

**POST-MIGRATION EXPERIENCES OF REFUGEE CHILDREN IN CANADA:  
STRENGTHS AND RESILIENCE**

by

ANGELINA LEE

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## Abstract

Given the history of immigration and refugee resettlement in Canada, its growing population of newcomers, particularly the recent influx of refugees, calls for a need to explore their experiences after migration. Previous research and clinical practice with refugee children and families have been predominantly trauma-based and focused on the maladaptive aspects of their post-migration lives. While it is important to recognize their unique challenges, this deficit-based model may risk pathologizing the refugee experience itself and disempowering refugee people. The present study uses a strengths-based approach and a qualitative methodology of interpretative phenomenological analysis to understand the lived experiences of children who arrived in Canada with refugee status. The purpose of the study was to explore the meaning of strength in their post-migration experiences by asking how they perceive their own assets and skills and how they describe the impact of their families, schools, and communities on their strengths. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with four girls between ages 10 and 14 using a narrative therapy- and arts-method called the Tree of Life as an elicitation device. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for data analysis. Results revealed ten subthemes as strengths and sources of resilience under three broad themes of *Individual Strengths*, *Family Impact*, and *School/Community Impact*. Participants discussed their personal qualities, including *Unique Talents*, *Ability to Face Challenges*, *Strong Family Bond*, *Openness to Diversity*, *Value in Own Culture*, and *Desire to Help Others*, as well as social support in forms of *Family as Role Models*, *Parental Involvement*, *Social Network*, and *New Experiences and Opportunities*. Findings of this study suggest potential individual, familial, and school/community-related protective factors for refugee children, and significant implications for professionals who work with refugee families in Canada.

## **Preface**

The content of this thesis is based on original unpublished work conducted by the graduate student, Angelina Lee, under the supervision from Dr. Laurie Ford. The research conducted for this study was approved by the Behavioral Research Ethics Board (BREB) at the University of British Columbia under the certificate number H14-02525.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### Overview

Canada is often characterized by its multiculturalism and referred to as a nation of newcomers. In 2011, the foreign-born population of Canada accounted for 20.6% of the total population, and children under the age of fifteen constituted 19.2% of the population (Statistics Canada, 2011). More recently, 271,662 newcomers, including family class, economic immigrants, refugees, and other immigrants, became permanent residents of Canada in 2015 (Government of Canada, 2016). Canada is also recognized as a global leader in refugee protection and resettlement. From 2005 to 2014, 263,702 refugees arrived in Canada, of which 5972 were children under the age of fifteen (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2014). In response to the largest refugee crisis in decades, the Canadian government passed a series of refugee policy changes and reached its goal of bringing over 25,000 Syrian refugees to Canada since November 2015 (Government of Canada, 2016).

This growing number of children from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds in Canada necessitates multidisciplinary research in developmental and clinical psychology, education, social work, and other fields of work involving children to investigate the post-migration experiences of children who are newcomers to Canada. Various challenges and barriers faced by foreign-born children and their maladaptive developmental outcomes related to high rates of poverty and other disadvantaged circumstances have been highlighted in the existing literature (Tienda & Haskins, 2011). However, previous studies have also found that immigrant children had lower levels of emotional and behavioural problems and higher levels of self-esteem than their native-born children (Beiser, 2002; van Geel & Vedder, 2010, 2011). These results suggest a trend of *immigrant paradox*: despite their disadvantaged circumstances,

such as a lower socioeconomic status, first generation immigrant children may have more positive adaptation outcomes than native-born children under similar circumstances. This advantage seems to disappear as immigrant children become more assimilated in the host society (De Feyter & Winsler, 2009; Suarez-Orozco, Rhodes, & Milburn, 2009). The recent arrival of refugees in Canada calls for a need to investigate whether the same pattern of paradox applies to refugee children, who are a similar but more vulnerable subset of newcomer populations.

Previous research and professional practice with refugee populations, influenced by a trauma-based perspective, have mainly examined the negative aspects of their post-migration experiences such as mental health problems, including psychological distress, anxiety, and depression (Berthold, 2000; Bronstein & Montgomery, 2011; Fazel, Reed, Panter-Brick, & Stein, 2012; Yakushko, Watson, & Thompson, 2008). This trauma paradigm emerged from clinical research and practice with a wave of Indochinese refugees after the Vietnam War and continued to influence research and practice with other refugee populations (Schweitzer & Steel, 2008). Alternatively, little research has looked to the individual strengths of refugee children and protective familial and environmental factors in their lives.

While the trauma-focused approach has the advantage of advocating the need for specialized care and support for refugee populations, it can automatically assume the process of becoming a refugee itself as a psychological issue, and fail to consider the socio-political and cultural implications of the process (Schweitzer & Steel, 2008; Watters & Ingleby, 2004). Focusing on the trauma stories of refugee people and neglecting their strengths and resilience, which are often “overshadowed by a dominant western deficits model,” may lead to a further alienation of refugee people from their inclusion into mainstream society (Hutchinson & Dorsett, 2012, p. 55). Dominant discourses of western expert knowledge in clinical and mental health

services may potentially silence marginalized cultural discourses regarding mental or emotional distress (Hughes, 2014), and may invite refugee children to believe in negative attributions about themselves by describing them with *thin descriptions* by others, such as teachers, with more powerful voices, taking away their voice to make meaning of their own experiences (Morgan, 2000). Hughes (2014) explains how this western approach may be inappropriate and problematic for refugee communities:

Although the enormous and multiple challenges inherent in the refugee experience are undeniable, being positioned as vulnerable can be a difficult label to live with, and hard to move on from. Although our mental health services are designed to alleviate distress, we risk alienating and disempowering those who come to ask for help if we do not attend adequately to their strengths they have developed through the socio-political contexts in which they have lived (p. 141).

Therefore, strengths-based approaches are much needed in conjunction with a recognition of trauma to avoid stigmatizing refugee experiences and using a psychopathologic model to portray refugee children and families as passive and helpless victims of trauma.

### **Definitions of Key Terms**

**Refugee.** According to Canadian Council for Refugees (2010), the term *refugee* refers to “a person who is forced to flee from persecution” (p. 1). Canada accepts refugees through government-assisted and privately sponsored, as well as by individual claimants who apply for refugee protection from within Canada. For the purpose of this study, the term *refugee children* is used to refer to a subgroup of immigrant children who arrived in Canada as Government-assisted Refugees (GAR) or Privately Sponsored Refugees (PSR) and currently hold permanent resident (PR) status in Canada.

**Family.** For the purpose of this study, the term *family* refers to a social and biological unit of kinship, including immediate family members, or parents and siblings, as well as extended family members, such as grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins.

**Community.** *Community* indicates a group of people who live in the same area and share the same interests with child participants and their families. This term includes community centres, libraries, churches, and other organizations that provide resources and services to refugee children and families.

**Post-migration experience.** For the purpose of this study, *post-migration experience* refers to contact with life events after refugee children and families landed in Canada.

**Assets and skills.** The term *assets and skills* is used interchangeably with the term *strength* to indicate the (perceived) qualities and abilities of refugee children. During interviews, simpler terms such as *some things you are good at* or *some things you know a lot about*, are used in order to ensure that participants understand the questions asked.

### **Significance of Study**

The importance of addressing positive individual and systemic qualities has been emphasized by recent theories of positive psychology and strengths-based approaches (Hunter, 2012; Lamb-Parker, LeBuffe, Powell, & Halpern, 2008; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). These theories and approaches focus on promoting protective factors and strengthening the individual assets of the child within the system. Refugee children bring their own cultural and ethnic values and perspectives to contribute to Canada's multiculturalism, as well as unique knowledge and skills with the potential to become competent members of the Canadian society (Beiser, Dion, Gotowiec, Hyman, & Vu, 1995; Lewis, Nugent, & Pelland, 2016; Sleijpen, Heide, Mooren, Boeije, & Kleber, 2013). Given the paucity of research with multicultural groups using

non-western and non-pathologizing approaches, there is a strong need for an investigation of the strengths of refugee children and their sources of social support. In the face of the largest refugee crisis in decades and the influx of refugee children and families in Canada, findings from this research can provide educators, school psychologists, administrators, and policymakers with valuable insights into best practices for working with refugee students in schools and communities. In addition, this line of research has the potential to address an area missing in the literature and contribute to the development of prevention and intervention programs for newcomer children and families.

## **Chapter 2: Review of Literature**

### **Overview**

This chapter outlines a synthesis of key literature to provide a context for the current study. The existing body of knowledge on refugee children in Canada, conceptual frameworks for the study, a brief overview of resilience theory and strengths-based approaches, and a summary of existing research on factors that contribute to refugee resilience and their mechanisms are presented. At the conclusion of this chapter, the significance of understanding the processes involved in reinforcing strengths and building resilience in the post-migration lives of refugee children in Canada is highlighted.

### **Refugee Children in Canada**

As one of the sixteen countries with an established resettlement program, Canada has a long history of humanitarian tradition toward refugees and has welcomed up to 16,000 children and young adults to Canada as refugees every year (Fantino & Colak, 2001; Tavares & Slotin, 2012). Refugee families were forced to leave their war-affected or poverty-stricken communities and seek safe places to rebuild their lives in Canada. During their quest and resettlement experiences, refugee families face traumatic life experiences and separation from their extended families and culture, as well as new, unique challenges and demands upon arrival (Schweitzer, Melville, Steel, & Lacherez, 2006; Taveres & Slotin, 2012). As a result, refugee children become vulnerable to developing social, behavioural, and psychological problems related to anxiety, posttraumatic stress, and depression (Bronstein & Montgomery, 2011; Tousignant et al., 1999). However, despite high-adversity exposure and the presence of multiple stressors in their lives, refugee children bring with them essential life and survival skills, motivation, and diverse perspectives to contribute to their new communities (Taveres & Slotin, 2012). These qualities are

some of their valuable strengths that educators, psychologists, and other professionals need to focus on in their practice, in order to foster resilience in refugee children. In addition, refugee families are often required to go through strict selection processes to migrate to Canada and demonstrate that they qualify for refugee status under the UN Convention definition (Beiser et al., 1995). Many refugee parents are highly educated professionals who have expertise and occupational skills in various areas to offer and contribute to Canadian society.

Refugee children share many commonalities with immigrant children who come to Canada without refugee status. In the process of sociocultural adaptation to their new environment, both groups of children face similar acculturative difficulties. Specifically, they may encounter racial/ethnic discrimination and language barriers, and may struggle to develop a sense of identity and belonging between the cultural beliefs and values of their home country and those of the host country (Fantino & Colak, 2001). Moreover, both groups of children may experience a burden to care for their parents and/or siblings and to act as a cultural broker for their families as they become more fluent in English and acculturated in Canadian society (Fantino & Colak, 2001). Refugee children, however, have additional unique circumstances that interfere with their adaptation in addition to the experience of migration alone. Ogbu and Simons (1998) distinguish refugees from immigrants as *involuntary minority* groups, indicating that refugees did not freely choose but were forced to migrate. Refugee children are likely to have experienced traumatic events related to violence, including losses of family members and targeted persecution (Fazel et al., 2012). They undergo both personal and cultural bereavement and become vulnerable to disrupted developmental trajectories (Eisenbruch, 1988), as they must confront new challenges in their post-migration lives before they can recover from their pre-migration experiences.

Alternatively, refugee children and families share the positive attitudes of immigrants, which may contribute to their successful adaptation. Both minority groups migrate with a “tourist attitude” toward the cultural and linguistic differences and with the goal of learning new ways of living and permanently settling in a new country (Ogbu & Simons, 1998, p. 165). Ogbu and Simons (1998) state that such a positive attitude allows refugees to adapt “without fear of losing their cultural and language identity” (Ogbu & Simons, 1998, p. 165). This contradicts literature that suggest that refugee and immigrant children may face challenges in identity formation between their home and host cultures (Fantino & Colak, 2001). Their ability to securely adapt also depends on the age upon arrival, family values, parenting styles, and peer influences, among many other factors. However, refugee children’s ability to learn a new culture and language while preserving their cultural and linguistic identities of origin may be a key ingredient that facilitates their adaptation and leads to successful outcomes in their new environments.

### **Ecological Systems in Post-Migration Life**

Drawing on the ecological model by Bronfenbrenner (1979), which views children as embedded within a social structure consisting of multiple tiers of ecological systems, Paat (2013) recognizes the significant role that ecological systems play in the life course of immigrant children. This conceptual framework is also helpful in understanding the post-migration experiences of refugee children. Based on Paat’s (2013) application of this model, the interrelationships between the two innermost levels closest to the developmental context of refugee children, microsystems and mesosystems, are examined in this study.

Microsystems represent how refugee children experience immediate surroundings, including activities, events, and interpersonal relations. The term *experience* is critical in defining microsystems from a phenomenological view (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), as it describes

how the environment and its properties are perceived by refugee children. Family, especially immediate family, is the most intimate and often the only microsystem for refugee children when they arrive in Canada. Therefore, healthy family functioning with support, flexibility, and responsiveness is crucial in promoting the well-being of refugee children in their post-migration lives (Paat, 2013). The “tourist attitude” of refugee families may involve optimism for security, educational aspirations, and other hopes and dreams and may facilitate refugee children’s adaptation to their new environments. Previous research has found a link between the mother’s optimism and the well-being of the child in a refugee family (Ekblad, 1993). Other familial strengths that predict positive outcomes in child development are discussed later in this chapter.

School is another important microsystem that provides a source of social connection as refugee children adapt to the host society. Socialization that occurs in schools forms a frame of reference about the Canadian culture for refugee children. The characteristics of friendships and relationships with school personnel determine the degree of their assimilation into mainstream society and influence the formation of their cultural identities (Paat, 2013). While experiencing isolation and discrimination from friends, and engaging in delinquent activities with friends are harmful to social emotional development and academic performance, positive peer relationships provide social support and contribute to healthy adaptation.

Mesosystem is made up of a network of microsystems and involves interactions between two or more settings in which refugee children participate. These include interrelationships among home, school, peer group, and community that have direct influences on the assimilation and developmental trajectories of refugee children. The interaction between the family, who encourages refugee children to maintain their native culture, and the peers, who help them assimilate into the social world of the host society, is particularly important (Paat, 2013). Family

characteristics, such as parenting styles (e.g., authoritarian, protective, authoritative, lenient) and socioeconomic status, influence refugee children's friendships or their involvement with friends (Paat, 2013). Relationships between refugee families and social institutions such as school or church, as well as family friends are also important social networks that contribute to refugee children's affiliation with their native culture and the dominant culture. Due to language and cultural barriers, it is often challenging for refugee parents to become actively involved in the host community, which indicates not only a lack of social support for parents themselves, but also missed opportunities for children through their parents' connections and pressure to translate for their parents. However, some studies report that parental fluency in the host language and social integration are not associated with their child's psychological outcomes (Rousseau, Drapeau, & Platt, 2004; Tousignant et al., 1999).

Experiences involving people and events in the immediate surroundings of refugee children and the interactions between these settings have a significant impact in the post-migration lives of these children. Microsystems and mesosystems may provide sources of resilience for refugee children to develop their strengths. Consequently, it is important to consider the multilayers of influences and their complexity when studying the experiences of refugee children.

### **Resilience Theory and Strengths-Based Approach: a Brief Overview**

Resilience is a complex and dynamic process that consists of multiple aspects at the individual, family, and community levels (Hunter, 2012), and develops in response to the experience of adversity (Rutter, 1987). The course of resilience can be understood and measured using three main components: risk factors, protective factors, and adaptive/competent functioning. Risk factors refer to variables that expose a child to a range of cumulative stressful

life events and place the individual at risk for poor developmental outcomes (Lipina & Colombo, 2009). Common risk factors include poverty, chronic or acute illness, and child maltreatment. The impact of risk factors on a child depends on the number of risks and chronicity or severity of the risk exposure (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000). Protective factors denote individual assets and potential family and community resources that reduce or moderate the harmful effects of risk factors (Kim-Cohen, 2007). These factors have varying degrees of protective effects depending on the child's developmental stage and the type of risks.

The traditional, retrospective approach of reconstructing the past stories of refugees has viewed these individuals as “casualties” rather than “survivors” (Werner, 2005). However, a number of studies have shown that a majority of children exposed to adverse life events are able to overcome their challenges and positively adapt to their environment. The Kauai Longitudinal Study by Emmy Werner and Ruth Smith in 1955 is one of the first and few longitudinal studies that followed at-risk children from infancy to adulthood. Despite perinatal complications and adverse caretaking environments, one third of the participants became competent adults with successful careers and healthy relationships. The major intrapersonal protective factors highlighted in this study included easy temperament, autonomy and independence, tendency to seek out novel experiences, self-reliance, perceived self-efficacy, internal locus of control, scholastic competence, and positive social orientation, in addition to environmental factors such as positive parent-child interactions and parental competence (Rutter, 1987; Werner, 1996; Werner & Smith, 1992). In order to understand resilience in children who are vulnerable, it is important to examine the protective processes that reduce the risk impact and promote self-esteem and self-efficacy to change their life trajectories (Rutter, 1987).

Strengths-based approach is consistent with the resilience theory in that it focuses on the strengths of individual abilities as well as family and community resources, and highlights that children will have positive outcomes in spite of exposure to adverse life events (Masten, 2001). This approach is based on the premise that “the normal human process is towards healthy growth and fulfillment, and that everyone has strengths that will aid them in the process” (Hunter, 2012, p. 5). The strengths-based approach, as a practical application of the resilience theory (Hunter, 2012), is used in the present study to investigate how refugee children identify and make sense of their own strengths and support networks as protective factors at the individual level (e.g., self-efficacy), the family level (e.g., parenting quality), and the community level (e.g., teacher and peer relationships) to demonstrate their own adaptive and competent functioning.

