

Identity and resilience among Hazara and Afghan adolescents and young adults following childhood experiences of forced migration

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Abstract

In Afghanistan, prolonged conflicts have for decades forced individuals to flee. Globally, the number of forcibly displaced people rose substantially to 108.4 million in 2022. The return of the Taliban government in Afghanistan in 2021 led to a large increase in the number of people fleeing the country. Australia is among the high-income countries hosting Afghans from a refugee background. The large number of resettled children and adolescents from Afghanistan in Australia increases the need to understand how they can be supported to build resilience after the adverse experiences of the refugee journey.

In the past two decades, researchers have focused on factors promoting resilience in young people from a refugee background. While research suggests that having a ‘positive sense of identity’ is a protective factor for resilience, little attention has been paid to the process of how a young person [re]constructs a positive sense of identity following experiences of trauma and displacement. Moreover, the interactions between [re]constructing a sense of identity, resilience and a young person’s sociocultural environment following refugee experiences have rarely been studied.

This PhD research sought to address this gap. The project furnishes a culturally and contextually grounded understanding of perceptions of identity and resilience in Hazara and Afghan young adults and adolescents and how these perceptions interact. While most studies of identity in the context of forced migration have been conducted with adults, this in-depth qualitative study involved 10 adolescents and six parents, along with 15 Hazara young adults who migrated as children. The work incorporated a scoping review of the past two decades of studies exploring the sense of identity in young people from refugee backgrounds and empirical findings from interviews, narratives and visual elements provided by participants.

The findings of the scoping review were that young people from refugee backgrounds perceived themselves as having multiple identity characteristics influenced by their interactions with their sociocultural environments and the need to integrate their past, present and future. The review emphasised the importance of holistic and pluralistic perspectives that consider factors in different layers of the social ecology for understanding how young people from refugee backgrounds shape their identities in their unique sociocultural contexts.

Interviews with young Hazara adults revealed that participants perceived their identity as a life story that integrated memories from childhood with experiences of forced migration. The participants reported that traumatic incidents prior to arrival in Australia and challenging experiences in Australia constituted turning points in their lives and disclosed how suffering was translated into resilience, hope, determination, aspirations and achievements. Although this meaning-making and a personal sense of resilience comprised core elements of participants' positive sense of identity, finding a middle ground between Hazara and Australian identity and developing a sense of belonging were loci of struggle for participants.

Findings with adolescents and parents also showed that faced with the effects of current and past adverse experiences, adolescents perceived themselves as resilient, with a sense of agency and determination central to their identity. Analysis of the interviews and narratives showed the substantial effect of post-migration barriers to seeking and finding belonging on the process of [re]constructing a sense of identity.

This work showed that when young people have experienced major life challenges (such as trauma and displacement), [re]construction of their identity, finding a sense of belonging and building resilience are interrelated, complex and ongoing processes. Supporting the wellbeing of young people from refugee backgrounds would require a holistic understanding of this complexity. Such an understanding can support the implementation of effective social policies and practices to provide culturally inclusive environments and support positive adjustment.

Declaration

I hereby declare that:

1. This thesis comprises only my original work towards the degree of a Doctor of Philosophy, except where indicated in the preface
2. Due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used
3. The thesis is fewer than 100,000 words in length, exclusive of tables, bibliographies and appendices.

Signed:

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January 2024

Preface

I performed the work described in this thesis except where due credit is given. This thesis contains no material that has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any university or equivalent institution. No work was carried out prior to enrolment in the degree.

The completion of this research project and thesis was supported by Melbourne Research Scholarship. During my candidature, I also received Population Health Investing in Research Students' Training (PHIRST).

Elite Editing provided professional editing services in accordance with the Institute of Professional Editors' Guidelines for editing research theses. Elite Editing service was confined to proofreading and English expression; they did not offer advice on the substance and structure of the thesis.

This thesis is a PhD with publication and includes three original papers which two are published and one has been submitted to peer review journals. My primary supervisor completed a 'Declaration for a thesis with publication' form and my co-authors completed 'Co-author authorisation' forms. The forms have been submitted separately online. I have reformatted chapters including the published papers for consistency.

My contributions to the work and the publication status of manuscripts are detailed below:

Thesis chapter	Publication title	Publication status	Nature and percentage of student contribution	Co-author names and nature of contribution
Chapter 4	Sense of Identity among Young People from Refugee Backgrounds: A Scoping Review	Children and Youth Services Review (published)	85%; Conceptualisation, methodology analysis, interpretation, manuscript preparation, review and editing	K Block; Conceptualisation, interpretation, manuscript review and editing E Alisic; Conceptualisation, interpretation, manuscript review and editing

Chapter 5	Still stood adamant and strong to chase my dream': sense of identity and resilience among Hazara youth following childhood experiences of forced migration	Journal of Immigrant and Refugee Studies(published)	85%; Conceptualisation, methodology, data collection, analysis, interpretation, manuscript preparation, review and editing	K Block; Conceptualisation, interpretation, manuscript review and editing E Alisic; Conceptualisation, interpretation, manuscript review and editing
Chapter 6	[Re]construction of identity and resilience among Afghan and Hazara adolescents following forced migration	Social Identities (under review)	80%; Conceptualisation, methodology, data collection, analysis, interpretation, manuscript preparation, review and editing	K Block; Conceptualisation, interpretation, manuscript review and editing E Alisic; Conceptualisation, interpretation, manuscript review and editing

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Baba, I wish you could still see me and would feel proud.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this body of work to all the powerful girls and women in Afghanistan who have been banned from schools, universities, and workplaces for the past two years /شب سیاه ما سحر شود/ the day will dawn.

Research outputs

Below is a list of peer-reviewed publications, presentations and talks I completed during my PhD candidature.

Peer-reviewed publications:

- Shahimi, Farnaz, Karen Block, and Eva Alisic. "Sense of Identity among Young People with Refugee Backgrounds: A Scoping Review." *Children and Youth Services Review* (2023): 107378. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chidyouth.2023.107378>
- Farnaz Shahimi, Karen Block & Eva Alisic (2023) '*Still Stood Adamant and Strong to Chase My Dream*': Sense of Identity and Resilience among Hazara Youth following Childhood Experiences of Forced Migration, *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15562948.2023.2290644>
- Shahimi, F, Block, K, Alisic, E. [Re]construction of identity and resilience among Afghan and Hazara adolescents following forced migration. Under review, *Social Identities*.

Presentations and talks

- Shahimi, F. A Social-Ecological Perspective on Resilience and Identity for Refugee Children', Presentation at the "Migration, Refugee and Statelessness", interdisciplinary conference. November 2019, Melbourne, Australia
- Shahimi, F. Supporting Teachers of Students with Refugee Backgrounds' Webinar presentation, Swinburne University, Melbourne University, Foundation House, and Department of Education. September 2021, Melbourne, Australia
- Shahimi, F. Psychosocial Impacts of Forced Migration. Guest lecture for subject "Refugees and Forced Migration" at Australian Catholic University (ACU). September 202, Melbourne, Australia
- Shahimi, F. Flee: Migration, Memory and Resilience. Presentation at Screening Ideas: Migration and Social Justice Film Series. April 2022, Melbourne, Australia
- Shahimi, F. Resilience and Identity among Hazara Adolescents in Australia. Qessa Podcast Stories of Afghan migrants in the West. July 2023, Melbourne, Australia

Available on YouTube and Spotify

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zPslicFFEc>

<https://open.spotify.com/episode/1CeOF0PIVVqFGUGZ2DrJAG?si=55ae3991368e454e>

- Shahimi, F. Sense of identity resilience among adolescents from Afghanistan. Presentation at MCRI Centre for Adolescent Health. November 2023.
- Shahimi, F. Presentation at 'Key Consideration for Clinical Practice with Children and Young People from Refugee and Asylum-Seeking Background: Clinical, Cultural, and Lived Experiences Perspectives in Dialogue'. Two-hour online forum hosted by The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture and Trauma. March 2024.

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Abbreviations and key terms

Displacement	Movement of people or individuals from their original or usual place of residence, whether voluntary or involuntary, temporary or permanent, within the same country (internal displacement) or across international borders (cross-border displacement) (Migration Data Portal, 2023).
Forced Migration	Forced migration is a broad term that covers several types of migration: temporary or permanent flight from home within a country, leading to internal displacement; pursuing permanent or temporary protection as an asylum seeker by fleeing to another country; and permanent resettlement as a refugee (Hugo et al., 2017).
Refugee	Refugee is a person who has been forced to flee their country due to persecution, war, or violence. A refugee has a well-grounded fear of persecution due to race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group. Most likely, they cannot return home or are fearful to do so (UNHCR, 2020).
Resettlement	The process of moving individuals or groups of people from one location, often their home country, to another place, usually a different country, with the intention of providing them with a safe and stable living environment (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2023).
Settlement	The process of establishing a new place of residence and integrating into a community or society. This term is not limited to refugees but applies to anyone who is relocating to a different area, whether within the same country or internationally. Settlement may involve finding housing, employment, social services, and adapting to the local culture and way of life (Refugee Council of Australia, 2019).
SEM	Social Ecological Model
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
US	United States
Young people	Individuals within the age range of 10 to 24 years old

Chapter 1 Introduction

The research described in this PhD thesis explores the resilience and sense of identity of Afghan and Hazara adolescents and young adults following childhood experiences of forced migration to Australia. In this chapter, I briefly explore the terminology of forced migration, the global statistics of the forcibly displaced, the history of conflicts in Afghanistan¹ and the persecution of Hazaras. I discuss the significance of this research project by providing a brief overview of the psychosocial effects of forced migration on young people. I outline reasons why research on identity as a resilience factor in young people is important in the context of forced migration and identify the research gap. I then present the aims and objectives of my study and briefly explain the rationale for the methods and theoretical frameworks used. I also outline the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the retaking of Afghanistan by the Taliban on the research process. I end the chapter by presenting the outline of my thesis.

1.1 Background

1.1.1 Forced migration

Forced migration or forced displacement is a broad term that covers several types of migration: temporary or permanent flight from home within a country, leading to internal displacement; the pursuit of permanent or temporary protection as an asylum seeker by fleeing to another country; and permanent resettlement (Hugo et al., 2017; UNHCR, 2014). Various issues, including conflict, violence, torture, persecution, or death make people escape their homelands. In the past few decades, wars, protracted conflicts, and natural disasters have displaced millions of people (Hugo et al., 2017). At the end of 2022, over 108.4 million people worldwide were forcibly displaced, with almost half of this population aged under 18. While the majority have fled to neighbouring countries, mostly low- and middle-income

¹ In Farsi, 'Afghanistan' means the Afghan state (Ibrahimi, N. (2017). *The Hazaras and the Afghan state: Rebellion, exclusion and the struggle for recognition*. Oxford University Press. The word is adapted from 'Afghan', referring to the Pashtun ethnic group. Afghanistan became the name of the country in the late 19th century, during political unrest involving Russia, since when, ethnic minorities have experienced discrimination and persecution. It is argued that Afghan is a non-inclusive identity as the name represents a single ethnicity, which is especially an issue since discrimination, persecution and interethnic hatred are directed against other ethnic groups in the country, including Hazaras, Tajiks and Uzbeks. Throughout this thesis, I use 'Afghan' as the official nationality for people from Afghanistan, but I differentiate between Afghan and Hazara—the only two ethnicities that participated in this research—when nationality is not the focus of the argument.

countries, about one in six of displaced people have sought asylum in high-income countries (UNHCR, 2023; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2022c).

For the past five decades, conflicts in Afghanistan have forced people to flee from their homeland (Clements & Adamec, 2003). In 2021, the world witnessed the return of Taliban rule over Afghanistan, triggering a large increase in the number of people fleeing the country (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2022a). In Sections 1.1.2 and 1.1.3, I briefly outline the history of conflicts in Afghanistan and the discrimination and ethnic persecution of Hazara to make clear the causes of forced migration of people from Afghanistan.

1.1.2 An overview of the history of conflicts in Afghanistan

The conflict in Afghanistan is enduring and complex. It has involved various groups, including the Taliban, the Afghan government, international military forces, and other armed groups. Violence, terrorism, human rights abuses, and political instability have characterised the conflict. The roots of the current conflict in Afghanistan can be traced back to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, which led to a long and brutal war that lasted for over a decade. After the Soviet withdrawal in 1989, a civil war started in the country, characterised by fighting between different groups and warlords (Clements & Adamec, 2003; Roberts, 2003).

The Taliban, a militant group that espouses a strict interpretation of Sunni Islam, emerged in the mid-1990s, and gained control of much of the country by 1996. Brutal human rights abuses, including the oppression of women and girls, the persecution of religious and ethnic minorities and the execution of political opponents, marked the first Taliban regime (Crews & Tarzi, 2008; Matinuddin, 2000). After the September 11 attacks in 2001, the United States (US) and its allies launched a military campaign in Afghanistan to oust the Taliban regime and dismantle terrorist networks. Conflict has continued since then, with armed and suicidal attacks over the following two decades (Laub, 2014). In August 2021, the Taliban regime regained control over Afghanistan after the exit of the US military. Conflict in Afghanistan and the subsequent violence and insecurity have led to displacement of millions of Afghans. There were over two and half million internationally displaced Afghans globally in December 2021, with the majority living in Pakistan and Iran (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2022b). In addition, more than four million persons were internally displaced

within Afghanistan (UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2021). It is essential to note that these numbers are constantly changing and do not capture the full extent of the displacement caused by the conflict. Many Afghans remain at risk of human rights abuses and forced displacement. The international community continues its efforts in providing humanitarian assistance and protection to Afghans whose lives have been impacted by the conflict (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2022b).

1.1.3 The history of Hazaras in Afghanistan

The Hazaras are an ethnic group in Afghanistan who are a predominantly Shia and have a physical appearance distinct from Pashtuns and members of other ethnic groups. This has contributed to them being a recognisable target of discrimination and violence. Hazaras have faced discrimination and marginalisation throughout history, particularly under the Taliban regime from 1996 to 2001, when they were persecuted for their religious and ethnic identity (Hakimi, 2022; Hucal, 2016). The Taliban targeted the Hazaras and committed massacres, rape, and other atrocities against them. The Hazaras also suffered during the civil war in Afghanistan in the 1990s, when different groups fought for power and control of the country. The Hazaras have faced violence and persecution from groups other than the Taliban, including the Northern Alliance, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria and Hezb-e-Islami (Hakimi, 2022; Hucal, 2016; Ibrahimi, 2017). The Hazaras have also faced discrimination in education, employment, and political representation. They have been under-represented in government and other institutions, with many Hazaras excluded from positions of power and decision-making (Ibrahimi, 2017). Recently, the violence against the Hazaras has been described by some human rights groups as having elements of genocide.²

The takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban in 2021 has again raised concerns about the safety and security of the Hazaras and other minority groups in the country. Although the Taliban promised to protect the rights of minorities, their previous and current human rights violations in Afghanistan have raised serious concerns about the safety of minorities and women and girls.

² Although actions targeting Hazaras have received much recent attention, neither in Afghanistan nor international organizations including the UN have recognised them as genocide either. With caution, a Hazara academic has instead suggested that the persecution of Hazaras has genocidal elements (Hakimi, M. J. (2022). The Genocide of Hazaras. *Virginia Journal of International Law Online*, 63.

1.2 The significance of the project

In 2022, the Australian Government stated through the Humanitarian and Family Visa programs, 31,500 Afghan nationals would be offered a visa (Department of Home Affairs, 2022). These numbers are in addition to the 67,030 people born in Afghanistan who had arrived in Australia by 2021 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021) and the many Afghans and Hazaras who were living in Australia but were born in Iran or Pakistan. The number of people arriving in Australia from Afghanistan rose from 562 in 2020 to 5,326 in 2022 (Department of Home Affairs, 2022), an increase that emphasises the importance of understanding how the wellbeing of young people in this group can be promoted in Australia (Ellis et al., 2020; Fazel & Betancourt, 2018).

Young people from refugee backgrounds have a higher likelihood of experiencing a broad range of adversities before, during and after displacement (Kehoe et al., 2019; Murray, 2019). They can experience trauma directly as a victim, by witnessing traumatic events or indirectly when their loved ones experience trauma (Kehoe et al., 2019). Young people and their families also experience numerous losses during forced migration, including their homes, family members, friends, community, language, culture and country (Hassan et al., 2016). These events may lead to psychosocial difficulties that may be sustained both in the short-term and long-term during and following the adverse experience (Blackmore et al., 2020; Fazel et al., 2012). Having knowledge about these difficulties is important for service providers to support young people from refugee backgrounds.

Table 1 summarises the psychosocial risks that a forcibly displaced child or adolescent may face before, during and after settlement in another country. The table uses a social-ecological framework to summarise two systematic reviews of risk factors for mental ill health of children from refugee backgrounds in high-income countries (Fazel et al., 2012; Scharpf et al., 2021) and a longitudinal study in Australia with children and adolescents (Lau et al., 2018). The social-ecological model (SEM) is a framework for describing and analysing numerous levels of exposures on a person's development and wellbeing, recognising that a complex interplay of factors across various levels of society shapes person's health and wellbeing. I explain the framework in detail in Section 2.1.2.

Table 1: Risk factors classified by the social-ecological context and stage in the refugee trajectory*

	Individual	Family	School	Community	Society/policies
Before migration	Multiple and/or prolonged exposure to traumatic event(s) Poor physical and mental health	Loss of parents and/or family members Parent/family member exposure to trauma	No or limited access to education due to safety concerns or experiences of discrimination	Poor support due to religious beliefs, ethnicity and sexual and/or gender identity	Threats/risks of persecution due to religious beliefs, ethnicity and sexual and/or gender identity
When seeking asylum	Exposure to traumatic event(s) because of high-risk refugee pathways Length of stay in a refugee camp or country of asylum Length of stay in detention centres	Separation from immediate family members Poor mental health of parents Family socio-economic position in a refugee camp or country of asylum	No or limited access to education due to visa status in countries of asylum	Lack of community support in camps, detention centres or countries of asylum	Complicated and lengthy legal immigration process Experience of racism and exclusion in countries of asylum Immigration detention laws
When settling in a host country	Mental health challenges including depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder Low self-esteem Poor coping strategies Poor physical health	Parent low education Poor family socio-economic position Poor parent–child relationship Parental acculturation stress Poor parental physical and/or mental health	Experience of exclusion and/or racism in school Teachers’ limited understanding of children’s needs Little interaction between the school and the parents Poor peer relationships	Poor support arrangements for unaccompanied minors Poor access to community support organisations Poor housing and living in high-risk neighbourhoods	Acculturation stress Language barriers Experiences of racism and exclusion Resettlement in a low-income region Immigration detention policies Uncertain visa status

*The table includes results from systematic reviews by Fazel et al. (2012); Lau et al. (2018) and Scharpf et al. (2021).

As with other groups from refugee backgrounds, studies involving the youth from Afghanistan have frequently concentrated on trauma and psychological problems and their impact (see Alemi et al., 2014; Alemi & Stempel, 2018; Copolov & Knowles, 2018, 2021; Hamrah et al., 2021a, 2021b; Ventevogel & Faiz, 2018). Despite the well-established effect of traumatic experiences on mental health disorders, not everyone who has been exposed to adversity will experience mental health disorders (Wade et al., 2019). Some people do indeed demonstrate resilience and long-term adjustment after experiences of forced migration during childhood, while also having mental health symptoms (Fouskas, 2019; Gartland et al., 2019; Zwi et al., 2018). Rather than only concentrating on trauma-related mental health issues, researchers have recently become more interested in exploring factors that promote resilience in young people from a refugee background (Lawrence et al., 2019; Masten, 2018; Scharpf et al., 2021; Sleijpen et al., 2017; Ungar & Theron, 2020).

Resilience has been described as abilities, procedures or outcomes related to positive adjustment in the context of adversity (Masten, 2018; Ungar, 2018). Resilience researchers suggest that a positive sense of identity and a supportive environment reduce the potentially negative impacts of adverse experiences (Cole et al., 2022; Marley & Mauki, 2018; Masten, 2018; Ungar, 2018). However, our knowledge of how young people from a refugee background develop a positive sense of identity in a new sociocultural context remains limited. Although identity is understood as an intricate and fluid concept that is constructed within a sociocultural context (Chao, 2019; Mijic, 2022; Schwartz et al., 2011), there has been little in-depth research with young people to holistically investigate the effects of forced migration and settlement experiences and to understand how identity interacts with resilience.

1.3 Aims and objectives

The broad aims of this research were to:

1. provide a culturally and contextually grounded understanding of perceptions of identity and resilience in Hazara and Afghan young adults and adolescents in Australia and how these perceptions interact.
2. understand the influence of forced migration experiences on perceptions of identity and resilience of adolescents and young adults from Afghanistan.

The specific objectives of this study were to:

1. collect empirical data from adolescents and young adults from Afghanistan who have childhood experiences of forced migration to Australia.
2. synthesise results from the existing literature about resilience and identity [re]construction in the context of forced migration from a holistic perspective that captures the intersection of multiple personal and environmental factors, including displacement, adversity, interpersonal relationships, ethnicity, culture, and society.
3. report and address the findings in a form that generates recommendations for policymakers, future studies, interventions, and services working with young people from Afghanistan in Australia and outside it.

1.4 An overview of the methods and theoretical framework

Because forced migration and the process of identity [re]construction are complex in nature, and this research was predominantly exploratory, I chose to use qualitative methods. Using a qualitative method for research is suitable for understanding individuals' meanings, interpretations, and subjective experiences in their historical and current social contexts (Hesse-Biber & Flowers, 2019). This is important when we focus on the experiences of silenced, othered or marginalised people in a broader dominant social setting (Hesse-Biber, 2012). A body of research discusses the appropriateness of qualitative methods for studying identity and resilience, particularly by addressing the power it adds to participants' voices (Schwartz et al., 2011; Ungar, 2003). The in-depth nature of the qualitative approach enabled me to use the participants' own words to explore their lived experiences and develop a more reflective understanding of the sense of identity and resilience in young Afghans and Hazaras from refugee backgrounds who live in Australia.

Post-structuralist and social constructionist lenses formed the basis of this qualitative study. Despite key differences between these approaches (explored in Section 3.2.2), they share common ground in their critique of essentialist and deterministic views of reality, and both challenge the idea that meanings and identities are fixed and objective. Rather, they emphasise how language, discourse and power contribute to shaping our understanding of the world. Post-structuralism stresses the fluid and contingent nature of knowledge and subjectivity (Mijic, 2022), while social constructionism is based on the understanding that social reality is shaped by humans (including the researchers), who themselves are the

products of this reality. Further, the social and cultural contexts in which a person lives shapes their understanding of reality (Andrews, 2012).

Combining these perspectives in one study can be beneficial as it enables analysing how language, power and social interactions influence the formation of ideas, identities, and societal norms. Together, these two perspectives allow for a more nuanced interpretation of the complexities of human experience and the multifaceted processes through which meaning is negotiated and constructed.

This thesis includes a scoping review and two empirical qualitative studies. The scoping review of quantitative and qualitative studies focuses on the sense of identity in young people from a refugee background. The scoping review focuses on how the concept of identity has been studied in the context of forced migration in children and adolescents internationally. The first empirical qualitative study is with young Hazara adults who experienced forced migration to Australia before they turned 18. The second study is with Afghan and Hazara adolescents and their parents from refugee backgrounds who arrived in Australia 3–7 years before the data collection.

1.5 The effect of COVID-19 on the research

On commencing the project in 2019, I initially designed a two-phase research project with adolescents and their parents. It was planned that an introductory face-to-face session to build rapport with adolescents and their caregivers would be followed by a face-to-face interview. However, following the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020, the state of Victoria imposed restrictions and lockdowns for much of 2020 and 2021. During this time, Melbourne was in lockdown for 354 days (Boaz, 2021). As I had migrated to Australia only in July 2019, I did not have a pre-existing network. To enable my planned research, I needed to build trust and a network with the Afghan and Hazara communities in Australia. COVID-19 restrictions in Melbourne severely disrupted opportunities to be involved with the community. Beyond the practical effect of lockdowns, the uncertainty distressed the community and, understandably, decreased the motivation of community members to participate in a research study. I also needed to conduct COVID-safe research, redesigning the study for online data collection. The process is described in Chapter 3.

1.6 The effect of the Taliban regaining control of Afghanistan

In August 2021, the Afghan diaspora in Australia—as with the Afghan diasporas in other countries—went through a very dark experience as Afghans watched their country crumble from afar. Witnessing the disappearance in one night of achievements and sacrifices over 20 years of struggle to build a country was deeply disturbing. In Australia, it was horrifying for the Afghan community, particularly the Hazara community, to see their friends and families left in Afghanistan without assistance or protection. The participants of this study were no exception. I paused recruitment at this time as the community was suffering, and their priority was helping anyone they could help out of Afghanistan as soon as possible. For this reason, recruitment was much slower than expected, and data collection took much more time.

1.7 Thesis outline

- In this chapter, I have provided an overview of the research background, aims, objectives and significance and have explained the effect of COVID-19 and the fall of Afghanistan into the hands of the Taliban.
- Chapter 2 provides a literature review focusing on (1) resilience research among young people from refugee backgrounds from a social-ecological perspective and (2) theories and literature that address the complexity of identity in the context of trauma and migration.
- Chapter 3 describes the research design, including my research paradigm, theoretical framework, recruitment process, data collection methods and procedures and analysis techniques. I discuss my positionality and summarise the key ethical considerations in research with young people from refugee backgrounds.
- Chapter 4 presents the scoping review entitled ‘Sense of identity among young people from refugee backgrounds’. This paper explores studies conducted with children and adolescents from refugee backgrounds, mostly in the Global North. The aim of the review is to bring together existing knowledge to understand the research gaps in studying identity in the context of forced migration. This article has been published in the *Journal of Children and Youth Services*.
- Chapter 5 presents the manuscript entitled “*Still stood adamant and strong to chase my dream*”: The sense of identity and resilience among Hazara youth following childhood

experiences of forced migration’. It reports findings from the first empirical study of this project. This article has been published in the *Journal of Immigrant and Refugee Studies*.

- Chapter 6 presents the manuscript entitled ‘[Re]construction of identity and resilience among Afghan and Hazara adolescents following forced migration’, which describes the second empirical study within this project. This article is under review in the *Social Identities*.
- Chapter 7 presents a discussion and conclusion integrating the findings from all three studies in relation to the work’s aims and objectives. It provides recommendations for future policies, practice and research and addresses the research’s strengths and limitations.

Chapter 2 Literature review

This chapter has two parts. In the first part, I review the definition of resilience and introduce the ‘social ecology of resilience’ as the framework I have chosen to conceptualise resilience for this study. I briefly review the extensive literature on social-ecological factors influencing resilience in young people from refugee backgrounds. I conclude this part by arguing why understanding the process of [re]construction of a positive sense of identity in the context of forced migration and as a protective factor for resilience is important.

In the second part, I argue that in the context of forced migration, identity [re]construction during adolescence becomes further complicated. I address literature presenting evidence about how trauma and displacement disrupt a young person’s identity [re]construction process. I argue that identity continuity following forced migration influences positive sense of identity. Using the concepts of ‘narrative identity’ and ‘hybrid identity’, I provide a theoretical perspective of the process of [re]construction of identity following disruptions of the kind experienced with forced migration.

I finish this chapter by addressing the theoretical and methodological gaps in existing research as a rationale for the studies in this thesis. Table 2 provides a brief summary of the chapter.

Table 2: Guide to Chapter 2

Chapter 2	Overview		
	Part 1	Resilience	Conceptualisation of resilience
			Social ecology of resilience
			Literature review
			Resilience and identity
	Part 2	Identity	Conceptualisation of identity
			Identity disruptions: trauma and forced migration
			Identity [re]construction: narrative and hybrid identities
	Research gaps	Theoretical and methodological gaps in research	

Part one: Resilience

2.1 Resilience following forced migration experiences

As discussed in Chapter 1, the youth from refugee backgrounds are likely to be exposed to multiple, sometimes long-term, traumatic experiences. A large body of literature has explored the protective factors within host countries, which promote resilience and psychosocial wellbeing among children and adolescents from refugee backgrounds (Masten, 2011; Masten & Cicchetti, 2016; Ungar, 2012). In the paragraphs that follow, I briefly describe the origin of resilience studies in the extensive research by Ann Masten, who explored resilience from the developmental perspectives of children and families, and Michael Ungar, who introduced and extended a social-ecological perspective on resilience. These two researchers have informed and influenced each other and contemporary resilience research. I discuss my reasons for choosing the social-ecological framework in my research and provide an overview of the past 20 years of research about protective factors contributing to resilience in young people from a refugee background.

2.1.1 Evolving conceptualisations of resilience

The psychological effects of climate change, natural disasters, political conflicts, economic uncertainty, and war have increased mental health experts' focus on resilience (Jafari et al., 2022; Masten, 2018; Scharpf et al., 2021). Years of developing research and theories focusing on the effect of adversity on individuals' functioning and development have led to the emergence of systematic approaches and research on human resilience (Masten, 2001). In the twentieth century, global disasters, most notably the consequences of World War II, encouraged researchers to explore the effects of such traumatic events on individual adaptation and ways to address risk or support recovery.

Several studies have been conducted on individuals, including young people, affected by various adverse experiences, including war, traumatic loss, violence, torture, and political disasters. Some research on resilience have concentrated on the person as the site of change (Masten, 2018; Ungar, 2012), treating resilience as a concept that individuals possess rather than as a process that the environment facilitates (Lipsitt & Demick, 2012; Ungar, 2011). This perspective has contributed to ambiguity in defining 'positive development' or 'adjustment' following adversity. Some studies have evaluated how family, school or community influence individual developmental processes. However, the emphasis of the studies was still on the

capabilities of the individual (see Ungar et al., 2013). The individual's qualities, including self-efficacy (Bandura, 1982), a coherent sense of self (Antonovsky, 1987) and self-esteem (Brown & Lohr, 1987), have been treated as protective factors against the effects of adversity (Werner, 1989). However, those studies did not investigate how environmental factors influenced individuals' personal qualities or how such qualities might develop in interaction within the environment. As a result of this individualistic perspective, the study of resilience in psychological sciences became primarily focused on how adversity affects the development of mental health problems (Masten, 2011). For high-risk samples and individual case studies, positive adjustment was described as invulnerability (Masten, 2001), and recovery from trauma was considered something that could be encouraged by supporting the individual in a process that activated their latent coping abilities (Ungar, 2011). This perspective gradually became recognised as problematic when working with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. The discourse of individualism represented by Western psychological frameworks began to change as evidence showed the need for a contextualised understanding of human development (Ungar & Theron, 2020). Specialists increasingly developed an understanding of resilience as abilities, procedures or results linked with positive adjustment when faced with adversity (Masten, 2018; Ungar, 2018). Research on resilience in young people also moved from concepts such as the 'invulnerable child' to the contextual factors that enable the improvement of child wellbeing following adversity (see Kuru & Ungar, 2020; Mohamed & Thomas, 2017).

2.1.2 Introduction to the social ecology of resilience

As discussed, resilience came to be understood as related to the presence of social and environmental protective factors. In newer studies, the psychological adjustment to adverse experiences of young people from a refugee background was described on the basis of the quality of their development in interaction with their environment (Motti-Stefanidi & Masten, 2020). It became clear that an ecological interpretation of resilience was needed to recognise the important role the interactions of an individual with their social environments played (Panter-Brick et al., 2018; Ungar, 2013).

Figure 1 shows the resilience SEM introduced by Ungar (2011), which is rooted in early work by Bronfenbrenner (1979). This model provides an interactional, environmental and culturally pluralistic perspective, which sees the individual central to a system that is interactive and combines numerous environmental factors. As Ungar et al. (2013) explains,

there is enough evidence to state that resilience-related processes that protect young people against trauma effects are complex and contextually and culturally dependent. Within the social-ecological framework, resilience is defined as the process of a person navigating protective resources that would support them to maintain their wellbeing when faced with adversity (Ungar, 2011). Social-ecological perspectives propose that resilience be considered a quality of the individual and layers of environmental interactions that sustain wellbeing (Ungar, 2012; Ungar et al., 2013). As illustrated in Figure 1, each layer influences and is influenced by each of the other layers.

The social-ecological perspective deliberately reduces a focus on individuals, avoiding criticising them for not thriving when access to resources is limited. It emphasises that individual resilience is supported when resources can be accessed in a culturally and contextually meaningful manner and those who dominate the resources offer a support that is indeed needed by the individual. An overemphasis on individuals ability to control their lives and other facets of resilience presumes that individuals ‘bounce back’ only by having a positive manner or similar individual factors (Ungar & Theron, 2020).

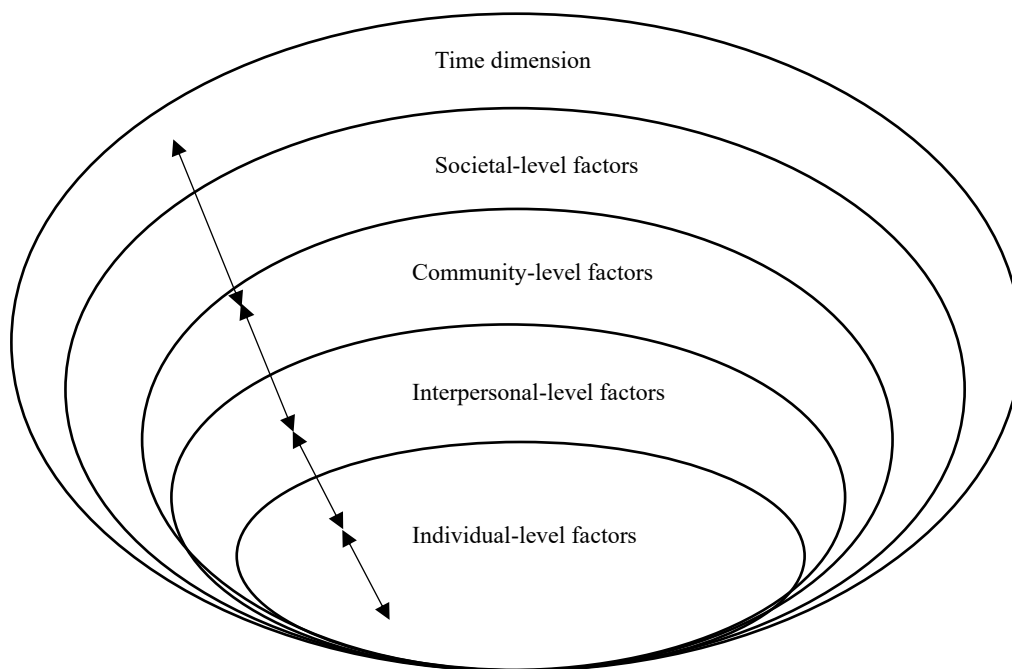


Figure 1 The social-ecological model of resilience, based on the model introduced by Ungar (2012)

2.2 Literature review on resilience in young people from refugee backgrounds

This section is mainly informed by two recent systematic and critical literature reviews of social-ecological protective factors that contribute to the resilience and mental health of young people from a refugee background. The systematic review by Scharpf et al. (2021) included 24 studies. The participants of the studies included in the review originated from 53 countries including Africa (21 countries), Asia (17), Middle and South America (10) and Eastern Europe (5). Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran, Burma, Somalia, South Sudan and Eritrea were the most common countries of origin. A review by Jafari et al. (2022) included 69 articles from the past 20 years that discuss social-ecological factors contributing to the resilience of young people from a refugee background from Afghanistan, Syria, Ukraine, Iraq, Palestine, Somalia, Kenya, Sudan, Libya, Eritrea and Cambodia. Both reviews considered studies performed in high-income countries and were focused on post-migration factors. They discussed protective factors across social-ecological levels, including those of the individual, family, school, peer relationship, community and society. I chose these studies because their categories of social-ecological protective factors are similar to those chosen for my PhD and because their focus was on the only setting where these factors are modifiable post-settlement. The findings are summarised in Table 3.

2.2.1 Individual-level factors

As indicated in Table 3, various individual-level factors are considered to be protective factors in the post-settlement period for supporting the youth who come from a refugee background. These include a positive sense of identity, high self-esteem, hope, self-regulation skills, adaptive coping strategies and religious beliefs or spirituality. In this thesis, my focus was on the positive sense of identity and its interaction with resilience. While many of these factors have been reported as separate concepts in the literature, in my epistemology in this research (see Sections 2.4 and 3.2.2), I have treated these factors as interwoven in a person's sense of identity and able to influence each other. In Section 2.4 and more extensively in Chapter 4, I argue that an individual's identity is a complex tapestry woven from various social, psychological, emotional, and spiritual elements, with these components playing integral roles in the construction of the sense of identity.

*Table 3 Supportive factors for resilience classified by the social-ecological context and stage in the refugee journey**

	Individual	Family	School	Community	Society
Pre-migration	Low or short-term exposure to traumatic events Hope	Higher socio-economic position Higher parental education Family support Low or short-term family exposure to trauma	Access to education Peer support	Lower levels of violence/discrimination experienced	Lower threats or risks of persecution or imprisonment
Peri-migration	Low-risk refugee pathways Shorter stay in a refugee camp or country of asylum Hope No experience of detention centres	Low-risk refugee pathway Shorter stay in a refugee camp or country of asylum No experience of detention centres Parental employment	Access to education Peer support	Safe and supportive community environment in the country of asylum	Positive social status in the country of asylum
Post-migration	Positive sense of identity High self-esteem Hope Self-regulation skills Adaptive coping strategies Religious beliefs or spirituality	Family cohesion, parental warmth and support Parental employment Higher parental education Parental psychological wellbeing Higher socio-economic position	Inclusive school environment Supportive and caring relationships with teachers Supportive and inclusive friendships with peers	Access to support systems in the host country with the same national or ethnic community Connection to religious communities	Legal status Access to language schools, education and employment opportunities Availability and accessibility of social resources Positive experience of acculturation Human rights and respect for diversity and equality

*The table includes results from a systematic review by Scharpf et al. (2021) and a review by Jafari et al. (2022).

For individual-level factors, for young people, resilience studies report positive personal attributions and beliefs about self to be protective factors when faced with adversity (see Marley & Mauki, 2018). Positive personal attributions include self-efficacy, perceived agency and how an individual apprehends their future (Chao, 2019; Motti-Stefanidi & Masten, 2020; Panter-Brick et al., 2018; Sleijpen et al., 2017).

Psychological theories such as Bandura's (1982) proposal of the 'centrality of the self-efficacy mechanism in human agency' underpin research on positive attributions towards the self. Theory also indicates that motivation drives learning and adjustment in individual development (Gallagher et al., 2020). Various positive beliefs, particularly self-efficacy and hope are associated with lower levels of post-traumatic stress symptoms, independent of gender and age. In studies with survivors of war and sexual violence from a refugee background, higher self-confidence in young participants was positively linked to coping with challenges after adverse experiences (Betancourt et al., 2012; Denov & Piolanti, 2020; Kahn & Denov, 2022). Being able to make meaning of traumatic experiences—a belief that life has meaning—has been the main emphasis of research on post-traumatic growth in young people from a refugee background. It is proposed that this ability can predict positive changes in how individuals view themselves, the world, and their relationships (S. Chen & Schweitzer, 2019; Sleijpen et al., 2016, 2019). Several of these studies have addressed the important role a positive sense of self plays in adjustment among young people from a refugee background. In Chapter 4, I demonstrate how other layers of the social ecology influence self-perceptions of identity in such young people.

2.2.2 Family

Research has identified factors at the family level that affect a young person's resilience following forced migration. These include family cohesion, parental warmth and support, parental employment, higher parental education, parental psychological wellbeing, and the family's socio-economic position (Rabiau, 2019; Yu et al., 2020).

The literature recognises parent-child interactions as a central influence in shaping young people's resilience (Beyers & Goossens, 2008; Masten, 2018; Ungar, 2012, 2016). Due to several roles that parents have in development of their child, caregiving practices and family cohesion are linked to all the individual protective factors, including positive views of the self (Masten, 2018; Rabiau, 2019). Many young people from refugee backgrounds look for family

support during and after trauma, something that indicates strong family cohesion (Sleijpen et al., 2015). Positive reinforcement from parents, such as encouragement for academic achievements (Jafari et al., 2022), a supportive family environment (Fazel & Betancourt, 2018; Masten, 2018; Ungar, 2016), parental warmth, secure attachment (Khanlou & Wray, 2014; Lau et al., 2018; Lawrence et al., 2019), strong family interaction and harmony (Betancourt et al., 2015) are all related to psychological resilience and a positive adaptation of young people from a refugee background. Notably, children's interaction and coping mechanism patterns may be very similar to those of their families in challenging times (Ungar, 2016). Therefore, for young people from refugee backgrounds, the psychosocial wellbeing of parents is an important factor influencing their resilience (Marley & Mauki, 2018). The socio-economic positions of parents within the host country, including access to higher education and employment opportunities, also are critical for parental mental health (Montgomery, 2010; Yu et al., 2020).

Beyond experiences associated with parenting difficulties (e.g. health problems or child behavioural problems), parents with refugee backgrounds may face additional stresses related to pre- and post-migration experiences (Lewig et al., 2010; Rabiau, 2019). Even so, when a beneficial environment provides sufficient resources, the probability of healthy family functioning and adjustment is higher (Masten, 2018). For instance, in a study with Somalis from a refugee background, community support and formal family intervention programs influenced family communication skills, parenting techniques and mutual understanding between parents and children (Betancourt et al., 2015). A higher sociodemographic status for a family (something that depends on resources available in the host society) makes resources available within that family that can promote resilience in children (Yu et al., 2020).

2.2.3 School and peer relationships

Among interpersonal factors outside the family, positive relationships with schools and peer relationships are the primary resources for development and acculturation in young people from refugee backgrounds (Schachner et al., 2018; Ungar et al., 2013). Children from refugee backgrounds can face difficulties in their daily interactions in school (e.g. racism, bullying, language barriers; (Scharpf et al., 2021). Caring and compassionate relationships with teachers and peers are a crucial factor in supporting such young people.

Peer support is an important factor for adaptation following experiences of adversity, particularly during adolescence (Lipsitt & Demick, 2012; Ungar, 2011). In the context of the refugee experience, friendships with members the ethnic community as well as the host country are a positive factor for resilience (Marley & Mauki, 2018). In a study by Kanji and Cameron (2010), young people from Afghanistan who were living in Canada suggested that friendships in school supported their sense of belonging to the school. Similarly, an Australian study with children from a refugee background and multiple ethnic backgrounds emphasised the value of positive relationships with peers and school-related experiences in supporting a sense of achievement and confidence (Lawrence et al., 2019). Better school achievements and the positive role of peer support predicted greater wellbeing and psychosocial adjustment (Çelik & İçduygu, 2019; Khawaja et al., 2017; Schachner et al., 2018). Peers can act as resilience-promoting agents by offering social acceptance, a positive sense of identity and a sense of belonging (Hayes & Endale, 2018; Scharpf et al., 2021).

Beyond peer support, the school experience and resources provided to support students from a refugee background also affect resilience. In a study with Sudanese young people from a refugee background in multiple contexts (Rana et al., 2011), support from the school was associated with positive school experiences, a sense of belonging and collective pride in educational achievement. Resources and support (e.g. scholarships) predicted positive school outcomes for young people from a refugee background. In Kanji and Cameron's (2010) study with Afghan young people from a refugee background in Canada, participants recognised several factors, including what their school provided to them as resources (e.g. computers and books) as supportive factors. Notably, schools that value diversity can bridge the gap that may exist between the original and host cultures for young people from a refugee background (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2018).

Overall, it was found that a safe, supportive, and inclusive environment at school that addresses immigration challenges and promotes a sense of belonging could promote resilience and higher self-esteem in children from a refugee background (Lau et al., 2018; Zwi et al., 2018).

2.2.4 Community-level factors

Social-ecological research suggests that various community-level factors foster psychological resilience in young people from refugee backgrounds (Pieloch et al., 2016).

Building social capital and a sense of belonging to their host community is crucial in promoting wellbeing in such young people (Chen et al., 2017; Oppedal et al., 2020). Community supports such as recreation centres (e.g. sporting centres), refugee settlement agencies, cultural organisations and same-ethnicity and host social groups provide young people from a refugee background with opportunities to sustain a sense of competence and agency, make friends and build resilience (Aldrich & Meyer, 2015; Scharpf et al., 2021; Young & Block, 2022).

Same-ethnicity and host social groups, along with mixed-culture groups and religious groups, were found to facilitate the building of social capital and a sense of belonging in young people from a refugee background (Jafari et al., 2022; Scharpf et al., 2021). Studies done in communities where young people from a refugee background were linked to community support indicated that young people with experiences of social inclusion in the host country could sustain their psychological wellbeing (Marley & Mauki, 2018). In a study with young Afghan females from a refugee background, relationships within the ethnic community were linked to better adjustment to post-settlement challenges in Australia (Iqbal et al., 2012). Likewise, while dealing with discrimination in host societies, community support facilitated young people from a refugee background develop a sense of belonging, a positive sense of identity and higher self-worth (Edge et al., 2014; Maehler et al., 2020; Yohani et al., 2019). For young people who fled as unaccompanied minors, better adjustment and a greater sense of belonging have been linked to community support (Brook & Ottemöller, 2020; Clacherty, 2021). For example, in a US study with Burundian and Liberian adolescents from a refugee background, community engagement was linked to a greater sense of connection and belonging (Weine et al., 2014).

Few studies also emphasized how important settlement agencies are in promoting resilience (Simich & Andermann, 2014; Weine et al., 2014). The types of settlement agency and the services they provide influence young people's resilience (Simich & Andermann, 2014). For young people, their resilience has been associated with factors including workers' professionalism and a capability to develop reliable connections. According to Geltman and Cochran (2005), young people from a refugee background can flourish when settlement agency employees use a comprehensive and inclusive approach that engages the community.

Religious practices and personal faith were also suggested to be of importance for developing resilience in some young people from a refugee background (Vinde vogel, 2017).

By offering a strong sense of community and belonging, hope and meaning as well as coping mechanisms, religious beliefs could provide young people with meanings in difficult time and support them maintain a sense of inner peace (Chow, et al., 2021; Pieloch, et.al., 2016). In a study in the Netherlands, religion was suggested as an important factor promoting resilience in young people from a refugee background, in that it provided social support and guidance and helped young people cope with stress. For some young people, religion acted as a source of hope, and God was considered their confidant (Sleijpen et al., 2017).

Participation in sports can also provide health and social benefits to young people from a refugee background by mediating a sense of inclusion and belonging in the host society (Young & Block, 2022). Sports could serve as a catalyst for young refugees to build social capital by fostering connections, skills, empowerment, and cross-cultural understanding. By creating opportunities for engagement and collaboration both on and off the field, sports programs could play a vital role in promoting social integration, resilience, and well-being among refugee youth (Doidge, et al., 2020; Smith, et al., 2019). In a study conducted in Australia by Block and Gibbs (2017), short-term engagement in sports was found beneficial. Young people's active and long-term participation in sports is likely to support integration by fostering social connectedness.

For younger children, more positive feelings were reported when children could access free, safe playgrounds (MacMillan et al., 2015). This is in line with a study with young people from Afghanistan in Canada, where participants reported a greater sense of agency and adaptation when they could play in their own space (Kanji & Cameron, 2010).

2.2.5 Societal-level factors

Societal factors can have a direct effect through the media and policies shaping the everyday interactions of young people from a refugee background (Ungar & Theron, 2020). An important societal factor is having a legal status in the receiving country; this facilitates access to resources, employment and education opportunities, assisting young people and their families with positive developmental and mental health outcomes (Motti-Stefanidi & Masten, 2020). Studies with people from immigrant and refugee backgrounds in multiple settings, including Australia, confirm that a better socioeconomic position and access to services predict psychological wellbeing in adolescents from refugee backgrounds (Lau et al., 2018; Lawrence et al., 2019; Liamputtong & Kurban, 2018; Zwi et al., 2018).

The recent literature has emphasised how inclusive host society can enable young people from a refugee background to develop a sense of belonging and overall wellbeing (Kuru & Ungar, 2020; Marley & Mauki, 2018). Correa-Velez et al. (2010) suggested that policies and programs related to settlement can be made efficient when they are rooted in a wider, inclusive society. Socioculturally inclusive policies and contexts have been suggested to facilitate the acculturation process for young people and their families (dAburu et al., 2019; Guler & Berman, 2019; Yu et al., 2020). Research on social policies in host countries has shown how societal factors allow young people to maintain their connections with their ethnic culture and religion while adapting to the new norms and culture of the host society. As an example, Earnest et al. (2015) reported that in Australia, young people from a refugee background who shared their ethnic origin with their foster caregivers or guardians were better adjusted to their new life. Similarly, in another study in Scotland, African, Asian and Eastern European young people recognised the important role of preserving connections with their cultures of origin (Hopkins & Hill, 2010).

Policies promoting multiculturalism in host societies' education systems were reported to have a positive impact on the experiences of students from refugee backgrounds and their teachers (Sheikh & Anderson, 2018). For example, in research by Abacioglu et al. (2022), Australian teachers who received professional development (e.g. supporting students from migrant and refugee background), especially during their service years, had more positive attitudes to and beliefs about multicultural ideas and practices than did teachers who did not receive such development.

2.2.6 The passage of time

In the ecological theory proposed by Bronfenbrenner, time, as a combination of “historical” and “developmental time”, and its effect on individuals and the environment in which they reside are depicted by the chronosphere (or ‘chronosystem’). (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007) “Historical time” is the broad sociohistorical context in which an individual lives, and includes cultural changes, historical events, and the changing of the societal norms. “Developmental time” is the transitions across an individual’s lifespan, which may include starting school, moving to a new city or personal life events. Studies suggest that in different developmental stages, different factors can influence the adjustment of young people from refugee backgrounds (Hodes & Vostanis, 2019). Some studies found that increased cognitive perception in adolescents from a refugee background was related to better coping

mechanisms and problem-solving skills. Cognitive maturity was also related to an ability to access more resources, which could ultimately protect such adolescents from the adverse psychological outcomes of trauma (Lee et al., 2017).

Another crucial time-related factor is the duration of stay in the host country that may influence how integrated an individual is with the new culture (Berry & Sam, 2016). Studies have found that achieving stability in terms of legal residency, housing, learning the language, and integrating into school during the later phases of settlement contributed to the overall adjustment of young people from a refugee background (Berry et al., 2006; Lau et al., 2018).

