

Pre- and Post-Migration Stressors and Marital Relations Among Arab Refugee Families in Canada



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DOHA INTERNATIONAL FAMILY INSTITUTE (DIFI)

The Doha International Family Institute (DIFI), a member of Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development (QF), was established in 2006. The Institute works to strengthen the family through the development and dissemination of high quality research on Arab families, encouraging knowledge exchange on issues relevant to the family and making the family a priority to policymakers through advocacy and outreach at the national, regional and international levels. Among the Institute's most important initiatives are the Annual Conference on the Family; and the OSRA Research Grant in collaboration with the Qatar National Research Fund, an annual research grant which encourages research related to the Arab family and family policy. The Institute has special consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

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FOREWORD

Wherever war and conflict erupt around the globe, their destructive forces wreak havoc on the very heart of society: families. In the midst of armed conflict, families are forcibly displaced and members must face the trauma of separation and/or loss of loved ones within an atmosphere of danger, destruction, and suffering. Yet, even after the resolution of wars and conflicts, when displaced families either return home or are resettled in host countries, the ongoing effects of such violent upheaval along with the trauma of the refugee experience continue to impact family integrity and stability. Following the trauma of pre-migratory experiences, refugee families must struggle to rebuild their lives during transit and resettlement while facing significant short and long-term social, cultural, and economic consequences, including loss of social connections, employment, property, and economic capital. In transit and resettlement countries, these families encounter another set of significant barriers to their well-being and integration including discrimination, an inability to communicate in the dominant language, and difficulty navigating the new systems of the host country, whether in regard to work, education, healthcare, or social services.

As 58 percent of the world's refugees are from the Arab region (primarily originating from Syria, Sudan, and Somalia), any effort to enhance the health and well-being of Arab families must explore the experiences of these refugee families—an often understudied and vulnerable segment of the Arab population. Indeed, the absence of reliable research on Arab refugee families heightens the risk that policies and programs for these families will be dismissive rather than inclusive, thereby rendering the crafting of effective policy responses impossible at national, regional, or international levels. Hence, the Doha International Family Institute, a member of Qatar Foundation, is pleased to partner with the Muslim Resource Centre for Social Support and Integration, the University of Guelph, and the University of Calgary on this study, which explores the post-migration narratives of transnational Arab refugee families resettled in Canada and the professional service providers who support them in order to provide insight into how policymakers can institute changes that better mitigate the effects of these challenges on their well-being and integration.



Noor Al Malki Al Jehani
Executive Director
Doha International Family Institute

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The study is funded by Doha International Family Institute (DIFI), a member of Qatar Foundation, and is a collaboration between the Muslim Resource Centre for Social Support and Integration of London, Ontario; University of Guelph, Ontario; and University of Calgary, Alberta, all located in Canada; and the Doha International Family institute, Qatar. The study received research ethics approval from the University of Guelph and the University of Calgary.

This study aims to assess the impact of pre- and post-migration on marital relationships and family dynamics for Arab refugee families resettled in Canada. The study also examines the role of professional service providers in supporting these Arab refugee families. The unique experiences of Arab families displaced from their countries due to war and political conflict, and the various hardships experienced during their stay in transit countries, impact their family relations and interactions within the nuclear family context and their interconnectedness with their extended families. Furthermore, these families encounter various challenges within their resettlement process that interrupt their integration. Understanding the impact of traumatic experiences within the pre-migration journey as well as the impact of post-migration stressors on recently settled Arab refugee families in Canada provides insight into the shift in spousal and family relationships.

Refugee research studies that focus on the impact of pre-migration trauma and displacement, the migration journey, and post-migration settlement on family relationships are scarce. Since the majority of global refugees in recent years come from Arab regions, mainly Syria, as a result of armed conflicts, this study is focused on the unique experiences of Arab refugee families fleeing conflict zones.

The Canadian role in recently resettling a large influx of Arab refugees and assisting them to successfully integrate has not been without challenges. Traumatic pre-migration experiences as a result of being subjected to and/or witnessing violence, separation from and loss of family members, and loss of property and social status coupled with experiences of hardships in transit countries have a profound impact on families and their integration. Refugees are subjected to individual and collective traumatic experiences associated with cultural or ethnic disconnection, mental health struggles, and discrimination and racism. These experiences have been shown to impact family interactions. Arab refugee families have different definitions of “family” and “home” from Eurocentric conceptualizations which are grounded in individualistic worldviews. The

discrepancy between collectivism and individualism is mainly recognized by collectivist newcomers as challenges in the areas of gender norms, expectations regarding parenting and the physical discipline of children, and diverse aspects of the family's daily life.

For this study, we interviewed 30 adults, all Arab refugees (14 Syrian and 16 Iraqi – 17 males, 13 females) residing in London, Ontario, Canada for a period of time ranging from six months to seven years. The study participants were married couples with and without children. During the semi-structured interviews, the participants were asked to reflect on their family life during pre-migration – in the country of origin before and during the war and in the transit country – and post-migration in Canada. The interviews were conducted in Arabic, audio-recorded, and transcribed. We also conducted one focus group with seven service providers from diverse sectors in London, Ontario who work with Arab refugee families.

The study used the underlying principles of constructivist grounded theory methodology to guide interviewing and a thematic analysis was performed. MAXQDA software was used to facilitate coding and the identification of key themes within the transcribed interviews. We also conducted a thematic analysis of the focus group transcription.

The thematic analysis of the individual interviews identified four key themes:

- Gender role changes influence spousal relationships;
- Traumatic experiences bring suffering and resilience to family well-being;
- Levels of marital conflict are higher following post-migration settlement;
- Post-migration experiences challenge family values.

The outcome of the thematic analysis of the service provider focus group identified three key themes:

- The complex needs of newly arrived Arab refugee families;
- Gaps in the services available to Arab refugee families;

-
- Key aspects of training for cultural competencies.

The key themes from the individual interviews demonstrate: (i) the dramatic sociocultural changes associated with migration that particularly emphasize different gender norms; (ii) the impact of trauma and the refugee experience itself on family relationships and personal well-being; (iii) the unique and complex aspects of the family journey; and (iv) how valued aspects of cultural and religious values and traditions are linked in complex ways for these Arab refugee families. These outcomes are consistent with previous studies.

The study finds that women were strongly involved in supporting their spouses in every aspect of family life and tried to maintain their spouses' tolerance towards stressors. The struggles of husbands to fulfill their roles as the providers and protectors throughout the migratory journey were evident. Some parents experienced role shifts that they understood to be due to the unstable conditions in which they were living but these changes were considered to be temporary. Despite the diversity of refugee family experiences, they shared some commonalities in how they experienced changes that were frightening for families, as well as some that enhanced safety and stability. These latter changes related to safety were welcomed by these families. Some of these families reported that they sought professional help, while others dealt with changes by becoming more distant in their marital relationship. The risk of violence increased as the result of trauma, integration stressors, and escalation in marital issues. These outcomes illustrate the importance of taking into consideration the complexity of the integration process in light of post-trauma and post-migration changes and the timespan each family needs to adjust and integrate. Moreover, these families expressed hope for a better future for their children and stated that they were willing to accept change for the sake of their children as well. At the same time, these parents voiced the significance of preserving their cultural and religious values and beliefs.

The service providers identified gaps in service provision to refugee families in some key areas. These included the unpreparedness of professionals and insufficiency of the resources available for newcomer families from all levels of government. This was particularly relevant in the context of meeting the needs of the large influx of Syrian refugees who were resettled in Canada within the period of November 2015 to January 2017. Furthermore, language skills and addressing trauma needs were found to require more than one year to address. The service providers identified

that a longer time span of government assistance for these families was necessary. In terms of training, the service providers pinpointed the value of learning more about culturally appropriate interventions and receiving professional development to enhance their work with refugee families.

In light of these findings, we recommend an increased use of culturally integrative interventions and programs to provide both formal and informal support for families within their communities. Furthermore, future research that examines the impact of culturally-based training, cultural brokers, and various culturally integrative practices will contribute to understanding best practices. These findings with regard to refugee family relationships and experiences are exploratory in their nature and support future research that extends understanding in the area of spousal relationships, intergenerational stressors during adolescence, and parenting/gender role changes.

CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

I. Internal Displacement, Migratory Journeys, and Refugee Settlement

During the recent years of unrest in the Middle East and North Africa, millions of civilians have been internally displaced or sought refuge in other countries (IDMC, 2016). Due to a variety of factors, the numbers are difficult to determine and those reported can be inaccurate (Butler, 2017). However, the best current estimates indicate that there were 21.3 million refugees globally at the end of 2015 and, of these, just over half originated in Syria, Afghanistan, and Somalia (Butler, 2017). In 2015, there were 8.6 million new cases of internally displaced persons due to conflict and violence with 4.8 million of these newly displaced persons from the Middle East – more than from the rest of the world combined (IDMC, 2016). Yemen, Syria, and Iraq accounted for more than half of the global total (IDMC, 2016). The majority of these people seek refuge in neighboring countries with a much smaller percentage migrating to Europe or North America. Again, using statistics from the end of 2015, of the total number of global refugees there were 110,325 who moved to Canada and 247,826 to the United States (Butler, 2017).

II. Canada's Role in Settlement of Refugee Families

As a percentage of total newcomers to Canada, 10 percent are refugees (Hyndman, 2011). Since 2009, the Government of Canada has resettled nearly 25,000 Iraqi and Syrian refugees. In response to the increased civil war in Syria, Canada has resettled more than 40,000 Syrian refugees from November 2015 to end of January 2017 (Government of Canada, 2017). Even though Canada has played a notable role in providing a safe refuge for these forcibly displaced persons, assisting this group of newcomers to integrate successfully into Canadian communities has not been without challenges.

Pre-migration experiences of wartime (Dillmann, Pablo, & Wilson, 1993) and subsequent dislocation in transit countries involve the normalization of incomprehensible acts of violence within the context of war. In addition to being victims of war atrocities, political conflict, and mass violence, these refugees have lost their homes, money, social status, and the means to maintain normal family life. Family members are killed, separated, and become disconnected from their socio-cultural and religious supports (Nickerson, Bryant, Rosebrock, & Litz, 2014). Transit conditions may include malnutrition, inadequate housing, lack of employment and schooling, and limited health services (Kaplan, 2009). Such traumatic

experiences can seriously impact family members and their eventual post-migration integration (Raphael et al., 2008).

Post-migration social support for refugee families can be limited in geographic areas with a small, fragmented, or nonexistent ethnic community. Community-based and government-funded health, family-support, and social services are likely to be oriented to a more individualistic view of persons accessing services in this post-migration context (Baobaid & Ashbourne, 2016). In addition, racism and discrimination from the dominant culture can be potentially re-traumatizing or increase risk and vulnerability post-migration (Jiwani, 2005).

Currently in Canada, refugees are either government-sponsored or privately sponsored (by groups such as church, service, or social organizations or informal networks of interested individuals). For all of these refugees, there is a higher level of financial and social support available in the first year, with a drop-off in institutional and government financial assistance after the first 12 months.

III. The Effects of Trauma and Migration on Individuals and Families

Linear models of accumulated trauma experiences are not likely to be helpful when considering the complexity of these refugee families' experiences (Kira & Tummala-Narra, 2015). In addition to individual traumatic experiences, refugees are also subject to collective traumatic experiences related to potential cultural or ethnic extinction, as well as the potential for additional mental health effects of gender discrimination or vulnerability on women; and the individual and collective effects of post-migration discrimination and racism (Kira & Tummala-Narra, 2015).

Research literature has illustrated the complex family interactions that exist within the context of families dealing with the effects of trauma. Spazojević, Heffer, and Snyder (2000) looked at marital relationship distress and how it is related to levels of acculturation and PTSD symptoms for Bosnian refugees in the US. They found that acculturation differences were less predictive of relationship distress than PTSD symptomatology. Their research findings showed that while husbands' global distress was not closely linked to PTSD or acculturation, wives' distress was more closely linked to their spouse's PTSD symptoms than their own and to their spouse's level of acculturation. When PTSD had an effect on marital functioning, it was mostly evident in a couple's communication. Sandgalang and Vang (2017) reviewed the limited empirical research on intergener-

ational patterns of trauma in refugee families and point to the need to conduct more specifically-directed research in this area. They emphasize the importance of expanding our understanding of the effects of refugee parents' trauma on families over time; the inclusion of children's perspectives; the "*convergence of social, cultural, and political factors that shape pre- and post-migration influences on the health and well-being of refugee families*" (p. 753), and exploring resilience and protective factors.

Simich, Este, & Hamilton (2010) suggest that understanding family and social support needs of refugees during settlement is even more important than conceptualizing struggles as reflective of diagnosed mental health concerns resulting from previous trauma. In fact, PTSD diagnoses may serve to "*medicalize*" trauma influences and interventions (Kira & Tummala-Narra, 2015; Simich et al., 2010) and direct service provider attention away from key elements of the more complex experiences of refugee family members.

The way that refugee family members define "family" and "home" may differ substantially from the more Eurocentric conceptualization of these terms present in the dominant Canadian context (Deng & Marlowe, 2013; Simich et al., 2010). Arab refugee families come from collectivist cultures and the shift to incorporate new internal value systems into family dynamics based on a different set of cultural understandings may impede integration. These families face various forms of basic challenges to their own deeply embedded values on parenting styles, gender roles, and socio-educational expectations and this can exert substantial stressors upon traditional family structures, potentially destabilizing the family (Renzaho, McCabe, & Sainbury, 2011; Simich et al., 2010).

Similarly, the loss of social networks, extended families, and socio-economic status associated with this type of displacement is particularly challenging for collectivist Arab families, relying as they do on the resources of the group, tribe, or extended family when coping with difficulties. Collectivist cultures place high value on interdependency, traditionalism, and fidelity to the family and tribe (Carteret, 2011; Dwairy, 2002; Markus & Kitayama, 1994; Triandis, 1996). Extended kin and community members are important and influential in the adjustment and settlement for refugee families (Tingvold, Middelthon, Allen, & Hauff, 2012).

BenEzer and Zetter (2014) point to the significance and uniqueness of refugee journeys for individuals, families, and communities. They describe

some of the conceptual and methodological challenges for researchers that are associated with studying these journeys and their effects on people's meaning-making about themselves, their families, and their cultural/ethnic/resettled groups while taking into account painful associations. For our purposes here, it is important to acknowledge that the journey itself has an influence on how family members will address new challenges, potentially change their family structures, and interact with each other in new ways.

Further, there are resiliencies and resources of individuals, families, and communities, which can help family members overcome some of the challenges of trauma, resettlement, and acculturative stressors (Betancourt et al., 2015). For example, in their 2015 Boston-based study, Betancourt et al. found that religion, family communication patterns, community, and peer supports were resources upon which Somali refugee families drew.

IV. Working with Refugee Families

Due to the complexities and uniqueness of each family's refugee and migration experience, it would be an extreme oversimplification to provide strict guidelines as to what to look for, or assess, or how to intervene with all families dislocated by war and political conflict now settling in a Canadian context. What is valuable, however, is sensitivity to the key elements that can cause distress for these families. Segal and Mayadas (2005) highlight some of these areas for child welfare workers who are engaged with immigrant and refugee families in the United States. Baobaid and Ashbourne (2016) outline a Four Aspects Screening Tool (FAST) for assessing strengths and challenges in key aspects of a family's past and current circumstances. Within FAST, a consideration of migration, ethno-cultural, religion-faith, and universal aspects directs service providers' attention to how pre- and post-migration experiences, family and personal dynamics, and cultural/religious expectations and supports may be seen as either exacerbating or helping to address current dilemmas or challenges for family members.

Any type of assessment or intervention requires careful consideration of cultural influences on both the service providers and families being served (Baobaid & Ashbourne, 2016; Kaplan, 2009; Segan & Mayadas, 2005). Within that cultural context, specific domains such as experience of torture and violence; hardships related to nutrition, shelter, and educational deficiencies during transit; and post-migration settlement including family functioning and separation from significant others

require careful attention (Kaplan, 2009). These various factors necessitate a comprehensive assessment and specialized interventions that are sensitive to the complex nature of a family's presenting concerns and the specific nature of a family's migration trajectory (Baobaid & Ashbourne, 2016; Kaplan, 2009; Kira & Tummala-Narra, 2015; Kirmayer et al., 2011).