### **Protective Factors for Refugee Children**

For refugee children, resilience is viewed as a positive adaptation to their new surroundings and competent functioning with positive outcomes in a range of areas, including academic achievement, conduct, peer relationships, and social emotional development (Masten et al., 1999). As Fazel and her colleagues’ (2012) systematic review of studies on risk and protective factors for displaced and refugee children indicates, previous research with refugee children has overlooked protective factors, with only 9 studies examining protective factors versus 36 studies examining risk factors. The following protective factors were identified in the review: high parental support and family cohesion (Berthold, 2000; Kovacev & Shute, 2004; Rousseau et al., 2004; Sujoldzic, Peternel, Kulenovic, & Terzic, 2006), self-reported peer support (Berthold, 2000; Kovacev & Shute, 2004; Montgomery, 2008), self-reported positive school experience (Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007; Kovacev & Shute, 2004; Sujoldzic, Peternel,

Kulenovic, & Terzic, 2006), and socialization with people of the same ethnic origin (Geltman et al., 2005; Liebkind, 1996; Porte & Torney-Purta, 1987).

In particular, social support from peers, families, and communities acted as a significant protective factor across the studies that examined the post-migration psychological outcomes of refugee children. For example, family cohesion and perceived social support from family and friends were associated with self-worth scores and feelings of competence, and negatively correlated symptoms of internalizing or emotional problems (e.g., PTSD, depression, somatization) and externalizing or behavioural symptoms (Berthold, 2000; Kovacev & Shute, 2004; Rousseau et al., 2004). Refugee children who experienced a higher sense of belonging to school, such as attachment, commitment, and involvement, showed a higher level of self-efficacy and a lower level of depression, after controlling for the level of past adversity exposure (Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007). Feeling safe at home and school was related to a reduced risk of PTSD (Geltman et al., 2005). In addition to family and school connectedness, neighbourhood attachment and religious commitment were associated with psychological well-being (Montgomery, 2008; Sujoldzic et al., 2006). Moreover, the reception of newcomers by the host community and society was one of the key factors in determining successful adaptation of refugee children (Fantino & Colak, 2001).

The most recent review of 26 peer-reviewed qualitative studies on the resilience of refugee children reports similar factors as sources of support or ways of coping with trauma and other stressors (Sleijpen, Boeije, Kleber, & Mooren, 2016). Hutchinson and Dorsett (2012) also conducted an extensive literature review of qualitative studies to investigate factors that either build or impede resilience in refugee populations, including adults and children. According to their review, personal qualities of optimism, adaptability, and perseverance were identified as

key factors that helped refugee women cope (Toth, 2003). Examples included: a belief in one's inner strength to deal with challenges, a positive attitude and hope for the future the determination to cope, and looking ahead to the future (Brough, Gorman, Ramirez, & Westoby, 2003; Khawaja, White, Schweitzer, & Greenslade, 2008; Gorman, Brough, & Ramirez, 2003; Shakespeare-Finch & Wickham, 2008). In the 'Lost Boys of Sudan' study, accepting their situation and refocusing on the present and future were helpful for the boys (Luster, Qin, Bates, Johnson, & Rana, 2009). Young refugees held a sense of hope as a source of positivity and had clear goals for a better future (Gibson, 2002; Goodman, 2004; McCarthy & Marks, 2010; Ni Raghallaigh & Gilligan, 2010; Poppitt & Frey, 2007; Sutton, Robbins, Senior, & Gordon, 2006; Weine et al., 2013).

Additionally, religion and spirituality, specifically a belief and faith in a higher power, were identified as factors that contributed to resilience in refugee people by providing guidance and meaning in their lives (Khawaja et al., 2008; Schweitzer, Greenslade, & Kagee, 2007; Sossou, Craig, Ogren, & Schnak, 2008; Weine et al., 2014). Religion provided a source of support, continuity, distraction, and strength for refugee children (Bolea et al., 2003; Ellis et al., 2010; Goodman, 2004; Gorman et al., 2003; Ni Raghallaigh & Gilligan, 2010; Ni Raghallaigh, 2011; Sutton et al., 2006; Weine, Ware, & Klebic, 2004; Weine et al., 2013). Strong ideological commitment was related to a low level of psychosocial problems in children who had been exposed to political violence (Punamäki, 1996).

External forms of support from family and community, including the reciprocal processes of giving and receiving, were also found to be evident in the construction of refugee people's resilience (Schweitzer et al., 2007; Sossou et al., 2008). For refugee children, social support was provided by their families, (Berman et al., 2001; Gorman et al., 2003; Merali, 2004; Merali,

2005; Poppitt & Frey, 2007; Weine et al., 2004; Weine et al., 2013) , peers (Anstiss & Ziaian, 2010; Berman et al., 2001; Ellis et al., 2010; Gorman et al., 2003; Groark, Sclare, & Raval, 2011; Weine et al., 2013), professionals such as social workers, school counsellors and social services (Ellis et al., 2010; Gorman et al., 2003; Groark et al., 2011; Sutton et al., 2006), and people from the same cultural background (Goodman, 2004; Gorman et al., 2003; Mels, Derluyn, & Broekaert, 2008; Ni Raghallaigh & Gilligan, 2010; Phan, 2003; Poppitt & Frey, 2007; Rousseau et al., 1998; Weine et al., 2004). Educational support provided by parents and school staff was also found to be helpful for refugee children (Weine et al., 2014). Having a strong attachment with ethnic peers was linked to psychological, social, and environmental well-being (Correa-Velez, Gifford, & Barnett, 2010). Sources of formal social support for refugee families in Canada include resettlement services, community centres, schools, non-profit organizations, and other social and health services, providing first language translation, permanent housing, English language classes, counselling, and educational programs. Informal supports from similar or same-ethnic communities are also important in helping refugee families adjust to their new lives in Canada. In addition to social support structures, other qualitative studies also report English language proficiency, finances for necessities, access to education and healthcare, employment opportunities, and social activities as facilitators of successful resettlement of refugee youth, who demonstrated resilience and future aspirations (Earnest, Mansi, Bayati, Earnest, & Thompson, 2015; Weine et al., 2014).

Therefore, the resilience of refugee children is a dynamic process of interactions between individual characteristics, individual and social resources, as well as a range of pre- and post-migration experiences rather than a fixed inner trait of an individual (Beiser, 2010; Lenette, Brough, & Cox, 2012). When studying protective factors in the lives of refugee children, factors

that are specific and related to migration, such as ethnic and civic identities, need to be considered in addition to more common factors, such as socioeconomic status, parental mental health, and family functioning (Beiser, 2010). While the protective factors and other sources of strength noted above may be important in promoting the resilience of refugee children, additional critical factors exist in the process of positive adaptation and growth for children who have experienced unusually traumatic life events and carry cumulative risk factors. First, for families who are new settlers, experiences typically considered risk factors for children's mental health, such as poverty, may have a different meaning – as temporary challenges to be overcome in the resettlement process (Beiser, Hou, Hyman, & Tousignant, 2002). More importantly, resilience is typically defined as the ability to “bounce back” from adversity (Rutter, 1995). However, for children who were forced to leave their home country, returning to their normal lives is often impossible (Beiser et al., 1995). Thus, the resilience of refugee children may be reconstructed as the ability to move on from adversity and “bounce forward” in their new post-migration lives (Pulvirenti & Mason, 2011; Sleijpen et al., 2013).

Integration, or “maintaining the original culture while participating in the host society,” with positive attitudes toward both cultures, is a key factor that is unique to refugee populations and was found to be significantly linked to their psychosocial adjustment in terms of self-worth and peer social acceptance (Kovacev & Shute, 2004, p. 266). Other studies report that the adoption of Western values was associated with an increase in self-reported anxiety and depression symptoms, whereas the presence of people of the same ethnic origin and their support in homes or the community had protective effects against anxiety symptoms among girls, as well as depression-related symptoms in unaccompanied minors (Geltman et al., 2005; Liebkind, 1996; Porte & Torney-Purta, 1987). Adherence to traditional family values and tight family bonds were

protective against anxiety symptoms for boys (Liebkind, 1996). Connecting to the culture or region of origin while adjusting the new culture was discussed as one of the coping strategies by young refugees (Gorman et al., 2003; Merali, 2005; Ni Raghallaigh & Gilligan, 2010; Phan, 2003; Poppitt & Frey, 2007; Weine et al., 2014; Weine, Ware, & Klebic, 2004)

Fazel et al. (2012) underline the paucity of studies that explore how refugee children's attribution of meaning with regard to their experiences of forced displacement might affect their mental health. In a qualitative study, children and their caregivers in war-affected areas of Afghanistan were interviewed to examine how they made sense of their adversity and built hopes (Eggerman & Panter-Brick, 2010). In the study, six key cultural values were identified as essential for a successful future: 1) faith in God, 2) family unity and harmony, 3) service for family and community, 4) effort to overcome stressors, 5) morals, and 6) social prominence, respectability, and honour. Additionally, education was perceived to provide the access to social respectability and economic security. These values were found to be the foundation that reinforces "social functioning and individual dignity, and core psychosocial dimensions of resilience" (Eggerman & Panter-Brick, 2010, p. 81).

Considering the wide heterogeneity of refugee populations in Canada, these cultural values of children and families in Afghanistan may not be applicable to refugee groups from other countries. However, these cultural views and "making sense" of their circumstances demonstrate the strengths of many refugee children and their families, and explain why the adherence to one's cultural values predicts the psychological well-being of refugee children. According to Beiser (2010), "the fact that most immigrant children meet the challenge is testimony to their resilience, a resilience based on personal qualities, the strength of the immigrant family and to the social resources they manage to find in Canada" (p. 106). These

results further suggest that the ability of refugee children to “bounce forward” as the ability to be securely rooted in the cultural identity of origin while safely exploring the new culture of their host country with a “tourist attitude.”

## **Summary**

This chapter provides a synthesis of the existing literature on refugee children in Canada, the ecological systems in their post-migration lives based on the Bronfenbrenner model, a brief overview of the resilience theory and strength-based approach, and protective factors unique to refugee children. A review of previous research on refugee resilience highlights the complexity and challenges of doing research with refugee children and families, and reveals protective factors that buffer against the negative impact of cumulative risk factors in their lives. These protective factors include personal qualities, social support from families, peers, schools, and communities, and a solid foundation in the culture of origin. In the present study, the individual strengths of refugee children and the impact of families, schools, and communities on their strengths are explored. The study aims to understand how refugee children make sense of their lived experiences after their migration to Canada, with a particular emphasis on the meaning of *strength* as perceived by the children themselves. Instead of examining their pre-migration experiences, which may be re-traumatizing to refugee children, this study focuses on their post-migration lives where “the majority overcome adversity, transform vulnerability into strength, and convert risk into opportunity” (Edwards & Beiser, 1994, p. 1). Findings from this study may inform practitioners, school personnel, and community workers of individual strengths and social support structures that promote the resilience of refugee children and buffer against their risk factors.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

### Overview

In this chapter, the design of this qualitative study, including the purpose and research questions, theoretical framework, and details of the study procedures, is presented. The philosophical and theoretical foundations of the methodology interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) is described and discussed in relation to the research questions. The research context, participant criteria and characteristics, and recruitment procedures are provided, followed by the data collection method, including a detailed description of the elicitation device, the Tree of Life, as well as data analysis procedures. Ethical considerations and strategies for ensuring scientific rigour are also included.

### Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of the study was to explore the meaning of *strength* in the lived experiences of refugee children in Canada. In the proposed study, the experiences of refugee children were examined to highlight their individual assets and skills as well as sources of social support that may function as facilitating or protective factors in their processes of adaptation in Canada and in multiple domains of their development, including academic, socio-emotional, and behavioural. In the study, how refugee children identify and perceive their own personal strengths and how they derive strengths from their relationships with families, schools, and communities in their social, cultural, and political contexts were explored. Thus, a goal of this research was to direct attention away from psychopathological perspectives and toward the strengths and positive post-migration experiences of refugee children. In the study, the following research questions were explored:

- 1) How do children who arrived in Canada as refugees perceive and describe their own assets and skills in their post-migration experiences?
- 2) How do children who arrived in Canada as refugees perceive and describe the influences of their families, schools, and communities on their strengths?

### **Theoretical Framework**

In the proposed project, the approach to qualitative inquiry of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was used to explore the involvement of refugee children in the process of discovering and developing their strengths in their post-migration lives. IPA takes a social constructivist approach where reality is socially co-constructed through human agency, perception, and shared experience, and changes through interpretation. In interpretive and critical research, this standpoint allows both the participant and the researcher to engage in a meaning-making process during their conversation. IPA supports the social constructionist point of view in that individuals make sense of their lived experiences within sociocultural and historical contexts, and the researcher is involved in this process (Eatough & Smith, 2008; Hefferon & Gil-Rodriguez, 2011; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

IPA was articulated as a distinct approach to critical and interpretive research in mid-1990s with an emphasis on the interpretative features of analysis and an interest in the diversity and variability of human experience (Eatough & Smith, 2008). The first major theoretical underpinning of IPA is rooted in the philosophical approach of phenomenology, which studies an individual experience in detail and the perception of the experience. In this philosophy, the focus is on understanding the individual's relationship to the world and making meaning out of one's personal involvement with the world. Second, IPA is informed by hermeneutics, or the theory of interpretation, which entails explicitly making sense of one's experience as it is being attended to

in an iterative process of analysis (Smith, 2004). This hermeneutic approach underlines the importance of understanding experience expressed in its own terms, without preconceptions. Third, IPA is influenced by idiography, which is concerned with the particular in detail and depth, as well as in a particular context; the emphasis is on case-by-case examination of *particular* individual lives. IPA is also *inductive*, allowing themes to emerge during the analysis, and *interrogative*, questioning and informing existing research and practice in psychology (Smith, 2004).

Thus, IPA is primarily concerned with a detailed examination of an individual's experience of a "socio-culturally and historically situated person who inhabits in an intentionally interpreted and meaningfully lived world" (Eatough & Smith, 2008, p. 7). The participant is understood as a person in a particular context and cannot be removed from his or her subjective experience of "being-in-the-world" (Eatough & Smith, 2008, p. 4). The aim is to understand lived experiences that are significant to participants based on their own accounts of them through intersubjective inquiry and analysis. This process involves a double hermeneutic with both the perception of participants trying to make sense of their personal experiences, as well as the conception of the researcher interpreting the meanings that those particular experiences hold (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Accordingly, the act of intersubjectivity, or "fusion of horizons" between the researcher and the participant within the framework of the research is emphasized (Gadamer, 1976). The researcher is encouraged to reflect upon his/her previous knowledge of the participant group and consider the extent to which he/she can relate to their experiences (Smith et al., 2009). In the present study, the researcher engaged with participants to reflect on their experiences as both parties participated in meaning making of participants' personal and social

world. IPA provided a framework for both the method and data analysis of the current research to allow the process to remain flexible and open to adaptation.

Schweitzer and Steel (2008) suggest IPA as an adequate approach to capture the salient experiences of refugees as “narrative methods emphasise the temporal and sequential nature of human experience as well as the capacity of humans to reflect upon the meaning of their experience” (p. 90). Schweitzer and Steel (2008) used IPA to examine the significance of coping strategies employed by Sudanese refugees resettled in Australia and found that it enabled participants to actively engage in their discussions and make meaning out of their beliefs and values, instead of focusing on their mental health problems. The authors emphasize the important of “a return to human experience and a deeper eco-social and cultural understanding” in doing research with refugee populations (Schweitzer & Steel, 2008, p. 87).

The use of IPA in this study allowed an exploration of detailed accounts of the experiences of a unique group of individuals in a particular context (i.e., refugee children in Metro Vancouver) and understand the significance of migration, family, and education in the development of strengths and resilience in their life-world. The study focused on interpreting the meanings embedded in participants’ post-migration experiences through their narratives in relation to their context and how these meanings have influenced them in their lives. Although research using IPA has been mostly disease- and deficit-focused, with the scope for research using IPA to keep with the emergence of positive psychology (Reid, Flower, & Larkin, 2005), this research took a strengths-based approach to meaning-making of the post-migration lives of refugee children. The presuppositions of the researcher were valuable guides to access personal accounts of participants through an inter-subjective process (Lopez & Willis, 2004). As the IPA approach offers the opportunity to integrate research and practice (Reid et al., 2005), the

researcher may inform parents and educators about ways in which these children build resilience and discover strengths in their experiences. While findings are not meant to be generalized, they may help generate ideas about providing appropriate support for other refugee children and reinforcing protective factors in school and at home.

### **Research Context and Participants**

**Context.** The current study was conducted prior to the Syrian refugee crisis. Of the 263,702 refugees who arrived in Canada from 2005 to 2014, British Columbia welcomed 1528 refugees (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2014). In 2013, the top source countries of alleged persecution for refugees in BC included: Iran (26%), Afghanistan (26%), Somalia (14%), Iraq (14%), and Bhutan (4%) (AMSSA, 2013). Refugee claimants in BC mostly live in the Metro Vancouver area, specifically in Vancouver, Burnaby, and Surrey. These areas were targeted to recruit participants for the study. The large number of multicultural communities in the regional district and metropolitan area of Vancouver provided a rich opportunity and a compelling reason to conduct the proposed research.

**Recruitment.** Given the importance of an ecological framework in understanding strengths in children, the recruitment of participants took place by contacting community-based organizations and agencies in Metro Vancouver that provide resources for refugee families. The following organizations and agencies were contacted to inquire about recruitment opportunities: DIVERSEcity, Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Vancouver, Anglican Church of Canada, Pacific Immigrant Resources Society, MOSAIC, Affiliation of Multicultural Society and Service Agencies (AMSSA), Kinbrace House, SUCCESS, Umoja Newcomers Family Service Centre, Big Sisters of BC Lower Mainland, Canadian Lutheran World Relief, Afro-Canadian Positive Network of BC (ACPNET BC), Cedar Cottage Neighbourhood House, Immigrant Services

Society of BC (ISSofBC), and Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Refugee and Newcomers Office. Due to budget cuts and staff reductions, as well as Canadian refugee/immigration policy changes leading to an increase in privacy concerns and heightened anxiety among refugee communities, connecting with individual refugee families through these organizations was a significant challenge at the time of the recruitment process. Out of all the organizations contacted, only the MCC Refugee and Newcomers Office was able to help with recruitment. The MCC is a non-profit organization that assists newcomers in the areas of sponsorship and settlement. All refugee families recruited for the study were referred by the MCC organization.

