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The Impact of Family Separation on Refugee Men

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Dedication

To everyone seeking safety and in the loving memory of those who sacrificed their lives in their efforts to reach it.

'Τι θα πει ευτυχία; Να ζεις όλες τις δυστυχίες.

Τι θα πει φως; Να κοιτάς με αθόλωτο μάτι όλα τα σκοτάδια."

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PS. You still owe me flowers.

And finally, thanks to Myself – for persevering, not giving up, and coming to the end of this journey. It was tough, but you made it! You can breathe now.

Abstract

Background: Many refugees face post-migration stressors during resettlement in host countries including forced separation from loved ones. This qualitative study aimed to examine the impact of family separation on refugee men living in the UK and their understanding of meaningful support.

Methodology: In-depth interviews were completed with nine individuals with experiences of family separation. Interviews were analysed following the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis framework.

Results: Five Group Experiential Themes with subthemes were identified. Altogether, the themes described the emotional burden of family separation, men's perceived responsibility to support their families, experiences of powerlessness, discrimination, and acculturation. Men made sense of their experiences in relation to time and context, and their stories were embedded in their intersectional identities of masculinity, race, sexuality, religion, and migration status. Men highlighted the critical role of family reunification and helpful outlets for integrated support.

Discussion: Clinicians need to be aware of the unique challenges male refugees separated from their families face in the UK and tailor their practice accordingly. The findings highlighted the appreciation of integrative and culturally sensitive approaches to assessment, formulation, and intervention. Recommendations are given for policymakers to implement consequential changes in the family reunification policy and simplify the process.

Keywords: *family separation, trauma, post-migration stressors, forced displacement, PTSD*

Table of Contents

List of Appendices

List of Tables

List of Figures

Introduction

This chapter positions this research within a personal context and introduces the critical realist philosophical framework through which this thesis has been authored. Terminology is defined to provide clarity whilst also situating the topic within the global landscape of the refugee crisis. I present a qualitative Systematic Literature Review on post-migration psychosocial difficulties in refugee communities. I critically evaluate the literature holding in mind the societal discourses on forced displacement and intersectionality. I conclude the chapter with my aims to explore the impact of family separation on male refugees and introduce the research questions.

Setting the scene: the research within a personal and philosophical context

Personal significance

This project has been inspired by my upbringing, lived experience of migration and research interest in refugee communities. I identify as a White, Greek, cis-gender woman and a migrant in the UK. The Greek culture is family-centred; behaviours, societal roles and the formation of human connection are valued through the lens of family. This family-oriented mindset affected my migration journey and settlement in the UK. Although my experience is very unlikely to match the experience of forced displacement, some mutual losses may exist. Family separation has shaped my identity as a migrant both positively and negatively. As an individual navigating a foreign country alone, I increasingly became aware of my independence, while also worrying for the life and community I left behind. The absence of blood and chosen families have generated feelings of loneliness, sadness, and insecurity at

times. On the other hand, the experience of balancing two different cultures has exposed me to diverse socio-cultural stimuli and more liberal/progressive ideas.

Following the beginning of the Syrian civil war in 2011, thousands of vulnerable people sought asylum in Mediterranean countries, including my own. Consequently, I was exposed to nationalist political discourses on immigration and the marginalisation of refugees within Greek micro-societies. Reflecting on the aftermath of the Greek-Turkish War[1] and the unfair treatment of Greek refugees, including my grandfather's family, I struggled to understand modern narratives towards people in need. So, the philosophical saying "*those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it*" (Santayana, 1905; p.284) was crucial in fostering my commitment to social justice and human rights advocacy, particularly in the context of displacement. Thought-provoking conversations with the older generation, asylum seekers and refugees have inherently shaped my ideologies and values. All the above have amalgamated my research interests in migration and, therefore, this study.

Ultimately, the researcher has a pivotal role in sculpting, conducting, and interpreting the research project (Cohen et al., 2007). My socio-cultural beliefs and intersectional identity in interaction with the population under investigation can helpfully further contextualise this study. One of my aims is to shift the readers' attention away from the binary 'insider-outsider' research position and highlight the dynamic, complex and multi-faceted nature of positionality (Bukamal, 2022; Mason-Bish, 2019). Almack (2008; p.8) claimed that researchers may experience a "*fluidity*

[1] The Greek-Turkish War took place in 1919-1922. Asia Minor, now known as Anatolia, hosted large Greek, Armenian and Assyrian communities, particularly in Smyrna. In the early 1900s, more than 1.2 million people from Asia Minor sought asylum in Greece and the discrimination they faced has been documented in historical texts and storytelling (Europeana, 2022). In 1922, the Burning of Smyrna resulted in thousands of deaths, and considered by historians as an act of genocide against the Christian minorities in the Ottoman Empire (Morris & Ze'evi, 2019; Shirinian, 2017).

of boundaries between being an insider or an outsider". To overcome my potential bias and assumptions about family separation and migration in the UK, reflective journaling and bracketing became integral to the research process (Appendices 1a,1b).

My political views, exposure to anti-immigration narratives and experience of being 'othered' as a migrant in the UK have strongly influenced the chosen language and philosophical approach in this project. Thus, I invite the reader to hold in mind my stance on language and examine the limits of critical thinking allowed in academia. Reading this thesis, I encourage reflection on whether the language is 'too critical' or 'critical enough' and pose the question: who decides the limitations of critical considerations in academia and clinical psychology? Language is a social construct defined by our experiences (Burr & Dick, 2017; p.59), and I aim to approach social phenomena with scepticism and merit, whilst being authentic to my political ideologies and life values.

Philosophical stance, epistemology, and ontology

Epistemology[2] aims to deconstruct the definition of knowledge (Pascale, 2011) and invite researchers to consider their assumptions and carefully evaluate the origins of their research claims (Moon & Blackman, 2014; Rohleder & Lyons, 2015). Researchers' assumptions can drive their practices from the conceptualisation of an idea to its methodological examination (Carter & Little, 2007).

Critical Realism (CR) is a philosophical standpoint that believes in a 'real word' beyond our subjective beliefs and observations (Fletcher, 2017; Bhakshar,

[2] Epistemological endeavours aim to understand what is knowledge, where knowledge comes from and what knowledge is privileged and valued compared to others (Scheurich & Young, 1997).

2016). The theoretical underpinnings of CR are ontological realism, epistemological relativism, and judgmental rationalism (Pilgrim, 2020). Ontological realism proposes that the world's existence is independent of our knowledge, perceptions, or experiences, which are temporary for the duration of our existence. The premise of epistemological relativism proposes that humans interpret the world and own realities, and knowledge may vary across societal, geographical, and historical contexts. Considering these, judgmental rationalism recognises that knowledge is susceptible to error and absence of veracity, therefore, we should scrutinise the evidence. Concluding, CR considers reality 'mind-independent' (Pilgrim, 2020), however, it is "*mediated through the filter of human experience and interpretation*" (Fletcher, 2017, p.183).

This research aims to explore the impact of family separation on refugee men. CR allowed me to approach the participants' lived experiences situated in both past and present, through interpretation. Despite the progress of the human rights movement, we are witnessing increasing incidents of oppression, discrimination, and racism globally (Amnesty International, 2024). The sense-making of lived experience can only happen following the acknowledgement and understanding of this socio-political landscape. CR helped me frame my research design to generate new knowledge (Moon & Blackman, 2014) and analyse, interpret and report the emerging findings (Harper, 2012).

Terminology

Relevant terminology is defined in Table 1.

Table 1

Terminology and Definitions

Refugee	The 1951 Geneva Convention has defined a '*refugee'* as a person who is "*unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion*" (UNCHR, 2009). Nevertheless, displaced people will have an individual understanding of their migrant identity (Watzlawik & Brescó de Luna, 2017). In this study, I consider the stigma associated with the terminology and the importance of inclusion/self-identification (Hack-Polay et al., 2021; Quinn, 2014). Therefore, the term "refugee" is used throughout to define people who self-identify as forcibly displaced and hold a refugee status.
Asylum seeker	An 'asy*lum seeker'* has been defined as "*someone who is seeking international protection*" (UNCHR, n.d.). Asylum seekers may have requested a refugee or protection status, which has not yet been processed, or may have not yet applied for asylum but they have an intention to do so. As UNCHR (n.d.) states, "*when someone crosses an international border seeking safety, they often need to apply to be legally recognized as a refugee. While they seek asylum and await the outcome of their application, they are referred to as asylum-seekers and should be protected. Not all asylum-seekers will be found to be refugees, but all refugees were once asylum-seekers.*"
Forced migration; forced displacement	'*Forced migration'* has been defined by the International Organisation for Migration (International Organisation for Migration, 2019; p.77) as *"a migratory movement which, although the drivers can be diverse, involves force, compulsion, or coercion.*" The definition is further clarified: *"While not an international legal concept, this term has been used to describe the movements of refugees, displaced persons (including those displaced by disasters or development projects), and, in some instances, victims of trafficking. At the international level the use of this term is debated because of the widespread recognition that a continuum of*

	agency exists rather than a voluntary/forced dichotomy and that it might undermine the existing legal international protection regime." Similarly, '*forced displacement'* is defined as "*the movement of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalised violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters.*" (International Organisation for Migration, 2019; p.55). The terms are used interchangeably, and the theoretical underpinnings are closely examined in the literature and current socio-political climate.
Intersectionality	The concept of '*intersectionality'* offers a framework to consider the multiple intersecting aspects of social and political identity and their relationship to power and privilege (Crenshaw, 1989). In this research, an intersectional approach was integral to expand our understanding into how gender, ethnicity, race, ability, religion, sexuality, disability, and migration status may influence the experience of resettlement, family separation, and access to mental health support in the UK.
Pre-, peri- and post-migration period	The experience of displacement can be understood as three distinct periods or phases with different associated stressors and traumatising events (Hazer & Gredebäck, 2023). The '*pre-migration'* period refers to the life and experiences refugees may have in their home country prior to their decision to seek asylum. For example, research on the pre-migration phase has discovered the impact of war experiences, violence and/or lack of basic needs (Mesa-Vieira et al., 2022). The '*peri-migration'* period (or else known 'in transit' or 'en-route') refers to the experiences refugees may have faced during their journey to their destination. This may include social and interpersonal trauma, such as threats to safety, lack of humanitarian aid, forced family separation, and crossing borders via dangerous routes (Mesa-Vieira et al., 2022; Palladino, 2014). Lastly, the '*post-migration*' period refers to the acculturation experiences and processes when resettlement takes place (Pieloch et al., 2016). This may include difficulties with social integration, relationships, cultural tensions, poor living conditions and being away from significant others (Gleeson et al., 2020).

Family	'*Family'* is typically defined as a unit of people who are related by birth or legal status; the most common appreciation of the term is the concept of the nuclear family. The nuclear family includes partners or spouses – often heterosexual – and underage children, and most commonly derives from the Global North (Edgar, 2004). The Human Rights Committee (1997) proposed that families may be differently determined across societies and, hence, the legal frameworks may vary. For instance, in non-Western/non-European countries, families are conceptualised beyond the institution of a nuclear family and extends to other family members (Baykara-Krumme & Fokkema, 2019; Löbel, 2020). In consideration of the above, I aimed to be inclusive and adhere to the social justice ethos guiding this work. Therefore, family is determined as either nuclear (i.e., spouse, minor children) or extended (i.e., parents, siblings) and participants who have been separated from significant family members in their lives were eligible to share their story.
Family Separation	'*Family separation'* is defined as the experience of forced separation from family members as a result of asylum-seeking and international protection (Tiilikainen et al., 2023). Family separation can be temporary, but often refugees would remain separated due to the time-consuming nature of the asylum processes and delays with family reunification (Choummanivong et al., 2014; Liddell et al., 2021). The concept also speaks to the idea of 'transnational families'; "*families that live some or most of the time separated from each other yet hold together and create something that can be seen as a feeling of collective welfare and unity, namely 'familyhood', even across national borders*" (Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002; p.9).
Family Reunion; Family Reunification	'*Family reunion'* or '*Family reunification*' is defined as the occasion when refugees, who are forcibly separated by their families due to war, conflict, or other reasons requiring international protection, reunite with their families/loved ones (British Red Cross, n.d.).
Acculturation	'*Acculturation'* is defined as the process that takes place when individuals raised in one socio-cultural context re-settle in a context culturally different than their own (i.e., immigrants, refugees, indigenous communities). Berry (1997) has studied the outcomes of acculturation in different populations and developed a framework to better understand this process; this framework consists of four

	strategies led by two underlying needs – to maintain the unique cultural identity, and to belong in other cultural communities. The strategies are as follows: a) assimilation; no maintenance of own culture and increased engagement with host culture, b) separation; maintenance of own culture and limited/no engagement with host culture, c) integration; balance between engaging with both cultures, and d) marginalisation; no balance/belonging in either own or host culture (Berry, 1997; Hebbani, Obijiofor & Bristed, 2013).

Theoretical underpinnings of migration

Population movement is a "*part of human experience*" across time and is considered "*intrinsic to human nature*" (McNeill & Adams, 1978 in King, 2012; p.4). The literature documents migration theories often conceptualised within a binary/categorical way, which may not represent the nuances of the modern world (Vella, 2019). Migration has been historically understood as voluntary or involuntary, temporary or permanent, internal or international, regular or irregular and legal or illegal (Cohen, 1996, p.11-17; King, 2002). This categorisation can fuel further ambiguity and restrictions in the ways migrants and refugees are treated (Jordan & Düvell, 2003; p.7). Moreover, it does not account for the reality of globalisation, borders and geopolitical changes over time as influenced by environmental/socioeconomic factors (Bird & Schmid, 2023; Martin et al., 2021). The complexities and diverse types of movement have made it difficult for scholars to develop one comprehensive theory of migration and subsequently, forced migration.

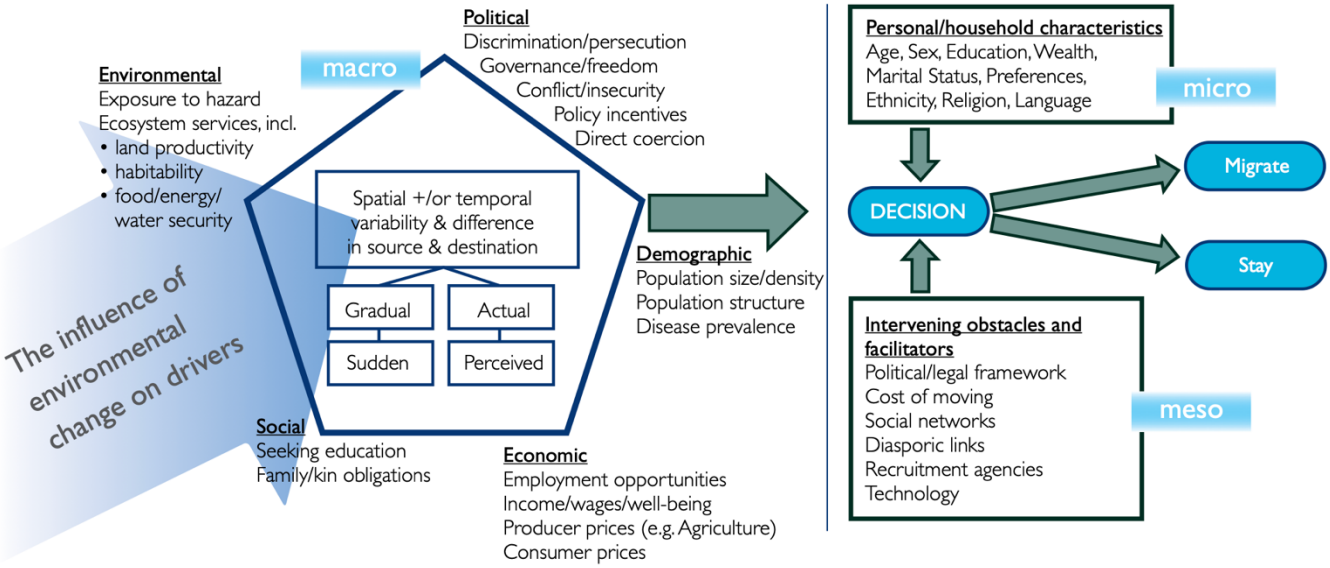
The segregation between voluntary (or 'economic') and forced migration is simplistic and fails to care for the socioeconomic consequences of armed conflict, such as increased and chronic poverty (Goodhand, 2003). Likewise, Di Tella et al. (2010; p.138-140) discussed the role of long-term war on civilians' damaged belongings, the collapse of the labour market and the loss of human/social capital. These circumstances can become instrumental and contribute to forced displacement, in this case, 'economic refugees' (King et al., 2005). Nevertheless, forced migration is globally considered "*illegal*" and is criminalised through border governance, detention and deportation (Walia et al., 2021, p.180-185). Regularly, displaced people are illegalised and categorised by the state as an act of exercising power (Cole, 2023).

Early theoretical frameworks largely focused on voluntary migration, and the socio-economic drivers to immigrate and resettle in certain locations, known as "push-pull" factors (Hare, 1999). Push factors[3] can include poverty, socio-political/economic insecurities, and unemployment; and pull factors[4] can include economic prosperity, cultural exposure, and closeness/openness of borders (Hager, 2021). However, the theories on displacement were considered underdeveloped and mainly focused on the conflict and persecution that drove people to flee their countries, presenting refugees as individuals with a lack of agency, choice and power (Martin et al., 2021). Schmeidl (1997) was the first to turn the scholars' attention to the systemic factors including oppression and war. Their groundwork greatly influenced further research on the conceptualisation of threat, violence and genocide as strong predictors of forced migration and humanitarian crises (Moore & Shellman, 2004; Shellman & Stewart, 2007). Those systemic, temporal and individual factors may interact and influence peoples' decisions; otherwise known as the macro-, meso- and micro-factors (Cummings et al., 2015). The report "Foresight: Migration and Global Environmental Change" (2011, p.12) developed a conceptual map (Figure 1).

[3] Push factors; pushing migrants out of an area (Hare, 1999).
[4] Pull factors; pulling migrants into an area (Hare, 1999).

Figure 1

Factors Influencing Migration or Displacement

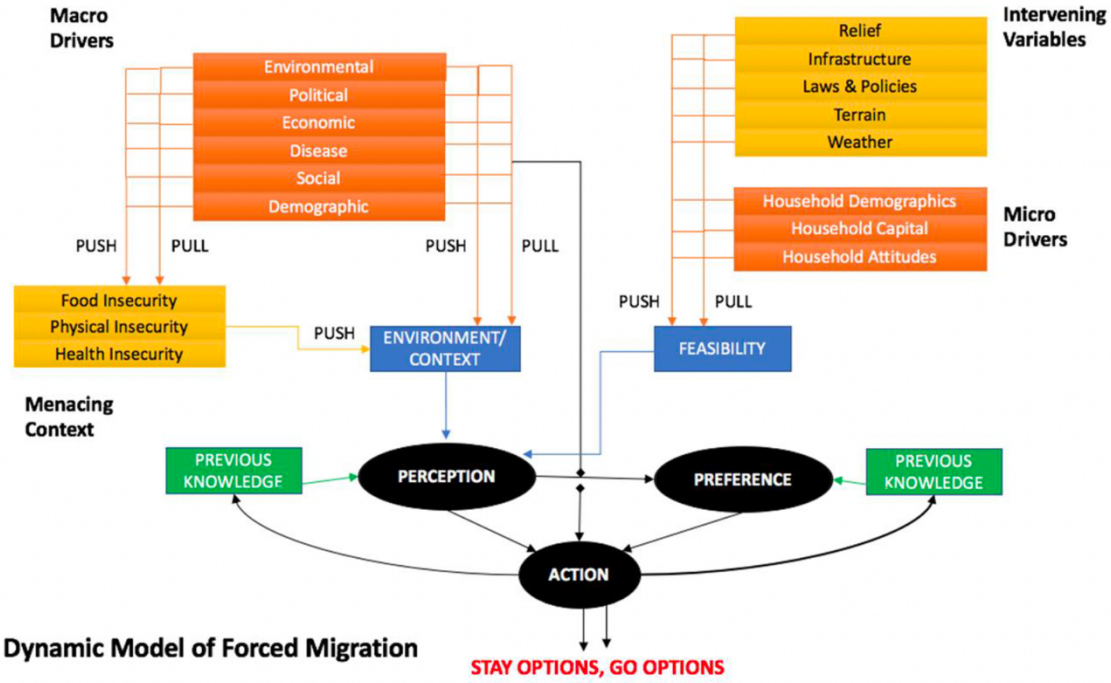


Taken from "Foresight: Migration and Global Environmental Change" (2011, p.12)

Recently, Martin et al. (2021) developed a theoretical model to capture the multi-faceted, interacting causal factors of displacement in humanitarian crises. The researchers considered the literature and the overlooked complexities surrounding displacement and further built on the Foresight conceptual framework. The Dynamic Model of Displacement introduced "high-level" influencing factors that condition the movement of communities, whilst highlighting how environmental/contextual factors are influenced by other characteristics (Figure 2). For example, the nature of conflict, human rights violations and violence may vary in appearance across societies.

Figure 2

Dynamic Model of Displacement



Taken from Martin et al. (2021)

The theoretical underpinnings provide insight into the reasons behind displacement and expand our understanding of why people may seek safety elsewhere.

Global perspectives of displacement

The refugee crisis and the (inter)national politics

Worldwide approximately 110 million people have been forcibly displaced from their countries of origin due to human rights violations, war, persecution, political turbulences, or climate change (UNHCR, 2023). Asylum seekers and refugees are not equally distributed globally, with more than 50% of those under the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' (UNCHR) mandate originating

from Syria, Afghanistan, and Ukraine; and resettling in low-and-middle-income countries (LMICs). According to recent statistics, the largest percentage of refugees are hosted in Iran, Turkey, Germany, Colombia, and Pakistan (UNHCR, 2023). Following the onset of the Russian war on Ukraine, the European Union (EU)[5] has received 1,129,800 asylum applications, with many first-time applicants seeking protection in Germany, Spain, France, Italy and Greece (Eurostat, 2024).

The UK has observed a decrease in asylum applications from 2002-2010, followed by a steady growth from 2011-present (UK Parliament, 2024). In 2023, 67,337 asylum applications were submitted for individuals and (on occasion) their families, while 63% of the decisions granted protection (Home Office, 2024a). The UK has made efforts to establish safe routes for refugees through resettlement schemes, such as the 'Homes for Ukraine' (UK Government, 2022) and the 'Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme' (UK Government, 2021). The restricted criteria of those resettlement schemes (i.e., time period, ethnicity) may have contributed to the continuous arrivals through dangerous crossings of the English Channel (Refugee Council, 2024). Delays in processing asylum claims due to an increasing backlog of older applications (House of Commons, 2022) seem to have a significant negative impact on people's lives and place them at a higher risk for mental health diagnoses (Hvidtfeldt et al., 2018, 2021). Waiting for an asylum decision has also been described as living a "*frozen life*"; a life stopped in time without a sense of control (van Eggermont Arwidson et al., 2022; p.4). Consequently, people may live in inhumane conditions with their fundamental needs unmet (Amnesty International, 2022).

[5] The European Union (EU) is a partnership of 27 European countries, established under the Treaty on European Union – Maastricht Treaty (1993) (European Union, n.d.).

Globally, an increase in governmental and societal hostility towards refugees and immigrants has been witnessed (The Migration Observatory, 2023; Esses et al., 2013; Rettberg & Gajjala, 2016). The international political presence of far-right movements has become more prominent, where immigration, ethnic diversity and multiculturalism are portrayed as threats to the economy, national identity, and the preservation of culture/tradition (Minkenberg, 2021; Nortio et al., 2021). As summarised by Edo et al. (2019; p.99), "*immigration has become one of the most divisive issues in many Western countries*". Euroscepticism, anti-immigration and anti-globalisation stances have been pillars in the political agendas across the West, including the UK (Artelaris & Mavrommatis, 2021; Indelicato et al., 2023).

In 2016, the British people voted in the Brexit[6] referendum to leave the EU, with a narrow win of 52-48% (BBC, 2016). The desire for Brexit could be explained by the large flow of immigrants in the country (perceived as a 'migration crisis') and the socio-economic divide within communities (O'Reilly et al., 2016). Menjívar and colleagues (2019; p.93-99) suggested that many did not condone the free movement and rights to foreigners, while focusing the anti-immigration sentiment on all immigrants, regardless of their migration status (i.e., refugees). Nonetheless, recent evidence on British attitudes towards immigrants has pictured an unwelcoming stance with 52% expressing that the government needs more restrictive policies for arrivals to the UK (The Migration Observatory, 2023). Oppositions to immigration may have been fuelled by the Conservative Parties' statements on refugee protection in the UK (BBC, 2023), as well as the international social media campaign, known as "Stop The Boats", investing in "tackling illegal migration" (Home Office, 2024b).

[6] Brexit is known as the withdrawal of the UK from the EU. Following a referendum on the UK membership in the EU held on 23rd June 2016, Brexit came into force on 31st January 2020 (European Council, n.d.).

To summarise, the historical and modern global context has been shifting throughout the years, with countries introducing more restrictive migration policies to 'protect' their borders.

Policy and legislation

Following the end of World War II and the establishment of the United Nations[7] to preserve peace and prosperity at an international level; significant policies and legislation were introduced for asylum and immigration in the UK (Refugee Council, 2023b). Table 2 displays pertinent policy changes over time, giving a historical context and discussing implications for refugees and their loved ones (Stewart & Mulvey, 2014).

[7] The United Nations is an international organisation that aims to maintain global peace, consider cross-borders issues, exchange views and identify solutions.

Table 2

Timeline of Important Policies and Legislations for Refugee Rights and Immigration in the UK

Policy or Legislation	**Summary of introduced ideas and implications**
1951 United Nations Refugee Convention in Geneva	This convention was crucial in the history of human rights and expanded on the comprehensive understanding of the rights displaced people have at an international level. Refugees were recognised their right to seek safety under certain conditions, leading to the recognition of an internationally accepted definition of the term refugee as an individual who *"owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of [their] nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail [themself] of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of [their] former habitual residence, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it."* (Article 1 (A) (2), 1951; amended in 1967 protocol). The 1951 Convention also outlines other rights of refugees, including but not limited to rights to education, housing, work, access to justice, freedom of religion and social protection. To date, 146 countries all over the world are party to the 1951 Convention.
Asylum and Immigration Act (1993, 1996, 1999)	The Asylum and Immigration Act was introduced in the UK initially in 1993, followed by successive revisions in 1996 and 1999 to introduce additional measures affecting immigration to the UK. The aim of the Acts was to alleviate the pressure on the immigration system, toughen border control and allocate resources more "efficiently" (Schuster & Solomos, 2004). The Acts proposed new measures on refugees' access to social housing, benefits, and employment opportunities. However, it is believed that the restrictive implementation of changes meant the erosion of refugees' human rights in the UK over the years and prevented them from accessing critical integrated support (Sales, 2005). Furthermore, one can also argue for the negative

	consequences that dehumanising language and political discourse has on refugees, including discrimination (Fowler, 1991). For example, in 1998, Jack Straw, then Home Secretary, presented a White Paper known as 'Fairer, Faster, and Firmer – A Modern Approach to Immigration and Asylum' in the UK parliament as a response to increased trends of immigration (Home Office, 1998). The report outlined various suggestions for the modernisation of border control, the protection of "legitimate" and "genuine" refugees and an integrated approach to streamline the immigration system. Among other measures, this integrated approach claimed to minimise economic incentives for people who "abused" the system. Language and social discourse have the power to construct meaning (Burr & Dick, 2017) and influence attitudes towards refugees and immigrants (Esses et al., 2013). Ideas on "illegality" can position refugees as a "threat" and act as a barrier to resettling in the host country (Finney & Robinson, 2008; Sasse, 2005).
Immigration Act 2014 & 2016	The Immigration Act 2014/2016 introduced new measures towards people who were deemed as "illegal" residents in the UK who had "no right to be here" (Home Office, 2014). At the time, Theresa May wished to implement a "hostile environment" for undocumented migrants, prohibit entrance without permission and penalise individuals without proof and residence documentation (Goodfellow, 2020). These Acts brought significant changes in the UK removal and appeal system and further restricted people's rights to seek asylum and safety. As such, if people were not able to "demonstrate their legal status" they could be exposed to government-enforced removals (i.e., deportation), detainment and refused permission to return to the country. Restrictions were announced across several life domains, such as employment, accommodation, access to services and healthcare. Unsurprisingly, research suggests that the implementation of hostile immigration tactics prevented people from seeking mental health support and accessing public services; further marginalising them in society (Griffiths & Yeo, 2021).

Illegal Migration Act 2023	The Illegal Migration Act was introduced in 2023 in the UK Parliament and aimed to "tackle illegal migration", "stop the boats" and promote a "fair system" for people who need protection and asylum (Home Office, 2022b). The Home Office (2023) claims that the "asylum system is broken" and refers to asylum seekers who arrive in the country by deadly sea passages. The political and public discourse on the illegality of asylum seekers has been historically present in the UK, with Taylor (2021) indicating the persistent use of dehumanising metaphors of migrants in UK headlines across time from 1800 to 2018. People have been presented as "invaders", "enemies" or a "burden". For instance, a recent study on anti-immigrant sentiment presented the increased flow of refugees as a "flood" which natives are unable to prevent (Marshall & Shapiro, 2018). The Conservative Parties political influence has shaped national narratives on migration, with many organisations expressing their concerns about the Illegal Migration Act. The UNHCR (2023) released a statement to increase public awareness that the Act would lead to an "asylum ban" depriving people their right to seek safety and protection. Likewise, the British Refugee Council (2023) estimated increased rates of inadmissibility of vulnerable communities in the country, deportation, and detention. In consideration of recent literature, it is possible that discriminatory and anti-immigrant policies will have a subsequent impact on refugees' mental health outcomes (Burford-Rice et al., 2020; Ziersch et al., 2020).
Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Act 2024	Following the Illegal Migration Act 2023, the UK government passed the Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Act 2024. The new law aims to act as a "deterrent" for people to seek asylum in the UK without prior permission, for example via small boats (Home Office, 2024). This strategy belongs to the governments' wider agenda to tackle the migration crisis despite being ruled as unlawful (Supreme Court, 2023) and violating people's *legal* human rights to seek asylum and safety (Amnesty International, 2024; p.390-393). Human rights activists and frontline professionals have highlighted the potential psychological harm and mental health risks of such law been enforced in the UK (Open Letter, 2024; United Nation, 2024).

Family Reunion Policy for Individuals with Protection Status in the UK (version 10.0)	The Home Office (2023) considers the psychosocial consequences of family separation due to force majeure[8], including war, conflict or persecution, on all family members. Therefore, they have published a policy which provides refugees in the UK the right to reunite with immediate family members, such as their spouses or partners and children. Sponsoring and applying for a family reunion visa may be a time-consuming, costly and complex process that often requires practical, legal and financial advice from specialist organisations (British Red Cross, n.d.). According to the policy, the applicant can only apply for people who were 'family' before they sought asylum in the UK and are less likely to be reunited with parents, siblings, or adult children, indicating further restrictions (Borelli et al., 2021). Nevertheless, research has shown positive outcomes for reunited families, such as increased support, a sense of belonging and better mental health (Choummanivong et al., 2014).

[8] French expression which is translated in English as "superior force".

Forced migration and mental health

The humanitarian crises across the world have led refugee mental health to be recognised as a "public health challenge" (Lindert et al., 2016). Notably, mental health research with refugee communities has increased over the years, however, methodologically rigorous and reliable studies are still scarce (Bogic et al., 2015). Up-to-date literature indicates that refugees are substantially more likely to experience long-term psychological needs compared to the general population (Ahmad et al., 2021; James et al., 2019; Lenferink et al., 2022; Lies et al., 2020). Global systematic reviews on the prevalence of mental illness in refugees have shown high records of depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress, substance abuse and severe mental health illnesses (Blackmore, Boyle, et al., 2020; Blackmore, Gray, et al., 2020; Giacco et al., 2018; Kien et al., 2019; Turrini et al., 2017).

Yet, a wide heterogeneity across the studies has been observed (Giacco et al., 2018; Kien et al., 2019), which could be explained by varied sample sizes, methodological rigour and diversity within refugee groups (Silove, 2022; Villanueva O'Driscoll et al., 2017). Refugees are often expected to participate in research with self-reported questionnaires/measures and diagnostic criteria that may not reflect their psychological presentation, or may not be culturally appropriate and sensitive (Fazel et al., 2005). Moreover, studies tend to group refugees and asylum seekers together, without acknowledging the role of migration status on mental health needs (Heeren et al., 2014).

Epidemiological research has highlighted numerous contributing factors to the persistent and elevated rates of mental distress in refugees. Pre-migration and peri-migration trauma have been identified as an important determinant of poorer mental health outcomes (Giacco et al., 2018; Mesa-Vieira et al., 2022). Migration

journeys can be extremely traumatising (Squire et al., 2017), as refugees are at 'en-route risk' of harm, exploitation and death (Ben Farhat et al., 2018; Giacco et al., 2018; Mandić & Simpson, 2017). In the absence of safe pathways, the Mediterranean Sea is considered the deadliest migration route in the world (Barnes, 2022; IOM, 2024). Resettlement difficulties may also negatively affect peoples' outcomes. Post-migration stressors have been positively associated with a higher prevalence of mental health disorders (Aragona et al., 2012; Bogic et al., 2015; Squire et al., 2017). The foreign environment that refugees face may be overwhelming and threatening, with some reporting that disclosing personal information in the Home Office while seeking asylum can be stressful and re-traumatising (Abbas et al., 2021).

Conclusions

The historical context of the refugee crisis, the geopolitical landscape, and the empirical literature review on refugee mental health highlight the importance of additional research. Many epidemiological and experimental studies focus on pre- and peri-migration periods and their impact on poorer mental health outcomes in refugees, but less attention is given to post-migration stressors (Hynie, 2018). Considering the multiple changes/losses refugees face in foreign countries, the large proportion of asylum claims and the resettlement challenges within the host countries themselves, it is pertinent to better understand the psychological consequences of the post-migration period (Gleeson et al., 2020). An extensive exploration of qualitative studies on this topic could inform the improvement of resettlement processes.

Systematic Literature Review

Systematic Literature Reviews (SLRs) strive to discover, critically examine, and synthesise research findings from different studies to build a comprehensive evidence base and highlight gaps in the literature (Siddaway et al., 2019). Qualitative SLRs allow an inclusive, thorough and careful consideration of unique lived experiences (Milner et al., 2020). To date, an initial examination of the literature revealed the lack of qualitative SLRs on post-migration difficulties in refugee communities. Exploring post-migration experiences and socio-cultural factors influencing refugees' integration in host countries can significantly improve the process of resettlement.

To address this research gap, my SLR aims to answer the following question: "What are the post-migration difficulties of refugees during resettlement in their host countries?". Post-migration difficulties were defined in this review as negative psychological and social experiences and/or stressors, including but not limited to poor mental health, challenges with the asylum process and daily life, family separation, racism, and discrimination.

Methodology

The SLR was pre-registered with PROSPERO (Protocol: CRD4202343747). Ethical approval was not required as SLRs are not primary research and do not collect sensitive/personal information. However, ethical considerations and guiding principles in the synthesis and interpretation of the findings were weighted to support ethical decision-making and conduct (Suri, 2008; 2020). The review process involved research team discussions, consultation with Experts by Experience (EbE) and external stakeholders (i.e., field supervisors).

Search strategy

The search strategy was informed by a scoping investigation of the literature to identify research published in PubMed, Cochrane Review Library, and a brief examination of up-to-date publications in Google Scholar. The systematic search of the literature intended to capture all available relevant studies and determine existing knowledge gaps. Multiple online databases and peer-reviewed journals were systematically searched for published research, alongside unpublished/grey literature sources and international websites of specialist organisations (Table 3). The decision-making on sources/databases was informed by the breadth of psychological and mental health academic research offered, previous systematic reviews on refugee mental health (Blackmore et al., 2020; Fazel et al., 2005), specialist interest in the population and access provided by the university. Grey literature, such as doctoral level studies or research reports by specialist organisations, was included to minimise publication bias and access timely/up-to-date research evidence on refugee communities often published without the delays faced in the peer-reviewed process (Enticott et al., 2018; Paez, 2017). Moreover, reference lists of identified studies and research reports were hand-searched to include articles that may have been previously missed.

Table 3

Information Sources for Literature

Online Databases	MEDLINE, APA PsychArticles, CINAHL, PubMed, Scopus, EMBASE, EBSCO, Cohrane Library, Centre for Reviews and Dissemination
Peer-reviewed Journals	Journal of Refugee Studies, Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies, International Journal of Migration, Disasters, Human Rights Quarterly,

	International Migration, International Migration Review, Forced Migration Review, Refugee Survey Quarterly, Conflict and Health
Unpublished/ Grey Literature	ETHOS, King's Fund, OpenGrey, The DART-Europe E-theses Portal, ProQuest Dissertation & Theses Global, University of Hertfordshire Research Archive
Online Websites of Specialist Organisations	Google Scholar, United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), Unicef, British Red Cross, Care4Calais, Refugee Council UK, WHO, Oxfam, International Rescue Committee, International Organisation for Migration (IOM), Caritas, Amnesty International, Freedom from Torture, Helen Bamber Foundation, Young Roots, Norwegian Refugee Council, Danish Refugee Council, European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE), Refugee Action, Lewisham Refugee and Migrant Network, Scottish Refugee Council, PRAXIS

The SPIDER criteria informed the search strategy to detect and document key terms associated with the research question (Cooke et al., 2012) (Table 4). The search terms were further refined in consultation with supervisors and stakeholders and adapted accordingly to the needs of the databases (i.e., Google Scholar vs. Databases). I used Boolean terms 'AND'/'OR' to combine/connect search terms, asterisks as truncation symbols to broaden the search and include variations on spelling and word endings, and quotation marks to search phrases or words together (see examples in Appendix 21). The final search was conducted between July and August 2023; searches were repeated in January 2024 to ensure no recent articles were missed and no additional publications were identified.

Table 4

Search Strategy Overview Using the SPIDER Criteria

SPIDER criteria	**Search strategy**	**Examples of key search terms**
Sample	Refugees	refugee* OR "asylum seeker*" OR "displaced person*" OR "displaced people" OR "undocumented immigrant* OR exile* OR "war victim*" OR "war survivor*" OR "stateless person*" OR "stateless people" OR "uprooted person*" OR "uprooted people" OR "forced migra*"
Phenomenon of **I**nterest	Post-migration experiences	"post migrat*" OR "post-migrat*" OR "after migration" OR resettle* OR settl*
Design	Qualitative data collection and analysis, Mixed methods data collection and analysis with qualitative elements (i.e., surveys, questionnaires)	questionnaire* OR interview* OR survey* OR "focus group*" OR "case stud*" OR observ*
Evaluation	Experiences, narratives, challenges, impact	experience* OR stor* OR narrative* OR perspective* OR view* OR opinion* OR perce* OR feel* OR thought* OR belie* OR understand*
Research type	Qualitative method or mixed methods with qualitative elements	"Qualitative research" OR "qual* study" OR "qual* data" OR "mixed methods"

Study selection

This SLR focuses on qualitative studies and mixed-methods studies with a qualitative component, reporting on the post-migration experiences of refugees.

These may include any individual/societal difficulties (i.e., emotional, psychological, cultural, spiritual, social outcomes) associated with refugees' resettlement in the host country. Qualitative in-depth data can be defined as personal accounts of people's experiences, stories, beliefs, feelings, or thoughts related to post-migration periods; including qualitative survey data (i.e., gathered via open questions), or data collected via structured/unstructured methods (i.e., interviews, focus groups, questionnaires). Following an initial search for pre-registered protocols on PROSPERO, this SLR focused on qualitative evidence to prevent the duplication of already registered reviews focusing on quantitative and mixed-methods research and further contribute to the literature. Inclusion and exclusion criteria are presented in Table 5.

Table 5

Eligibility Criteria for the Systematic Review

Inclusion criteria	**Exclusion criteria**
• Research on refugees. • Research on adults (over the age of 18 years old). • Research reporting on post-migration experiences and resettlement including negative experiences (i.e., individual, or societal outcomes). • Qualitative research. • Mixed-methods research with a qualitative component. • Research originally published or translated in English language.	• Research on voluntary immigrants or people who were not forcibly displaced. • Research on children or unaccompanied minors. • Research focusing solely on mental illness or mental health difficulties and/or diagnoses among refugees (i.e., prevalence studies). • Research not centred on refugees themselves (i.e., focus on mental health professionals, interventions, or services).