2.3 Resilience and identity

As discussed, research over the past two decades has demonstrated that, for young people, a positive sense of identity (as a protective factor that operates at the individual level), along with a supportive family, school, peers, community, and society, mitigates the likely negative impacts of adverse experiences and enables individuals to navigate paths to resilience (Marley & Mauki, 2018; Masten, 2018; Ungar, 2018). Nonetheless, the following issues have received less attention: (a) the identity disruptions caused by trauma and displacement, (b) the processes of identity [re]construction and development of a positive sense of identity in young people from refugee backgrounds after settlement, (c) the interaction of a young person's identity with their social ecology and (d) the role of post-migration identity [re]construction in developing a sense of resilience.

In the second part of this chapter, I focus on theories of identity, trauma and displacement and formulate the research aims and questions for this PhD study.

Part two: Identity

2.4 Identity in the context of forced migration experiences

In Sections 2.4.1 to 2.4.3, I explain how I have conceptualised identity and identity [re]construction in this research and present arguments about how the experiences of trauma and forced migration disrupt identity [re]construction. I then discuss the need for identity continuity and the processes of [re]construction of identity according to the narrative and hybrid identity theories.

2.4.1 Conceptualisation of identity

Identity is a term frequently used in a range of disciplines with different methodology and theoretical frameworks, which has resulted in different, inconsistent definitions and unclarity about the concept. Even within some disciplines, varying views on and approaches to studying identity are used (Schwartz et al., 2011, p. 2). In the introduction of the *Handbook of identity theory and research*, Schwartz et al. (2011, p. 2) ask this crucial question: ‘What is identity? Is it a self-view? Is it how others view a person? Is it both, or something different?’ Regardless of different points of view in answering these questions, generally it is understood that identity is constructed within a sociocultural context (Hogg et al., 2017; Karam et al., 2020; Kira et al., 2018; Leone et al., 2014; Vygotsky, 1978). From the social construction perspective, identity is formed and maintained by social processes determined by social structures (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). This is a dynamic process that continues across the person’s life and includes crafting and negotiating several aspects of identity, that include but are not limited to personal values, beliefs, interests, roles and affiliations, and are influenced by the social, cultural and environmental context (Schwartz et al., 2011, pp. 2 – 12).

One important aspect when conceptualising identity is to consider the difference between what influences identity and the ways in which individuals choose to express or portray their identity to others (Schwartz et al., 2011, p. 3). As discussed, identity is shaped by interaction with family; peers; communities; ethnicity; religion; the broader social, political, and historical context; personal experiences; and self-reflection. At the same time, an individual chooses to present aspects of their identity differently in different social contexts (Chao, 2019; Mijic, 2022; Schwartz et al., 2011, pp. 7–11). This matters, as research shows, for example, that although membership in a community is generated by the self-identification of an individual as part of a group, it is not firm or absolute. Individuals negotiate between various aspects of their identity and choose different self-descriptions depending on their situations and contexts (Stryker & Serpe, 1994).

The concept of identity negotiation (Swann, 1987) refers to the processes of conferring meaning to components that form identity, that is, the question of ‘who is who’ in interactions with social environment. The [re]construction processes of one’s identity, involving either embracing or distancing oneself from certain characteristics, are associated with the power dynamics between central and marginalised groups in societies. These processes are

influenced by (post)colonialism, globalisation, and the complex nature of redefining one's identity in the context of migration (both voluntary and forced) (Bhandari, 2022; La Barbera, 2014; Mijic, 2022).

Understanding how a young person from a refugee background perceives their identity in a positive sense is complex and encompasses how this identity is constructed in interaction with their sociocultural environment. In Section 2.4.2, I explore how trauma and displacement disrupt aspects of identity and address theories of how people [re]construct those aspects following disruptions.

2.4.2 Identity disruptions: trauma and [forced] migration during adolescence

Although identity development is a continuous process throughout life, adolescence has been understood as a critical stage for identity formation (Erikson, 1994; Syed & Fish, 2018). Individuals give meaning and direction to their lives in adolescence by determining goals, roles, skills, beliefs, and values (Arnett, 2015; Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1980; McAdams, 2018; McLean & Syed, 2015). In the process of identity construction, it is common for an adolescent to exhibit confusion, irritability, and discomfort (Côté & Levine, 2014; Kroger et al., 2010; Ryan & Deci, 2012). As discussed in Chapter 1, children and adolescents who have experienced forced migration have usually been exposed to various psychosocial risk factors, including traumatic events and adverse experiences related to settlement in host societies. Identity construction can be disrupted both by these experiences of trauma (Berman et al., 2020; Waterman, 2020) and by adverse events following [forced] migration (Mijic, 2022; Schwartz et al., 2011). In Sections 2.4.2.1 and 2.4.2.2, I briefly examine how these disruptions have been addressed in the literature.

2.4.2.1 *Identity and trauma*

Traumatic events can have relatively immediate disruptive effects: feelings of loss or grief, severe stress, mood disturbances, hypervigilance or difficulty concentrating (Fazel et al., 2012). The effects of traumatic events on identity construction are much more variable. As Berman (2016) argues, adversity, trauma and identity development influence each other. Some studies have suggested that trauma can disturb identity development (Tay et al., 2015; Zheng & Lawson, 2015). As discussed earlier, the construction of a person's identity involves creating and negotiating aspects that include personal values, beliefs, interests, and goals. Traumatic events, such as war or witnessing mass killings and persecutions, challenges an

individual's viewpoints about the world (e.g. that the world is a safe place or that human nature is good), and certain goals can become less reachable (e.g. because of disruption to education with displacement; Berman et al., 2020).

Additionally, other research suggest that identity can function as a lens through which individuals understand and make meaning of their experiences of trauma. Kira et al. (2018) have proposed an identity trauma model that explains how the individual's perception of their identity can ease the negative consequences of trauma on mental health. Beliefs about the world, including religious and political beliefs, position traumas in a specific viewpoint (Kira, 2019; Kira et al., 2018; Sleijpen et al., 2015), and this can make them either easier to endure (e.g. as a result of post-traumatic growth) or harder (e.g. due to experiences of powerlessness).

From a holistic perspective on the hypothetically equal link between trauma and identity, some researchers argue that traumatic events can be integrated into a person's identity when those events become a significant moment in their life. Experience of trauma can thus not only influence pre-existing meanings but also influence a person's present beliefs and prospects of their future (Berman, 2016; Berman et al., 2020).

Beyond their individual experiences of trauma, people from refugee backgrounds may also experience inter- and transgenerational trauma related to ethnic, national, religious, sexual and gender aspects of their identity. The term intergenerational trauma typically refers to the transfer of trauma and its effects from a generation to its immediate descendants (i.e. from parents to children). It often involves the direct transmission of trauma within the family and can manifest as the passing down of behaviours, emotional responses and coping mechanisms related to the original trauma (Castro-Vale et al., 2019). A systematic review by Sangalang et al. (2017) emphasised the effects of parental trauma transmission on children's health and wellbeing.

Transgenerational trauma is a broader term, encompassing the transmission of trauma across multiple generations. The underlying concept recognises that the impacts of trauma can persist across several generations, influencing the psychological, emotional, and physiological wellbeing of people who did not experience the original trauma (Dalgaard & Montgomery, 2017).

Despite these differences in meaning, the terms are sometimes used interchangeably, and their exact definitions can vary depending on the context. Both terms emphasise that trauma's psychological and emotional consequences can extend beyond the individuals who directly experienced the traumatic events (Goodman, 2013; Yehuda & Lehrner, 2018).

2.4.2.2 Identity and [forced] migration

[Forced] migration has also been discussed in theories of identity as a major influence on the identity development of a young person. To better understand how migration, particularly forced migration, influences an individual's identity, we need first to understand the context in which migration proceeds in today's world. Globalisation in the post-colonial, post-World War II world has played an important role in forcing people to leave their homelands. The legacies of colonialism and war have left many regions with social and economic inequality, instability and unresolved conflicts that continue to drive people to seek refuge or migrate in search of better opportunities elsewhere (Castles, 2002, 2003).

In the introduction to a book on identity and migration, La Barbera (2014) discusses how the arrival of migrants in the receiving country involves a comprehensive reconstruction of identity. When [forced] migrants leave their home countries, they may lose social status and networks as well as their family connections. In the host country, they also may find themselves deprived of a personal history or recognised image. Confronted with an unfamiliar world of meanings, they may feel lost and isolated without familiar reference points. Despite efforts to integrate, some people from refugee backgrounds continue to feel like outsiders. This experience of exclusion can stand in contrast to the idealised image of the host country as a place of opportunity (Ferrante, 2014).

A sense of belonging emerges as a crucial part of identity reconstruction processes for migrants and people from a refugee background (Milic, 2014). Belonging is a process that involves appropriating and reinterpreting social boundaries, something that is influenced by acceptance or rejection from those on the other side of the boundary. The 'other' and 'self' categories are not fixed and constant but rather represent situational and adaptable references used by individuals to define themselves in a larger interactive context (La Barbera, 2014). However, a [forced] migrant's longing for roots, stability and a sense of belonging goes beyond a binary division of 'us' and 'them'. It involves levels of identification that challenge the traditional notion of 'home' by recognising that it can be associated with the place of

birth, upbringing, family residence or the place where one currently lives, either exclusively or simultaneously. A [forced] migrant can thus have multiple homes that only partially align with physical locations (Caputo, 2014; Mohanty, 2003). The fact of having several homes means that adolescents and emerging adults, in particular, must search for a definition of self in diverse cultures, which makes the [re]construction of identity a more complex process (Jensen et al., 2011).

2.4.3 Theories of identity: searching for identity continuity

The term identity continuity refers to preserving and maintaining one's sense of self, personal history and cultural or social affiliations, even in the face of traumatic experiences or the feeling of being uprooted from one's country of origin. It encompasses individuals finding ways to sustain their sense of self by making meaning, retaining their values and traditions after displacement—because of forced migration, conflict, or other forms of upheaval—while adjusting to new ones (Ghorashi, 2003; Omer & Alon, 1994).

The concept of identity continuity acknowledges that trauma and displacement can disrupt individuals' connections to their familiar environment, social networks, and cultural practices. However, it emphasises that individuals (and communities) actively engage in strategies to retain a sense of continuity and coherence in their identities. This can involve a negotiation between the past and the present in which individuals seek to reconcile their previous sense of self with the realities of their new environment. Identity continuity can provide stability, belonging and resilience after displacement. It can help individuals retain a sense of agency and self-empowerment, enabling them to navigate the challenges of adapting to new cultural, social and economic contexts while preserving aspects of their core identity (Ghorashi, 2003; Omer & Alon, 1994).

In Sections 2.4.3.1 and 2.4.3.2, I explore how a young person can attempt to [re]construct their sense of identity following the refugee experience to maintain identity continuity. I discuss narrative identity to provide an understanding of how an individual [re]constructs their sense of self following experiences of trauma. I then outline hybrid identity theory, used to understand identity [re]construction in a context where a young person is exposed to a plurality of cultures and must adjust.

2.4.3.1 Narrative identity and meaning-making following trauma

In the past two decades, the concept that people form their identity by constructing stories about their lives has arisen in the social sciences (McLean et al., 2020). McAdams (2011) provided a theoretical model of narrative identity. He defined narrative identity as a reconstruction of the past and an imagining of the future. This perception could provide a person's life with harmony, determination and meaning. A person's life story creates memories and intended goals for different episodes, thereby forming a consistent identity across time. McAdams suggested that while individuals start to position their lives within narrative identities in their late adolescence and early adulthood, development of the narrative identity carries on throughout life. In creating life stories, a person draws profoundly on different features of their social life, including their dominant cultural norms and themes (McAdams, 2018).

In a context when people face adversity, McAdams and McLean (2013) argue that people construct narrative to make sense of pain in their lives. In the first step, termed adaptation, a person trying to understand the negative experience, thinking profoundly about their feelings towards that experience, how it happened, what might be the consequences, and how it might change the person's life. The second step, termed development, is where the person makes meaning of the suffering, articulates it and translate it to a positive purpose. Making meaning seems specifically vital when a person is facing challenging and stressful experiences (King & Hicks, 2021).

2.4.3.2 Hybridity and identity in a plurality of cultures

The concept of hybridity has its roots in the works of Bhabha (1994), who introduced this concept as a third space in the context of coloniality and post-coloniality. Bhabha (1994, 2012) explained hybridity as developing from the process in which colonial powers attempt to reshape the identity of the colonised in a uniform global framework, resulting in something that is simultaneously recognisable and novel. He introduced the third space as a political discourse characterised by in-betweenness and hybridity. Bhabha investigated the emergence of a hybrid cultural identity in colonised individuals as they encountered colonial domination and inequality. According to his analysis, a new hybrid identity arises from a cultural negotiation between the coloniser and the colonised (Bhabha, 2012; Bhandari, 2022).

An intersection of hybrid identity and forced migration occurs when individuals or communities who have experienced forced migration develop hybrid identities as a result of their interactions with new cultures, environments and circumstances (Radford & Hetz, 2021). The process of [re]adapting to one or multiple new societies while maintaining elements of their original identity can create unique, hybrid identities that reflect individuals' past and present experiences. Bhabha (2012) emphasised that the past and present play crucial roles in cultural identity through continuous interaction in the interstitial cultural space. This space of in-betweenness does not merely fuse two opposites; instead, it embodies a creative and adaptable ambiguity, encompassing simultaneous feelings of repulsion and desire. It exists at the interface between the self and the other or between the unequal polarities of the colonial present (Boehmer, 2005). Similarly, forced migration generates an in-between space of cultural encounters and produces a hybrid, multifaceted cultural identity in young people from refugee backgrounds. However, this process, which involves acculturation and integration into the new society (Berry, 2005), is complex and interacts with multiple sociopolitical and historical factors within the host countries (Guler & Berman, 2019; Joycea & Liamputtongb, 2017; Kehoe et al., 2019).

2.5 The research gap

As was briefly addressed in Chapter 1, there remain gaps in theory and methodology in the study of identity [re]construction in young people from refugee backgrounds and its relation to resilience.

In theoretical terms, there has been growing interest in gaining a better insight into what influences identity construction and self-perception among young people in the aftermath of forced migration (see Denov & Piolanti, 2020; Karam et al., 2020; Oppedal et al., 2020; Rabiau, 2019). Nonetheless, limited studies have focused on how the various layers of interaction influence an individual's perception of their identity in their sociocultural context (Mijic, 2022) and how this may relate to the experience of resilience (Waterman, 2020). It is necessary to have a holistic perspective to understand identity [re]construction and identity continuity when young people have experienced multiple disruptions to their sense of identity.

In terms of methodological gaps, the first is that knowledge about identity [re]construction following migration experiences has mostly been obtained from studies of adults, with only a

few being conducted with adolescents (Guler & Berman, 2019; Miller, 2019; Oppedal et al., 2020). Also, studies about adolescents' experiences following settlement are predominantly quantitative (see Scharpf et al., 2021) or draw on data gathered from parents, caregivers and teachers without including the voices of younger people themselves (Jafari et al., 2022). While quantitative research is valuable in providing a general understanding of mental health and resilience, understanding the complexity of identity [re]construction and its interaction with resilience requires a methodological approach with more depth (Schwartz et al., 2011; Ungar, 2003).

Beyond these general gaps, there are more particular gaps in the study of the effects of forced migration on young people from Afghanistan following their settlement in the host countries. First, there is a lack of qualitative studies with young Afghans and Hazaras to understand how the intersection of trauma, displacement and the experiences of settlement in a culturally different context has influenced their sense of identity and resilience. Some studies with adolescents from Afghanistan have also included adolescents from other countries and cultures. Therefore, they lack a culturally informed lens, which is fundamental to understanding identity [re]construction and perceptions of resilience (Theron et al., 2015; Ungar, 2013). The few studies that have been conducted focusing on identity [re]construction of Afghans and Hazaras in Australia were conducted with adults and in English. This could have excluded the voices of adolescents and their parents who have arrived recently and have limited language proficiency (Neve, 2022; Radford & Hetz, 2021).

2.6 Summary

In Chapter 2, I have reviewed how resilience arose as a research concept. In Part 1, I introduced the SEM framework for conceptualising resilience, reviewed the extensive literature on social-ecological factors affecting resilience and explored research about how the family, school, community, and society influence resilience in young people from refugee backgrounds. I argued for the importance of understanding the process of [re]construction of a positive sense of identity in the context of forced migration and as a protective factor for resilience.

In Part 2, I argued that identity [re]construction is complex in the context of forced migration, particularly for adolescents because of their developmental stage. I summarised literature results covering how trauma and displacement interrupt a young person's identity

[re]construction process. I proposed that a positive sense of identity is related to identity continuity following forced migration. Using the narrative identity and hybrid identity theories, I outlined the process of [re]construction of identity following the disruptions associated with forced migration.

I closed Chapter 2 by addressing the theoretical and methodological gaps in the literature and providing the rationale for the studies in this thesis. In Chapter 3, I outline the research questions and design intended to address these gaps.

Chapter 3 Research design

In Chapter 2, I presented the literature underpinning this study. In Chapter 3, I provide the research design, research questions, methodology, research paradigm and theoretical framework chosen for the studies included in this thesis. I describe the techniques for collecting and analysing data. I also emphasise the main ethical considerations for studies with participants and conclude the chapter by reflecting on my positionality and research journey.

3.1 Research questions

As discussed in Chapter 2, the exploratory literature review has identified several gaps, including a lack of understanding of how the social ecology influences the process of [re]construction of a positive sense of identity in the aftermath of disruptions caused by forced migration. Insufficient qualitative research addresses identity [re]construction from a holistic perspective that includes adolescents' voices. Additionally, there is limited research on the identity [re]construction of Afghans and Hazaras in Australia and its interaction with a perception of resilience. Existing research with Hazaras and Afghans has primarily concentrated on adults and has been conducted in English. This PhD research aims to address the gaps identified using a scoping review (Chapter 4) and two empirical studies (Chapters 5 and 6). The research questions are:

1. How do young people from refugee backgrounds perceive, describe and [re]construct specific aspects of their identity in interaction with their social ecology?
2. How do childhood experiences of forced migration influence perceptions of identity and resilience in adolescents and young adults from Afghanistan?
3. How do Hazara and Afghan adolescents and young adults perceive their identity and resilience in their interaction with their social ecology in Australia?

To begin, I elaborate on the design of the scoping review that addresses the first research question. I then describe the research design for two empirical studies that address the second and third research questions.

3.2 The scoping review

3.2.1 Methodology

Study 1 of this PhD thesis is a scoping review that explored the existing literature on the sense of identity in young people from a refugee background.

Munn et al. (2018) have suggested that, in contrast to systematic reviews, scoping reviews are useful to determine the extent and focus of the literature on a specific topic and can offer an overview of the number of available studies and their general or specified emphasis.

Scoping reviews are beneficial for developing evidence when it remains uncertain how to formulate more precise questions that a specific systematic review can address effectively (Armstrong et al., 2011). They can also provide insights into the types of evidence shaping practices in the field and the methodologies employed in research.

Munn et al. (2018, p. 2) summarise the indications for a scoping review as being to:

‘Identify the types of available evidence in a given field, clarify key concepts/definitions in the literature, examine how research is conducted on a certain topic or field, identify key characteristics or factors related to a concept as a precursor to a systematic review and identify and analyze knowledge gaps.’

I chose a scoping review to inform the development of a research agenda needed to advance our understanding of how a young people’s identity is [re]construction in the context of forced displacement. Conducting a scoping review allowed me to focus on describing the existing literature to provide a grounded understanding before conducting the two empirical studies.

3.2.2 Theoretical framework: the social-ecological model

To assist me in addressing the literature gap and constructing a holistic picture, I applied the SEM to categorise my findings. In Chapter 2, I discussed how the SEM conceptualises the individual as being at the core of a system that is interactive and encompasses different environmental settings (see Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Kuru & Ungar, 2020). Having the SEM as the theoretical framework can provide a comprehensive picture of the multilayered social,

institutional, and cultural contexts of young people from a refugee background and how these influence their sense of identity. Using the SEM, I was able to identify ways in which disruption in any layer of this social ecology may have adverse effects on young persons' identity [re]construction and how they may be shielded from them by protective factors (Hawkins et al., 2021; Keygnaert et al., 2012; McLeroy et al., 1988).

3.2.3 Methods

Three questions directed the search procedure and analysis for the scoping review:

1. Which characteristics of identity are emphasised in empirical studies with young people from refugee backgrounds?
2. How do young people from refugee backgrounds perceive and describe specific aspects of their identity?
3. How are interactions with young people's environment(s) related to these perceptions?

For the scoping review, I searched five electronic databases: SociINDEX, PsychINFO, Medline, MAIS (Informit) and CINAHL Complete, using the following combinations of keywords: (refugee* OR asylum* OR displaced*) AND (child* OR adolescen* OR teen* OR youth* OR young* OR kid*) AND (identity*). Peer-reviewed primary research studies that included people aged 18 years old or younger from a refugee background were included.

To permit a focus on contemporary displacements of people, research prior to 2000 was excluded. Other exclusion criteria applied were theses, reviews, and conceptual papers; studies with migrants without a refugee background; and studies that only included participants over 18. The literature search was conducted in April and May 2021 and yielded $n = 1,094$ articles. The citations were downloaded into an Endnote library, then imported into Covidence. After removing duplicates ($n = 300$), and screening titles and abstracts ($n = 794$) I assessed the remaining full-text articles ($n = 102$) for eligibility. Overall, 28 articles met the eligibility criteria.

The headings used for extracting data from the studies in Excel were as follows: author information, journal, year of publication, title, country of study, language of the study, focus area of identity, age range, ethnicity, years in the host country, gender, research design,

research method, sample size, data analysis and key findings. The search strategy and the summary of extracted information and findings are presented in greater detail in Chapter 4, which comprises this published article: Shahimi, F., Block, K. & Alisic, E. (2023). Sense of identity in young people with refugee backgrounds: A scoping review. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 107378. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2023.107378>

3.2.4 Data analysis

For the scoping review, a codebook approach to thematic analysis (TA) was used to theme synthesis and identification (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This approach involves creating a set of codes for classifying and analysing themes. The analysis included data familiarisation and coding. The latter which was based on the various aspects of identity addressed and findings about factors associated with identity. The themes were developed and organised using the SEM. As Braun and Clarke (2023) have outlined, codebook themes generally summarise participants' common opinions about the subject. The method of theme development used in this study assisted in understanding how identity has been conceptualised in the literature and the factors that influence perceptions of identity for young people from refugee backgrounds.

3.3 Empirical studies

3.3.1 Methodology

3.3.1.1 Qualitative and exploratory study

Acknowledging the complex experience of forced migration, I chose a qualitative method for the empirical components of my PhD research project (Study 2 and Study 3). Qualitative research concentrates on the social world and addresses how individuals make sense of their world and their personal experiences (Holloway & Galvin, 2017, p. 5). How individuals experience and understand reality may change with time and in differing social contexts (Dew, 2007). Therefore, using a qualitative method for research is suitable for understanding individuals' meanings, interpretations, and subjective experiences in their prior and current social contexts (Hesse-Biber & Flowers, 2019). This approach has value when we focus on the experiences of silenced, othered or marginalised people in a broader dominant social setting. As outlined by Hesse-Biber (2012) 'Qualitative methods ask not only "what is it?" but, more importantly, "explain it to me—how, why, what's the process, what's the

significance?''' (p.28). Using qualitative methods also provides a better research outcome by avoiding generalisation and requiring researchers to account for the bias inherent in their social location. A body of research has discussed the appropriateness of qualitative methods for studying identity and resilience, particularly by addressing the power it adds to participants' voices (Schwartz et al., 2011; Ungar, 2003). Here, using the in-depth nature of the qualitative approach in the two empirical studies allowed me to use the participants' words to explore their lived experiences and gain a reflective understanding of childhood resilience and identity in young Afghans from refugee backgrounds in Australia.

Despite their strengths, it is essential to consider the limitations of qualitative methods. Some significant limitations include subjectivity, limited generalisability due to small sample sizes and potential bias in data collection (Queirós et al., 2017). In sections 3.3.2 to 3.3.5 and 7.5 of the conclusion chapter, I will elaborate on how I considered these limitations in different stages of this PhD research.

3.3.1.2 Epistemology and research paradigm

By navigating the methodological literature, I have attempted to better understand how my ontological and epistemological perspective might determine my research paradigm. I first identified social constructionism as best reflecting my epistemological position. Social constructionism is based on the idea that humans shape social reality. Our social and cultural contexts and shared beliefs, values and experiences shape our understandings of reality, which may change over time and in different contexts (Mijic, 2022). Social constructionism originated in sociology and has been associated with postmodern approaches in qualitative research; it suggests that language predates concepts and lets individuals structure how their world is experienced (Andrews, 2012). This approach provided me with a basis for understanding how young people from Afghan refugee backgrounds create their specific realities and views of resilience and identity through patterns of interactions with society, history, ethnic culture, religion, norms, and the meanings they give to such interactions. As discussed in Section 3.4, this approach also recognises the active role of the researcher as a product of society and, therefore, positions me as a co-constructor of knowledge and realities (see Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Galbin, 2014).

While social constructionism was the research paradigm underpinning the research, I also drew on post-structuralism as a suitable paradigm for the analysis with Hazara young adults

(presented in Chapter 5). Post-structuralism primarily examines how language and discourse shape our understanding of reality. It questions the stability of meanings and emphasises that language is not a transparent medium but constructs our understanding of the world. Post-structuralism, heavily influenced by theorists like Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, emphasises power, subjectivity, and the deconstruction of binary oppositions in understanding social phenomena (Miller, 1998); in this research, the social phenomena of interest include vulnerability or resilience. Foucault (1980) theorised that identity continues to develop within a context that is shaped and represented by culture, history, power, and ideology. In this understanding, a person's personal and social identity and perception of self are actively defined and redefined through their interactions with the sociocultural setting (Penuel & Wertsch, 1995). A post-structuralist perspective emphasises that not only the context in which the identity is constructed is important, but also how a person gives meaning to and understands their interactions with that context (Chao, 2019).

These two approaches, social constructionism, and post-structuralism, have key differences in ontology and power dynamics. However, I combined them as methodological lenses in this study for a rich and nuanced understanding of identity and resilience in young adults (with a heavier emphasis on discourse and power) and adolescents (with extensions beyond language to examine various social processes in meaning-making). Both approaches challenge traditional notions of reality, truth and identity and emphasise the role of language, discourse, and power in shaping our understanding of the world.

3.3.1.3 Theoretical framework: the social-ecological model

For both empirical studies (Study 2 and Study 3), I chose the SEM as the theoretical framework. As discussed in Chapter 2, Ungar (2012) developed the SEM based on Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model to advance understanding of the influences of social, contextual, and cultural factors on the resilience of an individual. While the SEM treats having a positive sense of identity as an individual factor, my approach to understanding how a positive sense of identity is perceived and [re]constructed following forced migration is also informed by each layer of the model.

3.3.2 Methods

The empirical studies with young adults, adolescents and their parents were exploratory and focused on addressing the second and third research questions. The first of these two

studies focused on the experiences of young adults, while the second addressed adolescents' and their parents' perceptions of resilience and [re]construction of their sense of identity following their experiences of forced migration to Australia. Exploratory research was appropriate for both these studies because there are few studies with young people from Afghanistan in Australia focusing on their sense of identity and resilience (see Neve, 2021; Radford & Hetz, 2021).

In Sections 3.3.2.1–3.3.2.4, I outline the methods for the empirical studies. I have combined the descriptions of strategies that were common to the two studies (such as recruitment strategies) and given separate descriptions for those that were different (such as data collection procedures).

3.3.2.1 Sampling and recruitment strategies

For recruitment for studies with adolescents, parents, and young adults, I used my personal network and community members known to them in Melbourne and Adelaide. I conducted online and phone meetings and one in-person meeting at a Dari language school to introduce myself and my PhD research. The initial contact with the community was through an invitation letter (see Appendix A) in English and Farsi for participants older than 18 and their parents. Members of my networks in the Afghan community passed on the invitation letter through their own networks, including several Facebook pages and social media groups.

There were several challenges in building up the network within the community, which were exacerbated by the effects of COVID-19 lockdowns in Melbourne. For example, research with communities from refugee backgrounds needs time for trust-building. White and Bushin (2011) have outlined key elements of research with people from refugee backgrounds, such as building connections with communities and the extent to which trusting relationships with participants can be developed. Based on the feedback from community members and the challenges in building a trusting relationship, I realised that more face-to-face interactions were needed for recruiting newly arrived adolescents and families. Face-to-face interaction was considered crucial by community members for three main reasons. First, when I was discussing the topic of a sense of identity, there were some concerns about the nature of the questions. Particularly for Hazara community members in Australia, because of their experiences of being the target of discrimination and ethnic persecution, identity was a sensitive topic to discuss with strangers. Second, the nature of qualitative research was a

concern. In interviews, participants are not anonymous to the researcher, and the interviews were expected to be recorded using audio and video. At the same time, face-to-face interactions were not possible because of COVID-19 restrictions. This meant that data collection was delayed while I attempted to recruit participants who would consent to video interviews. Third, there was the challenge of my positionality as a researcher and an Iranian. I come from a similar cultural, linguistic, and religious background to people from Afghanistan. However, because of the high levels of racism and discrimination directed towards displaced Afghans in Iran (Ashrafi & Moghissi, 2002; Divkolaye & Burkle, 2011), some community members may have found it difficult to trust an Iranian (see Section 3.2.8 for more reflection on my positionality).

In addition to the research-related challenges, as mentioned in Chapter 1, the context of the study posed barriers to recruitment. The effects of COVID-19 left many community members in financial difficulty with little support. Parents and children were struggling with homeschooling, and the effect of Afghanistan falling again under Taliban rule left the community with more distress. Therefore, participating in research was a low priority. Despite strong support from individuals who facilitated my connections with the community, most of the primary invitations were not accepted.

Even so, through three initial contacts, the first group of participants eventually agreed to join the study. Following their interviews, the rest of the participants were recruited by snowball sampling through their networks (friends, community members and others). Parents and adults interested in participation then permitted an intermediary (i.e. someone who had participated in the research or knew the potential participant) to pass on their contact details to me. Information about subsequent recruitment to the study was not shared with the intermediary.

3.3.2.2 Participants' characteristics

The two empirical studies (Study 2 and Study 3) involved two groups of participants. The first group comprised 15 Hazara young adults (seven females, eight males, zero non-binary) who had arrived in Australia before the age of 18. The second group comprised 10 Hazara and Afghan adolescents (five females, five males) and six parents (four mothers and two fathers) from four families who had recently arrived in Australia (3–7 years earlier). Table 4

summarises the participants' demographic and migration characteristics. Additional discussion of participant characteristics is included in Chapters 5 and 6.

Table 4: Young adult and adolescent participants' characteristics and demographic information

	Participant pseudonym	Gender	Age at the time of interview	Age on leaving Afghanistan	Age at the time of arrival in Australia	Asylum country or countries	Years in asylum country or countries	Years in Australia	Type of journey
Young adult participants	Idris	Male	26	4	10	Pakistan	7	15	With family; humanitarian program
	Mahgul	Female	27	10	13	Pakistan	3	14	With family; humanitarian program
	Farida	Female	23	6	8	Pakistan	1	15	With family; humanitarian program
	Ali	Male	26	12	15	Pakistan, Malaysia, Indonesia	3	12	Alone; onshore permanent protection visa
	Gulnaz	Female	20	4	5	Pakistan	1	15	With family; humanitarian program
	Karim	Male	27	8	12	Iran, Pakistan	3	15	With family; humanitarian program
	Mariam	Female	28	10	14	Pakistan	4	18	With family; humanitarian program
	Razia	Female	28	13	16	South Korea	3	12	With family; humanitarian program
	Roya	Female	20	13	14	Pakistan	1	6	With family; humanitarian program
	Sami	Male	27	17	17	Pakistan	5	10	With family; community-sponsored program
	Nasir	Male	28	Born in Pakistan	17	Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia	1	9	Alone; onshore permanent protection visa
	Farid	Male	25	15	16	Pakistan, Malaysia, Indonesia	1	10	Alone; onshore permanent protection visa
	Amina	Female	29	8	14	Pakistan, Iran	6	15	With family; humanitarian program

	Participant pseudonym	Gender	Age at the time of interview	Age on leaving Afghanistan	Age at the time of arrival in Australia	Asylum country or countries	Years in asylum country or countries	Years in Australia	Type of journey
	Wahid	Male	27	5	17	Pakistan	12	10	Alone; onshore permanent protection visa
	Jalal	Male	26	3	14	Pakistan	12	12	With family; humanitarian program
Adolescent participants	Jawid	Male	12	10	10	Direct arrival from Afghanistan	-	2	With family; community-sponsored program
	Nasima	Female	11	9	9	Direct arrival from Afghanistan	-	2	With family; community-sponsored program
	Najib	Male	13	11	11	Direct arrival from Afghanistan	-	2	With family; community-sponsored program
	Karim	Male	16	8	10	Pakistan, Iran	2	7	With family; humanitarian program
	Sajjad	Male	15	8	9	Pakistan	1	6	With family; humanitarian program
	Fouzia	Female	17	7	13	Pakistan	10	4	With family; humanitarian program
	Shamisa	Female	16	6	15	Pakistan	10	4	With family; humanitarian program
	Shegofa	Female	15	5	11	Pakistan	10	4	With family; humanitarian program
	Gul Bahar	Female	13	3	9	Pakistan	10	4	With family; humanitarian program
	Ali Shah	Male	11	1	7	Pakistan	10	4	With family; humanitarian program

3.3.2.3 Data collection methods for Studies 2 and 3

In-depth interviews

Among qualitative research methods, in-depth interviews are the most commonly used by qualitative researchers (Liamputtong, 2020). Particularly if aiming to focus on participants' voices about their lived experiences, in-depth interviews allow knowledge of others through conversations and learning about their feelings and experiences and the world in which they live (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018). The researcher can then make sense of different meanings and interpretations of specific aspects of participants' lives, such as their cultural practices (Glassner, 2016).

Using in-depth interviews, the researcher can explore participants' ideas about complicated or conflicted topics. In postmodern research frameworks, in-depth interviewing has been closely associated with feminist research (Hesse-Biber, 2012) and continues to be suitable for collecting information from people with specific lived experiences, such as traumatic life events (Liamputtong & Kurban, 2018). In this research, in-depth interviews provided participants with sufficient space to convey their complex experiences of forced migration during their childhood and factors that had influenced their sense of identity and resilience (see Appendix D for interview guides).

Visual methods: narrative photo-elicitation

I also used photo-elicitation in combination with a short accompanying narrative that described why participants chose a particular photo and how it represented aspects of their identity or their perception of resilience.

The photo-elicitation method involves participants photographing important features of their lives, creating images, or providing photos taken by others that are of significance to them (Oh, 2012). From visual data, especially when combined with other data collection approaches, such as in-depth interviews, rich results can be obtained. Digital technologies offer the ability for research participants to produce images and videos independently of the researcher (Warr et al., 2016). The expressive nature of visual methods is being considered helpful for participants who may not be able or ready to express their experiences in words such as children (Clark, 2011; Lipponen et al., 2016; Literat, 2013).

Participants were offered the opportunity to write a narrative to accompany the image. This could create a space outside the interview session for participants, especially adolescent participants, to consider the research questions. Stuhlmiller and Thorsen (1997) explain that a narrative is a story of events and experiences and a simple way to convey understanding and craft meaning for life experiences. They report that combining narratives with a picture as a research strategy emerged from therapeutic work with survivors of trauma. Narratives used in combination with images may serve to associate a person's experiences with illustrative constructs of their sociocultural and historical context (McAlpine, 2016).

Research with marginalised communities has recognised the potential of narrated visual methods to engage people from a refugee background. Because photo-elicitation provides participants with visual and narrative elements, they are able to express themselves as well as their community (Vecchio et al., 2017). Photo-elicitation or photovoice has been used for research with young people from a refugee background in various international settings and topics. However, few studies have used visual methods to research resilience and identity in young people from refugee backgrounds (e.g. Evans, 2020a; Guerrero & Tinkler, 2010; Liamputtong & Kurban, 2018; Miled, 2020; Oh, 2012). Photovoice research show how, when used with a qualitative methodology, visual methods can enhance understandings of the lived experiences of young people from a refugee background by framing them as valued and knowledgeable social actors (Vecchio et al., 2017). In addition, these studies show how young people from refugee backgrounds can creatively express their various narratives to facilitate knowledge production, instead of just gathering knowledge (Veale, 2005).

Combining narrative and visual methods with in-depth interviews was used to enrich the data of this PhD research in multiple ways. In the study with adults, this approach provided a space for the participants to reflect on their interview and choose, create or capture an important aspect of their sense of identity and resilience. The visual elements and narratives also illustrated participants' feelings and emotions attached to their identity components (e.g. a sense of pride in ethnic identity). For adolescents, visual methods were explained in the introductory session (described below) and participants were asked to bring their chosen images for the interview session. Using visual methods contributed to building trust with the adolescents. Because all sessions were conducted online and there was no in-person interaction, engaging adolescents in a creative activity represented a way to establish a more

collaborative and less intimidating research environment, fostering a sense of trust that could not be easily achieved through traditional interview methods alone.

3.3.2.4 Data collection procedure

Young adults

Zoom was used as the platform to conduct the sessions. Interviews were conducted in English or Farsi, based on what each participant preferred. All participants provided verbal and written consent to participate in the study and to have their interviews videorecorded (see Appendix C for the Plain Language Statement [PLS] and consent form). Interviews took between 60–90 minutes. At the end of the interview, participants were asked if they wanted to discuss any further topics. Those who had interest in the visual component of the research were given several weeks to send a photo and short narrative to describe the significance of the provided photo. Pseudonyms were used to protect participants' anonymity. I transcribed the interviews and translated them from Farsi to English where needed. A small sum of money was offered to participants in recognition of their time and effort.

Adolescents and parents

Sessions were conducted in the adolescents' and parents' preferred language (English or Farsi) and were videorecorded with the participants' consent. The parents were provided with a PLS and a consent form, with the option of a Zoom or phone session to receive information about the research in English or Farsi. I first interviewed the parents and then asked them to provide their child or children with an invitation letter, the child version of the PLS and the consent form (see Appendix C). The adolescents were given a separate opportunity to confirm that they wished to participate.

I met the adolescents twice, with an introductory session conducted to build a trusting relationship for the interview. I had trust-building (icebreaker) discussions and briefly spoke about the young participant's favourite activities in Australia, such as soccer, Australian Rules Football, or online games. Then, using those topics, we discussed the concepts of resilience and identity, and I explained the visual methods and narratives. Adolescent participants were asked to bring to the interview session a meaningful image and a narrative explaining how the image represented their resilience or identity. Adolescent participants were also informed that they could write a narrative if they preferred not to provide an image. The introductory

sessions lasted 20–30 minutes, and the interview sessions and discussion of the written narratives and visual materials were conducted within the following two weeks for another 20–30 minutes. I used pseudonyms to protect the participants' anonymity. I transcribed the interviews and translated them from Farsi to English where needed. The participants were offered a small sum of money for their time and effort.

3.3.3 Data analysis

For Studies 2 and 3, considering the chosen social constructionist and post-structuralist lens, I applied reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019) to interpret patterns of meaning while using NVivo 13 as a data management tool. The analysis process included data familiarisation, open engagement with the data and literature and iterative coding and theme development (see Clarke & Braun, 2013).

Researchers often choose inductive or deductive approaches in coding data. The inductive approach starts with specific observations and builds theories based on the data, while the deductive approach begins with established theories or hypotheses and tests them against collected data (Azungah, 2018). Combining the inductive and deductive approaches, I chose an abductive approach in coding the data from studies with young adults and adolescents (Chapters 5 and 6). An abductive approach involves forming the best explanation for a set of observed phenomena. It does not aim for absolute certainty but rather seeks the most plausible interpretation or theory given the available evidence (Vila-Henninger et al., 2022). Therefore, although I had the SEM as a lens to examine the data, abduction provided me with a form of reasoning that could relate unexpected observations to other observations and introduce new ideas into the scientific body of knowledge (Tavory & Timmermans, 2019). To begin, I deductively coded data based on the SEM (individual, family, school, community, and societal levels). Using mind maps, I then inductively grouped similar codes to construct themes.

As Braun and Clarke (2023, p. 6) state, RTA treats themes as ‘generated at the intersection of the data and the researcher’s positioning and interpretations’ and comprising a group of mutual meanings integrated by a main concept or idea. The emphasis of RTA is on producing rigorous and high-quality analysis. The term ‘reflexive’ emphasises the important role of the researcher’s subjectivity as an analytic resource and their role in the process through their

theoretical approaches and data interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2020). I discuss reflexivity further in Section 3.4

3.3.4 Ethical considerations in the context of forced migration

The human ethics application for this research was approved by The University of Melbourne Office of Research Ethics and Integrity (2075900.1; see Appendix E). The ethical considerations applied in this research were based on the past several decades of research with people from refugee backgrounds (see Block, Riggs et al., 2013; Pincock & Bakunzi, 2021; Smith, 2009). In the following paragraphs, I discuss ethical considerations in refugee studies in general and when working with children from refugee backgrounds. I close this chapter by discussing why the researcher's positionality should be considered and reflecting on my own positionality and PhD journey in the context of the study.

General ethical considerations for refugee studies have been formulated in the 'Ethical Guidelines for Good Research Practice' by the Refugee Studies Centre at Oxford University (Refugee Studies Centre, 2007). The primary ethical considerations in these guidelines include protecting the research participants, respecting trust, predicting harms, avoiding unnecessary intrusion, discussing informed consent, maintaining the participants' rights to confidentiality and anonymity, protecting the participants' intellectual property rights, and endorsing the participants' contribution in research. Additionally, addressing how the research would benefit the refugee participants is another essential ethical consideration when conducting research with individuals from a refugee background. Participants may benefit from provision of a platform for their stories to be heard and validated. Additional benefits may flow from highlighting how research findings may contribute to a deeper understanding of their experiences, raising awareness, challenging stereotypes, and advocating for social change to benefit their community and the general refugee population in meaningful ways. These considerations were communicated to the participants in the PLS and consent forms and in the introductory conversations and interview sessions.

Block, Riggs et al. (2013) have discussed ethical and methodological challenges for researchers who conduct research with people from refugee backgrounds. Their main focus has been on vulnerability and power and the relationship between research and advocacy.

The question of vulnerability concerns people who may be less able to understand the power dynamic in research, something that might affect their motivation to participate and the agency of their consent. However, Block, Riggs et al. (2013, p. 6) state:

‘This label is resisted as implying a “deficit position”, which disregards the resilience and agency of those fleeing persecution. Understanding the potential vulnerability of research participants as resulting from the circumstances in which they find themselves—rather than locating it within the person—helps to remind us that such groups consist of “ordinary people” buffeted by extraordinary—albeit disturbingly common—events.’

The question of power relates to an imbalance in the power dynamics between the researcher and the participants, including the possibility that the research findings could be misinterpreted or misused by the researcher. The researcher needs to practise reflexivity in the research and collaborate with the community to prevent any such harmful outcome (Block, Warr, et al., 2013).

Questions of vulnerability and power can also generate a feeling of obligation in researchers, leading them to adopt an explicitly political position that views research as a means of advocacy. Jacobsen and Landau (2003, p. 187) discuss about a lack of research rigour ‘where researchers already know what they want to see and say and come away from the research having proved it’. At the same time, Voutira and Doná (2007) argue for a reciprocal relationship between advocacy and research, particularly in refugee studies. While a rigorous methodological approach and reflexivity should be adopted to avoid bias, Mackenzie et al. (2007) emphasise that where a researcher is able to advocate on behalf of the participants, failure to do is itself unethical.

Finally, beyond procedural ethics (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004), there are everyday issues that can arise because of the context in which the research is conducted. Therefore, ethics in practice is required when ethical incidents happen throughout the research projects (Block, Warr, et al., 2013). As described in Sections 1.5 and 1.6, the conduct of the study became challenging because of COVID-19 restrictions and the Taliban regaining control of Afghanistan. Adjusting the research process, including pausing data collection because of the distress of the community, was among the ethical responses considered and carried out during the study (see Section 3.2).

3.3.5 Ethical considerations in research with children and adolescents

Kaukko et al. (2017) have discussed that the way researchers construct, understand, and interpret the experiences of children within certain cultural contexts rises ethical and methodological issues. These involve the difficulty of making sure that the research is important for children and not only the researcher. This issue can be addressed by engaging the community members in designing and conducting research in ways they perceive as relevant. Preferably, researchers should ask children, families, and communities what they think is important to be studied and what are the best ways to do so. To address this issue, I discussed my research topic with my network and intermediaries in the community, asking whether the issue was important to the community and whether qualitative techniques were suitable for the culture and context of the Hazara community. I received much positive feedback about the importance of the topic, particularly research concerning the sense of identity.

Another ethical challenge in working with participants under 18 is the practical difficulty of acquiring genuinely informed consent (and not merely assuming consent when the corresponding forms have been signed). The community members who facilitated the recruitment suggested that it could be hard to fully engage adolescents in online research and that if they participated, we could not be sure that they did not feel pressure to participate from their families.

I may not have been able to fully address this issue. However, to address it as far as possible and evaluate whether the adolescents truly consented, I held introductory sessions with them. I discussed and explained their rights in plain language and encouraged them to speak about the topics that they felt were important in their lives rather than about fixed questions about resilience and identity. Also, I changed the timing of remuneration from after the interview to after the introductory session to ensure that if adolescents participated in the interview, their motivation to participate was not associated with this payment.

3.4 Reflexivity and statement of positionality

Researchers' views, values, opinions, and social backgrounds influence them in the research process, formation their decisions about their methodological and analytical choices. Positionality means an individual's view, history, life experiences and the position they have chosen to implement towards their research (Savin-Baden & Howell-Major, 2013). There are

also various ‘placing’ issues, such as gender, age, culture and ethnicity, social class and other identities that can have a substantial effect on the research process and outcomes (Manohar et al., 2017).

There is controversy about insider v. outsider positionality in undertaking cross-cultural research. Some believe that researchers should be insiders; that is, they should share social, cultural, and linguistic characteristics with the research participants (Tillman, 2002). Because of cultural similarities, insiders can better earn research participants’ trust and build a rapport, and this can frequently decrease the challenges in building relationship with the research participants (Liamputtong, 2010). However, cultural outsiders may also have advantages when it comes to understanding and explaining a phenomenon under investigation (Al-Makhamreh & Lewando-Hundt, 2008; Liamputtong, 2010). This is because they may have no or limited knowledge about the lives of the participants, may take less for granted and may want to move closer and gain a detailed understanding of the topic being researched (Merriam et al., 2001, p. 411).

In this context, I wish to reflect on my positionality, my PhD journey and how my professional background, nationality, ethnicity, culture, and other factors have influenced me as the researcher and, consequently, this research study.

First, the motivation for this PhD research was initially informed by the experiences I had as an Iranian psychosocial counsellor with the Afghan community of displaced persons in Iran. My understanding of resilience and how a person develops a positive sense of identity, even in countries with minimum social support for displaced persons—such as Iran—was heavily influenced by some extraordinary individuals I came across from 2016 to 2019. However, during my PhD candidature, this individualist perception has changed considerably to a more social-ecological understanding of the factors that influence a young person’s construction of resilience and a positive sense of identity. This change was prompted by the opportunity to conduct research at the Melbourne School of Population and Global Health and be provided with insight and knowledge through a public health lens.

Adopting a social constructionist framing for this thesis, I have reflected on the research and considered how my positionality shaped the research questions, interviews, analysis, discussion, and recommendations. I was conscious that I was a PhD student with no prior experience in qualitative studies, not from the same background as the participants but a

culturally and linguistically similar one while sharing certain trauma and migration experiences with them. The latter similarity increased with two major events. First came the adverse effects of the pandemic on my life as an international student: not being able to return home, being isolated in a foreign country with minimum social support, worrying about the physical health of family and friends and being uncertain about the future. Second came the uprising in Iran in September 2022 and the Islamic Republic's mass killing and arrest of protesters. The experience of enormous shock and worry for my family and friends at the beginning, then a brief moment of hope, which was shattered after a few months, led me to experience hopelessness and helplessness. The incidents in Iran resulted in me often feeling lost and uncertain about how my positionality was influencing my perceptions in analysing and interpreting the data. I benefited greatly from consulting with supervisors and other qualitative researchers about these feelings, mainly on how this positionality might positively influence my research. For example, I learned how to understand subtle meanings associated with some of the participants' traumas and belonging experiences by reflecting on my own lived experiences.

My experience of 'field work' was also particular because the research was conducted during COVID-19 lockdowns in Melbourne. As I previously discussed in section 3.3.2, due to high levels of racism and discrimination directed towards people from Afghanistan in Iran, some community members found it difficult to trust me as an Iranian. As a result of the long-term lockdowns in Melbourne and because of an inability to spend time in the community building relationships and trust, I had to redesign the face-to-face research to be entirely online. Therefore, the 'field' was initially my small room in a shared house with the experience of networking and interviewing using phone and Zoom. As I was a PhD student with no prior experience in qualitative studies, this limited my personal opportunities to learn from the field, the academy and community members. While I was still able to build a good network with community members and benefited from their input, reflecting on this limitation was important to me. Although my PhD was informed by a social justice framework as a core value, it would have benefited in its advocacy if it had been co-designed with community members and if I had had the opportunity to observe more, spending time in person with young people and their parents and learning more from them before conducting the interviews.

While I did not have that opportunity during the data collection, I do now have an ongoing collaboration with Hazaras and Afghan community members to explore the best means of data dissemination to the community and policymakers.

Chapter 4 Sense of identity among young people from refugee backgrounds: A scoping review

In chapter 3, I explained the research design I used for this research project. As discussed earlier in chapter 2, there is increasing interest in understanding the factors that shape identity formation and self-perception among young individuals from refugee backgrounds. In this chapter, I present the scoping review findings that explore the current research conducted with children and adolescents from refugee backgrounds, mostly across the Global North. The findings of this study will address the first research question: How do young people from refugee backgrounds perceive, describe, and [re]construct specific aspects of their identity in interaction with their social ecology? The work presented in this chapter provides a foundation for the following two chapters and informs the studies conducted with participants of this PhD study.