Considering that English may not be the primary language for most refugee families in Metro Vancouver and that the idea of participating in a research study may be unfamiliar to them, the researcher explained the study in a face-time meeting with each family who had expressed interest in participating in the study. Families who met the participant criteria (detailed in the subsequent section) were first contacted via phone or email to schedule a meeting in advance. The researcher then met with each family at a location of their choice, which included a local church, a community centre, or the MCC office, to obtain their informed consent. The researcher also volunteered at a local food bank run by the MCC, which served some of the families, to build further rapport with them and the community.

**Participant criteria.** As indicated, IPA uses an idiographic mode of inquiry as opposed to the nomothetic approach that is used in traditional psychology (Smith, Flowers, & Osborn, 1997). It is committed to an in-depth understanding of a particular group and detailed case-by-case analysis rather than making generalizations about large populations (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Therefore, purposive homogenous sampling is typically used for IPA studies (Smith et al., 2009). Participant criteria for this study included children who migrated with at least one of their

parents as refugees from any country of alleged persecution, hold permanent resident (PR) status in Canada, and live in the Metro Vancouver area. Unaccompanied minors or children who migrated with any other guardian(s) were not recruited for the study; while interviewing these children may add insights into studying the strengths of refugee children, the focus of this study was, in part, on children's relationship with their parents during their post-migration experiences as one of their potential protective factors. Another criterion for participation included having lived in Canada for approximately two years or longer in order for participants to be able to reflect on their post-migration experiences and communicate in English.

Furthermore, in terms of the age of participants, previous IPA studies have been conducted with people aged 10 years to 83 years, recruited on the basis that they were able to reflect on and express their experiences (Hefferon & Gil-Rodriguez, 2011). Therefore, the sample of interest for this study included elementary and middle school aged students, given the demands of the IPA for participants to be able to make meaning out of their experiences, and also considering that high academic achievement could be one of their protective factors; the effects and processes of risk and protective factors become more complex for high school aged students. More specifically, the target age group was age 10 to 14, with the assumption that, at this age, students would have been more aware of their academic achievement as letter grades are given starting in grade 4 in Metro Vancouver, and would have had more involvement with their peers and communities, yet likely still maintain strong ties to their families. In addition, in IPA studies, a small sample size is supported with an effort to gain deeper or richer information from the smaller group. Smith et al. (1997) suggest a sample of three to six as the default size for a master's level IPA study or for beginners.

A brief screening questionnaire was developed and given to each family to gather information about the age and grade of the child, the permanent resident status and the date of arrival in Canada, the relationship of the legal guardian to the child, and the child's English fluency in comprehension, speaking, writing, and reading on a scale of 1 to 5. A total of four girls aged 10 to 14 (or in grade 5 to 8) were recruited for the study. Refer to the section Participant Characteristics and Table 1 for a brief description of participants and their demographic information obtained from the screening and background questionnaires (Appendices E & G). Although the gender of participants was not an initial consideration for participation, having all female participants made the sample more homogeneous. All participants rated themselves as 4 or 5 out of 5, with 1 being limited and 5 being fluent, on the rating scale of their English language fluency in comprehension and speaking. The primary languages spoken in the home were Bengali (spoken by one participant) and Spanish (spoken by three participants). The countries of origin of participants were Bangladesh, Mexico, and Colombia. According to statistics, out of the refugees who landed in Canada from 2004 to 2013, 1,764 were from Bangladesh, 6,512 were from Mexico, and 17,381 were from Colombia (Schwartz, 2015). The small sample size and fairly homogeneous group allowed the researcher to engage in a microanalysis of patterns, as well as similarities and differences across the cases (Reid et al., 2005; Smith et al., 2009).

**Participant characteristics.** Four participants are presented in the order which they were first interviewed. Pseudonyms were assigned to protect their confidentiality. Table 1 summarizes participants' background information as provided by one of their parents including the age, grade, and living situation at the time of the initial interview. All participants had received support through the MCC organization but did not know each other.

**Chandhi.** Chandhi is a 10-year-old girl from Bangladesh. She is in grade 5. She arrived in Canada in 2013, and moved from Saskatchewan to British Columbia that year. She lives with her mother and father, and has an older brother, aged 22, who lives and attends university in the United States. She also has a few extended family members in Canada. She speaks Bengali at home, but learned to speak English when she was young. Her self-rated English proficiency is “5” on a scale of 1 to 5 in comprehension, speaking, reading, and writing. Chandhi’s father worked as a lawyer in the Supreme Court of Bangladesh in her home country.

**Maria.** Maria is an 11-year-old girl from Mexico. She is in grade 5. She arrived in Canada in 2010. She lives with her mother, father, and two older brothers, aged 14 and 17. She also has some family friends from Mexico who live in Canada. She speaks Spanish at home. Her self-rated English proficiency is “4” on a scale of 1 to 5 in comprehension, speaking, and reading, and “3” in writing. Maria’s father worked as a sales manager in her home country.

**Isabella.** Isabella is a 14-year-old girl from Costa Rica. She is going into grade 9. She was born in Colombia, and she moved to Costa Rica when she was 3 years old. She arrived in Canada in 2010. She lives with her mother, older sister, aged 18, and younger brother, aged 8, and also has an older brother, aged 26, who lives in Costa Rica with her father. She does not have any other family members or family friends in Canada. She speaks Spanish at home. Her self-rated English proficiency is “5” on a scale of 1 to 5 in comprehension and speaking, and “4” in reading and writing. Isabella’s mother worked as a baker in her home country.

**Sofia.** Sofia is a 14-year-old girl from Venezuela. She is going into grade 9. She was born in Colombia, and she moved to Venezuela when she was 6 years old. She arrived in Canada in 2011. She lives with her mother and two brothers, aged 20 and 24. Sofia keeps in touch with her father who also lives in Canada, but does not live with the family. She speaks Spanish at home.

Her self-rated English proficiency is “5” on a scale of 1 to 5 in comprehension, and “4” in speaking, reading, and writing. Sofia’s mother worked as a radiologist in her home country.

Table 1.

*Characteristics of Child Participants*

Pseudonym	Age	Grade	Primary Language	Family Ethnic Background	Country of Origin	Year of Arrival in Canada
Chandhi	10	5	Bengali	Bangladeshi	Bangladesh	2013
Maria	11	5	Spanish	Mexican	Mexico	2010
Isabella	14	8/9	Spanish	Colombian	Colombia	2010
Sofia	14	8/9	Spanish	Colombian	Colombia	2011

**Data Collection Procedures**

**Interview.** IPA requires flexible data collection methods such as personal accounts and diaries; also, the semi-structured interview method has been widely used. Interviewing enables the researcher to establish rapport with the interviewee, modify interview questions based on the interviewee’s responses, and probe interesting and novel ideas that arise during the interview (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Consistent with the IPA methodology, in semi-structured interviewing, the interviewee is considered the expert of one’s experience, enabling flexibility and the possibility for obtaining richer data in a sensitive and empathic manner (Fontana & Frey, 2000). In the present study, an in-depth, semi-structured interview was conducted with each participant, followed by a second interview to ensure richness and accuracy of data. A copy of the initial interview protocol is included in Appendix H.

Interviews were held in participants’ homes, community centres, a local library, and a local church. It is important to note that Chandhi’s father and both of Maria’s parents requested to be with their daughter during the initial interview, and the researcher respected their request. No specific instructions were given to parents regarding their presence; they were neither encouraged nor discouraged to participate in the interview. Maria’s parents occasionally interrupted to provide comments in response to the questions asked by the interviewer and to

remind Maria of family stories and her accomplishments; Maria and her parents communicated in Spanish at times. Chandhi's father was mostly quiet and occasionally chatted with Chandhi in Bangladesh. Isabella and Sofia were interviewed one-on-one without their mother, who was close by during the interview.

**Tree of Life.** A therapy-, arts-based method called the Tree of Life served as an elicitation device in the semi-structured interviews. This method uses the tree as a metaphor to facilitate a storytelling experience in which the researcher and the participant collaborate to construct a narrative. It was originally developed by Ncazelo Ncube (2006), a child psychologist from Zimbabwe, as a community project to provide therapy for children who had lost their parents to HIV/AIDS. Tree of Life has been effectively used with children aged 6 to 18 years in discussing their assets and skills, and therefore, was considered to be suitable for the ages (10 to 14 years) of the participants recruited for the study. In line with the requirements of successful IPA data collection and analysis, the Tree of Life method allows creativity, imagination, and playfulness to emerge in its application, while providing structure and organization. The narrative activity involves tracing cultural and societal histories in the roots of the tree, mapping out their current lives with their assets and skills in the main trunk, and describing hopes and dreams in the branches. The study focused on the main trunk, which represents the present, to discuss how participants perceived their strengths in their current life-world and how they had developed them from their past experiences. Children were also asked to use the leaves and fruit of the tree to talk about the important people and life events that had influenced them. Inviting children to map out their lives and build rich descriptions of themselves was helpful for reinforcing their identities and identifying their sources of social support. Such methods that utilize arts-based creative expression have been effectively used in developing and implementing

prevention and intervention programs for immigrant and refugee children (Rousseau & Guzder, 2008). Examples include sand play with cultural figurines, artwork about characters, myths, tales, or legends from non-dominant cultures, and improvisational theatre. These programs were designed to create a safe space in which children can share their stories, to help them construct their identities and meaning in their personal stories, and to establish a bridge between the past and the present (Rousseau et al., 2014).

Similarly, there were several advantages of using the Tree of Life method for this study. First, it was consistent with the goal of using a strengths-based and non-stigmatizing approach to the study. Rather than using a pathological model or focusing on negative refugee experiences, which may be overwhelming and re-traumatizing for participants and stigmatizing for their families, an approach that empowered and encouraged participants to draw on their assets and sources of social support was sought. The Tree of Life method critiques “the western notions of catharsis, the idea that bereaved children and communities are not given platforms to express their grief and therefore have feelings and emotions trapped deep inside them which need to be vented out” (Ncube, 2006, p. 3). Alternatively, an aim of the approach is to enable children to develop and share stories about their lives while valuing their cultural and social histories and rebuild a safe space for themselves by celebrating their lives (Hughes, 2014). While the nature of the interview and elicitation activity took a strengths-based approach, if participants wished to talk about any negative or traumatic experiences, the researcher allowed them to do so, as it could have been the case that they learned valuable lessons or drew their strengths from these experiences. Second, the activity offered an engaging and creative way to interview school-aged children, and the visual method helped communicate ideas that could have been otherwise overlooked or misunderstood due to language barriers. Furthermore, for participants who were

unfamiliar with the interview and research participation process, a drawing activity was much more inviting, natural, and less threatening. Lastly, it created a personal document of the children's representation of their subjective experiences. After this thesis project is completed, the researcher will follow up with participants to offer them the option or opportunity to share their personal document with their parents and/or teachers to highlight their strengths and help think about ways to support these children according to their strengths.

The script and outline for using the Tree of Life method are included in Appendices H and I. The Tree of Life activity was conducted with the members from the researcher's lab and with a 10-year-old child prior to beginning the data collection to help ensure that the researcher was fluent in its administration and that the directions were easy to comprehend and follow. It is important to note that Tree of Life was adapted for the study and used as an elicitation device for the interview. It was not used as a method of therapy as its original intended purpose. Therefore, a formal training in its administration beyond skills in conducting interviews with school-aged children was not required of the researcher.

**Background information.** A background questionnaire was completed by participants' parents to obtain basic information such as their socioeconomic status and family background. The information gathered from the questionnaire was helpful in identifying potential protective factors in participants' lives in Canada. A copy of the background questionnaire is included in Appendix G.

### **Ensuring Scientific Rigour**

In a qualitative context, the notion of ensuring and establishing reliability and validity may be conceptualized as demonstrating the credibility of the inquiry, and the transferability and dependability of results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). When considering the extent to which results

can be replicated or findings can be generalized to other refugee groups, it is important to highlight that, as discussed earlier, the goal of IPA research is to gain a better understanding of the lived experiences of a small group of individuals. However, in terms of the transferability of findings being applied to real life settings, the intent is for the information and knowledge gained from this study to inform and improve professional practice and future directions in research with different refugee groups.

In qualitative research, the quality of data relies on the researcher's skills and interpretations "as an observer, an interviewer, and an analyst" (Richards & Morse, 2007, p 190). Therefore, the validation process begins in the study design phase with appropriate preparation by the researcher and takes place throughout the methodology and the interpretation of data, including surveying the literature, constantly and actively engaging in qualitative inquiry, selecting methods and design, using sampling techniques, pacing the study, and coding the data collected (Richards & Morse, 2007). In the current study, the literature review involved gathering prior knowledge on the resilience of refugee children and potential protective factors in their environments, and left room for knowledge to be discovered from the data, rather than looking for specific information to fit any expectations or hypotheses. Richards and Morse (2007) refer to this process of literature review as "bracketing," or setting aside one's personal assumptions and the information gathered from the literature, and learning from the data to find concepts and patterns without preconceptions. After the analysis, the researcher returned to the literature to compare and contrast the newly discovered knowledge with previous knowledge and update the literature review based on findings. In addition to the literature review, the researcher paced the study, or spent adequate time in each stage and between stages for a thorough and comprehensive data collection and analysis. Data gathering continued until saturation of the data

was achieved, or until no new constructs emerged during the follow-up interview with each participant.

To enhance the validity of the findings, triangulation, or the use of multiple methods and sources of data, was necessary. Mathison (1988) defines triangulation as “a technique which provides more and better evidence from which researchers can construct meaningful propositions about the social world” (p. 15). This definition offers an alternative concept of triangulation that is less concerned with the outcomes of convergence, inconsistency, and contradiction, and it recognizes how we can use the discrepancies to arrive at a holistic understanding of a phenomenon. A few different validation procedures were used in order to ensure the quality or triangulation of the findings. First, throughout the data collection and data analysis procedures, the researcher had separate meetings with the research supervisor, graduate student peers, and lab members for peer debriefing to share feelings and thoughts that arose during the data collection process, as well as to discuss methodological processes and issues, and the researcher’s interpretations of the data. Second, during the second interview, member checking was used to review the summaries of the initial interviews, initial interpretations, and key subthemes identified with participants to check for accuracy and credibility. Third, an academic colleague, who was familiar with IPA methodology, served as an external peer auditor to review a random selection of direct quotes from the interview transcripts and their associated themes, and confirmed that the researcher’s interpretations were consistent with the data collected. In addition, prior to the write-up of the results section, the researcher met with the thesis supervisory committee to present a draft table of the themes, which were refined and revised based on their feedback and suggestions. These methods of triangulation helped ensure that the

interviews were being conducted appropriately and check whether any information from the interviews had been overlooked or misinterpreted.

In addition, the researcher kept a reflexive journal which systematically attended to and documented the context of the researcher's knowledge construction, or how the researcher claims to know what she knows, through introspection of the researcher's own biases and motivation for conducting the study (Tracy, 2010). This self-reflexive practice allowed the researcher to delve deeper into the research process and encouraged her to not only become more involved in participants' life-world but also in the researcher's own subjective experiences. In the reflexive journal, observations, impressions, insights, and follow-up questions, or field notes, were recorded immediately following every meeting or interview to capture a more comprehensive picture of the data collection experience, including the interviews and other interactions with participants. This journal was consulted during the write-up of the results and discussion to keep track of decision-making processes and personal biases, and to provide a larger context and rationale for data interpretation as well as richer descriptions of participants' stories and experiences beyond the interview data.

### **Ethical Considerations**

A number of ethical considerations were addressed prior to conducting the study and monitored throughout the data collection and data analysis processes. To start with, the researcher applied for an ethical approval from the Behavioural Research Ethics Board (BREB) at the University of British Columbia and made appropriate revisions as required. As detailed above, families were referred by an organization and recruited in-person at a location of their choice. All parents and children were given adequate time (at least two weeks) to consider participation before being contacted to ask for their initial verbal consent and schedule the first

interview. The researcher took extra caution to attend to participants' willingness to participate in the study during the recruitment procedure, considering that their voice could easily be lost in the process. The researcher provided child participants and their parents with detailed explanations of what to expect from the interviews and the likely outcomes of the data analysis, and gained informed consent from the parents for their child's participation. At the time of the initial interview, the purpose of the study was further explained to child participants, and their informed assent was obtained. Participants and their parents were informed that the purpose of the study was to learn about the post-migration experiences of participants, with a particular interest in understanding how they made sense of their strengths and how they had developed them from their families, schools, and communities. It was highlighted that their participation was voluntary, that they could choose not to answer any of the questions asked during the interview, and that they had the right to withdraw at any time during the study. Although the nature of the study was strengths-based, and the researcher informed participants in advance of the type of topics that would be covered; in case of unexpected sensitive topics raised by participants during the interview, a list of appropriate, free-of-charge services were to be provided.

In addition, participants and their parents were told that their confidentiality would be protected except in cases where there would be a risk of harm to self or others. They were also informed that their identities would be concealed by using pseudonyms and code numbers as well as storing data in password protected and encrypted files and locked filing cabinets in the researcher's lab on campus. Any identifying information such as participant names and contact information were stored separately from the data.

