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Stress, Coping, and Religiosity among Recent Syrian Refugees in Canada

By

Sara Keshavarzi

A Thesis  
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies  
Through the Department of Psychology  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
the Degree of Master of Arts  
at the University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

2018

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Stress, Coping, and Religiosity among Recent Syrian Refugees in Canada

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**AUTHOR'S DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY**

I hereby certify that I am the sole author of this thesis and that no part of this thesis has been published or submitted for publication.

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I declare that this is a true copy of my thesis, including any final revisions, as approved by my thesis committee and the Graduate Studies office, and that this thesis has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other University or Institution.

**ABSTRACT**

As of November 2015, 34 696 Syrian refugees have resettled in Canada (Government of Canada, 2016). Previous studies with refugee populations have found: a) depression, anxiety, and posttraumatic stress disorder resulting from trauma in their country of origin; and b) problems with discrimination and Islamophobia in new host cultures. Thus, coping strategies have been crucial for refugees to thrive in their new host countries. The current study conducted qualitative interviews with 10 recently arrived Muslim, Arab, Syrian refugees in Windsor, Ontario. The interviews explored participants' pre- and post-arrival experiences in Syria and Canada. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded using an interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach, into themes that emerged from refugees' lived experiences. Themes were organized based on the Transactional Model of Cultural Stress and Coping (Chun, Moos, & Cronkite, 2006). The results revealed superordinate themes that corresponded to each of the panels within the theoretical framework. The superordinate themes included 1) pre-migration stress and trauma; 2) identity assertion; 3) post-migration stressors; 4) religious and collective coping; and 5) positive outcomes and well-being in Canada. Pre-migration stress and trauma entailed fear for safety of family members, discrimination from citizens of neighbouring countries, and financial instability. Through enduring adversity, Syrian refugees asserted cultural and religious identities as well as their gender identities. Post-migration experiences included stressors in the form of acculturative stress, discrimination, financial burden, and survivor's guilt and loss. To cope, Syrian refugee participants reported the use of religious coping and collective coping strategies to ultimately achieve positive outcomes and hopeful outlooks for their future in Canada. The findings expanded on existing literature on stress and coping, and illuminated the importance of the cultural and religious contexts of Muslim Syrian refugees in Canada.

**DEDICATION**

I dedicate this thesis to my parents, who have instilled in me a love of learning and stood as my pillars of strength and encouragement as I embarked on this journey. To my brother, for carving out every path and for giving me something to aspire to. To my husband, the coolness of my eyes, for your patience and unconditional love and support. Thank you. Ultimately, I dedicate this thesis to Allah. May He accept this project from me as a devotion for His sake.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincerest gratitude to my supportive committee members, Dr. Suzanne McMurphy, Dr. Julie Hakim-Larson, and Dr. Catherine Kwantes, and to my advisor, Dr. Ben Kuo for all offering guidance and insight that was essential to shaping my research. I would like to thank Dr. Kendall Soucie for providing resources and consultation on how to navigate this qualitative undertaking. I am immensely appreciative for my research assistant, Zoha Salam, who has contributed countless hours as my coder and confidant throughout this project. I would like to acknowledge Monira for her help with translation. I am so grateful to Riham for all of her help and dedication during the recruitment process. I am also grateful to Jinan, my interpreter, for so sensitively and skillfully being (literally) by my side through each interview, for being my voice, and for giving voice to the participants. Most of all, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my participants. Thank you for sharing your stories, your pain, your sorrow, and your joys with me.

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## **Chapter I**

### **Introduction**

As of November 2015, 34 696 Syrian refugees have resettled in Canada (Government of Canada, 2016). Refugees are involuntary migrants fleeing political or cultural persecution, imprisonment, war, and torture in their country of origin (Mulder, Hollmann, Lollock, Cassidy, Costanzo, & Baker, 2001). Syrian refugees are coming from a social fabric where they belong to families and communities with strong collectivist and religious identities. Syrian refugees' arrival at foreign host cultures can be described as a displacement of many facets; removing Syrians not only from their country of origin but also from their cohesive cultural communities. Previous studies with various refugee populations have revealed the effects of this type of large-scale disruption by linking the migration of refugees to: a) depression, anxiety and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as resulting from trauma in their country of origin (De Jong, Komproe, & Van Ommeren, 2003; Mollica, Cardozo, Osofsky, Raphael, Ager, & Salama, 2004; Momartin, Silove, Manicavasagar, & Steel, 2004) and b) problems with interpersonal relationships, discrimination and Islamophobia in their new host cultures (Hassan et al., 2015). Further difficulties may arise when hopelessness and isolation set in for refugees in their country of resettlement and when they encounter barriers that prevent them from seeking help for psychological and emotional difficulties. Such barriers include mistrust of service providers, fear of treatment, fear of racism and discrimination, language barriers, differences in communication patterns, and issues of culture and religion (Inayat, 2007).

Thus, the need for effective coping strategies in response to multiple stressors is critical for refugees to survive and to thrive in their new host country. In a recent study, it was found that Syrian refugees reported the most effective coping strategies for them have included talking to

friends and family, prayer, reading the Quran, and joining support groups (Al Akash & Boswall, 2015). However, aside from the aforementioned studies, there are currently very few studies that have systematically explored and examined coping and resilience in refugee populations post-migration. Yet coping capacity and resilience are two critical factors for refugees who are fleeing from their homes to a foreign country. While much of the existing literature places the focus on refugees' challenges and distress, a more balanced approach is much needed to help understand refugees' stress responses as well as coping experiences. In the face of the recent Syrian refugee crisis such a research approach is needed. In particular, research that can help illuminate coping behaviours and pathways to resilience among Syrian refugees in Canada has the potential to assist health care professionals, social service workers and other professionals in their efforts to facilitate effective refugee integration into Canadian society.

Considering the above, the current study qualitatively investigated stress, coping, and religiosity among recent Muslim, Arab, Syrian refugees by conducting individual interviews with refugees from Syria between the ages of 30-55. The refugee participants in the current study were recruited from a community sample with the assistance of two individuals from the community that were not eligible to participate in the study. Qualitative in nature, the present study sought to understand the lived migration experience in the words of Syrian refugees. In-depth individual interviews with a total of ten participants were conducted to provide insight into the migration experience and daily stressors of Syrian refugee participants and to further understand their coping and resilience capacities. Resilience in the current context refers the changing process whereby refugees must navigate the interaction of risk factors and protective resources to overcome hardship (Liu, Wang, Zhou, & Li, 2014; Shiner & Masten, 2012). Syrian refugee participants were asked to explore their stress and coping strategies with regards to pre-

and post-arrival and settlement in Canada. The researcher facilitated an open discussion with Syrian refugee participants individually to allow them to identify significant issues they had faced and to engage in a candid dialogue with the researcher. The interviews were conducted in English and interpreted in Arabic with the assistance of a hired language interpreter from the Multicultural Council of Windsor and Essex County. The interviews were recorded, transcribed and coded by two coders, for inter rater-reliability. An interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) was conducted to organize the data into codes and ultimately, superordinate themes (Smith & Osborn, 2007). The IPA emphasizes idiographic meaning making processes and subjective realities. The IPA approach was used to code transcripts to provide insight into the lived experiences of Syrian refugee participants in the current study. It was expected that Syrian refugees' pre-arrival experiences in Syria would influence their post arrival attitudes. In other words, having had more traumatic experiences pre-arrival would negatively impact the ease of refugees' adjustment in Canada post-arrival. It was also postulated that Syrian refugees who identify more strongly with Muslim values would utilize more religiously-oriented coping strategies to deal with stressors associated with their refugee experience.

More research is needed to address the concerns of our ever-evolving society, particularly with regards to new prospective citizens in a country such as Canada and the experiences of Muslim refugees living in the West. Understanding the lived experiences of individuals from societies that are collectivist, such as Syrian refugees, can assist professionals and service providers in avoiding inaccurate or culturally insensitive preconceived assumptions about Syrian refugees when assisting these newcomers. This research holds potential implications for strengthening empirical evidence that can be used to better understand and aid refugees in

overcoming the distresses associated with migration, discrimination, identity, and in achieving better resettlement outcomes in Canada.

## **Chapter II**

### **Literature Review**

Within the current climate of fear, mental health workers must act as advocates and empirical scholarly works should address concerns surrounding the current international-socio-political situation to avoid generalizations and misunderstanding (Hedayat-Diba, 2000). While individuals may vary in devoutness and religious commitment, the broad context and politicization of religion has unintentionally organized and unified people (Shoeb, Weinstein, & Halpern, 2007). The implications of the distinct Syrian group brought together by religion in various host-countries under very specific circumstances is an unexplored phenomena that requires further empirical investigation. The following section will provide context and background on the Syrian refugee crisis, their experiences in Turkey and Lebanon, as well as how they are being received in North America. Such research can ultimately hold implications for strengthening alliances and reducing potential mistrust between Syrian refugees and the individuals with which they will interact in the host country, such as community members and settlement service providers. The results can aid refugees in overcoming barriers to seeking help, and distress associated with migration, discrimination, and identity conflict.

#### **Syrian Refugee Crisis**

As of March 2011, the people of Syria, a country once a haven for displaced refugees from Iraq, Palestine, Afghanistan, Somalia and others, fell in a position of vulnerability (Quosh, Eloul, & Ajlani, 2013). Over 11 million people were murdered or expelled from their homes (Mercy Corps, 2017) and displaced either within their borders or neighbouring countries (Hassan et al., 2015). Currently, Syrians are escaping the adversities of their broken state by seeking refuge in neighbouring countries, notably Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey. According to the United

Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), in May of 2016, 4.8 million Syrian refugees were residing in refugee camps across Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey. Others have journeyed further and sought asylum in European countries such as Sweden, Germany and Austria, while others still made the trek to Canada and the United States (Hassan et al., 2015). It is important to differentiate that while immigrants, in most cases, decide to leave their country of origin for opportunity, incentives, or personal desires thereby having time to plan for their move (Chung, Bemak, Ortiz, & Sandoval-Perez, 2008), refugees are individuals who are forced to leave their homes due to war, disaster, or fear for their lives, to escape in a moment's notice without much of their belongings or their loved ones and to move elsewhere into an exile with little chance of returning to their homeland.

The beginning of this crisis was rooted in the Arab Spring protests, commencing in the late 2010s (Mercy Corps, 2017). With the use of social media communication and the unification of civilians in many countries of the Middle East and North Africa, authoritarian governments were dismantled (Stepanova, 2011). Anti-government protests and armed rebellions took place, overthrowing authorities in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, and Libya (Stepanova, 2011). However, uprisings in Syria led to the Syrian Civil War, dominated by violent suppression by President Bashar al-Assad's forces. Within Syrian borders, over 210 000 Syrians have died, 840, 000 have been injured, and half of the country has been uprooted as many attempt to escape (Hassan et al., 2015). Three million have managed to successfully flee the country (Hassan et al., 2015).

Consequently, since November 2015, 1,220 government assisted refugees, 152 private sponsored refugees and 17 blended visa office refugees have been resettled in Windsor, Ontario – this led to a total of 1,389 Syrian refugees in the Windsor area since then (“Welcoming Refugees”, 2017). Government assisted refugees are supported by the federal government for up



to one year whereas private sponsored refugees are supported by small groups (“Welcoming Refugees”, 2017) such as the church sponsors of Southeast Asian refugees that migrated to Canada between 1979 to 1981 (Beiser, Noh, Hou, Kaspar, & Rummens, 2001). Support from private sponsors varies depending on the availability of funds and resources of private sponsors but tends to be rated more favourably as refugees report feeling more cared for (Chan & Lam, 2007). Blended visa office refugees are part of a program, which is a combination of the former two; government assistance is provided for six months and private sponsors provide support for the remaining six (“Welcoming Refugees”, 2017). However, after the initial support, refugees are expected to have settled enough to become independent after the first year, having secured housing and a source of income (Betancourt et al., 2015).

Research concerning the refugee experience is of great importance because the current time is marked by the largest number of displaced peoples in all of human history. The UNHCR (2015) reported an estimated 21.3 million displaced refugees worldwide of which 20,000 reside in Canada. Many living in exile, defined by Edward Said (2000) as the “unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home” (p. 357). While research on Syrian refugees in North America is limited, some studies have been conducted with Arab populations in North America and Syrian refugees in other countries that provide insight into the Arab resettlement experience in the West more general (e.g., Kazour et al., 2017; Parkinson & Behrouzan, 2015; Smeekes, Verkuyten, Çelebi, Acartürk, & Onkun, 2017; Thorleifsson, 2016). The following sections provide a review of relevant literature and research pertaining to Syrian refugees internationally and Iraqi refugees in the United States.

### **Syrian Refugees in Turkey and Lebanon**

In 2011, Syrian refugees began fleeing in waves. The war in Syria spread from southern areas of Damascus to central cities such as Homs, and eventually to the northern parts of the country in Aleppo (Kazour et al., 2017). While research is limited with Syrian refugees in North America, studies documenting the Syrian refugee experience in neighbouring countries provides some insight. The UNHCR reported 2.1 million Syrians refugees in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon, and 1.95 million Syrian refugees in Turkey (Hassan et al., 2015). Of the countries accepting Syrian refugees, Turkey and Lebanon took in the most as they had implemented open door policies (Smeeke et al., 2017).

**The Turkish context.** Many Syrian refugees that arrived in Turkey were initially considered as “guests”. The term inherently suggests a temporary stay, however, the Migration and Asylum Bureau under the Ministry of Interior implemented a temporary protection regime as of November 2011. This protection encompasses entry into Turkey without travel documents, no status determination process and no chance of deportation (Ihlamur-Öner, 2013). In addition to security, students were afforded the opportunity to continue their education in Turkish universities and those with refugee status were provided access to health care (Ihlamur-Öner, 2013). Many Syrian refugees, mainly from Aleppo, settled into refugee camps close to the border, such as in the city of Hatay, and others arrived with their passports (Ihlamur-Öner, 2013). However, the Syrian refugees’ who entered with passports are in hiding as they will be required to return to Syria or live in refugee camps once their visa has expired. In the meantime, Syrians without refugee status in Turkey are not allowed to work, attend school, or access health services (Ihlamur-Öner, 2013). Further, those that have ventured into the city of Istanbul were met with high costs of living and many remain homeless in public areas or live in overcrowded apartments (Ihlamur-Öner, 2013). As their stay extended and the country’s resource limits were tested,

hostility and skepticism began to emerge from Turkish citizens toward Syrian refugees (Ihlamur-Öner, 2013). Thus, Syrian refugees in Turkey are encountering discrimination, difficulty securing housing and employment, lack of access to health care, socioeconomic disadvantage and cultural bereavement (Eisenbruch, 1991; Porter & Haslam, 2005). The post-migration challenges may be contributing to the high prevalence of depression, anxiety, and posttraumatic stress disorder, in addition to health concerns among Syrian refugees residing in Turkey and Lebanon (Dura-Vila, Klasen, Makatini, Rahimi, & Hodes, 2013; Heeren et al., 2012; McFarlane & De Girolamo, 1996).

**The Lebanese context.** The cities and regions of Biqa' Valley, Tripoli, Beirut, Sidon, and Tyre in Lebanon have also welcomed over one million Syrian refugees (Parkinson & Behrouzan, 2015). Syrian refugees are sharing camps with the existing Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, which are seldom patrolled (Parkinson & Behrouzan, 2015). However, the refugee camps are far from ideal with poor sanitation and overcrowded tents (UNHCR, 2014). Others have rented rooms, are living with families who have opened up their homes to refugees or are seeking refuge in the shelter of mosques (Parkinson & Behrouzan, 2015). The large refugee populations are also causing a strain on health care and resources in Lebanon and refugees are having difficulty obtaining the care they need (Parkinson & Behrouzan, 2015). Syrian refugees registered with the UNHCR receive coverage for 75% of their health care costs and the remaining 25% is often covered by Islamic associations providing relief to those in need (Parkinson & Behrouzan, 2015). Refugees in Lebanon have become accustomed to weighing the costs and benefits to seeking care with regards to necessity, quality, and price. Despite their adversities Syrian refugees in Lebanon have developed unique coping strategies to construct new networks and opportunities for their livelihood in the new country. In Lebanon, it was reported

that Syrian refugees coped by reducing consumption by consuming one meal a day, moving to cities with existing Syrian populations for a sense of community, relying on local families for support, redefining gender roles and kinship ties, and creating spaces of shelter in shops, garages, and hallways for temporary housing (Thorleifsson, 2016). While Syrian refugees in Turkey and Lebanon are beginning to face ambivalence and skepticism from the general population, similar sentiments are mirrored in North America where many Syrian refugees have also settled (Carlier, 2017).

### **Syrian Refugee Resettlement in North America and the Current Canadian Multicultural Context**

Another key factor that can affect refugees' stress experience and quality of resettlement is the sociopolitical climate of their receiving, host countries (Carlier, 2017). Reactions by residents in the host society towards refugees can vary between Canada and the United States; there are in fact notable differences between these two nations towards refugees. Views of multiculturalism and pertaining policies, incidence of terrorism, and political differences are the most salient factors influencing acceptance of refugees in North America (Carlier, 2017). A prominent complaint of most Muslim refugees in North America is Islamophobia, which entails the holding of prejudicial beliefs against individuals that identify as Muslims (e.g., Abdi, 2015; Shoeb et al., 2007). The Pew reports (2010) found that 43% of Americans admitted feelings of prejudice towards Muslims. Studies have also demonstrated that the degree of Islamophobia in Canada and America are similar – a concerning notion for newly arriving Syrian refugees. In particular, responses from Americans to the arrival of Syrian refugees indicated that 51% approved while 41% disapproved (Pew Research Center, 2015a). Concern has also increased in both countries with 53% of Americans opposing the acceptance of Syrian refugees in 2015

(Talev, 2015) and 54% of Canadians opposing prime minister Trudeau's decision to welcome 25,000 Syrian refugees in 2016. The most prominent concern among those opposing Syrian refugees' resettlement was a concern for safety and the lack of security checks on refugees (Donnelly, 2015). However historically Canada has implemented many policies and practices encouraging a cultural mosaic of diversity, and has experienced fewer attacks resulting in a more welcoming attitude toward Muslim migrants (Carlier, 2017). This welcoming attitude may account for the faster rate of integration of newcomers to Canada as compared to migrants in America (Carlier, 2017).

Canada's multiculturalism and welcoming policies are appealing to many as they represent safety and acceptance. Canada has actively made efforts to be welcoming and inclusive, as reflected in the nation's policies. Canada has established the Multiculturalism Policy in 1971 and later put the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms of 1982 in place as well as the Multiculturalism Act of 1988. Many refugee populations have fled to North America in the past seeking the "land of opportunity". Although refugees arrive with a mix of anxiety, relief, and anticipation, unexpected challenges may arise demanding new ways of coping. Such experiences have been common and familiar to the Iraqi refugees that have resettled in North America, as addressed next.

### **Iraqi Refugees' Experiences in North America**

Aside from the Syrian refugee crisis, the most recent refugees arriving in Canada with a similar Arab background are Iraqi refugees. Iraqi refugees have been arriving to North America as early as the 1990s when the Persian Gulf War took place. However, the most recent Iraqi refugees were displaced during the invasion of Iraq war of 2003 (Jamil, Hakim-Larson, Farrag, Kafaji, & Jamil, 2002). The war in 2003 was initiated by the United States and resulted in the fall

of the oppressive regime of Saddam Hussein, who was later captured and executed. The war continued intermittently over the next decade subjecting many Iraqis to rape, torture, execution, and mass violence (Shoeb et al., 2007). A total of 4.4 million Iraqis were displaced as a result of this war (United Nations, 2016). Displaced citizens found refuge in neighbouring countries, with most fleeing to the city of Damascus in Syria, a country that sanctioned an open-door policy to Iraqis until 2007. Others found themselves within North American borders, but not without challenges.

The accumulation of multiple pre-migration traumas, separations and losses made the post-migration stressors even harder to surmount for Iraqi refugees in the United States (Kira, 1999). The heavy media coverage made it difficult for new refugees to feel welcome in the West. This was because the United States media's systematic "othering" of Iraqi refugees depicted them as coming from a culture that was the antithesis of what it meant to be a true and patriotic American (Shoeb et al., 2007). Iraqi female refugees even reported encounters of negative stereotypes and treatment from physicians, where assumptions about their perceived level of piety, hyperfertility, and oppression hindered their ability to receive proper care (Cinhom & Serour, 2011). For example, a study of Iraqi refugees in Dearborn, Michigan reported findings of extensive mental health concerns, difficulty securing housing, employment, and health care barriers for this population (Inhorn & Fakih, 2006; Shoeb et al., 2007). Although most Arab-Americans are of middle class, it is not uncommon for newly arriving refugees to live under the poverty line (Inhorn & Fakih, 2006). Other studies of Iraqi refugees in North America have found similar mental health concerns, with refugees having a high prevalence rate of depression, anxiety, and PTSD (e.g., Farrag, 1999; Gorman, 2001; Gorst-Unsworth & Goldenberg, 1998; Takeda, 2000). Keyes' (2000) review of studies on numerous refugee populations' mental health

has also found that these findings are reproduced among refugees in Europe, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia. The review revealed that refugees have high incidences of PTSD, depression, anxiety, psychosis, and dissociation among refugees across all of these resettlement regions. According to a study conducted by Baker and colleagues (2004), Iraqi refugees in North America in particular attributed their difficulties to verbal and institutionalized discrimination and physical assault due to racial prejudice as experienced by these refugees. Interestingly, these post-migration experiences parallel those of the Southeast Asian and Somali refugee groups living in North America as well (e.g., Abdi, 2015; Chan & Lam, 2007). However, Iraqi refugee coping was found to draw on their cultural and religious resources and social support to give them a sense of belonging and offer meaning to their difficult journeys (Levin, 1994; Shoeb et al., 2007). Given the parallels with other refugee groups from collectivistic backgrounds, perhaps the stressful experiences and coping strategies of the Arab Iraqi refugees might be similar to those of Arab Syrian refugees migrating to North America.