• Research published from 2011 onwards to capture recent experiences within the current socio-political climate, following the Syrian civil war and worldwide refugee crisis.	• Research on experiences of pre- or peri-migration periods. • Outcome or interventions-based research. • Theory-based research. • Conference abstracts, editorials, letters, or commentaries. • Quantitative studies or studies that do not include a qualitative component.

Screening and data extraction

All identified citations were collated and imported into Covidence, a software that accommodates the screening and data extraction process in healthcare research. Covidence has been evaluated as one of the most efficient, accessible and appropriate tools for research collaboration (Harrison et al., 2020). Following duplicate removal, all titles/abstracts were independently screened against the eligibility criteria by myself and a second reviewer[9]. Full-text articles of all studies that met the inclusion criteria were then retrieved and independently assessed. Discussions about discrepancies were completed at two time-points between the reviewers, following the completion of each screening stage. Each discrepancy was resolved by discussing individual papers against the inclusion/exclusion criteria and providing a rationale over reviewers' decision-making. Conflicts were related to reviewers' different conceptualisation of the research question (i.e., meaning of psychosocial difficulties).

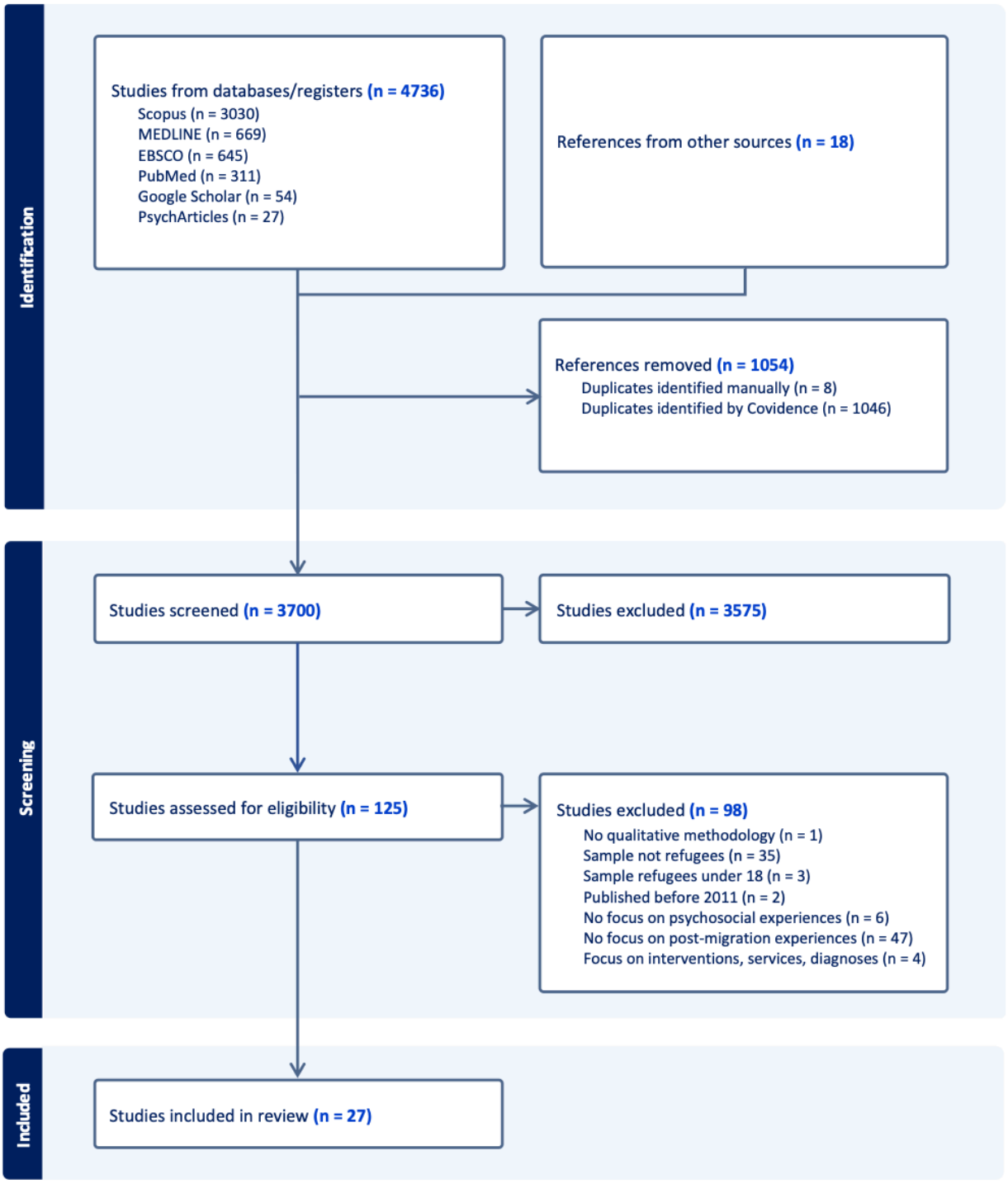
[9] Ms Janelle Spira (Trainee Clinical Psychologist, University of Hertfordshire) acted as the second reviewer in the screening of titles/abstracts and the full-text screening of studies that met the inclusion criteria. The inter-rater reliability between two independent researchers in healthcare research, measured through a statistical equation known as Cohen's Kappa coefficient, ensures the rigour and validity of the findings and minimises the risk of bias (McHugh, 2012). The Cohen's Kappa was calculated and indicated a degree of moderate agreement between the independent reviewers (κ=0.54).

Following discussion, reviewers reached a collaborative agreement on whether studies would be included or excluded in the SLR; this decision was also discussed with the supervisory team.

The SLR search generated a total of 4,754 studies. Following the removal of duplicates, 3,700 titles and abstracts were screened against the inclusion/exclusion criteria, of which 125 were selected for full-text review. Of those, 27 studies were included. According to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) statement, which provides internationally accepted standards for conducting and reporting systematic reviews (Moher, 2009; Page et al., 2021), the study selection process is presented in Figure 3.

Figure 3

PRISMA Flowchart



Data was extracted by the lead researcher to capture the study characteristics including publication year, title, author, country of origin, aims, methodology,

sample, findings, strengths and limitations and implications for policy, research, and practice.

Quality assessment of the studies

The Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) Checklist for Qualitative Studies was used to assess the risk of bias and the quality of each study. The CASP Checklist comprises 10 questions which support reviewers in thinking systematically about methodological rigour, clinical importance, and reliability. The studies were rated against each question, and then allocated to a score of low (0-4), moderate (5-7) and high quality (8-10) that corresponded to the overall critical appraisal (Milner et al., 2020). Due to a lack of evidence on the exclusion of qualitative studies according to their quality (Thomas & Harden, 2008), all studies that met the criteria were included and assessed.

Data synthesis

The included studies were synthesised following thematic synthesis (Thomas & Harden, 2008). This framework allows researchers to cross-examine and integrate qualitative findings across studies and develop a comprehensive narrative. The thematic synthesis and interpretation of the findings were completed in a stepped approach (Table 6), facilitated by NVivo 14 software. The codes and descriptive themes were reviewed, discussed, and refined upon consultation.

Table 6

Thematic Synthesis Stepped Approach by Thomas & Harden (2008)

Level	**Process**
Stage 1	The researcher to familiarise with qualitative findings and develop a coding framework that captures the meaning and content of themes across the primary studies that are included in the review.
Stage 2	The researcher to develop inductive *descriptive themes* based on the initial codes by grouping codes together.
Stage 3	The researcher to develop *analytical themes* that allow the researchers to surpass the primary findings of the included studies and present new ideas, concepts, or hypotheses across the qualitative dataset.

Findings

Study characteristics

The studies focused on the psycho-social impact of refugee resettlement in host countries and were conducted in the United States (n=6), Australia (n=5), United Kingdom (n=4), Germany (n=3), Canada (n=2), Sweden (n=3), Ghana (n=1), Iceland (n=1), South Africa (n=1), and Jordan (n=1). Across the studies, 490 refugees were included; 22 studies reported participants' demographics, including gender, age, length of stay in the host country, country of origin and religion. However, one study only reported characteristics that posed no risk of revealing participants' identities (Kristjánsdóttir & Skaptadóttir, 2019), whilst two mixed-methods studies only reported demographics on the whole sample rather than the sub-sample of those who participated in interviews (Correa-Velez et al., 2013; von Haumeder et al., 2019). Moreover, a few studies omitted details on gender, age or ethnicity without providing a rationale (Mangrio et al., 2019, 2020; Jawasreh, 2019).

The overall sample was predominantly male (n=247 vs. female n=228), and the age ranged from 18-77 years old. The studies included people from the Middle East, Africa, and South Asia. The length of stay in the host countries ranged from 2 months to 14 years at the time of the interviews. Purposive and convenience sampling were the most used recruitment techniques, while the authors completed semi-structured interviews and/or focus groups. The methodological approaches were thematic analysis (n=19), followed by phenomenological (n=5), content (n=2), narrative analysis (n=1) and framework method (n=1). The studies explored the psychosocial challenges, stressors and wellbeing during resettlement (Abur & Mphande, 2020; Dako-Gyeke & Adu, 2017; Darawsheh et al., 2022; Gangamma, 2018; Gautam et al., 2018; Gebresilassie et al., 2022; King et al., 2017; Labys et al., 2017; Mangrio et al., 2019, 2020; Mousa Haron Jawasreh, 2019; Rowley et al., 2020; Sim et al., 2023; Tsegay, 2022; Vitale & Ryde, 2016; von Haumeder et al., 2019; Vromans et al., 2018), social exclusion and discrimination (Bletscher & Spiers, 2023; Correa-Velez et al., 2013; Golembe et al., 2021; Kristjánsdóttir & Skaptadóttir, 2019; Saksena & McMorrow, 2021; Sundvall et al., 2021; Ziersch et al., 2020), and acculturation processes (Asmal-Lee et al., 2022; Hebbani et al., 2012; Tonui & Mitschke, 2022). Table 7 synopsises the study design, aims and characteristics, the reported findings, and a brief critical appraisal.

Table 7

Summary of Studies Included in the SLR

Title/Authors (Year)	**Country**	**Study Aims**	**Methodology**	**Sample Characteristics**	**Summary of Findings**	**Critical Appraisal**
Abur & Mphande (2019). Mental Health and Wellbeing of South Sudanese-Australians.	Australia	The exploration of resettlement difficulties and the impact on wellbeing on South Sudanese refugees in Melbourne.	The researchers conducted a qualitative study and collected data through in-depth interviews. They used thematic and narrative analysis.	Total N: 20 refugees (11 males, 9 females) Ethnic Background: South Sudan. Age: 18 to 64 years old. Length of stay: 2 to 14 years at the	Participants reported ongoing mental health difficulties in the South Sudanese refugee community resettling in Australia, particularly experiences of trauma, social isolation, loneliness, and loss of purpose to live. Participants also shared their struggles with disclosing mental health difficulties and seeking professional support due to culture-driven fears and stigma in their community.	+ The one-to-one interviews allowed the researchers to capture the lived experiences of resettlement and familial interpersonal relationships and struggles. The topic guide was designed to enable the exploration of barriers and facilitators during refugees' resettlement in Australia. + The authors highlight experiences of the South Sudanese refugee community, a

				time of the interview.	Interpersonal difficulties and intergenerational conflict in the families, particularly between parents and children, were also discussed. Participants reflected on work-based stress, financial hardship, and difficulties with securing a job, as well as the impact of these on their integration to the host community. Participants reported experiences of racism and discrimination in both institutional and public settings, and particularly incidents with the police. They attributed racism and discrimination to negative stereotypes and media	group often under-represented in research. despite the increased experiences of forced displacement. - The results are not clearly reported, and the reader cannot easily distinguish the themes from the literature evidence cited in support of the findings. - The authors do not provide a critique of their methodology and do not discuss their ethical considerations or position towards the topic.

					representation of the Sudanese community.	
Asmal-Lee, Liebling & Goodman (2022). "Syria is Our Mom, UK is Like Aunty": The Psychosocial Experiences of Acculturation in Syrian Refugees.	United Kingdom	The in-depth investigation of the psychosocial experiences of acculturation among Syrian refugees resettling in the UK.	The researchers conducted a qualitative study and used in-depth interviews to gather data. They employed interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to analyse the data according to Smith et al. (2022).	Total N: 6 refugees (3 males, 3 females) Ethnic Background: Syria* Age: 26 to 50 years old. Length of stay: 6 months to 5 years in the UK. **Participants were excluded if*	Participants reflected on their integration process as going through loss and rebirth. They discussed the loss of their home and possessions, their country, family separation and the loss of loved ones, as well as the loss of their cultural role and personal/professional identity as an individual. Participants explored the impact of these losses on their mental health and the experience of acculturation. The experience of past trauma was considered within the context of settling in a safe country, yet often made refugees	+ The methodology enabled the authors to shed light on the emotional pain inflicted by forced migration and loss. They evidenced that resettlement for some people can be a grieving process. + The findings can inform clinical and policy changes, such as tailored and culturally sensitive therapeutic psychosocial support and better validation of overseas qualifications/experiences.

				they were non-Muslim and did not speak proficient English.	feel unsafe and unsettled. People expressed their experience of freedom and rights associated with their gender or religion, and discussed racism, islamophobia and not feeling welcomed by the host society (i.e., hostile climate and stereotypes around refugees).	- The exclusion of non-English speaking participants may have limited the exploration of stories not often voiced or understood within the context of research and academia. - The small sample size in IPA does not allow universal generalisations of the findings in the refugee community.
Bletscher & Spiers (2023). "Step by Step We Were Okay Now": An Exploration of the Impact of Social Connectedness on the Well-Being of	United States	The examination of experiences of belongingness and social connection during resettlement in	The researchers conducted a qualitative study and collected data through focus groups. They analysed the data using thematic	Total N: 12 female refugees. Ethnic Background: Iraq and Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).	Participants discussed their experiences of belongingness, social connections, and support by the host community. Participants indicated that resettlement and building trust with the host community requires time, however, family	+ The study was informed by critical feminist theories and lens that enabled the researchers to concentrate on the female experience. + The theory of intersectionality was also considered to interpret

Congolese and Iraqi Refugee Women Resettled in the United States.		the US among refugee women.	analysis as suggested by Brown & Clarke (2006).	Age: Mean age 45.5 (Congolese women) and 32 (Iraqi women) years old. Length of stay: 2 months to 8 years at the time of the interview.	and religion were considered protective factors for emotional and social support. Participants discussed the slow process of developing new relationships and feelings of social isolation. Participants shared they experienced a lack of support in resources and information around pressing matters such as accommodation, employment opportunities, transportation, access to healthcare services, which acted as a hindrance to improved mental health wellbeing.	the stories emerging from the interviews and honour women's experiences. + The authors showed reflexivity and transparency throughout their study and stated their position towards the process and participants. - Although the collaboration with interpreters offered the researchers the opportunity to ensure accessibility and equity in the voices, there are challenges to acknowledge. Meanings may have been lost in translation, while authors note cultural/power dynamics and

						biases in the researcher-participant-interpreter relationship. - The small sample may limit the generalisation of the findings to refugees with similar identities.
Correa-Velez, Spaaij and Upham (2012). 'We Are Not Here to Claim Better Services Than Any Other': Social Exclusion among Men from Refugee Backgrounds in Urban and	Australia	The exploration of the mental health and resettlement experiences among newly arrived refugee men in Australia.	The researchers conducted a mixed-methods study and collected qualitative data through semi-structured interviews. The qualitative data were analysed using thematic	Total N: 28 refugee men. The authors do not report the characteristics of the subsample that participated in the semi-structured interviews of this mixed-methods	Participants reflected on their experiences of social exclusion across four dimensions of exclusion - production, consumption, social relations, and services. They faced multiple barriers to secure employment and recognition of their overseas educational qualifications due to a lack of appropriate support and discrimination. Participants also discussed their difficulty	+ The authors highlight the lived experience of refugees across four dimensions of social exclusion, and the overview of the challenges they face in a host country. + The study understands social exclusion across different settings, namely urban and regional areas where refugees may resettle.

Regional Australia.			analysis as suggested by Patton (2002).	study, but state that the sample was diverse.	progressing in the social ladder and feeling excluded from financial opportunities. All participants experienced racism and discrimination across different settings, as well as poor interactions with the police, which resulted in feelings of social isolation and helplessness. Participants also discussed their stress in securing housing and accessing healthcare services (i.e., emergencies).	- The non-probabilistic sampling strategy the authors employed may not have provided them with a representative sample of refugee males, so some experiences may have remained unvoiced. - The authors did not break down further their understanding of the lived experience of refugee men who entered the country alone (i.e., without a family) compared to those accompanied by their families.

Dako-Gyeke & Adu (2017). Challenges and coping strategies of refugees: Exploring residual Liberian refugees' experiences in Ghana.	Ghana	The investigation of the challenges Liberian refugees face in Ghana after the voluntary repatriation exercise in 2012.	The authors conducted a qualitative study and collected data through both focus groups and interviews. Data were thematically analysed, whilst the authors do not mention a specific framework.	Total N: 40 (17 males, 23 females) Ethnic Background: Liberia. Age: 25 to 70 years old. Length of stay: Not stated. However, the authors describe that participants resettled in Ghana following the civil war in	Participants discussed the challenges they faced in Ghana after the voluntary repatriation exercise offered by the government. Refugees' social networks were significantly disrupted, and participants had to be separated from their families and communities. Participants felt their families were divided between Liberia and Ghana without a concrete plan for family reunification. Refugees discussed the lack of opportunities in Ghana for employment, and the negative perceptions the host community held for Liberian refugees which impeded their resettlement and	+ The study highlights the conflicts and challenges between refugees and the host community, particularly within the context of voluntary repatriation opportunities. + The findings can inform professionals and services actions to help refugees strengthen their social networks and communities. For example, social connection may be reinforced by connecting with faith/religious practices, other refugees, or advocacy opportunities.

				Liberia and opted to remain after the voluntary repatriation exercise in 2012 by the Ghanian government.	integration. Participants also discussed their decreased sense of safety due to the increased criminality and violence in the refugee settlement area.	- The authors based their study on a sample of refugees who chose to remain in their host country following an option for voluntary repatriation. This may limit the application of findings in other refugee populations.
Darawsheh, Tabbaa, Bewernitz & Justiss (2021). Resettlement Experiences of Syrian Refugees in the United States: Policy Challenges and Directions.	United States	The examination of the post-migration experiences among Syrian refugees resettling in the US and the evaluation of the governmental support they received to	The authors conducted a qualitative study and gathered data through interviews. They analysed their data with interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) as indicated by Alase	Total N: 14 refugees (10 males, 4 females) Ethnic Background: Syria. Age: Mean age 40.4 years old (44.0 for males, 31.3 for females)	Participants discussed the factors hindering their resettlement in the host country, including the oppressive, hostile, and non-flexible refugee policies in the US, family separation and loneliness, and the lack of support with family reunification. Participants shared that little consideration was given to how Syrian refugees are allocated across the States, which	+ The findings underlined psychological difficulties refugees experience because of war and displacement, including being separated from their loved ones. + The study provides an evidence base to build on and further explore family separation, family union as a coping mechanism and family

		facilitate their resettlement.	(2017) and Creswll (2013).	Length of stay: Mean length of stay in the United States was 2.9 ± 0.7 years.	worsened the experience of family separation. Participants experienced a lack of support at the initial stages of their resettlement (i.e., housing, human rights, English language) and language barriers did not enable them to understand their rights, the laws, and the regulations of the host country. Their experiences and lack of support led them to feel disempowered and hopeless.	reunification. Further research can support policy changes on reunification. - The use of translation in research may have impeded the analysis and interpretation of the findings. However, researchers have controlled for the downsides of translation using reflexivity, discussion, and consultancy with researchers in the team who spoke both languages the research was conducted on. - The study has a particular focus on the Syrian refugee community and situates the

						resettlement within a specific context which may limit the generalisation of experiences.
Gangamma (2018). A Phenomenological Study of Family Experiences of Resettled Iraqi Refugees.	United States	The exploration of the experiences on family relationships and functioning among Iraqi refugees resettled in the US upon their arrival after the war in 2003.	The authors conducted a qualitative study and gathered data through interviews. They analysed their data with interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) as proposed by Padgett (2008).	Total N: 11 refugees (6 males, 5 females) Ethnic Background: Iraq. Age: 21 to 39 years old. Length of stay: 5 to 10 years at the time of the interviews.	Participants discussed post-migration difficulties in the context of family functioning including mutual experiences of loss and grief, familial relationships, and sense of increased trust between family members, and changes in cultural and gender roles (i.e., family roles in the house). Refugees shared their worries about family members back home and their sadness over family separation, as well as the emotional pain associated with loss of identity and status in the	+ The authors informed their research by contextual therapy theory that centralises family relationships and how they empower the members of the family. + The study showcased the impact of family separation, anxiety over the safety of family members and the role of family in resettlement. The evidence can guide further research exploration focusing on this difficulty among refugees.

					home country. Participants discussed their context of displacement and experiences of ethnic-based violence and trauma, but also their context of seeking safety and refuge in resettlement. People did not feel welcome by the host community, and felt their Iraqi identity was associated with 'terrorism'. Most participants disclosed experiences of overt and covert discrimination and islamophobia in their daily lives, which led to increased feelings of isolation.	- The recruitment of participants may have been limited due to the researchers' outsider identity and access to key informants. - The sample of Iraqi refugees identified as Muslim, which represents the dominant religion of Iraq, but may not have allowed the presentation of stories by Iraqis following a different religion (i.e., Christian). Moreover, considering the sectarian Sunni-Shia divide in Iraq, most participants were Sunni (n=8), which means that their experiences may have been over-represented.

						- The use of translation and interpretation may mean that nuances of language may have been lost.
Gautam, Mawn & Beehler (2018). Bhutanese Older Adult Refugees Recently Resettled in the United States: A Better Life With Little Sorrows.	United States	The investigation of the resettlement and adjustment experiences in the US among older refugees from Bhutan. The secondary objective was to examine refugee's unmet health and social service needs.	The researchers completed a qualitative study and gathered experiences through interviews. They analysed the data with phenomenological analysis as indicated by Charmaz (2014); Hays & Singh (2011).	Total N: 9 refugees (6 males, 3 females). Ethnic Background: Bhutan. Age: 50 to 77 years old. Length of stay: The time of resettlement in the US was 2 to 5	Participants disclosed feelings of sadness associated with family separation and an inability to connect with families back home, and an increased sense of social isolation and loneliness. Participants experienced grief and loss over their inability to attend loved one's funerals back home. Refugees felt language often stood in the way of developing new relationships and communicating well with people in the host country. Participants also experienced cultural	+ The findings offer insights into the lived experience of older refugees, who may often be under-represented in research samples. + The study provides implications for practitioners to deliver culturally informed and competent mental health care. + The authors recommend further research with extended family members to explore

				years at the time of the interviews.	tensions and intergenerational conflicts associated with respect towards traditional customs (i.e., older vs. youngest generations). Participants expressed their worries and feelings of uncertainty over the temporary visas and the right to remain and become a citizen in their host country.	intergenerational experiences, conflicts, and perspectives. - The snowball sampling method may have limited recruitment to refugees who had a successful integration and settlement in the host country. - The study focused on one region in the host country which may have limited the experiences faced in different areas.
Gebresilassie, Beiersmann, Ziegler, Keck, Kidane, Jahn & Benson-Martin (2022). Mental	Germany	The examination of the mental health experiences and social resilience of Eritrean	The researchers completed a qualitative study and conducted interviews to collect data. They	Total N: 15 refugees (11 males, 4 females).	Participants stressed out their experiences of social isolation and feelings of loneliness. The asylum process and initial stages of resettlement were described as stressful and distressing, but	+ The authors provided clear definitions on the language in use (i.e., terms on refugees), which is often missed in forced displacement research.

Wellbeing and Social Resilience of Eritrean Refugees Living in Germany.		refugees resettling in Germany.	thematically analysed the data by adopting a phenomenological approach, however they do not state the followed framework.	Ethnic Background: Eritrea. Age: 18 and 40 years old. Length of stay: 3 to 6 years living in Germany at the time of the interviews.	participants reflected time acted as a 'healer'. Refugees shared worries about their families back home (i.e., 'burden of responsibility'), family separation and loss of family and friends. The most common post-migration stressors were language difficulties, sense of insecurity with temporary visas, uncertainty about the future, cultural adaptation, and acculturation (i.e., cultural differences) and lack of employment opportunities. Participants experienced disruption and confusion in relation to their cultural and social identity. Participants	+ The authors consulted with experts in the field and conducted pilot interviews to ensure the acceptability and validity of their topic guide. - The restrictions of the Covid-19 pandemic limited the interviews to telephone. This may have limited the rapport developed between the researcher and participant; however, this was not experienced by the authors. In-person interviews would provide information on facial expressions and body language. - The sample was predominantly male, which may have limited

					shared their difficulties in developing new relationships with the host community, and feelings of being treated unfairly due to their migration status (i.e., being a refugee) and their racial background.	the understanding of female perspectives.
Golembe, Leyendecker, Maalej, Gundlach & Busch (2021). Experiences of Minority Stress and Mental Health Burdens of Newly Arrived LGBTQ* Refugees in Germany.	Germany	The in-depth understanding of the post-migration experiences of LGBTQ+ refugees settling in Germany and the impact on their mental health and wellbeing.	The researchers conducted a qualitative study and gathered data through focus groups. They thematically analysed the data but did not state their framework.	Total N: 26 refugees (21 males, 3 trans females, 2 non-binary/queer)* Ethnic Background: Iraq, Syria, Morocco, Lebanon, Malaysia, Guinea, and Kenya.	Participants shared their experiences of discrimination during their resettlement in Germany in both institutional and public contexts. Participants felt the discrimination was associated with the intersection between race, religion, gender, sexuality, and migration status, and often was considered worse compared to past experiences. Participants discussed their	+ The authors informed their research by theories on intersectionality and minority stress, which can extend the appreciation and interpretation of LGBTQ+ refugee's experiences on a broader/systemic level. The lens provide multiple potential explanations for the experienced distress in this group.

				Age: 18 and 46 years (M=29.7, SD=8.99). Length of stay: >12 months to 5 years living in Germany at the time of the interviews. **All participants identified as members of the LGBTQ+ community.*	experiences of internalised stigma in relation to their sexuality, expectations to be rejected and the need to conceal their sexual orientation and identity in the host country. Participants also shared how their mental health has deteriorated due to their distressing post-migration living conditions, and specifically disclosed feelings of depression (i.e., hopelessness, negative affect), anxiety, tiredness, and loneliness.	+ The study focused on a population that despite being extremely vulnerable, remains under-researched and misunderstood. The authors highlight experiences of discrimination and violence LGBTQ+ refugees face based on their intersectional identities. + Clinicians can inform their approach taking into considerations these experiences and ensuring an affirmative and non-judgmental therapeutic space for their clients, as well as signposting them to LGBTQ+ communities for additional support and connection.

						- The sample consisted mainly of gay males and cis-gender refugees, which may limit our understanding of female, lesbian, bisexual, and trans lived experiences. - The authors received recruitment support from LGBTQ+ organisations who acted as gatekeepers, which may have limited access to a more representative population (i.e., LGBTQ+ refugees in the country not receiving tailored support).
Hebbani, Obijiofor & Bristed (2012).	Australia	The exploration of the acculturation	The researchers conducted a qualitative study	Total N: 39 refugees (11	Participants expressed their post-migration difficulties with differences between males and	+ The authors highlight the experiences of parent refugees and the challenges they face

Acculturation challenges that confront Sudanese former refugees in Australia.		challenges that Sudanese refugees face during resettlement in Australia.	and gathered data through focus groups. They thematically analysed the data, following Miles & Huberman (1994).	males, 28 females). Ethnic Background: Sudan. Age: 24 to 57 years old. Length of stay: from 8 months to 12 years.	females. Men refugees discussed the perceived discrimination and racism, including the negative incidents with the police, and the stereotypes perpetuated by the media and within society about Sudanese refugees (i.e., crime/violence). Women refugees experienced challenges in relation to discipline and parenting perceptions in Australia compared to their own culture. Both men and women discussed the role of English language fluency in resettlement and integration to the new culture/country, as well as communication in the family and	upon resettlement, which may be different compared to people without dependents. + The authors informed their interpretation of the data through the cultural lens of collectivism and individualism to understand and conceptualise the experiences of Sudanese refugees. + The relationship between the researchers and the Sudanese refugee community, as well as to participants was discussed and explored throughout the research process.

					with other members of the community.	- The authors stated their challenges in recruiting males in the study because of employment and the role of the breadwinner for the family. This may require further exploration of family functioning from the male perspective.
King, Heinonen, Uwabor & Adeleye-Olusae (2017). The Psychosocial Well-Being of African Refugees in Winnipeg: Critical Stressors and Coping Strategies.	Canada	The examination of post-migration stressors experienced by African refugees during their resettlement in Canada. A second objective was to understand	The researchers conducted a qualitative study and used photovoice as their technique to collect participant's experiences. They thematically analysed the data,	Total N: 15 (7 males, 8 females). Ethnic Background: Ethiopia, Eritrea, South Sudan, Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of	Participants expressed the difficulties of being separated from their family members, worrying about people left behind and the consequent social ruptures. Refugees also shared the barriers in place to reunite with their families and a sense of loss and grief over familial networks. They struggled to build new relationships/networks in	+ The themes are well developed, and the methodology allowed the authors to explore in-depth the experiences of a group that is often marginalised, and not solely by language (i.e., photovoice). + Photovoice is a participatory action research tool and community-based approach that

		refugees' coping mechanisms.	as suggested by Riessman (2008) and Close (2007).	Congo, and Sierra Leone. Age: 21 to 57 years old. Length of stay: Not stated.	the host country due to cultural differences. Participants discussed feeling overwhelmed, uncertain, and afraid with the policies, laws, and regulations (i.e., childcare) and often powerless. They did not feel welcomed in the host country, and worried that the lack of English fluency often put them in unsafe positions (i.e., parenting beliefs). Participants shared that they coped through family relationships, community, and religion.	can allow individuals to initiate critical reflection, dialogue, and change. - Although the study has a diverse sample, the authors do not provide detailed demographic characteristics of the participants. This may limit the readers' understanding of how representative the sample is. - Despite the strengths of photovoice as a research methodology, ethical concerns may arise. For example, participants may not have similar views and the

						representation of differing voices may be challenged. Moreover, vicarious trauma from exposure to potentially triggering material is a risk to both participants, researchers, and readers. - The authors do not critically appraise their methodology and do not discuss limitations to their findings. This may indicate a lack of transparency and reflexivity.
Kristjánsdóttir & Skaptadóttir (2019). "I'll Always Be a Refugee": The	Iceland	The exploration of the resettlement experiences among Middle	The researchers conducted a qualitative study and gathered data through	Total N: 8 refugee women. Ethnic Background:	Women refugees reported a sense of social isolation and often feeling unwelcome. Most participants were alone, without social networks in Iceland and	+ This is to the authors' knowledge one of the few/first studies to explore the resettlement of refugee women 'at risk' in Iceland.

Lived Experience of Palestinian Refugee Women of Moving to a Small Society in Iceland.		Eastern female refugees ('women at risk') in Iceland.	interviews. They analysed data using a phenomenological analysis as proposed in stages by Lanigan (1988).	Middle East. Specific locations were not revealed to protect participant's identities. Age: 20 to 52 years old. Length of stay: Not stated.	separated from their friends/families. Women reported feeling uncertain and uncomfortable due to their religion/cultural attires (i.e., wearing a hijab) and experienced Islamophobic assaults. Women felt that not knowing the Icelandic language acted as a barrier to integrate and connect with the host community. Most reported a change in their identity (i.e., becoming more independent and having opportunities), which brought a stronger need to maintain their Islamic customs in the host country.	+ The methodology allowed the authors to highlight the challenges faced by Muslim women in a small, predominantly white/non-Muslim town in a country that does not receive many refugees. - Despite the understandable reasons of confidentiality, the authors provide to conceal refugee women's identities, the lack of demographic characteristics does not allow further interpretations of the findings.

						- The authors mention in their methodology that their relationship to the findings will be explored, yet their reflections and positionality are missed in the paper.
Labys, Dreyer & Burns (2017). At zero and turning in circles: refugee experiences and coping in Durban, South Africa.	South Africa	The examination of post-migration difficulties and the impact of these on mental health wellbeing among refugees resettling in South Africa. A secondary objective was to understand the coping strategies	The researchers conducted a qualitative study and collected data through interviews. They thematically analysed their data as indicated by Thomas (2006).	Total N: 18 refugees (9 males, 9 females). Ethnic Background: Democratic Republic of Congo and Zimbabwe. Age: 18 to 58 years old (median age= 35.9).	Participants discussed their difficulties with the host community and feeling accepted/welcomed. They talked about their experiences of racism, discrimination, unfair treatment, and xenophobia across different settings (i.e., housing, healthcare, work). Some participants shared that these incidents were on a wide spectrum from covert discrimination to verbal or	+ The authors present experiences that are consistent with the literature on other refugees' lived experiences resettling in South Africa. This provides good ground for policy changes and improving access to services and resources. + The authors clearly presented detailed personal accounts of xenophobia, racism and

		refugees employ to manage distress.		Length of stay: The average time of resettlement in South Africa was 5.8 years at the time of the interviews.	physical abuse. Refugees also discussed the absence of employment and housing opportunities, and the associated stress over finances. Refugees also discussed the lack of healthcare support with ongoing health issues and the multiple losses they have suffered moving countries, including a sense of safety, family, dignity, and freedom. Participants also discussed the psychological impact of these post-migration difficulties. The most common were worry, stress, fear, emotional pain, and anger.	discrimination as portrayed by refugees resettling in this area. - The sampling method and the recruitment from a refugee support centre may have limited the representative nature of the sample in South Africa. - The participants who accepted the invitation to share their stories may had the emotional and practical resources to take part in research. This means that certain stories may have been left unvoiced.
Mangrio, Carlson & Zdravkovic	Sweden	The exploration of the	The researchers conducted a	Total N: 24 refugee parents	Participants shared their anxieties and stress over their	+ The study provides a thorough exploration of family separation

(2020). Newly arrived refugee parents in Sweden and their experience of the resettlement process: A qualitative study.		resettlement experiences and process of adjustment in the host country among newly arrived refugee parents in Sweden.	qualitative study and collected data through interviews. They thematically analysed their data following Attride-Stirling's (2001) approach.	(% for males and females not stated by authors). Ethnic Background: Syria. Age: 21 to 65 years old. Length of stay: 2 months to 3 years at the time of the interview.	survival in the host country, mostly the feelings of uncertainty in relation to their temporary visas, and stable accommodation. Refugees also expressed their difficulties understanding the Swedish system and regulations, parenting expectations (i.e., discipline in the context of the new culture) and worries around their children's adjustment and trauma. Participants also shared their sadness over family separation and leaving their families in their home countries, while adjusting to a new culture. People shared worries about family members being in a state of war and something bad	and the impact of losing one's home on their quality of life. The urgency to remain with family members and the consideration of the themes emerging in this study can lead researchers to further explorations of the impact of family separation and post-migration processes. - The authors poorly report the characteristics of their sample. They signpost the reader to the table, without a clear explanation of their sample, and the demographics are presented in an unhelpful way (min/max) which does not provide a full

					happening to them. They also reported difficulty building a social network and adjusting to their social life.	picture of who was included in the study. - The interpretation and translation of Swedish during the interviews may have affected the information exchange and interpretation. - The sample was consisted of people with higher education compared to the average and this may not represent the experiences of resettlement after forced migration for most refugees.
Mangrio, Zdravkovic & Carlson (2019).	Sweden	The investigation of the resettlement	The researchers conducted a qualitative study	Total N: 11 refugee women.	Participants shared their emotional pain associated with family separation and leaving	+ The study highlights the emotional pain associated with family separation, bereavement,

Refugee women's experience of the resettlement process: A qualitative study.		experiences and the perceptions around active participation in the process of resettlement among refugee females living in Sweden.	and gathered data through interviews. They analysed the data with content analysis following the method by Burnard (2008).	Ethnic Background: The participant's ethnic background is not disclosed in the paper, but the authors state interviews were offered in Arabic to accommodate women from different cultural backgrounds. Age: 25 to 50 years old (median age= 34 years).	family members behind during war. Some expressed their worries about their families' safety and others expressed their grief over family members that have passed away. Women expressed feelings of loneliness away from home and family members, and social isolation from the host community. Women also discussed the challenge of balancing their physical and mental health in the host country and learning a new language. For some participants, the asylum process impacted further their mental health.	and uncertainty over reunification and over families' safety back home. This underlines the importance of exploring the impact further. + The findings can inform the approach of clinicians and organisations. Stakeholders can take into consideration the challenges and link refugees to resources, community, and support such as language courses, employment opportunities and other newly arrived refugees. - The use of Arabic translation may have led to power

				Length of stay: Not stated.		imbalances and meaning lost in translation. However, the authors consider the risk of translation minimal. - Most participants had higher education than average which may not be representative of most refugees resettling in Sweden. - The authors utilised a convenience sampling method, which may have limited the representativeness of their sample.
Jawasreh (2019). Exploration of the Quality of Life	Jordan	The exploration of the impact of displacement on	The researcher conducted a qualitative study	Total N: 17 refugee males.	Refugees disclosed multiple different daily stressors they face upon resettlement including the	+ The researcher shared the culture and language of the participants, which acted as a

and the Impact of Settlement Experiences of Adult Male Syrian Refugees Living in Jordan: Focusing on the Mental Health.		the quality of life and mental health among male Syrian refugees resettling in Jordan. A secondary objective was to identify the effectiveness of services and support this population received during their asylum process.	as part of their doctoral thesis and collected data via interviews. The data were thematically analysed as proposed by Bryman (2012) and Braun & Clarke (2006).	Ethnic Background: Syria. Other demographic characteristics of participants are not provided, such as their age and length of stay in the host country.	loss of home, profession, identity, and purpose in life. They described feeling powerless, isolated, and discriminated against. Participants shared their feelings of fear around their children's lives, education, and adjustment, as well as their worries about family back in Syria. People shared the difficulties of losing family members or leaving them behind and not being able to move on with their lives in the host country. However, people also talked about the poor access to services and the negative perceptions of mental illness within their community/culture	facilitator in building rapport and generating in-depth stories. - The researcher conducted the interviews without an interpreter and translated the transcripts accordingly. The researcher presented no barriers in understanding the meanings in people's stories, cultural perceptions, and transfer those in the English language. However, we know that despite best efforts, participant's narratives may have not been translated with precision. - The researcher does not provide demographic

					and the associated stigma. Lastly, refugees described having poor living conditions, living in poverty and with limited access to basic needs and services which impeded their mental health difficulties. Some also reflected on their experiences of trauma, war, and violence and how this affects them daily.	characteristics of participants; hence, it is difficult to identify the generalisability of the findings across refugee communities. - The findings are presented in a very confusing way to the reader. Although the author presents a thematic table, the report of the themes is poor. - This study is a doctoral thesis and is not a peer reviewed publication.
Rowley, Morant & Katona (2019). Refugees Who Have Experienced	United Kingdom	The examination of the experiences during the first	The researchers completed a qualitative study and collected data	Total N: 9 refugees (4 males, 5 females)	Participants shared feelings of abandonment and uncertainty in their transition period. Their interactions with both local	+ The authors developed a clear research question and objectives and highlighted the experiences of refugees in the transition

Extreme Cruelty: A Qualitative Study of Mental Health and Wellbeing after Being Granted Leave to Remain in the UK.		year after being granted leave to remain in the UK (known as 'transition period') among refugees that have experienced extreme cruelty. The authors focused on the impact of these experiences on refugees' mental health.	through interviews. The data were thematically analysed as proposed by Braun & Clarke (2006) with a phenomenological orientation towards participant's subjective lived experience.	Ethnic Background: Nigeria, Algeria, Albania, Mauritius, India, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Cameroon. Age: 20 to 59 years old. Length of stay: Up to 12 months after being granted Leave to Remain from the Home Office	services, housing/accommodation, and the public have been poor. Refugees experienced communication difficulties due to their language proficiency, and incidents of discrimination because of their refugee status. They disclosed feelings of sadness and anxiety, lack of social supportive networks (i.e., friends and family) and meaningful relationships, and increased loneliness. Most reported low self-esteem and confidence, feeling like a burden. Lastly, participants expressed financial difficulties and a sense of helplessness.	period after being granted leave to remain. + The authors captured reflexivity throughout the study, both in the development of the materials, and in the interpretation of data. + The findings highlighted the importance of stability in resettlement and provided further research implications to understand home, family structure and relationships, as well as loneliness in this group. - The sample may not be representative of the refugee

				('transition period').		population due to the lack of multiple channels of recruitment and demographics. - The researchers reflected on the shorter interviews with male refugees, which poses questions on the richness of their stories. However, this underlines the limited understanding of male experiences.
Saksena & McMorrow (2021). At the intersection of gender and discrimination: Experiences of	United States	The investigation of post-migration experiences, particularly wellbeing and integration stories, among	The researchers conducted a qualitative study and used photovoice as their technique to collect	Total N: 10 refugee women. Ethnic Background: Democratic	Women discussed various social and cultural difficulties they experienced resettling in the US. They shared the challenges of raising their children in America, both due to cultural tensions and racial biases (i.e., fear of policing	+ The authors used a qualitative longitudinal photovoice method, which has been shown to be an excellent research tool to amplify stories of marginalised groups, and empower people, especially women.