## **Data Analysis**

Given little prior experience in qualitative analysis, the researcher consulted and adapted the guidelines of doing thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006) as well as IPA analysis by Smith et al. (2009) and Smith and Osborn (2003) in analyzing the collected data. Thematic analysis is described as an accessible and theoretically flexible approach to “thematizing meanings” (Holloway & Todres, 2003, p. 347) within data and is a widely used method that is recommended for students who are new to qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), the issue of using the term “themes emerging” from the data is raised as it depicts a passive account of the process of data analysis where themes reside in the data rather than recognizing the active role of the researcher in interpreting the data and identifying and selecting patterns of interest. In IPA data analysis, it is important to balance the emic, phenomenological, insider’s position and the etic, interpretative, outsider’s position (Reid et al., 2005). In a double hermeneutic, the researcher engages in a subjective analysis of the meaning making of the lived experiences of the participant. The result is “a joint product of the participant and the analyst” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 80). Thematic analysis is consistent with IPA in that it aims to describe and explore patterns across qualitative data; however, it is not theoretically bounded as IPA is attached to a phenomenological epistemology (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2003). Conducting a thematic analysis for this study did not intend to replace IPA analysis, but it meant that the researcher engaged in a pattern-type analysis within a social constructionist epistemology that is similar to a more “named and claimed” analysis such as IPA without completely subscribing to a “full-flat” IPA (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This allowed room for flexibility and differentiation from IPA for a researcher who was not proficient in qualitative analysis.

To begin with, the transcripts were read multiple times, initially with open coding and annotation of interesting and significant points, followed by selective coding and identification of themes and their connections for constructing more abstract, higher order themes. Each transcribed line was closely looked at to search for patterns or themes of *strength* in an idiographic approach, beginning with specific examples to general categorization, with an emphasis on convergence and divergence within a single case and then across different cases. A computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS), ATLAS.ti, was used for coding, organizing codes into themes, and mapping out the themes and their connections. The details of the analysis process are outlined in four stages below. During this process, the researcher became even more involved in the lived experiences of participants in the double hermeneutic circle, resulting in a collaborative work between the participants' words and the researcher's interpretations. In addition to the transcripts themselves, the reflexive journal with field notes regarding the researcher's initial, memorable observations during the data collection experience guided and informed the researcher's interpretations and analytical decisions.

**Stage 1: Transcription.** The audio-recorded interviews were transcribed for completeness and accuracy. This lengthy process was more than merely a mechanical act of transferring spoken sounds into written texts, and was an interpretative act that provided the researcher with powerful recollections of initial observations and impressions and the opportunity to reflect on the interview experience (Braun & Clarke, 2007), which were confirmed and further enriched by the researcher's field notes in the reflexive journal. The data was organized by cases, rather than by interviews, resulting in a total of four cases. The initial and follow-up interview transcripts per participant were combined into one case.

**Stage 2: Familiarization and comprehensive exploratory commentary.** The initial stage of the analysis involved active repeated reading and engagement with the raw data for a thorough understanding of the data. Starting with the first case, the transcript was re-read while listening the audio recordings to examine different aspects of the data, such as the semantic content and language use. Repeated reading of the data helped the researcher see the overall structure and flow of each interview. During this familiarization process, an interpretive, or exploratory, comment was attached to each exemplar piece of evidence, or data extract, that captured the meaning of *strength*, with the research questions in mind.

Smith et al., (2009) suggest three different ways of exploratory commenting: descriptive, linguistics, and conceptual. Descriptive commenting analyzes the transcript to describe its content at face value, using key words, phrases, or explanations from the participant and builds rich accounts of the meaning of the participant's experiences. Linguistic noting focuses on the language use or how the content and meaning were presented in the transcript, attending to pronouns, pauses, laughter, tone, and other linguistic aspects. Conceptual coding involves an analytic dialogue where the analyst engages in an interrogation and reflection about one's own understandings of the participant's world at an abstract level. The original plan of analysis was to use all three approaches of exploratory noting along with other strategies, such as underlining and free associating. However, participants' limited proficiency and expression in the English language made it difficult to analyze the linguistic aspects of the transcripts or the audio recordings. In fact, transcribing itself was considerably challenging as participants struggled to express themselves with accuracy and depth and with the correct pronunciation of certain words. Linguistic noting would have been more meaningful if participants could communicate in their primary/native language. Accordingly, descriptive and conceptual commenting was used to

identify potential patterns, sequences, connections, and other relevant and interesting ideas in a systematic manner across the entire data set. The reflexive journal was consulted to augment the commentary with background information, important statements and ideas, or other relevant information, such as participants' body language, that were not included in the interview data.

**Stage 3: Codes and themes.** Subsequently, the data extracts, with their context, were organized into meaningful groups, or codes. The data was coded for as many potential themes as possible, and individual data extracts were coded according to as many different codes as they fit into. After initial codes were generated from the first case, the codes were categorized into more abstract concepts that led to bigger ideas, or candidate themes. This level of analysis worked primarily with the notes from Stage 2 to search for themes and connections within a case; then, all relevant coded data extracts were collated within the identified candidate themes. This was an iterative, nonlinear process that took many reads and rounds of “playing around” with the data. The researcher took time to pace the analysis, thinking through the data and about various relationships between codes, between candidate themes, and between different levels of candidate themes. In this stage, recorded thoughts and insights from the reflexive journal continued to inform and influence the researcher's analytical decisions and process.

**Stage 4: Connections and patterns across cases.** The final step involved repeating Stage 3 above with other cases. Although the researcher was inevitably influenced by the first case and used previous themes to orient the analysis, efforts were made to treat each case in its own terms and to be attentive to new themes. As the researcher worked through each case, the validity of individual candidate themes was checked against the original transcript to ensure that they accurately reflected the meanings evident in the data set as a whole. Previous themes were reviewed in order to identify extracts that did not form a coherent pattern, and were refined and

adjusted if they did not adequately capture the contours of the coded data. Candidate themes were collapsed, eliminated, separated, or reworded based on their supporting evidence. In addition, any data extracts missed in earlier stages were coded within the identified candidate themes. Again, this was not a linear, step-by-step process and took a number of going-back-and-forth and repeating or merging the steps of analysis. As the cases were being analyzed, the visual representation of mind-maps was laid out to organize the candidate themes and look for connections between and among them. Finally, the identified candidate themes were finalized and labeled as *subthemes*, which were then categorized under *broad themes*. The final product was a master table of these themes as well as *overarching themes*, constructed as the themes were once again revised, reconfigured, reworded, focused, and reduced based on their richness, pertinence to participants' experiences, and contribution to answering the research questions. The final subthemes, broad themes, and overarching themes were present across all cases.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, the IPA methodology was described, and the procedures of the data collection and analysis to explore the meaning of strength in the lived experiences of refugee children in Canada were detailed. Participants for this study included four 10- to 14-year-old children who migrated to Canada with their parent(s) as refugees. The Tree of Life method was used as a strengths-based elicitation device to focus on participants' individual strengths and how the environmental factors interact to support these strengths. IPA and thematic analysis approaches were used to analyze the data collected, and different levels of themes were actively identified and refined by the researcher, with the research questions guiding the process. The following chapter presents the results from this analysis according to the identified themes in a comprehensive manner.

## Chapter 4: Findings

### Overview

In this chapter, overarching themes, broad themes, and subthemes developed by the researcher from engaging with the data and analyzing participants' accounts of their own experiences are presented. All themes identified were discussed by all participants. These themes provide a rich description of meanings and conceptualizations prevalent across the data set as a whole, rather than within each participant data.

Three overarching themes of *Secure Identity*, *Empowerment*, and *Sense of Belonging* were documented across broad themes and subthemes to explain their interrelationships. A total of ten subthemes were identified and categorized under the three broad themes of *Individual Strengths*, *Family Impact*, and *School/Community Impact*. The broad themes are directly related to the research questions of the study regarding individual assets and skills, and the influences of families, schools, and communities. Six subthemes were identified under the first broad theme to describe participants' perceptions of their own individual strengths including: *Unique Talents*, *Ability to Face Challenges*, *Strong Family Bond*, *Openness to Diversity*, *Value in Own Culture*, and *Desire to Help Others*. Two subthemes, *Family Members as Role Models* and *Parental Involvement*, were identified for the second broad theme. Finally, two more subthemes, *Social Network* and *New Opportunities*, were identified for the third broad theme. These additional four themes illustrate participants' perceptions of the role of family, school, and community support in building their strengths. Refer to Figure 1 for a visual organization of overarching theme, broad themes, and subthemes. In presenting the results, direct quotes from participants are included to provide appropriate examples of the themes and capture the meanings in their statements and explanations. This was particularly important considering the population of

interest to ensure that the researcher’s dominant voice does not take over, and to tell the stories in participants’ own words, despite the language barriers.

Figure 1.  
*Thematic Map of Individual, Family, and School/Community Factors*



**Overarching Themes: Secure Identity, Empowerment, and Sense of belonging**

Three overarching themes, *Secure Identity*, *Empowerment*, and *Sense of Belonging*, are evident across all cases and illustrate how the broad themes and subthemes are interconnected. Every participant demonstrated a secure identity through their strong bond with family and sense of pride in their own culture, which aided them to safely explore and adapt to their new environment and appreciate diversity while maintaining their own cultural and familial values. Having family members as role models and parental involvement in their lives further built their resilience, or their ability to face and seek challenges with self-determination, perseverance and courage. In addition, participants’ unique talents and skills representative of their family and

cultural interests were sources of their self-confidence and pride. Furthermore, their social networks, such as family friends and schools, helped participants develop a sense of belonging by creating a welcoming and caring environment where participants had new experiences and opportunities for volunteering and community involvement. Overall, participants were empowered to proudly apply their strengths in helping others and become contributing members of their families, schools, and communities.

### **Broad Theme 1: Individual Strengths**

The first research question explored how refugee children perceived their own assets and skills in their post-migration experiences. During the “trunk” part of the Tree of Life activity, participants were asked to describe their skills and talents (e.g., “What do you think you are good at?”) and how those strengths made them feel. In addition, participants demonstrated their strengths as they shared stories from back home in the “roots” of their tree and their hopes and dreams for the future in the “branches.” Therefore, the entire interview process took a strengths-based approach to empower participants, who recognized and discovered their strengths as they engaged in a double hermeneutic meaning making process with the researcher.

**Subtheme 1.1: Unique Talents.** Each child participant indicated at least one talent or skill that they perceived they had used effectively in Canada. These included academic interests, artistic talents, sports, martial arts, and cooking/baking, which meant much more than merely interests and hobbies for these children. For some participants, their talents were the strengths that they had acquired in their home country and brought with them. For others, they had discovered their talents during their post-migration life course in Canada.

First, three out of the four participants discussed their strong academic interests and/or achievements. For Chandhi, being academically strong was important not only to herself but also

to her family. She reported feeling “really proud” to be good at math in her class and stated, “I’m the one who teaches math, really.” One of Chandhi’s future goals was to “try and go into Mini School,” which is one of the most elite and prestigious high schools in Vancouver. She explained her reasons for hoping to go to the Mini School, “If you go there, your future is bright. If you don’t go, your future is dark... If you go to Mini School, it’s really good. Your future is good. You’re going through the right path.” To Chandhi, “bright future” entailed obtaining more knowledge and helping others. For Maria, her hard work in reading was indicated as one of her academic strengths. She proudly talked about winning an award at school for reading the most books during a summer break. For Isabella, Science was the academic subject that she was interested and believed that she was strong in. She elaborated, “I’m proud of liking Science ‘cause most people don’t like it, but for me, I never used to like Science till I got involved and actually listen.” Participants indicated their diligence in school work despite language or any other barriers they might have experienced.

Second, participants reported non-academic talents that represented their family or cultural values. When asked to talk about herself, Chandhi listed her favourite activities with enthusiasm: “I like to draw, paint, sing, and dance!” She reported, “I do art when I am happy, sad, yeah... It makes me happy when I’m sad, and when I’m happy, it doesn’t make me sad, it makes [me] more happier.” Dancing was also important to Chandhi as she enjoyed entertaining people at local cultural events by doing classical Indian dances. She reported, “I do dances because people like my dances.” Therefore, for Chandhi, dancing was a cultural and traditional activity and a strength that she had brought from back home. She explained, “I learned how to dance in Bangladesh only.” Singing was another strength that she brought up briefly, but also indicated a sense of loss with as she indicated that she could not practice singing in Canada

without her traditional instrument, called the harmonium. When asked to elaborate, she said, “I do not want to mention it.” She indicated that her strengths made her feel “proud,” “good,” and “happy.”

Similarly, playing sports meant more than having a talent or hobby to Isabella. Her athleticism, particularly in basketball and swimming, reflected her family values. She explained that playing sports ran in her family and that she played for her father and brother who live in Costa Rica, “... ‘cause most of the boys in my family like to play like sports, and I’m the only girl that likes sports in my family.” She also reported that she was taking swimming lessons to become a lifeguard in order to fulfill her mother’s dream of becoming a perfect swimmer. Thus, Isabella’s talents in playing basketball and swimming represented her efforts to preserve her family values and maintain the connection with her family back home. When asked about what her strengths meant to her, Isabella replied, “They make me feel like proud of myself.”

Third, for all participants, cooking was a skill that signified family and cultural tradition and values. Chandhi explained the culture of cooking in Bangladesh, “Because in Bangladesh, you kind of, you know much more cooking than Canada. In Canada, you just cook something and eat it and stuff, but in Bangladesh, if you cook something, there’s always guests coming and stuff.” Whether their talents were acquired from home or newly discovered, for all children who had lost their ability to express themselves due to language barriers, these talents and skills provided alternative forms of expression, sources of pride, and ways to practice their cultural activities and preserve their cultural identities.

**Subtheme 1.2: Ability to Face Challenges.** Each participant discussed and demonstrated her own unique way of facing and overcoming challenges. Isabella described her journey of

playing basketball, which involved challenges and persistence as her mental health affected her performance. She recalled,

I used to play on a team for, it's the most popular Vancouver BC girls, the biggest one I got into it, but I had to quit because I fell in depression, and it was this year, and 'cause I ate something apparently poisonous, and I fell in depression and I couldn't eat, and I was really weak. I could only eat soups, and so I was really weak, so then I had to quit, and it was so upsetting because it was the best team in BC, and I actually got on it, and I had to quit.

However, Isabella showed that she was determined to try and join the basketball team again, and reported that she was saving up to buy a new pair of basketball shoes for herself. In Sofia's case, she reported that her life experiences had made her "more strong than usual." When asked what it meant to be strong, she replied, "To not let anybody take you down ... Stand up by yourself and not wait for someone to help you." During the second interview, Sofia opened up and elaborated further, "When a crisis happens, I won't just stay in a corner and be afraid. I'll just confront. ... I'm strong because I've been in things that not everyone has been on. ... I grew brave about it. ... From the experience I had, I had to be brave to confront the things." Sofia had transformed adversity into personal growth, and she demonstrated courage and a positive mindset during the interview. She reported that her friends would describe her as "weird, funny, [and] crazy," and she described herself as "outgoing." Maria, Isabella, and Chandhi shared similar traits of resilience and optimism. Maria indicated, "I'm not normally that sad." Isabella said, "I'm always make jokes. I'm, I'm never like upset." Chandhi reported that she sometimes felt left out among people who speak different languages, and explained how she dealt with feelings of isolation, "I kind of go and try be friends and stuff 'cause you can't just stay left out."

Similarly, Isabella shared her thoughts on strengths of newcomer children, “We have that strength to just go up to a person and talk.” In addition, participants continued to seek challenges and push themselves with determination and perseverance: Chandhi and Maria with their academic achievements, Sofia with her desire to explore and travel the world, and Isabella with her dream of becoming a professional basketball player.

**Subtheme 1.3: Strong Family Bond.** All participants clearly prioritized their families and demonstrated how much they cared about their families through their drawings. During the “roots” part of the Tree of Life activity, when asked about things she missed the most about home, Isabella and Sofia both said “family,” and Maria talked about her family friends. Maria and Isabella also recalled memories with their family pet: “Blacky” the “well-behavioured” cat and “Tintin” the loyal dog. Sofia missed how connected everyone was in her neighbourhood back home. She stated, “It was kind of cool to know everyone and to talk to every single person. ... There, it’s always like, there’s always parties and stuff.” Similarly, Chandhi reminisced about spending time with her aunts and other relatives back home,

Some of my, one of my aunts, we would go to their house, and the teenage people will go in their room, and one room had play games, card games, and the kids will just annoy adults, and play hide and seek ... Fun was something like, so we just used to tease people, or adults would tease us.

However, Chandhi’s lighthearted tone changed as she expressed empathy and concern for her mother, “Because here in Canada, my mom doesn’t have anyone. Like all sister and brother in Bangladesh, you know. She’s lonely. My dad, he’s okay, not bad.” Isabella also discussed how she sometimes worried about her family’s financial situation,

We all get brand new shoes and all, but then my mom doesn't want to get anything, and then we feel bad, so then I'm like oh my god, and then my brother, my little brother always wants that expensive stuff, right? And I'm like no, just get this. He's like, no, I want this, so it's like really hard.

Isabella reported that her family was gathering money to pay for her aunt's surgery in Costa Rica, and that her father and brother always visited her aunt to check up on her. Isabella elaborated on what it meant for her to talk about her family and their support, and shared her family's "miracle" story from when she was young,

Really important because like they cared about me. Yeah, 'cause when I was really little, I had problems in like from my waist to my legs, and the doctor said I wasn't going to walk at all, and every time we went to the doctors, they were like no, we can't help you, no, it's like, it's like, just a thing, and my mom 'cause she really believes in God, so then she took me to a church, and after a week I went to that church, I kind of started walking, and then I started walking, and the doctors were surprised. They were like we thought she wasn't going to walk, and my mom's like if you believe in God that, then maybe miracles would come true, so then she made a promise to God if my brother, my little brother wasn't born with any like damages or problems, she would name him Jesus, which is Jesus, so then he wasn't born with anything, so she called him Jesus, yeah.