### **Stress and Coping**

Considering the post-migration losses of material wealth, loved ones, and overall health status, personal resources, particularly in terms of coping and resilience, are essential for refugees as these elements provide a foundation for refugees' capacity to respond to their adversities and to reach recovery from past traumas. The following theory is reviewed to provide a foundational understanding of critical factors associated with individuals' stress appraisals and coping strategies. Understanding these factors can be helpful in considering how Syrian refugees might cope with post-migration stress. The presentation of the model is chosen to underscore the important role of culture in the process of appraisals of stress and coping.

### **Theoretical framework of coping for the present study: The Transactional Model of**

**Cultural Stress and Coping.** The Transactional Model of Cultural Stress and Coping (Chun, Moos, & Cronkite, 2006) highlights an interactive system of transactions between culture, context, stress and coping – all necessary components of the current study. The model will guide the contextualization of the stress experienced by Syrian refugees in Syria and Canada and the coping strategies employed by them to respond to stressors from their cultural and religious frameworks. The Transactional model by Chun and colleagues (2006) consists of a visual of several ‘panels,’ representing a unique system or domain within an individual’s process. According to Chun, Moos, and Cronkite (2006), the first panel of environmental systems, such as enduring social climates, stressors, and resources, in combination with the second panel of personal systems, consisting of individual traits and abilities, unique to each person, predict panel three of transitory conditions and stressors. In response, panel four of cognitive appraisal and coping necessitate a coping response that ultimately dictates the outcome of panel five, which is health and well-being (Chun et al., 2006).

These interactive systems work within a cultural framework that influence one’s resources, personal attributes, perception of stressors, and coping (Chun et al., 2006). In the current study, elements associated with Panel I of the theory on culture and the environmental system, Panel II on culture and personal systems, and Panel III on culture and transitory conditions will be examined. By considering factors associated with these panels, the study hopes to better understand the remaining Panels IV and V of the model – namely Syrian refugees’ outcomes in terms of their health, well-being, and adjustment in Canada.

Culture is considered a broad macro-level influence infused into all panels and stress and coping processes within the model, asserting influence over the entire process (Chun et al., 2006). In this context, culture can be understood as a dynamic system of meaning that is passed



on through generations. Panel I encompasses the specific settings in which Syrian refugees live such as the social climate in the countries that they resided in, their families, or work settings. Social climate can pose a threat to Syrian refugee families with the growing hostility in countries such as Turkey, Lebanon, and even North America, where skepticism and hostility toward refugees has been found to be growing (Carlier, 2016; Ihlamur-Öner, 2013). Additionally, research with refugee populations in North America have also identified trends of increasing intergenerational conflict and role reversal that disrupt the traditional family roles that are valued in collectivist cultures where interdependence is encouraged (Abdi, 2015; Triandis 1980). These factors also determine the demands and the resources available to refugees and hold implications for those who can provide the support and the resources required for refugees to thrive in the host country.

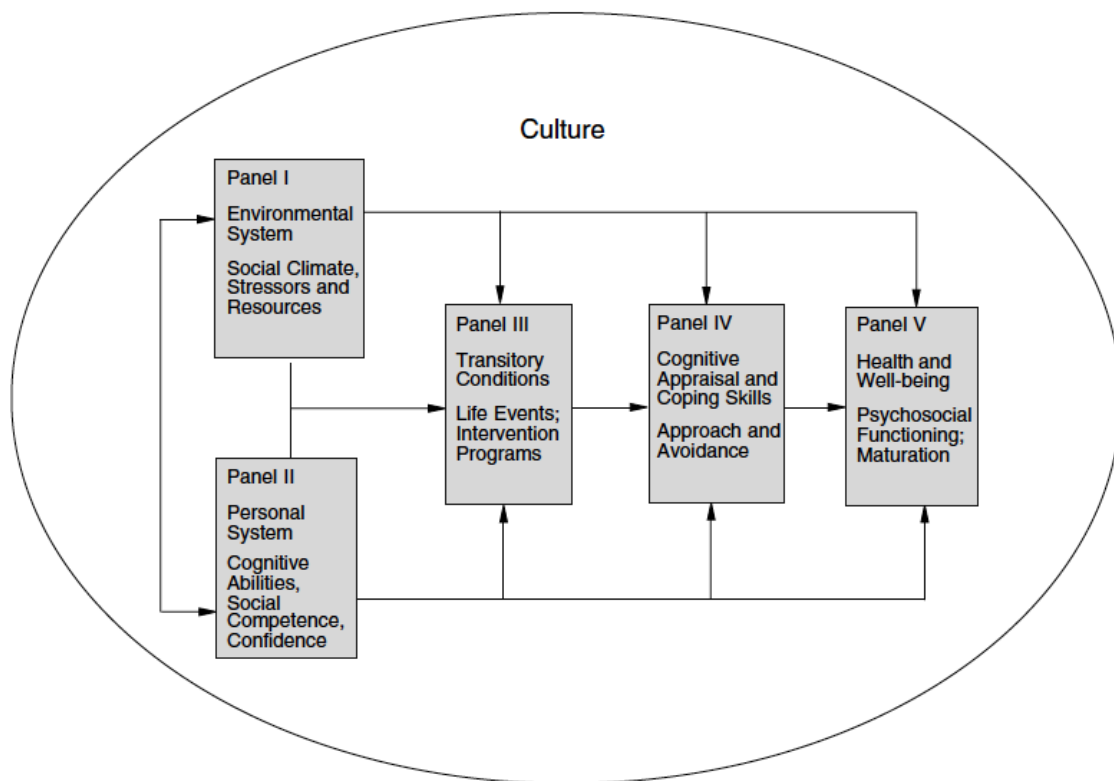
Personal systems are influenced by culture but individual characteristics and self-construals may play a larger role in how Syrian refugees may define themselves. Personal systems involve cognitions, behaviours, emotions, personality traits, attributions, motivations, and self-construals (Chun et al., 2006). In the collectivist cultural context, individuals identifying with collectivistic values at the person level possess allocentric self-construals (Lay et al., 1998), endorsing a close-knit family dynamic. Allocentrism refers to the process of internalizing collectivist values from the culture to fit one's own self-construal, ascribing to collectivist values on the person level (Lay et al., 1998). Individuals with interdependent or allocentric self-construals are socially attentive and have an external locus of control (Chun et al., 2006). An external locus of control makes individuals more likely to be impacted by environmental demands. This fits well with the collectivist culture orientation whereby members of a community look to family and friends for support and comfort in times of distress, as many

Syrian refugees, Asian refugees, Somali refugees and other refugee groups have reported (Abdi, 2015; Al Akash & Boswall, 2015; Chan & Lam, 2007).

Panel III represents transitory conditions, asserting that cultural and social factors dictate life events (Chun et al., 2006). These life events consist of difficulties with employment, financial instability, problems within the family unit, physical and mental health concerns and the experience of discrimination. Culture influences the types of events that commonly occur in a country and which events are perceived to be stressful. These experiences parallel the post-migration stressors identified by many refugee populations that are considered normative for refugees settling into the West. These might include difficulty obtaining housing and employment, intergenerational conflict and role reversal and Islamophobia (Abdi, 2015). This would be especially problematic for Syrian refugees because of the collectivist cultural values of stability and constancy. Hence, Syrian refugees have a need for group membership in search for continuity in a place where their stability has been lost due to migration and post-migration stressors (Chun et al., 2006).

The first three panels would determine Syrian refugees' appraisals of stress to decide on a culturally consistent coping strategy. Religiosity and spirituality often provide a way for refugees to frame their hardship and appraisal of their stress in a more constructive and purposeful way (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). For many Syrian refugees, it is likely that they would be utilizing collective and religious coping strategies to appraise their difficulties in a more positive light and to respond to these adversities with the strength and resilience that these strategies provide for healthy outcomes in Panel V. Therefore, the current study examines Syrian refugees' appraisals of their present circumstances in resettlement in Canada to identify which strategies they are reporting to be helpful for them, and how they view and describe their overall well-being and

post-migration experiences in Canada. The Transactional Model's (Chun et al., 2006) panels are summarized in Figure 1.0. It is necessary in this process to consider that individuals experiences of health and well-being may differ and that culture constructs unique expressions of health and distress (Chun et al., 2006). Therefore, it is necessary to understand Arab conceptions of stress first in order to gain a better understanding of Syrian refugees' culturally influenced coping strategies.



*Figure 1.0.* Transactional Model of Cultural Stress and Coping. Reprinted from *Handbook of Multicultural Perspectives on Stress and Coping* (p. 30), by C. A. Chun, R. H. Moos, and R. C. Cronkite, 2006, New York, NY: Springer Nature. Copyright 2006 by the Springer Nature Customer Service Centre GmbH. Reprinted with permission.

**Arab conceptions of stress and distress.** Syrian refugees, similar in many ways to the Iraqi refugees of Dearborn, are ethnically Arab and come from part of the Arabic-speaking

regions of the Middle East. A majority of Syrians and Iraqis are ethnically Arab and religiously Muslim. The term Muslim indicates a religious identity of being a follower of Islam. In the literature 'religiosity' has been referred to as the extent to which an individual has devoted themselves to their religion, whereas 'religious identity' has been referred to as the individual's ascribing to a given belief system and to the accompanying religious practices (Mattis & Jagers, 2001). Religion can broadly be defined as a sacred system of faith unifying individuals into a fellowship and connecting them to a transcendent being (Yinger, 1970). Arab conceptions of distress are framed within a unique cultural and religious context. For Arab populations, therapy is often not the first solution for resolving psychological distress. Inayat (2007) has identified barriers to help-seeking among Muslim migrant populations, which include mistrust of service providers, fear of treatment, racism and discrimination, language barriers, differences in communication patterns, and issues of culture and religion. This pertains to the Arab, Syrian population as a majority of them are Muslims.

A more frequent occurrence among Arab populations is the manifestation of distress through somatic complaints. Somatization of psychological symptoms may be attributable to stigma as noted by clinicians assisting Arab, and often Muslim, populations in America (e.g., Nassar-McMillan & Hakim-Larson, 2003). Many Muslim individuals do not differentiate somatic complaints and psychological symptoms, since body and soul are understood as interconnected in Islamic scholarly works regarding explanatory models of illness. Al-Ghazali's (1853/1986) conceptualization of the human was comprised of four inseparable parts; the self, *nafs*, the heart, *qalb*, the spirit, *ruh*, and the mind, *aql*. However, health practitioners must be careful in assessing somatic complaints in Arab clients because the attribution of emotional problems to physical bodies takes the focus off of social context, highlighting pathology and

downplaying cultural, religious, and social dislocations (Breslau 2005; De Jong & Joop 2005). When Arab populations are able to acknowledge their stress as part of an emotional problem, they use idioms and metaphors to convey a variety of emotions. For example, Arabs describe general distress as heaviness in the heart, pain in the stomach, or fatigue (Pridmore & Pasha, 2004). Anticipated anxiety or fear, experienced by Arabs, are described as a crumbling heart, *habat qalbi*. Sadness is experienced by Arabs as tightness in the chest, loss of appetite, or abdominal pain because life has blackened the eyes, *iswadat al dounia fi ouyouni* (International Medical Corps, 2014). When Arabs want to express concern regarding financial problems, they say that the eye sees but the hand cannot reach, *al ayn bassira wal yadd kassira*. Suicidality is a particularly difficult topic to discuss in the Muslim world because it carries with it shame, stigma, and social exclusion. Suicide is outlawed in many Muslim majority countries, including Syria, (Izutsu, 1980) so Muslims often use indirect expressions to reduce the weight of these feelings; Arab clients may voice a desire to sleep and never wake, *itmana nam ma fik*. Evidently, negative emotions and feelings are nuanced and expressed by Arab populations in various ways that are especially important to understand considering the current political climate and plight of Syrian refugees fleeing from war and seeking asylum. Unique problems arise at each step of the journey for all migrants. Pre-migration, migration, and post-migration stages of the refugee experience stages present difficulties that challenge refugees to respond in an adaptive manner.

### **Pre-Migration Stressors**

Pre-migration stressors have great implications for future physical and mental health among refugee populations around the world, predicting adaptability in the new culture (Castro & Murray, 2010). A resilience based stress appraisal coping model (Castro & Murray, 2010) posits that adaptation in a host culture for immigrants and refugee newcomers unfolds in phases,

beginning with conditions in the homeland proceeded by migration context and reasons for leaving. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the social and political circumstances from which many Syrian refugees are coming. The stressors endured and anticipated in the homeland would have shaped refugees' experiences, relationships, and coping styles. For example, in a study of Somali refugees, refugee parents reported that past traumas impeded their abilities to successfully resettle and these traumas increased their anger, as well as the frequency of child abuse and neglect (Betancourt et al., 2015).

Reasons for leaving in the Syrian context have included war, human rights violations, murder, torture, rape, poverty, unemployment, famine, and fear (Hassan et al., 2015). In addition to bombings and casualties, sieges took place and deprived entire villages of food, medical facilities, and education as well as basic necessities such as water, sanitation, and shelter for many Syrians (Chatty, 2010; Rousseau, 2014; Syrian Centre for Policy Research, 2015). Exposure to such heinous acts commonly leads to depression, anxiety, PTSD and somatic complaints (Bemak & Chung, 2008). Torture is a particularly common tool used to effectively silence and caution against defiant acts from the general public (Gorman, 2001). Following the atrocities of war, the average life expectancy of Syrians has decreased from 75.9 in 2010, to 55.7 in 2014 (Syrian Centre for Policy Research, 2015). The deterioration of mental health and overall well-being is preceded by fears of persecution, imprisonment, and disappearances by Bashar Al-Assad's regime. Overcoming the consequences of war requires the establishment of safety and the reconstruction of tragic narratives in meaningful ways using culture, religion, art, or ritual to establish reconciliation, reconnection, and reintegration of all aspects of the self in order to feel complete (Herman, 1992).

In addition to the experiences of violence and conflict, many have encountered personal

loss. The loss of loved ones, status, belongings, and education attainment is pervasive and can interfere with the achievement of educational and vocational goals for refugees (Bean, Derluyn, Eurelings-Bontekoe, Broekaert & Spinhoven, 2007; Bemak & Chung, 2008; Michelson & Sclare, 2009; Wiese & Burhorst, 2007). A sense of urgency brought on by terror and isolation is exacerbated by the loss of everything valuable. This often results in an action plan to flee the adversities encountered every day and the uncertainty of the future.

### **Stressors During Migration**

Devising a plan for escape for refugees requires much secrecy and it involves considerable financial commitment as the decision may risk losing all that is left for the sake of starting anew in the host country (Yakushko, Watson, & Thompson, 2008). Refugees' fears of being caught, persecution, and death are prominent on this voyage (Saldana, 1992). The most common way to travel for Syrian refugees is on overcrowded boats, exposing passengers to diseases in unhygienic spaces, various injuries, suffocation and the possibility of drowning en route (Human Rights Watch, 2013). Meanwhile, refugees experience disquiet over the anticipation of unknown circumstances awaiting them: citizenship limbo, housing situations, and even the simple fact of survival during the voyage. Upon arrival, Syrian refugees are often shepherded to designated refugee camps. Previous research conducted in refugee camps showed that the unsanitary nature and stressful environment many families settle into often includes malnourishment and medical illnesses such as parasitic diseases; these conditions can intensify the deterioration of refugees' mental and physical health (Barnes, 2001).

### **Post-Migration Stressors**

It is also necessary to understand stressors refugees face and must cope with in the host country. After surmounting the journey and leaving the refugee camps to begin new lives, many

Syrians are faced with acculturative stress, discrimination, familial role reversals, intergenerational conflict, difficulty attaining basic services, isolation, survivor's guilt and loss (Beiser, 1999; Hassan et al., 2015).

**Acculturative stress.** Coping mechanisms toward pre-arrival adversities are essential for sustaining refugees' resilience and successful adapting in a new environment (Liu et al., 2014). Acculturation refers to a process occurring during prolonged exposure in a new culture and the extent to which new beliefs, behaviours and traditions are learned and applied (Berry, 2002). The outcome of the acculturative process is manifested in four possible ways; assimilation, separation, marginalization, or integration (Berry, 1997). The healthiest of the four outcomes is 'integration', when migrants can successfully fuse host culture values with their pre-existing ones, from their heritage culture, in a balanced way to suit their specific needs. High levels of acculturation have been found to impact mental health (Yoon et al., 2012), identity (Ryder, Alden & Paulhus, 2000), relationships (Hwang, 2006) and acculturative stress (Kuo & Roysircar, 2004; Torres & Rollock, 2004). Acculturative stress occurs when migrants are challenged with incorporating new cultural values into pre-existing ones, especially if these values are incongruent or in conflict.

**Discrimination.** Discrimination is a widespread concern among refugee populations. Canadian policies encourage a cultural mosaic within our society in order to eradicate discrimination. While "the blemishes of overt racism are disappearing from the country's public face, a truer, meaner portrait hangs in the Canadian attic" (Beiser, et al., 2001, p. 47). Discrimination can range from daily inconveniences in the form of microaggressions in interpersonal interactions to institutional oppression through systematic policies marginalizing refugees (Chung et al., 2008). The prototype migrant, based on media depictions, is poor,



manipulative, uneducated, incompetent, and dark in complexion (Portes & Rumbaut, 1996). A study conducted in Dearborn, Michigan with Iraqi Arabs showed that 50% felt that they had been targeted due to their ethnicity by law enforcement and also reported physical and verbal assault, vandalism, and workplace exclusion (Baker et al., 2004). Bias and discriminatory policies can limit refugees in their access to work (Henry et al., 1995), fair pay (Li, 1988a), housing (Henry, 1989; Henry et al., 1995), loan appraisals, educational opportunities, and even health care (Chung et al., 2008).

**Role reversals.** Female refugees can more easily obtain jobs and are often forced to work due to the absence, disability, or death of their husbands (Imam & Abdullahi, 2017; Salmeh, 2014). While providing a sense of economic freedom for refugee women, it is not a role traditionally occupied by them. As a result, this role change can be frustrating for refugee families and can be perceived as a transgression of traditional roles (Abdi, 2015). This can also be difficult for refugee males who are used to providing for their families financially. The upset due to the household and gender role reversal can put migrant families at a greater risk for domestic violence due to the threats against the power structure of a traditional family (Bemak & Chung, 2014; Menjivar & Salcido, 2002).

**Intergenerational conflict.** Children of refugee families are acculturating more quickly than their parents, learning the language faster, and finding jobs more easily. Consequently, immigrant children are increasingly relieving parents from their traditional roles of comforter and caregiver (Beiser & Hou, 2001, 2006; Beiser et al., 2010; Hsu, Davies, & Hansen, 2004). Adolescents and teens especially are learning new ideals from peers and teachers of the dominant culture, which may sometimes oppose traditional ideals of parents. A common fear is that children are becoming too “North American” and losing their heritage culture and cultural

identity (Betancourt et al., 2015). Topics of parent-child conflict can include curfews, clothing choices, interracial dating, and the undermining of parental authority (Abdi, 2015).

**Survivor's Guilt and Loss.** Survivor's guilt is a phenomenon plaguing refugees with the rumination over friends, relatives, and loved ones left behind, worrying about their plight, their livelihood, and what might be done to save them, and feeling guilty about why they are able to make it to safety, while others are left behind (Almoshmosh, 2016). Survivor's guilt also encompasses feeling of sadness regarding the country's turmoil and worry for friends and relatives that are missing, dead, or suffering (Shoeb et al., 2007).

The arrival in a new country also signifies for refugees the loss of a familiar social fabric that one was an essential part of; these losses can include the loss of personal and ethnic identity, competence, confidence, credentials, social status, and financial independence (Beiser, 1999; Chan & Lam, 2007). Often the result is a poorer overall quality of life, decreased confidence and self-esteem, and reduced motivation for refugees.

**Identity struggle.** Much of the identity struggle faced by refugees is impacted by and throughout the acculturation process. There is often confusion about foundational concepts such as how to define home and the self (Shoeb et al., 2007), a feeling of being in limbo where neither Syria nor Canada feel stable. The establishment of communities and social networks often provide ways to recreate bonds that resemble those from the homeland such as Syria, a process that will help facilitate their integration in the host country (Shoeb et al., 2007). For example, previous research has found that Arabs in Dearborn created a communal identity of Iraqis in exile and outlined a plan to transmit language, culture, and pain as part of their unique national identity (Shoeb et al., 2007).

**Mental Health.** Syrian refugees have been found to be prone to mental health challenges

(Hassan et al., 2015). The compound effects of the pre- and post-migration challenges are commonly linked to mental health concerns expressed as depression, anxiety and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) by refugee newcomers (Bemak & Chung, 2008; De Jong et al., 2003; Mollica et al., 2004; Momartin et al., 2004). For example, acculturative stress from prolonged rumination over the displacement, loneliness, and loss can eventually result in disorientation, helplessness, and depressiveness for migrants, including refugees (Cook, Alegria, Lin, & Guo, 2009; Noh, Kasper, Wickrama, 2007; Tran, Manalo, & Nguyen, 2007). Previous research has found that Syrian refugees reported that their emotional problems instilled in them feelings of sadness, grief, fear, frustration, anxiety, anger, and despair (Hassan et al., 2015). Syrian refugees have also reported physical fatigue and somatic concerns, cognitive rumination, behavioural aggression, and social interpersonal problems in a number of previous studies (De Jong et al., 2003; El Masri, Harvey & Garwoo, 2013; International Medical Corps, 2013; International Rescue Committee, 2013; Mollica et al., 2004; Momartin et al., 2004; Pérez-Sales, 2012; Wells, Steel, Abo-Hilal, Hassan & Lawsin, 2016). Many resettled Syrian refugees continue to experience the impact of their pre-migration stressors, reliving it through nightmares and flashbacks from their time back home in Syria (Acarturk et al., 2015). It is therefore necessary for mental health researchers and practitioners to continue to probe deeper into mental health concerns of refugee populations and discern what may be causing further distress for them so that interventions can be developed to assist Syrian newcomers successfully in Canada.

All of the aforementioned post-migration struggles make integration and acculturation a difficult feat. Stressors pose a threat to the emotional and physical well-being of refugees (American Psychological Association, 2010; Derluyn, Mels, & Broekaert, 2009; Howard & Hodes, 2000; Peltonen & Punamaki, 2010; Reed, Fazel, Jones, Panter-Brick, & Stein, 2012).

