**A Thematic Analysis on Refugee Trauma and Post-Traumatic Growth Using Online Stories.**

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Dissertation submitted as a requirement for the degree of Bachelor of Science (Honours) in Applied Psychology, Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology, 2024.

**Declaration**

I declare that this submission is my own work. Where I have read, consulted, and used the work of others, I have acknowledged this in the text.

Word Count: 6799

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Date: 9th April 2024

**Acknowledgments**

I want to express my sincere gratitude to my thesis supervisor, Tim McNichols, for his continuous guidance and encouragement throughout this project. Your support has been greatly appreciated.

Thank you to Dr. Grainne Kirwan for her multiple classes that provided support for the analysis part of the project. Additionally, thank you to all the lecturers during the degree for the knowledge they have provided me with.

I want to thank my friends and family for their ongoing love and support throughout the last four years. I would not be able to get through it without you all.

Lastly, I want to thank all the refugees around the world who are willing to share their stories with the public. Your unwavering resilience and passion for a better future are something that will be admired for decades to come.

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**Abstract**

Refugees are considered to be one of the world’s most vulnerable populations that require ongoing research to further understand their general health and mental well-being (World Health Organization, 2022). Hence, the current study was conducted to investigate the traumas that refugees experience and the factors that contribute to refugees' post-traumatic growth (PTG). A qualitative research design was implemented with data analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) method of thematic analysis. Participants were randomly retrieved through online public websites from refugee and non-profit organizations. This resulted in 22 participants from 11 nationalities residing in 5 different countries. Four major themes were identified: loss, identity threat, identity growth, and coping strategies. The findings illustrate the importance of acknowledging the challenging events refugees face but also highlighting how they can prevail with their existing skills and develop their sense of self. Strengths of the study include the variation in participant demographics and the contribution towards the limited literature examining the significance of PTG on refugees’ mental health. A limitation of the study is the potential for bias due to information obtained from non-profit organizations. Future research could conduct in-person interviews for more detailed accounts of the refugee experience.

**Introduction**

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has estimated that up to mid-2023, 110 million individuals have been forcibly displaced worldwide, with 36.4 million of that number being refugees. The United Nations (1951) defined refugees as people who cannot or will not return to their native country due to the “fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion.” (p.3). Refugees are distinct from other groups who choose to leave their homes and relocate for better opportunities e.g., for education and economic reasons. They have no other option but to leave as a result of the ongoing conflict and dangers at home that prevent their return (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh et al., 2014). The journey of becoming a refugee is often divided into a three-stage process: pre-migration, migration, and post-migration. Pre-migration refers to the period prior to the escapism of the home country, which can be characterized by political violence or war, social turmoil, chaos, and more. Migration involves the transition from the home country to an alternative country. The relocation and resettlement to a host country is known as post-migration (Mohamed & Thomas, 2017). Each of these stages has its own obstacles, which can lead to significant psychological distress.

* 1. **Trauma**

Trauma can be described as any disturbing experience that causes notable distressing emotions that can have a long-lasting negative influence on the individual's functioning, behaviour, and attitudes (American Psychological Association, 2018). Coined as *“*concentration camp syndrome,” early academic reports on the short and long-term psychosocial effects of refugee trauma were propelled by Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany (Boehnlein & Kinzie, 1995). Researchers recognized that they had higher rates of insomnia, fatigue, anxiety, and depression compared to other ethnic groups (Arthur, 1982; Eaton et al., 1982; Eitinger, 1961). In these studies, the adverse effect of resource loss was evident which correlates with Schweitzer et al. (2011) study on resettled refugees in Australia. Some of the common types of traumas experienced by the participants during the pre-migration stage were the lack of food, water, and shelter, combat situations, and having no access to medical care. Fulfilment of basic physiological and psychological needs is a necessity for human survival. Individuals are consistently seeking to ensure that their resources are being maintained. This can be seen in Maslow’s (1943) hierarchal model of human needs, where physiological needs are at the very first level and must be met for human satisfaction. Furthermore, Hobfoll’s Conservation of Resource Theory (1989) can explain stress being induced by resources being lost. The premise of this theory is that individuals gain or lose certain resources that can result in distress or happiness. During the refugee stages, the individuals experience their safety, shelter, food, water, education, employment, and more at risk. The elimination of these resources can cause excessive anxiety for the individual as well as trauma, which has a long-lasting impact.

The lack of ability to retain these resources can also be frustrating for refugees as it is beyond their control. Perceived control can influence how we react to a situation (Lefcourt, 1991). If an individual believes a certain event is dependent on their own behaviour, they obtain an internal locus of control. However, external locus of control is the belief that external characteristics have power over the outcome of an event (Rotter, 1966). A more internal locus of control is necessary for refugees as it may mediate the negative effects of stressful situations, particularly when integrating into a new society (Xia & Ma, 2020). Having the right to self-directing freedom, i.e., autonomy, is also one of the fundamental attributes of human needs (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Individuals are considered to have three basic psychological needs – competence, autonomy, and relatedness. The fulfilment of these needs leads to healthy well-being and functioning. In contrast, if these needs are compromised, it can lead to strained relationships and diminished self-esteem and confidence (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Relatedness and being able to form a connection with others are important for refugees’ functioning which can be achieved through being active members of society. However, how refugees perceive themselves, their relationships with others, and the world can be tainted due to their traumatic experiences (Alayarian, 2011). Furthermore, it can have negative consequences on their identity, such as their social identity (Berman et al., 2020). Social identity is derived from the knowledge that an individual believes they are part of a social group whom they have an emotional association with (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The Social Identity Theory discusses intergroup relations and how individuals often favour their own group when comparing it to outgroup relations. Groups of ‘higher’ status are inclined to protect their superiority, whereas ‘lower’ status groups aim to reduce their social stigma and promote their positivity (Hogg, 2016). Since refugees may be viewed as inferior to others, they may face some discrimination. Studies on refugees who felt discriminated against in their host country felt that the prejudice was attributed to their language deficiency, nationality, religion, race, and level of social integration (Montgomery & Foldspang, 2007; Viazminsky et al., 2022). However, In Viazminsky et al. (2022) study, a self-reported measure for discrimination was used, which may lack intersectionality and the inability to account for confounding variables (Lewis et al., 2015).

A seminal contributor to the concept of identity is Erikson's stages of psychosocial development. Erikson (1994) considered identity as a sense of continuity of the self that develops over the lifespan but is particularly consolidated during adolescence. During this period, the individual attempts to incorporate their ego and social identity to create a cohesive sense of self. However, identity confusion and, furthermore, identity distress can occur if the individual feels they are unable to establish their place in life and have conflicting ideologies (Erikson, 1964). Although Erikson emphasized that this occurs mostly in the teenage years, for refugees, this can occur during any period regardless of age (Bergquist et al., 2019). Ertorer (2014) investigated the impact of resettling to a culturally different country on refugees' identity. The participants reported a diminished sense of continuity between their past, current, and future selves compared to the control group (natives). However, refugees who lived with families and attended education had an improved sense of continuity, suggesting that family and social connections play a role in identity stability.

