at multiple loss, acculturative stress, strain and fatigue from cognitive overload, loneliness, post-traumatic stress, loss of self-esteem, and a beliefs that they do not fit into their newly adopted culture (Casimiro, Hancock & Northcote, 2007; Drennan & Joseph, 2005; Yakushko et al., 2008). In order to deal with these stressors, refugees may utilize a variety of coping skills (Gladden, 2012) including existing personality traits and belief systems and support from friends, family and formal organizations to overcome stress (Gladden, 2012; Khamis, 2013; Simich, Beiser, Stewart, & Mwakarimba, 2005).

Many studies have shown that refugees suffer from stress, either before or after relocation (Balazo, 2013; Keddie, 2012; Simich et al., 2005). New culture, environment, weather, country policy and loss of connection with family and friends in the home country are among the stressors that refugees may face as a result of this daring choice (Casimiro, Hancock & Northcote, 2007). However, few studies have focused on new settlement refugees and their coping strategies in dealing with these problems (Drennan & Joseph, 2005; Yakusho et al., 2008). Furthermore, there is an absence of research that investigates the lived experiences of Rohingya refugees, despite many of them having immigrated to the U.S.

This study aims to explore the lived experience of new settlement Rohingya refugees who immigrated to the U.S. in terms of stressors faced and coping strategies to overcome these stressors. It was determined that a study into the experience of Rohingya refugees and their coping strategies in dealing with those stressors in their new country would help mental health professionals obtain more knowledge regarding Rohingya refugee experiences in general and results in the context of their current stressors and coping strategies after relocation to the new country. A good understanding about this ethnic would prepare mental health professionals to understand the uniqueness of this ethnic group as well as prepare them to be more alert and sensitive towards cultural difference. Therefore, the research questions for this study are: 1) What types of stressors do Rohingya refugees face and how do they experience them? 2) What are the coping strategies that Rohingya refugees use to overcome their stress and how effective are those strategies?

Methodology

Research Approach

This study investigated the lived experiences among new settlement Rohingya refugees, with a focus on the issues among new settlement Rohingya refugees based on a qualitative viewpoint to determine predominant themes specific to this ethnic group. In order to achieve this, a



qualitative phenomenological method design was utilized. Data were gathered from the lived experiences of the participants.

Marshall and Rossman (2006) state that “in order to fully understand the meaning of human experience, one must examine the lived experiences and the ways we understand those experiences to develop a worldview” (p. 104). The purpose of this study was to explore and begin to understand how adults experienced the phenomenon of immigration by giving them the opportunity to tell their stories using their own words and feelings. As such, a qualitative research design was appropriate. In this study, a social constructivist research paradigm was used and the research tradition of phenomenology was utilized as the framework.

This study had no underlying hypotheses and did not seek to test a theory. Through open-ended questions, the phenomenological approach allowed the participants to describe common meanings of their lived experiences. Open-ended interviews were conducted so that the participants were able to describe their unique experiences together with the context and meaning of those experiences. This phenomenological method assumed the participants could provide the best information about their experiences of stress and coping as a new settlement refugee in a metropolitan area in the southern region of the United States.

Participants

This phenomenological study interviewed Rohingya refugees who had recently moved to a metropolitan area in the southern region of the United States. Participants in this study were required to meet the below inclusion criteria:

1. Participant must be a current new settlement Rohingya refugee and have come to the US less than three years ago.
2. Participant must voluntarily want to be involved in this study, be able to be interviewed in person by the researcher and be willing to sign the consent document.

Sampling Method

In qualitative research, the sample includes those who are able to provide all necessary information related to the issue that is under exploration (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 1990). In qualitative research, research participant sample size is smaller when compared to quantitative research because a smaller number of respondents allows more space for researchers to conduct interviews and maintain an ongoing relationship between participants and researchers.

According to Creswell (2013), purposive sampling is the main strategy utilized in qualitative research. Purposive sampling is an assumption in which the sample is studied by the researchers



to gain in-depth understanding of the sample and which allows the researchers to obtain as much information as possible (Creswell, 2013). Purposive sampling seeks in depth information regarding the phenomena or cases that are being studied.

The researcher obtained all available refugee information from the Rohingya Muslim Relief Association in Dallas in order to determine which participants were interested in becoming study respondents and they were contacted personally by phone, by the researcher. A brief explanation was provided to the prospective participants who expressed interest and a brief suitability interview was conducted, over the phone, to ensure the inclusion criteria were met and if so, an initial interview was arranged. No incentive was offered for participation in this study.