Congolese refugee women with social and cultural integration in the United States.		African female refugee women resettling in the US. The authors focused on the gendered and racial challenges of this population, through the lens of intersectionality.	participant's experiences. They thematically analysed the data, as suggested by Miles et al. (2020).	Republic of Congo. Age: 25 to 57 years old. Length of stay: 3 to 5 years at the completion of the study.	and perceptions of parenting/discipline). Refugee women also reported experiences of discrimination across settings (i.e., work, neighbourhood) and the xenophobic/racist political climate under the Trump government. Considering the importance of social connections, women also shared their feelings of loneliness and social isolation due to limited social networks in the host country.	+ The study managed to retain a high number of participants across the years of their longitudinal design. + The authors emphasised on the intersectionality between gender and race, which can have a significant impact on people's experiences. - The authors did not explore the researcher's biases or their approach to the topic. - The authors did not provide a critical appraisal of their

						methodology and the ways their findings may be limited. - The findings may be limited by selection bias, as the sample was purposefully recruited within a resettlement agency and most women may have only included participants who were 'well enough' to share their stories, as purposefully recruited by a research team member.
Sim, Puffer, Ahmad, Hammad & Georgiades (2023). Resettlement, mental health, and coping: a	Canada	The exploration of the post-migration stressors and their impact on individual and systemic mental	The researchers conducted a mixed-methods study and employed a survey to gather both quantitative	Total N: 40 refugees (16 males, 24 females). Ethnic Background:	Refugees shared daily resettlement stressors including difficulties with the English language and their communication with the host community, services, employers that affected their abilities to	+ The authors focused on an under-represented population of refugee parents and the post-migration difficulties of parenthood.

mixed methods survey with recently resettled refugee parents in Canada.		health among refugee parents resettling in Canada. The secondary objective was to identify refugee parents' coping strategies. The authors examined these objectives through the lens of family systems and social determinants of health frameworks.	and qualitative data. The qualitative data were thematically analysed using an inductive approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006).	Syria, Iraq, and Sudan. Most of the participants were Syrian. Age: Mean age 43.3 years old. Length of stay: 3 to 5 years in Canada at the time of the interviews. 55% of participants arrived in 2018–2019, while the rest arrived in 2020–2021.	complete their responsibilities. People also discussed the worries related to financial hardship and pressure to take care of family members, the lack of governmental support and available affordable housing. Refugee parents felt distressed, helpless, and hopeless. They discussed past experiences of trauma and how these affect their day-to-day life and caring for children, family separation (i.e., single parents), and the high demands in caring responsibilities. Parents felt an increased sense of isolation and loneliness.	+ Clinical implications for mental health practitioners to invite perspectives of family members and utilise the support network (i.e., family) during treatment. - The study took place during the covid-19 pandemic; therefore, the findings may be limited in the context of the challenges the pandemic developed. - Most participants were from Syria, so the findings may not be applicable to parents from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

Sundvall, Titelman, DeMarinis, Borisova & Çetrez (2020). Safe but isolated – an interview study with Iraqi refugees in Sweden about social networks, social support, and mental health.	Sweden	The exploration of the experiences of social integration and social network support and the impact on mental health and wellbeing among Iraqi refugees resettling in Sweden.	The authors conducted a qualitative study and used interviews and a 'biographical network map' to collect data. The data were analysed using thematic content analysis, the authors do not specify a framework.	Total N: 31 refugees (17 males, 14 females). Ethnic Background: Iraq. Age: 23 to 71 years old (median age=48). Length of stay: 2 to 13 years in Sweden at the time of the interviews (median length of stay=5 years).	Refugees discussed the lack of social support and networks in Sweden due to family separation, and loss of their social circles due to migration. People also shared a difficulty in building a wider network of connections and developing meaningful relationships. Some discussed the emotional pain associated with unsuccessful family reunification and deaths in the family. Refugees shared experiences of cultural tensions and intergenerational conflicts in the family due to gender and parenting roles changing in the host country. Participants also disclosed experiences of negative	+ The findings showcase the impact of social isolation and family separation, alongside the importance of social networks during resettlement in the host country. + The sample size for the qualitative study was substantial compared to the average qualitative studies. Therefore, the authors provided an extensive exploration and richness of the topic under examination. - The authors do not offer a clear rationale for their focus on Iraqi refugees, whilst it would be

					contacts with authorities, discrimination and difficulties accessing accommodation or employment. Lastly, people described feeling a cultural dissonance and difficulties with the acculturation process and religious/cultural belongingness.	important for their readers to understand their decision-making and inclusion/exclusion criteria. - The analysis and interpretation of the data was conducted by one of the researchers, whilst they do not state if reflexivity and discussion with colleagues was part of their process.
Tonui & Mitschke (2022). "We still keep our culture to stay alive": acculturation and adaptation among resettled young	United States	The examination of the acculturation process and the development of a cultural identity among young refugees from	The researchers conducted a qualitative study and used interviews to gather participant's perspectives. The	Total N: 14 refugees (7 males, 7 females). Ethnic Background: Burma/Myanmar.	Participants expressed a sense of obligation and commitment towards supporting family members back home (i.e., financially), especially those who resettled independently. Refugees described their life during resettlement did not feel	+ The study focused on a sample of adult refugees who arrived in the host country as children or adolescents, giving a different lens into the resettlement experiences compared to other studies focusing on newly arrived refugees.

adult refugees from Burma.		Burma/Myanmar during their resettlement in the US.	data were thematically analysed, but do not specify the framework they follow.	Age: 18 to 29 years old (M=22.5, SD=4.18). Length of stay: 5 to 12 years in the US at the time of the interviews (M=7.9, SD=1.85).	better compared to their previous life, and their sense of freedom in the refugee camp was diminished. Participants also discussed significant changes in gender and cultural roles within the refugee camp (i.e., female freedom/rights). The biggest common difficulty refugees experienced was learning and using English language upon their resettlement.	+ The findings of the study highlight the need for support to increase family and community cohesiveness among refuges and facilitate integration in the host country. - The participants were all refugees from Burma, representing a specific ethnic group, the Karen community. Thus, refugees from different groups may not be represented here. - The sample size was small to offer generalisable findings, and

						participants had differences in their length of stay and age.
Tsegay (2021). Hope Springs Eternal: Exploring the Early Settlement Experiences of Highly Educated Eritrean Refugees in the UK.	United Kingdom	The examination of the early post-migration experiences among highly educated Eritrean refugees living in the UK.	The researcher conducted a qualitative study and gathered participant's experiences through interviews. The data were thematically analysed using Braun & Clarke (2006) approach.	Total N: 24 refugees (15 males, 9 females) Ethnic Background: Eritrea. Age: 30 to 50 years old. Length of stay: 2 to 10 years in the UK, with the majority being in the UK for 8 to 10 years.	Participants named their experiences of feeling humiliated, socially excluded, and powerless when seeking asylum in the host country. They described the asylum process as difficult, fearful and stress-provoking, and felt afraid due to the discriminatory narratives around refugees and 'illegal migration'. Refugees felt unwelcomed and shared feelings of uncertainty and fear, and a lack of safety. Their fear did not dissolve upon the receipt of leave to remain. Participants also described feelings of loneliness and	+ The study highlights the post-migration difficulties highly educated refugees may face in their host country, which provides implications for changes in policy and employment support. + Although the study has been conducted in the UK, it's important to underline that many countries accept an increasing number of refugees, and the study can offer helpful lessons helpful to facilitate integration.

					marginalisation during resettlement, whilst family separation and the loss of home intensified their experiences. They identified barriers to reuniting with their families/social networks and connecting with others, such as travel, finances, and restrictions due to their refugee status.	- The study explores the experiences of early resettlement; however, most of the sample has been residing for 8-10 years in the country. Therefore, recall bias may limit the accuracy of the memories and the number of experiences people shared.
Vitale & Ryde (2016). Promoting male refugees' mental health after they have been granted leave to remain (refugee status).	United Kingdom	The exploration of the post-migration challenges male refugees face in the UK upon the receipt of their Leave to Remain status.	The researcher conducted a qualitative study and gathered participant's experiences through interviews. The data were	Total N: 9 refugee males Ethnic Background: Middle East and Africa.	Participants shared the difficulties faced with the asylum process and detention in the host countries, which exaggerated their feelings of distress, uncertainty, and disempowerment. Refugees described their resettling process and detention as 're-	+ The researchers reflect on their social constructionist epistemological stance towards the topic and the interviews, which helps the reader to understand the approach the study was conducted, and how the findings were interpreted.

			thematically analysed but did not specify which framework was followed.	Age: 29 to 62 years old. Length of stay: The authors state that the participants spent six months to 3.5 years as an asylum seeker and their time granted Leave to Remain ranged from five months to two years.	traumatisation' and considered how the effects of their past traumas. They expressed barriers to accessing crucial information associated with resettlement, mental health care, housing, employment, and financial support to survive in the host country. People described difficulty in forming romantic relationships due to their poor living conditions.	+ The findings offer practical implications for frontline practitioners, including signposting to training, communities, and employment during the early stages of resettlement, as well as the need for integrative care provision. - The qualitative methodology allowed the researchers to explore in-depth the lived experience of refugees, however the themes in the paper can be perceived as under-developed due to lack of depth. - The researchers do not report their own biases and

						assumptions towards the interpretation of the data.
von Haumeder, Ghafoori & Retailleau (2019). Psychological adaptation and posttraumatic stress disorder among Syrian refugees in Germany: a mixed-methods study investigating environmental factors.	Germany	The understanding of the psychological adaptation in the host country and the experiences of post-traumatic stress disorder among Syrian refugees living in Germany. The authors aimed to build their understanding of risk and protective	The authors conducted a mixed-methods study and collected qualitative data through in-depth interviews. They analysed the data using thematic analysis framework, known as 'Coding Consensus, Co-occurrence, and Comparison' as outlined by	Total N: 10 refugees. No demographic characteristics are stated by the authors for the subsample that contributed with in-depth interviews of the mixed-methods study. However, the authors state that the mean age of the whole sample is 18 to 67	Participants expressed their worries for their families' safety and family separation, but also their concerns about family reunification with parents worrying about their children's future (i.e., safety and life free from war). Participants described the asylum-seeking process as their source of distress, uncertainty, fear, and hopelessness. Most reported experiences of being stereotyped, particularly due to their identity as Muslims, and discrimination which perpetuated their hardships and socioeconomic	+ The findings highlight the impact of family separation and concerns around family reunification in the host country (i.e., family safety, worries about children's future in war-affected countries). + The study brings insight into priorities for consideration in clinical work with refugees, including access to basic needs, training in the host country language, and links to community and social integration (i.e., family reunification).

		associated factors.	Willms et al. (1992). This approach is rooted in grounded theory.	years old, and the participants were predominantly male.	living conditions. All refugees stated that language and verbal adaptation to the host country has been a challenge across settings and contributed to their social exclusion in society.	- The authors state that in their mixed methods study there was no overlap between the participants in the quantitative elements and those in the qualitative interviews. However, they do not provide any demographic information of the qualitative sample. This limits the understanding of the reader about the applicability of the findings and is contradictory to the statement that the sample was predominantly male and between 18-67 years old.
Vromans, Schweitzer, Farrell, Correa-	Australia	The exploration of the lived experiences	The researchers conducted a qualitative study	Total N: 10 refugee females.	Participants discussed their experiences of loneliness and feeling alone in a completely	+ The authors inform their approach by feminist and intersectionality theoretical

Velez, Brough, Murray & Lenette (2018). 'Her cry is my cry': resettlement experiences of refugee women at risk recently resettled in Australia.		of newly arrived resettled refugee females ('women at risk') in Australia.	and collected data through focus groups. They analysed their data using a framework approach for qualitative data as proposed by Richie & Spencer (1994).	Ethnic Background: Afghanistan, Congo, Eritrea, Rwanda, and South Sudan. Age: 22 to 53 years old (mean age: 37.5 years). Length of stay: 16 to 40 months since arrival to Australia at the time of the interview.	unfamiliar society and new cultural customs. Refugees described loss of culture and family, due to distance (i.e., family separation) or grief and the added impact on their feelings of belonginess. Family separation came with worries of the hardships faced by their community back home, and powerlessness. Participants stated they were overwhelmed with the process of resettlement and practical responsibilities to strive towards independence and personal agency. People shared their distress and their difficulties in seeking help, housing, and financial stability.	frameworks, which centralises women's experiences in a cultural-informed way. + The researchers provide a thorough discussion on the process of analysis and interpretation of the findings, leading to the conclusion of validity and methodological rigor. + The findings can inform policies and support for women at risk in consideration of their intersectional identities. - The author's evidence quotes primarily from participant 1,

						which poses a question about the cohesion and group dynamics, as well as the focus group process in the data collection. - The reporting of findings often lacks an extended exploration of the concepts presented, which may limit the clarity of applicable implications. However, this limitation may enhance opportunities for further tailored research (i.e., loneliness, separation, and experiences of discrimination).
Ziersch, Miller, Baak & Mwanri (2020). Integration and	Australia	The investigation of the resettlement experiences in	The authors conducted a qualitative study and gathered	Total N: 44 refugees (22 males, 22 females).	Participants discussed their experiences of 'disrupted' sense of safety and belonging during resettlement. They reported	+ The researchers collaborated with community leaders and recruited a representative sample through snowballing

social determinants of health and wellbeing for people from refugee backgrounds resettled in a rural town in South Australia: a qualitative study.		rural areas of Australia in refugee populations. The authors aimed to understand the association between the integrating to a new country and overall wellbeing.	people's experiences through in-depth interviews. They thematically analysed the data drawing on grounded theory as indicated in Strauss & Corbin (1997) and Ritchie & Spencer (1994).	Ethnic Background: Burma/Myanmar and Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Age: 18 to 68 years old. Length of stay: Less than 10 years in Australia at the time of the interviews.	incidents of discrimination and racism in the host society, and the associated limitations of these experiences in their daily life, employment, and access to resources. Structural racism at the workplace had direct implications for refugees who were often worried about finding paid work and supporting their families financially. Refugees talked about their deteriorated mental and physical health since their arrival, and the difficulties of feeling integrated into the community, such as little support, loss of culture, loss of social networks, English language fluency and restrictions	sampling. The absence of gatekeeping was seen as a strength and provided the opportunity to recruit a diverse sample of refugees. + The interviews allowed people who may not have been in contact with support services to share their stories and benefit from their participation. - The research focused on a small area in Australia and was not extended to the regional community. This may have limited insights to the wider experiences of resettlement that may not be area specific.

					due to finances or migration status.	- The participants were from a rural area with specific local opportunities and living conditions. Thus, the findings may not be applicable to other rural areas or populations in urban areas.

Quality of the studies

The evaluation of all included studies indicated a moderate to high quality rating (Table 8). Most authors presented a thorough literature review and illuminated gaps in refugee research, such as the wellbeing of Syrian displaced communities (Asmal-Lee et al., 2022; Darawsheh et al., 2022; Jawasreh, 2019; von Haumeder et al., 2019), social integration of refugees in rural settings or countries with a low flow of displaced people (Kristjánsdóttir & Skaptadóttir, 2019; Ziersch et al., 2020), cultural adaptation in the host countries (Asmal-Lee et al., 2022; Hebbani et al., 2012; Tonui & Mitschke, 2022), and racism/discrimination (Golembe et al., 2021; Saksena & McMorrow, 2021). Thorough background information helped researchers define meaningful research questions that could inform research, policy, and practice.

Most researchers collaborated with organisations who acted as gatekeepers (King et al., 2017; Labys et al., 2017; Rowley et al., 2020; Sundvall et al., 2021; Vitale & Ryde, 2016; Vromans et al., 2018), local leaders, churches and communities (Gangamma, 2018; Gautam et al., 2018; Gebresilassie et al., 2022; Mangrio et al., 2019; Ziersch et al., 2020). The studies' recruitment strategies may have fostered trust and connection between researchers/refugees, enhanced access to marginalised populations (Eide & Allen, 2005) and improved representation (Turin et al., 2022). Qualitative research may evoke strong emotional reactions in participants (Wassenaar & Mamotte, 2012), therefore, gatekeepers could minimise plausible risks and safeguard participants against psychological harm or re-traumatisation (Singh & Wassenaar, 2016). Nonetheless, samples may have mostly represented refugees who accessed tailored support and/or were not considered vulnerable; a decision that may not examine the complexity of vulnerability, often amplified by cultural

influences and societal disempowerment (Dehghan & Wilson, 2019; Mackenzie et al., 2007). Likewise, the sample's homogeneity in ethnicity and religion may have captured the lived experience of a particular refugee community, while simultaneously limiting the applicability of findings across refugee populations (Bletscher & Spiers, 2023; King et al., 2017; Saksena & McMorrow, 2021; Tonui & Mitschke, 2022; Tsegay, 2022) requiring further explorations of the post-migration difficulties with more heterogeneous samples.

In most cases, researchers adopted appropriate methodological approaches for the scope and population of their studies, providing a clear rationale that adhered to their chosen epistemological stance (Asmal-Lee et al., 2022; Bletscher & Spiers, 2023; Gangamma, 2018; Rowley et al., 2020; Vromans et al., 2018). Studies had sample sizes appropriate for qualitative approaches, with IPA research reporting a smaller number of participants (Asmal-Lee et al., 2022; Darawsheh et al., 2022; Gangamma, 2018). This can be explained by the extensive focus on the subjective experience and interpretation of individual and collective stories (Smith et al., 2022). Contrastingly, studies using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) had large samples to uncover mutual experiences across the dataset (i.e., Dako-Gyeke & Adu, 2017; Rowley et al., 2020; Tsegay, 2022). Some researchers helpfully presented theories, including feminism, social justice and intersectionality, that informed their research projects from inception to execution (i.e., Golembe et al., 2021; Saksena & McMorrow, 2021; Vitale & Ryde, 2016; Vromans et al., 2018). The epistemological stance was considered a methodological strength, driving researchers to conduct participatory action research (King et al., 2017; Saksena & McMorrow, 2021). A significant limitation across almost half of the studies (N=14) was the lack of reporting on positionality and reflexivity on researchers' biases and researcher-participant relationships (i.e., Abur & Mphande, 2020; Correa-Velez et al., 2013;

Labys et al., 2017; Mangrio et al., 2020; Sim et al., 2023). This limited transparency and may have compromised the findings' reliability and validity (Katsampa et al., 2023).

Certain studies presented difficulties in capturing ethical considerations (Abur & Mphande, 2020; Hebbani et al., 2012; King et al., 2017; von Haumeder et al., 2019). Most authors considered informed consent and data anonymisation but did not examine the vulnerability of participants and associated risks, or discuss safeguarding procedures (i.e., Darawsheh et al., 2022; King et al., 2017; Mangrio et al., 2020). Moreover, two studies did not include an ethical approval statement (Hebbani et al., 2012; von Haumeder et al., 2019), which poses questions on whether the researchers complied with the principles of best research practice (Mackenzie et al., 2007). Overall, it would have been valuable for researchers to discuss their approach to mitigate risks for participants'/researchers' wellbeing to facilitate the readers' understanding.

With a few exceptions, most studies presented well-developed themes and clear statements of their findings. Researchers highlighted stories of loss (e.g., Labys et al., 2017; Mangrio et al., 2020; Sundvall et al., 2021) and the absence of safe and steady lives (e.g., Tonui & Mitschke, 2022; Tsegay, 2022; Ziersch et al., 2020). Nonetheless, some studies could have reported emerging themes more coherently (Abur & Mphande, 2020; Jawasreh, 2019), whilst others could have painted further developed themes (Vromans et al., 2018). Despite the limitations across studies, the findings elucidate the lived experience of resettlement and integration following forced displacement. Examples of detailed quality appraisals are presented in Appendix 2.

Table 8

Quality Appraisal of Included Studies Using the Critical Appraisal Programme Tool (CASP) Qualitative Checklist

Study	Clear Aims	Appropriate Qualitative Method	Appropriate Research Design	Appropriate Recruitment Strategy	Appropriate Data Collection	Researcher-Participant Relationship	Consideration of Ethical Issues	Rigorous Data Analysis	Clear Statement of Findings	Overall Value	Rating
Abur & Mphande (2019)	√	√	√	X	√	X	√	?	X	√	Moderate (6/10)
Asmal-Lee et al.(2022)	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	High (10/10)
Bletscher & Spiers (2023)	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	High (10/10)
Correa-Velez et al. (2013)	√	√	X	√	√	?	√	?	√	√	Moderate (7/10)
Dako-Gyeke & Adu (2017)	√	√	√	√	√	?	√	?	√	√	High (8/10)
Darawsheh et al. (2022)	√	√	√	√	√	?	√	√	√	√	High (9/10)
Gangamma (2018)	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	High (10/10)
Gautam et al. (2018)	√	√	√	√	√	?	√	√	√	√	High (9/10)

Gebresilassie et al. (2022)	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	?	√	√	High (9/10)
Golembe et al. (2021)	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	High (10/10)
Hebbani et al. (2012)	√	√	√	√	√	√	?	√	√	√	High (9/10)
King et al. (2017)	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	High (10/10)
Kristjánsdóttir & Skaptadóttir (2019)	√	√	√	?	√	?	√	√	√	√	High (8/10)
Labys et al. (2017)	√	√	√	√	√	?	√	√	√	√	High (9/10)
Mangrio et al. (2020)	√	√	√	√	√	?	√	√	√	√	High (9/10)
Mangrio et al. (2019)	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	High (10/10)
Jawasreh (2019)	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	X	√	High (9/10)
Rowley et al. (2020)	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	High (10/10)
Saksena & McMorrow (2021)	√	√	√	√	√	?	√	√	√	√	High (9/10)
Sim et al. (2023)	√	√	√	√	√	?	√	√	√	√	High (9/10)
Sundvall et al. (2021)	√	√	√	?	?	X	?	√	√	√	Moderate (6/10)

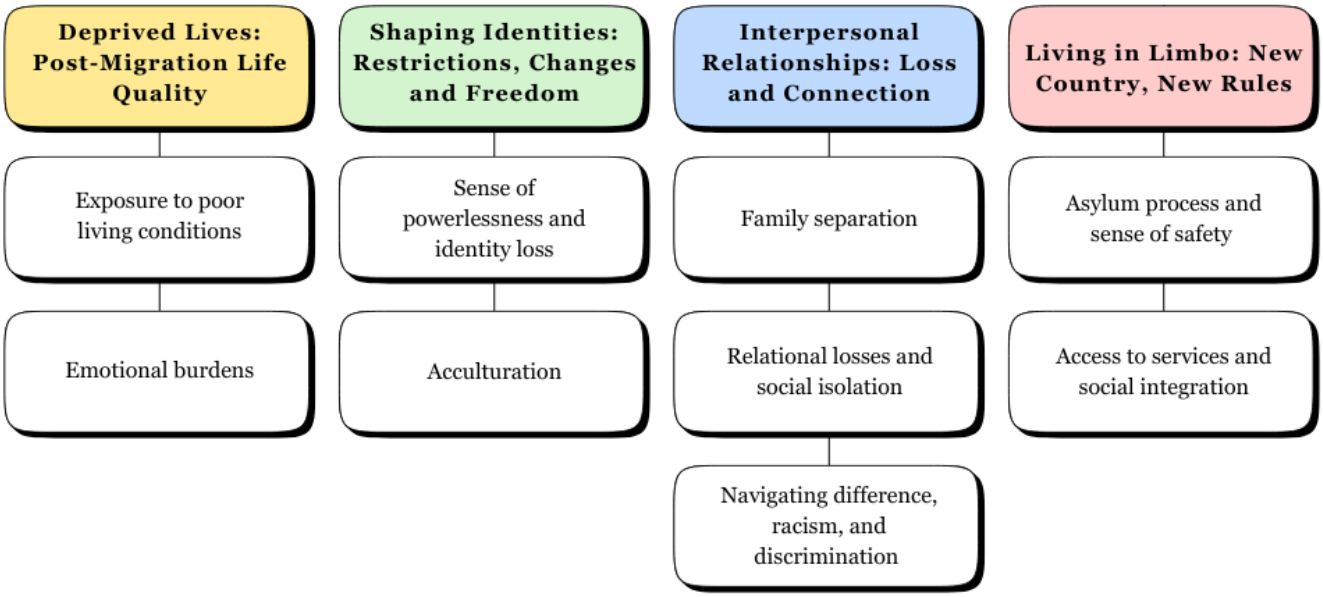
Tonui & Mitschke (2022)	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	High (10/10)
Tsegay (2022)	√	√	√	√	√	?	√	√	√	√	High (9/10)
Vitale & Ryde (2016)	√	√	√	√	?	√	?	X	√	√	Moderate (7/10)
von Haumeder et al. (2019)	√	√	√	√	√	?	?	√	√	√	High (8/10)
Vromans et al. (2018)	√	√	√	√	√	X	√	?	X	√	Moderate (7/10)
Ziersch et al. (2020)	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	High (10/10)

Thematic synthesis

Four main themes with subthemes were identified following the thematic synthesis, as presented in Figure 4. Supplementary materials include the recurrence of subthemes across studies (Appendix 3).

Figure 4

SLR Thematic Map



Deprived Lives: Post-Migration Life Quality

Exposure to poor living conditions

The poor living conditions refugees experience following forced displacement were highlighted in 20 studies. Striving to meet basic needs was considered by participants a result of limited available public resources, lack of governmental support and access to benefits (e.g., Gangamma, 2018; Tonui & Mitschke, 2022; Vitale & Ryde, 2016). In the absence of "home", participants discussed the difficulties of securing food and shelter in the host countries (Mangrio et al., 2020; Tsegay, 2022; Ziersch et al., 2020) and the uncertainty of temporary accommodation and access to housing (e.g., King et al., 2017; Saksena & McMorrow, 2021; Sim et al., 2023; von Haumeder et al., 2019; Vromans et al., 2018). Reflecting on early resettlement, a refugee in Darawsheh et al. (2022; p.61) shared:

> *"The beginning of resettlement was like going through red death. Life here was really difficult, adding to that the experience of alienation from home."*

Abur & Mphande (2020) illustrated the difficulties of newly arrived refugee families in finding affordable, spacious and safe accommodation often resulting in a poorer resettlement experience (Sim et al., 2023). Similarly, some studies associated the troubling situation of housing with a lack of employment opportunities, low income and poverty (King et al., 2017; Labys et al., 2017), perceived discrimination and family size (Ziersch et al., 2020). Accommodation challenges were associated with further negative experiences, as discussed in Rowley et al. (2019), including constant feelings of instability and uncertainty, poor physical hygiene, eating habits

and exacerbated physical health problems, hypervigilance, post-traumatic stress, and embodied presentations of mental distress (i.e., psychosomatic symptoms). A female participant shared:

> *"One of the women, she was next to my room, she had like drug dealer I think – she was drug dealer. So sometimes the police come and knock the door [hard], so that makes me panic attack all the time"* (p.365)

Participants in refugee camps faced further living difficulties such as limited access to water and electricity, extreme weather events, inability to self-protect from hazards to health, and a sense of imprisonment (Jawasreh, 2019) . A male refugee recalled the lack of freedom of movement (Tonui & Mitschke, 2022, p.127):

> *"…sometimes I want to go somewhere, like I want to go to different place. Sometimes I want to go back to my country. I can't go back… You have to stay in the camp."*

Moreover, studies reported on negative events influencing the living conditions of refugees, such as exploitation from local people and landlords (Labys et al., 2017) and incidents of eviction (Saksena & McMorrow, 2021). A female in Saksena & McMorrow's study (2021; p.5) was asked to "*get a hell out of our house"* and was told *"we don't need you anymore"* when her family was evicted without support to find alternative housing. Refugees disclosed such fears, alongside the impacts of poor living conditions, poverty and unstable housing on their wellbeing (e.g., Abur & Mphande, 2020; Asmal-Lee et al., 2022; Rowley et al., 2020). Lastly, participants also mentioned witnessing or falling victim to criminal activities,

gender-based or religion-based assaults (Dako-Gyeke & Adu, 2017; Kristjánsdóttir & Skaptadóttir, 2019), violence and exploitation (Jawasreh, 2019) that threatened their sense of safety and emotional stability (Labys et al., 2017).

Emotional burdens

The mental health impact of resettlement was explored in 25 studies. Studies reported increased mental health challenges, such as depression (Asmal-Lee et al., 2022; Sundvall et al., 2021), feelings of emptiness and hopelessness (Gebresilassie et al., 2022; Golembe et al., 2021), post-traumatic stress (PTSD) and ongoing trauma (Abur & Mphande, 2020; Darawsheh et al., 2022; Rowley et al., 2020; Vitale & Ryde, 2016), worries about work, life, and family (Hebbani et al., 2012; King et al., 2017; Vromans et al., 2018; Ziersch et al., 2020) and suicidal feelings (Labys et al., 2017; Sundvall et al., 2021).

Participants described the emotional effort to start their lives over which led to feelings of frustration, sadness and inadequacy (Asmal-Lee et al., 2022):

> *"I feel bad. Very, very, very bad. But sometimes I end up crying. You know sometimes I think this world is not… I think about the world in general. Is it really worth living, you know?"* (Rowley et al., 2020, p.365).

Mental distress was presented as an array of cognitive, physical and emotional reactions (Labys et al., 2017), whilst depression co-existed with PTSD, worthlessness and hopelessness, as one highlighted *"…you are traumatised, you are demoralised. You become ill from your thoughts"* (p.705). Participants who reported trauma and low mood, particularly men, also reported suicidal thoughts and were at higher risk of suicide (Sundvall et al., 2021). Participants described emotions showing up as pain

in the body, for example having a "*pierced heart*" (Labys et al., 2017, p.704), while others discussed repressed trauma appearing in their body as psychosomatic symptoms (Rowley et al., 2019). In some cases, participants also highlighted the impact of their mental health suffering on their physical health (e.g., Darawsheh et al., 2022; Mangrio et al., 2019; Sim et al., 2023). They reported the aggravation of certain conditions such as blood pressure, headaches, gynaecological difficulties and eating behaviours.

Refugees reflected on their overall poor mental health and reported feeling stressed, angry and dissatisfied with their life circumstances (Abur & Mphande, 2020; Golembe et al., 2021; Jawasreh, 2019) and the adversities they faced (Sim et al., 2023; Vromans et al., 2018). Participants felt misunderstood and overlooked by host societies, which led to increased stress (e.g., Asmal-Lee et al., 2022; Bletscher & Spiers, 2023; Golembe et al., 2021). Early stages of resettlement were described in Gebresilassie et al. (2022) as "*distressing, shocking, and stressful"* (p.5) which may have prolonged worries about the future and hopelessness: *"I can't see my future as the situation is foggy"* (Jawaseh, 2019; p.239). Golembe et al. (2021) emphasised the psychological burdens of post-migration, with some participants reporting deteriorated mental health compared to pre-migration periods: *"It is here we started to suffer"* (p.1055).

Experiences of trauma and PTSD were documented in 16 studies. Refugees discussed past traumatic events as witnesses or victims that preoccupied their minds, such as violence, war, human trafficking, torture, or migration journeys through deadly passages across the ocean (Darawsheh et al., 2022; Gangamma, 2018; Mangrio et al., 2020; Sundvall et al., 2021; Vitale & Ryde, 2016). Others discussed ongoing exposure to trauma in their host countries, which was summarised by one participant as "*Life is tragic and [our] souls are tired.*" (Jawaseh, 2019; p.243).

Studies highlighted the dehumanising conditions and sense of confinement in refugee camps or temporary accommodations (Abur & Mphande, 2020; Kristjánsdóttir & Skaptadóttir, 2019; Rowley et al., 2020; Sim et al., 2023; Tonui & Mitschke, 2022) and events that felt re-traumatising, bringing up memories from the past:

> *"I moved from that house [...] I couldn't even sleep [...] It just brought to my mind the times where we had like security coming in and trying to break into the house [...] It was in the first year of my being in the UK and you know having like triggered like previous bad experiences wasn't helpful."* (Asmal-Lee et al., 2022; p.660).

Employment-related stress and anxiety around financial independence were documented across 22 studies. Refugees worried about financial hardships and limited employment opportunities in the host countries, which consequently affected other life responsibilities, such as affording rent and supporting their families (e.g., Asmal-Lee et al., 2022; King et al., 2017; Mangrio et al., 2019). Tsegay (2021) underlined participants' worries about the recognition and appreciation of professional qualifications in the UK and the lack of career prospects. Moreover, worries appeared in other aspects of refugees' lives, such as childbearing responsibilities and families' futures. For example, research involving parents documented their anxiety about their children's education, cultural values and future (Gangamma, 2018; Hebbani et al., 2012; Jawasreh, 2019). Contrastingly, some participants expressed worries about their parenting style, which may be conceptualised as harmful in Westernised societies, and the involvement of social services (King et al., 2017; Saksena & McMorrow, 2021). Many participants agonised

about their children, recognising the level of their suffering or the trauma they have been exposed to (Gangamma, 2018; Mangrio et al., 2020).

Shaping Identities: Restrictions, Changes and Freedom

Sense of powerlessness and identity loss

In 22 studies, participants explored the way their refugee identity may have contributed to feeling disempowered to act independently, make decisions about themselves and be in control of their lives. In Asmal-Lee et al. (2022), refugees found it difficult to accept the powerlessness and lack of agency that accompanied their new beginning. Refugees considered the dependence on benefits, government and specialist organisations disenfranchising and described a lack of dignity and choice (Darawsheh et al., 2022; Rowley et al., 2020; Vitale & Ryde, 2016). In Labys et al. (2017; p.705) a man noted:

> *"I don't understand where I am going… because I do nothing here. There is no change. I'm like a child here; they treat me like a child."*

Participants felt quite overwhelmed with the responsibilities in the host countries, and the magnitude of bureaucratic tasks required to apply for asylum and find suitable accommodation, as well as seek practical information and funds to survive (e.g., Tsegay, 2022; Vromans et al., 2018). This led to feelings of worthlessness, incapability, and decreased self-esteem. Furthermore, some participants acknowledged their powerlessness to self-advocate in instances of discrimination, humiliation and exploitation (Abur & Mphande, 2020; Correa-Velez et al., 2013; Golembe et al., 2021; Jawasreh, 2019).

The loss of identity and the changes refugees faced in relation to their cultural identity and gender roles further increased feelings of disempowerment. Participants shared their struggles with losing their community roles, socioeconomic status and professional identities; particularly men (Abur & Mphande, 2020; Gangamma, 2018; Hebbani et al., 2012; Ziersch et al., 2020). For instance, participants in Tsegay (2021) had considerable professional experiences and university degrees not recognised in the UK, while Gebresilassie et al. (2022; p.8) underlined the devastating loss of past accomplishments and credentials during displacement: *"I only had the clothes on my back and a small bag on my hand. I had no educational or vocational papers from home, and there was no way to get it because of the political situation."*

Male refugees often held beliefs about their role as a breadwinner and head of the family. Feeling unable to provide and protect their families from hardship increased feelings of failure and powerlessness (Hebbani et al., 2012; Jawasreh, 2019; von Haumeder et al., 2019). The shifts in gender roles between family members were challenging for both males and females, however, in some cases patriarchal beliefs remained in place as understood within the cultural framework of the family (Gangamma, 2018; Gebresilassie et al., 2022; Sundvall et al., 2021). Nevertheless, women refugees, particularly from Muslim backgrounds, embraced their new freedoms and felt empowered to be liberal, access education and employment, share household responsibilities with men and hold active roles outside of the family (Asmal-Lee et al., 2022; Gangamma, 2018). A female reflected on the differences in women's human rights between her country of origin and host country (Kristjánsdóttir & Skaptadóttir, 2019, p.398):

> *"We say that the woman is half of the society. We are good at saying things but not living it, that is for sure. We don't have any equality in our country… we don't have any rights, there is nothing for women in our countries… in Iceland a woman can lead the country while a woman in our country cannot lead a school."*

Acculturation

The process of assimilating into the new dominant culture, while holding on to their cultural values was expressed by participants in 17 studies. Refugees experienced multi-faceted cultural losses following displacement and had to adapt to a foreign and unfamiliar cultural mindset (e.g., Abur & Mphande, 2020; Sundvall et al., 2021; Vromans et al., 2018). Cultural change and loss of deep connections to customs/traditions significantly impacted refugee families, who reported intergenerational conflicts between younger and older generations (e.g., King et al., 2017; Saksena & McMorrow, 2021). This was described as "*generation loss*" (Gebresilassie et al., 2022; p.8) due to cultural and national preservation challenges.

> *"I am concerned about the small children… they do not obey their parents… back home parents patpit lagauthe (beat) [their children] a little to threaten the kids… the teachers at school punished the kids to bend down on their knees over pebble stone surface for 2-3 hours… those techniques cannot be used here… there is no means of pressure to behave these kids."* (Gautam et al., 2017; p.167)

The cultural differences appeared to be perplexing, unsettling, and concerning; a 'cultural shock' for most participants from community-oriented

countries (King et al., 2017; Gebresilassie et al., 2022; Hebbani et al., 2012). For some women, enacting their freedoms felt like a betrayal of their culture (Asmal-Lee et al., 2022; p.662), creating more dissonance and potentially delaying the cultural transition in the host country. Participants experienced the internal conflict of belongingness and difference, while confronted by unfamiliar surroundings, religious customs and societal views (Mangrio et al., 2020; Saksena & McMorrow, 2021; Sundvall et al., 2021).

Interpersonal Relationships: Loss and Connection

Family separation

'Family breakdown' was considered one of the biggest post-migration challenges (Abur & Mphande, 2020). The psycho-social impact of family separation was evident across 21 studies. Participants discussed the loss of family and home, but also the consequences of being globally scattered, leading to feeling disconnected and fragmented (e.g., Bletscher & Spiers, 2023; Dako-Gyeke & Adu, 2017; Gautam et al., 2018), or completely losing contact (Gebresilassie et al., 2022). Leaving families behind signified the loss of communal, practical and emotional support (e.g., Sim et al., 2023; Sundvall et al., 2021) which played a crucial role in experiencing resettlement more positively, as someone described "*there's nothing left for me*" (Labys et al., 2017, p.705). Refugees expressed missing their loved ones and feeling lonely (eg., Tsegay, 2022; Vromans et al., 2018). For example, a Syrian refugee resettling in Sweden, experienced an emotional gap without her family by her side (Mangrio et al., 2019, p.3):

> *"Since I missed my parents and my sisters and brothers when I came to Sweden, you feel like there is something in your life lacking."*

Gautam et al. (2018) demonstrated sadness associated with missing important family events, such as births, ceremonies, and funerals, which provides more context into the refugee experience of feeling "lost between" two worlds (Asmal-Lee et al., 2022). Following forced displacement from politically unstable or at-war countries, refugees with families left behind expressed worries about their safety and continuous suffering. Syrians spoke about the civil war and their unconscious preparedness that something bad would happen to their loved ones (Mangrio et al., 2020), which consequently affected their ability to move forward (von Haumeder et al., 2019, p.7):

> *"In the beginning here in Germany everything was pretty horrible. I was a bit pessimistic… I was always worried about my family in Syria, maybe they die today or tomorrow or something happens to them. I was completely desperate…"*

Refugees' narratives highlighted their difficulty in coping alone with loss and grief following the bereavement of family members. For example, a man discussed losing his family during their migration journey and the difficulties of navigating resettlement on his own, while others struggled with family losses during the war (Mangrio et al., 2020). The uncertainty of family reunification and its time-consuming nature was an important stress factor (Mangrio et al., 2020; von Haumeder et al., 2019). Some participants reported negative experiences with family reunion processes, such as failure to reunite (Sundvall et al., 2021), completely losing families' whereabouts or barriers due to government policies (King et al., 2017; p.355): *"the Canadian system appears to be family unfriendly"*.