This chapter consists of the manuscript reproduced below:

Shahimi, F, Block, K, Alisic, E. Sense of Identity among Young People from Refugee Backgrounds: A Scoping Review. *Children and Youth Services Review*, available online on 5 December 2023. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2023.107378>.

4.1 Abstract

Multiple risk factors associated with the forced migration journey may adversely affect the identity development of young people with refugee backgrounds. Relatively little is known however, regarding how young people perceive their identity following the refugee experience and how their interactions with the environment influence this perception. To address this gap, this scoping review, which included 28 peer-reviewed articles from 2000-2020, explored the empirical literature that focuses on ways in which young people with refugee backgrounds represent their sense of identity. Our findings demonstrate that young people perceive themselves as having multiple identity characteristics, influenced by their interactions with their sociocultural environments and the need to integrate their past, present, and future. The review highlights the importance of holistic and pluralistic perspectives which consider factors at different layers of social ecology to understand how young people from refugee backgrounds shape their identities within their unique sociocultural contexts.

Keywords: young people, identity, forced migration, refugee background, social ecology

4.2 Introduction

Forcibly displaced people flee from their homelands to escape conflict, violence, torture, persecution, and death. In recent decades, civil wars and drawn-out conflicts, as well as natural disasters around the world, have led to the displacement of millions of people (Hugo et al., 2017). By the end of 2021, 89.3 million people were forcibly displaced (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2022c), the highest number the world has faced since the end of World War II. Approximately 40% of forcibly displaced people are under the age of 18 and are particularly vulnerable to trauma (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2022c). The significant number of young people who have experienced forced migration highlights the need to understand how their wellbeing can be supported in host countries (Fazel & Betancourt, 2018). Research indicates that having a positive sense of identity as well as a supportive environment promotes resilience, psychosocial wellbeing, and better integration in host societies (Fazel et al., 2012; Oppedal et al., 2020; Renshaw, 2019; Ungar, 2013). However, less attention has been paid to the process of identity [re]construction and factors influencing a young person's perception of identity following forced migration.

4.3 Identity [re]construction in the context of forced migration

Identity is a commonly used term in diverse disciplines. A wide range of theoretical and methodological perspectives brings a range of definitions and associated lack of clarity and consistency. Even within disciplines, different approaches to and perspectives on studying identity have been developed (Schwartz et al., 2011). Notwithstanding this divergence, identity is generally conceptualized as being constructed in a sociocultural context (Hogg et al., 2017; Karam et al., 2020; Kira et al., 2018; Leone et al., 2014; Vygotsky, 1978).

Identity construction refers to the process through which individuals form their sense of self. It is a dynamic process that occurs throughout an individual's life and involves creating and negotiating various aspects of identity, such as personal values, beliefs, interests, roles, and affiliations, within the context of social, cultural, and environmental influences. Identity is

also shaped by a range of factors, including interactions with family, peers, and society, as well as personal experiences and self-reflection (Chao, 2019; Mijic, 2022; Schwartz et al., 2011, pp. p 7-11).

While identity construction is a lifelong process, many theories of identity recognize late childhood and adolescence as comprising multifaceted transitional stages of human development that include forming a coherent sense of self (Erikson, 1968; Kroger et al., 2010; McAdams, 2011; Tajfel & Turner, 2004). Although it is normal for an adolescent to display signs of stress during identity construction (Côté & Levine, 2014; Kroger et al., 2010; Ryan & Deci, 2012), this process may be particularly vulnerable to experiences of trauma and displacement (Bergquist et al., 2019; Berman, 2016). Many young people with refugee backgrounds experience different types of traumatic events across various stages of their journey (Betancourt et al., 2012; Fazel et al., 2012; Murray, 2019). Moreover, post-settlement experiences of acculturation, language barriers, racism, and bullying, may also adversely affect the identity construction of young people with refugee backgrounds (Fazel & Betancourt, 2018; Fazel et al., 2012; Murray, 2019; Streeck-Fischer, 2019).

There has been a rise in interest in understanding the factors influencing identity construction and self-perception of young people following forced migration (Denov & Piolanti, 2020; Karam et al., 2020; Oppedal et al., 2020; Rabiau, 2019). However, few studies account for the complexity of how an individual's perception of their identity is influenced by multiple layers of interaction within their sociocultural context (Mijic, 2022). This scoping review explores the existing literature that focuses on how young people with refugee backgrounds perceive their identity following displacement and how their interactions with their environment might have influenced this perception. In doing so, it aims to provide a more holistic picture of identity [re]construction following forced migration that can inform future research as well as policies and practices supporting this cohort.

To construct a holistic picture, we applied a social-ecological model to categorize findings. A social-ecological model conceptualizes the individual as being at the heart of an interactive system that integrates various environmental settings (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Kuru & Ungar, 2020). It emphasizes the multiple, layered social, institutional, and cultural contexts of people's environments. Disruption in any layer of this social ecology may have negative consequences for the identity [re]construction of a young person, while protective factors

might buffer or reverse the impact of adverse events (Hawkins et al., 2021; Keygnaert et al., 2012; McLeroy et al., 1988).

4.4 Method

We opted for a scoping review in line with Munn et al. (2018), to inform the development of a relevant research agenda regarding young people's identity [re]construction in the context of forced displacement. A scoping review focuses on describing the literature to delineate existing knowledge, can accommodate research with a range of designs, and identify questions for further empirical research (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). As suggested by Munn et al. (2018), a scoping review rather than a systematic review is indicated where the purpose is to identify knowledge gaps, scope a body of literature, clarify concepts, or investigate research conduct. Useful in their own right, scoping reviews may also be helpful precursors to systematic reviews and can be used to confirm the relevance of inclusion criteria and potential questions.

We followed A&O's framework (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005) for scoping reviews, including the following steps: (a) articulating the research question; (b) identifying relevant studies; (c) selecting eligible studies; (d) charting the data; and (e) synthesizing and analyzing the results. The following questions guided the search process and analysis for the review: 1/ Which characteristics of identity are emphasized within empirical studies among young people from refugee backgrounds 2/ How did young people from refugee backgrounds perceive and describe specific aspects of their identity? 3/ How are interactions with young people's environment(s) related to these perceptions? We identified and searched five electronic databases, i.e., SociINDEX, PsychINFO, Medline, MAIS (Informit) and CINAHL Complete, using the following combinations of keywords: (refugee* OR asylum* OR displaced*) AND (child* OR adolescen* OR teen* OR youth* OR young* OR kid*) AND (identity*). We included only primary research studies among young people (under 18) with a refugee background that were peer-reviewed. We excluded research published before 2000 (in order to focus on contemporary refugee displacements); theses, reviews, and conceptual papers; studies with migrants without a refugee background; and studies that only included participants over the age of 18. The search strategy is summarized in Figure 2. We conducted the literature search in April and May 2021, yielding a total of n=1094 articles. We downloaded all citations into an Endnote library and imported the references into Covidence,

a systematic review management tool. We first removed 300 duplicates, then screened titles and abstracts (n=794) and assessed the remaining full-text articles (n=102) for eligibility criteria. Finally, a total of 28 articles met the full eligibility criteria and were included in this scoping review.

Data from the studies were extracted and charted in Excel 2020 using the following headings: author information, journal, year of publication, title, country of study, language of the study, the focus area of identity, age range, ethnicity of refugees, years in the host country, gender, research design, research method, sample size, data analysis, and key findings.

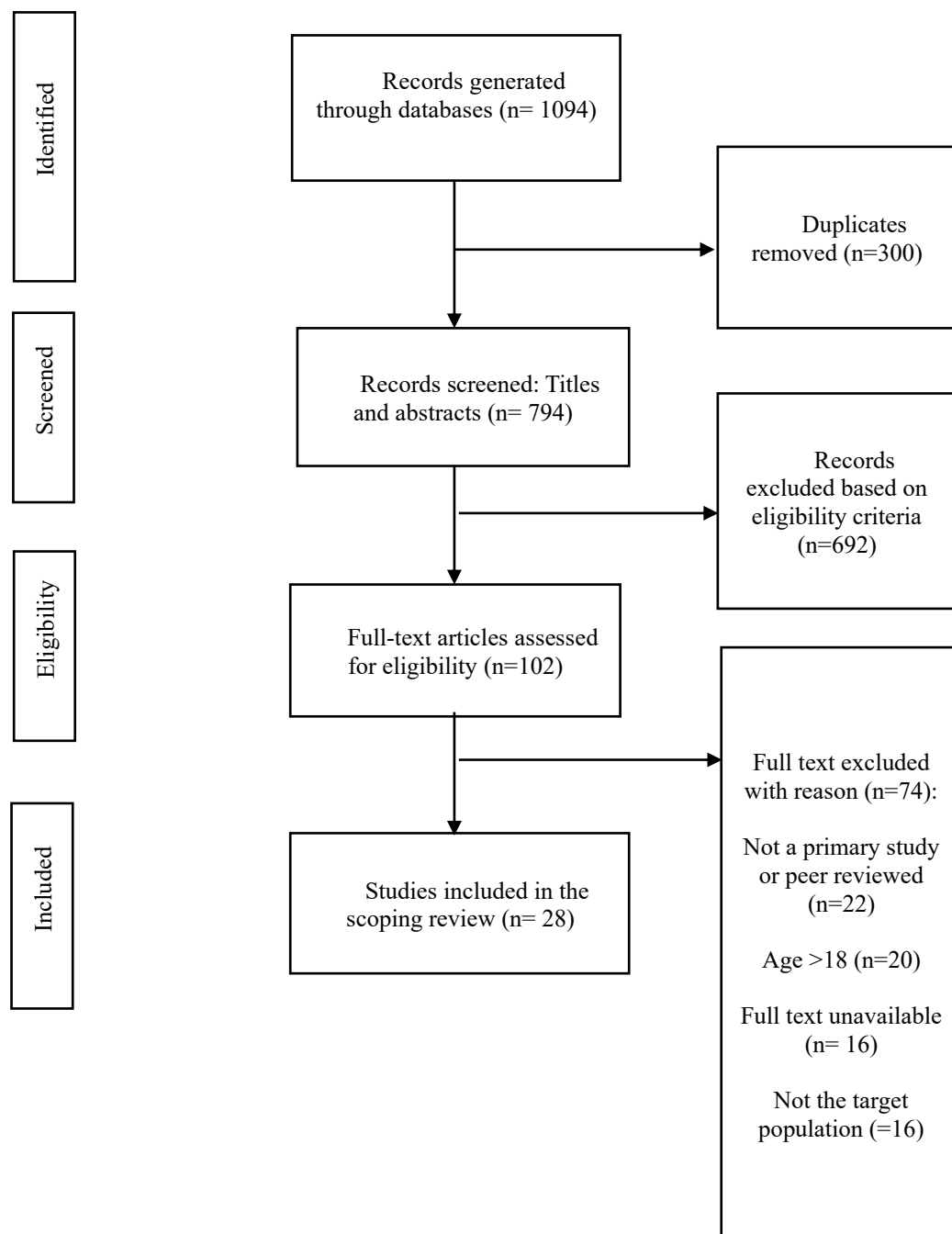


Figure 2 Literature search and selection criteria

We adopted a codebook approach to thematic analysis (TA) to synthesize the findings and identify themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2023). Codebook TA comprises forming a codebook or set of codes to classify and analyze themes. The analysis process included data familiarization, coding, and theme development conducted by the first author and reviewed by the co-authors. Coding was based on which aspects of identity were addressed and findings regarding factors influencing identity. Themes were developed by the three authors based on the coding and organized them using the social-ecological model. As Braun and Clarke (2023) explain, codebook themes usually contain a summary of common opinions stated by participants related to the subject. This method of theme development assisted us in creating a comprehensive picture of how identity has been conceptualized in the existing literature and factors influencing how young people from refugee backgrounds perceive their identity among young people from refugee backgrounds.

4.5 Findings

We first consider the research settings and aspects of identity reported in the included studies. We then summarize and discuss the themes and sub-themes that we constructed through our analysis, categorized according to the social-ecological model. Thus, we present findings that explore young people's personal perception of their identity; followed by the influence of interpersonal factors; and lastly, the influence of culture, community, and society. In the Discussion, we also focus on the interrelations and interactions between these social-ecological layers.

4.5.1 Identity focus and characteristics of included studies

Table 1 outlines the extracted information and key findings of the studies included in this review (n=28). Studies were conducted in Norway, Australia, Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, Sweden, Germany, Jordan and Colombia. The studies classified and investigated different areas of identity among young people with refugee backgrounds, such as cultural and bicultural identity, ethnic and racial identity, language identity, religious identity, personal identity, future-career and vocational identity, sense of belonging, ascribed identity, discourse and narrative identity, social and political identity. They also explored factors such as a sense of agency, hope for the future, school, family and peer relationships, ethnic culture, religion, and host countries' societal and political environment. Included studies discussed supports and barriers in the environments of young participants following

the experience of forced migration and how these factors influenced the construction of participants' identities. All but one study was undertaken in high-income resettlement countries. Two studies included second-generation migrant children (i.e., those whose parents had a refugee background), while seventeen studies were conducted among first-generation migrant young people with refugee backgrounds (including five studies with unaccompanied minors). Almost all studies (n=25) reported only binary gender categories of males and females. The remaining three studies did not specify the gender of the participants. Most participants were adolescents except for three studies that had a mixed age range of participants, including younger children and young adult participants. Most studies had a qualitative design (n=21). Five studies used a quantitative design, and two were mixed methods. Six studies were conducted in the host country's language with interpreter assistance, and seven had a bilingual researcher in the research team. The language of thirteen studies was solely the language of the host country with no interpreter or translation of materials, and participation depended on the ability to speak the host country's language.

Table 4: Summary of extracted information and findings

Author information	Country of study	Ethnicity or origin countries of participants	Age	Focus area of identity	Methodology	Major findings
Oppedal et al. (2020)	Norway	Afghanistan, Somalia, Iraq, and Sri Lanka and other.	13 years or older.	Bicultural identity	Quantitative	Positive association between resiliency and identification with heritage culture and negative association between reduced mental illness and identification with majority culture.
Moran (2020)	Australia	Sudan, Uganda, Sierra Leone, Thailand and Papua New Guinea	The majority were between 14-16 years old.	Ethnic and racial identity	Qualitative: Ethnographic fieldwork	The search for belonging was at the heart of the agency showed in the identity of the young people.
Miled (2020)	Canada	Somalia, Syria, Eretria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran	14-19	Muslim and/or Canadian identity.	Qualitative: Participatory research action	Centrality of race in the construction of Muslim and/or Canadian identity.
Karam et al. (2020)	United State	Iraq	12	Ethnic/language identity	Qualitative: case study	Findings supported views of identity as discursively constructed.
Evans (2020)	UK	Syria-Africa	16-20	Race, ethnicity, nationhood, and belonging.	Qualitative: Participatory research	Expression of forms of national, religious, and cultural identity through self-representations.
Ekström et al. (2020)	Sweden	Ethiopia, Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia and Syria	13-18	Religious identity	Qualitative	Lived practices of religion and the development of an oppositional gaze can function as mutually reinforcing processes in identity negotiation.
Streeck-Fischer (2019)	Germany	Arab-Turk	15-16	Individual and ethnic identity	Qualitative: Case example	Splitting processes, which occur during both adolescence and the migration experience, complicate the process of identity formation.

Rabiau et al. (2019)	Canada	Syria-Iraq	16	Cultural identity	Qualitative: Case study	The family was a protective factor allowing for growth and identity formation toward a path of resilience and adaptation.
Ludwig (2019)	US	Liberian	9-24	Cultural identity and ethnic identity	Qualitative: Ethnography	Low human capital was related to less willingness to hold cultural heritage.
Kennedy et al. (2019)	US	Burmese (Chin)	10	Multiple and intersecting identities	Qualitative: Case study	Refugee youth express their identities while navigating dominant social, cultural, and linguistic interactions.
Guler et al. (2019)	US	Cuba, Iraq, Jordan, Haiti, Colombia, and Venezuela	11- 17	Identity distress and cultural identity	Quantitative	Native cultural identity was a significant protective factor against identity distress among adolescents.
Filler et al. (2019)	Canada	Syria	16 -19	Cultural identity	Qualitative exploratory design	Achieving full potential, family support, social support, and integration into the education system were main factors for identity shaping among adolescents.
Davila (2019)	US	Congo	14 -19	Linguistic identity	Qualitative	The project emphasized on supporting complex language and content learning fluidly in ways that affirm students' identities and new learning.
Daniel (2019)	US	Thailand, Myanmar, Iraq	School aged	Future-career identity	Qualitative	"Refugee" was not the defining characteristic of participants identities; instead, visions of themselves were more or equally important to their identities.
Chen et al. (2019)	Australia	Multiple (16 ethnicity)	11-18	Sense of belonging	Qualitative	Five major themes related to the youth's experience of belonging: connection to a larger entity; experience of immersion; experience of connection (and disconnection); sense of identity; and instrumental outcomes.
Chao (2019)	US	Nepal (Bhutanese)	Mixed 14-47	Multiple identities	Qualitative	The essential nature of refugee youth's lived experiences is a way of being, becoming, and imagining.
Oppedal et al. (2017)	Norway	Afghanistan, Somalia, Iraq,	17-26	Vocational identity	Fixed methods	Important finding from this study was the lack of social support resources available to

		and Sri Lanka and other.				the unaccompanied refugees in this important developmental stage.
Herz et al. (2017)	Sweden	Afghanistan-Somalia	15-25	Ascribed identity	Qualitative	Experience of frustration about being labelled “unaccompanied” and critical reflexivity towards this labelling.
Uptin et al. (2016)	Australia	Karennii and the Chin States of Burma, from Burma, Burundi, Southern Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo and Sierra Leone, and Togo	16-25	Discourse/Narrative identity	Qualitative	Opening a discourse to include the complexities of each refugee experience.
Moran (2016)	Australia	Sudanese	10-15	Ethnic identity	Qualitative	Ethnic capital was constructed in the representation of self-racialized identity.
Ndengeyingoma (2014)	Canada	African origin	13-18	Personal identity	Qualitative	The development of personal identity was directly and indirectly influenced by personal characteristics, the environmental, and the interpersonal relationships.
Leone et al. (2014)	Jordan	Palestinian	Mean age 16	Social identity	Quantitative	Participants spontaneously thought of themselves as Palestinian and it influenced their self-definition.
Guerrero (2010)	US-Colombia	Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, and Colombia	10-18	Social and political identity	Qualitative	Participants were actively involved in the process of reconstructing the meanings of their experiences.
Ellis et al. (2010)	US	Somali	Quantitative 11-20 Qualitative 16-19	Social identity	Qualitative: Concurrent design/community based participatory research	For girls, greater Somali acculturation and for boys, greater American acculturation was associated with better mental health.

Valentine et al. (2009)	UK	Somali	11-18	Narrative-Individual identity	Qualitative: Multi-method	Highlighted the importance of young people's emotional investment in the subject position Muslim.
Aniko et al. (2009)	Australia	Sudanese	14-18	Ethnic language identity	Quantitative	Sudanese participants were strongly attached to their ethnic language.
Trickett et al. (2005)	US	Ukraine Belarus Russia and others including Uzbekistan Azerbaijan and Moldova	15-18	Cultural identity	Quantitative	With respect to the different cultures, different patterns of American and Russian acculturation were associated with different school outcomes, language competence, behavior, and identity
Gibson (2002)	US	Bosnian	14-18	Cultural/ethnic identity	Qualitative	The sense of self was highlighted during the unique and complex process participants were facing to explore and define their cultural identities.

4.5.2 The personal perception of identity

There were two prominent themes related to how young people perceived themselves: the importance of the sense of agency and hope; and negative perceptions of ascribed labels such as “refugee” among young people with refugee backgrounds.

4.5.2.1 *Sense of agency and hope*

Some studies found that having a sense of agency, hope, and vision for the future were crucial personal aspects of identity for young participants (e.g. Chao, 2019; Filler et al., 2019). While participants’ histories as refugees informed their goals, young people also shaped their futures in relation to their experiences after resettlement. Studies showed that neither the number of traumatic events they had experienced nor mental health problems affected how determined youth were with respect to their education (Oppedal et al., 2017; Uptin et al., 2016). In a study with Syrian adolescents in Canada, it was observed that the study participants were less focused on previous adverse experiences than on current and future school success and family relationships. The participants also emphasized the significance of reaching their full potential through their goals, responsibilities, and skills (Filler et al., 2019). Young people discussed their desire to engage in a specific profession as a means to overcome challenges and negative experiences, and expressions of the agency revealed aspirations to change society for the better (Daniel, 2019).

4.5.2.2 *Described identity versus ascribed labels*

Several studies discussed how the label of ‘refugee’ was actively rejected and not accepted by young participants as their significant defining characteristic (Chao, 2019; Daniel, 2019; Ludwig, 2019). Ludwig (2019) argued that the ascription ‘refugee’ was associated with stigma rather than a source of pride among second-generation Liberian participants in the United States. Rejecting the perceived implications of this label, they recognized themselves as capable actors in their world. In a study with unaccompanied minors in Sweden, participants described how the ongoing categorization of being alone or unaccompanied created an unwanted distinction between those who were considered insiders vs. outsiders within the host community (Herz & Lalander, 2017). Despite experiences of discrimination and adversity, many did not identify themselves as victims (Chao, 2019; Daniel, 2019; Guerrero & Tinkler, 2010). Young participants preferred their own narrative of their multiple

identities across their life trajectory to simple labels, believing that struggles, frustrations, challenges, and their hopes all defined their identity (Chao, 2019, p. 809).

4.5.3 Interpersonal factors

At the interpersonal level, we explore the findings of studies that focused on the influence of the closest level of interaction of the young person with their environment. We look into how family, peer relationships, and school experiences are understood within included studies to have influenced the reported perception of self.

4.5.3.1 Family support, conflicts, and complications

Some studies found that young participants considered their family to be the main positive influence on who they were (e.g. Filler et al., 2019; Rabiau, 2019). Experiencing a sense of belonging to their family unit and encounters of kinship was a positive influence on their perception of identity (Filler et al., 2019; Rabiau, 2019). Common activities are undertaken together, such as farming, cooking, and providing help and support for each other, were examples of ways in which the family played essential roles in young people's lives (Shiqi Chen & Robert D. Schweitzer, 2019). On the other hand, there were several challenges that undermined this feeling for some participants, (e.g. Ludwig, 2019). Since family members were also engaged in acculturation processes and dealing with traumatic experiences, this could complicate and burden the identity perception of young participants (Ludwig, 2019; Miller, 2019). Factors causing stress included parents' experiences of trauma, little or no formal parental education, and parents working in the unskilled labor market with long work hours (Ludwig, 2019). Family relationships were also complicated for unaccompanied minors. In a study with unaccompanied minors in Norway, only 12% lived with family members, mainly siblings, and only half had contact with their families abroad. The researchers concluded that the significant experience of loss and absence of family had affected participants' identity formation and, consequently their mental health and capacity to function (Oppedal et al., 2020).

4.5.3.2 Schools and shaping hope for the future

Although some youth faced challenges linked to linguistic and social isolation as well as pre-migration educational disruption (e.g. Chao, 2019; Karam et al., 2020), schools were

important settings for young people in [re]constructing a sense of self and coping with identity conflicts. Schools were also places in which they shaped their hopes for the future and manifested their sense of agency rather than only being a “refugee” (Chao, 2019; Filler et al., 2019; Karam et al., 2020; Oppedal et al., 2017). Some schools also provided regular opportunities for young people of refugee and migrant backgrounds to display their ethnic background in school events, seen as helping students to strengthen their ethnic identity (Trickett & Birman, 2005).

4.5.3.3 Support from peers

Studies showed that positive experiences in peer relationships, such as enjoyable interactions and close friendship bonds, had significant positive influences on the perception of the identity of young people (e.g. Shiqi Chen & Robert D. Schweitzer, 2019; Ludwig, 2019). Conversely, being identified as different by their peers was challenging. This made it difficult for them to connect with culturally different friendship groups and to develop a sense of belonging within their schools (Moran, 2020; Ndengeyingoma, Montigny, et al., 2014; Uptin et al., 2016). Some young participants, for example, reported withdrawing from their religious commitments, which marked them as different, to be able to assimilate with their peer groups and make friends (Ndengeyingoma, Montigny, et al., 2014).

4.5.4 The influence of culture, community, and society

On the wider level, we identified two key themes which directly (or indirectly by influencing interpersonal relationships) influenced the perception of identity among participants of included studies. First was the influence of ethnic culture and religion on the perception of identity. Below we elaborate on the positive influences of ethnic culture and religion as well as the challenges that ethnic culture or religion may add to the identity [re]construction of young people. The second theme was the influence of the host society and policies on young people’s lives. As discussed below, experiences of labeling, racism, and discrimination at the community and societal level, as well as language barriers, were reported as adversely impacting identity [re]construction post-settlement.

4.5.4.1 Influence of migrants' cultural backgrounds and religion

Ethnic culture and religion came up as having a significant influence on the identity perception of participants (e.g. Ellis et al., 2010a; Guler & Berman, 2019; Moran, 2016, 2020; Oppedal et al., 2020). Included papers recounted how young participants defined themselves using their perceptions of ethnicity, cultural values, and religion (Moran, 2016). Two studies addressed how ongoing struggles against oppression in countries of origin influenced the connection of some young participants with their ethnic identity (Leone et al., 2014; Uptin et al., 2016). For example, in a study with Palestinian adolescents in Jordan, despite being born in the Diaspora and never having been to Palestine, young participants attributed a deep emotional significance to aligning themselves with the Palestinian cause and defining themselves as Palestinian (Leone et al., 2014). Additionally, language was presented as a crucial manifestation of ethnic identity (Aniko & Terry, 2009; Davila, 2019). In a study with Congolese students in the United States, for example, participants articulated a strong 'African' identity represented by linguistic codes. These young people defined such communication as exclusively 'African' (Davila, 2019). Religion also played an important role. Several studies highlighted the influence of religious visibility in producing a strengthened sense of personal identity (Ekström et al., 2020; Miled, 2020; Valentine et al., 2009). In research with Somalian youth in the United States, girls who chose to wear the headscarf described it as engendering pride in their culture of origin, despite also sometimes putting them at risk of being targets for discrimination (Ellis et al., 2010b). On the other hand, some challenges associated with [re]construction of identity centered on the influence of ethnic, cultural background, and religion. Some youth struggled to embrace their ethnic identity actively, however, mainly due to stigmatization and/or conflicted relationships with their families. Some research implied an association between experiences of racism and exclusion in school and rejection of ethnic and cultural identity among young people from refugee backgrounds (Ludwig, 2019). One study indicated that inter-ethnic hatred was another factor that led some young participants to avoid being identified or engaged with their ethnic group (Gibson, 2002). Experiences of religious discrimination were also associated with a sense of exclusion from the host society and resulted in some rejecting religion as a part of their identity (Ekström et al., 2020; Moran, 2020; Ndengeyingoma, de Montigny, et al., 2014).

4.5.4.2 Impacts of host societies' culture, attitudes, and political climate

Challenges associated with living in the host country were discussed in most of the articles included in this review and have already been alluded to in previous sections, (e.g. Chao, 2019; Evans, 2020b; Filler et al., 2019; Ludwig, 2019; Oppedal et al., 2020; Rabiau, 2019). Post-migration environments, including the host population's attitudes, norms, and policies, significantly influenced experiences of interpersonal relationships with peer groups, school and family interactions, and young people's perceptions of their ethnic and cultural identity. Some studies showed that positive experiences of integration with the host society were a protective factor in helping young people to [re]construct a positive sense of identity (Shiqi Chen & Robert D. Schweitzer, 2019; Moran, 2020; Trickett & Birman, 2005). As described in previous sections, labeling, discrimination, and language barriers, however, were common issues that undermined a sense of belonging for some participants (Ludwig, 2019; Moran, 2020). Articles reported how societal factors such as systemic barriers and exclusionary discourses in mainstream media and policies prevented participants both from strengthening their ethnic identity and from developing a positive sense of belonging to the host culture (Shiqi Chen & Robert D. Schweitzer, 2019; Miled, 2020; Oppedal et al., 2017).

One main challenge experienced by young refugees in the United States, UK, and Canada was the impact of Islamophobia on their sense of identity (Ellis et al., 2010b; Miled, 2020). After 9/11, negative attitudes toward Muslim communities increased sharply. Refugees were characterized by media images and political discourses as potential threats and terrorists (Mir & Sarroub, 2019). While both male and female Muslims were exposed to the negative impacts of Islamophobia, visibly Muslim women and girls were most commonly the target of verbal and physical attacks (Ellis et al., 2010b; Evans, 2020b; Miled, 2020). In the study with Somali girls who had chosen to wear a Hijab and make this aspect of their social identity visible, participants risked experiencing discrimination. For those who did not have a sense of pride in their religious identity or were less surrounded by their ethnic community, such discrimination led to anxiety or feeling unsafe within the host society. Conversely, girls who chose not to wear the headscarf were at risk of discrimination or harassment within their own ethnic community (Ellis et al., 2010b).

Finally, the lack of accommodation towards those not fluent in host-country languages created barriers to belonging such that speaking the host country's language was a significant element of the new "national identity" of participants (Aniko & Terry, 2009; Evans, 2020b;

Karam et al., 2020; Kennedy et al., 2019). Language proficiency in host countries is generally considered a requirement for refugees' social integration (Watkins et al., 2012), without which a person might experience social exclusion, discrimination, and racism (Doğan et al., 2019; Ghahari et al., 2020; Mangrio & Forss, 2017). Young people in included studies also perceived host language proficiency as the key to community integration and *earning* a new national identity. As indicated by participants in a study conducted in the US, some youth aligned their aim of adjusting to the new national identity with learning English (Kennedy et al., 2019). Narratives about the importance of speaking English for integration and becoming a citizen in the United Kingdom among a group of young Syrians demonstrated a similar attitude toward the identity (Evans, 2020b). In a case study conducted in the United States, participants who were not proficient in English suffered difficulties in communication, received labels in school such as the "typical refugee", and were not recognized for their skills and strengths (Karam et al., 2020).

4.6 Discussion

4.6.1 Bringing together findings to construct a holistic perspective of identity construction as a sociocultural practice

Few studies included in this review addressed identity from a holistic perspective. Most focused on one aspect of identity, yet a synthesis of findings shows how a young person develops multiple identity characteristics through numerous interactions with their environment and how each of these characteristics intersects and interacts with one another in forming a coherent sense of identity. Moreover, none of the studies specifically explored the influence of time and developmental stages of young people in the process of identity [re]construction following forced migration experiences. Bringing together findings from the studies included in this scoping review demonstrates that young people from refugee backgrounds continuously [re]constructed their multiple aspects of identity while coming to terms with challenges in their past, present, and future.

A significant aspect of this process of identity [re]construction is the complexity, fluidity, and multifaced nature of the identity (Mijic, 2022). The study participants simultaneously perceived themselves as having multiple identity characteristics influenced by their interactions with their sociocultural contexts. As Schwartz et al. (2011) discuss, people use different ways to reconcile inconsistencies in their sense of identity and to maintain a

personal sense of self-continuity. An individual constructs narratives to make sense and meaning out of their lives across time and situations (McAdams, 2011, 2018), and they can personally redefine the meanings of the identity categories they represent and make them adjust well together (Huynh et al., 2011). While acknowledging the agency of the individual in constructing their identity is crucial, this process happens within a particular context which cannot be overlooked (Schwartz et al., 2011). Therefore, young people in studies included in this review portrayed their identity not as something fixed or singular such as only being a “refugee”, but as negotiated and contested in relation to their sociohistorical and cultural context. Studies revealed that while adverse experiences throughout the forced migration journey might have had negative impacts on their lives, young people actively rejected ascribed identities such as “refugee” or “unaccompanied minors” that implied victimhood or dependency and showed a strong sense of agency, hope, and visions of a brighter future.

To conceptualize the complexity of the multiple factors influencing identity, we classified findings based on a social-ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; McLeroy et al., 1988). Figure 3 shows an integration of our findings and theoretical interpretation. This figure conveys the multi-level systems in post-migration contexts and highlights how young people’s identities are [re]shaped through the intersection of individual, interpersonal, cultural, and societal levels of interaction within a ‘passage of time’. The model demonstrates how young people from refugee backgrounds construct and make sense of their own lives through their sense of agency and their hope for the future, and the important role of ‘outer’ layers and their influence on young people’s identities. While family, peer relationships, and school were the immediate supports for the development of a positive sense of identity, post-migration challenges such as parents’ lack of ‘Western’ education and experiences of trauma, rejection by peers, and discrimination at schools were found to have negative impacts on the interactions of young people and their identity [re]construction. Our review also found that ethnic culture and religion were important factors shaping the identity of young people with refugee backgrounds. For many participants in studies included in this review, strong connections with their ethnic and cultural background were a source of strength and pride and an important element of their identity. However, host societies and policies had a strong influence in strengthening or weakening this connection. An inclusive and supportive environment in host countries that appreciates cultural and ethnic diversity facilitated the acculturation process. Discrimination, racism, and language barriers, meanwhile, had a negative influence on young people’s perceptions of their ethnic culture and religion as well

as their sense of belonging to host societies. This is consistent with previous research with bicultural individuals, which indicated that the perception of lower integration between the individual's two cultures are associated with the experiences of discrimination, difficulties in communication with culturally diverse communities, and language barriers (e.g. Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005).

A significant aspect of identity construction, which we have included in Figure 2, is the concept of the 'passage of time' (Pickett, Vafai, Mathai, & Small, 2022). As discussed earlier, most studies in this review only indirectly considered time, by emphasising the age range of the participants or the time of displacement. However, none of the studies specifically looked into the influence of this factor on the process of identity [re]construction. According to Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory, the chronosphere (or 'chronosystem') represents the dimension of time and how it influences individuals and their environments. The chronosphere takes into account both historical and developmental time. Historical time refers to the broader socio-historical context in which individuals live, such as cultural changes, historical events, and societal norms. Developmental time refers to the individual's own life transitions, such as starting school, moving to a new city, or experiencing personal life events. A young person experiences major historical and developmental changes throughout the forced migration experience, and considering the influence of time on identity construction is fundamental (Pickett et al., 2022; Shevell & Denov, 2021).

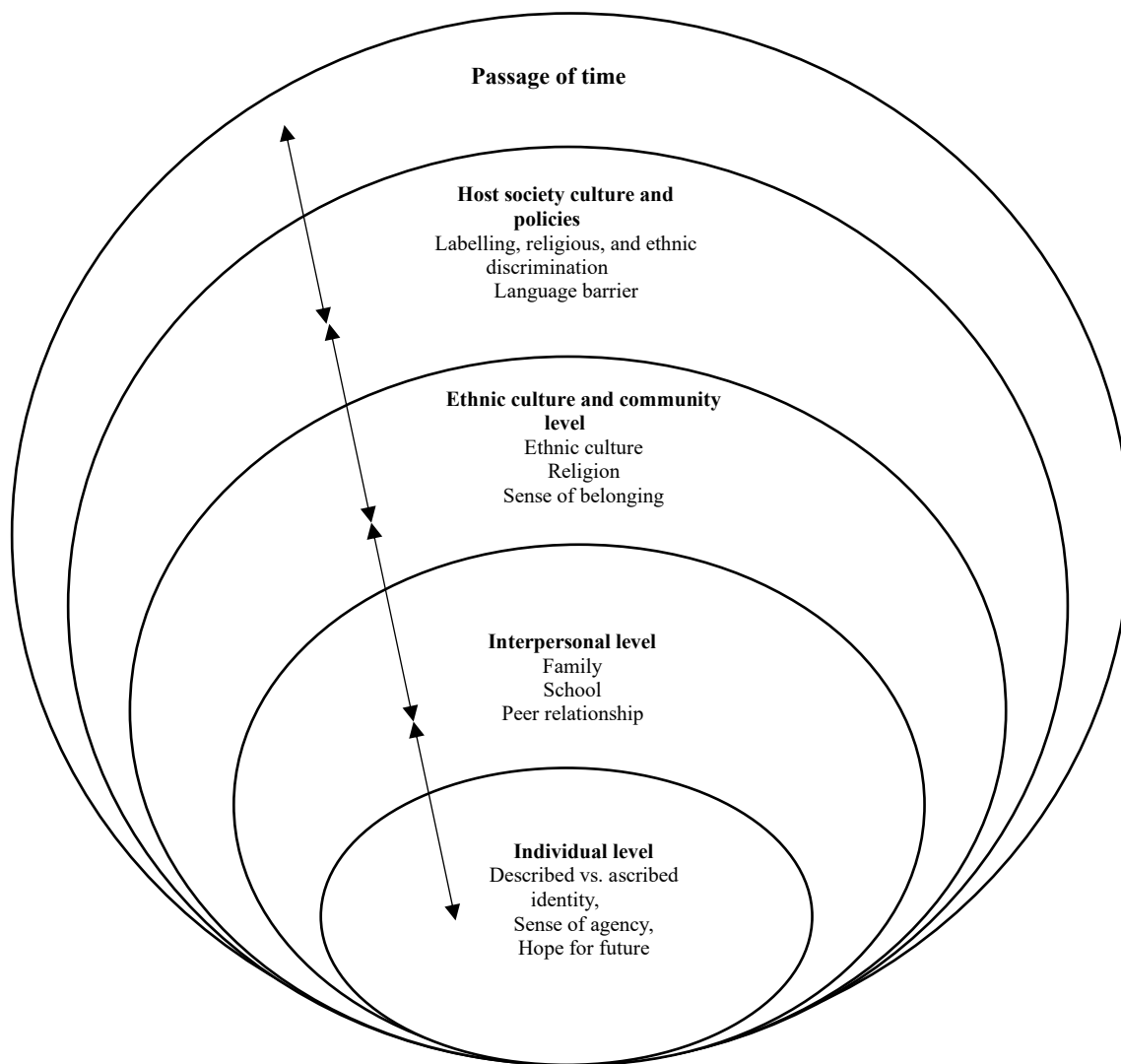


Figure 3 Social-ecological model of factors influencing the perception of identity in post-migration context

4.6.2 Limitation and strengths of studies in the review

Studies involving people exposed to adversity, particularly young people with refugee backgrounds, have specific methodological and ethical challenges. (Block, Warr, et al., 2013; Kristjánsdóttir & Skaptadóttir, 2019). Some of the studies in this review were conducted solely in the host countries' languages, likely excluding potential participants. Given that the ability to speak the host country's language was mentioned as a criterion for integration, omitting the voices of those who could not speak the language fluently may have consequently excluded those who experienced more identity distress and challenges (Ghahari et al., 2020).

Another methodological challenge is the need to develop trusted relationships with participants and overcome barriers to collaborating with communities as an outsider (Ellis et al., 2007; Skovdal & Abebe, 2012). Only a few studies clearly explained the positionality of the researchers or the collaboration of a bicultural and/or bilingual researcher (e.g. Chao, 2019; Miled, 2020).

Additionally, few studies included in this review addressed identity from a holistic perspective. Most studies focused on one aspect of identity, while the results of this review showed how a young person develops multiple identity characteristics through numerous interactions with their environment and how each of these characteristics intersects and interacts with one another in forming a coherent sense of identity. Also, none of the studies specifically explored the influence of time and developmental stages of young people in the process of identity [re]construction following forced migration experiences.

One of the significant strengths of some studies included in this review was using qualitative and mixed methods studies and their focus on hearing the voices of young people themselves. Quantitative studies brought insight into how young people from refugee backgrounds perceived a certain aspect of their identity and where their perceptions were significantly associated with positive or negative experiences in the host countries. However, some were limited to pre-specified definitions of identity. On the other hand, since identity [re]construction is a complex process, the qualitative and mixed methods included in this review explored young participants' self-definitions of identity, and some used creative methods such as narrative and/or visual methods to provide a culturally informed understanding of the perception of identity in the context of forced migration. And finally, we should note that the limitations of the literature mean that conclusions were dependent on the quality of the studies.

4.7 Limitations of the current review

Firstly, considering the wide range of disciplines concerned with the topic of identity development among young people with a refugee background, we used broad definitions and search criteria; however, we still may have missed some relevant studies. Secondly, the literature search generated a few articles in languages other than English, which did not meet our inclusion criteria for practical purposes. Given that a high proportion of people with refugee backgrounds reside in low to middle-income countries neighboring those from which

they have fled, where English is not the dominant language for publishing, this review may not reflect their experiences of identity development. This is important as often these countries are seen as places of temporary (albeit often extended) refuge rather than permanent resettlement. This, too, would provide different challenges for the identity [re]construction (Posselt et al., 2020). Thirdly, while we searched for studies among children as well as adolescents, the search identified only one eligible study that included participants in pre-adolescent childhood. There might be other relevant articles with adult participants with refugee background which focuses on their reflections on their childhood that our search did not locate.

4.8 Conclusion and further directions

In conclusion, this review emphasizes the role of societal and political factors in the host country on personal perceptions and definitions of identity among young people with refugee backgrounds. The findings of this review provide an overview of the existing knowledge of how young people with refugee backgrounds define their identities by integrating their senses of past and present selves and looking for opportunities to shape their own lives. For future studies, this review also indicates the value of more holistic perspectives in primary studies, which consider a variety of factors at different layers of social ecology to understand how young people from refugee backgrounds shape their identities within their unique sociocultural contexts.

In addition, while considering the past traumatic experiences of young people with refugee backgrounds is crucial, this review suggests the value of changing narratives associated with ascribed labels and the assumptions that come with them. Rather, using language and policies which appreciate the agency, sense of hope, and determination of young people from refugee backgrounds is likely to support their aspirations and wellbeing. Moreover, research with young people with refugee backgrounds would benefit from more culturally and linguistically appropriate designs and additional strategies to overcome barriers to accessing communities as outsiders. This review also suggests the importance of providing opportunities for young people with refugee backgrounds to express their own experiences. Recognizing individuals as having agency and unique characteristics and understandings of the world has the potential to enrich the cultures of their host countries.

Chapter 5 The sense of identity and resilience among Hazara youth following childhood experiences of forced migration

In Chapter 4, I presented a scoping review to understand how young people from refugee backgrounds perceive their sense of identity and how various factors within the social ecology influence this perception. Results from the scoping review demonstrated that young individuals see themselves as having multiple identity traits shaped by their interactions with their social and cultural contexts and the need to integrate their past, present, and future experiences. The analysis also underscored the significance of attending to comprehensive and diverse perspectives, which consider elements across various levels of social context, in comprehending how young people from refugee backgrounds shape their identities within their distinct sociocultural settings. This chapter is based on the first empirical study undertaken for the PhD as described in Chapter 3 and partially addresses research questions two and three. This study includes young adult Hazaras reflecting on their childhood experiences of forced migration. In this study, I aimed to understand how young Hazara adults living in Australia perceived and defined their sense of identity and resilience in light of those experiences.

This chapter consists of the manuscript reproduced below:

Farnaz Shahimi, Karen Block & Eva Alisic (2023) '*Still Stood Adamant and Strong to Chase My Dream*': Sense of Identity and Resilience among Hazara Youth following Childhood Experiences of Forced Migration, *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies*.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/15562948.2023.2290644>.

5.1 Abstract

This paper explores the interaction between the identity [re]construction, experiences of resilience and the sociocultural context of young Hazaras from refugee backgrounds. We conducted a qualitative study involving 15 in-depth interviews combined with visual elements. Results demonstrate that meaning-making and a personal sense of resilience were core elements of participants' positive sense of identity. Finding a middle ground between Hazara and Australian identity and developing a sense of belonging were sites of struggle for participants. We discuss how Hazara youth identities were [re]constructed through their sense of agency and opportunities provided in Australia.

5.2 Introduction

During the last few decades, protracted conflicts in Afghanistan have forced millions of people to flee. Approximately 2.6 million registered asylum seekers and refugees have fled Afghanistan, of whom 2.2 million are registered in neighbouring countries such as Iran and Pakistan, while the rest have been resettled in high income countries (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2022a). Among high income countries, Australia has been one of the largest per capita recipients of humanitarian entrants from Afghanistan (Department of Home Affairs, 2021). In 2021, approximately 67,000 people living in Australia were born in Afghanistan (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021), with several thousand more arriving since then. There are also many people of Afghan origin living in Australia who were born outside Afghanistan, particularly in Pakistan and Iran. A large proportion of the population from Afghanistan in Australia are Hazaras - the third largest ethnic group in Afghanistan – and many arrived as children or young adults (Radford & Hetz, 2021). Most arrived in Australia post 2001 as asylum seekers/refugees, due to significant expulsion and enslavement of the Hazaras in Afghanistan, reported as having genocidal elements³ (Hakimi, 2022; Ibrahimi, 2017, p. 57). This paper focuses on the specific impacts of forced migration in childhood and how best to support resilience for this population group (Copolov & Knowles, 2021; Hetz, 2021; Neve, 2022; Radford & Hetz, 2021).

Similar to other populations with refugee backgrounds, research with young people from Afghanistan has been mostly focused on the prevalence of trauma-related mental health difficulties, such as depression, posttraumatic stress disorder, psychological distress and damage to psycho-social functioning (Alemi et al., 2014; Alemi & Stempel, 2018; Copolov & Knowles, 2018, 2021; Hamrah et al., 2021a, 2021b; Ventevogel & Faiz, 2018). Nevertheless, despite the substantial association between adverse life events and mental disorders, not everyone who has experienced trauma will develop mental health problems (Wade et al., 2019). Even when mental health symptoms are present, many with childhood experiences of forced migration show resilience and adjustment in the long run (Fouskas, 2019; Gartland et al., 2019; Zwi et al., 2018). The term *resilience* broadly refers to the capabilities, processes, or outcomes associated with positive adaptation in the context of adversity (Masten, 2018; Ungar, 2018). Research with the general population in Western countries indicates that

³ Although it has received a lot of attention recently, the Hazara genocide is not yet recognized nationally in Afghanistan or by international organizations such as the UN. Therefore, Hazara academics cautiously suggest stating that historical persecution of Hazaras has genocidal elements instead of Hazara genocide. Ibid.

having a ‘positive sense of identity’ as well as a supportive environment can mitigate the risks associated with adverse experiences, assisting young people in navigating pathways to resilience (Marley & Mauki, 2018; Masten, 2018; Ungar, 2018). Nevertheless, there is a lack of insight into how young people from refugee backgrounds may perceive and develop a positive sense of identity within their new sociocultural environment and how this interacts with their perception of resilience. While identity is a complex, multifaceted, and socially constructed concept that is constantly evolving (Chao, 2019; Mijic, 2022), there has been limited research focusing on young people from refugee backgrounds to explore the impacts of forced migration experiences and the settlement process from a holistic perspective. This study begins to address this gap. Considering the significant number of Hazara people in Australia, this research aims to provide a culturally and contextually grounded understanding of how young Hazara adults with refugee backgrounds reflect on their childhood experience of forced migration. Specifically, we aimed to explore these young adults’ views on their identity and resilience during this journey and how their environment might have influenced these perceptions.

5.3 Theoretical and conceptual frameworks

Identity and resilience are widely used terms among a range of disciplines, with definitions varying according to discipline and theoretical and methodological frameworks. Here we discuss which theoretical and conceptual frameworks underpin this study.

5.3.1 Poststructuralism and identity construction: a sociocultural perspective

Poststructuralism recognizes identity as the way an individual understands their interaction with the world, how this interaction is constructed across time and space, and how the individual apprehends their future (Norton & Toohey, 2011). Poststructuralism is greatly influenced by Foucault (1980) who theorized identity as constantly developing in a context embedded within and embodied through culture, history, power, and ideology.

An individual thus actively negotiates and contests their personal and social identity and how they perceive their ‘self’ in interaction with their sociocultural setting (Penuel & Wertsch, 1995). This perspective emphasises both the context of identity construction and the agency of the individual to give meaning to their interactions with that setting (Chao, 2019). Young people from refugee backgrounds encounter at least two important known influences

on identity [re]construction: experiences of migration and displacement (Mijic, 2022; Rabiau, 2019); and experiences of adversity (Berman, 2016; Kira et al., 2018). In both contexts, the interaction between personal and social aspects of identity can be [re]constructed multiple times as circumstances are pushing for various changes (Mijic, 2022).

To understand identity [re]construction following adversity, we drew on Narrative Identity Theory. Narrative Identity Theory foregrounds the lived experiences of adversity and the individual definition of identity: ‘how I came to be the person I am becoming’ (McAdams, 2018). Thus, according to this theory, an individual simultaneously integrates different aspects of their life to maintain a sense of ‘inner sameness and continuity’ (Erikson, 1968, p. 251) across different contexts. An individual’s sense of identity also integrates life in a diachronic sense, that is, over time, showing how the self of yesterday has become the self of today through adverse experiences (McAdams, 2011).

To understand identity in the context of migration, where an individual experiences plurality of contexts and cultures, this study was informed by Bhabha (1994) definition of Hybrid Identity which was extended by Smith and Leavy (2008). Hybrid identity emphasises that identity does not represent a singular self or simply belonging to one community but is formed in cultural practices across time and in interaction with multiple cultures. Therefore, identity formation is not a fixed process but rather is precarious, fluid, hybrid, and shared (Smith & Leavy, 2008).

Using a poststructuralist lens, we conceptualized identity as multifaceted, dynamic, hybrid and (re)constructed in social interactions. This offered insights into how our participants define their sense of identity following the adverse experience of forced migration and how their interactions with their sociocultural environments have influenced [re]construction of identity. We conceptualized a ‘positive sense of identity’ as individuals having subjective feelings and definitions of self that are experienced as positive or favourable (Chen et al., 2012)..

5.3.2 Social ecological perspective of resilience

To better understand how having a positive sense of identity is interacting with resilience among young people from refugee backgrounds (Jafari et al., 2022), we explored how participants in this study perceived and defined resilience and its relation with identity. Using

a social ecological perspective, Ungar (2012) describes resilience as a process whereby an individual navigates protective resources across different layers of their social ecology to support wellbeing in the face of adversity. These layers include factors and attributes at the individual level (e.g., age, gender, cognitive abilities), micro level (e.g., family, friends, school), exo level (e.g., society and community) and macro level (e.g., cultural and political). Researchers are increasingly avoiding the assumption that young people with refugee backgrounds are either vulnerable *or* resilient individuals. Depending on the support systems available within the environment, the same individual might be both over time (Fazel et al., 2012; Frounfelker et al., 2020; Sleijpen et al., 2017). A social ecological perspective decentres the focus on individuals and avoids ‘blaming’ them for not flourishing when there are few opportunities to access resources. It also emphasizes that individuals and families with refugee backgrounds do not exist in isolation and that they live within a broader social structure, interacting with institutions and multiple domains of society (Jafari et al., 2022; Kuru & Ungar, 2020).