Data Collection Method

This study used interviews as the primary method to understand the refugee phenomenon. According to Merriam (1998), interviews are the most common method used in collecting data in qualitative research. In phenomenological study, the researcher usually uses open-ended questions to gather the data. Marshall and Rossman (2006) note that in qualitative phenomenological study, the researcher, as main investigator, will play both roles as a collector of data and a data analyst.

The actual words of the participants are really important in qualitative research. In this study, the researcher obtained a thorough and accurate description of the phenomena by immersing himself in the data. During the process of data collection, the research participants were provided with the procedures and purpose of the study. The researcher also informed the participants about confidential ethics of the research and assured participants that their identities would not be exposed throughout the study or in the final report. Each participant also was assigned with a codename to preserve confidentiality. The participants' name, contact information and their assigned codenames can only be accessed by the researcher. All of this information will be destroyed when the research is completed.

In a qualitative study, the need for data saturation is the main objective regardless of the sample size (Patton, 2002). Data saturation is a situation where the researcher no longer finds any new information that adds to an understanding of the category (Creswell, 2013). The purpose of the inquiry, what knowledge is sought, whether it will have credibility, what will be useful, and what will lead to saturation of the data, will determine the actual sample size. The goal of this study was to explore and describe participant lived experiences regarding their stress and coping strategies they used. This study intended to determine how the participants make sense of their experiences related to the research questions and the social/cultural contexts in which

these experiences occurred. Therefore, to answer the research questions, huge amounts of data were provided by the participants which was opposite to the typical quantitative methodology.

Results

Creswell (2013) found that to determine saturation, data should be gathered until each category or theme is saturated. In this study, data saturation was reached at 14 participants. All the audio interviews were transcribed by the researcher and a reflective journal was also used during the interview process. The interview transcription and the reflective journal were referred to in the coding process. After the interviews had been transcribed, they were sent to each participant to validate accuracy. Table 1 below is a summary of the participant demographics.

Table 1: Demographic Data of Study Participants

Codename	Gender	Age	Marriage Status	Length of Stay in the USA
Abdul	Male	33	Married	2 years 1 month
Sobri	Male	28	Single	2 years 6 months
Johar	Male	48	Married	1 year 5 months
Karim	Male	42	Widower	8 months
Yasin	Male	24	Single	2 years 9 months
Yusuf	Male	46	Married	1 year 6 months
Jalal	Male	27	Married	2 years 1 month
Halimah	Female	46	Married	2 years 9 months
Citra	Female	29	Married	1 year 6 months
Erna	Female	36	Married	8 Months
Faridah	Female	32	Married	1 year 5 months
Hasmah	Female	33	Married	2 years 9 months
Dilara	Female	28	Married	2 years 5 months
Yasmin	Female	40	Married	1 year 6 months

Research Question One

This section aims to answer the following research question: What types of stressors do the Rohingya refugees face and how do they experience them? Seven themes were identified which are: language barriers, living far away from family, opportunities to get jobs that are compatible with their skills, religious education and practice, difficulties in getting halal foods, expectation from families back home, and acculturation stress.



Theme One: Language Barriers

Based on the findings, all the participants admitted that language barriers become the main stressor for them in this new country. There were four subthemes identified which are: difficulties in fulfilling daily life tasks, difficulties when applying for jobs, difficulties committing to the English class, and difficulties in understanding the local accents.

Sub-theme: Difficulties in fulfilling the daily life tasks. The inability to understand and speak English will certainly give a great impression to refugees. Abdul who has been here for two years one month said “I feel stressed every time I go to the government office, I need to bring someone who can speak English with me, otherwise the process would be difficult because I don’t understand them and they also don’t understand me.”

Sub-theme: Difficulties applying for jobs. Many of the refugees also reported difficulties when they wanted to apply for jobs because of their lack of English proficiency. Most employers nowadays used online applications for job applications. This causes difficulties for them since they do not know how to fill out online forms which are often written in English and Spanish. Yasin shared his experiences when he was trying to apply a job position in Walmart:

I opened my friends’ laptop trying to apply but after I see all the questions in the website, I feel blurred. I didn’t understand anything. There were so many questions, and no one was willing to assist me because it took time to fill out.

