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# From Trauma to Resilience- Understanding the Migration and Integrations Experiences of Yazidi Youth

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## Abstract

Yazidis are an ethno-religious minority group who have experienced severe and prolonged exposure to extreme violence for centuries. In 2014, the Yazidi population was the target of the 74<sup>th</sup> recorded genocide against their population. The complex and intergenerational trauma that Yazidis have endured impacts their well-being and contributes to resettlement challenges. While their adjustment experiences have been explored within the literature, there is a need for research that is Canadian based, focuses on the perspectives of youth, and explores their resettlement experiences in the years following relocation, as well as research that prioritizes creating action and change to address their needs. This integrated article dissertation employed a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach to explore the migration and integration experiences of Yazidi youth refugees.

The first two papers (chapters two and three) used group concept mapping to explore the perspective of 12 Yazidi youth regarding their migration and integration challenges and successes. Results from chapter two (challenges) yielded seven concepts: 1) family stress and adjustment, 2) the experience of instability and fear, 3) navigating the differences between countries, 4) starting over, 5) getting used to school, 6) impact of war, and 7) my own discomfort. Results from chapter three (successes) also produced seven unique concepts: 1) experiences at school, 2) connection with family and friends, 3) accepting it takes time, 4) sense of security, 5) community agency support, 6) feeling liberated, and 7) feeling like I belong. The third and last paper (chapter 4) utilized Photovoice, an arts-based research design, to explore the perspective of 11 youth. Five themes emerged through collaborative discussion: 1) educating others on Yazidis and our experiences, 2) bullying and racism, 3) help families in Iraq, 4) rise against the oppressive government, and 5) desire to be there to help. These findings highlight the existence and potential for posttraumatic growth. Together, the results from these studies underscore the unique migration experiences of Yazidi youth refugees, highlighting the co-existence of trauma and resilience. Key considerations for ongoing support, including community based care and policy revisions, have been made that align with the youths' self-expressed needs.

## Keywords

Refugee youth; Yazidi refugees; Concept mapping; Photovoice; Participatory action research; Migration

## Summary for Lay Audience

Refugees are people who have been forced to leave their home countries because staying would put their safety or lives at risk. This sets them apart from immigrants, who relocate in search of a better life. The Yazidis are one such community, and they have been the target of severe violence for generations. In 2014, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) attacked the Yazidi population, with the goal of extinction. This was the 74<sup>th</sup> recorded attempt to eliminate the Yazidi people. This long and intense history of trauma has affected nearly every part of their resettlement in new countries. This research focused on exploring the experiences of Yazidi youth as they build new lives in Canada, working with them collaboratively to understand their needs and support meaningful change. This was explored in a series of 3 research papers.

The first two papers used individual interviews with 12 youth to explore their perspectives on their migration and integration. Paper 1 (chapter 2) focused on the challenges they faced, while paper 2 (chapter 3) focused on highlighting their successes. To analyze the interviews, the youth first grouped statements they felt belonged together in a sorting activity. The research team then reviewed a computer-based analysis of their sorting data, which identified seven main challenges: 1) family stress and adjustment, 2) the experience of instability and fear, 3) navigating the differences between countries, 4) starting over, 5) getting used to school, 6) impact of war, and 7) my own discomfort. Seven concepts were also used to capture their successes: 1) experiences at school, 2) connection with family and friends, 3) accepting it takes time, 4) sense of security, 5) community agency support, 6) feeling liberated, and 7) feeling like I belong.

The final paper used an arts-based design. Here, 11 participants took photos to represent their migration and integration experiences. After individually sharing their photos, they worked together to create a group story. From this process, five themes emerged that reflected elements of trauma and growth: 1) educating others on Yazidis and our experiences, 2) bullying and racism, 3) help families in Iraq, 4) rise against the oppressive government, and 5) desire to be there to help. Taken all together, the findings from all three papers highlighted the unique migration journeys and experiences of Yazidi youth. The

results suggested that trauma and resilience can coexist. These findings were used to suggest ways to support Yazidi's ongoing resettlement, including programs and advocating for policy change, that directly reflected the needs the youth identified themselves.

## Co-Authorship Statement

The following integrated-article dissertation was completed with coauthors. Charlotte Finnigan served as the primary investigator and author. As such, they conducted the literature reviews, recruited participants, collected data, led the analysis of the data, and produced the manuscripts. Dr. Jason Brown provided research supervision, contributed to the study designs, data analysis, and the preparation of the manuscripts (Chapters 2 – 4) and final dissertation (Chapters 1 & 5). Dr. Mohamed Al-Adeimi consulted on the study design and facilitated the connection to the Agency through which participants were recruited. All three authors have collaborated to present the findings of the research at the Pathways to Prosperity 2022 & 2023 National Conference.

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# Table of Contents

Abstract.....	II
Summary for Lay Audience.....	IV
Co-Authorship Statement (where applicable).....	VI
Acknowledgments (if any).....	VII
Table of Contents.....	IX
List of Tables.....	XIV
List of Figures.....	XV
List of Appendices.....	XVI
Chapter 1.....	1
1 Introduction.....	1
1.1 Research Positionality.....	3
1.2 Migration.....	4
1.2.1 Categories of migration.....	5
1.2.2 Experiences of Youth Refugees.....	6
1.3 Yazidis.....	8
1.4 Theory.....	9
1.4.1 Minority Stress Theory.....	10
1.5 Summary.....	12
1.6 References.....	13
Chapter 2.....	22
2 Adjustment challenges faced by Yazidi youth refugees in Canada.....	22
2.1 Abstract.....	22
2.2 Introduction.....	22
2.2.1 Minority Stress Theory.....	24

2.2.2	Historical Context of Yazidis' Experiences.....	24
2.3	Methods.....	27
2.3.1	Study Design.....	27
2.3.2	Procedure .....	28
2.4	Results.....	33
2.4.1	Family Stress and Adjustment .....	42
2.4.2	The Experience of Instability and Fear.....	44
2.4.3	Navigating the Differences Between Countries.....	45
2.4.4	Starting Over.....	46
2.4.5	Getting Used to School.....	47
2.4.6	Impact of War .....	47
2.4.7	My Own Discomfort.....	48
2.5	Discussion.....	49
2.5.1	Language and Cultural Differences .....	50
2.5.2	Triggering of Traumatic Memories .....	50
2.5.3	The Burden of Major Losses.....	51
2.5.4	Feeling Othered and Excluded.....	52
2.5.5	Minority Stress Theory .....	53
2.5.6	Implications.....	54
2.6	References.....	55
Chapter 3	.....	62
3	Facilitators of adjustment experienced by Yazidi youth refugees in Canada .....	62
3.1	Abstract.....	62
3.2	Introduction.....	63
3.2.1	The Experience of Yazidis.....	64

3.2.2	Yazidis Compared to Other Similar Groups of Refugees.....	64
3.2.3	Barriers and Enablers to Resettlement.....	65
3.2.4	Support Recommendations for Yazidi Refugees.....	69
3.2.5	Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs.....	70
3.3	Methods.....	71
3.3.1	Study Design.....	72
3.3.2	Procedure.....	72
3.4	Results.....	75
3.4.1	Sense of Security.....	82
3.4.2	Feeling Liberated.....	82
3.4.3	Accepting it Takes Time.....	83
3.4.4	Connection with Family and Friends.....	83
3.4.5	Experiences at School.....	83
3.4.6	Community Agency Support.....	84
3.4.7	Feeling Like I Belong.....	85
3.5	Discussion.....	86
3.5.1	Safety.....	86
3.5.2	Connection.....	87
3.5.3	Opportunities.....	88
3.5.4	Support.....	89
3.5.5	Implications.....	90
3.5.6	Limitations.....	91
3.5.7	Conclusion.....	92
3.6	References.....	93
	Chapter 4.....	104

4	A call to action: The use of Photovoice to increase awareness of the migration and integration needs of Yazidi youth refugees in Canada.....	104
4.1	Abstract.....	104
4.2	Introduction.....	105
4.2.1	Interplay of Trauma, Age, and Refugee Status.....	106
4.2.2	Posttraumatic Growth.....	107
4.2.3	Art, Research, and Posttraumatic Growth.....	108
4.3	Methods.....	109
4.3.1	Study Design.....	109
4.3.2	Curation of the Research Study.....	110
4.3.3	Procedure.....	111
4.4	Results.....	114
4.4.1	Photo Theme 1: Educating Others on Yazidis and Our Experiences.....	114
4.4.2	Photo Theme 2: Bullying and Racism.....	116
4.4.3	Photo Theme 3: Help Families in Iraq.....	118
4.4.4	Photo Theme 4: Rise Against the Oppressive Government.....	119
4.4.5	Photo Theme 5: Desire to be There to Help.....	120
4.5	Discussion.....	122
4.5.1	Intra- and Interpersonal Experiences.....	123
4.5.2	Structural and Systemic Experiences.....	123
4.5.3	Growth.....	124
4.5.4	Implications.....	125
4.6	References.....	126
	Chapter 5.....	135
5	Conclusion.....	135
5.1	Summary of Research Findings and Contributions.....	135

5.2 Overall Findings and Implications of the Research .....	137
5.2.1 What Youth Have to Offer.....	138
5.3 Implications for Policy, Practice, and Future Research .....	139
5.3.1 Amplifying the Voices of Youth.....	139
5.3.2 Active Engagement of Youth.....	139
5.3.3 Curating Services .....	140
5.3.4 Long-term Financial Support.....	141
5.3.5 Addressing Missing Services .....	142
5.4 Limitations .....	142
5.5 Personal Reflections and Final Thoughts .....	144
5.6 References.....	145
Appendices.....	147
Curriculum Vitae .....	167

## List of Tables

Table 1: Statements and Concepts for: "What factors have hindered your adjustment to life in Canada?"

Table 2: Statement and Concepts for: "What factors have promoted your adjustment to life in Canada?"

## List of Figures

Figure 1: Concept Map of Statements for: “What factors have hindered your adjustment to life in Canada?” .....	33
Figure 2: Concept Map of Statements for the 54 unique statements provided for the question “What factors have promoted your adjustment to life in Canada?” .....	76
Figure 3: Computer .....	116
Figure 4: People .....	117
Figure 5: The Centre .....	118
Figure 6: Citizenship.....	121

## List of Appendices

Appendix A: Western University Ethics Approval .....	147
Appendix B: Recruitment Letter.....	148
Appendix C: Confidentiality Agreement .....	149
Appendix D: Study Letter of Information/Consent .....	150
Appendix E: Individual Interview .....	159
Appendix F: Script for Sorting Task.....	160
Appendix G: Script for Art Creation Activity .....	161
Appendix H: Group Interview - Art.....	163
Appendix I: Counselling & Support Services.....	165
Appendix J: End of Study Template .....	166

## Chapter 1

### 1 Introduction

Canada is a highly diverse region. In 2021, almost 1 in 4 Canadians arrived through the immigration process, accounting for approximately 23% of the population (Statistics Canada, 2024). For that reason, Canada is home to an immigrant population which has more than 250 ethnic origins and lends to approximately 20% of the population having a first language other than English (Bartram & Chodos, 2013; Statistics Canada, 2017). Approximately 16% of those migrating to Canada are refugees (Statistics Canada, 2022).

Canada is considered a “safe haven” for refugees (Chan et al., 2016), and the government continues to take action relocating groups of refugees (Minhas et al., 2017). Although there may be significant relief associated with arriving in the host country, refugees continue to be impacted by their past experiences and face additional difficulties upon their arrival (The National Child Traumatic Stress Network [NCTSN], n.d.). This includes experiencing high rates of mental health problems (Reavell & Fazil, 2017). In Canada specifically, refugee youth have been found to present with high levels of distress, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Chan et al., 2016; Kartal et al., 2018; Kirmayer et al., 2011). Although deeply impacted by their migration journey, mental health services are highly under-utilized by refugee children and youth (Lee & Matejkowski, 2012; Thomson et al., 2015), even those who are highly traumatized (Ceri et al., 2016).

The Yazidi are a population of highly traumatized refugees (Ibrahim et al., 2018). They are among the most marginalized and tormented ethnic minorities (Bhattacharyya et al., 2020a), who have been oppressed and persecuted for centuries, repeatedly given the ultimatum to convert their religion or face execution (Asher-Schapiro, 2014). In the last 800 years, they have faced an estimated 74 attempted genocides (Kizilhan & Noll-Hussong, 2017). The longevity and severity of the trauma they have experienced has created complex mental health concerns (Hoffman, 2018; Ibrahim et al., 2018) and posed significant challenges involving all facets of their resettlement journey (Wilkinson et al., 2019), leading to Yazidi women having been characterized as “the most traumatized group yet to be admitted to Canada” (Uechi, 2018, para. 5). For Yazidi youth, these experiences

have shown to greatly impact their quality of life after resettlement (Ceri et al., 2016; Ibrahim et al., 2018).

In 2017, the Government of Canada pledged to support Yazidi refugees, taking action to resettle more than 1,000 Yazidis to Canada (Canada, Parliament, House of Commons, Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration [Government of Canada], 2018). When providing asylum, the government made a commitment to supporting Yazidi refugees, including a commitment to tailor groups and programs to their unique needs. While some initial funding was provided through Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), they continue to face ongoing resettlement challenges. For instance, the funding provided does not provide access to appropriate and affordable housing (Bhattacharyya et al., 2020a), their mental health needs are ongoing, and mainstream services are often inaccessible due to language and cultural barriers (Government of Canada, 2018). Yazidi youth have complex experiences that have deeply impacted their mental health and well-being. Their support needs have not been adequately met.

Using a three-article format, this dissertation explores the migration and integration experiences of Yazidi youth refugees in Canada. It focuses on highlighting the voices of the youth while exploring the factors that have hindered and promoted resettlement success, as well as understanding the supports still required, through engagement in participatory action research. The first two research papers (chapter two and three) utilized a group concept mapping methodology, drawing on the perspective of 12 youth. Paper one (chapter 2) explored factors that hindered adjustment to life in Canada, while paper two (chapter 3) explored factors that prompted adjustment to life in Canada. Lastly, paper three (chapter 4) utilized Photovoice, an arts-based research design, and participatory analysis with 11 youth to explore and create a visual representation of the migration experiences of Yazidi youth, further highlighting the support they still require. All three papers drew from the same sample of youth, with the addition of a new participant in the third paper. Taken together, these results illuminate the migration experiences of Yazidi youth refugees, underscoring their ongoing needs and challenges. From this, recommendations for research, practice, and policy are made that align with the self-identified needs of Yazidi youth.

## 1.1 Research Positionality

Positionality refers to our understanding of ourselves and answers the question “where are we coming from” in relation to our research (Holmes, 2020). Although often presented as unbiased, factual evidence, research, no matter the type, contains biases from hypothesis to reporting (Ashcroft, 2017). Positionality and reflexivity are crucial components of research, particularly in the social sciences (Gurr et al., 2024), that allow researchers to locate themselves and consider the ways in which who they are has impacted the research process from conception to the dissemination of findings (Holmes, 2020).

I am a white, cisgender, heterosexual female. I am a third generation immigrant to Canada, of European and Scottish descent. I, and my family, are all Canadian citizens. English is my first and only fluent language. I hold a Master degree in Counselling Psychology, and am a Ph.D. Candidate in School and Applied Child Psychology. I was born and raised in a middle to upper-middle class family, in a small, predominantly white, Eurocentric community, where Western values and worldviews were largely normalized and unchallenged.

As such, I did not begin to critically consider my positionality until later in life. That realization brought significant discomfort – discomfort that stemmed from a growing awareness of the unearned privilege associated with many aspects of my identity. I now recognize that this privilege has shaped not only how I experience the world but also how I move through academic and professional spaces. While my experience as a woman – and particularly as a mother – in academia, the structures of which are not designed to support the balance between career aspirations and the demands of motherhood, I acknowledge that my broader social privilege has allowed me to navigate many of these challenges with relative ease compared to others.

Given how I outwardly, and inwardly, identify and present, and that my research centers on supporting a marginalized group of individuals, understanding my positionality and being reflexive of how this influenced, shaped, and contributed to the research process is essential.

Within my research with Yazidi refugees, I am outsider. I am not Yazidi, nor a refugee. I have not experienced significant intergenerational trauma and have never feared extermination of myself, my family, and my heritage. As such, I am cautious not to present myself as an expert on the experiences of Yazidis. Rather, I am someone committed to using my privilege and position of power to amplify their stories and to bring attention and awareness to their experiences and needs. Given my role and position, I cannot remove my bias from this research. Instead, I have taken steps to ensure that my representation of their stories aligns with their perspective, views, and needs; this has been accomplished through active collaboration throughout every step of the research process.

Before beginning this research process, I was already connected and engaged with the South London Neighbourhood Research Centre – the local community center that was partnered with for this research. Following the identification of a need for research with Yazidi youth refugees, I embedded myself within the population, attending community events, volunteering with programming, and getting to know the youth, their families, and the service providers. I partnered with the agency and the youth to determine the focal questions of the research. I followed the lead of the youth regarding the methodology, output, and display for paper three. Lastly, I reviewed all findings with the youth before publishing.

## 1.2 Migration

There has been an influx in international migration over the last three decades. In 2020, there were approximately 282 million international migrants globally (International Organization for Migration [IOM], 2024). From 2015 to 2019, migration rates in North America increased by three million, doubling the number of migrants living in Canada (IOM, 2019). This influx of migrants to North America has been driven by a combination of increased economic growth and stability that has been experienced over the last 30 years, as well as record-high numbers of displacement factors, including conflict and violence, leading to a surge of refugees (Henkelmann et al., 2020; IOM, 2019). This number has continued to rise. In 2022, there was an estimated 35.2 million refugees globally (IOM, 2024), while an estimated 123.2 million people forcibly displaced in 2024 (United Nations

High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2025). This accounts for 1 in 67 individuals on Earth being forcibly displaced, a number that has nearly doubled in the last decade. In 2022, approximately 41% of refugees were those under the age of 18 (IOM, 2024).

### 1.2.1 Categories of migration

Migrants is a term used to describe individuals who have moved from their typical place of residence, capturing both immigrants and refugees (IOM, 2019). While similarities are present between these two categories of migrants – for example, they both may experience discrimination upon arriving in a new country (Kirmayer et al., 2010) and are both at an increased risk of mental health-related challenges if migrating from war-torn areas (Statistics Canada, 2020) – their overall experiences are vastly different. In terms of motivation to relocate, immigrants usually make an advance decision to relocate and have time to prepare for life in their new country (Reavell & Fazil, 2017). Their decision to relocate is often driven by factors pertaining to improving their future through access to education or reuniting with family and friends (Centre for Addiction and Mental Health [CAMH], 2012). Upon arriving to Canada, immigrants tend to have better overall health than their Canadian born counterparts (CAMH, 2012).

In contrast, refugees are forced to flee their countries due to war, violence, and fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, social group membership, political group membership, or their opinions (Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada [IRCC], 2019; NCTSN, n.d.). Given their forced reasons for leaving, they often leave in expedited manners and are required to leave behind their homes, possessions, and livelihoods (Henkelmann et al., 2020; Reavell & Fazil, 2017). Exposure to multiple harmful and traumatic circumstances during migration, displacement, and resettlement is common for many and creates a complex set of factors that impact their well-being, recovery, and mental health (Ahmad et al., 2020; IOM, 2019; Kronick, 2018). Mental health problems among refugees can often be traced back to traumatic experiences in their country of origin (Beiser & Hou, 2016; IOM, 2019). These experiences are intensified as they continue to accumulate due to new trauma experiences through migration and resettlement (Beiser & Hou, 2016). This includes separation from loved ones (Kirmayer et al., 2010), limited

access to basic necessities such as food and medical care (Henkelmann et al., 2020), as well as acculturation stress (Kirmayer et al., 2010), uncertain living conditions (Ahmad et al., 2020), and notable economic difficulties in their initial resettlement period in comparison to immigrants (Kaida et al., 2020).

### 1.2.2 Experiences of Youth Refugees

It is important to consider how age, refugee status, and experiences are interconnected. Youth, for purposes of this study, are in the developmental period spanning approximately 14 to 24 years of age (Sawyer et al., 2018). It is a period characterized by the development of a sense of self (Shahimi et al., 2024). When exposure to chronic and cumulative stressful events occurs during developmental periods it is called developmental trauma (Sar, 2011; Van; van der Kolk, 2015). Repeated exposure to such events is common among refugee youth (Ahmad et al., 2020). When trauma occurs during childhood or adolescence, its impact is deep and long-lasting because these are important self-formative years. (Copping, 2018). Chronic trauma during this time interferes with neurobiological development (van der Kolk, 2005). When children and youth are exposed to neglect, chaos, or terrorizing environments, they are placed at an increased risk for developing problems with functioning, and their brains can become primed to live in a constant state of fear (Perry & Hambrick, 2008). This trauma exposure is associated with an overstimulation of primitive, lower brain responses (e.g., survival responses such as the stress responses), which inhibits the ability of their upper brain mechanisms (e.g., language and abstract thinking) (Kraybill, 2018; Perry & Hambrick, 2008).

Family is an important protective factor for mitigating the experiences of developmental trauma, which is particularly true for refugee children and youth exposed to armed conflict (Khan et al., 2019). However, when parents themselves experience psychopathology or are inhibited in the quality and capacity of their parenting, they are unable to provide this protection. Thus, chronically traumatized children tend to suffer from distinct alterations in states of consciousness, flashbacks, nightmares, school problems, difficulties in attention regulation, disorientation in time and space, and sensorimotor developmental disorders (van der Kolk, 2005), particularly in the absence of family as a protective factor.

For refugee youth who are simultaneously navigating developmental changes in their bodies and minds, the perceptions of others are particularly powerful contributors to their settlement experiences. Youth may be met with a negative perception by the citizens of their host country (Ceri et al., 2016). This perception is typically based on an “us and them” discourse in which being a refugee is associated with fears around national security, uncleanliness, exploitation, and erosion of scarce resources (Beiser & Hou, 2016; Rousseau, 2018). The conflation of the label “refugee” with these stigmatized thoughts and beliefs creates a sense of social hostility that is directed towards refugees because of their “otherness” (Beiser & Hou, 2016; Rousseau, 2018). Such perceptions not only impact refugees interpersonally, but also in terms of policies and access to resources (Rousseau, 2018).

Although Canada accepts families who are survivors of persecution and supports their migration journey, the needs of youth are often neglected once they obtain residence (Beiser & Hou, 2016). The impact of exposure to multiple traumatic experiences, forced migration, and discrimination in their new country can have a deep impact on refugee youth. These factors impact their well-being and contribute to poor health and adjustment difficulties. The impact can also be expressed in emotional and behavioural challenges (Woodgate & Busolo, 2018). Youth with trauma experiences, such as those experienced by refugees, may display difficulties in peer relationships as well as low self-esteem and dissatisfaction with life (Ceri et al., 2016). In Canada, young refugees exhibit high levels of distress (Kirmayer et al., 2011), and there is a high rate of mental health problems among refugee youth. Rates suggest that 20-50% of youth who resettle in high-income countries will experience significant mental health problems (Beiser & Hou, 2016; Reavell & Fazil, 2017). Despite the high needs, refugees are less likely to access mental health services (Ceri et al., 2016) and they experience significant barriers to accessing these services, such as unfamiliarity with the mental health care system and financial difficulty (Bartram & Chodos, 2013; Lee & Matejkowski, 2012; Thomson et al., 2015).

### 1.3 Yazidis

Yazidis are an ethnic and religious minority group (Government of Canada, 2018), who are primarily situated in the Sinjar region of Northern Iraq (Ali, 2020). Here, approximately 400,000 Yazidis reside (Ali, 2020), while there is an estimated 800,000 Yazidis globally (Hassan et al., 2023). Yazidism is their religion, considered to be among the oldest religions in the world (Kizilhan & Noll-Hussong, 2017). There are many distinguishing features of Yazidism. It is a closed religion (Ceri et al., 2016; Hanish, 2009). Children are baptized at birth, and they do not accept religious conversion. They live according to a caste system, where no sexual contact or marriage is allowed outside of caste (Ceri et al., 2016; Kizilhan & Noll-Hussong, 2017). Failure to abide by these regulations can lead to being ostracized from the community. They are a monotheistic religion, believing in Malak-Tawus, also known as the Peacock Angel (Ahmed & Heun, 2023). In other religions, including Muslim and Christian, this figure is synonymous with the Devil (Mir-Hosseini, 1996). This association with being “devil worshipers” has been used as justification for the horrific atrocities inflicted on Yazidis by neighbouring Muslims (Asher-Schapiro, 2014; Mir-Hosseini, 1996).

In August of 2014, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), also known as Daesh, attacked the Yazidi population residing in the Sinjar region (Government of Canada, 2018), with a goal of eradicating the Yazidi population (Ibrahim et al., 2018). This attack has since been classified as the 74<sup>th</sup> recorded genocide against the Yazidi population (Kizilhan & Noll-Hussong, 2017). Nearly 5,500 Yazidis, predominantly men and elderly women, were murdered, and 7,000 women and children were captured by ISIS (Hassan et al., 2023; Sayki, 2024). The women and girls who were captured experienced sexual slavery, rape, and torture (Government of Canada, 2018; Ibrahim et al., 2018). Eight-year-old girls were raped with the goal of impregnation (Wilkinson et al., 2019), leading to many reported suicides due to the dishonor of engaging in sexual activity outside of the caste. Boys between the ages of eight and 14 were incorporated into Daesh fighting groups and forced to be child soldiers (Government of Canada, 2018; Ibrahim et al., 2018; Wilkinson et al., 2019). This attack also left an additional 200,000 Yazidis displaced throughout Iraq and neighbouring countries, such as Syria and Turkey (Government of Canada, 2018).

Yazidis are a distinctive group of refugees. Although many refugees experience trauma, the intensity and intergenerational nature of their trauma experiences are distinctive. Almost all Yazidis have witnessed or experienced vast amounts of violence (Bhattacharyya et al., 2020a), leading to the word “Ferman” – representing destruction and holocaust – being passed through generations to capture the terror attacks that they have endured for a millennium (Ceri et al., 2016). Upon relocation, the majority of those resettled were women and children due to the nature of the genocide, with 70% of Yazidi refugees in Canada being under the age of 30 (Bhattacharyya et al., 2020a; Wilkinson et al., 2019). In contrast, typically, there is a broadly gender-balanced resettlement pattern in Canada (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada [IRCC], 2024). Furthermore, Yazidi refugees are more likely to have no formal education. More than 50% of Yazidis arriving in Canada have no formal education (Bhattacharyya et al., 2020b). This is further complicated by many Yazidis being functionally illiterate, as their language, Kurmanji, is not officially recognized, leading to no formal education being offered (Akin, 2011; Bhattacharyya et al., 2020a; Wilkinson et al., 2019). This poses complications for many domains of resettlement, including language acquisition (Bhattacharyya et al., 2020b). The intensity and frequency of exposure to trauma and adversity have led to complex health and mental health challenges for Yazidi refugees (Hassan et al., 2023; Ibrahim et al., 2018). Those internally displaced experience excessively high rates of PTSD (Goessmann et al., 2020), up to 90% (Ibrahim et al., 2018). Children and youth experience a high prevalence of PTSD, depression, nocturnal enuresis, and anxiety (Nasiroğlu & Ceri, 2016). Those displaced in Canada experience abdominal and pelvic pain, iron deficiency, anemia, PTSD, nutritional diseases, mental and behavioural disorders, infectious and parasitic diseases (Hassan et al., 2023).