Research with Somali adolescents in New England clearly depicts the convergence of post-migration stressors, and their negative consequences. For instance Ellis, MacDonald, Lincoln, and Cabral (2008) found an association between resettlement stress, acculturative stress, and discrimination with post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms among a sample of 135 Somali refugee youth residing in America. Common themes of stress and coping emerge among refugee populations including Southeast Asian, Somali, Bosnian, and Iraqi refugees in North America. Primarily, concerns of discrimination are most prevalent among these refugee populations in North America. These post-migration stressors impact refugees' access to resources, including housing and employment (e.g., Beiser et al., 2001; Betancourt et al., 2015). However refugees from collectivist cultures have a trend of confiding in family, friends, and religious communities to overcome the stress of resettlement in a new host country (e.g., Abdi, 2015; Chan & Lam, 2007; Shoeb et al., 2007). Post-migration stressors highlight the necessity of effective coping strategies for refugees to promote resilience factors for positive outcomes and good functioning in the face of adversity (Liu et al., 2014; Zhu, 2017).

### **Coping**

Refugees' degree of resilience has been linked to their coping responses to perceived stress (Beiser et al., 2001). Coping is defined as the "constantly changing cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person" (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 141). It has been argued that stress and coping research is based on Westernized perspectives, perpetrating an individualistic paradigm (Dunahoo, Hobfoll, Monnier, Hulsizer & Johnson, 1998; Heppner, 2008). Recently, a cultural perspective is being applied to discern coping preferences and tendencies across cultures (Kuo, 2011). The selection of coping mechanism and perceptions of

stressors has been found to be different based on cultural differences in collectivism versus individualism (Bhagat et al., 2009; Kuo, 2011; Kuo et al., 2006). Collectivist goals in coping are centered around secondary-controlled methods of self-change and use others as reference points, whereas individualist goals focus on primary-controlled coping and changing the stressor to solve the problem, instead of changing the self (Kuo, 2011).

Further divisions of collectivist and individualist coping styles are passive versus active coping strategies. Passive coping is characterized by emotion-focused, interpersonal strategies found to reduce depression in collectivist individuals, such as Southeast Asian refugees in Canada (Noh, Beiser, Kaspar, Hou, & Rummens, 1999). Passive coping strategies are prevalent in minority populations and those that are less acculturated into the North American culture (Kareff & Ogden, 2013). Increases in acculturation have been found to be associated with decreases in interpersonal and social problems, creating easier access to resources in coping with stress and coping for healthier integration in a group of immigrant students in the United States (Mena, Padilla, & Maldonado, 1987). A study by Kuo and colleagues (2006) with Chinese adolescents in Canada found that lower acculturation levels were associated with collective and avoidance coping methods. Migrants that struggle with incongruence between the host culture and their heritage culture might use the “myth of return” to cope; this entails a yearning for their homeland and resolve to go back home, which provides a temporary comforting excuse for them regarding their failure to integrate in the host country (Al-Rasheed, 1994). However, clinging to the “myth of return” can ultimately have harmful consequences, creating further barriers in the integration process.

Active coping strategies, on the other hand, entail taking direct action to solve the problem. Examples of active coping are confronting the threat, problem solving, and deliberating

with friends or relatives. A study found that passive responses, as opposed to active ones such as confiding in others, to threats such as discrimination was associated with a greater risk of elevated blood pressure (Krieger, 1990). Ethnic minorities more often utilize passive coping strategies and avoid confrontational responses (Kareff & Ogden, 2013). Particularly, Asians residing in North America endorsed forbearance and preferred passive coping in reaction to discrimination (Kuo, 1995; Noh, Beiser, Hou, & Kaspar, 1998; Tietjen, 1989; Triandis, 1994). Within the collectivist cultures, passive emotion-focused coping reduces depressiveness while problem-solving and confrontational coping intensifies stress (Su, Lee & Vang, 2005). Within a sample of Asian migrants in Canada, 77.9% chose to ignore a discriminatory incident in which they were victimized (Beiser et al., 2001). The forbearance coping strategies among minorities can be attributed to cultural values of collectivism and the prioritization of social harmony over self-assertion (Triandis, 1980).

**Collective coping.** Collective coping is an umbrella term for strategies based on reliance, interdependence, and social support, utilized in collectivistic cultures to overcome hardship. Collective coping gives significance to the well-being of significant others and includes others in meaning making for culturally congruent outcomes in the stress and coping process (Moore & Constantine, 2005). Coping strategies appear in many forms including coping based on values of forbearance, interpersonally focused coping, culturally determined strategies, and religious practice (Fischer et al., 2010; Heppner et al., 2006; Kuo et al., 2006; Utsey et al., 2000; Yeh et al., 2003). A sample of Japanese participants reported the importance of family, ethnic identity, and community in the strong preference to cope by confiding in family members (Yeh, Inose, Kobori, & Chang, 2001). The Transactional Model (Chun et al., 2006), provides a theoretical foundation that highlights the interwoven relationship between cultural context, interpersonal

relationships, and coping.

Themes in collective coping across various collectivist cultures include: familial coping, intra-cultural coping, relational universality, forbearance, fatalism and indigenous healing (Yeh, Arora & Wu, 2006). Social and familial support is common among collectivist cultures as is the practice of seeking advice and guidance from authority figures and integrating indigenous practices (Triandis, 2001). Religious coping is closely related to concepts of fatalism, forbearance, and universality; the transcending feeling that one is part of something greater and that struggles are necessary and temporary (Shoeb et al., 2007). How members of a group interact with religious coping often varies.

Syrian women are more likely than men to employ positive collective coping strategies (Al Akash & Boswall, 2015; International Medical Corps, 2013). Prayer, talking to family and friends, and thinking of good times are all listed as methods used by Syrian women within their support networks. Others have organized charity events such as bazaars to maintain ties and proactively work to help others (Al Akash & Boswall, 2015; International Medical Corps, 2013). Syrians can also be categorized as cosmocentric, living in relation to God. To possess cosmocentric beliefs is to live in a double dimension of universal roles and social roles. One fulfills obligations to both the universal and social worlds by drawing strength from the universal to endure worldly dilemmas (Sadr, 2011). While this may not be true of all Syrians, Syrian culture is heavily influenced by Islamic ideals and dominated by a Muslim majority. Therefore, most Syrians ascribe to cosmocentric beliefs. Syrian refugee adolescents have also inherited similar coping methods, further reinforcing the notion that preferred coping methods and stress appraisals are influenced by cultural values. Adolescents reported talking to parents and friends, reading Quran, crying, joining community centers and support groups, playing with friends, and

drawing to distract themselves in order to cope (International Medical Corps, 2013, 2014).

Therefore, engaging with social groups and in social activities has an immense positive impact on mental health of Syrians.

**Religious coping.** The use of spirituality in coping is common among North Americans (Levin & Taylor, 1997; Poloma & Gallup, 1991; Princeton Religion Research Center 1984, 1994; Veroff, Kukla, & Douvan, 1981). However it is most prevalent among disadvantaged populations such as women, ethnic minorities, and those of lower socioeconomic status (Ellison, 1991; Krause 1995; Levin & Taylor, 1997). For example, Black Canadians most often used spiritual coping to overcome interpersonal struggles as a result of discrimination (Joseph & Kuo, 2009). A survey of various religious groups including Christians, Jews, and Muslims found that fundamentalists had higher levels of optimism and hope than liberals (Sethi & Seligman, 1993) - qualities previously found to buffer stress.

Religious-spiritual coping can be defined as a transcendent process used to find significance during stressful times. Religious conceptions of hardship become more easily accepted as the will of God, as adversities can be seen as opportunities for religious reward, growth, and strength (Deuraseh & Abu Talib, 2005). Previous studies have found that Vietnamese refugees found greater purpose in their journey when they attributed life circumstance to God's will. Vietnamese refugees' felt that their faith was reinforced and provided a source of hope and comfort for them in times of distress (Dorais, 2007). Muslim Iraqi refugees in Dearborn, Michigan described religious practices as respite from every day struggles and these practices give them a sense of continuity from pre- to post-migration, through various disruptions (Dorais, 2007). Religious beliefs in combination with faith-based communities act as emotional and social support, and provide these refugees an outlet for expression in a place of



belonging in which their group identity can be fostered (De Voe, 2002; Gozdziaak & Shandy, 2002; Welaratna, 1993). A community where support is abundant allows refugees to be more mobile and to find a home away from home. Somali refugees have described Islam as an enduring home, carrying it with themselves through hardship (McMichael, 2002).

Smeekees and colleagues, (2017) also identified that a protective factor that has served to provide continuity to Syrian refugees in both Turkey and Lebanon is a strong sense of group belongingness and social identity. Many Syrians find this connection among religious communities. For example, Syrian refugees that define themselves as Arabs, identifying with the unifying culture of countries in the Arabian Peninsula and surrounding regions, or Muslims, as followers of Islam, may find other Arab refugees such as Palestinians or citizens of the host-countries that are Muslims, creating a new social network for support and familiarity. Islam serves as one thing that is not left behind in their displacement and exile (Gozdziaak & Shandy, 2002). These populations are often encountered at mosques where Syrian refugees are seeking shelter and creating a sense of community and accountability.

Group membership and belonging provide continuity in an otherwise disorienting journey. Associating with multiple group identities, such as racially, ethnically, or religiously, further provides a buffer from negative outcomes among individuals suffering from identity loss (Smeekees et al., 2017). An explanation for this is that Syrian refugees ascribing to multiple identities, such as Syrian, Arab, and/or Muslim, are more likely to find similar others in their host country to provide comfort and continuity from Syria thereby maintaining some of their identity throughout the transition. Preserving some parts of one's identity in transitions has been associated with overall well-being (Haslam et al., 2008). These culture and value based networks

contribute to well-being by protecting against the accompanying problems of depression and PTSD, such as the comorbidity of substance use.

A study has shown that the prevalence of substance use is significantly lower than expected in Muslim refugee populations (Kazour et al., 2017), which is consistent with Muslim values of impermissibility of intoxicants. These findings are congruent with the social identity perspective which posit that individuals construct their sense of self through membership among groups (Turner & Reynolds, 2001). Researchers have found that social identities provide refugees with some certainty, meaning, esteem, and efficacy that are so often lost in the refugee migration experience (Haslam, Jetten, Postmes, & Haslam, 2009), and protect them from mental health problems while promoting their well-being during negative life transitions (Iyer, Jetten, & Tsivrikos, 2008). For example, a study conducted by Smeekees and colleagues (2017) with Syrian refugees in Turkey found that refugees ascribing to numerous groups prior to migration were more likely to maintain connection with these groups after arrival in Turkey; such a social pattern was also found to be associated with better psychological health and well-being.

Pargament (1997) formulated an empirically grounded theory on positive and negative religious-spiritual coping and how they were related to distress. Pargament (1997) proposes that the use of religious coping has a positive relationship with the severity of stress; it increases in response to more severe situations. When individuals are able to use faith on both the personal and the social level to find meaning in their struggle, the accompanying optimism promotes positive expectations of hope (Scheier & Carver, 1985, 1993). This in turn provides agency and motivation for the individual in looking for the good in future situations (Snyder et al., 1991). In a study on the influence of religious belief and practice on hopelessness and depression, Murphy and colleagues (2000) found that in a sample of 271 clinically depressed patients, religious belief

was a significant predictor of decreased hopelessness and reduced depressive symptoms among these patients. Simultaneously, the private and public rituals incorporated into daily life such as the Islamic prayer, *salah*, eases anxiety and combats loneliness. Not only are religious coping and involvement associated with reducing symptoms of sadness, they are also associated with increases in good health outcomes, psychological wellness, and self-efficacy (Harrison, Koenig, Hays, Eme-Akwari, & Pargament, 2001).

Religious coping can be divided into positive and negative coping (Pargament, 1997). Positive religious coping includes beliefs that God will use one's experiences to strengthen faith, seeking spiritual support from others, and engaging in religious helping (Pargament, 1997). An example of positive coping is seeking help to let go of harboured anger. In contrast, negative religious coping strategies are distinguished by beliefs of a hostile higher power, expressing frustration toward God for their circumstances, and disconnect from one's religious community (Pargament, 1997).

When reaching a sense of hopelessness, Syrians have been found to resort to negative coping styles expressing anger and worry as well as engaging in harmful behaviours such as smoking, withdrawal, and denial (Bou Khalil, 2013; De Jong et al., 2003). However, according to one report (International Medical Corps, 2012) Syrian men in refugee camps indicated that when basic needs are met and there is opportunity to spend time with family and friends, positive religious coping is their default method of stress response. For individuals using religious coping strategies, positive religious coping is significantly related to both increased positive adjustment (Lee, Nezu, & Nezu, 2014) and decreased negative adjustment (Gardner, Krägeloh, & Henning, 2014), whereas negative religious coping is associated with negative adjustment (Gardner et al., 2014; Lee et al., 2014).

In one study, positive religious coping among Bosnian refugees was found to be also associated with a sense of optimism, increased religiosity, and higher education levels (Ai et al., 2003). Religious coping, when used effectively, can restore the hope lost in refugees' journeys. Hope and optimism prevent refugees from resorting to negative religious coping strategies (Ai et al., 2003). Positive coping strategies are employed by those who are more religious and possess a higher education level, while negative coping was more common among those who had suffered more severe trauma (Ai et al., 2003). Studies with Christian participants have found that Christians generally use more positive than negative coping to protect their cognitive resources (Pargament et al., 1998). This finding was also reproduced in a Muslim sample, demonstrating that Muslims tended to use more positive than negative coping styles (Ai et al., 2003).

***Relationship among collectivism, Islam, and collective coping.*** Syrian refugees are considered to be coming from a collectivist culture. Collectivist cultures emphasize interdependency and strong communal values, placing the needs of others above individual needs (Hofstede, 1980; Kagitcibasi, 2005; Triandis, 1989). Collectivist cultures stress interdependence whereas individualistic cultures emphasize the self, autonomy, and independence (Triandis, 1989). Studies conducted with families have found that familial cohesion in particular fosters positivity and a sense of support felt by the children in the family (Maccoby & Martin, 1983). Family connectedness has been shown to act as a mediator against daily hassles by providing a sense of support (Ptacek, 1996). Family is the most important unit and source of support, particularly in collectivist cultures, because it serves as the foundation for establishing relationships, attitudes, and self-perceptions for an individual (Ross et al., 2006). This cultural paradigm makes it particularly difficult for allocentric refugees to accept biculturalism because the individualist norms are foreign and can challenge their understanding

of child-rearing, family dynamics, norms, and beliefs (Chung et al., 2008). Syrian refugee family dynamics may be impacted by the discrepancy between their collectivist culture in Syria and the individualist culture in Canada. Collectivist values are also inherently part of the Muslim tradition to which many Syrians ascribe.

Syria, a majority Muslim country, is predominantly comprised of Sunnis, accounting for three quarters of the country's population. The remaining quarter consists of other subtypes relating to Islam, such as Shias and Ismailis, as well as Christians (Hassan et al., 2015). Hence, it is important to consider religious beliefs in understanding the impact of displacement for Syrian refugees. Firstly, religious identifiers such as religious dress, a head covering called a *hijab* for women and a *kufi* or facial hair on men, are often used by non-Muslims to make generalizations and assumptions regarding Muslims. These superficial assumptions are, however, not accurate. In fact, a recent study has found that Muslim females who dressed in an Islamically prescribed manner and chose to cover themselves actually reported lower heritage acculturation but higher religiosity, and were less susceptible to media influences (Chaker, Chang, & Hakim-Larson, 2015). These preconceived assumptions about Muslim identity based on appearances can often lead to discrimination toward Muslims - a prominent complaint of most refugee groups (Abdi, 2015).

Islamophobia has become a serious problem around the world instilling fear in Muslim populations and distrust in the general public post-cold war and post-9/11. Muslims have become the 'religious outsiders' in North America due to geo-political conflicts and concerns (Moore 1986; Abdi, 2015). They are perceived as a threat to Western values (Rothe & Muzzatti, 2004) and represent everything antithetical to being "truly North American". Growing fears and media representations of Muslim populations, including Syrians, have influenced public and policy

discourses with increased border control and new legislation based on American foreign policies (Altheide, 2006). Extensive profiling of Muslims by law enforcement agencies have increased and research surveys regarding diversity show that attitudes toward Muslims are much worse compared to Christians, Jews, and other religious groups (Pew Research, 2010, 2014). Secondly, religion, an essential part of meaning making, is cited as a way of coping and understanding the struggles endured by Muslims in times of distress (Shoeb et al., 2007). Religion universally provides a system of ideas and practices that provide guidelines on how to conduct oneself and how to make meaning, especially in times of difficulty. Religious identity therefore provides believers of Islam an understanding of one's place in the world, both socially and spiritually (Shoeb et al., 2007). Hence, religion becomes inseparable and intertwined with culture (Abdi, 2015). In turn, culture prescribes acceptable and unacceptable social, moral, and ethical behaviours with customs centered around core beliefs, often stemming from religious values and practices for Muslims.

Many religious principles based in Islam support the notion of a cohesive society, which render collective and religious coping styles common in Muslim populations in the face of distress. It is therefore likely that Syrian refugee may utilize collective and religious principles to assist them in the migration process. There is evidence in religious texts emphasizing Islam as a religion of collective community that reflects in ideologies and sayings of the prophet Muhammad in *hadiths* such as “the community is like one body, if the head is in pain then the whole body is in pain” (Sahih Muslim, Book 45, Hadith Number 84) and “none of you truly believe until you love for your brother what you love for yourself” (Sahih Muslim, Book 1, Hadith Number 77). Islam is a commonality for many refugees, which serves as a unifying thread for their collective identities regardless of their nationalities. Islam can also provide

comfort within familiar communities for refugees in foreign lands such as Canada. Religious principles influence cultural practice and they provide a lens through which Muslims view the world and understand their experiences (Geertz, 2000). It is expected that Islamic faith and identity would likely impact Syrian refugee experiences in their resettlement in Canada. It is, therefore, important to study how Islamic faith and identity may buffer adversity and provide a basis for communal bonds among Syrian refugees, as religion and religious institutes have for other refugee populations in the past.

*Importance of religion and religious institutions for refugees.* Religion has a crucial role in the adaptation of refugees and has been found in numerous refugee populations (Abdi, 2015; Dorais, 2007; Shoeb et al. 2007). Islam has not only provided group membership and a transcendent tranquility to refugees but it has also provided tangible resources in the form of shelter in mosques and financial relief for Syrian refugees around the world (Parkinson & Behrouzan, 2016). Religious institutions are faith-based organizations that offer a unifying space for their followers and often provide emergency relief, assistance in settlement processes, and direction for refugees to necessary resources (Gozdziak & Shandy, 2002). The creation of religious spaces also provides an enduring home and community for refugees (Dorais, 2007; Gozdziaak & Shandy, 2002).

Religious faiths and institutions have not only been essential in the refugee experience of Iraqi refugees but for various other refugee populations. For example, research with Southeast Asian refugees in Canada found that stress response strategies included the use of available resources, confidants, and the establishment of religious spaces for practice in new communities and refugee camps (Dorais, 2007). Vietnamese refugees, most of whom were Buddhist, also considered their religion a moral guide, providing them direction in situations where they felt

lost (Dorais, 2007). In particular, Southeast Asian refugees reported that their church sponsors invested more care for them than did the government sponsors. The former provided not only interpersonal connection for refugees but also tangible support via housing accommodation, clothing, and furniture (Chan & Lam, 2007).

Particularly for refugees of Muslim background, Betancourt and colleagues (2015) reported that Somali refugees in North America find solace in faith and religiosity via connection with community and family members and these spiritual ties are vital for their coping and integration into their new country. The same study also found that Somali Muslim faith is closely related to Somali cultural identity. Ai, Peterson, and Huang (2003) found that optimism, hope and religiosity were used by Muslim Kosovar refugees to combat depressiveness. These studies illustrate how faith and the Muslim faith in particular serves a critical protective role in promoting refugees to reach out for assistance and to engage in constructive coping in their resettlement process (Betancourt et al., 2015). Individuals who have resources via religious organizations, communities, friends, and family commonly use social support in times of distress. Hence, many refugee populations cite social interaction and religious faith as their main coping mechanisms (Betancourt et al., 2015; Dorais, 2007; Shoeb et al., 2007). Though many refugee populations and their coping strategies have been explored in the literature, the Muslim Syrian refugee experience in North America in the context of their cultural and religious framework has yet to be addressed.

### **Gap in the Literature**

Previous reviews of studies conducted with refugee populations have concluded that refugees experiencing more hardship before their migration are more susceptible to post-migration stressors (Watters, 2001). Although the relationship between pre-migration trauma and



post-migration stress for immigrants and refugees is well established (e.g., Sinnerbrink et al., 1997; Silove, Sinnerbrink, Field, Manicavasagar, & Steel, 1997), it is unclear how recent Syrian refugees in Canada are coping with their distress in their host country. Coping ability is especially important for vulnerable populations such as refugees, because they are essential for survival. This is particularly true when there is evidence to suggest a reluctance to seek professional help on the part of Syrian refugees (Inayat 2007; International Medical Corps, 2013). There is currently limited understanding of how cultural and religious views influence Syrian refugees' perceptions and understandings of their circumstances, resilience, and stress-coping capacities. Generally speaking, little is currently known about the influence of culture on the stress and coping process. A growing number of scholars have called for a better understanding of the stress and coping process from a culturally informed and multicultural perspective (Kuo, Roysircar, & Newby-Clark, 2006; Wong & Wong, 2006). This study addressed the following gaps in the literature.

First, the lack of research on Syrian refugees in combination with the growing concern for their needs and specific social and religious identities necessitate further research and investigation on this critical population. Currently, only a few published studies have examined the Middle Eastern refugees' experiences living in the West (Shoeb et al., 2007). Second, there is a tendency in the existing literature on refugees to focus on the negative aspects of mental health concerns for refugee populations, as it typically places emphasis on refugees' deficiencies rather than resiliencies. There is an overemphasis on the stressors and traumas in refugee research than refugees' resilience and their ability to cope (Betancourt et al., 2015). Since positive coping and adjustment strategies have been neglected in the literature, there is a critical need for a more balanced approach and understanding of migrants' experiences, including those of refugees

(Cardazo, Vergara, Agani, & Gotway, 2000; Drozdek, 1997; Favaro, Majorani, Columbo, & Santonastaso, 1999; Weine et al., 1995). Third, as previously reviewed, several studies have suggested the importance of religiously oriented coping strategies among refugees in responding to their experiences with adversity (e.g., Abdi, 2015; Dorais, 2007; Shoeb et al., 2007). However, few empirical studies have systematically investigated the relationship between religious coping and war refugees (Ai et al., 2003). This resulted in a lack of understanding of the diversity of religious beliefs that might be important for refugees as they respond to the difficulties of war and their migration journey (Gozdziak & Shandy 2002).