Sub-theme: Difficulties committing to the English class. When asked whether they received any English lessons when coming to this country, all of them said yes and it helped a little bit. However, 12 of the participants did not finish the class. When asked why they did not go to the class, the majority of the male participants mentioned they had to spend their time looking for jobs and some of them were working, thus making it hard for them to attend the class. Abdul said “I wanted to join the English class but who’s going to pay my rent, the bills and our living expenses. That’s the reason why I need to work to support my family.”

Sub-theme: Difficulties in understanding the local accents. Six participants interviewed also mentioned they had difficulties in understanding the local speaker accents which resulted in hesitation to participate in social interactions. They mentioned how sometimes they feel too uncomfortable to convey their ideas and opinions to others and sometimes were unable to articulate their understanding. Sobri who has been living here for two years six months shared his experience:



I used to study in community college here for a while. In my class, it was difficult for me to involve in the class discussion. My classmates speak really fast and sometimes I cannot catch up their accent. It was good to get education here but language barrier also can make me down.

Theme Two: Living Far Away from Families

A majority of the Rohingya refugees interviewed also expressed how living far away from their family members was also a stressor for them. Living far away from families of origin, who they have blood relationships with and grew up together since they were small became something hard to accept. Sobri mentioned a few times how much he misses his mother and really hopes that his mother also can come here to live with him. However, he is waiting to become an American citizen first:

I really miss my family so much. The first time I came here, I called my mother almost every day. She gave birth to me but I can't be together with her, taking care of her. I feel disappointed when thinking about this. I wish when I became a citizen, I can bring my mother and lives with me here.

Theme Three: Opportunities to Get Jobs that are Compatible with Their Skills

All of the male refugees reported that in this country it was hard for them to get jobs compatible with their skills and experiences. In their country, or when they were in the transition countries, they worked a job that was suitable to their skills and interests. Abdul shared his experiences:

Before coming here, I lived in Malaysia for almost 10 years. In Malaysia, I ran a small business. From that, I lived comfortably and can support my family. For my entire life I was a self-employed and never worked under other people order. Here, it's hard to get a job because I don't have any qualification or skills.

Abdul also expressed his frustration because here he does not like his job but there was no option since he needs to support his family. Despite the fact that he is able to send more money to his family back home, he was not enjoying what he was doing. Abdul said "I feel like a servant here. My salary was paid according to the hours I worked. If I had overtime, I can earn more money that week. If there is no overtime, my income that week will be less."

A majority of the participants also shared that after a month where their income was low, they could send little to no money to their homeland. Karim expressed regarding this matter:



I like farming. In my country, I used to work as a farmer. I planted vegetables, coconuts and go to river to catch fishes. But here, I cannot do what I'm good at. I work in a factory to support my live. None of the Rohingya people work as a farmer here.

Several participants also mentioned the reasons why they did not get jobs that were compatible with their skills because was due to them not having contact that could link them to those skills. As mentioned by Karim, he used to be a farmer in Myanmar, but he could not work as a farmer in this new country because he did not know anyone in his community here (in his new location) working as a farmer, although that was the work that the majority of his people performed when they were in Myanmar or in the transition countries.

Theme Four: Religious Education and Practice

All of the participants admitted that religious education and practice were among the primary stressors to them. Living in a country where the majority population is non-Muslim created anxiety, especially for the future of their children. In the new country where the situation is different, their houses are now relatively far from the mosque and this has created stress for the new settlement refugees. The religious atmosphere is absent and access to religious lectures is difficult to obtain. Hasmah said:

There is no Islamic school around this area. My kids just received normal education, not religious education. I worry if one day they will not know anything about Islam and cannot be a good Muslim.

Johar also expressed a similar sentiment regarding his concern for his children's education:

Here, my children learn Islamic education at home and our musolla (mosque). Right now, because they're young, they still follow what I teach. But when they become adult, I don't know because too many bad examples here, we can see directly in front of our eyes.

Theme Five: Difficulties in Getting Halal Foods

The word "halal" literally means permissible or lawful based on Islamic Sharia. To make meat halal or permissible, an animal or poultry has to be slaughtered in a ritual way known as Zibah or Zabihah. All the participants expressed their hardship in finding halal foods and halal restaurants. For participants who used to live in Malaysia, the comparison to ease of access to to find halal foods and halal compared to in the US is noteworthy and Yasin, who lived in Malaysia, stated:



In Malaysia halal foods was easy to access. They are everywhere. You feel hungry, just go to any Malay or Indian Muslims restaurants and it will be halal. Here, halal foods are hard to find and only can be found in certain areas only.