## 1.4 Theory

This research was idiographic in nature, meaning that it focused on understanding the unique experiences of the individuals involved in the research process (Ponterotto, 2005). It was guided by both constructivist and critical theory perspectives. Constructivism takes the stance that there can be multiple, equally valid, realities (Heppner et al., 2016). From this perspective, reality is unique to the individual experiencing it, shaped by a person’s

lived experiences and perceptions. Meaning is uncovered through reflective dialogue between researchers and participants, with a goal of co-constructing data that authentically represents the participants' lived experiences. Similarly, critical theory also emphasizes the central relationship between the researchers and the participants, but also takes into consideration the influence of broader social structures and historical contexts on an individual's reality (Heppner et al., 2016). From a critical theory perspective, research is not only descriptive but also seeks transformation and empowerment, prompted through dialogue and participation in the research process. Applied to this research study, these perspectives guided an effort to understand the unique realities of the individual participants and their broader community (constructivism), while also centering a commitment to empowerment and promoting social change (critical).

In qualitative and mixed methods research, the goal is to provide deep insight into what phenomena mean to the participants (Patten, 2014), emphasizing understanding over generalizability. In this process, researchers are considered the primary instrument of inquiry (Creswell & Creswell, 2023; Patten, 2014), making reflexivity essential. Reflexivity involves researchers acknowledging how their own experiences, assumptions, and values, influence and shape the research process (Giddings & Grant, 2009). In this dissertation, trustworthiness was guided by following Lincoln and Guba (1985) framework, with an emphasis on establishing credibility. Credibility was centred through building trusting relationships with the Yazidi community through presence, volunteering, and prolonged engagement before, during, and after the formal research process. Additionally, the researchers conducted member checking of the final analyses and interpretations and engaged in ongoing debriefing and consultation with the research team throughout the study.

#### 1.4.1 Minority Stress Theory

This research can be understood by the tenets of Minority Stress Theory (MST), proposed by Meyer (1995; 2003). MST examines the adverse impacts of social conditions created by social systems on minority individuals (Meyer, 2003; Valentín-Cortés et al., 2020). It was developed for use in understanding the experiences of sexual minorities and expanded to include gender minorities. According to MST, minority stress differs from general stress

due to its origins in prejudice and stigma associated with an individual's social or minority position (Frost & Meyer, 2023; Meyer, 2003). The impact of minority stress is intensified due to the ongoing nature of this stress, as it stems from stable social and cultural structures (Meyer, 1995; Meyer, 2003). Therefore, due to their minority status or identity, minority individuals have greater levels of stress that are experienced more frequently (Valentín-Cortés et al., 2020).

Stress within MST is a multilayer construct that occurs on a continuum from distal (objective) to proximal (subjective) events (Holman, 2018; Meyer, 2003; Valentín-Cortés et al., 2020). Distal factors describe real, observable phenomena that do not depend on an individual's perceptions, whereas proximal events originate from socialization and represent an individual's internalized experiences with distal stressors (Frost & Meyer, 2023; Meyer, 2003). This can be applied to the experiences of refugees. Refugees' pre-migration trauma (e.g., experiencing persecution, exposure to violence, and their basic needs not being met), as well as their experiences of separation from loved ones and discrimination during resettlement, are examples of distal events that create sources of stress (Beiser & Hou, 2016; Woodgate & Busolo, 2018). Subsequently, how the individual perceives the distal stressors are proximal factors that can impact adjustment and wellbeing. For example, many refugee youth report feeling like an outsider in social situations due to their newcomer status, and they may attempt to conceal their identity to avoid stigma, discrimination, and rejection (Valentín-Cortés et al., 2020; Woodgate & Busolo, 2018), and may internalize "us and them" discourse due to being labelled a refugee (Rousseau, 2018).

Since its development, MST has been applied beyond the 2SLGBTQ+ populations, including applications to migrants. Valentín-Cortés et al. (2020) applied the Minority Stress Theory to the data from their study that examined stressors and coping strategies utilized by migrants to manage migration-related stress. The results of this study found that stress experienced by migrants is unique, chronic, and embedded in social policies and the social environment. This leads to adverse mental health outcomes, such as heightened anxiety, for migrants. Furthermore, Fox et al. (2020) found that minority stress is a determinant of LGBTQ asylum seekers' mental distress. This distress is influenced by

unique factors relevant to this minority population, such as barriers to social integration and motivation to participate in interventions.

## 1.5 Summary

Refugee youth face challenges in their resettlement to Canada (Woodgate & Busolo, 2018). The complex interplay of trauma with the stigma associated with being a refugee and the lack of services and support provided by the host country creates a complex migration journey that impacts their well-being and adjustment. This is true for the Yazidi refugees. Research has indicated that Yazidis are strongly impacted by present and intergenerational trauma, placing them at a heightened risk for developing mental health challenges (Kartal et al., 2018). Although Canada accepts survivors of persecution, the needs of refugees are often neglected after they are given residence (Beiser & Hou, 2016; Chagnon et al., 2020). Given that the government has a responsibility for settlement support for newcomers, it is vital that research be conducted to understand the needs of Yazidi families and youth (Beiser & Hou, 2016)

Since the 2014 attack, there has been a considerable amount of research conducted on the Yazidi population. Much of this research has been conducted while the Yazidis were internally displaced refugees or in refugee camps. Limited research has been conducted with Yazidi refugees upon their relocation to Canada, but that which has been conducted highlights the extensive trauma and excessive rates of mental health disorders experienced (Hassan et al., 2023; Wilkinson et al., 2019). Much of the research has been conducted from the perspective of Yazidi women, leaving a need for Canadian based research focusing on the perspective of the youth and research that is conducted with youth that engages them as participants and co-researchers. This research engages the youth as co-researchers from conception to dissemination of the findings, with the goal of empowering research participations through co-construction of knowledge (Heppner et al., 2016; Kim, 2019).

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## Chapter 2

### 2 Adjustment challenges faced by Yazidi youth refugees in Canada

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#### 2.1 Abstract

Resettlement to a new country is a period of adjustment for all youth refugees, especially for highly traumatized groups of refugees, such as the Yazidi population. This study explores adjustment challenges faced by Yazidi youth refugees in Canada using group concept mapping. 12 Yazidi youth participated. Seven concepts represent the statements, including family stress and adjustment, the experience of instability and fear, navigating the differences between countries, starting over, getting used to school, the impact of war, and my discomfort. The findings from this study were compared and contrasted with the existing literature.

Keywords: concept map, refugee youth, Yazidi youth, participatory action research, mental health

#### 2.2 Introduction

Refugees are migrants who have been forced to leave their homes due to war, violence, and fear of persecution (Henkelmann et al., 2020; Reavell & Fazil, 2017). For refugee youth, resettlement to a new country is a period of adjustment, when youth may be struggling to manage past traumatic experiences while adjusting once again to cope with a new culture, language, educational system, peer group identification, and social norms (Beiser & Hou, 2016; Minhas et al., 2017; Woodgate & Busolo, 2018). School can be an

area of particular challenge for refugee youth in their new country, as they are impacted by many disruptions in their previous education (Kaida et al., 2020) and their school performance may be impacted by mental health problems associated with being exposed to traumatic experiences (Reavell & Fazil, 2017). Overall, life in these new and permanent surroundings takes a toll on their already taxed internal resources (Ahmad et al., 2020; International Organization for Migration [IOM], 2019; Kartal et al., 2018) and has a significant impact on their well-being and mental health (Kirmayer et al., 2011). Yazidis are a highly traumatized group of refugees, who are a minoritized group even within their home country of Iraq. From communities that have experienced 74 recorded attacks of genocide in the past 800 years (Bhattacharyya et al., 2020b; Ibrahim et al., 2018; Kizilhan & Noll-Hussong, 2017) their resettlement needs are extensive (Wilkinson et al., 2019). For example, there are high frequencies of prior exposure to trauma reported among Yazidi youth during their residence at post-Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) refugee camps (Ceri et al., 2016). However, there is a research gap focusing on the youth's perspective and their identification of their challenges during resettlement.

The present study will explore the experiences of Yazidi youth. In order to understand the youths' experiences, this article will first explore the experiences of Yazidis as whole, by examining the historical context of the Yazidi population and the most recent attack, including its impact on displacement and resettlement. The purpose of the present study was to expand on the established literature by illuminating Yazidi youths own identification of their challenges during resettlement to Canada. This was accomplished through employing a participatory approach (Kim, 2019), during which individual interviews were conducted with the youth to address the question "what factors have hindered your adjustment to life in Canada?". Their responses were compiled into a single set that the same youth individually grouped into concepts according to the concept mapping method (Trochim, 1989). This research was then situated within a Minority Stress Theory lens (Meyer, 1995).

### 2.2.1 Minority Stress Theory

The Minority Stress Theory (MST) proposed by Meyer (1995; 2003) has yet to be applied to understanding the experiences of Yazidi youth refugees, however, this theory lends itself to framing the disproportionate levels of mental health concerns that are experienced by stigmatized populations, such as the Yazidis. MST was first conceptualized to understand how LGBTQ2+ individuals are disproportionately impacted by mental health conditions compared to heterosexual individuals, but has since been expanded to other stigmatized populations including migrants (Valentín-Cortés et al., 2020). Minority stress theory suggests that there are adverse effects on minority individuals that are the result of the social conditions (e.g. stigma and prejudice) that are created by social systems (Meyer, 2003; Valentín-Cortés et al., 2020). The underlying assumption of this theory is that minority stress is unique because only those who are stigmatized as a minority experience this added stressor, it is chronic because it is related to stable social and cultural structures, and it is socially based because it stems from social structures and processes beyond the individual (Meyer, 1995; Meyer 2003).

### 2.2.2 Historical Context of Yazidis' Experiences

Yazidis are a long-established ethnic and religious minority group (Canada, Parliament, House of Commons. Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration [Government of Canada], 2018). They consider themselves Kurdish, an ethnic minority, and their religion, Yazidism, is distinct and distinguishes them as a religious minority (Ceri et al., 2016; Kizilhan & Noll-Hussong, 2017). Yazidism is considered to be the most oppressed religion in the world. Yazidism is syncretistic (Asher-Schapiro, 2014), often resulting in it being misunderstood by others (Hanish, 2009). It is also a closed religion (Hanish, 2009), they do not accept religious conversion and are an endogamous group (Ceri et al., 2016). While the aim of extreme Islamists has been to force Yazidi's conversion to Islam, Yazidis have refused (Hanish, 2009). While Yazidis believe in God, Tawusî Melek, which represents the Peacock Angel who refused to bow to Adam in Yazidism but represents the devil in Muslim and Christian traditions, is a central figure in their religion, which has resulted in their being labelled devil worshipers and has been used to justify the persecution

(Asher-Schapiro, 2014; Ceri et al., 2016; Mir-Hosseini, 1996). Based on their strong rooted belief system, Yazidis have been the target of hatred and genocides for centuries (Asher-Schapiro, 2014; Ceri et al., 2016).

**The 2014 Genocide.** It is clear that Yazidis have experienced trauma for generations (Wilkinson et al., 2019). In August of 2014, ISIS launched an attack on the Yazidi population residing in the Sinjar region of Northern Iraq with the goal of purifying their Caliphate of non-Arab and non-Sunni Muslim communities (Government of Canada, 2018; Ibrahim et al., 2018). The 2014 attack by ISIS has been ruled a genocide against the Yazidi people and was the 74<sup>th</sup> recorded genocide against the Yazidi population in the past 800 years (Bhattacharyya et al., 2020b; Ibrahim et al., 2018; Kizilhan & Noll-Hussong, 2017). This genocide was a source of trauma in and of itself, during which Yazidis experienced severe and prolonged exposure to circumstances that threatened their livelihood and caused severe harm to their emotional and physical well-being; the events of this attack were characterized by extreme violence and torture (Wilkinson et al., 2019). Mass killings of Yazidi men took place, and Yazidi women were sexually assaulted, enslaved, tortured, and forcibly transferred (Hoffman et al., 2018; Ibrahim et al., 2018). Yazidi girls as young as 8 were abducted, sold in Arab markets, enslaved, impregnated and killed (Wilkinson et al., 2019). Yazidi boys aged 8-14, were abducted from their families and trained as child soldiers, involving daily religious indoctrination, martial arts training, and training against pain and brutality (Government of Canada, 2018; Wilkinson et al., 2019).

**The Experience of Displacement.** Yazidi experiences of displacement are unique relative to other groups of refugees (Chan et al., 2016). In the case of Yazidi displacement, an entire population of predominantly women and children were displaced (Ibrahim et al., 2018), all of whom had experienced significant levels of trauma for generations (Wilkinson et al., 2019). All who survived abduction and could arrange it, entered into refugee camps (Ibrahim et al., 2018). Some fled their home country and sought safety in neighbouring countries (Ceri et al., 2016), however, many were internally displaced within Iraq (Bhattacharyya et al., 2020b). Due to the extreme violence and trauma they were exposed to, Yazidis were resettled to non-neighboring countries, such as Canada, in an expedited manner (Bhattacharyya et al., 2020b). Research conducted from within the refugee camps

noted that Yazidi refugees continued to be deeply tormented and impacted by the current and intergenerational trauma they had experienced (Ceri et al., 2016; Wilkinson et al., 2019), with some research suggesting that the rate of experiencing a mental health disorder, predominantly PTSD, were as high as 90% (Ibrahim et al., 2018).

**The Experience of Resettlement.** There is little research examining the stressors that Yazidis face during resettlement. One source of stress is education. Yazidi refugees present with low levels of education, and in some cases, no formal education and the education they have received has been in Arabic rather than Kurmanji, all of which impacts their ability to access information and education in their new country (Nasıroğlu & Ceri, 2016; Wilkinson et al., 2019)

Results from the Wilkinson et al. (2019) study noted that trauma experiences influenced all aspects Yazidi's resettlement into Canada. Yazidi refugees experience perceived and real social isolation (Ibrahim et al., 2018; Wilkinson et al., 2019). Women and children who experienced abuse were left with the stigma of living a dishonorable life because of their sexual activity outside of the caste. Trauma and migration related stressors impact the mental health, well-being, and adjustment of Yazidi youth. Headaches, somatic complaints, and enuresis have been reported (Ceri et al., 2016). Many have difficulties with sleeping, and report high rates of stress, anxiety, and depression (Wilkinson et al., 2019). Youths present as jumpy, careful, fearful, withdrawn and avoidant of social contact (Ceri et al., 2016; Wilkinson et al., 2019). Consistent with other groups of refugees, it has been found that the traumatic impact is long-lasting (Ceri et al., 2016).

Previous research on Yazidi resettlement has taken a deficit centered approach. Deficit approaches stress pathology and sickness, highlighting problems and failures of the individual (Brun & Rapp, 2001; Xie, 2013). In contrast, strengths based approaches focus on the capacities and resourcefulness embedded within participants' stories (Xie, 2013). From such an approach, assets and strengths to handle life challenges are uncovered and highlighted (Brun & Rapp, 2001; Hammond & Zimmerman, 2012). The intent is not to diminish the experiences and challenges but rather, highlights strengths, resources, and abilities to overcome adversity (Hammond & Zimmerman, 2012).

## 2.3 Methods

### 2.3.1 Study Design

This study employed a group concept mapping approach, which falls under the participatory action research (PAR) umbrella. PAR is an approach to research that allows for research to be conducted with populations, rather than on a population (Heppner et al., 2016) and it provides an innovative way to use research and knowledge to organize, advocate and produce change for the population of interest (Mirra et al., 2016). Central to this approach is the relationship between the researcher and the target population (Heppner et al., 2016; Mirra et al., 2016), during which researchers typically act as outside agents of change, situating themselves within the group being researched (Kim, 2019). Approaches to data analysis range from more traditional approach to analysis in which the researchers are considered the experts and conduct the analysis and the other end represent a collaborative negotiation and interpretation that occur between the researcher(s) and the participants (Kindon et al., 2008). Group concept mapping is a methodology that falls on the latter side of this spectrum, during which the participants partake in all stages of the research (Windsor, 2013).

Group concept mapping is a mixed-methods approach to research that involves the quantitative analysis of qualitative data (Rosas, 2017). The approach was developed by William Trochim for use in programming planning and evaluation, and has since been expanded for use in the social sciences and has effectively be implemented to understand group experiences (Burgos et al., 2019; Kane & Trochim, 2007b; Rosas, 2017). Group concept mapping has been utilized with various hard to reach populations, including: individuals living with complex physical and psychosocial conditions, individuals who are in dispersed areas (e.g. rural areas), disadvantaged groups (e.g. marginalized and stigmatized groups), which includes children and newcomer families (Burgos et al., 2019; Cook & Bergeron, 2019). For example, Finnigan et al. (2022) found concept mapping to be an effective methodology for engaging newcomer youth in research on understanding their barriers to accessing mental health services in a new country and Nowicki and Brown (2015) noted that concept mapping can be used to engage children to share their perspective

and expertise. While concept mapping has been shown to be effective for use with hard to reach communities, such as newcomers and youth, this approach has not yet been utilized to examine the perspective of Yazidi youth refugees.

As with any research design, there are advantages and disadvantages to a group concept mapping approach. Ultimately, this approach was chosen because participants are actively involved in all phases. Participants identify the issues and help to frame the research focus. Participants contribute equally to producing and analysis the data, through providing their own answers to open-ended interview questions (data generation) and participating in a sorting activity (analysis). Participants actively engage in the results, by providing their approval of the final concepts selected, and they have autonomy in deciding what is done with the research findings. While the participants are engaged and consulted equally in all stages, there are components spearheaded by the researcher. The researchers select the responses to include, with intention of reflecting the entire range of responses provided, and the researchers determine the number of concepts for the final map produced. The lack of engagement with the youth participants at these points could be considered disadvantages of this approach.

The use of the Groupwisdom software were also carefully considered. Groupwisdom offers a streamlined approach to the two data analysis procedures that must occur, and provides visually presented results that show conceptual similarities and differences through the distances between points on the map. This streamlined approach allowed for a quick turn around on the data analysis to share with participants for their feedback. The predominant weakness is that as an internet-based software, thus it can be overwhelming for participants to navigate. As such, researchers opted to collect the data independently from the software and manually enter it after the fact. This required significantly more effort from the researchers, an investment that was deemed worthwhile to outweigh the potential weakness of using the software system for these purposes.

### 2.3.2 Procedure

Group concept mapping includes six major steps that occur during the data collection and analysis steps (Trochim, 1989; Trochim & Kane, 2005). These steps combine group

processes with multivariate statistical analysis (Trochim & Kane, 2005). Steps 1 through 3 occur during data collection and include preparation, generation, and structuring of the data. The remaining three steps, representation, interpretation, and utilization, occur during data analysis (Trochim, 1989; Trochim & Kane, 2005).

**Step 1: Preparation.** During the preparation step the focus of the study is determined, and participants are selected (Trochim & Kane, 2011; Trochim & Kane, 2005; Trochim & McLinden, 2017). A local community centre that the project coordinator has a longstanding relationship with was partnered with for this research. This relationship began through the conduction of previous research focused on resettlement challenges faced by newcomer youth. Working with an advisory team comprised of the researchers, the Director of Newcomer Settlement Services at the local centre, and other support staff, the need for research focusing on Yazidi youth was identified. Research commenced by expanding the advisory group to include the Yazidi youth in order to ensure the research topic was centered around their life and concerns (Branquinho et al., 2020), and the focal question was determined. Throughout this process, the project coordinator embedded themselves within the community through volunteering and attending events with the Yazidi population. This took place for two years prior to the data collection beginning, in line with the process-oriented and relationship centered approach to PAR models outlined by Kim (2019) and Mirra et al., (2016).

The participants were Yazidi youth between the ages of 15 and 24 who had resettled to a medium sized city in southwestern Ontario. A total of 12 Yazidi youth participated in this study. The average age was 17.7 and the average length of time in Canada was 4 years and 3 months. All youth completed the individual interview, and all but one completed the group sorting task. According to Kane and Trochim (2007b), group concept mapping is ideal for use with groups of between 10 and 40 participants. The age range of the participants was informed by the United Nations (n.d.) and Statistics Canada (2017) definition of “youth” as those between the ages of 15 and 24.

Participants were recruited through a local community centre. Recruitment occurred by word of mouth and through the flyer advertisements and posters that were distributed at

the centre. Interested individuals were asked to contact the study researchers for further information regarding participation in the study.

**Step 2: Generation.** In this step, participants generate responses to the focal question. In accordance with the ethics approved protocol, individual interviews were arranged with the participants who expressed their interest. A total of 12 youth were interviewed. These interviews were conducted at the community centre by the project coordinator. Translation assistance was available for those who required it. Upon arrival at the interview location, participants were read and given a copy of the Letter of Information for the study. All questions were answered. No parental consent was obtained. Within Canada, there is no specified age of consent, rather, parental consent is required for children or adolescents who do not have the capacity to consent on their own behalf (Government of Canada, 2022). Thus, based on this information, and after consultation with the advisory team, it was determined that the Yazidi youth age 15 and over had capacity to understand their rights and provide consent on their own behalf. This was also in line with the institutional approved protocol that did not require consent for youth 15 and over.

Once consent was obtained, a semi-structured interview was conducted that lasted approximately 30 minutes. During this interview, demographic information was collected and participants were asked to answer the focal. At the end of the interview, participants were invited back to the community centre at an agreed upon day to participate in the subsequent group sorting task. Participants were compensated with a \$25 honorarium for their participation. Participants were also provided bus tickets to facilitate their transportation to and from the interviews.

Subsequently, the first author and a psychologist with experience in concept mapping independently reviewed responses generated by the youth (Trochim & McLinden, 2017; Trochim & Kane, 2005). This included removing redundant responses, and editing for grammar, spelling, and other technical details (Trochim & McLinden, 2017). When there was disagreement between the reviewers, differences were discussed and a decision about changes made. The final response list included 73 unique responses.

**Step 3: Structuring.** In this step responses are grouped together by participants (Trochim & Kane, 2005; Trochim & McLinden, 2017). Youth participants returned to the centre at an agreed upon date and time and completed the group sorting task independently, but in the same room and at the same time. During the sorting task, youth were each given a set of responses to the focal question and asked to “sort the responses in any way that makes sense to you”. Participants were also invited to add descriptive labels for their groupings. The group sorting task took approximately two hours. The youth were provided with an additional \$25 gift card and bus tickets in recognition of their time and expertise. A total of 11 youth completed the sorting task.

**Step 4: Representation.** In this step the sort data are analyzed using two distinct procedures (Trochim & McLinden, 2017). Three sub-steps form the core analysis including the construction of similarity matrix from the sort data, multidimensional scaling (MDS) of the similarity matrix, and a hierarchical cluster analysis of the MDS coordinates (Kane & Trochim, 2007a).

To complete this step, the author input the data into the groupwisdom™ software (Concept System, 2021). The similarity matrix was formed from the qualitative sort data generated in step 3. Responses were rated either 1 (responses have been sorted together) or a 2 (responses have not been sorted together) (Kane & Trochim, 2007a). Each response was then summed. This sum represents a similarity that indicates how many people rated these responses together (Kane & Trochim, 2007a; Trochim & McLinden, 2017).

The summed similarity matrix was then inputted for a MDS analysis. The MDS analysis yielded an x-y axis, in which the distance between the points represents how often they were grouped together by participants (Trochim & McLinden, 2017). These distances were also represented with bridging index values. When plotted, these create a point map.

Subsequently, a hierarchical cluster analysis of the MDS coordinates was performed (Kane & Trochim, 2007a). Cluster analysis begins by considering each response as its own cluster. At each stage of the analysis, the algorithm combines two clusters until all the responses are in one cluster. The researchers will determine the number of cluster responses that best represent the data.

The key diagnostic statistic in MDS is the stress index (Kane & Trochim, 2007a). The stress value is a number between 0 and 1 that represents the goodness of fit of the final matrix (Rosas & Kane, 2011). A low stress value suggests a better overall fit and a high stress value implies greater discrepancy and does not represent the inputted data as well (Kane & Trochim, 2007a). The stress value for this map was 0.28. Stress values below 0.39 have a 1% chance of being random and are acceptable (Rosas & Kane, 2011).

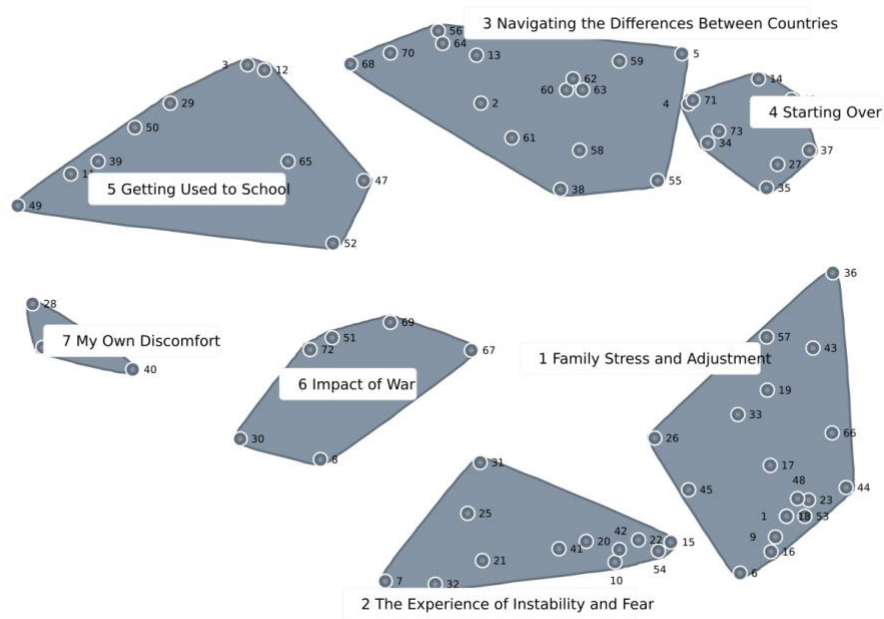
**Step 5: Interpretation.** In this step an appropriate number of clusters are selected by the researcher based on two factors: the average bridging indices and the level of similarity between the clusters (Brown et al., 2019; Kane & Trochim, 2007a). Different cluster maps were reviewed. The initial map included 15 clusters. Clusters maps of 6, 7, 8, 9, and 11 clusters were considered. The 7-cluster solution was chosen as it appeared to provide the best interpretability. This was determined by the researcher in consultation with the study advisory group, who examined the bridging index for each cluster. A low bridging index (0.00-0.25) indicates that the response was grouped with responses close in proximity on the map, whereas a high bridging index (0.75-1.00) indicates the number was grouped with responses all over the map. Additionally, the researcher examined the similarities of responses within each cluster and differences in responses between clusters.

