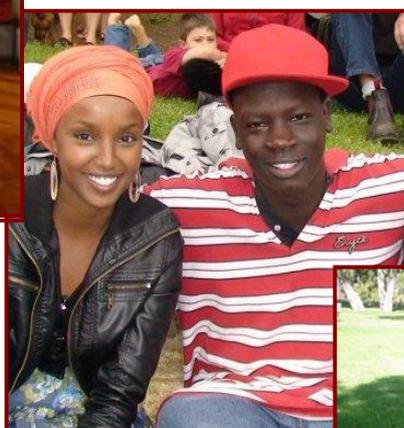


STRATEGIES TO ENHANCE THE WELL-BEING OF STUDENTS FROM REFUGEE BACKGROUNDS IN UNIVERSITIES IN PERTH, WESTERN AUSTRALIA



Jaya Earnest, Gabriella De Mori, Amanda Timler

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The impetus for this study arose out of the findings of previous research funded by a Healthway starter grant and the current increasing population of refugee students in Universities in Perth (Earnest, Housen, & Gilleat, 2007). Recent Australian research has shown that students from disadvantaged backgrounds are frequently confronted by a complex web of factors that influence students' decisions to withdraw from higher education (Joyce, Earnest, de Mori, & Silvagni, 2010). Other studies have demonstrated that early engagement of students with their studies and campus community life can lead to greater psychosocial well-being, student satisfaction, better performance and improved retention rates within the university (Earnest et al., 2007; Silburn, Earnest, Butcher, & de Mori, 2010).

Strong educational programmes inclusive of educational staff, communities, and families have been shown to increase psychosocial well-being and educational outcomes (Silburn, Earnest, Butcher, & de Mori, 2010). Recent statistics from the Department of Immigration reveal approximately 60% of humanitarian arrivals to Australia are under 19 years of age (Department of Immigration and Citizenship [DIAC], 2008). Research in the Australian context is gradually emerging in the last few years and indicating that it is imperative that the experiences of refugee youth in Australia are better understood and documented.

Their process of acculturation in the Australian context needs to be examined and, in particular, the role that educational institutions can play in improving their psychosocial well-being and adjustment and future outcomes. In recent years the number of students from refugee backgrounds has been steadily increasing in Universities across Australia (Earnest et al., 2007). With the attendant progressive rise in the proportion of students from diverse socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, it is evident that different pedagogical approaches and new teaching and learning resources are needed to facilitate the learning and socio-cultural adaptations these students must make to engage with their courses of study and university life in the current Australian context (Anderson, Stephenson, Millward, & Rio, 2004; Tinto, 2005).

The aims of this project were to:

1. To explore the perspectives of university students from refugee backgrounds specifically on adaptation and acculturation in Western Australia.
2. To document the perceptions and experiences the refugee youth have regarding tertiary education and understand their differing learning needs.
3. To understand the role that family and communities play in the life of refugee youth and how these influence education outcomes and success.
4. To propose strategies and make recommendations that may assist in possibly improving the success of refugee youth attending tertiary institutions.
5. To design, and trial a culturally sensitive and appropriate CD as a useful orientation tool for new refugee students in their first year of university that will assist with their engagement in university life.
6. To develop and trial a CD for academic staff to improve their understanding of refugee students.

The study followed a 3-stage exploratory, qualitative approach. Qualitative research aims to extract “the contextualized nature of experience and action, and attempts to generate analyses that are detailed, ‘thick’, and integrative” (Liamputtong & Ezzy 2005). A qualitative approach was chosen because this research sought to provide an insight into how refugee youth describe and interpret their experiences.

Stage One: The Rapid Needs Analysis

The project commenced with a ‘Rapid Needs Analysis’. Interviews were conducted with students from refugee backgrounds at each university in Perth. A thematic content analysis of the transcribed interviews was then undertaken to collate and condense the information gathered into themes and recommendations that could be used to design the teaching and learning programmes.

Stage Two: The Development of the CD

The analysis confirmed the need for a resource that would provide refugee students and academic staff with insights into the socio-cultural and pedagogical needs of students from refugee backgrounds. The project thus documented the differing learning and adaptation needs of students from refugee backgrounds at universities in Western Australia. The

analysis of the collated data guided the development of a template to design the CD resources for both refugee students and academic staff.

Stage Three: Trialling and modification of the CD

The CDs were trialled and evaluated by refugee students and academics and the feedback was used to modify the CD. It is hoped that the student CD will assist refugee students to navigate the tertiary education system and that the academic CD will provide university academics with the knowledge of how to better support students from refugee backgrounds. In addition to the two CDs, a modified framework based on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs was developed based on the interview analysis and guided the measurement of the psychosocial well-being of students from refugee background. The modified framework reflected two further needs identified in the analysis and a pictorial representation of the modified Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs framework has been presented in chapter 7.

This study has demonstrated that cultural differences of refugee students need to be addressed within the tertiary education system. The study focused on one of the priority areas in the Healthway Strategic Plan 2004-2007, that of Mental Health and is strongly aligned to the Healthway Strategic Plan 2008-2011 under the theme of reducing inequalities, using evidence and through research. This study fits into the high priority area of promoting mental health and well-being with an added focus applied to Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CaLD) populations. It adheres to the values of facilitating health through partnerships and collaboration and building an evidence base for health promotion through research and learning. If they are to become successful at university, the multi-faceted and complex needs of refugee students call for coordinated and specific approaches and new teaching and learning resources to accommodate the learning requirements of these students. The pre and post migration experiences that culminate in stressors associated with resettlement and acculturation in Australia demand extraordinary levels of resilience and determination for success in tertiary study.

Recommendations from the study include a need for understanding of refugee issues, increasing academic awareness of refugee backgrounds and educational shortcomings (eg: poor English language skills, lack of continuous schooling and differences in learning styles).

Strategies that can be implemented to improve psychosocial well-being and outcomes for refugee students include mentoring, cultural sensitivity training for academics, strategies to improve participation in tutorials and involving student from refugee backgrounds in guild activities.

Despite multiple stressors and difficulties in commencing and completing their studies, the dedication, resilience and agency of these students to education is undisputable and is vital to their success. It is hoped that the voices and needs of students from refugee backgrounds, will be heard and their concerns addressed so that current students from refugee backgrounds are retained and encourage others who have come to Australia on humanitarian visas to commence tertiary education.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to acknowledge the following people and organisations that enabled the successful completion of the project:

- Healthway (The Western Australian Health Promotion Foundation) who funded the project.
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- Jonathan Hallett for his graphic design work in the production of the academic and student CD resources.
- The academic staff who contributed to the evaluation of the CD and provided invaluable feedback.
- Pat Faulkner for assisting in the editing and proof reading of the report.
- Finally we thank the volunteer participants and students who gave generously of their time, and openly shared their experiences. Without their support the project could not have been as productive and significant. They have been truly inspiring in their contribution to support other students from refugee backgrounds. We wish them every success in their both studies and lives beyond university.

Associate Professor Jaya Earnest, Chief Investigator, Curtin University

Gabriella de Mori (Research Assistant)

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RESEARCH OUTPUTS: List of presentations and publications

Resources Produced

1. A detailed report for Healthway
2. An abridged report for NGOs and community organisations
3. A CD designed, developed and trialled as a resource for refugee students
4. A CD designed, developed and trialled as a resource for academics

Journal Publications

1. Joyce, A., Earnest, J., de Mori, G., & Silvagni, G. (2010). The experiences of students from refugee backgrounds at universities – reflections on the social, emotional and practical challenges. *Journal of Refugee Studies*. doi:10.1093/jrs/feq001.
2. Earnest, J., Joyce, A., de Mori, G., & Silvagni, G. (2010, accepted for publication) Are universities responding to the needs of students from refugee backgrounds? *Australian Journal of Education*.

Conference Presentations

1. Earnest, J., de Mori, G., Jorge, M., & Timler, A. (2010) Strategies to enhance the well-being of refugee youth in universities in Western Australia. Paper presented at the 18th Annual Teaching Learning Forum. Educating for Sustainability, Edith Cowan University, Perth: Western Australia.
2. Silburn J., & Earnest, J. (2009, July). *Facilitating effective learning of students from refugee backgrounds in Australian universities*. Paper presented at the 2009 HERDSA international teaching and learning conference under the theme: “The student experience”, Charles Darwin University, Darwin, Northern Territory, Australia.
3. Earnest, J., & de Mori, G. (2008, November). *Needs Analysis of Students from refugee backgrounds at a Western Australian University: a Case Study from Curtin University*. Refereed paper presented at the Australian Association for Research in Education conference. Brisbane, Australia.

4. Earnest, J., & Silburn, J. (2008, November). *The needs of students from refugee backgrounds in tertiary institutions: case studies from Western Australia*. Refereed Papers presented at the Australian Association for Research in Education conference. Brisbane, Australia.
5. De Mori, G., & Read, C. (2008, August). *Transitioning through culture: the needs of students from refugee backgrounds at Curtin University*. Paper presented at the Humanities Graduate Studies Conference, Curtin University.
6. De Mori, G., & Read C. (2008, August). *Needs analysis of university students on humanitarian visas: A case study from Curtin University*. Paper presented at the West Australian Institute for Educational Research Forum, Edith Cowan University, Western Australia.

Refereed Conference Proceedings

1. Read, C., Earnest, J., & de Mori, G. (2009). Meeting the Needs of Refugee Youth at a Western Australian University: A Case Study from Curtin University. Online Thematic Proceedings of the Curtin Humanities 9th Graduate Research Conference, Perth, Australia.
2. Earnest, J., & de Mori, G. (2008, November). Needs Analysis of Students from refugee backgrounds at a Western Australian University: a Case Study from Curtin University. Refereed proceedings of the Australian Association for Research in Education conference. Brisbane, Australia. Online available at <http://www.aare.edu.au/08pap/ear08788.pdf>.

Community and University Presentation

1. **November 2009:** Presentation to Curtin University staff and postgraduate research students by Dr Jaya Earnest.
2. **June 2009:** Presentation by Jaya Earnest to the Centrelink CaLD consultative forum presentation, Perth, Western Australia.
3. **November 2008:** Presentation by the research assistants at the Humanities Graduate Studies annual conference, Curtin University.
4. **September 2008:** Presentation by research assistants at the 'Social Inclusion of Refugees Workshop' held by Murdoch University and the Metropolitan Migrant Resource Centre.

5. **June 2008:** Invited presenter - the Centrelink CaLD consultative forum presentation, Perth, Western Australia.
6. **April 2008:** *Engaging African Refugee Students*. Invited speaker. CaLD Forum Engaging African refugee students, employers, industry and other stakeholders in a dialogue in Western Australia: Swan Alliance.
7. **January 2008:** The psychosocial well-being of refugee students in Western Australia. Presentation at the University of British Columbia in **Vancouver, Canada**.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction & Overview

1.0 Introduction to the chapter

This chapter provides the introduction and background to the research study, introduces the study design and describes the research process. Some of the outcomes and significance of the study are also discussed. The chapter concludes with the outline of the research report.

1.1 Background to the study

A unique feature of humanitarian entrants to Australia between 2002 and 2007 has been their youth – 45,900 of the 54,824 humanitarian visa entrants were between the ages of 16 years and 35 years with 24,500 females to 21,400 males – revealing a significant and critical youth population (DIAC, 2008). The needs of refugee youth are complex and require a co-ordinated approach between families, communities, educational institutions and service (Zwi et al., 2007; Thorell, 2007). Educational institutions are the settings in which many of the hopes of refugee youth materialise and can perform an important role in orientating them to the culture of the host country (Wilkinson, 2002). Educational settings also provide an opportunity to enhance the social and emotional health of refugee youth (Bond et al., 2007). While there has been some research on refugee youths' experience in secondary schooling there is little research on their experiences within the tertiary system.

In the past decade, issues of diversity have moved from the periphery to become central concerns of higher education institutions (Brown, 2004). The diversity of the current student body in higher education poses new challenges in regard to engagement of students for whom the university may be a culturally alienating place (Krause, Hartley, James, & McInnis, 2005). One of the challenges that academics face is the paucity of research on teaching and learning in relation to refugee students in Australia, in particular the absence of literature on the learning styles and academic needs of African and Middle Eastern refugee students.

Increasing globalisation presents new opportunities and challenges for higher education institutions internationally (Hanassab, 2006). Facilitating the early engagement of students with their studies and campus life has shown to lead to greater student satisfaction and improved rates of retention (Krause et al., 2005). The challenge remains how to provide engagement opportunities for these students for whom the university culture in Australia is often a very foreign one.

This study was conducted with students from refugee backgrounds who currently attend universities in Western Australia (WA). A needs analysis was undertaken to ascertain the specific learning needs and educational experiences of this unique student cohort and produced student-derived recommendations for all universities across Australia to provide better support to refugee students. Based on the results of the Needs Analysis, a culturally sensitive and appropriate CD was developed as a useful orientation tool for both new refugee students in their first year of university and for university academics.

1.2 Aims, approach & outcomes

1.2.1 Aims

This exploratory research addressed the following overarching aims:

1. To explore the perspectives of refugee university youth on adaptation and acculturation in WA.
2. To document the images (perceptions, beliefs, meanings, knowledge) and experiences the refugee youth have regarding tertiary education and to understand their differing learning needs.
3. To examine how these images influence psychosocial well-being and personal outcomes.
4. To understand the role that family and communities play in the life of refugee youth and how these influence education outcomes and success.
5. To propose strategies and make recommendations that may assist in possibly improving the success of refugee youth in tertiary institutions.
6. To develop and trial a culturally sensitive and appropriate CD that will be a useful orientation tool for new refugee students in their first year of university that will assist with their engagement in university life and improve self-confidence and psychosocial well-being.

7. To develop and trial a training CD for academic staff to demonstrate how supporting and supplementary programmes can address the specific needs of students from refugee backgrounds.

1.2.2 *The approach & framework*

This study had a conceptual structure underpinning a small number of research aims seeking information. The research design adopted a case study approach within a qualitative study design and made use of interpretive content analysis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). The research was underpinned by Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs framework and this framework guided the semi-structured interviews. The framework has been described in further detail in Chapter 3. This study thus interwove history, migration, resettlement and identity formation into an understanding of psychosocial well-being of refugee students studying at universities in Western Australia.

1.2.3 *Outcomes*

Although most students have high educational and career aspirations and hope for financial security, the reality is that currently they are not receiving the support needed to assist them in attaining their goals and many struggle to complete their degrees. The study identified that universities need to increase funding and resources to meet the complex needs of the current cohort of students from refugee backgrounds.

The information gathered in the course of this study has been used to design and develop two CDs, for both the refugee students themselves and the academic staff teaching or supporting them. It is hoped that the CD for refugee students will assist with their engagement in university life and improve their self-confidence and psychosocial well-being. The CD for academic staff endeavours to demonstrate how supporting programmes and understanding the specific needs of refugee students can address the needs of students from refugee backgrounds.

The research also revealed that the refugee students in this study strongly identified resettlement and acculturation as being critical issues to their success or failure in Australia. A modified framework that reflected these findings and based on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs has been proposed.

1.3 Significance of the study

There is a paucity of research and literature specifically concerned with refugee youth and specifically tertiary students from refugee backgrounds. This lack of research leaves important policy questions unanswered:

1. Do refugee youth have access to and do they utilise social, health and other services in the wider community?
2. Is adequate psychosocial support provided to students from refugee backgrounds?
3. How do universities currently address the psychosocial needs of refugee students?
4. Do universities have resources to effectively manage the new challenges these students bring to the classroom?

The study has provided insight into the complexities of refugee psychosocial well-being and the authors hope the study will generate improved policies and interventions to assist and support young refugees. The results will hopefully be used to re-align and enhance support programmes and university funding in an effort to improve outcomes for students from refugee backgrounds.

1.4 The research phases

The research was carried out by a team of four researchers from the Centre for International Health at Curtin University of Technology in WA. The research process was structured into predominantly three different phases.

The first stage was the pre-interview period which involved seeking ethical approval, conducting an in-depth literature review and drawing up a research framework.

The second stage involved data collection, the Rapid Needs Analysis phase, which extended over four months in 2009 during which the researchers interviewed refugee students from the five universities in Perth. This phase culminated with the initial data analysis where themes were identified and the CDs were designed, trialled and evaluated.

In the final stage of data analysis, themes were categorised and report writing took place at the Centre for International Health at Curtin University of Technology in WA. The final report was presented to Healthway in March 2010.

1.5 The health promotion benefits

This study explored and documented the perspectives of refugee youth in Western Australian Universities on acculturation, identity formation, learning styles and psychosocial well-being. The benefits and significance of this research to refugee and migrant health, resettlement programmes, health and educational services were multi-pronged. The study:

- Provided data on refugee youth perspectives and understanding of the acculturation process;
- Increased knowledge of strategies that assist in improving educational outcomes and psychosocial well-being among refugee youth in universities;
- Suggested recommendations and strategies for further research and interventions;
- Examined the roles that the post-migration experience, access to services and change in lifestyle play in forming barriers to success;
- The CD developed for academics will be used to provide information to academic and support staff on the types of materials and support they could provide to assist refugee youth in their adaptation to tertiary learning;
- The CD developed for refugee youth will assist in improving their self-esteem, psychosocial well-being and learning outcomes.

The study focused on the Mental Health priority area of the Healthway Strategic Plan 2004 -2007, and is strongly aligned to the Healthway Strategic Plan 2008 -2011 overarching theme of reducing inequalities, using evidence and building the future through research. This study fits into the high priority area of promoting mental health and well-being with an added focus applied to CaLD populations and people living in low socio-economic circumstances. The intervention proposed links with the Healthway impetus on advocacy within a settings focus. It adheres to the values of facilitating health through partnerships and collaboration and building an evidence base for health promotion through research and learning.

1.6 Recommendations and Strategies

This study revealed that these refugee students face numerous challenges associated with their past and present refugee experiences of conflict, flight, transition and finally resettlement in Australia. However in spite of these difficulties, refugee students see education as their passport to the future and display significant resilience and persistence

in their determination to succeed. Continuing acculturation and resettlement issues hamper many of them and universities must play a role in supporting these students in their aspirations.

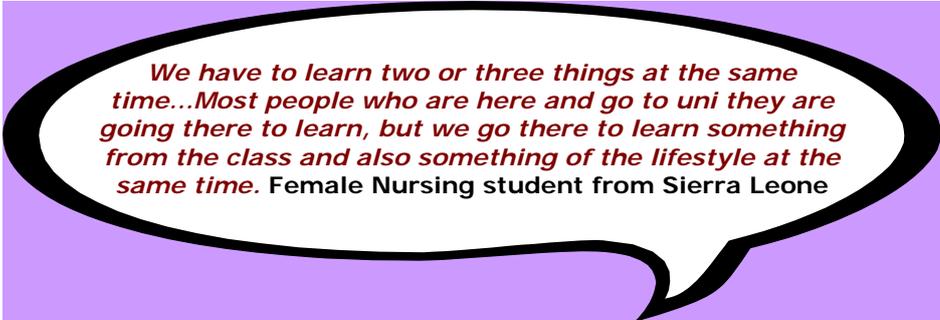
Recommendations from the study include a need for understanding of refugee issues, increasing academic awareness of refugee backgrounds, and educational shortcomings (eg: poor English language skills, lack of continuous schooling and computing skills, differences in learning styles).

Strategies that can be implemented to improve psychosocial well-being and outcomes for refugee students include mentoring, cultural sensitivity training for academics, strategies to improve participation in tutorials and involving student from refugee backgrounds in guild activities. A further list of recommendations and strategies has been listed in Chapter 7.

1.7 Outline of the research report

This research report is presented in seven chapters:

- Chapter 1 provides an introduction and background to the research and study;
- In Chapter 2, a critical analysis of literature is presented. In Chapter 3, the framework used for the study, the methodology considerations and the data analysis are discussed;
- Chapter 4 presents narratives of the refugee experience;
- Chapter 5 identifies and documents the educational needs of students from refugee backgrounds;
- Chapter 6 summarises the psychosocial needs to refugee youth and presents the modified framework and psychosocial tool ;
- Chapter 7 provides the discussion, limitations, student drawn recommendations and concluding remarks; a detailed list of references and appendices has been included at the end of the report.



We have to learn two or three things at the same time...Most people who are here and go to uni they are going there to learn, but we go there to learn something from the class and also something of the lifestyle at the same time. Female Nursing student from Sierra Leone

CHAPTER 2

A Review of Literature

2.0 Introduction to the chapter

Chapter 2 provides a critical review of literature outlining the theoretical underpinnings of the study. The chapter commences with a background to Australian humanitarian intake and then goes on to discuss current diversity in tertiary institutions. Recent research in the areas of refugee resettlement, pre-migration mental health, well-being in refugee adolescents, acculturation, intergenerational stress and psychosocial health and well-being have also been reviewed and critiqued in the later parts of the chapter.

2.1 Background to the study

2.1.1 Australian humanitarian intake

Refugee migration to Australia has two interesting trends that directly translate into enrolment patterns for universities in Australia. Refugee statistics in the last decade have been dominated by entrants from African backgrounds and by youth aged entrants. In 2007-2008, a total of 10,799 resettlement visas were granted under the offshore component of Australia's Humanitarian programme, comprising of 6004 Refugee visas and 4795 Special Humanitarian Programme visas (DIAC, 2008). In this cohort of entrants, refugees from African countries comprised a total of 30.5% of the total off-shore intake.

From 2001-2006, African nations accounted for five out of the top ten humanitarian group entrants to Australia, led each year except 2001 by Sudan. From 2002-2007, a total of 84% of humanitarian visa entrants were between the ages of 16 years and 35 years. WA alone has settled 4688 African humanitarian entrants between 2002 to 2006, with 60% of these being under the age of 19 years (DIAC, 2008). In 2007-2008, immigration statistics changed dramatically, with refugees from Burma, Iran and Afghanistan comprising the highest visa intakes, which will shift the profile of refugee students at universities in Australia over the years to come.

Figures 1 and 2 shown below represent the Offshore Humanitarian Visas granted in 2007-2008 by the Australian government based upon regional intake and the Top 10 Countries of Humanitarian entrants in WA 2001 – 2006 (DIAC, 2008).

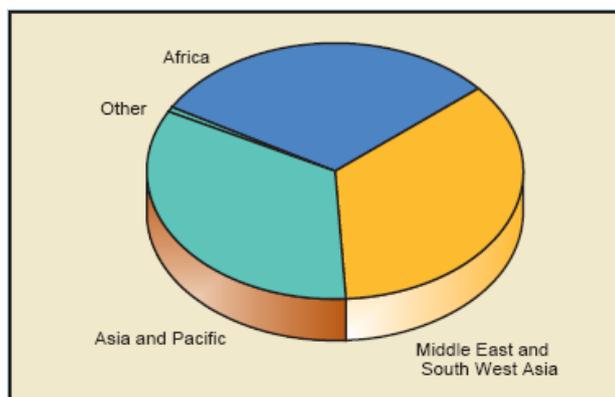


Figure 1: Offshore Humanitarian Visa Grants to Australia by region 2007- 2008 (DIAC, 2008)

Country of birth	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	Total
Sudan	102	232	459	737	413	1943
Afghanistan	143	127	103	73	148	594
Iraq	120	199	65	36	43	463
Liberia	55	26	28	133	84	326
Iran	33	70	79	79	44	305
Fmr						
Yugoslavia	117	115	36	17	11	296
Sierra Leone	71	40	22	95	36	264
Ethiopia	33	41	95	63	14	246
Burma	31	12	12	26	108	189
DR Congo	2	5	69	85	18	179

Figure 2: Top 10 Countries of Humanitarian entrants in WA: 2001 – 2006 (DIAC, 2008)

2.1.2 Refugee youth in Australia

The needs of refugee youth are complex and multi-faceted, requiring a co-ordinated approach among educational institutions, families, communities and service agencies. The results of the study by Earnest et al., (2007) revealed that educational institutions are the settings in which many of the hopes of refugee youth materialise. Refugee youth find educational institutions a safe environment and enjoy the learning and engagement with

other students that educational institutions offer. Australian and overseas literature highlight the importance of bringing health and social services into educational institutions, recognising educational institutions as a powerful resource for refugee youth and their families (Bond et al., 2007).