Kirmayer et al. (2011) underline that culture shapes the meaning that family members attribute to the traumatic events they have experienced as well as their interpretation of the symptoms that later emerge. Cultural competence, sensitivity, and awareness are necessary components of effectively building therapeutic relationships, working with competence and skill as a service provider, and developing procedures and practices that are effectively utilized with refugee family members (see Isakson, Legerski, & Layne, 2015, and Kira & Tummala-Narra, 2015, for discussion and review of evidence-based practices that show promise for adaptation to working with trauma-exposed refugees).

V. Research Objectives

Because so many of the current refugees in the world are from Arab states, this study is directed at the unique experiences of Arab families dislocated due to war and political conflict. There has been limited research on refugees that specifically addresses the effects of pre-migration trauma and dislocation, the migration journey, and post-migration settlement on family relationships. Trans-global migration from the Middle East to Canada represents a profound change in the socio-cultural backdrop with attendant challenges in the areas of gender norms, expectations for parenting and the physical discipline of children, and aspects of everyday family life.

The overarching objective of this research is to understand the impact of wars and conflicts and their subsequent migration journeys on recently settled Arab refugee families in Canada. Specifically, the research is aimed at understanding the impact of pre- and post-migration stressors on marital and parent-child relationships in Arab refugee families. In addition, this research considers the role that professional service providers play in supporting these Arab refugee families.

CHAPTER 2: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

This research project received research ethics approval from the University of Guelph, Ontario and the University of Calgary, Alberta, both in Canada. We used purposive sampling to recruit adult Arab refugees who had been in Canada for at least six months and no more than seven years, and who were spouses and/or parents. We also conducted a focus group with healthcare and social services professionals and follow-up focus groups with Arab refugee mothers and fathers to check and further develop the key analytic themes identified in individual interview data.

We used the underlying principles of constructivist grounded theory methodology (Charmaz, 2005) to guide interviewing – following up on interesting leads, inviting further description to saturate our understanding of key concepts and broadening descriptions. During the semi-structured interviews, we asked participants to reflect on their family life during each part of their migration journey: in their country of origin before and during wartime, in transit countries, and post-migration in Canada. These interviews were conducted in Arabic, audio-recorded, and transcribed.

A thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) of the interview data was also guided by the principles of constructivist grounded theory methodology (Charmaz, 2006). We used MAXQDA qualitative data analysis software to aid in identifying and grouping codes and eventual key themes within the transcribed interview data. Our analytic strategy is described in more detail below.

Similarly, key themes were identified in focus group transcripts and are reported herein to augment the thematic analysis of individual interview data.

I. Sample

We interviewed 30 Arab refugees (13 females and 17 males) currently residing in London, Ontario, Canada. These mothers and fathers left their countries of origin (14 from Syria and 16 from Iraq) as a result of war and political conflict. They lived in transit countries for varying amounts of time (ranging from 13 to 96 months, with a mean time in transit of 41 months). They arrived in Canada between six months and seven years prior to these interviews (with a mean length of stay in Canada of two years). The participants ranged in age from 29 to 62 years, with a mean age of 40 years. Current household sizes ranged from four to eight members (mean size 5.5 members).

Table 1. Participants' age, household size, length of time in transit, and length of time in Canada

	Range	Mean
Age of Participants	29 to 62 years	40 years
Household Size	4 to 8 members	5.5 members
Length of Time in Transit	13 to 96 months	41 months
Length of Time in Canada	6 months to 7 years	2 years

Table 2. Participants' countries of origin

Country of Origin	Frequency	Percentage of total sample
Syria	14	47%
Iraq	16	53%

Table 3. Participants' gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage of total sample
Male	17	57%
Female	13	43%

Many of the participants had been internally displaced before moving out of their country of origin to transit countries. The transit countries included Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, Egypt, Jordan, Ukraine, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and the United States of America.

In addition, we conducted a focus group with seven local service providers in London, Ontario, Canada. They were professionals from the following fields: law enforcement, youth outreach, child protection, settlement, social services, and health care. Their years of experience ranged from three to 25 years, with a mean of 12 years. They were represented by London Police Services, London Intercommunity Health Centre, Children's Aid Society of London & Middlesex, Women's Community House, and London Health Sciences Centre. All service providers participating in the focus group were female and their ages ranged from 31 to 60 years, with roughly half of the participants younger than 40 years of age. Five

of the participants indicated that they had received some type of cultural competence training to work with refugee families and two reported that they had received such training specific to working with Arab families. Cultural competence training was offered to four of the participants through their employer/agency.

II. Analysis

Interviews were conducted in Arabic with the exception of the service provider focus group, which was conducted in English. The interviews and focus groups were transcribed and coded by an Arabic speaker using MAXQDA software to aid in organizing codes and synthesizing these into coding groups. Codes were labelled with English language codes and translations of coded segments were attached in memo form to the coded segments. This allowed the research team members who were not fluent in Arabic to participate in the next steps of identifying key themes. Our intent was to keep the description of family interactions and subjective reflections on complex and difficult experiences as near to the participants' language as possible in the initial stages of coding.

Data analysis began with line-by-line coding of the first eight interviews. In addition to this initial coding, the interviewers prepared a narrative summary (in English) of the main events, experiences, and demographics of each of these first eight participants based on the interview contents. The research team met and discussed the predominant themes emerging from a review of these codes and narrative summaries. Out of this discussion, the team developed groups of codes reflecting the primary themes we saw as linked to our research question of understanding the influence on Arab family spousal and parent-child relationships of forced displacement and migration. Using these coding groups, the transcribed interview data for the remaining 22 interviews was coded. The coded segments in each group were reviewed by the three Arabic-fluent research team members for initial thematic analysis – looking for “*patterned responses or meaning*” (Braun & Clarke, 2005) in the data. Further research team discussion and development of themes included the insight of the two research team members who are not fluent in Arabic, using English coding labels and translated coded segments. Following team discussion and identification of key themes, representative coded segments from the transcripts were selected to use as support for discussion of themes, and more detailed English translations of these were made to add to the research report.

CHAPTER 3: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

I. Thematic Analysis of Interview Data

Four key themes were identified during analysis of this interview data. These include: gender role changes influence spousal relationships; traumatic experiences bring suffering and resilience to family well-being; levels of marital conflict are higher following post-migration settlement; and post-migration experiences challenge family values. Each of these themes will be presented below with supporting interview excerpts.¹

A. Gender Role Changes Influence Spousal Relationships

The couples we spoke to described instability in roles and responsibilities across the course of their forced migration journey. To a large extent, their experience in their country of origin prior to the initiation of political unrest and conflict or war was seen by them to be stable and normal. They described a division of labor and responsibilities based on gender that fits a traditional Arab society, with men working outside of the home and holding the roles of provider and protector, and women remaining in the home to care for and nurture children and maintain the household. Extended family members were available for support. There was some reference to limitations placed on women in public prior to war, suggesting that not all aspects of accepted gender roles were without challenge. The quotes below provide examples of participants' descriptions of the pre-migration status of their marital relationships in gendered terms.

We weren't under any pressure; for instance, for us, a woman didn't have to go outside and work. She could stay in her home where she is honored and valued. A young man goes outside and works and when he comes home at the end of the day, she [his wife] is content and relaxed. We didn't have work like this. [P1-Male]

I got married when I was 14 years and seven months old. Thank God, I was happy and we had everything. I had a house helper who worked on a monthly basis who was a big relief for me. We used to be surrounded by relatives, surrounded by my family and friends—always going back and forth, visiting one another. [P29-Female]

1 Note that throughout this report, quotes are identified by the participant's number, e.g., P24, followed by the gender of the participant, male or female (or, in the case of interviews with couples, either the husband or wife). The English translation, which is as close to the original Arabic as possible, is presented in the text.