> *"…Separation is a problem. I miss them all the time and they keep worrying about us, and we keep worrying about them. I do not know why the policies are making things difficult for Syrian refugees to be united with their family members."* (Darawsheh et al., 2022, p.599)

Lastly, family separation was considered a stressor due to participants' inability to financially support their families, which in certain cultures was conceptualised as an expectation or "obligation" (Tonui, 2022; von Haumeder et al., 2019).

Relational losses and social isolation

The loss of meaningful relationships and community, alongside social isolation was noted in 25 studies. Particularly, refugees missed close relationships with people outside of their families, such as friends, neighbours, religious communities and people with shared ethnocultural backgrounds (Dako-Gyeke & Adu, 2017; Rowley et al., 2020). Across the findings, the challenge to re-create social networks and participate in the community was present (Asmal-Lee et al., 2022; Vromans et al., 2018; Ziersch et al., 2020), as well as the lack of connection and long-lasting friendships with non-refugees (Saksena & McMorrow, 2021). Therefore, refugees felt alienated and marginalised, which increased loneliness and lack of motivation to become socially active:

> *"You feel that they do not want to know you, they are not interested in having any relations. So, I don't care about it… I don't need to have relations with them."* (Kristjánsdóttir & Skaptadóttir, 2019; p.399)

Social isolation prevented refugees from help-seeking and further isolated them (Tsegay, 2022; Vromans et al., 2018). In Sim et al. (2023) older generations felt dependent on their children for support, especially due to language barriers. Moreover, in Bletscher & Spiers (2023) building friendships was described as "*a slow and burdensome process*" (p.12) due to cultural differences, while Rowley et al. (2020) highlighted that some refugees felt like a 'burden'. Particularly, men struggled to initiate romantic relationships with women down to their refugee status (Vitale & Ryde, 2017). In many instances, host societies were presented as untrustworthy, distant, or hostile (e.g., Asmal-Lee et al., 2022), and participants leaned for support from fellow compatriots (Gebresilassie et al., 2022; Sundvall et al., 2021) or other refugees (King et al., 2017) and reported cultural dissonance with the natives:

> *"…Whites are not like us Africans. For us African we are kind of friendly. […] Whites they have that kind of something which is kind of privacy but for us as we grow, as our culture, I can come to your house. I go there waiting for the food. I eat. Something like that but that is not of the Whites. I have to come at the right time, if I was invited."* (Bletscher & Spiers, 2023, p. 12)

Navigating difference, racism, and discrimination

Personal accounts in 19 studies documented incidents of racism, discrimination, and islamophobia in public and institutional settings. The experiences were either overt or covert and participants reported facing intersectional discrimination described in Golembe et al. (2021) as "*worse than before flight*" (p.1053). Refugees stated multiple contexts in which exclusion based on protected characteristics existed

including countries' point of entry, local communities and neighbourhoods, educational and professional settings and healthcare (Saksena & McMorrow, 2021; Ziersch et al., 2020). Sundvall et al. (2021) identified that participants had "*negative contacts with authorities*" (p.354), which was evident across the findings, and created a sense of being unwelcome and illegal (Tsegay, 2022). Anti-immigration rhetoric in Western societies was internalised by some participants (Labys et al., 2017; p.704):

> *"I can't feel well when someone says to me, 'oh, you are a refugee. Why did you come here? …leave the country. Go in your house."*

Particularly, Muslim refugees reflected on their intersectional identities, racism, and Islamophobia. For example, Asmal-Lee et al. (2022) underlined the refugees' unfair treatment in the UK and the natives' difficulty accepting and celebrating difference. Female participants felt that no aspect of their identity was welcomed by the host society, hindering their integration:

> *"The way people perceive newly arrived or like foreigners, in general is not positive […] if you add the word refugees it becomes even worse, and then if you are a Muslim that's even worse."* (p.662)

Similarly, Gangamma (2018) highlighted the impact of religious extremism incidents on the Iraqi diaspora and perpetuated stereotypes, leading to identity concealment: *"Iraqi had become synonymous with 'terrorist' for some people"* (p.328). Negative stereotypes about refugees and ethnic diasporas were noted in other studies too, with Sudanese communities blaming social media interactions and

tabloid media representations (Abur & Mphande, 2020; Hebbani et al., 2012). Tsegay (2021) discussed political discourses in the media portraying refugees as "illegal".

Current socio-political tales on refugees' illegality and increased immigration waves compromised the support provided by developed countries and impeded participants' resettlement. Saksena & McMorrow (2021) noted that the election of President Trump in the US and the anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim political agendas aggravated racism, inducing fear and insecurity. Refugees resettling in Western societies also reported fear of the police and negative interactions that could escalate into conflict or assault. Strikingly, Abur & Mphande (2020) identified the impact of racism and state violence, as participants perceived that police officers were racially profiling young black men based on protected characteristics:

> *"…I did not like the police targeting refugee young people, particularly black young people from Africa who are often treated or targeted by police as criminal. Look at me; I am a South Sudanese and I have never fought in my life but guess what? The police or some people think that all the South Sudanese young people are bad because they fight lots on the streets. This is not true to generalise and treat the whole community as bad people."* (p.423)

In conclusion, all studies indicated that racism and discrimination acted as barriers for participants to develop relationships, connect with people, find employment and suitable housing, access services and good quality of care and live without fear.

Living in Limbo: New Country, New Rules

Asylum process and sense of safety

The arrival in a foreign country and the beginning of the asylum process were profound experiences for participants across 17 studies. Refugees struggled with many components during the early stages of asylum-seeking including the "*short-lived experience*" of feeling welcomed (King et al., 2017; p.357), the absence of legal documents and residence permits (Labys et al., 2017), and the lack of clarity and relevant information about Leave to Remain (Rowley et al., 2020).

> "*It feels odd because I asked for asylum at the airport. I felt vulnerable, scared, and helpless. I had no idea what to expect. I stayed that night at the airport guarded by the police. Then, I was taken to a hostel."* (Tsegay, 2022, p.1245)

Many studies, including Gautam et al. (2018), recognised the uncertainties experienced by refugees caused by the asylum process, which was characterised as long, time-consuming and beyond their control. In Mangrio et al. (2020) one participant considered that the application process was so long that they questioned whether this journey was worthless. Vitale & Ryde (2016; p.12) found that men who experienced detention reported further deterioration of their mental health and re-traumatisation, with their life being "*on hold*"; one of them stated, *"I was depression before I got Leave to Remain"* while another concluded, *"I felt I came to the wrong country."*

Refugees' accounts illustrated uncertainty until a decision was made by the government on their asylum application. However, fear and insecurity often persisted. Leave to Remain was time-limited and temporary, denying people a sense of security and permanency (Bletscher & Spiers, 2023), obstructing social integration and intensifying fears of deportation (Gebresilassie et al., 2022; von Haumeder et al., 2019). Participants also reported a lack of agency owing to their inability to travel and move freely cross-borders (Tsegay, 2021).

Studies showcased the continuous threat and fear in refugee communities during the early stages of resettlement. Participants believed that unstable environments and limited support contributed to feeling unsettled, particularly those in refugee camps (Jawasreh, 2019). Other studies discussed the impact of unsuitable accommodations on feeling safe, as people were often inappropriately placed in shared spaces despite experiences of torture and trauma (Mangrio et al., 2020; Rowley et al., 2020). Notably, in almost all cases, refugees expressed increased physical safety considering the dangers they escaped. Participants were grateful for receiving protection in countries with no human rights violations (e.g., Asmal-Lee et al., 2022; Gangamma, 2018).

Access to services and social integration

Limited provision of resources and information during the post-migration period was captured in 25 studies. People discussed the absence of knowledge of their rights, legal system and relevant regulations (Darawsheh et al., 2022), often leaving them without appropriate outlets of support (King et al., 2017). Rowley et al. (2020) explored the transition period after being granted Leave to Remain in the UK, and people expressed feeling abandoned by the government, and the urgency to

navigate a foreign country independently: *"Now I feel that no one is helping me, like I'm facing everything by myself"* (p.363).

Labys et al. (2017) suggested numerous difficulties regarding access to healthcare provision, with some participants reporting that they were refused treatment without legal documents. Likewise, Correa-Velez et al. (2013) described the mistreatment of people due to their foreign or refugee identity, which was evident in other personal accounts too (Jawasreh, 2019; p.233): *"Sometimes they used to deal with us as though we are not humans*." Language barriers added to the difficulty accessing services, as refugees reported that they were not supported by interpreters to adequately communicate their needs. Likewise, Ziersch et al. (2020) revealed additional difficulties, such as the time and cost of travel from rural areas, long waiting times to secure an appointment, the complexity of care pathways/services, and refugees' low education levels to comprehend inaccessible information. Language barriers compromised social integration and access to support in other settings, including banks and local councils. Rowley et al. (2020) highlighted communication difficulties and participants' struggles, who felt they had to explain themselves multiple times to pass information across services.

> *"If you don't learn the language, it won't work. So, the responsibility is on us."* (Mangrio et al., 2019, p.4)

In refugee camps, Jawasreh (2019) mentioned the paucity of psychological support, poor access to healthcare and insufficient care provision by non-governmental organisations. Refugees discussed the presence of favouritism, such as "*jumping the queue*" (p.230) which developed unequal distribution of services within the community and created frustration and dissatisfaction:

> *"If you are a friend with someone in the organisations, then you get whatever you want"* (p.232)

In other settings, mental health support was frequently prevented due to cultural stigma. Abur & Mphande (2020) indicated a culture-driven fear among Sudanese people, who considered mental illness as a taboo, which explained poor help-seeking behaviours for psychological symptoms. Similarly, Jawasreh (2019) noted the misconception of mental illness and fears of being labelled by the community as a "crazy" person or being punished by God, indicating the presence of self and public stigma.

Access to equal opportunities for education was questioned in a few studies (Tonui, 2022; Ziersch et al., 2020), while refugees also expressed the lack of appropriate and timely skill-based training offered by governments (King et al., 2017) including learning the native language and ways to navigate life. Where resettlement workshops and training were provided, people felt that facilitators were not culturally appropriate and sensitive (Darawsheh et al., 2022).

Discussion

Critical evaluation

To my best knowledge, this is the first qualitative SLR on psycho-social post-migration difficulties in refugee communities. The scope, although broad, allowed to capture an impressive range of social stressors and emotional responses following forced displacement. A leading strength was the thorough exploration of the literature through multiple databases with peer-reviewed research, expert journals

on displacement, and grey literature. This approach optimised the identification of literature involving refugees (Ewald et al., 2022), a population often considered 'hard-to-reach' (Enticott et al., 2018) and poorly indexed across databases (Enticott et al., 2017; Mason, 2000). Moreover, examining grey literature facilitated the inclusion of rich narratives in the public domain, such as unpublished doctoral projects. Given the time-consuming and biased peer-reviewed process (Enticott et al., 2018; Paez, 2017), grey literature may include more recent experiences and representation from non-Western settings, often missed in mainstream searches. In this SLR, only one doctoral study led by Jawasreh (2019) that would be considered grey literature was included. The study added to the findings by outlining the refugees' experiences in a non-Western refugee camp in Jordan and day-to-day resettlement difficulties that may have been missed in HMICs (i.e., access to basic needs, healthcare, further exposure violence). Given the high number of refugees hosted in LMICs (UNHCR, 2023) it was deemed important to not disregard. The quality of the doctoral study was rated as high, therefore, not considered to impact the rigour and validity of the findings (please see full appraisal in Appendix 2).

To minimise selection and publication bias, a dual review approach was used with the involvement of two independent reviewers in both title/abstract and full-text review of studies (Stoll et al., 2019), and discrepancies were resolved through discussion. The independent, but also collaborative nature of this approach supported the identification of more relevant studies and, subsequently, increased the reliability of the evidence synthesis (Mahtani et al., 2020). Due to time, team and funding constraints, the review only included studies written or translated and published in English. The absence of a multi-lingual search may have restricted the inclusion of relevant studies published in different languages and geographical refugee representation (Zenni et al., 2023). Furthermore, it could be considered a

weakness of this SLR due to the global impact of displacement and the high number of refugees hosted in LMICs (UNHCR, 2023). In line with decolonisation principles, future SLRs could adopt a multi-linguistic approach and build a team of authors with different language or translation skills (Katsampa et al., 2023). This would encourage inclusion in research practice, a genuinely international character and the discovery of global knowledges (Walpole, 2019; Zenni et al., 2023).

This SLR draws from qualitative studies conducted in different parts of the world, including Western countries (e.g., Asmal-Lee et al., 2022; Bletscher & Spiers, 2023; Mangrio et al., 2020) and countries from the Global South (e.g., Dako-Gyeke & Adu, 2017; Jawasreh, 2019). Nevertheless, most studies did not come from LMICs and may reflect refugees' integration and resettlement in Western societies. Global disparities in applied research between LMICs and high-income countries are not uncommon and may be explained by publication bias, limited resources and funding and the impact of colonialism (Castro Torres & Alburez-Gutierrez, 2022). Therefore, the findings may better depict the experiences of refugees originating from collectivist communities resettling in individualistic societies. Lastly, this SLR highlights adversities, such as racism, that would appear differently in other social contexts. White supremacy and perceived racial superiority may be a global phenomenon, but racism may operate differently depending on socio-cultural factors (George & Page, 2004; p.160-164).

Clinical implications

Several implications for professionals supporting refugees were identified. The broad cross-examination of resettlement experiences can inform clinical practice and provide tailored post-migration support, such as multi-faceted and integrated

help (Rowley et al.,2020). This support could involve practical aid with housing, employment and the asylum-seeking process, and skill-based training (i.e., language classes to facilitate communication and enhance social cohesion) (Darawsheh et al., 2022). Moreover, the findings can advise the psychoeducation on refugee mental health and normalisation of peoples' common lived/ing experiences (Abur & Mphande, 2020; Saksena & McMorrow, 2021). Clinicians should use the evidence to formulate questions and elicit more information about their client's current mental health state and needs (Asmal-Lee et al., 2022; Dako-Gyeke & Adu, 2017). For instance, developing a semi-structured clinical interview could improve refugees' engagement with services and clinicians' interpersonal effectiveness.

This SLR focused on refugees' adverse experiences, but some studies reported coping strategies to manage stressors (e.g., King et al., 2017; Sim et al., 2023). For instance, the presence of family support, social ties, community belonging, and religion were considered strong protective factors. Resettlement is a psychosocially and culturally challenging experience, but with appropriate support, some stressors can be alleviated. Protective factors could inform psychological formulations and care plans. As such, clinicians shall assess and monitor protective factors and minimise marginalisation (Bletscher & Spiers, 2023).

Research recommendations

This SLR uncovered new research opportunities in refugee mental health. Considering the disruption of meaningful relationships in forced migration and the theory of ambiguous loss (Boss, 2004), Gangamma (2018) understood family as an important factor in trauma formulation. Family separation remains a by-product of restrictive immigration policies worldwide (Wilmsen, 2011) and its negative

consequences on refugees have been previously documented (Hampton et al., 2021; UNHCR, 2018). Epidemiological studies have indicated higher rates of mental health difficulties in separated refugees, persistent PTSD and increased risk of psychiatric disorders (Fogden et al., 2020; Hvidtfeldt et al., 2022; Liddell et al., 2021). Little qualitative research on the experience of family separation suggests worries about loved ones left behind and an enduring sense of uncertainty and powerlessness (Beaton et al., 2018; Liddell et al., 2022; A. Miller et al., 2018). Survivors' guilt, shame, and regret relating to forced separation have been apparent but not directly revealed in personal accounts (e.g., Asmal-Lee et al., 2022; Darawsheh et al., 2022). However, targeted qualitative research on the impact of family separation and the ways it affects a successful resettlement process remains scarce and requires further attention.

The review also highlighted the limited in-depth male perspective in the refugee post-migration lived experience, with only three studies focusing solely on men (Correa-Velez et al., 2013; Jawasreh, 2019; Vitale & Ryde, 2016). Most studies grouped refugees together irrespective of gender (Golembe et al., 2021; Ziersch et al., 2020) or had a significantly higher female sample representation (e.g., Rowley et al., 2020; Sim et al., 2023). Although global migration discourses have been primarily male-dominated, recently the focus has turned to women and children (Birger & Peled, 2022; Choi, 2019). Admittedly, following forced migration, gender identity and masculinity are often challenged (Hack-Polay et al., 2021; Tessitore & Margherita, 2022). Historically, male asylum seekers have been further marginalised, particularly if they are young, unmarried, or unaccompanied by family. Media portrayals describe them as criminals, terrorists, and/or violent, especially if they are racialised as black or brown (Hudson, 2016; Charsley & Wray, 2015). In a nutshell, male refugees are 'not welcome' (Rettberg & Gajjala, 2016), resulting in

hostile and discriminatory policies that exclude male refugees who are travelling alone from resettlement programmes (Rhodan, 2015). Male refugees have an uncertain position in receiving humanitarian care at present (Turner, 2019) and are overlooked in mental health research (Papadopoulos & Gionakis, 2018), leading to the need for gender-specific research.

Rationale for the Current Study

The highlighted research gaps on the impact of family separation, which was identified as a significant post-migration difficulty, shaped the rationale for this project. Migration is considered a gendered process, especially for refugee families, with evidence suggesting men may seek asylum first (Kraus et al., 2019; Tiilikainen et al., 2023). A male-dominated ratio has been observed in Western and non-Western settings, including the EU, UK and Jordan (Eurostat, 2021; Home Office, 2023a; Kraus et al., 2019; REACH & Mixed Migration Platform, 2017). The exploration of an under-researched area focusing on an under-represented population is deemed both timely and important. Expanding our knowledge of the effects of family separation on male refugees could inform the design and development of appropriate and timely humanitarian aid and psychological interventions.

Aims

This study aimed to explore the impact of family separation on male refugees in the UK and answer the following research questions:

- How do male refugees experience family separation during their efforts to resettle in the UK?
- How do male refugees separated from their families conceptualise support?

Methodology

This chapter introduces the methodological approach for this empirical study, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) before discussing the research process and ethical considerations of recruitment, data collection, analysis, and dissemination. The chapter concludes with an appraisal of methodological rigour and quality.

Design

The SLR underlined the scarcity of evidence on the impact of family separation on refugee men and avenues for psychosocial support. A qualitative research design was regarded as the most suitable approach to enable a rich exploration of the complexities of family separation (Iosifides, 2020). Contrary to quantitative methodologies, qualitative approaches aim to carefully examine individual stories and invite participants to express their unique perspectives (Rohleder & Lyons, 2015). Moreover, qualitative approaches are considered more appropriate for under-researched psycho-social phenomena (Barker et al., 2016; Ritchie, 2019) and can be powerful tools to engage marginalised communities in research (Douedari et al., 2021; Saltsman & Majidi, 2021). Lastly, the methodology aligns with the CR principles guiding this research (Fletcher, 2017; Patel & Pilgrim, 2018).

Methodology

Rationale for IPA

IPA was deemed the most appropriate qualitative methodology for the study. According to Smith and colleagues (2022), IPA closely examines how people create meaning over complex major life experiences, including transition periods. Forced

displacement, resettlement, and family separation may represent major life transitions for men. IPA focuses on the lived experiences and their associated significance. Researchers endeavour to engage with participants' reflections on these experiences and their own interpretations, whilst the analysis is understood as '*a joint project of researcher and researched*' (Smith et al., 2009, p.110). The theoretical foundations of IPA, interpretation and hermeneutics, relate to both the research question and epistemological stance, as arguably researchers directly influence the meaning-making process of the lived experience (Smith & Nizza, 2022).

Nevertheless, IPA comes with limitations, and researchers often critique its rigour and usefulness in psychological research (Smith et al., 2022). However, numerous peer-reviewed studies support IPA's utility in generating theory and unveiling in-depth personal accounts (Pringle et al., 2011; Smith, 2011, p.201). Furthermore, IPA is a time-consuming methodology, especially for less experienced researchers, but it is not unachievable with appropriate guidance and supervision (Smith et al., 2022).

Alternative methodologies

Other qualitative methodologies were also considered, as per Table 9.

Table 9

Consideration of Alternative Qualitative Methodologies

Qualitative methodology	**Rationale for rejection**
Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019)	Thematic Analysis was considered for its flexible and accessible approach which attempts to identify meaningful patterns across the dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In consideration of the aims, philosophical stance and

	population, TA would lack the richness and depth of a phenomenological approach, which focusses on subjective lived experiences. TA would not offer the opportunity for a 'double hermeneutic' role with the researcher interpreting both the participant's experiences and their own self-reflections in the meaning-making process (Smith & Osborn, 2015).
Narrative Analysis (Bamberg, 2012; Josselson & Hammack, 2021)	Narrative Analysis was carefully considered in favour of its commitment to storytelling and temporality, and its focus on making sense of individual stories and amplifying marginalised voices (Bamberg, 2012). In consideration of the research question and objectives, Narrative Analysis would not afford an in-depth investigation of the resettlement experience in the UK while being separated from loved ones, nor would allow for more collective narratives to be identified. Moreover, this study did not aim to explore how participants conceptualise family separation over time.

Consultation

Consultation with Experts by Experience (EbE) and stakeholders is progressively encouraged in mental health research (Brett et al., 2014; Deverka et al., 2012). From a decolonisation perspective, EbE involvement in research promotes inclusion and equality (Atallah et al., 2018; Katsampa et al., 2023), reframes the researcher-participant power imbalance (Smith, 2021) and challenges well-established narratives in academia (Sunkel & Sartor, 2022; Todowede et al., 2023). Diverse stakeholder engagement can strengthen the translation of evidence to clinical practice and increase the research impact on the local community (Beeken et al., 2024; Kujala et al., 2022; Miller et al., 2021).

Consultation occurred through multiple routes and with an interdisciplinary focus. The recruitment of EbE consultants was facilitated through social media advertisement, email distribution lists and gatekeepers (Appendix 4). Additionally, professionals with clinical, research and academic expertise were approached for advice. Consultants were invited to consider their level of engagement, incentive, and commitment, and where applicable an agreement was signed (see example in Appendix 5).

People with different life experiences and expertise consulted on this project, including male refugees and/or with lived experience of mental health difficulties, research experts on displacement studies and frontline clinicians. EbE consultants actively influenced the formulation of the research question (i.e., focus on gender), whilst experts in the field informed the decision-making of the chosen research methodology, eligibility criteria (e.g. focus on asylum-seekers vs. refugees) (Jannesari et al., 2020; Nyikavaranda et al., 2023) and the identification of recruitment pathways/collaboration with third-sector organisations (Jannesari, 2022). Frontline clinicians' consultation shaped the interview schedule, such as the order of the questions moving from present moment to past/painful experiences to build rapport, set the scene and prevent re-traumatisation at the start of the interview. EbE consultants and clinicians influenced data interpretation and the conceptualisation of themes by sharing their reflections and supporting the refining of themes/subthemes.

Participants

Sampling

Participants were invited based on their contextualised experiences of forced migration and family separation. Compared to some other qualitative approaches,

IPA samples capture unique first-person accounts of lived experience rather than a representation of the wider community under investigation. Given the rigour and time-consuming nature of the analysis process, IPA requires smaller sample sizes ranging between four to ten participants (Smith et al., 2022). Although some level of diversity between participants often exists in IPA samples, homogeneity is recommended to avoid substantial emerging differences due to participants' social characteristics.

Honouring the methodological guidelines, participants were identified and recruited through a purposive sampling strategy with the support of specialist organisations. The study was restricted to refugees living in the UK, as refugees' experiences resettling in other countries may differ due to the socio-political context and policies (Table 10). Asylum seekers were excluded due to higher levels of distress and limited access to basic needs compared to refugees (Li et al., 2016; Ziersch et al., 2017). Considering the evidence on male refugee mental health, displacement journeys and potential differential treatment, the sample was restricted to gender. Refugees' wellbeing, risk and distress levels were also considered (i.e., end of therapy/discharged, stabilised) to minimise harm and conduct the interviews as safely as possible. Participants from a range of cultural backgrounds were encouraged to be involved, regardless of English fluency.

Table 10

Overview of Eligibility Criteria for Participation in the Study

Inclusion criteria	**Exclusion criteria**
• Participants identify as refugees. • Participants identify as adult male.	• Participants currently seeking asylum. • Participants currently experiencing high levels of psychological distress and are

• Participants' gender is the same as the sex assigned at birth. • Participants live in the United Kingdom. • Participants have a lifetime experience of family separation, defined as being away from immediate family due to reasons beyond control (i.e., forced displacement).	considered at risk following the screening process by their referring clinician. Participants currently vulnerable to engage in a sensitive interview process with the researcher and manage distress. • Participants are under the age of 18 years old. • Participants live outside of the United Kingdom. • Participants identify as female, trans, or non-binary refugees.

Recruitment and challenges

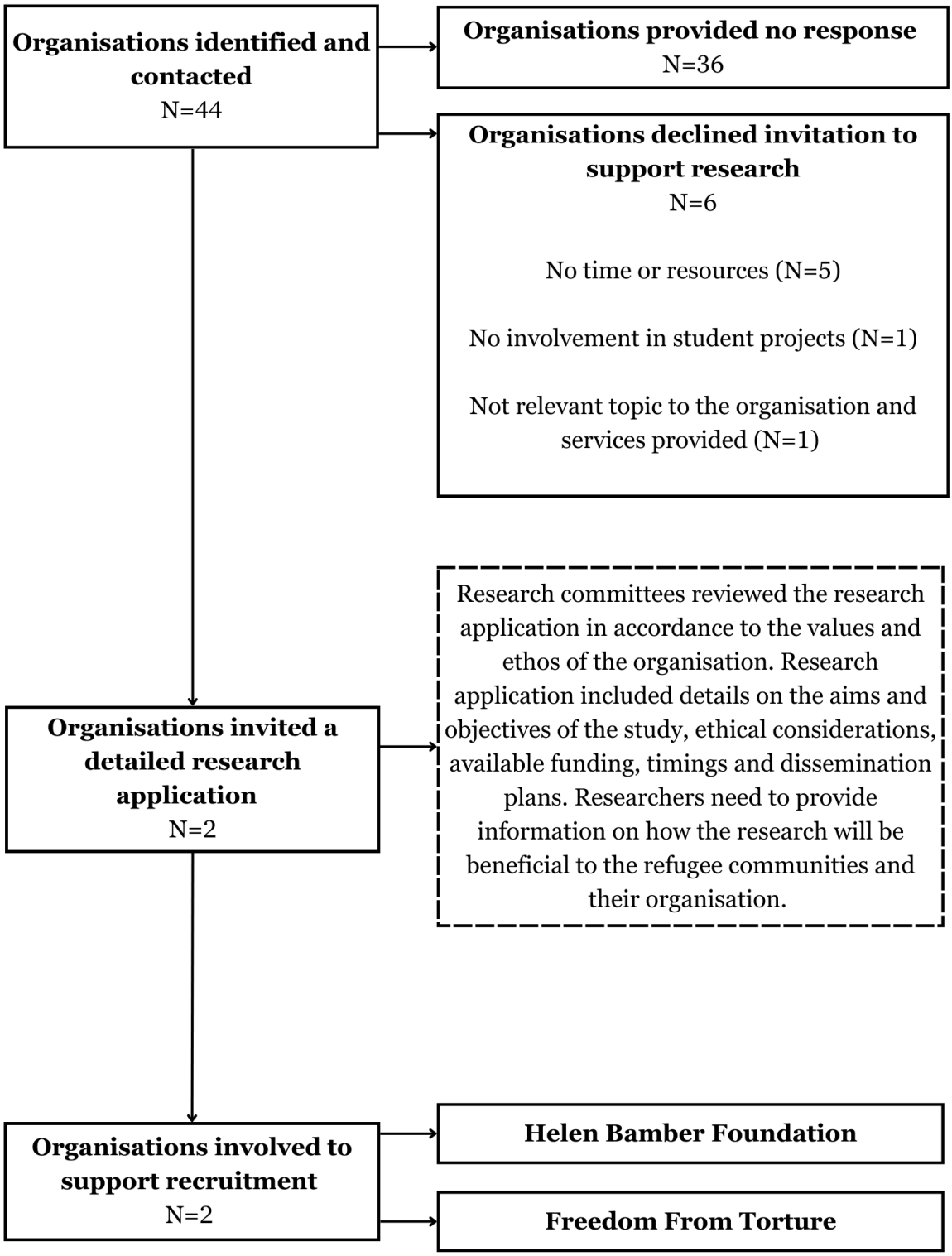
All participants were recruited between June-October 2023. Local, regional, and national organisations supporting refugees in the UK were contacted to support recruitment, with some organisations providing no response or multiple reasons for not getting involved (Figure 5). Of those, two London-based organisations, Helen Bamber Foundation (HBF) and Freedom From Torture (FFT), agreed to act as gatekeepers and facilitate access to participants. Both organisations provide integrative support (i.e., psychological, social, legal) to people who have experienced state/non-state violence. HBF specialises in supporting victims of trafficking, whilst FFT only offers services to survivors of physical/emotional torture.

In each setting, a clinical psychologist acted as the liaison contact to actively advertise the research, identify eligible participants, and initiate researcher-participant communication. Clinicians could refer eligible and interested service users, following a brief screening process to mitigate potential risks (Appendix 6). Once this process was completed, I received service users' contact details to discuss

research objectives, participation, and interview arrangements. Participants were offered to have an interpreter present depending on their confidence in English and fluency level. If an interpreter was needed, time was dedicated before the interview to go through the research materials. Participants were encouraged to ask questions about the research project and/or process.

Figure 5

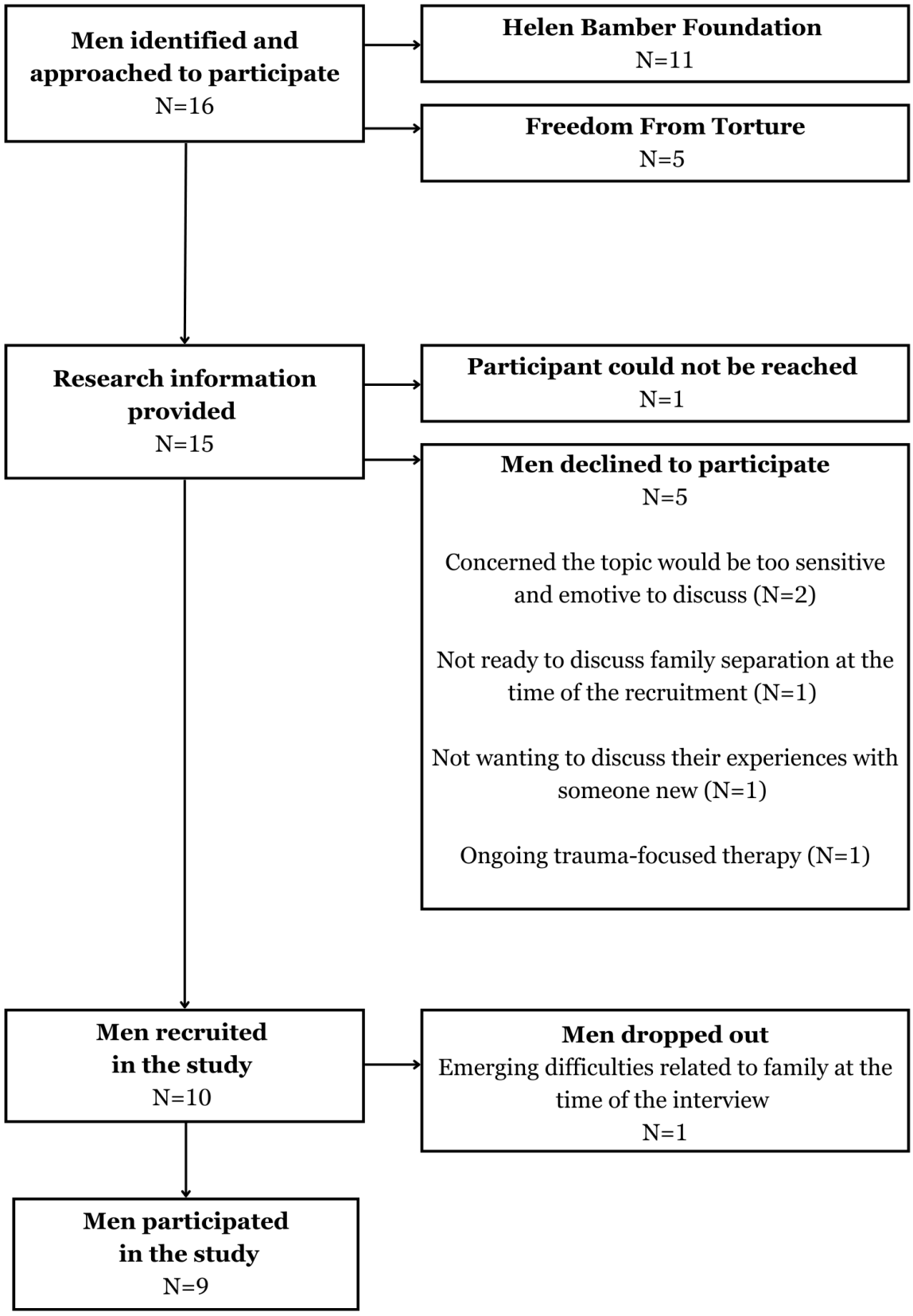
Flowchart of Organisations Approached to Support Recruitment



During recruitment, some challenges were unavoidably present. Time and funding constraints acted as barriers and prevented consistent presence at the organisations to actively promote the study and engage with potential participants. Furthermore, family separation is a very painful topic for many male refugees and contributes to significant daily stress and sadness. Thus, some participants showed scepticism towards an external researcher and did not feel comfortable sharing their stories without pre-established rapport. Some men did not feel ready to share their stories, describing family separation as "*raw*" and were afraid of the emotional toll their participation would have on their mental health. Lastly, although telephone/text reminders were provided, four participants did not attend the arranged interview appointments due to forgetfulness or confusion. Therefore, interview appointments had to be rearranged and the data collection process was delayed. For example, one interview was re-arranged three times. Across organisations, 16 potential participants were identified, with nine included in the final sample (Figure 6).

Figure 6

Flowchart of Participant Recruitment



Participant characteristics

Nine male refugees were recruited for the study. All participants experienced forced displacement and separation from their immediate family. At the time of their interviews, all participants were resettled in the UK and the length of stay ranged from 13 months to 14 years. All participants identified as religious. Their ages ranged from 30 – 53 years old. To respect confidentiality and anonymity, all participants have been given a pseudonym, either chosen independently (n=5) or through a cultural name generator (n=4). To further protect their anonymity, potentially identifiable factors, such as exact age and recruitment avenue are not revealed. Participants' characteristics are presented in Table 11.

Table 11

Overview of Participant Characteristics

Pseudonym	Country of Origin	Age	Religion	Marital Status	Context of family separation	Contact	Family reunion
Rahim	Bangladesh	25-35	Muslim	Married	Parents, siblings, and wife	Yes	No
Doyo	Democratic Republic of Congo	45-55	Christian	Divorced	Parents and siblings	Yes	No
Bilal	Yemen	25-35	Muslim	Married	Wife and children	Yes	In process
Sham	Eritrea	35-45	Christian	Widowed	Children	No	No
Aslam	Afghanistan	25-35	Muslim	Single	Parents and siblings	No	No
Anjaan	Sri Lanka	45-55	Muslim	Married	Parents and siblings	Yes	Reunited
Maj	Sierra Leone	25-35	Muslim	Single	Parents and siblings	No	No
Dialogue	Cote D' Ivoire	45-55	Christian	Widowed	Children	Yes	No
Paul	Cameroon	25-35	Christian	Married	Parents, siblings, wife, and children	Yes	In process

Ethical considerations

Ethical approval

Ethical approval was granted by the Health, Science, Engineering & Technology Ethics Committee with Delegated Authority at the University of Hertfordshire University with protocol number LMS/PGT/UH/05327 (2) (Appendices 7,8). Two amendments were approved to include collaboration with organisations and simplified versions of research materials (i.e., accessible language).

Informed consent

Research materials were shared with participants before the interview, whilst time was allocated at the beginning of the interview to ensure their understanding of the research aims and participation requirements (Appendices 9,10). The participant information sheet discussed the research remit, eligibility criteria, benefits and potential risks for participants, personal data storage/management, ethical considerations, and details on the research team. The research materials were provided in print to participants who agreed to a face-to-face interview, or via email to those who preferred an online or telephone interview. All participants were reminded of their ability to withdraw from the study if they changed their minds by the date specified in the information sheet. Dissemination plans and the possibilities of further involvement (i.e., member-checking) were also discussed.

Confidentiality and data protection

In line with ethical guidelines, all participant data was anonymised, stored, and protected in the encrypted university's drive, with the interview recordings and

consent forms kept in separate folders; hard copies were destroyed. Confidentiality and anonymity were discussed thoroughly with participants. Some participants expressed worries about identification following displacement due to war and persecution, and reassurance was offered on the protection of their identity. Participants were informed that confidentiality would be respected unless there were concerns of risk to themselves or others. Potentially identifiable factors, such as names, or references to hometowns, people or services have been removed from the transcripts to maintain anonymity. All participants were offered the opportunity to choose a pseudonym meaningful to them. All interviews were transcribed verbatim by me, whilst examples of transcripts were shared with the lead supervisor and consultant. The English grammar and syntax used by participants were transcribed verbatim and not corrected to maintain the conversations' authenticity. The interview recordings, consent forms and participant data will be deleted by September 2024, whilst the anonymised transcripts will be securely kept at the university's drive for further dissemination for up to five years.

Managing and responding to participant's distress

The nature of family separation during forced displacement is an emotive and sensitive topic and may lead participants to feel confused, upset, or distressed. Measures were in place prior to, during and after the interviews to ensure participants' wellbeing and mitigate potential risks. The screening process conducted by gatekeepers included a clinician's checklist (Appendix 6), which enabled clinicians to include important information on their client's mental health state. For example, some participants had been through stabilisation and trauma-focused therapy, and it was helpful to consider the use of grounding techniques if they became upset.

Prior to the interview, participants could ask questions about the interview and were reminded that they did not have to respond to questions if they did not wish to do so or felt uncomfortable. Grounding rules were introduced, and participants were encouraged to have a break, pause, or stop the interview at any point if they needed to. Participants were reassured that we could reschedule the interview for another day if it became too emotive. All face-to-face interviews were conducted at the organisation's location, where participants were offered tea, water, coffee, and biscuits. Moreover, a personalised safety plan was developed (Appendix 11) and participants were encouraged to reflect on enjoyable or calming activities that could be helpful if they become distressed during the interview (i.e., breathing, drinking water, using techniques) and provide the name of a trusted individual. Lastly, a brief discussion about my relationship to the topic, and transparency about my cultural background cultivated trust and rapport.

During the interview, I checked in with participants as/when needed and prompted them to pause and engage in an activity on their plan, if they became emotional. An on-call clinician was available on-site if participants required space outside the interview to discuss their feelings. Following the interview, I had a debrief conversation with participants and provided them with a debriefing letter (Appendices 12a,12b) and their personalised safety plan with a list of organisations for further support.

Researcher's wellbeing

An important consideration was the researchers' wellbeing and potential associated risks. The topic of family separation, migration and its impact on interpersonal relationships has a personal resonance and my characteristics place me

as an insider/outsider researcher as previously discussed. While the context of voluntary and forced migration differs, some elements may overlap (i.e., being away from family/home, acculturation). Continuous reflexivity helped me acknowledge similarities and differences with my participants (Appendix 1c). Moreover, it facilitated processing participants' personal accounts, often traumatic and emotive, and being aware of my own emotions during the research process. My professional experience with displaced people has equipped me with compassion, empathy, and extensive exposure to stories of migration, whilst my supervisory teams' experience with refugee populations placed them in a good position to advise/support.