Given the paucity of research on the educational and psychosocial needs of refugee students in Australian universities, it is imperative that the experiences of refugee youth in Australia are better understood and documented. Their decision-making processes, the external influences regarding commencing and completing tertiary education in the Australian context and, in particular, the role that educational institutions can play in improving their adjustment and future outcomes, need to be examined. To our knowledge, this research has only been conducted within secondary schools in Australia, and outlines their hopes of receiving professional careers through university and tertiary education. Refugee youth continue to face challenges within the educational system, such as disrupted schooling and an inflexible education system within Australia that often has impact on future study and employment opportunities (Cassity & Gow, 2005; Olliff & Couch, 2005). Currently there is little information on the university experiences of students from refugee backgrounds available to the tertiary education sector.

2.2 Theoretical Underpinnings

2.2.1 Diversity in tertiary institutions: Implications for educators

Changes in the tertiary education sector have resulted in staff having to accommodate a higher proportion of students from diverse backgrounds, and tertiary institutions globally have been moving towards greater recognition and support of diverse student groups through bridging, foundation and fast-track programmes. Educators in today's institutions are increasingly accommodating for diverse learning environments. They need to recognise differences among students to promote effective communication, so that all students (including refugee students) gain competencies that assist them to successfully function in a pluralistic society (Northedge, 2003).

Establishing appropriate cultural and social settings is an integral aspect of the learning process and assists in the realisation of an individual's learning potential and future goals and hopes. The pluralism imperative now requires that particular attention be given to students with little experience in academic communities, who often struggle to develop an

understanding of the expectations of academic culture. Their challenge is "...to develop an effective voice through which to 'speak' the discourse, whether in writing or in class ... support in establishing voice is a vital component of courses for students from diverse backgrounds" (Northedge, 2003, p. 25).

There is evidence that effective educational practices, which facilitate students' engagement, provide a boost to underrepresented and lower-achieving students commencing tertiary education. Data from the National Survey of Student Engagement conducted in Australia in 2006 found that student engagement activities fostering peer collaboration could assist in overcoming previous educational disadvantages. The survey findings documented that there is a strong relationship between in-depth approaches to learning and self-reported gains in intellectual and social development (National Survey of Student Engagement Institute, 2006). Other studies have shown that early engagement of students with their studies and campus community life can lead to greater psychosocial well-being, student satisfaction, better performance and improved retention rates within the university (Krause et al., 2005; Tinto, 2004).

To ensure provision of the best possible support for students from refugee backgrounds, it is essential that educators and academics be prepared in understanding the diversity in student intake. While many Australian universities have been proactive in responding to equity issues for students, such as Indigenous, rural, 'at-risk' or low socio-economic students, very little is known about what is needed to appropriately provide for the successful transition of refugee students into tertiary education. Additionally, while West Australian universities each have their own learning or student support centre that provides a number of programmes for its equity students, there is currently no programme specifically tailored to adequately support refugee students at any of the five universities included in this study (Curtin University, 2006).

There is a clear need for research that ascertains the psychosocial needs of refugee youth and, within this research agenda, develops models of practice that address the multiple needs of refugee students and evaluates any resultant programmes according to outcomes for these young people. While this research and programme agenda is emerging within the secondary school system there is a lack of information about the experiences and needs of refugee students in the tertiary system. Currently, even though

the numbers of refugee students in universities are relatively small (there are close to 50 students at Curtin University on humanitarian visas), educators need to be prepared to understand diversity in student intakes and to be alert in providing the best possible opportunities for refugee students.

2.2.2 *Students from refugee backgrounds*

While very little is known about refugee student perspectives, education needs and their acculturation processes into university, the health needs of refugee young people and adults has been reviewed by a number of sources. Reviews of the health needs of people from refugee backgrounds highlight the various atrocities and adverse events that refugees have commonly experienced. These include the death of a close family member, injury/torture of family members, bombardments and shelling, detention, beatings and/or physical injury, disability inflicted by violence, sexual assault, disappearance of family members/friends, witnessed murder/massacre, terrorist attack(s), parental fear and panic, famine, forcible eviction, separation and forced migration (Burnett & Peel, 2001; Davies & Webb, 2000; Lustig et al., 2004).

Birman, Trickett and Vinokurov, (2002) note that for students from this cohort, the acculturation process has three distinct aspects: language competence, behavioural participation and identification. These aspects are vital for successful outcomes at university as they allow individuals to communicate and function in differing contexts. Identity, in particular ethnic identity, is linked to outcomes such as self-concept and psychological and psychosocial adjustment (Burnett & Peel, 2001; Davies & Webb, 2000). For adolescent refugees, the educational environment is a key context for the development of language proficiency. Whilst a small percentage of this cohort successfully make the transition to university, students from this group very often find the multiple challenges of academic study, coupled with resettling in a host country and having to adjust to new belief systems, values and mores, too daunting.

2.2.3 *Refugee resettlement and education experience*

Despite the paucity of research at tertiary level, key lessons can be learnt from research conducted with refugee students in high schools. Qualitative research has revealed a number of other barriers that youth face in successfully completing secondary education. A large qualitative study of the social and emotional well-being of 123 young people from

CaLD backgrounds in Australia found that the supportive roles young people play in the home, and issues related to disrupted, or lack, of education from their countries of origin, made schooling in Australia very challenging (Brough, Gorman, Ramirez, & Westoby, 2003). These findings were confirmed by Cassity and Gow (2005) in their study of high school students from Southern Sudanese backgrounds living in Sydney. The difficulties of little previous educational background made schooling in Australia extremely difficult, decreasing the likelihood of successful transition to the tertiary studies which many refugee youth hope to undertake.

Preliminary research at Murdoch University in WA shows that, in spite of relatively good levels of spoken English, many refugee students from Africa still experience difficulty with the transition into tertiary education. Some of the challenges identified include developing a more critical and reflexive learning style, applying meta-cognitive strategies, balancing learning with earning and adapting to Australian values and systems (Box, 2007). According to Sidhu and Taylor (2007), in recent years the education system for refugees has been subsumed with that of migrants and international students and has tended to focus on English language, multiculturalism, social justice and sports, with factors that greatly influence refugee students' performance and integration into the education system often being ignored. These factors include issues of poverty, stress of resettlement, racism, discrimination and unemployment. Recent research demonstrates that the learning and psychosocial needs of refugee students extend beyond adequate English Language acquisition (Silburn, Earnest, Butcher, & de Mori, 2010).

2.2.4 Refugee students and secondary education

The traumatic experiences of pre-migration inhibit refugee student success at educational institutions and impede their ability to learn and acquire a new language (Sinclair, 2001). Refugee students face challenges that occur within their new educational setting, including discrimination, alienation, communication problems due to limited English proficiency and the added pressure of emotionally and financially supporting their family, both in the resettled country and in their country of origin (Brough et al., 2003; Cassity & Gow, 2005; Fisher, Wallace, & Fenton, 2000).

Olliff and Couch (2005) found that the first year provision of English as a Second Language (ESL) services for newly arrived refugee students was not enough for those with

disrupted schooling backgrounds. The period that these students spend in the English class has been found to vary in different states in Australia and this makes it even more difficult for consistency in the way educators in Australia cope with refugee students and their academic performance. Many students find themselves academically underprepared and are unable to cope in the mainstream education system (Miller, Mitchell, & Brown, 2005). This results in frustrations for teachers and students, as well as an increased risk of attrition among refugee students (Olliff & Couch, 2005).

2.2.5 Refugee students, tertiary education & unfamiliarity of Australian academic culture

While a small percentage of refugee students successfully make the transition to university, students from this group very often find the multiple challenges of academic study, resettlement and adjusting to new systems too daunting. Consequently, numbers of students from refugee backgrounds remain low, in comparison both to other students and to the numbers of refugee arrivals (DIAC, 2008; Murdoch University, 2009; Curtin University, 2009). Despite noted academic challenges, educational settings enhance the psychosocial well-being of refugee youth (Bond et al., 2007; Earnest et al., 2007). Education is considered important and vital for successful resettlement and acculturation, as it restores a sense of normalcy, provides security and helps refugees adjust to the cultural expectations of their new country (McBrien, 2005; Sinclair, 2001). For refugees, university and tertiary education is seen as their means to self actualisation and personal achievement (Miller et al., 2005).

A recent study in Australia has investigated the capacity of youth language programmes to respond to the emotional and social health needs of refugee youth (Bond et al., 2007). Through programme audits, group interviews with staff and interviews with management staff, changes to programme delivery were implemented and reflected upon. Changes initiated included more health within the teaching curriculum, increased contact hours for young people, increased partnerships between sites, and an increased focus on vocational support through linking with employment support services. Some services initiated a pastoral care approach and 'home rooms' where young people could meet. While the study was unable to assess needs or provide outcome data for the participants of the programmes, it did demonstrate that with effective service and evaluation frameworks, the organisations could shift their focus to address more holistic needs of these refugee youth.

The physical and social setting, including the teaching and support provided by the teacher, the behaviour of other students and the norms and expectations inherent in these settings, are key aspects of university learning and teaching culture (Marini & Genereux as cited by Volet, 1999). Refugee students who do make it to university are often lost or ignored in such large mainstream systems. These students need to acquire the capacity to participate in this unfamiliar community setting, which they can find culturally alienating (Krause, 2005). Students who are underprepared require a more specific tailored induction into the university culture so that they are better positioned and equipped to meet its challenges (Elliott, 2002).

2.2.6 *Effective learning environments and student engagement*

There is evidence that effective educational practices, which facilitate students' engagement, provide encouragement to underrepresented and lower achieving students commencing tertiary education. The development of appropriate cultural and social support structures nurture students' engagement through an integrated learning approach which assists in the learning process and the realisation of an individual's learning potential (Northedge, 2003, p. 25). Student engagement is defined as "the extent to which students are actively engaged in, committed to and actively involved in their own learning" (Markwell, 2007, p.1). Key indicators of student engagement include: attendance to, and active participation in, classes; collaborative and informal interaction with fellow students; interactions with academic staff which focus on an individual's learning and development; participation in extra-curricular activities; engagement with and through a range of available learning resources; and a sense of belonging to a learning community and to the university as an institution (Markwell, 2007).

Data from the National Survey of Student Engagement conducted in 2006 in Australia found that student engagement activities such as "collaborating with peers on projects inside and outside the classroom helped students overcome previous educational disadvantages" (Wasley, 2006, p. 1). Other studies have shown that early engagement of students with their studies and campus community life can lead to greater psychosocial well-being, increased student satisfaction, better performance and improved retention rates within the university (Krause, 2005; Tinto, 2005). Gurin's analysis of the literature on learning outcomes concluded that "diversity interactions increased active thinking,

motivation, academic and intellectual skills and academic engagement” (Gurin as cited by Maruyama & Moreno, 2000). Most students from refugee backgrounds encounter obstacles to many, if not all, of these aspects of engagement. Opportunities to come onto campus and fully engage can be severely limited as they usually need to work in paid employment, which is often menial and poorly paid, to meet their family’s basic needs, both within Australia and their country of origin.

2.3 Psychosocial well-being of refugees

Fargues (2009, p. 544) notes that “refugees move in response to insecurity in war-torn areas and their numbers grow in response to new conflicts or to the resurgence of old ones”. With the support and encouragement of individuals and community groups, the majority of refugees adapt to stressors and trauma upon their arrival in a new country (Pottie, Ng, Spitzer, Mohammed, & Glazier, 2008). However, it has been shown that language barriers, cultural alienation, disparate gender ideologies and institutional barriers reduce a refugee’s ability to find meaningful employment and develop personal and professional identities within their new host country (Pottie et al., 2008). Adapting to a new culture can be challenging, especially in the context of pre-migration experiences of mass violence and forced migration. Thus many refugees have difficulty engaging in activities such as education and employment (Khawaja, White, Schweitzer, & Greenslade, 2008). In the last fifteen years, the number of refugees has been increasing within developed countries but initial resettlement needs do not often place an emphasis on psychosocial well-being.

2.3.1 Psychosocial needs

In his 2002 paper on psychosocial well-being in complex emergencies, Ager describes psychosocial well-being as being impacted by extreme poverty and social marginalisation (Ager, 2002). He goes on to discuss and define the three domains that contribute to psychosocial well-being: human capacity, social ecology and culture and values. Human capacity is defined as being “based on the skills and knowledge and capabilities available to a household/ community” (Ager, 2002, p. 44). For an individual, the loss of family members by death, displacement or through disability (e.g. mental health outcomes and due to war injury) affects human capacity and how they adapt in their new surroundings. The social ecology of a community is rooted in the social connections within a community and, as a result of the associated loss of resources and peer support and family

fragmentation, is disrupted by displacement and war. War often leads to displacement due to destruction and loss of infrastructure (homes and places of worship), community traditions and human rights (Ager, 2002).

For refugees, specific and unique factors impede their ability to maintain psychosocial well-being and include particularly pertinent issues such as social isolation, the loss of everyday social roles, lack of environmental freedom, insufficient income and health problems (Khawaja et al., 2008). Prior to humanitarian entry into a host country, several factors affect the psychosocial well-being of refugees during their journey of experiencing war, displacement, seeking exile and finding refuge and finally resettlement. These factors were described by Khawaja et al. (2008) as having pre- and post-migration phases, each categorised by four basic themes, which impact refugee well-being. Pre-migration stressors include the lack of ability to meet basic needs, loss of support networks, impact on daily activities and experience of trauma. These stressors affect sense of self and formation of identity. It has been shown that young refugees who are exposed to torture and/or trauma during their development experience problems with identity formation (Farnan, 2001; Silove & Steel, 2006).

Farnan (2001) notes torture and trauma “shatter core assumptions of trust and emotional bonds with family, friends and community members” (p. 99), contribute to an increase in dependency, and influence responses to friends and the community within the host country. According to Khawaja et al. (2008), the four main themes of the post-migration phase encompass a lack of environment, financial difficulties, social isolation and impact of racism. These factors contribute to poorer psychosocial outcomes of refugees within their new host country and resettled refugees rely heavily on continuing relationships with friends, family and community members as a means of support upon arrival.

Silove and Steel (2006) have put forward the ADAPT model (Adaptation and Development after Persecution and Trauma) which defines the disruption and adaptation experienced by refugees in terms of five psychosocial systems: security and safety, interpersonal bonds/societal networks, justice, identity and roles, and finally institutions that confer existential meaning and allow the practice of religion, traditions, spiritual practices and social participation. Direct associations between the social and psychological systems in refugees include: post-traumatic reaction, fears about future, cultural isolation, loss of role

or identify, disruption of attachments, stress from life difficulties, concern with justice occurring and existential disorientation or loss of meaning (Porter, 2007). Porter (2007) also maintains that a refugee's social status prior to entering a new country impacts on their adaptive ability in their new host country. Due to the changes in social order caused by their move to the host country, an individual of high social status in their previous society may not adapt as quickly as someone from low social status. He suggests that community-level social functions predict psychological functioning and increase the likelihood of quicker adaptation.

2.3.2 Refugee resettlement: Acculturative and inter-generational stress

The transition from one country to another for refugees often encompasses changes in every aspect of daily life from the language one speaks to the ways in which groups and individuals interact. It includes loss of work status, communicating in a new language and encountering discrimination. This process of cultural transition has been defined as acculturation and the stresses associated with it are known as acculturative stress (Berry, Poortinga, Segall, & Dasan, 1987; Williams & Berry, 1991). Once refugees resettle in a host country, new belief systems, values and morals challenge their adjustment. During acculturation four broad phases take place: contact, conflict, crisis and eventual adaptation, with each stage impacting on psychosocial well-being (Williams & Berry, 1991, Papadopoulos, 2001).

During the resettlement phase many refugee children and families re-establish their lives and encounter western mental health services for the first time (Rousseau, Drapeau, & Corin, 1996). The legacy of trauma is superimposed on the already complex acculturation and adjustment process. Numerous studies and literature suggest that multiple stressors impact refugee children in resettlement: trauma, migration and loss of the familiar, acculturation and ensuing difficulties between generations (Angel, Hjern, & Ingleby, 2001; Howard & Hodes, 2000). Refugee youth experience challenges in accommodating the culture of their homeland in their or their parents' memories, the culture of the new country as well as the culture of refugee resettlement. Youth struggling with identity formation experience psychological difficulties in the context of dual cultural membership (Phinney, 1990).

Acculturative stress places refugee/asylum-seeking and refugee youth at greater psychological risk. Difficulties at school and in language acquisition have been shown to predict poor adaptation (Rousseau et al., 1996). There are two important factors in the adaptation to a new culture that either increase or decrease susceptibility to poor mental health. Conflict in the development of identity among adolescents has consistently been related to poor psychological adjustment (Joyce, Earnest, de Mori, & Silvagni, 2010). In addition, even though adaptation to a new culture can make provision for good outcomes, it can also increase psychological vulnerability through the creation of inter-generational stress (Rousseau et al., 1996). Intergenerational conflict arises when adolescents, particularly youth, adapt much faster than their parents. As such, the authority of parents is often compromised by virtue of their dependence on children for language and cultural access to the host society (Hyman, Vu, & Beiser, 2000). Other factors which have a negative influence on the mental health in refugee children and adolescents include low socio-economic status, long-term unemployment in parents, particularly fathers, and school difficulties such as language barriers and discrimination ((Howard & Hodes, 2000; Hyman et al., 2000).

2.3.3 Refugee health outcomes

While there is a clear recognition of the diversity in experience, health and social needs of young people from refugee backgrounds, there are common experiences related to exposure to war that increase their risk of emotional and social health problems (Burnett & Peel, 2001; Davies & Webb, 2000). Heptinstall, Sethna, and Taylor (2004) found a significant correlation between the number of pre-migration traumas experienced by refugee families and their children's post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) scores. A review of child and adolescent refugee mental health documents that as well as witnessing acts of violence, having actively participated in combat is also common among some refugee children (Zwi et al., 2007. Lustig et al. 2004)

Studies of refugee populations have demonstrated that exposure to an environment of war and conflict entails risks of rape, torture and war injuries, and generates a lack of trust in authority (especially law and justice), loss of moral perspective and increased risk of mental health and substance abuse problems within these groups (Lustig et al., 2004). Several authors have noted that higher incidences of stress and mental health issues are found when conflict and war persist in a refugee's country of origin (Angel et al.; Porter &

Haslam, 2005; Silove & Steel, 2006; Stewart, 2007). Pottie et al. (2008) noted that health in refugee groups can also be affected by factors such as economic status and linguistic and socio-economic barriers which reduce their opportunity to access resources. This in turn impacts directly on health and results in poorer health outcomes, loss of mobility, poverty and marginalisation. This study also noted that reduced English language skills were associated with poor self-reported health outcomes.

Lustig et al. (2004) found that child and adolescent refugees suffered from significant stress related to past prolonged exposure to conflict but reactions to stress were influenced and mediated by coping strategies, belief systems and social relationships. Despite the significant health and social challenges that young people from refugee backgrounds have experienced, the health and education systems in Australia are not well equipped or coordinated to meet their needs (Zwi et al., 2007; Olliff & Couch, 2005).

2.3.4 Mental health

Research by Khawaja et al. (2008) on the pre-migration, transit and post-migration experiences of refugees found that refugees who have resettled in western countries were approximately ten times more likely to develop PTSD. Predictors of refugee mental health outcomes included such factors as institutional residence, older age, lack of education, female gender and higher socio-economic status prior to displacement. Porter and Haslam (2005) found greater resilience among younger refugees. They documented that adolescents with better coping strategies were less likely to be affected by the stressors of displacement. These authors also noted that paradoxically those individuals with higher levels of education and socioeconomic status prior to resettlement may have poorer mental health outcomes due to the lack of opportunities available to them in their host country.

Unlike survivors of traumatic events such as natural disasters and accidents, refugees experience a different type of stressor that accumulates over the processes inherent to the refugee experience; i.e. displacement, flight, exile, resettlement or repatriation (Porter & Haslam, 2005). Post-migration stresses such as marginalisation, socioeconomic disadvantage, acculturation difficulties and loss of support networks and culture are the main contributing factors to their psychosocial outcomes (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2004; Porter & Haslam, 2005). It is these experiences that cause refugees to respond differently

to traumatic situations (Porter, 2007). Literature also documents refugees are not 'passive' victims of trauma, but 'active' survivors (Porter, 2007 p. 431) with immense resilience in their new environment and their psychosocial characteristics have an important effect on their adaption (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2004; Porter & Haslam, 2005, Khawaja et al. (2008).

2.3.5 Racism and discrimination

Ighodaro (2002) argues that racism and discrimination are reoccurring contributors to the sense of mistrust and insecurity expressed by refugees upon arrival to a new country. Institutional discrimination (particularly ethnic and racial discrimination) is the interchangeable difference between the use of the term 'refugee' and 'immigrant'. It creates discrepancies between the country's population and minority groups. Therefore immigration policies in developed countries need to be underpinned by socio-political and cultural values and embedded in theoretical grounding. The author also asserts that African refugees within developed countries have been the subject of human rights violations, political subjugation, post-colonial influences and racial discrimination. The problems faced by refugees are therefore strongly related to the issues of institutionalised racism, power and privilege, equity and social justice. Studies have shown that refugees and refugee students in Australia are at risk from racism and discrimination in their daily lives resulting in adverse outcomes for employment, housing and their self esteem and engendering social isolation (Farnan, 2001; Khawaja, 2008; Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2004).

2.4 Resettlement factors that impact personal and emotional well-being

2.4.1 Language

Language can be challenging for refugees especially among older parents who commonly rely on their children to act as interpreters (Farnan, 2001). This can cause a strain within the family structure and limit their ability to adapt quickly. Families that do not have family members already in the host country on their resettlement have smaller social networks, thus increasing their exposure to language barriers and reducing socio-economic horizons (Hiebert 2009). Language skills are linked to economic success and predictably refugees have been shown to have greater access to skilled employment opportunities if they have, or gain proficiency in, the official language of the host country (Pottie et al. 2008).

2.4.2 *Employment and socio-economic status*

Socio-economic development assists in determining the psychosocial well-being of refugees based on economic and household income recovery (Ager, 2002; Porter & Haslam, 2005). Competency in English affects the ability of refugees in Australia to secure employment; this limitation can be exacerbated by stressful situations (such as job interviews and completing documentation) and has been shown to be a factor in restricting possible employment opportunities (Farnan 2001).

The use of support from social networks for financial and material assistance and emotional support assist refugees through the period of transitions, especially through the initial resettlement stages and receiving employment (Khawaja et al., 2008). A strong link has been demonstrated between language, gender inequalities and health and is also seen in employment outcomes. Employment outcomes can be enhanced and assisted through the possible use of financial rewards which assist in promoting refugees to develop social networks and support groups, build self-esteem, understand employment processes, contact recruitment companies and obtain training (Pottie et al., 2008).

2.4.3 *Housing and long-term stability*

Housing affordability and uncertainty over tenure are known to engender financial and emotional stress in refugees who commonly spend a considerable proportion of household income on shelter, often in overcrowded accommodation (Hiebert, 2009; Miraftab, 2000; Waxman 1998). Hiebert (2009) reported on a longitudinal study of immigrants to Canada which assessed the changing rates of homeownership, crowding and affordability over time amongst various population groups. He noted that four years after arrival there was a dramatic improvement in home ownership rates and living conditions and a significant drop in the percentage of immigrants spending more than 30% of their household income on shelter. However this outcome was not shared across all groups of immigrants, with refugees showing the least improvement of all the groups and reporting continued difficulties associated with affordability and overcrowding.