Labels for the final concept map were selected by the primary author in consultation with the study advisory group. The labels were chosen based on quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitatively, responses with the lowest bridging indices were reviewed, as they were considered to be the most integral to the concept meaning. Qualitatively, the participant responses and participant generated labels were reviewed. Using this quantitative and qualitative information, the researchers refined the labels generated by the participants and applied a label that represented a single theme of the concepts. The seven concepts included: family stress and adjustment, the experience of instability and fear, navigating the differences between two countries, starting over, getting used to school, the impact of war, and my own discomfort.

**Step 6: Utilization.** The final step of the methodology is utilization. During this step, the map generated is used in accordance with the stated purpose (Trochim & Kane, 2005).

## 2.4 Results

A concept map for the focal question “What factors have hindered your adjustment to life in Canada?” was constructed based on responses generated and sorted by participants (see Figure 1). A total of 73 unique responses (see Table 1) were sorted by 11 of the youth who participated in the individual interviews. The contents of the concept map are described in the section.



**Figure 1:** Concept Map of Statements for: “What factors have hindered your adjustment to life in Canada?”

**Table 1:** Statements and Concepts for: "What factors have hindered your adjustment to life in Canada?"

Concept	Responses	Bridging Index
Concept 1 Name: Family Stress and Adjustment		Avg. 0.18

	1. A big family needs a father; it is too much for my mom alone.	0.02
	6. Finding a house for a big family is very hard. Because eventually we need a big house.	0.03
	9. I am with my family now but sometimes they have a hard time understanding me.	0.05
	16. I had family here and were expecting them to help us, but they didn't.	0.03
	17. I have a big family, so I can't be by myself or have space when I am upset.	0.14
	18. I have had to take on a lot of responsibility because my dad isn't here.	0.02
	19. I have to translate for my family. I am ok with translating, but at the hospital it is hard because there are a lot of new words and stuff.	0.42
	23. I was not very close to with my family when we moved here, I was closer to my grandmother and cousins. But when I got here, I stopped talking to my extended family and started making a relationship with my family here.	0.07
	26. I was shy, scared, and worried which made it hard. Scared and worried about what had happened, my family, and learning the language.	0.27
	33. It is hard for us now because we do not know how are neighbours are. We are a big family so we are loud and we	0.24

	may do things that are against the norm because we do not know. They do not really understand us; they don't like everybody. They do not like people who are not Canadian or do not know their language.	
	36. It was hard because of people. We do not have a problem with other religions, but it was hard because we used to live with just Yazidi individuals, but here we live with all sorts of people.	0.5
	43. My family doesn't like that Canada is always busy. We are always busy with all the stuff we need to do.	0.37
	44. My family is big, so some people need to work and some need to stay home with the kids. It was hard, people needing to go different places and figuring out who was doing what.	0.18
	45. My mom is upset and cries a lot because my sister is not here in Canada with us. I often remind her of my sister because we look so much alike.	0.13
	48. One of the hardest things is having a big family with a lot of younger kids, so I have to support my mom.	0.07
	53. Sometimes I feel bad for my mom because she has a big responsibility for my siblings. I try my best to help her because she has to be a mother and a father for us.	0.03
	57. The laws and rules are very different here than they are at home.	0.36
	66. We had a big family with small kids, so it was hard to learn anything.	0.3

2. The Experience of Instability and Fear		Avg. 0.2
	7. Having a big family is hard, because you need money to support them and the kids need to be looked after.	0.57
	10. I can't talk about my father around anyone. I don't want to bring my dad or my sister up around my mom, because they are both missing and assumed to be dead and this is very hard for my mom.	0.04
	15. I do not know anything about my dad or about what fatherly love is, because I was so young when my father was captured. So it is really hard when you see everyone else with their fathers and I do not have that.	0
	20. I lived by myself before I got here. It was really hard because I didn't know about my family, where they were or if they were safe.	0.07
	21. I was happy with my life before I came. I was with my family, friends, and I attended school one year. So being separated from these things was hard.	0.39
	22. I was holding my sisters hand when she was taken. They hit us with a stick to get us apart.	0.02
	25. I was separated from my family for one year. At this time, I was speaking Arabic and I forgot my Kurdish, because they wouldn't let me speak Kurdish. So when I returned to my family, it was hard for me because no one understood me.	0.34

	31. Iraq was the best place to be, to have fun and be with your family, but we had to come here because our home was taken from us.	0.3
	32. It is hard for me to find work, because I am younger, but I want to find work and help my family.	0.45
	41. My dad didn't show up. We are hopeful that he is okay but ISIS took the women and girls for themselves and often killed the men.	0.13
	42. My dad is missing and assumed to be dead, so it was hard being away from my dad.	0.04
	54. Starting all over without my family, even though I still had my immediate family, I miss everyone else that was at home.	0.06
3. Navigating the Differences Between Countries		Avg. 0.24
	2. After we left the initial settlement support services, they didn't help us very much.	0.22
	5. Everything is different here, like the traffic signals.	0.27
	13. I didn't have any relatives here or people who spoke the same language. There was only people who spoke Arabic but not Kurmanji.	0.25
	38. It was hard to be involved with everybody. For example, communication and if special things are happening and you do not know what is happening. It was hard to be involved with the new culture.	0.26

	55. The initial settlement support services said they would have session on how to adapt to life in Canada, but these programs scared people. They told us we shouldn't do certain things. Told us there were kidnappers and robbers and it scared us.	0.26
	56. The language was hard at first.	0.25
	58. The rules- like you can't leave Canada until you get your permeant residence, so you can't go back home until then.	0.17
	59. The translator showed us some basic places, like Food Basics, but I wish that they had showed us more.	0.27
	60. There was a lot of work (like paperwork) that we didn't know how to do, so we had to get help with that.	0.22
	61. Things are different between here and Iraq.	0.19
	62. We didn't have transportation. Just the city bus but we didn't know all the routes or how to find the routes.	0.19
	63. We didn't know anyone or the language or the country.	0.23
	64. We didn't understand the language or the writing, so we always needed a translator, but we didn't always have one. It was really hard to even get someone to help us, because they didn't understand.	0.25
	68. When I came here it was really tough because I didn't speak the language, and I was bullied and made fun of because of this.	0.31

	70. When I first came, the lack of language and the language barrier.	0.27
4. Starting Over		Avg. 0.36
	4. At the beginning, I was bored because I didn't know anyone or the neighbourhood I lived in.	0.31
	14. I didn't know the places. So you go around by yourself trying to figure out where to go.	0.34
	27. I was tired from everything.	0.42
	34. It is hard to start with the new things in your life, like the things you need to learn here.	0.26
	35. It was a new place. We were surprised by everything because it was new.	0.33
	37. It was hard for me to understand the new people I was seeing in Canada, because they were different than the people in Iraq.	0.42
	46. My parents still do not know English, so it is hard for them to do stuff independently, for example, going to their own appointments and being able to communicate with the doctors or teachers.	0.66
	71. When I was coming here, we didn't know how things worked here, like the bank.	0.23
	73. When we came here, we lived in an apartment, and this was hard because you couldn't go out because it was an	0.27

	apartment and we didn't know the area and they didn't show you around.	
5. Getting Used to School		Avg. 0.45
	3. At first because of the language barrier, I was not happy at school because there was not much communication at the school because of the language barrier. They didn't provide translation, like when you were sent to the office.	0.36
	11. I didn't go to school in Grade 5 because I was living in a camp, so this took a year away from me. So I got to skip a grade.	0.58
	12. I didn't go to school very much when I was young, so when I came to Canada I was happy to go school but it was hard because I didn't understand anything.	0.39
	29. If you are not educated or do not know the language, it is hard for you to talk to people in the school and you do not know how to do your school work.	0.4
	39. It was supposed to be my last year in school, and when I came here I had to start all over again.	0.49
	47. No one supported us being here. Only the people here at the center.	0.32
	49. School- I love school, but it can be tough or boring.	0.55
	50. School is hard for me. I did not have formal education before coming here, so entering school was difficult and even now it is still very difficult. When I was 10 years old, I went to school for one year and that was it.	0.56

	52. Some people are not nice.	0.46
	65. We feel like our neighbours have hate for us. They call and report us to the city of London. We feel like we are not welcome there.	0.41
6. Impact of War		Avg. 0.47
	8. Here we cannot leave our home at night, but in Iraq we stayed outside all day. But now, people are checking in on us and worried.	0.65
	30. In Iraq, I was a normal person, but when I came here, I started to feel sick.	0.66
	51. Seeing the Daesh here on TV, made me feel scared, because I saw them in Iraq and then I started seeing them here.	0.39
	67. We have seen so many things that I shouldn't have seen at my age. It makes us look and seem older, because I have been through a lot that people my age shouldn't have gone through.	0.35
	69. When I came here, I saw the Daesh on TV and phones, and I started thinking about them, and everything that I was trying to forget I remembered.	0.34
	72. When I was in Iraq and the Daesh caught us, I didn't want to see their faces, so I looked down.	0.41
7. My Own Discomfort		Avg. 0.93
	24. I was scared of the school.	0.86

	28. I was trying to help myself and my friends, but I didn't know anything.	1
	40. Making friends was hard because some people didn't like us or made fun of us.	0.92

### 2.4.1 Family Stress and Adjustment

Although family reunification was reported as a positive aspect of finding refuge in Canada, reunification also presented challenges that contributed to difficulties with adjustment. Central to this concept was the notion that the loss of their fathers, temporarily or permanently, and with their status unknown and possibly never known, had a major impact on youths' experience of family structure and function that changed post-migration. Though they did not speak specifically about having to assume the missing family members' roles and duties, they did feel an increased sense of burden that their mothers carried. This burden came in the form of learning how things are done and meeting basic needs for a family headed by a single parent. In particular, youth spoke about the challenges of having a big family with no father, noting this was a source of stress for their mothers in the response "A big family needs a father; it is too much for my mom alone". It was also reported as a source of stress for themselves, as youth described a sense of worry and a need to take on additional responsibilities, exemplified in the responses: "I have had to take on a lot of responsibility because my dad isn't here", "One of the hardest things is having a big family with a lot of younger kids, so I have to support my mom".

In addition to the caregiving responsibilities that mothers had, there were also basic shelter needs to meet and challenges interacting across cultural and language differences with their neighbors who lived in very close proximity. Youth described the challenges of finding housing to accommodate their families "Finding a house for a big family is very hard. Because eventually we need a big house". The necessity of sharing caregiving responsibilities was evident but new for some youth and their siblings who were also

adjusting to the new culture as evidenced by the following: “My family is big, so some people need to work and some need to stay home with the kids. It was hard, people needing to go different places and figuring out who was doing what”. Difficulties for youth and their families adjusting to new cultural norms was described in responses such as: “It is hard for us now because we do not know how are neighbours are. We are a big family so we are loud and we may do things that are against the norm because we do not know”. In addition, youth reported the need to help family members who were struggling with learning the language with the response “I have to translate for my family. I am ok with translating, but at the hospital it is hard because there are a lot of new words and stuff”.

Other changes to the youths’ family constellations included missing siblings, other relatives, and community members who were part of their daily lives before relocating, putting more emphasis on the relationships with family they arrived with – but not necessarily closest to – consistent with a mainstream nuclear family configuration normalized in North America. Youth noted that “I was not very close to with my family when we moved here, I was closer to my grandmother and cousins. But when I got here, I stopped talking to my extended family and started making a relationship with my family here”. Youth felt disappointed by a lack of support from their family members who were already settled in Canada: “I had family here and were expecting them to help us, but they didn’t”.

The ambiguous status of important people in their lives back home were reminders of the precarious situation they left and the vulnerability they felt in Canada as newcomers, learning a new culture, without traditional extended support systems they relied on. Youth described concerns for themselves and families “I was shy, scared, and worried which made it hard. Scared and worried about what had happened, my family, and learning the language” and that their presence was a reminder of family members who have been missing since the 2014 attack “My mom is upset and cries a lot because my sister is not here in Canada with us. I often remind her of my sister because we look so much alike”. Lastly, youth reported it was difficult to adjust to a new culture and set of norms, for themselves and their family, which hindered their overall adjustment experience. They had lost the sense of belonging they had in their religious community before seeking refuge.

This was apparent in the response: “It was hard because of people. We do not have a problem with other religions, but it was hard because we used to live with just Yazidi individuals, but here we live with all sorts of people”.

## 2.4.2 The Experience of Instability and Fear

Yazidi youth expressed their concerns about missing family members, particularly the older males, many of whom were fathers, taken and killed by ISIS, as well as other traumatic abductions of female family members known to have been taken to face rape and torture by their captors. Yazidi youth described in detail unstable familial conditions that contributed to a sense of fear for the safety of their loved ones. Youth noted that “I do not know anything about my dad or about what fatherly love is, because I was so young when my father was captured. So it is really hard when you see everyone else with their fathers and I do not have that”, “I was holding my sister’s hand when she was taken. They hit us with a stick to get us apart”, and “My dad is missing and assumed to be dead”, but, “We are hopeful that he is okay but ISIS took the women and girls for themselves and often killed the men” leaving youth and others in the family silent about the atrocities for fear of triggering traumatic memories in others. This was referenced in the response “I can’t talk about my father around anyone. I don’t want to bring my dad or my sister up around my mom, because they are both missing and assumed to be dead and this is very hard for my mom”, and “because I didn’t know about my family, where they were or if they were safe”. Youth also described instability that followed their family life from the first steps along their migration journey, leaving a life they enjoyed before the abductors came, with challenges from separations and limited income. They noted that “I was happy with my life before I came. I was with my family, friends, and I attended school one year. So being separated from these things was hard” and “Iraq was the best place to be, to have fun and be with your family, but we had to come here because our home was taken from us”. Family separations were also frightening associated with fears about ability to cope and survive without them. For youth this felt like “Starting all over without my family, even though I still had my immediate family, I miss everyone else that was at home” and “I was separated from my family for one year. At this time, I was speaking Arabic and I forgot my Kurdish, because they wouldn’t let me speak Kurdish. So when I returned to my family, it was hard

for me because no one understood me”. Another aspect of the separations of family members is the breakdown in survivors’ ability to cope financially. Youth noted that “Having a big family is hard, because you need money to support them and the kids need to be looked after” and a desire to want to contribute financially but being unable to due to age “It is hard for me to find work, because I am younger, but I want to find work and help my family”.

### 2.4.3 Navigating the Differences Between Countries

Youth described their challenges navigating a new country, learning local customs, and finding their way around. A major barrier was the different language and very few, if any, Kumanji speakers who could translate into English: “The language was hard at first”, “When I first came, the lack of language and the language barrier”, “We didn’t understand the language or the writing, so we always needed a translator, but we didn’t always have one. It was really hard to even get someone to help us, because they didn’t understand”. The communication barrier was isolating: “I didn’t have any relatives here or people who spoke the same language. There was only people who spoke Arabic but not Kurmanji”, “We didn’t know anyone or the language or the country”, and “When I came here it was really tough because I didn’t speak the language, and I was bullied and made fun of because of this”.

The youths indicated that the different norms and laws in Canada were challenging to navigate. For example: “Everything is different here, like the traffic signals”, “It was hard to be involved with everybody. For example, communication and if special things are happening and you do not know what is happening. It was hard to be involved with the new culture”, “The rules- like you can’t leave Canada until you get your permanent residence, so you can’t go back home until then”, and “Things are different between here and Iraq”. In addition, youth described a lack of knowledge about the forms and documentation required for a residence, utilities and other expenses such as transportation: “There was a lot of work (like paperwork) that we didn’t know how to do, so we had to get help with that” and “We didn’t have transportation. Just the city bus but we didn’t know all the routes or how to find the routes”. Yazidi youth described a reliance on formal

settlement support and an overwhelming amount of new information, and then felt abandoned when that support ran out: “After we left the initial settlement support services, they didn’t help us very much” and “The translator showed us some basic places, like Food Basics, but I wish that they had showed us more”.

#### 2.4.4 Starting Over

Youth reported many instances of how not knowing the people or the community hindered their own and family members’ adjustment: “At the beginning, I was bored because I didn’t know anyone or the neighbourhood I lived in”, “I didn’t know the places. So you go around by yourself trying to figure out where to go”, “When I was coming here, we didn’t know how things worked here, like the bank”, and “When we came here, we lived in an apartment, and this was hard because you couldn’t go out because it was an apartment and we didn’t know the area and they didn’t show you around”. Subsequently, due to not knowing, youth described needing to relearn what they had once taken for granted. Youth noted that “It is hard to start with the new things in your life, like the things you need to learn here” and “It was a new place. We were surprised by everything because it was new”. Part of starting over also included learning about new people and cultures, as depicted in the response “It was hard for me to understand the new people I was seeing in Canada, because they were different than the people in Iraq”.

Youth described that it was not just their personal experience of starting over that was challenging, but the experience of their family starting over; youth reported that their families did not adjust as quickly, resulting in youth having to support them. This aspect of starting over was reflected in the response “My parents still do not know English, so it is hard for them to do stuff independently, for example, going to their own appointments and being able to communicate with the doctors or teachers”. Lastly, youth reported that the process of starting over and learning new things was draining in the response “I was tired from everything”.

### 2.4.5 Getting Used to School

Challenges faced by Yazidi youth adjusting to school were related to a combination of factors, including challenging content, language barriers, a lack of previous formal education, and a lack of support. Additionally, transfer of credentials also posed a significant obstacle for these students. Participants noted that although school was a positive factor in their life, it was challenging: “School, I love school, but it can be tough or boring”. Some of the challenges around school were described as stemming from a lack of formal education before arriving in Canada, as exemplified in the responses “School is hard for me. I did not have formal education before coming here, so entering school was difficult and even now it is still very difficult. When I was 10 years old, I went to school for one year and that was it”, and “I didn’t go to school in Grade 5 because I was living in a camp, so this took a year away from me. So I got to skip a grade”.

Challenges experienced navigating the school system were multifaceted, but fundamentally connected to difficulties with the language. Barriers related to challenging content and a lack of previous formal education complicated matters further, causing frustration and disengagement. This was noted in the response: “If you are not educated or do not know the language, it is hard for you to talk to people in the school and you do not know how to do your school work”. In addition, youth academic credentials did not transfer, creating another challenge with adjusting to school: “It was supposed to be my last year in school, and when I came here I had to start all over again”. Youth also noted that there was a lack of support in the school and surrounding community. This was reflected in the responses: “No one supported us being here. Only the people here at the center”, “Some people are not nice”, and “We feel like our neighbours have hate for us. They call and report us to the city of London. We feel like we are not welcome there”.

### 2.4.6 Impact of War

Youth described the visceral impact of war, noting their experience of intrusive memories, being fearful of traumatic reminders, the developmental and physical consequences they experienced, and how this complicated their adjustment to Canada. These traumatic

experiences travelled with the youth and families, with triggers to painful experiences in the media and triggers to strong emotion evoked readily in an unfamiliar environment where new and unexpected events occurred daily. Youth described intrusive memories that they had of their experiences from during the war in the response “When I was in Iraq and the Daesh caught us, I didn’t want to see their faces, so I looked down”. Youth discussed being fearful of traumatic reminders of the war since arriving in Canada, and feelings associated with these reminders in the responses “Seeing the Daesh here on TV, made me feel scared, because I saw them in Iraq and then I started seeing them here” and “When I came here, I saw the Daesh on TV and phones, and I started thinking about them, and everything that I was trying to forget I remembered”. Youth reported the personal and physical consequences that these experiences of war had on their development. These consequences were reflected in the responses: “We have seen so many things that I shouldn’t have seen at my age. It makes us look and seem older, because I have been through a lot that people my age shouldn’t have gone through”, and “In Iraq, I was a normal person, but when I came here, I started to feel sick”. Additionally, youth felt safer in Iraq before the genocide than they did after arriving in Canada. Navigating life in a new country was made challenging by the reverberating impact of war and the changes this brought forth “Here we cannot leave our home at night, but in Iraq we stayed outside all day. But now, people are checking in on us and worried”.

#### 2.4.7 My Own Discomfort

Yazidi youth described that their own discomfort, as it pertained to school and relationships, hindered their adjustment to life in Canada. Youth identified their own discomfort around school within the response “I was scared of the school”. Whereas, the responses “Making friends was hard because some people didn’t like us or made fun of us” and “I was trying to help myself and my friends, but I didn’t know anything” reflected the youths’ own discomfort around relationships; this discomfort around relationships included discomfort with both making new friends and supporting existing friends.

Youth described experiences that hindered their adjustment to life in Canada. One major overarching experience was of feeling like the other. Youth talked about feeling singled

out at school and in their community, feeling that their families were not welcomed by their neighbors, and feeling that the government abandoned them after the initial support period ended. Youth also described the losses they encountered after ISIS raids in Iraq, abductions, rape, and killings of family members, that continued to put their lives at risk and how migrating meant loss of homeland as well as family, extended family and community members and relationships. In some cases, the losses were ambiguous given that the status of family members, particularly fathers, was unknown but often presumed deceased.

Traumatic experiences at the hands of ISIS soldiers left them feeling easily and unexpectedly triggered by images in the media in Canada and when checking for news from home. These experiences brought back the realities they escaped from and while they were living in a safer environment, the judgements, discrimination, and racism they encountered was not restorative left them feeling vulnerable. Language differences and the relative absence of Kumanji speakers in their new communities left older generations with little choice but to depend on the youth for translation, while they continued to struggle themselves with learning in English schools. Customary differences further complicated understanding of navigating government and community systems of support.

## 2.5 Discussion

Overall, there were four meta themes that arose within the concepts described above that can be used to conceptualize and categorize the findings of the present study: feeling othered and excluded, the burden or major losses, triggering of traumatic memories, and language and cultural differences. Results of the study were compared and contrasted with the body of available literature. Results of the present study are consistent with previous research that pre-migration trauma experiences, as well as general factors of reintegration, can make adjustment to life in Canada challenging for refugees in general. Findings of the study did however, highlight specificities that distinguish Yazidi youths' challenges and needs from other migrants and the Yazidi population.

### 2.5.1 Language and Cultural Differences

Similarities and differences are apparent between the results of the present study and the literature concerning language and cultural differences. The existing literature identifies that the new experiences associated with being a refugee in Canada, for example learning a new language and educational system, as well as adapting to new social norms, impacts resettlement (Beiser & Hou, 2016; Minhas et al., 2017; Woodgate & Busolo, 2018). School is framed as an area of particular challenge for refugees in general due to disruptions in education (Kaida et al., 2020) and for Yazidis due to a lack of previous formal education or education in Kurmanji (Wilkinson et al., 2019; Nasıroğlu & Ceri, 2016). Youth in the present study endorse similar findings. Youth identify difficulty with the language barrier, and lack of Kurmanji speaking individuals and translators, which made adjustment, and understanding the forms and documentation required here to be, challenging. They also identify adjusting to new laws and norms as a source of stress. Similar themes are apparent in the concept Starting Over, that endorse relearning a new culture and language, and supporting family members acculturating at different rates, as challenging. The language differences create challenges are at school, as noted in the Getting Used to School concept, and language and cultural differences create challenges for their families and within families, as described in the concept Family Stress and Adjustment. In contrast, a novel finding from the present study is the glimmer of hope that co-exist with their challenges, represented in the meta theme the language and cultural differences. For example, in the concept Getting Used to School, concurrently while talking about the challenges of having no formal previous education and lacking the language to adequately access the educational system, youth also talk about their love for school and they express their gratitude for having the opportunity to attend school in Canada.

### 2.5.2 Triggering of Traumatic Memories

The theme of triggering of traumatic memories hindering adjustment to life in Canada is a core feature found within the literature and the present study. The existing literature predominantly focuses on the reverberating impact that these trauma experiences has (Wilkinson et al., 2019). For example, noting all aspects of resettlement are impacted by

past trauma experiences (Wilkinson et al., 2019), and that these experiences ruminate in the minds of Yazidis and impact their mental-health and well-being (Ceri et al., 2016; Ibrahim et al., 2018). Similar findings on the impact of the traumatic memories was found in the current study, where the Yazidi youth described in detail the impact that their trauma experiences have had on their physical and mental well-being. For example, in the concept Impact of War, youth described having witnessed events that have physically aged them and as well as contributed to increased maturity. In addition, they described a transition from feeling normal in Iraq to feeling sick here in Canada. This was also reflected in the concept Starting Over, where youth described a physical and mental exhaustion from their previous experiences.

An interesting difference was how reminders encountered in Canada trigger these traumatic memories for youth. Yazidi youth spoke about being triggered by media coverage of ISIS, which brought up the feelings of fear and pain that they experienced at the hands of ISIS in Iraq within the concept Impact of War. Of particular interest, the youth in the present study spoke about how they themselves could be a triggering reminder of family members who are missing or dead for their mothers in the concept Family Stress and Adjustment, however, this notion was not observed within the existing literature. These reminders could stem from similarities in appearance, or by speaking about these family members, thus resulting in the youth avoiding bringing up these topics to try to mitigate instigating traumatic memories for others.

### 2.5.3 The Burden of Major Losses

The idea of the burden of major losses presented many nuances from the existing literature. The immense impact of having deceased or missing fathers was at the forefront of this meta theme, however, this key theme does not appear to be emphasized within the currently available literature on Yazidi refugees. While the literature makes reference to the immense trauma experienced by all Yazidi individuals due to the mass killings of Yazidi men (Government of Canada, 2018; Hoffman et al., 2018; Ibrahim et al., 2018), the lasting impact of having deceased or missing fathers on Yazidi youth upon resettling is not highlighted. In the concept The Experience of Instability and Fear, youth discuss the

profound impact on their well-being from not knowing the whereabouts or safety of their fathers, including sadness being separated from their fathers and unease from the ambiguity of not knowing the status of their fathers. Youth also describe sadness that stems from seeing intact Canadian families while the whereabouts of their fathers are unknown. A similar emphasis on the absence of their fathers was discussed in length in the concept Family Stress and Adjustment, where youth discuss the burden on their mothers to meet their family's basic needs as a single parent, and the additional responsibilities that fall on the youth to support their mothers.

Another difference between the present study and the literature is the nature of how Iraq is discussed in relation to being Yazidi. The literature predominantly framed Yazidi individuals time in Iraq as traumatic, focusing on the centuries of violence, torture, and displacement that Yazidi people have experienced (Bhattacharyya et al., 2020b; Government of Canada, 2018; Ibrahim et al., 2018; Kizilhan & Noll-Hussong, 2017). While these experiences of trauma are apparent in the present study, the idea of loss of their beloved homeland and family members is also discussed. For example, in the concept The Experience of Instability and Fear, youth discuss their fondness of Iraq and being with family and friends in Iraq, and how separation from these during resettlement to Canada has been a source of sadness and stress, and in the concept Family Stress and Adjustment, youth talk about their loss of cultural connection in Canada and the challenges of living with a diverse community, not just Yazidis.