Data collection

Interview guide

An interview schedule facilitated the semi-structured interviews (Appendix 13). The questions were developed based on the available literature and gaps related to family separation and in consultation with stakeholders. The initial questions were amended to reflect evidence emerging from a consultant's documentary on the emotional consequences of family loss as a man (Bertrand, 2023) and explore the emotional responses in-depth (i.e., loneliness, guilt, shame). The open-ended questions explored the experience of family separation at present, gender-related difficulties with asylum-seeking alone, and the impact on family cohesion and connection. Then, participants were encouraged to think about their life in the UK compared to family life back home, as well as outlets of psychosocial support. As advised by experienced clinicians, the topic guide moved from the present to past experiences to allow reflections on the here and now and prevent participants' re-traumatisation and/or dissociation at the start of the interview. Prompting

techniques, repetition and clarification were used to support participants – especially those who were not fluent in English – to consider difficult questions and provide guidance.

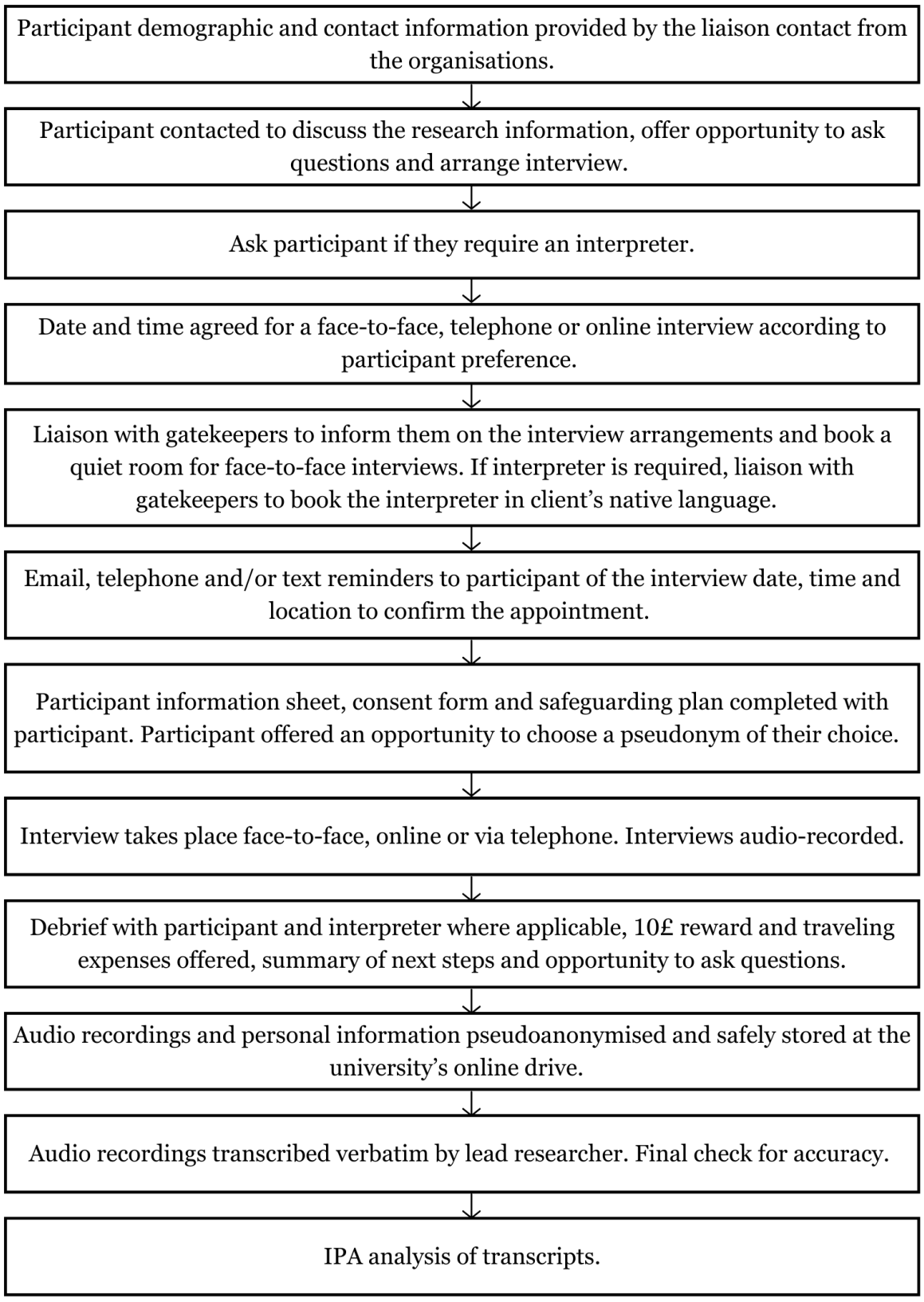
Procedure

Following screening from gatekeepers, participants were contacted to discuss and arrange an interview based on their preferences and availability. The interviews lasted between 32 – 72 minutes (mean average: 58 minutes). Of all interviews, six were completed face-to-face, two via telephone, and one online via MS Teams. Most interviews were conducted in English (N=7), whilst two interviews were conducted with the support of an interpreter in Arabic (N=1) and Tigrinya (N=1). Interviews were audio-recorded, and notes were taken on non-verbal behaviour where possible. Participants' travel expenses were covered, and a £10 cash reward was offered for their time.

Interview recordings were anonymised and securely kept in an encrypted online university drive. Participant demographic characteristics, clinicians' checklists and referrals, and consent forms were saved in a separate folder. Following initial transcriptions, audio recordings were re-listened multiple times to correct them as/where needed. Transcripts were then pseudo-anonymised, and any identifiable characteristics were removed. The process of data collection, management and analysis is presented in Figure 7.

Figure 7

Flowchart of Interview Procedure with Participants, Data Management and Analysis



Working with interpreters

Participants were offered the opportunity to complete the interview in their native language with the support of an interpreter. Available interpretation increased the inclusivity of non-fluent male refugees who are often further marginalised due to language barriers (Fennig & Denov, 2021). Experienced interpreters with long-standing collaboration with the organisation supported the interviews, with some having previously worked with participants. Interpreters were informed of the objectives of the research, received materials ahead of time, and had the opportunity to discuss with the researcher prior to the interview. Already established relationships facilitated the interview process and developed a trusting and friendly environment between the participant, interpreter, and me. Interpreters had confidentiality agreements in place with the organisation (Appendix 14). At the end of the interview, a debrief discussion with interpreters was followed to ensure their wellbeing (Appendix 12b).

Analysis

The data was analysed following the IPA framework as updated and proposed by Smith and colleagues (2022), which outlines the process followed by the researcher, the immersive experience engaging with the data and the techniques to interpret the participants' lived experiences. IPA is a multi-step approach that requires time, attention, and the researchers' active participation (Table 12).

Table 12

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis Process

Stage	Activity	Action

1	Reading and re-reading the interview transcript	The process starts with reviewing the first interview transcript and immersing oneself in the data. The researcher recollects their own memories and reflections on conducting the interview. The process involves the documentation of initial interpretations, thoughts, patterns, and explanations on the data, as well as the interviewer-participant rapport, flow, rhythm, and structure of the interview.
2	Exploratory noting	This stage involves the close examination of semantic content within the context of participants' life stories and the use of language. The researcher documents exploratory notes and comments, and describes the meaning of experiences, relationships, places etc may have to the participant. The researchers' interpretation during this stage supports the meaning-making of the participants' lived experiences. Key words and phrases used by the participant are highlighted. The linguistic focus in this stage helps the researcher to pay attention to the use of specific words or metaphors, tone of voice, verbal, or non-verbal emotional cues (i.e., laughter, hesitation, pause), and repetition.
3	Developing experiential statements	The researcher consolidates complex meanings of the participant's lived experiences and/or the interpretation of their story into preliminary experiential statements. Experiential statements capture important concepts described in the exploratory notes and signify both the participant's original feelings and thoughts and the researcher's analytical approach and interpretation.
4	Mapping connections across the experiential statements	This stage invites the researcher to identify connections across the statements in line with the research question

		and scope of the project. Each statement is treated with equal importance and the researcher is invited to re-organise the data and search for associations adopting an open-minded and innovative stance.
5	Developing Personal Experiential Themes (PETs)	Following the mapping of inter-connections in the data, the researcher needs to consolidate the clusters of experiential statements into Personal Experiential Themes. Personal Experiential Themes are considered to be the highest level of organisation within each case. These can be further divided into sub-themes. The researcher can use techniques to ensure the rigour of the case-analysis, such as member-checking with participants and consultation with co-researchers.
6	Repeating the process with the other interview transcripts	The researcher follows the same steps of the analytical process independently for each interview transcript. Here, the importance lies in treating each interview as a unique story and preventing the reproduction of ideas that emerged from the previous interview.
7	Developing Group Experiential Themes (GETs) across interview transcripts	The final stage of IPA invites the participant to work with PETs constructed for each interview and identify cross-data patterns and ideas to generate Group Experiential Themes (GETs). The cross-data analysis enables the researcher to highlight unique characteristics of the lived experience under investigation across the participants' stories. Similarly, this level of analysis is dynamic and requires creativity to reorganise statements in a way that suits the narrative of participants and echoes the important points of their experiences.

Before immersing myself in the data, listening and re-listening the interview recordings helped me familiarise myself with the participants' stories and note my initial reactions and reflections. The analytical process moved from the in-depth analysis of individual interviews to a broader cross-examination of transcripts. This enabled me to treat each story with justice and understand the unique impacts of family separation within the context of displacement on each of my participants. This approach towards people's lived experiences allowed me to enter their world and understand their perspective. Each transcript was annotated freely with experiential notes, such as descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual comments. To facilitate this process, a 3-column table was created, as indicated by Smith et al. (2022), with the original transcript in the middle, the experiential notes/comments on the right and the experiential statements on the left (Appendix 15). The analytical process was conducted manually to encourage innovation, creativity, and active engagement with the data (Appendix 16).

The final stage of cross-data examination allowed me to notice similarities, differences, and universal experiences of family separation and resettlement in the UK and develop themes (Appendix 17). All themes were reviewed with supervisors and consultants. To ensure analytical rigour and capture a more comprehensive interpretation of the participants' lived experiences, member-checking was completed with participants who expressed interest in further involvement (N=2). Participants re-engaged with their storytelling and my interpretations with full transparency and shared further reflections on the meaning-making of their lived experience and how PETs could be refined, before moving to the cross-case analysis (see also Table 13).

Reflexivity and Rigour

Reflexivity and active self-awareness throughout the research process are important aspects of qualitative studies, particularly in IPA (Smith et al., 2022), enabling the researcher to identify potential biases and assumptions. Multiple methods were used to ensure reflexivity from the conception of the research idea to the write-up.

Bracketing[10] sessions were completed in three stages: before data collection, before data analysis and before write-up. Bracketing facilitates the self-reflective process and encourages the researcher to consider with honesty and transparency their personal values, beliefs, biases and assumptions about the social phenomena under investigation (Tufford & Newman, 2012). Furthermore, reflective discussions occurred during advanced methodology workshops (n=5), as organised by the university, and monthly supervision. These significantly inspired further interpretations of the findings during the stage of analysis and fuelled my imagination considerably, an essential element in interpretative research (Smith & Nizza, 2022). Self-reflection helped me to stay true to my values and aided me in recognising the nuances of my position as an insider-outsider researcher. Lastly, a reflective journal was kept documenting my reflections and mapping my data interpretations (Appendix 1b).

According to Smith et al.'s (2022) recommendations on appropriate quality appraisal frameworks for IPA research, I assessed this study based on four principles proposed by Yardley (2000) on good qualitative research, as illustrated in Table 13.

[10] Bracketing sessions were facilitated by Ms Lauren Brockett (Trainee Clinical Psychologist, University of Hertfordshire), who was not involved in the project, nor had expert knowledge on the topic or refugee mental health research. The interviews followed the framework suggested by Tufford & Newman (2012).

Table 13

Principles of Good Qualitative Research as proposed by Yardley (2000)

Principles	**Relevance to this study**
Sensitivity to context	Smith and colleagues (2022) recommend that sensitivity to the context is modelled at the early phases of the research process in IPA, such as the cross-examination of other methodologies and rationale behind conducting interpretative research. Sensitivity is portrayed through the in-depth and idiographic nature of IPA. I demonstrated sensitivity to the context by engaging with consultants and experts in the field, literature highlighting personal accounts on the topic of family separation and drawing on the philosophical framework of CR in interaction with my own experiences of migration (Yardley, 2000). The knowledge of both socio-political and theoretical context helped me to stay grounded and centre refugees' experiences, but also conduct the interviews with consideration (i.e., pauses, empathy, trust). Similarly, I approached the data with sensitivity throughout the analytic process, immersed myself in the participants' worlds and encouraged their voices by illustrating direct quotations, which further increased sensitivity to context (Smith et al., 2022).
Commitment and rigour	Commitment is closely related to sensitivity to context and "encompasses prolonged engagement with the topic" (p. 221), the acquisition of research skills appropriate to the methodology and immersion to participants' stories. My commitment to both family separation and refugee populations is influenced by a multitude of factors, as discussed in chapter 1. Moreover, I have developed my qualitative skills throughout my career as a researcher, which increased my confidence and preparedness to conduct rich interviews, elicit information and mitigate potentially emerging risks. I have made efforts to ensure methodological rigour by fully adhering to the IPA framework (Smith et al., 2022) and encouraging collaboration with others despite the limitations in time and funding. Specialist organisations provided a safe space to conduct the interviews, which helped to build trust and rapport with participants. The consultation with a range of stakeholders and continuous reflection developed new pathways of interpretation. Bracketing sessions in different research stages (i.e., prior

	interviews, prior analysis) and the documentation of thoughts in a reflective diary increased my awareness on beliefs and assumptions. Lastly, the additional funding I applied for and secured encouraged inclusivity and ensured that participation was accessible to people who were not fluent in English. Therefore, I demonstrated both commitment and rigour in my aim to amplify voices that are less heard in research outlets. I discussed the emerging themes at earlier stages with various audiences to gather insights and further codevelop the themes, including my supervisory team, the HBF research committee, clinicians across both organisations and my consultant. I have also engaged in a thorough member-checking process with both my supervisor and consultant who each have undergone two different sets of interviews, and two participants who agreed to be further contacted. All participants who were fluent in English were provided with the ability to offer their thoughts, however, I was not able to contact people who needed further interpreter time due to lack of additional funds to do so (i.e., interpreters costs). The engagement with participants and different audiences has led to positive and encouraging feedback on my work and interpretation of people's stories, providing further credibility in the findings and interpretation of the data.
Transparency and coherence	Transparency and coherence relate to the clear and sound presentation of the research process, evidence, and arguments. Yardley (2000) indicates that the methodology and findings are driven by the research question and objectives, and the narrative is well-written and representative of the participants' world/perception (Smith et al., 2022). I believe that I have provided a detailed account of the research process step-by-step, and the collective narrative is grounded to the participants' meaning making of their experiences. I have also demonstrated transparency through my personal account and truthful position to the topic, as discussed in chapter 1. Throughout this research, I have demonstrated an ability to intertwine meanings and associations between the existing literature, research question, findings, and interpretations by also maintaining the philosophical framework and my own understanding of the world where possible. I have tried to present the experience of family separation in a refugee male population in accordance with the current socio-political landscape and challenge current societal narratives throughout my own interpretations. Furthermore, transparency also was shown in

	discussions with my participants about my motives to conduct this research and my own identity as a migrant and during member-checking sessions. I discussed my interpretations of peoples' experiences with sincerity and honesty in a "you told me this…" and "I interpreted like this…" way, which allowed participants to reflect and give me feedback on their Personal Experiential Themes. Overall, the findings adhere to the idiographic and the emotionally charged language participants used during their interviews, as I have used peoples' actual words throughout the text and maintained the authenticity of the dialogue without correcting English errors (i.e., grammar/syntax).
Impact and importance	This importance and value of the research is the "decisive criterion" against which a study's quality is appraised (Yardley, 2000, p. 223). The exploration of family separation in refugee communities, particularly men, emerged as an important post-migration difficulty in the systematic review of the literature. As discussed in Chapter 1, there is vast qualitative research on the acculturation processes and the accumulated stressors refugees face in the host countries, yet it fails to address the psychosocial impacts of forced separation from loved ones whilst navigating a foreign country. As influenced by the political contexts (i.e., Illegal Immigration Bill), I believe this study was relevant and timely. Consultants, field supervisors and participants felt this was an important topic to investigate and worthy of attention. The importance was particularly highlighted during member-checking sessions. One participant shared that the findings resonate with his experience and that following the interview he applied for family reunification. He also shared that he would like to show his children their contribution to this research when they reunite and requested a simplified version of the findings and illustrative personal quotes. The value of the research was also noticeable through participants narratives suggesting that their stories can be empowering for others. In their eyes, the research can have positive impact on the prevention of similar experiences through the asylum system in the UK, policy improvements on family reunification and recommendations for clinicians supporting separated refugee men. To increase the impact of the study, I have presented the findings to different stakeholders, including the two organisations involved,

	researchers in the field, and my NHS community mental health team that receives referrals of refugees in the local area. I have gathered highly positive feedback, and the head of therapy at HBF said that the findings “truly reflect our community's lived experience”. With funding I have secured, I commissioned illustrations to accompany presentations, that can be shared with participants and circulated in charities and social media (Appendix 18). Lastly, I have found that the findings often resonated with me as a migrant, and I would believe the themes would resonate with other refugee and migrant populations to some extent. Further research on family separation can be explored in different communities, such as women and unaccompanied minors, as well as voluntary migrants.

Results

This chapter presents the findings following an IPA framework (Smith et al., 2022). I introduce an array of collective experiences on the impact of family separation and illustrate "*areas of convergence and divergence across participant's individual stories*" (p.110) to balance the representation of mutual experiences and single voices. My interpretations of personal accounts are shaped by the philosophical stance informing this research and my own societal position in the UK as a migrant. This corresponds to the *reality* we operate within, particularly societal narratives/ideas around masculinity, power, and discrimination. I outline the Group Experiential Themes (GETs) and Subthemes (Table 14). Direct quotations[11] aim to position men's voices in the centre of the thesis, and alongside my interpretations, construct meanings and elucidate underlying messages. The recurrence of themes across participants is shown in Appendix 19.

Table 14

Summary of GETs and Subthemes

GETs	**Subthemes**
1. "Family separation just break you inside" – the emotional burden of being away from loved ones	• Absence of family: lonely and socially isolated. • Life without a family has no longer a meaning.

[11] Direct quotations are presented in *italics* and "within quotation marks". Further notes:
bold text indicates shift in tone of voice, where the participant emphasises words or phrases.
[…] indicates omitted words to improve the clarity of the personal account.
(*description*) indicates pauses or other non-verbal signs of communication in speech.
( ) indicates words that have been inserted to improve the coherence of the personal account.

	• Time- and context-dependant emotional responses.
2. "Maybe they think I left them" – the responsibility to be present	• Abandoning the family through the lens of masculinity. • Worrying about family. • Missing moments in time: loss and grief.
3. "They don't like you to be here" – experiences embedded in masculinity and intersectionality	• Powerlessness and helplessness. • Systems: experiences of hostility, racism, discrimination, and opportunities. • Navigating a new country alone: post-migration difficulties and acculturation.
4. "Family means everything" – living with the hope to reunite	• The importance of family in our lives. • Family reunification: a dream come true.
5. "We are like a family" – coping with separation	• Sources of strength and resilience. • Community, belonging and helping others. • It's like a package: integrated support.

GET 1: *"Family separation just break you inside"* – the emotional burden of being away from loved ones

Family separation had a multi-faceted psychological impact on participants' lives, which Aslam described as "*just break you inside"*. This GET illustrates the emotional burden of being in the UK alone without family, and the multiplicity of feelings across individual stories of asylum-seeking as an unaccompanied minor,

young man, father, or gay man. It describes experiences of emotional/physical disconnection from significant others and shifted life perspectives without the presence of family. This GET consists of the following subthemes.

Absence of family: lonely and socially isolated

The absence of loved ones left men with a deep feeling of loneliness, emptiness, and isolation. Rahim, who came to the UK as a young man, described a difficulty naming his "*very much **sad**"* feelings and expressed an emotion of emptiness in his life: "*I have a little big gap"*. Loneliness was intertwined with the reality of being alone in a foreign country without emotional or practical support from significant others. Anjaan emphasised his experience of coming to the UK without his support system, *"I'm alone when I came here, I'm alone here. No friends, no relatives, no one here. […] Anyone coming alone **definitely** suffer"*. Similarly, Dialogue expressed his sadness about not being present in his children's lives, and although he has managed to create a new life in the UK, he still experiences *"family loneliness"*. He stated: *"I feel loneliness from my children. **I miss them a lot**. […] **I was their best friend**. Then this best friend was not there anymore"*. His voice tone indicates the extent of his loss and how lonely he feels without his children around.

Doyo described loneliness as both a physical and emotional reaction, which can be understood here as the result of physical distance and lack of geographical proximity (*"I can say what, physical connection, yeah? (laughs) […] Not being there with them. […] Just to fight together, to be together… it is hard")*. Being alone and lonely was not seen as a natural emotional response, but as a mental health difficulty by some, indicating the significance of the emotional pain following family

separation. Maj reflected on his experience surrounded by loved ones in his country and noted:

> *"(Loneliness) happens, isn't it? Yeah, it happens. You can't go everything, you know, money, family. But I think that's a psychological issue. It's not natural. […] maybe it's because of my situation, allowing me feeling lonely sometimes. But when I was in Sierra Leone […] I never had any loneliness. […] So I* ***might*** *feel lonely* ***here****, but maybe if you ask me in Sierra Leone, I* ***not ever*** *feel lonely." – Maj*

For some participants, this was further explained by their difficulties in developing meaningful friendships or romantic relationships. Doyo indicated that fast-paced life rhythms and the British culture may hinder human connection and the formation of social bonds, as "*people are very busy (****laughs****) so it's not easy…".* Similar thoughts were shared by others and may reflect the values of collectivist societies in the Global South compared to individualistic/capitalist societies like the UK, where efficiency/productivity are privileged (Turner, 1988). For Rahim, it has been difficult to be truthful about his past and trust people in this country. His fear of others was driven by earlier experiences of being let down, betrayed, or disbelieved, and prevents him from sharing his emotional challenges. This not only fuels his loneliness but does not help him to alleviate some of his pain:

> *"I was used to feel very lonely because I cannot tell any friend or what situation I was, what happened with me […] I know only. I cannot tell because they cannot help me. I know, but they are not loyal, they are not nothing. So, if I tell them, they tell another person and they're gossiping*

about there, maybe some people is laughing. […] when I was good position in back home also a lot of people was with me, when I was in bad position a lot of people ***left me****." - Rahim*

Doyo, Maj and Aslam discussed romantic loneliness and their desire to emotionally connect with a partner and be in a committed relationship. Doyo expressed that this was a missed aspect of the interview on family separation, given that his experience as a single man in the UK may be different without having a partner to reconnect with and be romantically intimate:

"…It was very long to be lonely as a man, a grown-up man, without any relationship, without being able to meet your relatives. […] ***it's hard to start a relationship*** *because you want to be a man. I don't know about guys like me, I can say if I'm in a relationship I have to fulfil some responsibility […] I try to be in connection with women. But… (laughs) I can say it's like… if I can try, is it going to be successful?* ***Maybe I will bring stress to someone who wants a better life****" – Doyo*

Maj's loneliness is embedded in his intersectional identity and sexuality. He discussed his negative experiences dating other men in the UK, both as an African man dating white people, as well as an asylum seeker without a *"legal"* status. Maj questioned the LGBTQ+ visibility, pride and allyship in the UK, as he found it difficult to understand how although people advocate for human rights, men still do not want to openly form romantic relationships ("*Is it a society or is it a set of group that are coming to challenge the person? I was thinking of that. Or is it politics?")* and shared that men "*just wanna have fun"* without forming a "*proper relationship"*.

His thoughts suggest that public homophobic attitudes in the UK and internalised homophobia may still negatively impact the way gay men experience romance. Romantic relationships, closeness and intimacy can fulfil the absence of family and the feeling of emptiness people experience. Aslam discussed his ex-partner, who provided a sense of safety, love, and care and prevented loneliness: *"I had a girlfriend for six years. I was spending time with her, so I was just **happy** with her, but then we broke up, so now **I'm feeling alone again**…".*

Finally, men expressed other psychosocial difficulties associated with loneliness, including a lack of energy and motivation, emotional exhaustion (*"**heart also very tired**")*, low mood, and thoughts that life is not worth living. Aslam described that it is difficult to find enthusiasm about life when feeling lonely and does not want to leave the house. Similarly, Paul portrayed loneliness as a feeling he wants to *"escape"* and to "*stay a little bit away*" demonstrating the need to minimise the psychological impact of his thoughts.

Life without a family has no longer a meaning

Feelings of loneliness, isolation and social exclusion can exacerbate certain emotional responses, such as sadness, numbness, and suicidality. Through their narratives, men spoke about the centrality of family in life and the absence of purpose if this is lost, and as Sham described, *"It's life… and if you don't have that, that means you don't have life"*. Men discussed their experiences of struggling with depression, suicidal feelings and a history of suicidal behaviours, and the ways this is interconnected with the complexities of navigating a foreign country alone.

Being separated from family creates an emotional numbness, *"feeling nothing"*, being on autopilot, as described by Aslam, *"I'm alive now, I'm breathing, I*

don't have family, I'm not breathing and I'm not alive. So, I just feel the same" and Rahim, *"when you have (no family), I have to nothing to do, I'm going to the deep rest. I'm going to the hangout. I like to kill myself."*.

For most men, living without family had an impact on their mood, and motivation to keep themselves going as noted by Sham:

> *"I am surviving by taking the medication [*shows a box of antidepressants*]. It kind of tricks my mind for not worrying too much and I can only sleep once I've taken those medications." – Sham*

In Anjaan's story, the sense of hopelessness and helplessness was very strong, and the separation negatively coloured his experience of resettlement, as described *"I'm very upset. I was a cry. […] Always that time I think why my life?* ***What is my life, this one life?"*** He disclosed a history of suicidal behaviours, inpatient hospitalisations following suicide attempts and his thoughts that life is not worth living. The suicidal feelings were more intense during instances of uncertainty and hopelessness about family reunification and the quality of his life in the UK without his family:

> *"I can't never see my wife and daughter and mom and dad. Yeah. So, then I decided why I want to live? What's the point? I don't want to live this way. I kill myself." – Anjaan*

Anjaan struggled with low mood and post-traumatic symptoms associated with his experience of torture, escape and family separation. Intense sadness and unprocessed trauma influenced the frequency of his thoughts about death and his

tolerance of difficult emotions: *"Sadness and the… sadness I manage because first I can't control. That's why I kill myself. I don't want to live."*.

Similar experiences were shared by Dialogue, whose suicidal feelings were situated within his guilt, shame, and disappointment in leaving his family behind and not achieving reunification. Dialogue felt that he was his failure, despite having lots of plans of action to bring his children to the UK. He lost faith in other people, and he was overwhelmed by self-blame, which led him at one point to consider attempting to take his own life:

> *"I was stressful, have a suicide attempt… and I hate myself, a lot of things went through on my brains, and then* ***I don't trust anyone, anything****. […]* ***It's a hate, a hate, a hate up my heart****.* […] *And then when I look back, I feel very… let's say,* ***I feel shame.*** *But it's like a* ***self-defence****."* – *Dialogue*

The existence of family and the hope to reunite with their loved ones for some people acted as a protective factor at times when they were feeling suicidal. For example, Paul discussed the benefit of having his family next to him to prevent negative thoughts, the impact his suicide would have on his children and the strength he draws on his family to keep himself alive:

> *"****If*** *I had my family with me, I think it could be a little bit easier because I was thinking a little bit less. […] Oh, sometimes I can watch some videos of my children playing or some photos when they were, something like one year, two years and it gives me strength to keep going on and… sometimes I*

*say to myself, **if now I pass away**… it will be more difficult for them." – Paul*

In support of this, Bilal, who did not report suicidal feelings but spoke about his struggles with low mood and emotional isolation away from his family, reflected that family helps him to manage hardships, can distract him from day-to-day problems and provide emotional support:

"*When you live with your… around people, like your family, your mom, your wife, your children… you are distracted, even if life is difficult. But there is somebody there to support you, to talk to you." – Bilal*

Rahim, who described being in a better psychological place at the time of the interview, spoke about other men whose mental health does not improve significantly over time:

*"…a lot of people they have no family… and some people still look like a **mad**, so they don't talk with anyone […] some people is mentally ill, so they don't come back, the normal life is hard to them…" – Rahim*

Some participants did not report suicidal feelings themselves but showed solidarity to those who were not able to cope with the sadness and loneliness of family separation. For instance, Doyo shared his understanding of the layers of difficulties during resettlement and considered that other males' mental health has further deteriorated since he met them.

Time- and context-dependant emotional responses

Men's personal accounts suggest that the emotional impact of family separation tends to fluctuate over time and is context-dependent, including their migration journey and past family life, the presence of communication with loved ones or lack thereof, the geographical proximity, and the circumstances of the separation. Some people discussed how their emotions often get triggered in the UK.

Men detailed the shades of sadness associated with separation and its relationship to time. For Aslam, the early resettlement period was harder than the present day, after almost two decades of not having a shared life with his family, which may indicate that overwhelming feelings may cease to be so overwhelming and improve with time. However, regardless of how many years have passed by, loneliness can be chronic and persistent:

> *"At the start it was depression, sadness like I'm feeling… because it's been 15 years now… so I'm just being fine right now, but it used to be still, like, of course, if I feel sometime, if I feel alone, I miss my family. I just letting me down…" - Aslam*

Conversely, Bilal considered separation more present over time, as *"it's very difficult to be away from your family, especially when the time is around four or five years already."* Equally, Dialogue felt that the longer the absence from his children's lives, the worse it is for their relationship as noted, "*I'm still alive, but I'm not on their side. […] For how long? **So long**! For **14** years.".* Doyo also expressed that missing his family becomes harder the longer one is away when he stated, *"**It's very hard to miss your relatives for such a long time**. Especially me, I left*

my country in [year]. So since, yeah, I've never met any of my relatives, my mother…". Bilal conceptualised family separation differently across periods of migration, such as before vs after leaving his country and stated the gap between his expectations prior to displacement and the reality in the UK. He used the concepts of "*nostalgia*" and "*passion*" which may have distinct historical, cultural, and societal meanings which may suggest both positive and negative colours in his experiences in time:

> *"It's very difficult because at the beginning when I left them, I thought it was something* ***normal****, it's not going to take that long […]* ***The more the time passes, the more your nostalgia and the more your love and your passion increases more*** *[…] you want to meet them, you want to be with them, but you cannot and of course there's nothing in our hand that we can do." – Bilal*

The emotional toll of separation may be more impactful to unaccompanied minor refugees separated from primary caregivers, like Aslam. His narrative raised a sense of feeling unprotected, abandoned, and unable to manage his sadness: *"I came to UK at the age of 15. So… I didn't have no one, no family here as my family. […] I was crying every day, sad every day, missing my mom, missing family, my brothers, siblings.".* Men's personal accounts implicitly expressed how their position in the family may have influenced their separation experience. Unlike Aslam who travelled as a minor, Bilal held the role of the protector leaving dependents behind in a war zone or unsafe circumstances. For him it was not just the act of separation, but also the unsafe context in which his family lived.

Family separation was also dependent on its repetition. For Bilal, separating from his family once again, following other instances of separation was unbearable:

> *"I thought my wish was just to see them once, even my dream was just to see them once… but now when I saw them and I came back, the feeling is* ***even*** *worse […] the* ***most*** *difficult to us was when I was leaving them* ***again****. They were crying five days before I leave. They were starting to cry and cry…" – Bilal*

Paul discussed the trauma of losing his father at an early age and thus, experiencing separation from his caregiver in an unexpected way, and the repetition of the intergenerational trauma on his children*: "my heart is just broken because I never… I was not planning my life that way. It seems like the same story happening again, what's happened to me, is happening to my children too."*. The conceptualisation of absence through death is considered of similar impact to the absence through separation here.

The experience of separation was also influenced by the family life people had and the context in which they were separated. For Bilal, the stronger the bonds, the harder the separation: *"it's very difficult to be away from your family, especially […] when you have a very good and strong relationship with your family and you have… you were very close to them, and suddenly you have to leave them…"*. On the contrary, Maj's family separation happened in the background of parental rejection of his sexual identity. He viewed resettlement as an opportunity to explore his sexuality and feel empowered, as in his belief "*you separate from them to come and see new challenges, new culture"*. Growing up as a gay man, Maj had to conceal his identity ("*do not ever tell them to be a gay man*") and felt afraid of his parents ("*if*

my parents find out… I attempt to go for that ball, they said it's not good, why did he do that?"). He discussed the lack of freedom within the context of family and home country to be fully himself, and the need to escape this, as "*It's like a two-fight. The government is against that. If your family is against that* ***as well****… the family that will protect you, hide you from stuff, that means it's not safe.".* For him, family separation also meant rejection, homophobia, betrayal, confusion, and abandonment.

Communication and connection with family members have been reported by participants as very important, whereas limited communication or completely losing touch with loved ones, was described by Aslam as "***It's killing me inside***". Bilal's communication with family was affected by his long journey to reach the UK and lack of access to the internet or telephone*:*

> *"…the connection with my family was very difficult, I couldn't communicate with them until I arrived to this country. After arriving to this country, I was able to communicate with them, but still from their side, it was difficult because they were in a state of war." – Bilal*

In others' narratives, there was a sense of intense sadness and hopelessness for not being able to locate their children and knowing they were safe. Reflecting on their loss, participants started crying and we briefly paused the interview in both instances indicating that the emotional pain is still raw and present in their lives:

> *"I lost contact with them for* ***two years****. […] I realised that the phone, the number not the phone, the number I used to call them don't go through anymore. Can't go for a second,* ***can't*** *(crying)." – Dialogue*

> *"I got separated from my children when I went out for work and then traffickers took me to [country]… it was not a planned thing. I didn't mean to leave them behind, but it's because of what happened, because of the incident […] I have not had the chance to speak with them.* ***I haven't had contact since****. I'm still trying to find their number to reach them." – Sham*

Most men reported feeling triggered by certain situations, such as being exposed to what they do not have in their lives and feeling jealous of others for their privilege to be with family. Aslam described how social media acted as a reminder of the family's absence from his life, as described *"Especially on social media, if I watch some videos about moms, any videos about siblings, it was just like making me emotional and cry by my own."*. Men also discussed the triggering nature of witnessing families outside:

> "*When you see the everyone in the park outside when you go and when you see the nice family, they're going gathering together. So you feel* ***more bad.*** *Maybe I am missing my family." – Rahim*

Participants found that video or image communication was extremely painful for numerous reasons. For Paul, seeing his children in photographs was a depiction of their unhappiness in his absence, as described:

> *"I try to imagine, but it seems to me like they are not happy […] Sometimes when they send me some pictures, they're sitting on the sofa it's making me*

cry because it seems like they put them there or so, oh, 'smile, we are sending a picture for your dad." *– Paul*

Face-to-face video communication brought up sadness and tearfulness, but men's responses also indicate feelings of helplessness and powerlessness to have control over their lives:

*"**I feel very, very sad, frustrated** and… **I hate myself**. I'm really feel very sad […] **the first time I called them on video, it was the last time I called them by video**." – Dialogue*

GET 2: *"Maybe they think I left them"* – the responsibility to be present

Men shared a sense of responsibility for their families, which can be conceptualised through the lens of patriarchal gender roles and masculinity as portrayed culturally and societally around the world. Guilt and shame were associated with the act of leaving the family behind and abandonment, as captured in Paul's words, *"maybe they think I left them"*. This GET outlines the complexities of separating from family to escape harm and seek safety and the attached meaning to this action as informed by the role and unique position men hold in their families. This GET encompasses three subthemes.

Abandoning the family through the lens of masculinity

The act of leaving in some men's minds was an act of abandonment and was associated with guilt, shame, self-blame, failure, worthlessness, and regret. Bilal

carried a responsibility for the sequence of events, the urgency and burden to leave his family behind when embarking on his journey to seek safety, as "*suddenly you have to leave them"*. His narrative had an active voice and an essence of accountability when he said *"what **I have left back at home** is my father, my mother, my brothers, my sisters, my wife and my two children."*. Bilal also expressed strong feelings of shame, disappointment, and guilt, acting against his parental beliefs:

> *"I always say to myself, 'how did I **dare** to leave them and to abandon them?' […] 'How did I dare to leave my family and go by myself? They are part of me." – Bilal*

Similarly, Paul reflected on the day he left and described leaving as an abandonment of his family, which remains for him incomprehensible:

> ***"Oh God, it was really hard that day.** I remember even today when we were speaking like I can see the picture… it was… It was like, I don't know how to say that in English. I was kind of like abandon, like abandon them because it's make no sense, you know. I'm supposed to protect my family." - Paul*

Dialogue noted, "*I **left** one part of me behind*" when thinking of his children, while Sham discussed the emotional burden of leaving his children without warning, without saying goodbye and completely unprotected:

> *"There is a lot of guilt, guilty feeling as well… and it just makes me feel what is the point of me being here? Of being alive and being here? What is adding, what's the point of it? […] It's the* ***worst thing in the world*** *to leave your loved ones behind." – Sham*

Men expressed deeply rooted beliefs about manhood and fatherhood and the ways in which men should provide, support, and protect their families, particularly their dependents. For Rahim, the priority for men is to provide financial security to their families, and refugees often fail to fulfil this role because *"you have no work permit and no money, your mind is not good because you cannot help* ***anyone****"*. This idea was also supported by Dialogue, who believed that refugee men separated from their families need to consider "*how to support them financially"* whilst "***the most important*** *is emotional, psychology support."*. He supported that a man's role is to create a caring, loving, and safe environment for his family, as he described that a responsible man *"still care about the children, care about their wife****, physically, emotionally, financially****, and give them more safety,* ***assurance****"* and he felt like he failed.

Dialogue's core beliefs about his male and parental role were solidly established resulting in continuous emerging self-conceptualisations as a failure, a worthless, powerless father, and a neglectful husband throughout the interview. This self-image nods to the emotional burden he carries with him all those years*:*

> *"I was* ***unable*** *to do* ***my duty*** *as a husband, as a father. So,* ***double, double failure****. And I was so* ***powerless****, and my* ***big regret*** *is that* ***it's my fault****. It's my fault because I* ***should*** *be there with them, or they* ***should*** *be there with me." – Dialogue*

The beliefs around the intersectional roles of masculinity and parenthood were also shared by Paul, who saw himself as the protector of his children and the "*only one"* who could offer them safety besides his wife, therefore, letting them down.

The sense of abandonment was also characterised by the uncertainty of seeking asylum in the context of family separation, powerlessness and self-blame for the harm caused to loved ones, particularly children. Anjaan reflected on the questions received from his daughter about family reunification, such as *"When we going to reunited? Always when we going to reunite? When we going to settle the family?"* which he found overwhelming and difficult to answer. Men shared Anjaan's pain with leaving their children in uncertainty due to a lack of resources, power, and information, as their asylum case was beyond their own control, indicating emotional tiredness and inability to provide reassurance and validation, which subsequently almost felt inauthentic:

> *"I have to speak to them, when they ask me, Dad, where are you? When are you coming?* ***I'm just <u>tired</u> all the time*** *to lie on them, to say, oh no, I'm not that far, I'm coming on Friday." – Paul*

Across men's stories, there was another element in common, as Bilal described, *"I felt regret, but I had no other choice. I had to leave."*. Although men felt regret for '*abandoning'* their families back home, and often in an unsafe environment, they also acknowledged the danger they were in and the urgency to reach safety. For instance, Paul stated "*I left my home country, I was just looking for safety"* and Aslam noted, *"my life was endangered myself, so I have to leave my home country and my family."*.

Their stories often indicated that they could provide more to their families by being alive and far away, rather than tortured or dead. As such, men considered that the hardships of seeking asylum and their sacrifices were the first step to providing a better and safer future for their families.