5.4 Method

5.4.1 Design and participants

Given the complexity of experiences of forced migration and the exploratory nature of our research questions, we employed qualitative methods. This enabled us to explore the lived experiences of participants in their own words (Liamputtong & Kurban, 2018). Semi-structured in-depth interviews complemented by visual materials were chosen as data collection methods. Interviews focused on participants’ experience of forced migration; how participants defined their sense of identity and resilience in their own words; and the role and influence of social and environmental factors. We used visual data collection as an optional addition to the interviews as it can produce rich data, often in combination with different modes of data collection, such as in depth-interviews. This method typically involves participants visualising aspects of their lives or bringing meaningful images from other photographers (Oh, 2012). Studies with people from a refugee background demonstrate how visual methods incorporated in qualitative methodologies can add insights to the lived experiences of youth, understanding them as valuable and knowledgeable social actors (Block, Warr, et al., 2013; Vecchio et al., 2017).

5.4.2 Context of the study

The study was conducted in Australia, and participants were recruited between July 2021 and June 2022. Two significant incidents affected the study. First, the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated restrictions significantly slowed recruitment. Second, in August 2021, when the Taliban retook control of Afghanistan, recruitment was paused due to significant distress among the Afghan and Hazara communities in Australia. The impact of Afghanistan's collapse will be discussed in the results and discussion sections.

5.4.3 Procedure

The study received ethics approval from the University of Melbourne (2075900.1). The first author, a Farsi speaker with a background in mental health and experience working with Hazara refugee communities in Iran, reached out to several Hazara community members through phone and Zoom video conferences.

Participants were recruited through Melbourne community members' networks using snowball sampling. The first author conducted all sessions on Zoom in the participant's preferred language (English or Farsi). All participants consented verbally and in writing to participate in the research and for their interviews to be video recorded. Interviews lasted 60-90 minutes, and participants were given the opportunity at the end of the interview to raise anything the researcher might not have asked.

To explore identity and resilience, we asked interviewees questions such as "How would you describe identity, and specifically your identity?" and "What is your view on resilience?" And, reflecting on their childhood experiences of forced migration, we asked what factors have been influencing these perceptions. As appropriate, the interviewer asked follow-up questions to probe for depth and examples. Participants who were interested in the visual component of the research, were given a few weeks' time to provide a photo and a short accompanying narrative. The first author transcribed the interviews, simultaneously translating to English from Farsi where needed. To protect the identity of participants, we used pseudonyms. Participants were all offered a small remuneration for their time and contribution.

5.4.4 Analysis

Data were imported into NVivo 13 and analysed using reflexive thematic analysis, informed by the theoretical and conceptual frameworks discussed above, to interpret patterns of meanings (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019). The process of analysis included data familiarisation and extensive and iterative coding and theme development. Coding and theme development were flexible, allowing open engagement with the data and literature. Suggested by Clarke and Braun (2013), this approach helped us to analyse semantic content to produce latent patterns and themes in our analysis.

5.5 Results

The sample comprised 15 Hazara adults aged 20-28 (eight males -seven females - zero nonbinary) who experienced forced migration prior to age 18 and now reside in Melbourne. Alongside the 15 interviews, six photos with short accompanying narratives were sent to the researchers within a few weeks of the interview sessions. Participants had a range of asylum experiences and pathways to permanent protection in Australia (e.g., migrating alone or with family, a range of years in asylum countries and of experience in immigration detention in Australia). All except one participant, had completed or were studying for higher education degrees in Australian universities, and all had full-time or part-time jobs at the time of the interview. All participants identified as Hazaras from Afghanistan. Some referred to themselves as "Afghan" as it is the most used term for the national identity of people from Afghanistan in English and Farsi. In this study, we refer to participants as Hazaras and only use "Afghan" when it is a direct quote. Participant demographic information is summarised in Table 1.

Table 5: Adult participants' characteristics

	Participant ID's	Gender	Age at the time of interview	Age leaving Afghanistan	Age at the time of arrival to Australia	Asylum country/ies	Years in asylum country/ies	Years in Australia	Type of journey
1	Idris	Male	26	4	10	Pakistan	7	15	With Family-Humanitarian program
2	Mahgul	Female	27	10	13	Pakistan	3	14	With Family-Humanitarian program
3	Farida	Female	23	6	8	Pakistan	1	15	With Family-Humanitarian program
4	Ali	Male	26	12	15	Pakistan/Malaysia/Indonesia	3	12	Alone- onshore permanent protection visa
5	Gulnaz	Female	20	4	5	Pakistan	1	15	With Family-Humanitarian program
6	Karim	Male	27	8.5	12.5	Iran/Pakistan	3-4	15	With Family-Humanitarian program
7	Mariam	Female	28	10	14	Pakistan	4	18	With Family-Humanitarian program
8	Razia	Female	28	13	16	South Korea	3	12	With Family-Humanitarian program
9	Roya	Female	20	13	14	Pakistan	1	6	With Family-Humanitarian program

10	Sami	Male	27		17	17	Pakistan	5	10	With Family-Community Sponsored Program
11	Nasir	Male	28		Born in Pakistan	17	Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia	1	9	Alone- onshore permanent protection visa
12	Farid	Male	25		15	16	Pakistan, Malaysia, Indonesia	1	10	Alone- onshore permanent protection visa
13	Amina	Female	29		8	14	Pakistan, Iran	6	18	With Family-Humanitarian program
14	Wahid	Male	27		5	17	Pakistan	12	10	Alone- onshore permanent protection visa
15	Jalal	Male	26		3	14	Pakistan	12	10	With Family-Humanitarian program

Participants discussed their personal sense of identity and their perception of resilience, explaining how they perceived these as influenced by overcoming past traumas; the challenges following arrival in Australia; and how far they have come to achieve their goals and dreams. Participants simultaneously perceived themselves as having multiple identity characteristics which changed depending on their contexts. Our analysis identified three main aspects as central to participants' identity. First were participants' personal identity and perception of resilience. Participants conveyed how they defined themselves as a 'resilient person' through their stories of migration challenges. Second was the Hazara ethnic identity and what it meant to participants and their experiences of cultural clashes post-settlement. Third, was their Australian identity and challenges for finding a sense of belonging in Australia. Participants described how they overcame adverse experiences, combined Hazara and Australian identity into a cohesive sense of self, and how support systems including family, education, and community support influenced this process.

5.5.1 Personal sense of identity and resilience

Most participants defined their identity and resilience through their challenges, traumas, successes, passions, and achievements. Participants spoke about their identity as a life story that included experiences of adversity, then integrated those memories with goals, success and passions and created a coherent account of identity over time. In the following quote, Farida conveys to us who she is now through her multiple lived experiences:

I don't know who I am now [laugh]... My lived experiences with my family, my sicknesses or my house, the weddings, the parties...My art, my research ... and the way I choose to present myself to the world in the way that I dress. *Farida*

We identified two key themes concerning participants' personal sense of identity and definition of resilience. The first focused on adverse experiences before and during migration and the impact of forced displacement; the second on how these negative experiences influenced participants' sense of self as "resilient" individuals, transforming displacement experiences into aspiration and determination over time.

5.5.1.1 ‘Nothing I can do can erase those memories’: impacts of trauma and displacement on sense of identity

Participants explained that the adversities that they endured perhaps represented the point at which they began defining their sense of identity and resilience. They shared stories of their earliest memories in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the challenges which led to forced migration and adversities associated with the displacement journey itself. Some could still remember bomb blasts and family members being persecuted by the Taliban, while some shared how the fear of death in suicide attacks or of being kidnapped by the Taliban forced them to flee. Some had to live in countries of first asylum, mainly Pakistan and Iran, for years while waiting for settlement in Australia. Some fled alone with smugglers to Indonesia and Malaysia and then travelled by boat to Australia. Some participants spoke of how those traumatic experiences changed their lives drastically:

We watched the bodies of our own people being torn to pieces and we saw that as kids, I was probably age 9. It's so traumatic... nothing I can do can erase those memories and I guess that's something that will just stay with us until we die. *Idris*

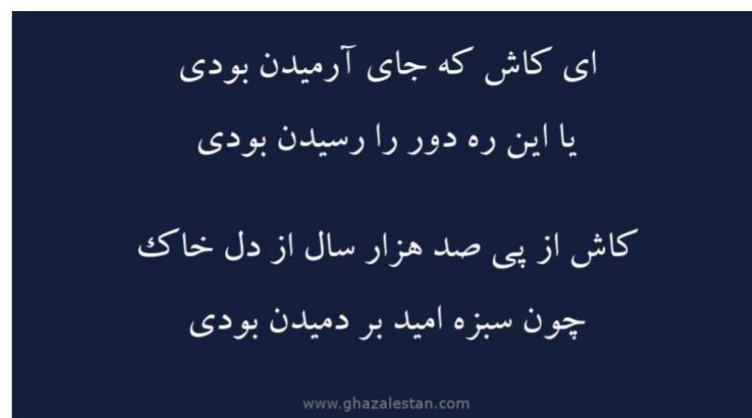
Some participants explained that forced migration can be a constant experience of pain which might linger with a person for life. The topic came up in the context of Afghanistan falling back into the hands of the Taliban in 2021. Nasir shared the ongoing experience of worrying about his family who were still in Afghanistan. He explained that while people considered him a ‘lucky person’ to survive the conflicts, he felt that although he had physically ‘survived’, mentally he was still experiencing them. Some participants, including Mariam pointed out the trauma of displacement itself:

You know one day I was just playing with my friends in the streets and telling them that I'll see you tomorrow and the next day you'd be gone, leaving your whole home, and never seeing your friends again. I think that definitely traumatized me. *Mariam*

Idris shared that even though he is not a ‘refugee’ anymore, the negative experience of leaving home and displacement enormously influenced his identity.

It's sort of being 'Avareh'[adrift] or you know refugee. It's right to the very end of our lives... We are like trees, we're taken, we're uprooted, and were planted elsewhere. *Idris*

He also referred to a Farsi poem by Khayyam⁴ about his philosophy of living and death (see image 1) to share the idea that the journey of life for a displaced person can be never-ending and the hope for 'reaching a destiny', 'comfort' or 're-birth' can only be an imaginary desire.



I wish there was some place for repose
I wish this long passage reached an end
I wish, after a hundred thousand years beneath the earth's breast,
Like meadows, we sprang forth into life again

Omar Khayyam

Image 1: Poem by Omar Khayyam translated to English by Idris, 26 years old

5.5.1.2 '[I] still stood adamant and strong to chase my dream': meaning making, personal sense of resilience, hope and aspiration

Participants emphasised how perceiving themselves as 'resilient' influenced the way they understood challenges throughout their migration journey. Some shared how a sense of self-

⁴ Omar Khayyam (8 May 1048 – 4 December 1131), was a polymath, known for his contributions to mathematics, astronomy, philosophy, and Persian poetry.

efficacy aided them in coming to terms with their traumatic memories and being proactive in overcoming those challenges:

It provides that fuel that I need. To look on the bright side to get through the day. To have goals, to strive to struggle... It's through my own traumatic personal experience. *Ali*

Facing and dealing with adverse experiences associated with forced migration was life defining and a reference point for expectations about the future. As Farid explained, his hopes kept him resilient through the horrifying asylum journey and the months he spent in Australian detention centres. One of his hopes was to get to Australia and to have the chance to study, so his future could be 'better' and 'predictable'. Some believed that without the experience of dislocation, they would not be the same hard-working and resilient person with the power to achieve much.

Participants also explained how the experience of displacement influenced their motivations and aspirations. As illustrated in image 3, Mariam described how the experience of displacement from her beloved homeland changed her, and how she turned that experience into motivation and determination.



“I guess this photo shaped up the person that I’m today. It is an image of my home back in Afghanistan, a place that gave me so much to reminisce about but also a place that shattered my heart because we had to leave it all behind us - possibly given the current circumstances, forever. It’s a place that motivates me so much to do better and give back to everyone who is left behind”.

Image 2: Photo by Maryam, 28 years old

However, for some of the participants who came to Australia as unaccompanied minors, this process was particularly challenging. A few explained how they mentally and emotionally struggled to cope with trauma and how it impacted the process of forming a cohesive sense of identity. As Farid explained in the next quote, his motivation to be an ‘educated’ and ‘successful’ person was undermined by trauma and living alone in Australia. The combination of not having family or social support and the high expectations for success that he had for himself, led him to burn-out, depression and ‘not knowing who he is anymore’:

I was vulnerable in my loneliness so I wouldn’t do anything but regretting my situation and feeling pity for myself. I was wasting every minute and

hour in my life... But I couldn't help the situation and myself. I was going to school, but I was disengaged, and I couldn't do my homework. Not that I didn't want to, I didn't have the energy. It took me 2.5-3 years until I could return to my normal self, and I was able to study again. *Farid*

5.5.2 Hazara identity, cultural clashes, and identity crisis

As illustrated in image 3, most participants shared how their ethnic identity and its history had extensively influenced many aspects of their sense of resilience and their personal sense of identity.



“To me, this headpiece (also known as "paykai" in Hazaragi) symbolises both my identity and resilience. The bird engraved in this silver headpiece is a symbol of freedom and also a reminder of who I am and where I come from”.

Image 4: Photo by Mahgul, 27 years old

From conversations about the influence of ethnic identity and culture, two themes were constructed. The first concerned how Hazara cultural identity and associated multi-generational trauma combined with participants' personal experiences of migration and adjustment in Australia to shape the person they had become. The second focused on the

challenges of cultural integration in Australia. Participants experienced an ‘identity crisis’ and eventually occupied a ‘middle ground’ that combined their two cultures.

5.5.2.1 ‘Yes, I am Hazara. We have been discriminated [against] and persecuted for centuries’: the Influence of ethnic and cultural identity

As illustrated in an image provided by Nasir of Buddhas of Bamiyan ⁵, the Hazara ethnic identity and the impact of years of discrimination and persecution were crucial influences on participants’ sense of identity and perception of resilience.

“I am really inspired by this image of Buddhas of Bamiyan. I have adopted the resilience from the people living in the caves around the Buddha for centuries. They have seen more difficult times than anyone, yet they still are living either in those caves or close to that mountain no matter what the conditions are”.

Mariam described how she believes Hazara identity for her was associated with both trauma and resilience at the same time:

Being a minority within the minority and being a minority from [one of] the most persecuted tribe[s], pain, discomfort and grief come with that identity. But at the same time, determination, courage, and resilience.
Mariam

Being Hazara also had a significant influence on how participants shaped their vocational identity. A few had chosen law and activism for their careers and were advocates for their community. Gulnaz explicitly shared how her ethnic identity and its intergenerational trauma history contributed to her choice of profession:

I think the legal profession gives you an opportunity to be outspoken on things. The way Afghanistan was, not just as of recently, but many, many years and for centuries, [it] needs people from within to stand up for it. Stand

⁵ As of the thesis’ publication, I was unable to obtain permission from the photographer to use the participant-provided photo due to copyright restrictions. The photo can be accessed using the address: <https://www.muzafar.net/index/G0000CqB3QM5udew/I0000J8SBJ0uU9B8>. The Buddhas of Bamiyan (or Bamyan) were two enormous statues carved into the side of a cliff in the Bamyan valley of central Afghanistan. The Buddhas were destroyed by Taliban tank in 2000.

up for their own country... A country that I could go back to and feel safe in. Just like the friends around me did that. They would go on vacations and come back home but we didn't. As Afghans we don't have that option because of the safety issues and everything. *Gulnaz*

Some participants felt that similar experiences of ethnic trauma, resilience and marginalized identity brought them together with other social groups. For example, a participant shared how he believed the experience of ethnic persecution in Afghanistan brought his identity closer to Indigenous people in Australia and their history of intergenerational trauma and colonization of their lands. Another said he felt more comfortable being around people from communities that had also experienced persecution and forced migration.

While ethnic persecution was the main reason for migration, participants emphasised how they protected and kept their Hazara cultural identity. Most participants had beautiful memories, loving family members still living in Afghanistan, and some strong ties to their homeland's culture. Some shared how they maintained cultural ties through their interest in the Farsi language, literature, music, traditional food, clothing, dancing, and celebrating traditional events. Participants expressed different views however, as to what extent religion influenced their identity: from being a Muslim as a major component of their identity to not identifying as Muslim. Some participants believed that Islam, Afghan, and Hazara cultures have merged and that it is sometimes difficult to differentiate religious and ethno-cultural practices. For other participants, however, they were two separate things that may have influenced each other but can be differentiated:

Islam is a religion. It's not a culture. each country may have hundreds of cultural tribes. Culture for me is the style of living. How you celebrate your ceremonies, things like that. *Nasir*

5.5.2.2 *'I'm too Afghan for Australians and too Australian for Afghans': cultural clashes and creating a combined cultural identity*

For most of our participants and their families, the experience of leaving everything behind including family members, belongings and culture, and then attempting to 'successfully' integrate into the host society, was a source of stress. Participants in our study reported their experience of identity distress or 'identity crisis' which they experienced after they arrived. Participants shared how at some points they felt they did not belong either to their ethnic culture or the Australian culture:

It's like an identity crisis. It's so hard that you can have mental breakdowns from not knowing where you belong or not really knowing who you are. [One] panics or goes into a depression and so not knowing in any moment who you are or not having any sort of identity, distress, or an identity crisis, it hits. *Farida*,

Mariam shared how some of her behaviours and beliefs such as being an 'extrovert' or a 'loud' woman were not very common in her own culture and it made it hard sometimes to connect with her own people. As another participant explained, she would define her identity as the 'third culture kid' and how she had positioned her identity in the middle so that she could find common ground. An illustration created for this research by Farida (see image 4), shared how she gradually came to the point that she could choose some aspects of Afghan and Hazara culture and combine them with Australian culture to make a combined culture of her own.

The Nobel Hound



“For me, a huge sense of identity and belonging comes from the idea that we are all interconnected. In the west people dress and accessorise their dogs. In Afghanistan, families don’t typically own dog pets let alone dress them. Religious households consider it to be unsanitary. So, the idea of the Afghan dog wearing traditional Afghan attire is a symbol of the culture personified. A juxtaposition. The Hazaragi headwear is used with the intent to put the Afghan hound in the same light as other dogs- loyal, loving and obeying. To allow Afghans to see their native animal through a curious lense rather than the lense we have been brought up to see dogs as-unsanitary. This drawing captures its elegance through a close-up portrait. The hound is wearing a stack of traditional “Kola Qabtumar”. The traditional headwear is worn by Hazaras. Qabtumar is a complicated geometric pattern that is hand-embroidered”.

Image 4: Illustration by Farida, 23 years old

5.5.3 Navigating a sense of belonging and resilience in Australia

Almost all participants highlighted how they struggled at different stages of life and to different extents to find a sense of belonging in Australia. We begin by elaborating the first theme on experiences of racism, social exclusion and the impact of policies on sense of belonging. We then describe how participants navigated and built resilience and sense of belonging, discussing three sub-themes: family support; access to education; and building social capital.

5.5.3.1 ‘I’m More than a hijabi girl’: experiences of racism, exclusion, and the impact of social policies

Participants shared their experiences of racism and exclusion and how it negatively affected their sense of belonging and ultimately, their ‘identity crisis’ during late adolescence

and early adulthood. Both male and female participants were exposed to the negative impacts of gendered stereotyping, racism, and Islamophobia. Some male participants experienced racist stereotyping: being called a ‘terrorist’; while some visibly Muslim female participants experienced verbal or physical attacks focused on them wearing a hijab. As Roya explained, the feeling of exclusion associated with her Muslim identity were not apparent when she was at primary school, when it was not obvious that she was culturally ‘different’. It began later when she started wearing a hijab and led to ‘culture shock’ when she experienced being picked on and called ‘towel head’:

When I got to high school, because I was a Muslim girl wearing my hijab, I kind of felt outcasted in one way or another, even though you wanna fit in, you wanna belong, you can't help but feel that barrier between you and some other students, or a barrier between you and some teachers. *Roya*

Mariam expressed that she wanted others to see different components of her identity, leading her to be outspoken about her culture and religion on various media platforms:

I'm not just a person who put on the head scarf on her head. I'm more than that. I am a leader, I'm an activist, I'm a journalist, I'm a student. I'm a person made of different elements to make me as one whole person and I think the saddest part is a lot of people see me as just a *hijabi* girl. *Mariam*

Similarly, Idris shared his experience of witnessing racist insults against his mother wearing a veil and addressed how it impacted his sense of belonging to Australia:

People have either tried to take it off or sworn or said things. We've got citizenship but you know, citizenship cannot protect you from something like that. *Idris*

Female participants also spoke about how they experienced racist stereotyping based on their gender, cultural and/or national identity. Roya explained that when she was too young to understand racism, she still knew that one of her teacher’s comments about her being from Afghanistan and pursuing education was wrong:

It was a psychology class, and the teacher would come up ... oh why you even studying so hard? All Afghans girls at the end of their day they would

get married, have kids, make a family. He kind of said that and I felt bad.

Roya

Male participants also experienced racist stereotyping including being called *terrorist*. Particularly in schools in which there was little diversity, students from refugee backgrounds could feel unsupported by the school staff. Feelings of exclusion, particularly in school or university environments, were brought up both by female and male participants. Negative stereotypes, language and cultural barriers all contributed:

Sometimes, you think you don't belong here. Specially that you speak English with a different accent, some tiny cultural differences and sometimes you face some people that even if they are not acting the obvious racism, they transfer that feeling to you. Even now that I am working with government and I am citizen of Australia, sometimes I have this feeling that in that person's mind, you don't belong here. *Sami*

Amina described how she compared her language ability or achievements to those who came to Australia at an earlier age or were born here and this significantly influenced her self-confidence. Therefore, she was pushing herself to compensate for her lack of education and language knowledge with more hours of work and study which impacted her social life.

Immigration policies also influenced sense of belonging. While almost all participants had received permanent protection visas ⁶, Nasir shared the impact of being stateless. He explained that he was born to "Afghan" parents in Pakistan. However, Afghanistan doesn't accept the Pakistani birth certificate, and Pakistan doesn't accept him as he is born to 'Afghan' parents. That is how he ended up being undocumented when he arrived in Australia and has been unable to apply for citizenship. His sense of relief when he reached his destination after days of being on a boat and surviving the traumatic asylum journey only lasted for a couple of weeks until Immigration started 'interrogating' him about his past. The participant shared how not being a citizen of any country, particularly Australia, affected his sense of belonging and opportunities:

⁶ Most participants came here on permanent protection visa directly from Pakistan or Iran (resettled through UNHCR) and spent the processing time in those countries. Those who arrived seeking asylum as an unaccompanied minor, spent approximately a year in detention centres before receiving a permanent protection visa. However, none of the participants arrived after 2012, when policies were changes whereby no permanent protection visas have been granted to asylum seekers arriving by boat after that time.

My [study] major is cyber security. So, any job that involves cyber security needs level 4 for security clearance and that's only given to citizens of Australia. Because I'm not citizen I can't get level 4 security clearance. Therefore, I can't get the dream job that I am seeking. *Nasir*

5.5.3.2 'Now it feels good to give it back to the community': navigating and building resilience

After discussing the challenges affecting participants' sense of identity and belonging, we asked participants to reflect on the early years after they arrived and evaluate the influence of their family, school, friendships, and community in overcoming them. Participants mentioned multiple factors that assisted them to regain, sustain, or improve their mental wellbeing and resilience. We discuss the following sub-themes below: family values and the role of family support; education opportunities; and the role of friendships and community support.

Family values and the role of family support: Most of the participants described their parents and older siblings, as a significant support and drew inspiration from the resilience of their parents. However, some participants who migrated to Australia with their parents had mixed feelings. Some mentioned that growing up in a different culture caused conflicts between them and their parents, who were not 'supportive of their decisions for life'. Since family members were also engaged in dealing with traumatic experiences, financial hardship, and cultural clashes, this could complicate their relationships with each other. For some parents, the sense that their children were distancing themselves from their origin culture was a source of conflict. One participant described how his decision to change his original name to a common Western one sparked disagreement. Changing one's name to make it easier to pronounce was likely seen by parents as rejecting *their* cultural identity in favour of a more 'Australian' identity.

Different challenges confronted those who migrated without their families. As one participant explained, although his mother was comforting him by saying he was fortunate that he had left Afghanistan, he felt guilty about surviving alone and not being able to share his happiness with family. As another related, when his family arrived in Australia, he had to withdraw from university to work to support them. He felt that the parent-child support role had changed, and this responsibility had put enormous pressure on his shoulders.

Education opportunities: Most participants pointed out the influence of Australian education as an important factor contributing to their ‘Australian’ identity. Along with seeking safety, access/lack of access to education was a driver of migration:

One of the most important problems in our country is that most people can’t access good education so they cannot understand who is good for them (as the leader), or their country. If people were educated and could choose educated people, they could help building Afghanistan and they could fight for cultural freedom. *Farid*

As Roya explained, seeing successful, passionate, and independent women inspired her to seek education. Something that many children, particularly girls, were finding difficult and life-threatening in Afghanistan. However, while those who were younger when they arrived were able to pursue education, those who arrived here at older ages, or were older siblings in the family, often had to start working due to financial difficulties. As Amina mentioned, her oldest brother had to give up on studying, and work when he arrived at the age of 17 to support the younger siblings. Still today, although he is successful in his business, he is wistful about not having the chance to study.

The role of friendships and community support: Only a few participants mentioned access to mental health support when they struggled with challenges. Most explained they received support for their needs through their friendships and community support and answered ‘no’ when asked if they ever sought mental health support.

For some participants, finding friends within their ethnic community helped them keep their Afghan and Hazara identities as well as cope with challenges. Sami shared that he did not want to adjust to Australian culture too fast as he wanted to keep his ‘Afghanistani’ culture and his Farsi language. Also, having friends from the Afghan and Hazara communities was helpful as they shared an understanding of what they had been through in Afghanistan and their journeys to Australia:

When we are sitting together, sometimes we don’t need to talk about everything, when I say the beginning of my thoughts, he can read the end of it’ [an idiom in Farsi]. *Sami*

As Farida explained, these connections and friendships significantly influenced her sense of belonging to Australia, helped her cope with the past, and put it behind her.

All of the male participants and one female participant, Mariam, highlighted the importance of sport to connect with the community, expand their social capital and improve mental health:

Football was my main connection. [Football] was the language I could communicate with people. Whenever I have time, I love to play soccer and that's where I literally forget my old pain. *Nasir, 28 years old*

Participants also shared how positive experiences with Australian support systems influenced their resilience and sense of identity. Participants recalled that it gave them a good feeling knowing that they could ask for help and support from these community organizations, particularly for those who entered the community without their families.

Some participants particularly appreciated the support of teachers and school staff, mainly in their language schools. As Mariam mentioned, her teacher encouraged her to speak out without fear, which greatly influenced her sense of identity. Roya described how the support of her school social worker influenced her sense of identity and choice of her current career:

I was very interested to become someone like them in future. To assist people and I feel like it's rewarding and it's giving back to the community and assisting other peoples. *Roya*

Similarly, some participants mentioned that after a while, rather than needing support, they gained strength from the positive feeling of helping others in a similar situation, including those who needed information about visa applications, university, school, access to welfare benefits and choosing the right path. Some started working as translators with service providers for immigrants or even during their time at school, helping other Afghan and Hazara parents with the enrolment of their children:

You feel like I can help. I have this power that I can do it. That connected me to [the community] and being able to speak English and to help someone that is speaking my home country [language] or that is going through what I went through made me feel that I am making a difference there. *Amina*

5.6 Discussion

In this paper, we have explored young adult Hazaras' perceptions of the influence of their childhood experience of forced migration on their identity and resilience. Here we integrate our core findings with our conceptual frameworks and the literature and discuss their implications.

5.6.1 Personal sense of identity: meaning making and resilience

Consistent with Narrative Identity theory, (McAdams, 2011), participants perceived their identity as a life story which integrated memories from childhood experiences of forced migration and more recent events. Participants emphasised how challenging experiences were a turning point in their lives and how they translated their pain into resilience, hope, determinations, aspirations and achievements and created a coherent and positive sense of identity over time. 'Hope for a better future' was an integral part of participants' sense of resilience. This finding was similar to that observed by Panter-Brick and Eggerman (2012) who argued that enduring pain for people in Afghanistan is not necessarily internalized negatively and overcoming challenges is 'valued' and 'praised' both culturally and religiously. A sense of hope for a better future made 'meaning' out of suffering and underpinned Afghan families' beliefs that present wellbeing was determined much more by their imaginable future than their traumatic past.

This observation is also consistent with what Pals (2006) referred to as 'adaptation' where people narrate their experiences of enduring pain and then articulate and commit to a positive resolution of the event. The notion of 'posttraumatic growth' suggests that people can grow and even experience positive consequences in the wake of adversity, without ignoring the negative impacts (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2014; Sleijpen et al., 2016). Thus individual resilience occurs when there is an environment that facilitates access to needed resources and a willingness by those who control them to provide what individuals need in ways that are congruent with their culture (Ungar & Theron, 2020). Ungar (2013) argues that it is important not to 'naively' assume that resilience is the outcome of purely individual attributes.

Aligned with this social-ecological perspective, and previous resilience research, our results demonstrated the positive impacts of a protective social ecology, including access to education, a supportive family and peer group, and access to community and social support

(Jafari et al., 2022; Scharpf et al., 2021; Sleijpen et al., 2017; Ungar & Theron, 2020; Young & Block, 2022). Participants also shared negative experiences they had endured since arriving in Australia, which had challenged their resilience, sense of self and sense of belonging during their adolescence. A recurring theme was that of an ‘identity crisis’ while negotiating for a ‘middle ground’ between two cultures: Hazara and Australian.

5.6.2 Hybridity and finding a middle ground

Being identified as an ethnic and religious minority, and Hazaras’ endurance of discrimination and violence provided a central inspiration for how participants conceptualized their identities and resilience. This is consistent with substantial research on intergenerational trauma among groups who have experienced genocide or been subjected to ethnic violence (Kahn & Denov, 2022). Muldoon et al. (2019) argue that social identity amongst people living in the same conflict zone, class and religious group play a significant role in shaping interpretations of traumatic events. Traumatic events are appraised not only in a personalised way, but also through the lens of an ethnic identity. In addition to the trauma experiences of Hazaras, most participants also saw language, ‘Afghan’ food, family values, cultural celebrations, and festivals as significant components of who they are.

Nonetheless, participants shared how challenging it was to find a balance between their sense of belonging to ‘their country’ and ethnic culture and to Australia. The process of integration to the new society’s culture and emotional ties to the culture of origin can create identity distress or an identity crisis among young people (Guler & Berman, 2019) as refugees struggle to integrate the various cultural and social expectations and their lived experiences into a coherent sense of self (Weems et al., 2016). Participants found their identity positioning and moving between their Hazara/Afghan identity and Australian identity difficult, and attempts to adjust to one, could result in rejection by the other. They strove to find a middle ground that merged both cultures or to become the ‘third culture kid’ (Kwon, 2019). Kwon (2019) explains that third culture kid (TCK) is a term used to describe individuals who have spent a significant part of their developmental years living in a culture or country different from that of their parent's home culture. The ‘third culture’ refers to the unique cultural space that TCKs often occupy, which is neither the culture of their parents nor the culture of the country where they currently reside. To understand this complexity, we must avoid reducing participants’ identities to the purely national or ethnic signifiers of ‘Afghan/Hazara-Australian’ (Mijic, 2022). Recognizing the hybridity of identity (Bhabha,

1994; Smith & Leavy, 2008), there are multiple cultural, historical, religious and contextual factors contributing to how a person might develop their identity throughout the experience of [forced] migration (Chao, 2019; Radford & Hetz, 2021). Some of these factors may look ‘conflicted’ when the experiences of people are simplified. For example, the experience of trauma-induced migration from Afghanistan while simultaneously having a sense of pride in the homeland and Hazara identity may look incompatible at first. However, for participants of our study, it was reasonable that forced migration from Afghanistan and having a sense of pride in the homeland co-existed.

Nevertheless, identity crises or conflicts began for participants with socio-political pressures to preference particular identity aspects over others. For example, they needed to focus on negative aspects of their experiences in Afghanistan, proving they would be in danger there, to be accepted as a ‘genuine’ refugee (Kenny, 2017). As a result, narratives which participants - particularly those who arrived as unaccompanied minors - had to tell for their refugee claims were solely focused on negative experiences from the country of origin and were unable to fully portray how they felt about their origin country and culture.

Secondly, participants experienced pressure to be ‘successfully’ integrated into Australian society, potentially entailing implicit or explicit criticism of Hazara culture through adoption of ‘Australian social values’. Moreover, our results demonstrated how the expectation of ‘successful integration’ was undermined by multiple factors including language barriers and racist stereotyping. Consistent with previous research, lack of accommodation towards those not fluent in host-country languages created barriers to a sense of belonging (Aniko & Terry, 2009; Evans, 2020b; Karam et al., 2020; Kennedy et al., 2019). This was compounded by the negative impact of media and political discourses creating stereotypes about people from refugee background. After 9/11, negative attitudes toward Muslims increased sharply. Refugees - particularly those from Afghanistan - were characterized by media images and political discourses as potential threats and terrorists (Mir & Sarroub, 2019). Among our participants, the experience of highly gendered racist stereotyping was significant and consistent with existing research on systemic racism and exclusionary discourses in mainstream media and policies which prevent young people from refugee backgrounds developing a positive sense of belonging to the host culture (Shiqi Chen & Robert D. Schweitzer, 2019; Miled, 2020; Oppedal et al., 2017).

Responding to pressure to be successfully integrated and resisting these negative stereotypes, created the urge felt by some participants to be ‘as good as Australians’ and to be highly competent. This conformed with what Hetz (2021) describes as pressure to be a ‘good refugee’. The ‘good refugee’ was described as a ‘worthy’ or ‘deserving’ refugee who can demonstrate eligibility for refugee protection; a willingness to integrate and contribute; gratitude and docility; political moderation; and passivity, with limited demands for agency and a political voice. Hetz concludes that the idea of being a good refugee contributes to ambitiousness and achievement. However, our findings also show that if a person is struggling to overcome displacement, racism and post-migration challenges, achieving the attributes of the ‘good refugee’ may be impossible, ultimately impacting their sense of belonging and resilience.

5.7 Conclusion

Our study provides new insights into how young Hazaras gave meanings to adverse experiences during forced migration, and how multiple cultural and contextual factors influenced their perception of resilience and sense of identity after settlement in Australia. Identity, resilience and sense of belonging among participants were not only acquired through social interaction with significant others during primary socialization but were also obtained through agency and participation opportunities provided within society. Our study demonstrated how social exclusion which occurred for Hazara participants in Afghanistan (being Hazara and Shia) and in Australia (being Muslim, from Afghanistan with language barriers) undermined efforts to find a sense of belonging to both Afghanistan and Australia. It is vital to consider structural, historical, and contextual factors in understanding development of identity and resilience, as well as the role of agency, that is, the way individuals creatively respond to their circumstances and environment.

We have also demonstrated how social policies may be informed by narratives that pathologize people from refugee backgrounds. According to a Western mental health lens, ‘traumatization’ is linked to ‘psycho-social challenges’ and renders people from refugee backgrounds as a ‘vulnerable’ (Lawrence et al., 2019). However, without ignoring the negative impacts of traumatic events, culturally informed meaning-making and a sense of pride in enduring trauma among Hazaras in this study meant ‘resilience and hope’ and ‘vulnerability and trauma’ co-existed and shaped a cohesive sense of identity for participants.

Hazara history and intergenerational experiences of trauma, combined with personal experiences of forced migration and settlement, informs how participants have merged these seemingly contradictory concepts and values and created a hybrid, multifaceted identity which is culturally and contextually coherent.

5.8 Limitations, strengths and further directions

This paper draws on interviews with a relatively small group of Hazara youth living in Melbourne, Australia. Due to the impact of COVID and access barriers to the community, recruitment and data collection were conducted online and through personal networks. This limited opportunities to access a wider range of participants with varied socioeconomic positions. Most participants were studying at a university or had graduated, were employed in stable jobs, had family and social supports, were permanent residents or citizens of Australia, with access to governmental supports. These represent significant distinctions from the experiences of those seeking asylum in Australia and on temporary protection visas. Therefore, the participants' views naturally do not represent the experiences of all Hazaras, other ethnicities from Afghanistan and other people from refugee backgrounds in general.

On the other hand, one could also argue that there was still substantial heterogeneity within our group of participants, which has likely influenced our findings. Although participants had a similar socioeconomic status at the time of the study, there was still variation within their experience of forced migration (e.g. in the way they migrated, the number of years spent in varying asylum countries). A more homogenous group might have led to more specific recommendations.

Nonetheless, the findings of this study are important due to the significant increase in settlement of Afghans and Hazaras in Australia after August 2021 and can inform future research on identity development in the context of forced migration. These findings also highlight the need for more holistic, contextual and culturally informed longitudinal studies on factors influencing identity construction among children and adolescents from refugee background. Despite the impacts of trauma and settlement challenges, none of the participants in this study accessed formal mental health support during the first few years. This needs further exploration and active involvement in the community to understand the low rates of engagement with mental health supports and to inform culturally appropriate mental and social support for newly arrived children and adolescents from Afghanistan.

Additionally, while experience of exclusion and racism might no longer be a novel outcome of research with migrant and refugee population, results of this research provide more evidence that enhanced social policies are needed, particularly across the education system to eliminate experiences of racism and exclusion and promote a sense of belonging for young people from refugee backgrounds.

5.9 Acknowledgement

We would like to acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as Australia's First People and Traditional Custodians on whose Country we work, learn, and live, and pay our respects to Elders past and present. We would like to acknowledge the support and assistance of Hazara community in Melbourne. Particularly, we would like to acknowledge the support of our Hazara colleague Azadah Maryam Raz Mohammad for assisting us with recruitment and generously offering to review the article for cultural sensitivity. We would also like to acknowledge our funding: FS is supported by the Melbourne Research Scholarship (MRS) and EA by an Australian Research Council Future Fellowship (#FT190100255).

Chapter 6 (Re)construction of identity and resilience among Afghan and Hazara adolescents following forced migration

In chapter 5, I explored sense of identity and resilience among young Hazara adults who arrived in Australia prior to the age of 18. Participants reflected on their childhood experiences of forced migration before and following their arrival in Australia. Results demonstrate that meaning-making and a personal sense of resilience were principal foundations of participants' positive sense of identity. Young participants reported that finding a middle ground between Hazara and Australian identity and developing a sense of belonging were sites of struggle for participants. I also discussed how Hazara youth identities were [re]constructed through their sense of agency and opportunities provided in Australia. This chapter is based on the second empirical study conducted for the PhD which addressed the research questions two and three in relation to Afghan and Hazara adolescents' experiences of forced migration to Australia. In this study, I aimed to understand the experiences of adolescents who recently arrived in Australia to reflect on their current barriers and supports and explore the factors that influence the process of [re]construction of their sense of self and resilience. I also integrated the perspectives of their parents to complement adolescents' reports of their experiences.

The manuscript that forms this chapter is: Shahimi, F, Block, K, Alisic, E. [Re]construction of identity and resilience among Afghan and Hazara adolescents following forced migration. *Social Identities* (under review)

6.1 Abstract

This paper explores [re]construction of a sense of identity and resilience among Hazara and Afghan adolescents from refugee backgrounds following migration to Australia. We conducted a qualitative study involving ten adolescents and six parents. Findings demonstrated that adolescents perceived themselves as resilient with a sense of agency and determination core to this identity. Our analysis also showed the substantial influence of seeking and finding a sense of belonging. In the context where young people have experienced major life challenges such as forced migration, reconstruction of identity, finding a sense of belonging and building resilience, are interrelated, complex and ongoing processes.

Supporting wellbeing of young people from refugee backgrounds requires a holistic understanding of this complexity and the implementation of effective social policies and practices that provide culturally inclusive environments to support positive adjustment.

Keywords: adolescents, refugee, resilience, sense of identity, forced migration

6.2 Introduction

Globally, forcibly displaced people numbered 108.4 million by the end of 2022 (UNHCR, 2023). According to the UNHCR (2023), almost 40% of this population were under 18 and likely to have experienced a wide range of traumatic events before, during and after displacement (Kehoe et al., 2019; Scoglio & Salhi, 2021). In Afghanistan, long-suffering conflicts have been forcing people to flee for decades (Clements & Adamec, 2003; Crews & Tarzi, 2008). Since 2021, the return of the Taliban rule over Afghanistan, has triggered a significant increase in people fleeing the country, and Australia is among the high-income countries which has received a number of those people (Department of Home Affairs, 2021). The Australian Government announced in 2022 that they would provide 31,500 places for Afghan nationals through the Humanitarian and Family Visa programs. This is in addition to the 67,030 people currently living in Australia who were born in Afghanistan (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021) and many with Afghan or Hazara background who were born outside of Afghanistan. The high number of children and adolescents being resettled underscores the need to understand how they can be supported post-settlement to build resilience following adverse experiences of the refugee journey (Ellis et al., 2020; Fazel & Betancourt, 2018).

6.3 Resilience following forced migration: a social-ecological perspective

Rather than only focusing on the prevalence of trauma-related mental health issues (e.g. Alemi & Stempel, 2018; Copolov & Knowles, 2021), researchers have recently begun attending to protective factors that promote resilience and recovery among young refugee populations (Masten, 2018; Scharpf et al., 2021; Ungar & Theron, 2020). Drawing on a social-ecological perspective, Ungar (2012) explains resilience as a process in which individuals navigate protective resources across various layers of their social environment to promote wellbeing in the face of adversity. These layers encompass factors at the *individual level*, such as age, gender, and a positive sense of identity; the *interpersonal level*, including

family, friends, and school connections; the *community level*, involving agencies and community service providers; and the *societal level*, encompassing policy level factors (Ungar & Theron, 2020). A social-ecological perspective of resilience shifts the focus from individual responsibility for flourishing (or not), to support systems and opportunities. It highlights the interconnectedness of individuals and families with refugee backgrounds within a broader social structure, emphasising their interactions with institutions and multiple domains of society (Kuru & Ungar, 2020).

6.4 A sociocultural approach to identity [re]construction

Identity development is a continuous process throughout life, with adolescence marked as a critical stage (Erikson, 1994; Syed & Fish, 2018). Despite disagreements in definitions, identity has been largely conceptualised as being constructed in a sociocultural context and in relation to others (Hogg et al., 2017; Kira et al., 2018; Leone et al., 2014; Vygotsky, 1978). Taking a social constructivist perspective of reality, identity is formed and maintained by social processes, which are determined by social structures. (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 176).

Identity has also been considered multifaceted, fluid and hybrid, with its multiple components being [re]shaped during different stages in life (Schwartz et al., 2011, p. 10). Even within a particular developmental stage, changing the context, such as through the experience of [forced] migration, is likely to significantly influence the different components of a person's identity (Mijic, 2022; Radford & Hetz, 2021). As an individual's identity has multiple features, such as personal, ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and national aspects, the young person may experience [re]construction in many of these components due to experiences of adversity (Berman et al., 2020) and settlement in a culturally and linguistically different country (Radford & Hetz, 2021). Additionally, a forced migrant may experience changed sociocultural contexts multiple times, potentially spending years in asylum countries prior to settlement, for example, which means they must constantly [re]adjust their identity to the new environment (Bergquist et al., 2019).

While there has been a growing interest in understanding how young people [re]construct the various components of their identity following forced migration (Chima & Horner, 2022; Mijic, 2022; Moran, 2019), most knowledge about this topic has been acquired through adult studies and limited studies have been conducted with adolescents (Shahimi et al., 2023a).

Moreover, little attention has been paid to interactions between sense of identity, self-perception of resilience, and the influence of a young person's socio-cultural environment. Finally, existing studies of adolescents' experiences are predominantly quantitative (Scharpf et al., 2021) and/or are based on data collected from parents, caregivers and teachers without including the voices of younger people from refugee backgrounds (Jafari et al., 2022). The current study addresses this gap. Using narratives, visual data, and in-depth interviews, we aimed to understand the complex interaction of sense of identity and resilience for adolescents from Afghanistan following forced migration and settlement in Australia.

6.5 Methods

6.5.1 Design and Participants

The study was conducted with Afghan (Pashtun) and Hazara⁷ adolescents and their parents. Due to the complexity of experiences of forced migration and the exploratory nature of our research questions, a qualitative method was chosen. This enabled us to investigate participants' lived experiences and gain a reflective understanding of their perceptions of resilience and identity (Liamputtong & Kurban, 2018). Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews, written narratives and visual materials produced by participants. To explore how identity and resilience interact, interviews with adolescents focused on the research questions: How do participants define their identity? And how do they perceive resilience and define their experiences of, and responses to, challenges in life? We included narratives and visual data collection as optional additions to the interviews. We asked adolescent participants to write about and/or use experiences or symbols illustrating their perceptions of self and/or resilience. To complement adolescent perspectives, parent interviews focused on their own views regarding the challenges their children had experienced throughout the forced migration experience, particularly following settlement in Australia. We aimed to compare and contrast the viewpoints of both to capture a more nuanced understanding of adolescents' (re)construction of sense of identity and resilience.

⁷ It has been emphasised that 'Afghan' is not an inclusive national identity for people from Afghanistan as it primarily represents Pashtun ethnicity. It is considered particularly problematic as there is discrimination, persecution, and inter-ethnic hatred against other ethnicities in Afghanistan, including Hazaras. Ibrahimi, N. (2017). *The Hazaras and the Afghan state: Rebellion, exclusion and the struggle for recognition*. Oxford University Press

6.5.2 Procedure

The study received ethics approval from the University of Melbourne (2075900.1). The first author, a Farsi⁸ speaker with a background in mental health and experience working with Afghan and Hazara refugee communities in Iran, reached out to Afghan and Hazara community members. The study was conducted in Melbourne, Australia, and participants were recruited between July 2021 and June 2022. Parents were recruited through community members' networks. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, all communication and data collection was done by phone and Zoom video conferences. It is important to note that in August 2021, when the Taliban took control of Afghanistan, recruitment was paused since the incident significantly affected the Afghan and Hazara diaspora in Australia.

The first author conducted all sessions in the participant's preferred language (English/Farsi) and they were video-recorded with participants' consent. Parents were provided with a plain language statement (PLS) and consent form, with the option of a Zoom or phone session to receive information about the research in English and Farsi. We first interviewed parents, then asked them to provide their child/ren with an invitation letter, PLS-child version, and the consent form. Adolescents were then given the opportunity to confirm whether they would like to participate. We met adolescents twice, with an introductory session conducted to build a trusting relationship with adolescents for the upcoming interview. We had ice-breaker discussions and briefly chatted about the young participant's favourite activities in Australia, such as soccer, footy and online games. Then, using those topics, we discussed the concepts of resilience and identity and explained visual methods and narratives. We asked adolescent participants to bring a meaningful image and a narrative explaining how the image represented their resilience or identity to the interview session.

Adolescent participants were also informed that they could just write a narrative if they preferred not to provide an image. Introductory sessions were between 20-30 minutes, and the interview sessions and discussion of the written narratives and visual materials were conducted within the following two weeks for another 20-30 minutes. We used pseudonyms to protect participants' confidentiality. The first author transcribed the interviews, simultaneously translating to English from Farsi where needed.

⁸ Farsi (Persian) is the mother language for Dari and Hazaragi is a dialect of Dari. All Farsi speakers can understand each other.

A significant ethical challenge of working with young participants under 18 was the practical difficulty of obtaining genuinely informed consent (and not just assuming consent when forms are signed) (Woodgate et al., 2017). We may not have been able to fully address this issue. But to address it as much as possible and evaluate if children truly consented, we held the introduction sessions with children. We discussed and explained their rights in plain language and encouraged children to speak about the topics that they think are important in their lives rather than fixed questions about resilience and identity. Also, all participants were offered a small remuneration for their participation. We changed the time for giving the remuneration payment from the end of the research to after the introductory session to make sure that if children participated in the second session, their motivation to show up was not incentivised by this payment.

6.5.3 Analysis

We used a social constructionist lens to locate and make sense of the adolescents' perception of identity and resilience in their current sociocultural context. This approach is based on the idea that social reality is shaped by humans. Understandings of reality are shaped by social and cultural contexts and shared beliefs, values, and experiences, which may change over time and in different contexts (Mijic, 2022). Additionally, this approach recognises the researcher's active role as a product of society and a co-constructor of knowledge and realities (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Galbin, 2014).

To apply a social constructionist lens, we employed Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) using NVivo 13 to interpret patterns of meanings (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019). The analysis process included data familiarisation, open engagement with the data and literature and extensive and iterative coding and theme development. (Clarke and Braun, 2013). As Braun and Clarke (2023, p. 6) suggest, RTA conceptualizes themes as “generated at the intersection of the data and the researcher’s positioning and interpretations” and comprising a group of mutual meanings integrated by a main concept or idea. The flexibility of reflexive TA aided semantic analysis and generation of latent themes from the adolescents’ interviews, images, and narratives. We also considered the relationship between adolescents’ and parent data to see how child/ren and parents' perspectives converged or diverged when discussing the same phenomena.