* 1. **Post-Traumatic Growth**

As discussed previously, trauma can have severe negative consequences for the individual. However, there has been emerging evidence that there can be positive outcomes as well, known as post-traumatic growth. PTG is known as the beneficial changes that trauma survivors encounter in the post-trauma adaption period, which could relate to a better and more optimistic mindset (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). Tedeschi et al. (1998) proposed that there have been three broad perceived benefits of trauma identified, which is also seen in refugees. First is changes in self-perception, with some refugees disclosing that they felt stronger after the trauma and developed resilience (Walther et al., 2021). Changes in interpersonal relationships where some reported forming deeper connections with friends and family after realizing how quickly these relationships can be lost (Hirad et al., 2022). Additionally, individuals may become more open and self-disclosing after the trauma, expressing how they feel. This can lead to emotional vulnerability and an increased acceptance to look for help, such as utilizing social supports that have been rejected before (Tedeschi et al., 1998). Lastly, people report a changed philosophy of living by having a heightened appreciation for their own life and maximising their potential (Chan et al., 2016). Furthermore, for some individuals their spirituality strengthened with an increased sense of finding meaning (Atari-Khan et al., 2021).

A systemic review carried out by Henson et al. (2020) determined that coping strategies acted as a core element of PTG. Coping strategies are referred to as continuous behavioural and emotional patterns intended to alleviate the distress from adversity. In Lazarus and Folkman’s transactional theory of stress and coping (1984), they determined two forms of coping. Directly altering the stressful environment, i.e., problem-focused coping, and regulating your emotional response to the stressful situation, i.e., emotion-focused coping. These forms of coping, as well as additional forms, are also evident in refugees. For example, a study on Syrian refugees in Jordan found that 88% pursued social support, 64.5% reported avoidance, and 39.5% used problem-solving as a coping strategy (Alzoubi et al., 2019). Further findings identified that men were less likely to use social support than women, avoidance was more evident in refugees who were settled in Jordan for under two years, and that higher level of education indicated the use of problem-solving coping. The measure used in the study, the Coping Strategy Indicator, had acceptable validity for each subscale (.92, .94, .86) and has been widely employed (Amirkhan, 1998). However, the scale only measures three coping strategies, which limits other potential strategies refugees use. It was also a purely quantitative study. For a topic like coping strategies, which is subjective and can be influenced by individual attributes such as upbringing and personality traits, a qualitative analysis could have provided a more in-depth review of the tactics employed. For instance, Zbidat et al. (2020) performed semi-structured interviews with 16 Syrian refugees. The participants coping strategies were categorized into either social, emotional, religious, cognitive, avoidance, or use of activity. Hope has also been shown as a coping mechanism for refugees, with one study applying Snyder’s (2002) hope theory. In his framework, Snyder believes there are three components to establishing hope. Being goal-directed is considered the backbone of having hope, where the individual intends to make positive goals or delay negative outcomes from a goal. Pathway thinking involves creating a plan to achieve your goals. Lastly, agency thinking consists of having self-belief that you can achieve these goals. The participants in the study who scored high in PTG stated how they worked towards learning a new language (pathway thinking), availed of new opportunities (agency thinking), and had long-term aspirations (goal thinking) (Umer & Elliot, 2019).

Coping through creative means has also been seen in research. A mixed-method study investigated the role of creative writing for individuals seeking asylum in the UK. The participants expressed an increased sense of confidence and hope, improved well-being, and improved English (Stickley et al., 2018). Another study explored the effects of poetry on young unaccompanied refugees adapting to the resettlement period. Writing poetry provided the refugees with an outlet to comprehend their feelings but also to establish new relationships (Hosseini & Punzi, 2022).

Creating new bonds with individuals, especially in the host country, can significantly improve refugees’ mental health as they are more integrated into society (Jorgenson & Nilsson, 2021). This integration can develop refugees' sense of belonging and protect their identity. Belonging to multiple groups, such as ethnic and religious groups, can enhance refugees’ social self-continuity (a connection between one’s past and present self), which in return can positively influence their psychological well-being (Smeekes et al., 2017). Protecting refugees' vocational identity may also facilitate their PTG. Holland et al. (1980) defined vocational identity as an individual's life goals, interests, personality traits, and talents that create a clear and stable picture of who they are. A study investigating the vocational identity of refugees residing in Germany discovered that some of the participants reframed their negative situation into a positive one by acknowledging their career-related growth and new educational opportunities (Wehrle et al., 2018).

**1.3 Rationale for Research Study**

Although there is an abundance of literature that discusses the traumas that refugees face, it is a constantly evolving topic that requires ongoing research (World Health Organization, 2022). However, it is necessary to emphasize that refugees are not passive victims and can support themselves emotionally in multiple ways. Hence, why there is a growing need for research to replicate this by investigating their post-traumatic growth (Shakespeare-Finch et al., 2014; Von Arcosy et al., 2023; Yoon et al., 2023). Additionally, examining these topics and what strategies refugees employ can facilitate therapeutic centres in the treatment of refugees that could be crucial to their development (Umer & Elliot, 2019).

**1.4 Research Questions**

Given the reasons discussed above, the following research questions will be investigated:

Research Question 1: What are the traumas that refugees face?

Research Question 2: What factors contribute to refugees' post-traumatic growth?

**Methodology**

**2.1 Design**

The present study employed a qualitative research design with data being thematically analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) method. This flexible method allows for investigating various perspectives from different research participants. It emphasizes the similarities or differences between the groups and formulates unanticipated insights that may not be possible with a quantitative method (Braun & Clarke, 2012). It is also beneficial for those conducting research for the first time (Braun & Clarke, 2006; King, 2004, as cited in Nowell et al., 2017). This study will formulate key themes based on the trauma and post-traumatic growth experienced by the participants.

**2.2 Participants**

A total of 22 (N=22) participants' stories were retrieved and analysed. Prior refugee studies using thematic analysis recruited 10 – 54 participants (Kuru & Ungar, 2020; Nungsari et al., 2022; Walther et al., 2021). However, this does not force researchers to limit themselves to this range. Instead, justification is provided for the given sample size (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Purposeful sampling was conducted as the inclusion criteria for participants were to have been a refugee in the past or currently are one. Participants must have disclosed information on the challenges they have faced or their optimistic experiences that arose from being a refugee. Hence, 34 profiles were considered for analysis, with only those profiles selected that had information relevant to the inclusion criteria. This resulted in 22 final participants. A data search was conducted on 22/12/23 with the timeframe set between 01/01/2015 and 01/12/2023. This timeframe is due to a spike in refugees worldwide in 2015, with a consistent increase each year until its peak in 2023 (The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2023). Basic demographics of the participants were collected (See Table 1). There were 13 men and 9 women in the analysis. Those who disclosed their age ranged from 19 – 33 years old. The participants came from 11 nationalities, migrating to 5 different countries. All data used was in English. Only information that was in direct quotation marks was collated for data collection.

**Table 1**

*Frequency Participant Demographics*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Demographic** | **Count** |
| ***Gender***  Male  Female | 13  9 |
| ***Age***  19 – 26 years  26 – 33 years  Undisclosed | 4  2  16 |
| ***Home Country***  Afghanistan  Democratic Republic of Congo  Iran  Iraq  Rwanda  Somalia  Sudan  Syria  Sierra Leone  Myanmar  Tanzania | 5  1  1  1  1  2  3  4  1  2  1 |
| ***Host Country***  Australia  Bangladesh  Lebanon  United Kingdom  United States | 3  2  1  10  6 |

**2.3 Materials**

Data was gathered from publicly available information on websites displaying extracts from refugees' experiences during the pre-, mid-, or post-migration stages. Keywords and terms searched in the Google engine included “refugee experience,” “refugee migration,” “refugee stories,” “refugee trauma,” “refugee coping strategies,” and “refugee trauma growth.”An estimated 14 websites were considered for analysis. The final participants were retrieved from 9 websites (See Appendix A). Websites from refugee support and non-profit organizations were targeted as they were in direct contact with refugees documenting their experiences. Some profiles provided information on just one research question, while others for both research questions. Any profile not related to the questions was extracted. The final participant's data for analysis was collected into a Word document. A table was created to transfer the information. One column had the participant number, e.g., ‘Participant 1, 2,3…’ and the other had the actual data content. Excel was also used during the analysis process.