Isabella started walking when she was approximately two and a half years old. This story reflected the faith, hope and strength to survive a hardship together as a family even before their migration. Maria also shared a special story about a stuffed bear that symbolized her family's resilience:

In Christmas, in Mexico, when I was five years old, I remember my brother woke me up and he had a bear in his hand, and he said that Santa Claus left him in on top of ... So he gave it to me and he's like yeah, that's your bear, and so I have it ... so and I still have it till now. I still save it, and he was the first, he was the stuff that came with me into Canada. ... I named him Honey in Spanish.

Maria indicated that the teddy bear reminded her of her "family and culture and Mexico."

Maria's father, who was present during the interview, commented, "He's part of our family ... That teddy bear has been with us in the immigration process."

During the "ground" part of the Tree of Life activity, Isabella and Maria showed an appreciation for being able to spend more time with their families in Canada than they used to back home. Some of the family activities included: exploring the nature such as lakes and waterfalls, going on hikes, camping, walking to the park, going to the mall, playing baseball, biking around the seawall, swimming, and baking. Maria stated, "We do a lot of things together." These activities were new and meaningful experiences for the families. Maria's father described the family's experience of building a snowman together, and how it was a "special" activity for the family. For participants and their families, experiencing and seeing the nature, "animals," "fresh air," and "snow" were unique experiences that represented living in Canada. Isabella identified her family becoming closer in Canada as one of her accomplishments which she indicated being proud of:

Being close to my family 'cause before, I never told them anything. So now I got closer to them, and I told them everything. ... 'cause now we have more time together. Now that we are far apart, we talk more, and we pay attention more to each other, but before, it was like, we were there, we did our own thing by ourselves so.

In contrast, Sofia indicated that her family was closer back home and that they “kind of lost that bond” because everyone became busy with school or work. However, she also talked about spending quality time with her family and family friends by going to the amusement park with her father and having family parties at home.

Finally, during the “branches” and “leaves” part of the activity, all participants identified their immediate family members as the most important people in their lives and wrote their names inside the leaves of their tree. Isabella’s wishes were her family coming to Canada and her aunt’s recovery. Chandhi excitedly discussed hopes and wishes for her family, “Get a sister-in-law! ... I want my brother to be married.” When asked why her family was so special to her, Chandhi replied, “Cause it’s like your family is the biggest thing you need in your life, first of all.” Sofia made a similar statement about family, “You can get friends that goes and comes, but your family will stay there.”

**Subtheme 1.4: Openness to Diversity.** The most prominent experience for participants involved interactions with people from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds and cross-cultural learning. All participants indicated that they had “friends from all over the world,” including India, Pakistan, Philippines, Colombia, El Salvador, United States, England, Egypt, Scotland, Vietnam, Ukraine, and others. Isabella discussed how “there’s not that much international people” back home and she did not have the opportunity to meet many people. She showed her appreciation for diversity and interest in learning about different ethnic groups:

It’s good ‘cause there’s different people and you can learn about different cultures, and all that, yeah. ... we learn more and it’s like you’re gonna learn more from people from other cultures than just being in one culture and you already know about that culture, so it’s good to have friends that are from other cultures so you can know their culture too.

Chandhi shared a similar experience, “In Bangladesh, I really didn’t get to make new friends that are like different culture and stuff, and learn different things about them like, you know, how they live, how they do things, and stuff.” Chandhi expressed her interest in meeting and learning about people from diverse cultural, linguistic, and religious backgrounds. Chandhi indicated that she enjoyed having “lots of celebrations with the people” and doing dances and entertaining people at the “Multicultural Helping House.” She stated, “It’s nice to know different things, you know.” Sofia also indicated that “it’s like pretty fun to know their, they act differently and know their, a bit of their background.” Maria expressed her interest in other cultures and said that one of the things that she liked the most about Canada was “different foods, [and] different cultures.” Maria explained her cultural experience and how her pre-migration expectations about Canada had changed after she moved and encountered different cultures:

My dad, when we were going to move here, he told us that there’s, it’s not gonna be multicultural. He just told us there’s gonna be very different people, and not like us.

That’s the thing the three of us, me and my brothers, were scared about. When we came here, it didn’t feel like we were in Canada, it felt like we were somewhere, like in a small world. You walk around and you see different culture, and since I was small, I had this thought that only we didn’t have any different culture, it’s just Mexicans and that’s it. I didn’t know any other culture, and that’s it until we came here and now I learned.

Maria also talked about how she had been learning about Canadian history by participating in a community youth program with her brothers:

They talk about when that aboriginal people are not all like ... so when the British came here, there was the real Canadians, call it the First Nations people, they are the real Canadian people, and right now, you might go to Vancouver, and there might be some

homeless people that are aboriginal, but that's not because they wanted to do that, it's because of their families, because their families were treated bad, and their kids didn't learn things, and it passed on, and yeah. That's something I heard.

During the branch part of the Tree of Life activity, some participants expressed their hopes and dreams to travel the world and continue their journey of learning new and "different things about people."

**Subtheme 1.5: Value in Own Culture.** Participants not only showed an appreciation for other cultures but also valued their own culture. When asked about her cultural identity, Maria indicated that she believed that she was both Canadian and Mexican, and explained that it was important for her to preserve her Mexican culture and the Spanish language while learning more about Canadian culture and the English language,

What I'm trying to say is that I still want to be, I want to learn still more about Mexico and Canada. ... Because I don't want to lose... at home, we speak Spanish, not English, so school, outside, English and Spanish, I know more. ... So I don't lose like Mexico, and my culture. ... If I lose it, then I'm, I don't consider myself Mexican as much.

Because if I don't have the culture, then I'm not Mexican.

Similarly, Chandhi explained her dual identity, "I'm like half Bangladeshi and half Canadian. I like them both. ... More Bangladesh 'cause I get to do more things about like what Bangladesh people here, and I get to do more Canadian things with Canadian people." Chandhi associated her Canadian identity with volunteering, and related dancing to her identity as a Bangladeshi.

Sofia thought that she was "kind of both" because her roots and traditions made her Colombian, but her personality developed in Canada. Isabella's dual identity included Colombian and Costa Rican as she had lived in both countries before moving to Canada.

If I were to say Canadian or Costa Rican, I would say Costa Rican because I lived there for ten years, and here I just lived for five, so I'm sure of that much here and I know back home everything, so I think I would say Colombian and Costa Rican.

Isabella reaffirmed her cultural identity, "I would always say I'm more Costa Rican than Canadian." Therefore, all four girls identified with both their native culture and the Canadian culture. In addition, they demonstrated a sense of pride in their own culture regardless of the number of years they had lived in Canada. For example, Maria viewed Mexico as "more cultural, more different" than Canada in terms of clothing, food, music, and others, which she indicated being proud of. Chandhi reported being proud of the "unique clothes," "cultural traditions, ceremonies, and celebrations," and the "Quran." Sofia talked about specific holidays or events back home, such as Christmas or the world's second largest carnival. She elaborated, "[The carnival] can actually, traditionally it's four, but you can make it longer, knowing how Spanish people are. ... We like to party a lot. ... We can make fun of anything. Like if we're in a bad situation, we'll always be having fun, although it's bad." She took pride in the ability to celebrate life in the face of adversity, indicating a cultural resilience.

**Subtheme 1.6: Desire to Help Others.** All participants placed a value in their ability to help others in their post-migration lives and reciprocate the type of support that they received as newcomers to Canada. Some participants identified with "being helpful" and described this trait as one of the strengths that they had more opportunities to use in Canada. Chandhi and Maria both used the word "helpful" as one of their best qualities recognized by their friends and families. For these girls, being helpful to others was a source of pride and happiness, as they stated that helping makes them "feel happy" or "good." They discussed the ways in which they had given back to their families and communities or paid it forward to others. For example,

participants described how they helped their parents by doing chores around the house and by translating English for them. Chandhi jokingly said, “I might have helped them rather than they help me – in translating,” expressing a sense of importance of her role as a translator for the family. However, she also found it “sometimes frustrating because [her] parents sometimes never understand.” When Maria was discussing her role as a helpful member of her family, Maria’s father proudly talked about how his daughter always offered to help out at home and she was his best “companion.” During the interview with Sofia, she often brought up her baby niece and how she helped her family by changing the baby’s diapers and looking after her.

In addition to helping their families, some participants also assisted other students who were new to Canada by showing them around the school and helping them with their English, demonstrating reciprocity. Furthermore, Chandhi and Isabella discussed their volunteer work in the communities where they helped people outside of their family and peer circles. When asked about how she spent her time in the community, Chandhi talked about volunteering at a local church and community organization where she helped to distribute food and organize community events. Chandhi indicated that helping others was something that she had always wanted to do when she lived in Bangladesh, but did not have a chance to. She further described her dream of helping people as a doctor or an engineer when she grows up by building a “hospital for the poor kid, poor people and stuff and sick people, and the store for helping others in the future to be faster in time,” and “making work easier” for people. When asked about her volunteer experience, Isabella replied, “It’s really nice ‘cause like just knowing that you are helping your community and other countries too.”

## **Broad Themes 2 & 3: Family Impact & School/Community Impact**

The second research question addresses how refugee children perceive the impact of their microsystems on their individual strengths. During the interviews, participants were asked to reflect on how their families, peers, schools, and communities had supported them. All participants recognized and expressed gratitude toward their support and discussed the influences on their individual strengths, goals, and dreams.

**Subtheme 2.1: Family Members as Role Models.** All participants indicated at least one family skill or value that had been taught or passed down. Isabella described how she was trying to follow her family's footsteps and achieve her parents' goals and dreams,

My mom wants me to start swimming 'cause her dream was to become a perfect swimmer ... but then she started into baking , so then, my brother and my dad wanted me to play sports, so what I did is I'm playing sports, and I did all my swimming lessons, and now I'm training for a lifeguard , and in school, there's a program of foods , so then I joined that, so I'm trying to get what my dad and mom want to play sports and become a swimmer, and to become a baker, so then I have to gather them all together to do it."

She reported that her father and brother funded her to join sports teams at school. Similarly, Maria's father had taught her how to play baseball, and Sofia's brother had taught her how to longboard. As discussed earlier, cooking was another important family skill that all participants had learned since they were young. In addition, Chandhi looked up to her brother who was in university for engineering and helped her with "big words" in English. Chandhi explicitly stated, "I'm just gonna follow my brother's footsteps ... because he's doing the career I want to do." When asked about ways in which her family had supported her in Canada, Chandhi replied, "They helped me learn new stuff [and] taught me how to do stuff." Maria showed appreciation

for her two older brothers who took her to different places in the community. Both Chandhi and Maria's parents helped their children with school work to the best of their abilities given the language barriers, teaching them math and providing ideas for school projects. For Sofia, her mother provided a good example for her, as Sofia remembered that her mother would help children from low-income households during Christmas when they lived in Colombia. Chandhi also reported that her parents helped other newcomers to Canada by showing them around. Therefore, participants had parents or older siblings as role models, who demonstrated academic strength, autonomy, social responsibility, and community involvement, as well as empathy and kindness for their daughter or younger sister.

**Subtheme 2.2: Parental Involvement.** In addition to teaching or passing down family skills and spending time with their children, participants' parents, with their involvement and encouragement, played a significant role in the adjustment process of the post-migration lives of participants. Chandhi's parents had set high academic expectations for Chandhi, which motivated her to work hard toward her short term as well as long term goals of going to prestigious schools and pursuing a career as an engineer or a doctor. Her parents also had encouraged her to continue her dances, which was one way to preserve her cultural activity. Chandhi reported that her parents bought her books to read and jewellery for her dances. Isabella also discussed how her mother encouraged her to be more involved in extracurricular activities. For example, Isabella described how she learned to control her anger as her mother had her involved in sports and volunteering. This demonstrated an example of how Isabella's own determination, her parental involvement, and her community resources came together to provide Isabella with the support she needed. She elaborated,

They try to get me in community centres with other people, but I didn't like it 'cause I didn't know anyone, so I had to get used to it, and then, they tried to get me involved with a lot of community work and all. ... My mom told me to get involved with a lot of stuff. And like in school, she wants me to get involved, there's a Leo club in my school, so she wants me to get involved with it 'cause at the end of the year when you graduate, they will give you more credit and more opportunities for more college.

For Maria, it was evident that her parents were closely involved in her life as they stayed with Maria during the interview; they helped Maria when she struggled to find appropriate words and added to their family stories. When asked about how her family had supported her in Canada, Maria recalled her first day of school in Canada,

I remember they helped me, I remember that my dad, when I went to school, my first school, he said my two brothers and me, he like let, let's imagine that I'm the teacher, and he said okay, how, I remember that, like how would you say good morning, and I remember I started crying because I knew I didn't know anything, and I remember that my dad was like okay, this is strawberry, and we, he had, we repeated everything, and my brother and I never knew.

During the interview, Maria's father often talked about how proud he was of his daughter as he reminded her of her accomplishments at school. In Sofia's case, her mother demonstrated her involvement in Sofia's life by accepting her friends from the youth group into their family and inviting them to their family parties. When asked who was in her family, Sofia reported, "My mom, my brothers, my older brother's girlfriend ... blood related, two, and the other two are just friends ... and they like being here, so they just, my mom just really adopted them." Therefore,

Sofia's mother's as well as other parents' involvement allowed participants to form social networks in the community.

**Subtheme 3.1: Social Network.** Another critical factor that may have played a role in building resilience in the post-migration lives of participants was having a social network in Canada. Only one participant had extended family members in the country; however, other participants had sought other types of social network available in their environment, whether it was a group of family friends or people from the school or community. Chandhi and her family had made connections in the community by participating in different organization events and programs, such as the First Mennonite Church and the Multicultural Helping House. As for Isabella, although she reported that most of her neighbours in Canada were “really mean,” and that they sometimes bullied her family, her social network existed at school, where her teachers and principal provided a safe and caring environment for Isabella to learn and participate in extracurricular activities. She described her school as “really welcoming” and the principal as “really nice” as he helped students solve problems at school. She also talked about how her favourite teacher made her feel belong.

Because every time I have a problem ‘cause I was drinking a juice, and then, you know when it’s finished, it makes sounds? And then somebody thought that I farted, but it was the juice box, and then they started making fun of me and telling everyone. So then my Home Ed teacher took them to the principal and started talking to them why they shouldn’t do that and all. And she just treats me like if I was part of her family.

Additionally, Isabella indicated that her friends from her school were “always there for [her]” to “have [her] back” when she had family problems or trouble with school work.

Maria also indicated having a social network at school and a favourite teacher who reached out to Maria when she could not speak or understand English. Maria recalled,

There's my grade 1 teacher ... I remember that whenever I never knew how to say something, she told me what do you need? Like sometimes now, when it's cold outside, I fall on my leg and my arm. They start to hurt, and in school when it was winter, I'm like it hurts and she said what, did someone hurt you or did you fall down? What happened? And I never knew how to say it to her.

Maria's father added that the teacher was "strict but good" and showed respect for how she disciplined her students and involved parents. Sofia had found a social network through the Latin youth program which she was a part of. She indicated that her brothers first joined the program when they were younger, and that she met most of her close friends through the program. She talked about the variety of activities which she participated in with the youth group,

Every Tuesday, we play soccer. On Thursdays, we cook something from every Spanish country, or sometimes Canada. And on Saturdays, we go out. What I really like is when we go to Playland, or Watermania, or go-karting. Have you been go-karting? Yeah, it's so fun.

In addition, during the interview with Maria, her father highlighted the importance of having family friends in their post-migration life,

Yeah, but they, honestly they, all friends, has been most important, has been the key. That's why we are here because all of them have both seen some special things ... They give us their social network ... key for us. All of them ... All the networks has been the most important things for us.

Maria's father indicated that he was teaching Maria and her brothers not to forget about the people who had supported the family. Maria shared a memorable story about one of her family friends who welcomed her family into Canada by helping them connect with the community and showing them around:

It was something, my dad when he was kind of younger, he had a friend, a girl, and she moved here to Canada. And when we moved here to Canada, we were in the airport, we stepped out, and then we, and then my dad, he was calling on the phone, he was like we all go to look at a hotel and everything. And then, my mom ... found exactly that same day my dad's friend, she was walking because she was going to find us in the airport, and my mom saw her, was like, hey, look, that's your friend, and then we saw her and she was actually came here and she came to look for us and to help us ... When we were in her house, she had some friends, we met him and her, my brother, that's how my brother started going, my biggest brother started going to things ... They've shown us a lot of places like I've never seen before.

It was evident that having this social connection made a huge difference for Maria and her family in Canada.

**Subtheme 3.2: New Opportunities.** Another way that participants benefited from their communities was through new experiences and opportunities. All participants discussed "learning new things" in Canada as one of the most valuable aspects of their post-migration lives and believed that they moved to Canada for "opportunities." For example, Isabella indicated that there were more opportunities available for herself and her family in Canada and how much her life had changed from going back and forth between home and school to going to the community centre with friends to play basketball, and having more mobility and being able to take the sky

train to the mall. Sofia also talked about her life in Venezuela before moving to Canada, “It was a hard country like there were a lot of violence, and we were always at the house. ... Like we were always inside the house. We didn’t really go out,” and contrasted it with her life in Canada, where she became more open to new experiences,

Here, I’ve done a lot of things I wouldn’t have done in Colombia. Like going to Playland.

The first time I went to Playland, it was with the school, and I was so scared of the rollercoaster. ... And then the second time, I was still a bit scared, then the third one, it was just so fun.

Sofia expressed her desire to “explore” and “know more” about Canada and explained, “I’m not the type of girl to stay one place.” For Chandhi, she felt proud when she was given an opportunity to succeed by using her academic strength in math to help peers in the classroom.