Positive attitudes and coping strategies are necessary components of surviving the refugee experience and must be further examined. Unfortunately, existing standard measures of coping are not sufficiently culturally responsive to capture cultural expressions of distress and stress responses (Wells, Wells, & Laws in 2015). In order to better assist refugees, more research must be conducted to address the growing concerns around the refugee crisis. The purpose of a shift in research concerning the role of culture in adversity is to increase understanding, acceptance, and cohesion (e.g., Bograd, 1988; Oyserman & Spike, 2008), because suffering cannot be understood outside of the context of culture, meaning, and each individual's view of themselves and the world. Therefore, a qualitative approach is adopted for the current research to examine the lived experiences of Syrian refugees.

### **The Current Study**

The current study explored the role of coping in response to post-arrival stressors among recently arrived Muslim, ethnically Arab, Syrian refugees residing in Windsor, Ontario. This study aimed to expand the literature by contributing research on refugees in Canada and on refugees' experiences as Muslims living in a Western nation. The study hoped to do so by

providing a balanced approach to consider and examine refugees' sufferings as well as their patterns of strength and positivity. Previous research has found that effective coping plays a constructive role in protecting refugees from the negative consequences of intense stress and in shielding refugees from mental health deterioration (Ai et al., 2003). Using the individual interview method, this research aimed to provide a platform and create a space for Syrian refugees to share their narratives and experiences in their own words. Adopting face-to-face individual interviews with Syrian refugees, this qualitative study intended to generate in-depth understanding of the post-migration realities faced by Syrian refugees in Canada and to illuminate refugees' experiences of coping and survival through their lived experiences.

### **Research Questions**

As this current investigation was exploratory in nature, the researcher's individual interviews with the Syrian refugee participants were designed to solicit their responses to speak about their lived experiences. It was hoped that the interview would provide insight into Syrian refugees' personal encounters with stress and coping, and help identify the role of cultural and religious identities in Syrian refugees' coping responses and their current resettlement experience in Canada. Specifically, the interview questions were designed to explore the nature of stress experienced by Syrian refugees in relation to their departure from Syria, their migration journey, and difficulties they might have faced with attempting to adjust and acculturate in Canada. The interview questions were designed to understand the various elements of stress and coping within the panels of the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Chun et al., 2006).

Hence, the present study asked the following five research questions: a) What changes and challenges have arisen for Syrian refugees on their migration journey from Syria to Canada?; b) What particular coping strategies do Syrian refugees utilize to manage their losses due to war

and conflict?; c) How are Syrian refugees currently coping with the post-migration stressors they face in Canada?; d) What are Syrian refugees' perceptions regarding the importance of their Muslim identity?; and e) What is the relationship between Syrian refugees' Muslim identity and their responses to adversity in their journey as a refugee? For the first question, the interview questions focused on determining stressors and changes in lifestyle and family dynamics for the participants over the course of their journey. The subsequent questions were intended to help shed light and explain if and how the use of the coping strategies identified by Syrian refugee participants might have changed for them over time. Particularly the current study sought to compare the coping strategies used by Syrian participants pre- and post-migration and to explore to what extent their Muslim identity may have influenced this process.

## **Chapter III**

### **Methodology**

#### **Study Design**

A qualitative, semi-structured individual interview method design was adopted for the current study, as it allowed participants to safely and privately discuss their past and present experiences, which may be sensitive in nature. Qualitative researchers have observed that the individual interview has unique strengths over group methods as it ensures maximum confidentiality, depth, and detail through the interviewer-interviewee interaction (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Kuzel, 1999). Using an interview guide, as outlined in Appendix A, this researcher asked Syrian refugee participants to describe their stress and coping responses with regards to their pre- and post- arrival circumstances. The main purpose of the interviews was to facilitate an open discussion with Syrian refugee participants in a safe setting and for them to share their lived migration experiences with the researcher. This method provided rich, meaningful data based on the direct perceptions and the first-hand narratives of refugee participants from their personal perspectives. This method further afforded the researcher the ability to develop rapport, show genuine interest and respect for the Syrian participants, and to provide them with a sense of support by involving them in the study. Geertz (2000) noted that retelling personal narratives allows individuals the voice to recount their life stories, as they so choose, in accordance with their self-representations; for example, the method allows participants the choice to use overtones of strength in the retelling of their narrative. Open-ended questions presented in the interviews offered refugee participants the opportunity to elaborate on their experiences in their own words. Hence, for this purpose the interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) was selected by this researcher to analyze the interviews, as it allows the

researcher to better understand the subjective realities of their participants (Smith & Osborn, 2007). This is because IPA is focused on context and personal narratives, combining psychological, interpretive, and idiographic elements. A focus on idiographic contexts is also consistent with the aims of the theoretical Transactional Model of Cultural Stress and Coping (Chun et al., 2006). The IPA method differs from other qualitative methods as it does not seek to develop new theories or verify hypotheses, but rather it emphasizes a participant-centered approach.

### **Procedure**

The present study obtained clearance from the Research Ethics Board at the University of Windsor, to ensure that all research protocols were performed in adherence with ethical standards. Previous research has noted that building trust and rapport between researchers and their refugee participants is of critical importance because distrust of perceived authorities by refugees has been reported in prior studies (HelpAge, 2014). Hence, confidentiality was of utmost importance in the current study as sensitive information pertaining to Syrian refugee participants' experiences was solicited through the face-to-face interview with the researcher. Given that mistrust of authority is common among refugees, researchers must ensure protection of identity and privacy of information of refugee participants, in order to encourage their participation (Ai et al., 2003). When trust is lost, a disintegration of trust by individuals, such as refugees, toward institutions can extend to social structures and political systems (McMurphy, 2013). Therefore, research conducted by perceived authorities can potentially be perceived as distrustful by refugees. Therefore, in this study, the interviews commenced only after the researcher obtained the informed consent from Syrian refugee participants verbally. Syrian refugee participants were not required to sign the consent form, as signatures are an identifier.

The participants were provided with a signed and dated copy of the consent form by the researcher outlining all procedures. Furthermore, all interviews questions and probes were asked in English and interpreted into Arabic and all participant responses were delivered in Arabic and interpreted to English as well. Interpretations between the researcher and interviewees were performed by a hired Iraqi, Arabic-speaking female interpreter who had personal experience herself as a refugee fleeing war in her homeland. The same language interpreter was available for all interviews to ensure consistency in interpretation. The language interpreter was hired from the Multicultural Council of Windsor and Essex County (MCC). The MCC is the largest organization in the greater Windsor and Essex region that offers settlement, social, educational, and medical services for immigrant and refugee newcomers.

When participants arrived at the University of Windsor campus for the interviews they were first presented with a demographics sheet. The demographics information collected included general background information from the participants, including gender, age, education, sponsorship and length of time in Canada. Second, an interview guide of 12 questions, developed by this researcher based on themes identified in the literature, was used to guide the interview. The questions were first posed verbally in English to participants by the researcher and then interpreted verbally into Arabic by the interpreter. Third, following the completion of the interview, participants were given the opportunity to add or elaborate any other relevant information related to their stress, coping, religious identity, or migration and resettlement experiences that may not have been discussed in the interview.

### **Participant Recruitment and Participant Characteristics**

A total of 10 recently arrived Muslim, Arab, Syrian refugees, 5 males and 5 females, were recruited for this research from Muslim and Arab communities in Windsor, Ontario. Two

recruiters from the Muslim, Arab, and Syrian communities of Windsor, Ontario disseminated information to potential participants. The recruiters were provided with the inclusion criterion for the current study to be distributed within the Muslim, Arab, Syrian refugee community for recruiting potential participants. Recruiters were also responsible for identifying individuals that met the inclusion criteria of the current study and for providing potential participants with the contact information of the researcher. Interested participants who contacted the researcher were provided with time, date, and location details of the University of Windsor, to schedule a meeting for the interview.

The inclusion criterion required participants to be Muslim, Arab, Syrian refugees recently arrived to Canada since 2016 within the ages of 30-55. The inclusion criterion was meant to ensure a purposive sample for insight into information-rich narratives of Syrian refugee participants as opposed to empirical generalization (Patton, 2002). Therefore, an equal number of male and female participants were intentionally selected. The 30-55 age bracket of Syrian refugees was selected because it is the age range wherein the importance of mobility is heightened. Refugees in this age range are generally grappling with issues related to family life, career direction, and re-establishing a new identity in the host society. Previous research has further suggested that older refugees reported more difficulties coping with migration stressors than younger refugees (Chan & Lam, 2007). Therefore, studying mature refugee adults provided richer data in terms of understanding their migration process, changing family dynamics, and other relevant experiences identified in the previous refugee literature. Further, using the participant inclusion/recruitment criterion described above, allowed this study to examine the experiences of a more homogenous sample group of recent Muslim Syrian refugees who shared more similar background characteristics and lived experiences.



The demographics information, collected in the current study, provided information regarding various sample characteristics. All participants were unemployed, married, had children, lived with their spouse and children in Canada, identified as Sunni Muslims and rated themselves as “moderately religious”. The number of children in the families among the 10 participants ranged from two to six. Eight of the participants were government assisted refugees and two were privately sponsored refugees by a family member. The range of time residing in Canada was less than a year on average but ranged from 10 to 24 months. The highest level of education obtained ranged from elementary school to high school with the exception of three participants who were college and university educated.

### **Interview Topics**

As indicated in Appendix A, the interview guide questions asked participants to broadly provide a chronological account of their pre-arrival experiences in Syria, their decision to leave and the precipitating factors for their departure, their journey to Canada, their current experiences with resettlement and acculturation, and general questions regarding their emotions associated with their personal stories and their general family relationship dynamics since resettlement. Additionally, participants were asked about what methods of coping they use to overcome their stressors before, during, and after migration for the purpose of comparison, from their displacement to their resettlement. Furthermore, refugees’ religious attitudes toward Islam were enquired about in order to explore the extent to which their Muslim religious identity and their religious practices may have played a role in their coping with stress over the migration process. Lastly, the interview ended on a positive note by the researcher asking refugee participants to describe their hopes, dreams, and aspirations for their resettlement and future in Canada.

The development of the interview questions were guided by the panels of the Transactional Model of Cultural Stress and Coping (Chun et al., 2006); inquiring about context, stress, and identity to understand how they are influencing coping strategies and well-being. Participants' pre-arrival experiences were expected in the current study to correspond with Panel I of environmental factors. It was also expected that cultural and religious identities would correspond to Panel II of personal systems and that post-migration stressors would correspond to Panel III of transitory systems of the model. The first three panels would then influence Syrian refugees' chosen coping methods in Panel IV to determine outcomes in Panel V. The unique ways in which themes correspond to the Panels in the Transactional Model (Chun et al., 2006) and how the themes emerge throughout the coding process would provide an understanding of the interaction between culture, context, stress and coping. To pilot test the interview, the interview questions were presented to two individuals who are part of the Arab and Syrian community in Windsor, Ontario. This was conducted in order to understand how well the interview questions were translated and interpreted by Syrian refugees before they were used in the study. Participants were compensated for their time with a culturally appropriate token gift containing dates and tea. Date palms have an exalted rank and significance in Islam, as there are *hadith* that juxtapose their strength with Muslim resilience: "there is a tree amongst trees, the leaves of which do not wither and that is like a Muslim. Tell me what that tree can be?" (Sahih Muslim, Book 39, Hadith 6747).

## **Analysis**

**Interpretive phenomenological analysis.** In this study, the interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach was used to guide the analysis of the data obtained from the interviews. A phenomenological approach entails the exploration of participants'

subjective experiences to understand their detailed perceptions of reality (McLeod, 2001). An IPA analysis is idiographic – that is, it provides insight into participants’ meaning making with respect to their stress and unique experience (Brocki & Wearden, 2006). The dialogical nature of the data collection of the current study, along with the idiographic commitment of the IPA approach, encourages the use of small and homogenous samples as a strength within this method (Eatough & Smith, 2008). Within the IPA, there are two levels of interpretation; an empathic approach which seeks detailed descriptions of participant experience and the critical method which requires the researcher to build an alternative narrative based on the accounts of participants’ meaning-making. According to Eatough and Smith (2008) occurrences and events are subjective and must be understood through the lens of how individuals experience them. An individual’s understanding of an event is mediated by previously accrued experience (Smith & Osborn, 2007). The current study employs the empathic approach of IPA, considering the manifestations of the participants’ wishes, desires, feelings, motivations, and belief systems (Eatough & Smith, 2008).

Psychological research often neglects the study of experience, overlooking the contributions of individual context with regards to behaviour and personal understandings of events (Eatough & Smith, 2008). Using the IPA method, this study focused on Syrian refugees’ subjective realities within their cultural and religious framework. An individual-centered idiographic approach offers perspective into the specific experiences rather than the universal experiences of participants. Thus, the approach provides details, insights, and potential explanations for findings from individual narratives that converge or diverge from findings in the literature. The interview process employed in IPA, and used in the current study, helps bridge the gap between literature and lived experience. In the context of a face-to-face interview the process

allows the researcher insight into participants' exploration and meaning making of their narratives (Eatough & Smith, 2008). The advantages of this retrospective reflection satisfy the aims of Jacobs (1986) who asserted that the past is investigated so it can be renegotiated and relived but this time with a different ending. Therefore, the process and methodological practice in an IPA require a researcher to formulate research questions directed at the specific population being interviewed (Eatough & Smith, 2008). Thus, in the current study, questions regarding stress, coping, and religiosity were created and posed within the pre- and post-migration context of the Syrian refugee participants. Additionally, the requisite for small homogenous samples in IPA was satisfied with the specific inclusion criteria of the current study and the interview questions were designed to allow participants to play a significant role during the interview interaction and process (Eatough & Smith, 2008). The IPA method necessarily involves detailed readings and active engagement by the researcher in the coding and the interpretation of data to understand participants' meaning making and experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2007). Hence, the data analysis for the present study began with a close reading of the transcribed interview dialogues by both coders.

***Coding process in IPA.*** The interviews were conducted with Syrian refugee participants and recorded using a recording device for transcription purposes. Transcriptions were written using the interpreter's English translation verbatim, with minor clarifications, indicated in square brackets, to provide context. After the interviews were transcribed by the researcher, the contents of the interview were coded by two separate coders – the researcher and a volunteer research assistant, to ensure validity and interrater reliability. Both coders have previous experience analyzing qualitative data in a research context. The IPA method was utilized to inform the coding process of each interview. Initially the researcher actively read and commented on each

transcript with thoughts and interpretations within the narratives from the Syrian refugee participants looking for meaningful segments, patterns, and general statements of interest. Particular topics of focus by the researcher included Syrian refugees' stress, coping, resilience, family dynamics, reoccurring patterns, as well as religious and cultural notions. Initial comments were annotated in the left column of the printed transcripts. Once the researcher became familiarized with the data, a code was assigned to each meaningful segment from the participants' responses and then annotated in the right column of the document. Themes that were transformed into codes were not necessarily assessed by what was most frequently mentioned by participants. Rather codes were formed based on themes reflected in the literature and based on statements that were emphasized by Syrian refugee participants as salient during the interview. Participants conveyed the saliency of certain aspects of their journey in relation to stress, coping, and religiosity during interviews using nonverbal behaviours, emotional expressions, as well as through frequent mention of their important memories.

Each code represented the central meaning of the emerging themes in the data and related codes were labeled 'clusters'. Each cluster of codes comprises a superordinate theme. Superordinate themes convey the overarching commonality among clusters of codes. The superordinate themes were then organized the panels of the Transactional Model (Chun et al., 2006). Superordinate themes were matched with panels based on which clusters of emergent themes corresponded with Chun and colleagues' (2006) definitions of what each panel entailed. Both coders followed the same procedure detailed above. Once all transcripts were coded independently by both coders, differences in coding were resolved. Differences in coding between both coders were discussed to reach a conclusion. A resolved code was reached by deleting the previously assigned codes that differed and deciding on a mutually agreed upon code

between both coders. The mutually agreed upon code was decided based on which code the quote more closely resembled. Additionally, if statements from the participants seemingly fit into more than one code, a final code was assigned by the coders based on the essence of the quotes and was determined based upon which code represented the true meaning. “True meaning” in this context refers to the original intent of the statement in relation to the question it was meant to answer. Codes were assigned based on the quality of the quote rather than superficial expression. For example, some participants practice patience in enduring distress but do so for the sake of their families. While patience can fit into the code of “forbearance coping”, distress is endured with the more expressed intent of protecting the family and fulfilling culturally and religiously ascribed gender roles. Therefore the example would be coded as an assertion of “gender identity”. The coding process revealed five superordinate themes and all final codes were used in the IPA analysis. The coding rubric and an example of a coded transcript, including the resolved codes, are presented in Appendix D and E, respectively. Further detailed discussion of the themes are presented below and the superordinate themes are also outlined in the following section.

## Chapter IV

### Results

The intention of the present study was to address the following five research questions: a) What changes and challenges have arisen for Syrian refugees on their migration journey from Syria to Canada?; b) What particular coping strategies do Syrian refugees utilize to manage their losses due to war and conflict?; c) How are Syrian refugees currently coping with the post-migration stressors they face in Canada?; d) What are Syrian refugees' perceptions regarding the importance of their Muslim identity?; and e) What is the relationship between Syrian refugees' Muslim identity and their responses to adversity in their journey as a refugee?

The interview guide was formulated to align with and inquire about various aspects that correspond to the Transactional Model of Cultural Stress and Coping (Chun et al., 2006). The descriptions of all the superordinate themes emerged from the analyses are detailed and presented in Table 1.0. The left side of the table corresponds to Chun et al.'s (2006) model and the right side of the table lists the narrative themes from the analyses. More specifically, participants' responses consistent with Panel I on environmental factors, Panel II on personal systems, and Panel III on transitory conditions were examined closely to better understand the experiences of Arab, Muslim, Syrian refugees in Canada. Additionally, responses related to Panels IV and V on coping strategies and well-being respectively, were also examined to understand refugees' coping processes and outcomes. Therefore, using the Transactional Model of Cultural Stress and Coping (Chun et al., 2006) and the literature as a guide, the interview questions were formulated to gain insight into the various components of the migration journey and how they corresponded to each of the panels. The interviews were transcribed with specific quotes from Muslim, Arab, Syrian refugees and were grouped in accordance with the associated

panels. The coding process revealed many superordinate themes that map onto each panel of the Transactional Model (Chun et al., 2006), which included 1) pre-migration stress and trauma; 2) identity assertion; 3) post-migration stressors; 4) religious and collective coping; and 5) positive outcomes and well-being in Canada.

*Table 1.0 Superordinate Themes and Clusters*

Superordinate Themes	Themes in Narratives
Panel I Environmental Systems – Pre-Migration Stress and Trauma	Fear for safety of family members Discrimination in Lebanon, Turkey and Jordan Financial Instability
Panel II Personal Systems – Identity Assertion	Cultural Identity Religious Identity Gender Identity
Panel III Transitory Conditions – Post Migration Stressors	Acculturative Stress Discrimination Financial Burden Survivor’s Guilt and Loss
Panel IV Cognitive Appraisals and Coping Skills – Religious and Collective Coping	Religious Coping Collective Coping including familial, intracultural, fatalism and forbearance
Panel V Health and Well-Being – Positive Outcomes	Positive outcomes in Canada

### **Panel I Environmental Systems - Pre-Migration Stress and Trauma**

The first of the superordinate themes was pre-migration stress and trauma. Stories told by refugees recounting their time in Syria, the precipitating factors that led to their departure from



Syria and the associated challenges on their migration journey and in neighbouring countries are all encompassed by Panel I. These issues pertain to the social climate, family, and work settings prior to their arrival in Canada. Participants were asked to recall their lives in Syria, experiences and hardships before arriving to Canada, and their reason for leaving it all behind. Participants' responses frequently included atrocities from the war, the problematic political regime, and the lack of available support services. During the interviews, traumatic memories resurfaced for some participants as they described the loss of their homes, bombings, kidnappings, and fear for the lives and safety of their family members. The following quote provides context regarding the experience of living in the war and how the political situation in Syria is understood from the perspective of a native Muslim, Arab, Syrian refugee. Participant M described his families' longstanding dissatisfaction with the Syrian regime and how it had impacted his life and the lives of his family members.

*“When I did start to go to protests I didn't go alone because I didn't know how to walk in the streets when snipers started and the police are shooting at us and I don't know where to escape. I always went with my friend and my boss from my job. We have a lot of, not military but, other kind of officials only for Syrian people that now cause a lot of problems in Syria. They wanted to know everything about Syrian people and everything outside. They are undercover, you won't know them, they look like normal people but they are undercover, they're wearing civilian clothing. Yeah they have a mission to kill, to punish, to hide you in jail. There's a very bad history of these kind of groups. When people started rebelling against the regime, it only took one demonstration before they started killing people. When people started having knives and small weapons we knew this was only going to increase. One day the regime brought weapons to our street, a car*

*opened and anybody could take a weapon to protect themselves. Stupid people started taking weapons to protect themselves. We knew from then that the war would get worse and they were sending tanks and bombs and that's what happened. When I escaped from my country it was around twenty days that they had been sending bombs into our area so we would hear bombs every day, twenty four hours a day. We hear very bad stories about people who cannot escape from this surrounded area. They take women and do very bad things to the women. I had my sisters, my mom, my wife. I took them and we went to Damascus. Damascus is the capital. They made a policy to make a capital that had nothing to do with Syria. Anybody can go to Damascus and they would not believe the media about what's happening in other cities like Homs. So when they see the city that my car is from they would do something bad to me because they don't want anybody coming from other cities or countries and saying what he has seen or heard. When protests started in Damascus as well I sold my car and went to Jordan.” – M, 38*

The quote by participant M provides perspective and insight into the beginnings of the war. The complicated history of the regime is highlighted in the above narrative. Participant M candidly expressed the thoughts and fears that may be pervasive in the minds of those living in the midst of the Syrian refugee crisis. One of the fears described by participant M as well as other Syrian refugee participants in the current study was a fear for the safety and well-being of their loved ones.