Colic-Peisker & Tilbury (2004) in their study of refugees in Perth noted that for most of their respondents, stable housing and employment were seen as primary factors in restoring normalcy to their lives. This was confirmed in meta-analyses undertaken by Porter and Haslam (2005) and Porter (2007) of factors affecting mental health of refugees.

These analyses identified that long-term accommodation and post-displacement and resettlement economic opportunities were predictors of better mental health outcomes. They concluded that psychological outcomes among refugees could be significantly improved by the provision of resettlement support services that assisted them in securing employment and obtaining long-term housing.

2.4.4 Family violence

Family and domestic violence is recognised to be a global issue affecting women, children and family members in all countries of the world. The 2005 World Health Organisation (WHO) report into violence against women concluded that violence against women is universal and affects women from all backgrounds and economic status, but women from immigrant and refugee backgrounds are particularly at risk (Garcia-Moreno, Jansen, Ellsberg, Heise, & Watts, 2005).

Family and partner violence in families from refugee backgrounds in Australia has been found to be associated with the pre and post resettlement experience (Rees & Pease, 2007). Prior to their resettlement in Australia, refugee women may have been at risk of rape or gender based violence during conflict, flight or sojourn in refugee camps and may be left with an ongoing legacy of medical and mental health issues (Rees & Pease, 2007). Several authors (Khawaja et al. 2008, Garcia-Moreno, et al, 2005, Rees & Pease, 2007) have suggested that partner and family violence occurring post resettlement may arise out of the tensions caused by the disparity between societal norms of the refugees' original country and that of the host country. Though this partner violence may be initiated by resettlement stressors, such as language barriers and cultural differences, change in gender roles is the most common stressor. Children who have more exposure to and more readily embrace the new cultures may also experience family violence due to these tensions and attempts to restore a perceived loss of discipline.

2.4.5 Gender

Refugee women in their resettled countries may find themselves receiving a parental allowance or working outside of the home for the first time in their lives. They may also work more hours and earn a higher income than their husband or partners thus providing these women with an increased sense of power and independence. This role change and female economic power often threatens the traditional male role of being the sole provider.

It impacts masculinity and causes tension in the marital relationship, particularly amongst couples from traditionally patriarchal cultures (Nilsson, Brown, Russell, & Khamphakdy-Brown, 2008; Rees & Pease, 2007).

Nilsson et al. (2008) found that many refugee women were eager to learn a new language and new skills. With a higher proficiency in English, they were able to engage more with the social and community structures of their host country. Subsequently, they were more likely to experience psychological and physical abuse from their partners due to the disparity in values and roles in the resettled country to those of their country of origin.

Health outcomes for refugee women have also been found to be adversely impacted by reduced access to health services. Porter and Haslam (2005) found that female refugees have slightly poorer mental health outcomes than male refugees. Rees and Pease (2007) suggest that in order to address this issue in Australia, refugee resettlement policies should promote gender equality in refugee communities by providing access to education and social inclusion whilst incorporating cultural safety and sensitivity to the norms and traditions of those communities.

2.4.6 Coping strategies

In their study of Sudanese refugees in Brisbane, Khawaja et al. (2008), identify various coping strategies employed by refugees including: reliance on religious beliefs and practices, social support networks and cognitive strategies such as reframing the situation, relying on their inner resources and agency, and focusing on future aspirations. Respondents generally fell into two groups, those who reframed their situation (adjusted to changes in their new country and took on different positions if needed) with a positive approach, or those who were resigned to their situation. The positive respondents developed an inner strength, felt that they could cope with any situation and were focused on hope and aspirations for the future. The respondents resigned to their situation on the other hand felt that there was nothing they could do to alter their situation. Colic-Peisker and Tilbury (2004) identified these two coping styles as 'active' and 'passive' and argued that 'active' refugees tended to have better outcomes in terms of social and emotional well-being. Silove and Steel (2006) stress that the ability of refugee communities themselves to be proactive in self help and to draw on community beliefs to support each

other and initiate recovery from past trauma should not be underestimated and should be utilised when devising programmes for these communities.

2.5 Concluding comments: Unique students, unique needs: where to from here?

Levin asserts that the changing distribution of students from non-traditional backgrounds has resulted in a fundamentally different profile of educational support needs. Framing the discourses around academic and social inclusion requires a more differentiated systemic response to cater for a broader range of student needs in making the transition into university learning (Levin, 2007). Rawls advocates that educational institutions have a responsibility to ensure substantive equality of opportunity, and that disadvantaged students must not be subjected to an educational system in which their individual agency or self-purpose is neglected (Rawls as cited in Levin, 2007). Currently, very little is known about refugee student perspectives and their acculturation processes into university. Accordingly, educators do not have an adequate knowledge base from which to assist young students from refugee backgrounds in achieving educational success. It is this absence of research and the mounting urgency to address the unique needs of students from refugee backgrounds in Western Australia that this study sought to address, through the exploration and documentation of the unique needs of refugee students.



CHAPTER 3

Research Design and Methods

3.0 Introduction to the Chapter

This chapter outlines the research methodology used for the study. The chapter describes the methods, research process, ethical considerations, quality criteria and data analysis employed in the study.

3.1 Conceptual Framework used for the study

This study was underpinned by a framework that was informed by Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, a model originally developed and refined by psychologist Abraham Maslow to explain the underlying drivers of human motivation (Huitt, 2007). However it has subsequently has been modified and expanded upon and is used in many fields, including those of humanitarian and disaster relief. In this form the underlying premise is that agencies recognise that whilst biological and physiological needs (air, water, food and shelter) and safety issues must be addressed, they must also remain cognisant of community social and psychological needs.

All interventions targeting refugees and vulnerable groups must recognise that individuals have several basic human needs, which include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Physiological - air, water, food, and sleep;
- Safety – personal and financial security (work, family, morality), protection from accidents/illness and the adverse impacts, and experiencing justice;
- Love and belonging – sense of well-being, family, friends and intimacy;
- Self esteem – self esteem, confidence, respect of others, respect by others;
- Self actualisation – morality, creativity, problem solving, lack of prejudice, and acceptance of reality (Simons, Irwin et al., 1987; Taylor, 2005).

To explore the psychosocial well-being of the students, the interview questions were designed to be guided by each of these five stages of Needs as depicted in Figure 3.

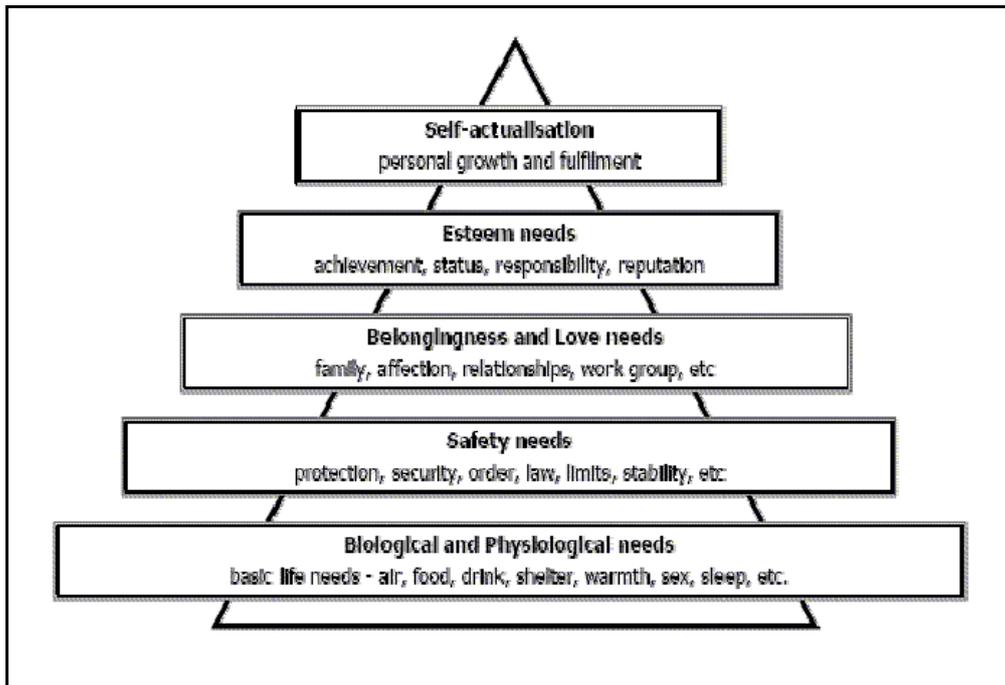


Figure 3: Diagram of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Chapman, 2001)

The psychosocial component of the interview comprised an exploration therefore of

1. Basic and physiological Needs;
2. Safety Needs;
3. Belongings and Love Needs;
4. Esteem Needs and
5. Self Actualisation

Students were asked to discuss these topics, with interpretation of the needs left up to the students. Taylor (2005) adapted Maslow's original pyramid depiction of the hierarchy of needs to a three legged stool (shown below in Figure 4). This model illustrates that if the basic first three needs are not met, the stool becomes tilted and a person's sense of self esteem and self actualisation will not be stable.

Thus, it is essential to be mindful of these three elements of basic human needs when devising programmes for victims of humanitarian disasters, either natural or man-made, if they are to fully recover, (re)gain their self-esteem and progress to realise their full potential.

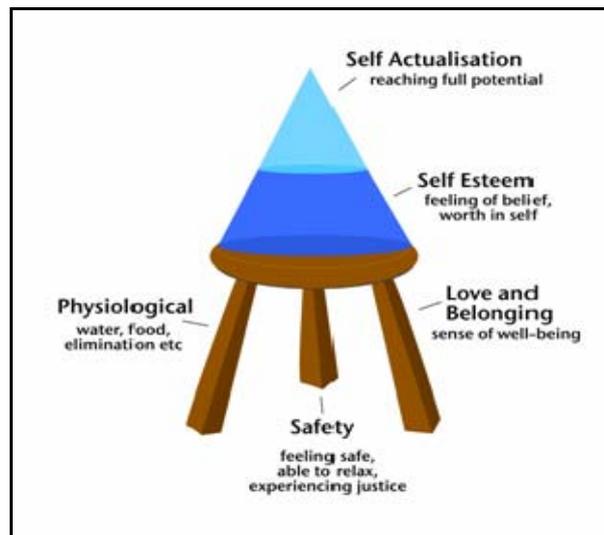


Figure 4: Adaptation of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Taylor, 2005)

The researchers drew on the analysis of the student interviews to further adapt and refine these models to reflect their findings and this has been presented in Chapter 6. Based on our analysis the model has been further modified and the result is presented in Chapter 7.

3.2 Research Design

3.2.1 Qualitative approach and undertaking a needs analysis

The culturally sensitive nature of the study led to the adoption of an interpretive, qualitative approach (Denzin, Lincoln, & Smith, 2008). This qualitative approach allowed for shared dialogue between researchers and participants. The researchers were able to draw attention to diverse perspectives, draw conclusions from a synthesis of the results, and place the focus on the refugee students' own perceptions and interpretations. This was achieved through an in-depth exploration of the complexities and meanings of their educational and psychosocial experiences in university settings (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005).

The study commenced with a 'needs analysis' undertaken with refugee youth using focus group discussions and interviews that were conducted using a framework based on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. The Rapid Needs Analysis (RNA) reported in this paper was conducted in 2008 and 2009 in WA as the first stage of the study.

The RNA was then used to inform the development of two CD resources: An academic CD for staff to better support the learning needs of refugee students and a student CD that provides essential links, resources and advice on both educational learning and issues of psychosocial well-being, such as employment and housing for refugee students. All stages of the study; the literature review, needs analysis and the final CD productions were guided by principles of psychosocial well-being underpinned by a framework based on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. The timeline and overall framework for the study is represented below in Figure 5.

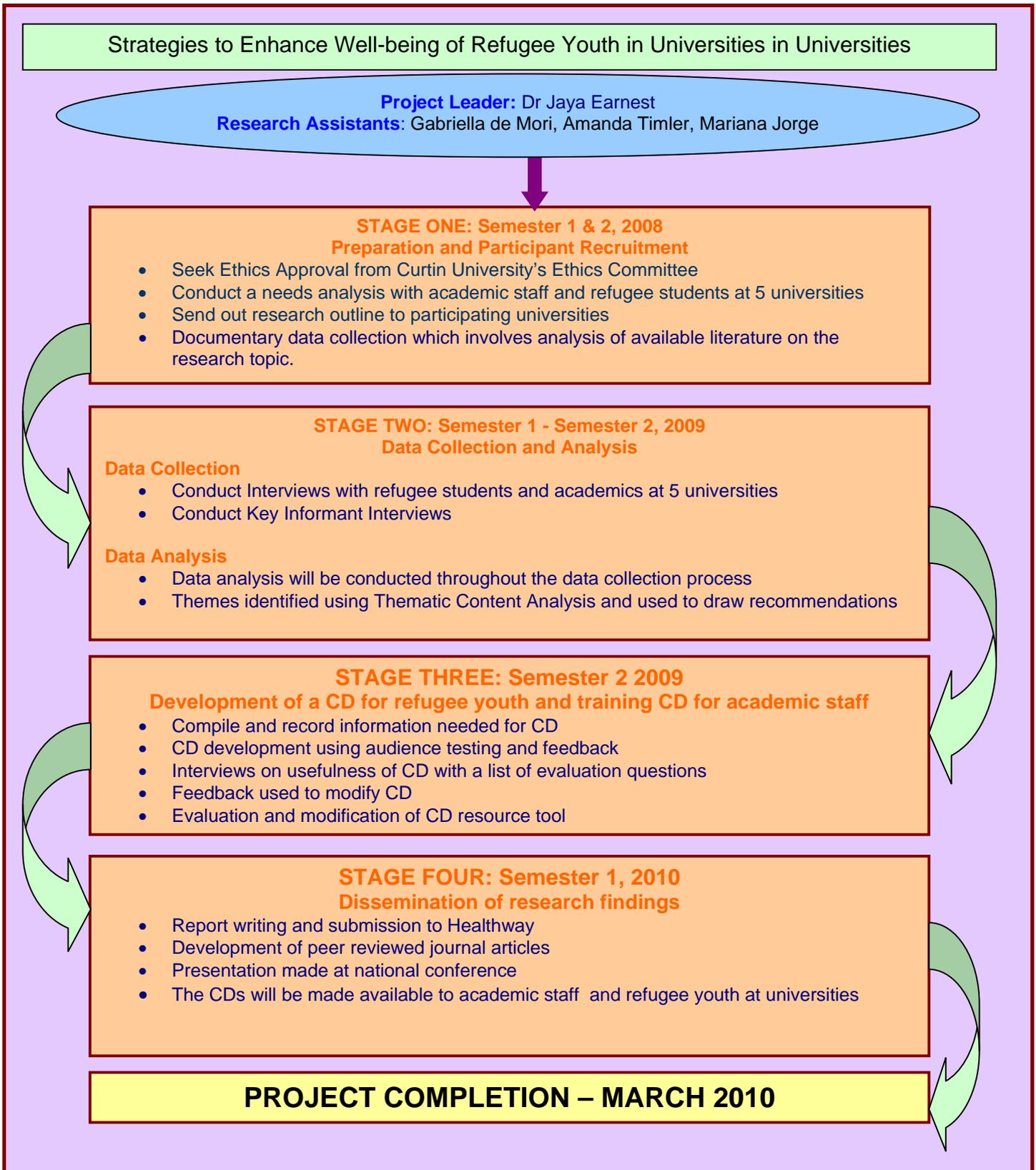


Figure 5: Timeline framework of the study

3.2.2 Stage One: Rapid Needs Analysis

This study was undertaken using a Rapid Needs Analysis (RNA) that aimed to examine and document the academic needs of African refugee students at each of the five universities in Western Australia: Curtin University of Technology, Edith Cowan University, Murdoch University, Notre Dame University and the University of Western Australia.

A RNA is the systematic processes in identifying and understanding the needs of a local population (Wright, Williams, & Wilkinson, 1998) and is used to uncover the causes of existing problems, so that deficits and weaknesses of the situation can be addressed in subsequent planning (Cohen, Marion, & Morrison, 2000). This qualitative research approach aims to extract the contextualised nature of experience and was chosen for its suitability to explore the ways refugee students describe, interpret and make sense of their experiences (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005). The RNA was designed to produce data that would enable the development of strategies for empowerment described in the model proposed by Fawcett et al. (1995). This RNA suggests four strategies that enhance the empowerment process and related outcomes, these include:

- 1) Enhancing experience and competence;
- 2) Improving group structure and capacity;
- 3) Removing social and environmental barriers; and
- 4) Strengthening environmental support and resources (Fawcett et al., 1995).

Consequently, the final analysis facilitated a better understanding of the specific learning and social needs of refugee students and helped determine the factors that enable students to feel that they 'belong' to the university community (Cohen et al., 2000).

3.2.3 Interviews and focus group discussions

In-depth, semi structured interviews were used to explore perceptions and experiences of refugee students, and provided a rich and detailed set of data about thoughts, feelings and impressions in their own words (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005). The interviews were open and exploratory with the focus placed on the refugee students' own perceptions and interpretation of their experiences. Pini (2002) noted that interviews and focus group discussions provide opportunities for reflection of the subjective experiences of everyday life. In the interviews and focus group discussions, conversations flowed freely and participants were supported to disclose their concerns about acculturation, resettlement,

financial commitments, difficulties in obtaining suitable work and formation of new identities.

The semi structured interview questions explored educational aspects of the students' learning experiences and touched on students' educational backgrounds prior to resettling in Australia. At the conclusion of the interview, students were asked to suggest recommendations for staff and fellow students to better support them through such issues. The interviews and focus group discussions were conducted at a time and place convenient to the participants, either on campus or at the participants' homes. Two focus groups discussions, each consisting of three to four students, were held at Murdoch University. Interviews used open-ended questions and lasted an average of 60 minutes. All interviews and focus group discussions were audio recorded and transcribed by a professional transcriber. Brief notes taken during the interview, along with additional reflections written immediately after the interview, were compiled to add context and further clarity to enhance the richness of data and assist in the thematic analysis.

3.2.4 Participant recruitment

Participants were initially recruited from community contacts that the research team had previously established. At Curtin University, an initial list of students on humanitarian visas was obtained from University Planning and Statistics. These potential participants were screened according to the selection criteria and asked to give referrals to other potential participants. Snowballing and purposive sampling from these initial contacts occurred thereafter. Very few refusals occurred, with most participants enjoying participating in the study and referring contacts to be included after the conclusion of their own interview.

The inclusion criteria sought participants who were currently enrolled at Curtin University of Technology, Edith Cowan University, Notre Dame University, Murdoch University and the University of Western Australia in Western Australia. Participants had to have entered Australia on Humanitarian visas and were included regardless of age, course, gender, year of study, family structure, number of years in Australia, previous education and English level proficiency before commencing tertiary education.

3.2.5 Using Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs framework to guide the questions and analysis

The interview questions were guided by a simple interview schedule (see Appendix 1). Towards the end of each interview, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs was used as a framework to underpin the level of psychosocial well-being felt by refugee students. A diagram of the framework, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs was provided to each participant towards the end of their interview. The research team explained the framework and asked students to mark on the left hand side of the pyramid where they felt their level of psychosocial well-being was situated prior to resettlement in Australia, and then to mark on the right hand side where students felt this level was post resettlement to Australia. To illustrate what the terms 'self' and 'actualisation' meant to them, students were asked to also write their aspirations on top of the pyramid. This analysis is explained in Chapter 6.

The researchers drew a line to connect both sides of the pyramid to allow participants to reflect where they currently were on the framework in comparison to where they previously had been before resettlement, and how many steps away from self actualisation the students currently stood. This activity was useful to the findings because it examined not only their basic needs, but also their views on abstract concepts of 'self', 'belonging' and 'self-actualisation'. Results from this activity are presented in Chapter 6. A representative group of students was selected to complete the framework. Participants were from each of the five universities and included both males and females from a variety of countries, courses and year levels.

3.3 Study participants

The inclusion and exclusion criteria of the study ensured that a cross-sectional cohort of refugee students were included in the study. The study found participants had varying degrees of previous education, English language proficiency and computer literacy prior to commencing university with differing resultant effects on their experience of university learning. Some participants had experienced earlier rungs of the Australian educational system, including secondary schooling and TAFE level qualifications, before entering university. Others had studied in their countries of origin and entered at tertiary level upon arrival to Australia. Most participants had experienced disrupted education due to conflict and/or war in their country of origin and had often sought refuge in another country before finally resettling in Australia.

A total of **39** students, comprising **26** male and **13** female students, were involved in the study. A detailed demographic background of the sample is provided below.

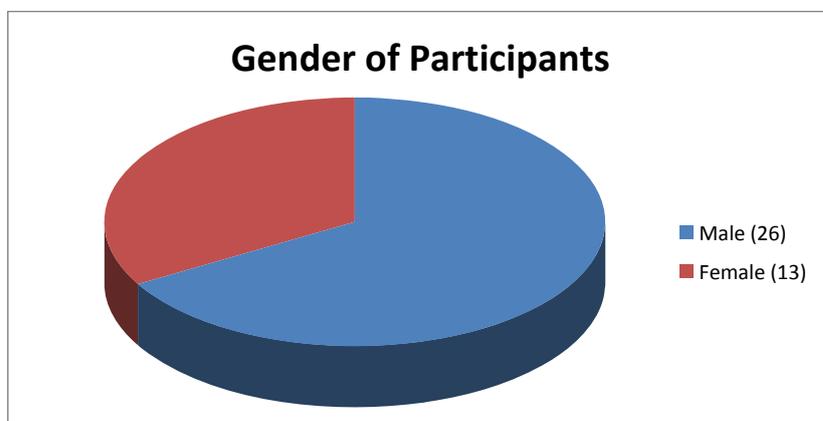


Figure 6: Gender of Participants

The students came from a variety of ethnic backgrounds and represented nine different African countries including Ethiopia, Eritrea, Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan and Uganda, with the largest proportion of students from Sudan, followed by Sierra Leone.

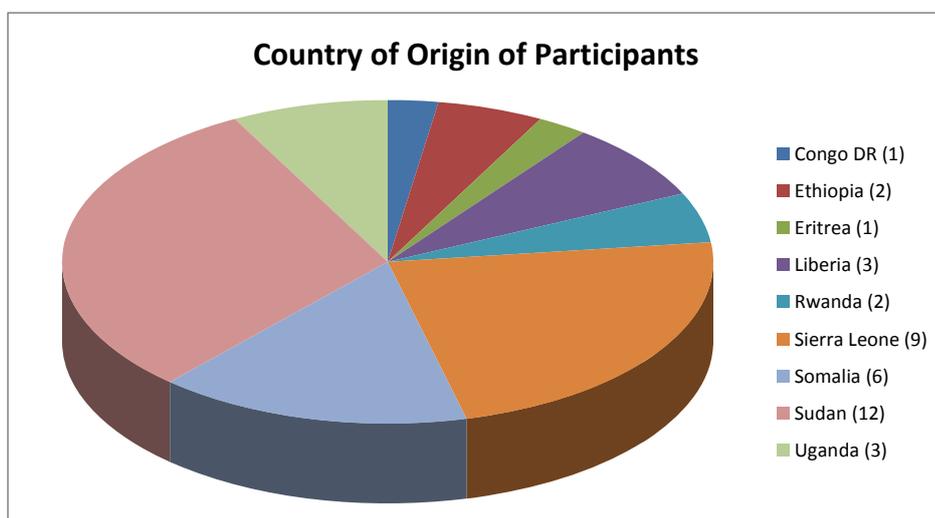


Figure 7: Country of origin of participants

Participants were enrolled in a variety of courses encompassing the Humanities, Science and Engineering, Business and Health Science Faculties, demonstrating a wide range of

interests and skills. A large number of students in the sample were females studying nursing. University courses that participants were enrolled in included community development, sociology, social work and science. All students bar one were undergraduate students who were at various levels of study, ranging from their first semester to their final year. One student was currently enrolled in a bridging course at the University of Western Australia and one participant was a postgraduate Master's student.