6.6 Results

Ten adolescents with Afghan and Hazara's backgrounds aged 11-17 (five reporting male identity, five female, and zero non-binary) and six parents (five mothers and one father) from a total of four families participated. In total, six introductory sessions and sixteen interviews were conducted. To ensure parents and adolescents felt safe with the researcher, parents were able to stay in the room with their children during their interview sessions and in all cases, a parent chose to do so. Adolescents sent five photos and narratives to the researchers prior to, and three were sent following, interview sessions through email. Participants all arrived in Australia three to seven years earlier on humanitarian or family sponsorship program visas. Three adolescent participants arrived directly from Afghanistan; the rest arrived after years of living in asylum countries. Adolescent participants were all studying in high school, with one close to graduating at the time of the interview. Demographic details are summarised in Table

Table 6: Adolescent participants' characteristics

	Participant	Gender	Age at the time of interview	Age when leaving Afghanistan	Age at the time of arrival	Asylum country/ies	Years in asylum country/ies	Years in Australia at the time of interview
1	Jawid	Male	12	10	10	Directly from Afghanistan	-	2
2	Nasima	Female	11	9	9	Directly from Afghanistan	-	2
3	Najib	Male	13	11	11	Directly from Afghanistan	-	2
4	Karim	Male	16	8	10	Pakistan/Iran	2	7
5	Sajjad	Male	15	8	9	Pakistan	1	6
6	Fouzia	Female	17	7	13	Pakistan	10	4
7	Shamisa	Female	16	6	15	Pakistan	10	4
8	Shegofa	Female	15	5	11	Pakistan	10	4
9	Gul Bahar	Female	13	3	9	Pakistan	10	4
10	Ali Shah	Male	11	1	7	Pakistan	10	4

Adolescent participants described their identities as multifaceted and used a wide range of attributes to depict themselves. Some included their ethnic or national identities, such as being Afghan and Hazara and some their religious identity as Muslim. Some included their expertise in sports or art, and some used their future dream jobs to describe their identity. They more commonly however, emphasised specific individual characteristics. Like Jawid in the quote below, being resilient, overcoming barriers and achieving goals were characterisations adolescent participants commonly used to define their sense of self:

People around me describe me as kind, smart, resilient, and a bit stubborn! I am proud of my kindness, resilience, IQ and friendship skills. *Jawid, 12 years old*

We conceptualised the findings into three themes: 1/ *crafting futures*: [re]construction of a resilient sense of self through agency and determination, 2/ *invisible walls*: a closer look at the obstacles confronting adolescents and, 3/ *between two worlds*: seeking a sense of belonging and hybrid identity. The themes will elaborate on the significant role of agency and determination, attempts to find a sense of belonging as well as bridging between two cultures and how all these factors were fundamental for the [re]construction of a positive sense of self among adolescents.

6.6.1 *Crafting futures*: [re]construction of a resilient sense of self through agency and determination

Adolescents' primary understandings of resilience were 'never giving up in the face of challenges', 'resistance to achieve goals' and 'being strong'. Young participants' narratives convey their perceptions of challenges and demonstrates their sense of self efficacy, their ability to influence their environment and overcome challenges. This manifested in their pursuit of success in education, in overcoming language barriers, and setting personal goals. As illustrated below, Figure 1 demonstrates Najib's sense of agency in how he - as an active agent with control over his actions - 'managed' to overcome language barriers and hence, felt 'good' about himself. Having a resilient sense of identity was underpinned by adolescents seeing themselves as active agents, persistently overcoming challenges to achieve their goals. As illustrated below, Image 1 demonstrates Najib's sense of agency in how he - as an active agent with control over his actions - 'managed' to overcome language barriers and hence, felt 'good' about himself.

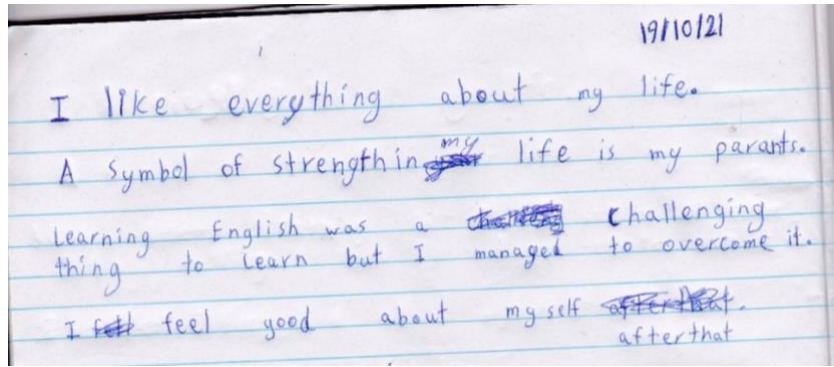


Figure 1: Image by Najib, 13 years old

Like Najib, in most narratives, adolescent participants' sense of agency was illuminated through their awareness of initiating and controlling their actions and decisions and their feeling of managing themselves and their surroundings. While acknowledging the impact of past difficulties, adolescent participants were predominantly focused on the present and future:

Things that happened in the past; I don't think about them often, but I think overcoming them contributed to my resilience now to achieve my goals.

Najib, 13 years old

The quote below also shows Fouzia's sense of agency through her commitment to taking up opportunities, self-encouragement, and staying persistent: to 'never give up'. By giving meaning to hardships in the past, she relates adversities to her current resolve and assertiveness. This in turn allows her to achieve a sense of coherence between her past and present:

Whenever any opportunity comes, I don't mess it up. I always encourage myself [to] never give up. Things that we suffered in the past in our country encourage us here; there are opportunities for everyone, and I don't want to miss them. So, I always stand up for myself and speak up. *Fouzia, 17 years old*

As illustrated in Fouzia's quote, meaning-making involved participants reinterpreting the significance of adverse events and moving forward with a renewed sense of purpose. This entailed [re]construction of their sense of self now and in the future expressed as the quality

of having a firm goal or purpose and being committed to achieving it despite obstacles or setbacks.

6.6.2 *Invisible walls*: a closer look at the obstacles confronting adolescents

In response to probes about the challenges that underpinned their determined and resilient sense of self, adolescents also discussed several obstacles faced since they arrived in Australia. Lack of fluency in English was a critical post-migration challenge that influenced sense of identity, and which participants discussed at length. Jawid's mother described how the language barrier impacted her son's sense of control and academic performance and how disappointed he was with his lowered academic achievement. Losing confidence in academic performance was also demonstrated in Shamsia's quote below:

When I came to Australia, every morning when I would wake up, I was worried about how my day would go because I couldn't understand what the teacher (was) saying and could not complete my work. *Shamsia, 16 years old*

Like others, the experience of Shamsia demonstrates that difficulty in expressing oneself due to language barriers, led to a diminished sense of self-efficacy. When adolescents struggled to communicate effectively, they doubted their ability to influence their environment, hindering their confidence in their capacity for education.

Participants' constant struggle with language barriers intensified other causes of psychosocial stress. Fouzia spoke about her struggle as an 'older sister' and the responsibilities associated with those aspects of her identity, to support her family in the face of hardships. This stress was compounded by lack of skills in English:

We suffered from having no family here, [and] no one to show us the right direction. None of us was able to speak English. Dad struggled a lot to find a job because he couldn't speak English. I had to do lots of searches [s] on the internet and ask people to find things. We suffered, but we found ways. *Fouzia, 17 years old*

Fouzia's quote demonstrated her frustration, and feelings of helplessness that threatened her sense of agency and control and challenging her sense of self-efficacy.

Most adolescent participants also described how communication barriers created difficulties in finding friends and led to feeling socially excluded and isolated in school. Shegofa (Figure 2)⁹, described how social isolation made her feel ‘depressed’ and ‘lonely’. While depression and loneliness did not define her identity, they represented the feelings and emotions she experienced while struggling to find a sense of belonging in Australia. Shegofa emphasised that by ‘pushing herself’ to learn English she was able to overcome the friendship barrier and saw this as an achievement that could be ‘inspirational’ to other migrants. Shegofa’s persistence in overcoming the language barrier and finding friends underpinned her confidence in overcoming all challenges: ‘every problem has a solution’.

Friendship

One of the most vital factors in your life is friendship. Having friends makes life easier since they consider your problems as their own and create precious memories between you and the world. Once upon a time, I migrated to Australia. The circumstances were difficult and challenging. One of the circumstances I faced was that I was unable to speak English. It was quite difficult for me to make friends when I was attending school since I couldn’t speak English. It took me months to find a friend. I was feeling depressed and lonely, and occasionally I would begin to hate the world and the people because I believed that without a friend, there was no sense in continuing to exist in this world. I went through all of these things, but once I learned English, I was able to communicate with everyone, which made life easier and more enjoyable. However, I have learned that no matter how big or difficult the challenge you have faced, you should never give up because when we go through difficult times, that is when we put ourselves to the test. Life is full of challenges, but that doesn’t mean we should let life to an end since, as humans, we can find a solution to any problem, no matter what the situation is. I really believe this since I’ve pushed myself to learn English in order to make friends and be able to communicate with new people, and this is where we learnt about different people and the world. I want to inspire all migrants not to give up when they are facing a hard circumstance because this is where you may acquire valuable lessons and get new experiences. Every problem has a solution!!!

Figure 2: narrative by Shegofa, 15 years old

In addition to social exclusion caused by language barriers, participants had to overcome racism and discrimination in school. Experiences of bullying were described particularly by adolescent participants who did not go to culturally diverse schools. Najib and Jawid were the only students from Afghanistan in their classrooms. A Harry Potter image provided by Jawid¹⁰ illustrated how Harry Potter represents Jawid’s perception of resilience founded on

⁹ Image provided by Shegofa is subjected to copywrite. The design “Happy Friendship Day” by Rajinder S Gill can be accessed using this link: <https://www.pinterest.com.au/pin/381680137140458993/>

¹⁰ The photo provided by Jawid is subjected to copywrite by Warner Bros. The image can be accessed using the link: <https://krislaurite.wordpress.com/2016/01/07/harry-potter/>

resistance to bullying and exclusion. The narrative and image combined illustrate that while bullying could create a sense of powerlessness in him, he sees himself as like Harry Potter who is an 'active agent' seeking justice for himself:

Resilience means being very strong; I don't know another word to describe it. The only example that comes to my mind is Harry Potter. He is very resilient and strong. During my first years in Australia Queensland, I was faced with these rude boys who were always mean and harsh to me. I told my teachers and parents, but nothing really changed until my main teacher witnessed their terrible acts and had a conversation with the principal. They had to write an apology letter to me and had detention. After that event, I felt calm and relaxed.

Figure 3: narrative by Jawid, 12 years old

Jawid's mother also spoke about how exclusion from friendship circles influenced her son's sense of self-worth, even when his English improved. Like most other participants, initially he could only find a friend among other migrant students. Jawid talked about finding an 'Australian' friend recently as a significant achievement, and he perceived his friends and friendship skills as a part of his resilient identity:

I am a good conversation starter, I join in group activities, I am really talkative, so I ask questions and trying to find friends. I eventually found a friend and it was really a good person, I could find a friend from Iran. Now I even have an Australian friend and I am proud of my friendship skills.
Jawid, 12

Najib's mother shared her thoughts about her son's and her own experiences of discrimination and noted that she, too, was gazed at 'differently' in the school because of being visibly Muslim. She remarked that perpetrators of racism failed to acknowledge that they too were migrants, noting that only '*Boomiha*/ بومی ها' (First owners of land in Farsi and, in this case, Indigenous Australians) originally belonged to this land.

It's obvious from our faces that we are not Australian. Even if my son's name was Australian, our background is not [Australian] even when I am a citizen. When children are not encouraged to embrace their ethnic culture, and they do not have the opportunity to learn from early ages [in school] that

everyone here is a migrant, even white people, how should we expect racism doesn't exist?

While participants who went to schools in multicultural areas generally reported fewer difficulties in finding friends, Shamsia described being put in a class with other children from Afghanistan with a different dialect. It caused her to feel even more isolated among her peers.

While overcoming challenges through agency and determination clearly underpinned participants' positive sense of identity and resilience, many also acknowledged that social exclusion, comprising language barriers, discrimination, isolation, and racism, negatively impacted their self-esteem and self-efficacy. This led to a struggle for young people to reconcile their ethnic identity with pressures to conform to the dominant culture. As discussed in the following section, striving to overcome these barriers to inclusion was intrinsically linked to their attempts to navigate a middle ground between two cultures while finding a sense of belonging to Australia.

6.6.3 Between two worlds: seeking a sense of belonging and hybrid identity

As discussed above, the personal values for determination and having a firm goal and experiences of social exclusion underscored the significance of seeking and finding a sense of belonging to Australia. This generally entailed development of a hybrid identity that integrated both Afghan/Hazara and Australian identities.

Participants appreciated opportunities associated with the safety and freedom that Australia offered them, and these were key to their developing a sense of belonging. Jawid's mother shared that within the first few months after arriving in Australia, her son was walking on the beach, and suddenly he started screaming: 'I'm Australian, I love Australia, I am safe here'. To explain why 'safety' was so significant, Sajjad's mother revealed how traumatic experiences in Afghanistan had profound psychological impacts on her son:

There was a suicide attack near our house which caused all the windows and doors to break. Since then, sounds of ambulance or firefighting vehicles have been triggering for him. He used to see nightmares for a few years. Once he woke up saying that he had a nightmare that the Taliban had shot me dead in the head.

Nasima's father described how schooling for his daughter was very unsafe in the last few months before coming to Australia. He had to prevent his daughter from going to school at some stages because he feared her being abducted. He explained how disappointed she was, crying and saying she would never be an interior designer if she could not go to school.

Parents shared how their children's mental health significantly improved after the first few years in Australia. As Alishah's mother explained, their children's wellbeing was underpinned by them feeling safe here. Jawid's mother believed that if children experienced injustice in Australia, there was a support system in place that could not only assure children of their safety but also improve their self-esteem:

When a child at that age who has been bullied is supported, his self-esteem would clearly strengthen. Also, it gave him the courage to speak up if anything happens to him again because he experienced that there is a justice system supporting him. Even [school] principals invited us [parents] and apologised for what happened.

Nasima and Najib's father mentioned that opportunities and freedom of choice support children to be the people they want to be. Alishah's mother spoke about never having had the opportunity to study herself. Her husband also had limited literacy. *Jawid's* mother told us that she could not attend school for a long time as a refugee and experienced discrimination and racism once she did. She discussed the importance of access to a proper education system:

My child's education started somewhere, which is fundamentally great. I always owe it to his school and their patient teachers. School is one of the first places that children's future starts shaping. There is a Farsi saying that: *Kheshte avval gar nahad memar kaj, ta Soraya miravad divar kaj* [If the architect builds the first brick crookedly, the wall will be built crookedly to the infinite sky].

Adolescent participants shared with us that having access to education, jobs, and sports opportunities made them feel more 'Australian' and had a significant influence on their sense of self. As Fouzia stated, not having access to proper education in Pakistan motivated her to become a successful and 'independent' woman:

I grew up in Pakistan, and for two years, I had to stay home. I had no hobbies. I wanted to study to become something so that people say (about me) ‘This girl is doing something. She is independent’. *Fouzia, 17 years old*

The quote below also, demonstrates how post-migration opportunities supported Gul Bahar’s sense of agency:

I did not have job in Pakistan, we were asking our parents for everything. Now I am standing on my own. I can buy anything I want. I have a bit of control over my life. *Gul Bahar, 15 years old*

Karim and Jawid mentioned that being part of soccer teams or swimming with friends contributed to their self-esteem and friendship-building. The female participants in this study were not actively engaged in sports however, some due to a lack of interest and some due to their family preventing them:

I love playing sports and playing volleyball. I requested my dad, and he said that Afghan girls couldn’t do this; it’s difficult to deal with their [parents] and convince them. *Nasima, 14 years old.*

Our analysis illustrated that in the process of seeking a sense of belonging in Australia, young participants were exploring and reconciling their original cultural identity with the new cultural elements they encountered. It was noteworthy however, that parents and adolescents diverged in their perceptions regarding the process of integrating into Australia. Some parents believed their children quickly adjusted to Australian norms and culture to feel accepted in society, with age affecting the speed and extent of adaptation to the new culture and retention of their ethnic culture. Jawid’s mother mentioned that her son mostly suppressed his memories of Afghanistan and avoided speaking Farsi. She reflected that it was more challenging for parents to shape their identity in adulthood according to Australian norms. Seeing their children quickly conforming to Australian culture prompted families to feel responsible for maintaining their ethnic culture at home; by speaking the language, having traditional foods and clothes, and observing festive occasions. Parents were concerned about their children losing their Afghan/Hazara identity and felt that it was challenging to balance Afghanistan's and Australia's cultures without pressuring their children to practise their origin culture.

However, what adolescents imparted at the time of the interview differed. Not only did they express pride in their origin country and culture, but some participants felt that their parents or family back in Afghanistan symbolised resilience. Families and culture were discussed at length by adolescents as central to their identities. For some participants, including Gul Bahar, family members were the symbol and source of resilience (Figure 4). Her grandfather's love motivated her, and he was a role model and inspiration for resilience due to the ways he protected and supported his family. She conveys this by telling the story of a precious ring that she received from him and how looking at this ring gave her the confidence to overcome challenges and represented connections she had with her home country.

The rings in the photographs inspire me to push myself in difficult situations. Because my grandfather specifically bequeathed this ring to me. When I faced a dilemma, I looked to and it made me brave to confront any problem. It also serves as a reminder to me that I am a significant person to my grandfather. This always reminds me of who I am and provides me with the response that I am a special person in my house. It gives me more confidence in the things my grandpa did for his family and inspires me to do the same. The ring also reminds me of the wonderful qualities of my grandpa, such as his preference for protecting others above himself.

My friends and family tell me that I should replace my ring because it has become too old, but they have no idea how essential the band is to me and how much it allows me to live my life. So one day, I intruded on my pals and the individual who asked why I wasn't talking about the ring. I cooked dinner for them that night, and they thoroughly loved it. When everyone left the home, I gave each individual a card on which I explained why I wasn't taking off the ring. After a day, everyone who received the card apologised and apologised to me.

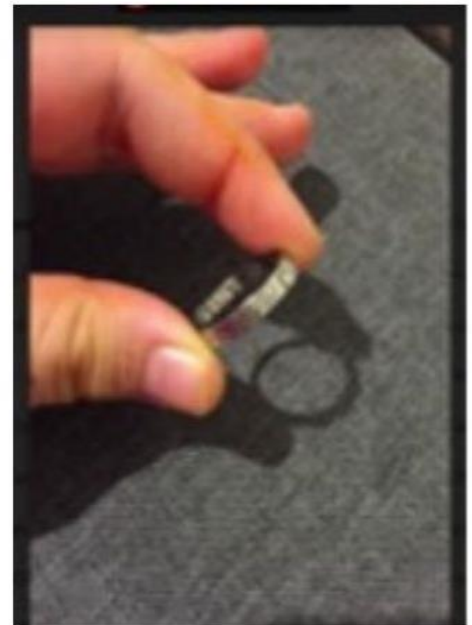


Figure 4: image and narrative 4 by Gul Bahar, 13 years old

Cultural values also informed perceptions of resilience. As Fouzia elaborated in her written narrative below (Figure 5), she represented herself with an image of a Muslim woman holding a book. She explained how studying hard to overcome the language barrier was central to her sense of self as resilient.

One of the difficult situations that migrants confront is communication. The communication barrier prevents you from doing anything, including making new friends at school and connecting with new people. As the older sister, I once had a challenging situation when I first moved to Australia. I was incapable of supporting my family and had no one to turn to for guidance. All these difficulties have upset me. I believe that one of the best and most significant aspects of life is resilience. A bad existence may be transformed into a successful one by maintaining resilience. I worked very hard to improve my English so that I could provide for my family, make their lives simpler, and prevent them from having to deal with any difficulties while living in this country. I would encourage all migrants who have encountered or are already encountering a communication barrier to maintain resilience and not let it go from their hands because resilience makes the impossible possible! By maintaining your resilience, you may build a brighter future and overcome the difficult situations you've faced.



Figure 5: image and narrative by Fouzia, 17 years old

Her narrative and interview also illustrated the influence of culture. Fouzia's perception of 'being resilient' is informed by the historical, cultural, and religious value of '*sabr*/صبر' or patience in facing hardships in Afghanistan. Jawid's mother addressed this aspect of culture in Afghanistan as '*moghavemat*/مقاومت', which means resistance with strength that has always been culturally encouraged and religiously praised and valued in Quran:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اسْتَعِينُوا بِالصَّبْرِ وَالصَّلَاةِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ مَعَ الصَّابِرِينَ / 'You who believe, seek help in patience and the prayer. Truly Allah is with the patient ones'. *Surah Al-Baqarah Ayat 153*

As demonstrated in the photo below and narrated by Sajjad (Figure 6), a traditional dress symbolised his identity and connection with his 'vatan/وطن' (homeland).



This is my Afghan dress. I usually wear this during Eid celebrations as it brings my childhood memories back. I wear this to remember my identity and Vatan (country of origin).

Figure 6: image and narrative by Sajjad, 15 years old

Nasima, Fouzia, Gol Bahar and Shegofa also identified themselves with Afghan and Muslim identities, indicating their strong connection to their ethnic culture and religious beliefs. Ali Shah declared that he talks about the resistance of people in Afghanistan with his friends and how they are fighting against the Taliban like a 'superhero'.

These findings demonstrate how adolescent participants were attempting to develop a hybrid identity to find a balance between belonging to their two immediate but different cultural contexts: their homes and families contrasting with school and friends. The fluidity of their multifaceted identity allowed them to exhibit the different components which were – in their own perceptions - most relevant to the context.

6.7 Discussion

This paper has explored how Afghan and Hazara adolescents perceived and defined resilience and their sense of identity and how these interacted with their sociocultural context following settlement.

While past adversities informed young people's goals, their current experiences in Australia, resilience, and determination to reach those goals were central to their perceptions of self. Consistent with previous studies, the findings indicate that despite (and/or as a consequence of) adversity, creating meaning out of hardship was a core component of a positive sense of identity among adolescents (Chao, 2019; Oppedal et al., 2017; Sleijpen et

al., 2017; Uptin et al., 2016). Previous studies have also emphasised the need for identity continuity in the context of adversity, connecting the past, present, and future and making meaning of past negative experiences to find a balanced sense of self (McAdams, 2011). As Ghorashi (2003) describes, identity is a narrative of the self, a dynamic process, that constantly develops new meanings and forms through interactions with social and historical contexts. This interaction between change and continuity involves practices and identity narratives that integrate past and present experiences and future expectations. Experiences of significant changes in life or childhood traumatic incidents can cause disruptions to this continuity (Waterman, 2020)

Although adolescent participants in our study were less likely than their parents to raise past traumatic experiences spontaneously, studies with adults from refugee backgrounds demonstrate how their reflections on childhood traumatic incidents shaped their identity development (Shahimi et al., 2023b). There may be multiple reasons why young people did not choose to discuss past traumatic incidents. These may include a wish to avoid bringing up negative feelings, difficulty remembering and/or verbalising these experiences, different expectations of what the interviewer was after, and fragile trust of this relatively unfamiliar conversation partner (Alisic et al., 2011; Bal, Crombez, et al., 2003; Salmon & Bryant, 2002; Truss et al., 2023a)

Aligned with previous studies, adolescents discussed substantial struggles they endured in Australia related to the language barrier, finding friends and experiences of exclusion and racism (Dandy & Pe-Pua, 2015; Uptin et al., 2016). Our data suggested that adolescents' current struggles in Australia to find a sense of belonging, had particular salience for how they perceived themselves. Findings revealed that as a consequence of social exclusion and racism, as well as living in a socioculturally different context, adolescents sometimes struggled to bridge their past and present experiences and to find a balance between their Afghan/Hazara identity, family-belonging and their Australian identity. Parents tended to believe their children were becoming 'too Australian', despite young participants demonstrating pride and belonging to their origin culture at the time of the interview. Previous research recognizes this challenge as the identity crisis or identity gap in the context of resettlement (e.g. Bergquist et al., 2019). Identity crises post-migration have been described as resulting from cultural clashes between ethnic and host cultures; changes in family roles; and experiences of racism, exclusion, and difficulty in finding a sense of belonging to host

societies (Chao, 2019; Guler & Berman, 2019; Johansen & Varvin, 2020; Maehler et al., 2020; Oppedal et al., 2020; Rabiau, 2019). Adolescent participants' experiences of traumatic incidents in Afghanistan as well as challenges to find sense of belonging in Australia resulted in seemingly conflicted emotions towards their sense of identity: 'I am Australian, I am not Afghan anymore' and 'I tell all my friends that Afghans are superheros'. This apparent conflict reflects young people's attempts to give meaning to their past and current experiences, to link their multiple realities, and [re]define their identity (McAdams, 2011). Past trauma experiences such as a suicide attack in school, for example, could lead to seemingly opposing identity constructions co-existing: 'I'm Australian' (because of the safety being experienced in Australia); and 'Afghans [including me] are superheroes' (due to the resilience and resistance of people in Afghanistan).

As demonstrated above, the relationship between belonging and identity is complex. Anthias (2009, p. 233) contends that identity and belonging 'live together but involve a different emphasis'. While identity encompasses individual and collective narratives of self, belonging is more about experiences of being part of the social fabric. Belonging is also a matter of agency, participation opportunities, and power in the origin and host country. It involves processes of the social system or being a part of the fundamental social dialectic (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Mijic, 2022). An individual's sense of identity can influence sense of belonging through connection to a community that shares similar beliefs. Conversely, sense of belonging can influence identity as people may adopt beliefs or values consistent with those of the group to which they belong (Cole et al., 2022; Mijic, 2022).

While belonging is a subjective feeling (Allen et al., 2021), adolescents' struggles to find a sense of belonging in part reflected a dynamic relationship with representations of Muslim refugees in Australia. Recent research explores how young people from refugee backgrounds develop hybrid identities in the context of a plurality of cultures (Radford & Hetz, 2021; Shahimi et al., 2023b). In particular, cultural hybridity refers to the mixing and merging of diverse cultural components and challenging binary divisions (Afghan/Hazara vs. Australian in this study) (Bhabha, 2012). However, language and communication barriers, exclusion, bullying, and racism all affected participants' attempts to develop a sense of belonging and a positive hybridity that balanced their ethnic and Australian identities (Radford & Hetz, 2021). Our findings are consistent with existing research on systemic racism and exclusionary discourses and their impacts on young people from refugee backgrounds attempting to find a

positive sense of belonging to the host culture (e.g. Shiqi Chen & Robert D. Schweitzer, 2019; Miled, 2020; Oppedal et al., 2017).

Overall, this study contributes new understandings of the complex relationship between social context, identity, and resilience for adolescents from refugee backgrounds post migration. (Filler et al., 2019; Miled, 2020; Rabiau, 2019; Renshaw, 2019). We acknowledge however, that this paper relies on interviews with relatively few Afghan and Hazara families living in Melbourne, Australia. All participants were permanent residents or citizens of Australia and could therefore access governmental support. This signifies substantial differences from the experiences of those seeking asylum in Australia and on temporary protection visas. Therefore, the participants' views cannot be generalised and may not represent the experiences of all Afghans or Hazaras, other ethnicities from Afghanistan, or people from refugee backgrounds in general. These limitations have implications for further research, as suggested below.

6.8 Conclusion, implications, and suggestions

In conclusion, our research revealed that Afghan and Hazara adolescents showed a strong sense of agency in overcoming challenges and determination to achieve their goals. Agency and determination were the key components of adolescents' positive perceptions of their identity and resilience. Challenges to finding a sense of belonging and a balance between origin and Australian cultures, at times, could undermine participants' positive perceptions of self. Findings also illustrated that young participants were actively attempting to make meaning of their experiences and create a hybrid multifaceted identity of belonging to their origin and host culture.

Our findings offer new evidence for understanding routes of identity [re]construction among adolescents who have experienced forced migration. Furthermore, this research makes a significant contribution to bridging the gap between research on resilience and identity, previously studied separately. We argue that in the context of major life challenges such as forced migration, reconstruction of identity, finding a sense of belonging and building resilience, are interrelated, complex and ongoing processes. More holistic, contextual, and culturally informed longitudinal studies on factors influencing identity construction among children and adolescents from a refugee background are therefore required.

This study also has implications for policy-makers, teachers, counsellors, and social and community workers working with children and adolescents from Afghanistan, enabling better understanding of how young Afghans and Hazaras develop a positive sense of identity and resilience and the influence of social-ecological interactions. Supporting wellbeing for young people from refugee backgrounds requires effective social policies that provide an inclusive and supportive environment. For service providers, this study indicates the importance of implementing programs that are inclusive, trauma-informed and acknowledge the strength of the young people and connections to their original culture. Encouraging and facilitating young people's active participation in shaping services and supporting their advocacy for their community have been shown to be critical for achieving this (Robinson et al., 2019).

Our findings support decades of research on the impacts of racism and exclusion on the psychosocial wellbeing of young people from refugee backgrounds (e.g. Dandy & Pe-Pua, 2015). Improving policies and practices to provide a more inclusive education system requires a comprehensive approach to address the systemic and structural barriers perpetuating discrimination and exclusion. Social policies which target micro-level factors (such as school, family, and friends) and macro-level factors (such as societal policies, community supports, etc.) within children's environments are needed. Our results suggest that schools can provide opportunities for students from diverse cultural backgrounds to interact and learn from each other and culturally diverse schools generally provided a more supportive environment for participants. Additionally, to reduce the gap between the acculturation experiences of children and their parents, schools can work with families and communities from diverse cultural backgrounds to understand their needs and challenges. This can help build trust and ensure that policies are tailored to the needs of these communities. Finally, government agencies should collect and analyse data on the experiences of racism and exclusion among children from refugee backgrounds and use this information to inform policy development and implementation. Such data can also help track progress and identify areas for improvement.

6.9 Acknowledgment

We would like to acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as Australia's First People and Traditional Custodians on whose Country we work, learn, and live, and pay our respects to Elders past and present. We would like to acknowledge the support and assistance of Hazara community in Melbourne. Particularly, we would like to acknowledge

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Chapter 7 Discussion and conclusion

In this chapter, I discuss the experiences of young adults and adolescents in the process of identity [re]construction. Further, I present implications and recommendations for field workers, researchers, and policymakers, reflect on the strengths and limitations of this research and suggest areas for future research. I close the thesis by suggesting that [re]constructing identity, finding a sense of belonging in a new context and building resilience are not separate or limited to the first few years after settlement. In fact, these are interrelated, complex and ongoing processes that interact with the social-ecological environment of young people from refugee backgrounds.

7.1 Framework

In Figure 4, I have compiled the main arguments from the discussion sections of Studies 1–3 to provide an overarching picture of identity [re]construction of young people from Afghanistan following their refugee experiences and settling in Australia.

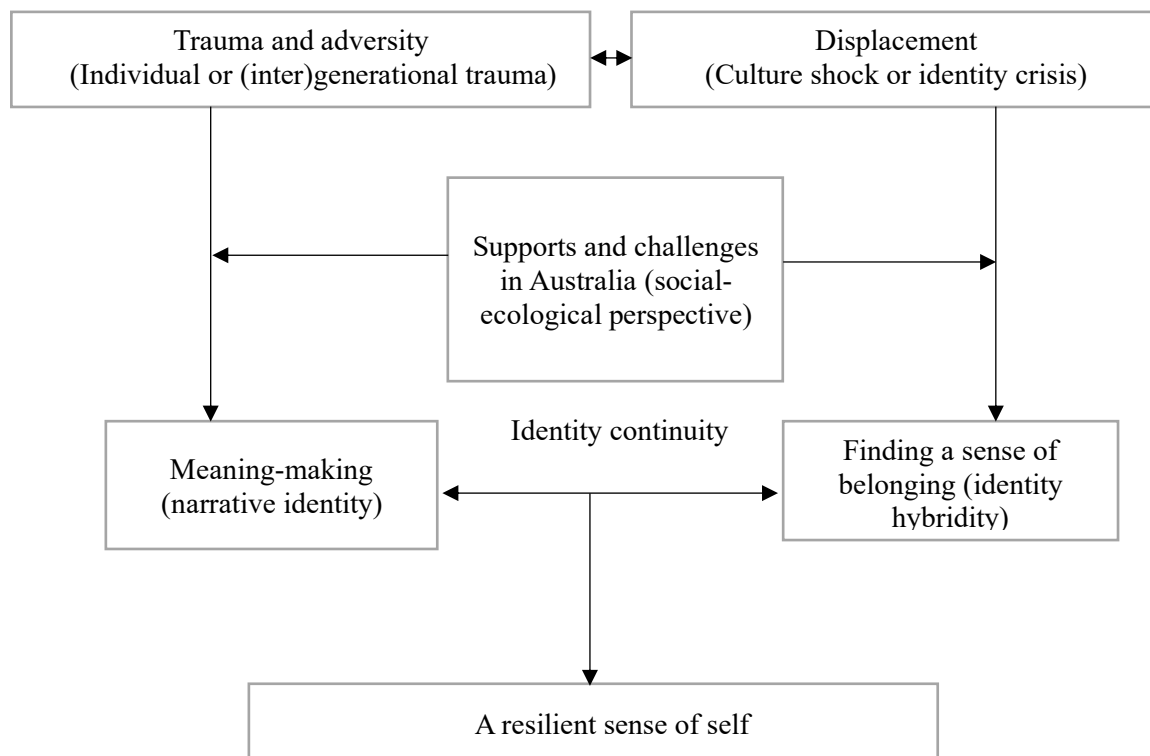


Figure 4 Identity [re]construction of young people from Afghanistan following their refugee experiences and settlement in Australia

Figure 4 illustrates the two major disruptions that affect the sense of identity of a young person from a refugee background: trauma and displacement. The figure shows how young people [re]constructed their resilient sense of identity by making meaning out of trauma and adversity and seeking a sense of belonging. It also emphasises that [re]construction of a resilient sense of self is greatly influenced by opportunities and supports, along with challenges and experiences of exclusion within the young persons' social context.

In the following, I elaborate on each part of the figure. First, I discuss disruptions to the sense of identity of a young person, dividing the disruptions to identity [re]construction into 'trauma experiences' and 'displacement'. The two elements are separated only to allow a clear discussion of the influences of each factor on the perception of self; the argument is not that they are truly separate. It is important to mention that displacement is itself a source of trauma; thus, the two concepts necessarily interact and overlap. The effects of these two factors in the process of identity [re]construction cannot be separated, given that trauma and displacement are likely to have happened together or in relation to each other during the lifetime of the young person. The reason I have here chosen 'displacement' rather than 'forced migration' is that while all forced migration involves displacement, not all displacements result in migration to another country (Bakewell, 2011). Although all the participants in this study have experienced forced migration, the term displacement covers the experiences of the participants prior to their resettlement in Australia (e.g. internal displacements in Afghanistan or Pakistan, something that affected their sense of identity).

I further discuss how participants attempted to [re]construct a resilient sense of identity by making meaning of traumatic experiences and seeking a sense of belonging in Australia through finding a middle ground between two cultures. I use the term 'resilient sense of identity' to reflect participants' perceptions of what being resilient means. Using a version of the SEM, I conceptualise how supports and barriers within the different layers of the social ecology influenced their perception and process of [re]construction of a resilient sense of identity. It is important to again acknowledge that while all participants of this PhD research perceived themselves as resilient (I discuss this as a limitation in Section 7.5), resilience is not an inevitable outcome when people experience major traumatic incidents. Some people may not deal effectively with the consequences of trauma and may develop ongoing mental health problems (Blackmore et al., 2020; Fazel et al., 2012).

7.2 Disruptions to identity construction

As I argued in Chapters 5 and 6, the adolescent period is a critical stage for finding a sense of self and the future (Erikson, 1994; Syed & Fish, 2018), but trauma (Berman et al., 2020) and forced migration (Mijic, 2022; Posselt, et al., 2019) can disrupt identity development in a young person. The participants discussed traumatic incidents in Afghanistan and asylum countries, traumatic journeys in transit countries and substantial challenges in Australia (e.g. discrimination, exclusion, or spending time in detention) as having substantial influence on their sense of identity.

7.2.1 Individual and ethnic group experiences of trauma

The adult participants and the adolescents' parents underwent multiple traumatic and adverse experiences before coming to Australia: persecution, witnessing suicide attacks and barriers to education. As Berman et al. (2020) have argued, adverse or traumatic experiences and identity development influence each other. Although trauma can change the development of identity by disrupting existing identity commitments (Tay et al., 2015; Zheng & Lawson, 2015), identity can also serve as a lens through which trauma is perceived and interpreted, thus moderating its effect on the individual (Bombay et al., 2014).

While adults in this PhD research chose to talk about the traumatic incidents they had experienced before coming to Australia, adolescents generally chose not to do so and primarily addressed their struggles in Australia. According to Alisic et al. (2011), a difference of this kind can arise from the different reactions of adolescents to traumatic incidents compared with adults. From a developmental perspective, adults are cognitively more skilled in appraising traumatic experiences and negative feelings associated with them (Salmon & Bryant, 2002). Additionally, talking about recent trauma can be emotionally challenging (Tong et al., 2019; Truss et al., 2023b). Therefore, adolescents may instinctively try to protect themselves from further distress by avoiding discussions that could trigger painful memories or emotions (Bal, Van Oost, et al., 2003). Thus, we cannot ignore the effects of traumatic incidents on identity development in adolescents merely because they choose not to talk about these incidents. The parents indicated that their children showed signs of mental health improvement over time after arrival in Australia. However, they still exhibited psychological symptoms of dealing with the effects of trauma. Witnessing or experiencing trauma can lead to symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, including flashbacks, nightmares, severe

anxiety, depression, withdrawal, and behavioural problems (Blackmore et al., 2020). As discussed in Chapter 1, while many young people show improvement over time, some continue to face challenges and may require long-term mental health support. In Section 7.3.1, I argue that while it is vital to acknowledge the effects of trauma, we should respect the agency of adolescents in choosing aspects of their lives other than trauma and vulnerability—particularly their strengths—as defining them.

Beyond individual experiences of trauma, Hazara young adult participants and Hazara parents also shared how witnessing the ongoing inter- or transgenerational trauma of ethnic Hazaras still influenced their perceptions of who they are. Witnessing, from a distance, the horrifying experiences of people in Afghanistan at the time of the research made the topic a dominant theme in conversations with adults. This observation further reinforced the effects of ongoing ethnic group trauma on the sense of identity of young people in the diaspora, even in the second or third generation (Mahamid, 2020).

While the Hazaras' persecution by the Taliban has not been officially recognised as genocide, Amnesty International describes the persecution of Hazaras as having genocidal elements (Hakimi, 2022). Genocide and persecution with genocidal elements can cause great trauma by deliberately and systematically destroying, in whole or in part, an ethnic, racial, religious, or national group and violating assumptions that people may have about their identities (Aydin, 2017). As demonstrated in the studies with adolescents and young adults, the historical trauma became a central element of their memory and served as a reminder of past injustices and resilience in the face of adversity (see Sections 5.5.2.1 and 6.8).

The findings with young adult Hazaras are consistent with research conducted with other groups whose ethnic, national, or religious identities remain affected by experiences of persecution or genocide, even after generations in the diaspora (Dalgaard & Montgomery, 2017; Sangalang & Vang, 2017). For example, Leone et al. (2014) conducted a study with adolescent Palestinians born in the diaspora who had never visited Palestine. Even though almost half of them also had parents born in the diaspora, they defined themselves as Palestinian and demonstrated strong emotions associated with their Palestinian identity. This is similar to the findings of this research suggesting that the participants' experiences of intergenerational traumas deeply influenced how they, as a part of their ethnic and national community, perceived themselves, their role in society and their commitment to preserving their heritage and seeking justice for past wrongs.

7.2.2 Displacement

7.2.2.1 Before arriving in Australia: loss of the beloved homeland

Displacement from their homes and spending their childhood and adolescence in asylum countries were the other major disruptions to the participants' identity development. Leaving their belongings, family, friends, homes, and lands behind was described as a major negative experience, even by adolescents. In addition to what adolescents and adults personally left behind, adults reflected on how witnessing their parents bearing the loss of their belongings influenced their perception of having lost their homeland. This is consistent with inter- and transgenerational trauma research indicating that young people carry not only their own traumas but also their families' negative experiences of displacement (Kahn & Denov, 2022; Sangalang & Vang, 2017). The metaphor used by a young adult participant of an 'uprooted tree, which was planted elsewhere' explains the significance of displacement in the disruption of the participant's sense of identity. Even if they were too young at the time of migration to remember the experience clearly, they could reflect on it later.

As discussed, many participants spent years in countries of first asylum after leaving Afghanistan. Beyond traumatic experiences associated with attempts to cross borders, this part of the journey also brought much uncertainty and disruption to their childhood development. Not being able to attend school, financial difficulties for the family and the experiences of racism and social discrimination that some participants experienced in Pakistan and Iran greatly affected their sense of self. Being unable to picture their 'future self' and having a lack of control over their life circumstances in those countries were the dominant experiences that affected their sense of agency and identity (see Crawley & Kaytaz, 2022; Dryden-Peterson, 2016; Khanlou et al., 2008).

7.2.2.2 After arriving in Australia: experiences of exclusion and discrimination

The experience of settlement in a new sociocultural environment in Australia was another disruption within the displacement journey. Both adolescents and young adult participants discussed the difficulties they faced in Australia in relation to the language barrier, trouble finding friends and experiences of exclusion and racism. While the young adults in this study arrived in Australia between 2000 and 2012, their experiences of exclusion and racism were

similar to those of adolescents who arrived later, in 2018 and 2019 (Dandy & Pe-Pua, 2015; Uptin, 2021).

The interviews and narratives revealed that young people's perceptions of their position after settlement were that they felt they should be 'successful' at integrating into Australian society. The process of integration was understood as including the adoption of 'Australian' social values and being symbols of 'deserving' and 'worthy' new arrivals. Previous research suggests that the pressure to integrate into a new society's culture, combined with emotional ties to the culture of origin, could create identity distress or an identity gap (Bergquist et al., 2019). For example, in a US study with 33 adolescents from Cuba, Iraq, Jordan, Haiti, Colombia and Venezuela, identity distress and symptom internalisation were observed when adolescents were encouraged to 'Americanise' quickly (Guler & Berman, 2019). Similarly, young adult participants in this PhD study described how the tension between their culture of origin and Australian culture was the greatest challenge for their sense of self (also see Weems et al., 2016). Adolescents also emphasised the considerable influence of language and friendship barriers on their sense of identity and resilience. Consistent with previous research, both related to perceived societal demands for rapid and successful integration into the Australian culture (see Evans, 2020a; Karam et al., 2020).

I have argued at length in Chapters 4 and 5 that experiences of societal pressure for quick and successful integration into Australian culture created barriers for participants to form a sense of belonging to Australia. The findings in this PhD research are consistent with other research on the effects of racism and discriminatory discourses (see Aniko & Terry, 2009; Evans, 2020; Karam et al., 2020; Kennedy et al., 2019). For example, media and political discourses creating stereotypes have played a major role in intensifying discriminatory attitudes affecting the lives of young people from refugee backgrounds (Miled, 2020). After the September 11 attacks, negative attitudes towards Muslims increased sharply in Australia, as well as in other Western countries. Displaced persons—particularly those from Afghanistan—were characterised in media images and political discourse as potential threats and terrorists (Mir & Sarroub, 2019). As a result, strongly gendered racist stereotyping was experienced by the participants of this PhD research (e.g. when a female participant who wore a hijab was called a 'towel head' or a male participant was referred to as a 'terrorist'). Consistent with previous research (Ellis et al., 2010b; Evans, 2020a; Miled, 2020), while both male and female Muslim participants were exposed to the negative effects of racism and

Islamophobia, visibly Muslim women and girls were more commonly the target of verbal violence.

In summary, the considerable effort that young people and their families had to expend on the acculturation process and the adjustment to their new context presented a challenge for their identity development.

7.3 Identity continuity and [re]construction of a resilient sense of identity

As I discussed in Chapter 2, the literature suggests that, following disruptions to identity construction, an individual attempts to find cohesion in their identity and retain a perception of self (Ghorashi, 2003; Omer & Alon, 1994). Following disruptions caused by experiences of trauma and displacement, identity continuity appeared central to participants' efforts to make sense of the experience of forced migration. Making sense of multiple and, in some cases, ongoing adverse experiences does not happen instantaneously: identity [re]construction is a lifelong process. However, both adolescent and young adult participants demonstrated attempts at finding identity continuity to achieve a coherent sense of self. As McAdams (2018) writes, individuals usually use a story to define their identity, allowing the integration of different psychological elements and bringing a certain kind of narrative order and logic to the chaos of life events. From a social constructivist perspective, identity is considered a narrative of the self, a dynamic process and a changing view of the self that constantly develops new meanings and forms through interactions with social and historical contexts (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). This interaction between change and continuity includes practices and identity narratives used by participants that embrace their past and present experiences and future expectations (McAdams, 2011).

In Sections 7.3.1 and 7.3.2, I discuss how the participants navigated identity continuity by creating a resilient identity through two pathways: culturally informed meaning-making for adversity and finding a sense of belonging in Australia after the displacement experience. With reference to social-ecological levels, I discuss the factors that participants reported as supporting the process of identity [re]construction.

7.3.1 Meaning-making

In Chapter 5, I discussed how a view of people from refugee backgrounds as inherently vulnerable is increasingly contested (see Lawrence et al., 2019). Omer and Alon (1994), in a paper about the importance of continuity following disaster and trauma, discussed beliefs about victimisation and the vulnerability of people who survive trauma and how an image of vulnerability might disrupt identity continuity. They argued that a focus on pathological symptoms turns a person into a passive victim who is unable to cope, for whom help must come from outside. However, one must consider that allowing people to express vulnerability when facing hardships is different to labelling them as vulnerable. By considering historical, intergenerational and transgenerational experiences of trauma and their association with culturally informed meanings throughout the forced migration experience, we can understand how participants have merged their vulnerability and resilience into their sense of identity. In this study, adolescents and adult participants demonstrated a strong sense of agency and determination to cope with traumatic experiences from the forced migration experience. This determination was culturally informed by what the majority of participants referred to as *sabr* (صبر, 'patience in facing hardship'). In particular, the participants reflected on how resilience could co-exist with hope and vulnerability could co-exist with trauma in their sense of identity without necessarily coming into conflict. Even though disruptions to identity development may have caused vulnerability, young people translated them culturally or religiously into resilience and determination, with hope for a better future serving as their core motivation (see Panter-Brick et al., 2011).

Hazara adult participants also reflected on seeing the world through the lens of meanings associated with inter- and transgenerational trauma and the ongoing ethnic persecution of Hazaras. Beyond individual experiences of trauma, witnessing that of previous generations or recent experiences of trauma in the Hazara community in Afghanistan—to which a part of the person's identity belonged—profoundly influenced the meanings associated with the [re]construction of identity. As discussed in Chapter 5, social components of identity in people living with experiences of marginalisation and discrimination play an important role in shaping interpretations of traumatic events (see Muldoon et al., 2019). Similar to results from research on intergenerational trauma in groups who have experienced genocide or been subjected to ethnic violence (Kahn & Denov, 2022), young adult participants in this study interpreted the Hazaras' experiences of traumatic events and discrimination as a part of their

social identity that informed their vocational identity or their advocacy and activism. Parents also described how for people in Afghanistan, particularly Hazaras, *moghavemat* (مقاومت, being resistant and strong) in facing trauma across decades has become a part of their cultural and national identity.

7.3.2 Seeking and finding a sense of belonging

The overall findings indicated that following settlement, young people struggled with what some described as ‘culture shock’, which prevented them from finding a balance between belonging to their Afghan or Hazara and Australian identities. As I discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, the relationship between belonging and identity is complex. While these are two different concepts, they are interrelated (Mijic, 2022). Mijic (2022) argues that identity refers to the fundamental sense of self that individuals construct based on various factors such as culture, ethnicity, nationality, religion, gender, and personal experiences while belonging, on the other hand, refers to the feeling of being accepted, included, and connected to a particular group, community, or place. It involves a sense of attachment, affiliation, and acceptance within social and cultural contexts. May (2011) discusses the process of finding a sense of belonging as a daily way of being that is achieved through social interaction with significant others, predominantly during initial socialisation (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). Anthias (2009) also discusses that finding belonging is not a passive process but an active course in which an individual experiences a sense of belonging from collective interpretations of reality negotiated through social interactions. Mijic (2022) further argues that belonging, like identity, is a matter of agency, opportunities to participate and power. A person experiences a sense of belonging to a context when they comprehend that they are involved in processes of social change or are part of the fundamental social dialectic. Therefore, while feeling accepted, valued, and included within a community can affirm and strengthen one's sense of identity, continuity, connection, and validation, experiences of exclusion, discrimination, or marginalization can challenge individuals' sense of identity, leading to feelings of alienation or disconnection.

In Section 7.2.2, I argued that experiences of social exclusion and racism interrupted the perception of identity and belonging in the young people in this study. In an attempt to find a sense of belonging, young people navigated their identity to find a balance between their two cultures and tried to bridge their Hazara or Afghan and Australian identities. One participant referred to this as being the ‘third culture kid’. Drawing on the concept of hybrid identity

(outlined in Section 2.4.3.2), Bhabha (1994) introduced the idea of the third space to conceptualise the negotiation of cultures. This concept was central to Bhabha's exploration of cultural identity and its complex dynamic. This third space is not a physical or geographical location but a metaphorical and discursive space. It represents the in-between, liminal and hybrid zones where cultures intersect, overlap, and negotiate. This space emerges in the contact zones between the coloniser and the colonised, between different cultures and in the interstices of power relations. In particular, cultural hybridity refers to the mixing and blending of different cultural elements, challenging binary distinctions between the coloniser and the colonised or the self and the other. In the third space, cultural identities are not fixed or stable but are continuously shaped and reshaped through processes of negotiation and adaptation. The third space also provides a site for agency and resistance. Within this space, marginalised individuals and communities can negotiate and resist dominant power structures. Bhabha recognised the potential for subversion and reappropriation in the creative acts of individuals who navigate the complexities of the third space (also see Bhandari, 2022; Easthope, 1998; Smith & Leavy, 2008).

The third space for participants in this study comprised the deconstruction of the idea of a fixed identity and an understanding of their identity as produced by the fluidity and openness of multiple cultural signs and symbols. A good example of the third space is the visual element and narrative provided by Farida (see Section 5.5.2.2). In the narrative, she addresses the interconnectedness of human beings and their cultures; this concept is fascinatingly illustrated in the visual element of an Afghan dog with Hazaragi headwear. She presented this as culture personified. For participants in this study, the third space was a transcultural space in which their identity celebrated pluralities and hybridity of cultures. By developing a middle-ground, fluid, hybrid and multifaceted cultural identity, participants attempted to find a sense of belonging to both their origin and Australian identities to fill the identity gap created by the effects of displacement. This is consistent with previous studies on the general refugee population (e.g. Chao, 2019). In their research with Hazara participants in Australia, Radford and Hetz (2021) reported that their study participants had a fresh perspective on Australian national identity, characterized by its multicultural essence and the collective sharing of rights and responsibilities under Australian citizenship. This allowed individuals from the Hazara community to identify themselves as 'Australians' or 'Aussies' and to experience a sense of belonging that embraces their multifaceted identity, including their Hazara/Afghan heritage, Muslim faith, and past refugee status.