**Fear for the safety of family members.** A common thread of fear for family members is apparent in the participants' narratives. Several mothers recounted their experiences of living in the war through their children's fears, such as constantly worrying about their children's nightmares, whereabouts, and mortality.

*“I stayed for eight months in Syria after my husband left to Lebanon. I was alone. I couldn’t sleep at night. When the bombs happened, my son was one years old and my daughter was four, and they would tremble. It was frightening. After that my husband came because my children couldn’t stand it. He came and took us with him to Lebanon. Even in Lebanon when it was raining and there was lightning, my children would feel frightened and I would tell them ‘there is no Bashar Al Assad, there is nothing, we are not in Syria anymore, we are in Lebanon’ but it was not easy. In Syria when the war was happening and the bombs would fall, I would put my children to sleep and lay in bed thinking “oh my God, what will happen if the bombs fall this way or that way”. I would cover them all the time with my body and be afraid. It’s not easy. I couldn’t leave them so then my husband decided to rent a house in Lebanon and he came and took us there because we couldn’t stand it.” – N, 38*

In another interview, participant S tearfully retold her understanding of her son’s disappearance and the pervasiveness of kidnappings throughout the war. She recounted the mystery and sadness associated with the experience.

*“At the beginning, we didn’t know who took him. He was with his friends outside of our door, chitchatting. He didn’t have anything on him, his ID, nothing, he just had the keys to the house. We didn’t know who took him. We didn’t know until we kept asking ‘where is my son? Where is my son?’ After two weeks, because they heard that we were asking about him, they released him. He was in bad condition, no shoes no nothing. [The military]called my husband who went to pick him up and it was not a good scene to see our son like that. [The military] tried to shoot him in the front door. We didn’t know what was happening, it was dark and it was night. They took him and accused him of untrue*

*things like 'you were trying to shoot us, why were you doing that?' I have three brothers too. They took them and we don't know anything about them yet. We don't know if they are alive or not. If I wanted to tell you stories I have a lot and they are bad, they are very bad. We went to another city and it was the same thing with the bombs and everything so we decided to go to Jordan.*" – S, 53

Participant W vividly recalled her unplanned homebirth and the simultaneously hopeless and miraculous qualities of this event. She described the bittersweet experience and the helplessness of nearby doctors. Ultimately her husband was guided through the birth by a nurse over the phone.

*"I gave birth to my son without a doctor. Without anything. During the war it was the night and I felt like I was going to give birth to my son. It was very hard. No one could come because the city was surrounded by the military and regime and we couldn't do anything. We couldn't reach a doctor. My neighbour is a doctor and he couldn't come to help. We have another doctor that was close by and she couldn't come either so my sister-in-law and husband helped me, all praises and thanks be to God, the Lord of the universe (Alhamdullilahi rabbil 'alamin). They cut the umbilical cord. That is the hardest thing to remember. All praise be to God (Alhamdullilah). After the war it was frightening. All was fear and fear. That's all that we had. The fear. I was too afraid for my children, for my husband. That's it. Fear. Fear."* – W, 37

The above quote illustrates the simultaneous love and fear that several mothers in the current study experienced pre-migration in Syria. These feelings were one of the contributors that propelled these Syrian refugees to flee. However escaping Syria to settle in neighbouring

countries for safety presented Syrian refugees with new challenges such as discrimination towards them from citizens of the host countries.

**Discrimination in Lebanon, Turkey, and Jordan.** Participants emphasized that it was no longer feasible to remain in their homeland and many migrated to neighbouring countries such as Jordan, Turkey, and Lebanon. Unfortunately it was not the safe haven they were hoping for and many described problems with facing discrimination from Turkish, Lebanese, and Jordanian citizens prior to their migration to Canada. Experiences of discrimination in Lebanon, Turkey, and Jordan are considered as part of the pre-migration context as they preceded the Syrian refugees' arrival in Canada. The findings of discrimination from citizens of neighbouring countries towards Syrian refugees is consistent with findings in the literature of growing skepticism towards and mistreatment of Syrian refugees by the host communities in the country of resettlement (Ihlamur-Öner, 2013; Parkinson & Behrouzan, 2015). Discrimination in Lebanon, Turkey, and Jordan in the current study are evaluated as part of the pre-migration stage as it preceded their arrival in Canada. The social climate in neighbouring regions towards Syrian refugees was generally taunting, cold, and unwelcoming.

*“When I was in Jordan they told me ‘don’t come back because your house is not there anymore’. When I lived in Jordan, it wasn’t easy because everyone looks at you like this (furrows brow) and asks ‘are you Syrian?’ In Jordan there are tribes and they are strict: ‘why did you leave Syria? You have to fight for your country’ and we ran away from problems, we don’t want problems. We want to live safe and be safe but they don’t understand that.” – K, 55*

*“[Our family was] separated into two different countries, some of us in Turkey, some of us in Jordan, and some of us stayed in Syria. Life in Jordan was good in the beginning*

*but it got harder with time because life was very expensive and we didn't have anything with us. They started treating us like we were abnormal. They kept calling us 'refugees refugees' and my children were really bullied. I was worried about my children and wanted them to feel safe."* – F, 37

Syrian refugee participants described receiving fewer rights than the citizens of the host countries. Further, participant K explained the blame from Jordanians that was associated with leaving Syria behind as a shameful act. Participants in the study described the shortage of resources in neighbouring countries, as reflected in the literature (Parkinson & Behrouzan, 2015). The lack of resources is particularly problematic for Syrian refugees as they were not allowed to work (Ihlamur-Öner, 2013). The financial instability that Syrian refugees experienced was exacerbated by the lack of resources and inability to be employed in Lebanon, Turkey, and Jordan.

**Financial instability.** As Syrian refugees arrive in new countries, their attempts to reestablish a life and obtain financial stability are thwarted by the costs of living and lack of access to jobs. Muslim, Arab, Syrian refugees described the blame and accusation from the citizens of Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon when they were living outside of Syria prior to their migration to Canada. Refugees were blamed for the rise in the cost of living, mistreated, and unable to work in neighbouring countries.

*"When we lived in Jordan, they always blamed us. 'You raised even the tomatoes prices,' 'you used the water in the tanks more than usual,' 'it's not good to have you in our country' but (K saying to the Jordanians) you raised the rates for rent in the houses and rooms. It's more than double. They don't allow Syrians to work in Jordan. They caught*

*my son working in Jordan so they picked him and his wife and three children up and just drove him to the border.” – K, 55*

The sense of loss was very apparent for the Syrian refugee participants. They lost not only their residence but also the little belongings they were able to salvage from Syria. Their losses were more than material possessions, it was the loss of humanity that was most disquieting.

*“They took my car, because I can’t use it, and put it in a special garage there and gave me three months either to sell it or to take it out of Jordan. Yeah so it was so difficult in Jordan. They didn’t allow us to work or do anything and we couldn’t uh how can I say this? They didn’t consider us as humans (crying).” – E, 47*

While all participants were undergoing distress in exile, it was particularly trying for Participant F, who had the added responsibility of caring for her child with a disability. Her daughter lacked the resources necessary for her rehabilitation in Jordan.

*“Life in Jordan was very difficult. I told you how expensive it is there. We also were not allowed to work there. We didn’t have a work permit. We weren’t funded there, which was especially difficult for me, I have a daughter who is completely physically and mentally disabled. She needed physical treatment and therapy and as soon as we got a chance to leave Jordan to come to Canada we took it without thinking twice.” – F, 37*

Participants in the current study explicated upon their loss of their wealth, access to vital resources, and status. Chan and Lam (2007) assert that loss of credentials, financial independence, and ethnic identity signify a greater loss of a familiar social fabric. The current study found that some Syrian refugee participants engaged in identity assertion to compensate for the many losses.

## **Panel II Personal Systems – Identity Assertion**

Interestingly, despite the adversities participants had encountered, the participants appeared to have a fond remembrance of Syria, in which their memorable lives were left behind. Panel II consists of personal systems with individual traits and self-construals often manifested in participants' interviews as an intensification of gender identity, cultural identity and ideals, and religious identity. The maintenance of social identities can provide Syrian refugees with certainty, meaning, and self-esteem (Haslam et al., 2009). When participants were asked about life in Syria prior to leaving, nearly all participants began their stories by stating that life prior to the war was pleasant. When they were discriminated against in Canada, participants asserted what they perceived to be important aspects of their various identities such as cultural values or religious ideals.

**Cultural identity.** Participants expressed their cultural identities by stating that they noticed discrepancies between Syrian collectivist and Canadian individualist cultural ideals. Cultural identity in the current study was evaluated as self-perceptions relating to collectivistic values or ethnicity. Cultural discrepancies became apparent to Syrian refugee participants during their struggle to assimilate to the host culture. As an example, participant A reported missing the unity that was pervasive in Arab, Syrian culture and felt isolated in trying to accommodate and adopt a new individualistic lifestyle in Canada.

*“We come from the East. It’s a different kind of life. We’re used to always being together. I had my family, sister, brother, extended family members like uncles. We always met together with friends.” – A, 39*

However, despite the culture shock Syrian refugee participants experienced, they also conveyed their efforts to build on previous knowledge, skills, and identity and to grow in the new



Canadian context as well. There was an interest and motivation for personal growth and to contribute in Canada, as expressed by participant E.

*“[Citizens of the host countries] think that we leave our countries because we want food or things like that. This is not the truth. We are not leaving our countries because of that. It’s different. We don’t need food or anything else but they think that every refugees has – no! We didn’t need anything. Similar to when we came to Canada, we didn’t come to Canada to sit at home and just eat and drink. We didn’t come here for that. We came here to be a useful member of society because if you don’t have a position in society you do not exist, you are nothing. I have spent about seventeen years as a lawyer. I couldn’t work any other career. I couldn’t change my career. I couldn’t make a transition. I myself wouldn’t accept that. I couldn’t work as a driver and I couldn’t stay at home. I couldn’t stay at home.” – E, 47*

However, participants had not forgotten their homeland. Holding on to Syria symbolized part of a kept identity for refugees, which is often associated with migration, when their sense of “home” is not clear due to war and danger in one’s country of origin. This serves to help preserve part of refugee participants’ identities which previous research has found to be associated with refugees’ overall well-being (Haslam et al., 2008). Some participants appeared to have very positive memories of Syria.

*“Before the war we were living a good life. Everything was good, we were happy and it was a good life.” – W, 37*

*“Before the war I had no stress, life was good.” – N, 38*

Positive perceptions of Syria and the assertion of Syrian cultural ideals are indicators of a maintained part of participants’ Syrian identities. Maintaining values from one’s heritage culture

can assist Syrian refugees in fusing those values with those of the host culture in a balanced way. The ability to successfully combine the two cultures is referred to as ‘integration’ (Berry, 1997) – an acculturation outcome that can relieve acculturative stress (Kuo & Roysircar, 2004; Torres & Rollock, 2004). Another form of identity assertion that emerged in the interviews was Syrian refugees’ commitment to religious identity.

**Religious identity.** Post-arrival to Canada, the participants also reported clinging to their religious and cultural ideologies, particularly in response to negative evaluation from others. Religious identity assertion in the current study was evaluated as those statements made by participants pertaining to self-perceptions about their level of religiosity. Additionally, there appeared to be an influence of Canadians’ reactions to Syrian refugees’ religious appearances, found in the current study. Participants who dressed in religious garb in particular reported a strengthening of religious identity in response to discrimination. Participant S had removed her face veil (*niqab*) to avoid confrontation and discrimination towards her sons, but she was very clear about her own stance regarding her religious identity. She stated that she would choose to remain steadfast in her religious practice, despite the cost.

*“We worship God. There is no God but Allah (la illaha illAllah). My husband told him ‘we are Muslims, we are from Syria, and we don’t speak English, we speak Arabic’. I don’t want to make it a tragedy. I like it this way. Even if they said to me that I am not accepted in Canada this way, it is okay with me, I will go back home. If they want something more, like ‘take off your gloves’ or ‘take off your head cover’ I don’t mind leaving Canada to go back to Syria.” – S, 53*

This quote demonstrated the breadth of participant S’s commitment to her religion and personal identity. Her dedication to her religious obligations outweighed the risks of returning to

war-torn Syria. Besides religious identity, another theme that emerged in the interviews was gender identity.

**Gender identity.** Consistent with cultural identity, several male participants reported gender identity assertion in response to stressors; this was apparent in their use of forbearance and fatalism as their coping mechanisms. Gender identity assertion in the current study was coded as those statements pertaining to behaviours conducted in accordance with traditional gender roles. For example, cultural ideals of gender roles and what constitutes coping strategies used by the male participants were informed by husbandly duties from Muslim, Arab, and Syrian culture, which appoints males as providers for their families. A male's role is outlined in religious text, such as in the hadith stating "a man is a guardian over the members of his family" (Sahih Muslim, Book 33, Hadith Number 24).

*"I have a strong heart. This is my duty as a husband a man to be strong. I don't have a choice. I have to be strong for my family. I give them courage."* – K, 55

*"Whenever I feel stress or am not feeling good I don't tell my wife because I don't want her to be uncomfortable or sad or think. I just deal with it myself."* – M, 30

It appeared that Muslim, Arab, Syrian refugees also asserted these facets of their identity to present a positive image not only within their families but also to the Canadian community in Windsor, Ontario. Consistent with prophetic teachings of loving for your brother what you love for yourself (Sahih Muslim 45, Book 1, Hadith Number 77), participants expressed a desire to help the community as good Samaritans without compromise of religious practice.

*"We try to help a little bit based on our experience. We have faced a lot of issues, the community has helped us, so now that the community has increased, we share our experiences by helping."* – M, 38

*“My hope is that we as the Muslim community give a good reflection of who we are.”* –  
L, 32

Syrian refugee participants expressed genuine care for the well-being of their families and their communities – a concept consistent with literature on collectivist cultures and their emphasis on interdependence (Triandis, 1989). Despite Syrian refugees’ efforts to remain positive, participants still suffered a number of post-migration stressors in Canada.

### **Panel III Transitory Conditions – Post-Migration Stressors**

Panel III of the model entails transitory conditions and stressors. Despite efforts to adapt in Canada, participants reported a high degree of acculturative stress. Based on the Transactional Model (Chun et al., 2006), the current study anticipated Panel III to include acculturative stress, discrimination, financial burden, survivor’s guilt and loss, intergenerational conflict and role reversals in Canada. The interview guide included questions pertaining to Syrian refugees’ challenges that have arisen since settlement in Canada, level of satisfaction with their new lives in Canada, and emotions associated with their narratives. These questions were asked to assess the stressors present in the post-migration phase of Syrian refugee participants’ journeys. Syrian refugee participants’ responses to questions about post-migration experiences confirmed that they are experiencing acculturative stress, discrimination, financial burden, and survivor’s guilt and loss. Participants’ did not however report experiencing intergenerational conflict or role reversals.

**Acculturative stress.** Acculturative stress occurred for those participants who reported a struggle in incorporating the new Canadian cultural values into their pre-existing Arab, Syrian ideals. Syrian refugee participants admitted their dilemmas in attempting to merge their Syrian

and Canadian identities. Participants struggled with the individualist nature and lifestyle of Canadian culture and Canadian lifestyle.

*“It’s not easy. I stayed for five years in Jordan. I left in the sixth year and now I’m in Canada and it’s not easy for me. Home is the best place for a person to live. It’s not easy to get used to things. I don’t know maybe in ten years from now or maybe not. It’s not easy.”* – S, 53

*“At the beginning it was very hard for the family because it is a new country and everything is new and we feel like strangers here. When we came here it’s a very different life because everyone is busy with other things, we don’t know anyone.”* – A, 39

Furthermore, nearly all participants reported difficulty mastering the English language. Participants reported feeling surprised by the level of difficulty of the language, frustration with not understanding others, and making continued efforts to learn English through classes and school programs.

*“The first challenge was language. I couldn’t imagine it would be as difficult as it was to learn.”* – E, 47

*“The language is a big barrier. When people talk to me in a language I don’t understand it’s very hard for me. I’m going to school and trying to learn the language.”* – S, 53

Difficulty learning English as a second language and adjusting to new Canadian cultural norms were not the only challenges that Syrian refugee participants faced in Canada.

Discrimination, as found in previous literature that studied refugee populations (e.g Abdi, 2015; Hassan et al., 2015), was also a major concern for Syrian refugees in the current study.

**Discrimination.** Beyond adjustment to a new lifestyle and a new language, participants also reported experiencing discrimination. The theme of discrimination is present both in the pre-

migration context in neighbouring countries of Syria and in the post-migration context in Canada. Notably those participants who reported the most amount of unwanted attention from onlookers or mistreatment in the Canadian context were also those participants who wore religious identifiers such as head coverings (*hijab*) or face veils (*niqab*).

*“When I was in front of the mall a guy saw me wearing my face veil (niqab) and he came and asked me ‘why are you wearing this? Where are you from?’ The way he looked at me was interesting as if saying ‘we are not used to this, why are you wearing this?’ When people are saying things about my head covering (hijab) or my clothing (khimar) or my face veil (niqab), my husband told me ‘just take it off, it’s okay, nothing will happen’ but I don’t want to because I am used to it. Sometimes I go outside with my sons and people stare or say things and my husband said it is not a good idea to wear it because my sons might become upset and we don’t want any problems.” – S, 53*

*“The first challenge was the face veil (niqab) because I was wearing a face veil (niqab) and they were looking at me like it was something strange even when we just landed at the Canadian airport.” – L, 32*

Syrian refugees’ experiences of discrimination in the current study corroborate Carlier’s (2017) findings of negative attitudes by North Americans towards Syrian refugees. Furthermore, Carlier (2017) posited that the quality of resettlement is influenced by sociopolitical climate. Syrian refugee participants in the current study noticed a shift in social climate and growing attitudes of hostility in North America towards Syrian refugees, as explained by Participant M. These experiences of discrimination mirrored their experiences of discrimination in Jordan, Turkey, and Lebanon.

*“When I went to the American embassy in Toronto, I felt like I was in Syria. Lots of questions, she started speaking loudly, yelling and then she said “go and sit there” all in front of my wife. I felt different. Because my background is Syrian and now they increased these problems and feelings towards us among American people” – M, 38*

The quote by participant M provides insight into Syrian refugees’ ideologies about how they are perceived by North Americans. In addition to sometimes feeling like an outsider in their new host countries, some of the Syrian refugee participants in the current study also reported struggling with financial burdens in Canada.

**Financial burden.** Besides discrimination, participants also felt the financial burden that often accompanied the refugee experience. While participants disclosed financial instability in the pre-migration phase, their post-migration financial concerns are different. Instead of financial instability, participants reported current financial burdens as they have to repay loans and grapple with the costs of establishing a new life in Canada. Many participants reported difficulty with paying back loans, rent, and obtaining enough money to sponsor family members left behind in Syria to migrate to Canada.

*“The biggest challenge for me now is money. My wife has diabetes and needs to go to the doctor all the time. I bought a car but I have to pay the lease so I pay a lot and of course we also have to pay for the airplane we came in. I don’t have the money.” – K, 55*

*“The house we rented, we paid the rent and they came back saying ‘where is the rent?’ Housing is the problem that is facing all newcomers.” – N, 38*

*“We have to pay [to sponsor] both [our son and our daughter’s families to come to Canada] and we don’t have this much money. Now we feel homeless because they separated us.” – S, 53*

Male Syrian refugee participants also reported difficulty securing employment. Participant E disclosed his distress surrounding efforts to restore his job title and status upon arrival in Canada.

*“It’s not easy to find a job.” – M, 30*

*“Another big challenge also is our education, my certificate, how can I transfer my certificate or the equivalent of my certificate? It is so difficult.” – E, 47*

In addition to difficulty providing for their families, Syrian refugee participants in the current study also reported struggling with feelings of survivor’s guilt and loss.

**Survivor’s guilt and loss.** Among the most frequently reported stressors for the Muslim, Arab, Syrian refugee participants in the current study was the resounding sadness and pain from the experience of leaving loved ones behind. Consistently, a recent study by Almoshmosh (2016) found that Syrian refugees experienced feelings of guilt regarding friends and family members that are still residing in Syria. This longing extends to parents, children, siblings, and friends who are left behind. Family, as expressed in Muslim *hadith* (e.g Sahih Muslim, Book 1, Hadith Number 77; Sahih Muslim, Book 33, Hadith Number 24) and Arab cultural idioms and quotes above, encompasses a network and community of loved ones.

*“Sad. When I remember all these days before, I feel sad. I left my neighbours, friends, and even family members. I just had my wife and children with me. Everyone else is still there. It’s sad. It’s not easy to forget your country and your family. Their memories will be always there.” – M, 30*

There is a yearning to be together again with one’s family and a discomfort in being apart. The collectivist and interdependent ideals are evident in participants’ delaying of comfort or joy until they can be reunited with those significant others.



*“My only concern is my children, my son and my daughter. They are there and I always think about them. I want them to be here (crying)” – K, 55*

*“Two days ago I was talking to my mom and the bombing started and I said “it’s okay, let’s go, close the phone” because I feel sad for them (crying). I’m afraid to lose them. It’s not easy for me I think of them all the time. I’m afraid that I will lose them because of the war. It’s not good. Sometimes at night I turn off my phone because I’m afraid to hear something bad. I lost my brother and my cousin (crying). He was younger than me. That’s why I’m afraid to hear something bad.” – N, 38*

Losing and leaving family behind represents the loss of an essential part of the self. That is part of the greater loss for Syrian refugees as they experience this throughout the migration journey. Participant W concisely described this:

*“(Crying) leaving my country, leaving my family, leaving my brothers. It’s like I am leaving my soul. It is my country.” – W, 37*

The quote by participant W demonstrates that feelings of survivor’s guilt not only extends to individuals left behind but also to the refugees’ homeland (Shoeb et al., 2007). The post-migration stressors necessitate that Syrian refugees employ coping skills to endure the distress. The current study found that religious and collective coping were commonly used to overcome stressors among the Syrian refugee participants.