#### 2.5.4 Feeling Othered and Excluded

The experience of being an outsider does not appear to be a new phenomenon for Yazidi individuals. The experience of being othered and misunderstood by others stems back for centuries, and has been experienced by Yazidi individuals within Iraq (Hanish, 2009). Upon resettlement, isolation and rejection are common themes noted that have impacted resettlement (Ibrahim et al., 2018; Wilkinson et al., 2019). Youth in the present study report similar experiences of social isolation from Canadian culture and relationships. In the concept family Stress and Adjustment, youth discuss being misunderstood because of their large families, which is not the Canadian norm. Their discomfort about school, particularly

being bullied and feeling not liked by others, was reported in the concept My Own Discomfort. Youth also noted that there was a lack of support occurring in the school and community in the concept Getting Used to School. Of note, an inconsistent theme found is that the literature emphasizes perceived and actual social isolation that occurred within the Yazidi community as a result of experiencing sexual abuse outside of the caste (Ibrahim et al., 2018; Wilkinson et al., 2019). Whereas, in the present student, this theme was not presented by the youth, who only focused on their exclusion from Canadian culture and relationships.

### 2.5.5 Minority Stress Theory

Yazidi individuals have a unique experience as minorities- they were a minority in their country of origin (Government of Canada, 2018), and continue to be a minority upon relocation to Canada. The stance of minority stress theory is that there are adverse impacts of being a minority that are based on social conditions, such as stigma and prejudice, that are socially based on social structures in place (Meyer, 2003; Valentín-Cortés et al., 2020). This appears to be true for Yazidi youth, both from their experiences in Iraq and upon migration to Canada. Yazidi youth in the present study spoke in depth about the prejudicial experiences they had in Iraq, represented in the meta themes the burden of major losses and the triggering of traumatic memories. While they were often speaking about experiences had in Iraq, such as the abductions, rape, and killing of family members, they spoke about how these experiences continued to haunt them in their while in Canada. For example, youth spoke about being easily and unexpectedly triggered by images in the media in Canada and when checking for news from home in the meta theme trigger of traumatic memories; thus, while they were physically in a safer environment here, they continued to be impacted by the judgement, discrimination, and racism they encountered.

In Canada, youth continue to experience stigma in the form of being othered and excluded. Youth talked about feeling singled out at school and in their community, feeling that their families were not welcomed by their neighbors, and feeling that the government abandoned them after the initial support period ended. Youth also spoke about how their migration difficulties are socially based in the meta concept language and cultural differences. Here,

youth speak about the lack of Kurmanji speakers, and the way this gives older Yazidi generations no choice but to depend on the youth for translation, which is challenging for youth who are still learning English and are experiencing customary differences that make navigating social systems challenging. Youth discussed how all of these aspects negatively impacted their well-being, and hindered their adjustment to life in Canada; this deep impact is consistent with what would be expected from a MST lens.

### 2.5.6 Implications

Since the voices of Yazidi youth had yet to be the focus of previous Canadian based research, there is much to be learned from the youth in the present study, which can inform practice and research. Within the meta themes triggering of traumatic memories and the burden of major losses, youth identify that the impact of their past trauma experiences is vast and has implications for their resettlement journeys in Canada. The impact of the injustices executed by ISIS, their missing family members, and the overall experience of discrimination and judgement both in Iraq and in Canada, continues to take a significant toll on Yazidi youth. Youth continue to operate from a place of fear of being triggered by these past traumatic memories, or triggering these memories in their family members. This has important implications for practice in supporting Yazidi youth. While on the surface, many of the youth appear to be functioning and coping well, this research brought to light that underneath this all, the youth continue to be deeply impacted by their past experiences. Thus, it is vital that a trauma informed lens be utilized at all times, and a trauma informed approach to support be provided, in all support settings, despite whether the youth appear to present with clear symptoms of trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder.

In the meta themes language and cultural differences, and feeling othered and excluded, youth speak about the challenges associated with being a refugee in a new country. They identify that learning a new language and culture is not only challenging for themselves, but creates family based challenges as youth must support family members acculturating at different rates. The lack of effective services and supports has left them feeling alone, both at school and within the community, and as though the government abandoned them after their initial support period ended. This highlights an area for potential future research.

While the present study identified some gaps and problems in the support being provided, further research on the effectiveness of services across settings and ages for Yazidi refugees is needed. This should include community based services, school based services, and health and mental health care. Such research could be used to inform policy and future support, to ensure effective services are being provided to all and that gaps in services are being addressed.

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## Chapter 3

### 3 Facilitators of adjustment experienced by Yazidi youth refugees in Canada

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#### 3.1 Abstract

Yazidis, an ethnic and religious minority group from Northern Iraq, are a distinctive population of highly traumatized refugees who have been persecuted for centuries. In 2014, the 74th recorded genocide was committed against the Yazidis. In response to the genocide, the Government of Canada has assisted in relocating, and committed to supporting, the Yazidis. However, to date, little is known about the factors Yazidi youth find helpful in promoting their mental, physical, and social well-being, or their integration. This study uses concept mapping, a form of participatory action research, to explore factors that have promoted adjustment for Yazidi youth refugees in Canada. 12 Yazidi youth between the ages of 15 and 24 participated in interviews and a subsequent group sorting activity. Seven concepts to represent the responses were generated, including: experiences at school, connection with family and friends, accepting it takes time, sense of security, community agency support, feeling liberated, and feeling like I belong. These findings were compared and contrasted with existing literature. Using the youths' perspective and needs as a guide, recommendations have been made for continued support, facilitated through policy revisions, that centre on fostering connections to Yazidi culture and community here in Canada and promoting family reunification.

Key words: refugee youth, Yazidi refugees, Yazidi youth, concept mapping, participatory action research

## 3.2 Introduction

Yazidis are a religious (Mohammed, 2022) and ethnic minority group from Northern Iraq (Ali et al., 2022), many of whom are settled in the Sinjar region (Sannes, 2022). Yazidi's define their religion, Yazidism, as one of the oldest religions in the world (Kokaisl et al., 2022). In August of 2014, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), also known as Daesh, launched an attack on the Yazidi people living in Sinjar region with the intent to eradicate their religion (Cook et al., 2021). This genocide is referred to as the Sinjar massacre. In addition to being current victims of trauma (Ibrahim et al., 2018), Yazidis also experience extensive intergenerational trauma (Wilkinson et al., 2019) due to centuries of persecution and constant threats of extermination that they have faced due to their religious views, dating back for nearly a millennium (Kizilhan & Noll-Hussong, 2017).

It is known that survivors of extreme circumstances, like the Yazidi refugees, require a holistic approach to assistance (Hosseini, 2020). Following the Sinjar massacre of 2014, the Government of Canada has acknowledged Yazidis as a vulnerable group and made recommendations for a wraparound team of support in the year following displacement (Canada, Parliament, House of Commons. Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration [Government of Canada], 2018; Kizilhan & Noll-Hussong, 2017). While federal income and social support for Yazidis provides a start, after one year, they transition to provincial and local support, which is standard for all refugees to Canada who are provided up to one year of financial support by the government, in rare cases up to two years, before transitioning to social assistance (Pauls, 2021). However, there is substantial research suggesting most Yazidis continue to face resettlement challenges well beyond the first year following relocation (Government of Canada, 2018). In contrast, there has been little research to date identifying factors that report on or facilitate resettlement success for Yazidi youth after the year of federal support. The present study, situated within a larger participatory action research (PAR) project, seeks to fill this void. Yazidi refugee youth who resided in a medium sized central Canadian city were asked what has helped them adjust. Results were analyzed in accordance with the Trochim (1989) group concept mapping method.

### 3.2.1 The Experience of Yazidis

Yazidis are a group who have been distinguished as a minority based on their Kurdish ethnicity (Ceri et al., 2016), and are further distinguished as a double minority due to their religion, Yazidism (Asher-Schapiro, 2014; Government of Canada, 2021). Considered to be atheists and nonbelievers, the Yazidi population has been labelled as devil worshipers, which has been used to rationalize their persecution from Islamists (Asher-Schapiro, 2014; Hanish, 2009; Mir-Hosseini, 1996). The Sinjar massacre of 2014, recognized as a genocide by both the Canadian government (Government of Canada, 2021) and later the United Nations (United Nations, 2021), was the 74th attempted genocide targeting the Yazidis (Kizilhan & Noll-Hussong, 2017). The massacre triggered executions of Yazidi men, sexual slavery of Yazidi women and girls, and the training of Yazidi boys as Daesh soldiers (Government of Canada, 2021; Hoffman et al., 2018; Wilkinson et al., 2019). This attack displaced over 200,000 Yazidis throughout Iraq and neighbouring countries (Government of Canada, 2021), leaving an estimated 500,000 Yazidis fearing for the end of their people and religion (Asher-Schapiro, 2014). The United Nations declared the Yazidi crisis a "Level 3 Emergency", acknowledging the need for additional resources. In February 2017, Immigration Minister Ahmed Hussen committed to resettling a total of 1,200 survivors of ISIS by the end of the year. As of January 31, 2021, Canada had welcomed 1,400 survivors of Daesh (Government of Canada, 2021).

### 3.2.2 Yazidis Compared to Other Similar Groups of Refugees

While the tragic experiences of Yazidis are not unlike those of other highly traumatized refugees, they bear many distinguishing features. Other groups, such as the Hazaras from Afghanistan, are no strangers to long-standing persecution and attempted eradication due to racial and religious prejudice (Hakimi, 2023); however, the length of their victimization dates back for over 100 years (Canada, Parliament, House of Commons [Government of Canada], 2023) in comparison to the Yazidis who have been targeted for nearly a millennium (Kizilhan & Noll-Hussong, 2017). Yazidi refugees were relocated in an expedited manner, in some cases a matter of weeks, this is a stark contrast to most refugees who wait an average of 12 years between fleeing their country and being accepted for

permanent residence elsewhere (Bhattacharyya et al., 2020). Furthermore, while it is not uncommon to arrive to a host country with little to no formal education, as was the case for 80% of Syrian refugees (Government of Canada, 2019), Yazidis not only lack formal education but are unable to read and write in their mother tongue, Kurmanji, as it is not an officially recognized language and not taught in school (Akin, 2011; Wilkinson et al., 2019).

Yazidis also differ in their gender and age distribution post-migration due to the genocide targeting the elimination of Yazidi men (Hoffman et al., 2018). In 2017, 77% of Yazidi refugees in Canada were women and children (Government of Canada, 2021). In contrast, 51% of Syrian refugees in Canada following the Syrian crisis were reported to be men over the age of 18 (Government of Canada, 2019). The complex interplay of gender and trauma experienced by Yazidi women and children has vastly impacted their mental health outcomes. Goessmann and Ibrahim (2020) study reported high levels of PTSD and depression among Yazidi women displaced in camps, aligning with Ibrahim et al., (2018), who found that approximately 90% of Yazidi women and girls in these camps met the criteria for a probable diagnosis of PTSD. Trauma exposure and enslavement, coupled with social stressors like stigma and rejection, often tied to rape and sexual violence, exacerbated these outcomes (Ibrahim et al., 2018). More recently, Beroni et al. (2024) study examining Yazidi adolescents and young adults in internally displaced camps found that all suicides within the camp were committed by girls, and that being female and a refugee increased risks related to health complications and experiences of gender-based violence. Similar impacts are noted in Yazidi youth, including high rates of anxiety, depression, PTSD, nocturnal enuresis, frequent colds and gastrointestinal symptoms (Nasiroglu & Ceri, 2016; Wilkinson et al., 2019), with some symptoms showing a stronger association for female Yazidi youth (Nasiroglu & Ceri, 2016).

### 3.2.3 Barriers and Enablers to Resettlement

The adaptation and resettlement of refugees is a two-way process in which refugees adapt to their new environment, and their new environment adapts to accommodate them (Chen & Schweitzer, 2019). In addition to legal citizenship, refugees must also be met with

positive attitudes and acceptance from the community to which they resettle, which includes a domestic desire to protect and assist (Chen & Schweitzer, 2019; Esses et al., 2017; Labman & Pearlman, 2018). To understand resettlement and its success, or lack thereof, the characteristics and attitudes of refugees must be explored alongside the responses of the community receiving them (Esses et al., 2017). Overall, good mental and physical health promotes resettlement success because it is a protective factor that facilitates the refugees' ability to fully engage in economic, social, and cultural life (Joshi et al., 2013).

**Policies and Their Impact.** Public policies significantly impact the care and support of refugees, and how they are received (Esses et al., 2017). Public policies and attitudes impact refugees' experience of creating meaningful bonds that resonate with the individual (Chen & Schweitzer, 2019). The more socially accepted refugees feel, the more likely they are to integrate within their host country (Esses et al., 2017). A welcoming community contributes to a sense of belonging, which is critical for the success of integration for refugee youth (Anderson et al., 2023; Chen & Schweitzer, 2019). The host country's culture, attitudes, and policies also play an important role in impacting the connection refugees foster towards their own culture (Shaimi et al., 2024), which is an important aspect in promoting resettlement success. Resettlement success for refugees in Canada has been observed because of the policies and procedures in place, as well as the positive attitudes of the Canadian population towards supporting refugees (Labman & Pearlman, 2018). In contrast, refugees can be provided physical safety but not a warm welcome in their host country (Beiser & Hou, 2016), hindering resettlement success. Experiences of social exclusion, racism, and discrimination are common for refugee youth, as are linguistic and socioeconomic difficulties (Woodgate & Busolo, 2018).

**Relationships and Their Impact.** Relationships and connection to others are key aspects that promote or deter resettlement success for refugee youth. Given the importance of the adolescent time period in forming a sense of self, having opportunities to connect to one's own ethnic and religious background during adolescence is an important aspect in shaping a sense of self for refugee youth upon relocation (Mulongo et al., 2021; Shahimi et al., 2024). This sense of self is positively influenced by opportunities to give back. Markhoul

et al. (2011) found positive impacts upon refugee youths' communication skills, self-confidence, and self-esteem after having the opportunity to work as peer mentors supporting other refugees in refugee camps. While fostering a relationship with oneself and culture can positively impact resettlement success, acculturation stress can be a barrier for refugee youth (Kartal et al., 2018). In a study examining Vietnamese Canadian students and Somali refugees in Canada, George et al. (2015) identified that acculturation related stresses are associated with mental health difficulties. For Yazidi young people, while family can be a source of stress for similar reasons, connection to family, including close friends, also provides a support network for sharing and coping with problems, and also facilitates a sense of connection to their identity and culture in the aftermath of the 2014 genocide (Beroni et al., 2024).

Relationships with others are a prominent factor in determining resettlement success for refugee youth. Positive peer relationships with both same-ethnic peers and peers of different nationalities are of importance, and foster a sense of happiness in refugee youth, and contribute to them feeling settled in their new country (Mulongo et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2021). School is central in fostering belonging for refugee youth (Anderson et al., 2023). Belonging at school is associated with higher rates of self-efficacy and lower rates of mental health difficulties for refugees. Affective relationships have also been positively linked to academic achievement (Smith et al., 2021). Being socially connected and accepted by peers is essential for fostering feelings of belonging and successful integration at the moment (Esses et al., 2017; Morrice et al., 2020), and it is also linked to successful future integration as youth refugees become adults (Morrice et al., 2020). While relationships can have a positive impact on refugee youth, contributing to resettlement success, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2016) found that discrimination, racism, and xenophobia occur and can leave youth refugees feeling isolated and marginalized. A poor sense of belonging within a host country leaves youth vulnerable to experiencing poorer mental wellbeing and hindered adaptation to their new environment (Chen & Schweitzer, 2019). This contributes to a lack of safety and security experienced.

**Needs of Refugee Youth.** Chronic and traumatic stressors experienced early in life, or Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), have a vast impact on an individual's health and

behaviour (Wood et al., 2020). The more adverse events that a person experiences, the higher the likelihood of them developing a mental illness (Allen et al., 2014). It is common for refugee youth to have encountered multiple ACEs before migration (Wood et al., 2020). These experiences can be confounded by difficult migration and acculturation experiences, as previously described, exacerbating migration difficulties for refugees (Beiser & Hou, 2016; Kartal et al., 2018). Given this, having access to timely and high-quality health and mental health care immediately upon arrival is essential for refugees (Joshi et al., 2013). It is vital that individuals and organizations supporting refugees be provided with adequate resources and training to understand and support the needs of these youth, including training to support cultural competence and to address the specific needs of refugees (Rousseau, 2018), and that they are knowledgeable about the impact of gender differences and ACE's on symptoms presentation and intervention outcomes (Tabone, 2022).

Notably, the core characteristics of best practices for treatment that should be present when supporting refugees are empathy, emotional support, and advocacy to reduce adversity (Kronick, 2018). Communication is key, as noted by the results of the study conducted Joshi et al. (2013). This study found that patient dissatisfaction more frequently arose from poor communication with service providers in comparison to medical errors and that language barriers reduced the quality of care refugees received. Ensuring services are accessible is vital (Joshi et al., 2013). To ensure accessibility, professional interpreters should be provided when individuals engage in services using their non-dominant language, while lay interpreters and family members should be avoided (Kronick, 2018). In addition, after the initial care period has ended, to support resettlement success the transition to long-term care should be facilitated (Joshi et al., 2013). Education is another service of great importance upon relocation. The ability to access good formal education is vital for youth refugees (Woodgate & Busolo, 2018), as well as having access to educational environments that are inclusive and culturally appropriate (Minhas et al., 2017). Youth refugees across the globe have indicated that difficulty accessing quality learning, formal education, and skill-building is a significant challenge contributing to resettlement success (UNHCR, 2016).

**Service Coordination.** Poor continuity of care leads to fragmented service delivery for refugee young people, and has been noted as a barrier to service engagement (Colucci et al., 2015). Thus, coordinated care is an essential component of service access and utilization towards promoting adjustment success (Joshi et al., 2013). An integrated model of care, grounded in an ecological framework, should be utilized to address all factors impacting the youth, including medical, developmental, and socio-cultural background, as well family and community influences (Kronick, 2018; Minhas et al., 2017). A multidisciplinary approach, with high levels of collaboration between all parties providing support, including schools, primary care physicians, community workers, and mental health institutions, is essential (Kronick, 2018; Rousseau, 2018). Schools play a particularly important role in identifying, managing, and promoting the health and mental health of refugees, given the immediate and enduring impact school has on the life of youth (Beiser & Hou, 2016; Woodland et al., 2016). Results from Pastoor (2017) study supported that collaboration between schools and community organizations should occur to promote learning for refugee youth and to support youth in reaching their potential.

### 3.2.4 Support Recommendations for Yazidi Refugees

Due to the high levels of trauma that Yazidi individuals have experienced, they require additional services and supports (Bhattacharyya et al., 2020). Current research has illuminated the need for utilizing a culturally sensitive approach to support (Kizilhan & Noll-Hussong, 2017), and given the high rates of trauma, safety has been identified as the most prominent factor that support should provide (Hoffman et al., 2018). If treatment is utilized as a form of support, safety must be established by providing a secure service environment that fosters a sense of security and does not lead to the individual feeling threatened or in danger (Kizilhan & Noll-Hussong, 2017). Support can be enhanced by providing individual rather than group support and providing in-home mental health services (Government of Canada, 2018).

The Government of Canada (2018) identified additional best practice recommendations, informed by service providers and the Yazidi community, to support their integration and resettlement, stemming from acknowledgement that the needs of Yazidi refugees in

Canada are not being met. They currently receive insufficient monthly income and, in some cases, have failed to be connected to established Canadian Yazidi communities upon resettlement. These recommendations, among others, include a suggestion for additional funding periods and relocating new Yazidi refugees closer to their families and other established Yazidi refugees in Canada. In December of 2023, the Government of Canada (2023) issued a statement in support of reuniting resettled Yazidi refugees with their families in Iraq through accepting applications for resettlement to Canada, which also identified the need to provide mental health support during resettlement. However, despite the previously acknowledged need for additional resettlement support, approved applicants will only receive one year of income and resettlement support, including mental health supports (Government of Canada, 2023). No mention is made of longer funding periods, despite the acknowledgement that Yazidis continue to struggle with their resettlement beyond the first year (Government of Canada, 2018). Nor is there mention of providing multidisciplinary support that utilizes collaboration between multiple parities, including mental health, despite the strong evidence for this as best practice within the literature (Kronick, 2018; Rousseau, 2018). This is occurring simultaneously to a fivefold increase in those seeking asylum in Canada from 2021 to 2023 (Smith, 2024), as well as the exacerbation of resettlement challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic leading to an additional source of trauma for refugees, and a lack of funding for services which has been reported to comprise service quality for refugees (Al-Janaideh et al., 2023).

### 3.2.5 Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is used to understand how people make decisions. Maslow states that there are five levels of human needs 1) physiological, 2) safety, 3) love and belonging, 4) esteem, and 5) self-actualization (Warren & Smith, 2020). They are arranged according to hierarchy (Maslow, 1943). This means that our lower-function needs, such as meeting our physiological need for food, water, and shelter, and our need for safety, such as having security and stability, take priority over higher-function needs (Warren & Smith, 2020). Higher function needs include things like our need for love and belonging, such as our need for relationships and intimacy, our esteem needs, for example those that make us feel accomplished, and our self-actualization needs (Lonn & Dantzler, 2017; Warren &

Smith, 2020). It is argued that these needs are universal and fulfilling them leads to increased feelings of well-being for individuals across the globe (Tay & Diener, 2011). While originally depicted as a linear journey, more recent interpretations argue there is a more fluid transition between the levels (Lonn & Dantzler, 2017; Warren & Smith, 2020). This suggests that needs may overlap, specific concerns may be comprised of multiple hierarchical needs, and instances may occur that threaten a lower level while one feels satiated at a higher level. Maslow's hierarchy of needs can be applied to understand how people decide settlement-related behaviours. It has been applied as a guiding theory to support refugees in emergency cases (Pop, 2022) and in counselling refugee clients (Lonn & Dantzler, 2017).

### 3.3 Methods

Participatory action research is the term used to represent collaborative approaches to research between researchers and participants, in which an equal partnership is created (Doucet et al., 2022; Kim, 2019), with the goal of empowerment (Heppner et al., 2016). When used in research with youth, the following three principles are key: 1) the research topics center on the lives and concerns of the youth, 2) youth participate, and 3) there is a “transformative” experience that occurs for participants by them creating knowledge and practices that directly benefit themselves and their community (Branquinho et al., 2020). The research must be led by participants and stakeholders (Kim, 2019), and participant input must be provided at each stage of the research process (Heppner et al., 2016). The relationship between the researcher and the community involved is central to the research process (Mirra et al., 2016).

The present study sought to honour the principles of PAR. The researchers had a prior relationship with the local community agency that was collaborated with for the present study, which developed over years of collaboration on other research endeavours. Collaboration with an advisory team comprised of the Director of Newcomer Settlement Services, various support staff at the agency, and Yazidi youth occurred at every stage of the research, outlined below. The relationship between the Project Coordinator and the community was central (Mirra et al., 2016) and developed over time by the Project

Coordinator embedding themselves within the population by attending events, participating in programming, and getting to know the youth and families.

### 3.3.1 Study Design

The present study was a group concept mapping study, a PAR methodology that utilizes a mixed-methods approach, where qualitative approaches are used to gather the data and quantitative approaches are used to analyze the qualitative data collected (Kane & Trochim, 2007b; Rosas, 2017). Within this method, participants act as co-researchers, helping to develop research questions, collect and analyze data, and interpret the findings (Windsor, 2013). Concept mapping has been widely recognized as an effective way to capture the complexity of group phenomena, which occurs through capturing the individual participant voices and the participants' shared view (Rosas, 2017; Windsor, 2013). Previous research has effectively utilized this approach with various populations, including migrants and children (Burgos et al., 2018; Dare & Nowicki, 2019; Nowicki & Brown, 2015). Dare and Nowicki's (2019) study found that children and youth can be successfully involved in generating, sorting, and labelling data while bringing a new understanding of social phenomena by highlighting children's perspectives. Burgos et al. (2019) successfully implemented concept mapping with newcomer youth to explore factors that promote resettlement.

### 3.3.2 Procedure

The methodology followed the six major steps outlined within the concept mapping framework (Trochim, 1989; Trochim & Kane, 2005). Steps 1 through 3 are considered to be the data collection phases, and steps 4 through 6 are considered to be the data analysis stages.

**Step 1: Preparation.** During the preparation stage, the project's logistics are determined (Trochim & Kane, 2005). The project was completed in conjunction with a local community centre that offers settlement services in the southern region of a medium-sized city in Southern Ontario, Canada. The center primarily draws from the surrounding neighborhoods, and other settlement services are available in other parts of the city. The

present study sample drew from Yazidi refugees who access this centre specifically. A collaborative research approach was utilized from the project creation (Kim, 2019). The author met with the advisory team, and together, the research concentration on the Yazidi population was determined. Subsequently, Yazidi youth were recruited as part of the community advisory team, and the focus on the study and map were determined; this map examined the factors that helped youth adjust to life in Canada.

The participants were Yazidi youth between the ages of 15 and 24. A total of 12 youth participated in the study, 12 of whom participated in the data generation phase and 10 participated in the structuring phase. The average age of the youth participants was 17.7 years old (2.81), and the average approximate years since resettlement in Canada was 4.25 years (0.72). The participants were recruited through a local community centre utilizing word of mouth and flyer advertisements. Interested participants were asked to contact the researchers for further information on participation.

**Step 2: Generation.** The generation step occurs through a brainstorming activity and the synthesizing of ideas to prepare them for use in step 3 (Trochim & Kane, 2005). The brainstorming activity was comprised of individual interviews with 12 of the youth participants. Upon expressing their interest in participating in the study, individual interviews were arranged and conducted with the youth at a local community centre by the Project Coordinator. A translator was available if needed. Once consent was obtained, the youth engaged in a semi-structured interview that lasted approximately 30 minutes that included demographic information and the focal question “what factors have promoted your adjustment to life in Canada?”. Participants were compensated with a \$25 honorarium gift card and provided bus tickets to cover their transportation.

Upon completing the interviews, the researchers met to edit and synthesize the responses. Carefully considering maintaining as much content and wording as possible, redundant responses were removed, and language and grammar were edited to ensure responses would be understood by all the participants in the subsequent stage (Trochim & McLinden, 2017). A final response set of 54 unique responses was generated.

**Step 3: Structuring.** The structuring step involved the participants sorting the responses generated in step 2 (Trochim & Kane, 2005). During this phase, all the participants who completed step 2 were invited back to the local community centre at a specified date and time to participate in a group sorting activity. Participants were provided with individual item responses generated in step 2 and asked to sort the responses in any way that made sense. Translation assistance was provided. 10 of the interviewed participants completed the sorting task, for which they were compensated with a second honorarium (\$25 gift card) and two additional bus tickets.

**Step 4: Representation.** During step four of the concept mapping methodology, data analysis was performed (Trochim & McLinden, 2017), utilizing the Groupwisdom™ software (Concept System, 2021). Two analyses were run on the sort data (Kane & Trochim, 2007a). First, a multidimensional scaling (MDS) analysis of the similarity matrix. From this analysis, the data was plotted into two-dimensional (x,y) space, creating a point map where the distance between the points on the axis represents the frequency at which the responses were grouped together by the participants (Rosas, 2017). A quantitative reflection of how often the responses were grouped together by participants was reflected by a bridging index. This is a value between 0.0 and 1.0, where lower values represent responses that were grouped together with responses near it on the map, and a higher bridging value represents responses that were grouped together with responses over the whole map (Brown et al., 2019; Kane & Trochim, 2007a).