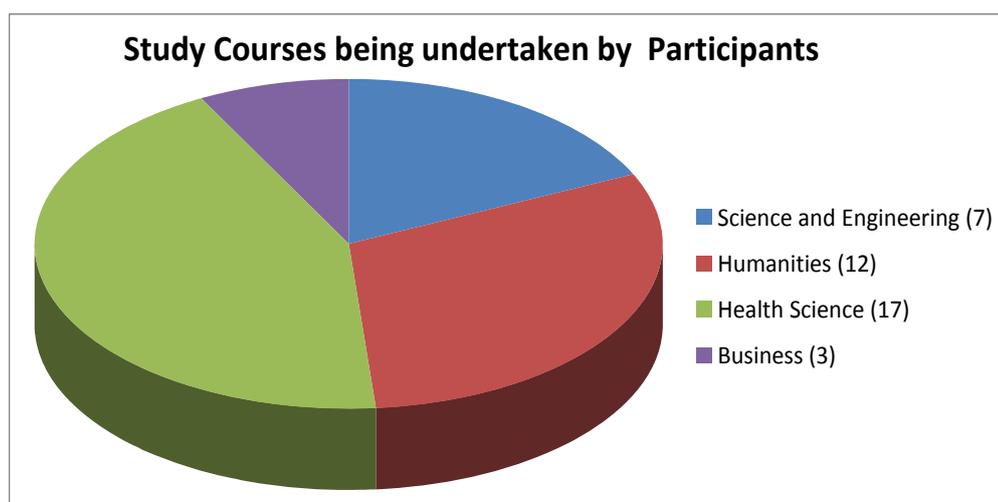


Figure 8: Study courses being undertaken by participants

The study included participants from each of the five universities in Western Australia which included four public universities and Notre Dame University, a private Catholic University.

3.4 Ethical considerations of the project

This research was carried out in accordance with the Australian National Health and Medical Research Council guidelines. The Human Research Ethics Committee of the Office of Research and Development of Curtin University of Technology approved the project (see appendix 3).

All interview participants read a one-page information sheet outlining the objectives of the study and the requirements associated with participation. All participants were made aware that participation was voluntary, that consent could be withdrawn at any time and confidentiality would be maintained in the study.

3.5 Thematic content analysis of interviews

After the interviews were completed and transcribed, thematic content analysis was undertaken to collate and condense the information gathered into distinct, and succinct themes and recommendations that could be used to design and direct the remaining aims of the project (Boyatzis, 1998; Neuendorf, 2002). The aim of the analysis was to produce a succinct and reliable matrix of key themes (Reis & Judd, 2000). This was important in communicating the results to participants as the summarised themes and recommendations were provided to participants for their feedback. The data analysis was guided by the Framework Approach to Analysis (Pope, Ziebland, & Mays, 2000; Lacey & Luff, 2001). The key stages were:

- Familiarisation - immersion in the raw data in order to list key ideas and recurrent themes;
- Identifying a thematic framework - identifying the key issues, and themes by which the data was examined and referenced;
- Indexing - applying the thematic framework to all the data in textual form by annotating the transcripts with codes;
- Interpretation - using the charts to define concepts, and find associations between themes with a view to providing explanations.

The themes and issues emerging from the analysis for each of the different groups of refugee youth were examined for similarities and differences and the distilled themes are presented in Chapters 4, 5 and 6. These themes were then subsequently used to develop a modified psychosocial framework, presented in Chapter 7, which can be used in refugee research. The themes were also used to design CDs for refugee students and staff which were trialled with a cross-section of academic staff and refugee students.

3.5 Stage 2: Design and delivery of CD resources

With the help of a graphic designer, the research team designed and developed two interactive CD's (one for academics and the other for students from refugee backgrounds) as a useful mode of increasing academic knowledge of refugee students' needs and providing a resource tool for refugee students in their areas of identified need. The designs of both CDs were based on the results of the thematic content analysis, and drew on student comments on their aspirations to be successful learners and their

recommendations on what they felt academics need to know in order to support refugee students to achieve these aspirations and succeed at university.

3.5.1 Student CD design & delivery

The information obtained from the RNA provided the research team with material to include within the student CD and help in its design. Further information was drawn from available internet resources and a previously developed teaching and learning programme called LiFE (Learning interactively for engagement) at Curtin University (Dias & Earnest, 2008), aimed at improving educational needs of students specifically from refugee backgrounds. The LiFE project was funded by the Australian Teaching and Learning Council (ATLC). The student CD entitled '**Uni Guide**': *Navigating your way through University* was designed as a resource to assist students from refugee backgrounds was designed to cover three main areas of need:

- University learning
- Campus life
- Living in Perth

'Uni Guide' has attempted to address the educational and psychosocial needs and learning styles of students from refugee backgrounds commencing tertiary education in Australia. The design was culturally sensitive in its approach, allowing for it to be applicable and useful for a cross-section of religious and ethnic backgrounds. The CD was designed to be interesting and fun for students, and the student CD was designed to assist them to become independent, pro-active learners, increase their confidence and to understand and navigate the university system. The design layout ensured a user-friendly and appealing approach that was appropriate for students with low computer literacy. Several meetings were held between the Curtin research team and the graphic designer to ensure that the layout and contents were culturally sensitive, suitable and engaging.

The design team felt that the key skills necessary for refugee students to succeed within the university was to learn the university system and allow them to develop their voice and skills within this system. Therefore the objectives of the student CD development were to provide one useful resource that enables students to increase their empowerment and support systems, thereby helping to lower the number of roadblocks they may encounter in universities and remain motivated and confident during their study semesters. Its

overarching aim was to motivate students to tackle any study roadblocks in an easy, quick and understandable manner.

Once the CD was developed, it was evaluated by interview participants who had volunteered to evaluate the draft version of the CD. Students were asked to comment on the useful and positive aspects of the CD, as well as suggestions for redesign and editing of the content and layout. The compiled evaluations enabled proper redesign of the CD that was satisfactory for the students who would receive the final copy, along with all refugee students at university campuses in Perth, WA.

3.5.2 Academic CD design & delivery

An academic CD was developed based on research findings and student interviews. It was designed to assist in increasing academic staff members' awareness and knowledge of about the experiences of students from refugee backgrounds. The CD intended to provide academics with an insight into the difficulties refugee students face and will hopefully enable them to enhance support for this particular cohort. Additionally, the CD was designed as a manageable resource that an academic could view within a short time frame and portrays insights into refugee students' experiences using their own narratives and voices. The researchers, with the permission of participants and the project team leaders of the ALTC LiFE project, used short video clips of footage that had previously been shot on Curtin campus during the development of the DVDs for the LiFE project (Silburn et al., 2010).

The academic CD entitled '**Strategies to enhance outcomes for students from refugee backgrounds**' was designed to cover three main areas of need:

- Convey voices of students from refugee backgrounds
- Tips for providing support to students from refugee backgrounds
- Resources of interest for academics

The CD was developed under the assumption that academic staff had little knowledge about refugee students. Therefore the CD aimed to provide academic staff with adequate, and accurate material that not only immersed them in the experiential world of refugee students, but provided them with strategies to support these students, through the provision of 10 recommendations and additional reading material. The CD achieved this

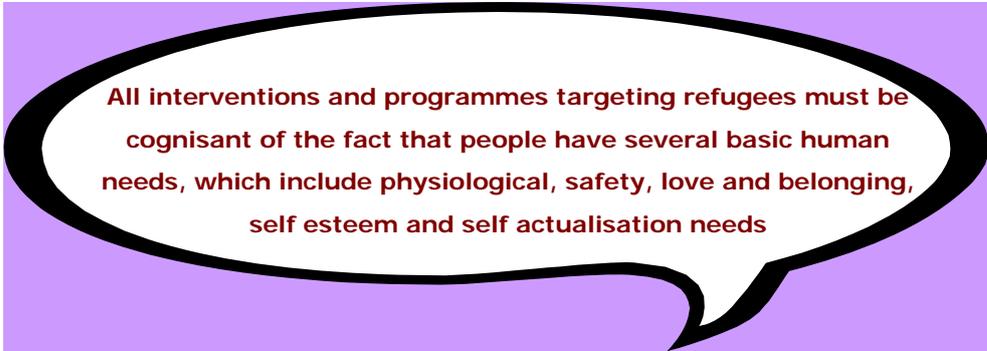
through its mixed material methodology, combining short video clips, short recommendations and academic reading material. Staff evaluated the CD through feedback forms which allowed for appropriate redesign before the final copy was disseminated to academic staff at university campuses in WA.

3.6 Rigour in the study

Steps were taken throughout the data collection and analysis to establish trustworthiness of the method and credibility with respect to the findings. Multiple perspectives on the subject enabled the development of a more holistic and contextual portrayal of real-life situations experienced by refugee youth (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Verification strategies such as systematic checking of data and ongoing monitoring and interpretation of data were used to enhance reliability and validity. Constant analysis of incoming data guided selection of participants and strategies were questioned to ensure confirmation of newly formed and developing themes. An audit trail, as discussed by Patton (2003) was also conducted, ensuring methods and data were documented so that the analysis of the data could be confirmed and replicated by other researchers. Validity was enhanced by “member checks” with key informants and expansion or clarification of issues that emerged during data analysis (Sharts-Hopko, 2002).

3.7 Summary

Chapter 3 has described the conceptual framework used for the study, the study design and procedures, the stages of the RNA and CD design. The following chapters detail the interview analysis, the design and delivery of the CD, the evaluation, discussion, final recommendations and conclusions.



All interventions and programmes targeting refugees must be cognisant of the fact that people have several basic human needs, which include physiological, safety, love and belonging, self esteem and self actualisation needs

CHAPTER 4

Results of the Needs Analysis: Part 1

Narratives of the Refugee Experience

4.0 Introduction: Use of narrative and voice

This chapter commences the first of three chapters of interview analysis and the refugee experience as voiced by the participants themselves is presented. Narratives are important social and cultural tools used in most CaLD cultures (Hinton & Earnest, 2010; Liamputtong, 2007), and were employed during the interviews to elicit descriptions of participants' experiences of resettlement and university life. Through their voices, participants were given an opportunity to share personal perceptions and experiences. Respondents discussed their hopes, their agency and how they navigated the social, educational, health and community systems.

4.1 Narratives of the refugee resettlement experience

4.1.1 *Political conflict and flight*

Participants had varying experiences of war, trauma, conflict, seeking exile, being internally or externally displaced and seeking refuge in Australia. Each of their countries of origin was framed within different socio-political histories that spanned decades. Many of these conflicts persist and the participants remained connected to them. They were concerned for the state of their countries and their family and friends still living there. Their identities were strongly linked to the pre and post migration refugee experiences.

I came here six years ago with my step-mum when I was like thirteen years of age, I was told that my mum was killed during the war, I flee with my step-mother to the neighbouring country where we seek asylum to get into Australia. When we got here, five years later then I heard that my mum is alive. I tried to bring my mum but it didn't work. **Sierra Leonean female studying Nursing at Curtin University of Technology (Curtin)**

I'm from Liberia and from a background of people who have been at war some part of their lives since 1989... we've been in war and most cases I've been abused... but trying to adjust to Australia. **Liberian male studying Commerce at the University of Western Australia (UWA)**

What happened back home... it was horrible. Sometimes I just don't want to think about it... when the war broke like in the streets when we were trying to get out of there you'd be jumping over dead bodies and flies everywhere, dogs everywhere. It was really horrible and you see the rebels cutting little babies there, their arms or they asking people to line up and ask you 'what do you want[cut]?' Some people just stand there and cry, don't know what to say... Now you can talk about it because it's gone you know, but it's really difficult, it's really hard. **Sierra Leonean female studying Nursing at Edith Cowan University (ECU)**

4.1.2 Resettlement in Australia – anxieties and challenges

During the process of resettlement in Australia, refugees are faced with a myriad of challenges: learning the government assistance system, navigating public transport systems, understanding renting/real estate procedures and new banking systems. Their limited knowledge of the Australian government systems impacts on how they access and utilise services.

Pretty much moving from one place to another it's kind of challenging because if you leave from your home of stay and then move into another country and then you've got to settle down and then adapt to new things, adapt to new culture, ways of doing everything that changing and so yeah it's a bit of challenge. So we had to work around all of those things and to make ourself a better Australian. **Liberian male studying Commerce at UWA**

For many, it signified an opportunity to continue their way of life. For others, it was a major setback when they felt **they** were starting their lives from square one again. Some students commenced education almost immediately after arriving in Australia, while others took a few years to get established. Regardless of resettlement issues, cultural issues persisted in their new lives.

In the first few months when we were here it was quite hard to get the transport because you didn't know where you can pick the bus from. So that was one of the major problems we experienced. Another problem we experience in those first few months was the accent here. You know it was quite hard for me to understand somebody in the shopping centres and all the way and in the bus, the bus stops and all that it was quite hard, unless I'll come to any institutions like Centrelink and maybe the school and all that only you know it was very clear to me to speak to these people because they speak a very clear English rather than the people who have never gone to class you know. So the accent was one of the major problems we experienced when we came here. **Sudanese male studying Mechanical Engineering at Curtin**

It was difficult at first when I just arrived, I crying a lot and didn't want to be here, wanted to go back and then there is not a little bit of difference, there are so many difference like a bit of racist words against you and calling you names. Saying "what are you doing here, where do you come from, go back to your country". You get that a lot when you just arrive here and that makes you feel really bad and you want to go back home. And then you feel confused as well and it's too big here, the town is really big compared to Africa. So you are scared, you don't know from here to where, you don't know what you are going to do now. **Sierra Leonean female studying Social Work at Curtin**

It was a problem because remember it was a very strange place for me and certainly if you come in here for the first time you can't actually know where to begin. So it was really very hard for me to find places like Centrelink and bank and shopping centres. **Sudanese male studying Science at Notre Dame University**

4.1.3 Cultural Identity and intergenerational stress

Beyond navigating the systems in place in Australia, the data confirmed deeper issues uncovered in literature that go beyond every day struggles, into cultural identity, dual cultural membership, difficulties in obtaining employment and inter-generational stress. Some of these factors arise when children adapt faster than their parents, and parents become reliant upon them.

With me I feel like I've grown up here and I feel more like Australian because I don't speak Somali very well but with other people when they see me they think that I'm more Somali because they see what I wear and so when they look at me they go , where you're from, how long have you been here? They don't know that I've grown up here and it's all I know...So it's just different in that way, people think that I'm different and I don't fit with the Somalis and also don't fit in with Australians because they can only see what I'm, what I look like so it's just a bit of a clash. I feel like, there's something's missing, I need to at least go back or learn Somali. I guess identity's sort of fluid but I don't exactly fit in with both because I don't have the Somali culture, I speak English and if I meet Australians they see me as a refugee and somebody that's come from somewhere else so it's just strange in a way... I keep telling them I'm going to go back and learn, I'm going to go back every year and it's the same people that come and say how come you don't know Somali yet and you know and some of them are like what are you wearing pants you know. It's not accepted, it clashes sort of with the religion side of everything. **Somali female studying Health Science at Curtin**

Our mum she is an old woman now and of course she is still within the working age as far as the Australian system is concerned, so when we arrived they sent her to school but back home she didn't even know how to hold a pen so everything in terms of writing started here. So like how she's finding it very, very difficult. Of course like the children they are very easy to adapt to you know changes. **Sierra Leonean male studying Science and Computing at Curtin**

4.2 Multiple Stressors

4.2.1 Acculturative Stress

The process of acculturation, whereby a person must become accustomed to a new culture they are now living in, causes the refugee youth ongoing challenges. Despite most participants being in Australia for a number of years, these issues continue to arise and cause anxiety among students and significantly affected the time they spent studying and therefore impacted their academic performance.

I'm still facing a lot of challenges on cultural differences where I tend to not to understand the accent of Australians the way they speak, and the cultural different

where, the way they swear, they turn out that I didn't like it at all...The way they speak is, the accent they speak is, it tend to be difficult for me in the first place but swearing is a kind I didn't get used to. So yeah people swear at me when I came into Australia, even now I'm still hard. So I'm getting and adjusting into the culture, the way things are done and so I will say there are some positive aspect that I will appreciate because of maybe now I can drive before I didn't used to drive which is also good, it's a good part that I enjoy and also I met a lot of my new friends from different backgrounds. **Sudanese male studying Management and Marketing at ECU**

So far, I'm trying to do all my things the Australian way because I have to follow the rules and regulations, especially if I'm driving. Very, very careful driving in the school zone. **Sierra Leonean male studying Nursing at Curtin**

Other difficulties is ahm the cultural, the way Australian do things, the way they talk like the way before I said, the way they swear. It seemed a bit hard to me and I don't actually like when people swear at me although the negative impression of it and positive part of it sometimes when people swear they don't actually mean to abuse you but they swear because they get used to it. **Sudanese male studying Management and Marketing at ECU**

4.2.2 Financial stressors and responsibilities

All participants were burdened with sending money back to their extended family and sometimes friends in their countries of origin, on top of providing for themselves and those they live with in Australia. This need to constantly work significantly affects their studies and stood out as one of the main issues affecting refugee students. Most students juggle employment with fulltime study loads, often forcing some students to withdraw from studies altogether. Some students worked night shifts in factories and commenced their days at university with no sleep. The amount of money required by family members back home illustrates the desperation felt by family in their countries of origin, and the enormous senses of responsibility refugee students felt towards their large extended families was often prioritised before their studies. This issue was particularly felt by male participants and older sons.

So every time they're waking me up, or they need money, they need this, and I have to always be there to help them out... especially Christmas is approaching and everyone needs Christmas money. I'm looking after a family of fifteen back home, feeding them every month. **Liberian male studying Commerce at UWA**

Financial struggle is the most thing affected our studies, because you know we have to go sometimes during the day, and sacrifice our classes... almost everyday, you're thinking about how you're going to pay the next bills. It becomes very hard for me, so when I study...my mind is always divided here in school but thinking about family and finances. **Sudanese male studying Environmental Health Science at Curtin**

I have to look after my son and look after myself as well, being his dad I have provide for him. So with all those things sometimes I have to take time to go and take him around. Sometimes maybe I'll have my assignments and stuff to do and have to forego them because of him. **Liberian male studying Commerce at UWA**

Every time they call you and if you see like private number you go like - it's them again, I'm not even going to pick that you know but they keep calling, and the thing is even if you say I'm not going to pick that call but then in your mind you go like I should pick the call because I want to know why they calling you, maybe something is happening? Maybe someone is sick? You feel guilty if you don't answer the call. So if you don't answer the call but then after a while you go and buy a phone card and call; "Did you call me? What is it? Is mamma ok? Is this person ok? Is anyone sick?" **Sierra Leonean female studying Social Work at Curtin**

4.2.3 The stress and stigma of being a refugee on a humanitarian visa

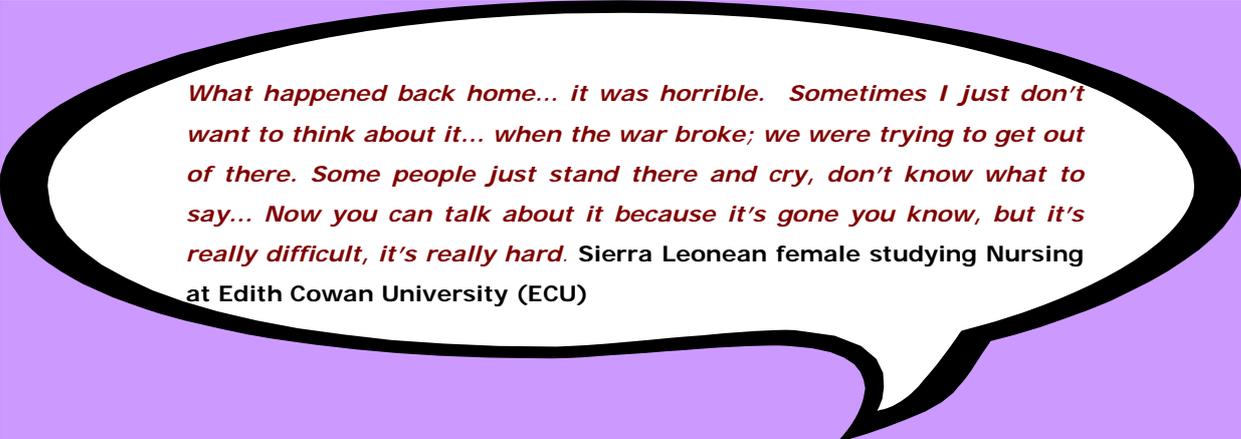
Most participants expressed a sense emotional distress at some stage of their studies at university. This was attributed to carrying the burden of their refugee background, working within dual cultures and managing frustrations associated with the university culture and academic system. All of this was confounded by financial burdens, community pressures and resettlement issues.

"Yeah it's a little bit hard for me, because I tried to put in application for humanitarian form so that my mum and my siblings will get here but immigration declined my

application so it's a little bit hard for me. 'Because once if they are here we can like do things together, maybe mum will look after my baby while I can do something and other siblings may work, they may go to school and have good life you know. But like me be here alone helping them and studying while looking after my baby, it's a little bit you know [Hard for me]". **Sierra Leone female student studying Nursing at Curtin**

4.3 Conclusion

It is clear that being a student from a refugee background creates particular and unique difficulties for these students. Both their past and present experiences are significant factors impacting on their university experiences and successes and respondents were affected by stress, anxiety, health issues, racism and aspects related to acculturation. The next chapter discusses the educational aspirations of refugee students



What happened back home... it was horrible. Sometimes I just don't want to think about it... when the war broke; we were trying to get out of there. Some people just stand there and cry, don't know what to say... Now you can talk about it because it's gone you know, but it's really difficult, it's really hard. **Sierra Leonean female studying Nursing at Edith Cowan University (ECU)**

CHAPTER 5

Results of the Needs Analysis: Part 2

Educational Needs and Future Aspirations

5.0 Educational aspirations

The pre and post migration experiences of students from refugee backgrounds culminate in stressors associated with resettlement and acculturation in Australia and demand high levels of resilience and determination for success in tertiary study. Those students that had received a preparatory course or completed other Australian education had an advantage over other students. Despite this, all students struggled to become familiar with the university academic culture and its expectations. Once enrolled, the academic culture of universities in Western Australia involves new systems, ways of thinking, engaging and assessment, bringing issues of socialisation and acculturation to the forefront of the students' lives. It is apparent that there is a sense that university is very challenging and too difficult. Language barriers, cost and recognition of overseas qualifications appear to be the major factors contributing to this perception. Despite multiple stressors and difficulties in commencing and completing their studies, the dedication, resilience and agency of these students to education is undisputable and vital to their success. This chapter provides an analysis of the educational needs drawn from the interview analysis.

5.1 Interrupted schooling whilst in transition

In addition to socio-cultural issues, students from refugee backgrounds had experienced disrupted and/or poor schooling, at the primary, high school or tertiary level. While their experiences are not uniform, all students felt that their previous education was not sufficient to prepare them adequately for entry into university.