My wife used to work before we were married, as did my two sisters. When my brother and I were doing our mandatory military service and unable to work or earn an income, my sister and my other sister used to work with my wife in the capital. When I was first married, I told my two sisters that they would be staying at home as soon as I completed my military service, and that my wife would do the same thing. So, a few months before I married her, I made her stop working; so no, she didn't used to work. [P13-Male]

With rising conflict and the outbreak of war, husbands' injury or absence contributed to changing roles for wives and sometimes increased distance in their marital relationships. For example:

It really affected his mood a lot [a war-related injury leading to disability]. He felt like he was inferior, especially when we would go out together and I would walk ahead of him, he would feel inferior. This really affected us a lot and we grew distant (in terms of our relationship). [P25-Female]

With the outbreak of war or increasing destabilizing of society, the provider and protector roles that men held meant that they witnessed and experienced direct violence threatening the well-being of their family and felt called upon to act in order to ensure their safety and security. Both men and women reported that they became increasingly concerned about protecting their children and other family members. It was within this context that parents took action to flee their homes, often in a multi-stepped relocation to other parts of their country of origin and to neighboring countries as refugees in transit.

They described their experience in transit countries as initiating changes in their roles as husbands and wives, mothers and fathers. They talked about three main areas of responsibility that they shared as parents: protection, provision, and caring for children. Addressing these responsibilities could mean changing roles in public and private spheres for both spouses. With regard to providing economically for their families, some men risked their own safety to return to financially lucrative jobs, leaving their wives to look after children in transit countries. Some women were more able to locate employment in the transit country and/or to learn new languages more quickly, and thus, took on breadwinner roles while their husbands stayed home to care for the children. Women were involved in

multiple tasks as primary caretakers of their children and responsible for household chores in addition to being employed. The quotes below represent the participants' descriptions of their marital relationships during transit with respect to spousal roles and responsibilities:

Marital conflicts started happening to everyone, both to me and my family. I told you that I used to work in the capital. I would stay home for two weeks, then return for one day and work from 8am to 12 midnight for 10 pounds in the local currency of the transit country in order to cover our rent, expenses, and food. The UNHCR used to provide us with some but then the food rations were cut and they didn't give us the same amount that they used to. So, you want to work – but what work can you do? What is right for you? You have no choice but to accept any job – whether you know how to do it or not. I was kicked out of the refugee camp. My sponsorship was cancelled and I was kicked out because of smuggling. If you want to work, you do whatever you have to do to get money to feed your kids and to cover the expenses of your family. My wife, what can I say, she had a nervous breakdown and wasn't able to handle it. She told me: "Let's go. It is better to return to our home country." [P8-Male]

Yes, thank God, I learned the language in seven months because I had to, as I have a large family. I have children. They didn't know the language so I would go with them to the dentist, the physician, the market, and buy clothes for them. Everything, I did everything as my husband didn't know the language, he would take me with him on his errands, even to pay bills, I was the primary person responsible for handling everything related to our lives.

My husband and brother-in-law worked for around three months and we, myself and my sister-in-law, worked for the rest of the time because no matter how much they searched, there was no work to be found. [P20-Female]

While women maintained primary responsibility for ensuring their children's schooling, both parents were concerned when schooling was unavailable or substandard. Depending on the financial resources of the family, private school was sometimes an option. If mothers were more

highly educated, they could provide educational support for their children at home. Often, there was little that the couple could do to improve the educational opportunities for their children during their time in transit countries and this was a reported source of stress for them.

*Of course, they had left a country and they didn't even know what it was, just a little bit about it. Schools were far away from them. The schools weren't very welcoming or serious, they were schools in name only. I put my son in school but there wasn't any encouragement there given to anyone, there was still learning going on but no improvement. I only sent my daughter to school for one term—not because I didn't like for her to go but because the education was poor. The education was poor. And because they went to school in the evenings, they would attend from 1 o'clock in the afternoon until after the sunset call to prayer, which is when the children would go to school. The schools were far away and it was a lot of pressure for a child who would return home from school after the sunset call to prayer. When it is winter time like this, after one hour, forget it, there is no time for anything. When can he go to sleep? When can he study? Was that really an education?
[P1-Male]*

*So, we lost a lot of things... When I fled our home country my son (name of the son of the participant) was 12 years old. He was old enough for school, but I wasn't able to put him in school in (the name of the transit country) because of our financial situation, and someone was ill when we arrived in (the transit country). So, I didn't have the financial ability to put (name of the son of the participant) in school. I wanted him to go, but his little sister was in the first year of primary school and we needed to put (name of the daughter of the participant) in school. So although he was still a child, (name of the son of the participant), we needed him go out to work. He used to work in restaurants, laundries, and cleaning toilets—excuse me—to earn a wage.
[P11-Couple]*

We had nothing left, mentally or emotionally. The period of depression that followed, how can I describe it to you? Why? My children were not in school for three years.

Every time I opened my window and saw children coming and going, I would sit and cry. I wouldn't ever talk about it. It didn't have a huge impact except that they became stronger and they wanted to come here. [P23-Female]

The changes taking place in their relationships were sometimes described by participants as providing insight into their spouses' past roles and responsibilities and the overall adaptation in family structure and activities to maintain balance. For example, one woman [P20-Female] described her experience of role reversal with her husband when she became the economic provider in the transit country. She stated that she gained an enhanced understanding of his previous pressures as an income earner, as well as identifying her own desire to work in their home and with their children as she had previously done. She also pointed to how her in-laws were paying their rent in transit from their own retirement income and that this maintained her husband's status in important ways.

Yes, I became head of our household and am under a lot more stress. We started to understand how men feel when they are responsible for a lot and get up and go to work in the morning while we cook and care for the children. We started to understand how one feels, having to go back and forth and deal with people in order to earn money. I tell my husband that I hope that God gives him strength to endure because he suffers in the morning, waiting for the bus and dealing with how people treat him on the buses. And, you search for work...how will your boss treat you? I said, "Not me, in all honesty, I prefer to do a thousand tasks at home instead of any work outside." My husband accepts that and isn't bothered by it because his mother and father are nice about it and they help us with the rent. You know they are elderly and receive a pension every month from here so they give us rent money. [P20-Female]

The couples we spoke with frequently described these changes in family structure and roles as normal and to be expected, given the circumstances. They appeared to perceive this marital or family instability as temporary and context-driven. It is important to note that the societal backdrop during this time of transit in countries neighboring their country of origin did not hold markedly different social mores than their homeland. Gender roles and interactions under normal conditions were expected to

fall within more traditional Arab norms and the current context could be easily understood as extraordinary with corresponding changes due to necessity. The quotes below speak to the participants' views of instability as normal, temporary, and necessary and of the impact of this on marital relationships:

My wife was patient with me, she endured patiently and so did my children, of course. The sad thing is the effect that the financial crisis which I experienced in the transit country had on me. As for my wife, she would ask me for some household item and I would answer her without even thinking during our conversations. I would say: "I don't have it today. Right now, I don't have it. Be patient and wait until the end of the month. We didn't work this month so wait until we have it as we are looking for work." These words were harsh. Of course, my children were either in the same room or an adjoining room, listening to us and were really impacted by it. They were really affected a lot by it. [P7-Male]

I will share with you how becoming responsible for my family affected me. I swear I can't even tell the negative from the positive. But one negative was how I exhausted myself but it is still a plus that I was able to provide something for my family. This is the nice side of it. I helped, I helped them to live comfortably in the transit country. [P10-Female]

There was a huge difference. In our home country, there was the physical danger to our lives, we were fleeing from death. Now, we face the normal pressures of life here but there is also another type of stress. Small issues that we had been ignoring during the war started to resurface little by little, our problems resurfaced at the same time that our girls were growing up over the past four years. [P18-Male]

The changes and adaptations to previously taken-for-granted roles as husbands and wives, mothers and fathers, were not without personal cost. One father stated: "When a person cannot work to provide for oneself and one's family [he] will not feel joy. When I work and provide for my home, I feel my purpose and place." [P2-Male] He earlier described his feeling that "the only thing that I am able to give my children having left our country of

origin is advice, as I am unable to provide for them financially.” [P2-Male] Similarly a mother, who was disappointed in her husband’s apparent inability to protect and provide for her and their children in the face of tribal law and in the context of war, requested a divorce in their country of origin. Because she was pregnant at the time, the divorce was refused. She left for a transit country where she eventually obtained the divorce. She saw herself as needing to take action to protect and provide for her children in a safe context and ultimately arranged to move to Canada. Although the couple remarried before her departure to Canada, the family currently awaits reunification and she is applying to have her husband join the family in Canada soon. She says: “*I felt broken and disheartened. I did not forgive him in my country of origin, but finally, after what I have been through, I forgave my husband for failing me.*” [P12-Female]

During transit, the primary focus for spouses and parents was security and safety, with predominant questions being where to live, whether to move together, what would be best for the children, and what about extended family members. With such big questions in front of them, it may be that changes in gender roles that were influencing their relationships were viewed as more minor and temporary.