**2.4 Procedure**

Data was analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis method. It is a six-phase process, with each phase being revised when necessary. Due to its flexibility, the method was not followed strictly but as a guideline that could be adapted.

**Phase 1: Being Familiar with the Data**

The first stage involved the researcher becoming aware of and immersing themselves in the content collected. The data was actively read multiple times to generate any initial thoughts, meanings, and patterns. The first read-through involved reading every piece of data collected for a general comprehension of the refugee experience. The second reading involved noting down any interesting quotes and trends. The third reading consisted of writing subjects that jumped out from the data and could act as an overarching theme. The final reading involved looking for themes/meanings that may not have been noticed initially. This led to the adoption of a theoretical framework based on the data and related to the two research questions proposed by the background research. However, an inductive approach was also taken as the researcher had an open mind and was willing to find emerging themes that did not necessarily fit the research questions. One participant's data was verbally transcribed as it was sourced from a website linking it to a YouTube video. This was done by copying the transcript from the video and re-reading/typing it out to ensure it was a direct translation of the video.

**Phase 2: Creating Initial Codes**

Once the data was familiarized, coding took place. This involved organizing the information into meaningful groups. The coding was conducted using Word to insert comments on specific phrases and sentences. The codes were then transferred to Excel, where they were organized into groups based on similarity to showcase any potential themes and meanings of the information. As Braun and Clarke (2012) recommended, the researcher used two coding forms. Semantic coding refers to the explicit meanings of the traumas and post-traumatic growth of refugees and does not go beyond surface-level meaning. Latent coding goes beyond the overt meanings, with the researcher diving deeper into the underlying assumptions of what the refugees were conveying (See Table 2). No data was excluded from coding, and there was no set number of themes to code for. Data was coded and recoded when required. Any links that were found between different data were noted.

**Table 2**

*Sample of Semantic and Latent Coding*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Data Extract** | **Semantic Coding** | **Latent Coding** |
| *“we put together a play called Dear Home Office, which is about our real experiences as unaccompanied refugee children in the UK”* | Putting on a play to illustrate their experiences. | A way to cope with and comprehend their past experiences by displaying it in a way that’s enjoyable to the individual but also informs the public. |
| *“I feel like I’m part of the UK. I love the neighbours. I’m so happy. I have my job. I have my children. I want to say thank you to the UK.”* | Gratitude for their current position. | Relief and happiness that they have integrated into a new society and have found their place in a new environment. |
| *“Leaving my family behind and leaving Syria was one of the hardest things I have ever done”* | Separation from their family. | Making sacrifices for a better life – fearful for their family’s safety |
| *“The government in the UK have just seen me as another illegal immigrant coming over here to sponge off the system”* | Facing discrimination. | Automatically assigned a negative label – harms their sense of identity. |

**Phase 3: Searching for Themes**

After the development of the codes, potential themes were established. All codes were re-read and placed into their relevant possible themes, considering the relationships between the data extracts and themes identified. This resulted in multiple thematic maps, with the final version acting as a visual representation of the relationship between the themes and subthemes (See Appendix B).

**Phase 4: Reviewing the Themes**

The themes that were generated in the previous stage were reviewed to ensure that they were an accurate representation of the refugee stories. Some themes were replaced, refined, or combined into one due to their similarity. As stated by Patton (1990), the themes were ensured to be harmonious but distinct from one another. Themes were validated considering their relevance to the coded data, the overall data, and the meaning of the research questions i.e., the traumas and post-traumatic growth of refugees. Previous phases were revisited to confirm that the themes were reliable.

**Phase 5: Defining and Naming Themes**

Once a solid and satisfactory thematic map was created, the themes were further developed by defining and refining them. It is important that each theme had a strong narrative with additional subthemes/codes that provide a meaningful contribution to answering the questions surrounding refugee trauma and post-traumatic growth. Concise and straightforward titles were given to the themes.

**Phase 6: Producing the Report**

Despite the writing of the final report beginning in the earlier stages, this phase involved the final completion and inspection of the analysis. All themes were reevaluated, supported by appropriate data extracts (See Appendix D – O). The findings were reported in a way that provided a coherent, interesting, and strong narrative of refugees' experiences.

**2.4 Ethics**

Since all the data was publicly available information and there was no direct contact with the participants, the report was deemed a green route ethics project granted by the Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design, and Technology Psychology Ethics Committee (PEC) (See Appendix C). Complying with the Psychology Association of Ireland's code of ethics, the participant's privacy was respected, with all information being confidential. Their identity was anonymous by only being referred to as a number, e.g., “Participant 3 stated that…”. Quotes were also paraphrased for confidentiality (Eldh et al., 2020). Integrity was maintained by being honest through all aspects of collecting, collating, and analysing the data and obeying all relevant ethical procedures. To the best of the researcher's ability, these ethical standards were complied with to reduce any risk or harm to the participants.

**Results**

A total of four major themes emerged from the analysis, with each theme having three subthemes. These major themes were loss, identity threat, identity growth, and coping strategies. These themes were created to provide an overall account of the lived experiences of refugees by describing their trauma and the positive growth that arose from it. The quotes presented are paraphrased for participant discretion; however, the original meaning of the data was maintained. The fully coded participant quotes under each subtheme can be seen in Appendix (D – O).

The first two themes were formed to answer the research question, “What traumas do refugees experience?”. The themes are as follows:

**3.1 Theme One: Loss**

**Figure 1**

*Thematic Map of Theme One*

The first theme describes what refugees experience during the forced displacement period. The most reported form of distress was being separated from family. Participants stated having persistent anxiety for their loved ones’ well-being. They lived in “constant fear” and felt “worried all the time” due to family members still living in “the most dangerous conditions.”,with some family members even being killed in these conditions. Feeling incomplete without their family was also disclosed by Participant 9, who said, “My heart is with my family, and I will not be whole until we are all together again.” Many participants also had to make the sacrifice to leave their families in “search for a better life.”

Lack of security was a subtheme due to participants fearing the unknown. For example, Participant 15 expressed their concern, saying, “All the time we are worried. When you leave your house, you worry – will I come back?”. Anxiety about the future was also common. Participant 17 revealed, “You don’t know what’s going to happen to your future and [my] kids’ future. There were a lot of insecurities”.Relying on a consistent routine, such as attending education, was also “no longer a guarantee.”

Resources being lost was a relevant element during the participant's migration journeys. The struggle to obtain basic resources was evident. Participant 18 mentioned how “It took almost two years to reach the UK. We were robbed twice and had no food for days, and we barely slept.” When resources were available, they were poorly equipped and inadequate. Participant 13 described how “when classes were offered, the classrooms were always overcrowded and under-resourced.”