I did my first class in a displaced camp and it was really very hard to being because we were just taught under the trees just like, and we had no resources like books and pens so we're just given a, we were just given like to write on the floor and the teacher could come and supervise us in writing so that was the, how I started anyway. **Sudanese Male studying Human Biology at Notre Dame University**

*Yeah back home I was on the science department, I was doing a little bit about medicines, I was in the first year, first year second semester then from there the war breakdown the cities so I decided to evacuate and because of that then I can't, I don't even take everything, nothing, I just try escape with my life so that I can able to save my life and go to the other neighbouring country which is Guinea, Conakry, then from there I spend a time doing no, almost one year doing nothing,. Then I, we are trying to come then we do write a letter from the Australian government so that we can able to seek asylum as a refugee here so that we can able to continue our education. And then from there they accept our, out letters, then go for interview then we succeeded. **Sierra Leonean male studying Nursing at Curtin***

5.2 Ethnic and community influences

Social support, especially from the student's own cultural background, was considered to be pivotal in shaping and supporting decisions to go to University. Some participants received encouragement from members of their own community. The pressure of having to succeed at university and keeping a positive reputation was mentioned as an influencing factor in whether to attend university.

*Actually I think it depends from the family you comes from. 'Cause what I understand is the family play a great important, important role in a person's life. So if you come from a family who really don't care that's how your life going to ahead up, you wouldn't really care for nothing yeah 'cause my parents always talked to me going back to school. **Liberian male studying Commerce at UWA***

For some participants, family were motivating factors to attend university, while for others, negative perceptions of university were issues they confronted every day. For many participants there was little support from community members in their quest to study at university.

Yes those are some of the things you know, peer pressure out there, people telling you whole lots of things like "Oh I don't think it's necessary to go ahead and you know study, just go and work in a factory and get money 'cause that's why we came here for". After all even if you go to school you are going to work for money so it's

better just go and work, or work yourself out and get money. People actually say like "You don't have to go"..We get that every day, every day of our life. People say "You just want to be lazy, you don't want to work, that's why you want to go to school". Yeah we get that every day. **Liberian male studying Commerce at UWA**

I have avoided a lot of peer pressures. "come and do this, why don't you work, get married, go back to Sudan, get yourself a good car" and all this stuff but I tried to put all those needs and demand aside and go ahead with my education...It's friends, Sudanese in particular, Sudanese young people who are just here in Australia, they are married, got good cars, work in factories anyway and they find their life is like comfortable. They are content and from their own perspective they look at me that I'm, what I'm doing is a struggle, why should I study that much. Why don't I join them and work, get married, weekend just enjoy, drink and that is it. **Sudanese male studying Master of Infectious Diseases at UWA**

Students who were currently enrolled were all extremely ambitious students with strong educational goals. They had learnt to take strength from those who supported them and were resilient to negative attitudes about education. Even when participants decided to commence tertiary education, they were faced with a myriad of systematic and bureaucratic processes that complicated their enrolment. Many of the participants expressed receiving mixed messages about enrolment, their qualifications and entrance requirements, which had nearly forced them to give up studying. Participants expressed feelings of having no support in their pursuit of beginning and completing their degree.

To me the difficult part of getting to uni is the process of getting admitted... when you try to use that qualification... they completely rubbish it! I almost gave up studying...It took me three and a half years to qualify to go to uni. **Sudanese male studying Environmental Health Science at Curtin**

They just say you're not fit to be here, go back to TAFE and see what you can do from there... When I went to TAFE... they told me "Your English is OK, you're not fit to be with us here". **Sudanese male studying Health Promotion at Curtin**

5.3 The University academic culture in Australia

There was a slight difference in experiences and satisfaction with university for students who had attended high school or TAFE in Australia or completed a preparatory course before entering university compared to those that had commenced directly into a degree programme. At university, students found that they cannot withdraw into their own ethnic networks but must interact with students from a variety of backgrounds on a daily basis. In addition they were confronted by different forms of assessment that they had not encountered before and this was often the source of anxiety and confusion.

5.3.1 Difference in African and Australian teaching styles

Central to understanding the Australian tertiary education system is the significant difference between African and Australian teaching styles. The African teaching style is teacher centred, whereby teachers take ownership of lesson content and of any resources used. This was repeatedly described as “spoon feeding” contrasting participants’ descriptions of Australian university teaching and learning where students are forced to be independent learners and interact with lecturers, tutors and fellow students in new ways. Participants are often overwhelmed with the number of assessments and have to teach themselves to be self-motivated and disciplined. Although students struggled initially to grasp the concept of being independent learners, they soon saw the benefits of the new style.

It's very stressful in a sense but it is very useful. One thing that education here in Australia is student centred whereby you as a student is expected to generate 75% of your learning where it was, in Africa it was reversed. In Africa you were supposed to be a teacher based, centred whereby the teacher had to generate 75% of learning to his student. **Sudanese male studying Management and Marketing at ECU**

Yeah they spoon fed you, like tell you everything, show you everything and even show you the paragraphs that you need to read to understand that particular unit you know. It's like you just sit there and the teacher stands there and say everything and show everything you know and then do assignment and then do exam and test and all that stuff. Here you go and do your research and then you learn what you haven't been taught. **Sierra Leonean female studying Social Work at Curtin**

Their own style of learning is they do all the research while they bring the material to school, where you learn it and memorise it, study it and do your assignment, your essay. While here most of your own research you have to do it for yourself, like in essays you have to do your own research and even there is some note taking in the class you have to do, but in my country they bring all the materials in the class... It's more good here because like you can learn a lot of different things. But while in my country you don't have all these facilities. **Sierra Leonean female studying Nursing at Curtin**

You have to be an independent person, you can't rely on teachers to tell you or anything so, basically you have to be an individual, and independent and responsible, so far that's with I know, but so far I haven't really learnt it. **Somali male studying Commerce at Curtin**

5.3.1 Impact of interrupted schooling

As participants commonly experienced interrupted schooling and were accustomed to a different style of education, they were often academically underprepared to commence university. While students who completed some high school or TAFE in Australia should have been more familiar with the Australian academic culture, all participants commented on the shock and initial unfamiliarity of the university level academic culture and its expectations of them as individual learners. The exploration of difference in education styles between Australia and the countries of origin of the participants also revealed the limited resources that respondents had access to during their previous educational experiences.

My first experience ... it was kind of maybe different because it's a higher institution so everything was very, very different. You've got to go about to look for things for yourself, it's not like back in high school where your lecturer or teacher going to come to class and you know gave you things and stuff. In university its like you are eating a tough bone, yeah back in high school teachers will spoon feed you and everything. So yeah so it was pretty much of a challenge. **Liberian male studying Commerce at the UWA**

At first here you have a lot of resources, like back there the teacher was just coming to teach or maybe give you information but you won't find the resources mainly, only the books. So I imagine they know there's lots of facilities for internet use and so like websites and stuff. So most of your resources are books which is not good at all.

Rwandese female studying Nursing at ECU

5.4 New skills for success

Researching, using comprehensive libraries, electronic catalogue systems and online database searching were new skills that overwhelmed students. This was confounded by difficulties when it came to referencing, notions of plagiarism, paraphrasing and critiquing that seemed to arise from the initial difficulties in grasping the new techniques of managing and utilising multiple resources for each assignment. Other academic skills student struggled with were paraphrasing, critical debate and meta-cognitive skills.

*The flow of your ideas in the essay it's so confusing. You have your idea here, you have this other idea here how would you put them together for them to flow and then actually, it's sort of, it's a headache so that's a big problem. There are heaps, and even the books, the authors. When you, are reading the books for you to understand it's really hard to understand. There are some words there you have to have the dictionary here, you have to have the book here, every little word you have to underline that. You underline the word or write it somewhere, then you read the book, you don't understand the book, you come back to the little words that you find and then have to go through all them but in the dictionary to know their meaning and then come back to the book. It takes so much time to read. **Sierra Leonean female studying Social Work at Curtin***

Basically one skill that I've learnt is that I find it very important the skill of essay writings, the skill of report writings and generally document, proof reading where you can write something but you still need to go through it and find, maybe go through and find out some errors to come up with the writing that you might able to give someone to read it. This essay writing skill which I didn't believe I was perfect when I was in Africa but now I can, develop a topic of my own and write on it perfectly knowing what I'm talking about and what to conclude and. So I'm actually

appreciating the essay writing and report writing which are also very important in life.

Sudanese male studying Management and Marketing at ECU

PowerPoint - It's completely new to me, presentation would just kill me. It would just kill me because ok I know what I'm going to say but when I stand there in front of the audience, everything would just go; I can't say what I want to say because the confidence will not even be there because one thing that will make you lose confidence is that I didn't really understanding what I'm saying. My accent, my English is it ok? Am I confident, am I actually telling them, giving them a good message or what, it's kind of like that when you doing presentation you know and with the projectors and all that stuff. It's all new, I have to struggle to go through all those stuff to learn how to do them which takes a little bit of time **Sierra Leonean female studying Social Work at Curtin**

5.4.1 Time management

Time management was a recurring theme and many respondents recognised that it was a critical skill to acquire if they were to succeed at university. Students were able to articulate well the different cultural relationships with the concept of time and how they struggled to enforce western concepts of time and its detailed management.

Time management is very, is very poor within the African people and they're, maybe we cannot blame our self much because of it because it is not something you inherited and being an adult now then jumping into it it becomes very, very difficult thing. So like the thing we did the last time you know that helps me a lot at least to squeeze through some of my waste times. **Sierra Leonean male studying Science and Computing at Curtin**

New skills, coming on time, we don't do that in Ethiopia so yeah. People really don't respect the times. They just come in the time they want. **Ethiopian male studying Environmental Health at Curtin**

For newer students to succeed first of all they have to know how to manage their time and they have to make like a...timetable and the other one is a diary, diary helps you a lot so you have to have that one, and everything has to be managed where

you have the free time, where you have to spend the free time, not everything like for free, going out something. They have to manage that's the most thing to succeed at uni... **Ethiopian male studying Health Science at ECU**

5.4.2 Computing

The practical challenge of computing skills persisted for the duration of a student's course. Significant anxiety and stress was caused by consistent lack of adequate computing skills across participants. While some of the more fortunate students had computing lessons in their country of origin, or engaged with computers during education in Australia, all students reported that their library skills, online researching, online communicating and assignments was significantly impacted by slow and inadequate computing skills.

So basically I'm trying hard to know computers and it is one of the thing that I find it very difficult to study in the university when you don't know how to use the computer to write. I find it very hard to type, and it will take me some hours or even a day or two day to type an assignment of two thousand, three thousand words of which my friend do type in maybe thirty minutes. Assignment of two thousand will be finished which I actually find it very frustrating why can't I do if he can do it. **Sudanese male studying Management and Marketing at ECU**

There's some icons on the blackboard I don't even what they mean. I only know how to find my lectures note, if there's other stuff I wouldn't know cos i don't know what other icons do. 'Cause only the one I know it's my lectures and that's it. **Rwandese female studying Nursing at ECU**

We in African we use pen and paper for write because we don't do computer this, that he say when you come here you never do it you know. Which is very difficult, our fingers is very stiff to...So you know you started counting the letters, where is A, where is B. So then you have to print out many thousands of words. **Sierra Leonean male studying Nursing at Curtin**

For the thing about this computer, the computer is still challenging for everyone I think who come from refugee especially when you have like this database accessing, internet researching stuff. If you don't know or if you don't know how to do it, if you

don't talk to people, if you don't, that one is a bit tough... . **Ethiopian male studying Health Science at ECU**

5.4.3 Communicating in English

Participants had varying years of experience speaking English, yet all had begun learning English before arrival to Australia. Most started learning in school, but many had limited lessons or opportunity to practise outside the school environment and therefore lacked fluency. They particularly struggled with writing and using academic English for assignments and understanding conversational Australian English for informal educational settings such as tutorials and group work. English persisted as a challenge throughout the duration of their course. Participants consistently reported that their perceived level of English directly hindered them from participating in tutorials and developing social networks.

Yeah I found that, most difficult for me in English, they way you pronounce the words is different, so I was practicing like all the time, so eventually I could speak it. **Somali male studying Environmental Health Science at Curtin**

Language not a barrier, it's only that the slangs word 'cause English since, you know, grade one, we start learning English. So I don't, I'm not saying English is a key barrier but it is the slangs **Sierra Leonean male studying Nursing at ECU**

Participants noted that while their conversational or spoken English had improved, their academic writing remained a challenge. They felt that the strength of their ideas, research and structure was overlooked due to their poor English and felt frustrated and upset when receiving assignments back with negative comments. Additionally, students felt disadvantaged when it came to exams.

Some comments that are a bit negative, so it makes you feel like, somebody like me from a non-English Speaking Background, it always brings that question of whether ..I'm not, you know, Australian. It brings that question all the time. **Sudanese female studying Community Development at Murdoch University**

I have a little bit challenging to start on my assignment because when I write down my grammar too much mistakes with that. So when I handed my assignment the teacher, lecture puts too much red and stuff when they mark it so at that time when you see the other student you feel a little bit bad. **Ethiopian male studying Health Science at ECU**

Doing exams was sometimes a problem because I have to sit in the hall with the other students who have no English problem and their speed of writing goes with their thinking, like if I have an idea, I have to think how I would put it down ...but to those who are not, who English is their first language they write it straight away, so having exams with the other students is always a problem. **Sudanese male studying Agricultural Science at Murdoch University**

5.5 Experiences of powerlessness and finding a voice

Students struggled to find their voice in university and contribute to the learning environment. Despite an overwhelming amount of knowledge and preparation for classes, students were too shy, concerned over their English, or unfamiliar with the style of tutorials to participate and effectively communicate their knowledge and ideas. Students felt that they have valuable contributions to make, particularly cross-cultural examples that can enrich the experience of fellow students and tutors, if only given the space, time and forum to contribute comfortably without interjection. These frustrating communication barriers resulted in feelings of powerlessness.

With the first I think three classes I was really, really shocked 'cause everyone's participating and it was kind of really strange... the style of learning was different. I've been in a tutorial but the style of learning was different from back home. **Liberian male studying Commerce at UWA**

Refugee students were not as outspoken as other students in tutorials and group assignments because they also felt their contributions were not listened to or valued. Participants tended to remain quiet unless asked or prompted directly. This was partly due to participants finding communication within the university system new and challenging. Most participants were unfamiliar with the tutorial style of learning, feeling anxious to counter or question the knowledge of the authors in the weekly readings or that of the

tutors. Australian accents, jargon and uncertainty over when to 'jump in' on discussions or being talked over further exacerbated the problem, resulting often in poor grades for participation. Many participants also disliked group work, feeling powerless to contribute adequately, due either to their own shortcomings or the treatment of fellow group members.

I'll participate in class discussions, but sometimes the topics...its moved too fast and we can't get it. **Somali male studying Environmental Health Science at Curtin**

Because there are too many people, I don't want people who are turn around because maybe, in, in a tutor I'm the only black person there, yeah I don't want everyone turning around looking at me asking. Maybe the question I have to ask is some kind of weird question, maybe it's not in place, maybe it's not proper and people will just turn around and look at you. **Liberian male studying Commerce at UWA**

Sometimes you feel isolated. That's why sometimes I sometimes feel group work ... it's a waste of a time, because some people in my group may not want me to contribute. **Sudanese male studying Health Promotion at Curtin**

Students whose cultural norms do not allow them to talk back to elders unless spoken to particularly struggled with the concept of tutorials. Other cultures more familiar with political or other discussion, fared better, but still experienced challenges with language, speed and critical thinking. However, once familiar with these systems and styles of learning and assessment, particularly tutorials, students thrived and felt more confident and comfortable to participate fully.

According to my culture, people always sit in a group and discuss some issues and then the resolution comes in there through the discussion. And when I came to Murdoch, I found that as one of the ways of learning. So I developed that and got into it... Here, people, you know, they throw ideas into the air as quick as they could and I think, as English is a second language for me, and I have to think of the way to construct what the idea is about. So by doing that, he has already spoken and she

has already spoken and everybody else has already spoken. **Sudanese male studying Community Development at Murdoch University**

As far as participating in class, there is an initial...not wanting to speak. I would say to begin with, my first couple of semester, I think it was difficult, because there is a fear which, you know when you're young and all that stuff you don't want to be embarrassed, there is that fear that comes across that, maybe your accent, maybe the way you pronounce a certain word, stops you from participating. This what I said before that it's important to learn the language and the culture and so you're able to get rid of that...to participate, so it doesn't hold you back in ways...I've learnt to do that over the years, I'm confident now. **Somali male studying Community Development at Murdoch University**

5.6 Socialisation and relationship with other students

5.6.1 Social life

Some participants, who had experienced schooling within Australia prior to commencing university, found that whilst they felt academically similar to other students in University, social differences were apparent. Language and cultural barriers were identified as being the main sources of concern for the participants in relation to being able to develop positive relationships with academic staff and other students. Some participants found it easier to make friends with international students and other refugees and commented on the multicultural nature and diversity of university, which they liked. Their sense of community outside university life is very important to their mental and social well being. Some participants felt well connected to their university community.

I made not that many friends I did make like high school and here everyone is busy, of, some of them as well in the group assessment.... I have mostly from Africans like and I have some of them from Australia as well but mostly the one I see the one African ones 'cause still the culture is still the same so sometimes we hang around with them but I have like Rwandans and Sudanese common nationalities. **Ethiopian male studying Health Science at ECU**

I have friends but most of them are like people from overseas though, like they are from other. because maybe we are from overseas is we all sort of fit in one, we think

we fit in one group so I have more friend from overseas than one which are like real Australian...Rwandese female studying Nursing at ECU

This is where you get so many people from around the world...I got friends who are Australian, friends who are from Hong Kong, from Singapore and from Indonesia... Sudanese as well. I got friend also from Kenya, another from Sierra Leone...I got a friend from South Africa, from India. If you have your friends, first of all you will find it very easy to settle at university, you can get a lot of information. Not only academic but you can sometimes interact on other issues outside the academic field. You are able to know, a friend from Indonesia how his culture or her culture is like. What are the sensitive issues, how you can cope with them...It is really amazing. If you are able to respect someone who is born to different parents, from different, far area of the world then you can interact with anyone in the world...Sudanese male studying Master of Infectious Diseases at UWA

5.6.2 Experiences of social exclusion

Participants shared examples of social exclusion by their fellow students and its effect on their willingness to form bonds, participate and feel part of the university community was striking. Participants felt there was ignorance towards refugee students who are made to feel unimportant, stupid or different. Many felt alienated and unwelcomed by fellow students.

Like this group that I'm in I have a group, a group like for my primary health care, we have to work as a group the whole semester and the girls we're meeting up and then two of them they just talk to themselves. Like I'm sitting there and they just exclude me from the meeting and then I'm like "Hello! What are we working on?" and they're like "Yeah give us a minute, give us a minute" and then I feel that they are racist.

Somali female studying Nursing at Curtin

There are sometimes where I actual over, generally I will feel, I will say I feel connected because I got admitted to the university and I do come to the university. But then there are some, certain aspect where I feel disconnected sometimes because when you are given a group assignment and some people who think English is first language will tend to neglect your contribution and every time and

again a group discussion will be dominated by certain individuals which I actually find it difficult. I do, I would want to maybe contribute sometimes but when I contribute at some point maybe feel invalid and people will not be concerned on what I contribute of which actually I find sometimes horrible but there's nothing I can do about it. But it's basically when I, I develop a strategy to do group work. Every time I go to a group I want everything distributed equally without any discussion. **Sudanese male studying Management and Marketing at ECU**

At times they really don't appreciate an African student, especially student from refugees background and then so you know at times they neglect you, at times they're, it's just really, really frustrating maybe trying to fit into society and people are not appreciating you. **Liberian male studying Commerce at UWA**

5.6.3 Difference from Australian students

African refugee students were aware of their 'visible' differences from other students and at times resented standing out so much, feeling that it caused a barrier to making friendships and being comfortable on campus. However, participants very much wanted to become part of the learning community and not be singled out or treated differently, either by academic staff or by fellow students.

Everyone like pretty much do their own thing because I think at UWA students are not friendly ... at times in a lecture theatre I'm the only black student in there so sitting all by myself. Sometimes when I go to lecture early when I sit down so now I go at the far end, far left end to sit and there'll be no students sitting... I suppose I used to feel very bad, like people don't want to identify with me because I'm black. **Liberian male studying Commerce at the UWA**

For me, I don't want to like, for example, because I'm like not Australian, I'm from somewhere, I'm not being treated differently, but I don't want to be treated differently, we just want to be the same level as everybody, that's really just what I want to say. **Sudanese female studying Community Development at Murdoch University**

Oh I would feel isolated 'cause I would feel why then I'm being chosen. 'Cause I'm here to be Australian you know to be classified as a refugee so if for then I'm still

considered as a refugee then that would affect the people then. **Rwandese female studying Nursing at ECU**

Because I'm a Sudanese, a black man, it's very difficult to be here. You really struggle and it's always like that like sometimes if you have not interact with student very well, there are some student that just have that judgment. They may not be very comfortable to be with you in the group because they have, they understand at that back of their mind they say...later on in the assignment if I pair up with him I may find maybe doing the work on my own **Sudanese male studying Master of Infectious Diseases at UWA**

Participants were able to clearly articulate the perceived differences between themselves and non-refugee students, both culturally and academically. Refugee students noted that they were learning numerous things at once, such as English, technology, communication, learning styles and course content, while Australian students simply need to concentrate on the course content.

Because what happens is we have to learn two or three things at the same time...Most people who are here and go to uni they know they are going there to learn, but sometimes we go there to learn something from the class and also something of the lifestyle at the same time. **Sudanese male studying Environmental Health Science at Curtin**

I'm still not good at time management because I'm a slow reader and have to use the dictionary. So I've found like I'm always not on time like the rest. I don't know if the other students also struggle like me but I find like maybe I'm not on the same pace as them. **Congolese female studying Sociology at Murdoch University**

Easier for them to understand what the lecturer say. For us you have to go home and you have to through the lecture before you come into the lecture and then when he says something you have to highlight the one you don't understand and you have to stay behind and ask him or in tutorial you have to ask them, understand but for them when they talk sometimes, some lecturers it's very fast, you know you can't

understand them. For them I think it's easy the language maybe yeah. **Ethiopian male studying Health Science at ECU**

5.6.4 The challenges of being a refugee student

The educational backgrounds of students from refugee backgrounds and experiences of interrupted schooling due to their refugee experiences particularly undermined students' preparedness and confidence.

It's difficult for students who came here on humanitarian visa because these student have been in school before but going through what they've gone through and coming to this other country as a refugee to stay there they haven't been going to school. Like I wasn't going to, I haven't been in school for eight years after the war. So just imagine not going to school for eight years and then coming here and go to school straight away it's like all new. It's like, it's like when you start all over again in primary school, you learning everything, everything has been gone and now you're coming back to learn again, it's like you starting all over. It's all new again you know and it's, that's the difficulty that they, I face and I believe other people face that as well. **Sierra Leonean female studying Social Work at Curtin**

The only thing is it has, of course the poor background from during the refugee period because the education was not continuous. Sometimes you have to, when you break off for about a month without going to school... Yeah and when you go you just continue, maybe just leave those break away and jump ahead so we are having sort of not continuous education in the system yeah... So that was the problem. So the background preparation was not, the foundation was not there yeah. **Sierra Leonean male studying Science and Computing at Curtin**

Participants were aware they had less support than Australian students and fewer people to turn to for help.

Most people from refugee backgrounds haven't been to university before and they don't have anyone to give them advice or give them help at home. **Somali male studying Environmental Health Science at Curtin**

*If they have all their families together and they're all here most of the kids find it easy to do, to go to school and do things because their parents are there to support them and there's some others they don't have parents to support them and maybe their parents are here but they don't really support them. **Sierra Leonean female studying Nursing at EDU***

*Yeah I think so. I think some families especially if they have all their families together and they're all here most of the kids find it easy to do, to go to school and do things because their parents are there to support them and there's some others they don't have parents to support them and maybe their parents are here but they don't really support them. **Sierra Leonean female studying Nursing at ECU***

Participants also noted the differences in the educational backgrounds of international students and refugee students, noting that the international students had to meet the educational requirements prior to coming to Australia.