Several participants also mentioned how they have been striving to eat only halal foods. For Yasin, despite the fact that he was alone here and no one would know whether he eats halal or not, it was his principle to eat only halal foods for as long as possible:

At my work we have a break time at 10.00am in the morning for half an hour, usually if I did not bring any foods from home, I just went to a gas station, buy some bread and drink. It was enough for me until evening.

For the female participants, where the majority of them were housewives, waking up early in the morning to cook for families became their routine. Some of them woke as early as 4 a.m. to cook. For Erna, since coming here, it became routine for her to get out of bed by 4 a.m. Erna stated “I need to cook for my kids and my husband every day without excuse. My children’s school, they provide foods for free but I don’t allow them to eat because it’s not halal.”

Theme Six: Expectation from Families Back Home

Seven of the participants interviewed also shared how they feel stress because families back home or in other transition countries think that their lives here are comfortable and that they are wealthy. A majority of participants mentioned it was hard to make their families understand that they were also struggling to live and worked day by day to earn money to pay rent, car instalments, insurance, and service other commitments. Erna noted how sometimes she and her husband argued when both of their families back home were asking for money. Erna mentioned:

My family is depending on me to support them at the refugees’ camp in Bangladesh, same with my husband. It causes stress for us when both families always asked money and at the same time we’re also struggling to pay our commitments here.

Dilara also shared her family’s expectations when she received news that she would be relocated in the US Her family felt happy because at least there would be someone in the family who could help if they had financial difficulties. Dilara said “my family thought we have easy life here, they don’t know, here we also rely on food stamps [assistantship from the Texas government] to live.” Dilara also mentioned that she would help her family back home as much as possible but it was not long until she had to borrow money from other parties, “some people here, they send money back home, but they made debt whether from friends or from a debt collector.”

According to several participants, this type of perception happened due to the attitude of their own community. Some of them were bragging to their families in their homeland that they were loaded here, having a comfortable life and decent salaries. Johar who was not working due to his illness shared:

In my hometown, I'm not the only one who was relocated to the US, but some other folks either. So when my family knows that their friends' children always sent money, they also have same expectation on me. I feel pressured because they knew that I'm not working and just rely on my wife but still asked money from me.

Theme Seven: Acculturation Stress

Acculturation stress refers to the emotional and mental challenges of adapting to a new culture (Chung et al., 2000). Adaptation to a new culture involves changes in multiple areas of functioning such as beliefs, values, behaviours, and attitudes and for people who are engaged in the acculturation process, these adjustments are usually experienced as stressful. A lot of literature notes that acculturation is a common problem faced by refugees due to their relocation to a new country. The findings prove that the Rohingya refugees also faced significant problems.

Nine of fourteen participants interviewed stated that their lives had changed drastically after coming to the US. In their hometown, a collectivist culture is strongly held but this had changed gradually towards an individualistic culture post transition. Johar expressed his worries:

At the beginning I feel happy came to this country, but right now I feel like I have lost my identity. Everything is different here. Everybody is busy with their own life and it is really different with my village where people always spent time together.

Five participants mentioned living in the new country also made them lose power over their families. The Rohingya refugee's children know that their parents cannot spank them here, which is in contrast with usual practices in their home country or in the transition countries. Yusuf mentioned how his daughter started to change and dare to protest against her parents. According to Yusuf "before this she was not like this, now she always rebel and becomes hard to control. She threaten me, if I beat her she will call 999."

Research Question 2

This section aims to answer the following research question: What are the coping strategies that Rohingya refugees use to overcome their stress and how effective are those strategies?



From the interviews, four themes were identified which are: 1) religion, spirituality or belief system, 2) social support from family members and friends, 3) formal support, and 4) strong personality traits.

Theme One: Religion, Spirituality or Belief System

Most of the participants interviewed noted that the religion and their belief system became their main coping strategy in dealing with stressors. The researcher found that the majority of the participants believed religion plays a big role in their lives. Although now they are living in a new country, most of them strictly attempt to practice their belief and preserve the same values in their children. Yusuf stated “when I feel stress, I remember that everything is happened due to God permission. I am here right now because it is already written in the God’s book. No one can change if God already wants it.” The researcher realized that most of the refugees always mentioned the word “God” in their speech. This indirectly shows that the participants strongly believed in their religion.