**Figure 2**

*Number of Occurrences in Each Subtheme of ‘Loss’*

**3.2 Theme Two: Identity Threat**

**Figure 3**

*Thematic Map of Theme Two*

The second theme provides insight into how the participant's identity was endangered. Lack of freedom acted as a strong indicator of identity threat. Participants stated they were unable to choose how they wanted to live. They were “not able to work or study”and simply yearned for “the right to move freely.” Additionally, they were forced to follow orders e.g., Participant 18 voiced how “our decisions were no longer our own. We just got used to doing what menacing strangers told us.”

Some participants also faced discrimination in both their home countries e.g., Participant 8 stated,“The government said we were all armed extremists and closed the mosque and madrassa [religious school]” and the country they migrated to e.g., Participant 5 expressed, “The government in the UK have just seen me as another illegal immigrant coming over here to sponge off the system.” Moreover, cultural differences were acknowledged in a negative light, where one participant said, “At school, I was bullied for my accent.”

Participants exhibited signs of feeling powerless when settling into a new country. Some compared their experiences to “like being blind” and feeling like a “newborn baby.” One participant mentioned how they were eager to start a new life in the host country, but reality halted their excitement as they realized they were “so new and didn’t know anyone.”

**Figure 4**

*Number of Occurrences of Each Subtheme in ‘Identity Threat’*

The final two themes were established to answer the research question, “What factors contribute to the refugee's post-traumatic growth?”.The themes were as follows:

**3.3 Theme Three: Identity Growth**

**Figure 5**

*Thematic Map of Theme Three*

After the refugees' identity had been compromised throughout their journey, this theme explains how different variables contribute to their identity growth. The most frequent aspect that participants mentioned was being resilient. One participant disclosed how they had to keep pushing under dangerous conditions as “under air strikes,” they would “go to internet cafes to apply to schools and programs around the globe.” Some participants expressed trying to rationalize their situation by believing that this was their destiny. For example, Participant 6 said, “I tell myself that it's part of life and that I have to make something out of everything sacrificed.”

Moving to a new country and taking advantage of the opportunities that presented themselves operated as a way for the participants to grow personally. More specifically, by having the chance to gain an education, which was not possible in the country of origin, e.g., Participant 13 said, “I’m the first college graduate in my family, and earning this degree only reinforces those thoughts I had as a child in the refugee camp - education is a human right and every child deserves one.”Some participants also revealed that they had created new goals to work towards. Participant 19 stated, “I put away all the goals I had before and made new goals,” while Participant 4 mentioned, “Back home, I wanted to be a sports journalist. Now I want to be an actor too”.

The last subtheme that helped them find confidence in their identity was integrating into society. Participants expressed feelings of happiness and relief by finding their place in the country they migrated to. Participants who moved to the UK disclosed they felt like “part of the UK” and “eventually started feeling more at home.” One participant described how learning English was beneficial to them as it helped them to “understand the culture.” Another, who learned English with other refugees, stated, “Although we couldn’t communicate with each other at first, we became friends.” Creating a new community in which could be invested into was beneficial, with Participant 13 stating, “I know my knowledge, energy, and opportunity for positive change is here in my new community”

**Figure 6**

*Number of Occurrences of Each Subtheme in ‘Identity Growth’*

**3.4 Theme Four: Coping Strategies**

**Figure 7**

*Thematic Map of Theme Four*

This theme captures how refugees face their trauma through healthy coping mechanisms. Many participants disclosed that engaging in prosocial behaviour served as a comfort to them. Specifically, by playing an active role in reducing the negative perceptions of refugees. One participant mentioned wanting to be a “voice for the voiceless,” while another said they felt “inspired every day to keep advocating for refugees.” In addition, helping the less fortunate was seen; for example, participant 11 declared, “Ifeel peace as I am able to continue my father’s legacy of providing for the needy.”

The second sub-theme was storytelling, in which the participants illustrated the solace and importance of sharing their experiences. Storytelling was fulfilled through acting, where one participant took part in a play about their “real experiences as unaccompanied refugee children in the UK.” Writing was also seen as a way to share with the community what they were experiencing and to “bring forward political and cultural issues.” Participant 12 expressed playing an instrument as a way to explain the complexity of the refugee experience, something that “otherwise is difficult to understand through words”.

The last coping strategy was fostering hope. This entails the participants being optimistic about having a prosperous life in the host country. Family served as motivation to look forward to the future. Participant 16 stated, “The migration journey was painful, but the thought of bringing our children a brighter future was enough motivation to keep us going.” Another participant shared how fantasizing about “how advanced and welcoming it would be” in the host country, inspired them to stay hopeful.

**Figure 8**

*The Number of Occurrences in the Subthemes of ‘Coping Strategies’*

**Discussion**

The main objective of the present study was to answer two research questions. Research question one aimed to discover what traumas refugees experience. The core traumas participants described were experiencing loss in various aspects of their lives as well as having their sense of identity threatened. The second research question investigated factors that helped them prevail through the trauma and contribute to their post-traumatic growth. The results indicate that having strong coping skills and having their identity grow were all important factors. These findings help to provide an overview of the refugee experience.

**4.1 Refugee Trauma**

Refugees encounter many traumatic events, with one being the experience of loss in multiple ways. This theme is consistent with previous studies that also discovered the implication of loss on refugees’ and asylum seekers’ mental health (Betancourt et al., 2015; Taylor et al., 2024). From a young age, people strive to be in close contact with those they feel attached to and search for their loved ones in times of need. When this is not feasible, it can result in significant distress (Bowlby, 1969). In the participant's case, they are forcibly separated from their families and, therefore, cannot rely on them for comfort and support through these difficult times. Participants reported experiencing persistent anxiety about their families' lives, that they were missing their families and felt incomplete without them. This family separation may lead to avoidant attachment styles where refugees struggle with trust and finding social support in the future (Morina et al., 2016). Lack of security was another loss with individuals describing being uncertain about what the future holds for them. Safety and security are essential needs for human survival (Maslow, 1943). However, these needs were not met by the participants. They experienced severe instability throughout their lives, such as fear of death and general uncertainty about the present and future. These findings support Ajil et al. (2020) study, which found among Syrian and Iraqi refugees that pre-migration insecurities surrounded physical safety, whereas post-migration insecurities were based on economic, social, and legal reasons. A number of participants also referenced the suffering from having their food, shelter, personal belongings, and education jeopardized. This distress can be explained by the Conservation of Resource Theory by Hobfoll (1989), which explains how the loss or vulnerability of resources can result in significant stress due to the individual's inability to maintain these resources.

Unfortunately, refugees are more vulnerable to having their identity threatened due to the additional stressors they face in their lives (Bergquist et al., 2019). The participants in the current study expressed having limited freedom as they were unable to live as desired and had to rely on others for their own survival, which harmed their self-perception. This is in line with Ertorer's (2014) study, where the participants conveyed having more external rather than internal locus of control, causing increased anxiety and a hindered sense of agency. Additionally, this impacts their autonomy, which is considered a core aspect of an individual's personality (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Some participants faced discrimination when resettling from other members of society who had negative preconceptions of refugees. They were also judged for their cultural differences. Refugees who experience discrimination have been shown to have poorer mental health as well as a diminished sense of belonging in society, and lower levels of trust (Ziersch et al., 2020). Feelings of powerlessness were also apparent, due to the refugees feeling misplaced in the host country, unsure of which life direction they were heading in. Individuals staying in refugee camps have also expressed feeling meaningless and unempowered due to the static nature of the camps (Bjertrup et al., 2018).