Living in a house of 11 people affected the relationship between myself and my wife. Since I didn’t have work, we actually became closer and held tighter to one another. Whenever a person goes through difficult circumstances, it reveals to you whether or not the person who is with you is good or not. All thanks and praise be to God, my in-laws were with us, hand-in-hand, through our joy and sadness. Although there were some disagreements about the kids, because you know, as they say: “The one who serves as a judge for children hangs himself.” [P20-Female]

We grew closer to each other in the first and second transit countries and even closer in the country of resettlement. But the suffering that I encountered in the second transit country was inhuman. The suffering that I encountered in the second transit country was unbearable – no salary, no assistance, no UN and our families in our home country stopped sending us money. And there were days – sometimes ten days – where we didn’t eat anything but bread as there wasn’t any work. He (my husband) used to go with someone and work in construction. [P23-Female]

It is important to note here that these forcibly displaced refugee families did not have a great deal of choice over where they were able to move to from the transit countries. The family members with whom we spoke had often come to Canada because it was the only option available to them – in effect, Canada “*chose us*” [P10-Female]. These families did not necessarily want to move to a non-Arab social context, but rather to relocate to somewhere safe. They did not select a new country in which to live because it favored gender equality, for example. The research participants we interviewed told us about how they understood and experienced post-migration gender changes with regard to roles and responsibilities in their families differently from the more temporary changes that occurred during transit. They said that the post-migration changes seemed to be more stable and grounded in societal differences that posed difficulties to their adaptation. In addition, their descriptions suggested that the views of others played an important role in their sense of comfort and the level of conflict or instability they experienced in their family relationships. They identified that these judgemental or contrary views were expressed by people from the broader majority community and from within the local Arab community in their new homes. The following quotes describe participants’ post-migration views and experiences on gendered roles and responsibilities, interactions in spousal relationships, and of being seen by others in particular ways related to gender and relationships:

Here there are differences. They say that it is not allowed to hit. Women and children are protected by the law. Sometimes when my wife and I fight, she says that I am right. Sometimes, it is like she says: “No, women have rights.” I think this is normal and I don’t hold anything against her. I am around but I don’t stay at home all day. This is one of the only obstacles that I have faced in Canada with regard to preserving one’s relationship with one’s wife: that the law is in favor of women and children in our country of resettlement instead of in favor of men. [P21-Male]

On the contrary, one good thing about Canada is that here it is normal for women to drive cars, whereas it was not allowed for a woman to drive a car where we come from. Here, thankfully, women can do many things, like working outside the home, driving a car, doing this and that. And why not? I swear I...Yes, on the contrary, this is something

that...Honestly (laughing), if it is always the man who has to drive, take care of the home, and work – then what will happen? We haven't accomplished anything. One will face the same pressures but one should try to do something. Honestly, my wife has adapted to this situation and I can't believe how over the moon she is with happiness because I let her do it. [P13-Male]

The first thing is for me to find work, to find a job. Finding work would help us more as every family here dreams of having men or a father that is working and can cover their expenses. So I am not happy, honestly, to live on assistance. I am a self-made man that loves to work for himself, that is what I am used to doing and so are my kids. So, the matter that I am mostly focused on is finding work so that I can strengthen my relationship with my family more. I have started to pay careful attention to my children's education and I take them to and from school, therapy, and sports activities, meaning I am able to fulfill more of their needs. Now, I want to work. Happiness to me is how able I am to fulfill more of my family's needs. I want to bring more happiness to their lives so they will love me more. But my family empathizes with my situation, they truly understand my situation, but at the same time, they are worried. They empathize with the reality of my situation and respect my condition, understanding that if I am not working then I can't fulfill their needs. Yet, at the same time, they are worried and dream of the day when I will find a better opportunity and am able to work to fulfill their needs. [P7-Male]

The couples we interviewed described different ways of adapting to this experience of marital instability and destabilizing changes. This often included some form of distancing or separation from each other. They reported that maintaining a connection of some sort was important in order to meet the children's needs. The following quotes provide examples of how couples were utilizing distance in their relationships or separation/divorce in the post-migration context.

I became distant with my husband because of increased responsibilities and it was not easy what we went through. It is always more and more difficult. We want to work and provide a life of happiness for our children and fulfill their school needs and their school trips here and there. Some things are offered to us for them and we go around for things, money, items that they want. But how can we know which area to go to as we haven't memorized the areas and our English language skills are not good. But it has been three and a half years since we came to Canada and we have finally started to feel like we are a part of our country of resettlement. Thank God, we have now integrated a bit. [P20-Female]

There is nothing like the impact of the war and the things that affected me and caused my separation from my children. It is a very trying thing and I can't even describe it because it can't be put into words. My psychological state now has improved as I am more relaxed because I am no longer seeing things that upset me... Before I came to Canada, I was easily agitated. I was so tired that I was unable to control myself if anyone spoke to me. Thank God, now I know how to react even in the street and how to talk with my wife. There are many matters that have really changed for me. [P24-Male]

In summary, the influences of forced displacement, living in transit, and post-migration settlement in Canada on gender relations in these families was described by these research participants in the context of the migration journey across time, changing cultural backdrops, and pressing family concerns. What is accepted as normal in the pre-migration and pre-war context of the country of origin becomes secondary to priorities of safety and security in temporary flight. Once the family has an opportunity to settle in a more permanent, secure but quite socially and politically distinct context, the marital partners are challenged to adapt to what may now be viewed as more permanent gender roles and interactions. What we heard from these participants was that role changes, as well as distance within the relationship (including physical and marital separation in some cases), were used to address these challenges. Alongside these changes, a continued focus on what was best for children was maintained by these parents.

B. Traumatic Experiences Bring Suffering and Resilience to Family Well-being

All of the participants interviewed during this study had lived with and fled from political violence and war in their countries of origin. Many also experienced violence and threat to life and security during their time in transit countries. While the specific details of these traumatic events varied widely across participants and descriptive accounts were not requested or required during our interviews, these experiences were such that personal psychological and physical injury was a likely outcome for most if not all of those with whom we spoke. The impact of this trauma was acknowledged by these participants and described as contributing to suffering as well as resilience within family relationships.

Pre-migration life during war and political conflict was described in these interviews as contributing to difficulties coping and living with fear and uncertainty. These were framed as personal struggles primarily associated with war and needing to move, job loss, and day-to-day worries about such concerns as money, food, and documentation. One participant said that “*nothing was normal or explainable... it was not only us, we witnessed our families and relatives experience the same or more difficult circumstances*” [P26-Couple]. The parents we interviewed described the disruption to family life as a result of living in a context of internal displacement, unsettled economic conditions, checkpoints, and abductions. They talked about children having less time with their fathers and worry on the part of both parents. Similarly, pre-existing concerns, such as parents’ or children’s disabilities or special needs, took on greater significance and were more difficult to deal with in the context of war and forced migration.

These couples described various ways in which these stressors and worries affected their relationships. Some pointed to increased spousal conflict, while others stated that they became more distant from each other yet outwardly united as they “*avoided problems...[and] worked together*” [P19-Male], or relied on beliefs such as “*I know his needs without him saying anything*” [P20-Female]. Again, while some described an increase in conflict with their partners, others responded in different ways. One man used the phrase “*bird and wing*” [P2-Male] to metaphorically describe how partners joined together to compensate for each other’s deficiencies, for example where the wife had a job and the husband didn’t, saying that “*we carry one another*” in those times. One woman outlined her role of talking to her husband and children in order to calm

them, being a peacekeeper, and helping them to be “*patient*” [P10-Female]. Another wife talked about “*persuading*” her husband to get a job [P16-Female]. Parents talked about how their own stresses and responses to changed circumstances led them to respond to children with anger and hitting. One father stated that “*my relationship with my children is as every father’s relationship – I care for them and fear for them.*” [P8-Male]

What stands out about these participants’ perspectives on what was happening to them at that time is that, while acknowledging their fears for the present, they were also able to express their hopes for the future. They attributed any family conflicts or problems, including intimate partner violence, to the fears and challenges associated with living in that current context, rather than ascribing those problems to their partner, or to their relationship as a couple. They also spoke of missing the support of absent extended family members and drawing on the support offered by neighbors in transit countries.