“I can find new things in Canada,” Isabella stated. She talked about discovering new sports, “... before the only sports I knew was soccer, and when I came here, it was like tennis, volleyball, basketball, and like I never knew those existed till I came here.” She recalled how her school provided her with financial support to help her play basketball,

There was one day that I didn’t have the money for basketball uniform ‘cause it’s a deposit of a hundred dollars, and if you don’t give your uniform, then they take the hundred. And then, I didn’t have it for that day, but I was going to give it next week. So they gave it. They said I didn’t have to pay it. They would pay it for me.

This kind gesture from her school meant a lot to Isabella whose passion was playing sports, as she emphasized, “Sports is like my life.” Furthermore, through the school, Isabella discovered volunteer opportunities in her community. She explained,

It's pretty much they do everything at school. They fix everything. They organize everything. If new people from, like international people come to school, we get them organized and we take them to places ... they do a lot of community thing. They go around houses and they ask for recycles so we can get money to help other kids, and this year, we gathered money to do for Nepal, for the incident that happened, yeah.

Isabella indicated that these opportunities made her feel "like you're already a part of like a big like, yeah." She also reported that she was also given an opportunity to attend a free summer camp, which she found "really interesting," and she appreciated that her family had "free time without [her]" while she enjoyed being away and participating in the camp. Therefore, these opportunities to participate in fun activities, have more freedom and mobility, succeed in school, showcase their strengths, help others in need, and pursue their dreams were empowering for children who had experienced loss, trauma, and/or other tragedies, as they gained autonomy and a sense of confidence.

## **Summary**

In this chapter, the findings of the study were presented to answer the research questions, organized by the overarching themes, broad themes, and subthemes developed by the researcher from the data analysis to represent participants' accounts of their own experiences. These themes provide a rich description of meanings and conceptualizations evident across all cases. The overarching themes, *Secure Identity*, *Empowerment*, and *Sense of Belonging*, explain the interrelationships among broad themes and subthemes. Participants perceived their *Individual Strengths* to be their *Unique Talents*, *Ability to Face Challenges*, *Strong Family Bond*, *Openness to Diversity*, *Value in Own Culture*, and *Desire to Help Others*. They described having *Family Members as Role Models* and *Parental Involvement* as their *Family Impact*, and having a *Social*

*Network and New Opportunities* as their *School/Community Impact* on their strengths. These findings are further discussed in relation to the existing literature along with their implications in the next chapter.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

### Overview

The purpose of the present study was to understand the meaning of strength in the post-migration experiences of children who came to Canada with refugee status. The research questions explored refugee children's perceptions of their own individual assets and skills and of the influences of their families, schools and communities in fostering their strengths. Four 10- to 14-year-old girls participated in semi-structured interviews with a strengths-based elicitation device, the Tree of Life. Findings revealed a number of individual strengths and family, school, and community influences that may act as facilitating or protective factors in the post-migration lives of refugee children. This chapter integrates and discusses current findings in relation to the previous literature on refugee resilience. Implications of the study for professionals working with refugee children, as well as for policies are addressed. Finally, the limitations and strengths of the study, as well as recommendations for future research with refugee populations and personal reflections from the researcher are presented.

### Findings of the Present Study in Relation to Previous Literature

**Individual Strengths.** This broad theme was developed based on the first research questions of how refugee children make sense of their own assets and skills in their post-migration experiences. Participants in this study discussed a number of unique strengths, some of which were discovered during the interview process through the elicitation device. Previous studies with refugee children have examined their resilience in terms of processes and interplay between their microsystems and mesosystems. While it is critical to consider the protective effects of their sociocultural contexts and environmental influences when studying refugee resilience, especially given their collective culture, findings from this study highlight the

importance of acknowledging and helping refugee children recognize their own assets, skills, and inner strengths.

First, participants reported using their academic competence and/or artistic, culinary, or athletic talents to convey their unique cultural and family strengths and carry on their values. These strengths provided participants with meaning and a sense of pride. These results match Werner and Smith's (1992) description of resilient children from their Kauai Longitudinal Study: "Although not usually gifted, the resilience children used whatever skill they had effectively. Both parents and teachers noted that they had many interests and engaged in activities and hobbies that were not narrowly sex-typed. Such activities provided them with solace in adversity and a reason to feel proud" (p. 56). The existing literature documents that unique talents or alternative forms of expression (e.g., theatre/drama, storytelling, art) in the framework of their cultural heritage have been used as therapeutic tools in intervention programs which aim to help refugee children integrate their past, present, and future in order to restore a sense of identity and belonging (Rousseau & Guzder, 2008). Findings from the current study support that such programs help bolster refugee children's resilience.

Second, as participants shared some of their stories of hardships and barriers that they experienced in Canada, they explained their extraordinary capacity to face challenges by means of their determination, perseverance, optimism, and courage. These intrapersonal traits coincide with those of refugee women identified in an extensive literature review by Hutchinson and Dorsett (2012). For example, having determination to cope and a belief in one's own inner strength to deal with hardships have been found to be personal qualities that build resilience in refugee women (Brough et al., 2003; Gorman et al., 2003). In addition, similar to participants in the longitudinal study on the Hawaiian island of Kauai, participants in this study demonstrated

autonomy, self-reliance, and an internal locus of control, or a belief in one's ability to affect their environments and outcomes (Werner & Smith, 1992).

Third, openness to diversity, is unique to the current study, which may have been possible due to the multicultural mosaic context of Canada where cultural diversity is celebrated. All participants expressed not only a positive attitude toward learning English language and adapting to Canadian culture, or what Ogbu and Simons (1998) refer to as a "tourist attitude," but also an appreciation for diversity and eagerness to learn about other cultures, languages, and religions. According to their stories, this open-minded curiosity and appreciation for diversity allowed participants to make friends from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. However, the essential piece that complements this quality as a potential protective factor is their ability to place value in their own culture, as well as maintain strong bonds with their families. Consistent with Ogbu and Simons' (1998) views, their positive attitude toward both the native and host cultures allowed them to adapt to a new culture without losing their own cultural identities. Consequently, this integration provided them with a sense of secure identity as well as sense of belonging, which emerged as overarching themes and seemed to be the key facilitating or protective factors in their post-migration lives. Their ability to recognize the importance of family and maintain connections with immediate and extended family members in Canada and their country of origin also contributed to their sense of security and connectedness. Participants showed gratitude toward their family members and appreciated their time spent together. As previous research shows, adherence to traditional family values and tight family bonds may have protective effects on refugee children (Liebkind, 1996). These results support previous research findings by Kovacev and Shute (2004), which found a significant positive association between integration with positive attitudes and psychosocial adjustment. The subtheme of *Strong Family*

*Bonds* falls under the broad theme of *Individual Strengths* in order to recognize the agency of participants in their own efforts to maintain a strong cultural identity and positive relationships with their family members. The role of family support is discussed separately in the next section.

Finally, participants expressed the desire to help others and reciprocate the support that they received as newcomers to Canada. They perceived “being helpful” as one of their strengths. This finding is also unique to the current study and is often not addressed as a potential protective factor in the literature as refugee children are often viewed as vulnerable *helpees* rather than *helpers*. Lewis and colleagues (2016) of Brown University share lessons of resilience learned from the refugee families they have worked with as service providers of a refugee health clinic at a children’s hospital in Rhode Island. As part of their assessments at the clinic, the refugee children were asked what they might ask for if given one wish. These children’s responses were similar to those of participants in this study in that they wished for the well-being and reunification of their families and expressed their “desire to give back and/or convey their gratitude, connectedness, and responsibility” (Lewis et al., 2016, p. 8). The authors point out that the public discourse overlooks the benefits that refugee families may bring to their new communities, and that western cultures, which are characterized by independence and self-sufficiency, can gain valuable perspectives from refugee families.

**Family Impact.** There is ample evidence in the existing literature that family connectedness and support contribute to the construction of resilience in refugee children. According to the review of studies on risk and protective factors by Fazel et al. (2012), family cohesion and perceived social support from families were found to be associated with fewer internalizing and externalizing symptoms in displaced and refugee children. Family support also emerged as a source of resilience in two other extensive reviews by Hutchinson and Dorsett

(2012) and Sleijpen et al. (2016). Similarly, support from family members helped to build the strengths of participants in this study. All participants in the study prioritized their families and emphasized the significant impact of family in their lives. This is also consistent with previous findings by Eggerman and Panter-Brick (2010), which reported family unity and harmony as one of the fundamental cultural values which the war-affected families held onto as their hopes.

The results of this study add to the literature by providing concrete examples of how refugee family members work together to help each other and how parents may support their children in the process of their adaptation. Despite their own language and cultural difficulties, the parents and older siblings of participants in this study were closely involved in various aspects of the children's lives: by helping them with their homework, teaching them family skills, and encouraging their participation in extracurricular activities, hosting parties for their friends, and demonstrating social responsibility through volunteer work in the community. In response, participants looked up to their parents and older siblings as role models. These findings, together with strong family bonds, show the parents' efforts to share the same pace of acculturation as their children, as well as participants' efforts to respect their parents' expectations and wish to maintain their traditional family cultural values, which can have protective effects against negative outcomes of cultural dissonance between newcomer parents and children (Paat, 2013; Portes & Zhou, 1993). Parental involvement was also noted by the researcher during the interview process as the parents of some participants were present during the interviews to listen to and participate with their child despite their own language barriers.

**School/Community Impact.** In addition to family factors, previous research on refugee resilience has documented school and community support and connectedness as facilitators of the well-being of refugee children. In the case of participants in this study, they had established

their support networks through their peers, schools and/or the host or same-ethnic communities in Canada. For children and families estranged from their extended families and other support networks in their country of origin, having social connections in their schools and communities was immensely helpful. Most participants reported having their social networks at school where some of their peers and the school personnel provided a welcoming and caring learning environment for them. These children discussed their academic competence and interests, positive relationships with their peers and teachers, and participation in after-school clubs or activities, and thus, experienced a sense of belonging at school. This reflects findings by Kia-Keating and Ellis (2007) and Geltman et al. (2005), which indicated that a higher sense of belonging and safety and self-reported positive experience at school were related to a lower level of depression and reduced risk of PTSD. These participants were also well connected to and actively involved in their communities via their schools, family friends, or non-profit organizations. These communities provided participants with new experiences and opportunities, which were recognized and appreciated by participants as a distinct and valuable aspect of their lives in Canada. Seeking novel experiences has also been identified as one of the interpersonal protective factors in the Werner and Smith (1992) report. By volunteering in the community and helping others, participants were empowered and gained a sense of confidence. In the existing body of literature, neighbourhood attachment and religious commitment have also been highlighted as significant protective factors in the community (Eggerman & Panter-Brick, 2010; Montgomery, 2008; Sujoldzic et al., 2006). While these specific factors were not found in the results of this study, participants indicated other sources of social support through like-ethnic or multicultural communities. Existing literature provides evidence of protective effects against negative psychological symptoms when refugee children have support from their communities,

particularly from the same ethnic group (Geltman et al., 2005; Liebkind, 1996; Porte et al., 1987). One father indicated during his child's interview that having family friends in Canada has been one of the most important things for their family and that he wanted to make sure that his children remembered the people.

**Secure Identity, Sense of Belonging, and Empowerment.** These overarching themes were addressed throughout the discussion of the broad themes and subthemes above. The findings echo the quote from Hamilton and Moore (2004)'s book on educational intervention for refugee children:

School and individual therapeutic interventions need to be interlinked to reconstruct a sense of social belonging in a way that validates their cultural identities. Consequently, both schools and families need to adapt and create a safe arena for supporting the *child's* transition. Recovery from trauma can only take place in the context of relationships; it cannot occur in isolation (Herman, 1992). Therefore, empowerment of the young person in these social contexts is vital (p. 33).

### **Implications for Professionals Working with Refugee Children**

Findings from the current study demonstrate the individual strengths of four refugee children and the impact of their families, schools, and communities on their strengths. A number of practical implications are directly drawn from the ways in which the interactions between participants and their microsystems helped foster their strengths. Suggestions for culturally sensitive and congruent practice are made for educators, school psychologists, administrators, community organizers, and policymakers working with refugee children and families in school and community settings.

Most significantly, it is necessary to use strengths-based approaches when working with refugee populations, and avoid stigmatizing their experiences and portraying them as victims (Watters and Ingleby, 2004). As demonstrated in the course of the Tree of Life activity, focusing on the positive aspects of their “roots” or home country and learning about their cultural and family backgrounds directly from refugee children and families may be the first step to take. Participants in the present study happily and proudly shared their favourite memories about their home country. This step is essential in building rapport and providing culturally sensitive and appropriate support for unique and diverse refugee populations. In addition to the sociopolitical context and specific individual and family characteristics, considering potential protective factors and understanding resilience within refugee populations are helpful in developing appropriate educational and intervention programs. Based on the findings of this study, more specific implications for school and community settings follow.

First, each refugee student’s unique skills and talents, including academic achievements and interests, as well as artistic and athletic abilities, should be recognized and fostered by providing ample opportunities to succeed and practice leadership. For participants in the study, their skills and talents provided alternative ways to express themselves and represented their pride and efforts to maintain family values and cultural activities. These children thrived when they were given opportunities to practice and demonstrate their skills and talents in their classrooms, schools, and communities. Such opportunities are especially valuable to children who have experienced significant losses in their lives. Schools and community organizations require funding from the federal and provincial governments to provide refugee students with financial support to help them participate in extracurricular activities, after-school activities, school clubs, and summer camps.

Second, school personnel need to make a conscious effort to create a welcoming, safe, and culturally sensitive environment and actively engage not only refugee students but also their families. Participants in the study identified having strong bonds with their immediate and extended family members who acted as their role models. Parental involvement was another significant factor in the post-migration lives of these children. Schools need to initiate and reach out to refugee families to offer support, rather than waiting to be approached by them, with a willingness to learn from and collaborate with families and respect for their cultural and familial, as well as individual and collective norms. As a start, it is crucial that school psychologists and educators assess their personal biases and seek additional training in cultural competency through professional development. Moreover, school districts need to employ more multicultural workers to facilitate family-school relationships and meet families where they are, which may involve translation/interpretation and home visits. It is important to recognize that many refugee students come from cultures where family is prioritized and that strong family bonds are part of their pride and strengths.

However, unlike other newcomer families, this strength is jeopardized for refugee families as they are forced to part from their immediate and extended family members, and they do not have the choice of visiting their home country. According to Canadian Council for Refugees (2015), refugee families face significant challenges in reuniting with their family members due to a number of barriers, including policies that impede family reunification such as a narrow definition of family. These barriers can be detrimental to the well-being of refugee children and families in Canada. The importance of family emphasized in this study support the CCR vision of “speedy family reunification,” with express entry program for family members and broad and inclusive definition of family (CCR, 2015, p. 2). As family is a priority for these

refugee families, the CCR calls for the Canadian government to make family reunification a priority.

Third, the ability to maintain a sense of secure and positive identity in their home culture while exploring other cultures with a sense of belonging and openness to diversity may act as a protective or facilitating factor in the process of adaptation in Canada. One aspect of life in Canada which all participants in the study particularly appreciated was the opportunity to interact with people from diverse cultural, linguistic, and religious backgrounds. They also valued their ability to help others in need and give back to their families and communities. The cultural knowledge and experience that refugee children bring with them need to be acknowledged and supported, as they be culturally competent leaders in working with other newcomers in the future. Taking a step further from these results, moral development programs that transform the representations of the “other,” develop empathy and recognize otherness in oneself, build one’s capacity to perceive complexity, and face moral dilemmas may be implemented in schools (Apsful & Simon, 2000; Lin, 2001; Sluzki, 2002). Such programs can help reduce anxiety and multiethnic tensions in schools and provide opportunities for refugee youth to identify with similar experiences of other communities, while being able to distance themselves from overwhelmingly painful emotions.

Finally, socialization with peers and adults within and outside of school and community involvement should be encouraged to expand refugee students’ social networks, and strengthen their support systems. For some participants in the study, school was a welcoming and caring place where they developed a sense of belonging. For others, their social network existed in the community. In their review of school-based programs in mental health services, Rousseau and

Guzder (2008) highlight the key role that schools play, as mediators between refugee families and mental health services, in helping refugee children adapt to their host country.

In light of increasingly diverse classrooms and communities, educators, school psychologists, administrators, community organizers, and policymakers need to collaborate to develop culturally congruent curriculum and practice that promote cross-cultural learning and appreciate diversity, and culturally appropriate intervention programs. School psychologists in particular, providing consultation services, must consider that evidence-based programs and strategies may not be beneficial or adequate for refugee children due to limited research involving foreign-born and ethnic minority group and the heterogeneity of refugee children. Therefore, cultural adaptations, defined as modifications to accommodate the cultural beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours of the target group (Whaley & Davis, 2007), and “practice-based evidence” are required in developing and implementing programs for refugee children (Price et al., 2015). In addition, the localization and empowerment aspects of programs should be emphasized over content standardizations (Rousseau & Guzder, 2008). Emphasis is placed on empowerment to counteract the power imbalance between refugee families and host-country institutions.

During the follow-up interviews, participants were asked what they would recommend as effective ways of helping other newcomer children in Canada, and provide feedback on their experiences of participating in the interview process and the Tree of Life activity. Participants indicated that people could help newcomer families by providing an orientation to their new surroundings and information about life in Canada, which could be provided by previously newcomer families, and helping them with English. One participant said she would tell other newcomer children to “start over” in a new country, or adopt a new mindset. Other

recommendations included learning about newcomers as individuals and their backgrounds, and making them feel welcome by reaching out to them and offering help. In response to the refugee crisis, there has been an increase in programs in school districts and communities that offer settlement and language services for refugee families who have recently arrived in Canada. While it is necessary to help refugee families adapt to their new lives in Canada during the settlement phase, it is also important to provide continued support during their integration into Canadian society, help them transition out of the stage in which they are viewed as vulnerable people who are in need of help, and empower them as contributing members of the host society.