**4.2 Refugee Post-Traumatic Growth**

The concept of identity can be reconstructed and altered for refugees in different ways across the displacement process (Bergquist et al., 2019). Although the participants had their identities stripped away initially, certain variables led to flourishing identities. Sustaining resilience acted as a protective factor in the face of adversity for the participants. Many attempted to make the most of their situation by adopting the mindset that they could still achieve a successful life and taking action to pursue it. This correlates with a prior study on refugee resilience, where focusing on the present or future and accepting the situation were contributing factors (Walther et al., 2021). Refugees had new opportunities presented to them, which fuelled their vocational identity. Prior research has implied that education and career-related opportunities can combat the threats to refugees' vocational identity (Wehrle et al., 2018). Education and career prospects were also considered of great value to the refugees in the study as it encouraged them to have a clear ideology and positive outlook on what they can achieve in their future. Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) could explain why integrating into society was also reported as a growth factor. Individuals derive their self-concept from group memberships and inter-group relations, which influence their attitudes and behaviours. Studies have found that those who are more integrated into society and associated with multiple social groups have better mental health (Jorgenson & Nilsson, 2021; Smeekes et al., 2017).

The participants developed coping strategies, which acted as a way for them to distract and manage their stress in a healthy way. This supports the existing literature on coping strategies. Both storytelling and fostering hope are a form of emotion-focused coping as they help to regulate the troubling emotions arising from displacement (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The refugees described their personal experiences through several creative outlets, such as writing and acting, which fuelled their empowerment. Narrative storytelling has been shown to act as a therapeutic intervention for refugees through creative formats, as it supports healing and resilience while also building on key life skills (Moore, 2017). The participants reported staying hopeful, which correlates with Umer and Elliot’s (2019) study, which discovered that hope acted as an important contributor to refugees' psychological well-being. This sub-theme also links with some components of Snyder's (2002) hope theory. Participants expressed having positive goals, e.g., for their children to succeed in life, and agency thinking, e.g., being confident in their abilities.

Pro-social behaviour was an unexpected finding as past refugee research does not emphasise the role of helping others as a coping strategy. However, it does correlate with Shakespeare-Finch et al. (2014) findings on how compassion and responsibility for others contributed to the refugee's post-traumatic growth. They also suggested that a possible reason for the limited research on this topic is that Western research typically focuses on the extent to which refugees accept help from others rather than how they help others themselves. This sub-theme also links with Midlarsky's (1991) article on helping to cope with life stressors. The findings of Midlarsky could explain why the participants would engage in pro-social behaviour. To promote social integration, some reported wanting to advocate for their community in hopes of reducing the negative stigma and also assigning meaning to their lives, believing that this is their role to help others. These are all features that may have been disrupted in their lives due to the displacement process.

An anticipated finding which surprisingly did not emerge under the theme of coping strategies was religious coping. Often, refugees lean into their faith to cope with adversity by believing this brings them closer to God, assigns meaning to their lives, and rewards them in the afterlife (Atari-Khan et al., 2021). However, this was not prevalent in the current study as it only was referenced by one participant.

**4.3 Strengths and Limitations**

A strength of the study is that there are variations in the participants' demographics. Often, refugee research is specified towards individuals from a single country who have migrated to the same host country, resulting in a non-diverse sample (Yoon et al., 2023). However, this study included 11 nationalities with people residing in 5 different countries. This allows for the results to be more generalizable by establishing the commonalities between refugees from diverse backgrounds and resettling in different countries. Another strength of the study is that research is often dominated by the challenges refugees face, not emphasizing how they overcome these traumas (Von Arcosy et al., 2023). This research contributed to the literature on post-traumatic growth, which is a growing area of interest. A further benefit of this study is the unexpected finding that highlighted the importance that refugees place on being active participants in advocating for other refugees in both a way to help themselves and others.

However, there are some limitations to this project, particularly concerning the sampling technique. Since the information was obtained from public, non-profit organizations' websites, the information provided could be biased and purposively filtered. Some participants were receiving support from the organization and, therefore, may have felt pressured to present their stories in a certain way. Another issue is that all quoted information was written in English, which is not the native language of the majority of the participants. With varying levels of English, certain information may have been misinterpreted or not represented in the way the actual individual intended it to be. Lastly, due to the methodology of the study, only a limited number of quotes could be evaluated in the thematic analysis.

**4.4 Theoretical Implications**

The coping strategy, prosocial behaviour, provides support for the concept of social change, an aspect of the Social Identity Theory by Tajfel and Turner (1979). Adopting a social change mindset insinuates that moving from one group membership to another is difficult. This can lead to the ‘lower’ status groups participating in social creativity, where they aim to improve their groups' social position by highlighting their values and strengths (Hogg, 2016). In the present study, the refugees were motivated to participate in volunteering and work in careers that would help other refugees. By partaking in this behaviour, they are engaging in reducing the negative perception towards refugees, reinforcing that they can achieve the same as natives (i.e., the higher group status).

The concept of identity was also a crucial component of the participants' displacement experience. The findings from the present study accentuate the need for identity theories to highlight how it is a dynamic process that depends on life experiences and the current surrounding environment. For example, in Erikson’s (1964) stages of psychosocial development, he proposes that identity confusion occurs during adolescence when individuals struggle to obtain a solid perception of themselves. However, in the participant's case, this occurred during the early to middle stages of adulthood. Therefore, when applying psychological theories to refugees, it is necessary to consider that their sense of identity can be considered in two phases: how they view themselves pre-migration vs post-migration.

**4.5 Practical Implications**

This study has practical implications for refugees and any organizations assisting refugees. One important finding emphasized the necessity for refugees to be actively involved in reducing the negative stigma around refugees. Agencies can create grassroots organizations where the refugees would be part of the societal and economic movement toward helping other vulnerable groups. Not only does this promote social change, but it can also act as a way for refugees to comprehend their trauma. Storytelling emerged as a coping strategy in the study, which showcases the need for adaptions in the therapeutic interventions available for refugees. For example, narrative exposure therapy can be incorporated more as it encourages the clients to process and integrate their traumatic memories within the context of their life narratives (Wright et al., 2020). As stated in the discussion, vocational identity was seen as a way to promote post-traumatic growth. To facilitate this, refugee policies could allow for the transfer of qualifications or offer additional training courses to add to the existing qualifications so that refugees can work in the country and contribute to society in a meaningful way.

**4.6 Future Research**

Since the information was retrieved from public websites, future studies could conduct face-to-face interviews for a more accurate and comprehensive evaluation of the refugee experience. An interpreter could also be included in these interviews for authentic and reliable accounts in their native language. A topic that could be interesting to investigate further is the role of pro-social behaviour and storytelling in alleviating the mental stress of refugees. This could be done through experiments where the participants are encouraged to describe their experiences creatively or volunteer in organizations. To provide more depth into the emerging findings of post-traumatic growth, longitudinal studies could evaluate what strategies refugees implement that are beneficial in mitigating trauma in the long term and foster more assimilation in the host country.

**4.7 Conclusion**

As the number of forcibly displaced people increases each year, it is vital for the general public and academic professionals to understand the complexities of being a refugee. The present study intended to contribute to this literature by providing a glimpse into the various traumatic events refugees encounter throughout their journeys. However, it is important for research to not solely focus on these painful memories but also to take into account the conscious efforts refugees have made to overcome this trauma. By drawing attention to the post-traumatic growth, refugees worldwide can be confident that they are more than capable of having a fruitful life full of success and happiness.