Worrying about family

The men's accounts suggested worrying in their absence for their families' welfare and hierarchy of needs, such as basic needs and psychological safety (Maslow, 1943). Paul expressed his lack of knowledge about his children's access to food and water or if they are eating every day, as he stated: "*I don't know how, if they have 3 meal a day, I don't know.".* He also worried about his wife's and children's unhappiness and emotional pain while he was away, taking responsibility for their suffering: *"Now some people are suffering because of me and not good at all."*

The love and closeness participants shared with their families were central in their stories and provided the foundation for their worries. For example, Paul worried about his wife's sadness over his resettlement and concealed the struggles of being alone and "*nothing*" away from his community in the UK. Rahim also expressed worries for the emotional pain and harm caused to his family following his escape, as noted that *"they suffer a lot for me by police.".*

Rahim shared fear about his family's physical and psychological safety, particularly due to his persecution, as "*maybe they are also in the danger […] maybe they are attacked, their opponent to their family, they are sometimes a little bit scary"* and reflected on the impact of his persecution on the family's life:

> *"a lot of torture is ongoing in my family last years or before also. If another people in this position without my mom and my brother, they will, they said, I don't know, we don't know you. (laughter) […] every day when you knock you in the night 10, two o 'clock in the midnight, knock your door in the police." – Rahim*

These fears were shared by Anjaan, as he worries that his persecutors can "*reach illegally"* his family and *"can track my phone calls to my wife and daughter"* which makes him feel *"very, very scary"* of what could happen to them. For others the fears about their families' safety are contextualised in the war and political climate of their countries. For Aslam, refugees *"came from the fighting"* suggesting real danger for families behind and difficulties to not worry, as noted by others:

> *"Worrying comes when I see the fall down of the country, or my brothers, my siblings are just telling me about the social situation and economic situation, and also with war and security." – Doyo*

> *"…when they are also living in a very difficult environment and surrounded with unsafe circumstances, in the place where they are not well and they are not good, you are even more worried about them. It's not just the separation…" – Bilal*

Missing moments in time: loss and grief

Men disclosed their need to be present in significant life events. Most shared guilt for missing important moments, being absent and unable to travel for a long

time, which ranged from 18 months to almost two decades, evidencing the time-consuming and re-traumatising process of claiming asylum in the UK. Rahim unfolded an internal conflict of being a member of the family, but not feeling like a member of the family due to his prolonged absence, and said, *"Sometime I feel maybe, maybe I exist in the family **before**. I am on the family still, so, but… how can I describe? […] I'm long time outside"*. Rahim explained that he "*missed a lot of things"* including weddings, funerals, and Eid celebrations.

Missing significant life events was also dominant in other men's accounts, with Doyo recounting that *"it's like missing… I have missed many things that I could experience in my life. I left my country when I was 26."*. On the other hand, Anjaan discussed the loss of his daughter's childhood, years and memories that cannot be replaced: "*she was two years […] I miss 14 years, how misses dad love, yeah, how I miss my daughter love."*. These experiences were shared by other fathers, such as Paul who described that *"the miss is too high*" when considering his children.

Maj, who had strong bonds with his family before his persecution, spoke about missing *"the good memories, like… eating in the same **plate**. […] Sit down, eat, satisfied, you know, go to the shops, come back home together"* and learning from the family members he admired, including his father for whom he said that "*he's a big man, he has knowledge and he knows what he knows, so… I miss all that"*. Men suggested that their absence had a notable impact on the nature of their relationships with significant others, such as parents and children. Maj stated with sadness in his voice *"**I love my mum**, I was **so close**, **we were so close**"* indicating multiple losses within this separation including the bond, intimacy, and cohesion.

Most men experienced bereavement and carried with them the grief of losing a parent or a family member for years. Some participant's narratives indicate that

they still have not come to terms with their loss. The denial of a loved one's loss is associated with not being able to attend their funerals, having the opportunity to be by their side in their final moments or saying goodbye, calling attention to the power of the refugee status over people's lives and freedom of movement beyond borders:

> *"My daddy died, before I got the paper. […] So I couldn't ever to go back to and I see, I cannot see to him for the last time." – Rahim*

> *"My mother passed away in [year], like 2 years after being here in the UK. So even my relatives… **so hard**. I could not do anything because I didn't have… I was an asylum seeker, so I didn't have any travel documents, maybe to travel, to participate in the funeral…" – Doyo*

Lastly, men reflected on how it feels to not only lose your family but in the background of this losing everything, as Sham emotively described the multi-faceted case of displacement: *"Being a refugee or a migrant is not a nice thing. It's the worst thing in the world to leave your loved ones behind…"*. "*Losing everything*" including family, home, country, culture, memories, friends, was either explicitly or implicitly mentioned by men, while the impact of the multiple losses was unspoken or hidden behind other aspects of their narratives.

GET 3: *"They don't like you to be here"* – experiences embedded in masculinity and intersectionality

Men expressed different aspects of their identities, such as gender, disability, age, parenthood, sexuality, race and immigration status and the ways these

intersected with their experience of family separation and resettlement in the UK. This GET explores men's difficulties considering the existence of patriarchal, ableist and racialised societal ideas and in relation to behaviours constituted as the 'norm' for males. Here, intersectionality is crucial to capture people's identities not solely as refugees, but alongside other factors that may position men differently in society. This GET includes three subthemes.

Powerlessness and helplessness

Male power and patriarchy ("rule of the father") have dominated the world since pre-historical periods (Levy, 2022) and have likely informed participants' beliefs about societal expectations. Despite the limited resources refugees may have, the expectations did not vanish following their migration journeys. Throughout people's stories, powerlessness and helplessness were focal points and related to other aspects of their own identities, unique to each participant. Powerlessness showed up in different ways, such as in relation to their position, power, and privileges within the family, within their community and within themselves.

Rahim's absence from the family not only signified a change in his involvement in family decisions but also the ability to hold power within the household (*"Only big decisions they are ask me.")*. Hence, Rahim often felt unable to help, especially during the early time of resettlement, failing the expectations placed upon him as a family man. Likewise, Bilal's narrative suggests feeling powerless as a man, within his identity as a husband and father who is far away and unable to support his family: "*you are here, you cannot do **anything** to help them.".* The accentuation of the word "anything" underlines the perception of his weakness. Dialogue, who has a strong cultural identity contributing to his understanding of himself and the world, felt worthless in the eyes of his family and described losing his

masculine authority over his children. Consequently, he did not feel respected as the head of their household, and he forfeited the ability to influence decisions and shape his children's lives. Reflecting on a transitional period when his children moved without his consent to a neighbouring country with extended family members, he said:

> "***I lost my power, I lost my authorities***. *So, what I've done, I will take decisions, what I'm going to do for them. They don't care anymore about me. So, when I found out, it very hurt me, I feel frustrated. It was* ***a big, big humiliation*** *for me. It's my first time,* ***I feel very humiliated***. *Take decisions for my children, they don't associate me. It's like… you are* ***nothing****, they don't care about you. So that day I realised that I was very useless." – Dialogue*

The loss of power and agency was also experienced by men in relation to their previous social status. For example, Paul had a professional position with privileges to support his community, while his role meant that he was able to independently make decisions and be in control of his life. On the contrary, resettling in the UK alone he felt "*like a child"* as he mentioned "*everything I need, I have to ask and I don't like that.".* Paul's words indicate the discrepancies between his past and current life and the impact of completely losing agency: *"I'm nothing in this country. […] when you have to compare about what you have and what you have now,* ***it's not easy****".*

Men described being in the country's power, which was often accompanied by the notion of being an "*illegal immigrant*". The lack of agency and power participants experienced implied the power a country or state has on refugees who

live a temporary life excluded by social systems providing safety, certainty, and a sense of predictability. For instance, Rahim demonstrated that government bodies carry great power over refugees' settlement and right to remain in the UK, which feeds into the uncertainty of seeking asylum and the fear of deportation: "*Home Office, **anytime send you back**, you are back in your country.*".

In forced displacement, the helplessness and loss of control apply to travelling and moving cross-country, which evidences the ways borders and politics affect people's lives globally. Men discussed the power of asylum to enable visiting their families and beginning the process of reunification, which remains in the hands of the country:

> *"I'm like in jail, my body is here in the UK, but my spirit is still in Cameroon […] If I had power, I would like to go back to my home country." – Paul*

Unsurprisingly, being granted asylum marked the beginning of a new life for participants, what Rahim described as "*heaven*". The refugee status indicated becoming "*legal*" and acquiring the freedom to travel.

Systems: experiences of hostility, racism, discrimination, and opportunities

Most participants reported experiences of racism and discrimination, both institutional and societal. This hostility was understood as influenced by the intersection of race, gender, and migration status, as Paul described, "*sometimes you see you are not on the right place for sure. I'm sorry to say that, but… they look at you, you see on their face, they don't like you to be here for sure…*". Some

experienced racism by individuals in everyday situations ("*if you are on the bus*"), whilst other narratives focused on the hostility of the immigration system. For instance, Dialogue, whose initial claim was rejected, and was granted asylum many years later, described the harm inflicted upon him by the Home Office. Prior to his arrival in the UK, Dialogue expected that people's human rights would be protected, however, his experience in detention centres proved the opposite:

> *"It's **discrimination** to be honest. That's it. It's discrimination. Make people that because of your gender, you are more vulnerable than another gender. So, let's make some favour to that gender, **you**…**you are a man**, it's like they go to punish you because you're a man. So, you know that you got to be strong so you can deal with the pain they are going to inflict you. […] It's the power of their **hostile environment** they are making purpose to eat you up, to give up." – Dialogue*

Dialogue recognised that the gendered assumptions and traditional expectations of masculinity, such as resilience, strength and toughness acted as reasons to be discriminated against. These ideas insinuate the detrimental effects of patriarchy on men. However, his words also accentuate the unfair and unjust treatment of people seeking protection and the current conditions with immigration: *"**You are not welcome. They don't believe you. Go back to your country.** I said **wow**."*.

Maj, who was initially disbelieved on the grounds of seeking protection over his sexuality, also spoke about the Home Office's hostile treatment, demonstrating disappointment and higher expectations: *"I did not expect **this** from the government, like if you want to seek protection […] I think the country just… the UK turned around against me."*. Moreover, Anjaan shared that a terrorist investigation

was initiated when he sought asylum in the UK, driven by his protected characteristics, possibly indicating anti-Muslim sentiment and islamophobia: "*When I was applied, within three days, the TID and CID, Terrorist Investigation Department and CID, yeah, both went to my home. I don't know how they know.".*

Rahim found a way to radically accept those imbalances and believes that "e*veryone is not equal anywhere in this world it will be up and down".* Nevertheless, it's important to note that not all participants had discriminatory experiences. For example, Bilal reported:

> *"…until now I haven't experienced any type of or any act of racism from any person when I ask a question and…told me 'oh you didn't understand, you don't understand' or 'you have to learn the language', I never experienced something like that as it happened in other countries." – Bilal*

Overall, most participants expressed a deep appreciation for the provision of state support and opportunities in the UK, particularly compared to their countries of origin. Aslam, who came as a minor, illustrated that this country provides a better quality of life and felt grateful for being here: *"So just you come here because this country give you other opportunity. They give you college, houses, money, everything.".* Some participants shared appreciation towards the UK and its people for encouraging refugees to resettle and offering unconditional support without any expectations from them:

> "*…the efforts that they make in this country to make you feel welcome and integrated, that kind of helps to take away some of the worries that you have." – Sham*

Navigating a new country alone: post-migration difficulties and acculturation

On the background of family separation, men disclosed the challenges to navigate a foreign country on their own, and often completely alone. Participants discussed the limited access to food, housing, employment, and healthcare services, as well as the long and time-consuming process of seeking asylum. Paddling in unfamiliar waters without a female familial presence by their side was a "cultural shock" as described by Rahim. The shift in gender roles demanded people resist their existing views on masculinity and learn new skills. For some, acting independently without practical support from their families was proven arduous due to their disabilities.

Rahim shared his lived experience of separation through the lens of his intersecting identities of gender, culture, disability, and age. He came to the UK in his early 20s calling himself *"very little"* for the struggles he faced. Being a victim of torture, Rahim had a permanent disability and missed his hand. This extremely impacted his ability to perform simple tasks without his mother's presence, like holding objects. In a similar fashion, Anjaan discussed the consequences of torture on his mobility, causing him intense pain and restricting his ability to walk or complete tasks independently. Developing survival skills alongside his disability was a lot of "*suffering*". Both their stories highlighted resettlement barriers and the lack of tailored support for asylum seekers with visible or invisible disabilities living without a carer in the UK:

> *"On difficult day when feel pain. When feel more pain anyone I feel always if I have my wife and daughter, they do some massage or something. Whole year, I'm alone.* ***No one****. That's the most suffer here, no one look after me…" – Anjaan*

Men conveyed the stress of surviving in the country without adequate financial aid, access to food and permanent housing. For instance, Rahim protested about the myths surrounding people who escape their countries and receive protection in the UK. People back home may believe that the quality of life here is outstanding, however, he highlighted that the reality is concerning, as people have poor access to food and are living in poverty: *"they're thinking we are very good, we live in UK so we have everything […] but we cannot survive up here.* ***We are fighting for the food…"****.*

Most participants experienced homelessness or the risk of becoming homeless, which further deteriorated their mental health, and had a cumulative character to all the other present stressors. Anjaan reported the impact of poor living conditions throughout the stages of asylum-seeking, such as the effects of rough sleeping on both his physical and mental health, the consequences of cold/rainy weather on the degree of his pain and the shortage of safe shelters.

> *"Lots of sometimes most of the time I will sleep at the temple, front of the temple, eating mostly temple that I had here. That life is terrible, terrible life. I want to pray for the good no one give to the same life, might suffer for that. Most of the time I live in [train station]. I can never forget here." – Anjaan*

Aslam reflected on the transition from being an unaccompanied minor to being an adult asylum seeker and the associated risks of homelessness. His words support the notion of systemic issues and inability to care for and protect young refugees:

> *"I had the foster services and she was cooking for me, she was looking after me. I had a social services, they were looking after me. […] But when my social services stopped, so my life was especially finished you know. I was homeless, I didn't have no money, I was on the street…" – Aslam*

At that point, it seems Aslam's life once more became uncertain at a very vulnerable age, leading him to believe that his life was "*especially finished*" and overwhelm him with hopelessness.

No access to housing often came together with insufficient financial governmental aid, which according to participants was approximately £40 per week and as Aslam noted, "*It is not enough for us all our week, like, if you don't work*". Participants expressed associated concerns about the lack of employment opportunities, and many criticised the inability to make money through legal routes during earlier stages of resettlement:

> *"You cannot work to support your family. You cannot do anything. You have to stay in the hotel the whole day." - Paul*

Consistently, Doyo reflected on the barriers to employment even at later stages of asylum, which continuously posed difficulties in supporting family back home and in fulfilling the provider role: "*I had a responsibility to take care of them,*

*maybe financially or something like that and sometimes it's **hard** to support, especially when you are a foreigner, can't try to find a good job or to find something that can help you also to help relatives or friends."*. These difficulties were exacerbated by the laborious and lengthy asylum processes in the UK.

Some men shared the noticeable changes in their sense of identity as males without their families' presence and the benefits of being exposed to contrasting cultural stimuli. For instance, Rahim reflected on growing up in a large South Asian family, which adhered to a cultural norm where women were the "*leaders"* of the house. Rahim and other men in his family were dependent on females for all the house chores. Upon his arrival in the UK, he realised that men could learn to care for themselves, be independent and responsible, and his words indicate a shift in his beliefs around gender roles:

> *"When you came out from the family, so it's a bit shocked and you missed everything for like every step. So, like me, I never cooked or do anything in my back home. So maybe… we got everything ready and but nowadays I realise we learn here. […] it's not only for women. It's for… anyone can do it, you know?" – Rahim*

Aslam's story was slightly different, but equally important to highlight. He discussed his journey to independence coming too early. It required a great effort to learn to be self-sufficient as a child at a fragile age when he needed his primary carers. Aslam described the responsibilities of taking care of everything as being "***too much***" and the weight of these words signifies the influences of growing up alone and the likelihood of feeling abandoned:

> *"I just came here, and when I was growing up, slowly, slowly, I was just living alone, cooking for myself, washing dishes for myself, washing clothes for myself, clean my room for myself. […] Big change, big change… Breakfast my mom was making, dinner my mom was making, lunch my mom was making. And here* ***I'm on my own****. And I just do everything by myself. I just don't even sometimes eat as well because I'm my own." – Aslam*

Participants also focused on the exposure to difference and diversity, new experiences, and life in the UK. Their narratives suggest that refugees need to respect the country that offers them protection, understand the cultural habits and identity of their new community, and make efforts to assimilate whilst balancing their own traditions. For Maj, coming to this country opened the door for freedom and exploration of his sexuality and masculinity far away from fears of persecution and the rejecting eye of his family. He felt empowered to engage with life and people in the UK to improve as a person and live according to his values:

> *"it's a different culture here. It's a different power here. So, I start copying some of the things that you guys doing here, I think so… because I'm changing myself to for the better. Seeing that there is a way to be independent." – Maj*

Moreover, men spoke about the dissonance between people's ideas and ways of living here compared to their home countries, particularly in relation to human rights and LGBTQ+ identities. Dialogue mentioned his ability to challenge traditional ideas about homosexuality and stated, "***I accept it.*** *Even I have a (gay) friend, that things back home,* ***never****.".* The way he phrased this meaningful change shows the

significance of human rights and advocacy, possibly informed by both the development of friendships with people who have been discriminated against based on their sexual preferences and his battles for freedom. In support of his LGBTQ+ friends, Dialogue was criticised by his African peers for letting Western ideas influence his mindset, calling him "*coconut*" and telling him that "*I got that thing about my brain, it's white, it's for white people.".*

Lastly, Maj discussed the internal conflict he often finds himself in when considering embracing his sexuality and holding onto his faith. His story speaks to the complexities of homosexuality in Islam and explicit condemnations of same-sex sexual acts in the Qur'an. Maj's words reveal his struggles with being true to himself and the internalised homophobia that often accompanies the experience of sexually minoritised people:

> *"I just try to ignore it, live my life…I'm still a Muslim, trying to be brave, try to go closer to (God). Is that wrong? So, try to go more closer to him and see, because my experience is like, it's true. It's like the religion, all the religion says, all the Qur'an say. It's true.* ***It's a dirt again****. And the* ***Qur'an*** *is not advocating for people that dirty, do not go closer to dirty things." – Maj*

GET 4: *"Family means everything"* – living with the hope to reunite

Men discussed the central position family holds in their lives, hearts, and thoughts. This GET highlights that families provide a lot of benefits for people's emotional wellbeing, quality of life and prosperity. Families acted as pillars in life for all participants, and the hope to reunite enriched them with resilience. Men reflected on cherished moments, as well as the barriers, worries, and gains in relation to family reunification. The two following subthemes were developed.

The importance of family in our lives

Men portrayed the family as a meaningful institution in life, a source of happiness and support against difficulties. Participants repeatedly conceptualised their family as their whole world, as ***"everything"***, raising feelings of wholeness, love, and completion. Dialogue described the family as a "***meaningful feeling"*** and said, *"Family means unity. Family means one, one, one, unique human being."*. The repetition of "*one*" alludes to the vital feature of unity in families that could be understood as togetherness in sickness and health, and commitment to one another. Similarly, for Maj family is "*love, caring and problem solving."*.

Family not only provided a shelter and safe place to exist but also helped Bilal *"feeling settled"* and offered Dialogue *"psychology balance"*. This illuminates the unsettling nature of losing their support system in place. Doyo believed that families "*needs to be together to support each other"* and provide emotional and physical welfare. Maj reflected that even the war left him without serious mental health difficulties because his family was present: *"**Can you imagine**, even after the war, there is no **PTSD**, because I'm there with my family."*. The shift in his voice highlights his own surprise with this argument and is indicative of the beneficial, nurturing, and sustaining character of families on individuals. Men had positive beliefs about families and appreciated how loved, cared for, and protected they felt by their families. Rahim spoke about receiving unconditional love and acceptance for who he is from his family, despite the odds of being rejected because of his persecution:

> *"This is the main thing. And without family, people thinking, different people is very helpful. No, without family everyone is **harmful**. It's the honest*

thing. If you do a lot of things with family, still they can accept you, but no one else can." – Rahim

Nostalgia was a collective feeling in people's narratives, especially among those who reflected on shared moments with their children and those who discussed their own childhoods with parents who may no longer be alive. This feeling demonstrated closeness and a community-oriented mindset across participants, which can be associated with their cultural origins. Their words coloured their understanding of these bonds being the "*most important*" in life, enough to make anyone happy. Consequently, some participants reflected on a family being everything one needs and its' higher position in comparison to material wealth. For Sham, playing with his children was "*the biggest gift or the biggest wealth"* someone could ever experience, whilst Paul shared:

"*if you have all the money of this life, you don't have family,* ***it doesn't mean anything****" – Paul*

Family reunification: a dream come true

Family reunification appeared to occupy people's minds since their early days of resettlement. Maj, who expressed a *"missing"* without his family, when asked about family reunification shared that *"if that's going to happen, I think* ***problem solved****"* which emphasises that their absence is indeed a problem for him at present. Likewise, Bilal, who was in the process of reuniting with his family, stated it was his *"big dream"*. Coming from a politically unstable country, he hoped to provide a better future for his family:

> *"My big dream is to be able to save and to rescue my family and my children, to bring them to a safe country and my children to learn and to be useful people that can serve the community and then they can replace or then they can compensate what I've lost and what I wasn't able to do." – Bilal*

Sham, who not only was separated from his children but also was not able to locate them expressed his hopes and willingness to reunite. In his view, this would help him to leave his old life in the past and move on. Sham's statement is powerful and conceptualises the role of family reunification during resettlement in a foreign country:

> *"I believe that will create a lot of happiness for me and it would give me more hope to carry on and to live life…if that was to happen, it will be like injecting a new life into me." – Sham*

Family reunification was experienced as a long and stepped process. Anjaan, who has successfully reunited with his family, reflected at the beginning of this process, and felt that his leave to remain was the first step towards happiness, as noticed: "*I thought my 50% is okay, I'm going to reunite my family.*". He described being overwhelmed by uncontrollable emotions, joy, and tears, and his account indicates a sense of relief and achievement following years of hardship and sacrifice:

> *"I applied for sponsor my wife and daughter […] You **can't** believe, when I got the accepted for, the response is ready, okay, I can't, my heart was **very***

> ***very*** *tight and I was crying alone. I* ***cry, cry, cry, cry*** *the same day. […] I'm going to see my family." – Anjaan*

Until his claim was approved and his family arrived in the UK, Anjaan experienced worries that something wrong would happen, for example with their flight, but also eagerness and anticipation as the time felt like it had stopped. This emotional reaction is a sign of the life-changing nature this decision has for a refugee man who lives alone:

> *"How long I wait for them…nearly 13-14 years I wait. When I got the asylum, I* ***can't*** *wait until they come (laughs). Every single day, that time the time was not moving, not fast." – Anjaan*

Participants who were not in a similar position felt that reunification was beyond their control as it was strongly associated with their asylum claims and other factors, such as employment or housing. On this matter, Paul shared that he finds it difficult to even think about reuniting because failing this and letting his family down, or not being able to control it makes him feel sad. Nevertheless, Sham believed that for male refugees separated from their families, reunification in the UK needs to be prioritised and supported by the organisations:

> *"…if there's someone that they've left family behind, then it would be good if they could be reunited with their family kind of as soon as possible to alleviate some of the worries and stress." – Sham*

Moreover, Rahim alluded to the current societal context with immigration and the change in rules, when he shared his hope for family reunification, and the fear of stricter rules in place to contain immigration: *"nowadays they're going to be hard again"*. Another significant barrier for people was losing touch with family members, and not being able to locate them. Aslam, Sham, and Dialogue were among those who did not know their families' whereabouts and attempted to locate them with the help of organisations and local people. However, this task had proven to be arduous. Their stories imply the lack of tailored support for men with similar backgrounds and the need to identify more practical ways of helping people locate their families.

Bilal and Rahim have only managed to reunite temporarily with their families in other countries by meeting halfway. Both felt happiness and as Rahim described, *"I still **can't believe** I see my mom, so it's like a dream"*. Bilal described himself as more relaxed and settled, and marked the virtue of patience in life for good things to happen:

> "*It was a sensation I cannot describe because I was dreaming and meeting them. But thank God **this dream became true**, and I was able to meet them […] I'm much calmer than before." – Bilal*

GET 5: *"It's like a package"* – coping with family separation

Men's stories captured the multiple ways people managed to cope alone in the UK and the available integrated support Paul described "***like a package***". This GET considers protective systems in place that have helped men feel safe, process trauma, and resettle. Men reflected on the roots of hope and perseverance to reach improved living conditions, the kindness and care received by individuals and the government,

and the tailored support offered by specialist organisations. This GET introduces the three following subthemes.

Sources of strength and resilience

Life values were important in men's personal accounts, so "*Even when you see everything is gone, it's gone. Keep having hope, keep having hope,* ***keep having hope****"* as Paul said. Love, hope, resilience, perseverance, commitment, trust, and acceptance gave participants the strength to resettle and often acted therapeutically. Maj referred to "***love***" as *"healing from psychological perspective"*. Resilience, self-trust, and trusting others were significant factors for Aslam to reach a happier life ("*stay strong and believe yourselves, believe the person who support you*"). Acceptance towards the past was mentioned by Rahim, as men *"need to start new life here, because he know he cannot go back, so he have to accept it*". This belief notes the seriousness of being in the present moment and not dwelling over the past in his efforts to adapt in the UK. In a similar spirit, Aslam has accepted that the UK is a better option compared to Afghanistan, despite the difficulties: *"I've been safe here, so I feel relieved here. I prefer to be here than there at the moment."*.

Religion and spirituality represented sources of resilience, as recognised in Paul's words, *"I keep hope like I'm Christian.* ***I pray too much***.". Religion held a unique place for both Christian and Muslim participants, as men connected to their cultural customs, sought hope from their God, integrated into their local community, shared the burden with other people from the same religion and drew inspiration from religious scripts:

"So, I just go on Friday to mosque or sometimes to mosque. […] I was there, when I was reading Quran, I was just going to reading, pray sometime, so it just making me relax my mind and relax myself." – Aslam

Learning new skills to facilitate social integration and resettlement was also crucial not just for men's healing, but also for their sense of identity. In Anjaan's story, there was a recurrent feeling of pride and increased self-esteem in his ability to do well in the UK:

"I take interest to cook. I learned everything. […] I finished all the culinary course. Everything I learned there. […] Happy. My life is going, next steps. I can find a job here." – Anjaan

Participants reflected on the value of English in helping them to feel a member of society and navigate this country. Acquiring the knowledge of the language seemed to be a necessary step toward positive resettlement and independence in the UK and was considered a priority, as Aslam said: *"So just try focus on your study and learn English. English is more important here."*.

Some men shared their love for the arts and considered the healing nature of creative writing, poetry, and photography. Their words highlight the empowering character of expressing emotions through creative ways to not only make sense of their stories but also to source hope and connect with others:

"…writing poems, talking about stories. Stood in front of people, good with talking about myself and to other people. People enjoying that, hearing my stories." – Maj

"*Sometimes they ask us to write […] and we speak about **resilience**." – Paul*

Community, belonging and helping others

Men conveyed the gravity of building a community and support networks as a man in the UK without the presence of family. The emphasis on communities being *"another family"*, as described by participants, speaks to the power of belongingness and solidarity, as human beings are inherently social and have a strong desire to be in groups. For instance, in Doyo's narrative, the need to feel cared for and have people to reach out to when needed in this country is noticeable:

> *"I can say I build another family, like friends. […] So I've coped with them, I feel confident when I'm with them. It took time, but now I can feel that." – Doyo*

A key part of being in a community with others was common cultural or social characteristics, such as religion or ethnicity. Doyo felt *"lucky to meet some Congolese",* while Paul's voice showed excitement when he was talking about sharing cultural heritage with people here in the UK *("She's from Cameroon, **like me**!")*. It's imperative to note that this was not a shared experience for all, as for example, Bilal felt that compatriots *"when you go to them to help, they don't help that much"*. Therefore, although cultural similarities understandably may be points of connection for some, the nuances in people's experiences indicate the likelihood of distinct cultural differences in diaspora populations scattered in the world. Contrastingly, Anjaan underlined that participation is critical and whether people share similar

characteristics does not matter, as stated: "*Keep in touch for any community. No same community. **Any community***.". His view represents that connection is key to preventing loneliness and that engaging with different communities has respective benefits.

Participants reflected on the merit of shared experience and their identities as refugees. Men's stories revealed that having been through similar migration journeys may place people in better positions to offer validation, reassurance and understanding, and as Dialogue described "*you share the same suffer.".* Some participants advocated for asylum seekers, providing advice and information on their rights in the UK. Advocacy indicates achievement and confidence that their experiences can positively shape the experience of others and prevent harm from happening again. Other participants focused more on providing practical support, such as access to food and housing:

> *"I can never forget here. I still do charity, I do some cook the food and I'm giving it still now. […] Because I know how…to feel hungry here." – Anjaan*

The combination of the words "*hungry*" and "*here*" mirrors the reality of homelessness, poverty and seeking asylum, in conjunction with Anjaan's lived experiences that drive his charitable giving. The emphasis on support with housing, accommodation, and access to means in the early stages of resettlement was present across people's narratives. Reciprocating kindness and compassion towards the refugee community and using their voices to inspire others was centred in all interviews. Men's passion for change and social justice implied that advocacy is healing.

Integrated support

A principal feature of the participants' conceptualisation of care and support was its integrated nature. Everyone championed their access to specialist organisations offering tailored support. Aslam said, *"I had, **luckily**, the organisations that helped"* and the emphasis on "*luckily*" marks his fortune and hints at the mainstream service access for refugees and asylum seekers across the UK. The support was not limited to the provision of psychological interventions, as men recognised the importance of employment and financial support:

> *"…the most priority is a job, you know? when they got a job, every problem is done." – Rahim*

Dialogue underlined the multifaceted help:

> *"it is **so** useful that you give your hope that you are not on your own that you got people on your side, even on the very difficult moments where you want to give up and you realise that people are there to help you out, no matter the situation and that support is psychological support, emotional support, financial support. That's what asylum or refugee man looking for. […] without this charity, **I was gone**." – Dialogue*

Doyo also stated: *"try to be registered with organisations, it's the only way that you can get there."* The use of "*there*" at the end of the sentence suggests that to be granted refugee status and recover, engaging with organisations is a necessity. The value of organisations for refugees' quality of life is well summarised by Rahim's

thoughts too, *"that's why some people still exist."*. Organisations also provide a place of safety, stability and comfort, a warm and welcoming environment, as well as a structured routine to help people cope with their day-to-day difficulties:

> *"They really helped me out to go through from this hard time. When I was alone, I would just go there and stay with them, talk to them for hours. They just really give me a good thought and give me enough energy and it was really helping me. Because of them, I'm still breathing like almost four years, I was going to see them every day." – Aslam*

Men expressed their gratitude to the mental health support, particularly the therapists they shared this journey with. Their narratives suggested that their therapeutic progress acted as the ground to improve their sense of self and pave the way to recovery, as noted:

> *"…mental health support…was a key point, it was very important because even if I got status, even if I had family or union, if you are not mentally stable, you won't be able to commence a life or to live your life normally." – Bilal*

Participants explicitly mentioned the values psychologists hold and appreciated being treated with respect, humanity, compassion, and kindness. Maj drew attention to "***empathy, solidarity"***, while Paul said: "*… it's not a job for her. She has* ***passion*** *for what she's doing. We are not just there like a migrant.* ***No****. She has too much kindness for us."*. His choice of words stresses the need for

psychologists to be social justice-led and human rights defenders when working with minoritised communities. Similar thoughts were expressed by others:

> "*…people that will give you **all** the type of support that you need when in return you cannot give them anything… just out of humanity, being human beings and they want to help." – Bilal*

> *"…people on your side […] the representation of a new family […] **decent** people, **compassionate** people, people of integrity, legal. They told you that they are wrong, don't listen them. You will make everything on your right, on your human being, on your human right, to tell them **they are wrong**, that you **deserve** to live in here…" – Dialogue*

Dialogue's emphasis on the trust he received from clinicians on his side highlights his experience of being disbelieved by the Home Office and the reality of the current socio-political landscape. For him, recognising the goodness in people's hearts required time: *"you realise that they are **different** with the system"*. However, once trust is built then the therapeutic relationship can act as the driver for change ("*when they really feel that you care about him as a refugee first, **and then you go to open his mind, you go to open his brain, you go to open his heart**")*. Psychological therapy helped clients by providing a space to reflect on their experiences and share their stories, recognising the healing nature of talking therapy:

> *"Sometimes when you speak, you speak, you speak, **it helps**. It's like reading. When you read, you are in another world. So, it keeps you away from your thinking for a little bit of time. But it's always like battle between*

the positive and the negative. Sometimes the positive can win and sometimes the negative. And in that case, you need to ***fight*** *not to go in the dark part of yourself, but still stay under light and keep happy, keep having hope, because without hope, I'm not sure to be still alive for sure." – Paul*

Participants also learned how to manage their post-traumatic symptoms, with an array of techniques, such as grounding, breathing and thought-challenging techniques:

"(Family separation) is something I am through ***every day, every day, every day, every day****. That's why I always have my grounding material with me because sometimes it can happen anywhere." - Paul*

The impact of the emotional burden is noticeable, and subsequently, the therapeutic tools become even more important to manage his feelings. Three elements were considered crucial by participants to not only develop a good rapport with the psychologist, but also make progress in therapy, including the pace and readiness of the client, therapeutic boundaries, and transparency, as well as tailoring the intervention to individual needs:

"…Once they know what are the problems that they're facing, they can address those issues, and it could help them to start to feel better…" – Sham

"I know there is boundaries, the client ***needs to know that****. […] If the client is not coming in and know some sessions you need to come in, if you want to better help, you need to come in first of all." – Maj*

Discussion

This chapter summarises the findings on the impact of family separation in cross-comparison with wider literature. I critically evaluate the study and consider research recommendations and clinical implications.

Summary of Findings

This study aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. How do male refugees experience family separation during their efforts to resettle in the UK?
2. How do male refugees separated from their families conceptualise support?

Nine refugee men living in the UK were interviewed for this IPA study. Men originated from Africa, South Asia, and the Middle East. I identified five themes, each with respective subthemes. Altogether the findings paint individual and collective stories of family separation as influenced by dynamic socio-cultural and systemic components. Men discussed the psychological impact of leaving loved ones behind and their strong sense of responsibility. Family separation was considered an act of abandonment and was tightly interwoven with guilt and shame. Life disruptions and the transition in the UK evoked feelings of powerlessness. Family separation was experienced through the intersectional lens of masculinity, race, disability, sexuality, and migration status. Intersectionality was a strong indicator of racism, discrimination, perceived opportunities, and acculturation. Men drew hope from family and accessed meaningful support through community engagement and organisations.

This qualitative study builds our understanding of the complexities of family separation in refugee men and mirrors stressors previously documented in the literature and further explained by existing psychological theories (see more details in Appendix 20).

Literature cross-examination

Emotional burden of family separation

Participants reported an array of emotional consequences of family separation, including trauma, low mood, lack of motivation, loneliness, suicidal feelings and worries about their families. The negative impact of family separation on refugees' emotional wellbeing has been previously documented (Asmal-Lee et al., 2022; Beaton et al., 2018; Fogden et al., 2020; Liddell et al., 2021, 2022; Miller et al., 2018). Quantitative studies have shown a significant association between forced separation and mental illness including depression, anxiety, PTSD, and disturbed eating and sleeping patterns (Fogden et al., 2020; Nickerson et al., 2011; Schweitzer et al., 2006). Furthermore, a study exploring the effects of spousal separation on Syrian refugees in Germany reported lower social and psychological quality of life and significantly higher emotional distress (Georgiadou et al., 2020).

Participants described the experience of forced separation as "*tough*", "*sad*", *"lonely*" and "*hard*". Likewise, another study on the effects of family separation found that refugees used highly charged language to describe their life circumstances (Liddell et al., 2022). Although loneliness has been briefly mentioned and associated with family separation before (i.e., Gautam et al., 2018; Mangrio et al., 2019; Vromans et al., 2018), this study considerably adds to our knowledge of the experienced loneliness and isolation in separated male refugees. Participants also

discussed factors that exacerbate or trigger feelings of loneliness such as the observation of other families or engaging in video calls. This could be explained by the theory of ambiguous loss, which captures the experience of a person being present, but simultaneously absent or physically distant (Boss, 2004). The findings also highlighted romantic loneliness and the difficulty of finding love, connection and intimacy in a partner, which has not been fully explored in male refugee populations (Vitale & Ryde, 2018).

Consistent with the literature, the study identified the importance of context. The geographical distance, duration of forced separation and context of displacement influenced men's experiences. Previous research on refugee family networks and diaspora also indicated the importance of context on refugees' mental health decline (Löbel, 2020). As such, the further geographically someone's family was located, the more debilitating separation was for their wellbeing. Considering that all participants had experienced several traumatic events, Rousseau et al.'s (2001) argument regains ground: "*For refugees who have had traumatic experiences, extended separation from family members may serve as a continuing link to an unbearable past*" (p.41). Nevertheless, this study underlined additional factors including serial separations, familial bonding and relationships and the presence of communication, all of which contribute to the perception of family separation in male refugees.

Being responsible, being present

This study emphasised the strong sense of responsibility men held towards their families. Men reported associated feelings of guilt, shame, and self-blame for not being able to provide and protect, but also for "abandoning" their families. These feelings were particularly present in fathers. The perceived consequences of relational disruptions in the family can be further elucidated by the attachment

theory (Bowlby, 1978) which centres the parent-child relationship and the long-term impact of this bond on children's development. Presence was understood through physical, practical, financial, and emotional support, and ideas around masculinity were key in shaping participants' beliefs. The desire to financially support families overseas has been reported in other studies (Miller et al., 2018; Savic et al., 2013). Nonetheless, men's narratives uncovered the multidimensional nature of perceived responsibility that may have previously remained unvoiced. This could potentially be explained by the absence of fully male samples in the investigation of family separation (Hampton et al., 2021; Liddell et al., 2021) and the tailored aim to unpack gendered experiences.

Concerns were shared by participants about their families' lives and safety in politically unstable places. Living under constant fear and stress about potential harm and loved ones' welfare has gained some traction in previous research (Mangrio et al., 2020; Nickerson et al., 2011; Schweitzer et al., 2006). Worrying about families overseas can have a debilitating effect by causing nightmares and sleep disruptions (Wilmsen, 2013) and contributing to enduring PTSD trajectories (Fogden et al., 2020). The magnitude and presence of worries could also be influenced by the geographical distance and the limited opportunities for support provision (Löbel, 2020). Nevertheless, in this study, men also highlighted the perceived impact of their own actions and/or living conditions in the UK on their families' happiness.

Forced separation prevented men from sharing moments with loved ones, attending significant life events, and witnessing their family over time. The findings particularly centred the cycles of human life, and men's inability to meet new family members (i.e., children) or grieve over loved ones passing. Mangrio et al. (2020) reported on the experience of bereavement whilst separated, while Gautam et al.

(2018) revealed that older adult refugees have felt sorrow with missed funerals. The impact of missed moments could be explained in the context of collectivism[12], which is strongly associated with family cohesion and, therefore, may exacerbate the sense of familial fragmentation (Liddell et al., 2021; Miller et al., 2018; Savic et al., 2013).

Intersectionality

Intersectionality affects the experience of family separation in the background of asylum-seeking, racism, and exposure to unfamiliar cultural stimuli. The theme identified here has been considered in research focusing on post-migration difficulties (Alemi & Stempel, 2018; Burford-Rice et al., 2020; Golembe et al., 2021), but in relation to family separation has been only briefly documented. For instance, refugee men have reported powerlessness to reunite with their families, lack of control and helplessness (Beswick, 2015; Tiilikainen et al., 2023, p.6). This study shed further light on the parental powerlessness and responsibility towards dependents and almost certainly confirmed the deterioration of male mental health due to delays in family reunification and the inability to financially provide for dependents (Georgiadou et al., 2020; Hvidtfeldt et al., 2022; Miller et al., 2018). Similarly, studies focusing on parents have reported that separation from "at least one child" can increase parental risk for mental health difficulties (Belau et al., 2021; Löbel, 2020), which could explain the multi-faceted emotional responses among the fathers in this study, including low mood, suicidality and loneliness. According to social rank theory (Gilbert, 2000), social adaptation in hierarchical societies can influence mental health outcomes and inequalities, particularly in refugees who experience downward social mobility (Mahadevan et al., 2023). Therefore, negative

[12] Collectivism is defined as the "emphasis on collective rather than individual action or identity" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

emotions and mental health difficulties could be explained by the loss of social status and role in the host country.