The point map generated by the MDS analysis was then analyzed using a hierarchical cluster analysis (Kane & Trochim, 2007a). In this step, each response began as its own cluster. At each step, two clusters were merged until the optimal number of clusters to represent the data has been reached, to be determined by the researchers in the subsequent step (Brown et al., 2019; Burgos et al., 2019).

A validity index called the stress value was also generated, which examines the goodness of fit of the final concept map (Kane & Trochim, 2007a; Rosas & Kane, 2011). Stress values are numbers between 0.0 and 1.0, where a high stress value indicates greater discrepancy within the map and does not represent a strong overall fit and a low stress

value indicates lower discrepancy within the map and a better overall fit (Kane & Trochim, 2007a). The stress value for this map was 0.29, falling in the acceptable range. According to Rosas and Kane (2011), a stress value of 0.39 and below is in the acceptable range, indicating a 1% chance of the data being random.

**Step 5: Interpretation.** In step 5, the researchers determined the appropriate number of clusters for the concept map to represent the data based on a qualitative and quantitative review of the information (Brown et al., 2019; Kane & Trochim, 2007a). Cluster maps of 13, 12, 11, 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, and 5 were considered. The 7-cluster solution was chosen, as it showed qualitative distinction and had a favourable amount of low bridging indices, indicating that the responses were paired only with responses that were close to the map (Brown et al., 2019; Kane & Trochim, 2007a).

The researchers created labels for the final concept map, determined based on a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the final clusters. Qualitatively, the researchers examined the participant-generated labels, and the participant-generated responses within the cluster. Quantitatively, the researchers reviewed the responses within the cluster with the lowest bridging indices, as these are considered the cluster's most central responses. The seven labels were deemed the most appropriate: experiences at school, connection with family and friends, accepting it takes time, sense of security, community agency support, feeling liberated, and feeling like I belong. The final concept map and labels were reviewed with the youth participants for final approval to ensure the integrity of the PAR research design was upheld.

**Step 6: Utilization.** The final step of the concept mapping methodology surrounds utilizing the data generated from the maps (Trochim & McLinden, 2017), as done below and through the dissemination of these findings through conference presentations and discussions.

### 3.4 Results

A concept map was created for the focal question, “What factors have promoted your adjustment to life in Canada?”. This map was created based on the responses generated and

sorted by the youth participants. A total of 54 unique responses were sorted by 10 of the Yazidi youth participants. The contents of the map created are described within this section. While the results are produced in random order, after spending significant time conversing with the youth, the results below have been arranged by the researcher in a way that they feel most accurately reflects the sequences of the youths' stories.

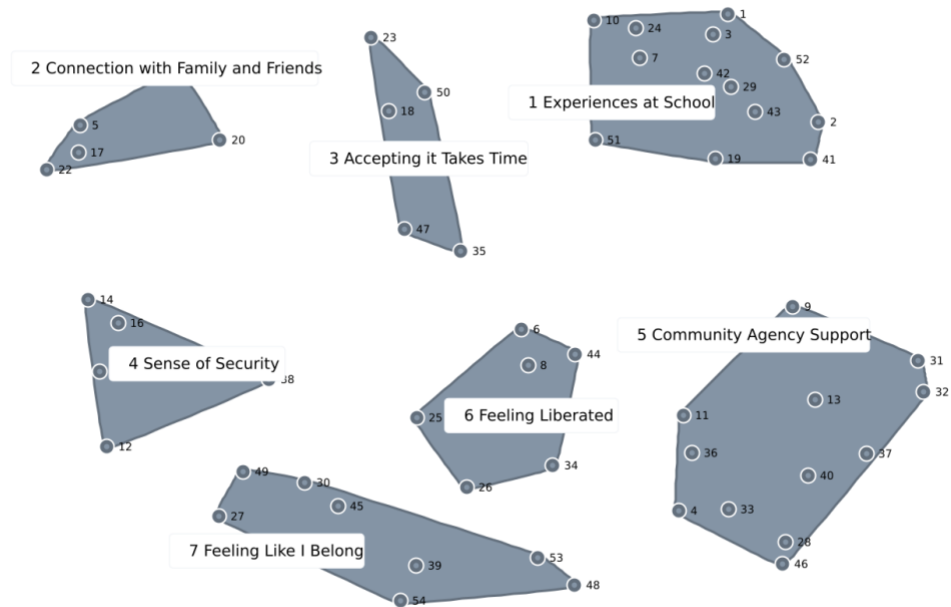


Figure 2: Concept Map of Statements for the 54 unique statements provided for the question “What factors have promoted your adjustment to life in Canada?”

*Note.* Each point in the table represents one statement, indicated by the statement number.

The distance between the points on the map indicate how often the statements were grouped together by participants. Points closer together on the map were grouped together more often by participants, whereas points further away from each other on the map were grouped together less often by participants.

Table 2: Statement and Concepts for: "What factors have promoted your adjustment to life in Canada?"

Concept	Responses	Bridging Index
1. Experiences at School		Avg. 0.09
	42. The school. They helped me learn how to do things, like how to type.	0
	3. Attending school.	0.01
	1. At school, it was easy to understand the teacher.	0.03
	24. Once I learned the language, I got successful in school and I could communicate with the teachers.	0.04
	29. School makes it easier, because I learned English in the school.	0.04
	10. I am able to talk in English to my teachers and strangers.	0.05
	7. Going to school all day. every day, because in Iraq I only went 8-12:30.	0.08
	52. When I was at school, I was learning and also helping other people to learn. Being able to help other students, because my teacher needed my help, helped me.	0.1
	43. The teachers are really nice and they teach me a lot. They help me a lot, they don't leave you alone to figure things out.	0.12
	19. In grade 8, I started to think that I have to learn and get used to Canada, to get a new life here. So when I started to make these changes, it made things easier.	0.15

	2. At school, there is a resource worker who helps us. She helps us at school and outside, if we need anything.	0.16
	41. The school was helpful to learn the language and to be connected to other people and forget about things.	0.21
	51. When I naturally learn a language, I get comfortable with it, and that is a good thing for me.	0.21
2. Connection with Family and Friends		Avg. 0.56
	5. Being reunited with my family.	0.38
	17. I have my mom and my siblings.	0.44
	22. Now I am with my family and I know I will always be close to them.	0.49
	20. My aunt and my uncle were here already, so we knew we wouldn't be alone here.	0.55
	15. I have made a best friend. She is really kind. We go everywhere together.	0.92
3. Accepting it Takes Time		Avg. 0.3
	35. The idea of having a new life here.	0.17
	47. We came here to start a new life, so once I learned the language and made friends it was easier.	0.22
	50. When I know that I am ready to speak English and be involved in activities and special things going on.	0.3

	18. I learned to be patient. The things you wished and wanted, you just need to wait for it.	0.33
	23. Once I got good at speaking English, I could help my family with their language needs.	0.46
4. Sense of Security		0.69
	38. The people I have met.	0.32
	12. I get paid.	0.67
	16. I have made Canadian friends.	0.72
	21. My friend makes me happy every day.	0.72
	14. I have food.	1
5. Community Agency Support		Avg. 0.21
	36. The initial settlement supports helped us a lot. There were certain people that helped with translation stuff and with applications for citizenships.	0.09
	33. The center supported me with everything in the first year. The language, how to get around, and how to do things here.	0.12
	28. Programs that were being run at the center and other community organizations. It got us out of the house, do some fun stuff, and see how other people and cultures do things and interact.	0.14
	13. I get to go to programs and I have fun. The people are really nice and respectful.	0.15

	37. The library and staff at the center were helpful. There was information about Canada and they could answer our questions, and help us read bills and paperwork.	0.17
	40. The programs at the center. Every day we are here to learn new things, and we have met many great people here.	0.18
	4. Being a part of volunteering with the kids at the center has been helpful. It is easy and I like it.	0.21
	11. I am involved with a community mentorship program, and my big brother has shown me around the area.	0.22
	46. They made programming for us to help us learn more things. For example, the library did a program for Yazidi. They help us if we need anything.	0.24
	9. Having translators was helpful.	0.26
	32. The center helped us to get involved with the new people who are here and has given us a lot of programs that are fun, and made us feel that we are included.	0.28
	31. The center and our teachers try to help us because we don't have a father, but memories always stay.	0.41
6. Feeling Liberated		Avg. 0.11
	44. The water is different. It is snow and rain. It was exciting the first time we saw the snow.	0.01
	6. Canada made my life really easy. Canada has more things.	0.04

	8. Having a peaceful life here, because in Iraq there was always war.	0.07
	34. The city because it gave us a home.	0.14
	25. Once we got to know people, they would show us around and we got to do more things and feel more connected.	0.21
	26. Other new comers.	0.21
7. Feeling Like I Belong		Avg. 0.4
	45. The Yazidi community here who have been here longer than us.	0.18
	30. Some people here are very nice and they try their best to help us.	0.3
	53. When we came from Iraq, the government helped us and they still help us. The Iraq government and the Canadian government. They help us with the bills, with translation, and with programming.	0.3
	48. We used to live in a rural area in Iraq, but here it is more urban. So once we got to know people, they showed us around the city and it was helpful.	0.33
	49. When I first got resettled, I was resettled in Winnipeg and then I decided to move to London. I had no one in Winnipeg, and my family was here in London, so being with family here was helpful.	0.34
	39. The people. Helped me learn different activities and stuff.	0.43

	54. You see the Yazidi community and how well some people are doing, and this gives you the push to also want to do better. Life here is very different than Iraq, so we really needed the push.	0.6
	27. Our family doctor has helped us a lot. She helped my mom a lot when we were sick, and she helped take care of us.	0.73

### 3.4.1 Sense of Security

The youth described a new found sense of security through their needs being met in Canada, which facilitated their adjustment. Some responses identified that youths' basic needs were being met, such as their physiological needs, "I have food," or their need for financial security, "I get paid." Other responses identified that youths' higher-level needs were being met, such as their need for love and belonging. This was endorsed in the responses "The people I have met", "I have made Canadian friends", and "My friend makes me happy every day."

### 3.4.2 Feeling Liberated

The youth described a feeling of liberation and freedom, in its truest form of being freed from living in war and captivity, and liberation in the form of experiences that came with being free. Central to this concept was the idea that life in Canada brought peace, in contrast to the chaos of living in war and captivity, represented in the response "Having a peaceful life here because in Iraq there was always war.". As a result of peace in Canada came an ease of life for the youth: "Canada made my life really easy. Canada has more things". This new, peaceful life brought forth new opportunities for youth, such as experiencing varying weather systems: "The water is different. It is snow and rain. It was exciting the first time we saw the snow". Youth also experienced new opportunities from the people they met, who shared their world with them and made them feel welcomed and connected: "Once we

got to know people, they would show us around, and we got to do more things and feel more connected”.

### 3.4.3 Accepting it Takes Time

Adjusting to life in Canada required acceptance. Youth identified that, although their lives may not have instantly improved upon arriving in Canada, accepting it takes time to attain the future they dreamed of was helpful, represented in the responses “The idea of having a new life here” and “I learned to be patient. The things you wished and wanted, you just need to wait for it”. Youth also had to accept that building skills takes time but leads to positive experiences, such as facilitating their connection to others, involvement in activities, and supporting their families: “We came here to start a new life, so once I learned the language and made friends it was easier” and “Once I got good at speaking English, I could help my family with their language needs”,

### 3.4.4 Connection with Family and Friends

Youth described many ways in which they were connected with others in Canada. Some of this connection came from reunification with family members: “Being reunited with my family”. Whereas some of the connection stemmed from knowing that their families are now safe from harm and being separated again: “Now I am with my family, and I know I will always be close to them”. Youth also spoke about the connection facilitated with extended family members who were already resettled to Canada, which provided a sense of comfort to them as they faced many unknowns during resettlement: “My aunt and my uncle were here already, so we knew we wouldn’t be alone here”. In addition to reunification, the youth spoke about the opportunity to build new connections in Canada, represented in the response “I have made a best friend. She is really kind. We go everywhere together”.

### 3.4.5 Experiences at School

Experiences had at school, such as the chance to attend school, learning opportunities that occurred at school, and the supportive staff, promoted Yazidi youths’ adjustment to life in

Canada. Central to this concept was the idea that having the opportunity to attend school on a regular schedule, which many of the youth did not have previously, was a positive aspect of settling in Canada. This was represented in the responses “Attending school” and “Going to school all day. every day, because in Iraq I only went 8-12:30”. By attending school, youth had many opportunities to learn, “The school. They helped me learn how to do things, like how to type”, which included the opportunity to learn English, “School makes it easier, because I learned English in the school”.

School was also a location in which youth encountered kind and helpful people: “The teachers are really nice and they teach me a lot. They help me a lot, they don’t leave you alone to figure things out” and “At school, there is a resource worker who helps us. She helps us at school and outside, if we need anything”. School also provided the opportunity for the youth to be of service to others, which was a rewarding experience for the youth: “When I was at school, I was learning and also helping other people to learn. Being able to help other students because my teacher needed my help, helped me”.

### 3.4.6 Community Agency Support

Many facets of community agency support were identified by the youth as helpful in their adjustment to life in Canada. A fundamental aspect of this concept was a local community center, with programming and staff specifically geared to supporting newcomers: “The center supported me with everything in the first year. The language, how to get around, and how to do things here” and “I get to go to programs and I have fun. The people are really nice and respectful”. The support at the centre often came in the form of initial settlement supports and programming offered at the center: “The center supported me with everything in the first year. The language, how to get around, and how to do things here”. However, these supports may have also been accessed in other places in the community: “Programs that were being run at the center and other community organizations. It got us out of the house, do some fun stuff, and see how other people and cultures do things and interact”. Translation services were also a helpful factor of initial services, acknowledged in the response “Having translators was helpful.”

No matter where the services were being accessed, a key component that made these helpful was the supportive people they encountered within the services: “The center and our teachers try to help us because we don’t have a father, but memories always stay” and “The library and staff at the center were helpful. There was information about Canada, and they could answer our questions, and help us read bills and paperwork”. The opportunity to be connected with others and learn skills was another helpful aspect of the programs and community agency support: “The center helped us to get involved with the new people who are here and has given us a lot of programs that are fun, and made us feel that we are included” and “I get to go to programs and I have fun. The people are really nice and respectful”. However, benefitting from services was not the only aspect of community agency support that youth described benefiting from. In fact, the youth felt grateful for the opportunity to give back, noted in the response “Being a part of volunteering with the kids at the center has been helpful. It is easy, and I like it”.

### 3.4.7 Feeling Like I Belong

Youth reported many ways in which a fostered sense of belonging promoted their adjustment to life in Canada. One predominant way the youth felt like they belonged was by resettling into an area with an established Yazidi community, noted in the response “The Yazidi community here who have been here longer than us.”. Seeing the success of their community members promoted their own adjustment success: “You see the Yazidi community and how well some people are doing, and this gives you the push to also want to do better. Life here is very different than Iraq, so we really needed the push”.

The youth described how kind community members went out of their way to provide support and make them feel welcomed, which fostered a sense of belonging. “Some people here are very nice, and they try their best to help us” and “The people. Helped me learn different activities and stuff”. Formal support and services, such as initial settlement support and health care providers also fostered their belonging. This was represented in the responses “When we came from Iraq, the government helped us and they still help us. The Iraq government and the Canadian government. They help us with the bills, with

translation, and with programming” and “Our family doctor has helped us a lot. She helped my mom a lot when we were sick, and she helped take care of us”.

## 3.5 Discussion

Seven key concepts were reflected to represent Yazidi youths’ perspectives on adjusting to life in Canada: experiences at school, connection with family and friends, accepting it takes time, a sense of security, community agency support, feeling liberated, and feeling like belong. While no coherent message is reflected when reviewed in the order produced by groupwisdom™, when analyzed in sequence of the youths’ stories and overall message, four meta themes aligned with Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs emerge: safety, connection, opportunities, and support. The first three meta themes align with Maslow’s framework directly, while the theme of support emerged as a facilitator for meeting these needs. This study found that meeting lower-level and higher-level needs were happening sequentially and concurrently (Lonn & Dantzler, 2017).

### 3.5.1 Safety

According to Maslow’s Hierarchy, a person must first ensure that their physiological needs are met and that they have established safety through finding security and stability before attempting to satisfy higher-order needs (Maslow, 1943; Warren & Smith, 2020). This same notion is depicted in the present study. Youth simultaneously discussed how meeting their physiological and safety needs- often interconnected, as discussed by Lonn and Dantzler (2017)- promoted their resettlement. Establishing safety serves as the foundation that allows the youth to explore and meet their higher-level needs.

In the concept, Sense of Security, youth discussed having their physiological met, such as access to food and income. In the concept Feeling Liberated, they described experiencing physical and mental security in Canada, having been freed from war and captivity. Safety also manifested in knowing that family members and friends were safe and alive, as well as the ability to reunite with them and be surrounded by a community of Yazidis in Canada. This was captured in the concept Connection with Family and Friends, where youth described immense relief at being reconnected with their family members and the

assurance that ISIS can no longer target or separate them. This finding aligns with existing literature, which emphasizes that physical and emotional safety is fundamental to refugees' needs upon relocation (Beiser & Hou, 2016). It also corresponds with recommendations for supporting Yazidi refugees that suggest extended funding periods (Government of Canada, 2018) to ensure Yazidis can continue to meet their basic physiological and safety needs. More recently, however, the Government of Canada continues to provide only one year of income and resettlement support (Government of Canada, 2023), raising concerns about whether Yazidi refugees are achieving long-term economic security- an essential factor in meeting the physical and emotional safety needed to promote resettlement success (Beiser & Hou, 2016; Pop, 2022).

### 3.5.2 Connection

Once youth have met their physiological and safety needs, they can take action to satisfy their higher-level needs (Maslow, 1943). Meeting their need for connection, which aligns with Maslow's need for love and belonging, represents the second meta theme reflected by the youth that promoted their resettlement to life in Canada. Although the actions needed to satisfy the need for connection could happen simultaneously with meeting safety needs, the youth described this more as a "next step" in facilitating resettlement. For them, connection came in the form of connecting with family in Canada, connecting with their culture of origin, and forming new friendships.

The positive impacts of family connections are captured in the concept Connection with Family and Friends. Youth discussed the sense of belonging they felt with loved ones and their community, emphasizing family members already established in Canada were instrumental in helping them navigate their own resettlement. Connection with one's culture of origin is dependably identified in the literature as a necessary component for the resettlement success of youth refugees (Mulongo et al., 2021; Shahimi et al., 2024). This trend was consistently reported by youth in the present study, who identified reunification and connection with family members as promoting factors to resettlement in the concept Connection with Family and Friends. The idea of connection to the Yazidi community was further explored in the concept Feeling Like I Belong. This, too, aligns with

recommendations made by the Government of Canada (2018) that suggest relocating Yazidi refugees closer to their families and other established Yazidis. However, whether this recommendation has come to fruition has not been adequately explored.

The positive impacts of forming new friendships were also discussed. The concept Connection with Family and Friends captures the important role of meeting new people. Welcoming individuals at school and within community agencies were also recognized as an important point of connection for the youth in the concepts Experiences at School and Community Agency Support. While these experiences contributed to developing a sense of belonging, this construct was specifically expressed in the concept Feeling Like I Belong. These findings align with existing literature that emphasize the positive resettlement impacts that stem from acceptance by resettlement communities and the development of meaningful bonds with peers and staff at school and in the community, have for refugee youth (Anderson et al., 2023; Chen & Schweitzer, 2019; Esses et al., 2017; Labman & Pearlman, 2018).

### 3.5.3 Opportunities

The concepts from the present study form a meta theme of opportunities. For the youth, having access to previously inaccessible and new opportunities represented their ability to feel accomplished, which promoted their resettlement success. This feeling of accomplishment stemming from opportunities is consistent with what Maslow calls esteem needs (Maslow, 1943).

In the present study, many opportunities were associated with school. Youth indicated that both the opportunity to attend school, which had previously been denied to them, and the learning that occurred at school, played an important role in their resettlement success, as noted in the concept Experiences at School. Community programming was another important facet in creating opportunities. In the concept of Community Agency Support, youth endorsed that they had been presented with ample opportunities to learn new skills while attending programming and accessing support. This aligns with the literature that acknowledges the importance of school and education (Beiser & Hou, 2016; Woodgate & Busolo, 2018) and external agencies (Kronick, 2018; Rousseau, 2018) in the resettlement

process. Given the well-established necessity of these services for meeting the needs of refugee youth, as evident in the literature and present study, consideration for the sustainability of refugee support services is needed, particularly in light of evidence that suggests these services are lacking funding (Al-Janaideh et al., 2023) and potentially overburdened due to the surge in asylum seeking refugees in the last few years (Smith, 2024).

Opportunities that left youth feeling accomplished did not come solely from learning new skills, they also arose from having the opportunity to give back. This was endorsed in the concept Community Agency Support, where youth described the gratification they felt from volunteering, which helped promote their resettlement. This is consistent with the literature on refugee youth (Markhoul et al., 2011). However, it has not been explored in past research on Yazidi refugees. An important construct in relation to opportunities in the present study was learning the virtue of patience. The youth described that although they had many new opportunities here in Canada, they must accept that it takes time to learn new skills and to achieve the life they had dreamed up. This provides important contextual information to support resettlement success among Yazidi refugees and other refugees.

### 3.5.4 Support

For the youth in the present study, the ability to take action to meet their needs was facilitated by the support they received from others. Some of this support came in the form of formal support, which the literature identifies as essential to resettlement success for refugees. Formal support can be provided in the form of policies (Shaimi et al., 2024), health and mental health care (Joshi et al., 2013), education and its associated supports needed for success (Woodgate & Busolo, 2018), and community workers (Kronick, 2018). Ensuring the accessibility of services by providing things like the presence of translators (Chen & Schweitzer, 2019; Kronick, 2018) and culturally appropriate support (Kizilhan & Noll-Hussong, 2017) is essential. The importance of formal supports was evident as a facilitator of resettlement for youth in the present study. Within the concept Feeling Like I Belong, Yazidi youth identified that the initial government supports, as well as health care providers, were extremely helpful. At school, the youth experienced support from teachers and a settlement resource teacher, identified in the concept of Experiences at School.

Furthermore, formal supports that were accessed through community agencies, such as initial settlement services, group programming, and translation, were key ideas within the concept Community Agency Support. However, mental health care support was not noted among the youth in the present study.

Other support came in the form of informal support for the youth. Informal support was described as the kind and responsive care being provided, the people they encountered, and the opportunities facilitated by formal support, such as meeting new people, as was discussed in the concepts Feeling Like I Belong, Community Agency Support, and Experiences at School. Similar notions are emphasized in the literature on supporting refugees, which identifies that the responses of receiving countries, such as having a desire to assist and protect refugees, strongly impact resettlement success (Esses et al., 2017). For youth in the present study, having access to these formal and informal supports facilitated their ability to meet their needs, subsequently promoting their adjustment to life in Canada.

### 3.5.5 Implications

It is evident that Yazidi youth are not only motivated to satisfy their needs, but their resettlement journey is promoted by their ability to do so, as is understood through Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. From these needs, clear implications for how this information can be implemented were presented.

An underlying message was the importance of finding safety in Canada, and fostering connection to Yazidi community members and culture, in their resettlement success. Youth spoke about being grateful for the opportunity to reconnect with family members they had been previously separated from, the importance of knowing their family members are safe, and the sense of belonging from being surrounded by Yazidi community and culture. Important implications for policy and practice can be inferred from this information. First and foremost, it is essential that new Yazidi refugees continue to be resettled in areas in Canada with an already established Yazidi population. Programs and support agencies should build on this information by continuing to foster a sense of belonging and connection to the Yazidi community. This includes continuing to provide opportunities and support for Yazidi's in Iraq to relocate to Canada, and be connected with

those already settled here. This not only ensures the safety of additional members of the Yazidi community, but promotes the resettlement of those already in Canada by providing a sense of relief for knowing their family, friends, and community are safe. This could also include continuing to offer Yazidi-specific programming long after the initial settlement services cease to be offered and celebrating Yazidi culture and holidays within the support agencies. It may also include opportunities for mentorship between already established Yazidi youth refugees and those newly arriving, which satisfies the need for connection to the Yazidi community and provides altruistic opportunities for the youth, both of which were identified as resettlement promoters. To sustain these programs and practices, policies must be adjusted to allocate financial support to for on-going, Yazidi-specific programming. Additionally, continued opportunities and financial aid should be provided to support Yazidi in Iraq to relocate to Canada in proximity to their resettled family members.

There seems to be a lack of consistency with the best practice recommendations for supporting refugees and Yazidi refugees specifically, and what Yazidi youth are identifying as helpful factors that promote their resettlement. For example, the literature identifies having timely access to mental health care (Joshi et al., 2013), providing individual, home-based support (Government of Canada, 2018), and ensuring integrated care is being provided by all supporting agencies and individuals (Kronick, 2018). However, throughout the meta themes, there is no mention of collaboration between supporting people or mental health-based support, let alone in-home care being provided. Furthermore, there appears to be limited individual-based support. This is particularly evident in the meta theme of the support, which identifies various aspects and characteristics of support that are helpful and does not mention of the best practices from the literature. Thus, further research is needed to identify best practices for supporting Yazidi youth refugees in Canada. It is vital that this research incorporates the perspectives of the youth and the service providers directly supporting them.

### 3.5.6 Limitations

There are limitations to consider with regard to the present study. While past research in promoting resettlement success for refugees highlights the need for timely access to

effective health and mental health supports (Joshi et al., 2013), the present study did not ask about these constructs specifically. Thus, the researchers are unable to conclude the reason for the lack of emphasis on mental health support as a factor contributing to resettlement success for Yazidi youth in Canada. Regarding research design, limitations may include that this approach required a significant amount of reading for individuals with variable English literacy skills. Through consultation with the advisory team, it was determined that many of the youth had adequate literacy skills to engage with the task. Additional support in the form of volunteers available to read the statements in English and translation services for anyone who may require additional support were made available to all participants. This approach also required the researchers to work independently from the youth participants during the Interpretation phase. This could be considered not in line with a participatory approach to research, in which the participants are involved at every step of the way. To address this limitation, the authors reviewed the results with the youth before deciding on the final concept map and labels. Due to the qualitative nature of the study, the findings are specific to the Yazidi youth refugees residing in the city where the research was conducted. Further research, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, as well as longitudinal studies to track long-term resettlement trajectories, is recommended to support a more holistic understanding on Yazidi youth refugee's resettlement journeys and to enhance the generalizability of the findings. Despite these potential design limitations, it was determined that group concept mapping was the most appropriate design for conducting research with Yazidi youth, rather than on Yazidi youth, to foster feelings of empowerment (Heppner et al., 2016).

### 3.5.7 Conclusion

The present study expands existing literature by examining factors that promote the resettlement of Yazidi youth refugees in Canada, a perspective that has not been the focal point of previous exploration. Findings align with research on other highly traumatized refugees, highlighting the positive impact of social acceptance, supportive programming, education access, and cultural connection. Additionally, the study underscores the value of having opportunities to give back through supporting others. However, it also reveals gaps requiring further research, particularly in mental health, service provision, and

coordination. The findings emphasize the need for policy revisions to fulfill ongoing resettlement commitments to Yazidi refugees.