Several refugees also reported reading al-Quran is one of the most effective ways to reduce their anxiety. They believed al-Quran not only guided them on how to live their lives but also made them feel calm and peaceful. Abdul shared his experiences “Whenever I feel stress, I will pray and recite Quran. I feel better after that.” Jalal also mentioned the same thing:

At the first few months here, I didn’t have Quran at my home, so I bought it from EBay. I bought a good one. It took me almost \$30. Whenever I feel lonely, I will recite it and I feel better.

Theme Two: Social Support from Families and Friends

Social support from other people is essential to human survival in all situations, and can be particularly important especially in assisting refugees to cope during difficult situations. Social support from families, teachers, peers, and elders helped the refugees to feel they are not alone. Ten of the 14 participants agreed that family and friends play an important role as a coping strategy in dealing with stress. Yusuf shared his experiences during the interview with UNHCR officer when he was in Malaysia. Yusuf stated:

The UNHCR officer asked me which countries I preferred to go, I chose to come in the US because I already had a friend who came here first before me. So I feel more confident to go to a place that I had already known someone.

Yasin also said the same thing, despite how he was alone and did not have any family here, he chose to come to Dallas because his friend’s brother was here. Although they were not close to



each other, if Yasin had a problem he knew that he had someone that he could ask for help. Yasin mentioned:

When I was in Malaysia, a friend of mine has a bother here. He always shared his brother's stories with me. So when the UNHCR officer asked me whether I can come to the US, I said I can live anywhere you want to send me because I don't have anyone in my life. But when they asked which place in the US I prefer to go, immediately I said Dallas, thinking of my friend's brother is here.

Theme Three: Formal Support

Formal support received is also helpful for the new settlement Rohingya refugees to assist in quick adaption to new life in their new country. Six of the refugees interviewed mentioned that formal support also became a coping mechanism for them. Formal support from UNHCR officers, social workers, and medical doctors had eased their lives here especially in the beginning. Jalal shared his stories getting medical treatment from a medical doctor and a group of medical students who came to his place:

All new refugees will get free Medicaid, after one year we need to reapply again. So now, my family has Medicaid but I don't. I am really thankful to a group of doctors who willingly came here every week to give us free checkup and treatment.

When asked why he did not get the insurance, Jalal said:

Insurance here is so expensive. I could not afford to buy it because I have a lot of commitments. My wife doesn't work, everything is on me. But now I'm also planning to buy it because I heard there is insurance that cost only \$30 a month. For the time being, I'm lucky because the doctors and their teams always come here during weekend to provide free services.

Support from the agencies and social workers was also very valuable for the refugees, especially during the first few months. Usually the social workers would take them to the hospital for health check-ups and help them apply for social security cards and work permits, provide them with basic home items and find jobs and so on. Faridah reported "My couch, mattress, fan, and kitchen utensils and many more things all were provided by our agency."

Theme Four: Strong Personality Traits

Coping traits according to Folkman (1997) are the properties of persons that dispose them to react in certain ways. Strong personality traits here refer to variables or traits that assisted refugees in coping with their past and present situations. Patience was a main trait that the



researcher found. Six of the participants mentioned they always persuaded themselves to be patient whether before or after relocation to a new country. Jalal said:

When I was in refugee camp, life was hard over there. Sometimes we did not have clean water to drink and clean ourselves. I always reminded myself that I need to be patient, life was not easy, and if I cannot control myself, I will be spoiled by doing something unnecessarily.

Faridah mentioned how she needs to be patient with her life as a breadwinner for the family since her husband was sick and not working:

I work start from 4pm until 12pm. I always looked for overtime, sometimes I go out from my work place at 1am, sometimes at 2am and sometimes when there are a lot of works, I worked until 3am. I cannot entertain my thoughts just want to rest and stay at home, because if not me, who's going to support my family.

Discussion

Many of the challenges outlined in this study are supported by previous research. Language barrier is a common topic discussed in the refugee literature. Difficulties in English communication caused a lot of problems for the Rohingya refugees especially in going about their daily life business. Communication barriers in government offices, at malls when buying goods, dealing with their children's school matters, etc. were the common hurdles faced by the Rohingya refugees. These also emerged theme is the work of Gladden (2012) who studied coping skills used among east African refugees. He found that different languages and environments of the host country is one of the most significant stressors faced by East African refugees. This finding is also consistent with Crawford (2004) and Williams (2003) who found for first generation refugees and immigrants, the common problem is lack of English proficiency.