This study significantly contributed to the identification of cumulative stressors during the post-migration period based on multiple identity layers. For participants, family separation was simply not the only problem. Their experiences were coloured by human rights violations, discrimination, demoralising living conditions, increased risks of homelessness and deportation, language barriers, and the loss of "*everything*". Participants' experiences of social exclusion and hostility faced in the UK can be understood through the social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) which suggests that people conceptualise their identities based on the social groups they belong to. This further explains feeling like an 'outsider' in a predominantly White/Western society (Özoflu, 2019). Men did not only lose their families, but considering their identities beyond family, they lost their homes, cultural and religious customs, community, social identity, and self-confidence.

Importance of family

In consonance with other studies, family was considered important for resettlement and social integration (Asmal-Lee et al., 2022; Bletscher & Spiers, 2023; Darawsheh et al., 2022; Gangamma, 2018; Labys et al., 2017; Sim et al., 2023; Sundvall et al., 2021). Close social relationships and community cohesion increase the sense of belongingness and can significantly predict successful resettlement in the host country (Chen & Schweitzer, 2019; Chen et al., 2017). The absence of family hinders refugees' engagement with activities, such as learning English, that would facilitate their integration, employment, and quality of life (Weine et al., 2004).

This study enhances our knowledge of how families can act as a protective factor against mental health difficulties (Löbel, 2020). Men discussed that their

families give them a purpose in life and act as a source of support, strength, and resilience. Family, particularly children, was described as a deterring factor in the decision of whether to act on suicidal thoughts, which has been noted in suicide prevention research (Marzano et al., 2021). An important finding was that although family reunion was expressed as a first-line priority, people also shared their fears, including potential familial rejection, family dynamics and the impact of acculturation on their parenting style.

Coping with separation

This study supported the importance of community for people who are separated from their loved ones, which was described "*like another family*". Men felt supported by people from similar cultural backgrounds or with mutual experiences (i.e., asylum-seeking identity). By way of illustration, Yaron Mesgena & Baraka (2023; p.90) argued that "*while fleeing one's country removes closeness to one's family, it may also bring new intimacies: individuals who share journeys and lives in exile may become very close.*" Fostering relationships with people from similar backgrounds had an empowering effect in men's lives (Asmal-Lee et al., 2022). The increased comfort, safety, and confidence to integrate into the host country may be explained by participants' collective cultures and values.

The themes of coping with separation are consistent with the wider literature on post-migration difficulties (Ahmad et al., 2020; Alemi et al., 2016; Dako-Gyeke & Adu, 2017; Rowley et al., 2020). Similarly, studies on family separation in wider refugee populations have found formal/informal support and distraction strategies helpful (Liddell et al., 2022; Miller et al., 2018). Nevertheless, informal support by other men was underlined as extremely useful, as participants shared *"the same suffer*" and could provide validation. Compared to the existing literature,

participants here expressed gratitude towards organisations, professionals, and kind strangers. In their narratives certain qualities stood out including peoples' passion for social justice, kindness, humanity, and compassion; this indicates the importance of values in clinical practice and beyond.

Implications

Wider Implications

Policymakers should use insights from this study to improve and simplify the family reunification process in the UK. Lately, family reunion processes have become stricter across countries and have posed further difficulties for refugee families to reunite (Tiilikainen et al., 2023, p.4,19,29; UNHCR, 2018). Policies have introduced firm eligibility criteria for the sponsor (i.e., housing/income) (Hiitola, 2019) and socially constructed definitions of "family" biased by Western mentalities (Edgar, 2004). The UK family reunion visa narrowly defines family and excludes members such as adult children, parents, and siblings (British Red Cross, 2022). Notwithstanding, men without children or wives in this study still struggled with family separation. This has been previously challenged (Wilmsen, 2013), but restrictions continue to grow (Beaton et al., 2018). Therefore, adopting more inclusive definitions of "family" is crucial.

Furthermore, the family reunion application is an expensive, inaccessible and complex process that requires financial stability, legal support and large-scale documentation often unavailable in LMICs (i.e., birth certificates, DNA tests) (British Red Cross, 2022; UNHCR, 2018). Policymakers and government bodies should consider this evidence to streamline the process in place and develop clear, accessible information for applicants, particularly non-English speakers. Considering the

negative consequences of rejected applications for family reunification (Sundvall et al., 2021), more flexibility and sensitivity need to be adopted by caseworkers.

The NHS Long Term Plan sets out action within NHS services to prevent mental health difficulties, reduce inequalities, improve the quality of care and move towards a trauma-informed framework (NHS, 2024). Specialist NHS services focusing on refugees, as well as mainstream NHS services accepting referrals for people with a refugee background should consider the findings and invest in further service development, collaboration and continuous staff training/education to achieve the goals of national policy agendas.

Clinical Implications

Refugees resettling in the UK often struggle to seek support due to multiple factors including intersectional differences (i.e., religious/cultural beliefs), negative attitudes towards help-seeking, language and communication barriers, limited awareness of service provision and stigma (Nyikavaranda et al., 2023; Pollard & Howard, 2021; Satinsky et al., 2019). Despite the provision and availability of mental health support, research has indicated that the therapeutic progress and recovery in separated refugees is limited (Beaton et al., 2018). In this study, participants have highlighted the necessity for clinical competency and integrated support.

Family separation was experienced as an active loss, with men battling with their responsibility to be present for their families whilst being miles away. Exploring ambiguous loss in the psychotherapeutic context would help separated men to start healing. Boss (2004) showed that family storytelling and talking about loved ones was essential to find closure, and that narrative approaches tend to be beneficial for this population (Wright et al., 2020). Moreover, clinicians should aim to anchor positive family memories to alleviate worries and foster resilience. This may be

extremely important for separated men who have lost contact with their families, as their grieving process may differ from bereavement. As stated by Boss (2004) *"a person's story of loss is not real, and thus not resolvable, until someone is willing to hear it*" (p.558).

The findings show that the experience of separation was influenced by men's identities, therefore, it is critical to consider intersectionality within the therapeutic work. Clinicians and services need to escape the trap of defining their service users exclusively by their migration status. Psychological formulations should account for other socio-cultural factors. For example, one man shared the complexities of being a gay Muslim refugee and how parental rejection may have affected his separation. By showing curiosity when working cross-culturally clinicians may reveal pathways for further exploration. Clinician's awareness and acknowledgement of oppressive systems in place may increase the trust and rapport with separated men, as one participant highlighted that psychologists are often viewed as part of the "*hostile system*". Participants appreciated psychologists who held an earnest human rights stance and named systemic harm. Men were often robbed of control and agency, and the therapeutic space can be a space where this is regained through co-creation and active participation in decision-making (Røhnebæk & Bjerck, 2021).

Additionally, the findings suggested clear implications for psychoeducation and the use of grounding techniques when working with separated men. Several participants have found it extremely challenging to have video communication with family members. Clinicians can normalise this experience for clients struggling to contact their families and suggest alternatives used by men in this study (i.e., telephone-only calls/daily communication). Men also reported the healing benefits of art, poetry, writing and nature. Clinicians can bring creativity into the room and use art therapy techniques to facilitate the expression of daunting or unspoken emotions

and experiences. They can also encourage connection with nature and physical activity to improve mood (Astell-Burt et al., 2023). Furthermore, increased awareness of specialist organisations in the locality offering community-based activities for refugees is vital. This way, active collaboration between local NHS services and the third sector can flourish to bridge existing gaps through community psychology approaches.

In conclusion, clinicians and services hold the power and responsibility to facilitate the process of family reunification within their available means. At an individual level, mainstream services accepting referrals for refugees can develop accessible leaflets with information on family reunification and organisations with resources to support their application/sponsorship. More importantly, clinicians can write a letter of support to the Home Office caseworker, which can be used as further evidence in their application. At a systemic level, clinicians can advocate and campaign for changes in the local community by bringing services together, organising joint pop-up events for refugees and moving beyond individualistic outlets of support.

Limitations and Research Recommendations

To the best of my knowledge, this is the first empirical study to explore this topic. The findings significantly contribute to the wider literature and increase our understanding of the psycho-social impact of forced separation. This study illuminates individual factors influencing family separation, the value of family in resettlement and the coping mechanisms employed by men to navigate an often unwelcoming environment. It also highlighted consequential systemic and clinical implications to improve the quality of care and the provision of support towards separated refugee men.

Ethics were a leading aspect in the design, coordination, and completion of this study. The research proposal, protocols and materials were reviewed by an independent ethical board at the University and the gatekeepers' research committees. It was important for participants to be provided with a space that would be as safe as possible to talk about some potentially painful experiences. Measures were in place to prevent emotional harm to individuals, including distress protocols and robust recruitment supported by organisations (Singh & Wassenaar, 2016). However, this approach may have impeded participation from refugees not supported by organisations (Rowley et al., 2020) or people who may have been considered too vulnerable (Dehghan & Wilson, 2019). Despite the best efforts to increase access, limitations may still apply due to systemic barriers to seeking mental health support (Pollard & Howard, 2021) or clinicians' selection biases when they consider a research referral (Smith et al., 2022).

The study reached a desirable sample size for IPA research (Smith et al., 2022). The sample was homogenous and involved nine male refugees with a lived experience of family separation. The participation was accessible to non-English speakers with the support of an experienced interpreter. This approach helped to amplify voices that may have been previously marginalised and excluded from research opportunities due to the difficulties of working cross-culturally and cross-linguistically (Lee et al., 2014). For instance, vulnerable research topics may require a rich vocabulary in a different language than their own (i.e., English) which could impose communication and expression difficulties for diverse participants (Elam & Fenton, 2003). Therefore, the execution of the interviews in the participant's first language may have facilitated their understanding of the research questions and increased the richness of their responses. One limitation is that cultural meanings may be lost in translation, which was mitigated by collaborating with professionally

trained interpreters. Interpreters had marked experience working with refugees and a long-standing collaboration with organisations. The interpreters' accuracy in language, good retention of information and appropriate pacing during the interview increased my confidence in the validity and high quality of the interpretation (Fennig & Denov, 2021; Lee et al., 2014).

The current study focused on the experiences of male refugees who had experienced family separation. The findings highlighted that the experience of family separation is embedded in intersectionality. Considering the different layers of experiences, it's important for further research to explore family separation in sub-populations. Research on LGBTQ+ refugees resettling in Germany has underlined the internalised stigma, expectations to be rejected by society and the perceived need to conceal their sexual identity, as shaped by pre-migration experiences (Golembe et al., 2021). Similar observations occurred in this study, leading to further questions about family separation in the context of parental rejection and discrimination. Likewise, participants who have experienced different levels of disability due to past torture spoke about the lack of practical support in the absence of familial people in the UK and the difficulties it posed in navigating the host country. As research on the disability and forced migration landscape is scarce, an exploration of their experiences could enrich our knowledge (Soldatic et al., 2020).

Furthermore, the findings highlighted the impact of separation depending on men's position in the family. For example, the sense of responsibility, shame and guilt was experienced differently among those who left behind dependents compared to those who migrated as unaccompanied minors. Future studies could focus on the role of the family identity one holds when forcibly separated. In the UK, most sponsors for family reunion visas are male (Beswick, 2015), while quantitative research shows an increased risk of mental illness in separated fathers (Hvidtfeldt et

al., 2022). Thus, it may be beneficial to qualitatively explore their experiences. Similarly, an in-depth investigation of the female experience could be considered, as we cannot deny the existence of female and maternal first-time refugees (Kristjánsdóttir & Skaptadóttir, 2019). Former unaccompanied minors in this study struggled to self-care and survive without a primary carer, and their narratives indicated mixed feelings of abandonment and gratitude. Noting the sudden rise of unaccompanied minor refugees throughout Europe (Eurostat, 2024), understanding the consequences of separation for this population could inform further policy changes for family reunification.

Conclusions

Family separation is a common global phenomenon observed in forced displacement (Tiilikainen et al., 2023). This study explored the experiences of family separation in refugee males and demonstrated its multidimensional psychological consequences. Familial fragmentation was challenging for all men and invites policymakers and clinicians to respond with tailored approaches. Considering the benefits of families in men's lives, it's imperative to call for changes in the family reunification eligibility criteria, as well as the simplification of the process. Moreover, clinicians are invited to consider family separation during psychological assessment, formulation, and therapeutic intervention. Clinicians and service providers can support people to socially integrate and use their power to dismantle systemic barriers in resettlement. The NHS needs to become better equipped offering integrated support to separated male refugees that address their psychological, housing, and other needs.

Reflections

This project has been a journey I will never forget. It was a real privilege to meet the kind and compassionate men who shared their stories with me. Hearing about their lives was another reminder of the important relationships and bonds in life. I imagined the finish line as a moment of relief, yet my emotions are very mixed. Men's stories acted as a reminder of the love, appreciation, and gratitude I feel towards my own supportive networks. However, it also acted as a reminder of their absence – this was difficult and increased loneliness. Some stories were extremely emotive and close to home, while others generated feelings of anger, despair, and disappointment. Reading the literature in line with my findings was disheartening at times – it felt like no matter all the research things never change. I considered the unfair systemic treatment of my participants and the ways they managed to reach the bright side – this filled me with admiration and restored my hope. Hope for a better version of this world, hope for those not yet reunited with their families, hope for those seeking protection.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Examples of Bracketing Session and Reflective Diary Entries

1a. Transcript Excerpt from Bracketing Session

03.07.2023: Bracketing – Stage: Prior to Interviews

Colleague: Hearing you talking about how much is linked to your personal experience, the family separation and loneliness [...] you must have your own assumptions I guess for what you might find or how the research might play out. What are they and what are you gonna do if they don't...

Me: I think, well... my assumptions are probably that they have a very difficult story to share, they're missing their families ah... and that they experienced isolation and loneliness [...] at the same time I feel I want to be open and with curiosity into things that they may express that are different. So, for example, I was listening to a book last week and it's a memoir on an LGBTQ+ background refugee who went to the US from Nigeria [...] he said something I was like “Oh, I've never thought about that” [...] he said that it was very difficult to maintain relationships with the family abroad because of how much he was changing here because he got his asylum in the US, he was able to be himself, embrace his sexuality, and how difficult that was to then call mum and dad at home who did not accept him and sort of maintain that relationship with the people that he considers family [...] He closes the book with, you know, you're leaving your family behind, but you're creating another family which consists of friends, mentors, lovers, like significant others. So, I think that was sort of like “WOW experience” for me [...] maybe I won't find similar findings to my assumptions... maybe people will experience family separation differently like... maybe they have a strong willingness to reconnect with their families or something completely different, I don't know.

1b. Reflective Diary Entries

18.12.2023: transcribing

Re-listening to the interview while transcribing I clearly hear the sadness in the participant's voice while narrating his story. He speaks very slowly, and his voice at times is almost like lifeless. How much of our emotions can be transferred through language, verbal and non-verbal? I remember the participant in the room, feeling maybe lonely, guilty at times, being very sweet (…) He is first-born and comes with a sense of responsibility, being paternal towards siblings. How do I connect to this? I am a first-born in my family, and often you feel like the glue to the system; being the child with the solutions to a problem or where all the expectations are placed. It is SO HARD.

9.1.2024: analysis

The most powerful quote has been where he describes living among the alive, but not feeling alive. I felt the chills. This interview has been different than the other ones so far in the sense that the exit from the country was not planned (trafficking); he did not even have a chance to say goodbye to the children. It was also different in the sense of being separated and worried, but not knowing where your children are (…) I wonder how much harder it must be sitting with the not knowing, the uncertainty of whether your family is alive, what they think of you? Can you even move forward? I felt a lot of guilt in the room –what would his children think? did they know what happened? This interview helped me realise that separation has multiple variations; people who are separated and know where their family is, whilst others feel like they lost their family forever. How can you start over if you don't know anything about your family to get some emotional closure?

8.3.2024: member-checking/presentation

I had a really really powerful discussion with my participant, Paul, about how I interpreted his story; what he shared and the meanings attached. Paul was very emotional, tearful, and started crying. He was very impressed by the way I managed to present his story in a comprehensive way and felt that I told his story "better than I did". This is definitely one of the **most humbling** experiences that I've had in my life!!! I have felt ups/downs with my thesis and he gave me a lot of strength and

motivation to move on, and a sense of achievement; he felt I did his story justice. For me that's the most important because it just made my day, it brought a huge smile on my face! Our researcher-participant relationship, which probably goes back to co-creation of meanings and connection, has been so rewarding. This interaction led me thinking how empowering is to lead research in your own way and challenge the ways research is usually conducted within academia. Paul shared with me that he applied for family reunification this week and I felt so proud of him. So truly inspiring!

27.3.2024: write-up

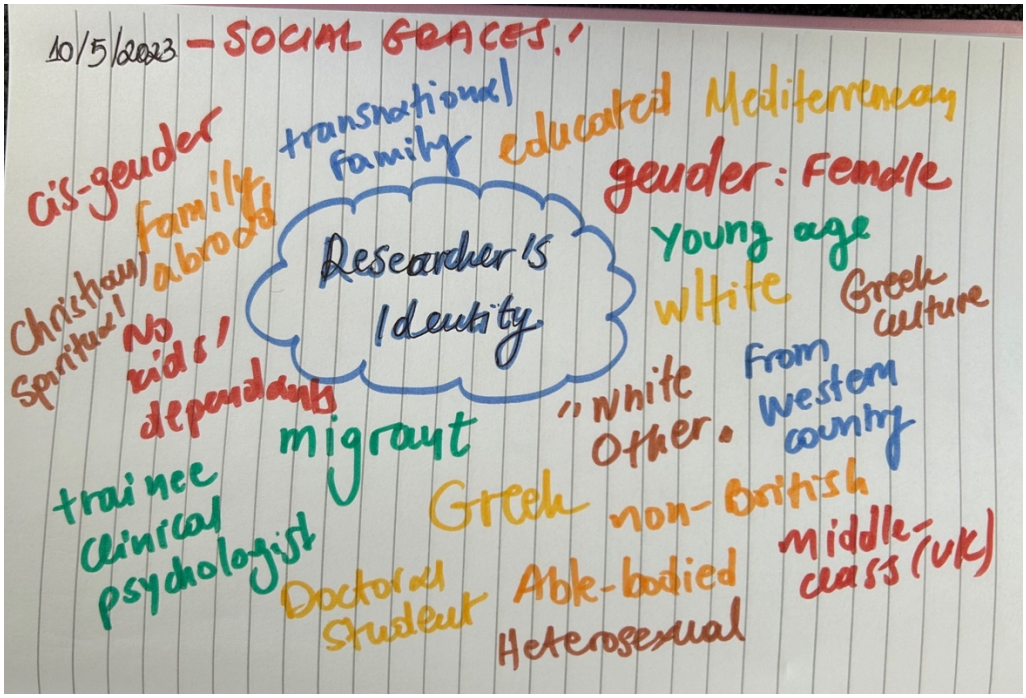
Immersing with the stories has been more difficult and triggering than I thought. I find myself tearful, angry, disappointed, sad, tired, an array of emotions. Is it the trauma-specialist placement? My clinical work is focused on complex trauma and returning to my thesis following a tough working day, it often feels I am exposing myself to more trauma. I am emotionally exhausted and angry with the level of systemic injustice in the UK. People are CONSTANTLY let down by different systems, and consistently harmed in different ways. Is this how things will continue to be? Are things going to get even worse? Issues around migration makes me feel hopeless. I am striving to grab on to my participants' hope for a better world, but the reality gets in the way.

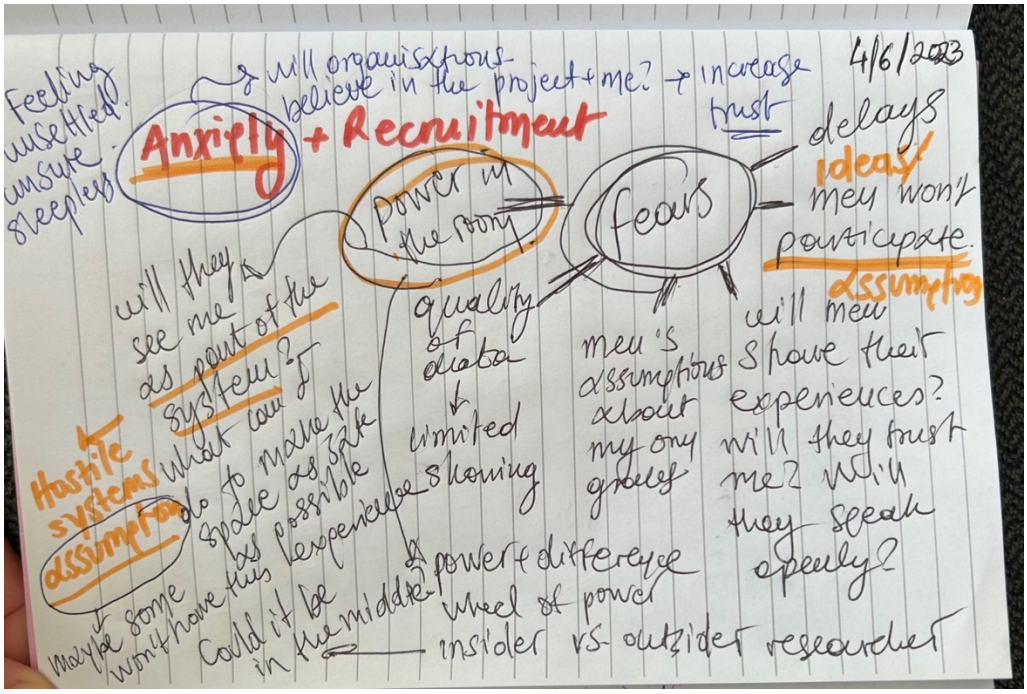
28.4.2024: write-up

The Rwanda Bill became a law a few days ago and the news has still not sunk in properly. I am in the process of updating my introduction, and I find myself feeling frustrated. We campaign, we research, we advocate, we are doing groundwork – what else can we do to convince politicians that their policies are oppressive, discriminatory, and hostile? I am debating a lot with myself about the language I am using and how this will be received by the reader. Does my language need to be 'more tentative' to fit with academic requirements, public attitudes? Is my language 'critical' or 'too critical'? Is it maybe 'too political'? But well, this topic is political! In IPA you bring a lot of yourself as a researcher and you co-construct meanings. I am an immigrant in a country that (feels like it) does not want immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers. I need to speak about the hostility and racism – it exists! If only we open the news daily, and it's there, every single day. Language is my tool to advocate

more in favour of refugee communities. If I don't use my voice to do this, I won't be authentic to my values. I struggle with this. What do I do?

1c. Exercises and Self-Reflection: Researchers' Identity in Relation to Participants





Appendix 2. Supplementary Detailed Version of Quality Appraisal

Examples of written summaries and appraisal for 20% of the included studies in the Systematic Literature Review are presented in the table below to offer insights to the process.

Study (Year)	Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research?	Is a qualitative methodology appropriate?	Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?	Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research?	Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue?	Has the relationship between researcher and participants been adequately considered?	Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?	Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?	Is there a clear statement of findings?
Abur & Mphande (2019)	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Can't Tell	No
	How valuable is the research? The authors present a clear rationale based on the available refugee mental health literature, particularly considering the resettlement in Australia and the challenges faced by the Sudanese refugee community. The qualitative design allowed the authors to capture the participants' lived experiences of settlement, family functioning and general wellbeing on an individual and systemic level. The findings have implications for an under-represented community in support of integration policies in the host country and frontline practice, such as providing culturally sensitive interventions, and training to professionals on the impact of discrimination/racism. However, it's important to note that limitations in reporting (i.e., recruitment methods, themes) may impact on the validity and application of the findings. **Overall rating**: 6/10; **Overall quality**: Moderate								
Gebresilassie, T., Beiersmann, C., Ziegler, S.,	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Can't Tell	Yes
	How valuable is the research? The researchers provide a clear rationale, considering the resettlement of refugees in Germany, national research evidence, and the unvoiced needs of Eritrean refugees. The authors aimed to understand the Eritrean refugee's perceptions of their mental								

<table>
<tr><td>Keck, V., Kidane, Y. S., Jahn, A., & Benson-Martin, J. (2022).</td><td colspan="9">wellbeing and identify the social conditions in Germany that may be associated with resilience through a qualitative exploration. Their design allowed them to unpack the multiple layers of refugees' lived experience, whilst the snowball sampling method was deemed appropriate to access participants from the same community in lack of collaboration with an organisation. Open-ended questions were designed based on the literature review the authors conducted and the ADAPT framework to ensure relevance. The researchers consulted with professionals from humanities and social sciences fields and conducted two pilot interviews to improve the topic guide. The study took place during the covid-19 pandemic and face-to-face restrictions, which may have limited the opportunities for rapport between the researcher and participants. However, the cultural background of the lead researcher (I.e., Eritrean) may have facilitated the process. The researchers reflect on the potential biases associated with aspects of their identities (i.e, gender), and ethical considerations (i.e., literacy level and consent). Interviews were conducted in Tigrinya, which allowed the inclusivity of participants, but meanings may have been lost in translation. The authors present themes supported by quotations based on the framework followed, but the reporting of their analysis and interpretation process could have been clearer. Overall, the findings provide insights to guide further development of German policies, as one of the European countries accepting many refugees yearly. The study highlights the importance of culture, community, and family, which are important concepts for mental health professionals to hold in mind when supporting refugees.
Overall rating: 9/10; Overall quality: High</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Golembe, J., Leyendecker, B., Maalej, N., Gundlach, A.,</td><td>Yes</td><td>Yes</td><td>Yes</td><td>Yes</td><td>Yes</td><td>Yes</td><td>Yes</td><td>Yes</td><td>Yes</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="9">How valuable is the research? The authors state the aims of their research and highlight the gaps in the exploration of LGBTQ+ refugee experience despite people worldwide seeking asylum and safety on the basis of their sexual orientation. The research question is well-defined and informed by the minority stress theory which is relevant to this population to help researchers and clinicians better understand their experiences. The qualitative methodology is appropriate to investigate these objectives, and the choice of focus groups may have better facilitated cohesion and</td></tr>
</table>

<table>
<tr><td>& Busch, J. (2021).</td><td colspan="9">participation in discussion with people from similar backgrounds. The researchers collaborated with an LGBTQ+ organisation to identify suitable participants and the focus groups included facilitators from both the research team and organisation to increase safeguarding and mitigate risks. The topic guide prompted discussions on sensitive topics, however, it also included closed-ended questions that may have influenced participants' responses. The researchers reflect on their own identity in relation to their participants in terms of migration, sexuality and gender, which could have limited biases in the interpretation of data and ensure a data-driven analysis. The authors conducted the focus groups in three languages and translated to English; this increased the participation of people who were not fluent in English but may have limited the accuracy of the lived experience during translation. However, the authors had the transcripts reviewed by second translators. The researchers' process is well-detailed and seemed collaborative and rigorous. Taking into consideration the current political landscape towards migration and the intersection with sexuality/gender, this study sheds a light into the resettlement of LGBTQ+ refugees and the hostility they have to endure in host countries due to their identity. The authors provide recommendations for further research in this area and policy improvement to protect vulnerable populations, such as LGBTQ+ refugees seeking freedom and safety.
Overall rating: 10/10; **Overall quality**: High</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Jawasreh, M. H. (2019).</td><td>Yes</td><td>Yes</td><td>Yes</td><td>Yes</td><td>Yes</td><td>Yes</td><td>Yes</td><td>Yes</td><td>No</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="9">**How valuable is the research?** The researcher conducted this study as part of her doctoral research project and aimed to explore the resettlement experiences of Syrian refugees in Jordan's refugee camp. The qualitative methodology, deemed by the researcher as the most culturally appropriate tool for refugee populations, allowed them to gather data in a rich and comprehensive way. The researcher had a long-standing relationship with the refugee camp as a former worker, and established rapport with the gatekeepers to support recruitment and encourage participation. The researcher used open-ended questions and a semi-structured, flexible interview approach that allowed Syrian</td></tr>
</table>

<table>
<tr><td></td><td colspan="9">refugees to share their story on post-migration daily challenges and helpful/unhelpful support. The researcher goes in great depth of reflexion of their own personal experience working with refugees in camps, intersectional similarities and differences (i.e., ethnicity, gender), and how their identity may have influenced the dynamics of the researcher-participant relationship and interpretation of data. The researcher describes in length the ethical considerations and safeguarding concerns about both participants and researcher. Thematic analysis informed by interpretivist constructivist epistemological approach was conducted, which helps the reader to understand how the data were analysed and interpreted. Despite the initial presentation of the themes in a comprehensive table, the author does not report or discuss the findings in correspondence with their table, which does not help the reader understand the depth of each theme/subtheme. This may be explained by the lack of a rigorous peer-reviewed process and the structure of a doctoral thesis. Overall, this is a well-thought piece of research supporting our knowledge on the life of refugee men in Jordan, and highlights family loss and associated trauma and the impact on resettlement. The author provides clear implications for policy and practice, especially for humanitarian organisations and frontline practitioners working within the context of refugee camps and centres.
Overall rating: 9/10; Overall quality: High</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Sundvall, M., Titelman, D., DeMarinis, V., Borisova, L., & Çetrez, Ö. (2021).</td><td>Yes</td><td>Yes</td><td>Yes</td><td>Can’t Tell</td><td>Can’t Tell</td><td>No</td><td>Can’t Tell</td><td>Yes</td><td>Yes</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="9">How valuable is the research? The authors describe the reasoning to examine the resettlement of Iraqi refugees in Sweden and explore the changes in their mental health. This study is part of a larger, mixed-methods research project on refugee mental health and the acculturation process. The exploration of their research question using qualitative data seems appropriate, however the reader cannot fully evaluate the methodological rigor given due to absence of information. The authors do not state their inclusion/exclusion criteria, how participants were approached or recruited, or the reasons participants declined the invitation to participate. Researchers conducted semi-structured interviews focusing on questions on identity, migration experiences, access to healthcare services, and trauma. Participants also developed a ‘biographical network map’, which – from a psychological perspective – may have added richness to the data, people and closeness to the individual are visually</td></tr>
</table>

	represented. Interviews were conducted in English, Swedish or Arabic, therefore translation limitations may apply in the transferable meanings across languages. The participants received written and oral information on the study before giving consent, however the authors do not expand on ethical considerations or safeguarding concerns. The findings warrant practitioners' attention on the importance of signposting refugees to activities/communities and supporting the process of family reunification. However, due to the lack of information on the methodological execution of the research design, caution is required when interpreting the data. **Overall rating**: 6/10; **Overall quality**: Moderate

Appendix 3. Recurrence of Subthemes Across Studies Included in the SLR

Study (Year)	Theme 1		Theme 2		Theme 3			Theme 4	
	Poor living conditions	Emotional burdens	Sense of powerlessness and identity loss	Acculturation	Family separation	Relational losses and social isolation	Navigating difference, racism, and discrimination	Asylum process and sense of safety	Access to services and social integration
Abur & Mphande (2020)	x	x	x	x		x	x		x
Asmal-Lee et al. (2022)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Bletscher & Spiers (2023)		x		x	x	x		x	x
Correa-Velez et al. (2013)	x		x	x		x	x		x
Dako-Gyeke & Adu (2017)	x				x	x	x		
Darawsheh et al., (2022)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x
Gangamma (2018)	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x
Gautam et al., (2018)	x	x		x	x	x		x	x
Gebresilassie et al. (2022)		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Golembe et al. (2021)		x	x			x	x	x	x
Hebbani et al. (2012)		x	x	x		x	x		x
King et al. (2017)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x

Kristjánsdóttir & Skaptadóttir, (2019)	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x
Labys et al. (2017)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Mangrio et al. (2020)	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x
Mangrio et al. (2019)		x	x		x	x		x	x
Jawasreh (2019)	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x
Rowley et al., (2020)	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x
Saksena & McMorrow (2021)	x	x		x		x	x		
Sim et al. (2023)	x	x	x		x	x			x
Sundvall et al. (2021)		x	x	x	x	x	x		x
Tonui & Mitschke, (2022)	x	x	x		x				x
Tsegay (2022)	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x
Vitale & Ryde (2016)	x	x	x	x		x		x	x
von Haumeder et al. (2019)	x	x	x		x		x	x	x
Vromans et al. (2018)	x	x	x	x	x	x			x
Ziersch et al. (2020)	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x
Total N of Studies	**20**	**25**	**22**	**17**	**20**	**25**	**19**	**17**	**25**

Appendix 4. Research Advertisement


University of Hertfordshire UH
HELEN BAMBER FOUNDATION
strength to fly
Research invitation
My name is Dafni and I am interested in men's experience of family separation and forced migration. I am looking for people to take part in my research.
Do you identify as a refugee man?
Have you experienced family separation during displacement?
Are you interested to share your story?
I would love to hear from you!
Please get in touch to find out more:
d.katsampa@herts.ac.uk

Appendix 5. Contract with Research Consultant

University of Hertfordshire

AGREEMENT FOR VOLUNTEERS & LAY MEMBERS INVOLVEMENT IN RESEARCH

Doctorate in Clinical Psychology research study: "Families against the odds: experiences of family separation and displacement among refugee men"

This research project is a study based at the University of Hertfordshire. The researcher is Dafni Katsampa (Trainee Clinical Psychologist). The purpose of the study is to understand the in-depth experiences of family separation and displacement among refugee men.

Payment will be made to volunteers and lay members of the public for their participation in meetings and other research involvement activities. The project will finish on 07/06/2024.

This form must be completed by the participating volunteer before payment can be made. Any queries concerning this Agreement should be referred to the relevant Head of Research Centre at the University of Hertfordshire

Between:	**The University of Hertfordshire**
and [redacted]	**(The "Participating Volunteer")**
ACTIVITY	Volunteer for Doctorate in Clinical Psychology research study

The **Participating Volunteer** has agreed to assist the University by voluntarily taking part in the research **Activity**.

1. The Activity to be undertaken is described below and it is the Activity for which you have given your consent/agreement.

> Provide own views and perspectives to inform the research process and the direction of the research proposal/study.
> Attend meetings to discuss appropriate research methods, recruitment pathways, study progress, preliminary findings and dissemination (i.e. ways to share findings with the broader community).
> Review research materials (i.e. participant info sheet, debrief, recruitment materials etc).
> There will be **no requirement** for the participating volunteer to attend all meetings or take part in all activities.

CONFIRMATION OF ATTENDANCE

2. The Researcher will confirm the Participating Volunteer has attended the Activity outlined above.

PAYMENT

3. The Participating Volunteer will receive a participation payment of £10 in the form of vouchers for completion of the activities described above. Payment will not be made for any activities in which the Participant did not participate at all.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE UNIVERSITY AND THE PARTICIPATING VOLUNTEER

4. **The University does not regard the Participating Volunteer as an employee of the University nor as a worker, and the payment made to the Participating Volunteer for the participation is not made with respect to any employment relationship with the University.**
5. **The Participating Volunteer is advised that it is their personal responsibility to declare any payment for participation to HM Revenue & Customs under Self-Assessment, if that is appropriate to their personal circumstances. The University will not deduct income taxes from the payment.**

SIGNED FOR AND ON BEHALF OF THE UNIVERSITY

The signatory for the University confirms they have authority to enter into this agreement on behalf of the University e.g., Principal Investigator

SIGNED 

PRINT NAME Dafni Katsampa
Position at UH Trainee Clinical Psychologist
DATE 5th October 2022

SIGNED BY THE PARTICIPATING VOLUNTEER

I acknowledge receipt of a copy of this agreement and accept its terms.

SIGNED [redacted]

PRINT NAME
DATE 01/02/2023

Appendix 6. Clinicians' Checklist to Recruit Participants

University of Hertfordshire UH

Clinician's Checklist to Recruit Participants

'Families against the odds: understanding the impact of family separation among refugee men'

Project Administration: [add name]

Referring Clinician:

Name of Client:

Has the client given permission for Dafni to contact them? Yes No

Client's preferred method of contact:

Telephone / Email _____

Has a brief explanation of the study provided? Yes No

Has information sheet been given or read to client? Yes No

Does the client need an interpreter? Yes No

- What language does the client speak?
- Do the client work with a specific interpreter?
- Are there any considerations when booking the interpreter? (i.e., male/female)

In your professional opinion is the client well enough to participate in this study?

Yes No

Please provide any further details:

Client's background information

Age:

Nationality:

Religion:

Months/Years in the UK:

Granted leave to remain: Yes No In process

Please provide any further details:

Please contact the lead researcher: Dafni Katsampa via email (d.katsampa@herts.ac.uk) to arrange an interview.

Appendix 7. Ethical Approval

University of Hertfordshire UH

HEALTH, SCIENCE, ENGINEERING AND TECHNOLOGY ECDA

ETHICS APPROVAL NOTIFICATION

TO	Dafni Katsampa
CC	Dr David Chapman
FROM	Dr Rebecca Knight, Health, Science, Engineering & Technology ECDA Vice Chair
DATE	14/06/2023

Protocol number:	**LMS/PGT/UH/05327**
Title of study:	Families against the odds: the impact of separation during forced displacement among refugee men

Your application for ethics approval has been accepted and approved with the following conditions by the ECDA for your School and includes work undertaken for this study by the named additional workers below:

Dr Vasiliki Stamatopoulou (External/Second Supervisor)
Dr John Done (Research Consultant)
Dr Christina Curry (Gatekeeper at Helen Bamber Foundation)
[redacted]**Expert by Experience Consultant)**
(Expert by Experience Consultant)

Conditions of approval specific to your study:

Ethics approval has been granted subject to the following conditions being seen and approved by the supervisor as addressed prior to recruitment and data collection:

- **Please amend the withdrawal date on page 16, it should state March 2024.**

General conditions of approval:

Ethics approval has been granted subject to the standard conditions below:

Permissions: Any necessary permissions for the use of premises/location and accessing participants for your study must be obtained in writing prior to any data collection commencing. Failure to obtain adequate permissions may be considered a breach of this protocol.

External communications: Ensure you quote the UH protocol number and the name of the approving Committee on all paperwork, including recruitment advertisements/online requests, for this study.

Invasive procedures: If your research involves invasive procedures you are required to complete and submit an EC7 Protocol Monitoring Form, and copies of your completed consent paperwork to this ECDA once your study is complete.

Submission: Students must include this Approval Notification with their submission.

Validity:

This approval is valid:

From: 14/06/2023

To: 24/09/2023

Appendix 8. Ethical Approval Amendments

University of Hertfordshire UH

HEALTH, SCIENCE, ENGINEERING AND TECHNOLOGY ECDA

ETHICS APPROVAL NOTIFICATION

TO	Dafni Katsampa
CC	Dr David Chapman
FROM	Dr Simon Trainis, Health, Science, Engineering & Technology ECDA Chair
DATE	11/07/2023

Protocol number: **aLMS/PGR/UH/05327(1)**

Title of study: Families against the odds: the impact of separation during forced displacement among refugee men.

Your application to modify and extend the existing protocol as detailed below has been accepted and approved by the ECDA for your School and includes work undertaken for this study by the named additional workers below:

Dr Vasiliki Stamatopoulou (External/Second Supervisor)
Dr John Done (Research Consultant)
Dr Christina Curry (Gatekeeper at Helen Bamber Foundation)
[redacted] Expert by Experience Consultant)
[redacted] (Expert by Experience Consultant)

Modification: detailed in EC2.

General conditions of approval:

Ethics approval has been granted subject to the standard conditions below:

Original protocol: Any conditions relating to the original protocol approval remain and must be complied with.

Permissions: Any necessary permissions for the use of premises/location and accessing participants for your study must be obtained in writing prior to any data collection commencing. Failure to obtain adequate permissions may be considered a breach of this protocol.

External communications: Ensure you quote the UH protocol number and the name of the approving Committee on all paperwork, including recruitment advertisements/online requests, for this study.

Invasive procedures: If your research involves invasive procedures you are required to complete and submit an EC7 Protocol Monitoring Form, and copies of your completed consent paperwork to this ECDA once your study is complete.

Submission: Students must include this Approval Notification with their submission.

Validity:

This approval is valid:

From: 11/07/2023

To: 24/09/2024

Appendix 9. Participant Information Sheet

University of Hertfordshire UH

Brief and Accessible Participant Information Sheet

'Families against the odds: the impact of family separation during displacement among male refugees'

What is this study about?

We want to understand how refugee men feel being separated from their family. You need to be:

- over 18 years old
- a male refugee
- live in the UK

What if I want to take part?