Beyond hybridity and identity fluidity, another important aspect that requires attention is the intersection of identity components. The concept of intersecting identity facets (or identities) is that individuals possess multiple social identity components. Each person embodies a complex combination of social categories, such as race, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, socioeconomic status, ability, and religion. The concept of intersecting identity components recognises that the way different facets of identity intersect with systems of privilege, oppression and power shapes people's experiences, perspectives, and social interactions (Choo & Ferree, 2010). For example, for the young adult participants in this study, the intersection of their ethnic identity as Hazara, Shia in Afghanistan (and hence marginalised and persecuted in their home country) and a new arrival and Muslim in Australia (and hence experiencing racism and exclusion) greatly influenced how they negotiated their new social context. For example, a young Hazara participant spoke about this intersection of his identity as a marginalised person in Australia and a persecuted Hazara in Afghanistan and how this experience brought him closer to appreciating the history of First Nations people in Australia. The experiences of persecution, discrimination and social injustice were compounded for this participant when multiple facets of his identity intersected and influenced his sense of belonging in interaction with his sociocultural context. These complex experiences of participants can be analysed through the lens of intersectionality. This lens recognizes that the effects of discrimination and oppression are cumulative, meaning that individuals may face compounded disadvantages due to the intersection of multiple marginalized identity facets. This can result in heightened vulnerability to various forms of injustice and exclusion, making equitable and inclusive supports and opportunities within the context more vital (Chossière, 2021; Paz & Kook, 2021).

7.3.3 Supports and opportunities in the context of social ecology

Within the SEM presented in Chapter 4, while both meaning-making and finding a sense of belonging are subjective matters, neither of these processes occurs in a void. The participants negotiated their identity continuity and the [re]construction of their identity in interaction with several supportive environmental factors. This finding is congruent with previous research on resilience (see Chapter 2) and identity (see Chapter 4), indicating that a protective social ecology positively influences the self-concept by facilitating a sense of belonging in young people from refugee backgrounds. Below, I provide a summary of the

factors that adult and adolescent study participants reported as supporting and assisting them in Australia through the process of identity [re]construction.

On an interpersonal level, both adults and adolescents considered their family members, friends, school staff, language teachers and social workers their primary supports and, in some cases, role models influencing their perceptions of identity and resilience. This is consistent with previous research, which indicates that having warm and supportive parents (Grotevant & Cooper, 1985; Johansen & Varvin, 2020; Rabiau, 2019), supportive peer relationships (S Chen & Schweitzer, 2019; Moran, 2020) and supportive and understanding teachers and school staff (Chao, 2019; Karam et al., 2020) positively influenced the [re]construction of a resilient identity in young people from refugee backgrounds.

Our data are also consistent with previous studies showing that community supports, such as sports clubs (Young & Block, 2022), ethnic and cultural community groups (Iqbal et al., 2012), local councils and new arrival service providers (Panter-Brick et al., 2018; Shevell & Denov, 2021; Simich & Andermann, 2014) can support participants by assisting them in finding a sense of belonging in the host country.

On a broader level, opportunities and access to education were among the societal factors that supported young people in developing a sense of belonging to Australia and strongly influenced their perception of self. Young adults and adolescents mentioned how having the opportunity for education and success tied them to Australia and assisted them in constructing their Australian identity. Although the meanings associated with hope and resilience were strongly informed by their culture, the opportunities and access to education in Australia provided a pathway for participants to navigate the hope of being an ‘educated’, ‘successful’ person.

To address the final research question about how the social ecology influenced the [re]construction of a positive sense of identity in the participants, I have summarised and conceptualised the findings in Figure 5.

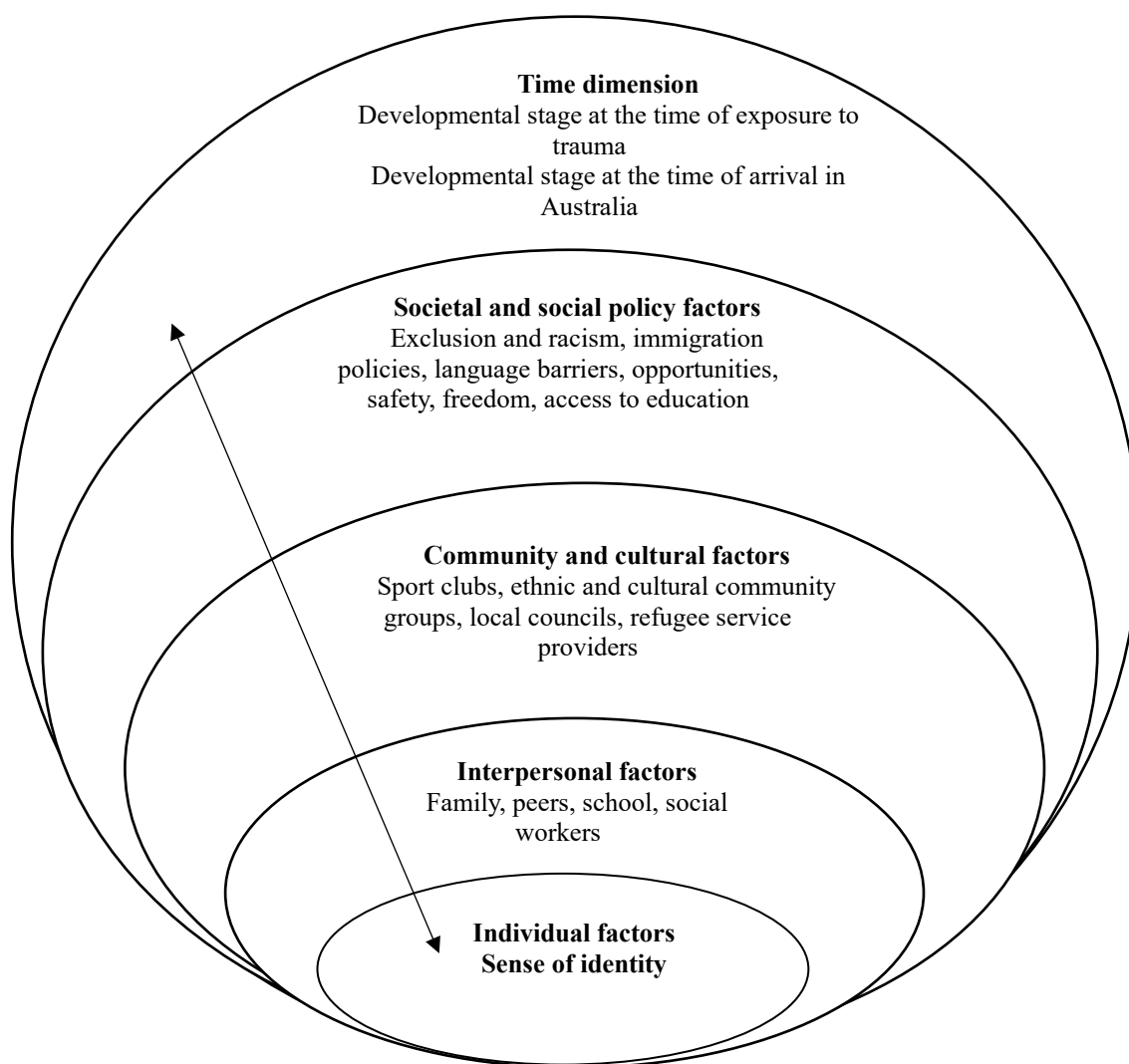


Figure 5 Interaction of the sense of identity with the social ecology layers

In Chapter 4, I discussed the chronosphere as a factor representing the dimension of time, which influences individuals and their environments (see Pickett et al., 2022). The chronosphere includes both the historical sense of time (the broader sociohistorical context in which individuals live) and developmental time (the individual's life transitions) (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Consistent with previous results (Pickett et al., 2022; Shevell & Denov, 2021), in this study, the influence of time on the participants' [re]construction of identity was fundamental. From a developmental perspective, it was found that when participants arrived in Australia at a younger age, they reported different and apparently easier acculturation pathways compared with older arrivals. This had the largest influence on successfully navigating belonging between two cultures during adolescence and early adulthood and finding a middle ground. The reason could be due to easier language acquisition and cultural learning. Participant who arrived at younger ages could benefit from

socialisation opportunities in school environments, where peer interactions fostered cultural exchange and support (see section 5.5.3.2).

The other important effect of the developmental stage was the difference in the ability of adolescents and adults to process and make meaning of traumatic events in Afghanistan. Young adult participants described their experiences of traumatic events before coming to Australia, but adolescents chose not to talk about this. As described, this difference could reflect their developmental stage and cognitive ability to discuss traumatic incidents (see Alisic et al., 2011). This is an important observation that may indicate that the developmental stage of a young person influences how they perceive their experiences and incorporate meanings associated with adversity into their sense of identity. Individuals are actively constructing their sense of self and understanding of the world around them. Younger children may struggle to comprehend complex or abstract concepts, while adolescents may start to develop more nuanced understanding of adversity and its implications. Additionally, developmental stages shape individuals' coping mechanisms, resilience, and social support networks, influencing how they navigate and make sense of challenging experiences. The meanings attributed to adversity are often filtered through developmental lenses, impacting individuals' sense of agency, self-worth, and future orientation (Pasupathi, et al., 2007).

Another influence of time was that young adults had had enough time to negotiate and [re]construct their sense of identity between two cultures, reflect on their struggles in the past and relate those experiences to their current sense of self. For example, many young adult participants stated that they would not be the same hardworking individuals that they were if they had not experienced adversity. They also discussed how marginalisation had formed their sense of identity to be proud of their ethnicity and advocate for it. Adolescents, however, were still sometimes struggling to establish themselves in Australia. They were still in the early stages of integration in their new context, and therefore, their priority was addressing current challenges rather than reflecting on past experiences.

It is important to note that not all developmental factors were individual-level. The social ecology was also different at the different ages of an individual, and changes in the social ecology interacted with the individual development of the young person. That is, expectations of the self or others, family dynamics, school environments and experiences of discrimination differ at different ages. Some participants reported that the experience of cultural dislocation was not strong until they started wearing the hijab or started attending university or work.

This experience indicates not only that the form of exclusion or racism changed as they grew up but that the expectations of young participants about the inclusivity of their environment (e.g. university or workplace) and respect for diversity from peers and colleagues changed. For example, one participant mentioned that even though he works for the government, he senses that, in the opinion of some of his colleagues, he does not belong in Australia. This experience indicates that as one grows older, the forms of exclusion or racism present in more subtle ways compared with in the school years when the experience of exclusion can be more direct.

Another important social-level aspect of time related to changes in the political climate of host countries. For example, changes in which political parties are in power often result in changes in how people from refugee background are viewed and represented in the public discourse and influences the experiences of racism and exclusion among young refugees in Australia (e.g. the experiences of Islamophobia following the 9/11 attacks which was discussed earlier). From 2013, a substantial shift occurred in Australia in how people from a refugee background, especially people seeking asylum, were treated. The change accompanied the reinstating of offshore detention for people seeking asylum by boat. Since then, public opinion about refugees in Australia has been influenced by a complex interplay of political, social and global factors. Both politicians and the media used language that constructed a division between ‘genuine’ asylum seekers, those who are processed overseas and are offered a visa before their arrival in Australia, and those who arrive by boat and may be described as ‘illegal’, ‘queue jumpers’ or ‘unauthorised arrivals’ (Lippi et al., 2020; McAdam, 2013; Rowe & O'Brien, 2014). Since 2013, the diversity of views within Australia towards refugees has sparked public debates. On the one hand, discourses have increased the stigmatisation and perpetuation of negative stereotypes associated with refugees by dehumanising them and minimising their experiences (Hartley & Fleay, 2017). At the same time, there has been increased activism, leading to amplified awareness of humanitarian concerns and, in some cases, shifts in public discourse towards a more empathetic approach (Hartley et al., 2013; Wroe, 2018). While none of the participants of this PhD research sought asylum to Australia by boat after 2013, a few who arrived by boat before that time still experienced the effect of hostile language directed towards their mode of arrival, together with their experiences of racism. Not only those who arrived by boat, but others were also impacted by certain stereotypes introduced by the media about refugees, particularly since 2013 in Australia. As one young adult participant shared, even citizenship could not protect

him and his family from racist attacks. Thus racism, amplified by negative media discourse, diminished from participants' sense of belonging.

Finally, the overall major influence of time was invoked by young adult participants who described forced migration as a lifelong journey. As participants explained, some of the experiences of forced migration could continue or have prolonged impacts on their lives. Participants addressed their experiences of intergenerational trauma, adversity, social exclusion, and racism in Australia in different stages of their development. This is notable as it demonstrates forced migration is a journey that may be never-ending, as displaced individuals navigate the complexities of trauma, resilience, and identity in their quest for stability, dignity, and belonging (see Kahn & Denov, 2022; Sangalang & Vang, 2017).

7.4 Implications for practice and policy

The findings of this research have implications for practice and policy within the social-ecological environment. In Section 7.4, I discuss these implications as considerations and interventions that can be targeted at individual, interpersonal, community and, finally, societal and policy levels.

7.4.1 The individual level

The findings of this research suggest a need to understand the vulnerability and resilience of young people from Afghanistan not in absolute terms but as nuanced experiences that merge into their identity. The sense of agency, hope for a better future and culturally informed meaning-making demonstrated by participants of this study suggests the importance of a strong will as an individual factor in overcoming the effects of trauma (see Chao, 2019; Filler et al., 2019). While this determination exists at an individual level, social and policy-level factors are responsible for a person's opportunities and strengthening or hindering their willingness to navigate those opportunities (Kuru & Ungar, 2020). I discuss this further in Section 7.4.4.

While recognising the diversity of individual needs, this research provides insights that support key individual-level recommendations for young people from refugee backgrounds. These include acknowledging and validating their emotional experiences, promoting mental health awareness, and supporting them in seeking support from mental health services. Some

participants shared that they had difficulty adjusting to norms in Australia and felt alienated. Some struggled with anxiety, depression and social withdrawal but ignored those feelings as they felt pressure to be grateful and be an example of a ‘successful’ new arrival. As emerged from the discussions with young adult participants, acknowledging that vulnerability can co-exist with resilience is an important individual-level recommendation. Active engagement in community activities and seeking assistance for educational and skill development are also integral in fostering resilience and wellbeing.

7.4.2 The school level

For teachers, counsellors and social or community workers working with children and adolescents from Afghanistan, the findings of this study can provide an enhanced understanding of how young Afghans and Hazaras perceive their identity and [re]construct it in interaction with their immediate environment. Finding a sense of belonging in Australia begins with the first experiences in schools with teachers and peers (Grüttner, 2019; Trickett & Birman, 2005; Yıldırım et al., 2022). I recommend implementing programs that are inclusive and trauma-informed and that acknowledge the strength of the young person and acknowledge and support their original culture. Some parents may find it difficult to see their children distancing themselves from their culture of origin to find friends and a sense of belonging in Australia. However, culturally informed programs will not only support children’s wellbeing but also strengthen their relationships with their parents. As discussed, parents are also affected by trauma and the consequences of displacement. The burden of displacement, financial pressure and acculturation difficulties can create distance between young people and their parents (Yu et al., 2020). However, encouraging and appreciating young people’s ethnicity and culture in schools can make them feel proud of their culture of origin, minimise the pressure for rapid acceptance of perceived Australian norms, abate the tension between children and parents and reduce the feeling of exclusion by encouraging other students to understand and respect diversity. This recommendation, which is supported by previous research (see Karam et al., 2020), emerged from conversations with parents and young adults. As one young adult participant shared, school encouragement for her to present her culture using traditional clothes and Afghan or Hazaragi dance influenced her sense that her culture was valued and respected. A parent also shared that school support for immigrant children to present their languages and cultures encouraged his son to feel proud of his Afghan identity.

7.4.3 Community and cultural factors

Even though there are dedicated service providers and ethnic-led community organisations in Australia, for multiple reasons, people from refugee backgrounds might not have access to these services or feel comfortable accessing them (Fauk et al., 2021; Saberi et al., 2021). For example, Saberi et al., (2021) argued that low health literacy, stigma, cultural stoicism and fatalism, language barriers and lack of cultural competency among medical professionals are potential barriers to accessing primary mental health care among Hazara community.

In line with previous studies (Smith et al., 2020; Uptin et al., 2013), the results of this research suggested that some educational organisations (schools or universities), might lack an understanding of the complex experience of people from refugee backgrounds. In addition, some health services might lack an understanding of the multifaceted mental health needs of people from refugee backgrounds (Saberi et al., 2021; Ziersch et al., 2020). While these findings are suggested from the reports of participants in this project, additional research is required in these settings to investigate these claims further. This research found that lack of attention to cultural nuances associated with mental health in various populations, treating people from refugee backgrounds as ‘vulnerable’ in Western mental health frameworks and barriers to communication led young people to avoid support from these services. Based on this observation, I recommend improving the services delivered by these organisations by providing their staff with resources that will support them in implementing trauma-informed, culturally sensitive services for young people and their families from refugee backgrounds.

As gaining an education is a major motivation for most young people from Afghanistan, supporting them in accessing education and vocational training opportunities is crucial. This aim is achievable by assisting young people through a trauma-informed framework that acknowledges their vulnerabilities and strengths and allows them to navigate pathways to their personally defined success. This will prevent young people from assuming that there is a predefined status of a ‘good’ and ‘deserving’ new arrival and that if they do not achieve it, they will be deemed a failure or ungrateful (Nayeri, 2019). There are mainstream support organisations in Australia that provide trauma-informed support to schools and are located in the parts of the country where the majority of new arrivals reside (For example, the Victorian Foundation House supports for schools: <https://sifr.foundationhouse.org.au>). However, since not all children and adolescents from a refugee background live in the areas serviced by these

organisations, adopting and adjusting other services' trauma-informed framework may be helpful for students from a refugee background.

I have discussed how finding a sense of belonging relates to agency, participation opportunities and power. Including young people in program development that involves them is essential. This aim can be achieved by a concerted and long-term commitment from the relevant services to encourage young people's active participation in shaping the services, which would facilitate young people's involvement and empower their advocacy for their community (see Robinson et al., 2019). Supporting the belonging, participation, and agency of adolescents from a refugee background would go beyond traditional services and involve creating an environment that fosters holistic development. Ways to enhance the wellbeing of adolescents include social integration programs (community events, language exchange programs), cultural and arts initiatives (art workshops, cultural festivals), sports and recreation (youth sports leagues, recreational facilities), educational opportunities (school leadership programs, peer mentoring), digital inclusion (technology workshops), empowerment programs (life skill training, entrepreneurship initiatives) and community engagement (volunteer opportunities, community gardens). By means of these diverse initiatives, communities can create inclusive environments, nurture holistic development in adolescents from a refugee background and foster a sense of belonging, contribution, and agency.

7.4.4 The societal and policy level

The findings of this study are in accordance with decades of research results on the effects of racism and exclusion on the health and psychosocial wellbeing of young people from refugee backgrounds (Bailey et al., 2017; Dandy & Pe-Pua, 2015; Miled, 2020; Noh et al., 1999; Radford & Hetz, 2021). Its findings emphasise the ongoing experiences of racism and the importance of inclusivity if young new arrivals are to develop better resilience, sense of identity and belonging in their host countries.

The findings emphasise the need for educational policymakers to develop a more inclusive education system. Improving policies and practices in the education system will require a comprehensive approach based on the social-ecological framework to address the systemic and structural barriers perpetuating discrimination and exclusion.

At the macro level, this comprehensive approach involves social policies. These policies need to be designed to target and rectify the broader societal norms and biases that affect the experiences of young people in educational settings. They should challenge stereotypes and promote diversity and inclusion in educational materials, ensuring that the voices and experiences of all students are represented.

The findings of this research also demonstrate the significance of community factors for young people. These include the accessibility of community support systems and resources, extracurricular activities and programs that promote diversity and understanding among young people. Such systems and resources must ensure that there are opportunities for young people to engage with their local communities and learn about different cultures, perspectives, and experiences.

For social policymakers, the results of this study are another indicator of how media presentations of people from refugee backgrounds can present them dichotomously as either vulnerable and a burden to society or successful and resilient as grateful and deserving new arrivals. Including the voices of new arrivals in policy development is central to addressing stigma (Lenette et al., 2020). This aim can also be achieved by developing and implementing media guidelines or standards that emphasise accuracy, fairness and ethical reporting when covering refugee issues, as well as diversifying newsrooms by hiring journalists with lived experiences of forced migration. This can bring fresh perspectives and contribute to more nuanced reporting.

Finally, policymakers can allocate resources and grants to support research projects focused on refugee and forced migration issues. This can encourage in-depth research, uncover hidden stories, and shed light on systemic challenges faced by people who have experienced forced migration and factors that support successful outcomes.

7.5 Strengths and limitations

My PhD research had several strengths. I developed the research questions and aims in consultation with experts in the field and Afghan and Hazara community members. Integrating their feedback at the early stages of the process ensured that my research captured information that was contextually and culturally relevant to the needs of the community and service providers. Additionally, the consultations ensured that the data collection methods

were flexible and gave young people a choice in how they participated. The fact that the participants were able to communicate with a researcher from a culturally similar background and had the option to communicate in Farsi or English facilitated the research process and enriched the data collection.

Conducting a scoping review on identity [re]construction in young people from refugee backgrounds allowed me to expand my understanding of the gaps in the literature and how to address them. This thesis was further strengthened by the use of appropriate theoretical and conceptual frameworks. Informed by Ungar's (2012) SEM for understanding resilience, I developed a version of the SEM following the completion of the scoping review. My research has demonstrated the factors in multiple levels that influence the sense of identity in young people from refugee backgrounds. Using theories of narrative identity (McAdams, 2011) and hybrid identity (Bhabha, 1994) also enriched my understanding of identity [re]construction in the context of forced migration.

Another strength was that this PhD research captured the views of different generations on childhood experiences of migration: adolescents who had migrated to Australia recently, the parents of those adolescents and young adults. The inclusion of different generations in one study provided valuable insight into different experiences of forced migration and the effects of the passage of time. Specifically, it provided an overview of how some of these adverse experiences are shared between different generations (e.g. trauma, social exclusion, racism) and how some become more important over time in [re]constructing a sense of identity and resilience (e.g. making meaning of traumatic incidents).

However, the findings of this research should be interpreted with caution because of several limitations. My aim was to generate a greater understanding of identity [re]construction in young people from Afghanistan in Australia. However, the research was conducted in the context of COVID-19 lockdowns (see Section 1.5), which resulted in limited access to the marginalised target population, which included different ethnic communities from Afghanistan. In this context, I was only able to recruit a small number of participants, all of whom were from similar sociodemographic backgrounds. Further, the fall of Kabul in August 2021 (see Section 1.6) substantially affected the Afghan and Hazara communities in Australia, including the participants of my study.

Other than five participants and one parent who identified as Pashtun, all participants identified as Hazaras. Hence, the result of this PhD research should not be assumed to represent other ethnicities from Afghanistan. Also, because all participants were permanent residents or citizens of Australia, this research did not capture the lived experiences of young people from Afghanistan who are still seeking asylum in Australia and have limited social and financial resources.

Further, this study may only have captured the experiences of young people who perceived themselves as resilient at the time of the interview. This is a substantial limitation, as the findings might not reflect the voices of people who do not perceive themselves in this way. It is, therefore, important to avoid generalising the findings to the experiences of all people from refugee backgrounds. As noted earlier, many who have experienced severe trauma and violence, such as sexual exploitation (see Denov & Piolanti, 2020; Longobardi et al., 2017) might not succeed in ‘staying’ resilient or might not perceive themselves as resilient because of ongoing mental health symptoms.

Additionally, my PhD supervisors are from linguistic and cultural backgrounds different to those of the study participants, and their input on the findings of studies included in this thesis was based on my translation into English and interpretation of the data. Therefore, I may have missed some opportunities to exchange ideas with them that included an intuitive understanding of how things work in Hazara, Afghan, Iranian and Muslim cultures.

Despite the limitations, this study has generated insights into how young Afghans and Hazaras perceive resilience and how they have [re]constructed a resilient identity following settlement in Australia. While the findings are likely to also have resonance for other groups from refugee backgrounds, further research is needed to confirm this.

7.6 Future research

The findings of the study emphasise the need for more holistic, contextual, and culturally informed longitudinal studies that can consider factors influencing identity [re]construction in children and adolescents from a refugee background. Longitudinal studies could dedicate attention to the intersection of trauma and displacement with multiple aspects of identity [re]construction and finding a sense of belonging during the years following settlement in Australia. Additionally, longitudinal studies could capture the influence of time, specifically

in studies with people from a refugee background experiencing inter- or transgenerational trauma. As discussed in Chapter 4, none of the studies captured in the scoping review focused on the influence of time; thus, this is an important research gap. Including the element of time would advance the understanding of the relationship between society and individuals and answer a range of important questions: How do people's reflections on their experiences and perspectives change over time? How does a young person who does (or does not) have a positive sense of self during their adolescent period lose (or gain) a positive sense of identity later in adulthood? What are the barriers or protective factors in that process that social or educational policies can target?

The other key outcome of this study was the significance of intersectionality in studying identity and belonging. While the experiences of displacement and forced migration to Australia were crucial for participants in forming their identity and sense of belonging, being 'a Hazara'—and, for some, being 'a Muslim'—and the experiences associated with that component of identity contributed strongly to their perception of a resilient sense of identity. This finding, consistent with previous studies, emphasises that studying the intersectionality of identity components is important because it recognises the diversity and complexity of human experiences (see Sultan et al., 2020). The identity of an individual is multifaceted and shaped by factors such as ethnicity, race, gender, class, sexuality, disability and religion (most of which can change over time). These facets intersect in a person's life, influencing their experiences, opportunities and challenges. Understanding the systems of privilege, oppression and power that shape people's experiences of intersectionality is essential for understanding how a young person [re]constructs their sense of identity and finds a sense of belonging to a new context.

In closing, I argue that mixed-methods longitudinal studies, designed collaboratively with community members, could provide a culturally informed understanding of young people's experiences in the years following their arrival and transition into adulthood. Collaborating with children and adolescents, for example through community-based participatory research, would not only empower them by recognising their agency but also permit a co-creation of knowledge, in which researchers and community members work together to generate insights.

7.7 Conclusion

This research has shown that the experiences of young adults and adolescents in the process of [re]constructing their identity following the experiences of forced migration are characterised by two important features. The first is that the challenges are not limited to the first few years post-arrival but can show negative effects in the later stages of a person's life. The second is that although social policies in Australia may have changed, there is still no holistic response to the lifelong disruptions caused by forced migration experiences. This has resulted in similar experiences for participants who migrated to Australia at different times across almost a decade. The findings of this study suggest that [re]constructing identity, finding a sense of belonging in a new context and building resilience are interrelated, complex and ongoing processes. Therefore, addressing inadequacies in the existing policies and practices is vital.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Invitation to participate in research



Invitation to participate in research

Melbourne School of Population and Global Health
Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences

The Childhood Experience of Resilience and Sense of Identity among Afghans with a Refugee Background



Hello,

My name is Farnaz and I am a PhD student at the University of Melbourne. I warmly invite you to participate in my research. Here is a little bit information about this project!

I am interested to explore how children with refugee backgrounds perceive their strengths (resilience) and how it might influence their feelings and beliefs about themselves (identity). There is a lack of knowledge about the strengths of children with refugee backgrounds from different cultures and how they develop these strengths through their interactions within their families, schools and community.

**If you are Afghan,
If you experienced forced migration before the age of 18,
Or, if you are parents of children who migrated to Australia before the age of 18,**

I would like to speak with you about your experiences. Hearing the voices of people from refugee backgrounds will help experts to understand and improve children's lives.

If you are interested in participating, please contact me on **0424948486** or fshahimi@student.unimelb.edu.au for more information and details about this project. All the information will be presented to you in **Farsi** if you prefer.

Participation is voluntary, your details will be kept confidential, and your name will not be used in any materials produced from this research.

Many thanks!

Farnaz Shahimi

Dr Karen Block (Research Supervisor)

Associate Professor Eva Alisic (Research Supervisor)

Child and Community Wellbeing Unit/Centre for Health Equity

Melbourne School of Population and Global Health / University of Melbourne

Appendix B: Farsi brochure

تجربه ی تاب آوری و هویت در
 کودکی در افراد دارای تجربه ی
 پناهندگی





**پژوهشی بر
 تجربه ی تاب
 آوری و هویت
 در کودکی در
 افراد دارای
 تجربه ی
 پناهندگی**

اگر علاقه مند هستید

لطفاً با ما تماس بگیرید
 +61 424948486

یا ایمیل بفرستید
 fshahimi@student.unimelb.edu.au



هدف ما

ما علاقه مندیم تا بدانیم افرادی که در
 کودکی تجربه پناهندگی و پناهندگی دارند،
 چگونه نقاط قوت خود را می شناسند و این
 نقاط قوت چه تأثیری بر احساسات و باور
 آنها در مورد خودشان دارد.



اطلاعات پژوهش

چرا این پژوهش؟

در این زمینه در استرالیا، دانش کافی وجود ندارد،
 مخصوصاً اینکه کودکان با فرهنگ های متفاوت چگونه
 در ارتباط با خانواده، مدرسه و جامعه نقاط قوت و
 هویت خود را شکل می دهند.

چه کسانی می توانند شرکت کنند؟

اگر شما اهل افغانستان هستید و تجربه ی پناهندگی یا
 پناهندگی تا پیش از ۱۸ سالگی دارید،
 اگر والدین کودک یا نوجوان بین سنین ۸ تا ۱۸ سال
 هستید و شما و فرزندانتان تجربه ی پناهندگی یا
 پناهندگی به استرالیا را دارید، خوشحال می شویم که با
 شما و فرزند شما در مورد تجربیات تان صحبت کنیم.
 شنیدن تجربه های کودکان از خود کودکان باعث می
 شود که افراد متخصص درک بهتر و صحیح تری از زندگی
 کودکان داشته باشند و بتوانند برنامه های بهتری برای
 ارتقا زندگی کودکان با تجربه ی پناهندگی طراحی کنند.

شرایط شرکت در پژوهش چیست؟

شرکت در این پژوهش کاملاً داوطلبانه و تمامی اطلاعات
 و گفته های شما محرمانه است و هرآنچه که در این
 پژوهش با ما در میان بگذارید بدون ذکر نام و هویت شما
 در گزارش پژوهش درج خواهد شد.
 برای تشکر از وقت شما، هر شرکت کننده در این
 پژوهش یک کارت هدیه ۵۰ دلار ری دریافت خواهد کرد.



Information for Parents/Guardians

The Childhood Experience of Resilience and Sense of Identity among Afghans with Refugee Background

Researchers:

Farnaz Shahimi (Graduate Researcher)

Dr Karen Block (Responsible Researcher)

Associate Professor Eva Alisic

Child and Community Wellbeing Unit/Centre for Health Equity

Melbourne School of Population and Global Health

University of Melbourne

Dear Parents/Guardians,

Thank you for your interest in participating in this research project at the University of Melbourne, School of Population and Global Health, conducted by PhD student, Farnaz Shahimi. We would like to explore how you perceive your children's strengths (resilience) and how it influences their feelings and beliefs about themselves (identity). We are also interested in understanding children's perspective on resilience and identity.

Your participation would be of great value to this study and highly appreciated!

Do you or your child have to participate?

No. Participation is voluntary and if you or your child wish to stop at any stage you are free to do so.

What will you be asked to do?

Depending on COVID-19 restrictions, our meetings can be face-to-face if you live in Melbourne, or they can be online via Zoom or Skype due to COVID-19 or if you live in other regions. If you agree to participate, you will be invited for an interview with the PhD student (Farnaz Shahimi) at a time and if face-to-face at a place convenient for you (such as public places or your home). You can choose to speak in English or Farsi. In this interview you will be asked questions about your perspective on your child's resilience and identity such as: What do you think are the positive aspects of your child's personality? What are their strengths? What are your children's wishes for the future? What may help or hinder her/him in achieving those plans? How does community, Australian society and policies affect your children?

The interview will be recorded, so that we can make an accurate record of what you say. We estimate that the total time for the interview will be 45-60 minutes.

What will children be asked to do during this project?

If your child is happy to participate, Farnaz will meet your child with a few other children for an introductory session. All the sessions with your children will also be face-to-face or online via Zoom or Skype. You can also participate in this session with your child. This session will be at a time and if face-to-face at a place that suits you and your child, for about 30 to 45 minutes. If preferred, your child has the option to choose an individual introductory session instead of a group session with other kids.

During this session, we will have the chance to get to know each other, talk about children's strengths and about doing some activities such as video art, photography, drawing or painting, favourite objects and writing stories. Discussions are around questions such as "What do you like about your life? What is a symbol of strength in your life"? Children will have two to three weeks until the next session to choose one or more than one of the activities based on their interest to answer these questions about resilience and their sense of identity.

Two to three weeks later, Farnaz will meet your child individually, or with one or more of the others from the introductory group, to talk about their videos, photos, painting, objects or their stories for about 30 to 45 minutes. We will ask your child about their perceptions of strengths and positive aspects of their identity. Questions like: How would you describe yourself? What is in you that you are proud of? How do you like to spend your time? What kind of things usually help you to stay strong when things are not easy in your life? We kindly ask you to give privacy to your child during this session.

She will be recording the introduction and interview meetings so we can remember what was said.

How will you and your child's confidentiality be protected?

We will not use names in our reports. Children can choose whether they want to share a copy of their videos, paintings, photos or stories in the final report.

We will protect the privacy of everything you say. We would only discuss what was said with others (such as appropriate authorities) if we were worried about you and your child's safety. There are only a small number of people taking part in this project. However, so it is possible that someone might be able to guess who you are based on what is said. But we will group the results in all reports to reduce the possibility that this will happen.

What are the possible benefits?

We hope that participation in this research will be interesting and enjoyable. There is evidence that involving children in research that is relevant to them can contribute to self-esteem, hope for the future, and sense of active contribution to the community. Your ideas and lived experiences will help experts think of better ways to understand and support children with refugee backgrounds.

What are the possible risks for you?

Although it is unlikely that the nature of the interview questions will upset you, we recognise that sometimes talking about things that have happened in your life can bring up distressing thoughts or memories. Should you become distressed during the research you can stop participating if you want to. You can also contact any of the services below if you would prefer:

Lifeline:

Crisis support – suicide prevention
For a call (24/24): + 61 13 11 14
For a chat online (24/24): www.lifeline.org.au

Cabrini Asylum Seeker and Refugee Health Hub:

Provides access to multidisciplinary care for clients with mental health needs.
Tel: +61 (03) 8388 7874
Email: healthhub@cabrini.com.au
Website: [www.cabrini.com.au/patients-and-families/services/directory/asylum-seeker and refugee-health-hub](http://www.cabrini.com.au/patients-and-families/services/directory/asylum-seeker-and-refugee-health-hub)
Address: 503 Sydney Road (ground floor), 3056 Brunswick – Victoria

Foundation House:

Provides services to advance the health, wellbeing and human rights of people of refugee backgrounds in Victoria who have experienced torture or other traumatic events in their country of origin or while fleeing those countries.

Tel: +61 (03) 9389 8900
Email: info@foundationhouse.org.au
Website: www.foundationhouse.org.au
Address: offices in Brunswick, Dandenong, Dallas, Ringwood & Sunshine. See their website: www.foundationhouse.org.au/client-information

What are the possible risks for children?

It is also unlikely that the nature of the interview questions will upset your child. However, if during the interview, a child experiences distress or feels uncomfortable due to the topic of discussion or an activity, they won't be pressured to participate, and can choose if they want to talk about it or not. The same services will also be available for children as well as Kids Helpline on 1800 55 1800. This is a free, private telephone service for young people aged 5 to 25.

What will happen with your information?

The information you provide will be part of the research data of the doctoral thesis of Farnaz Shahimi. It is also likely that the results will be presented at academic conferences, in journals and/or as book chapters. Since your children will provide some videos, photos, paintings or written stories, we might find a creative way like blogs, podcasts or art shows to present them to the wider community in ways that reflect unique voice of your children and their lived experiences. We will ask your child's permission to share their artworks.

All data will be kept securely in the Melbourne School of Population and Global Health for five years from the date of any publication, before being destroyed. If you decide to withdraw from the study, you can ask to have any data that you or your child has already contributed also withdrawn for up to one month after the interview session.

Will I hear about the results of this project?

Yes, you and your children will be provided with a summary of the research findings.

Where can you get further information or raise concerns?

If you would like more information or have questions about the project, please contact us:

Farnaz Shahimi: fshahimi@student.unimelb.edu.au or 424948486 Karen Block:
keblock@unimelb.edu.au or 8344 0862

Research funding

This project is funded by the Melbourne Research Scholarship and the Population Health Investing in Research Student's Training (PHIRST) funding.

Who can I contact if I have any concerns about the project?

This research project has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of The University of Melbourne (Ethics ID: 2057900.1). If you have any concerns about the conduct of the project which you do not wish to discuss with the research team, please contact the Manager, Human Research Ethics, Research Ethics and Integrity, University of Melbourne, VIC 3010. Tel: +61 3 8344 2073 or Email HumanEthics-complaints@unimelb.edu.au. All complaints will be treated confidentially. In any correspondence please provide the name of the research team or the name or ethics ID number of the research project.

Consent Form for Parents



Project: Experience of Childhood Resilience and Sense of Identity among Afghans with Refugee Background

Researchers:

Farnaz Shahimi (Graduate Researcher)

Dr Karen Block

Associate Professor Eva Alisic

Child and Community Wellbeing Unit/Centre for Health Equity

Melbourne School of Population and Global Health

University of Melbourne

-
1. I understand that I will be asked about my perspective on my child's resilience and their sense of identity.
 2. I understand that my child will be asked about their strengths and their thoughts about their identity.
 3. I understand that my child will participate in an introductory session with a few other children or he/she can choose to have an individual introductory session.
 4. I understand that my child will be asked to choose one or more activity among these activities: video making, taking a photo, painting, bringing a favourite object or writing a narrative about resilience and identity.
 5. I understand that what is said during the interviews with me and my child will be treated as confidential and only the researchers named above will have the access to the content.

6. I understand that my child might be interviewed individually, and the information provided by children won't be revealed to parents. Authorities or parents will be contacted only if the researchers were worried about his or her safety.
7. I understand that the information from the discussions will be grouped and not linked to any individuals but if my or my child's story is familiar to others, they may recognise my/his/her contribution.
8. I understand that interviews with me and with my children will be recorded.
9. I understand that video or audio recording (including taping, recording, photographing, screen capture and other methods of capture) by me and my children is not permitted
10. I understand that the results will be part of the research data of the doctoral thesis of Farnaz Shahimi and might be presented at academic conferences, in journals and/or as book chapters.
11. I understand that videos, photos, paintings and narratives provided by my child might be exhibited in blogs, podcasts or art shows to present them to the wider community.
12. I understand that participation is voluntary and that we are free to stop participating in the project anytime, without explanation and this will not affect us in any way.
13. I understand that if I choose to withdraw, the information which my children and I are already provided can be withdrawn unless it has already been included in reports and other publications.
14. I understand that after I sign and return this consent form, it will be retained by the researcher.
15. I understand that the data from this research will be stored at the University of Melbourne and will be destroyed after 5 years.

Please put your details and sign here if you agree to being part of this project and agree to your child being asked to participate:

- Parent/guardian name:
- Parent/guardian phone number:
- Parent/guardian e-mail:
- Child's Name:
- Parent/guardian signature:
- Date:

Information for Children

The Childhood Experience of Resilience and Sense of Identity among Afghans with Refugee Background

Researchers:

Farnaz Shahimi (Graduate Researcher)

Dr Karen Block (Responsible Researcher)

Associate Professor Eva Alisic

Child and Community Wellbeing Unit/Centre for Health Equity

Melbourne School of Population and Global Health

University of Melbourne



Hi,

My name is Farnaz and I am a researcher at the University of Melbourne, School of Population and Global Health and would like to tell you about my project. If you're interested in taking part in our research, please read this information carefully, and decide if you want to take part. You can ask me questions if there's something you don't understand or want to know more about.

I hope that you enjoy participating in this project!

What is this project about?

This project invites Afghan children from a refugee background to talk about their lives and their strengths.

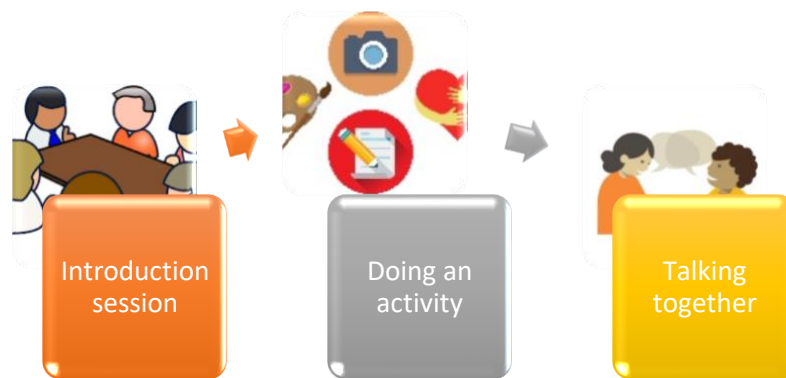
Do I have to participate?

It's up to you. Even if your parents agree with your participation, you may choose not to participate. Also, if you join in, you can also stop at any time.

If I decide to participate, what will I do?

We will have two meetings. Considering the COVID-19 restrictions, our meetings can be either face-to-face or online via Zoom or Skype. First, I will meet you in a group with a few other children (these can be your friends or siblings) or, if you prefer, we will meet individually. Your parents also can be present at this session. We will meet for about 30 to 45 minutes at a time and place that is convenient for you. If we meet face-to-face, this could be in a public place or your home. We will have the chance to get to know each other and talk about what kinds of things might help children to feel strong in their lives. We will also plan some activities such as video art, photography, drawing, painting, bringing your favourite objects and writing stories to bring to our next discussion.

Then you have two to three weeks to choose one or more than one of the activities based on your interest.



Two weeks later, you and I will meet individually or with your friends or siblings, at a time and a place if face-to-face that suits you (such as public places or your home), to talk about these videos, photos, paintings, your favourite objects or your story for about 30-45 minutes. We will talk about your strengths and feelings and thoughts that you have about yourself.

You can choose the language of the meetings to be in or English. I will be recording both introduction and interview meetings, so I remember what was said.

Will the things that I say in the meeting be kept private?

We will not use your name in our reports. You can choose whether you want to share a copy of your videos, paintings or photos or stories in the final report.

We will protect of everything you say. We will only contact your parents or authorities if we are worried about your safety.

If you choose to participate in a group with your friends or siblings, they will know what you say during the sessions. Also, there are only a small number of people taking part in this project, so it is possible that someone might be able to guess who you are based on what is said. But we will group the results in all reports to make this unlikely.

If you decide to withdraw from the study, you have one month after our interview session to ask for that. Otherwise, we will keep recordings and notes from the project for five years at The University of Melbourne after the last reports are published and then we will destroy them.

What are the possible benefits?

I cannot promise that you will receive direct benefits of this research. But it can be fun! You will meet a group of peers and talk about your strengths in life. Sharing your ideas with others can be interesting. It can also be a great way to share your skills with others.

Participating in research might also benefit other children like you. Your ideas will help adults know more about children from Afghan and Iranian background and think of better ways to support them. To be able to fully acknowledge the value of your experience and contribution, as a thank you for your time, you will be provided a \$50 gift card at the end.

What are the possible risks?

While talking about some of your feelings, thoughts, and experiences during our two sessions or after, you might feel sad, angry or uncomfortable. You can choose to stop the session at any time. You do not have to give a reason why, but if you would like to talk about it, we will listen.

If you are ever distressed about any problems and you are not sure who you can talk to, you can call Kids Helpline on 1800 55 1800 (see the website <https://kidshelpline.com.au>). This is a free, confidential telephone and webchat service for young people aged 5 to 25.

Will I hear about the results of this project?

Yes. We will decide together how we can share them with you and with others.

Where can I get further information?

You can contact us any time to discuss the project:

Farnaz Shahimi: fshahimi@student.unimelb.edu.au or 424948486

Karen Block: keblock@unimelb.edu.au or 8344 0862

Research funding

This project is funded by the Melbourne Research Scholarship and the Population Health Investing in Research Student's Training (PHIRST) funding.

Who can I contact if I have any concerns about the project?

This research project has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of The University of Melbourne (Ethics ID: 2057900.1). If you have any concerns or complaints about the conduct of this research project, which you do not wish to discuss with the research team, you should contact the Manager, Human Research Ethics, Office for Research Ethics and Integrity, University of Melbourne, VIC 3010. Tel: +61 3 8344 2073 or Email: HumanEthics-complaints@unimelb.edu.au. All complaints will be treated confidentially. In any correspondence please provide the name of the research team or the name or ethics ID number of the research project.

Consent Form for C

Researchers:

Farnaz Shahimi (Graduate Researcher)

Dr Karen Block

Associate Professor Eva Alisic

Child and Community Wellbeing Unit/Centre for Health Equity

Melbourne School of Population and Global Health

University of Melbourne



1. I understand that I will be asked about how I think about myself and what I think about my strengths in life.
2. I understand that the group discussion and individual interviews will be recorded.
3. I understand that a copy of the videos, photos, drawings and the stories that I provide will be used later by the researchers to present the result of this study.
4. I understand that it is up to me if I want to be part of this research and I can stop any time.
5. I understand that only the researchers in this project or other children in the introductory group will know my name, but that it may be possible that someone may guess who I am from what I said.
6. I understand that video or audio recording (including taping, recording, photographing, screen capture and other methods of capture) by me is not permitted.
7. I understand that the information collected for this research, including this form, will be kept at the University of Melbourne and will be destroyed 5 years after all the reports have been published.

Please put your details and sign here if you agree to be part of this project:

- Name:
- Date of Birth:
- Signature:
- Date:



THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE

Pls and consent forms for young adults

Information for Participants

The Childhood Experience of Resilience and Sense of Identity among Afghans with a Refugee Background

Researchers:

Farnaz Shahimi (Graduate Researcher)

Dr Karen Block (Responsible Researcher)

Associate Professor Eva Alisic

Child and Community Wellbeing Unit/Centre for Health Equity

Melbourne School of Population and Global Health

University of Melbourne

Thank you for your interest in participating in this research project at the University of Melbourne, School of Population and Global Health, conducted by PhD student, Farnaz Shahimi. We would like to explore how you perceive your childhood strengths (resilience) and how it might have influenced your feelings and beliefs about yourself (identity).

Your participation would be of great value to this study and highly appreciated!

Do you have to participate?

No. Participation is voluntary and if you wish to stop at any stage, you are free to do so.

What will you be asked to do?

Depending on COVID-19 restrictions, our meetings can be face-to-face if you live in Melbourne, or they can be online via Zoom or Skype due to COVID-19 or if you live in other regions. If you agree to participate, Farnaz Shahimi (PhD student) will have a short introductory session with you at a time and if face-to-face at a place convenient for you (such as public places or your home). You can choose to speak in English or Farsi. In this session, we will have the chance to get to know each other, talk about your childhood strengths. There is an optional part in this research that is about doing some activities such as video art, photography, drawing or painting, favourite objects and writing stories. Discussions are around questions such as “What do you like about your life? What is a symbol of strength in your life”?

This meeting will take 20-30 minutes and can be conducted online or face-to-face at a time and place convenient for you depending on your preference and any current COVID-19 restrictions.

Two to three weeks later, you will be invited for a face-to-face or online interview with Farnaz at a time and place convenient for you. You can choose to speak in English or Dari. In this interview, we will discuss about visual data or narratives that you may have provided. Also, you will be asked questions about your perspective on your childhood resilience and your sense of identity such as: What do you think were the positive aspects of your childhood? What were your strengths? What

were you proud of? How do you describe your childhood? Who were the important people in your childhood? What were the positive things that you used to do while facing challenges in childhood? Do you have any example of that since you arrived in Australia? How does your origin culture influence the strength and identity of you during your childhood?

The interview will be recorded, so that we can make an accurate record of what you say. We estimate that the total time for the interview will be 45-60 minutes.

How will your confidentiality be protected?

We will not use names in our reports. You can choose whether you want to share a copy of your videos, paintings, photos or stories in the final report.

We will protect the privacy of everything you say. There are only a small number of people taking part in this project however, so it is possible that someone might be able to guess who you are based on what is said. We will group the results in all reports to reduce the possibility that this will happen.

What are the possible benefits?

We hope that participation in this research will be interesting and enjoyable. There is evidence that involving community members in research that is relevant to them can contribute to self-esteem, hope for the future, and sense of active contribution to the community. Your ideas and lived experiences will help experts think of better ways to understand and support children with refugee backgrounds.

To be able to fully acknowledge the value of your experience and recognize your contribution, as a thank you, you will be provided a \$50 gift card at the end.

What are the possible risks for you?

Although it is unlikely that the nature of the interview questions will upset you, we recognise that sometimes talking about things that have happened in your life can bring up distressing thoughts or memories. Should you become distressed during the research you can stop participating if you want to. You can also contact any of the services below if you would prefer:

Lifeline:

Crisis support – suicide prevention

For a call (24/24): + 61 13 11 14

For a chat online (24/24): www.lifeline.org.au

Cabrini Asylum Seeker and Refugee Health Hub:

Provides access to multidisciplinary care for clients with mental health needs.

Tel: +61 (03) 8388 7874

Email: healthhub@cabrini.com.au

Website: [www.cabrini.com.au/patients-and-families/services/directory/asylum-seeker and refugee-health-hub](http://www.cabrini.com.au/patients-and-families/services/directory/asylum-seeker-and-refugee-health-hub)

Address: 503 Sydney Road (ground floor), 3056 Brunswick – Victoria

Foundation House:

Provides services to advance the health, wellbeing and human rights of people of refugee backgrounds in Victoria who have experienced torture or other traumatic events in their country of origin or while fleeing those countries.

Tel: +61 (03) 9389 8900

Email: info@foundationhouse.org.au

Website: www.foundationhouse.org.au

Address: offices in Brunswick, Dandenong, Dallas, Ringwood & Sunshine. See their website: www.foundationhouse.org.au/client-information

What will happen with your information?