*They're non-refugee students, of course they have like they international students they have a system at which they came here which you know you have to get something grades for the university to allow you, you know, or your parent to release you to come here. But like us now we didn't come to Australia on educational background we came here on refugee background it is just that when we came we decided at least let me do something. So whether the background was strong or not you know you just have to force yourself something so there are some of very differences. **Sierra Leonean male studying Science and Computing at Curtin***

Refugee students also felt they were disadvantaged as they had limited knowledge of Australian culture and history, and that courses were too focused on local issues, with limited international topics further alienating them and under-utilising their local knowledge.

The language is hard. So if they [class] me as a non-speaking I would accept that 'cause I will need more help for the language with what like the culture 'cause sometimes you're not used to the culture even though you like pretty much understand everything which is happening but you don't understand the culture then

*it's hard for you to be engaged in the culture if you don't understand it or what's been happening. **Rwandese female studying Nursing at ECU***

5.7 Gender Roles

There were a number of challenges that participants felt impacted on their studies that were embedded within socio-cultural factors and gender roles. This section focuses on the aspect of gender and its influence on educational encouragement and support among female participants. Female students face greater challenges in completing their studies, as they have significant responsibilities in their home lives to fulfil, that they are forced to prioritise before studying. In addition to the burden of the household chores they complete for their male family members, several of the participants were single mothers.

I had a like a two thousand two hundred essay to write and it was ... and my mum, she's just been doing the iftar [evening meal during Ramadan], like cooking for the people that are, my family who are fasting... and then she's tired and then we have to go prayer after that, it's like two hour prayer, you're standing two hours praying and then I have to work, clean after the house and then after that I start my assignment at twelve o'clock and then at three o'clock I had to cook for my mum.

Somali female studying Nursing at Curtin

*I help my mum, she works as well like part time and the thing is she does a lot. She does all the cooking and everything but we, I mean it's in my culture it's found as like inappropriate or disrespectful to sit around or do other stuff while you're mum's in the kitchen cooking or cleaning. It's just you know why should you sit down when your mum's up. **Somali female student studying Public Health at Curtin***

My brother and father say like "Go make ugali for me" even though I'm studying.

Sierra Leone female studying Nursing at Curtin

Many of the male participants were equally cognisant of the role of gender in their families, often through the comparison of household duties that they witnessed their sisters were burdened with, despite also being a student.

That's what happens, with almost all of our women...in our family setting, the mother or our sisters take care of the family, whether its cooking, washing dishes or other stuff, that's what they're doing. So if I'm home, and if I start cooking, my sister feels bad. **Sudanese male student studying Health Promotion at Curtin**

So naturally that's what they do, and even if she has her assignment to finish, if she knows the family has to eat, she has definitely to cook. So that definitely can affect their performance at the end. **Sudanese male studying Environmental Health at Curtin**

A male Sudanese participant expressed the following insights into gender issues and the dilemmas for females in his community now they are in the Australian environment.

The Sudanese culture especially where I come the [Dinka] people as a young male I have my own life. I make my own decisions, I can live anywhere, I live the way I want to live my life and the community may not have any negative kind of thing on me because I'm a man and whatever I do they know later on as a man you're going to still do his stuff and you're going to still be successful. That thing may need to be more little advantageous compared to female Sudanese because if I were a female Sudanese I would not have continued with my education. The community expectation from them that they have to be married and settled...When they stay more than twenty five years community look at them as they are old and they say and how come that they got to that age when they are not married. Is it because they have other lifestyle that's not accepted in the community? And again from peer or families there is always a high expectation that their daughter has to be married off before she can do other things. You see so long as she get married to someone who is well off, a successful man that is it. The families who are in Australia now they really trying to encourage their daughters so that they get the education first. But again it just like, psychology in the community. Girls themselves they are worried, if they get that education man may not be attracted to them again. They can see when there are some young girls, they don't have an education, they are getting married to the successful people, yep they really confused there... **Sudanese male studying Master of Infectious Diseases at UWA**

Female participants began to expand on the relationship between being educated and being an African female in their cultures. Being a female student often meant less emotional support from male family and community members. The participants explained that education enabled a certain level of power and recognition that was either resented or feared by males in their communities. Non-studying females in their communities on the other hand drew great strength from them as mentors and motivators to consider studying themselves, or at least support and encourage current students to continue with their studies.

*Most parents will let the boys go to school instead of the girls and they will say the girls should be at home doing like domestic things at home like cleaning and washing dishes and cooking and going to the market. And but now it's, I think it's changing. So many people want their girls to go to school now because they know if the girls go to school at least if they do something they wouldn't forget where they come from, while the boys when they finish school and all that and they get married it's them and their wives, they don't even think about their family anymore and that's starting to change now... that's why they were not sending girls to school 'cause they're saying if they're educated then they'll get out of hand something like that then they won't listen to you anymore because they know more than you and yeah that's why they were not doing it...Men were very scared to get married to someone who is more intelligent maybe I'll say. They don't want that yeah. **Sierra Leonean female studying Nursing at Curtin***

Participants were navigating new perspectives on gender that are integral to the Australian culture in which they were now immersed. The clear differences often made participants feel different to fellow students and that teachers couldn't understand them.

*You know in Africa you know that is where you can see a distinct between a male and female but in Australia here you know what men do, also a woman can do. So I don't see a big different here [between men and women] and you know being a male here doesn't affect anything for me either from in relation with my family or other people. You know it doesn't happen if at all. **Sudanese male studying Commerce and Economics at Curtin***

Some were beginning to adapt to new ideas of gender and witnessed this progression in their communities. Female participants who had been able to capitalise on the more relaxed norms in Australian culture, welcomed their changed roles that moving to Australia had afforded them

*In Sierra Leone I'll say, I'll just base it on that now because I've got friends that have been there 'til, like since they were little like twenty something, they're at ECU now and most of them because most parents will let the boys go to school instead of the girls and they will say the girls should be at home doing like domestic things at home like cleaning and washing dishes and cooking and going to the market and all that stuff. And but now it's, I think it's changing. So many people want their girls to go to school now because they know it, if the girls go to school at least if they do something they wouldn't forget their, where they come from while the boys when they finish school and all that and they get married it's them and their wives, they don't even think about their family anymore and that's starting to change now. Yeah 'cause it's been happening a lot. **Sierra Leonean female studying Nursing at ECU***

*Here I think everything is for everyone, there is no gender thing. Ok there is no women should do this, men should do this. Yeah so you have, like men can do what women can so that's good. Back home men are pretty much, I think they do nothing. Yeah like they do work, like if you have work then you work but then the family role is for the women. Like if I'm studying and I have family I will look after them than the man would so they would expect me to do more than a man in the home but then the man just have. If I have work that's it yeah but here you, if you have like a family, if I have a brother or they can cook while I'm away but if I have back there I have to come and cook. **Rwandese female studying Nursing at ECU***

5.8 Academic staff and understanding refugee issues

5.8.1 Understanding the experiences of refugee students

Understanding the particular experiences of students from refugee backgrounds was seen as a vital component of refugee student success at university. Participants felt that there was a general lack of understanding or awareness amongst academic staff concerning the issues that refugee students have faced prior to commencing study and that impact on academic performance. Cultural understanding of the backgrounds of refugee students

and how they still have strong family connections back home which impact their everyday lives is a critical factor that academic staff in Australia have little understanding of. Some participants felt that they had experienced some form of academic prejudice from academic staff who assumed that refugee students possess basic or little knowledge, skills and education, despite some refugees having come from highly educated backgrounds.

One thing I would like them to know is that they should understand that all students that are in this university came from different, different regions and different countries and they have different way of speaking so they should at least try to understand, to probe into those students know their way of speaking so that they'll be able to you know interact with them easily. **Sierra Leonean male studying Science and Computing at Curtin**

They should know that you are humanitarian student here and they should know that you have not been to school for a while and then they should not expect a lot from you because you learning again, you just, you starting and they should actually empower you to not to drop because you could be a good student well if they don't give you that encouragement you might drop and not go back and then they should take your grammar, your English writing, your essay writing structure, they should take all that into consideration when they marking your assignment and be lenient a little bit at least for the first semester yeah. **Sierra Leonean female studying Social Work at Curtin**

Participants also felt that, although teachers needed to have insight into the difficulties many refugees had faced and were continuing to struggle with, they also had to understand that many refugee students did not want to stand out but wish to be now treated as part of the community.

So like first the English is not our second language, I mean it's not our first language so sometime or even, I think even though you can achieve your English but it wouldn't be the same as someone who, who has the English as their native language...And again they [refugees] have been through like lots stuff maybe which hurts them so it's hard for them to get used to the community I guess. Yeah because you feel like they're different from others maybe... But then more we're coming you

*as sort of just to get, get rid of the refugee stuff and be used to the, they [feel] like you're not a refugee there anymore like you in the community now... Feel more of the group that's what I meant. **Rwandese female studying Nursing at ECU.***

5.8.2 Mentors and connectedness

Students have varying experiences with teachers which significantly affected their feelings of connectedness to the university community and attachment to their studies. Students who developed positive and personal relations with teachers, some of whom had provided immense confidence and support to students, often remembered their teacher's words and encouragement vividly. This contributed to their success rates of finishing their degrees.

*Is it the year before, I was just about to drop, but I said before I do this decision I better go talk to somebody... and we had a good talk and he ask me, , "Are you in a hurry for your degree?", and I said "No", ...and he said "if you're not in hurry, just take your time, do one unit per semester, or two if you can"... ...and that really helps me, and we had a long talk with him, and he has been positive...So otherwise I would have gone...So yes always if I face difficulties or something, I just remember what he told me. **Sudanese female studying Community Development at Murdoch University***

*I had to go to my lecturer who's been very, very helpful, He is very, very good. He can actually see the knowledge from me but how actually to put things especially with the English so I had to always write him emails. I said "Look, what do you actually want from this? What do you want from this? If I do this, is it ok?" And he'll say "No, you have to go more onto this and to this and do this". It's like, even like writing the first thing I always send him to read, so I have a lot of letters. He said "You actually have, you have very many ideas but you're rambling around". **Sierra Leonean male studying Nursing at Curtin***

Other students who had no connection with teachers felt disconnected with the university community, as if withdrawing would not be noticed and therefore no support was offered to motivate and support students through their academic journey. The majority of the participants felt that student support does exist, particularly for language/academic writing, but many staff that facilitate these services do not have a grasp on the specific subject

material that is being presented. Furthermore participants felt that adequate time is not set aside to allow students to be able to effectively talk about and clarify their queries in relation to their essays. Some participants had utilised family members who had commenced studying (not necessarily at the same institution) before them as mentors providing support and advice.

I guess always call my brother and when I had an assignment I always go with him. For example that time with the research the one for information from me I can't find a way in referencing stuff, I can't find a way in here but in Curtin when I see the referencing style they give to student it's more written well and organised so easy to follow that one. **Ethiopian male studying Health Science at ECU**

5.8.3 Achieving Success

Once students master the new skills necessary for tertiary education, they build their confidence and enjoy reaping the benefits of the new learning strategy. Students soon learnt that they must ask for help to receive it, and the strength of social networks and supportive relationships cannot be underestimated, as they were central to their success at university.

It's very, helpful when you go into group discussion you like share ideas like if you don't know something or you know something you can express your own idea, the other group member will express their own idea and put them together and absorb it. It's really, really helpful, it's better than like sitting by yourself doing things. **Sierra Leonean female studying nursing at Curtin**

That idea of self learning is really good for me because it's up to you. If you really want to do something, or if you want to achieve something, it very much depends on you. So it's good. **Sudanese male Studying Community Development Murdoch University**

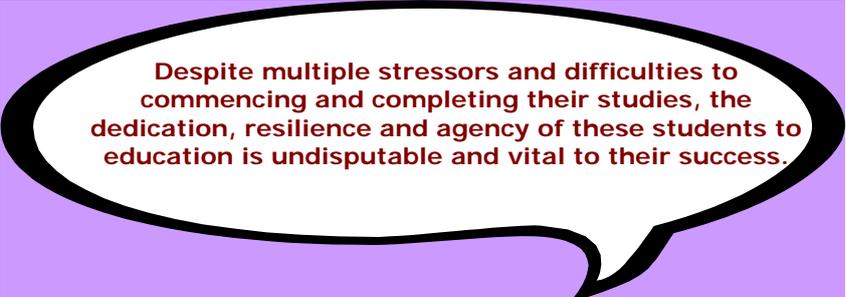
Skills that students felt were applicable to their lives outside university, such as independent learning, time management and personal organisation were particularly needed and well accepted.

Learning here is about being independent and independence doesn't just happen here. It's going to happen wherever you go. You need to be independent and do all your stuff and if you need help, it could be minimal than just seeking help for everything that you need, so I think it's a great achievement like for whatever I've got. **Sudanese male studying Community Development at Murdoch University**

If you're given an assignment you need to work very hard to collect some material which you might find difficult to collect. But if you know the resources, where to find the resources, and how you write your essay then life becomes easy at university. So I wouldn't call it totally easy but once you get used to university life, knowing what to do at the right time and right place then the life become simple. Some areas where it comes difficult is to chose a career and that career become difficult to understand, you have to shift to another course which you think might help you a lot which I also think is giving us a lot of problems as international, people who have not made up their mind to pick their areas of study would want to maybe change course every now and then because, every course is difficult. **Sierra Leonean female studying Social Work at Curtin**

5.9 Conclusion

This chapter has provided an overview of the educational needs and aspirations of refugee students. The support systems available to students vary between universities, with a general lack of consistency in the nature and delivery of the system/programmes. With no specific programmes for students from refugee backgrounds, participants that were only able to access generic language/academic writing support services found this to be ineffective and often cursory. Despite an overwhelming amount of academic and acculturative challenges, students who persist and find success are those who find their voice and position within the academic culture.



Despite multiple stressors and difficulties to commencing and completing their studies, the dedication, resilience and agency of these students to education is undisputable and vital to their success.

CHAPTER 6

Results of the Needs Analysis: Part 3

Psychosocial Needs based on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

6.0 Introduction

To explore the psychosocial well-being of the students, the interview questions were designed to be guided by each of the five stages of Needs, according to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. The psychosocial component of the interview comprised an exploration therefore of:

1. Basic and physiological Needs;
2. Safety Needs;
3. Belongings and Love Needs;
4. Esteem Needs; and
5. Self Actualisation

This chapter explores the psychosocial well-being of students from refugee backgrounds based on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.

6.1 Using Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs to guide the interviews and analysis

The use of a pictorial depiction of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs during the interviews to further explore psychosocial well-being felt by refugee students was described in Chapter 3, 3.2.5. This section discusses the results in more detail, giving sample illustrations of the students' representations of where they felt they were situated on the hierarchy along with some examples of their life goals. The research team felt that a mixture of results would demonstrate that some students' lives had improved in Australia due to better housing and security, but also that some refugees' social and economic status had reduced due to overseas qualifications not being recognised in Australia and separation of family members.

6.1.1 Notions of self actualisation

Students were asked to state their life goal to illustrate the notion of self actualisation. All respondents' notion of self actualisation either directly mentioned completing their degrees or finding work related to their degree. For some students, this was their only key to achieving self actualisation. For others, it was their primary goal and was supported by other, less important ideals. Most students combined education and employment desires, both in Australia and in their countries of origin. Several male participants noted their aspiration to be married and start a family. This was not replicated in female respondents. No female participants mentioned starting their own family, nor were any of these female respondents already married. A few respondents mentioned wanting to be reconnected with family members.

The following are examples of some participant responses to the question on self actualisation needs:

Student Responses	Respondent country of origin and course currently studying at university
<i>Completing my degree, get the rest of my family to Australia, get married & have children</i>	Sierra Leonean female studying Nursing at ECU
<i>Getting my degree and finding a good job</i>	Rwandese female studying Nursing at ECU
<i>Finishing Studies and being a doctor</i>	Sudanese male studying Human Biology at Notre Dame University
<i>Becoming a Lecturer, working for the UN and having a Happy Family</i>	Sudanese male studying Political Science at Notre Dame University
<i>To see myself getting into Medical School</i>	Sierra Leonean male studying Nursing at ECU
<i>Finish My degree & have a family of my own</i>	Liberian male studying Commerce at UWA
<i>Finishing my education and working in Africa</i>	Somali female studying Health Science at Curtin
<i>Finding a job in Australia, and having my own family</i>	Ethiopian male studying Environmental Health at Curtin
<i>Getting my degrees and going back to work in Africa</i>	Sudanese male studying Commerce and Economics at Curtin
<i>To Become a doctor</i>	Liberian male studying (Bridging Course) Biomedical Science UWA

The following sections are illustrated by a representative sample of the psychosocial tools completed by the respondents to indicate where they perceived they had been on the continuum pre migration and where they felt they were now, post migration to Australia.

6.1.2 Perceived status of needs pre migration

Figure 9 illustrates that this respondent felt that prior to migration to Australia, their 'Biological and Physiological' needs were not met. Their denotation on the baseline of the pyramid is indicative of the severe conditions they had endured, during which these basic needs remained unmet. In all a total of 14 of the 19 respondents fell into this category.

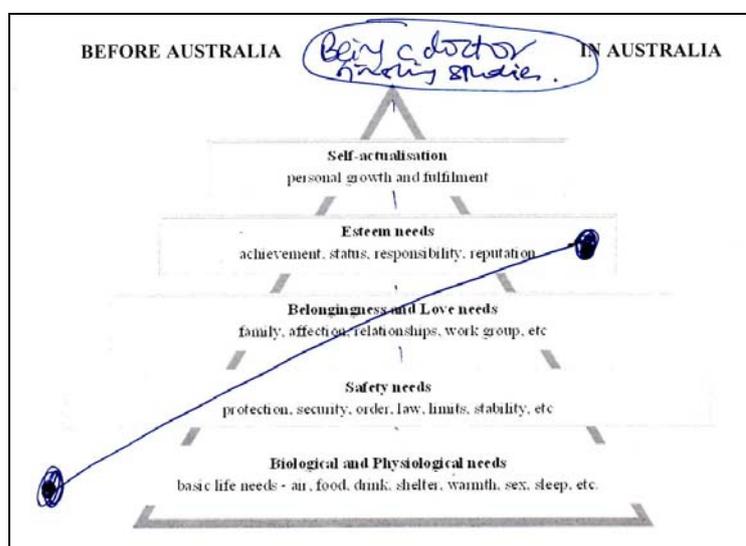


Figure 9: Psychosocial tool indicating pre and post migration positions of respondent; Pre migration 'Physiological and Biological' needs not met

Many of the participants could not move onto the next stage of need, 'Safety', even if they felt basic needs had been met, as the refugee experience of war, trauma, lawlessness and lack of governance precluded any progression. None of the students marked 'Safety' needs as their position before migration.

A further 4 of 19 students marked that they had their 'Love and Belonging' needs met prior to migration (figure 10).

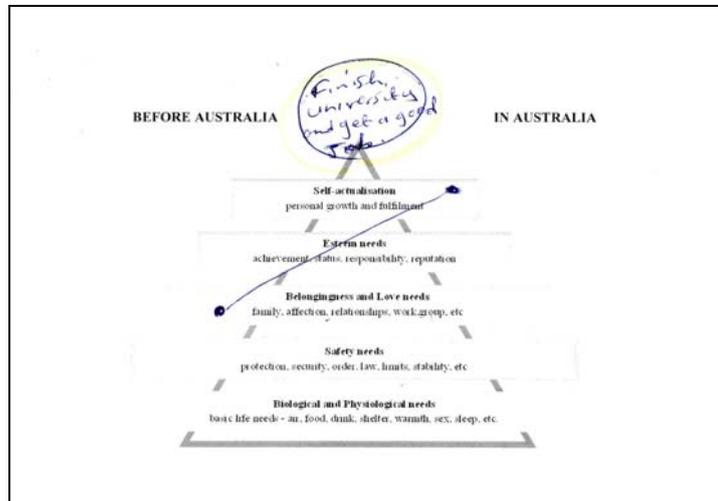


Figure 10: Psychosocial tool indicating pre and post migration positions of respondent; Pre migration 'Love and Belonging' needs met

The remaining student marked his 'Esteem' needs as being met, however post migration, he had not advanced towards self actualization. He was one of two students whose progress towards self actualisation had stagnated and formed a straight line across the hierarchy (see figure 11).

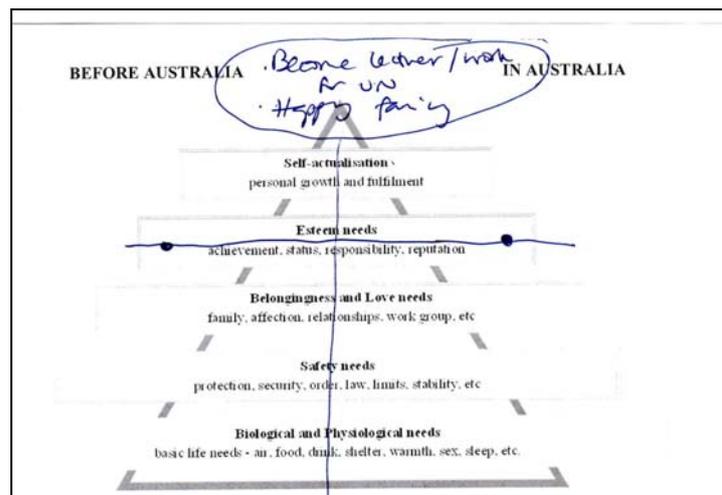


Figure 11: Psychosocial tool indicating pre and post migration positions of respondent; Pre migration 'Esteem' needs met

6.1.3 Perceived status of needs post migration

As no students marked 'Biological and Physiological' needs as being unmet in Australia, it was assumed that all respondents felt that these basic needs had been met following resettlement. Only 2/19 participants felt their progress was at 'Safety' needs. As illustrated in figure 12, this was however still an improvement for these two students when compared to their pre migration status. A total of 4/19 participants felt their 'Love and Belonging' needs were met in Australia. The participants who had all or most of their family in Australia were more likely to record this level. 8/19 participants felt that their 'Esteem' needs were met in Australia. This was largely attributed to their roles in their ethnic and religious communities and organisations. A remaining 5/19 students marked that they had reached self actualisation. However all of their goals for self actualisation had not yet been realised. This is perhaps due to the students understanding self actualisation as being a step under reaching their final goals, or connecting with the words 'personal growth and development' used to illustrate the need, as most students had made significant progress in their lives since being resettled in Australia.

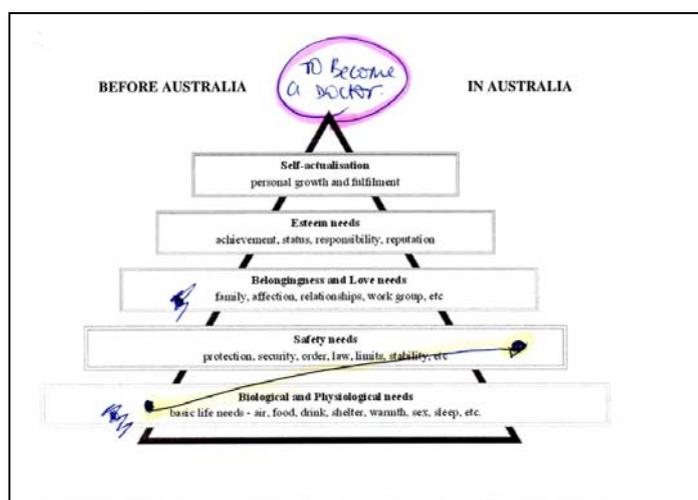


Figure 12: Psychosocial tool indicating pre and post migration positions of respondent; post migration only 'Safety' needs met

6.1.4 Trends

All participants' livelihoods had either been maintained or increased since arriving in Australia. A total of 17/19 participants livelihoods had increased, while only 2/19 had remained at the pre migration level. It was interesting to note that no participants felt that their livelihoods had decreased since arriving in Australia. Despite some participants

having well paid jobs or having completed tertiary education in their countries of origin, they did not feel as though having to re-educate warranted marking a decrease in their achieved level of needs since arriving in Australia.