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**Appendices**

**Appendix A**

List of Websites Where Participants Data Was Extracted From

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | **Website Source** |
|  | https://www.globalgiving.org/learn/listicle/13-powerful-refugee-stories/ |
|  | https://www.nottsrefugeeforum.org.uk/refugee-stories/ |
|  | https://refugeeweek.org.uk/20-simple-acts/3-share-one-of-20-refugee-stories/20-refugee-stories/ |
|  | https://www.msf.org/refugees-around-world-stories-survival-world-refugee-day |
|  | https://refugeevoices.unrefugees.org/?\_gl=1%2Ajms4e9%2A\_rup\_ga%2AMTIwNzQ2NzI1LjE3MDY5ODE3NTU.%2A\_rup\_ga\_EVDQTJ4LMY%2AMTcwNjk4MTc1NS4xLjEuMTcwNjk4MjI0NC4wLjAuMA...&\_ga=2.240970883.1422113116.1706981755-120746725.1706981755 |
|  | https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/stories/ |
|  | https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/latest/stories-from-afghan-evacuees/ |
|  | <https://www.refugee-action.org.uk/refugee-voices/> |
|  | <https://www.redcross.org.uk/stories/migration-and-displacement/refugees-and-asylum-seekers> |

**Appendix B**

Final Thematic Map

**A diagram of a diagram

Description automatically generated**

**Appendix C**

Ethics Approval

**A close-up of a email

Description automatically generated**

**Appendix D**

Coded Quotes from the subtheme ‘Separation from family’ under the theme ‘Loss.’

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| ***Participant No.*** | ***Quote*** | ***Code*** |
| 1 | “We were a close-knit family, but we had to flee Syria,” “I worry about them every day.” | Constant anxiety for family – fear of the unknown |
| 9 | “I am grateful to be here, but my heart is with my family still in Tanzania. I will not be whole until we are all together again.”  “Many of us had to leave behind the people we love in search of a better life. “ | Gratitude for new life but grief for what is left behind – incomplete without family  Having to make sacrifices |
| 23 | “I’m very far from home and I miss my family. I know they are alive. But I cannot do anything to help them. I feel worried about them all the time. “ | Family separation, feeling helpless, constant anxiety |
| 3 | “My wife is very sad that he is not with us, sometimes she cries at night.” | Grieving her son – separation causes significant distress |
| 6 | My father was killed in Afghanistan for his political beliefs – he was very outspoken  It hasn't been easy leaving my family behind and settling in here in England as a teenager. | Death of a family member  Not being able to lean on family during this new transition – no support |
| 7 | They shot him dead. We had to flee.” | Losing a loved one in a traumatic way |
| 8 | On the morning of Eid Al Azha, they killed my eldest child, Salim | Grief – having to live past your son |
| 10 | To seek safety, we had to leave behind our loved ones, without even being able to say goodbye to some of them. | Having to make sacrifices - abrupt change |
| 12 | Leaving my family behind and leaving Syria was one of the hardest things I have ever done.  I live in constant fear for my family and friends who are trying to survive in Aleppo. I wonder if I ever will be reunited with them again. | Separation from family – moving from familiar to unfamiliar surroundings – making sacrifices  Constant anxiety from separation – fear of their future, having to continue on with life with the awareness they may never reunite |
| 16 | I have lost my father now but my mother is still alive and still lives under the most dangerous circumstances in the hope of seeing Afghanistan become a better place to live | Losing a loved one – worried for her mother’s life |

**Appendix E**

Coded Quotes from the subtheme ‘Lack of security’ under the theme ‘Loss’.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| ***Participant No.*** | ***Quote*** | ***Code*** |
| 10 | It’s so hard to imagine a good day when you didn’t know if your family was going to be able to meet at night and eat dinner together again. | No sense of security – cannot properly function without feeling on edge |
| 13 | As a child, my life was chaotic — there was little peace or safety.  My parents tirelessly worked to keep me and my siblings safe. But in the chaos of that environment, nothing was certain.  Life was not easy there and I soon recognized that things that I loved, like going to school, were no longer a guarantee. | Being born into a world of inconsistencies, violence and chaos: that is the ‘norm’ - knowing nothing better  admiration for family but aware that no matter how hard you try it may not be enough to survive as nothing is certain.  Fundamental rights not met – nothing is certain |
| 15 | In Sudan, all the time we are worried. When you leave your house you worry – will I come back? When you sleep at night you worry that someone will knock on your door. You worry that security will arrest you for no reason and when you ask why, they don’t know either.  I told them about my situation, what happened to me in the past, but they rejected me. My wife also, they rejected her. We were waiting without United Nations protection. | corruption, no peace, constant anxiety: waiting for something bad to happen, anticipating the worst  Vulnerability and uncertainty on present and future status |
| 17 | You don’t know what’s going to happen to your future and [my] kids’ future. The kids needed education and so did we. There were a lot of insecurities. | Uncertainty: fear of the unknown, no security, worried about others around you |
| 18 | I didn’t know if we’d see the next day sometimes. | uncertainty, never knowing what to expect |

**Appendix F:**

Coded Quotes from the subtheme ‘Loss of resources’ under the theme ‘Loss’.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| ***Participant No.*** | ***Quote*** | ***Code*** |
| 16 | With no electricity, clean water, school or doctor my husband felt the need to build a small clinic as he was a medical doctor. | basic needs not met and trying to maintain them in your own way |
| 8 | They would take our money and produce from the farms. They would also beat us up. I am fleeing Myanmar for the third time in my life. | Experiencing torture, resources threatened, trying multiple times to flee |
| 14 | So in the refugee camp, she really made sure we went to the school, even though it was very far away and sometimes we had to walk to school barefoot.” | Rough journeys just to achieve a basic right |
| 17 | They couldn’t cope and the weather was bad and no good food. It took a while for UNHCR to find us. | hard conditions - no food, having to see other people struggling, can’t do anything but wait to be saved- relying on others |
| 13 | When classes were offered, the classrooms were always overcrowded and under-resourced | Inadequate resources, one barrier solved, another one forms |
| 18 | It took almost two years to reach the UK. We were robbed twice and had no food for days and we barely slept. | Long journey: lack of resources |
| 7 | We were all hiding in our houses, and could not go anywhere, not even to collect food | Unable to obtain basic resources |