Living far away from families is also a theme that emerged in this study and is a stressor that the Rohingya refugees experienced in their relocation. Keyes (2000) found that refugees that came from countries at war or under oppressive political regimes often suffer extensive family loss or personal violence such as torture. Their stressors may include physical and emotional torture, witnessing war trauma, imprisonment in concentration camps, death or disappearance of family members, separation with extended families, and fear for personal safety (Keyes, 2000).

Finding a job that is compatible with their experiences and skills is also a source of stress for the new settlement Rohingya refugees and many of them worked as farmers in their home country or received skill training while they were in transition countries, however, in this new country it is hard for them to find a job that is in line with these skills and experiences. This



situation happens due to several factors such as: their credentials are not recognized here, the credentials are not related to the job applied for, they do not have any references or sources that could link them to the job they wanted. Therefore, these conditions mean that the Rohingya refugees tend to work within their own community in factory sectors.

Many studies have shown that acculturation issues are a common phenomenon faced by refugees or immigrants and this is one of the themes that emerged in this study. Chung et al. (2000) found that refugee families will experience additional stress when they are trying to assimilate into a new culture but at the same time are trying to accommodate their own culture. This is consistent with the findings of this study as most of the Rohingya refugees expressed their concern that their cultural identity that would be lost in their new country. Several of the Rohingya refugees mentioned that some of their cultures which are strongly practiced in their hometown had begun to disappear. In the new country, everyone is busy seeking money to fulfil their personal commitments rather than caring for others which was the practice in their hometown.

Most of the coping strategy themes found in this study are also supported by previous research. Religion, spirituality, or belief system is a coping strategy that is often discussed in previous literature. In this study, it is found that religion is the primary coping strategy used by the Rohingya refugees. This theme is consistent with the work of Khawaja, White, Schweitzer, and Greenslade (2008). Their qualitative research involved interviews with Sudanese refugees residing in Brisbane, Australia. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to examine the participants' pre-migration, transit, and post migration experiences. The result shows that the first identified coping strategy was religion. Participants informed the researchers that during times of struggle they would pray either to have the strength to continue, or for the situation to improve.

Social support from family members and friends is also a theme that emerged from the interviews. Friends and families become a network for them to share and discuss problems, especially when they are in anguish or trouble. Numerous researchers agreed that social support such as friends and family are essential resources for refugee coping skills (Khamis, 2013; Misra et al., 2006; Reitmanova & Gustafson, 2009). Most scholars also insisted that having a quality support system is more important than quantity because through it the refugees will be enthusiastic to cope. For some refugees, social support will assist them to make sense of the situation, encourage each other, and make them to feel that are not alone (King et al., 2017; David, et.al 2018).

Formal support received is also helpful for the new settlement Rohingya refugees to quickly adapt with a new life in this country. Home payment assistance, food, health insurance, and English tutoring classes are among the formal support they received when they reached this



country, and all those supports are highly appreciated by them. The effectiveness of formal support as a coping strategy is also found in a study by Robertson et al. (2006). The study found a majority of Oromo and Somali women refugees often seek a doctor or nurse to take medicine to calm themselves down. The finding also shows that they seek help from mental health professionals regarding their mental health issues. A study by Geltman et al. (2005) found that the frequency of Sudanese minors seeking medical care related to mental health issues was fairly high. His finding also showed that utilization of counselling and medical services would be helpful for these minority groups to overcome their distress.

Folkman (1997) noted coping traits are the properties of persons that dispose them to react in certain ways. Strong personality traits are also variables found that assisted the Rohingya refugees in coping with their past and present situations and the strength of these individual personality traits are a factor that determines how each person handles stress. The findings from this study show that being patient, showing respect and having a strong mind are the traits that have helped refugees in dealing with the stress they face daily. This finding is also parallel with Farwell (2001) who found Eritrean youth claimed that their self-control and ability to be patient were the primary traits that helped them to survive during their exile in Sudan.

Conclusion

This research has expanded the literature which investigates the lived experiences of Rohingya refugees who relocated to the US region during the last three years ago. The results show the value of qualitative methods for addressing unrepresented subjects in research and clinical practice. Moreover, this study can help to empower the Rohingya refugees through garnering a richer understanding of their experiences of stress and coping traits is found through research. There is significance in adding to the existing literature so that clinical practitioners and academics might expand their knowledge base to include an accurate description of the Rohingya refugees.



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