6.2 Biological and Physiological Needs

Participants all felt that their basic needs were being met in Australia. Their food, drink and warmth needs were definitely met, supported by their settlement packages and financial assistance from Centrelink. Participants did however strive to be independent from these support services. The measurement instrument used uncovered that many participants felt that these basic needs were not met prior to migration to Australia. Food, shelter and water persisted as daily struggles for those living in refugee camps for extended periods of time. Many participants were under financial strain as a result of sending remittances back to family members still in the camps to try and provide or supplement these basic needs.

*I got a car, I got my clothes, I know where to shop, I know what to eat so I personally was fulfilling my basic needs. Because I don't go back to the Centrelink and ask them to give me a job or I don't go for social security. I don't want those money and I don't like them so I'm meeting my own needs. **Sudanese male studying Management and Marketing at ECU***

6.3 Safety Needs

Results from an exploration of the safety needs of participants were uniform across the board. No students felt threatened by the Australian community or authorities. No students felt their lives were at risk through violence, terrorism, health or the law. Participants seemed relieved they have been resettled in Australia and often used examples of the terror, uncertainty and daily threats they lived with in the refugee camps to illustrate that, comparatively, life in Australia is safer than in their countries of origin.

As soon as I came to Australia I think I haven't heard a sound of a gun whereas before I used to live in Kenya people were killed every now and then by locals who think because they do not actually have the people who feel they have difficulties in life and we were concentrated in refugee camps where our facilities were much better than the local. So every now and then they would venture into communities and kill people and especially in Sudan it was also not safe because of the civil war.

So it's, I do highly appreciate my being in Australia for the safety reason. **Sierra Leonean male studying Nursing at Curtin**

While they felt safe, secure and comfortable in Australia, housing persisted as the main issue threatening their idea of safety.

You know one of the worries that I have here in Australia you know the stability always begin with wherever you stay in. And here we are renting the houses you know and you may rent a house and you sign a contract for six more months and the landlord or an agent maybe a owner of the house may change a decision within the midst of your lease and maybe decide to sell the house you know and that it will create another problem for you now to look for another house. **Sudanese male studying Commerce and Economics at Curtin**

One of the challenges we are presently facing is accommodation because...When we came the number is too large, you know eight of us to have a place, a single house that accommodate so it was a problem. So we managed to get something like an old house now which we are living but you know the owner of the house is not paying too much attention to it and we cannot easily leave because it becomes difficult to get another place so just be there to be together you know to maybe when the family size gets smaller, smaller maybe. **Sierra Leonean male studying Science and Computing at Curtin**

Yeah we are a 100% comfortable here the only problem is the accommodation. The accommodation even that one is not a something you would be as serious as a factor. The only problem we have is we are mainly, though now we have the houses, the house we rent is two unit, they are staying in the one unit and I'm staying in the other unit. So, so apart from the house constraints we are safe and we are happy. **Sierra Leonean male studying Science and Computing at Curtin**

All that what they give you it is sustain you for the next fourteen days until you get another one. So the question of food is not a big worry here, but the big worry here is the rent problems is the only problems people face. **Sudanese male studying Commerce and Economics at Curtin**

6.3.1 Employment

Second to housing, employment was the issue that threatened the safety of participants in Australia. Participants struggled to find suitable employment for students, and it was often referred to as competing with their time spent studying.

*I used to work ninety hours, that's a lot a fortnight and you get really tired and sometimes I'd even have a day off and because I just want to you know meet my needs and yeah I want to save some money because I wanted to go to uni. **Sierra Leonean female studying Nursing at ECU***

*I have to wake up about five in the morning when I used to do morning shifts to catch the six o'clock bus and I'll be at work maybe forty minutes early because if I don't I'll be late and I didn't want to be late so I'll come early and sit there and wait 'til seven o'clock to start work and that was very stressful, and I'll be at work 'til three o'clock and then go home get ready for the next day it was very, it was too stressful. **Sierra Leonean female studying Nursing at ECU***

*I just know that, I know that it has taken much of my time. The time that I use for work now is that I would have been using to study. You know a time wasted is not recovered and I make all that time is wasted because in term of study now I will never get that time and what, and my expectation of performances will never go to the way I expect it you know. If I supposed to get ninety and then take three hours for work. If I design to study for eight hours and then I take three hours for work now and only study for five hours see now there is a great different there and whenever I just expect the result on, and if I was expecting 90, 90% I don't think that I'll get 90% because three hours has already been taken by work. So I will come to 60, so it has expected, affected my studies. **Sudanese male studying Commerce and Economics at Curtin***

Some of the older participants noted that their overseas work qualifications were not recognised and they were forced to start working in low level employment to survive.

On that I will tell you that before I came to Australia...I was a senior teacher and was also a community youth leader and of course in the teachers', the teachers' college I

*was in charge of environmental science...So I had a lot of responsibilities but when I came here in Australia everything turned upside down. So the, negative part that I get it was very shocking to me was that I was given a job. I remember I got a job in twenty three days so when I first got a job I wrote in my resume telling every detail that I was this person, that I was a teacher and of course my friends who came ahead of me were telling me that there are no good jobs in Australia. The only job you can get in Australia is just go to a factory and work physically hard. So that was a part of thing that I found it difficult and the fact that I was also refused to teach here, it was the kind of thing I didn't like. Because I think I had qualification and I was taught that once you train a teacher you'll train a teacher that's it. **Sudanese male studying Management and Marketing at ECU***

6.4 Belongingness and Love needs

Family and community were recurring themes that defined the participants' lives and identity, both past and present. Separation from family members due to resettlement in Australia meant that many participants felt their families were incomplete and struggled to move on, with their family members in other countries and often financially dependent on them.

*My aunty wants to come because she wants her kids to you know have education and all that. Maybe that's why she'll want to come but if you really, if you tell her about the culture or the different things and like I don't know but I'll have to come yeah. If that's the only way they'll be protected they'll, they'll have to come. **Sierra Leonean female studying Nursing at ECU***

*I came here like six years ago with my step-mum when I was like thirteen years of age, I was told that my mum was killed during the war, I flee with my step-mother to the neighbouring country where we seek asylum to get into Australia. When we got here I, five years later then I heard that my mum is alive. I tried to bring my mum but it didn't work and this upsets me. **Sierra Leonean female student studying Nursing at Curtin***

Some defacto relationships and marriages had ended due to the strains of resettlement. The following respondent comments eloquently bear out the findings of studies discussed

in Chapter 2 which revealed the strains on relationships caused by gender role reversal following resettlement in Australia.

Because in Africa I was with my partner, like three months before coming I was just, as I told you I was the person working. I work; I get money and look after all of them. But when we came here..the immigration said ok we make, the woman to be the family head.... We are no longer together. She's gone to Melbourne, she's been there for I think almost four years now. Yeah so but all started from finances. I had no more security as, in fact I have nothing to say in the house and then any time she becomes annoyed she calls the police and that is very, very bad from my own point of view... when I was separated with my partner it was very hard for me like now I'm just sharing rent with some university friends. **Sierra Leonean male Studying Nursing at Curtin**

6.4.1 Desire to get married and have a family

A number of male participants expressed marriage and children as a goal they needed in order to fulfil their love and belonging needs. Their financial situation postponed realisation for their goals as most had to pay bride wealth to their bride's family. None of the female participants were married, although some were single mothers. Their family commitments were therefore tied to their children and to their male siblings and fathers who they continued to support in the household they shared.

I have a lot of goal because first and foremost passionately I was intending of pushing very hard to become at least you know a university graduate within the shortest possible time. But that force is getting a little bit weak. And as an African man this time I want to at least have my own family, you know get my own family settled a bit and if possible have my kids playing around me. Yeah but this is not happening now because of financial constraints. **Sierra Leonean male studying Science and Computing at Curtin**

Like now I'm not married, it is also a priority for me to get married of which is one of the things that is also under valuing me because in our community you need to get married to be, to have authority somewhere and you will never have authority that is complete when you don't have a family. They will believe that and they will regard

you as a failed person, they will regard it as a failure if you don't have a family. So this is also that kind of thing that is, I see that as a negative part is sometimes when I think of it it affects my studies but not, not as much as. **Sudanese male studying Human Biology at Notre Dame University**

6.4.2 Community

Outside of immediate families, participants were strongly tied to their ethnic and religious communities, both informally in social settings and formally by membership of committees, associations and church groups. Most spare time was spent in these forums.

The only day that I go off is normally on Sundays and I take my kids and my wife to the church and that's it. Other days I'm oh busy all the time. **Sudanese male studying Political Science at Notre Dame University**

We have ethnic Oromo community, there's a community we usually do in that community if some new people comes we have to make like a barbeque stuff and welcome that person. They do that kind of stuff so we belong that community...Yeah we learn that from Aussie now so. Yeah the first time when they come they do that so we learn from there. **Ethiopian male studying Health Science at Edith Cowan University**

I'm a really active participant in Sudanese community. Last year I was the Sudanese youth leader, so I'm a really active person there...I go to church every Sunday unless this time when I have a lot of assignment, and sometime on Sunday I come here, I do have to come to finish my assignment. **Sudanese male studying Master of Infectious Diseases at UWA**

6.4.3 Connectedness to university

Returning to education, students assessed their level of connectedness to the university as a branch of the concept of belonging needs. Participants had varied and mixed responses, however both feelings provoked strong emotions. Students who felt attached to the university community felt it was beneficial to their study and the level of enjoyment of their university experience, and described the university as a safe and welcoming environment where they enjoyed being on campus. Those students who felt excluded or

ignored by the university spoke of wanting to switch universities as a means of achieving their desired connectedness to the university campus, and this impacted negatively on their current involvement in the university culture.

*Yeah, with the community, with the students and in general, the people at Curtin, I really feel so much connected because as soon as I started there, I didn't know, I quite knew a few friends, I'm not someone who comes from the college and probably knows some students from the college, so yeah my first days were really hard because I'd go there, I was by myself, I knew my friends, who I saw maybe once or twice back in Africa, or who maybe I met them in the (night) club or something. But yeah my first days were really hard, but as time goes by, I feel myself being connected to uni and I have lots of friends now, and now I really enjoy it because everywhere I go everyone says "Hey ***!"* **Sudanese male studying Health Science at Curtin**

6.5 Esteem Needs

Participants esteem needs were inextricably linked to achieving educational goals, success in securing employment and increasing standard of living. Participants were immensely proud to be able to say they were students, and looked forward to being able to announce their graduation.

It is very, very accomplishing yeah. Yeah I like meeting people and staying I'm studying at ECU and I'm doing nursing I get, it makes me very proud really. **Sierra Leonean female studying Nursing at ECU**

Participants struggled to articulate the issue of self esteem ways other than education. A few mentioned their roles in their ethnic and religious communities that developed their reputation, role and self esteem needs. In addition to education, being able to fulfil their roles and responsibilities were strongly tied to esteem needs. An ability to provide for their families both financially and in securing housing was important to self esteem for male participants. Many respondents were involved in their church and ethnic communities in formal positions and took great pride in this responsibility.

Their esteem was strongly linked to their ability to give back to their community in meaningful ways that displayed their experience and education. Many of their esteem

needs relate to the peak of Maslow's pyramid; self actualisation, or ultimate goals. This section however will focus on other components of this section, such as role, responsibility and status.

*Where I am the church secretary... I also belong to the work community where I'm in charge of production so there is an area that I'm responsible for in the workplace where I'm in charge, the supervisors, actually leading and the supervisor. So that is a community I do belong and the Anglican community these are the two community that I do belong and of course the university. **Sudanese male studying Management and Marketing at ECU***

*Well positioned in the community, many people know me so...That I'm able to do this. I can organise them, prepare them, represent them. Write anything like a grant request, write their own small constitution if they're going to be incorporated into the associations. They know that I can do all those stuff, yep. **Sudanese male studying Master of Infectious Diseases at UWA***

While many participants had active and well respected roles in their country of origin prior to them seeking refuge in Australia, most had experiences in the refugee camps that were worse than the menial employment they psychologically endured in Australia. Despite most participants working in undesirable positions, it did not appear to affect their self esteem. Most participants were happy to find any employment that would complement their student commitments and knew this was a temporary position. While Australia's lack of recognition of their overseas qualifications drew initial frustration and resentment **due to** their drop in status, it did not appear to significantly reduce their self esteem in the long-term.

6.5.1 Gendered roles and changes on resettlement

Most participants discussed their roles and responsibilities, both pre and post migration, in relation to their cultural expectations of gender. The male participants struggled more with their responsibilities and esteem due to their financial and housing related burdens. Male self esteem suffered when employment and housing could not be secured. This inability to fulfil their perceived roles and responsibilities as determined by their gender and cultural background caused significant anxiety and frustration.

I do believe like what the bible says like if you are a man you have to take care of your family, you have to look after everyone, you have to look after the environment and that's what I do believe in so. I believe in responsibilities, not only to my family but to anyone who might have problems. I might be able to help them, take care of them. **Sudanese male studying Political Science at Notre Dame University**

That's the first thing I always make sure that there is always food on the table for my wife and my kids and that is my responsibility. The thing is housing, shelter is becoming a main problem in my case. **Sudanese male studying Political Science at Notre Dame University**

You know I'm second born in my family and the first born is a girl and in African tradition everything will be left to a baby boy to make decision of the family, so I'm decision maker... So my role is highly valued in our culture whereby there is no this autonomy that 'I'm so and so' and 'I'm independent from my brother and I will make my own decisions', no. We are bind by that kinship that we born, we're one family, we born by a father and a mother and it always the responsibility for eldest son to make decision... They will also contribute but they will prioritise my decision of which also a positive part of African cultures, of which actually if I compare it to Australian system it is quite a difference in Australia where once you are eighteen years you don't have to listen to anybody. **Sudanese male studying Management and Marketing at ECU**

Female participants also had distinct roles defined by gender; these were, however, completely different to those of their male counterparts. Participants noted that household chores were a necessity, and that education was therefore to be undertaken in their spare time, once these chores had been completed. Female participants' self esteem was not negatively affected by their gendered responsibilities as they were always able to fulfil their gendered roles of household chores. However these roles undermined their success at university due to a sense that these burdened roles were prioritised ahead of education by expectation, not by their own choice.

Back home men are pretty much, I think they do nothing. ..Yeah like they do work, like if you have work then you work but then the family role is for the women. Like if

I'm studying and I have family I will look after them more than the man would so they would expect me to do more than a man in the home. **Rwandese female studying Nursing at ECU**

Two female participants noted that the higher level of education a female of their ethnic origin (*Both Sierra Leonean in this case*) has, the less likely they are to be approached, desired or seen by men as potential marriage partners. In a sense, the female participants were demonstrating almost a rejection of their cultural values by continuing to study despite the negative perceptions of female students by their own communities. In some ways, educating themselves could be seen as defying their cultural values or rejecting traditional desires of marriage and families. By choosing education, and knowing this would mean they would be less likely to get married, they were deliberately rejecting their gendered cultural values and ultimately, their culture.

It's most of the time, that's what they think, that's why they were not sending girls to school 'cause they're saying "If they're educated then they'll get out of hand", something like that, "then they won't listen to you anymore because they know more than you" and yeah that's why they were not doing it...It is very interesting and they will say "Men will be very scared to marry you because you're educated"...Yeah 'cause some people that went to school, now ages ago with my mum, my mum went all the way to year eleven and she stopped and people who did more than that, went to university and all that, some of them didn't get married 'til their forties or so 'cause men were very scared to get married to someone who is more intelligent maybe I'll say. **Sierra Leonean female studying Nursing at ECU**

Look I'm not married, when I was then before I came here, I have boys after me and all that, you look at each other as boyfriends and stuff like that. Ok then, the war separated us and everybody goes their own way and then I happen to come to Australia and then I went for holiday last year in November and no man can talk to me because they scared...Yeah they're scared to talk to me, like tell me, can we, like to ask me out, they can't date me...They think I will say no and I will look at them as low class and to go like no you are not my type that's what they think. And they think they can't actually, how can I say this,...they cannot finance me. **Sierra Leonean female studying Social Work at Curtin**

They think women who are too educated are too powerful. Yeah so somebody if a woman is too educated up to PhD or first degree, Masters or so they think that “oh she has gone to university she will never listen to you”. “She is too powerful now, you going to be subordinate, don’t even bother”, you know, and the men will be like “No I don’t want a women who is very educated because they will stand on top of my head, she will not listen to me”. **Sierra Leonean female studying Social Work at Curtin**

No, no when the women comes here with their husband what I’ve observed, observe and witness most marriage break up once they get here. ..Because maybe the woman will go to uni and then the husbands think that “oh, she has gone to uni, there’s no way I can control her anymore so I need to back off straight away”. So that man will have that in the head that she has gone to uni, “it is finish. I’m not going to control her anymore, so I better quit”. Or the woman will go like “I’ve gone to uni, I’m here in Australia , I’m working, I’m getting money for myself, I am at uni so what do I have to do with a man? Why do I have to wait for a man, why do a man have to control me I have my rights?” and then she will stand up for her rights. Then there will start the problem between the husband and the man and at the end they will split... they’re scared and give up. **Sierra Leonean female studying Nursing at ECU**

6.6 Self Actualisation Needs

Notions of self actualisation, the pinnacle of Maslows Hierarchy, were expressed through discussing and exploring the participants’ future goals and ambitions following graduation. It is overwhelmingly clear, without exception, that obtaining university education would signify self actualisation for the participants. It is particularly interesting to note that their idea of self actualisation and their personal goals consistently referred to the wider community. No student spoke of self actualisation as a solely individual goal or for purely personal satisfaction.

Now my first goal is to be a business man. That’s why I come to the university to get trained in management as long as I complete this course I will be on the right track to pursue my ambition which is being a business person. So that is one priority. The other priority is to serve the community where I belong. Every now and again the members of my community are interested in my services that I do, like one being a

community elder, youth leader and one being the church secretary so this supporting kind of position but people are interested in giving them to me to serve them. ..It's my priority to achieve it. **Sudanese male studying Management and Marketing at ECU**

Self actualisation is articulated as a realisation of their desired place in their families and communities: Their education and its relationship with self actualisation are tied into their desire to be recognised by their communities and have their reputations and community authority strengthened. Obtaining their degree meant an authorised ability to inspire, encourage and motivate other family and community members, now that they had gained their appropriate qualifications.

I'm seeing people who are very rich because of what they do, it was not a community goal it's individual objectives that are set and they put strategies in place to achieve them. So this thing is actually motivating me and of course I would not want to believe the generation that may come after me, my children or other people who might come after me without anything because I do also believe it is fault from parent when children maybe inherit nothing from you. It is a big fault from us because we expect, when we bring these people to the world they brought up with nothing and it is a prime responsibility for them to give them where to start on. So it's also a kind of a motivation that I have that is motivating me, I see it as a priority, I will do something to help the generation that may come. **Sudanese male studying Management and Marketing at ECU**

Female participants often spoke of inspiring individual females from their community who wanted to study but didn't have the courage or support to do so. Female students from refugee backgrounds studying at university become role models and motivators for others refugee females in their communities and inspire them to continue studying themselves.

She said to me one day, she said "look how far you've gone! You know, I never believed that you were going to make it, I thought you would break out and just drop at the middle of your course but you've gone really far. I think it's high time I go to TAFE and do enrolled nursing and then from there I'll go to uni as well." And she's at TAFE now. . **Sierra Leonean female studying Social Work at Curtin**

The relationships between university degrees and higher income also relate to their roles and responsibilities with their families who they will continue to support for financially. A university degree meant increased financial aid to their families both in Australia and abroad. Other degree choices were influenced by advice from their personal mentors, such as parents and grandparents, and many were inspired by being mentors to other young refugees who were considering studying.

My aunty, she loves education. She wants every kid to go to school and you know have an idea of what you're doing and all that. So that's where I got it from. **Sierra Leonean female studying Nursing at ECU**

Many students expressed a desire to not only work in Australia but in their countries of origin. Indeed it was the motivating factor for the choice of many of their degrees, particularly of nursing, social work and community development students.

I had a lot of passion for nursing like way back home as I said earlier I was actually working in a pharmacy but that was just a diploma before the war broke out so I had a passion and when I came to Guinea everything went away 'cause of, you know the only way they could have refugees is to work in the swamps. Yeah so I was there and never knew one day that I might get back because I was actually growing up, getting older. I was just thinking ah, but everything, I believe in God because I always am a Christian, I always love church activity and I'm still looking forward to whatever I will do in the future. Make sure I keep my faith. **Sierra Leonean Male studying Nursing at Curtin**

6.7 Conclusion

This chapter has examined participant responses using Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs as a template to gain insight into the psychosocial aspects of the refugee students' experiences of resettlement and university in WA. The participants in this study confirmed that, as identified in the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, stable housing and employment were critical to the resettlement process. The instability of continuously moving leads them to be less likely to feel supported within the community and therefore less likely to understand the systems and language used in Australia.

Successful acculturation lowered the social pressure to become involved in community activities and increased their chances of receiving promotions at work. It assisted with lowering the amount of government assistance refugees were receiving and increased their chances of furthering their education and thereby bettering their lives. Resettlement can be a challenging process and without significant support by governments, refugees find it very difficult to acculturate quickly. Language difficulties and understanding the differences in government systems and support networks can be overwhelming for refugees. The challenge faced by many refugees lies in the tension created in the struggle to adapt and accept new values and beliefs whilst not compromising those of their own culture. Chapter 7 comprises the discussion, recommendations and conclusions of the study.



Female students from refugee backgrounds studying at university become role models and motivators for other young refugee girls in their communities and inspire them to continue studying

CHAPTER 7

Discussion, Recommendations and Conclusions

7.0 Introduction to the final chapter

Students from refugee backgrounds, particularly those with limited educational experience, face a number of challenges coping with the demands of tertiary education in Australia. The experience of university is often overwhelming given the combination of stressors relative to resettlement issues and adapting to new educational settings. The researchers felt that two important aspects of the refugee experience - acculturation and resettlement, should be reflected in a modified framework of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. A modified framework was thus developed and has been presented in this chapter. This final chapter presents a brief discussion followed by student derived recommendations. Proposed strategies to enhance the psychosocial well-being of student from refugee background are listed followed by concluding comments.

7.1 Discussion

The experience of university for most new students can be a daunting experience and this is magnified many times over for students from refugee backgrounds who are coping with multiple stressors arising out of their past and present experiences. The journey from arriving in Australia, commencing and completing tertiary education is a long, arduous process that tests the ambition, motivation and resilience of refugee students in unimaginable ways. The explored learning difficulties documented the relationship between socio-cultural issues, such as gender, and the academic performance of refugee students. While a familiarity of the academic culture remains central to the students' success, a strong relationship between psychosocial well-being and educational outcomes is also demonstrated. Broader frameworks of powerlessness, social exclusion and acculturative stress underlie the academic experiences of refugee students and must be addressed to secure the academic future of students from refugee backgrounds.

This research presents much-needed data on the experience of refugee students attending Australian universities that has previously been lacking in Australian literature.

As noted, there has been a paucity of research on tertiary educational experiences of refugee students to date. The study confirmed several issues highlighted in current refugee literature and has contributed to a much needed body of literature surrounding refugee student's experiences at tertiary education. Despite variation in the sample and the diverse and complex backgrounds particular to each student, the study through the analysis drew succinct themes that represented their voices and experiences from their own perspectives.