**Appendix G**

Coded Quotes from the subtheme ‘Lack of Freedom’ under the theme ‘Identity Threat’.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| ***Participant No.*** | ***Quote*** | ***Code*** |
| 2 | we didn't have much freedom there in Iran as Afghan refugees sometimes we were not allow even to go to school. We were not allowed to work. | No autonomy – cannot do basic human things |
| 5 | I faced another four years of being a stateless person, not able to work or study. | Forced to be in a limbo/waiting, not being able to contribute to his life or society |
| 6 | My father was killed in Afghanistan for his political beliefs – he was very outspoken | No freedom of speech – abusive government |
| 7 | But Myanmar is my homeland, that’s where all my ancestors are buried. You can all go home, but I cannot, we have to stay in a small hut in a camp.” | Feeling most connected in home country and no choice but to life away for safety |
| 16 | We had no choice but leave, as like many other homes our hospital became a victim of the terrorism caused by Islamic extremists. They were not happy with women having careers  My husband and I fled to Pakistan by foot in disguise as the government did not want the educated to flee for a better future instead they wanted them to die in their nation so that their voices would never be heard | No freedom – life at risk – extremist ideologies  Women no seen as their own beings – dehumanising, conform to norms  under terrorist control but trying to push past the barrier, not being able to advocate for own beliefs due to fear of being persecuted. |
| 8 | we were forcefully returned to Myanmar.”  We are not allowed to go outside the camp and find work, money or new clothes. | No option but to return home, out of control  No freedom to obtain basic rights |
| 10 | our lives came under threat because my husband was working with U.S. companies in Iraq, trying to educate both sides about the differences between our cultures and trying to reduce the death toll. | No freedom to free speech – threatened if had contradicting views with what was seen as ‘acceptable’ |
| 13 | It left me yearning for the chance to go to a school where I could actually be taught how to read and write like anyone else, but this was something I could only dream of achieving  Our small village was embroiled in a violent conflict between rival militia groups and the national army and due to my father's involvement in politics, our family was frequently targeted by militia groups  I realized that what should have been a fundamental human right was a luxury beyond my reach. | Doesn’t have the privilege of having aspirations and going out to achieve them - forced to limit themselves  violence, targeted for being a member of a group (Identity) - can’t openly claim your political position  Aware of the lack of freedom but not be able to obtain it |
| 22 | “I lie to her sometimes because I don’t know what to say anymore. I don’t have any control of my situation.” | Identity (no control), embarrassed of the situation - doesn’t want to disappoint his wife |
| 18 | She saw that things were changing for women in Afghanistan and had decided that enough was enough  Our decisions were no longer our own. We just got used to doing what menacing strangers told us.  But what could we have done? If we had stayed, my mother wouldn’t have lived. And we wouldn’t have had another 17 years with my beloved brother. Nobody does this because they want to. | Women having no rights in home country  Doing what others say to survive, submissive, new routine, SDT, having to put trust in others without choice.  Having to weigh up options, unsure if made right decisions, making decisions for survival not because they actually want to |

**Appendix H**

Coded Quotes from the subtheme ‘Discrimination’ under the theme ‘Identity Threat’.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| ***Participant No.*** | ***Quote*** | ***Code*** |
| 5 | I was detained in prison for four months, because I had no papers or any regular documentation.  Hip-hop and rap and all those who performed it were seen as enemies of the government and endured persecution  government in the UK have just seen me as another illegal immigrant coming over here to sponge off the system | Left a restrictive environment just to be entered into another one - treated as a criminal even though it was for survival  Automatically negatively labelled for partaking in an activity that brings joy  grouped/labeled into the box of being an illegal immigrant - discrimination - not respected like other UK citizens |
| 4 | I turned up at the bus stop in London wearing a suit and bow tie – and everyone laughed at me for the duration of the trip | Cultural differences - made fun of for being different |
| 8 | The government said we were all armed extremists and closed the mosque and madrassa [religious school]. | Negative label, taking away education + sense of belief – religious discrimination |
| 6 | At school, I was bullied for my accent | Cultural differences – made fun of accent |
| 22 | “I am a good person; I have never done anything wrong in my life. Why are they leaving me hanging like this while others are being granted status? | Feeling discriminated against - how others are treating you contradicts how the individual feels about themselves. Conflicting views |

**Appendix I**

Coded Quotes from the subtheme ‘Feeling Powerless’ under the theme ‘Identity Threat’.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| ***Participant No.*** | ***Quote*** | ***Code*** |
| 19 | Being here is like being a newborn baby. All I have is a bag of clothes and all the memories. | Identity: leaving things of value, having to start all over again, memories and thoughts are all that has survived |
| 10 | When I first arrived to the U.S. I thought, "Hey, it's a free country. I can speak up. I can help make changes." But of course, I was so new and didn’t know anyone. | wanting to take the most out of the opportunity but not knowing where to start |
| 3 | It is difficult in the beginning, you are in a new country and you don’t know the language or the people, it is like being blind. | Feeling helpless - not feeling you can achieve what you want |
| 18 | I’d gone from being ‘Hamed Amiri’ to a boy called ‘John’, and later, ‘a refugee’ when we reached Calais, via Germany, Belgium and Holland. Our identities were stripped away bit by bit’  What does ‘refugee’ mean to me? It wasn’t a word that I chose, it was a word that was given to me. | Others having power over your name - a dominant/submissive role dynamic |

**Appendix J:**

Coded Quotes from the subtheme ‘New Opportunities’ under the theme ‘Identity Growth.’

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| ***Participant No.*** | ***Quote*** | ***Code*** |
| 4 | When I lived in Somalia I wanted to be a sports journalist. Now, I want to be an actor too. | Having new aspirations/goals |
| 13 | I made the varsity soccer team, joined student government and began doing community service on weekends.  I’m the first college graduate in my family and earning this degree only reinforces those thoughts I had as a child in the refugee camp in Uganda — education is a human right and every child should have access to one. | Successful life, doing lots of activities, capitalising the benefits  Being able to live out childhood dream, creating new norms in her family: that education is possible, pride |
| 12 | My violin and my music have saved my life. It helped me receive asylum in the United States and it has helped me understand that my music comes with a tremendous obligation | aware of the power she has, playing the violin has snowballed into various opportunities |
| 19 | I put all the goals I had before, I have put them away and made new goals | Identity: a new version of themselves with a new outlook, different things are now a priority |
| 10 | After living here for about a year I was invited to speak in D.C. to share my story as a refugee who came from Iraq. | New opportunities |
| 16 | Currently I am working as a FICT Facilitator at STARTTS, as well as a bilingual community educator with Refugee Health Services and also a Parental Project Officer with Auburn Diversity Service. | Established a career when in home country that was not possible |

**Appendix K**

Coded Quotes from the subtheme ‘Integrating into society’ under the theme ‘Identity Growth’.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| *Participant No.* | *Quote* | *Code* |
| 21 | “I feel like I’m part of the UK. I love the neighbours. I’m so happy. I have my job. I have my children. I want to say thank you to the UK.” | PTG: Identity - feels part of the community - her children’s happiness is her happiness - Gratitude |
| 13 | While I hope for a peaceful future for those back in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, I know that my knowledge, energy and opportunity to make positive changes are here in my community in Denver  We all learned English together and despite not being able to communicate with each other at first, we became friends. | created a solid community in host country, wanting to establish his life here, be a positive member of a new society  social support/friendships with people in similar situations- comfort in knowing someone has gone through a similar situation - wanting to integrate into society by learning the language |
| 10 | States the first goal that we put in our mind is, "When am I'm going to become a U.S. citizen? | Eager to be part of the US - social identity theory |
| 3 | Learning the language also helps me to understand the culture | PTG: Language forms a big part of being able to connect with the community: SDT |
| 6 | I eventually started feeling more at home in London and I made friends, but none of that would have happened if it hadn't been for my teachers and my foster family, who I'm so grateful for | PTG: creating bonds with people that push the them to achieve what they can, social support |

**Appendix L:**

Coded Quotes from the subtheme ‘Resilience’ under the theme ‘Identity Growth’