The information you provide will be part of the research data of the doctoral thesis of Farnaz Shahimi. It is also likely that the results will be presented at academic conferences, in journals and/or as book chapters. Since you will provide some videos, photos, paintings or written stories, we might find a creative way like blogs, podcasts or art shows to present them to the wider community in ways that reflect your unique voice and lived experiences. We will ask your permission to share your artworks.

All data will be kept securely in the Melbourne School of Population and Global Health for five years from the date of any publication, before being destroyed. If you decide to withdraw from the study, you can ask to have any data that you have already contributed also withdrawn for up to one month after the interview session.

Will I hear about the results of this project?

Yes, you will be provided with a summary of the research findings.

Where can you get further information or raise concerns?

If you would like more information or have questions about the project, please contact us:

Farnaz Shahimi: fshahimi@student.unimelb.edu.au or 424948486 Karen Block:

keblock@unimelb.edu.au or 8344 0862

Research funding

This project is funded by the Melbourne Research Scholarship and the Population Health Investing in Research Student's Training (PHIRST) funding.

Who can I contact if I have any concerns about the project?

This research project has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of The University of Melbourne (Ethics ID: 2057900.1). If you have any concerns about the conduct of the project which you do not wish to discuss with the research team, please contact

the Manager, Human Research Ethics, Research Ethics and Integrity, University of Melbourne, VIC 3010. Tel: +61 3 8344 2073 or Email HumanEthics-complaints@unimelb.edu.au. All complaints will be treated confidentially. In any correspondence please provide the name of the research team or the name or ethics ID number of the research project

Consent Form for Participants

The Childhood Experience of Resilience and Sense of Identity among Afghans with a Refugee Background: A Social-Ecological Perspective

Researchers:

Farnaz Shahimi (Graduate Researcher)

Dr Karen Block

Associate Professor Eva Alisic

Child and Community Wellbeing Unit/Centre for Health Equity

Melbourne School of Population and Global Health

University of Melbourne

-
1. I understand that I will be asked about my perspective on my childhood experience of resilience and sense of identity.
 2. I understand that I will participate in a short introductory session.
 3. I understand that I will be asked to choose one or more activity among these activities: video making, taking a photo, painting, bringing a favourite object or writing a narrative about resilience and identity.
 4. I understand that what is said during the interviews with me will be treated as confidential and only the researchers named above will have the access to the content.
 5. I understand that the information from the discussions will be grouped and not linked to any individuals but if my story is familiar to others, they may recognise my contribution.
 6. I understand that interviews with me will be recorded.
 7. I understand that the results will be part of the research data of the doctoral thesis of Farnaz Shahimi and might be presented at academic conferences, in journals and/or as book chapters.
 8. I understand that videos, photos, paintings and narratives provided might be exhibited in blogs, podcasts or art shows to present them to the wider community.
 9. I understand that participation is voluntary and that I am free to stop participating in the project anytime, without explanation and this will not affect us in any way.
 10. I understand that if I choose to withdraw, the information which I are already provided can be withdrawn unless it has already been included in reports and other publications.
 11. I understand that after I sign and return this consent form, it will be retained by the researcher.
 12. I understand that the data from this research will be stored at the University of Melbourne and will be destroyed after 5 years.

Please put your details and sign here if you agree to being part of this project:

- Participant name:
- Participant phone number:
- Participant e-mail:
- Participant signature:
- Date:

Thank you!

Appendix D: Interview guides

Parents in-depth interviews

Introduction

- Thank you for your interest in participating in this research project. Today, I will ask some questions regarding your perception of your child's strength when they are facing difficulties in life. I will also ask questions about feelings and thoughts that you think they have about themselves and also your perception of their identity.
- Review key information from PLS
- Ask if any questions before starting
- Demographic information :ages of children, country of birth, year of arrival in Australia, family structure, current city in Australia

Individual-level

- 1- What do you think are the positive aspects of your child's personality? What are their strengths? What are you proud of?
- 2- How do you describe your child?
- 3- How does your child like to spend their time?
- 4- What are your children's wishes for the future? What may help or hinder her/him in achieving those plans?

Interpersonal-level

- 1- Who are the important people in your child's life?
- 2- How do you think they are influencing your child?
- 3- How does your child get on with other members of the family?
- 4- How does your children get along with their peers/teacher?
- 5- How is your relationship with school and your child's teacher?
- 6- Do you think it's been helping or influencing your child?

Community/society-level

- 1- What are the positive things that your children do when they face challenges in life?

- 2- Do you have any example of that since you arrived in Australia?
- 3- How does community, Australian society and policies affect your children?
- 4- What are the positive things within the community, Australian society and policies that help your children to stay strong during challenges?
- 5- Are there any aspects of the community, Australian society and policies which make life more difficult for your child?

Cultural level

- 1- How does your origin culture influence the strength and identity of your children?
- 2- How has Australian culture influenced the strength and identity of your children?

Chrono-level

- 1- How do you think that your child has coped with leaving their home country, the journey to Australia, and settling into a new country and culture?

Final question and closing the interview

- Is there anything that you would like to add?
- Thank you for your time and participation in this research project.

Children introductory session

(The starting point of this session is very dependent on the child or children. Below is the general guide for this session):

- Introduce ourselves and a quick review of the PLS.
- Ice-breaker activity
- Introduce the research project in plain language and answer questions
- General questions about perceptions of resilience: e.g. How do you describe children who grow up well in your community even when they face problems?
- Introduce and explain the visual methods: Describe what photo elicitation, video art, painting and show and tell techniques are. Ask children to take choose any of these methods such as taking photos, making a video, drawing, painting or bring an object

for the next session which they think respond to these questions: What do you like about your life? What is a symbol of strength in your life?

- Introduce the narrative task, asking children to also write a narrative if they are not interested in visual methods, or they can combine their narrative with their visual method and answering this question: e.g. Can you write a story about a time that you have managed to overcome something challenging in Australia? How did you feel about yourself after that?
- Explain how to choose one or more than one of the activities and answer any questions
- Explain that the next session will be in 2-3 weeks.
- Plan the next session if they are interested to continue their participation.

Children in-depth interviews

Introduction

- Thank you for your effort and contribution to this research project. Today, we will talk about your (visual/narrative) data and I might ask some questions about them and some questions, such as your thoughts about yourself, important people in your life, your goals in your life and your hobbies. At the end, we will also discuss together how you would like us to present your (visual/narrative) data

Example questions

- How do you describe the details in your photo/video/painting/object?
- How would you describe yourself?
- What is in you that you are proud of?
- How do you like to spend your time?
- What kind of things usually help you to stay strong when things are not easy in your life?
- Who are the important people in your life? What important people in your life like about you the most?
- How would your family/friends/teachers describe you?
- What do you like about yourself when you are with your friends/family/teacher?
- What do you think about living in Australia? How was settling down here for you?
- What do you like about your origin culture?

- What are your plans for the future? What may help or prevent you in achieving those plans?

Final question and closing the session

- Is there anything that you would like to add?
- Thank you very much for your time and for participating in this research project.

Young adults in-depth interview

- Introduce ourselves and a quick review of the PLS.
- Introduce the research project in plain language and answer questions

Individual level topics to be covered

- 1- What do you think were the positive aspects of your childhood? What were your strengths? What were you proud of?
- 2- How do you describe your childhood?
- 3- How did you used to spend your time?
- 4- What were your childhood wishes for the future? What may have helped or hindered you in achieving those plans?

Interpersonal level

- 1- Who were the important people in your childhood?
- 2- How do you think they were influencing your childhood?
- 3- How did you get on with other members of the family?
- 4- How did you get along with your peers/teacher?
- 5- How do you think your family/school/peers influenced you?
- 6- How was your parents' relationship with school and teacher?
- 7- Do you think it helped or influenced your experience of school?

Community and society level

- 1- What were the positive things that you used to do while facing challenges in childhood?
- 2- Do you have any example of that since you arrived in Australia?

- 3- How does community, Australian society and policies had affected your childhood?
- 4- What are the positive things within the community, Australian society and policies that helped you during your childhood to stay strong during challenges?
- 5- Are there any aspects of the community, Australian society and policies which made life more difficult in your childhood?

Cultural level

- 1- How does your origin culture influence the strength and identity of you during your childhood?
- 2- How has Australian culture influenced the strength and identity of you?

Chrono-level

- 1- How do you think that you as a child had coped with leaving your home country, the journey to Australia, and settling into a new country and culture?

Final question, describing visual element of study and closing the session

- Is there anything that you would like to add?
- Introduce and explain the visual methods: Describe what photo elicitation, video art, painting and show and tell techniques are. Ask participants to take choose any of these methods such as taking photos, making a video, drawing, painting or bring an object for the next session which they think respond to these questions: what is a symbol of identity and/or resilience in your life?
- Introduce the narrative task, asking participants to also write a narrative if they are not interested in visual methods, or they can combine their narrative with their visual method and answering this question: what is the symbol of your identity and/or resilience in your life and why?
- Thank you very much for your time and for participating in this research project.

Appendix E: Ethics committee certificate of approval



Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

Human Ethics Application Approval

MS Belinda Kelly

Research Ethics Officer
Office of Research Ethics and Integrity
Research, Innovation & Commercialisation
Level 5, Alan Gilbert Building, 161 Barry Street, Carlton
The University of Melbourne, Victoria 3010 Australia
T: (03) 9035 9095
E: belinda.kelly@unimelb.edu.au

Date: 17/12/2020

ATTENTION: Dr Karen Block

5050 - Melbourne School Of Population And Global Health

The University of Melbourne

Research Application

Reference Number: 2020-14618-13242-2

Project Title: Resilience and Sense of Identity among Afghan and Iranian Children with Refugee Background: A Social-Ecological Perspective

Dear Dr Karen Block,

Thank you for your response to queries raised by STEMM 3 at a meeting held on 18 November 2020.

The Committee agreed to **approve** the application on the basis that it meets the requirements of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007). Please see overleaf, *Summary Details for the Approved Human Ethics Project and Conditions of Approval*. It is your responsibility to ensure that all people associated with the Project are made aware of what has been approved.

In line with government directives on social distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic, research activity that involves researchers being physically present for data collection with human participants (such as face-to-face field work, experimental and cohort studies, clinical trials etc) cannot currently commence and will need to be deferred and rescheduled. In exceptional circumstances, where such activities are part of priority research, including that directly related to the University's COVID-19 response, approval to commence may be given by the relevant Dean and endorsed by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research.

Desk-based elements of your research project can commence now, as can data collection that can be conducted online or via telephone, subject to necessary approvals or amendments to ethics applications.

Researchers will be advised by the University when other elements of planned and approved data collection can commence. Please consult the COVID-19 website for research guidance, FAQ and updates. <https://staff.unimelb.edu.au/covid-19-response/research-activity>

If you have any queries on these matters, or require additional information, please contact me using the details below. Please quote the ethics ID number and the title of the Project in any future correspondence.

Yours sincerely,

MS Belinda Kelly

Research Ethics Officer

Summary Details for the Approved Human Ethics Project

Project Title:	Resilience and Sense of Identity among Afghan and Iranian Children with Refugee Background: A Social-Ecological Perspective
Reference Number:	2020-14618-13242-2
Approval Date:	17/12/2020
Expiry Date:	17/12/2023
Responsible Human Ethics Committee	STEMM 3
Project Supervisor	Dr Karen Block
Other Investigators	A/Prof Eva Alisic, Farnaz Shahimi
External Investigators	

Documents table:

Document Type	File Name	Date	Version
Other		15/09/2020	
Interview questions and/or themes		15/09/2020	
Plain Language Statement (PLS)		15/09/2020	
Recruitment materials		15/09/2020	
Other		15/09/2020	
Other		06/10/2020	
Other		14/10/2020	
Other		14/10/2020	
Other		14/10/2020	
Other		14/10/2020	
Other		14/10/2020	
Other		14/10/2020	
Other		14/10/2020	
Other		14/10/2020	
Other		14/10/2020	
Other	2057900.1 response to HREC	17/12/2020	1

Conditions of Approval:

Research projects are normally approved to the anniversary date of the approval. Projects may be renewed yearly for up to a total of three years upon receipt of a satisfactory annual report. If a project is to continue beyond three years, two optional extensions of one year each (3+1+1) will need to be applied for. Anything beyond 5 years will need a new application to be submitted.

Please note that the following conditions apply to your approval. Failure to abide by these conditions may result in suspension or discontinuation of approval and/or disciplinary action.

1. **Limit of Approval:** Approval is limited strictly to the research as submitted in your Project application.
2. **Variation to Project:** Any subsequent variations or modifications you might wish to make to the Project must be notified formally to the Committee for further consideration and approval. If the Committee considers that the proposed changes are significant, you may be required to submit a new application for approval of the revised Project.
3. **Incidents or adverse effects:** Researchers must report immediately to the Committee anything which might affect the ethical acceptance of the protocol including adverse effects on participants or unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the Project. Failure to do so may result in suspension or cancellation of approval.
4. **Monitoring:** All projects are subject to monitoring at any time by the Committee.
5. **Annual Report:** Please be aware that the Committee requires that researchers submit an annual report on each of their projects at the end of the year, or at the conclusion of a project if it continues for less than this time. Failure to submit an annual report will mean that ethics approval will lapse.
6. **Auditing:** All projects may be subject to audit by members of the Committee.



Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

Human Ethics Application Approval

ATTENTION: Dr Karen Block

5050 - Melbourne School Of Population And Global Health

The University of Melbourne

Research Application

Reference Number: 2021-14618-19548-4

Project Title: The Childhood Experience of Resilience and Sense of Identity among Afghans with a Refugee Background

Dear Dr Karen Block,

The Committee agreed to **approve** the amendment application on the basis that it meets the requirements of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007, Updated 2018). Please see overleaf, *Summary Details for the Approved Human Ethics Project and Conditions of Approval*. It is your responsibility to ensure that all people associated with the Project are made aware of what has been approved.

Desk-based elements of your project and face-to-face research can commence now, as can data collection that can be conducted online or via telephone, subject to necessary approvals or amendments to ethics applications.

Please consult the COVID-19 website for research guidance, FAQ and updates. <https://staff.unimelb.edu.au/covid-19-response/research-activity>

If you have any queries on these matters, or require additional information, please contact me using the details below. Please quote the ethics ID number and the title of the Project in any future correspondence.

Yours sincerely,

MS Belinda Kelly

Research Ethics Officer

Human Ethics Team

Office of Research Ethics and Integrity | Research, Innovation & Commercialisation

Level 5, Alan Gilbert Building, 161 Barry Street, Carlton

The University of Melbourne, Victoria 3010, Australia

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Summary Details for the Approved Human Ethics Project

Project Title:	The Childhood Experience of Resilience and Sense of Identity among Afghans with a Refugee Background
Reference Number:	2021-14618-19548-4
Approval Date:	12/07/2021
Expiry Date:	17/12/2023
Responsible Human Ethics Committee	STEMM 3
Project Supervisor	Dr Karen Block
Other Investigators	Farnaz Shahimi, A/Prof Eva Alisic

Documents table:

Document Type	File Name	Date	Version
Interview questions and/or themes	Amendment 5-Interview Guide		
Recruitment materials	Amendment 6 Invitation Letter		
Plain Language Statement (PLS)	Amendment 1- PLS and Consent form-Children		

Plain Language Statement (PLS)	Amendment 2- PLS and Consent form Parents	
Plain Language Statement (PLS)	Ammendment 3 PLS and Consent form Adult participantdocx	
Participant distress protocol	Amendment 4- COVID-19 safety plan	
Recruitment materials	Invitation Letter amendment-revised	
Plain Language Statement (PLS)	Appendix 2- PLS_Consent Parents- amendment revised-final	
Plain Language Statement (PLS)	Appendix 3- PLS_Consent Children- amendment_revised_Final	
Plain Language Statement (PLS)	Appendix 6-PLS-Consent Adults-amendment-revised_Final	
Other	Response to revisions requested docx	
Other	Appendix 8-Home Visit Protocol_final docx	
Other		15/09/2020
Interview questions and/or themes		15/09/2020
Plain Language Statement (PLS)		15/09/2020
Recruitment materials		15/09/2020
Other		15/09/2020
Other		06/10/2020
Other		14/10/2020
Other		14/10/2020
Other		14/10/2020
Other		14/10/2020
Other		14/10/2020
Other		14/10/2020
Other		14/10/2020
Other		14/10/2020
Other		14/10/2020
Other	2057900.1 response to HREC	17/12/2020 1

Conditions of Approval:

Research projects are normally approved to the anniversary date of the approval. Projects may be renewed yearly for up to a total of three years upon receipt of a satisfactory annual report. If a project is to continue beyond three years, two optional extensions of one year each (3+1+1) will need to be applied for. Anything beyond 5 years will need a new application to be submitted.

Please note that the following conditions apply to your approval. Failure to abide by these conditions may result in suspension or discontinuation of approval and/or disciplinary action.

1. **Limit of Approval:** Approval is limited strictly to the research as submitted in your Project application.
2. **Variation to Project:** Any subsequent variations to the Project must be notified formally to the Committee for consideration and approval before they are implemented. If the Committee considers that the proposed changes are significant, you may be required to submit a new application.
3. **Incidents or adverse events:** Researchers must report immediately to the Committee anything that could affect the ethical acceptability of the project, including adverse effects on participants or unforeseen events. Failure to do so may result in suspension or cancellation of approval.
4. **Monitoring:** All projects are subject to monitoring at any time by the Committee.
5. **Annual Report:** An annual report must be submitted each year on the anniversary of project approval, and at the conclusion of the project. Ethics approval will lapse if an annual report is not submitted.
6. **Auditing:** All projects are subject to audit by members of the Committee.

Appendix F: Sense of identity among young people with refugee backgrounds: A scoping review

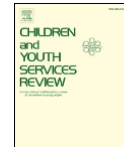
Children and Youth Services Review 157 (2024) 107378



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Sense of identity among young people with refugee backgrounds: A scoping review

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
Young people
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ABSTRACT

Multiple risk factors associated with the forced migration journey may adversely affect the identity development of young people with refugee backgrounds. Relatively little is known however, regarding how young people perceive their identity following the refugee experience and how their interactions with the environment influence this perception. To address this gap, this scoping review, which included 28 peer-reviewed articles from 2000 to 2020, explored the empirical literature that focuses on ways in which young people with refugee backgrounds represent their sense of identity. Our findings demonstrate that young people perceive themselves as having multiple identity characteristics, influenced by their interactions with their sociocultural environments and the need to integrate their past, present, and future. The review highlights the importance of holistic and pluralistic perspectives which consider factors at different layers of social ecology to understand how young people from refugee backgrounds shape their identities within their unique sociocultural contexts.

1. Introduction

Forcibly displaced people flee from their homelands to escape conflict, violence, torture, persecution, and death. In recent decades, civil wars and drawn-out conflicts, as well as natural disasters around the world, have led to the displacement of millions of people (Hugo, Abbasi-Shavazi, & Kraly, 2017). By the end of 2021, 89.3 million people were forcibly displaced (UNHCR, 2022), the highest number the world has faced since the end of World War II. Approximately 40% of forcibly displaced people are under the age of 18 and are particularly vulnerable to trauma (UNHCR, 2022). The significant number of young people who have experienced forced migration highlights the need to understand how their well-being can be supported in host countries (Fazel & Betancourt, 2018). Research indicates that having a positive sense of identity as well as a supportive environment promotes resilience, psychosocial well-being, and better integration in host societies (Fazel, Reed, Panter-Brick, & Stein, 2012; Oppedal, Ramberg, & Roysamb, 2020; Renshaw, 2019; Ungar, 2013). However, less attention has been paid to the process of identity [re]construction and factors influencing a young person's perception of identity following forced migration.

2. Identity [re] construction in the context of forced migration

Identity is a commonly used term in diverse disciplines. A wide range of theoretical and methodological perspectives brings a range of definitions and associated lack of clarity and consistency. Even within disciplines, different approaches to and perspectives on studying identity have been developed (Schwartz, Luyckx, & Vignoles, 2011). Notwithstanding this divergence, identity is generally conceptualized as being constructed in a sociocultural context (Hogg, Abrams, & Brewer, 2017; Karam, Kibler, Johnson, & Molloy Elreda, 2020; Kira et al., 2018; Leone, Siag, & Sarraica, 2014; Vygotsky, 1978).

Identity construction refers to the process through which individuals form their sense of self. It is a dynamic process that occurs throughout an individual's life and involves creating and negotiating various aspects of identity, such as personal values, beliefs, interests, roles, and affiliations, within the context of social, cultural, and environmental influences. Identity is also shaped by a range of factors, including interactions with family, peers, and society, as well as personal experiences and self-reflection (Chao, 2019; Mijic, 2022; Schwartz et al., 2011).

While identity construction is a lifelong process, many theories of identity recognize late childhood and adolescence as comprising multifaceted transitional stages of human development that include forming a coherent sense of self (Erikson, 1968; Kroger, Martinussen, &

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Marcia, 2010; McAdams, 2011; Tajfel & Turner, 2004). Although it is normal for an adolescent to display signs of stress during identity construction (Côté & Levine, 2014; Kroger et al., 2010; Ryan & Deci, 2012), this process may be particularly vulnerable to experiences of trauma and displacement (Bergquist, Soliz, Everhart, Braithwaite, & Kreimer, 2019; Berman, 2016). Many young people with refugee backgrounds experience different types of traumatic events across various stages of their journey (Betancourt et al., 2012; Fazel et al., 2012; Murray, 2019). Moreover, post-settlement experiences of acculturation, language barriers, racism, and bullying, may also adversely affect the identity construction of young people with refugee backgrounds (Fazel & Betancourt, 2018; Fazel et al., 2012; Murray, 2019; Streeck-Fischer, 2019).

There has been a rise in interest in understanding the factors influencing identity construction and self-perception of young people following forced migration (Denov & Piolanti, 2020; Karam et al., 2020; Oppedal et al., 2020; Rabiau, 2019). However, few studies account for the complexity of how an individual's perception of their identity is influenced by multiple layers of interaction within their sociocultural context (Mijic, 2022). This scoping review explores the existing literature that focuses on how young people with refugee backgrounds perceive their identity following displacement and how their interactions with their environment might have influenced this perception. In doing so, it aims to provide a more holistic picture of identity [re]construction following forced migration that can inform future research as well as policies and practices supporting this cohort.

To construct a holistic picture, we applied a social-ecological model to categorize findings. A social-ecological model conceptualizes the individual as being at the heart of an interactive system that integrates various environmental settings (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Kuru & Ungar, 2020). It emphasizes the multiple, layered social, institutional, and cultural contexts of people's environments. Disruption in any layer of this social ecology may have negative consequences for the identity [re] construction of a young person, while protective factors might buffer or reverse the impact of adverse events (Hawkins et al., 2021; Keygnaert, Vettenburg, & Temmerman, 2012; McLeroy, Bibeau, Steckler, & Glanz, 1988).

3. Method

We opted for a scoping review in line with Munn et al. (2018), to inform the development of a relevant research agenda regarding young people's identity [re] construction in the context of forced displacement. A scoping review focuses on describing the literature to delineate existing knowledge, can accommodate research with a range of designs, and identify questions for further empirical research (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). As suggested by Munn et al. (2018), a scoping review rather than a systematic review is indicated where the purpose is to identify knowledge gaps, scope a body of literature, clarify concepts, or investigate research conduct. Useful in their own right, scoping reviews may also be helpful precursors to systematic reviews and can be used to confirm the relevance of inclusion criteria and potential questions.

We followed A&O's framework (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005) for scoping reviews, including the following steps: (a) articulating the research question; (b) identifying relevant studies; (c) selecting eligible studies; (d) charting the data; and (e) synthesizing and analyzing the results. The following questions guided the search process and analysis for the review: 1/ Which characteristics of identity are emphasized within empirical studies among young people from refugee backgrounds 2/ How did young people from refugee backgrounds perceive and describe specific aspects of their identity? 3/ How are interactions with young people's environment(s) related to these perceptions? We identified and searched five electronic databases, i.e., SociINDEX, PsychINFO, Medline, MAIS (Informit) and CINAHL Complete, using the following combinations of keywords: (refugee* OR asylum* OR displaced*) AND (child* OR adolescent* OR teen* OR youth* OR young*

OR kid*) AND (identity*). We included only primary research studies among young people (under 18) with a refugee background that were peer-reviewed. We excluded research published before 2000 (in order to focus on contemporary refugee displacements); theses, reviews, and conceptual papers; studies with migrants without a refugee background; and studies that only included participants over the age of 18. The search strategy is summarized in Fig. 1. We conducted the literature search in April and May 2021, yielding a total of $n = 1094$ articles. We downloaded all citations into an Endnote library and imported the references into Covidence, a systematic review management tool. We first removed 300 duplicates, then screened titles and abstracts ($n = 794$) and assessed the remaining full-text articles ($n = 102$) for eligibility criteria. Finally, a total of 28 articles met the full eligibility criteria and were included in this scoping review.

Data from the studies were extracted and charted in Excel 2020 using the following headings: author information, journal, year of publication, title, country of study, language of the study, the focus area of identity, age range, ethnicity of refugees, years in the host country, gender, research design, research method, sample size, data analysis, and key findings.

We adopted a codebook approach to thematic analysis (TA) to synthesize the findings and identify themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2023). Codebook TA comprises forming a codebook or set of codes to classify and analyze themes. The analysis process included data familiarization and coding conducted by the first author and reviewed by the co-authors. Coding was based on which aspects of identity were addressed and findings regarding factors influencing identity. Themes were developed by the three authors based on the coding and organized using the social-ecological model. As Braun and Clarke (2023) explain, codebook themes usually contain a summary of common opinions stated by participants related to the subject. This method of theme development assisted us in creating a comprehensive picture of how identity has been conceptualized in the existing literature and factors influencing how young people from refugee backgrounds perceive their identity.

4. Findings

We first consider the research settings and aspects of identity reported in the included studies. We then summarize and discuss the themes and sub-themes that we constructed through our analysis, categorized according to the social-ecological model. Thus, we present findings that explore young people's personal perception of their identity; followed by the influence of interpersonal factors; and lastly, the influence of cultures, communities, and society. In the Discussion, we also focus on the interrelations and interactions between these social-ecological layers.

4.1. Identity focus and characteristics of included studies

Table 1 outlines the extracted information and key findings of the studies included in this review ($n = 28$). Studies were conducted in Norway, Australia, Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, Sweden, Germany, Jordan and Colombia. The studies classified and investigated different areas of identity among young people with refugee backgrounds, such as cultural and bicultural identity, ethnic and racial identity, language identity, religious identity, personal identity, future-career and vocational identity, sense of belonging, ascribed identity, discourse and narrative identity, social and political identity. They also explored factors such as a sense of agency, hope for the future, school, family and peer relationships, ethnic culture, religion, and host countries' societal and political environment. Included studies discussed supports and barriers in the environments of young participants following the experience of forced migration and how these factors influenced the construction of participants' identities. All but one study was undertaken in high-income resettlement countries. Two studies included second-generation migrant children (i.e., those whose parents

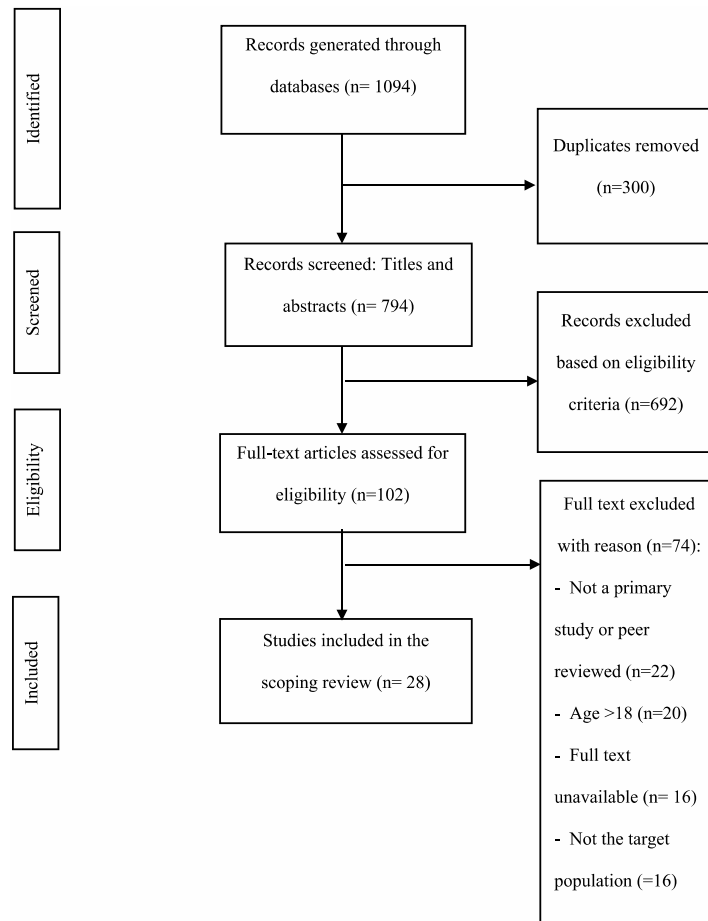


Fig. 1. Literature search and selection.

had a refugee background), while seventeen studies were conducted among first-generation migrant young people with refugee backgrounds (including five studies with unaccompanied minors). Almost all studies ($n = 25$) reported only binary gender categories of males and females. The remaining three studies did not specify the gender of the participants. Most participants were adolescents except for three studies that had a mixed age range of participants, including younger children and young adult participants. Most studies had a qualitative design ($n = 21$). Five studies used a quantitative design, and two were mixed methods. Six studies were conducted in the host country's language with interpreter assistance, and seven had a bilingual researcher in the research team. The language of thirteen studies was solely the language of the host country with no interpreter or translation of materials, and participation depended on the ability to speak the host country's language.

4.2. The personal perception of identity

There were two prominent themes related to how young people

perceived themselves: the importance of the sense of agency and hope; and negative perceptions of ascribed labels such as "refugee" among young people with refugee backgrounds.

4.2.1. Sense of agency and hope

Some studies found that having a sense of agency, hope, and vision for the future were crucial personal aspects of identity for young participants (e.g., Chao, 2019; Filler, Georgiades, Khanlou, & Wahoush, 2019). While participants' histories as refugees informed their goals, young people also shaped their futures in relation to their experiences after resettlement. Studies showed that neither the number of traumatic events they had experienced nor mental health problems affected how determined youth were with respect to their education (Oppedal, Guribye, & Kroger, 2017; Uptin, Wright, & Harwood, 2016). In a study with Syrian adolescents in Canada, it was observed that the study participants were less focused on previous adverse experiences than on current and future school success and family relationships. The participants also emphasized the significance of reaching their full potential through their goals, responsibilities, and skills (Filler et al., 2019). Young people

Table 1
Summary of extracted information and findings.

Author information	Country of study	Ethnicity or origin countries of participants	Age	Focus area of identity	Methodology	Major findings
Oppedal et al. (2020)	Norway	Afghanistan, Somalia, Iraq, and Sri Lanka and other.	13 years or older.	Bicultural identity	Quantitative	Positive association between resiliency and identification with heritage culture and negative association between reduced mental illness and identification with majority culture.
Moran (2020)	Australia	Sudan, Uganda, Sierra Leone, Thailand and Papua New Guinea	The majority were between 14–16 years old.	Ethnic and racial identity	Qualitative: Ethnographic fieldwork	The search for belonging was at the heart of the agency showed in the identity of the young people.
Miled (2020)	Canada	Somalia, Syria, Eretria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran	14–19	Muslim and/or Canadian identity.	Qualitative: Participatory research action	Centrality of race in the construction of Muslim and/or Canadian identity.
Karam et al. (2020)	United States	Iraq	12	Ethnic/language identity	Qualitative: case study	Findings supported views of identity as discursively constructed.
Evans (2020)	UK	Syria-Africa	16–20	Race, ethnicity, nationhood, and belonging	Qualitative: Participatory research	Expression of forms of national, religious, and cultural identity through self-representations.
Ekström et al. (2020)	Sweden	Ethiopia, Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia and Syria	13–18	Religious identity	Qualitative	Lived practices of religion and the development of an oppositional gaze can function as mutually reinforcing processes in identity negotiation.
Streeck-Fischer (2019)	Germany	Arab-Turk	15–16	Individual and ethnic identity	Qualitative: Case example	Splitting processes, which occur during both adolescence and the migration experience, complicate the process of identity formation.
Rabiau (2019)	Canada	Syria-Iraq	16	Cultural identity	Qualitative: Case study	The family was a protective factor allowing for growth and identity formation toward a path of resilience and adaptation.
Ludwig (2019)	US	Liberian	9–24	Cultural identity an ethnic identity	Qualitative: Ethnography	Low human capital was related to less willingness to hold cultural heritage.
Kennedy et al. (2019)	US	Burmese (Chin)	10	Multiple and intersecting identities	Qualitative: Case study	Refugee youth express their identities while navigating dominant social, cultural, and linguistic interactions.
Guler and Berman (2019)	US	Cuba, Iraq, Jordan, Haiti, Colombia, and Venezuela	11–17	Identity distress and cultural identity	Quantitative	Native cultural identity was a significant protective factor against identity distress among adolescents.
Filler et al. (2019)	Canada	Syria	16–19	Cultural identity	Qualitative exploratory design	Achieving full potential, family support, social support, and integration into the education system were main factors for identity shaping among adolescents.
Davila (2019)	US	Congo	14–19	Linguistic identity	Qualitative	The project emphasized on supporting complex language and content learning fluidly in ways that affirm students' identities and new learning.
Daniel (2019)	US	Thailand, Myanmar, Iraq	School aged	Future-career identity	Qualitative	"Refugee" was not the defining characteristic of participants identities; instead, visions of themselves were more or equally important to their identities.
Chen and Schweitzer (2019)	Australia	Multiple (16 ethnicity)	11–18	Sense of belonging	Qualitative	Five major themes related to the youth's experience of belonging: connection to a larger entity; experience of immersion; experience of connection (and disconnection); sense of identity; and instrumental outcomes.
Chao (2019)	US	Nepal (Bhutanese)	Mixed 14–47	Multiple identities	Qualitative	The essential nature of refugee youth's lived experiences is a way of being, becoming, and imagining.
Oppedal et al. (2017)	Norway	Afghanistan, Somalia, Iraq, and Sri Lanka and other.	17–26	Vocational identity	Mixed methods	Important finding from this study was the lack of social support resources available to the unaccompanied refugees in this important developmental stage.
Herz & Lalander (2017)	Sweden	Afghanistan-Somalia	15–25	Ascribed identity	Qualitative	Experience of frustration about being labelled "unaccompanied" and critical reflexivity towards this labelling.
Uptin et al. (2016)	Australia	Karennii and the Chin States of Burma, from Burma, Burundi, Southern Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo and Sierra Leone, and Togo	16–25	Discourse/ Narrative identity	Qualitative	Opening a discourse to include the complexities of each refugee experience.

(continued on next page)

Table 1 (continued)

Author information	Country of study	Ethnicity or origin countries of participants	Age	Focus area of identity	Methodology	Major findings
Moran (2016)	Australia	Sudanese	10–15	Ethnic identity	Qualitative	Ethnic capital was constructed in the representation of self-racialized identity.
Ndengeyingoma, Montigny et al. (2014)	Canada	African origin	13–18	Personal identity	Qualitative	The development of personal identity was directly and indirectly influenced by personal characteristics, the environmental, and the interpersonal relationships.
Leone et al. (2014)	Jordan	Palestinian	Mean age 16	Social identity	Quantitative	Participants spontaneously thought of themselves as Palestinian and it influenced their self-definition.
Guerrero and Tinkler (2010)	US-Colombia	Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, and Colombia	10–18	Social and political identity	Qualitative	Participants were actively involved in the process of reconstructing the meanings of their experiences.
Ellis et al. (2010)	US	Somali	Quantitative 11–20 Qualitative 16–19	Social identity	Qualitative: Concurrent design/ community based participatory research	For girls, greater Somali acculturation and for boys, greater American acculturation was associated with better mental health.
Valentine et al. (2009)	UK	Somali	11–18	Narrative-Individual identity	Qualitative: Multi-method	Highlighted the importance of young people's emotional investment in the subject position Muslim.
Aniko and Terry (2009)	Australia	Sudanese	14–18	Ethnic language identity	Quantitative	Sudanese participants were strongly attached to their ethnic language.
Trickett and Birman (2005)	US	Ukraine Belarus Russia and others including Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan and Moldova	15–18	Cultural identity	Quantitative	With respect to the different cultures, different patterns of American and Russian acculturation were associated with different school outcomes, language competence, behavior, and identity.
Gibson (2002)	US	Bosnian	14–18	Cultural/ethnic identity	Qualitative	The sense of self was highlighted during the unique and complex process participants were facing to explore and define their cultural identities.

discussed their desire to engage in a specific profession as a means to overcome challenges and negative experiences, and expressions of the agency revealed aspirations to change society for the better (Daniel, 2019).

4.2.2. Described identity versus ascribed labels

Several studies discussed how the label of 'refugee' was actively rejected and not accepted by young participants as their significant defining characteristic (Chao, 2019; Daniel, 2019; Ludwig, 2019). Ludwig (2019) argued that the ascription 'refugee' was associated with stigma rather than a source of pride among second-generation Liberian participants in the United States. Rejecting the perceived implications of this label, they recognized themselves as capable actors in their world. In a study with unaccompanied minors in Sweden, participants described how the ongoing categorization of being alone or unaccompanied created an unwanted distinction between those who were considered insiders vs. outsiders within the host community (Herz & Lalander, 2017). Despite experiences of discrimination and adversity, many did not identify themselves as victims (Chao, 2019; Daniel, 2019; Guerrero & Tinkler, 2010). Young participants preferred their own narrative of their multiple identities across their life trajectory to simple labels, believing that struggles, frustrations, challenges, and their hopes all defined their identity (Chao, 2019).

4.3. Interpersonal factors

At the interpersonal level, we explore the findings of studies that focused on the influence of the closest level of interaction of the young person with their environment. We look into how family, peer relationships, and school experiences are understood within included studies to have influenced the reported perception of self.

4.3.1. Family support, conflicts, and complications

Some studies found that young participants considered their family to be the main positive influence on who they were (e.g. Filler et al., 2019; Rabiau, 2019). Experiencing a sense of belonging to their family unit and encounters of kinship were a positive influence on their perception of identity (Filler et al., 2019; Rabiau, 2019). Common activities undertaken together, such as farming, cooking, and providing help and support for each other, were examples of ways in which the family played essential roles in young people's lives (Chen & Schweitzer, 2019). On the other hand, there were several challenges that undermined this feeling for some participants, (e.g. Ludwig, 2019). Since family members were also engaged in acculturation processes and dealing with traumatic experiences, this could complicate and burden the identity perception of young participants (Ludwig, 2019; Miller, 2019). Factors causing stress included parents' experiences of trauma, little or no formal parental education, and parents working in the unskilled labor market with long work hours (Ludwig, 2019). Family relationships were also complicated for unaccompanied minors. In a study with unaccompanied minors in Norway, only 12% lived with family members, mainly siblings, and only half had contact with their families abroad. The researchers concluded that the significant experience of loss and absence of family had affected participants' identity formation and, consequently their mental health and capacity to function (Oppedal et al., 2020).

4.3.2. Schools and shaping hope for the future

Although some youth faced challenges linked to linguistic and social isolation as well as pre-migration educational disruption (e.g. Chao, 2019; Karam et al., 2020), schools were important settings for young people in [re]constructing a sense of self and coping with identity conflicts. Schools were also places in which they shaped their hopes for the future and manifested their sense of agency rather than only being a "refugee" (Chao, 2019; Filler et al., 2019; Karam et al., 2020; Oppedal

et al., 2017). Some schools also provided regular opportunities for young people of refugee and migrant backgrounds to display their ethnic background in school events, seen as helping students to strengthen their ethnic identity (Trickett & Birman, 2005).

4.3.3. Support from peers

Studies showed that positive experiences in peer relationships, such as enjoyable interactions and close friendship bonds, had significant positive influences on the perception of the identity of young people (e.g., Chen & Schweitzer, 2019; Ludwig, 2019). Conversely, being identified as different by their peers was challenging. This made it difficult for them to connect with culturally different friendship groups and to develop a sense of belonging within their schools (Moran, 2020; Ndengeyingoma, Montigny, & Miron, 2014; Uptin et al., 2016). Some young participants, for example, reported withdrawing from their religious commitments, which marked them as different, to be able to assimilate with their peer groups and make friends (Ndengeyingoma, Montigny et al., 2014).

4.4. The influence of migrants' and host countries' cultures, communities, and society

On the wider level, we identified two interrelated key themes which directly (or indirectly by influencing interpersonal relationships) influenced the perception of identity among participants of included studies. First was the influence of participants' ethnic cultural background and religion on their perception of identity. Below we elaborate on the positive influences of ethnic culture and religion as well as the challenges that ethnic culture or religion may add to the identity [re]construction of young people. The second theme was the influence of the host society culture and policies on young people's lives. As discussed below, experiences of labeling, racism, and discrimination at the community and societal level, as well as language barriers, were reported as adversely impacting identity [re]construction post-settlement.

4.4.1. Influence of migrants' cultural backgrounds and religion

Ethnic culture and religion came up as having a significant influence on the identity perception of participants (e.g., Ellis et al., 2010; Guler & Berman, 2019; Moran, 2020; Oppedal, Ramberg, & Roysamb, 2020; Moran, 2016). Included papers recounted how young participants defined themselves using their perceptions of ethnicity, cultural values, and religion (Moran, 2016). Two studies addressed how ongoing struggles against oppression in countries of origin influenced the connection of some young participants with their ethnic identity (Leone et al., 2014; Uptin et al., 2016). For example, in a study with Palestinian adolescents in Jordan, despite being born in the Diaspora and never having been to Palestine, young participants attributed a deep emotional significance to aligning themselves with the Palestinian cause and defining themselves as Palestinian (Leone et al., 2014). Additionally, language was presented as a crucial manifestation of ethnic identity (Aniko & Terry, 2009; Davila, 2019). In a study with Congolese students in the United States, for example, participants articulated a strong 'African' identity represented by linguistic codes. These young people defined such communication as exclusively 'African' (Davila, 2019). Religion also played an important role. Several studies highlighted the influence of religious visibility in producing a strengthened sense of personal identity (Ekström, H Bülow, & Wilinska, 2020; Miled, 2020; Valentine, Sporton, & Afshar, 2009). In research with Somali youth in the United States, girls who chose to wear the headscarf described it as engendering pride in their culture of origin, despite also sometimes putting them at risk of being targets for discrimination (Ellis et al., 2010). On the other hand, some challenges associated with [re]construction of identity centered on the influence of ethnic, cultural background, and religion. Some youth struggled to embrace their ethnic identity actively, however, mainly due to stigmatization and/or conflicted relationships with their families. Some research implied an

association between experiences of racism and exclusion in school and rejection of ethnic and cultural identity among young people from refugee backgrounds (Ludwig, 2019). One study indicated that inter-ethnic hatred was another factor that led some young participants to avoid being identified or engaged with their ethnic group (Gibson, 2002). Experiences of religious discrimination were also associated with a sense of exclusion from the host society and resulted in some rejecting religion as a part of their identity (Ekström et al., 2020; Moran, 2020; Ndengeyingoma, de Montigny, & Miron, 2014).

4.4.2. Impacts of host societies' culture, attitudes, and political climate

Challenges associated with living in the host country were discussed in most of the articles included in this review and have already been alluded to in previous sections, (e.g., Chao, 2019; Evans, 2020; Filler et al., 2019; Ludwig, 2019; Oppedal et al., 2020; Rabiau, 2019). Post-migration environments, including the host population's attitudes, norms, and policies, significantly influenced experiences of interpersonal relationships with peer groups, school and family interactions, and young people's perceptions of their ethnic and cultural identity. Some studies showed that positive experiences of integration with the host society were a protective factor in helping young people to [re]construct a positive sense of identity (Chen & Schweitzer, 2019; Moran, 2020; Trickett & Birman, 2005).

However, as described in previous sections, labelling, discrimination, and language barriers, were common issues that undermined a sense of belonging for some participants (Ludwig, 2019; Moran, 2020). Articles reported how societal factors such as systemic barriers and exclusionary discourses in mainstream media and policies prevented participants both from strengthening their ethnic identity and from developing a positive sense of belonging to the host culture (Chen & Schweitzer, 2019; Miled, 2020; Oppedal et al., 2017).

One main challenge experienced by young refugees in the United States, UK, and Canada was the impact of Islamophobia on their sense of identity (Ellis et al., 2010; Miled, 2020). After 9/11, negative attitudes toward Muslim communities increased sharply. Refugees were characterized by media images and political discourses as potential threats and terrorists (Mir & Sarroub, 2019). While both male and female Muslims were exposed to the negative impacts of Islamophobia, visibly Muslim women and girls were most commonly the target of verbal and physical attacks (Ellis et al., 2010; Evans, 2020; Miled, 2020). In the study with Somali girls who had chosen to wear a Hijab and make this aspect of their social identity visible, participants risked experiencing discrimination. For those who did not have a sense of pride in their religious identity or were less surrounded by their ethnic community, such discrimination led to anxiety or feeling unsafe within the host society. Conversely, girls who chose not to wear the headscarf were at risk of discrimination or harassment within their own ethnic community (Ellis et al., 2010).

Finally, the lack of accommodation towards those not fluent in host-country languages created barriers to belonging such that speaking the host country's language was a significant element of the new "national identity" of participants (Aniko & Terry, 2009; Evans, 2020; Karam et al., 2020; Kennedy, Oviatt, & De Costa, 2019). Language proficiency in host countries is generally considered a requirement for refugees' social integration (Watkins, Razee, & Richters, 2012), without which a person might experience social exclusion, discrimination, and racism (Doğan, Dikeç, & Uygun, 2019; Ghahari, Lui, Nagra, & Morassaei, 2020; Mangrio & Forss, 2017). Young people in included studies also perceived host language proficiency as the key to community integration and *earning* a new national identity. As indicated by participants in a study conducted in the US, some youth aligned their aim of adjusting to the new national identity with learning English (Kennedy et al., 2019). Narratives about the importance of speaking English for integration and becoming a citizen in the United Kingdom among a group of young Syrians demonstrated a similar attitude (Evans, 2020). In a case study conducted in the United States, participants who were not proficient in

English suffered difficulties in communication, received labels in school such as the “typical refugee”, and were not recognized for their skills and strengths (Karam et al., 2020).

5. Discussion

5.1. Bringing together findings to construct a holistic perspective of identity construction as a sociocultural practice

Few studies included in this review addressed identity from a holistic perspective. Most focused on one aspect of identity, yet a synthesis of findings shows how a young person develops multiple identity characteristics through numerous interactions with their environment and how each of these characteristics intersects and interacts with one another in forming a coherent sense of identity. Moreover, none of the studies specifically explored the influence of time and developmental stages of young people in the process of identity [re]construction following forced migration experiences. Bringing together findings from the studies included in this scoping review demonstrates that young people from refugee backgrounds continuously [re]constructed their multiple aspects of identity while coming to terms with challenges in their past, present, and future.

A significant aspect of this process of identity [re]construction is the complexity, fluidity, and multifaceted nature of identity (Mijic, 2022). The study participants simultaneously perceived themselves as having multiple identity characteristics influenced by their interactions with their sociocultural contexts. As Schwartz et al. (2011) discuss, people use different ways to reconcile inconsistencies in their sense of identity and to maintain a personal sense of self-continuity. An individual constructs narratives to make sense and meaning out of their lives across

time and situations (McAdams, 2011, 2018), and they can personally redefine the meanings of the identity categories they construct and make them coherent (Huynh, Nguyen, & Benet-Martínez, 2011). While acknowledging the agency of the individual in constructing their identity is crucial, this process happens within a particular context which cannot be overlooked (Schwartz et al., 2011). Therefore, young people in studies included in this review portrayed their identity not as something fixed or singular such as only being a “refugee”, but as negotiated and contested in relation to their sociohistorical and cultural context. Studies revealed that while adverse experiences throughout the forced migration journey might have had negative impacts on their lives, young people actively rejected ascribed identities such as “refugee” or “unaccompanied minors” that implied victimhood or dependency and showed a strong sense of agency, hope, and visions of a brighter future.

To conceptualize the complexity of the multiple factors influencing identity, we classified findings based on a social-ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; McLeroy et al., 1988). Fig. 2 shows an integration of our synthesised findings and theoretical interpretation. This figure conveys the multi-level systems in post-migration contexts and highlights how young people’s identities are [re]shaped through the intersection of individual, interpersonal, cultural, and societal levels of interaction within a ‘passage of time’. The model demonstrates how young people from refugee backgrounds construct and make sense of their own lives through their sense of agency and their hope for the future, and the important role of ‘outer’ layers and their influence on young people’s identities. While family, peer relationships, and school were the immediate supports for the development of a positive sense of identity, post-migration challenges such as parents’ lack of ‘Western’ education and experiences of trauma, rejection by peers, and discrimination at schools were found to have negative impacts on the

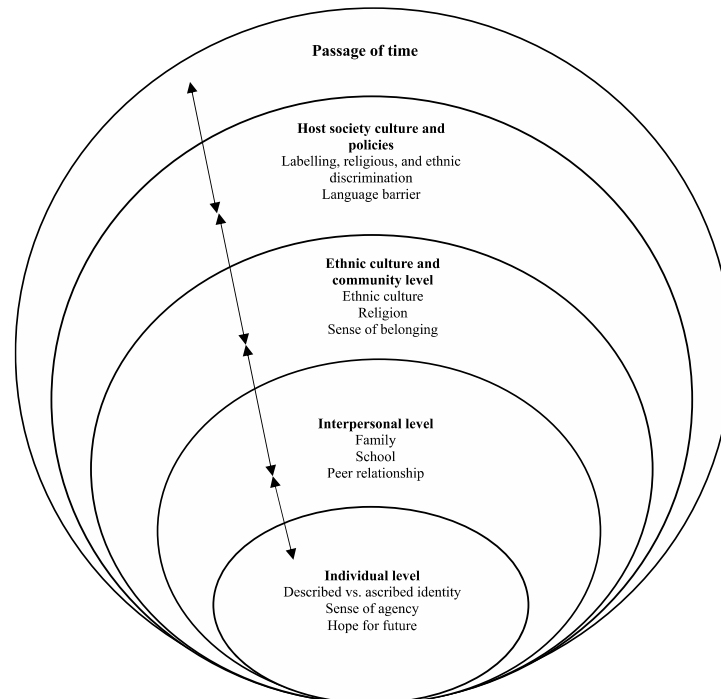


Fig. 2. Social ecological model of factors influencing the perception of identity in post-migration context.

interactions of young people and their identity [re] construction. Our review also found that ethnic culture and religion were important factors shaping the identity of young people with refugee backgrounds. For many participants in studies included in this review, strong connections with their ethnic and cultural background were a source of strength and pride and an important element of their identity. However, host societies' culture, attitudes and political climate had a strong influence in strengthening or weakening this connection. An inclusive and supportive environment in host countries that appreciates cultural and ethnic diversity facilitated the acculturation process. Discrimination, racism, and language barriers, meanwhile, had a negative influence on young people's perceptions of their ethnic culture and religion as well as their sense of belonging to host societies. This is consistent with previous research with bicultural individuals, which indicated that the perception of lower integration between the individual's two cultures are associated with the experiences of discrimination, difficulties in communication with culturally diverse communities, and language barriers (e.g., Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005).