This study both confirmed the issues highlighted in current refugee literature, and revealed the complex factors that refugee students are forced to navigate and overcome in order to succeed at university in Western Australia. Despite variances in age, previous education, English level, family structure and years spent in Australia, the data analysis produced clear, succinct and striking themes of refugee students' unique experiences and needs that demand recognition. The diversity in the backgrounds and experiences of African refugee students pose new challenges for universities who must strive to foster student engagement. Results from the study also confirmed that for many students from refugee backgrounds, university as a whole can be a culturally different place, further risking poor student engagement and impacting retention. In order to succeed, students are forced to quickly learn new academic skills in order to communicate and participate effectively (Northedge, 2003).

It is clear that "for students with little experience in academic communities, there is a struggle to develop an effective voice through which to 'speak' the discourse". Students are forced to quickly learn unfamiliar strategies and skills to communicate and participate effectively (Northedge, 2003, p.25). Supporting students to establish this voice is a vital component of success for students from diverse backgrounds. Many of the participants in this study expressed a sense of anxiety and emotional distress due to carrying the burden of their refugee background, as well as anxieties and frustrations about the university culture and academic system; all of this was often compounded by real and overwhelming financial pressures and by issues that threatened the maintenance of their psychosocial well-being.

The diversity in backgrounds, needs, and expectations of students pose new challenges for universities in regard to engagement of students (Krause *et al.*, 2005). In the past

decade, issues of diversity have moved from periphery positions into central concerns of higher education institutions (Brown, 2004). Results from this study reveal that for many students, the university is a culturally alienating place; programmes may need to be developed that enable students to become active members of a learning community and have a sense of belonging to this culture. Students who are under-prepared (that is, they do not have an understanding of how the university operates and how to succeed within the culture), require a more specific tailored induction into the university and its knowledge communities so that they are strategically positioned and equipped to meet its challenges (Northedge, 2003).

Students from refugee backgrounds, particularly those with no previous education experience, face a number of challenges coping with the demands of university education in their resettled country similar to students in the secondary system (Brough *et al.*, 2003). Many of the participants in this study expressed a sense of anxiety and emotional distress. This was due partly to a few key reasons: carrying the burden of their refugee background, anxieties and frustrations about the university culture and understanding the academic system. These issues are then compounded by financial and some social pressures. Many of the participants expressed having previously or currently struggled financially when studying, supporting family here and back home, in addition to their own study costs.

Participants also expressed the need for preparatory or bridging classes to be made available to refugees, in order to familiarise them with the language, culture and disciplines prior to beginning their studies. It was pointed out that something similar to what is provided for international students would be helpful as the language courses provided on arrival through the Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy (IHSS) do not adequately prepare potential refugee students for university study. There is an apparent lack of clear and accurate information available about university studies within these communities and this can distort or portray incorrect images and understandings of what it entails. In addition universities could take a more active role in promoting their courses through refugee communities, church groups and civil society, to act as a bridge to university, and to assist with identified enrolment challenges.

7.2 Modified framework for Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Having analysed the results of the psychosocial components of the participant responses, the researchers felt that in order to accurately depict student experiences, they needed to further adapt the models discussed in Chapter 3. A model (presented below in figure 13) was developed that, in addition to the five classes of the original frameworks, also incorporated the recurring issues of resettlement and acculturation and could be used as a psychosocial tool in future research into the refugee experience.

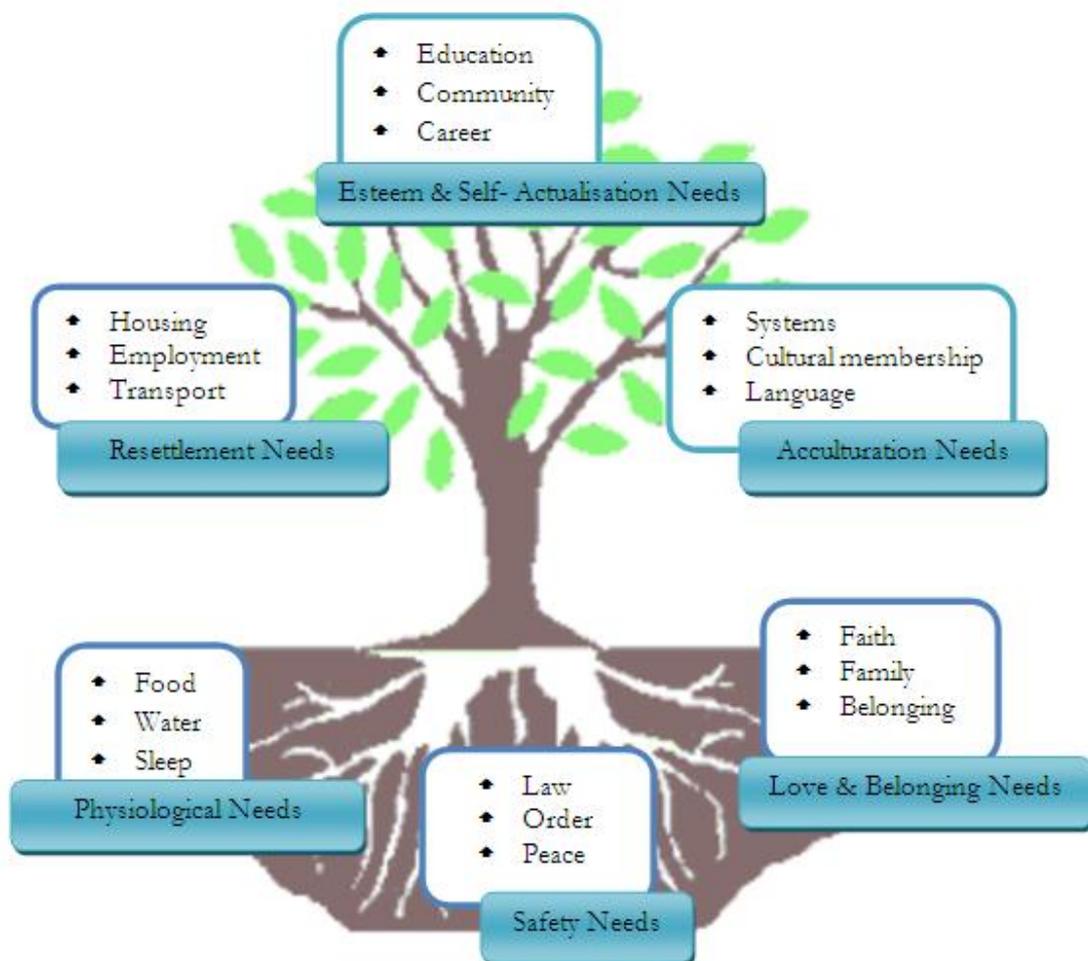


Figure 13: Framework Incorporating Needs of Respondents from Refugee backgrounds (Modified from Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Framework)

(Image of tree sourced from: www.epa.gov/R5Super/ecology/html/erasteps/erastep3.html)

The above framework has been modified from Maslow's original model of five groups of needs as well as Taylor's (2005) adaptation of this original and incorporates two further categories that emerged from analysis of the data collected in this study. Whilst it here is specifically representing refugee students' needs it is felt that it has applications in the exploration of the psychosocial well-being of other groups such as indigenous and immigrant populations. The researchers felt that a tree best represented the hierarchy of refugee student needs. In this representation, the three basic needs of 'Physiological', 'Safety' and 'Love and Belonging' needs are situated under the ground and incorporate the roots of the tree. Thus, if these needs are not met, the foundation of the tree will be weak and the tree may easily fall over. The symbolism of the tree also reflects the strong attachment to land expressed by the participants.

The trunk of the tree is specifically aimed at refugees and takes into consideration 'Resettlement' needs and 'Acculturation' needs. 'Esteem' needs and 'Self actualisation' remain at the pinnacle of the tree, illustrating that refugees must feel that they are accomplishing their goals and realising their skills in their new host country. The analysis of the interviews documented that all refugees in this study regarded receiving their education a measure of self actualisation.

7.3 Recommendations from the study

Student derived recommendations were proposed as participants were asked the following questions: "What should academic staff and fellow students know about refugee students?" and "How can they respond to the needs to refugee students?" Recognition of these recommendations would enable strategies for empowerment as described by Fawcett et al., (1995) by enhancing the students' experiences and competence, developing refugee students' capacity as a group, removing social barriers and strengthening the use of support and resources. The responses have been developed into the recommendations below:

1. ***Academic staff and students need a humane understanding of refugee Backgrounds:*** Patience and encouragement from teachers are key strategies that will enhance the educational outcomes of refugee students. Academic staff and fellow students need to be aware of language, cultural and religious sensitivities, and ensure that the voices and contributions of refugee students can be heard and are valued.

2. ***Academic staff should understand academic under-preparation among refugee students:*** Professional staff and fellow students at universities should have an understanding and awareness of not only experiences of refugee students, but particularly their previous educational experiences and backgrounds. Staff should be aware that students from refugee backgrounds have many difficulties in understanding the new educational and cultural system. They should understand students are often working in their third or fourth language and have experienced interrupted schooling and education systems that do not have functioning library systems, computer access and technology and use of laboratory or scientific equipment. Staff should also be aware that general life skills, such as how to be an independent learner, personal organisation and time management are often new skills to refugee students.
3. ***Universities need to provide and enhance support and guidance to refugee students:*** Refugee students have unique needs, experiences and difficulties that are best resolved by approaching students and offering support. Students need constant support, encouragement and one-to-one help to stay motivated and confident to complete their studies. This is particularly needed in students' first year and with computing and academic writing skills. Asking a student at the end of a lecture or tutorial how they are progressing provides invaluable pastoral support and builds supportive relationships.
4. ***Academic staff should be aware of and cater to student diversity:*** Courses should endeavour to encourage more of an international focus, as students from refugee backgrounds are not only at a disadvantage from having less local knowledge, they also intend to work internationally. Academics and fellow students should reduce their use of Australian jargon, abbreviations and local terminology and ensure explanation when they are used. Tutors should prompt refugee students for their comparative input and allow their cultural understandings of concepts to be explored.
5. ***Universities should encourage and nurture participation of refugee students:*** Students need to be encouraged to participate in university life, especially in developing in-class friendships and to participate in tutorials. Staff should facilitate

opportunities for participation in tutorials, foster comfortable learning environments, ensure students are suitably grouped for group assessments and encourage students to develop in-class friendships.

6. ***Increase service awareness to refugee students:*** Often, students had not heard of equity, guild, counselling, health or library support, and consequently under-utilised these services. In particular, the learning centres need to be promoted, as many students were unaware or confused regarding the service and would benefit from a relationship with the centres at the commencement of their studies.
7. ***Motivate, encourage and inspire refugee students:*** Refugee students need to be better engaged, and supported in the process of commencing university. Once enrolled, support during the first semester is critical to retaining students, as this is often a time of confusion, frustration and despair, causing students to withdraw.
8. ***Provide more attention and help, especially in first year.*** Refugee students would like more attention and help, especially in first year. Participants felt lost and thought the lecturers were too busy, especially in first year units with so many students in each class. They suggested two lecturers in larger units, one to lecture, one to go around offering help. Participants also felt the need for increased specialised, one-to-one academic and general support service for refugee students on campus. The support that refugee students needed was more than just language support and greater assistance was needed in how to undertake and write assignments, use proper referencing and avoid plagiarism. They also felt that support and counselling staff need to have knowledge of the experiences of refugee students. They expressed a desire for increased interaction between academic staff and refugee students, and for cultural safety and awareness training to be provided to academic staff.
9. ***Offer refugee students a bridging or preparatory course:*** Participants felt that offering refugee students a bridging course or preparatory course prior to entering university, would equip them with the necessary skills and knowledge of university culture and expectations. They also felt that their units should be more international

in their focus, as universities must not assume all students are going to work in Australia upon graduation.

10. **Increased Financial Support:** Lastly, the students discussed financial stress, and felt that more scholarships and financial assistance need to be made available for refugee students as a means to reduce stress and the temptation to discontinue their education for work. Most students were struggling to cope with the demands of supporting families back home, whilst also paying their bills in Australia.

These recommendations can both help frame future research into the academic needs of students from refugee backgrounds and also assist in the development of support programmes. This study did not obtain information on the academic performance of students from refugee backgrounds and future research could track such progress. While participants did note that their experiences were not the same as international students, the aims of this study were not to compare the educational experiences between refugee and international students. More research is required on intervention strategies, especially on the efficacy of such strategies and their cultural relevance.

7.4 Strategies proposed from the study

As detailed in the literature review in their study of Sudanese refugees in Brisbane Khawaja et al., (2008) identify various coping and cognitive strategies employed by refugees to cope with resettlement: religious practices, social support networks, reframing a situation, relying on inner resources and agency, and focusing on future aspirations. Silove and Steel (2006) stress that the ability of refugee communities to be proactive in self help and to draw on their community to support each other should not be underestimated and should be utilised when devising programmes. Strategies that can be implemented to improve outcomes for students from refugee students include mentoring, cultural sensitivity training for academics, improving participation in tutorials and involving student from refugee backgrounds in guild activities.

- Promotion of understanding by both academics and other university students of the background and difficulties faced by students from refugee backgrounds.

- Cultural safety and awareness should be raised amongst academics that refugee students may be underprepared, not only academically but also in life skills, and be ready to assist students from refugee backgrounds at the onset of their courses.
- Academics should also be made cognisant of potential difficulties and be prepared for a more one-on-one approach to this cohort, referring students from refugee backgrounds to support services where necessary.
- Universities should raise awareness of the background of students from refugee backgrounds who may often be studying a third or fourth language. Both academics and fellow students need to be conscious of modifying their language and speed of delivery when conversing with or lecturing to students from refugee backgrounds.
- Mindful that such students may be self-conscious, academics need to develop culturally sensitive strategies to encourage them to participate in tutorials. They should recognise that such students can contribute significant insights and perspectives arising from their histories and cultural diversity and as such enrich discussions.
- Universities and student guilds should consider implementing the use of a mentor to guide students from refugee backgrounds throughout their university experience.

7.5 Conclusion

This study was undertaken with students from refugee backgrounds at each of the five universities in Western Australia. The study documented that students from refugee backgrounds frequently find the culture of tertiary institutions alienating and experience difficulties in succeeding academically and forming social bonds. Students from refugee backgrounds, particularly those with no previous education experience, face a number of challenges coping with the demands of university education in Australia. Their migration experiences that culminate with the stressors of resettlement and acculturation in Australia demand extraordinary levels of resilience and determination of in order to complete university education.

This study explored and documented the complex challenges refugees face throughout their tertiary education, and demonstrated the strong relationship between psychosocial

well-being, acculturation and socio-cultural factors with educational outcomes. The participants regularly experienced alienation which was related to powerlessness, social exclusion and acculturative stress. Such research findings contribute to the emerging literature that intersects the refugee experience with tertiary education in Australia. It is hoped that the results and student recommendations will provide a foundation for new teaching and learning pedagogies that reflect the needs of students from refugee backgrounds.

While this study provides some preliminary suggestions for how universities can cater for students from a refugee background, more work is required to ascertain their specific educational and support needs. As the number of refugee students entering university increases, further research needs to track the academic progress of these students so that appropriate programmes can be developed if there are concerns with their progress. Despite these difficulties, this study has revealed that, aligned with research findings in other countries (Wilkinson, 2002), these participants were very motivated to successfully complete their studies and begin professional careers.

This research also echoes findings from other research that community development approaches connecting refugee students with each other through mentor and group situations, together with strengthening the connections with academic and support staff, are critical for the success and retention of refugee students (Brough et al., 2003, Cassity & Gow, 2005). Through greater connections with refugee groups, increased understanding of their psychosocial needs and increased support for students from refugee backgrounds at university, their chances of academic and future employment success would be enhanced.

Participants included in the needs analysis varied in age, the courses they studied and the number of years they had been in Australia and at university. Their pre and post migration experiences that contributed to the stressors of resettlement and acculturation in Australia demand high levels of resilience and determination of the students if they are to complete university education. In light of this, it is clear that the multi-faceted needs of refugee students require a co-ordinated approach from university teaching staff, teaching and learning service providers and support staff that specifically address refugee students'

needs. Despite these difficulties, this study has also revealed that universities represent the setting where many of the hopes of refugee students materialise.

Tertiary institutions need to develop new methods to impart the necessary skills and sensitivities for living successfully amid student diversity. Programmes need to be developed that enable students to become active members of a learning community and have a sense of belonging to this culture. Students who are under-prepared (that is, who do not have an understanding of how the university operates and how to succeed within the culture), require a more specific tailored induction into the university culture and its knowledge communities so that they are equipped to meet its challenges and expectations (Northedge, 2003). All participants were extremely motivated and inspired to achieve their career objectives, and rated education as one of their top priorities. Previous studies suggest that, given the challenges students from refugee backgrounds face at high school, university studies might be unrealistic for many students from refugee backgrounds (Cassidy & Gow, 2005; Olliff & Couch, 2005). It is hoped that the CD resources generated by the findings of the study and student suggestions will be widely disseminated and serve to assist in the transition of this cohort to the university environment and help to reduce some of its associated stresses.

This study has documented that there is a need for greater understanding to adequately respond to the needs to refugee students. This requires a deeper cross-cultural awareness and avenues for dual communication so that students become more familiar with the expectations of universities and vice versa. Although most refugee students had experienced disrupted schooling, multiple transitions before final resettlement in Australia, and challenges associated with trauma and resettlement, all were confident that, with increased support, they would succeed at university and fulfil their aspirations. It is to these students that universities need to respond so that students from refugee backgrounds are able to contribute to the wider Australian community, and build successful lives in their country of resettlement.

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Appendix 1: Interview Schedule

Background and demographic data

- Name:
- Course:
- Year
- University:
- Country of origin.
- What year did you arrive in Australia
- How old were you at the time of arrival?
- What countries did you spend time in before you arrived in Australia?
- Have you attended university before coming to Australia?
- Did you attend high school education, if so where?
- When did you start learning English, how did you find it?
- When did you start learning to use a computer, how did you find it?

Resettlement

- When did you come to Australia?
- With whom did you come to Australia with?
- Who do you live with?
- Did you have any expectations before arriving in Australia? If so like what?

Family

- Has your family adjusted to life in Australia?
- What difficulties/challenges has your family faced in Australia?
- What have been some of the enjoyable or beneficial things about life in Australia?

Friends

- Have you made friends at university?
- What are their nationalities?
- In what ways do your friends help you in university?
- Do you go to your friends or lecturers first for help?
- How important are your friends to your success and enjoyment to university?

Settling into University

- What made you decide to enroll into university?/wanted to start university?
- How do you initially find studying at an Australian university? (positive and negative examples)
- In what ways has your resettlement affected your experience at university?
- What new skills have you needed to learn for university in Australia?
- What did you find easier or enjoyable about university?
- In what ways do you think studying is harder for you than non-refugee students?
- What do you find most difficult about university (lectures, computers, English, Aus style)?
- Could you describe differences between your home style of teaching and the Australian style of teaching?
- What is your experience of the teaching methods used in Australian Universities?

- Do you feel connected to the university community, if so what helped you feel this way (resources, university groups)?
- What does/doesn't make you feel part of the community?
- What could be improved as part of the community?

University experience

- What were your expectations before coming to university?
- When did you start using computers and how have you found that?
- Do you participate in your online-discussions?
- Do you go to most of your classes and tutorials?
- How do you find your tutorials and do you participate during them?
- Did you seek help from (equity, health and counseling, Student Learning, Guild?)
- What do you find difficult about the way information is taught?
- How do you feel teaching could be improved?
- Do you ever seek help from your lecturers?
- What kind of things do you need help with?
- Do you feel comfortable asking for help?
- Are your lecturers helpful and welcoming?
- Are you experiencing any physical and emotional needs that affect your studies? (Depression, Anxiety)

Gender:

- How does your gender affect your role in your family and community
- How does this affect your study
- Has your gender role changed since being in Australia
- How is it different to the opposite gender?

Suggestions and recommendations

- What support systems did you use to overcome your challenges in Australia? (Friends, University programmes)
- What strategies would you recommend to a friend if they were starting university?
- If you were given a CD with resources, what kind of information would you like in it?
- What support did you feel you needed the most when you first arrived?
- How have your needs changed from your arrival until now?
- What would you like staff to know about refugee students? How can they assist you?
- What would you like fellow students to know about refugee students? How can they support?

APPENDIX 2: Questions based on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Belongingness and love needs

- Which communities do you feel like you belong to? (family, relationships, work, uni, sports, community, faith)

Identity Formation/Esteem needs

- Could you please discuss with us your role/status/responsibility within your country
- How has your role changed now in Australia?
- What other things in your life take up your time, energy and money (stress)?
- What other responsibilities do you have in your life (Job, children, family commitments)?
- How do these effect your study?
- What else builds your self esteem?

Safety needs

- Do you feel safe in Australia? (stability- comfortable)
- Do you feel your family is secure and stable now/for the future? (visa status, financial)
- Who supports you/your family in Perth?
- Who helps you in difficult times?

Biological and Physiological needs

- Do you feel like your basic needs are met (food, shelter, sex, sleep)?
- Who do you have to support or help you through these feelings?

Self actualisation

- What are your plans for the future (your goals, expectations)?
- What keeps you motivated?
- Who continues to encourage you?
- What does getting an education mean to you, your family, your community?
- Was there ever a time you thought about stopping uni? Why?
- What made you feel this way?

APPENDIX 3: Ethics Approval



Office of Research and Development

Human Research Ethics Committee

TELEPHONE 9266 2784
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memorandum

To	Dr Jaya Earnest, Centre for International Health
From	A/Professor Stephan Millett, Chair, Human Research Ethics Committee
Subject	Protocol Approval HR 41/2008
Date	8 May 2008
Copy	Miss Bernadette Masbayi Centre for International Health Dr Girma Molla Centre for International Health

Thank you for your application submitted to the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) for the project titled "*Strategies to enhance well-being of refugee youth in universities in Perth*". Your application has been reviewed by the HREC and is approved.

The Committee has requested all approval letters from other institutions involved be included in the file. Could you please send these through when available.

- You are authorised to commence your research as stated in your proposal.
- The approval number for your project is **HR 41/2008**. Please quote this number in any future correspondence.
- Approval of this project is for a period of twelve months **06-05-2008** to **06-05-2009**. To renew this approval a completed Form B (attached) must be submitted before the expiry date **06-05-2009**.
- If you are a Higher Degree by Research student, data collection must not begin before your Application for Candidacy is approved by your Divisional Graduate Studies Committee.
- The following standard statement **must be** included in the information sheet to participants:
This study has been approved by the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee (Approval Number HR 41/2008). The Committee is comprised of members of the public, academics, lawyers, doctors and pastoral carers. Its main role is to protect participants. If needed, verification of approval can be obtained either by writing to the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee, c/- Office of Research and Development, Curtin University of Technology, GPO Box U1987, Perth, 6845 or by telephoning 9266 2784 or by emailing hrec@curtin.edu.au.

Applicants should note the following:

It is the policy of the HREC to conduct random audits on a percentage of approved projects. These audits may be conducted at any time after the project starts. In cases where the HREC considers that there may be a risk of adverse events, or where participants may be especially vulnerable, the HREC may request the chief investigator to provide an outcomes report, including information on follow-up of participants.

The attached **FORM B** should be completed and returned to the Secretary, HREC, C/- Office of Research & Development:

When the project has finished, or

- If at any time during the twelve months changes/amendments occur, or
- If a serious or unexpected adverse event occurs, or
- 14 days prior to the expiry date if renewal is required.
- An application for renewal may be made with a Form B three years running, after which a new application form (Form A), providing comprehensive details, must be submitted.

Regards,

PP A/Professor Stephan Millett
Chair
Human Research Ethics Committee