We will agree a date and time to talk about your experiences. This will take place at Helen Bamber Foundation in person, online or via phone. It will last 60 to 90 minutes. If you do not want to travel, and you have access to a computer, we can do this online. If you do not have internet connection or data, we can do the interview by the phone. The interview will be recorded, but only the research team will listen to it. If you speak English, the interview will be in English. If you do not speak English fluently, an interpreter will be there to support you during the interview.

What are the advantages and disadvantages of taking part?

Talking about your experiences might be helpful, but sometimes it can be upsetting. Sharing your story can help us to support male refugees. If you feel upset, we can take a short break or stop and meet another day. You do not have to answer questions or share parts of your story if you feel upset.

University of Hertfordshire UH

What will happen to my personal information?

Your personal information will be stored securely on the University of Hertfordshire One Drive storage. Only the research team will have access to it. All information will be anonymised and stored until the completion of the research project until the 30th September 2024.

Do I have to take part?

No, you do not have to take part if you do not want to. If you decide to take part, you can change your mind at any time and say that you want to stop. If you have taken part in the study, and you want to withdraw your data, you can do so before 1st March 2024, and the data analysis begin.

Is this study approved?

The Health, Science, Engineering & Technology Ethics Committee with Delegated Authority at the University of Hertfordshire University has approved this study, with protocol number LMS/PGT/UH/05327.

What will happen next?

I will write about what I find for my university degree. I will also share the results with Helen Bamber Foundation and other people who are interested through articles, blogs, or other creative ways. ***Only the research team will know you have taken part in this study. All your personal information will be kept strictly confidential.***

Researcher: Dafni Katsampa (d.katsampa@herts.ac.uk)

Supervised by Dr David Chapman and Dr Vasiliki Stamatopoulou

If you have any concerns or complaints about how you have been treated during the interview, please do not hesitate to write to the following address: Secretary and Registrar, University of Hertfordshire, College Lane, Hatfield, Hertfordshire, AL10 9AB.

Appendix 10. Informed Consent

University of Hertfordshire UH

Consent Form

Thank you for taking part in my study *'Families against the odds: the impact of family separation during displacement among male refugees'. Please read carefully each statement. By signing this form, you are giving your consent to be a participant.*

I confirm that:

- I understand why the research is happening and what I need to do as a participant, including the topic that we will discuss.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw before, during or after the interview without giving a reason (see: information sheet).
- I understand that I can choose not to answer a question.
- I understand how my information will be recorded and stored on a secure University OneDrive that only the researchers can access.
- I know that my information will ONLY be used for research unless I decide to withdraw.
- I understand that the researcher has a duty of care to share information for my safety if they are concerned of immediate risk to myself or others.
- I understand that all my information will be anonymised and confidential.
- I understand how my information may be presented in publications or presentations through quotes. I know I can ask for specific quotes to be removed from any publication.
- I understand how my information may be presented in different formats such as academic articles, books and/or creative ways (i.e., social media, poetry, art).
- I have been provided with the contact details of the researcher and received satisfactory answers to any question I had about the project.

If there are any issues above you do not understand, please ask for clarification before signing this consent form. One copy to be kept by both parties involved.

I have read and fully understand the consent form. I provide my name/signature as consent.

Signature:

Name: **Date:**

Appendix 11. Safety plan

Title of research project: '*Families against the odds: the impact of family separation after displacement among male refugees*'

Personalised Plan

Talking about your experiences might be helpful and healing, but sometimes it could also be upsetting. If during the interview you feel uncomfortable or upset, and you would like to stop or pause the interview, please let your interviewer know. This will allow the interviewer to offer you space and additional support. You do not have to answer questions or share parts of your life story if you are not feeling comfortable.

We would like to take a few minutes before the interview and reflect on some questions that may be helpful for the interviewer in an event you become upset, distressed or confused during the interview.

It helps me to do things I enjoy, such as (i.e., drink a cup of tea, cold water, take deep breaths):

_____
_____
_____

It would be helpful to contact…

Name:
Telephone:

The person of contact could be a trusted family member, partner or friend, or a professional you trust.

What happens if I become distressed during the interview?

If you become distressed during the interview, I will ask you if you would like to pause the interview and take a brief break until you feel ready to continue. If you do not wish to continue after the brief break, I will ask you if you would like to re-schedule the interview on a different date. Using this plan, and especially if the interview happens online or by phone, I can suggest one of the things you enjoy, or ask you to call a trusted friend.

If the interview happens face to face and you decide to stop the interview, an on-call clinician at Helen Bamber Foundation will be able to offer support and space to discuss your feelings.

What happens if I become distressed <u>after</u> the interview?

If you have any concerns about the interview, you can contact us by email (d.katsampa@herts.ac.uk). However, if you feel you need additional support after the interview, please contact any of the organisations included below.

An on-call clinician on site will be able to offer support and space to discuss your feelings if you become distressed after the interview.

If you are thinking about harming yourself or attempting suicide, please seek help from your GP, a key worker, or family and friends. If you feel that you are in need of immediate support, please call the Samaritans (116 123) or NHS Choices (www.nhs.uk/111) on 111 (both are available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, and free). Alternatively, please attend your nearest accident and emergency (A&E) department and tell the staff how you are feeling.

You can find a list of organisations below that provide support and additional information to people who experience distress.

Organisation	**Support**	**Contacts**
Samaritans	24-hour service providing confidential emotional support to anyone in crisis.	Helpline: 116 123 Website: www.samaritans.org
Mind	Mental health charity offering support to people experiencing mental health difficulties.	Helpline: 0300 123 3393 Text: 86463 Website: www.mind.org.uk
CALM	Mental health charity aiming to prevent suicide among men.	Helpline: 0800 58 58 58 Website: www.thecalmzone.net
HOPELineUK	Specialist telephone helpline to prevent suicide among young people.	Helpline: 0800 068 41 41 Email: pat@papyrus-uk.org Website: www.papyrus-uk.org
Shout 85258	Specialist 24/7 free confidential text support service for people who are struggling to cope and need mental health support.	Text: To start a conversation text SHOUT to 85258.
The Listening Place	Face to face support for those who feel life is no longer worth living. The Listening Place is somewhere individuals can talk openly about their feelings without being judged or being given advice.	Telephone: 020 3906 7676 Website: https://listeningplace.org.uk/contact-us/

Appendix 12. *Debrief*

12a. Debrief Letter

University of Hertfordshire UH

Debrief Letter for Participants

Title of research project: '*Families against the odds: the impact of family separation after displacement among male refugees*'

Thank you for taking part in our research project entitled 'Families against the odds: the impact of family separation after displacement among male refugees'. Your contribution will help us to understand how to better support male refugees in our care who have been separated from their families during their settlement in the UK.

Please be assured that all the information you provided will be stored securely and treated with the strictest confidentiality. If you have any further questions about the research, or if you would like to withdraw your participation, please do not hesitate to contact me at d.katsampa@herts.ac.uk.

Should any of our questions have caused you distress, please click here for a list of support organisations suggested by the NHS. If you feel that you are in need of immediate support, please call the Samaritans (116 123) or NHS Choices (www.nhs.uk/111) on 111 (both are available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, and free). Alternatively, please attend your nearest accident and emergency (A&E) department and tell staff how you are feeling. You can also refer to your personalised plan for further information on helpful resources.

Thank you again for your time and interest taking part in our study.

Yours sincerely,

Dafni Katsampa

12b. Debrief Checklist

University of Hertfordshire UH

Debrief Checklist for Researcher

This checklist has been developed to support the researcher ensure the wellbeing of the participants.

- How do you feel about taking part in the research? How do you feel about been interviewed on this topic? Do you feel well enough to continue your day?
- Is it okay for us to end the interview here? Do you have anything to add?
- Is there anything that would be helpful for me to know before we finish the interview?
- Is there anything I can do to help?
- Do you need any support now?
- Provide the Debrief Letter (see below) and remind participants of the personalised care plan.
- Confirm consent.
- If an interpreter is present – check-in with the interpreter as well. How do they feel? Do they have any concerns regarding the participant? How did the interview feel from their point of view? As above, remind confidentiality agreement.

Appendix 13. Topic guide

Semi-structured Interview Schedule

Duration: 90 minutes

For the researcher:

- Informed consent and confidentiality, anonymity of data
- Remind participants of audio-recording
- Personalised plan with the participants
- Overview of topic – what's the aim of the research project
- Acknowledgment of the sensitive topic – if participant feels distress during the session they will be encouraged to pause or stop the session.
- Remind participants they do not have to answer questions they are not feeling comfortable responding to.

Questions

1 – Experience of displacement

i. Would you like to tell me a little bit about your family life in [*country of origin*]? What was different?

ii. Could you tell me about your experience of leaving [*country of origin*]? What was it like coming to the UK? How was your experience of the journey? How did you cope with any difficulties?

iii. How come you chose this country to settle in? How do you feel for not being able to go back to [*country of origin*]?

2 – Experience of family separation

i. Could you tell me about your experiences of being separated by your family? *How did it feel to leave the family behind? How did it feel to be separated with the family when reaching the UK?*

ii. How do you think your male gender may have affected your experience as a refugee *coming/living alone* in the UK?

iii. How has the experience of displacement impacted the family connection, family union? How has your behaviour towards members of your family changed whilst being separated?

iv. How have you coped as a family with any problems in times when you are not together? Communication? Emotional response? Belongingness and connection? Distance? Regret? Loneliness? How did you adjust to the new environment here in the UK?

v. How do you imagine family reunification?

3 – Family life in the UK

i. Do you think the experience of displacement has influenced the way you view yourself as a member of the family union? *[Prompts for identity - as a parent, a partner, a brother, or a son?]. How has your identity changed or not changed? How have you managed to maintain cultural roles and traditions? What would your family say if they were here?*
ii. How do you understand your family after experiencing family separation? What aspect of family life as you know it, do you value and appreciate the most?
iii. What feelings have been present while separated by your family? i.e. loneliness, sadness, relief, worrying.

4 – Support

i. Have you received any support from people who are not your family? Has a person or a community provided help for these difficult experiences? [Prompts: community, faith leaders, professionals, friends]. How did you find the support?
ii. If you have not received any support, what do you imagine helpful support to be like? What would this look like for you? What would you find useful to cope with family separation in a foreign country?
iii. How would you advise clinicians to support other male refugees coming to this country alone?
iv. What would your advice be to other people in your position, who are refugees and have been separated from family members in the UK?

5 – Reflections

i. How did you find telling your story to me today?
ii. Is there anything you wish I would ask you and I didn't? If so, how would you respond to your question?

Conclusions – Closing

- Debrief checklist
- Next steps:
    - Receive a debrief letter.
    - Receive a short summary of research findings when the project is completed.
    - (for HBF clients) Receive an invitation to a presentation of the research findings.
    - Thank participant (and/or interpreter) for their time and participation.

Appendix 14. Helen Bamber Foundation Interpreters' Confidentiality Agreement

Bruges Place, 15-20 Baynes Street, London, NW1 0TF (Entrance via Randolph St)

T: 020 3058 2020 | E: reception@helenbamber.org | helenbamber.org | @HelenBamber

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Confidentiality Agreement

Introduction

The nature of the work of the Helen Bamber Foundation means that information relating to our work must be kept highly confidential. This is true of clients' personal information, but also of the operations of the organization, and data relating to employees and other parties associated with the Helen Bamber Foundation. Breaches of this agreement could have very serious implications for the affected individuals or organizations.

Definitions

1. "Confidential Information" in terms of this agreement shall include but not be limited to data (howsoever stored) relating to Clients of the Helen Bamber Foundation (including date of birth, country of origin, first name, surname, specific details of the human rights violations, clinical histories), employees of the Helen Bamber Foundation, other parties associated with the Helen Bamber Foundation and the operations of the Helen Bamber Foundation itself.

Terms of the Agreement

2. The Helen Bamber Foundation requires that each volunteer and staff member reads and understands the Foundation's internal data protection policies.

The signatory agrees that information obtained in performing his or her obligations under the agreed upon responsibilities will be treated as Confidential and further will:

i. keep the Confidential Information safe and confidential;

ii. not disclose the Confidential Information to any third party without prior written consent;

iii. not make any physical or digital copies of any Confidential Information without express permission from the Helen Bamber Foundation;

iv. only use or make copies, whether physical or digital, of the Confidential Information for the purpose of fulfilling his or her obligations in the agreed upon work;

v. inform the Data Protection Representative and Operations Coordinator about all confidential data stored on personal devices for the purpose of work for the Foundation;

3. Employees of the Helen Bamber Foundation are given access to the Confidential Information on a "need to know basis" and that such employees are informed of the confidential nature of the Confidential Information

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4. and, if applicable to the signatory's role, shall ensure that such employees enter confidentiality agreements similar to this agreement.

5. Disclosure to the employee of any information deemed Confidential would not vest or confer any intellectual property rights or copyright to the employee. Nor will disclosure be construed expressly or by implication as granting or conferring any rights by licence on any such information.

6. This agreement is and will be in addition to and not instead of any other written agreements between the employee and our organisation and is not limited by time. The signatory agrees to return all media and copies thereof containing any Confidential Information to the Helen Bamber Foundation and to remove all Confidential Information from any personal devices to the signatory upon completion of the work.

7. The signatory agrees to record and report promptly of any circumstances of which it becomes aware surrounding any potential confidentiality breach or unauthorised possession or use of the supplied information.

Signed on behalf of the employee / volunteer

Signature

_____

Printed Name:

_____

Signed on behalf of the Helen Bamber Foundation

_____
Line Manager or Volunteer Coordinator

_____
Date

Appendix 15. Example of case analysis for Personal Experiential Themes

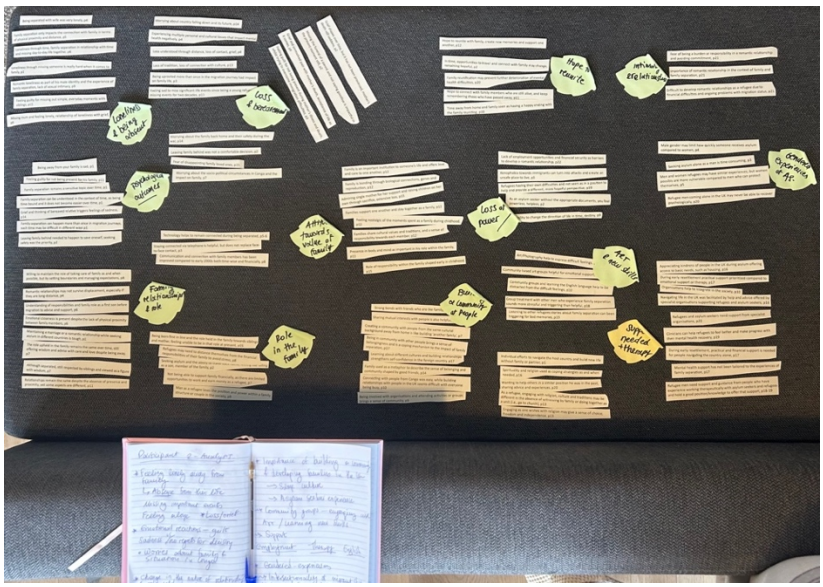
This case analysis is an interview transcript from my interview with Paul, who was separated from his wife, children, and extended family.

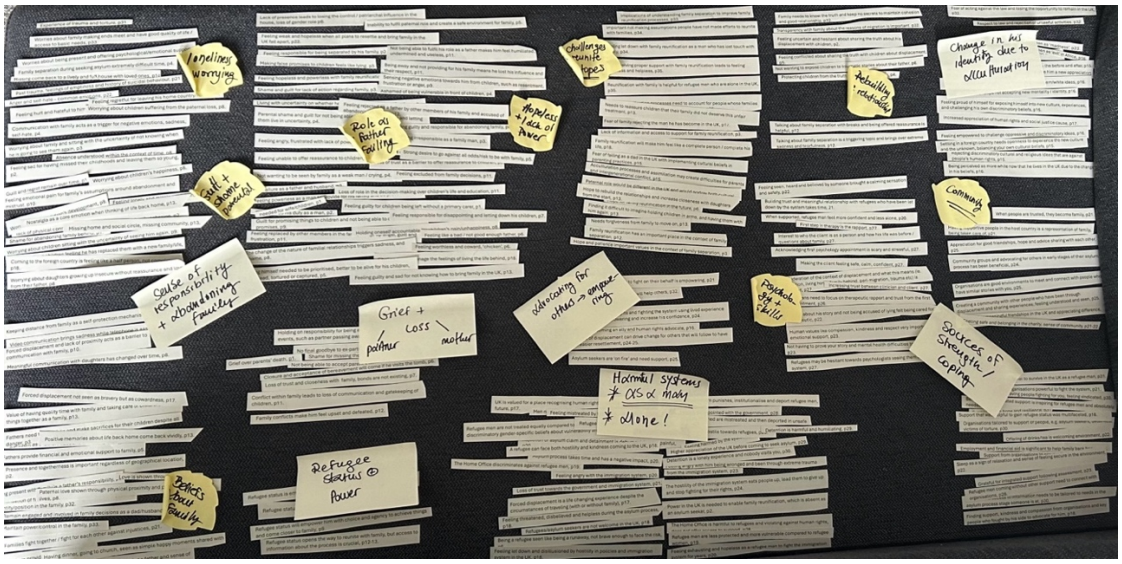
Experiential Statements	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
	I: Do you want to tell me a little bit about your experiences of being away from your family?	
Separating from family is the **most hard** thing someone can experience, p1.	P: Yeah… (sigh) it's the *most hard thing* I've ever experienced in my life because I'm away from my family not just when I came here but even since in my home country I was separated from my family. But you know, I can say when I was in my home country was not so hard like now because there I was keeping hope to see oh maybe if we find a solution to come and see me, so I was keeping hope but now it's more hard because I know it cannot happen because yeah they are very far away from me so… yeah…	Family separation as one of the most painful experiences in life despite location – just the absence, loss of proximity, not being able to see each other. Separation happened multiple times over time?
Family separation experienced multiple times, p1.		
Family separation is especially painful with the awareness of the geographical distance, p1.		Location changed relationship with hope – in the UK feels hopeless with the increased distance, knowing it cannot happen soon.
	I: No go ahead, go ahead, I'm sorry.	
Seeing other families in the host country acts as a trigger, p1.	P: It's *very, very difficult, very, very difficult* sometimes when I see people on the street or even here in the [location] I see family so… that's why sometimes I don't want to leave my home. I just want to stay inside my home, spend days, I'm outside, I have some pictures so… it's been a while on my previous life how it was looking like and it's *very tough* on this time.	Being triggered by families, being reminded of what he is missing? Don't want to expose himself to other people's lives – makes him sad. Feeling lonely/alone. Being isolated, feeling demotivated, feeling depressed. Ruminating over photos and how previous life was vs. life in the UK – tough and difficult to resettle alone.
Feeling lonely and sad without family, p1.		
Feeling isolated and demotivated to go outside, p1.		
	I: And who is family for you? I guess who is left behind, in your home country?	Prompting to define family – not wanting to make assumptions?
Ruminating over past life, p1.		
	P: The most who miss me is my children, my wife and my mom.	Having dependents. Mum a significant person in his life, despite making his own family.
	I: Hmmm, how old are your children?	
	P: The first one is six years, the second year, the second one is four years.	Children are young – missing their dad.
	I: Aw, they're quite little.	
Sad for leaving children behind so young, p1.	P: *Yeah*.	Missing them growing up? Sadness in his voice here.
	I: Yeah. And how did it feel to leave your family behind?	
		The act of leaving the country – hard, emotional, difficult.

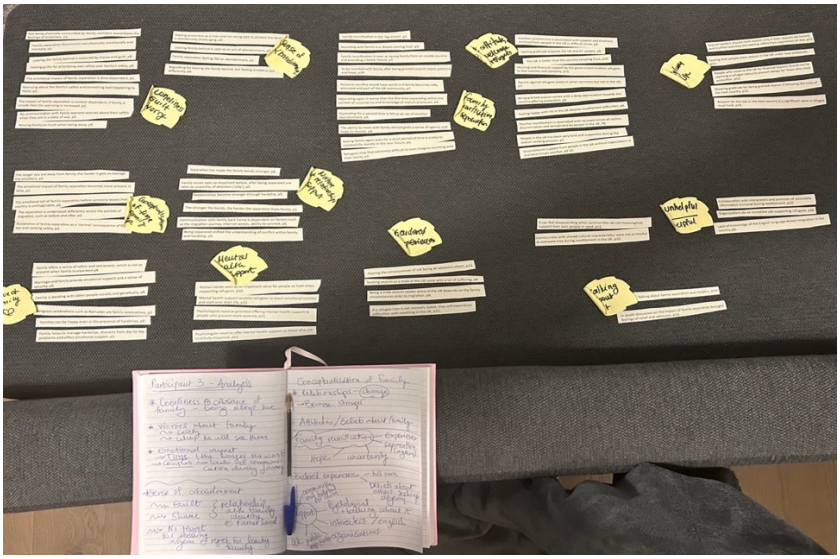
The act of separating and leaving the country was very hard and emotional, p2. Feeling of abandoning the family, p2. Failing as a dad in his role as a protector of the family, p2. Providing safety and protection in family is a man's duty, p2. Emotional fatigue with letting down children, p2. Guilt for leaving children sitting with the uncertainty, p2. Guilt for lying to children, p2. Fear of losing closeness with children due to his absence, p2. The absence of a dad growing up has a significant impact on children's lives, p2. Being absent is similar to being dead, the result is children grow up without the presence of dad, p2. Guilt over inability to provide guidance and support, p2. Worrying about children's unhappiness and emotional pain, p2. Feeling broken and defeated with how life has turned out to be, p2. / Living away from family day to day is very hard to manage, p2. Feeling like a failure, p2. Shame for leaving family behind, p2-3.	P: *Oh God*, *it was really hard that day*. I remember even today when we were speaking like I can see the picture… it was… It was like, I don't know how to say that in English. I was kind of like abandon, like abandon them because it's make no sense, you know. I'm supposed to protect my family and… I feel like I *fail* for my duty and… sometimes when I have to speak to them, when they ask me, Dad, where are you? When are you coming? *I'm just* ***tired*** *all the time* to lie on them, to say, oh no, I'm not that far, I'm coming on Friday. And the thing is they are growing up now and… maybe they think I *left* and because I'm not close to them, because as well I am not there. So… it's *really difficult*. I: And it sounds like your role as a father, it means a lot to you as being the protector? P: Yeah, yeah, you know… I lost my dad when I was four years. So, I know how much difficult it can be for children not to have the father close after the school maybe they have some issue there you need some, they need the father to be really close to them to explain them something, because some of them, how they parent, we have to take them to school and so come and pick them up. So… *I'm not there*. I don't know… I just, I can just imagine how they're feeling because I went through that so I know *exactly* what they feel. It's like… they must be *very unhappy* for sure, and when I think about that, ***ugh***… my heart is just broken because I never… I was not planning my life that way. It seems like the same story happening again, what's happened to me, is happening to my children too. It's a not easy, it's very hard to handle. I: How do you think your experience of seeking asylum and coming to the UK has that changed the way you view yourself as a father or as a husband? P: *Yeah*. I told you previously, I feel that I *fail* on my duty because when my mom arranged this plan for me to escape and leave my home country, I was supposed not to leave my family behind me. I was found, I was found excuse for it, I said, oh no, the mother was not enough or all of us because I came here to study with student visa, but I think that I don't	Sense of abandoning family – shame, guilt. Father as a protector. Needs to provide safety, protection – links to ideas around masculinity. Failing on his role as a father. Parental guilt – lying to children, trying to pretend everything is OK, letting them sit with uncertainty. Feeling guilty children are missing them. Emotional fatigue with the separation, uncertainty Fear of being rejected by children / fear of losing closeness and love – fear of the impact his leaving has on the children. Growing up without a dad – painful absence? Uses death as a metaphor for his own absence? Sign of hopelessness? Guilt for not being present for his kids when they need support. Closeness and support here understood in the context of proximity/presence in the family. Dad offering guidance and advice. Expressing sadness, regret. Making assumptions about children's pain – sadness, guilt, sense of responsibility. Hope his life would be different. Defeated? Intergenerational trauma – feels very guilty. Family separation, separation from children very hard to manage. Failure as a dad. Shame, regret, anger towards himself. Change of plans – not planning to leave family, this is possibly why he feels like he abandoned them?

Anger and regret over actions, p3. Feeling responsible for abandoning children unprotected and unsafe, p3. Guilt and shame over wife for leaving her alone with the responsibility of the children, p3. Photos of children make him sad and tearful, p3. Seeing children trigger worries and guilt about them feeling abandoned and unhappy, p3-4. Missing witnessing children growing up and spending quality time with them, p4. Feeling very sad, p4.	have any excuse and I think about that now. I'm feeling very ***ashamed*** because… I don't know if they are safe now because for me the only one who can keep, who can take care of my children, *is just me or my wife*. No one can take care of them like we can do so… I try to stop thinking about that and just have something like positive attitude to say to myself, oh, they are okay. Sometimes when they send me some pictures, they're sitting on the sofa it's *making me cry* because it seems like they put them there or so, oh, smile, we are sending a picture for your dad. I don't know if I'm just imagining, if it's just… I try to imagine, but it seems to me like they are not *happy*. I: It sounds like you have a lot of worries about your family being away. P: Yeah, for sure. *The miss is too high*.	Shame. Guilt towards wife for letting her alone taking responsibility of children, not helping? Feeling inadequate as a dad / weak? Let down children. Responsibility as a parent to keep children protected, safe – feels like he has left them back in the country in an unsafe environment? Or maybe is this only linked to his absence/presence. Photos/seeing children is triggering. He is afraid children are pretending to be happy and smile? Worries about children being unhappy, feeling sad, feeling abandoned. Missing time with children. Missing their childhood, seeing them growing up. Missing paternal presence. Missing simple moments with them.

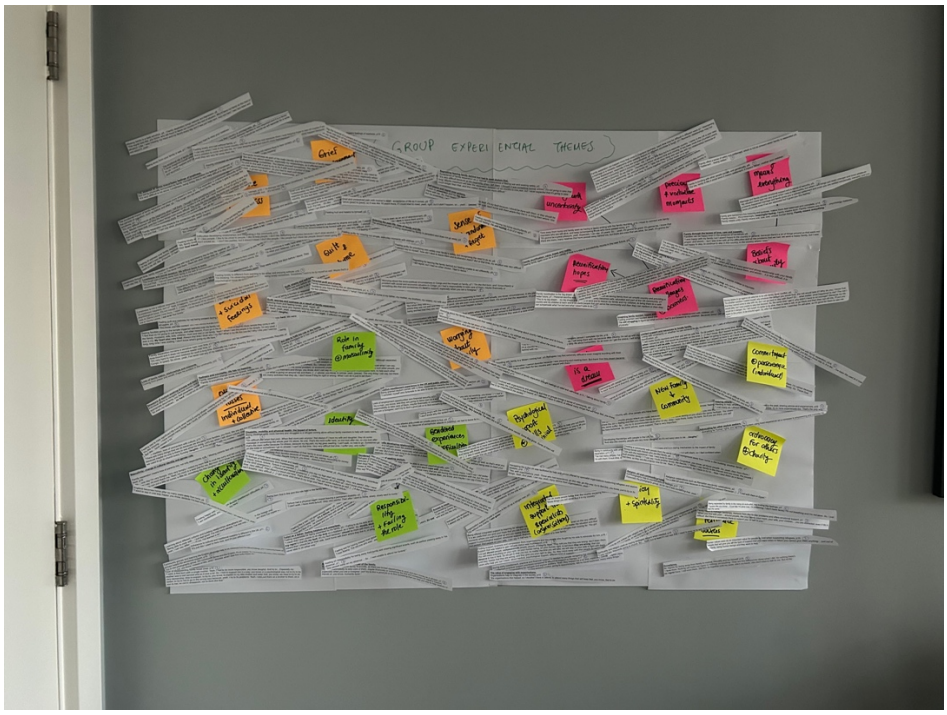
Appendix 16. Case Analysis Audit Trail

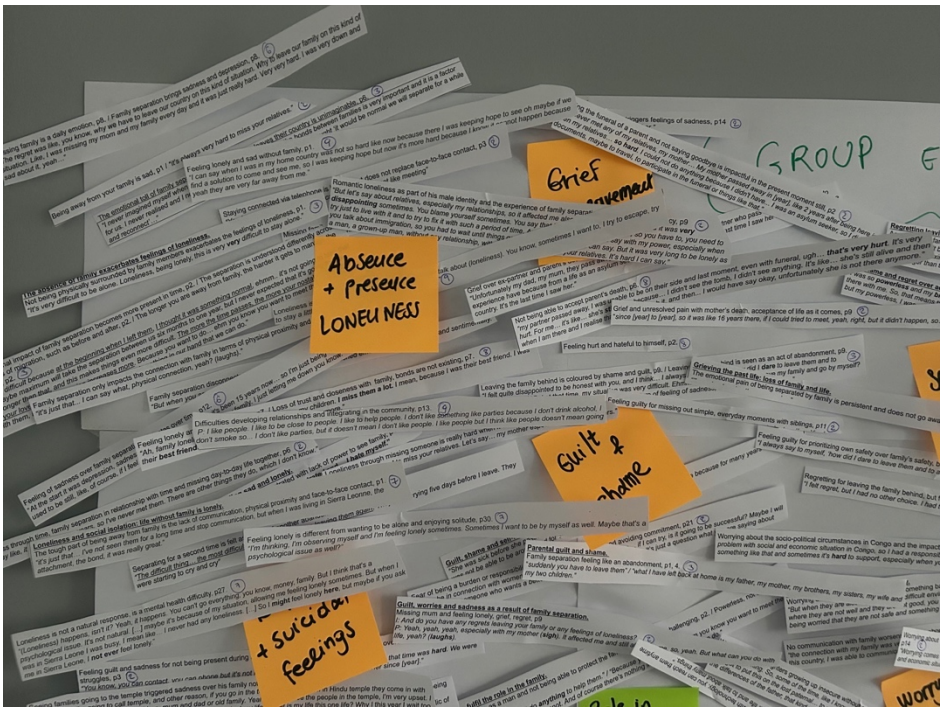






Appendix 17. Cross-Case Analysis Audit Trail for Group Experiential Themes





Appendix 18. Dissemination illustrations

Appendix 19: Recurrence of Themes

GETs	Sub-GETs	Rahim	Doyo	Bilal	Sham	Anjaan	Aslam	Maj	Dialogue	Paul
“Family separation just break you inside” – the emotional burden of being away from loved ones	Absence of family: lonely and socially isolated.	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
	Life without a family has no longer a meaning.	x			x	x	x		x	x
	Time- and context-dependant emotional responses.	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
“Maybe they think I left them” – the responsibility to be present	Abandoning the family: guilt and shame.	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x
	Worrying about family.	x	x	x		x	x		x	x
	Missing moments in time: loss and grief.	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x
“They don't like you to be here” – experiences embedded in masculinity and intersectionality	Powerlessness and helplessness.	x	x	x		x		x	x	x
	Harmful systems: experiences of hostility, racism and discrimination.	x	x			x		x	x	x

	Navigating a new country alone: post-migration difficulties and acculturation.	x	x			x	x	x	x	x
"Family means everything" – living with the hope to reunite	The importance of family in our lives.	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
	Family reunification: a dream come true.	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
"We are like a family" – coping with separation	Sources of strength and resilience.	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
	Community, belonging and helping others.	x	x		x	x	x		x	x
	It's like a package: integrated support.	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x

Appendix 20: Psychological Theories in Relation to the Findings

Theories	Relevance to the findings
Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1978)	The attachment theory, proposed by Bowlby in the late 1970s, emphasises the pivotal role of primary caregivers and proposes that the sense of safety is rooted in the parent-child bond. Attachment in the early years, if disrupted, can potentially impact the formation and maintenance of interpersonal relationships long-term. The caregivers provide a secure system for children to survive and evolve, particularly at times of distress or perceived threat, which requires their presence. This theory also centres the parent-child bond as a potential explanation of adult attachment, self-image, and perceived rejection/acceptance. With this theory in mind, some of the findings can be further explained. For instance, men who held a parental role expressed guilt, shame, and fear about the impact of their absence on their children. Firstly, as a primary caregiver, men felt unable to provide security, safety, and protection, and, therefore, fulfil their parental role. Secondly, they worried about the development of their children and the potential false understandings of abandonment or rejection, which could potentially impact their future relationships with others. In the wider family context, attachment theory can also be the pillar of family cohesion, healthy family dynamics and intimate relationships (Mikulincer & Florian, 1999). Due to family separation and trauma, the family system can be hugely disrupted and challenged (Stauffer, 2008). This can potentially explain feelings of emotional disconnect from the family due to contextual factors such as time and distance, as well as individual factors such as the journey of displacement. This was evident in the case of participants who came to the UK as minors or young boys and reported a sense of abandonment and the relentless need to be self-sufficient at a young age. However, it is important to acknowledge the cross-cultural limitations of attachment theory and its cultural bias, as it was primarily developed in Western cultures and may not fully account for cultural variations in attachment styles and caregiving practices (Crittenden & Dallos,

	2009). According to Kelly (2018) our understanding of attachment needs to move beyond primary caregivers and encompass the concept of "attachment networks". This may be more suitable for collective/Indigenous cultures and non-Western understandings of family.
Ambiguous Loss Theory (Boss, 2004)	The ambiguous loss theory is rooted in family therapy research during the early 1970s which focused on the impact of absent/distant fathers on family relationships. This research shaped the understanding of being present but simultaneously absent ('a person who is there, but not there'; p. 553) and its association with family stress and experience of loss. To capture this experience across different contexts, ambiguous loss was recently defined as "a situation of unclear loss resulting from not knowing whether a loved one is dead or alive, absent or present" (Boss, 2004; p. 554) and describes the degrees of physical or psychological absence. This can be experienced in unforeseen and often psychologically harmful situations including war, terrorism, displacement, migration and human trafficking (Renner et al., 2021). This theory provides the basis for understanding the multidimensional experience of loneliness and homesickness described by participants, but also the extent of the loss both for themselves and their families (Bunn et al., 2023). This is illustrated by the loss of "everything", the triggering nature of communication with families, the loss of significant family moments and the realisation that although families can act as a source of hope and resilience for most participants, the physical absence is extremely painful (Löbel, 2020). Moreover, some participants did not know their families' whereabouts or whether their loved ones are dead, alive, or missing. This ambiguity surrounding their loss brought up feelings of hopelessness, confusion, disappointment, and self-blame. By conceptualising their loss in this way, we could potentially better understand the emotional impact (i.e., prolonged grief), sense of closure and ability to move forward with their lives in the host country (Renner et al., 2021).

Social Identity Theory (Tajfel et al., 1971; Tajfel & Turner, 1979)	The social identity theory was presented by Tajfel & Turner (1979) to explain the importance of belonging in social groups and its contribution to developing an identity. The theory suggests that social groups, such as family, class, race, and community, can be great sources of purpose, unity, connection, and self-worth. Moreover, social groups can also organise a system of common values and beliefs for individuals (i.e., culture, religion). This explains the comparisons people often make with others who do not belong to the same social group (in-group vs. out-group). In this study, the importance of family can be understood through the lens of social identity theory, as people described family means "one" or "unity". Therefore, family is seen as an important institution that shapes peoples' identities, and fuels them with purpose in life. Similarly, this can be extended to religious and cultural groups, given that many participants described difficulties assimilating with the foreign culture whilst also maintaining their own values (Liddell et al., 2021; Miller et al., 2018; Xiong et al., 2021). Lastly, the in-group vs. out-group element of the theory may provide the context to understand the participants' experiences of racism, discrimination and hostility faced in the UK as the 'outsiders' (Özoflu, 2019) and the felt embeddedness within groups of other refugees and asylum seekers (Alfadhli et al., 2019).
Social Rank Theory (Gilbert, 2000, 2016; Price et al., 2007)	The social rank theory offers an evolutionary approach to social adaptation in hierarchical societies and the relationship to mental health outcomes. Drawing on the wider literature, Mahadevan et al. (2023) discuss the presence of social ranking across social, financial, political, educational and professional levels. From this evolutionary perspective, individuals pursue a higher rank in class, power, and social status. Social rank further explains emotional responses and perceptions in particular within group comparisons, such as depression, suicidal ideation, low self-esteem, guilt and shame (Mahadevan et al., 2023; Nesse, 2011). For example, individuals with perceived lower social rank compared to their counterparts tend to present with higher symptoms of depression, suicidal ideation and self-harm (Wetherall et al., 2019). Historically, refugees tend to face

	downward social mobility and inequalities in the host countries, which has been previously associated with poor mental health outcomes and negative self-image (Albrecht & Smerdon, 2022; Costa et al., 2020; Tsegay, 2022). This theory is relevant to understand the perceived difficulties and sense of self for male refugees in this study followed by the loss of their social status and role in the wider community. For example, participants described feeling powerless, *"like a child"* or that they are "*nothing*". Gilbert (2000; p.174) indicates that maladaptive emotions are natural responses to the perceived status and "*the degree to which one feels inferior to others and looked down on*". The literature also discusses that negative social comparisons may activate or exaggerate submissive behaviours, such as feelings of defeat and entrapment (Gilbert, 2000; Mahadevan et al., 2023; Wetherall et al., 2019). This may further explain the feelings of hopelessness that some participants have shared while navigating the UK without the support of their families, as well as without the ability to work, use their skills and be active members of society.

Appendix 21: SLR Search Strategy Example

Search strategy – Scopus

#1	refugee* OR “asylum seeker*” OR “displaced person*” OR “displaced people” OR “undocumented immigrant*” OR exile* OR “war victim*” OR “war survivor*” OR “stateless person*” OR “stateless people” OR “uprooted person*” OR “uprooted people” OR “forced migra*”
#2	“post migrat*” OR “post-migrat*” OR “after migration” OR resettle* OR settl*
#3	questionnaire* OR interview* OR survey* OR “focus group*” OR “case stud*” OR observ*
#4	experience* OR stor* OR narrative* OR perspective* OR view* OR opinion* OR perce* OR feel* OR thought* OR belie* OR understand*
#5	1 AND 2
#6	1 AND 2 AND 3
#7	1 AND 2 AND 4
#8	1 AND 2 AND 3 AND 4
#9	“qual*” OR “qualitative*” OR “mixed methods”
#10	8 AND 7
#11	5 OR 7
#12	6 OR 7

Search strategy – PsychINFO

#1	Keywords: Refugee* OR Keywords: “Asylum seeker*” OR Keywords: “Displaced pe*” OR Keywords: “Undocumented immigrant* OR Keywords: Exile* OR Keywords: “War victim*” OR Keywords: “War survivor*” OR Keywords: “Stateless pe*” OR Keywords: “Uprooted pe*” OR Keywords: “Forced migra*”
#2	Abstract: Refugee* OR Abstract: “Asylum seeker*” OR Abstract: “Displaced pe*” OR Abstract: “Undocumented immigrant* OR Abstract: Exile* OR Abstract: “War victim*” OR Abstract: “War survivor*” OR Abstract: “Stateless pe*” OR Abstract: “Uprooted pe*” OR Abstract: “Forced migra*”

#3	Title: Refugee* OR Title: “Asylum seeker*” OR Title: “Displaced pe*” OR Title: “Undocumented immigrant* OR Title: Exile* OR Title: “War victim*” OR Title: “War survivor*” OR Title: “Stateless pe*” OR Title: “Uprooted pe*” OR Title: “Forced migra*”
#4	1 OR 2 OR 3
#5	“post migrat*” OR “post-migrat*” OR “after migration” OR resettle* OR settl*
#6	1 OR 2 OR 3 AND 5
#7	questionnaire* OR interview* OR survey* OR “focus group*” OR “case stud*” OR observ*
#8	experience* OR stor* OR narrative* OR perspective* OR view* OR opinion* OR perce* OR feel* OR thought* OR belie* OR understand*
#9	6 AND 7 AND 8
#10	“qual*” OR “qualitative*” OR “mixed methods”
#11	9 AND 10

Search strategy – Google Scholar

Google Scholar does not provide advanced search terms and functions. The search was conducted by using the key search terms with Boolean connectors or phrases in quotation marks. Examples are provided below.

#1	Refugee AND Post-migration difficulties OR stressors
#2	Forced migration AND resettlement
#3	Refugee AND post-migration AND qualitative research
#4	Post-migration AND qualitative