A significant aspect of identity construction, which we have included in Fig. 2, is the concept of the 'passage of time' (Pickett, Vafai, Mathai, & Small, 2022). As discussed earlier, most studies in this review only indirectly considered time, by emphasising the age range of the participants or the time of displacement. However, none of the studies specifically looked into the influence of this factor on the process of identity [re]construction. According to Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory, the chronosphere (or 'chronosystem') represents the dimension of time and how it influences individuals and their environments. The chronosphere takes into account both historical and developmental time. Historical time refers to the broader socio-historical context in which individuals live, such as cultural changes, historical events, and societal norms. Developmental time refers to the individual's own life transitions, such as starting school, moving to a new city, or experiencing personal life events. A young person experiences major historical and developmental changes throughout the forced migration experience, and considering the influence of time on identity construction is fundamental (Pickett et al., 2022; Shevell & Denov, 2021).

5.2. Limitation and strengths of studies in the review

Studies involving people exposed to adversity, particularly young people with refugee backgrounds, have specific methodological and ethical challenges. (Block, Warr, Gibbs, & Riggs, 2013; Kristjánsdóttir & Skaptadóttir, 2019). Some of the studies in this review were conducted solely in the host countries' languages, likely excluding potential participants. Given that the ability to speak the host country's language was mentioned as a criterion for integration, omitting the voices of those who could not speak the language fluently may have consequently excluded those who experienced more identity distress and challenges (Ghahari et al., 2020).

Another methodological challenge is the need to develop trusted relationships with participants and overcome barriers to collaborating with communities as an outsider (Ellis, Kia-Keating, Yusuf, Lincoln, & Nur, 2007; Skovdal & Abebe, 2012). Only a few studies clearly explained the positionality of the researchers or the collaboration of a bicultural and/or bilingual researcher (e.g., Chao, 2019; Miled, 2020).

One of the significant strengths of some studies included in this review was using qualitative and mixed methods studies and their focus on hearing the voices of young people themselves. Quantitative studies brought insight into how young people from refugee backgrounds perceived a certain aspect of their identity and where their perceptions were significantly associated with positive or negative experiences in the host countries. However, some were limited to pre-specified definitions of identity. On the other hand, since identity [re]construction is a complex process, the qualitative and mixed methods included in this review explored young participants' self-definitions of identity, and some used creative methods such as narrative and/or visual methods to

provide a culturally informed understanding of the perception of identity in the context of forced migration. And finally, we should note that the limitations of the literature mean that conclusions were dependent on the quality of the studies.

6. Limitations of the current review

Firstly, considering the wide range of disciplines concerned with the topic of identity development among young people with a refugee background, we used broad definitions and search criteria; however, we still may have missed some relevant studies. Secondly, the literature search generated a few articles in languages other than English, which did not meet our inclusion criteria for practical purposes. Given that a high proportion of people with refugee backgrounds reside in low to middle-income countries neighboring those from which they have fled, where English is not the dominant language for publishing, this review may not reflect their experiences of identity development. This is important as often these countries are seen as places of temporary (albeit often extended) refuge rather than permanent resettlement. This, too, would provide different challenges for the identity [re]construction (Posselt, McIntyre, Ngcanga, Lines, & Procter, 2020). Thirdly, while we searched for studies among children as well as adolescents, the search identified only one eligible study that included participants in pre-adolescent childhood. There might be other relevant articles with adult participants with refugee background which focuses on their reflections on their childhood that our search did not locate.

7. Conclusion and further directions

In summary, this scoping review found that research on the sense of identity among young people from a refugee background has addressed a variety of characteristics. However, none of the included studies looked at identity from a holistic perspective that can address the complexity of identity as a multifaceted phenomenon. The findings of this review has brought together existing knowledge of how young people with refugee backgrounds define their identities by integrating their senses of past and present selves and looking for opportunities to shape their own lives. This scoping review uncovered that while young people from refugee backgrounds perceive their identity through their sense of agency and hope, several environmental factors influence their perceptions. Mainly, this review emphasizes the role of societal and political factors in the host country on personal perceptions and definitions of identity.

For future studies, this review indicates the value of more holistic perspectives and longitudinal approaches in primary studies, which consider a variety of factors at different layers of social ecology over time to understand how young people from refugee backgrounds shape their identities within their unique sociocultural contexts.

In addition, while considering the past traumatic experiences of young people with refugee backgrounds is crucial, this review suggests the value of changing narratives associated with ascribed labels and the assumptions that come with them. Rather, using language and policies which appreciate the agency, sense of hope, and determination of young people from refugee backgrounds is likely to support their aspirations and well-being. Moreover, research with young people with refugee backgrounds would benefit from more culturally and linguistically appropriate designs and additional strategies to overcome barriers to accessing communities as outsiders. This review also suggests the importance of providing opportunities for young people with refugee backgrounds to express their own experiences. Recognizing individuals as having agency and unique characteristics and understandings of the world has the potential to enrich the cultures of their host countries.

8. Author statement

FSH performed the systematic literature research, article selection,

data extraction and created the first draft of the manuscript including the introduction, methods, results, and discussion. KB and EA contributed substantially to formatting the article, giving feedback, and made essential corrections and writing revisions. All the authors contributed to the final manuscript and submission.

9. Disclosure statement

The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Data availability

No data was used for the research described in the article.

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Appendix G: 'Still Stood Adamant and Strong to Chase My Dream' Sense of Identity and Resilience among Hazara Youth following Childhood Experiences of Forced Migration



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'Still Stood Adamant and Strong to Chase My Dream': Sense of Identity and Resilience among Hazara Youth following Childhood Experiences of Forced Migration

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the interaction between the identity [re]construction, experiences of resilience and the sociocultural context of young Hazaras from refugee backgrounds. We conducted a qualitative study involving fifteen in-depth interviews combined with visual elements. Results demonstrate that meaning-making and a personal sense of resilience were core elements of participants' positive sense of identity. Finding a middle ground between Hazara and Australian identity and developing a sense of belonging were sites of struggle for participants. We discuss how Hazara youth identities were [re] constructed through their sense of agency and opportunities provided in Australia.

KEYWORDS

Forced migration; sense of identity; resilience; youth; refugee-background

Introduction

During the last few decades, protracted conflicts in Afghanistan have forced millions of people to flee. Approximately 2.6 million registered asylum seekers and refugees have fled Afghanistan, of whom 2.2 million are registered in neighboring countries such as Iran and Pakistan, while the rest have been resettled in high income countries (UNHCR, 2022). Among high income countries, Australia has been one of the largest per capita recipients of humanitarian entrants from Afghanistan (Department of Home Affairs, 2021). In 2021, approximately 67,000 people living in Australia were born in Afghanistan (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021), with several thousand more arriving since then. There are also many people of Afghan origin living in Australia who were born outside Afghanistan, particularly in Pakistan and Iran. A large proportion of the population from Afghanistan in Australia are Hazaras—the third largest ethnic group in Afghanistan—and many arrived as children or young adults (Radford & Hetz, 2021). Most arrived in Australia post 2001 as asylum seekers/refugees, due to significant expulsion and enslavement of the Hazaras in Afghanistan, reported as having genocidal elements¹ (Hakimi, 2022; Ibrahim, 2017, p. 57). This article focuses on the specific impacts of forced migration in childhood and how best to support resilience for this population group (Copolov & Knowles, 2021; Hetz, 2021; Neve, 2022; Radford & Hetz, 2021).

Similar to other populations with refugee backgrounds, research with young people from Afghanistan has been mostly focused on the prevalence of trauma-related mental health difficulties, such as depression, posttraumatic stress disorder, psychological distress and damage to psycho-social functioning (Alemi et al., 2014; Alemi & Stempel, 2018; Copolov & Knowles, 2018, 2021; Hamrah et al., 2021a, 2021b; Ventevogel & Faiz, 2018). Nevertheless, despite the substantial association

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between adverse life events and mental disorders, not everyone who has experienced trauma will develop mental health problems (Wade et al., 2019). Even when mental health symptoms are present, many with childhood experiences of forced migration show resilience and adjustment in the long run (Fouskas, 2019; Gartland et al., 2019; Zwi et al., 2018). The term *resilience* broadly refers to the capabilities, processes, or outcomes associated with positive adaptation in the context of adversity (Masten, 2018; Ungar, 2018). Research with the general population in Western countries indicates that having a 'positive sense of identity' as well as a supportive environment can mitigate the risks associated with adverse experiences, assisting young people in navigating pathways to resilience (Marley & Mauki, 2018; Masten, 2018; Ungar, 2018). Nevertheless, there is a lack of insight into how young people from refugee backgrounds may perceive and develop a positive sense of identity within their new sociocultural environment and how this interacts with their perception of resilience. While identity is a complex, multifaceted, and socially constructed concept that is constantly evolving (Chao, 2019; Mijic, 2022), there has been limited research focusing on young people from refugee backgrounds to explore the impacts of forced migration experiences and the settlement process from a holistic perspective. This study begins to address this gap. Considering the significant number of Hazara people in Australia, this research aims to provide a culturally and contextually grounded understanding of how young Hazara adults with refugee backgrounds reflect on their childhood experience of forced migration. Specifically, we aimed to explore these young adults' views on their identity and resilience during this journey and how their environment might have influenced these perceptions.

Theoretical and conceptual frameworks

Identity and resilience are widely used terms among a range of disciplines, with definitions varying according to discipline and theoretical and methodological frameworks. Here we discuss which theoretical and conceptual frameworks underpin this study.

Poststructuralism and identity construction: a sociocultural perspective

Poststructuralism recognizes identity as the way an individual understands their interaction with the world, how this interaction is constructed across time and space, and how the individual apprehends their future (Norton & Toohey, 2011). Poststructuralism is greatly influenced by Foucault (1980) who theorized identity as constantly developing in a context embedded within and embodied through culture, history, power, and ideology.

An individual thus actively negotiates and contests their personal and social identity and how they perceive their 'self' in interaction with their sociocultural setting (Penuel & Wertsch, 1995). This perspective emphasizes both the context of identity construction and the agency of the individual to give meaning to their interactions with that setting (Chao, 2019). Young people from refugee backgrounds encounter at least two important known influences on identity [re]construction: experiences of migration and displacement (Mijic, 2022; Rabiau, 2019); and experiences of adversity (Berman, 2016; Kira et al., 2019). In both contexts, the interaction between personal and social aspects of identity can be [re]constructed multiple times as circumstances are pushing for various changes (Mijic, 2022).

To understand identity [re]construction following adversity, we drew on Narrative Identity Theory. Narrative Identity Theory foregrounds the lived experiences of adversity and the individual definition of identity: 'how I came to be the person I am becoming' (McAdams, 2018). Thus, according to this theory, an individual simultaneously integrates different aspects of their life to maintain a sense of 'inner sameness and continuity' (Erikson, 1968, p. 251) across different contexts. An individual's sense of identity also integrates life in a diachronic sense, that is, over time, showing how the self of yesterday has become the self of today through adverse experiences (McAdams, 2011).

To understand identity in the context of migration, where an individual experiences plurality of contexts and cultures, this study was informed by Bhabha's (1994) definition of Hybrid Identity which was extended by Smith and Leavy (2008). Hybrid identity emphasizes that identity does not represent a singular self or simply belonging to one community but is formed in cultural practices across time and in interaction with multiple cultures. Therefore, identity formation is not a fixed process but rather is precarious, fluid, hybrid, and shared (Smith & Leavy, 2008).

Using a poststructuralist lens, we conceptualized identity as multifaceted, dynamic, hybrid and (re)constructed in social interactions. This offered insights into how our participants define their sense of identity following the adverse experience of forced migration and how their interactions with their sociocultural environments have influenced [re]construction of identity. We conceptualized a 'positive sense of identity' as individuals having subjective feelings and definitions of self that are experienced as positive or favorable (J. Chen et al., 2012).

Social-ecological perspective of resilience

To better understand how having a positive sense of identity is interacting with resilience among young people from refugee backgrounds (Jafari et al., 2022), we explored how participants in this study perceived and defined resilience and its relation with identity. Using a social ecological perspective, Ungar (2012) describes resilience as a process whereby an individual navigates protective resources across different layers of their social ecology to support wellbeing in the face of adversity. These layers include factors and attributes at the individual level (e.g., age, gender, cognitive abilities), micro level (e.g., family, friends, school), exo level (e.g., society and community) and macro level (e.g., cultural and political). Researchers are increasingly avoiding the assumption that young people with refugee backgrounds are either vulnerable or resilient individuals. Depending on the support systems available within the environment, the same individual might be both over time (Fazel et al., 2012; Frounfelker et al., 2020; Sleijpen et al., 2017). A social ecological perspective decenters the focus on individuals and avoids 'blaming' them for not flourishing when there are few opportunities to access resources. It also emphasizes that individuals and families with refugee backgrounds do not exist in isolation and that they live within a broader social structure, interacting with institutions and multiple domains of society (Jafari et al., 2022; Kuru & Ungar, 2020).

Method

Design and participants

Given the complexity of experiences of forced migration and the exploratory nature of our research questions, we employed qualitative methods. This enabled us to explore the lived experiences of participants in their own words (Liamputtong & Kurban, 2018). Semi-structured in-depth interviews complemented by visual materials were chosen as data collection methods. Interviews focused on participants' experience of forced migration; how participants defined their sense of identity and resilience in their own words; and the role and influence of social and environmental factors. We used visual data collection as an optional addition to the interviews as it can produce rich data, often in combination with different modes of data collection, such as in depth-interviews. This method typically involves participants visualizing aspects of their lives or bringing meaningful images from other photographers (Oh, 2012). Studies with people from a refugee background demonstrate how visual methods incorporated in qualitative methodologies can add insights to the lived experiences of youth, understanding them as valuable and knowledgeable social actors (Block et al., 2013; Vecchio et al., 2017).

Table 1. Participants Demographics.

Participant ID's	Gender	Age at the time of interview	Age leaving Afghanistan	Age at the time of arrival to Australia	Asylum country/ies	Years in asylum country/ies	Years in Australia	Type of journey
1 Idris	Male	26	4	10	Pakistan	7	15 (since 2006)	With Family-Humanitarian program
2 Mahgul	Female	27	10	13	Pakistan	3	14 (since 2007)	With Family-Humanitarian program
3 Farida	Female	23	6	8	Pakistan	1	15 (since 2006)	With Family-Humanitarian program
4 Ali	Male	26	12	15	Pakistan/Malaysia/Indonesia	3	12 (since 2009)	Alone-onshore permanent protection visa
5 Gulnaz	Female	20	4	5	Pakistan	1	15 (since 2006)	With Family-Humanitarian program
6 Karim	Male	27	8.5	12.5	Iran/Pakistan	3-4	15 (since 2006)	With Family-Humanitarian program
7 Mariam	Female	28	10	14	Pakistan	4	18 (since 2003)	With Family-Humanitarian program
8 Razia	Female	28	13	16	South Korea	3	12 (since 2009)	With Family-Humanitarian program
9 Roya	Female	20	13	14	Pakistan	1	6 (since 2016)	With Family-Humanitarian program
10 Sami	Male	27	17	17	Pakistan	5	10 (since 2011)	With Family-Community Sponsored Program
11 Nasir	Male	28	Born in Pakistan	17	Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia	1	9 (since 2012)	Alone-onshore permanent protection visa
12 Farid	Male	25		16	Pakistan, Malaysia, Indonesia	1	10 (since 2011)	Alone-onshore permanent protection visa
13 Amina	Female	29		14	Pakistan, Iran	6	18 (since 2003)	With Family-Humanitarian program
14 Wahid	Male	27	5	17	Pakistan	12	10 (since 2011)	Alone-onshore permanent protection visa
15 Jalal	Male	26	3	14	Pakistan	12	10 (since 2011)	With Family-Humanitarian program

Participants discussed their personal sense of identity and their perception of resilience, explaining how they perceived these as influenced by overcoming past traumas; the challenges following arrival in Australia; and how far they have come to achieve their goals and dreams. Participants simultaneously perceived themselves as having multiple identity characteristics which changed depending on their contexts. Our analysis identified three main aspects as central to participants' identity. First were participants' personal identity and perception of resilience. Participants conveyed how they defined themselves as a 'resilient person' through their stories of migration challenges. Second was the Hazara ethnic identity and what it meant to participants and their experiences of cultural clashes post-settlement. Third, was their Australian identity and challenges for finding a sense of belonging in Australia. Participants described how they overcame adverse experiences, combined Hazara and Australian identity into a cohesive sense of self, and how support systems including family, education, and community support influenced this process.

Personal sense of identity and resilience

Most participants defined their identity and resilience through their challenges, traumas, successes, passions, and achievements. Participants spoke about their identity as a life story that included experiences of adversity, then integrated those memories with goals, success and passions and created a coherent account of identity over time. In the following quote, Farida conveys to us who she is now through her multiple lived experiences:

I don't know who I am now [laugh]... My lived experiences with my family, my sicknesses or my house, the weddings, the parties... My art, my research ... and the way I choose to present myself to the world in the way that I dress. *Farida*

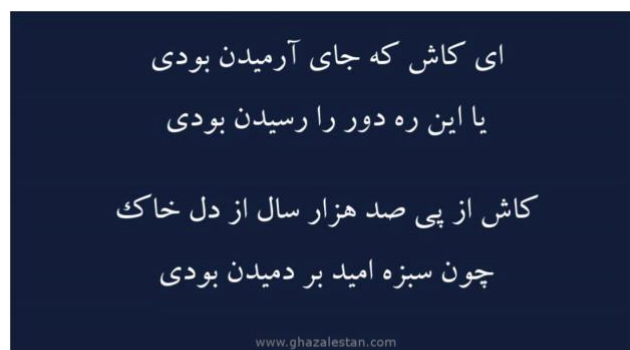
We identified two key themes concerning participants' personal sense of identity and definition of resilience. The first focused on adverse experiences before and during migration and the impact of forced displacement; the second on how these negative experiences influenced participants' sense of self as 'resilient' individuals, transforming displacement experiences into aspiration and determination over time.

'Nothing I Can Do Can Erase Those Memories': Impacts of Trauma and Displacement on Sense of Identity

Participants explained that the adversities that they endured perhaps represented the point at which they began defining their sense of identity and resilience. They shared stories of their earliest memories in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the challenges which led to forced migration and adversities associated with the displacement journey itself. Some could still remember bomb blasts and family members being persecuted by the Taliban, while some shared how the fear of death in suicide attacks or of being kidnapped by the Taliban forced them to flee. Some had to live in countries of first asylum, mainly Pakistan and Iran, for years while waiting for settlement in Australia. Some fled alone with smugglers to Indonesia and Malaysia and then traveled by boat to Australia. Some participants spoke of how those traumatic experiences changed their lives drastically:

We watched the bodies of our own people being torn to pieces and we saw that as kids, I was probably age 9. It's so traumatic... nothing I can do can erase those memories and I guess that's something that will just stay with us until we die. *Idris*

Some participants explained that forced migration can be a constant experience of pain which might linger with a person for life. The topic came up in the context that Taliban take over Afghanistan in 2021. Nasir shared the ongoing experience of worrying about his family who were still in Afghanistan. He explained that while people considered him a 'lucky person' to survive the conflicts, he felt that



I wish there was some place for repose
 I wish this long passage reached an end
 I wish, after a hundred thousand years beneath the earth's breast,
 Like meadows, we sprang forth into life again

Omar Khayyam

Figure 1. Poem by Omar Khayyam translated to English by Idris, 26 years old.

although he had physically 'survived', mentally he was still experiencing them. Some participants, including Mariam pointed out the trauma of displacement itself:

You know one day I was just playing with my friends in the streets and telling them that I'll see you tomorrow and the next day you'd be gone, leaving your whole home, and never seeing your friends again. I think that definitely traumatized me. *Mariam*

Idris shared that even though he is not a 'refugee' anymore, the negative experience of leaving home and displacement enormously influenced his identity.

It's sort of being 'Avareh'[adrift] or you know refugee. It's right to the very end of our lives... We are like trees, we're taken, we're uprooted, and were planted elsewhere. *Idris*

He also referred to a Farsi poem by Khayyam³ about his philosophy of living and death (see Figure 1) to share the idea that the journey of life for a displaced person can be never-ending and the hope for 'reaching a destiny', 'comfort' or 're-birth' can only be an imaginary desire.

'[I] Still Stood Adamant and Strong to Chase My Dream': Meaning Making, Personal Sense of Resilience, Hope and Aspiration

Participants emphasized how perceiving themselves as 'resilient' influenced the way they understood challenges throughout their migration journey. Some shared how a sense of self-efficacy aided them in coming to terms with their traumatic memories and being proactive in overcoming those challenges:

It provides that fuel that I need. To look on the bright side to get through the day. To have goals, to strive to struggle... It's through my own traumatic personal experience. *Ali*

Facing and dealing with adverse experiences associated with forced migration was life defining and a reference point for expectations about the future. As Farid explained, his hopes kept him



“I guess this photo shaped up the person that I’m today. It is an image of my home back in Afghanistan, a place that gave me so much to reminisce about but also a place that shattered my heart because we had to leave it all behind us - possibly given the current circumstances, forever. It’s a place that motivates me so much to do better and give back to everyone who is left behind”.

Figure 2. Photo by Mariam, 28 years old.

resilient through the horrifying asylum journey and the months he spent in Australian detention centers. One of his hopes was to get to Australia and to have the chance to study, so his future could be ‘better’ and ‘predictable’.

Some believed that without the experience of dislocation, they would not be the same hard-working and resilient person with the power to achieve much. Participants explained how the experience of displacement influenced their motivations and aspirations. As illustrated in Figure 2, Mariam described how the experience of displacement from her beloved homeland changed her, and how she turned that experience into motivation and determination.

However, for some of the participants who came to Australia as unaccompanied minors, this process was particularly challenging. A few explained how they mentally and emotionally struggled to cope with trauma and how it impacted the process of forming a cohesive sense of identity. As Farid explained in the next quote, his motivation to be an ‘educated’ and ‘successful’ person was undermined by trauma and living alone in Australia. The combination of not having family or social support and the high expectations for success that he had for himself, led him to burn-out, depression and ‘not knowing who he is anymore’:

I was vulnerable in my loneliness so I wouldn’t do anything but regretting my situation and feeling pity for myself. I was wasting every minute and hour in my life... But I couldn’t help the situation and myself. I was going to school, but I was disengaged, and I couldn’t do my homework. Not that I didn’t want to, I didn’t have the energy. It took me 2.5–3 years until I could return to my normal self, and I was able to study again. *Farid*

Hazara identity, cultural clashes, and identity crisis

As illustrated in Figure 3, most participants shared how their ethnic identity and its history had extensively influenced many aspects of their sense of resilience and their personal sense of identity.



"To me, this headpiece (also known as "paykai" in Hazaragi) symbolises both my identity and resilience. The bird engraved in this silver headpiece is a symbol of freedom and also a reminder of who I am and where I come from".

Figure 3. Photo by Mahgul, 27 years old.

From conversations about the influence of ethnic identity and culture, two themes were constructed. The first concerned how Hazara cultural identity and associated multi-generational trauma combined with participants' personal experiences of migration and adjustment in Australia to shape the person they had become. The second focused on the challenges of cultural integration in Australia. Participants experienced an 'identity crisis' and eventually occupied a 'middle ground' that combined their two cultures.

'Yes, I am Hazara. We have been Discriminated [against] and Persecuted for Centuries': The Influence of Ethnic and Cultural Identity

As illustrated in an image provided by Nasir of Buddhas of Bamiyan,⁴ the Hazara ethnic identity and the impact of years of discrimination and persecution were crucial influences on participants' sense of identity and perception of resilience.

I am really inspired by this image of Buddhas of Bamiyan. I have adopted the resilience from the people living in the caves around the Buddha for centuries. They have seen more difficult times than anyone, yet they still are living either in those caves or close to that mountain no matter what the conditions are.

Mariam described how she believes Hazara identity for her was associated with both trauma and resilience at the same time:

Being a minority within the minority and being a minority from [one of] the most persecuted tribe[s], pain, discomfort and grief come with that identity. But at the same time, determination, courage, and resilience. *Mariam*

Being Hazara also had a significant influence on how participants shaped their vocational identity. A few had chosen law and activism for their careers and were advocates for their community. Gulnaz explicitly shared how her ethnic identity and its intergenerational trauma history contributed to her choice of profession:

I think the legal profession gives you an opportunity to be outspoken on things. The way Afghanistan was, not just as of recently, but many, many years and for centuries, [it] needs people from within to stand up for it. Stand up for their own country... A country that I could go back to and feel safe in. Just like the friends around me did that. They would go on vacations and come back home but we didn't. As Afghans we don't have that option because of the safety issues and everything. *Gulnaz*

Some participants felt that similar experiences of ethnic trauma, resilience and marginalized identity brought them together with other social groups. For example, a participant shared how



The Nobel Hound

“For me, a huge sense of identity and belonging comes from the idea that we are all interconnected. In the west people dress and accessorise their dogs. In Afghanistan, families don’t typically own dog pets let alone dress them. Religious households consider it to be unsanitary. So, the idea of the Afghan dog wearing traditional Afghan attire is a symbol of the culture personified. A juxtaposition. The Hazaragi headwear is used with the intent to put the Afghan hound in the same light as other dogs- loyal, loving and obeying. To allow Afghans to see their native animal through a curious lense rather than the lense we have been brought up to see dogs as-unsanitary. This drawing captures its elegance through a close-up portrait. The hound is wearing a stack of traditional “Kola Qabtumar”. The traditional headwear is worn by Hazaras. Qabtumar is a complicated geometric pattern that is hand-embroidered”.

Figure 4. Illustration by Farida, 23 years old.

he believed the experience of ethnic persecution in Afghanistan brought his identity closer to Indigenous people in Australia and their history of intergenerational trauma and colonization of their lands. Another said he felt more comfortable being around people from communities that had also experienced persecution and forced migration.

While ethnic persecution was the main reason for migration, participants emphasized how they protected and kept their Hazara cultural identity. Most participants had beautiful memories, loving family members still living in Afghanistan, and some strong ties to their homeland’s culture. Some shared how they maintained cultural ties through their interest in the Farsi/Dari language, literature, music, traditional food, clothing, dancing, and celebrating traditional events. Participants expressed different views however, as to what extent religion influenced their identity: from being a Muslim as a major component of their identity to not identifying as Muslim. Some participants believed that Islam, Afghan, and Hazara cultures have merged and that it is sometimes difficult to differentiate religious and ethno-cultural practices. For other participants, however, they were two separate things that may have influenced each other but can be differentiated:

Islam is a religion. It’s not a culture. each country may have hundreds of cultural tribes. Culture for me is the style of living. How you celebrate your ceremonies, things like that. *Nasir*

‘I’m too Afghan for Australians and too Australian for Afghans’: Cultural Clashes and Creating a Combined Cultural Identity

For most of our participants and their families, the experience of leaving everything behind including family members, belongings and culture, and then attempting to ‘successfully’ integrate

into the host society, was a source of stress. Participants in our study reported their experience of identity distress or 'identity crisis' which they experienced after they arrived. Participants shared how at some points they felt they did not belong either to their ethnic culture or the Australian culture:

It's like an identity crisis. It's so hard that you can have mental breakdowns from not knowing where you belong or not really knowing who you are. [One] panics or goes into a depression and so not knowing in any moment who you are or not having any sort of identity, distress, or an identity crisis, it hits. *Farida,*

Mariam shared how some of her behaviors and beliefs such as being an 'extrovert' or a 'loud' woman were not very common in her own culture and it made it hard sometimes to connect with her own people. As another participant explained, she would define her identity as the 'third culture kid' and how she had positioned her identity in the middle so that she could find common ground. An illustration created for this research by Farida (see [Figure 4](#)), shared how she gradually came to the point that she could choose some aspects of Afghan and Hazara culture and combine them with Australian culture to make a combined culture of her own.

Navigating a sense of belonging and resilience in Australia

Almost all participants highlighted how they struggled at different stages of life and to different extents to find a sense of belonging in Australia. We begin by elaborating the first theme on experiences of racism, social exclusion and the impact of policies on sense of belonging. We then describe how participants navigated and built resilience and sense of belonging, discussing three sub-themes: family support; access to education; and building social capital.

'I'm More than a Hijabi Girl': Experiences of Racism, Exclusion, and the Impact of Social Policies

Participants shared their experiences of racism and exclusion and how it negatively affected their sense of belonging and ultimately, their 'identity crisis' during late adolescence and early adulthood. Both male and female participants were exposed to the negative impacts of gendered stereotyping, racism, and Islamophobia. Some male participants experienced racist stereotyping: being called a 'terrorist'; while some visibly Muslim female participants experienced verbal or physical attacks focused on them wearing a hijab. As Roya explained, the feeling of exclusion associated with her Muslim identity were not apparent when she was at primary school, when it was not obvious that she was culturally 'different'. It began later when she started wearing a hijab and led to 'culture shock' when she experienced being picked on and called 'towel head':

When I got to high school, because I was a Muslim girl wearing my hijab, I kind of felt outcasted in one way or another, even though you wanna fit in, you wanna belong, you can't help but feel that barrier between you and some other students, or a barrier between you and some teachers. *Roya*

Mariam expressed that she wanted others to see different components of her identity, leading her to be outspoken about her culture and religion on various media platforms:

I'm not just a person who put on the head scarf on her head. I'm more than that. I am a leader, I'm an activist, I'm a journalist, I'm a student. I'm a person made of different elements to make me as one whole person and I think the saddest part is a lot of people see me as just a *hijabi* girl. *Mariam*

Similarly, Idris shared his experience of witnessing racist insults against his mother wearing a veil and addressed how it impacted his sense of belonging to Australia:

People have either tried to take it off or sworn or said things. We've got citizenship but you know, citizenship cannot protect you from something like that. *Idris*

Female participants also spoke about how they experienced racist stereotyping based on their gender, cultural and/or national identity. Roya explained that when she was too young to

understand racism, she still knew that one of her teacher's comments about her being from Afghanistan and pursuing education was wrong:

It was a psychology class, and the teacher would come up ... oh why you even studying so hard? All Afghans girls at the end of their day they would get married, have kids, make a family. He kind of said that and I felt bad. *Roya*

Male participants also experienced racist stereotyping including being called *terrorist*. Particularly in schools in which there was little diversity, students from refugee backgrounds could feel unsupported by the school staff. Feelings of exclusion, particularly in school or university environments, were brought up both by female and male participants. Negative stereotypes, language and cultural barriers all contributed:

Sometimes, you think you don't belong here. Specially that you speak English with a different accent, some tiny cultural differences and sometimes you face some people that even if they are not acting the obvious racism, they transfer that feeling to you. Even now that I am working with government and I am citizen of Australia, sometimes I have this feeling that in that person's mind, you don't belong here. *Sami*

Amina described how she compared her language ability or achievements to those who came to Australia at an earlier age or were born here and this significantly influenced her self-confidence. Therefore, she was pushing herself to compensate for her lack of education and language knowledge with more hours of work and study which impacted her social life.

Immigration policies also influenced sense of belonging. While almost all participants had received permanent protection visas,⁵ Nasir shared the impact of being stateless. He explained that he was born to 'Afghan' parents in Pakistan. However, Afghanistan doesn't accept the Pakistani birth certificate, and Pakistan doesn't accept him as he is born to 'Afghan' parents. That is how he ended up being undocumented when he arrived in Australia and has been unable to apply for citizenship. His sense of relief when he reached his destination after days of being on a boat and surviving the traumatic asylum journey only lasted for a couple of weeks until Immigration started 'interrogating' him about his past. The participant shared how not being a citizen of any country, particularly Australia, affected his sense of belonging and opportunities:

My [study] major is cyber security. So, any job that involves cyber security needs level 4 for security clearance and that's only given to citizens of Australia. Because I'm not citizen I can't get level 4 security clearance. Therefore, I can't get the dream job that I am seeking. *Nasir*

'Now it Feels Good to Give it Back to the Community': Navigating and Building Resilience

After discussing the challenges affecting participants' sense of identity and belonging, we asked participants to reflect on the early years after they arrived and evaluate the influence of their family, school, friendships, and community in overcoming them. Participants mentioned multiple factors that assisted them to regain, sustain, or improve their mental wellbeing and resilience. We discuss the following sub-themes below: family values and the role of family support; education opportunities; and the role of friendships and community support.

Family values and the role of family support

Most of the participants described their parents and older siblings, as a significant support and drew inspiration from the resilience of their parents. However, some participants who migrated to Australia with their parents had mixed feelings. Some mentioned that growing up in a different culture caused conflicts between them and their parents, who were not 'supportive of their decisions for life'. Since family members were also engaged in dealing with traumatic experiences, financial hardship, and cultural clashes, this could complicate their relationships with each other. For some parents, the sense that their children were distancing themselves from their origin culture was a source of conflict. Jalal described how his decision to change his

original name to a common Western one sparked disagreement. Changing one's name to make it easier to pronounce was likely seen by parents as rejecting *their* cultural identity in favor of a more 'Australian' identity.

Different challenges confronted those who migrated without their families. As Farid explained, although his mother was comforting him by saying he was fortunate that he had left Afghanistan, he felt guilty about surviving alone and not being able to share his happiness with family. As Wahid related, when his family arrived in Australia, he had to withdraw from university to work to support them. He felt that the parent-child support role had changed, and this responsibility had put enormous pressure on his shoulders.

Education opportunities

Most participants pointed out the influence of Australian education as an important factor contributing to their 'Australian' identity. Along with seeking safety, access/lack of access to education was a driver of migration:

One of the most important problems in our country is that most people can't access good education so they cannot understand who is good for them (as the leader), or their country. If people were educated and could choose educated people, they could help building Afghanistan and they could fight for cultural freedom.

Farid

As Roya explained, seeing successful, passionate, and independent women inspired her to seek education. Something that many children, particularly girls, were finding difficult and life-threatening in Afghanistan. However, while those who were younger when they arrived were able to pursue education, those who arrived here at older ages, or were older siblings in the family, often had to start working due to financial difficulties. As Amina mentioned, her oldest brother had to give up on studying, and work when he arrived at the age of 17 to support the younger siblings. Still today, although he is successful in his business, he is wistful about not having the chance to study.

The role of friendships and community support

Only a few participants mentioned access to mental health support when they struggled with challenges. Most explained they received support for their needs through their friendships and community support and answered 'no' when asked if they ever sought mental health support.

For some participants, finding friends within their ethnic community helped them keep their Afghan and Hazara identities as well as cope with challenges. Sami shared that he did not want to adjust to Australian culture too fast as he wanted to keep his 'Afghanistani' culture and his Farsi/Dari language. Also, having friends from the Afghan and Hazara communities was helpful as they shared an understanding of what they had been through in Afghanistan and their journeys to Australia:

When we are sitting together, sometimes we don't need to talk about everything, when I say the beginning of my thoughts, he can read the end of it' [an idiom in Farsi]. *Sami*

As Farida explained, these connections and friendships significantly influenced her sense of belonging to Australia, helped her cope with the past, and put it behind her.

All of the male participants and one female participant, Mariam, highlighted the importance of sport to connect with the community, expand their social capital and improve mental health:

Football was my main connection. [Football] was the language I could communicate with people. Whenever I have time, I love to play soccer and that's where I literally forget my old pain. *Nasir, 28 years old*

Participants also shared how positive experiences with Australian support systems influenced their resilience and sense of identity. Participants recalled that it gave them a good feeling

knowing that they could ask for help and support from these community organizations, particularly for those who entered the community without their families.

Some participants particularly appreciated the support of teachers and school staff, mainly in their language schools. As Mariam mentioned, her teacher encouraged her to speak out without fear, which greatly influenced her sense of identity. Roya described how the support of her school social worker influenced her sense of identity and choice of her current career:

I was very interested to become someone like them in future. To assist people and I feel like it's rewarding and it's giving back to the community and assisting other peoples. *Roya*

Similarly, some participants mentioned that after a while, rather than needing support, they gained strength from the positive feeling of helping others in a similar situation, including those who needed information about visa applications, university, school, access to welfare benefits and choosing the right path. Some started working as translators with service providers for immigrants or even during their time at school, helping other Afghan and Hazara parents with the enrollment of their children:

You feel like I can help. I have this power that I can do it. That connected me to [the community] and being able to speak English and to help someone that is speaking my home country [language] or that is going through what I went through made me feel that I am making a difference there. *Amina*

Discussion

In this article, we have explored young adult Hazaras' perceptions of the influence of their childhood experience of forced migration on their identity and resilience. Here we integrate our core findings with our conceptual frameworks and the literature and discuss their implications.

Trauma and dislocation: meaning making and resilience

Consistent with Narrative Identity theory, (McAdams, 2011), participants perceived their identity as a life story which integrated memories from childhood experiences of forced migration and more recent events. Participants emphasized how challenging experiences were a turning point in their lives and how they translated their pain into resilience, hope, determinations, aspirations and achievements and created a coherent and positive sense of identity over time. 'Hope for a better future' was an integral part of participants' sense of resilience. This finding was similar to that observed by Panter-Brick and Eggerman (2012) who argued that enduring pain for people in Afghanistan is not necessarily internalized negatively and overcoming challenges is 'valued' and 'praised' both culturally and religiously. A sense of hope for a better future made 'meaning' out of suffering and underpinned Afghan families' beliefs that present wellbeing was determined much more by their imaginable future than their traumatic past.

This observation is also consistent with what Pals (2006) referred to as 'adaptation' where people narrate their experiences of enduring pain and then articulate and commit to a positive resolution of the event. The notion of 'posttraumatic growth' suggests that people can grow and even experience positive consequences in the wake of adversity, without ignoring the negative impacts (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2014; Sleijpen et al., 2016). Thus individual resilience occurs when there is an environment that facilitates access to needed resources and a willingness by those who control them to provide what individuals need in ways that are congruent with their culture (Ungar & Theron, 2020).

Ungar (2013) argues that it is important not to 'naively' assume that resilience is the outcome of purely individual attributes. Aligned with this social-ecological perspective, and previous resilience research, our results also demonstrated the positive impacts of a protective social

ecology, including access to education, a supportive family and peer group, and access to community and social support (Jafari et al., 2022; Scharpf et al., 2021; Sleijpen et al., 2017; Ungar & Theron, 2020; Young & Block, 2022). Participants also shared negative experiences they had endured since arriving in Australia, which had challenged their resilience, sense of self and sense of belonging during their adolescence. A recurring theme was that of an 'identity crisis' while negotiating for a 'middle ground' between two cultures: Hazara and Australian.

Hybridity and finding a middle ground

Being identified as an ethnic and religious minority, and Hazaras' endurance of discrimination and violence provided a central inspiration for how participants conceptualized their identities and resilience. This is consistent with substantial research on intergenerational trauma among groups who have experienced genocide or been subjected to ethnic violence (Kahn & Denov, 2022). Muldoon et al. (2019) argue that social identity amongst people living in the same conflict zone, class and religious group play a significant role in shaping interpretations of traumatic events. Traumatic events are appraised not only in a personalized way, but also through the lens of an ethnic identity. In addition to the trauma experiences of Hazaras, most participants also saw language, 'Afghan' food, family values, cultural celebrations, and festivals as significant components of who they are.

Nonetheless, participants shared how challenging it was to find a balance between their sense of belonging to 'their country' and ethnic culture and to Australia. The process of integration to the new society's culture and emotional ties to the culture of origin can create identity distress or an identity crisis among young people (Guler & Berman, 2019) as refugees struggle to integrate the various cultural and social expectations and their lived experiences into a coherent sense of self (Weems et al., 2016). Participants found their identity positioning and moving between their Hazara/Afghan identity and Australian identity difficult, and attempts to adjust to one, could result in rejection by the other. They strove to find a middle ground that merged both cultures or to become the 'third culture kid' (Kwon, 2019). Kwon (2019) explains that third culture kid (TCK) is a term used to describe individuals who have spent a significant part of their developmental years living in a culture or country different from that of their parent's home culture. The 'third culture' refers to the unique cultural space that TCKs often occupy, which is neither the culture of their parents nor the culture of the country where they currently reside. To understand this complexity, we must avoid reducing participants' identities to the purely national or ethnic signifiers of 'Afghan/Hazara-Australian' (Mijic, 2022). Recognizing the hybridity of identity (Bhabha, 1994; Smith & Leavy, 2008), there are multiple cultural, historical, religious and contextual factors contributing to how a person might develop their identity throughout the experience of [forced] migration (Chao, 2019; Radford & Hetz, 2021). Some of these factors may look 'conflicted' when the experiences of people are simplified. For example, the experience of trauma-induced migration from Afghanistan while simultaneously having a sense of pride in the homeland and Hazara identity may look incompatible at first. However, for participants of our study, it was reasonable that forced migration from Afghanistan and having a sense of pride in the homeland co-existed.

Nevertheless, identity crises or conflicts began for participants with socio-political pressures to preference particular identity aspects over others. For example, they needed to focus on negative aspects of their experiences in Afghanistan, proving they would be in danger there, to be accepted as a 'genuine' refugee (Kenny, 2017). As a result, narratives which participants—particularly those who arrived as unaccompanied minors—had to tell for their refugee claims were solely focused on negative experiences from the country of origin and were unable to fully portray how they felt about their origin country and culture.

Secondly, participants experienced pressure to be 'successfully' integrated into Australian society, potentially entailing implicit or explicit criticism of Hazara culture through adoption of 'Australian

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Secondly, participants experienced pressure to be 'successfully' integrated into Australian society, potentially entailing implicit or explicit criticism of Hazara culture through adoption of 'Australian

social values'. Moreover, our results demonstrated how the expectation of 'successful integration' was undermined by multiple factors including language barriers and racist stereotyping. Consistent with previous research, lack of accommodation toward those not fluent in host-country languages created barriers to a sense of belonging (Aniko & Terry, 2009; Evans, 2020; Karam et al., 2020; Kennedy et al., 2019). This was compounded by the negative impact of media and political discourses creating stereotypes about people from refugee background. After 9/11, negative attitudes toward Muslims increased sharply. Refugees—particularly those from Afghanistan—were characterized by media images and political discourses as potential threats and terrorists (Mir & Sarroub, 2019). Among our participants, the experience of highly gendered racist stereotyping was significant and consistent with existing research on systemic racism and exclusionary discourses in mainstream media and policies which prevent young people from refugee backgrounds developing a positive sense of belonging to the host culture (S. Chen & Schweitzer, 2019; Miled, 2020; Oppedal et al., 2017).

Responding to pressure to be successfully integrated and resisting these negative stereotypes, created the urge felt by some participants to be 'as good as Australians' and to be highly competent. This conformed with what Hetz (2021) describes as pressure to be a 'good refugee'. The 'good refugee' was described as a 'worthy' or 'deserving' refugee who can demonstrate eligibility for refugee protection; a willingness to integrate and contribute; gratitude and docility; political moderation; and passivity, with limited demands for agency and a political voice. Hetz concludes that the idea of being a good refugee contributes to ambitiousness and achievement. However, our findings also showed that if a person is struggling to overcome displacement, racism and post-migration challenges, achieving the attributes of the 'good refugee' may be impossible, ultimately impacting their sense of belonging and resilience.

Conclusion

Our study provides new insights into how young Hazaras gave meanings to adverse experiences during forced migration, and how multiple cultural and contextual factors influenced their perception of resilience and sense of identity after settlement in Australia. Identity, resilience and sense of belonging among participants were not only acquired through social interaction with significant others during primary socialization but were also obtained through agency and participation opportunities provided within society. Our study demonstrated how social exclusion which occurred for Hazara participants in Afghanistan (being Hazara and Shia) and in Australia (being Muslim, from Afghanistan with language barriers) undermined efforts to find a sense of belonging to both Afghanistan and Australia. It is vital to consider structural, historical, and contextual factors in understanding development of identity and resilience, as well as the role of agency, that is, the way individuals creatively respond to their circumstances and environment.

We have also demonstrated how social policies may be informed by narratives that pathologize people from refugee backgrounds. According to a Western mental health lens, 'traumatization' is linked to 'psycho-social challenges' and renders people from refugee backgrounds as a 'vulnerable' (Lawrence et al., 2019). However, without ignoring the negative impacts of traumatic events, culturally informed meaning-making and a sense of pride in enduring trauma among Hazaras in this study meant 'resilience and hope' and 'vulnerability and trauma' co-existed and shaped a cohesive sense of identity for participants. Hazara history and intergenerational experiences of trauma, combined with personal experiences of forced migration and settlement, informs how participants have merged these seemingly contradictory concepts and values and created a hybrid, multifaceted identity which is culturally and contextually coherent.

Limitations, strengths and further directions

This article draws on interviews with a relatively small group of Hazara youth living in Melbourne, Australia. Due to the impact of COVID and access barriers to the community, recruitment and

data collection were conducted online and through personal networks. This limited opportunities to access a wider range of participants with varied socioeconomic positions. Most participants were studying at a university or had graduated, were employed in stable jobs, had family and social supports, were permanent residents or citizens of Australia, with access to governmental supports. These represent significant distinctions from the experiences of those seeking asylum in Australia and on temporary protection visas. Therefore, the participants' views naturally do not represent the experiences of all Hazaras, other ethnicities from Afghanistan and other people from refugee backgrounds in general.

On the other hand, one could also argue that there was still substantial heterogeneity within our group of participants, which has likely influenced our findings. Although participants had a similar socioeconomic status at the time of the study, there was still variation within their experience of forced migration (e.g. in the way they migrated, the number of years spent in varying asylum countries). A more homogenous group might have led to more specific recommendations.

Nonetheless, the findings of this study are important due to the significant increase in settlement of Afghans and Hazaras in Australia after August 2021 and can inform future research on identity development in the context of forced migration. These findings also highlight the need for more holistic, contextual and culturally informed longitudinal studies on factors influencing identity construction among children and adolescents from refugee background. Despite the impacts of trauma and settlement challenges, none of the participants in this study accessed formal mental health support during the first few years. This needs further exploration and active involvement in the community to understand the low rates of engagement with mental health supports and to inform culturally appropriate mental and social support for newly arrived children and adolescents from Afghanistan. Additionally, while experience of exclusion and racism might no longer be a novel outcome of research with migrant and refugee population, results of this research provide more evidence that enhanced social policies are needed, particularly across the education system to eliminate experiences of racism and exclusion and promote a sense of belonging for young people from refugee backgrounds.

Notes

1. Although it has received a lot of attention recently, the Hazara genocide is not yet recognized nationally in Afghanistan or by international organizations such as the UN. Therefore, Hazara academics cautiously suggest stating that historical persecution of Hazaras has genocidal elements instead of Hazara genocide (Hakimi, 2022).
2. "Afghanistan" is a Farsi word that means the Afghan state. It is adopted from the name "Afghan," which is used for the Pashtun ethnic group in Afghanistan. Afghanistan was chosen as the country's name during political unrest with Russia in the late 19th century. Since then, ethnic minorities, including The Hazaras, have been subjected to discrimination and repeated persecution. It has been asserted that "Afghan" is not an inclusive national identity as it only represents one ethnicity. It is considered particularly problematic when there is discrimination, persecution and inter-ethnic hatred directed against other ethnicities in Afghanistan, including Hazaras (Ibrahimi, 2017). *The Hazaras and the Afghan state: Rebellion, exclusion and the struggle for recognition*. Oxford University Press.
3. Omar Khayyam (8 May 1048–4 December 1131) was a polymath, known for his contributions to mathematics, astronomy, philosophy, and Persian poetry.
4. As of the article's publication, we were unable to obtain permission from the photographer to use the participant-provided photo due to copyright restrictions. The photo can be accessed using the address: <https://www.muzafar.net/index/G0000CqB3QM5udew/I0000J8SBJ0uU9B8>. The Buddhas of Bamiyan (or Bamyān) were two enormous statues carved into the side of a cliff in the Bamiyan valley of central Afghanistan. The Buddhas were destroyed by Taliban tanks in 2000.
5. Most participants came here on permanent protection visa directly from Pakistan or Iran (resettled through UNHCR) and spent the processing time in those countries. Those who arrived seeking asylum as an unaccompanied minor, spent approximately a year in detention centres before receiving a permanent protection visa. However, none of the participants arrived after 2012, when policies were changed whereby no permanent protection visas have been granted to asylum seekers arriving by boat after that time.

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Appendix H: (Re)construction of identity and resilience among Afghan and Hazara adolescents following forced migration (submission confirmation)

Monday, January 22, 2024 at 20:19:33 Australian Eastern Daylight Time

Subject: Submission received for Social Identities (Submission ID: 248069020)
Date: Monday, 22 January 2024 at 8:17:49 pm Australian Eastern Daylight Time
From: CSID-peerreview@journals.tandf.co.uk
To: fshahimi@student.unimelb.edu.au



Dear Farnaz Shahimi,

Thank you for your submission.

Submission ID	248069020
Manuscript Title	(Re)construction of Identity and Resilience among Afghan and Hazara Adolescents Following Forced Migration
Journal	Social Identities

If you made the submission, you can check its progress and make any requested revisions on the [Author Portal](#)

Thank you for submitting your work to our journal.
If you have any queries, please get in touch with CSID-peerreview@journals.tandf.co.uk.

Kind Regards,
Social Identities Editorial OZice

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