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| *Participant No.* | *Quote* | *Code* |
| 10 | I feel inspired every day to keep going, keep advocating for [refugees](https://www.unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/what-is-a-refugee/) and make sure that these stories are heard and our voice is counted. | This new label (citizenship) helps as motivation to keep going, bringing change |
| 4 | It's good for me to remember what I've done and how far I've come | Reflection acts as a reminder of resilience |
| 5 | I believe this is the journey I had to walk. I believe that there is no looking back, so I have to look forward and move forward. | Meaning-making, resilience, making the most of the situation |
| 6 | I tell myself that it's all part of life and that I have to make something out of everything they sacrificed | Resilience: feeling obligated to succeed after so much has been sacrificed |
| 13 | My life began in a world of gunfire, but I’m determined to build a more peaceful path forward.  From day one, I was resolute in my pursuit of education and relished the comfort of sleeping soundly without the fear of being displaced. | Determined to change her future  determined to create a life where her goals can be achieved |
| 12 | Under air strikes, I would go to internet cafes to apply to schools and programs around the globe  Being a refugee has made me stronger, more independent and more focused on my music. | Resilience - still having to function amidst the chaos - blocking out what’s going on - survival instincts to get out of the situation  Personal Growth: Realising the strength her being a refugee has given - PTG, |
| 18 | Now, I’m just incredibly proud I got through it. I’m so resilient. I compare things to my brother’s experience – if Hussein could get through that journey, then I can get through anything. | Personal growth/resilience: leaning on his sibling as inspiration to get through |
| 19 | But I had to be an educated girl with a dream, I cannot sit forever and cry. I tell myself, now you are here, find what is happening as an opportunity and carry on your life. | Resilience/Gratitude: appreciative of the new life given + wanting to make the most out of it |

**Appendix M**

Coded Quotes from the subtheme ‘Prosocial behaviour’ under the theme ‘Coping strategies’

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| *Participant No.* | *Quote* | *Code* |
| 4 | There are many people in the world, and maybe some don't really understand what's going on with refugees. I think it's my job to tell them. | Assigning himself an obligation to spread the refugee story |
| 5 | Across the world there are thousands of people who are displaced and seen as just migrants, not people with skills, abilities, talents and stories. I want to help change this situation. I want to help change the way we think and talk about this global crisis.  I can be a voice for the voiceless. | Wanting to reduce the negative stigma around refugees so that they are perceived in a positive light  Helping those less fortunate |
| 10 | After that first public speaking event, some media reached out and they told me that my story had really made a difference. That moment made me feel that [refugee] voices can make a difference and we should not stop.  I feel inspired every day to keep going, keep advocating for [refugees](https://www.unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/what-is-a-refugee/) and make sure that these stories are heard and our voice is counted. | Realised she made a strong impact, inspired to make a difference  Activism |
| 14 | “I feel like I'm making a [positive] change,”  “I also think I’m helping refugee youth realize that they are making a change too.” | being aware of the influence she has - inspired to help others realize they can achieve anything you want |
| 17 | It’s good to help people, remind[s] me of back home where I took care of the Lost Boys | helping others is a reminder of the positive memories back home - able to transfer the feeling of home to a new country |
| 2 | I had to deal with the same problem that they are dealing now with so it is it's kind of joy that you can do something about about you know the things that you've gone through | Finds happiness in being able to help people in similar situations |
| 11 | I feel peace as I am able to continue my beloved father’s legacy of providing for the needy, especially in the month of Ramadan.” | Pride: Feeling inspired to carry out his fathers dream, a way to feel connected to him - PTG |
| 21 | “You see my English is low. But still I have hope that I can do everything. I hope to help people.” | aware of the disadvantage she has but still eager to thrive - helping others brings meaning to life |
| 12 | I want to make people aware that refugees are not a burden but are eager to find not only a safe place but also a second chance for life. | PTG: wanting to reduce the stigma |
| 13 | I studied Political Science with the hopes of one day working in politics and positively affecting policy and bringing change in my community.  One thing I’ve learned throughout my journey as a refugee is that those with lived experience are often in the best position to help bring about positive impactful change | advocacy, altruism - motivations to continue to succeed in life  understanding the influential position he has, feels it is his job to bring about change - meaning making |

**Appendix N**

Coded Quotes from the subtheme ‘Storytelling’ under the theme ‘Coping strategies’

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| *Participant No.* | *Quote* | *Code* |
| 4 | we put together a play called Dear Home Office, which is about our real experiences as unaccompanied refugee children in the UK.  the Fringe was an incredible experience. As much for us as for our audience, I think, since everyone seemed really interested in hearing our stories  I felt very vulnerable when that happened, but when I perform the scene the audience laughs with me, and I feel powerful. | taking a traumatic event that can provide knowledge to others but also as a way to comprehend their own experiences  joy that others wanted to grasp a sense of what they went through - surprised that others enjoyed the show.  turning an embarrassing moment into one that can bring laughter to people, converting the narrative of the moment - cognitive reframing; |
| 5 | only way to keep myself sane was through writing poetry, something which I took pleasure in as a kid back home  my lyrics bring forward many political and cultural issues, from global asylum to women’s rights, to trying to help people my age in Iran to know and fight for their rights | transferable skill: Writing - sense of relief - the skill back home was for fun, now for survival  Storytelling: describing his experiencing through his love for rap, wanting to inspire others |
| 10 | After that first public speaking event, some media reached out and they told me that my story had really made a difference. That moment made me feel that [refugee] voices can make a difference and we should not stop. | Storytelling: strong impact, inspired to keep going, PTG |
| 12 | Music is a universal language and through music we can communicate, advocate, inspire and express what otherwise is so difficult to be understood through words. | Easier to put traumatic experiences through music as it is a way for everyone to understand  Acknowledging not everyone can speak the same language but everyone can hear the same sound |
| 18 | To honour him, I wrote the ‘Boy with two hearts’, which was turned into a play. Writing it was hard, but it means Hussein will never be forgotten.  The Boy with two hearts is about Hussein’s physical heart and the almighty spirit that kept him going. But you could also say it’s about every displaced person – their heart in the here and now, and the heart in the country they left behind. | Writing as coping- being able to put memories into physical written content-can never be lost  PTG: storytelling - a way for everyone to relate to similar experience  Sense of pride of being able to convey his story in a beautiful and enjoying way |
| 14 | “I started writing about what I was experiencing in the refugee camp,”  “To me, it was also another way to talk to God and also to share with my community what we were experiencing,” | Coping strategy: writing - express feelings not keeping everything built up in the mind, feel more connected with god and the community |

**Appendix O**

Coded Quotes from the subtheme ‘Fostering hope’ under the theme ‘Coping strategies’

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| *Participant No.* | *Quote* | *Code* |
| 3 | My dream is for my children to succeed and to have a future. | Hope for a better future for children |
| 6 | On the way to Europe, my fellow travellers and I would fantasise about how advanced and welcoming it would be there, | Hope used as motivation to travel through tough conditions - that it will be worth it |
| 7 | “I dream of my home when I sleep. One day we will return to Myanmar or maybe some other country where there is peace.” | Hope contributes to his survival – a way to remember that this situation will not be forever |
| 16 | Although it was a painful journey where we suffered from illness and had no form of shelter but the thought of bringing our children a brighter future was enough motivation to keep us going  We walked for days from the borders of Afghanistan in the hope of finding a better future in Pakistan. | PTG: Hope acted as motivation, having the pressure not only to survive yourself but have your children survive – hoping that she made the right decision  Long journey but a sense of hope motivated to get through |
| 21 | You see my English is low. But still I have hope that I can do everything. I hope to help people.” | PTG: aware of the disadvantage she has but still eager to thrive - Hope |

**Appendix P**

Dissemination component

The researcher will take part in the IADT on-show in May 2024 as part of the dissemination component.