#### **Panel IV Cognitive Appraisal and Coping Skills – Religious and Collective Coping**

Panel IV is of particular interest in the current study as it consists of cognitive appraisals, subjective understandings in the form of meaning making with regards to their refugee experiences and coping mechanisms employed to respond to the aforementioned stress. The dependence and connectedness of family and community for Syrian refugee participants extends

to coping strategies, as well. Coping responses that were identified in the current study included religious coping and collective coping strategies.

**Religious coping.** Religious coping was evaluated as any statements relating to religious practice or belief that facilitated a personal connection between the participant and God. Syrian refugee participants relied heavily on the omnipotent presence of God and religious practice as well as the scripture to comfort and soothe themselves in times of distress. Participants emphasized God's giving nature, as is reflected in the attributes of God described in Islam. God is also known as The Bountiful, The Generous, *Al-Karim* (Qur'an 82:6).

*"I swear to God (Wallahi) all praise be to God (Alhamdullilah) because He gave us the strength to overcome all these problems. We have good nerves (asab - this expression implies a good attitude)." – S, 53*

*"Religion is like a light for me that is leading the way. It influences how I live, I work, I meet others. When I go to Friday prayers, they keep telling us 'love each other, don't give bad looks to others, don't give them the one eleven (making angry facial expression), smile all the time.'" – K, 55*

Muslim, Arab, Syrian refugees from this study also deferred to God's will as embodied in the Quranic concept that "perhaps you hate a thing and it is good for you; and perhaps you love a thing and it is bad for you. And Allah knows, while you know not" (Qur'an 2:216).

*"First of all, it's God. He helps me whenever I feel stressed or anything uncomfortable or I am afraid of, I always pray to God. It is the most important thing. I always pray to God to help me. I tell Him "do whatever You want to do. You know best for me". Whenever I feel stressed or even unhappy or something I pray to God. The first thing I do is pray to God, I always read the Quran, and I pray. It's the first thing I do whenever I have any*

*problem or I feel stressed. I am very dependent on God, glory be to Him the most high (Allah subhanahu wa ta'ala). I always pray to God, all praises and thanks be to God, the Lord of the universe (Alhamdullilahi rabbil 'alamin). I know God. I believe in God, He has something, we don't see things the same way He sees them. Whenever He takes something He gives something better.” – L, 32*

*“He will take me another route that is better than what I was thinking because we are humans and we think “oh this is good, this is good for me” so we do only what we should do and the rest is success from (tawfiq) from God (Allah).” – M, 38*

Participant E stressed the importance of knowing his struggles were heard by God and being grateful for his journey thus far as well as his connections to a religious community, attributing it all to the will of God. He indicated that these connections and his path all represent a greater purpose for him.

*“All praise be to God (Alhamdullilah) I think and I believe that this is the most important thing that when we pray we believe that God, glory be to Him the most high (Allah subhanahu wa ta'ala). He listens to us and He helps us overcome all the hard times and we are so thankful that we are in Windsor. We have the Muslim community. We have people who are like us, we don't feel like strangers in this community. It's helped a lot. Prayer is the main thing that's helped. All praise be to God (Alhamdullilah).” – E, 47*

Reliance on God and trust in God's will provided Syrian refugee participants with a sense of comfort and relief. Additionally, participants in the current study utilized culturally congruent coping strategies apparent in their report of collective coping.

**Collective coping.** A major category of coping that emerged from the interviews is collective coping. Collective coping took on many forms, the most prominent subtypes found in

the current study were familial coping, intracultural coping, forbearance and fatalism. All participants utilized family and community in times of hardship. The aforementioned coping strategies used by Syrian refugees are consistent with the literature on commonly used coping methods in collectivist cultures (Triandis, 2001; Yeh, Arora & Wu, 2006). However, forbearance and fatalism were more common among male participants in an effort to protect the family unit from stress and adversity. Male participants considered the protection of their families to be part of their role in order to uphold cohesion and morale within the family.

***Familial coping.*** Many of the Muslim, Arab, Syrian refugee participants knew family members or friends in Windsor, Ontario that assisted them with the initial settlement process. Familial coping refers to a reliance on family members for support in times of hardship. Participants reported that the assistance with every day errands by other family members was a great help to them.

*“My husband’s cousin came two weeks before us and when we came they helped us. His cousin always came to pick us up and take us to their house and to buy things. He helped us with a lot of things. Another relative helps us with going to the doctor and things like that.” – S, 53*

During their time in Windsor, there was an unexpected strengthening of familial ties as reported by the Syrian refugee participants. Participants’ narratives depicted a prioritization of the family unit as a source of happiness for Syrian refugees.

*“I don’t have a choice. I have to be strong. I have to be strong even for my family. I give them courage, I tell them ‘we didn’t lose anybody. Nobody is martyred (shahid). Our health is good’ and I keep encouraging them. I keep giving them the strength that we are good, we are doing good (crying).” – K, 55*

*“All praise be to God (Alhamdullilah) it was my husband, he completes me. Whenever we have any trouble or conflict we manage to get through it together, all praise be to God (Alhamdullilah). Love of the family that connected us together. We went through a lot but together it was easier for us. They are always with me, they help me go through everything. We are very connected and we complete each other. I depend on them 100%.” – F, 37*

Moreover, happiness of the individual was contingent upon the happiness of their family members and children in particular. Participant M succinctly stated:

*“When my family is happy and I have a good job and I’m happy, it will be pleasant to live here. That’s my dream.” – M, 30*

In addition to the prioritization of family members over the self, there were notable gender differences in familial coping. Though there was a general concern for family members’ well-being over the self, gender and familial roles impacted whom participants considered to be the priority of their concerns. For example, husbands reported the most concern about their wives, while mothers were most concerned about their children.

*“[My wife] is a mom and a woman. She has one girl. She doesn’t have a lot. It’s not easy for her. Two days ago it was Mother’s Day so I was reading something and watching videos on YouTube and I started crying. I don’t want her diabetes to go over. I want to work and bring money and live a good life with my wife.” – K, 55*

*“They are a big support for me and every time I am down I remember that it is for my daughters’ future and I stay strong because of that. I just want to see my daughters’ have a bright future.” – F, 37*

Furthermore, differences in the children's gender were found to influence the nature of parent-child dyad dynamics. Parents of daughters had closer bonds and reported more supportive relationships, whereas parents of sons reported more concern regarding education and behaviour.

*“When I need I talk to my girls. I speak whatever I am feeling uncomfortable about.*

*That's the only thing I do. Talk to my daughters. whenever I am feeling sad they try to cheer me up or they try to joke with me to make me feel less stressed. They help me a lot, all praise be to God (Alhamdullilah).” – W, 37*

*“When we went to Jordan [my sons] didn't have anything. Just drinking, eating, going to coffee shops and such but this is not what I want for my children. I want them to be educated. That is why I came to Canada, to see my children educated.” – K, 55*

The above quotes highlight the importance of families to the participants in this study. The tendency for refugee newcomers to rely on family members for support in the resettlement process has been found in previous studies as well (e.g., Abdi, 2015; Chan & Lam, 2007; Shoeb et al., 2007). Another source of support for the Syrian refugee participants was a sense of friendship and community.

***Intracultural coping.*** Communal ties also assisted with social support and the construction of an enduring feeling of “home” for the participants. Intracultural coping was evaluated in the current study as a reliance on friends and community members to assist with satisfying their particular needs. Participants identified friends of Arab background who had already settled in Windsor, social service agencies such as the Multicultural Council of Windsor and Essex County (MCC), and educational and religious institutions as helpful resources for coping during their settlement process.

*“The MCC employees have helped me a lot. They take us outside for picnics and fun stuff. Every Saturday we go out and have fun, we play music. Groups with Syrians and other newcomers, we go outside and get the children to play games. We had one friend at the beginning, he helped us and took us shopping, to the supermarket, and showed us where to shop, where to go and now we have another friend so we have two. We bought a car and now we are good.” – N, 38*

*“The community also. I registered to volunteer in the community helping newcomers from Syria. Translating, taking them places with my car, they want to know where to get halal foods, going to the mosque to pray Friday prayers (jummah) at the very least. They want to know where to go to register for school. My neighbours, my area, the mosque and musallah, we have several WhatsApp groups to communicate and help each other so that we’re doing good. After we come here we have a lot of support. Gathering Muslims in the mosque is a big support, right?” – M, 38*

Participants found meaning in connecting with similar others, embodying the *hadith* relating to the qualities of a good friend; “one whose appearance reminds you of God (*Allah*) and whose speech increases you in knowledge and whose actions remind you of the hereafter” (Musnad Abu Ya’ala, Book 2, Hadith Number 2437). The familiarity of culture and religious spaces provided comfort and relief in a tumultuous time for the participants.

*“In the mosque I know good ladies that know a lot about religion. They help me a lot, all praise be to God (Alhamdullilah). They always give me advice that I have rely on God, the most Glorified, the most High (Allah subhanahu wa ta’ala), He can help, God is perfect, free of errors or deficiencies (SubhanAllah), He can help with everything in life.”*  
– W, 37

*“Before coming to Windsor I had a friend that lived in Windsor. When I talked to him he told me ‘it’s okay, don’t be afraid, come here. We have a mosque. We have a Muslim community here.’ I didn’t believe him because what do you mean? It’s Canada. What do you mean they have a Muslim community? But when we came here I found that it was true. I don’t feel like a stranger. It’s comforting to feel that you have somebody here that is the same as you. All praise be to God (Alhamdullilah).” – E, 47*

The quotes from participant W and participant E are also intertwined with religious concepts. However, the interpersonal involvement and the specific ways in which members of the community encourage each other are a reflection of intracultural coping. Individuals from the Muslim, Arab, and Syrian communities are attuned to the needs of similar others and provide a way for the Syrian refugee newcomers to engage in religious coping using intracultural means.

***Fatalism and forbearance.*** Unfortunately there were also participants whose family or friends could not sufficiently ease their pain. While female participants consistently reported talking to family members as a way to relieve stress, male participants appeared to rely heavily on patience, and fatalism as ways to manage their sadness. Previous research with Syrian refugees conducted by Al Akash and Boswall (2015) found that Syrian refugee females were more likely to use positive collective coping strategies as compared to males. Consistent with the findings of the current study, Al Akash and Boswall (2015) reported that females employed strategies such as prayer, talking to family and friends, and thinking of positive memories. However the male Syrian refugee participants in the current study preferred to endure stressors with forbearance and fatalism. Forbearance coping refers to the concealment of distress to uphold social harmony and avoid burdening others (Moore & Constantine, 2005), such as their children and wives. Fatalism, in the current study, refers to the belief that events are predestined



and unavoidable. While forbearance and fatalism are two separate but related constructs, they consistently emerged together throughout the interviews with Syrian refugees and were placed under one theme.

*“I am flexible (laughing). We can’t do anything, we have to go with whatever. Every day it’s the same. That’s all I can do. Sitting alone, that’s all. Every time that I don’t feel good, I sit alone and think about what’s happening. It’s just the way I am, since I was a child, whenever something happened I sat alone and just thought about it.” – M, 30*

*“I’m trying to forget everything that bothers me, leave it away. Don’t try to think about it or rethink about the things that happened that make me not positive. I just want to keep positive right now. I change my mindset. I try not think about the things that will make me stress and lead me to problems.” – A, 39*

These coping mechanisms are collectivistic and nuanced due to their familial coping tendency – participants cited the use of forbearance and fatalistic coping strategies to be best for the family unit as it shielded the family from further difficulty.

*“I was reading something and watching videos on YouTube and I started crying. My wife and two sons were sitting across the room and she noticed that something was happening because she could see that my belly was moving. Because she can’t see very well, she asked me ‘what’s wrong, are you crying?’ and I said ‘no, I am laughing’ even though I was crying but because she couldn’t see me that well I said that I was laughing because of a funny thing on YouTube. I don’t want her diabetes to go over. I hold myself (sighing).” K, 55*

The forbearance and fatalistic attitudes reflected in the above statements from Syrian refugee participants are commonly employed by individuals from collectivist cultures (Yeh et al.,

2006). Ultimately, the many stressors that Syrian refugees have undergone did not hinder their ability to engage in various coping strategies and they reported positive outcomes with regards to their resettlement in Canada.

### **Panel V Health and Well-Being –Positive Outcome**

**Positive outcomes in Canada.** Reliance on various coping strategies that involve personal resilience, communal, familial and institutional efforts have resulted in positive outcomes and overall well-being in recently arrived Muslim, Arab, Syrian refugees in Windsor, Ontario. Participants reported finding relief and security in religion and family. Many have also begun attending school programs, making friends, learning to become more fluent in English, and looking hopefully forward to opportunities for their children. When asked about hopes, dreams, and ambitions in the interviews, participants reported an overall satisfaction with life in Canada and held an optimistic outlook for their future.

*“It’s a relief for me. Friday is the day when we go to the mosque and pray and that’s the way that we are used to so when I started school I told the lady there that I can’t come to school on Fridays because I have to go pray at the mosque and she said ‘just tell your teacher that you are not coming on Fridays, no problem. Tomorrow no school’ so they respect that. We came to Canada and it’s better life, people are more open, more educated and [my sons] will be educated too so that’s why we decided to come to Canada. Now in Canada, they are getting good grades and I’m happy about that. It’s a good life in Canada, the weather is nice, the people are nice, everyone is smiling and they respect you. My children are in school, I’m happy for their education. My wife and I are learning and improving our English and I’m so happy about that.” – K, 55*

*“I am very satisfied, my future is here, the future of my children is here, all praises and thanks be to God, the Lord of the universe (Alhamdulillah rabbil ‘alamin). This is my second country now, all praises and thanks be to God, the Lord of the universe (Alhamdulillah rabbil ‘alamin). I feel happy, stress-less, relaxed. I am happy I am telling these stories and emptying my heart.” – N, 38*

*“[My husband] helps me feel less stressed inside. School too has helped me. I make friends. I went to school and going to school helped me a lot. I am slowly slowly acclimating, all praise be to God (Alhamdulillah). I am making friends, going outside, even trying to help my children at school with their homework. Now I am satisfied with myself and my life, all praise be to God (Alhamdulillah), all praises and thanks be to God, the Lord of the universe (Alhamdulillah rabbil ‘alamin). I feel like I am satisfied. I feel I am safe, my husband is safe, my children are safe, all praise be to God (Alhamdulillah). It’s the most important feeling you can have to feel safe.” - L, 32*

*“We don’t have bad dreams about tomorrow. Now it’s peaceful here in Canada. No more need.” – M, 38*

Despite the hardships that the Syrian refugee participants have endured, they reported many positive outcomes. The above quotes illuminate Syrian refugees’ resilience and capabilities to thrive and grow in their new place of resettlement in Windsor, Ontario.

## **Chapter V**

### **Discussion**

The purpose of the current study was to examine Syrian refugees' stress, context, and personal systems based on Panels I, II and III to better understand coping and outcomes in Panel IV and V of the Transactional Model of Cultural Stress and Coping (Chun et al., 2006). The first three panels outline environmental, personal, and transitory systems to determine the coping mechanisms and outcomes in Panels IV and V (Chun et al., 2006). The overlap among the panels and the interactive system of transactions between culture, context, stress and coping were evident in the participants' narratives as they capture the nuanced details associated with their migration. Refugees' experiences often did not fit neatly into categories but were rather interwoven and multidimensional in nature. The interactive nature of culture, context, stress and coping were the basis for the selection of the Transactional Model for the current study. Therefore, segments of the interviews were carefully considered based on their essence and to help answer the research questions of the current study. Participants' responses were analyzed to understand the changes and challenges that have arisen for Syrian refugees on their migration journey, coping strategies Syrian refugees have used pre- and post-migration to Canada, and Syrian refugees' perceptions regarding the importance of their Muslim identity.

The first consideration in the current study was examining the changes and challenges that have arisen for Syrian refugees on their migration journey from Syria to Canada. The results found that Syrian refugee participants reported trauma, fear for safety, discrimination from citizens of neighbouring countries, and financial instability prior to their arrival in Canada. However, Syrian refugees in the current study currently focused on their post-migration difficulties with acculturative stress and language barriers, discrimination, financial burdens, and

preoccupation with survivor's guilt and loss. The stressors faced in the pre-migration correspond with the first panel of environmental systems in the Transactional Model (Chun et al., 2006) while post-migration phases of their journeys correspond with transitory conditions in the third panel. The post-migration stressors experienced in Windsor, Ontario by Syrian refugees in the current study are common among recently arrived refugee populations residing in North America. Similar findings of acculturative stress, discrimination, and survivor's guilt and loss have been found in previous research with Iraqi refugees in Dearborn, Michigan (Shoeb et al., 2007) and Somali refugees in Boston, Massachusetts (Betancourt et al., 2015). However, the term "transitory" from the Transactional Model (Chun et al., 2006) used to describe post-migration stress in the current study implies that these stressors are constantly changing and evolving. Thus the transitory nature of stressors in the post-migration phase may account for the finding that Syrian refugee participants did not report intergenerational conflict and role reversals in the current study. Intergenerational conflict and role reversals are common stressors experienced by refugees in a country of resettlement (Abdi, 2015; Triandis 1980). However it is important to consider that the participants in the current study are recent arrivals in Canada since 2016. Therefore, the initial stages of settlement and their experiences could be subjected to change over time, giving further credence to the usage of the term "transitory" to describe stressors in Panel III of the theoretical model.

In managing their pre- and post-migration stress, the current study also sought to find the particular coping strategies utilized by Syrian refugees to overcome their previous losses from Syria and their current challenges in Canada. The Transactional Model's (Chun et al., 2006) Panels II and IV are particularly relevant to identity assertion and coping skills as both require introspection from the Syrian refugee participants. Syrian refugees must consider which aspects

of their identity to maintain and how to incorporate the host culture in Canada with their Syrian heritage culture (Berry, 2002). At the same time, Syrian refugees are in search of coping mechanisms that are culturally congruent with their values. The results from the current study show that Syrian refugee participants began to assert their cultural, religious, and gender identities when feeling discriminated against in Canada. In other words, culturally and religiously salient characteristics emerged when Syrian refugee participants felt discriminated against or threatened in some way. This process begets an identity similar to the constructed identity of “Iraqis in exile” in Dearborn. Arab refugees in America, described transmitting a modified culture in new generations to come. A newly formed culture that consisted of language, customs, but also pain (Shoeb et al., 2007). Similarly, the Syrian refugee participants from the current study reported feelings of wanting to maintain their heritage culture as well as feelings of deep pain and loss. It became apparent to the researcher that a potential motivating factor for Syrian participants to be involved in this current study was their compelling emotion. That is, the participants’ grief, guilt, pain and loss propelled them to tell their stories and have their voices heard. For example, Syrian refugee participants were eager, forthcoming, and candid regarding the grievances they had endured. Participants also expressed gratitude to the researcher at the conclusion of each interview for providing the opportunity to share and be heard in an empathetic space.

In addition to navigating their identity, Muslim, Arab, Syrian refugee participants in the current study employed similar coping strategies pre- and post-migration to cope with previous losses and current challenges. Syrian refugee participants utilized family, friends, fatalism and forbearance coping strategies; female participants relied more on intracultural and familial coping while male participants resorted to fatalistic attitudes and patience. The employed

collective coping strategies used by participants in the current study were passive, emotion-focused strategies. Su, Lee, and Vang (2005) have found passive coping techniques to be helpful in reducing depressiveness specifically for individuals from collectivist cultures. A common underlying thread among the coping mechanisms selected by Syrian refugee participants was a collectivist goal, defined in the literature as a secondary control method for self-change that uses the family and community as reference points (Kuo, 2011). One reason for the reliance on family and friends as reported by female participants could be attributed to the finding that they reported more discrimination as compared to male participants. Discrimination could lead to feeling of isolation and prompt individuals to connect with similar others in their support networks, including friends and family to gain a sense of belonging. Another potential explanation for this gender effect is that Syrian refugee females' religiosity is more outwardly apparent by their apparel, hence resulting in differential treatment by the public (Abdi, 2015).

Gender differences emerged not only in coping mechanisms but also in strengthening of gender identity, whereby males considered their duties to include protecting the family from distress. Male participants cited themselves as their own support system deliberately hiding their grief from their wives and emphasizing self-reliance. Male participants also expressed an interest in working to provide for the family and being responsible for taking the family for outings as a distraction from their sadness. Moore and Constantine (2005) suggested that individuals from collectivist cultures prefer collective coping strategies which provide meaning in the stress and coping process. However the literature has not addressed the gender differences in collective coping mechanisms that emerged in the current study. There remains a need for nuanced cultural and religious considerations in conducting research with refugee populations from collectivist cultures.

Finally, the current study examined Syrian refugees' perceptions regarding the importance of their Muslim identity as well as the relationship between their Muslim identity and their responses to adversity in their journey as a refugee. All participants underscored the importance of prayer and reliance on God for consolation, embodying cosmocentric belief systems. Syrian refugee participants in the current study reported religion to be a source of comfort, relief, and emotional support. This is consistent with research conducted by Sadr (2011) which describes cosmocentric individuals as those who endure worldly challenges by drawing strength from God. The stable and magnanimous qualities of God were emphasized perhaps to compensate for the pervasive instability and loss that participants had recently endured. Religion was used to provide hope and meaning to help interpret the occurrences in their lives were all part of a greater purpose that could not be understood and that better times awaited them. These sentiments echoed those of the Bosnian refugees that reported religious coping as restorative of hope and optimism (Ai et al., 2003).

Despite their positive religious coping and strengthening of religious identity, for some participants surprisingly there was a lack of connection and direct interaction between Syrian refugees and the Muslim community of Windsor. Participants instead expressed resentment towards a community that was not involved in sponsoring them or providing much financial relief upon their arrival in Windsor. The finding of strained ties to the religious community in Windsor, Ontario is contrary to a study conducting research with Syrian refugees in Jordan. Al Akash and Boswall (2015) found that Syrian refugee women in Jordan reported engaging in various community support groups. One reason for Syrian refugees' lack of connection to a religious community in Windsor, Ontario may be attributable to the surge of Syrian refugees that arrived in 2016. There has been a possible shortage of resources within the religious



communities to provide recent Syrian refugees. There is also the possibility that newly arrived refugees shy away from seeking support due to cultural shame (International Medical Corps, 2014). One participant described a discomfort in asking others for help stating “I can ask a friend or a family member once, twice, or three times but it’s not good to ask all the time.”