Of course, because a person isn’t able to control himself – how can he control himself when he is so tired? He will yell and make mistakes, the same as any other person would in the same circumstances. If I am unable to sleep, then I will not be in the right mood to talk with my wife or my child. I will lose my temper – and so it’s better that I don’t talk to them at all. If one comes home from outside exhausted, and his wife talks to him, he may become angry or lose his temper and yell. There are lots of things that men start to do – that any person starts to do – when he loses his temper that are not normal. A person won’t be able to differentiate when he wants to talk to his wife or child for 10 minutes without regretting what might happen. [P24-Male]

Wife: It’s true that stress really affected us. We were stressed in our home country, that’s true, but even though we experienced stress in our lives, we had a better standard of living. We were able to eat, drink, dress, and such. When we went to the transit country, no. You have to take into consideration your clothes and your food. Husband: Rent, electricity... Wife: Water, and how to pay... I have a little girl so we need milk and diapers. But there were days that I didn’t have any milk left so I had to give her rice water. That is how bad things got for us. [P26-Couple]

Once they are settled in Canada, family members describe the continuing impact of the traumas they have experienced upon themselves and their relationships. They see those traumas as leading to conflict within the spousal relationship, and shaping their responses to it, as well as contributing to a widening gulf between them. Marital interactions were often influenced by the distress of one or both partners.

I feel (my husband is stressed) but I don't let him feel this way. I start talking to him to help him forget about it. You are the peacemaker in the home and you calm things down. Yes, yes, whenever I find that he is angry and such, [I tell him] all families are like this, so I am able to break the tension and lighten his load. Men keep things to themselves. They don't tell us because women and men are different. I am very patient. Everyone tells me that, including my nephews and siblings. [P30-Female]

Thank God, things got better during our migration. He said to me: "(name of the participant), you are far away from home and I am far away from home. You don't have anyone but me and I don't have anyone but you. I am yours and you are mine." Sometimes, you know, people lose their temper with one another, especially due to the children, but we always reconcile immediately. [P15-Female]

While some couples talk about providing support to one another, they also refer to the support they have received from professional support providers, which helps them to cope both individually and as a couple.

I left my home and went to a shelter, and I told them about the beatings and violence. The shelter called the police, and a case was filed against him. But I returned to my home after 15 days and I went to the organization for him to talk. We have been separated for almost a year and there are court proceedings... they have helped me... I have my own counselor and he has his own counselor... psychological treatment... and the court-mandated program... He wants [to reconcile] and he is regretful... he wants to change... we are trying now. [P3-Female]

So, frankly, since the matter began, I have been thankful for the service provider who understood my situation. His

stance, what can I say, his stance was always in my favor and he supported me until the last second. And, I always listened to his advice and it was correct. And that is what allowed me to change my life later for the better. There were things that I benefited from and he was co-operative toward me and showed me the right way. [P4-Male]

In summary, the traumatic experiences and suffering of these families are absorbed and integrated into family life and marital relationships in a range of ways. This integration can materialize in conflict and stressful situations, with ineffective or exacerbating interactions that contribute to suffering. In other families, or at different times, their relationships, responses to one another, and the support they receive from others, all contribute to their resilience.

C. Levels of Marital Conflict Higher Following Post-Migration Settlement

While some of the husbands and wives we interviewed spoke of becoming closer or more accepting in their spousal relationships over time, typically attributing this to age or having been through difficult experiences together, more often couples reported being more distant, or more conflictual now. Some of this heightened conflict and reactivity was attributed to the impact of previous traumatic experiences associated with war and forced migration as well as challenges related to gender role changes described in the previous sections. In addition, participants described the impact of post-migration time pressures: not having enough time, as well as the many demands related to children, school, lack of household help or extended family help, language barriers, and employment challenges. Similarly, they pointed to space pressures: too little or too much home space to maintain and not being able to navigate outdoor space freely due to not knowing how, or having worries about safety. In addition, fears were expressed in interviews about unfamiliar Canadian rules regarding the treatment of women and children and the potential loss of the family/spousal unit or involvement in court proceedings.

Oh, so much changed. First, our psychological well-being was totally destroyed. The relationship between me and my husband is not good. Neither one of us can stand to hear the other one speak anymore. It's impossible. We are always losing our temper with the kids. Yes, this is the impact of the war on everyone and we are still suffering

from it, even now. Nowadays, my husband and I attend sessions at the hospital because my relationship with him is not good. Meaning, if he says anything to me, I rage. If I say anything to him, he rages. Meaning, we are still suffering from this, even now. Even my youngest son suffers a lot of from it. Our situation is very volatile. [P6-Female]

My fights increased and up until now, I had expected that I would receive treatment for my hand (an injury as a result of a war incident in the transit country) when I got to Canada. The issue that occurred was that I had been seeing a physician for almost a year and two months at the hospital and the last information that I received was he said that there was no surgery that would benefit me and that he couldn't do anything about my situation or my injury that I sustained because the main nerve was severed three years prior to that and they would not be able to reconnect it. So, this affected my emotional state. I have a limited income and am currently living on government assistance. And, okay, while government assistance achieves its aim, it doesn't leave any extra. I am a person who naturally loves to work so not having a job also puts stress on me, psychologically. [P24-Male]

Gender appears to be a factor in the increased marital conflict that emerges following migration. Issues of freedom for women, changed public roles, and rights for women and children in Canada appear to be understood and seen variously as positive or threatening influences on marriage. Some decisions to separate have been made by the participants in this study in response to violence or threats of violence that women have experienced. It also appears that among the family members that we interviewed, it was women who had made these decisions to separate, not men.

Our relationship deteriorated (the couple). Let me add that it was because he thought that I was going to leave him and that I want to live my life here in Canada more. And that was what he thought, which was wrong as I wasn't thinking about that. It was because the laws here are in favor of women and children and against men and he thought that I would use this point against him in addition to another factor, which was that he wasn't working. As

soon as we got here and it was women and children and then men...that was the information that he received and he interpreted that to mean that it was inevitable that I was going to try to control him and force my opinion on him, so he became more short-tempered... and more violent. Things were like this between us. He would hit me and raise his hand to me and was more irritated and more agitated. Hmmm, when this started to happen between us, I had almost decided that it was over, that I had suffered enough because no matter how much I spoke with him or how much we discussed matters, we got nowhere. [P3-Female]

Other contributing factors to increased marital conflict and risk of violence may be the context of living within a minority culture where the traditions, expectations, and rules of society are unfamiliar and quite different from the pre-migration social context. Couples may be more isolated, more uncertain about where to find help, and have fewer informal family supports available to them. Conflict may also be heightened in response to parental worry about their children and their future.

Frankly, my children scare me. When they speak about me, I don't understand them because their English is so advanced. Truly, I am scared of them because I feel like they are stronger than me. I feel like they are more Canadian than they are Arab. They don't have anything similar to Arabs. If they happen to sit with an Arab family, they can't relate to them and withdraw. They prefer Canadian children. I wasn't able to preserve the traditions and customs of my upbringing because societal pressure is greater. [P12-Female]

These services were available from the time I arrived. I always think about the future and the families that want to come. For each family that wants to come, there should always be a professional on their case who has access to full background information about their specifics – i.e. how they were hurt, whether somebody was abducted, whether a person had something happen to one of his children, and so on. Okay, this would have been good for me. My psychological state might have been different, but we will never know. If the support worker had offered

treatment after asking questions like: “Did you go through the circumstances 1, 2, or 3?” this might have had an effect on me, even now. At least after that, you would be familiar with how you would be living and how you would live together in a traditional family. In one way or another, your daily life style would change but you would not stumble over these bumps in the road. [P4-Male]

In summary, this theme illuminates the nature of changed spousal relationships following flight from conflict zones and migration to a quite different socio-cultural context. The nature of these changes was sometimes more distance, but could also lead to increased conflict and sometimes to enhanced risk of spousal violence. Sources of conflict were found in worries and concerns about their new Canadian context, gender role changes, and the impact of past experiences. The role of service providers is acknowledged to be potentially valuable in addressing individual needs related to the personal impact of trauma and change as well as supporting couples.