### **Limitations of the Present Study**

The findings of the current study contribute to a better understanding of the strengths and resilience of refugee children in their post-migration experiences and the interplay between their individual strengths and social support, and have significant implications for professionals working with refugee families. However, there are limitations to this study that need to be acknowledged and addressed in future research with refugee children. The first limitation relates to the appropriateness of the methodology of IPA for the sample of interest. There were certainly advantages of using IPA; the methodology has been suggested as an adequate approach for exploring refugee experiences (Schweitzer and Steel, 2008), and has been conducted with children as young as 10 years. Nevertheless, in this study, the language barriers impeded participants' ability to express themselves and tell their stories using rich descriptions, and the level of maturity or insight required to engage in meaning making posed another challenge. Consequently, participants often repeated themselves, went off-topic, and had difficulty providing articulate responses to open-ended questions and finding appropriate words; and therefore, required frequent follow-up prompting. Considering the age, language, and maturity

factors, this limitation suggests that IPA alone may not be appropriate for doing research with refugee children.

Secondly, while generalizability is not a goal of IPA, and the present study provided an in-depth understanding of the meaning of the experiences of a specific group, the sample size was small, and the inclusion of only girls in the study was not deliberate. These are viewed as limitations as the results provide a less comprehensive perspective of the strengths and resilience of refugee children. In addition, the families recruited through a community organization may have had more resilience factors than other refugee families as they were actively involved in the community and had sought resources through the organization. Therefore, the diversity of the family participants was likely limited. As explained in Chapter 3, connecting with refugee families was particularly challenging during the time of recruitment for the present study, and the recommended sample size for a master's level IPA study is three to five.

In addition, the presence of participants' parent(s) during the initial interview was not controlled for, which resulted in inconsistency in the data collection process. While the focus of the interview was on perceived experiences of the child participant, the remarks from the parents as well as the interaction between the child and parents provided valuable insights into the child's experiences, especially considering that the questions addressed family support. Therefore, some of the parents' responses were included in the data transcripts (e.g., Maria's father's comment regarding support from family friends). This indicates a drawback in the method as the presence or absence of parents may have contributed to differences in the richness of the data and the comfort level of participants. Given the importance of family and collective culture in many refugee groups, future research may consider interviewing families together in focus groups.

Furthermore, one of the participants, Sofia, was an outlier, which posed a challenge in the data collection and analysis. Sofia was different from the other three girls in that she was reluctant to open up to the interviewer and share her experiences at first. She was mostly silent during the initial interview. At the time of the recruitment process, the researcher had been informed that Sofia was experiencing psychological difficulties and seeing a community counsellor. Unlike other participants, Sofia had a hard time identifying her strengths and expressed a lack of academic motivation and perceived school support. She explicitly indicated that she had experienced hardships, and she did not like to talk about such experiences in general. However, the recruitment criteria did not include a purposive sample of refugee children who are exceptionally resilient, and Sofia indicated her own unique strengths as the nature of the interview was strengths-based. With a belief that every child has strengths, the focus of the study was to look for an evidence of resilience in refugee children rather than looking for refugee children who are resilient. Sofia's case presents an account of how resilience may unfold in a refugee child who is particularly vulnerable.

### **Strengths of the Present Study**

Despite its limitations, this study has a number of strengths and contributes to the small pool of literature on refugee resilience while providing suggestions for culturally appropriate practice and strengths-based approaches in working with refugee children. While the majority of previous literature and the mainstream media tend to portray refugee children and families as vulnerable rather than resilient and focus on the effects of trauma and other risk factors in their post-migration lives, this study takes a completely positive approach in representing their post-migration experiences from their own perspectives and highlighting their perceived strengths.

Additionally, this study is timely given Canada's commitment to refugee protection and resettlement and the recent influx of refugee children and families in Metro Vancouver. When starting this project, the graduate student, or the researcher, was well aware of forthcoming challenges involved in conducting a study with refugee children at a time of strict Canadian refugee policies, funding and staff reductions in community organizations and programs for refugees, and increased privacy concerns and heightened fear of deportation among refugee communities. These challenges motivated the researcher to be involved in the community by volunteering at a local foodbank for refugee families and in a summer camp for refugee children, and to have one-on-one meetings with the MCC Refugee and Newcomers Office organizer to discuss issues in the community and brainstorm ways to support refugee families. In addition, the researcher was able to fully engage in every part of the research process including recruitment of participants, interviews with participants, as well as transcription and analysis of data, and develop professional yet authentic relationships with families who participated in the study.

Another unique, major strength of this study was the use of a truly strengths-based method, the Tree of Life, as an elicitation device to interview participants. This method empowered participants to reflect on their experiences through a positive lens and see themselves as individuals with strengths. Despite its limitations, the use of IPA was also more adequate than most other qualitative methodologies for capturing in-depth and detailed accounts of the post-migration experiences of refugee children. The use of IPA enabled the researcher and participants to engage in an intersubjective, meaning making process that is flexible and open to adaptation.

## **Future Research Directions**

Given the recent changes occurring in Canada due to the refugee crisis, there is an urgent need for future research to expand upon the findings of this study and further enhance literature with refugee populations, particularly newcomers from Syria in Canada. Replicating the current study with boys may provide different perspectives and allow for understanding protective/resilience factors for boys in comparison to girls. Greater insight could be gained by conducting research with larger, more diverse samples of refugee children throughout Canada to corroborate the findings from this study, as well as produce more generalizable findings to inform resettlement and intervention programs in school and communities.

The current study was conducted in Metro Vancouver where the population is relatively diverse and the public transit system is well developed; it would be informative to conduct similar studies and explore protective/resilience factors in rural, or more remote, areas where the population is more homogeneous and the public transit may not be as easily available for refugee families to access community resources. In addition, although participants for this study only included children, it would also be insightful for subsequent studies to explore the experiences of refugee parents and professionals who have worked with refugee children and how they perceive the strengths of these children.

Given the limitations of IPA, future research with school-aged refugee children may consider using more creative methodologies with reduced language demands, such as photovoice, or ethnography, to further investigate environmental factors fostering resilience. Alternatively, findings of this study may contribute to designing quantitative research (e.g., a survey measure) methods to target larger samples of participants. It is important for future research to continue to explore unique protective and resilience factors against the negative

aspects of refugee experiences and contribute to fostering them in schools and communities. The potential protective/resilience factors found in this study need to be further explored and confirmed in correlational and experimental studies and could be used to develop a resilience measure.

### **Researcher Reflections**

Refugee families who participated in the study were exceptionally warm and welcoming. Three out of the four families invited the researcher into their home for the follow-up interviews and offered refreshments. The follow-up interviews were crucial as participants shared more freely and provided further details of their experiences. They were often seemed cheerful as they joked, smiled, and laughed during the interviews and interactions with the researcher. The biggest strength of this study was that it captured the voice of refugee children and used a truly strengths-based method to explore refugee children's strengths and sources of resilience. Despite the language barriers, participants were able to deeply reflect on their experiences and better understand their own perceptions. When asked about their experiences of participating in the interviews, participants indicated that the activity, or the interview, made them feel "really good" and "happy," and it helped them to know more about themselves and their country, and their own strengths that they were not aware of. Some of their responses included: "felt like important because I have to go back and remember stuff," "felt like really happy because it just reminded of so much stuff back at home," and "I was sometimes impressed about what I said." For the researcher herself, conducting a qualitative research with refugee children was a humbling and enriching experience through which she learned not only about her participants but also about herself as a researcher, practitioner, and once a newcomer to Canada.

## Conclusions

In the current study, the meaning of strength in the lived experiences of four children who arrived in Canada with refugee status was explored using a strength-based approach. Two research questions stem from the Bronfenbrenner's ecological model with an emphasis on the influences of environmental factors including the family, school, and community on individual development. The research questions asked how refugee children perceive their own assets and skills and the impact of their families, peers, schools, and communities on their strengths in their post-migration experiences. The Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was used as the methodological framework for collecting and analyzing the data. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using the IPA approach in conjunction with thematic analysis approach. The use of IPA and Tree of Life as an elicitation device allowed creativity, flexibility, and exploration of detailed accounts of participants' experiences of their strengths in relation to environmental factors in their sociocultural context. The findings revealed six personal qualities of *Unique Talents*, *Ability to Face Challenges*, *Strong Family Bonds*, *Openness to Diversity*, *Value in Own Culture*, and *Desire to Help Others* perceived by participants, as well as four sources of strength in having their *Family Members as Role Models* and *Parental Involvement*, as well as having a *Social Network* and *New Opportunities* in their communities. Patterns of *Secure Identity*, *Empowerment*, and *Sense of Belonging* also emerged across the cases as critical elements of resilience in participants. These findings are similar to and consistent with individual, family, school, and community factors that have been identified in the previous literature. The interplay between the perceived strengths and support structures exemplify the dynamic process of resilience in refugee children. In particular, the findings support that the ability to maintain one's native culture while adapting to the host culture may be a unique

protective factor of refugee children. In sum, this study used an innovative method to give voice to refugee children and understand the meaning of strength and sources of resilience in their post-migration experiences, which underlines the importance of using strengths-based, culturally-appropriate, and non-stigmatizing approaches with refugee children and families in research, education, and mental health/clinical practice.

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## POST-MIGRATION EXPERIENCE OF CHILDREN WHO ARE REFUGEES TO CANADA: STRENGTHS AND RESILIENCE

---

We invite you and your child to take part in a study looking at post-migration experience of children who are refugees. The purpose of the study is to explore how children who are refugees to Canada develop and make sense of their *strengths* and understand their individual assets and social supports.

- ❖ Findings from this study will help us learn how to better support these children in our community.
- ❖ Taking part involves a one-time commitment to two interview sessions with your child at a location of your choice.
- ❖ In the interviews, your child will be asked to describe their experience in Canada in a drawing activity.

This research is for a graduate thesis project.  
If you would like to learn more about the study or would like to take part,  
please contact: **Angelina Lee**  
at **XXX-XXX-XXXX** or **name@XXX.ca**.

**Principal Investigator:**  
Laurie Ford, PhD  
Department of Educational & Counselling  
Psychology & Special Education  
Phone: XXX-XXX-XXXX  
Email: name@XXX.ca

**Co-Investigator:**  
Angelina Lee, BA  
Department of Educational & Counselling  
Psychology & Special Education  
Phone: XXX-XXX-XXXX  
Email: name@XXX.ca

## APPENDIX B. Recruitment Card

### POST-MIGRATION EXPERIENCE OF CHILDREN WHO ARE REFUGEES TO CANADA: STRENGTHS AND RESILIENCE

We invite you and your child to take part in a study that looks at how children who are refugees to Canada make sense of their *strengths*.

- ❖ Help us better understand how to support children who are refugees
- ❖ Taking part involves a one-time commitment to two interview sessions with your child at a location of your choice
- ❖ In a drawing activity, your child will be asked to describe their experience in Canada

If you would like to learn more about the study or would like to take part, please contact: **Angelina Lee** at XXX-XXX-XXXX or name@XXX.ca.

Principal Investigator:  
Laurie Ford, PhD  
Phone: XXX-XXX-XXXX  
Email: name@XXX.ca

Co-Investigator:  
Angelina Lee, BA  
Phone: XXX-XXX-XXXX  
Email: name@XXX.ca

Department of Educational  
& Counselling Psychology  
& Special Education

Faculty of Education



a place of mind  
THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

## APPENDIX C. Invitation Letter

### POST-MIGRATION EXPERIENCE OF CHILDREN WHO ARE REFUGEES TO CANADA: STRENGTHS AND RESILIENCE

#### Letter of Invitation

Dear Parent,

We are currently looking for children who are refugees to Canada to take part in our research. We are looking for children between the age of 10 and 13 who are currently enrolled in school and have lived in Canada for at least two years. The purpose of this study is to explore how children who are refugees develop and make sense of strengths in their post-migration experience. Understanding individual assets and social support networks of children who are refugees will help us learn how to better support them at school and at home.

Taking part in the study means that, in two interview sessions, your child will be asked to share his/her own thoughts about the meaning of his/her own strengths and how his/her families, peers, schools, and communities have helped him/her develop their strengths. Your child will be asked to draw a picture of a tree to help with this process. We will interview your child individually at a quiet location of your/your child's choice. This could be your home, UBC campus, or another private place that is convenient for you and your child. The first interview will take about 60 to 90 minutes, and the second interview will take about 30 to 60 minutes. They will be audio-recorded and transcribed after the interview sessions.

Your child's taking part is completely voluntary and will not affect any services you or your family may receive in your neighbourhood. Your child will be stop taking part at any point or not to take part at all without any consequences, even after you sign this consent form.

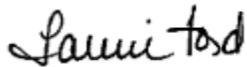
It is very important to us that your family's privacy is protected. All information collected as part of this research study will be confidential. **No individual information will be reported, and all documents will be identified only by code numbers.** The information collected will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in a secured room at UBC and will be viewed only by the researchers working on the project.

We hope that findings from this study will help improve post-migration experiences of children who are refugees. Your child will each receive a \$15 gift certificate to a local store as a thank-you gift. Any parking or transportation costs (such as taking the bus) will be reimbursed.

We would be delighted if you and your child would take part in our study. If you are interested in taking part or would like to learn more about this research and what is involved, please contact Angelina Lee at (604) 822-4062 or by email at [angelinalee@alumni.ubc.ca](mailto:angelinalee@alumni.ubc.ca). After you contact us to learn more about the study, you will be asked if you wish to have your child take part in the study. If you do wish to have your child take part, we will find a time and a location that works best for you and your child for the initial interview.

Thank you for your interest in our research!

Sincerely,



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**Principal Investigator:**

Laurie Ford, PhD  
Associate Professor  
Department of Educational & Counselling  
Psychology & Special Education  
Phone: XXX-XXX-XXXX  
Email: name@XXX.ca



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**Co-Investigator:**

Angelina Lee, BA  
Graduate Student Researcher  
Department of Educational & Counselling  
Psychology & Special Education  
Phone: XXX-XXX-XXXX  
Email: name@XXX.ca

## APPENDIX D. Parent Consent Letter

### POST-MIGRATION EXPERIENCE OF CHILDREN WHO ARE REFUGEES TO CANADA: STRENGTHS AND RESILIENCE

#### Parent Consent

---

<b>Principal Investigator:</b> Laurie Ford, PhD Associate Professor Department of Educational & Counselling Psychology & Special Education Phone: XXX-XXX-XXXX Email: name@XXX.ca	<b>Co-Investigator:</b> Angelina Lee, BA Graduate Student Researcher Department of Educational & Counselling Psychology & Special Education Phone: XXX-XXX-XXXX Email: name@XXX.ca
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**PLEASE SIGN PAGE 3, COMPLETE PAGE 4, AND RETURN THEM  
KEEP A COPY OF PAGE 1 & 2 FOR YOUR OWN RECORDS**

Dear Parent,

We are writing to ask for your permission to have your child take part in our research study.

**Purpose:**

The purpose of this study is to explore how children who are refugees develop and make sense of strengths in their post-migration experience. Understanding individual assets and social supports of children who are refugees will help us learn how to better support them at school and at home.

**Participation:**

Taking part in the study means that, in two interview sessions, your child will be asked to share his/her own thoughts about the meaning of his/her own strengths and how his/her families, peers, schools, and communities have helped him/her develop their strengths. Your child will be asked to draw a picture of a tree to help with this process. We will interview your child individually at a quiet location of your/your child's choice. This could be your home, UBC campus, or another private place that is convenient for you and your child. The first interview will take about 60 to 90 minutes, and the second interview will take about 30 to 60 minutes. They will be audio-recorded and transcribed after the interview sessions.

We will review the interview with you and your child after it is completed to discuss any additional things you/your child would like to change. The picture that your child will draw belongs to him/her. By agreeing to take part in the study, you are agreeing to the use of the interview transcripts and a copy of the drawing for the purposes of conducting this study and reporting the results of the study in presentations or publications, including the final thesis document.

If you agree to have your child take part in the study, we will ask you to answer a few questions to make sure that your child meets the criteria for the study. This includes your child's age, your child's status in school, your family's date of arrival in Canada, your permanent resident status in Canada, your relationship to your child, and your child's ability to communicate in English.

**Risks/Harm:**

We believe that risks in taking part in this study are minimal; however, if any of the questions makes your child feel uncomfortable, he/she may choose not to respond to the question(s) or stop the study at any time.

**Confidentiality/Privacy:**

Your child's taking part is completely voluntary and will not affect any services you or your family may receive in your neighbourhood. Your child will be stop taking part at any point or not to take part at all without any consequences, even after you sign this consent form.

It is very important to us that your family's privacy is protected. All information collected as part of this research study will be confidential. **No individual information will be reported, and all documents will be identified only by code numbers.** The information collected will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in a secured room at UBC and will be viewed only by the researchers working on the project. If you decide to have your child take part in this study and have any concerns about you and your child's rights or treatment as a research participant, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at the University of British Columbia at XXX-XXX-XXXX.

We hope that findings from this study will help improve post-migration experiences of children who are refugees. Your child will each receive a \$15 gift certificate to a local store as a thank-you gift. Any parking or transportation costs (such as taking the bus) will be reimbursed.

If you would like to have your child participate in our study, please complete the attached consent form and the questions and return them to the researcher. If you would like to receive general information about the results, we are happy to share them with you after the study is completed.

**POST-MIGRATION EXPERIENCE OF CHILDREN  
WHO ARE REFUGEES TO CANADA: STRENGTHS AND RESILIENCE**

**Parent Consent**

**PLEASE RETURN THIS COPY TO THE RESEARCHER**

1. Please check one of the following:

- Yes, I agree to **my child** taking part in this study.
- No, I do not agree to **my child** taking part this study.