The collectivist ideals shine through the interplay among panels, as participants told narratives of fear for the safety of their family, described the self in relation to others and their culture, experienced survivor’s guilt and mourned their losses, coped in relation to others and worked to ensure the safety and happiness of others before the self. The unifying thread among the panels through stress, coping, and religiosity is collectivism and interdependence. This is one possible explanation for the unexpected finding of Syrian refugees’ fond remembrance of Syria. Fond memories serve as a more adaptive way to remain connected to their homeland compared to the upholding of beliefs such as the “myth of return”, hindering their ability to adjust to a new host culture (Al-Rasheed, 1994). Some participants admitted to an expectation that their displacement was temporary, assuming it would be a matter of months before they could resume their previous lives in Syria. However upon realizing the permanence of their migration, Muslim, Arab, Syrian refugees in the current study reported an interest in remaining in Canada – a country exemplified as a peaceful and multicultural nation. Participants’ lives in Syria were associated with family, and strong familial and marital bonds after arrival in Canada. The importance of strong familial ties could also account for the absence of intergenerational conflict and role reversals within the family units. Despite the early stage in settlement and previous traumatic experiences, participants reported contentment and unbreakable communal and familial bonds. The family as a cohesive unit embodies the concept of “wholeness” in family

systems theory, which states that the family must be understood as an integrated whole and not by its individual members (Broderick, 1993; Klein & White, 1996).

Though the current study posited that having more traumatic experiences pre-arrival would negatively impact the ease of refugees' adjustment in Canada post-arrival, participants reported having similar difficulties post-arrival regardless of pre-arrival experiences and all participants were eager to learn and grow in their new Canadian context. The use of religious coping strategies, relied heavily upon by Syrian refugee participants, were reported to be associated with comfort, relaxation, and relief. The importance of religiously oriented coping among refugees has been found in numerous studies as a response to experiences of adversity (e.g., Abdi, 2015; Dorais, 2007; Shoeb et al., 2007). The sense of relief and positivity reported by Syrian refugees' in the current study is indicative of positive outcomes in Panel V of the Transactional Model (Chun et al., 2006). Furthermore, religious accommodations, such as exemption from classes for Friday prayers, provided in their new environment in Canada was associated with positive outcomes, greater satisfaction and feeling respected. Interviews revealed a gratefulness on the part of Syrian refugees towards the Canadian government, their primary sponsor, and a satisfaction with the treatment they received from the residents of Canada as compared to their experiences in Jordan, Turkey, and Lebanon. Canada provided the Syrian refugees the opportunity to replenish their resources.

The results of the current study further illustrate the need for theoretical models that can elucidate stress, coping, and social context for conducting research with refugee populations. The Transactional Model (Chun et al., 2006) comprehensively entails all aspects of the migrant journey and illustrates the interactions and complexities within and between panels. Thus, the findings from the current study were most suitably informed and interpreted by the Transactional

Model of Cultural Stress and Coping (Chun et al., 2006). The theoretical model used to guide and inform the current research study suggests that environmental systems, personal systems, and transitory conditions influence cognitive appraisals and coping methods that are selected to predict health and well-being. The current study confirms that this process was evident in the Syrian refugee journey. While the model outlines the interactive systems of context, culture, stress, and coping, there is no explicit mention of religious beliefs or values. Panel II of the Transactional Model (Chun et al., 2006) encompasses personal systems and cultural contexts. For the purposes of the current study, religious identities were included as a theme within Panel II. The complexities of religious and cultural identities as well as how they influenced coping strategies was demonstrated in the current study. The Transactional Model (Chun et al., 2006) could be modified to include religious considerations, given the importance of religious identities to refugees in the literature (e.g. Abdi, 2015; Ai et al. 2003; Shoeb et al., 2007) and the findings of this study. In the present study, religious identity corresponded with personal and cosmocentric, connections with an omnipotent being for meaning making. Cultural identities however led to intracultural coping through friends and community members. The nuances of Syrian refugees' multifaceted identities were captured and illustrated through narratives in the current study. A shortcoming of the Transactional Model (Chun et al., 2006), however, was that the distinction of religious and cultural identity was not addressed but grouped into a larger concept of personal systems.

Overall, the use of Transactional Model (Chun et al., 2006) in guiding the current study revealed that participants' experiences were well represented within the panels. While not all aspects of the Syrian refugee experience fit neatly into a panel, the panels were broad enough to encompass a variety of codes. As themes emerged from the transcripts they were incorporated

into the larger framework of the theoretical Transactional Model (Chun et al., 2006). The Transactional Model (Chun et al., 2006) posits a predictive sequence whereby Panels I, II, and II, environmental, personal, and transitory systems, respectively, influence Panel IV and the coping strategies used to predict outcomes in Panel V.

Considering the temporal relationships among the panels of the Transactional Model (Chun et al., 2006) it is possible that the Syrian refugee stress and coping experiences follow a similar sequential pattern as specified in the model. Syrian refugee participants reported that their environmental systems included many traumatic experiences of war, fear, discrimination, and financial concern during their displacement pre-migration. It is possible that the environmental stressors led Syrian refugee participants to employ personal systems such as their culture, religion, and gender to better establish a sense of self and to strongly hold on to their cultural values. Syrian refugees' cultural, religious, and gender identities manifested in Syrian refugees' struggle to define "home" and assert their cohesive identities, particularly in the face of challenges in Canada. Challenges in the post-migration context of Canada for Syrian refugee participants included continuous difficulties with discrimination and financial burden. However there was also the addition of acculturative stress for Syrian refugees, particularly with regards to language learning, and their survivor's guilt and loss of family members. Thus, Syrian refugees' tumultuous pre-migration environments in combination with their personal systems and transitory post-migration stressors may have influenced the coping strategies they implemented.

Syrian refugees' reliance on collective and religious coping align with their personal systems and identities. Participants reported relying on family members, community members, educational institutions, social services agencies and their connections with religion through times of distress. Positive cognitive appraisals were used to surmount the challenges they faced

pre- and post- migration and to maintain their resilience and hope for their new lives in Canada. It is likely that using culturally congruent coping mechanisms to overcome pre- and post-migration adversities resulted in positive outcomes for Syrian refugees new lives in Canada. Not only did Syrian refugee participants manage to survive their struggles, they also began to thrive in their new homes in Canada where they reported feelings of safety, satisfaction, and optimism for their families' futures.

### **Implications for Research and Practice**

The current study identified areas of difficulty and sources of strength and resilience for Syrian refugees in their transition to Canada. The current study implemented an idiographic approach to data analyses guided by the comprehensive Transactional Model of Cultural Stress and Coping (Chun et al., 2006). Further research on Syrian refugee populations is necessary to gain a more holistic understanding of their stress and coping processes. Theoretical models such as the Transactional Model (Chun et al., 2006) that addresses social and cultural contexts are necessary for conducting research with refugee or ethnic minority populations. Theoretical models that pay special attention to social contexts as well as individual characteristics ensure that all areas of participants' experiences are addressed and explored. The application of the Transactional Model (Chun et al., 2006) in the current study provided a tangible example of the theory. The results of the current study illuminate the interactive systems and transactions among culture, context, stress and coping. The coding process and emerging themes in the interviews which corresponded to each panel, as depicted in Table 1.0, illustrate the interplay of the constructs within each panel.

Key findings included participants' prominent complaint of discrimination but also of immense appreciation for the respect they have received from their host society. While these

findings seem paradoxical, acculturative stress in the form of discrimination is common for newcomers during resettlement (Berry, 1997). Despite reporting some negative experiences, Syrian refugee participants' feelings of safety, security, and hope for the future appeared to have outweighed any adversities in their migration journeys. Additionally, local social service agencies and programs designed for refugees were highlighted as a helpful resource for support and guidance. Moreover, participants appreciated respect for and understanding of their religious practices such as exemption from classes on Fridays for prayer. These findings together suggest that institutions such as the MCC, the mosques, and school programs which cater to and accommodate the specific needs of refugee populations should work closely with refugees to facilitate better adjustment for them in Canadian culture.

Many institutions and policies are involved in the integration of newcomers to Canada. The findings from this research suggest that cultural sensitivity is a necessary component in support services. Participants noted the MCC and their group activities as a source for intracultural coping, where they could connect with individuals with similar ethnic and refugee backgrounds. Identifying areas of difficulty for refugees in Windsor such as acculturation, discrimination, financial burden and survivor's guilt and loss can inform social service agencies on how to best allocate their resources. Providing newcomers with affordable and accessible resources to aid with the difficulties they have expressed will result in easier transitions to Canada for improved mental health outcomes.

With regards to mental health, clinicians, counsellors, and psychologists can assist the integration of Syrian refugees in Canada. Given the traumatic experiences that Syrian refugees have endured, they may benefit from services addressing emotional distress. As noted previously, a possible motivator for participation in the current study was the opportunity to

share their stories, struggles, pain, and loss with those that were willing to empathetically listen. This speaks to the power of empathy and validation. It is also an indicator that Syrian refugees may be interested in counselling and can benefit from psychological services that provide an emotion-focused approach to exploring their pain. It is important that clinicians are aware of cultural idioms, expressions, and contexts when treating clients of diverse backgrounds. Culturally competent care could normalize Syrian refugees' difficulties with adapting to a new culture. Furthermore, clinicians could serve as advocates, connecting clients with local educational, employment, and newcomer services to create a support network for Syrian refugees. In addition to social service agencies and clinical services, religious institutions are also involved in easing the transition for refugees in Canada.

Religious institutions can also benefit from understanding refugees' needs, as they typically offer emergency relief and assistance in settlement processes globally (Gozdziak & Shandy, 2002). However, the results of the current study suggest that Syrian refugees in Windsor are not directly involved with religious communities and would prefer to have assistance and involvement from the Muslim community. Additionally, the results of this study found that those Syrian refugee participants that were involved in their religious communities were interested in helping others. Furthermore, the Syrian refugee participants of the current study stressed the importance of religious coping practices. Windsor mosques have the unique opportunity to provide a sense of community, group membership, and a space to facilitate religiously oriented coping. Organized community efforts and religious spaces have been integral to the well-being of Iraqi refugees (Shoeb et al., 2007), Southeast Asian refugees (Dorais, 2007), and Somali refugees (Betancourt et al., 2015) in North America.

Other relevant organizations involved in the creation of a community for refugees are educational institutions. Educational institutions were reported by Syrian refugees in the current study to be a source of optimism. Learning the English language provided them with feelings of confidence and competence. Participants emphasized the mobility that accompanied learning English as they could now make friends, independently run errands, and assist their children with schoolwork. This parallels the finding the education has been associated with how successfully migrant families cope with migration stressors (Yakushko et al., 2008). Educational institutions have a large role in assisting refugees with their acculturation processes. Teachers' accommodations for religious observances was reported by participants to be a sign of respect. Educational institutions serve the role of socializing and mobilizing newcomers to Canada. In addition to institutions, governmental policies also play a role in determining how well refugees are adjusting in Canada.

Government policies in Canada have been evolving over time to reflect the inclusive Canadian culture of a mosaic. Participants were very grateful to the Canadian government for their role as a sponsor and Justin Trudeau's decision to admit 25,000 Syrian refugees to Canada in 2016. Hostility against refugees has increased in neighbouring countries of Syria and the rate of Islamophobia is growing in North America as well (Carlier, 2017). Thus the continued growth as a nation moving towards social harmony, acceptance, and the dismantling of racist and prejudicial views is integral for positive outcomes among newcomers in Canada.

The Syrian refugee participants of this study expressed a desire to succeed, excel, and grow to become significant contributors in their current Canadian context. Successful integration and overall mental health outcomes depend on available supports, psychological interventions, and adjustment in Canada over time. Muslim, Arab, Syrian Refugee populations are especially



prone to mental health concerns (Hassan et al., 2015) and Muslims face many barriers to seeking help (Inayat, 2007). The current study underscores the importance of avoiding assumptions based on group characteristics and being sensitive to individuals' personal experiences to successfully balance universal experiences and individual perspectives (Arthur & Collins, 2010). Culturally sensitive counseling is of utmost importance when assisting newcomers. Therefore, collaboration between institutions, support services, and motivated newcomers can foster a welcoming community and environment that will lead to the achievement of dismantling barriers to encourage the sharing of important skills and resources within a cohesive society.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

The results of this study illuminate the influence of religious and cultural contexts of Syrian refugees and underscore the importance of including these factors in services available to refugee populations. Thus, the qualitative nature of the study was intended to study specific issues of stress, coping, and religiosity. Additionally, the research was conducted using a small, homogenous sample with very specific inclusion criterion with regards to age, time spent living in Canada, ethnicity, and religious affiliation of the Syrian refugee sample. However, an unexpected commonality shared by all the participants in this study was their unemployment due to their short time in Canada. Although this was not selected for, participants' unemployed status may have impacted the study's findings in some way. For example, it is possible that once participants obtain employment, their family dynamics may change and role reversal patterns may begin to emerge over time. Another factor which was not controlled for in this present study was that some participants were couples and married to other respondents. Although each story was unique some commonalities may have been due to shared experiences as couples. Moreover, the research was conducted in the Windsor region, which influences the specific resources

available within the city, the representation of cultural groups of similar ethnicity, and the availability of religious communities. Therefore, while similarities with Syrian refugees globally emerged, the findings from the current study cannot be generalized to all Syrian refugees migrants.

The Syrian refugee narratives provide an in-depth understanding of their journeys and meaning-making processes. The theoretical model was chosen to guide the analyses of the data based on comprehensiveness and incorporation of stress, coping, and culture. The Transactional Model's (Chun et al., 2006) inclusion of the essential components of stress, coping, and culture made it an optimal choice for guiding the formulation and analyses of the current study. However, the model did not include religious identity considerations, which were demonstrated by the findings of the current study to be an important factor in stress and coping processes of Syrian refugees. Thus, a potential limitation of the study is the use of a theoretical model that did not account for the influence of religious affiliation of the current refugee sample. Religious identity assertions in the current study were however closely related to and influenced by cultural factors and therefore grouped into the same panel. Given that most elements being examined in the current study were part of the interactive systems outlined by Chun and colleagues (2006), it was the most accurate available model with regards to fit, which rendered the creation of a model based on an exploratory analysis obsolete. Instead, the study can suggest a revision of the model and provide evidence for the necessity of incorporating religious identities, influences, and considerations. Modifying the model in such a way would create a better fit with regards to addressing refugee populations' stress and coping.

Additional limitations include the difficulty of ensuring full disclosure, trust, and honesty on the part of the participants in the sample. To obtain information of a sensitive nature, the data

for the current study was gathered through individual interviews. This method allows researchers to collect data of a sensitive nature while ensuring confidentiality and providing the opportunity for detail in the interaction (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Kuzel, 1999). While the individual interview method provided a safe space for disclosure of personal narratives some participants initially appeared to be skeptical about the interview process. One participant in particular required more time and elaboration of the consent forms and reassurance that the outlined confidentiality procedures would be adhered to, specifically with regards to audio recording. As refugees it is likely that participants from this study had previously been required to discuss some of the topics that arose during the interviews from authorities involved in their migration process. However mistrust of authorities is a salient concern among refugees (Ai et al., 2003). If interviews were reminiscent of important documentation used to assess their eligibility for certain access, it is possible that some participants may not have been comfortable sharing unreservedly.

Therefore, potential limitations of the study pertain to generalizability, model fit, and the possibility that certain participants may have withheld information during the interview process. This can manifest as the possibility of overreporting satisfaction with their lives in Canada for social desirability reasons, impression management, or to avoid appearing ungrateful. Thus, a potential future direction to minimize confounds of distrust or undue influence would be to remove the impact of a researcher by administering questions through a diary method. The qualitative diary method would allow participants to record responses in an anonymized diary without having to interact with a researcher or interpreter face-to-face. The major advantage to this method for the purposes of a study such as the current one includes the removal of a perceived authority figure and a lack of retrospective bias (Ohly, Sonnentag, Niessen, & Zapf,

2010). Furthermore, another potential future direction could be to have an additional coder examine the transcripts or diary entries naïve to a theoretical framework, thereby conducting an exploratory analysis, to assess for model fit. The limitations of the current study illustrate the importance of protecting identities of participants and allowing them to be heard by considering the influence of context on their multifaceted identities.

### **Conclusion**

The current study seeks to contribute to the growing research on Syrian refugees, highlighting stories of resilience and coping in the framework of the Transactional Model of Cultural Stress and Coping (Chun et al., 2006) with a population that has undergone many adversities. The Muslim, Arab, Syrian refugees interviewed in the current study reported suffering traumatic experiences in Syria and neighbouring countries prior to their arrival in Canada. While Canada has provided the safety they were seeking, they continuously experience acculturative stress, discrimination, financial burden, and feelings of survivor's guilt and loss. Drawing on cultural and religious identities and coping strategies, Syrian refugee participants engaged in collective and religiously oriented coping strategies to achieve positive acculturation outcomes in Canada. The study draws attention to understanding and framing refugee experiences in the appropriate cultural and religious lens in order to provide Muslim, Arab, Syrian refugees with the appropriate support and assistance needed for better adjustment, acculturation, and resettlement outcomes in Canada.

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**Appendix A – Interview Guide**

- What was your life like in Syria before you decided to leave? (Providing context)
- What were the circumstances and the precipitating factors in your decision to leave? How did you get here? (Pre-migration and migration)
- What were some of the challenges you faced prior to leaving? What were some of the challenges you faced on your way to Canada? (Pre-migration and migration stress)
- What challenges have arisen since your settlement in Canada? How satisfied are you with life in Canada so far? (Post-migration)
- Who is living with you in Canada? Please describe the relation and not their names. If you are currently living with your family in Canada, how has your family dynamic (e.g., relationships with your spouse, child, parents, siblings, and/or extended family members) changed since moving to Canada? (Post- migration stress – specifically role reversal, intergenerational conflict)
- What are the most important emotions associated with the stories you just told me? What is your experience right now as you re-tell your story? (Stress)
- What and/or who helped you overcome the challenges? How did you cope with previous stressors? How are you coping with stress now? (Coping)
- For some, it is important that they cope with the help of friends and family. To what extent, in your life, do you rely on friends and family to deal with a problem? What role have your friends and family played in helping you since you moved to Canada? Give examples. (Collective coping)
- Some also consider religion an important method for their coping. When you encounter difficulties or face stress to what extent do you use dhikr, prayer (*salah*), and Quran, to overcome challenges? How helpful do you find them to be and why? (Religious coping)

— How involved are you in the Muslim community in Windsor, Ontario? What role has the Muslim community had in your transition to Windsor if any? Give examples. (Religious identity)

— What are your hopes, dreams, and ambitions for the future in Canada? If you could have things your ideal way, what would that look like? (Ending on a positive note)

— Is there anything you would like to add to our discussion today?

## Appendix B – Consent Form



University  
of Windsor

### CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Title of Study: Stress, Coping, and Religiosity among Recent Syrian Refugees in Canada

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. My name is Sara Keshavarzi and I am a Master's student of clinical psychology, supervised by Dr. Ben Kuo, at the University of Windsor. Currently, I am conducting research on stress, coping and religious identity among recently arrived Syrian refugees.

Should any questions or concerns arise after the interview has been completed, you are encouraged to contact me ([keshava1@uwindsor.ca](mailto:keshava1@uwindsor.ca), 519-804-xxxx) or my supervisor, Dr. Ben Kuo ([benkuo@uwindsor.ca](mailto:benkuo@uwindsor.ca), 519-253-3000 ext. 2238), at any time.

#### PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The focus of this research is to conduct interviews with Muslim, Arab, Syrian refugees that have been residing in Windsor for less than two years. The goal of this research is to understand the nature of their stress, how they are coping, and to what extent religiosity has helped in the migration process. This research utilizes a qualitative research methodology approach to draw out themes that can have implications for assisting refugee newcomers with their transition to Canada.

#### PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to:

Engage in an open-ended interview at the Multicultural Clinical and Counselling Research Group (MCCRG) Lab on the University of Windsor campus. The interview will involve answering twelve questions about your migration journey, the stressors you have encountered, and how you are coping with them. An interpreter from the Multicultural Council (MCC) of Windsor and Essex County, will translate my questions into Arabic, you will be provided the opportunity to respond in Arabic, and your answers will be translated to me in English for further discussion and elaboration if necessary. The interpreter will be fluent in both Arabic and English to translate the interview questions and answers and all other necessary communication during the interview process. Interpreters from the MCC are provincially accredited and bound to maintaining confidentiality. The duration of the interview will be approximately one hour.

#### POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

If you should become uncomfortable in discussing sensitive matters at any point during the interview you have the right to decline in answering any particular question. You also have the right to withdraw from the study at any point during the interview. I have also attached a mental health resource list in English and in Arabic, developed by Dr. Kuo and students at the University of Windsor, should you require further mental health services and support.

#### POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

Benefits to the participants from their involvement in this research are that participants will gain access to resources and may become aware of services available to them through the distribution of a mental health resource list and self-care tip sheet. This study provides the opportunity to tell the Syrian refugee story in a safe space where it will be heard and utilized to contribute to the dialogue about refugees in Canada. The data collected in this research can contribute to increased awareness and understanding of the Syrian refugee experience and for potentially improved policies and services for newcomers.

#### COMPENSATION FOR PARTICIPATION

You will receive a gift for participation and compensation for your parking fees.



## CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. Our interview will be audiotaped to accurately capture your experiences and insights in your own words. The tapes will be encrypted and then transcribed two weeks after the completion of the interview and your statements will be utilized for a thematic analysis and for inclusion in the study. Once transcribed, the audiotapes will be destroyed, thereby anonymizing your data. Though direct quotes from our interview may be used in the study, your name and other identifying information will be kept confidential. Everything that you disclose during the interview will be confidential between you, the researcher Sara Keshavarzi, the language interpreter, and my supervisor Dr. Ben Kuo, and a research assistant Zoha Salam, who will assist in the analysis of data. The only exceptions to the confidentiality are reports of harm to yourself or others, child abuse, and/or medical malpractice, as it is our ethical duty to report these concerns to the appropriate authorities.

## PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

If you choose to withdraw from the study all of your information (including audiotapes) will be destroyed and omitted from the final paper. You may also choose to withdraw your data after the completion of the interview for up to **two weeks**. After two weeks your interview will be transcribed and anonymized and audiotapes will be destroyed. Therefore the data cannot be withdrawn as it will no longer be identifiable.

## FEEDBACK OF THE RESULTS OF THIS STUDY TO THE PARTICIPANTS

If you are interested in the research findings, they will be made available through the use of this website (<http://www1.uwindsor.ca/reb/study-results>) by the Fall of 2018.

## SUBSEQUENT USE OF DATA

These data may be used in subsequent studies, in publications, and in presentations.

## RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact: Research Ethics Coordinator, University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario, N9B 3P4; Telephone: 519-253-3000, ext. 3948; e-mail: [ethics@uwindsor.ca](mailto:ethics@uwindsor.ca)

## AGREEMENT OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

I understand the information provided for the study on Stress, Coping, and Religiosity among Recent Syrian Refugees in \_\_\_\_\_ Canada as described herein. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

## SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

These are the terms under which I will conduct research.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Investigator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix C – Arabic Consent Form

### الموافقة على المشاركة في البحث

#### عنوان الدراسة: الإجهاد والتأقلم والتدين بين اللاجئين السوريين في كندا

شكرا على موافقتك على المشاركة في هذه الدراسة. اسمي سارة كيشافارزي وأنا طالبة ماجستير في علم النفس السريري، تحت إشراف الدكتور بن كو، في جامعة وندسور. وفي الوقت الراهن، أجري بحثا حول التوتر والتكيف والهوية الدينية بين اللاجئين السوريين الذين وصلوا مؤخرا إلى كندا.

في حالة وجود أي أسئلة أو مخاوف بعد انتهاء المقابلة، يتم تشجيعك على الاتصال بي (keshava1@uwindsor.ca، 804-xxxx (519) أو المشرف الخاص بي، الدكتور بن كو (benkuo@uwindsor.ca، 253-3000 (519) تحويلة 2238) في أي وقت.

#### الغرض من الدراسة:

يركز هذا البحث على إجراء مقابلات مع لاجئين مسلمين عرب سوريين تتراوح أعمارهم بين 30 و55 عاما يقيمون في وندسور لمدة تقل عن سنتين. الهدف من هذا البحث هو فهم طبيعة الإجهاد، وكيفية التعامل معه، وإلى أي مدى ساعد التدين في عملية الهجرة. ويستخدم هذا البحث منهجية البحث النوعي لاستخلاص مواضيع يمكن أن تترتب عليها آثار بالنسبة لمساعدة القادمين الجدد من اللاجئين خلال انتقالهم إلى كندا.

#### إجراءات:

إذا كنت تتطوع للمشاركة في هذه الدراسة، سوف يطلب منك:

المشاركة في مقابلة مفتوحة في مختبر فريق البحوث متعددة الثقافات السريرية (Multicultural Clinical and Counselling Research Group (MCCRG) Lab) في حرم جامعة وندسور. ستشمل المقابلة الإجابة على اثنتي عشرة سؤالاً حول رحلة الهجرة، والإجهادات التي واجهتها، وكيفية التعامل معها. سوف يترجم مترجم من المجلس الثقافي المتعدد الثقافات في وندسور ومقاطعة إسكس (Multicultural Council (MCC) of Windsor and Essex County) أسئلتني إلى اللغة العربية، وسوف تتاح لك الفرصة للرد باللغة العربية، وسوف تترجم إجاباتك لي باللغة الإنجليزية لمزيد من المناقشة إذا لزم الأمر. سوف يجيد المترجم اللغتين العربية والإنجليزية لترجمة أسئلة وأجوبة المقابلة وجميع المحادثات الضرورية الأخرى أثناء عملية المقابلة. والمترجمون الشفويون معتمدون في المقاطعات ويتعهدون بالحفاظ على السرية. وستكون مدة المقابلة حوالي ساعة واحدة.

#### المخاطر المحتملة وعدم الارتياح:

إذا شعرت بعدم الارتياح في مناقشة المسائل الحساسة في أي لحظة أثناء المقابلة لديك الحق في رفض الإجابة على أي سؤال. لديك أيضا الحق في الانسحاب من الدراسة في أي وقت أثناء المقابلة.

إذا كنت بحاجة إلى مزيد من خدمات الصحة النفسية، فقد أرفقت قائمة موارد الصحة النفسية باللغتين الإنجليزية والعربية، التي وضعها الدكتور بن كو والطلاب في جامعة وندسور.

### الفوائد المحتملة للمشاركين وللمجتمع:

فوائد المشاركين في هذا البحث هي أنهم سوف يحصلون على الموارد ويمكن أن يصبحوا أعلى علم بالخدمات المتاحة لهم من خلال توزيع قائمة موارد الصحة النفسية وورقة معلومات الرعاية الذاتية. توفر هذه الدراسة الفرصة لإخبار قصة اللاجئين السوريين في مكان آمن حيث يتم سماعها واستخدامها للمساهمة في الحوار حول اللاجئين في كندا. يمكن للبيانات التي تم جمعها في هذا البحث أن تساهم في زيادة الوعي والفهم لتجربة اللاجئين السوريين واحتمال تحسين القوانين والخدمات للقادمين الجدد.

### التعويض عن المشاركة:

سوف تتلقى هدية للمشاركة وتعويض عن رسوم وقوف السيارة الخاصة بك.

### السرية:

ستظل المعلومات التي يتم الحصول عليها في هذه الدراسة سرية ولن يتم الكشف عنها إلا بإذن منك. مقابلتنا سيتم تسجيلها صوتياً لنتمكن من التعرف بدقة على خبراتك في كلماتك. سيتم تشفير الأشرطة ومن ثم كتابتها بعد أسبوعين من الانتهاء من المقابلة وسيتم استخدام البيانات الخاصة بك لتحليل مواضيعي وإدراجها في الدراسة. بعد نسخ الأشرطة الصوتية سيتم إتلافها، وبالتالي إخفاء هوية البيانات الخاصة بك. وعلى الرغم من إمكانية استخدام اقتباسات مباشرة من مقابلتنا في الدراسة، فسيتم الاحتفاظ بسرية معلوماتك الشخصية الأخرى. كل ما تفصح عنه أثناء المقابلة سيكون سرياً بينك وبين الباحثة سارة كيشافارزي ومترجم اللغات والمشراف الدكتور بن كو والباحثة المساعدة زها سلام التي ستساعد في تحليل البيانات. الاستثناءات الوحيدة للسرية هي تقارير عن الضرر الذي يلحق بنفسك أو بالآخرين والذي قد يعرض شخص ما للخطر، أو إساءة معاملة الأطفال مثل سوء معاملة الطفل، و / أو سوء الممارسة الطبية مثل الإساءة أو التحرش من أخصائي صحي مسجل، وواجبنا الأخلاقي الإبلاغ عن هذه المخاوف للسلطات المختصة.

### المشاركة والانسحاب:

إذا اخترت الانسحاب من الدراسة سيتم تدمير جميع المعلومات الخاصة بك (بما في ذلك الأشرطة الصوتية) وحذفها من الورقة النهائية. يمكنك أيضاً اختيار سحب البيانات الخاصة بك بعد الانتهاء من المقابلة لمدة تصل إلى أسبوعين. بعد أسبوعين سيتم نسخ المقابلة الخاصة بك وستصبح مجهولة الهوية وسيتم تدمير الأشرطة الصوتية. ولذلك لا يمكن سحب البيانات بعد ذلك لأنها لن تكون قابلة للتحديد.

### نتائج هذه الدراسة للمشاركين:

إذا كنت مهتماً في نتائج البحث، فهي ستكون متاحة بحلول خريف عام 2018 على هذا الموقع (<http://www1.uwindsor.ca/reb/study-results>)

**الاستخدام اللاحق للبيانات:**

يمكن استخدام هذه البيانات في الدراسات اللاحقة وفي الأبحاث المنشورة وفي العروض التقديمية.

**حقوق المشاركين في البحث:**

إذا كانت لديك أسئلة تتعلق بحقوقك كمشارك بحثي، يرجى الاتصال بمجلس أخلاقيات البحوث من جامعة وندسور، Research Ethics Board of University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario, N9B 3P4 هاتف: (519) 3000-253 داخلي 3948، أو عن طريق البريد الإلكتروني على: [ethics@uwindsor.ca](mailto:ethics@uwindsor.ca)

**اتفاقية المشاركة في البحث:**

أنا أفهم المعلومات المقدمة للدراسة حول الإجهاد، والتأقلم، والتدين بين اللاجئين السوريين الذين وصلوا مؤخرا إلى كندا كما هو موضح هنا. تم الرد على أسئلتي، وأوافق على المشاركة في هذه الدراسة. تم إعطائي نسخة من هذا النموذج.

**توقيع الباحث:**

سأجري البحث بموجب هذه الشروط.

التاريخ

التوقيع

الباحث

## Appendix D – Coding Rubric

### Legend for Panels

- panel 1** = environmental systems, such as enduring social climates, stressors, and resources  
 >encompasses the specific settings in which Syrian refugees live such as the social climate in the country they reside in, their families or work settings  
 > social climate, skepticism, and hostility toward refugees has been found to be growing
- panel 2** = personal systems, consisting of individual traits and abilities, unique to each person  
 > involve cognitions, behaviours, emotions, personality traits, attributions, motivations, and self-construals
- panel 3** = transitory conditions and stressors  
 > transitory conditions, asserting that cultural and social factors dictate life events  
 >financial instability, problems within the family unit, physical and mental health concerns and the experience of discrimination
- panel 4** = cognitive appraisal and coping necessitate a coping response
- panel 5** = which is health and well-being  
 >positive outcomes

### Pre-Migration and Migration Stress and Trauma

\_\_ Environmental systems

### Post-Migration Stress in the form of:

- \_\_ Acculturative stress
- \_\_ Role reversal
- > \_\_ Gender Identity (related to gender roles)
- \_\_ Intergenerational conflict
- \_\_ Financial burdens
- \_\_ Survivor's guilt and loss
- > \_\_ Mental well-being
- > \_\_ Physical well-being
- \_\_ Discrimination

### Coping

- \_\_ Collective coping
- > \_\_ Cultural identity (making note of their way of life). Also related to identity struggle
- > \_\_ Familial coping
- > \_\_ Intracultural coping
- > \_\_ Forbearance
- > \_\_ Fatalism
- \_\_ Religious coping
- > \_\_ Religious Identity (asserting that they are Muslim, explicitly). Also related to identity struggle
- \_\_ Positive outcomes

## Appendix E – Coded Transcript

Initial Comments	Transcription	S Codes	Z Codes	Resolved Codes
Fond remembrance of Syria despite adversity	S: What was your life like in Syria before you decided to leave?			
	M: It was bad lately. The last two years of it was not good but before that it was good.	Panel I – Premigration Stress & Trauma	Panel I – Premigration Stress & Trauma	
	S: Can you describe before that how it was?			
Fear of uncertainty	M: Like a normal life with family, I had a job and a good life, a normal one.	Panel II – Cultural identity	No Code	Panel II – Cultural identity
	S: What happened that made you want to leave? What were the circumstances and the precipitating factors in your decision to leave?			
	M: War	Panel I – Premigration Stress & Trauma	Panel I – Premigration Stress & Trauma	
Traumatic experiences	S: War, yeah so how was your life? What was happening at the time?			
	M: Life became difficult because you never know, you could lose a part of your body or lose a family member anytime. It's not safe.	Panel I – Premigration Stress & Trauma	Panel I – Premigration Stress & Trauma	
	S: So what was happening? What was going on?			
	M: War. The city I was living in wasn't bad but the war became closer because I	Panel I – Premigration	Panel I – Premigration	

	<p>lived in the city. It wasn't that bad but it came. I heard the bombs and everything.</p> <p>S: So how did you get here?</p> <p>M: What do you mean?</p> <p>S: How did you come on a boat or a plane?</p> <p>M: Airplane.</p> <p>S: What were some of the challenges you faced prior to leaving? Was it difficult to find a plane ticket or arrange to leave? What was that like?</p> <p>M: I left Syria to Jordan first and then I came here so the flight wasn't hard.</p> <p>S: How did you get to Jordan?</p> <p>M: I walked.</p> <p>S: With your whole family?</p> <p>M: Yes. When we left our home we walked and we were close to Jordan and when we entered it was just five minutes walking to enter Jordan and then the Jordanian army saw us and picked us up and it was okay. They did everything.</p> <p>S: Okay</p>	<p>Stress &amp; Trauma</p>	<p>Stress &amp; Trauma</p>	
<p>Casual usage of religious terminology</p>	<p>M: The last two years in we lived in Syria was the hard part and then we left to</p>	<p>Panel I – Premigration Stress &amp;</p>	<p>Panel I – Premigration Stress &amp;</p>	

<p>when speaking of traumatic experiences</p>	<p>Jordan and lived there for five years before coming to Canada. It was a normal life in Jordan, all praise be to God (<i>Alhamdullilah</i>).</p> <p>S: What was it like in Jordan?</p> <p>M: I worked and I had my family with me, all praise be to God (<i>Alhamdullilah</i>), so it was a normal life.</p> <p>S: Why did you decide to leave Jordan?</p>	<p>Trauma</p>	<p>Trauma</p>	
<p>Admiration for Canada</p>	<p>M: (laughing) because Canada is better than Jordan.</p> <p>S: What were some of the challenges you faced on your way to Canada? From Syria to Jordan to Canada what was difficult about that journey?</p> <p>M: When we left from Syria to Jordan it was just five minutes walking but the only hard thing was that when we left from Jordan to Canada it was a long flight and we waited a long time in Germany and Toronto. It was a long time waiting like four hour, six hours.</p> <p>S: What challenges have arisen since your settlement in Canada?</p>			
<p>Experiencing acculturative stress in terms</p>	<p>M: <b>The language of course and it's not easy to find a</b></p>	<p>Panel III – Acculturative Stress and</p>	<p>Panel III – Acculturative Stress and</p>	



of language learning and financial burden.	<p>job. Everything else was good except these two.</p>	Financial Burden	Financial Burden	
Thankful and grateful to be in Canada	<p>S: How satisfied are you with life in Canada so far?</p> <p>M: Oh, all praise be to God (<i>Alhamdulillah</i>), very good.</p> <p>S: Who is living with you in Canada? You said your wife and children.</p> <p>M: Yes.</p> <p>S: If you are currently living with your family, how has your family dynamic changed you're your wife and your children since moving to Canada?</p>	Panel V – Positive Outcome and Well-Being	Panel V – Positive Outcome and Well-Being	
No role reversal or intergenerational conflict. Acculturative stress in terms of becoming accustomed to different routines	<p>M: No nothing (clicking tongue). Just the children (laughing) because of school there are certain times for everything and it's a more perfect life now.</p> <p>S: And what do you mean by that? How has your relationship with your wife or with your children changed?</p> <p>M: No no no (clicking tongue) the relationship is the same, there is nothing different about that. Just the children when they wake up they know what to do, they have to be prepared for going to school but the relationship is the same, nothing different.</p>	Panel III – Acculturative Stress & Panel V – Positive Outcomes and Well-Being	Panel III – Acculturative Stress & Panel V – Positive Outcomes and Well-Being	

<p>Collective coping using family and possible forbearance</p> <p>Fatalism</p>	<p>S: What are the most important emotions associated with the stories you just told me? What is your experience right now as you re-tell your story of leaving Syria and the difficulty and the two years of living in Jordan and coming here?</p> <p>M: <i>Sad. When I remember all these days before, I feel sad.</i></p> <p>S: What about it is sad?</p> <p>M: <i>When I remember the old days, I left my neighbours, friends, and even family members. I just had my wife and children with me. Everyone else is still there. It's sad.</i></p> <p>S: What or who helped you overcome the challenges?</p> <p>M: <i>Just me and my wife.</i></p> <p>S: Yeah and how did you cope with previous stressors? When you were stressed in Syria, how did you cope with that?</p> <p>M: <i>I am flexible (laughing). We can't do anything, we have to go with whatever. Every day it's the same. When we left Syria we left to a better, safer place in Jordan and now we are in Canada and it's better. It's more safe and you feel like</i></p>	<p>Panel III – Survivor's Guilt and Loss</p> <p>Panel III – Survivor's Guilt and Loss</p> <p>Panel IV – Collective Coping: familial</p> <p>Panel IV – Collective Coping: familial and</p> <p>Panel V – Positive Outcome and Well-Being</p>	<p>Panel III – Survivor's Guilt and Loss</p> <p>Panel III – Survivor's Guilt and Loss</p> <p>Panel IV – Collective Coping: familial</p> <p>Panel IV – Collective Coping: familial and</p> <p>Panel V – Positive Outcome and Well-Being</p>	
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Isolation in times of distress	<p>everyone treats you good. I feel safe.</p> <p>S: So to cope you left? Would you say that's accurate, the way to cope with the stress was to leave the situation?</p> <p>M: That's all I can do.</p> <p>S: Yeah and how are you coping with stress now?</p> <p>M: Sitting alone, that's all. Every time that I don't feel good, I sit alone and think about what's happening. It's just the way I am, since I was a child, whenever something happened I sat alone and just thought about it. It's not easy to forget your country and your family. Their memories will be always there.</p> <p>S: For some, it is important that they cope with the help of friends and family. To what extent, in your life, do you rely on friends and family to deal with a problem?</p>	<p>Panel IV – Collective Coping: fatalism</p> <p>Panel IV – Collective Coping: forbearance</p> <p>Panel III – Survivor's Guilt and Loss</p>	<p>Panel IV – Collective Coping: fatalism</p> <p>Panel IV – Collective Coping: forbearance</p> <p>Panel III – Survivor's Guilt and Loss</p>	
Collective in nature because the forbearance coping is motivated by protecting his wife	<p>M: Whenever I feel stress or am not feeling good I don't tell my wife because I don't want her to be uncomfortable or sad or think. I just deal with it myself.</p> <p>S: Have they played a role at all? What role have your friends and family played in</p>	<p>Panel IV – Collective Coping: forbearance</p>	<p>No Code</p>	<p>Panel II – Gender identity</p>

<p>Deference to others and trust in friends – intracultural coping</p>	<p>helping you since you moved to Canada?</p> <p>M: I had some friends that have been here before me in Canada so I talk to them and asked “what do you think?” and they said “yeah it’s a good place to move to” and we talked and I decided to come to Canada. They helped me.</p> <p>S: Have they done anything since you’ve come to help you with your move? Can you give examples of how they’ve been helpful?</p>	<p>Panel IV – Collective Coping: intracultural</p>	<p>Panel IV – Collective Coping: intracultural</p>	
<p>Collectivist culture – almost a duty to help others in the community</p>	<p>M: Oh, my friends helped me a lot because when I first arrived I didn’t have a car, they helped me with furniture, whenever I needed to go somewhere they’d come to pick me up. They helped me a lot.</p> <p>S: Some also consider religion an important method for their coping. When you encounter difficulties or face stress to what extent do you use dhikr, prayer (salah), and Quran, to overcome challenges?</p>	<p>Panel IV – Collective Coping: intracultural</p>	<p>Panel IV – Collective Coping: intracultural</p>	
<p>Identified as moderately religious, says not very religious but still relies on positive religious coping</p>	<p>M: Of course, I pray and read Quran and it’s helped me. I’m not a very religious person but I do pray and it has helped me a lot, all praise be to God (<i>Alhamdullilah</i>).</p>	<p>Panel IV – Collective Coping: religious</p>	<p>Panel IV – Collective Coping: religious</p>	

and finds it to be helpful versus hindering	<p>S: How helpful do you find it to be and why?</p> <p>M: <i>A lot, a lot.</i></p> <p>S: And why?</p> <p>M: I don't know why (laughing). <i>It's Allah, it's Allah.</i></p> <p>S: Yeah that's just how you feel.</p>	<p>Panel IV – Collective Coping: religious</p> <p>Panel IV – Collective Coping: religious</p>	<p>No Code</p> <p>Panel IV – Collective Coping: religious</p>	<p>Panel V – Positive Outcome and Well-Being</p>
Feels comfort as a result of religious coping so it is a positive outcome	<p>M: <i>Even if you listened to the Quran you would feel comfortable and you'd feel good.</i></p> <p>S: Yeah it makes you feel comfortable.</p> <p>M: Yeah why? I don't know why (laughing).</p> <p>S: It's a miracle.</p> <p>M: <i>Ah, yes!</i></p> <p>S: How involved are you in the Muslim community here in Windsor, Ontario?</p>	<p>Panel V – Positive Outcome and Well-Being</p> <p>Panel IV – Collective Coping: religious</p>	<p>No Code</p> <p>Panel IV – Collective Coping: religious</p>	<p>Panel V – Positive Outcome and Well-Being</p>
	<p>M: Everyone I know is Muslim. There is no matter if they are Sunni or Shia, they are Muslims.</p> <p>S: What role has the Muslim community had in your transition to Windsor if any?</p>	<p>Panel IV – Collective Coping: religious</p>	<p>No Code</p>	<p>No Code</p>
Very short – no Muslim community	<p>M: No, just my friends.</p>	<p>Panel III – Acculturative Stress</p>	<p>No Code</p>	<p>No Code</p>

<p>support as a source of distress? Possible feelings of isolation?</p> <p>Has never considered this?</p> <p>Happiness is contingent upon the family and delayed. Happiness of the self is dependent upon cohesion and happiness in the family unit.</p>	<p>S: So what are your hopes, dreams, and ambitions for the future in Canada?</p> <p>M: My dream is to find a job, a good one and buy a house and just live a good life in Canada.</p> <p>S: So if you could have things your ideal way, what would that look like? Best case scenario.</p> <p>M: What do you mean?</p> <p>S: Ideally, if everything could be perfect, what would that be?</p> <p>M: <i>When my family is happy and I have a good job and I'm happy, it will be pleasant to live here. That's my dream.</i></p> <p>S: Yeah and is there anything you would like to add to our discussion today or anything you feel like we've missed?</p> <p>M: No.</p> <p>S: Well thank you so much.</p> <p>M: Thank you.</p>	<p>Panel IV – Collective Coping: familial</p>	<p>Panel IV – Collective Coping: familial</p>	
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