D. Post-Migration Experiences Challenge Family Values

What we repeatedly heard in interviews with mothers and fathers participating in this study was that in a post-migration context they held fast to two primary values for themselves and their children. One of these was keeping the family together and the second was maintaining their cultural and religious identity.

As described earlier, it appears that during forced migration issues of safety and security override everything else. In hopes that educational opportunities for children, renewed networks of social/familial support for the family, and recovered economic status would attend future settlement, these key aspects of family life were put on hold in many ways to allow for migration and resettlement. Following migration, fathers in particular talked about the importance of their efforts to keep the family safe, to move their family to safety, and to sacrifice their own well-being in order to maintain that of their spouse and children.

Our marital relationship became stronger in Canada because we were able to relax and my husband was no longer worrying about money, work, or the children here. This remains in the hearts of mothers and fathers. In our home country, schooling requires money or it is not

successful. My mother-in-law must pay seven million for my children's school. Everything cost us money and there was no real teaching in our home country. I know that here they have a future. He doesn't worry about them. I know that this country has provided them with a safe haven and taken care of them. This matter puts us at peace. [P32-Female]

Everything stayed the same. Our relationship didn't change. It is just the same as it was in our homeland, the transit country, and even Canada. For example, I go to the mosque. Now, I have the kids in a mosque where they take Qur'an lessons and I take them to an Arabic language school on Saturdays. Our traditions remain and no one interferes. In the transit country, they disliked the hijab, not too much but a little but here this is normal. You go to work and there is no issue if you wear your regular clothes. [P17-Male]

Once family life settled into newfound stability in a peaceful, social/political context, other issues moved back into focus. For example, these parents described appreciating some aspects of their post-migration family life – specifically safety, available education, and freedom to practice religion. In addition, however, they expressed fears about their children's adaptation to Western culture over time. These fears included children adopting Western-style freedom, becoming more liberal, not upholding their religiosity, loss of cultural traditions, and moving out of the family home.

Like I told you at the start, we suddenly entered a society with its own customs, and I am prepared to accept that as our religion is flexible it allows for this sudden freedom to an extent. But I tell her (my daughter) that adhering to it too closely is wrong and they (my daughters) are at a slightly difficult age. My daughters wear the hijab, which is okay as they are from a country that has customs and tradition and our religion guides them. They mingle and go out but within limits. At this age, they prefer greater freedoms and would leave their customs and maintain this freedom. Of course, this bothers me in the long term. They want to become citizens of our resettlement country. On the contrary, Canada is home to all races but what I am saying to you is that the problem is our religion calls for

moderation and is flexible. When a person has unlimited freedom, he becomes lost from inside and can't untangle himself in the future. [P18-Male]

I have found that the most difficult thing is that I wish, I truly wish that they find work and that they work and stay with us. What I want to say is that they stay living with me no matter how old they get and they don't move far from us, that they stay with their father and me. [P30-Female]

The move from a more collectivist social structure to that of a more individualist Canadian context appears to contribute to some shifts in family-held values and identity. Participants identified those values that they were unwilling to change and suggested how they would ensure such priorities were upheld. Similarly, they pointed to changes they were willing to embrace or accept in order for their family to be more successful in a new context.

Until now, I didn't have any concerns. As for my teenage daughter, you don't know what will happen. She might meet someone and as you know, we are Muslims and our customs and traditions are completely different. No, I don't feel like she would maintain our customs. Many times, this summer, she said to me: "Mom, I want to wear shorts." I told her: "No, we are Muslims, and so on..." But she said: "All my friends wear shorts. Why can't I?" I told her: "People are different. We are Muslims and we have to cover as God commanded us to do. According to their understanding, their religion allows for that and everyone always follows his own religion. Our customs are different." And she was convinced. This year, she wears mascara and eyeliner. So, she has started doing this little by little. [P25-Female]

We have been able to preserve and maintain some of our traditions here in Canada; but we couldn't have expected to be able to maintain them all. As far as the upbringing of my children, I have raised them based on some traditions or even a lifestyle that is more open here. There aren't always limits. At a certain age, children hear about everything and learn about everything. They do everything. But where we come from, a child learns certain information at a specific age and learns other things at a different age. Here, if you

go out anywhere, you will find two people kissing one another. These scenes are shameful and where we come from we don't have these kinds of scenes or inappropriate actions taking place in malls, buses, and on the street. So, I am worried that they will lose control but all praise and thanks be to God, my children, my girls, were only little during the three-and-a-half years that I have lived here and haven't yet started adolescence or the period from 17-18 years of age. It is possible that I will encounter more difficult stages later on, but until then my girls are with me and I am still in control of matters. So I can instill in them what is wrong through language, through talking to them. I won't stop giving them advice and I have to keep advising as much as I can so I can provide them with the same upbringing and traditions that I grew up with, so they will not follow a different path. [P20-Female]

The absence, distance, and overall separation of extended family from these relocated nuclear families is seen as an important loss, both in day-to-day family life and during special occasions and celebrations of religious, cultural, or family significance.

When I used to get sick, they were always by my side. But let me tell you that I lived in a different municipality for seven years, while my family were living in a small town on the border. I was separated from my family for that whole time by a distance of five hours by car. So, I had gotten used to being far away and my neighbors became like my family. My friends were like sisters. Yet, I used to visit my family and we were still close to one another. I used to visit my mother, go see her and she would come visit me. My sisters would come visit me and I would visit them. I didn't notice it. Thank God, they always supported me. For example, if I ever got sick, or when I gave birth, or when my daughter was admitted to the hospital and underwent surgery, they were always by my side. Then, in the transit country and in Canada, I relied on myself for everything. I decided to depend on myself and persevere. [P10-Female]

These participants made some comments that may be different from what we might hear from migrating families who have chosen their relocation

rather than being forcibly evicted due to war. Some of these participants referred to their appreciation of some of the changes in rules or rigidity regarding discipline of children, more relaxed social standards allowing for clothes, outings, school, and friends that allow for changes that are still acceptable by parents' standards. It sounds as if many of these parents and children discuss changes, talk about how religion and acceptable practices can proceed, while also making room for something different than what was practiced prior to war and migration. It may be that this demonstrates an effect of living in political conflict zones where people are persecuted due to societal rigidity about right/wrong ways to live.

I know that here they have a future. He doesn't worry about them. I know that this country has provided them with a safe haven and taken care of them. This matter puts us at peace. Let me tell you about understanding and respect for our religion, and one's duty toward one's family, toward one's children, and those of the children toward their family. Of course, I have encountered difficulty but I reveal it to my children. I let my children think that it is a simple matter. My eldest daughter wears the hijab and is religious but my middle daughter, no. She doesn't want to wear it. I tell her: "Dear, this is up to you but let me tell you what God has commanded." But you find that she still prays, fasts, and respects her father and me. I tell her to study and not go out but then I say: "Okay, go ahead and go out but don't do anything wrong as I trust you." Most of the time, I feel that I have to protect them. [P23-Female]

Yes, customs are different but I don't think that they will do anything wrong as I feel that they are close to us. Things will happen in this country like possibly my daughter will find work. We keep saying even if it is in another city in our resettlement country that I won't object. Of course, I have become more open-minded and they have too and I have noticed that they are more willing to depend on themselves. So, I am not worried about them. It's become normal. I don't consider this a challenge for me. On the contrary, I am proud of them. For example, in our home country, I was the one who would bring items from the market. So, it is an improvement that anyone can go to

Walmart for food or whatever is needed at home. You feel like you draw strength from their presence. [P28-Male]

We find within these excerpts two threads of talk about discipline, freedom, and Canadian norms that are different from those of the country of origin. One of these represents what we might have expected, which is an expression of fear and concerns about how children will adjust or grow up within a context of more freedom and how they may be difficult to discipline or manage in the current context. In contrast, there appears also to be an expression of appreciation for freedom alongside stability in the absence of war, willingness to learn new ways of discipline, and a hopefulness about how this (including its multicultural and multi-religious social context) will benefit their children in the future. It may be that this is influenced by the young age of children in many of the participant families and/or by distinctions between countries of origin and relative pre-migration rigidity.