My signature below means that I have read and understood the information about the research study entitled "Post-Migration Experience of Children Who are Refugees to Canada: Strengths and Resilience" by Dr. Laurie Ford and Angelina Lee, and that I agree to have my child take part in the study.

Your child's name (print): \_\_\_\_\_

Your name (print): \_\_\_\_\_

Your signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

2. If you agree to take part in this study with your child, please let us know if you would like a copy of the results summary and provide us with your email or mailing address (please print clearly):

- Yes, I would like a copy of the results summary.

Mailing Address or Email Address:

\_\_\_\_\_

- No, I am not interested in receiving a copy of the results.

APPENDIX E. Screening Questionnaire

POST-MIGRATION EXPERIENCE OF CHILDREN  
WHO ARE REFUGEES TO CANADA: STRENGTHS AND RESILIENCE

Screening Questionnaire

1. How old is your child?
2. Is your child currently attending school in a structured school setting (e.g. public or private)?
  - a. **If YES** what grade is he/she in?
  - b. **If NO**, in what type of program does your child receive his/her schooling?  
(please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

3. Do you have permanent resident status in Canada?

4. What is your date of arrival in Canada? Year \_\_\_\_\_ Month \_\_\_\_\_

5. What is your relationship to your child? (Please check one)

\_\_\_\_\_ Biological Mother

\_\_\_\_\_ Biological Father

\_\_\_\_\_ Stepmother

\_\_\_\_\_ Stepfather

\_\_\_\_\_ Other Legal Guardian (Please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

6. How fluent is your child's English on a scale of 1 (limited) to 5 (fluent)?

Comprehension:      1      2      3      4      5

Speaking:              1      2      3      4      5

Writing:                1      2      3      4      5

Reading:                1      2      3      4      5

## APPENDIX F. Child Assent Letter

### POST-MIGRATION EXPERIENCE OF CHILDREN WHO ARE REFUGEES TO CANADA: STRENGTHS AND RESILIENCE

#### Child Assent

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<b>Principal Investigator:</b> Laurie Ford, PhD Associate Professor Department of Educational & Counselling Psychology & Special Education Phone: XXX-XXX-XXXX Email: name@XXX.ca	<b>Co-Investigator:</b> Angelina Lee, BA Graduate Student Researcher Department of Educational & Counselling Psychology & Special Education Phone: XXX-XXX-XXXX Email: <a href="mailto:name@XXX.ca">name@XXX.ca</a>
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#### TO BE REVIEWED VERBALLY WITH ALL CHILD PARTICIPANTS AFTER PARENT CONSENT

*The basic areas to be covered are highlighted below.*

*If needed, additional clarification will be provided and language may be adjusted depending on the developmental level and English language fluency of the child.*

#### What is the study about?

I am a researcher from the University of British Columbia, and I would like to talk with you about our research study before we start our interview. I am asking if you would like to be in a study about the experiences of children who are refugees to Canada. We would like to learn more about your experience in Canada. We have permission from your parent(s) to talk with you, and now we are asking you if you would like to take part in our study. By taking part in this study, we may be able to help other children who are refugees to Canada in their school and home.

#### What happen if I take part in the study?

- If you agree to take part, I will interview/talk with you at a quiet location of you and your parent's choice. This could be your home, UBC campus, or another private place that is comfortable for you. There will be two interviews in total. The first one will take about 1 to 1.5 hours, and the second one will take about 30 minutes to 1 hour.
- I will talk with you about what living in Canada has been like for you and things that you like about living in Canada. I will ask you what you think you are good at, what others think you are good at, how you found out about these strengths, and how others have helped you build those strengths. I will also ask you to draw a big tree to help you talk about your strengths. I may ask you questions about your family, your friends, your school, and your community. If you do not feel comfortable answering any of my questions, you do not have to answer them. You can either skip those questions, or you can stop all together at any time.
- The interviews will be audio-recorded and written/typed out after the session to help us remember what we talked about. I will review the interview with you after if you want to add or change anything.
- It is completely your choice to take part in this study. You can take a break or stop at any time and you do not have to answer my questions if you don't want to. All you have to do is let me know.
- Taking part in this study is confidential. This means that only the people who are working on this study will see your responses and your privacy will be protected. All documents will have a code number and will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in our lab. Your name will not be on any of our documents.
- You will receive a \$15 gift card to a local store as a thank-you for taking part in our study.

- If at any time, you or your parents are worried about how you are being treated in this project or your rights as a person taking part in the study, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at UBC at (604)-822-8598. We have also given this number to your parents.
- If you want, we are happy to share the results of the study with you when it is complete.
- If you have any questions or concerns about the project, you may talk with any of the researchers working on this project at the numbers above. We have also given these numbers to your parents.

-----

I understand that I am taking part in the project, “Post-Migration Experience of Children Who are Refugees to Canada because I want to. I know that I can change my mind about being part of this project, and I can stop at any time without consequences. My printed name below shows that I agree with my parent’s decision to allow me to be a part of this project.

Student name (print): \_\_\_\_\_

Student signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX G. Background Questionnaire

### Background Questionnaire

Thank you for allowing your child to take part in this study. Please take a few minutes to answer questions about your background, your family, and your child. If there is any question you feel uncomfortable answering, skip the question.

1. What is your child's first name?
2. What is your child's date of birth?
3. What grade is your child in?
4. What is your child's sex?: _____ Male _____ Female
5. Does your child have any siblings? _____ Yes _____ No a. If yes, do they live with you? _____ Yes _____ No b. If yes, do they live in Canada? _____ Yes _____ No c. If yes, what are their ages? _____
6. What is your child's primary language spoken at home?
7. Does your child speak any other language(s)? _____ Yes _____ No a. If yes, please specify: _____
8. Do you have any other family members/relatives in Canada, family friends, or acquaintances in your social support network? _____ Yes _____ No a. If yes, please specify: _____ _____
9. How many people currently live in your home? a. Number of adults (including yourself) _____ b. Number of children (19 years or younger) _____
10. What is your family's ethnic background?
11. What is your country of origin?
12. What is your reason for migration?
13. What was profession/occupation in your home country?
14. What is your current profession/occupation in Canada?
15. What is your annual household income? (This is optional. Please check one.): _____ less than \$15,000 _____ \$15,000 – \$19,999 _____ \$20,000 – \$29,999 _____ \$30,000 – \$39,999 _____ \$40,000 – \$49,999 _____ \$50,000 or more
16. What is your marital status?
17. Is your child regularly cared for during the week by someone other than yourself? (e.g., another parent, grandparent, nanny, family friend, child care, after school program) a. If yes, please specify: _____

## APPENDIX H. Initial Interview Guide

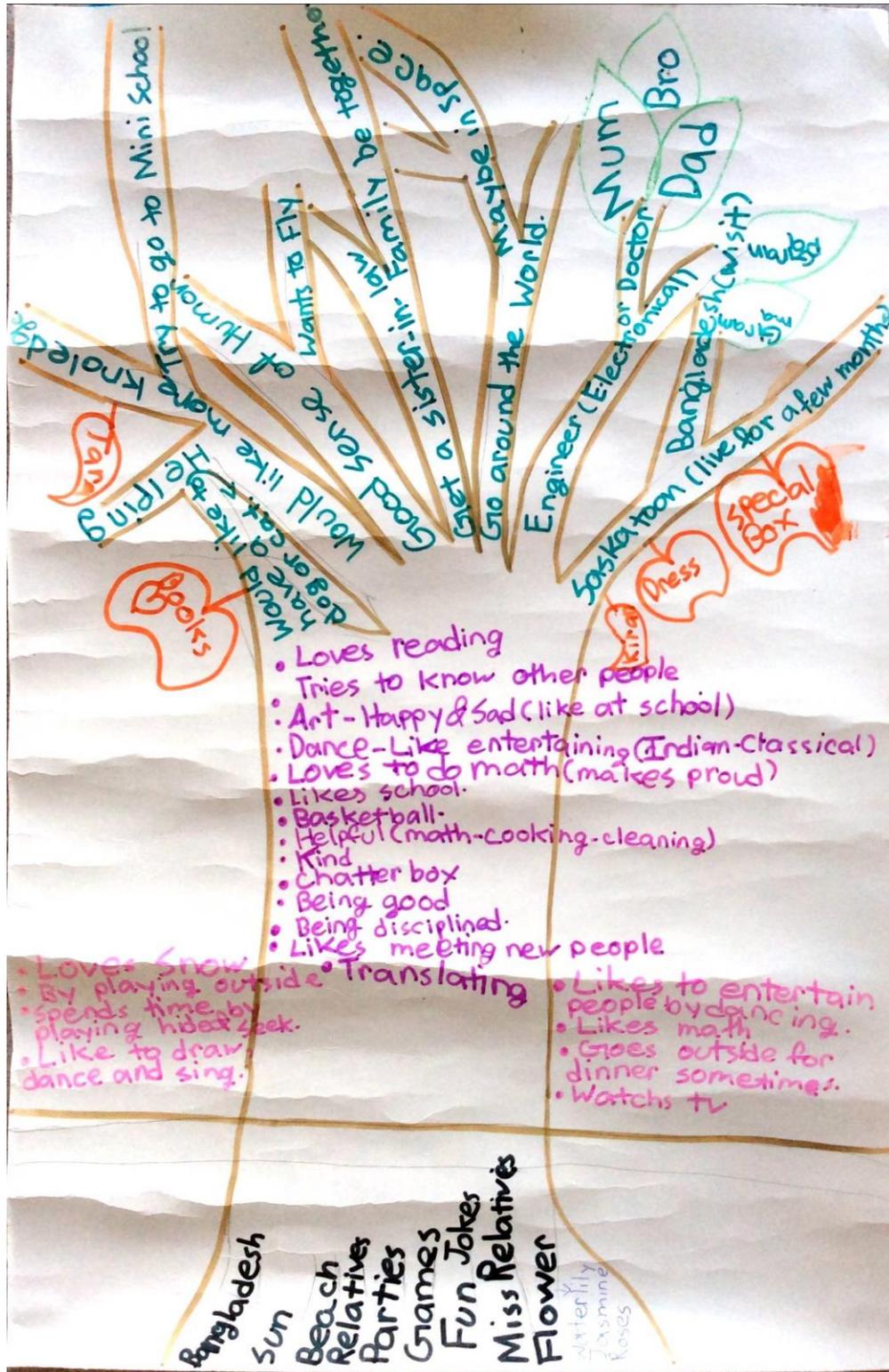
1. Tell me about your life in Canada from when you moved here until now.  
prompt: What is it like living in Canada?
2. Tell me about your family.  
prompt: How do you spend your time with your family?  
prompt: What are some ways that your family has supported you in Canada?
3. Tell me about your friends.  
prompt: How do you spend your time with your friends?  
prompt: What are some ways that your friends have supported you?
4. Tell me about your school.  
prompt: What are some ways that your teachers have supported you?
5. Tell me about your community.  
prompt: How do you spend your time in your community (e.g., library, community centres)?
6. Tree of Life: Now, we are going to do a little activity. First, tell me what you know about trees. What are some of the different kinds of trees you see in your neighbourhood? Tell me about the different parts of a tree (roots, trunk, branches, leaves, and fruits). This activity is called the Tree of Life. In this activity, we are going to draw a tree on this big piece of paper (bring out the paper). Don't forget to draw the different parts that we just named. As you are drawing your tree, I want you to imagine that you are a tree and think of the parts of your life as the parts of a tree. After you are done, if you want to, you will get a chance to share your drawing and your story. Do you have any questions?
  - 6.1.1 Let's start with the roots of the tree. The roots represent where you come from. (Give child time to draw.) Tell me about where you come from (i.e. village, town, country).  
prompt: What were some of your favourite things about home?  
prompt: Do you have any special memories?
  - 6.1.2 Let's draw the ground above the roots. The ground represents your life now. (Give child time to draw.)  
What is living in Canada like for you now?  
prompt: Where do you go to school?  
prompt: What are some of the activities that you do in your regular daily life?
  - 6.1.3 Let's draw the trunk of the tree. This is the most important part of our activity. This is an opportunity for you to talk about some of your skills and talents. (Give child time to draw.) What are do you think are your strengths? How would you describe your strengths?  
prompt: What are you good at?  
prompt: What are some things that you have accomplished and are proud of?  
prompt: What do you think others like about you?  
prompt: How do you use your strengths?  
prompt: How long have you had these strengths/skills?  
prompt: How did you learn or where did they come from?  
prompt: How do those strengths make you feel?  
prompt: What do your strengths mean to you?
  - 6.1.4 Let's move on to the branches. The branches are for your future. (Give child time to draw.) Tell me about your hopes, wishes, and dreams for the future.  
prompt: How long have you had these hopes and dreams?  
prompt: How did you come up with these hopes and dreams?  
prompt: How do you hold onto these hopes and dreams?
  - 6.1.5 Let's draw some leaves between the branches. The leaves represent people that are important to you. (Give child time to draw.) Tell me about people who mean a lot to you. They can be people who are alive today or people who passed away. They can still be important and connected to you.  
prompt: Why are these people special to you?
  - 6.1.6 Let's draw some fruits in the tree. (Give child time to draw.) Tell me about gifts that you have been given. These gifts may be not necessarily be material gifts but something like friendship, acts of kindness, or care from other people.  
prompt: Why do you think that the person gave this to you?
7. What does it mean to you to talk about your strengths? What does it mean to you to talk about people who have supported you?

## **APPENDIX I. Follow-up Interview Guide**

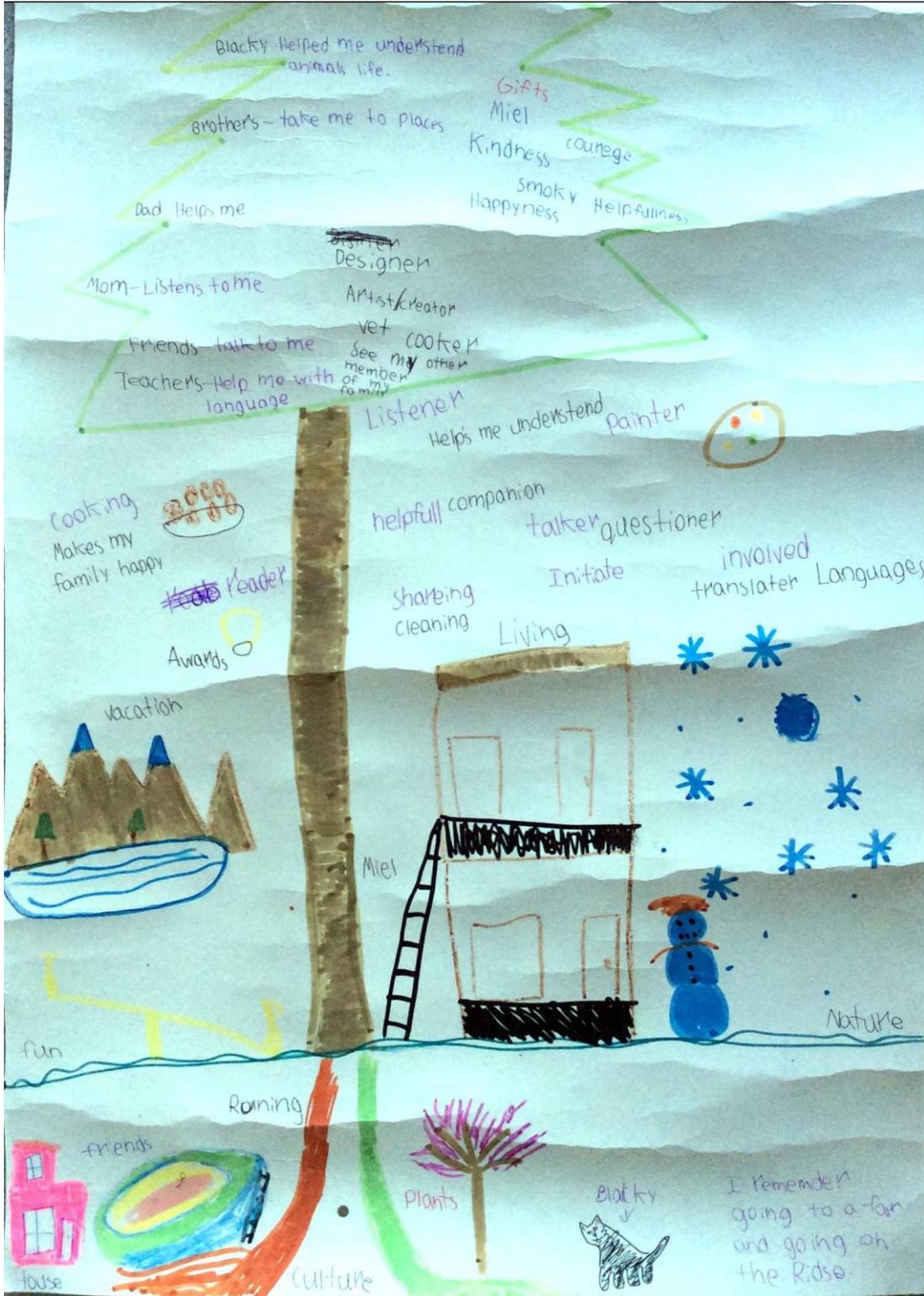
- When you think of yourself, would you say that you are more \_\_\_\_\_ or Canadian? Or both?
- What are some things about your culture that you are proud of?
- How do you think your life would've been different if you hadn't moved to Canada?
- What are some new skills and talents you have discovered since moving to Canada?
- What are some strengths that are unique to children who are refugees to Canada?
- What did this activity mean to you? How did this activity make you feel?
- How do you think we can help kids who are new or refugees to Canada?

# APPENDIX J. Tree of Life Drawings

Chandhi's Tree of Life



# Maria's Tree of Life





# Sofia's Tree of Life