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## Chapter 4

### 4 A call to action: The use of Photovoice to increase awareness of the migration and integration needs of Yazidi youth refugees in Canada

This work has been submitted for publication in its entirety in the *Journal for Social Action in Counselling* and is awaiting peer review:

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#### 4.1 Abstract

Exposure to traumatic stressors is common among refugees. This is true for Yazidi refugees, who have experienced immense pre and post-migration stressors. Two separate, but often concurrent, outcomes of exposure to traumatic events are posttraumatic responses and posttraumatic growth. While both are common, the literature tends to highlight negative outcomes. This study explored the migration experiences and needs of Yazidi youth refugees in Canada. Using Photovoice, an arts-based research design that placed the youth at the helm of the research process, the perspective of Yazidi youth was explored. Data was analyzed using participatory analysis, structured from Wang and Burris (1997) three-stage approach. Through collaborative discussions, five themes were identified by the youth: Educating Others on Yazidis and Our Experiences, Bullying and Racism, Help Families in Iraq, Rise Against the Oppressive Government, and Desire to be There to Help. Within these themes, the youth demonstrated the ability for growth and emotional distress to coexist. Recommendations are made for supporting youth in feeling in control of their narratives, fostering relationships, and working with the youth to address structural and systemic level problems, to help support the development of growth following trauma.

Keywords: participatory action research, Photovoice, posttraumatic growth, refugee youth, Yazidi youth

## 4.2 Introduction

Refugees are migrants who have been forced to flee their own country in search of safety and are unable to return due to the threat of persecution associated with war, violence, or mass disorder (Henkelmann et al., 2020; UNHCR, n.d.). Refugees are commonly exposed to multiple harmful and traumatic stressors (Ahmad et al., 2020). Past and current trauma experiences are often at the core of the adverse effects experienced with their physical health, mental health, and adjustment to a new country (Beiser & Hou, 2016; Ceri et al., 2016; Henkelmann et al., 2020). Despite higher occurrences of trauma-related disorders, such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Chan et al., 2016; Kirmayer et al., 2011), there are many instances of resettlement success for refugees (Chen & Schweitzer, 2019; Kartal et al., 2018). While a substantial body of literature suggests that positive change can occur from trauma experiences (Tedeschi & Colhoun, 2004), these experiences are underrepresented.

Yazidis, an ethnically Kurdish group situated in the Sinjar region of Northern Iraq, are a distinctive population of refugees who have endured profound and on-going trauma (Canada, Parliament, House of Commons. Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration [Government of Canada], 2018; Kizilhan & Noll-Hussong, 2017). Marginalized due to their unique ethnic and religious identity, they have often been faced with the ultimatum to convert their religion or face execution (Asher-Schapiro, 2014). In 2014, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) perpetrated the 74<sup>th</sup> recorded genocide against the Yazidi people, leaving nearly 200,000 Yazidis displaced and even more fearing for the lives and wellbeing of themselves, their families, and their broader community (Asher-Schapiro, 2014; Government of Canada, 2018). Brutalities of the attack included the murder of Yazidi men, enslavement and torture of Yazidi women and girls, and the forceful recruitment of Yazidi boys as ISIS child soldiers (Government of Canada, 2018; Hoffman et al., 2018; Wilkinson et al., 2019).

While there is considerable research on refugee pathology and growth, research with Yazidi refugees has primarily focused on highlighting traumatic experiences and their negative impact. There is limited attention to growth after trauma for Yazidi youth refugees in Canada. The present study intended to contribute to this gap in research by utilizing an arts-based methodology to understand Yazidi youth refugees' migration experiences and needs. This was accomplished by implementing a Photovoice design, where youth were asked to “take photos that represent what they would like others to know about their migration and integration experiences”. The present study is situated within a larger participatory action research (PAR) project examining the experiences of Yazidi youth refugees.

#### 4.2.1 Interplay of Trauma, Age, and Refugee Status

Trauma can be understood as the emotional response to a distressing event (American Psychological Association [APA], n.d.), whereas PTSD refers to the immediate and long-term impact of exposure to trauma involving death, threat of death, serious injury, or sexual violence (CMHA, 2016; Hoffman et al., 2018; Mash & Barkley, 2014). Trauma and subsequent PTSD can be the result of direct experience with the aforementioned, witnessing it, learning it has occurred to someone close to you, or by repeated or extreme exposure to the adverse details of the trauma (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; CMHA, 2016). In Western cultures, late childhood and adolescence, developmental time periods captured for youth, are defined by identity formation, increased independence, and close interpersonal relationships, making it a time when youth are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of trauma that affects both their current and future adjustment (Milan et al., 2012; Tsujii et al., 2017). Some of these effects include self-image, self-regulation, trusting others, sense of safety, and self-efficacy (Marquer et al., 2015; Mash & Barkley, 2014; Tsujii et al., 2017), and it places youth at an increased risk for longer psychopathology, substance use, and other quality of life deficits (Milan et al., 2012; Tsujii et al., 2017).

For refugees, exposure to trauma often begins prior to migration, due to war, violence, and discrimination (Beiser & Hou, 2016; Kartal et al., 2018). During migration, their pre-migration trauma experiences are compounded by new traumas that occur during migration (Beiser & Hou, 2016; Kronick, 2018). Research with Yazidi refugees has identified high

occurrences of PTSD (Ibrahim et al., 2018). Richa et al. (2020) found a 70% incidence rate of PTSD among Yazidi refugees in the Iraqi Kurdistan region, and Ibrahim et al. (2018) found a prevalence rate of 90% in internally displaced Yazidi refugees. For Yazidi youth refugees, there have been significant impacts on quality of life, with youth reporting physiological symptoms (e.g., headaches, incontinence) and psychological symptoms (e.g., jumpy, cautious, and isolating from others) (Ceri et al., 2016; Wilkinson et al., 2019).

#### 4.2.2 Posttraumatic Growth

Posttraumatic growth (PTG) is another potential outcome of experiencing traumatic stress (Sleijpen et al., 2016; Zoellner & Maercker, 2006). PTSD and PTG are distinct constructs that are not mutually exclusive (Zoellner & Maercker, 2006). There is a linear relationship between PTSD and PTG, meaning that the greater the distress experiences, the greater potential there is for growth from the distress (Joseph & Linley, 2005; McCormack & Strezov, 2021).

PTG refers to the positive change and growth that occurs out of the psychological struggle that follows an experience of adversity (Collier, 2016), resulting in improvement in areas of an individual's life (Tedeschi & Colhoun, 2004; Zoellner & Maercker, 2006). Two processes must occur: 1) exposure to a traumatic event, and this event 2) disrupts, challenges, or contradicts the way an individual understands circumstances and the world (Tedeschi & Colhoun, 2004). This can lead to the individual processing their struggles, incorporating their experiences into their personal beliefs, and rebuilding their worldview to accommodate the new information (McCormack & McKellar, 2015; Zoellner & Maercker, 2006). Although the trauma experience itself may continue to be distressing, the individual experiences a change in their assumptions about the world, leading to positive benefits (Tedeschi & Colhoun, 2004). Commonly, these five factors are examined to determine whether an individual has achieved growth after trauma: 1) greater appreciation of life and changed sense of priorities, 2) warmer, more intimate relationships, 3) a greater sense of personal strength, 4) recognition of new possibilities or paths for one's life, and 5) spiritual development (Collier, 2016; McCormack & Strezov, 2021; Tedeschi & Colhoun, 2004).

The potential for PTG is influenced by age as well as the nature of trauma experienced and the amount of social support received (Chan et al., 2016; Sleijpen et al., 2016). While trauma exposure disrupts development and creates adverse outcomes (Milan et al., 2012), age is also a mitigating factor for PTSD (Ahmad et al., 2020). During adolescence, many developmental changes occurring in the brain are caused by experiences, not genetics (Perry, 2002). The fact that the brains of youth are more receptive to environmental input means there is a considerable amount of potential for PTG with the right environmental circumstances (Mohr, 2014; Perry, 2002). PTG has been observed following genocides, holocaust, and war (Chan et al., 2016). Recently, Preiss et al. (2022) study found significant levels of posttraumatic stress symptoms (PTSS) and PTG in first-generation Holocaust survivors. PTG is also common among refugee populations (McCormack & Strezov, 2021), and has been observed in different populations of refugees, including Syrian refugees (Chan et al., 2016; Rizkalla & Segal, 2018).

#### 4.2.3 Art, Research, and Posttraumatic Growth

Art is a powerful means to support both personal and social transformation (Goessling et al., 2021; Wright, 2021), and it is an effective strategy for helping individuals cope with trauma in both research and practice (Mohr, 2014). Arts-based research provides participants and researchers a way to express themselves that does not involve language, facilitating descriptions of emotions beyond current cognitive ways of knowing (Lam et al., 2020; van der Vaart et al., 2018). It promotes insight into the experiences of others that may otherwise be difficult to gain (van der Vaart et al., 2018), and facilitates the ability to see injustice through a new perspective, fostering a sense of optimism for the future (Wright, 2021). By fostering a sense of community as awareness, there are interpersonal impacts as it brings together people of diverse ages and generations, and promotes a sense of understanding, dissemination of, and renewal of culture (Humpage et al., 2019; Jokela, 2019). The impacts of this can stem beyond the strengthened community and can create system-level impacts, as it can influence policy-making to promote systemic change (Goessling et al., 2021; Sanon et al., 2014).

Verbal approaches to working through traumatic experiences may not be appropriate for all. Neuroimaging studies have shown that being exposed to traumatic reminders can

influence blood flow in the brain, deactivating the expressive speech center needed to express thoughts and feelings (van der Kolk, 2006). Arts-based research and therapeutic work provide a way to explore trauma and facilitate recovery from traumatic experiences through non-verbal communication (Harris, 2009). Art is one way of expressing the discomfort associated with trauma in a way that empowers individuals for positive change, and it can help individuals attribute meaning to devastating events, which can promote resiliency following adversity (Harris, 2009). As such, arts-based activities are effective in promoting reintegration with youth who have witnessed violence and atrocity and those who have been uprooted.

## 4.3 Methods

### 4.3.1 Study Design

The present study employed a Photovoice methodology grounded in participatory action research (PAR). PAR emphasizes collaborative research practices where researchers and participants work in equal partnership as co-researchers throughout all stages of the research, with the goal of promoting social change (Heppner et al., 2016; Kim, 2019). In the study, researchers and participants jointly explored the central research question to foster positive change for Yazidi youth refugees and their broader community (Kesby et al., 2007). Care was taken to ensure participants were engaged as co-researchers in every phase the project (Doucet et al., 2022; Heppner et al., 2016).

In line with the collaborative approach of PAR, the specific arts-based approach was not predetermined. The potential use of Photovoice was initially discussed with a community advisory group involved in an art therapy initiative with Yazidi parents at the community agency. With their support, Photovoice was introduced as one of several methodological options to the advisory team for this study and was ultimately chosen by the youth participants as their preferred methodology.

This research was conducted with a local community centre servicing newcomer families in a medium-sized city in Southern Ontario, Canada. The research team has a longstanding relationship with the organization, built through previous collaboration and volunteer involvement. An advisory team, comprising the Director of Newcomer Settlement

Services, agency staff, and Yazidi youth, were consulted through all phases of the research. Establishing mutual trust with participants is foundational to the process and aligns with PAR principles, which emphasize building community relationships as a prerequisite to research (Heppner et al., 2016; Kim, 2019). Prior to and following the study, the Project Coordinator remained actively engaged with the youth through participation in cultural events and volunteer activities at the community center.

Photovoice is an arts-based research approach in which participants use cameras to capture images that reflect their perspective on a topic (Lam et al., 2020). These photographs are then explored through writing or dialogue (Latz & Mulvihill, 2017), allowing for richer understanding of participants' experiences (Doucet et al., 2021). The process centers participants' voices and has proven effective in research with refugee and youth populations, including individuals with limited language abilities (Coad et al., 2009; Lam et al., 2020). As noted by Harris (2009), therapeutic art-making has shown benefit for children who have endured trauma and loss.

#### 4.3.2 Curation of the Research Study

Photovoice research can be structured and analyzed in various ways (Sutton-Brown, 2014), which is both a methodological strength and a challenge (Lantz & Mulvihill, 2017; Tsang, 2020). Two broad categories of approaches are typically used: 1) participant-led, which emphasizes community-driven action and empowerment, and 2) researcher-led, which focuses on interpreting the meanings participants assign to their photographs to contribute to academic literature (Latz & Mulvihill, 2017; Tsang, 2020). This study adopted the former approach, emphasizing participant-led analysis.

**Participatory Analysis.** Participatory analysis involves including participants in all aspects of the research process, from planning and design to analysis and dissemination (Bourke, 2009). In this framework, participants serve as the primary interpreters of the data, while researchers act as facilitators, mentors, and co-learners (Nind, 2011). Using participatory analysis enhances the study's validity and deepens insight into participants' lived experiences.

**Analysis for Present Study.** The Project Coordinator served as a practical facilitator and scaffolder, structuring the analysis while participants led the interpretation of the data (Nind, 2011). Given that participants are often excluded from data analysis (Nind, 2011), this study emphasized ongoing engagement with the youth to ensure the research’s credibility and impact (Rahman et al., 2022). The analysis followed Wang and Burris (1997) three-stage Photovoice process: selecting, contextualizing, and codifying images. This method has been effectively applied in research with displaced youth and refugee populations (Adinia & Kirana, 2019; Rabaey et al., 2021). In the present study, adaptations were made to meet the needs of both researchers and participants. While Wang and Burris (1997) include a final stage, developing theories to explain identified concerns, the participants opted not to pursue this step, feeling it did not align with their goal of sharing their stories and creating change. In keeping with the participant-led approach, researchers did not extend the analysis beyond this to honour the vision of the youth participants.

### 4.3.3 Procedure

The procedures represent a modified version of Lantz and Mulvihill's (2017) eight-step methodological script. Their script was selected because it drew on a breadth of peer-reviewed and empirical research, embraced the variability and uniqueness in Photovoice research, and represented a participatory approach to structuring Photovoice research.

**Step 1: Identification.** During this step, the research topic is identified with an advisory team (Lantz & Mulvihill, 2017). Together with the advisory team, the population for inquiry was determined to be Yazidi youth between the ages of 15 and 24. This age range is based on the United Nations (n.d) definition of youth, which defines a ‘youth’ as an individual between the ages of 15 and 24. The advisory team then expanded to include Yazidi youth refugees. Subsequently, the topic of the current research study was determined – migration and integration experiences of Yazidi youth refugees – and the study question was formulated: “What would you like others to know about your migration and integration experience?”. Before any data collection, the researcher obtained institutional ethics approval.

**Step 2: Invitation.** Given the identified population for inquiry, purposive sampling was most appropriate (Lantz & Mulvihill, 2017). Participants were recruited through flyer advertisements posted at the local community centre and through word of mouth. The present study included 13 Yazidi youth participants, of whom two did not participate due to conflicting commitments. This number fell within the range for the number of participants used in previous Photovoice studies, as outlined by Sanon et al. (2014) to include a minimum of six participants to a maximum of 49.

**Step 3: Education.** During this step, participants were educated on the Photovoice and details of the current project were reviewed (Lantz & Mulvihill, 2017). Upon expressing their interest in participating in the study, participants were invited to join in on a group art activity at the community centre. At the beginning of the group art activity meeting, participants were read the Letter of Information and asked to sign an Informed Consent Form. Translation assistance was available. Participants were instructed on how to use a camera and reminded of the focal question.

**Step 4: Documentation.** During the documentation stage, participants were informed on how to document their responses to the question, photo prompts were provided, and the cameras were distributed (Lantz & Mulvihill, 2017). Participants were arranged into four teams comprised of two to four people, and each team was given one camera (Fujifilm Instax Mini 11 Instant Camera) and was assigned a volunteer from the advisory team to support them. Polaroid cameras were selected as they allowed for instant access to the photographs. Each youth was given 10 film sheets, and additional film sheets were available. Participants were asked to use their cameras to document what they would like others to know about their migration journey. The participants were then prompted to take photos that 1) represent their migration and integration challenges, 2) represent their success, and 3) represent the support they still require.

**Step 5: Narration.** In step five, participants interpret their photos, giving meaning to their images. The narration stage comprised the data analysis for the study, and followed a modified version of the three-stage approach by Wang and Burris (1997), which includes selecting, contextualizing, and codifying (Kile, 2022). Upon consultation with the

participants, they wished to engage in the narration stage immediately. First, participants were invited to share and talk about their photos with the group, and then worked together as a group to determine which photos most accurately reflected their collective story (Lantz & Mulvihill, 2017). A total of 16 photos were selected by the participants, seven photos to represent migration and integration challenges, five photos to represent migration and integration successes, and four photos to represent the support still required. Unique to the support still required document, the youth selected two photos to represent one idea, as they decided the same concept required two photos to capture their vision.

In accordance with Wang and Burris (1997), once the photos were selected, the youth worked together following the VOICE acronym (Voicing Our Individual and Collective Experience) to provide context to the photos chosen, creating a story that represented the meaning behind the photographs (Lantz & Mulvihill, 2017). Through group discussion, participants told the story of the photographs and worked to create captions to represent each. In the end, participants created two to six captions for each photo. The number of captions reflects the number of points the youth felt were required to capture all their voices and all the ideas each photo represented. Participants also created titles for each photo that summarized the idea represented. This categorizing of photos represents the initial step in identifying photo themes.

Lastly, in accordance with Wang and Burris (1997), through analyzing the content and context of the photos, participants codified the pictures by identifying concerns for immediate action (issues) and concerns for future investigation (themes) (Lantz & Mulvihill, 2017; Sutton-Brown, 2014). During this process, youth first began identifying broad categories of themes. Subsequently, through discussion, the youth began building a story within the broad themes. Participants identified five photo themes, two representing concerns for immediate action (issues) and three for future investigation (themes) to represent their stories. Participants were given a \$25 gift card honorarium and bus tickets to cover their transportation to and from the centre as compensation for their participation in this meeting. In addition, participants who completed the art activity were entered into a draw to win the four cameras and extra film.

**Step 6: Presentation.** During the final stage, the art is showcased for others to see (Lantz & Mulvihill, 2017). The results were depicted in a final art piece containing the pictures, captions, and title. Four frames were created. The first frame provided a brief overview of the Photovoice study. Three additional frames were created, one to reflect each photo prompt: 1) migration and integration challenges, 2) migration and integration successes, and 3) support still required. At the youths' request, this final art piece is currently being displayed at the local university. The results from the activity will also be presented at various conferences to further advocate for their needs.

## 4.4 Results

The youth created five themes from their photos and discussion about their experiences (Tsang, 2020). The first two photo themes were categorized by the youth as issues requiring immediate action, and the last three photo themes were categorized as themes for future investigation (Lantz & Mulvihill, 2017; Wang & Burris, 1997).

### 4.4.1 Photo Theme 1: Educating Others on Yazidis and Our Experiences

Youth discussed a need to educate others on who they are and what they have been through. In a powerful statement summarizing this issue, the youth expressed a desire to be heard: "We want people to understand because only Yazidis know about it [the genocide]. We want to be heard.". This was referenced in their caption displayed on the photo frame Support Still Required, in which the youth expressed the following about the need for support:

We need support to educate others on the genocide and what the Yazidis in Iraq are still dealing with right now. We need support to tell our stories of what happened to us, what ISIS did to us, and why. It is important because we still have family living in this war every day. And there are girls, women, and boys still in captivity or being forced to be ISIS soldiers. There are men still missing that we do not know if they are alive.

The youth shared that educating others is also important because “Others think we are fake and acting and that our experiences are not crises.”. They suggested creating articles online to spread information, even globally, as one option for educating others on the Yazidi population, culture, and experiences. The idea of online learning was consistent throughout the photographs taken and discussions on their photographs. Participant #3 shared that “I would learn about the Internet and I read articles which helped me learn.”. This was described in the context of information gathering and learning about activities they could share with their Canadian peers. Participant #4 shared a picture of the computer, explaining that with the computer, “You can help yourself, and the computer helps you help yourself.”. This, again, was in the context of information that can be gathered through the digital platform.

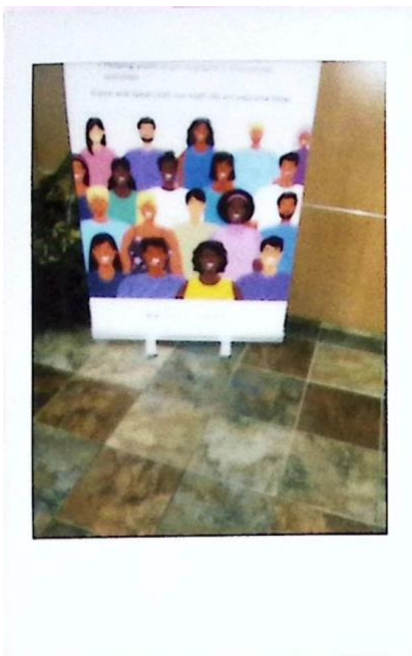


Figure 3: Computer

*Note.* This picture, taken by Participant #4, was selected to represent migration and integration successes associated with Technology.

#### 4.4.2 Photo Theme 2: Bullying and Racism

The second issue that arose for the youth was the bullying and racism that took place since arriving in Canada, requiring a need for immediate action. While sharing their photographs, Participant #5 stated: “When I came here, many people were bullying me. I cried too many times.”. This feeling of being rejected by others was endorsed by Participant #11, who stated: “People not accepting of you. Neighbours hateful to us and makes it hard to feel welcome. Similar to back home because people used to hate each other back home.” about their pictures on migration and integration challenges. This notion was the foundation of one photograph chosen to represent their migration and integration challenges – a photo of a sign where youth expressed “People were rude. They didn’t respect us, our culture, or our religion.” and “People bullied us. They had hate for us and our families.”.



#### Figure 4: People

*Note.* This picture was selected to represent People who contribute to migration and integration challenges for the Yazidi youth.

Unfortunately, this trend of bullying and racism occurs in other environments, not just with peers, and expands to include adults in positions of power. When describing the challenges associated with school, the youth depicted bullying imposed by teachers in a caption, “Sometimes the teachers show us they don’t like us or care.” Participant #3 also suggested that Yazidis are often blamed for things and not allowed to be heard, reflected in the statement “If we got in a physical fight they would blame you anyways. Others that live here [born in Canada] would not get in trouble, it would be me.” A collective view of the youth was that support was still required around health and dental care to combat the discrimination they experienced. When curating this frame, the caption noted that “We [the Yazidis] have been refused help from dentists and doctors because they don’t understand us or because they are racist.” The impact of bullying and racism runs deep within the lives and integration experiences of the youth, and their discussion focused on a need to “[...] create change to make things better” as captured by Participant #11. They felt one way to foster this would be to have accountability, and they brainstormed the idea for a reporting center where they could hold professionals accountable. This was discussed to combat systemic racism that was being experienced when trying to access and being denied health and dental care.

The youth also endorsed the positive impact that others have on their integration experience when they are met with positivity and acceptance. When sharing photos of their successes, the youth identified that forming friendships has given them connection and support. This was endorsed by Participant #6 “Having friends here helped to feel safe and better.” and Participant #9 in the statement “If you need help, you can ask your friends at school anything.” The helpful people at the local community centre have also played an important role in supporting their basic needs and processing their traumatic experiences. Youth curated the caption “The Centre helps us with documents and bills and gives us opportunities to be involved and face our fears.” to accompany a picture of the Centre. The

influential role others play in resettling Yazidi youth is evident in both the negative and positive examples discussed, and highlights the importance of supporting positive encounters and combating experiences of bullying and racism.

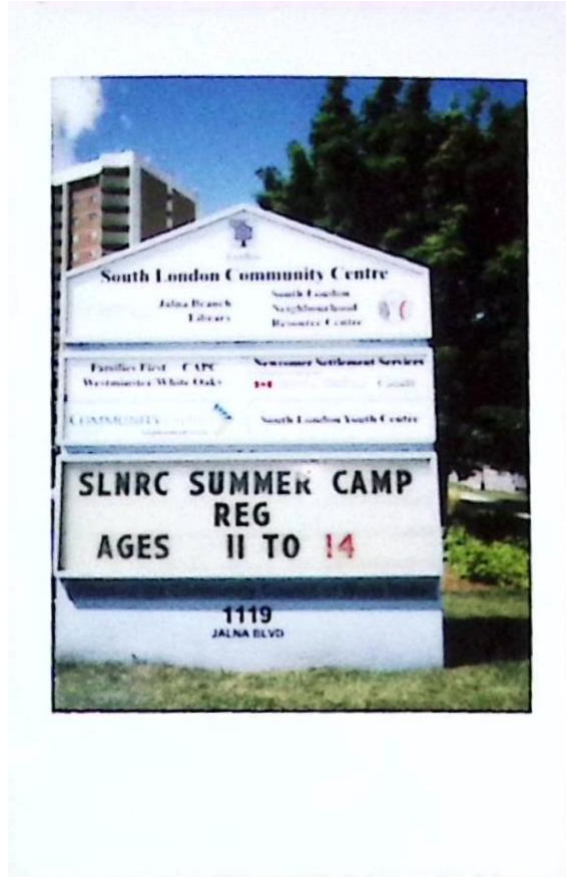


Figure 5: The Centre

*Note.* This picture was taken to represent The Centre, which was pivotal in the migration and integration successes of the youth participants. The centre was central in many aspects to resettlement success, including being a place where the youth are surrounded by helpful and supportive people.

#### 4.4.3 Photo Theme 3: Help Families in Iraq

The youths' primary concerns for future investigation surround their families and broader community. Here, concern for Yazidis still in Iraq was at the heart of the message youth tried to capture in response to the prompt "What are the supports you still require?". The

youth wrote many captions reflecting this desire to help their people still in Iraq, including: “The government of Canada, and the countries throughout the world, need to support individuals still in Iraq and suffering.” and “We need others to know what happened because the Yazidis in Iraq are not in a safe place. All we want is support for Yazidis.”.

This need for help was two-fold. The youth wanted to support Yazidis still in Iraq to find refuge in Canada, just as they have found. At the same time, they also advocated for assisting those in Iraq to rebuild their lives there. When discussing this topic, Participant #3 shared that some “Yazidis don’t want to leave their country, they want to stay and rebuild their houses but they can’t financially.”. This led the youth to wonder about many things that warrant further investigation, leaving them with many unanswered questions: “How can we support Yazidis who want to remain in Iraq or return to Iraq?”, “How can we support Yazidis to rebuild their communities in Iraq?” and “How can we get the government of Iraq to help these individuals.”.

The youth expressed a feeling that if others knew what they had experienced and what Yazidis in Iraq continued to experience, more support would be provided to them. Within this line of thinking, the youth suggested that one approach to this theme would be to write letters to the government that might help solicit this type of support. However, as Participant #11 stated, it is vital to “find the right way to do that”.

#### 4.4.4 Photo Theme 4: Rise Against the Oppressive Government

The youth also discussed their desire to do something concrete. This centered on a longing to raise awareness of the humanitarian needs of Yazidis in Iraq. Here, there was a trend of raising awareness around the practices of the Government of Iraq, with a goal of understanding people’s current knowledge of unjust practices. The youth felt a survey may be an appropriate way to identify the knowledge people had and the stories they had to share, to shed insight into the unfair and unjust practices occurring. Participant #3 summarized this by stating “People would learn it is very discriminatory against people, biased against specific religion and culture.”. The youth described their own perceptions of these discriminatory government practices. In some cases, the youth described a gender bias, in which females did not have the same freedom as males in Iraq: “Sometimes we

have dreams and we want to achieve it but we didn't always have the support. Didn't have these chances back in Iraq as a girl.". Furthermore, there was a bias against the entire Yazidi religion and culture. Participant #11 shared that in Iraq "They think Yazidi means terrorist.". These biases have resulted in a lack of support from the Government "The law did nothing because Yazidi means nothing.". While the youths' primary concern was to provide support and create action to help Yazidis in Iraq, they felt this was connected to raising awareness of unjust practices.

#### 4.4.5 Photo Theme 5: Desire to be There to Help

Rooted in their desire to do something concrete and their focus on supporting their families and communities, the final theme that emerged was a desire to be in Iraq to help their families and friends, which is hindered by an inability to leave Canada because of the strict rules for leaving and re-entering the country before receiving citizenship. When describing the challenges related to migration and integration, Participant #7 identified citizenship as a challenge, noting that "You can't leave Canada until you have citizenship." which means they "Can't go home [to Iraq].". The ability to get citizenship and have the freedoms that came along with this is made more challenging by the language barrier, as noted by Participant #13 when sharing a photograph of a citizenship handbook "It's hard to get citizenship because couldn't speak the language.".



Figure 6: Citizenship

*Note:* This photo, taken by Participant #13, was selected by the youth to represent Citizenship as a challenge associate with their migration and integration.

The youth wanted to educate others on the impact that these rules and regulations have on them and how they are perceived as refugees awaiting citizenship. The youth felt that Yazidis have only one chance to enter Canada, which seems unfair compared to other people, religions, and cultures who “get so many second chances”. They felt this was another form of discrimination. The youth noted that others, including individuals who joined ISIS, have had the opportunity to return to Canada even after leaving for harmful purposes. They described this in their statement:

We have only had one chance and those that have hurt us are allowed back in the country with no problem. What’s the logic in letting these people that left Canada to hurt others return here? These people are leaving Canada and going against Canadian

values of freedom and are allowed to come back. Those who are getting hurt by those actions aren't allowed to enter the country.

All in all, the youth felt it is not fair that people from Canada can leave and fight with ISIS, and then return to Canada and be free, all while Yazidis are still stuck in Iraq and the Yazidis in Canada cannot leave. They hoped by sharing this, they could impact policy to allow for them to travel back and provide help to their families in need. Thus, the rules surrounding leaving and entering Canada and the impact this has on refugees by being denied entry while others are granted it warrants further exploration.

In conclusion, Yazidi youth in the present study were vulnerable in sharing their experiences and needs as related to their pre and post-migration experiences. While their own distress is evident through their individual and collective stories, the youth demonstrated significant personal growth through their ability to use their voices for activism. This was evident by the central focus on educating others. First, they wished to educate others on Yazidis' past and current experiences. While the youth have shared the positive impact this would have on themselves and their own adjustment in Canada, predominantly, their goal was to rally support for their families and communities still in Iraq. Second, they wished to shed light on the unfair and unjust practices that occur, which have had an immense impact on Yazidi youth, their communities, and their ability to adjust post-migration. This includes the bullying and racism that still occurs, the oppression Yazidis face by the Government of Iraq, as well as the policies that feel discriminatory in Canada.

## 4.5 Discussion

The experiences and difficulties of the youth, as described in the five photo themes, can be understood as intra- and interpersonal experiences, and structural and system experiences. Woven into these discussions is also a clear picture of both post traumatic responses to trauma and PTG. Throughout this study, the youth have represented the ability for growth and emotional distress to coexist, which clearly reflects concurrent constructs of posttraumatic responses to trauma and PTG, as described by Zoellner and Maercker (2006).

### 4.5.1 Intra- and Interpersonal Experiences

Yazidi youth in the present study discuss intra- and interpersonal experiences associated with migration, depicting both instances of difficulty, connection, and growth. On an intrapersonal level, the youth struggled with navigating their feelings and experiences associated with their traumatic encounters and migration experiences. This was evident by the deep emotion associated with sharing their individual and collective stories of trauma of the genocide and of their missing family members in the theme Educating Others on Yazidis and Our Experiences, the uncertainty of the wellbeing of those in Iraq in the theme Help Families in Iraq, and the discriminatory practices they have experienced noted in the themes Rise Against the Oppressive Government and Bullying and Racism. Youth described personal struggles with seeing individuals who have targeted their community living freely in Canada, as described in the theme Desire to be There to Help. Their ability to process and live with their experiences is further hindered by their interpersonal encounters, such as seeing those who support and are connected with ISIS and the general lack of awareness of their experiences. The youth describe discriminatory encounters with neighbours who have hate for them due to being refugees, individuals who do not respect their religion, and outright discrimination in being refused services or dismissed by health care providers in the theme Bullying and Racism. In other instances, such as the theme Educating Others on Yazidis and Our Experiences, the youth described that others do not believe “their crises.”. While the youth clearly described many instances of discrimination, they also described times when they simply felt misunderstood by others because their stories are not known by others. In contrast, the youth have also had many instances of interpersonal connection that have facilitated their migration experiences. Within the theme Bullying and Racism, the youth describe the immense positive impact others have had on their integration. The friendships formed, and guidance from services and organizations have been central to promoting their migration and integration successes.

### 4.5.2 Structural and Systemic Experiences

While many of the youths’ experiences occur at intra- and interpersonal levels, numerous instances point to structural and systemic level problems that must be addressed in both Canada and Iraq. While youth feel impacted personally by the trauma they have

experienced through war, violence, and threats to the livelihood of their own and their community, all of which are precursors of posttraumatic responses (Beiser & Hou, 2016; Kartal et al., 2018; Mash & Barkley, 2014), this is not an intra- or interpersonal problem. This points to deeply rooted systemic racism occurring within Iraq. This culture of racism and discrimination has allowed for an entire ethnic group to be targeted, violated, and killed for centuries in an attempt to eradicate their kind. The nature of the government system was depicted by the youth in the themes *Educating Others on Yazidis and Our Experiences and Rise Against the Oppressive Government*.

While Yazidi youth reported feeling physically safe here in Canada, sadly, post-migration, they continue to experience instances of racism and discrimination. The misinformation and lack of information have created a culture in Canada where the youth feel misunderstood, rejected, and discriminated against by peers, neighbours, the school system, and health and dental care providers. As described in the theme *Desire to Be There to Help*, rules around citizenship seemed biased to support Canadian natives. In addition, the youth have a strong desire to be able to return home to Iraq to see family members and help their community rebuild. Yet, they are hindered by the strict rules in place in Canada while awaiting citizenship. This calls into question the system's structure, which places such strict rules and regulations on refugees. Yazidi youth call for action to change this process to allow them to be a part of the change and support relief being provided to Yazidis who remain in Iraq. Moreover, the process of obtaining citizenship is challenging due to other structural barriers, such as the language barrier, which makes it challenging for Yazidis to access the system to receive support and pursue citizenship.

#### 4.5.3 Growth

Despite the trauma they have experienced, youth display significant personal growth. While much of this growth is reflected on an intrapersonal level, the youth discussed how they hope their personal growth can lead to systemic growth and change. A changed sense of priorities and a recognition of new possibilities for their life (Tedeschi & Colhoun, 2004) is evident by the way they begin to see themselves as activists. They feel a greater sense of personal strength (Tedeschi & Colhoun, 2004) as they move past feeling like recipients of support from others to seeing themselves as agents of change who can support other

people. It is also evident in how they feel they can now share their stories to educate others to be heard and seen for who they are, and not misunderstood as they currently feel. Despite feeling vulnerable in many ways, as a result of discriminatory treatment, youth have established a sense of relative safety in Canada in comparison to before migrating, which has allowed them to speak out against their oppression and call for change. This reflects personal growth in many domains for the Yazidi youth participants, who begin to see themselves as agents of change who can move the needle in creating larger, system-level change.

#### 4.5.4 Implications

The youth in the present study demonstrated a keen ability to express their own views and to create a story that represents the collective view of their community. Through the use of an arts-based research design, which combats the fact that trauma can impact one's ability to express thoughts and feelings verbally (van der Kolk, 2006), the youth were able to move beyond their circumstances to a place where they felt empowered to advocate for themselves and their communities. This research design promoted a sense of community as the youth worked together to move from their individual stories, to creating a collective story and a call to action (Humpage et al., 2019; Jokela, 2019).

This highlighted the need for opportunities to share and discuss their experiences in instances where they feel in control of their narrative and empowered. In practice, this could include fostering a safe space for youth to share their stories and challenges and taking a strengths-based approach to providing support. In practice and research, it may also mean providing alternative approaches to working with the youth. As seen in the present study, art was an effective means for evoking deep insight into the experiences of the youth that may have been otherwise difficult to gain (van der Vaart et al., 2018) due to the impact of trauma on the brain (van der Kolk, 2006) and the language barrier experienced by Yazidi youth.

The present study illuminated the important role of relationships for the youth and their resettlement journey. It is clear that negative interactions with peers, teachers, and service providers, woven with misunderstanding, prejudice, and judgement, leave a lasting impact

on the youth. In contrast, positive encounters that present elements of openness, acceptance, and understanding, have a strong impact on the youth and their experiences of resettlement. Youth must be supported in fostering these connections with others. The youth feel that one way to support this is by sharing their stories. They believe if they are heard, they will be more understood and ultimately more accepted by others. Deeper exploration of the role of relationships is needed. This should include a deeper look at prejudicial and discriminatory elements, which were described by the youth as an issue for immediate action.

While discrimination and prejudice is affecting youth on intra- and interpersonal levels, it points to a much deeper rooted problem of racism and discrimination that is occurring both here in Canada and Iraq. In addition, there are structural barriers in place that are impacting the migration experiences of the youth, all which represents a structural and systemic level problem that requires action, and the youth express a desire to be a part of this change. Thus, action that creates change beyond the personal level for these youth is needed. Action that addresses the barriers they are experiencing and the deeply rooted systemic discrimination is needed. Youth need to be part of this change. Their voices and the needs of the Yazidi community need to be central to the change that is occurring to ensure their needs are being met.

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## Chapter 5

### 5 Conclusion

This integrated article dissertation examined the migration and integration experiences of Yazidi youth refugees in the years following resettlement. Despite the considerable literature examining the 2014 genocide, there was limited Canadian based research that highlighted the voices of Yazidi youth refugees in Canada. Furthermore, there was a need for research examining the perspective of youth, focused on understanding the ongoing support needs of this population, and that utilizes a strengths based perspective focused on empowerment. This study employed a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach that prioritized the co-creation of knowledge to explore the perspective and experience of Yazidi youth refugees in Canada after their initial resettlement supports had ended, and fostered active collaborative with the youth through all stages of the research process.

Chapter one reviewed relevant literature related to migration and Yazidis, highlighting the complex interplay of past and current trauma experiences, refugee status, age, and the lack of adequate ongoing supports tailored to the needs of the Yazidi population. Chapter two outlined ongoing migration and integration challenges for the youth, highlighting the unique ways that Yazidi youths' challenges are distinguished from the experiences of other migrants. Chapter three explored migration and integration successes, operating from a strengths-based lens to supporting ongoing integration. The findings from chapter four highlighted the co-existence of emotional distress and growth that stems from trauma experiences while exploring issues requiring immediate action and themes for future investigation with regard to ongoing support for the Yazidi community. In this fifth and final chapter, the connection and themes from all three studies will be drawn and discussion will be had on future directions indicated from this research.

#### 5.1 Summary of Research Findings and Contributions

Taken together, these studies provide a complex overview of the migration and integration experiences of Yazidi youth refugees in Canada, emphasizing their ongoing support needs and highlighting their views on how to meet these needs. Chapter one utilizes group

concept mapping to underscore the challenges they have experienced with regard to migration and integration. The seven concepts identified can be understood through four broader themes that have, and continue, to impact their experiences – feeling othered and excluded, the burden of major losses, triggering of traumatic memories, and language and cultural differences. These findings illuminate the long-lasting and pervasive impacts of trauma, coupled with on-going integration challenges, that continue to hinder the adjustment of Yazidi youth to life here in Canada. While aspects of this align with past research, the present study highlights that there is more than meets the eye with the experiences of Yazidi youth, who are often assumed to be functioning well in the years post-migration. While aspects of this are true, Yazidi youth also described the burden associated with their past experiences and the role that they have had to fill in the absence of family members and in light of their parents' challenging integration experiences. This research also highlights the coexistence of emotions that may appear contradictory – for instance, participants describe their time in Iraq as both a source of profound pain and of beloved memories. Furthermore, the notion that trauma is held alongside resilience was discussed – a paradox that was revisited in later chapters focused on promoting resettlement success. The findings hold significant impact for practice and policy, highlighting the need for ongoing care and support above and beyond what is typically provided. Specifically, it endorses the need for trauma-informed care, on-going tailored support, and integrated services and care in order to continue to meet the needs of Yazidi refugees in the years following resettlement and beyond the standard resettlement supports.

While it is important to consider the challenges individuals experience in their migration and integration in order to identify their needs, tailor support, and improve services moving forward, it is equally important to adopt a strengths-based perspective. Simultaneously with chapter 2, chapter 3 was conducted to explore the other end of this spectrum: the migration and integration success of Yazidi youth and the factors that facilitated this success. Results from this study identified seven concepts that can be understood through four broader themes aligned with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs: safety, connection, opportunities, and support. Youth described how meeting their basic needs, such as their need for safety, not only promoted resettlement but also enabled them to pursue higher order needs. For example, connection with others, including ties to Yazidi community and culture, were

described as essential, as was access to opportunities previously denied and opportunities to give back. They also highlighted the indispensable role of support agencies and individuals in this process. These findings carry important implications for ongoing support and future resettlement of Yazidi refugees. In particular, it underscores the critical importance of fostering connection. This includes connection to Yazidi community and culture through thoughtful resettlement planning (e.g., where individuals are resettled to) and sustained programming tailored to the Yazidi community, as well as opportunities for mentorship and meaningful avenues for youth to participate in and shape change.

Lastly, chapter four sought to integrate the above findings and consider where and how action is needed. Continuing to operate from a PAR lens, this study utilized Photovoice to explore Yazidi youths' migration and integration challenges, successes, and supports still required. Through a participatory analysis, five concepts were identified. Two concepts reflected areas requiring immediate action (issues): educating others on Yazidis and their experiences, and addressing bullying and racism. Three additional concepts reflected directions for future investigation (themes): helping families in Iraq, rising against the oppressive government, and a desire to be in Iraq to help others. These themes underscore the complex interplay between intra- and interpersonal experiences that shape adjustment, as well as structural and systemic challenges faced in both Canada and Iraq. Importantly, this study demonstrated that emotional distress and growth can and does co-exist for Yazidi youth refugees. While continuing to grapple with their own experiences, the youth in this study focused strongly on activism and on supporting the broader Yazidi community, particularly those who remain in Iraq and require urgent assistance. This study also highlighted the value of art as a meaningful way to explore difficult and traumatic experiences. Overall, the findings emphasize the need to move beyond supporting youth solely at an individual level, and instead calls for action to dismantle systemic barriers rooted in discrimination, underscoring the urgency of systemic change to promote resettlement and enable meaningful transformation.

## 5.2 Overall Findings and Implications of the Research

When taken together, these findings from chapters 2 to 4 hold important meaning.

### 5.2.1 What Youth Have to Offer

First and foremost, this integrated article dissertation emphasizes the important insights that youth have to offer. While nearly half of all refugees are individuals under the age of 18 (International Organization for Migration [IOM], 2024), and past research has highlighted the unique experience of youth refugees who experience the pervasive impacts associated with developmental trauma (Ahmad et al., 2020), research with Yazidi refugees has not extensively examined the perspective of youth. While their voices have often been overlooked in the past literature, the youth from the present study were able to verify and expand past literature regarding their migration and integration experiences. In this research, their stories centered on the profound and pervasive impact of their past experiences, as well as the positive and negative impact that others can have throughout their migration experiences. Their stories highlighted the complexity that arises from acculturating at different paces than their older family members, and how their wellbeing is directly linked to the wellbeing of their family. This highlights that a systems level approach to support is required, in addition to individual tailored care. Importantly, it also highlighted the positive benefits in the youths' active involvement in creating the change. By working with youth in this process, we can ensure that changes align with their needs while also supporting their wellbeing through the positive impacts of activism and engagement, which foster a sense of power and agency over their lives.

**Looking to the future.** In this process, it also became apparent that looking towards the future is just as important for understanding migration and integration needs as is looking to the past. The youths' collective stories through these three chapters highlight the pervasive and profound impact, positive and negative, of their past and current experiences, but also highlights deep insight into impactful ways to move forward. Thus, we cannot only focus on the past experiences of Yazidi youth refugees in order to support them in their migration and integration experience, we must also consider what they need moving forward. Integral to this is active, on-going collaboration and consultation to ensure the change is driven by the needs of the youth.

## 5.3 Implications for Policy, Practice, and Future Research

### 5.3.1 Amplifying the Voices of Youth

Although young, the Yazidi youth in this study demonstrated profound capacity for deep, meaningful reflection, offering perceptive observations about systemic challenges that affect both their own adjustment and well-being, as well as that of their community. Their contributions illuminated perspectives that have not previously been noted in the literature. In chapter 2, the youth highlighted the pervasive impact of racism on their day-to-day lives and access to care. In chapter 4, they highlighted that the presence, and threat, of ISIS continues to shape their lives in Canada. Importantly, the youth noted that relocation from Iraq is not always the ultimate goal for Yazidi individuals, challenging common assumptions about resettlement and continued support. These insights hold important implications for policy. It highlights that change cannot be externally imposed on the Yazidi community without risk of being unhelpful and harmful. Consistent with the ‘nothing about us, without us’ philosophy (Charlton, 1998), there must be meaningful engagement from those directly affected by research, services, and policies (Jackson & Moorley, 2022). This study underscores that the voices of Yazidi youth are not only valuable but essential in shaping policies that impact their realities and address the needs of their communities.

### 5.3.2 Active Engagement of Youth

Yazidi youth in the present study saw themselves as more than a source of valuable information – they identified as active participants in the change that could and needs to occur. In paper 4, they brainstormed the idea of a reporting centre available that would allow anonymity in identifying acts of racism and discrimination. They also spoke about being involved in writing letters to the government to advocate for the needs of their community and how these needs could be met. More broadly, they spoke about raising awareness of Yazidi culture and experiences to combat the misinformation that is associated with judgement from others. Through all these ideas, youth spoke about themselves as part of the driving force of the change. Qualitatively, it was hard not to observe the changes in their demeanor as they thought about themselves embedded in the

anticipated change. They began speaking louder and faster, building from the ideas presented by each other. You could feel their passion as they conversed not only about what the problem was but also about what action could be taken and how this would lead to meaningful change for their community. While it is vital that the voice of Yazidis be the driving force behind the change, this study suggests youth should also be involved in creating the change. From a policy standpoint, this may look like the creation of youth advocacy groups and fostering opportunities for activism and engagement.

In practice, this involves youth in the development and implementation of programming and services. Throughout the studies, particularly in chapter 3, the youth also spoke about the positive benefits of volunteering in the programs being provided for younger children. These altruistic opportunities offered the youth ease of engagement, when many other aspects of life felt challenging, and offered the positive benefits associated with helping others. They also spoke about the benefits of being connected with Yazidi individuals in their community. These observations can be used to guide services and programming, such as facilitating opportunities for volunteering and incorporating youth mentorship with newly resettled Yazidis.

### 5.3.3 Curating Services

The present study supported the notion that growth can occur despite trauma, consistent with research on posttraumatic growth (Collier, 2016), and that engagement in art is a powerful means for individuals to express themselves, empowering them for positive change (Harris, 2009). The high levels of engagement in the arts-based study (chapter 4) and the observable benefits of this engagement in prompting growth and empowerment support the notion that art is an effective strategy for Yazidi youth. This holds important implications for programming, whether it be for mental health services or community programs. Continued and diversified opportunities to use art to process their past and current experiences will be useful.

Through the process of amplifying the voices of the Yazidi community in the present study, the youth also spoke concretely about the types of services that have been beneficial and would continue to be beneficial moving forward. In chapter 3, they identified the invaluable

support of community agency programs and staff, from the practical information they provided and the learning they facilitated, to the warm and welcoming environment they fostered. Their narratives also highlighted the importance of Yazidi specific programming. This information can be utilized to inform policy and financial support allocated for programming. It can also be used on a more practical level of program development and implementation. Continued programming geared towards and offered specifically to Yazidi individuals is needed. Future research should further explore the support needs of Yazidi youth and draw on their perceptions of how programs can meet these needs. In practice, agency staff can also be encouraged to further draw on the voice and perspective of the youth in the program development to ensure the services offered are meeting the needs of the community.

#### 5.3.4 Long-term Financial Support

What is evident through the present study is the vital role that meeting an individual's basic needs has to resettlement. It is by meeting basic safety and physiological needs, that an environment is created where higher order needs can be pursued and met. This has important implications for practice and policy. This means that access to basic resettlement services, such as access to housing and food, is one key component in supporting resettlement. However, as per the reflection of the youth, their parents continue to struggle in the years following resettlement. Their parents continue to face health and mental health challenges that have implications regarding their ability to learn English and actively engage in the workforce. While the youth are recuperating and adjusting at a faster rate than their mothers, youth cannot be responsible for supporting themselves and their families. Thus, policies must be updated that provide the security of long-term financial support that allows Yazidi families' basic needs to be met. This support must stem beyond the one year of standard support, and beyond the two years of extended support, that is currently accessible (Pauls, 2001). Updated policies that reflect the unique needs of Yazidi youth not only provide physical security, but psychological security that their basic needs will be met, allowing for Yazidi youth and their families to focus on healing and adjustment. This has profound impacts, as seen from the present study. When the obvious basic needs of individuals are met, they are able to focus on healing and growth, and look

towards the future. This was evident in the Yazidi youth from the present study. Working from a place of security, they were able to be reflective and identify the holes that still exist in support for the Yazidi community.

### 5.3.5 Addressing Missing Services

A final consideration for research, policy, and practice is the further exploration of the services that are currently missing. While the focus of this research was not on school specifically, the youth identified many aspects of school that were challenging. In chapter 2, they noted the transition to a formal education system after limited education access, language barriers and the lack of translation services available at school, and unkind individuals at school, as barriers to their resettlement. In chapter 4 they further explored the latter concept, noting that they were victims of bullying from peers and racist practices at school by educators, which were often exacerbated by a lack of knowledge and understanding of their experience and needs. While research suggests that access to education, as well as the school environment, are key components that support resettlement success for refugees (Minhas et al., 2017; Woodgate & Busolo, 2018) and that coordinated care is essential (Joshi et al., 2013), further research is necessary to identify the gaps in services provided at school and what youth feel would be helpful to facilitate immediate and long-term adjustment. Policy is required that supports youth in being able to access the curriculum, such as translators and small group intervention to help youth bridge the gaps in their education history. From a practice standpoint, integrating community services with education is also necessary. This not only aligns with research on best practices for support (Minhas et al., 2017), but also allows for consistency of care and increases the accessibility of services.

## 5.4 Limitations

While this study both aligned with previous research and offered new perspectives, there are limitations that must be acknowledged. In particular, the predominantly qualitative research design warrants attention. Qualitative designs offer deep insight into the experiences of others with a focus on understanding the meaning individuals attribute to phenomena (Creswell & Creswell, 2023; Patten, 2014). As such, use of this research

design facilitated examination beyond immigration trends and instead produced findings that illuminated the meaning Yazidi youth attribute to their pre-migration, migration, and resettlement experiences. However, qualitative designs are not without their drawbacks. Thus, while this study provided an in-depth understanding of the experience of twelve participants in London, Ontario, and some similarities may be assumed with Yazidis in other Canadian regions, this information is not transferable to other populations of refugees. While the valuable insight gained may be used to inform research and practice with other populations of highly traumatized refugees, careful consideration must be given to the nuanced experience of all refugees, particularly those from different cultural and geographical locations, and those who have experienced different forms of trauma.

Aligned with the above considerations of research design, the timing of the study must also be noted. Data collection and analysis took place during the COVID-19 pandemic. While past research has shown that the pandemic exacerbated resettlement challenges for refugees (Al-Janaideh et al., 2023), this study did not directly examine its impact on Yazidi youth and their families. Thus, there is a need for future research that considers the immediate and long-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the resettlement experiences of Yazidi youth.

A final limitation involves the complex interplay of culture and status that may have shaped the research findings. Yazidi culture adheres to a caste system (Kizilhan & Noll-Hussong, 2017). Conversations with youth, parents, and agency staff that took place throughout the research process revealed that elements of this system remain deeply embedded, even post-migration. The present study did not collect data on individuals' caste status, and therefore did not explore whether caste influenced participants' migration experiences. Additionally, the potential impact of caste on group dynamics within the study was not examined. Further research is needed to explore the complex role of the caste system in the Yazidi community post-migration to Canada, including how it may shape both individual experiences and collective interactions.

## 5.5 Personal Reflections and Final Thoughts

As an academic and a clinician, I view learning as a lifelong process. I think we must continually strive to deepen our understanding of ourselves, others, and phenomena. We must be willing to sit with discomfort and lean into it – as it is in this discomfort that we are able to be critically self-reflective and can challenge our current ways of thinking and knowing in order to grow and do better. We must fight against becoming complacent, and be cautious in understanding the limits of our knowledge and expertise, consistently striving for humility rather than competence as it pertains to culture, intellect, epistemology, and interpersonal relationships.

Through the process of this dissertation, I have engaged in learning and unlearning. I began by gathering extensive information from the literature while allowing the personal experiences of the Yazidi participants to inform my interpretation and implementation of the evidence-based research. I have been challenged to examine my positionality and be reflexive of my unearned privileges. It required me to consistently consider how I show up in spaces where there is a clear power imbalance, recognizing that so many aspects of myself are embedded in the systems that are a part of the problem. I have learned so much from the youth, agency staff, and Yazidi community as they welcomed me with open arms and were vulnerable in allowing me to walk with them on their journeys.

On a more practical level, I have gained significant knowledge on the Yazidi community, the experiences of youth refugees in Canada, and supporting survivors of extreme trauma that stem far beyond the world of research. Although valuable information is available in the literature, this dissertation taught me that the literature alone does not capture the nuanced experience of the individuals. More importantly, I was exposed to the importance of letting the individual be their own experts and informants, and letting their felt experience inform the literature. Moving from their reported experience, their input into the design of support did the most to change and shape perspective.

This is knowledge I have sought to integrate into all facets my work – whether it be research, teaching, or clinical practice. I have grown in my ability to consider how culture, refugee status, and experience of trauma influence individuals and their family systems.

On a clinical level, I have been able to integrate this information into my clinical formulations and treatment planning. I strive to consistently consider how Western approaches to formulation and treatment planning may fall short or even be harmful depending on the experiences of the individual and family I am supporting. While it is important for me to be informed by best practices from the literature, this research highlights the importance of individually tailoring the care provided to each unique client. In teaching, I strive to integrate the same participatory nature that was fostered throughout this research process. By walking alongside others in learning, we are able to learn from each other and with each other, co-creating knowledge that dismantles traditional power hierarchies.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A: Western University Ethics Approval



**Date:** 4 July 2022

**To:** Dr. Jason Brown

**Project ID:** 120999

**Study Title:** Understanding the experiences of Yazidi Youth

**Short Title:** Experiences of Yazidi Youth

**Application Type:** NMREB Initial Application

**Review Type:** Delegated

**Full Board Reporting Date:** August 5 2022

**Date Approval Issued:** 04/Jul/2022 11:48

**REB Approval Expiry Date:** 04/Jul/2023

Dear Dr. Jason Brown

The Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (NMREB) has reviewed and approved the WREM application form for the above mentioned study, as of the date noted above. NMREB approval for this study remains valid until the expiry date noted above, conditional to timely submission and acceptance of NMREB Continuing Ethics Review.

This research study is to be conducted by the investigator noted above. **All other required institutional approvals and mandated training must also be obtained prior to the conduct of the study.**

**Documents Approved:**

Document Name	Document Type	Document Date	Document Version
Individual Interview	Interview Guide	02/May/2022	1
End of Study Template	End of Study Letter	02/May/2022	1
Study Recruitment Poster	Recruitment Materials	02/May/2022	1
Group Interview- Art	Interview Guide	02/May/2022	1
Study Letter of Information:Consent (updated, no tracking)	Written Consent/Assent	10/Jun/2022	2
Script for Sorting Task	Interview Guide	10/Jun/2022	1
Script for Art Creation Activity	Interview Guide	10/Jun/2022	2

**Documents Acknowledged:**

Document Name	Document Type	Document Date	Document Version
Counselling and Support Services	Other Materials	10/Jun/2022	1

No deviations from, or changes to the protocol should be initiated without prior written approval from the NMREB, except when necessary to eliminate immediate hazard(s) to study participants or when the change(s) involves only administrative or logistical aspects of the trial.

The Western University NMREB operates in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2), the Ontario Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA, 2004), and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario. Members of the NMREB who are named as Investigators in research studies do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on such studies when they are presented to the REB. The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00000941.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Kelly Patterson , Research Ethics Officer on behalf of Dr. Randal Graham, NMREB Chair

**Appendix B: Recruitment Letter****Request for Participation by Yazidi Youth Aged 15-24**  
**About Adjustment to Life in Canada**

We are looking for volunteers to take part in a study about adjustment to life in Canada for Yazidi Youth who have resettled to London, ON.

Your participation would involve 3 sessions. If you are interested and agree to participate you would be asked to:

- 1) First, be interviewed in-person. This will take approximately 30 minutes.
- 2) Later, engage in a group activity to sort the interview responses made by all the participants. This will take approximately 1 hour.
- 3) Later, engage in a full day (approximately 5 hours) art creation activity that will be used to represent what participants would like others to know about their migration and integration experience.

Language translation services will be available.  
Compensation (gift cards and bus tickets) are available to all youth participants.

For more information about this study, or to volunteer for this study,  
please contact:

Charlotte Carrie, Project Coordinator  
Dr. Jason Brown via email

## Appendix C: Confidentiality Agreement



### Adjustment to Life in Canada for Yazidi Youth Refugees Confidentiality Agreement

Charlotte Carrie, MA, PhD Student, Project Coordinator  
 Dr. Jason Brown, Principal Investigator  
 1110 Althouse, Faculty of Education,  
 1137 Western Road, London, Ontario  
 N6G 1G7

I understand confidential information will be made known to me as (please check all that apply):

an interpreter

a transcriber

an audio assistant

a video assistant

a research assistant

other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

for a study being conducted by Charlotte Carrie, under the supervision of Dr. Jason Brown, at the Department of Education, Western University. I agree to keep all information collected during this study confidential, and will not reveal by speaking, communicating, or transmitting this information in written, electronic (disks, tapes, transcripts, email), or any other manner to anyone outside the research team.

Name of Assistant: \_\_\_\_\_ (please print)

Signature of Assistant: \_\_\_\_\_

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

Name of Principal Investigator: \_\_\_\_\_ (please print)

Signature of Principal Investigator: \_\_\_\_\_

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

## Appendix D: Study Letter of Information/Consent



### Adjustment to Life in Canada for Yazidi Youth Refugees Letter of Information

Charlotte Carrie, MA, PhD Student, Project Coordinator  
 Dr. Jason Brown, Principal Investigator  
 1110 Althouse, Faculty of Education,  
 1137 Western Road, London, Ontario  
 N6G 1G7

You are being invited to participate in this research on adjustment to life in Canada for Yazidi Youth Refugees, because you are a Yazidi refugee between the aged 15-24 who has resettled to London, Ontario.

The purpose of this study is understand what has hindered and promoted your adjustment to life in Canada. The study is being done in partnership with South London Neighborhood Resource Centre. Research team members Jason Brown and Charlotte Carrie from Western University, and Mohamed Al-Adeimi from South London Neighborhood Resource Centre will have access to all non-anonymized data collected and contribute to the final report.

If translation is needed to provide consent, we will arrange for you to speak with \_\_\_\_\_.

If you agree to participate you will be asked to engage in a 30-minute in-person interview about the factors that have hindered and promoted your adjustment to life in Canada.

You will be invited to a group meeting in approximately 1 month. At this meeting you will be asked to group together the answers provided by all youth. Direct quotes from the interviews will be used. While best efforts are in place to protect confidentiality, it is possible someone could identify you based on your response. This will take approximately 1 hour to complete. Translation assistance will be provided if necessary. During the sorting task, you will be working independently in the same room as the other participants. At the completion of the interview, you will be invited to stay for a 30-minute brainstorm activity to discuss the subsequent art project that will be used to represent your journeys and highlight your needs for further support.

In the following month, you will be asked to meet as group at the Centre for a full day art project. During this time, the information from the interviews and group sorting task will be reviewed. Based on this information, you will be asked to participate in the creation photovoice project to inform community agencies and service providers on the experiences of Yazidi youth and what is needed to effectively support the needs of Yazidi youth. The polaroid cameras for the art project will be distributed at this time. You will be divided into groups of two to four participants who will share one polaroid camera and you will be given two hours to capture your photographs. Once the photographs have been taken, participants will gather all together to discuss their individual photographs and to create a final cohesive art piece. In total, the art project will take approximately 5 hours to complete. Translation assistance will be provided if necessary.

Direct quotes from the interviews will be used in the publication of the results, but your name will be replaced with your study number. The artistic creation will be published publically as well.

The possible risks and harms to you include that you may experience uncomfortable feelings during discussions about challenging and/or unpleasant aspects of your adjustment to life in Canada.

The possible benefits to society may be to inform the development of services for Yazidi youth. The possible benefits to society may be increased accessibility and effectiveness of services for Yazidi youth.

You may withdraw from your participation in the study at any time. Your data from the individual interviews can be withdrawn at any time before the group sorting activity, and all your other data may be withdrawn at any time before the publication of the study results. This can be done by making a request to Charlotte Carrie, Project Coordinator, by using the contact information on this form.

Representatives of Western University's Non-Medical Research Ethics Board may require access to your study-related records to monitor the conduct of the research.

The researcher will keep any personal information about you in a secure and confidential location for 7 years. A list linking your study number with your name will be kept by the researcher in a secure place, separate from your study file. If the results of the study are published, your name will not be used

An honorarium in the form of a \$25 gift card will be provided at the time of interview, at the group sorting activity, and at the art creation meeting. All youth who engage in the art activity will be placed in a draw to win one of the four polaroid cameras used for the art activity; the draw will take place at the end of the art activity and participants will be awarded the cameras immediately. Two

bus tickets will also be provided at each session to reimburse you for your transportation to and from the Centre.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may decide at any point not to be in this study. Even if you consent to participate, you have the right to not answer individual questions or to withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose not to participate or to leave the study at any time it will have no effect on your access to services, professional status, or employment status. You do not waive any legal right by consenting to this study.

If you have questions about this research study please contact Charlotte Carrie, Project Coordinator.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or the conduct of this study, you may contact The Office of Human Research Ethics (519) 661-3036, 1-844-720-9816, email: [ethics@uwo.ca](mailto:ethics@uwo.ca). The Research Ethics Board is a group of people who oversee the ethical conduct of research studies. The Non-Medical Research Ethics Board is not part of the study team. Everything that you discuss will be kept confidential.

**This letter is yours to keep for future reference.**

## Adjustment to Life in Canada for Yazidi Youth Refugees Youth Interview Consent Form

Charlotte Carrie, MA, PhD Student, Project Coordinator  
 Dr. Jason Brown, Principal Investigator  
 1110 Althouse, Faculty of Education,  
 1137 Western Road, London, Ontario  
 N6G 1G7

### 1. Consent for Interviews

I have read the Letter of Information, have had the nature of the study explained to me, and I agree to participate in the interviews. Any and all questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

\_\_\_\_\_

Print Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature

\_\_\_\_\_

Date (DD-*MMM*-*YYYY*)

### 2. Consent to Contact for Sorting Activity

I consent to being contacted for the grouping sorting task. My preferred method of contact is \_\_\_\_\_.

- Telephone Number \_\_\_\_\_;
- Email address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Print Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature

\_\_\_\_\_

Date (DD-*MMM*-*YYYY*)

### 3. Consent to receive results

I wish to receive a copy of the results via email. Email is not secure and participation in the study could be revealed if the email was viewed/obtained by another party.

\_\_\_\_\_

Print Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature

\_\_\_\_\_

Date (DD-*MMM*-*YYYY*)

\_\_\_\_\_

Email address

Was the participant assisted during the consent process by a translator?

YES       NO

If **Yes**, please check the relevant box and complete the signature space below:

The Person signing below acted as a translator for the participant during the consent process and attests that the study as set out in this form was accurately translated and has had any questions answered.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Name Translator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Date (DD-MMM-  
YYYY)*

My signature means that I have explained the study to the participant named above. I have answered all questions.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Name of Person  
Obtaining Consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Date (DD-MMM-  
YYYY)*

## Adjustment to Life in Canada for Yazidi Youth Refugees Group Sorting Consent Form

Charlotte Carrie, MA, PhD Student, Project Coordinator  
Dr. Jason Brown, Principal Investigator  
1110 Althouse, Faculty of Education,  
1137 Western Road, London, Ontario  
N6G 1G7

### 1. Consent for Group Sorting Activity

I have read the Letter of Information, have had the nature of the study explained to me, and I agree to participate in the group sorting activity. Any and all questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Date (DD-MMM-  
YYYY)*

### 2. Consent to Contact for Art Creation Activity

I consent to being contacted for the art creation activity. My preferred method of contact is \_\_\_\_\_.

- Telephone Number \_\_\_\_\_;
- Email address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Date (DD-MMM-  
YYYY)*

### 3. Consent to receive results

I wish to receive a copy of the results via email. Email is not secure and participation in the study could be revealed if the email was viewed/obtained by another party.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Date (DD-MMM-  
YYYY)*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Email address

Was the participant assisted during the consent process by a translator?

- YES       NO

If **Yes**, please check the relevant box and complete the signature space below:

- The Person signing below acted as a translator for the participant during the consent process and attests that the study as set out in this form was accurately translated and has had any questions answered.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Name Translator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Date (DD-MMM-  
YYYY)*

My signature means that I have explained the study to the participant named above. I have answered all questions.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Name of Person  
Obtaining Consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Date (DD-MMM-  
YYYY)*

## Adjustment to Life in Canada for Yazidi Youth Refugees Art Activity Consent Form

Charlotte Carrie, MA, PhD Student, Project Coordinator  
Dr. Jason Brown, Principal Investigator  
1110 Althouse, Faculty of Education,  
1137 Western Road, London, Ontario  
N6G 1G7

### 1. Consent for Group Sorting Activity

I have read the Letter of Information, have had the nature of the study explained to me, and I agree to participate in the art activity. Any and all questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

---

Print Name of Participant

---

Signature

---

Date (DD-*MMM*-*YYYY*)

### 2. Consent to Contact for Art Creation Activity

I consent to being contacted for the art creation activity. My preferred method of contact is \_\_\_\_\_.

- Telephone Number \_\_\_\_\_;
- Email address \_\_\_\_\_

---

Print Name of Participant

---

Signature

---

Date (DD-*MMM*-*YYYY*)

### 3. Consent to receive results

I wish to receive a copy of the results via email. Email is not secure and participation in the study could be revealed if the email was viewed/obtained by another party.

---

Print Name of Participant

---

Signature

---

Date (DD-*MMM*-*YYYY*)

---

Email address

Was the participant assisted during the consent process by a translator?

YES       NO

If **Yes**, please check the relevant box and complete the signature space below:

- The Person signing below acted as a translator for the participant during the consent process and attests that the study as set out in this form was accurately translated and has had any questions answered.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Name Translator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Date (DD-MMM-  
YYYY)*

My signature means that I have explained the study to the participant named above. I have answered all questions.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Name of Person  
Obtaining Consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Date (DD-MMM-  
YYYY)*

## Appendix E: Individual Interview



ID \_\_\_\_\_  
 Date of Interview \_\_\_\_\_  
 Interviewer \_\_\_\_\_

Youth, 15-24 YO In-Person Interview
<b>Participant Demographics</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Age:</li> <li>2. Grade:</li> <li>3. Gender:</li> <li>4. Languages spoken:</li> <li>5. Months in Canada:</li> <li>6. Immigration status: refugee (sponsor: government, private, both)?</li> <li>7. Family structure             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) who lives with you now?</li> <li>(b) do you have other family members locally?</li> <li>(c) do you have other family members still in Iraq?</li> <li>(d) do you have other family members who did not survive the 2015 attack?</li> </ol> </li> </ol>
<b>Concept Mapping</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What factors have hindered your adjustment to life in Canada? (probe: family, friends, school, community)</li> <li>2. What factors have promoted your adjustment to life in Canada? (probe: family, friends, school, community)</li> </ol>

## Appendix F: Script for Sorting Task



### Script for Sorting Task

Hello,

Thank you for joining us for the group sorting task. This task will take approximately 60 minutes.

Previously you participated in an interview about factors that have hindered and promoted your adjustment to life in Canada. We have sets of unique responses provided by all of the youth participants for each question (i.e. "What has hindered your adjustment to life in Canada?" and "What factors have promoted your adjustment to life in Canada?"). Each response is written on an individual slip of paper that is colour coordinated based on which question it goes with.

No one's name is included with their statements. Please be advised that although the researchers have taken every precaution to maintain confidentiality of the data by not including participant names, the nature of concept mapping prevents the researcher from guaranteeing confidentiality. The researchers would like to remind participants to respect the privacy of your fellow participants and not repeat what is written in the individual statements to others.

For each question, please read each individual response and group the responses into piles that you feel reflect similar ideas. We would ask you to use the Identification Numbers on each response to list the responses you put into each group. There is no maximum or minimum number of groups. You can use as many as you like. We do ask that you do not leave any responses out of the groups. Language translation services are available to you at this time, if required.

This task will take approximately 1 hour to complete. You will be compensated with a \$25 gift card and two bus tickets to cover your transportation to and from the Centre for your participation in this study. If you do not complete the entire study you will still be compensated with the gift card. You will receive your compensation upon your completion of the sorting activity.

If you have any questions, please reach out to any one of the project team members who are here today.

## Appendix G: Script for Art Creation Activity



### Script for Art Creation Activity

Hello,

Thank you for joining us for the art creation task. This task will take approximately 5 hours to complete.

Previously you participated in two sessions: 1) an interview about factors that have hindered and promoted your adjustment to life in Canada and 2) a group sorting activity. We have the concept maps that were created based on the responses to the interview questions you gave and the sorting activity you participated in. We will review the concept maps that were generated from this data. No-one will know who gave what response or who sorted which responses in which way.

Today's art creation task will require you to 1) take individual photographs using the provided polaroid cameras, 2) share your photographs with the group, and 3) work as a group to create a final art piece from your photographs.

We will spend the first part of this meeting providing a demonstration on how to use your camera. You will then be divided into groups of two to four participants. Each group will be provided with one camera to share. You will be given two hours to take individual photographs of represent what you would like others to know about your migration and integration experiences. Specifically, please take pictures that represent the following: 1) your migration and integration challenges, 2) your migration and integration successes, and 3) the support you still require. We will meet back in this room after two hours for a group interview. During this interview, you will have an opportunity to share your photographs and discuss them with the group. We will then work as a group to create a final art piece that represents your collective journeys. Language translation services are available if needed.

No one's name is included with their statements or sorting responses; your name will also not be included with your photographs. Please be advised that although the researchers have taken every precaution to maintain confidentiality of the data by not including participant names, the nature of group interviews prevents the researcher from guaranteeing confidentiality. The researchers would like to remind participants to respect the privacy of your fellow participants and not repeat what is said in the group interview to others.

This task will take approximately 5 hours to complete. You will be compensated with a \$25 gift card and two bus tickets to cover your transportation to and from the Centre for your participation in this study. If you do not complete the entire activity you will still be compensated with the gift card and bus tickets. You will receive your compensation today before you leave. There will be a pizza lunch provided after you return from collecting your photographs before engaging in the group interview. All youth who participate will also be entered into a draw for the polaroid cameras used. This draw will take place at the end of the art activity and the cameras will be awarded immediately.

If you have any questions, please reach out to any one of the project team members who are here today.

## Appendix H: Group Interview - Art



Date of Interview \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewer(s)

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Participant ID's

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<p>Youth, 15-24 YO In-Person Group Semi-Structured Interview</p>
<p><b>Participant Demographics</b></p> <p>8. Age: 9. Grade: 10. Gender: 11. Languages spoken: 12. Months in Canada: 13. Immigration status: refugee (sponsor: government, private, both)? 14. Family structure     (a) who lives with you now?     (b) do you have other family members locally?     (c) do you have other family members still in Iraq?      (d) do you have other family members who did not survive the 2015 attack?</p>
<p><b>Photograph Guiding Question</b></p> <p>1. What would you like others to know about your migration and integration experience?</p> <p>Prompt: Take a picture that represents your:</p> <p>a. migration and integration challenges b. your successes c. the support you still require</p>
<p><b>Interpretation</b> Individual Meaning</p> <p>3. Tell us about your photo's (prompts: thoughts, feelings, meaning) a. Challenges:</p>

- b. Successes:
- c. Supports still required:
- 4. Tell us about other people's photos (prompts: thoughts, feelings, meaning)

#### Group Meaning

- 1. How do others photo's fit with your photos? (prompts: thoughts, feelings, meaning)
  - a. Challenges:
  - b. Successes:
  - c. Supports still required:
- 2. What are some common themes or ideas? (prompts: thoughts, feelings, meaning)
  - a. Challenges:
  - b. Successes:
  - c. Supports still required:
- 3. What are some of your theories around these themes and ideas?
- 4. What themes require action
  - a. Immediately
  - b. In the future

## Appendix I: Counselling & Support Services



### Adjustment to Life in Canada for Yazidi Youth Refugees Counselling and Support Resources

Charlotte Carrie, MA, PhD Student, Project Coordinator  
 Dr. Jason Brown, Principal Investigator  
 1110 Althouse, Faculty of Education,  
 1137 Western Road, London, Ontario  
 N6G 1G7

**Some free counselling and support services in London, Ontario are as follows:**

#### **Telephone**

##### **Tandem**

24 hours a day, 7 days a week by  
 Phone: 519-433-0334

##### **Reach Out**

24 hours a day, 7 days a week by  
 Phone: 1-866-933-2023  
 Text: 519-433-2023

Webchat: <https://reachout247.ca/get-help/web-chat/>

#### **Walk in**

##### **“Talk-In” Clinics**

Craigwood Youth Services  
 520 Hamilton Road, London, ON  
 Mondays 2pm-6pm

##### **Mental Health Crisis Centre**

648 Huron St., London,  
 Monday to Friday 4:00pm-10:00pm

## Appendix J: End of Study Template



### Adjustment to Life in Canada for Yazidi Youth Refugees Results Summary

Charlotte Carrie, MA, PhD Student, Project Coordinator  
 Dr. Jason Brown, Principal Investigator  
 1110 Althouse, Faculty of Education,  
 1137 Western Road, London, Ontario  
 N6G 1G7

Thank you very much for your valuable participation in this research study about adjustment to life in Canada for Yazidi youth refugees.

During 2022-\_\_\_\_\_ we interviewed \_\_\_\_\_ Yazidi youth in London, Ontario about the factors that have hindered and the factors that have promoted their adjustment to life in Canada. We generated concept maps from the youth participants to represent the findings for each of these questions.

Summaries [HERE](#)

This information was then used to inform community agencies on how to effectively support the needs of these youth. We generated an art based action that was created by the youth participants.

Summaries [HERE](#)

We are in the process of drafting more substantial presentations of the results for scholarly publications. Feel free to contact me in the future should you wish to have more detailed information about these findings.

Thanks!  
 Charlotte Carrie, MA, PhD Student

Jason Brown, PhD., C.Psych.

# Curriculum Vitae

Charlotte Finnigan

## **Education**

### **Ph.D., School and Applied Child Psychology**

Western University, London, Ontario

Advisor: Dr. Jason Brown

2020-Present

### **M.A., Counselling Psychology**

Western University, London, Ontario

Advisor: Dr. Jason Brown

2018-2020

### **B.A., Honours Specialization in Psychology, Major in Family Studies**

Brescia University College – Western University

Advisor: Professor Richard Shugar and Dr. Anne Barnfield

## **Honours and Awards**

### **Graduate Student Entrance Scholarship**

2018 – 2025

### **Walter M. Lobb Ontario Graduate Scholarship**

20200

### **Ontario Graduate Scholarship**

2021

**Brescia University Dean's Honours Scholarship**

2017 & 2017

**Relevant Work**  
**Experience**

**Psychology Resident**

Dr. Forbes & Associates

2024-Present

**Psychology Resident**

West London Psychology

2024-Present

**Limited Duties Professor – Counselling for Career  
Development and Life Transitions (EDU 9552-001)**

Western University

2025

**Limited Duties Professor – Assessment in Career and  
Counselling Psychology (EDU 9542-001)**

Western University

2025

**Limited Duties Professor – Research Design in  
Counselling (EDU 9546-001)**

Western University

2024

**Project Coordinator**

Western University

2022-Present

**Ph.D. Practicum Student**

Mary J. Wright Child and Youth Development Clinic

2022-2023

**Psychoeducational Consultant**

London District Catholic School Board

2022

**Group Facilitator – Practical and Positive Caregiving**

Merrymount and K.B. Psychological Services

2022

**Teaching Assistant**

Western University

2021-2023

**Ph.D. Practicum Student**

London District Catholic School Board

2021-2022

### **Guest Lecturer – Research Design in Counselling**

Western University

2021 & 2022

### **Ph.D. Practicum Student**

Mary J. Wright

2021

### **Program Development**

Western University

2021

### **Masters Practicum Student**

Child and Youth Development Clinic

2019-2020

### **Publications**

Keast, R., Lengyell, M., **Finnigan, C.**, Jay, M., & Brown, J. (2025). Barriers to mental health care for low-income clients. Submitted to Submitted to Journal for Social Action in Counseling & Psychology.

Lengyell, M., **Finnigan, C.**, & Brown, J. (2025). Accountability and growth in the therapeutic journey. In S. Collins and M. Jay (Eds.), Decolonizing health, healing, and care: Embodying culturally responsive and socially just counselling (Chapter 8.4). Counselling Concepts.

**Finnigan, C.**, Brown, J., Al-Adeimi, M. (2025). Promoting adjustment for Yazidi refugees: Youths' perspectives. Submitted to Child and Adolescent Social Work. 37 pages.

Rego, S., Lengyell, M., **Finnigan, C.**, Jay, M., & Brown, J. (2024). Counsellor considerations for providing helpful therapy practices for clients living with low income. *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/capr.12863>

**Finnigan, C.**, Brown, J., Al-Adeimi, M., Al-Abed, R. (2021). Barriers to accessing mental health services by migrant youth. *Community Mental Health Journal*, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10597-021-00919-1>

**Finnigan, C.**, Brown, J., & Al-Adeimi, M. (2023). Adjustment challenges faced by Yazidi youth refugees in Canada. *Children & Society*, 00, 1–26. <https://doi.org/10.1111/chso.12801>

**Finnigan, C.**, Brown, J., Al-Adeimi, M., & Al-Abed, R. (2023). Self-reported stressors experienced by migrant youth in Canada. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 107296-. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chilyouth.2023.107296>

### **Presentations**

Lengyell, M., Brown, J., Jay, M., **Finnigan, C.** (2025, May 29-31). *Reclaiming and transforming: Advancing antiracist and decolonizing practices in counselling and teaching* [invited panel]. The Inaugural Conference on Critical Social Justice in Psychology (ICCSJ), Vancouver, BC.

**Finnigan, C.**, Brown, J., Lengyell, M., Jay, M. (2025, May 29-31). *Co-creating knowledge and practice: Advancing culturally responsive and inclusive counselling for clients living with low-income post-COVID-19* [think tank]. The Inaugural Conference on Critical Social Justice in Psychology (ICCSJ), Vancouver, BC.

**Finnigan, C.**, Lengyell, M., Brown, J., Jay, M. (2024, June 21-23). *Counselling individuals living with low-income during the pandemic- A glimpse at the perspective of counsellors in Canada* [5-minute snapshot]. Canadian Psychological Association 2024 CPA National Convention, Ottawa, ON, Canada.

Rego, S., Lengyell, M., Jay, M., **Finnigan, C.**, Brown, J. (2024, June 21-23). *Helpful aspects of counselling for clients with low-income: Perspective of Counsellors* [poster presentation]. Canadian Psychological Association [CPA] 2024 85<sup>th</sup> Annual National Convention, Ottawa, ON, Canada.

**Finnigan, C.,** Brown, J. (2023, June 23-25). *Understanding the experiences of Yazidi youth: showcasing the voices of Yazidi youth on their resettlement success and needs* [12-minute talk]. Canadian Psychological Association 2023 CPA National Convention, Toronto, ON, Canada.

**Finnigan, C.,** Brown, J., Al-Adeimi, M. (2023, Virtual Workshop Series January-March). *Understanding the experiences of Yazidi youth* [workshop]. Pathways to Prosperity 2022 National Conference, Virtual Workshop Series.

**Carrie, C.** (2020, November 23-24). *Barriers and facilitators to accessing mental health services for migrant youth- Perspective of service providers* [poster presentation]. Pathways to Prosperity 2020 National Conference, Virtual Conference.

**Carrie, C.** (2019, October 31-November 1). *Participatory research with immigrant youth* [workshop]. Pathways to Prosperity 2019 National Conference, Toronto, Ontario.

**Carrie, C.** (2017). *Relationship between sense of belonging and academic achievement: effect of involvement in a sports team* [Conference presentation]. Brescia University College Psychology Honours Specialization Undergraduate Thesis Conference, London, Ontario.