Here, I worry that my sons will go to a restaurant that serves food that is not allowed (“haram”) for them to eat. I am always asking them about it and staying with them. I worry because I have a teenage son who likes girls a bit too much (laughs) and these matters, well, it’s true that it’s normal because he is a teenager and at that age but I worry...I worry that he will make a mistake with a girl and do something inappropriate with her. You know how mothers are. [P10-Female]

As for our customs, I would like for my family to hold on to our religion. I don’t want them to lose their faith. I respect all religions but we should hold on to the religion in which we were raised. I treat them with compassion... The only thing that I couldn’t accept was when I heard that they were teaching them about sex in school. I was shocked to the point that I risked all that I had to register them in an Islamic school because I didn’t want them to be subject to this law. I went and paid and but it didn’t work out so I lost the non-refundable 100-dollar registration fee. So, in the end, I gave up and they remained at the same school. This morning, my daughter told the neighbor’s son: “Don’t kiss me!” When a child in first grade is kissing another child, I can’t accept this. Our integration into Canadian society has many beneficial aspects that are very good and perhaps this

is the one bad thing that I can't accept. As for the benefits of Canadian society, no one discriminates against another or wrongs another person in the society. I am protecting my children with regard to 99 percent of these aspects but there is that one percent. I just don't know the wisdom behind it. I don't know, this requires a little bit from me, and I don't know its impact, I just don't know. [P12-Female]

Here, every person ultimately has their own individual freedom. I have. But I have faced problems with a certain center that I wasn't able to solve regarding my children, because they have their own freedom to decide. Even divorced women have freedom, which we don't have in our traditions and customs, or even in our religion. A divorced woman, that is what I am talking about and you can check it. Here, one worries that if she can't put up with you then she will terrorize you if she wants. You can call it "unbridled freedom". [P18-Male]

These families are negotiating changes that were hard to predict and plan for, and which have come at great personal cost. Some of the changes are embraced and adopted while others are seen as threatening. There appears to be a rather consistent 'push and pull' between adaptation (or acculturation/integration) and attempting to find new ways to hold on to what is valuable about their former ways of family life.

II. Thematic Analysis of Service Provider Focus Group Data

The following analysis reflects some exploratory focus group conversations reflecting service providers' perspectives on working with recently arrived Arab refugee families. As the data collected for this analysis was taken for one group discussion with seven service provider participants, it is considered partial and preliminary. However, it does provide an interesting counterpoint to and some confirmation of the analysis of the themes evident in the interviews with Arab refugee family members themselves. We identified three key analytic themes in the transcribed focus group discussion. These included: the complex needs of newly arrived Arab refugee families; gaps in the services available to them; and key aspects of training for cultural competencies.

A. Complex Needs of Newly Arrived Arab Refugee Families

The service providers acknowledged first and foremost that the Arab refugee family members with whom they had worked were resilient, had strong family values, and were highly motivated.

They are very capable of doing so many things. They are very resilient families, parents, and children.

I have a client going to full time school in the morning and afternoon, and in the evening he is working. WOW! This is, I told you, this is the quality Canada needs.

I find it in comparison to some other families I worked with. A lot of the Arab families, because they are coming here to make a fresh start for themselves, they are highly motivated to be successful to make changes.

These service providers also spoke of the challenges for family relationships (marital and parent-child) that they observed in their work. They described how they saw changes related to a shift in gender norms and more individualistic social systems as a source of conflict and confusion for parents. This included: adolescents wanting to dress differently, and girls in particular rejecting the wearing of hijab; women becoming more assertive in their spousal relationships and threatening to leave or actually leaving with their children; children taking on a “guidance role” with parents because of more advanced language skills and ease in navigating new systems; and finding new ways to discipline children.

Men feel threatened as women seem to have a voice here. So that means the men need to figure out what they kind of do about the children power shift. It encourages the man to be more protective of his family through fear that his partner has more rights and can leave... and will leave... and does leave.

Because we are dealing with protection one major issue is discipline. And they come to our country and they feel disempowered because they can't do what they used to do. So that's... It just feels like they are not prepared when they come here. They are not told enough about our culture and the struggles they are going to have. So, they get here and they ask: “What am I going to do?”

In addition, the service providers who participated in this focus group were cognizant of the multiple challenges facing these families. In particular, they described the multiple demands of addressing loss of social and economic status and resources, settlement into a new community, learning language, and finding employment.

B. Gaps in Services

The service providers spoke at length about some of the shortcomings they saw in the system of services available to Arab refugee families. In particular, they described how services are not always co-ordinated and the challenges for families navigating these complex systems. They pointed to the sometimes narrow focus of each agency or worker. One provider described how she tries to pick up the missed pieces and ends up not being able to do all of the jobs she should be doing:

These families are so complex and there are so many things that you end up doing, things that you are not really supposed to. You don't have enough time allocated for you to do everything in your position. So, you kind of end up doing a little bit of the work you are supposed to do, but also all these other things. So, you are not really doing the best of your job for that family.

And there is so much that you have to do – doctor's appointments, finding a dentist with an interpreter; there are so many doors that would get shut. It is kind of overwhelming even for me to get all the steps that you have to take – and I had support. I had [the cultural co-ordinator] and public health. So, I think that is a strength of the system that we do have agencies that work together to try to solve this. But I think for families that are not involved with us, I can't even imagine what it would be like for them to navigate.

They also spoke about complicated systems that were hard to access or navigate:

The basic navigation of paying your bills, talking to the Canada Revenue Agency, doing your taxes, and all of that. All these great programs are out there but how do they get

to the programs and how do they get this information? Right! It is just navigating it all.

There was this one family ... [he] couldn't get any financial support [and] he was told he had to resolve the immigration thing. It was going on forever and that is, like, I don't know what to do with that. I talk with people in immigration but I mean they got their own thing going on. So, the family they face so much stuff when they come here. There is just not enough support there.

I don't know why it is all so complicated. Why is there so much paperwork? Why can't they simplify things? We can still be professional even if we are using simple language.

Everything is online. It's all done by machine. You have to 'press two' for this or that. It's all so difficult.

These service providers described the difficulties of getting interpreters, and language gaps, as significant problems in the system. They also identified the one-year settlement support as a limitation on helping families to integrate and adapt to their new surroundings. They reflected on some of the variation in services based on rural or urban location, or private sponsorship communities.

F. Key Aspects of Training for Cultural Competencies

Finally, the service providers reflected on what they saw as the most important aspects of training for doing the type of work they are currently doing. They indicated that much of the training they had received was on their own initiative.

I think it is directed by the worker and what they want, they want to learn and what they want to expose themselves to. There isn't any overall mandatory training for everyone which I kind of feel like there should be more of a push toward that.

They also described the importance of having a supportive work environment for this work. They referred to “*debriefing and collectiveness at work*” as important to team-building as well as informal support for one another.

We each share our experiences and challenges. For example, I would say I have a case and describe it, and then say that I don't know what to do, and ask for advice. What do you advise me? What do you recommend? So, it is a very healthy environment and I consider it important for my professional development.

CHAPTER 4: IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The findings from this study from both individual Arab participants and service providers provide evidence that the needs of these Arab refugee families are complex, corroborating previous research (Renzaho et al., 2011; Simich et al., 2010).

There is strong evidence in the identified themes from these interviews that (i) the dramatic sociocultural change that particularly emphasizes different gender norms, (ii) the impact of trauma and the refugee experience itself, (iii) the unique and complex aspects of the family's journey, and (iv) the valued aspects of cultural and religious values and traditions are intertwined in complex ways for these Arab refugee families. This is consistent with previous literature in many ways, extending the research findings of Spazojević et al., (2000) on marital interactions and Sangalang and Vang, (2017) with regard to intergenerational trauma. There is support here for seeing women as heavily engaged in how their partners are coping and intervening to counsel patience and action as needed to enhance their husband's ability to deal with psychological and material distress. There is some more detail contained in these interviews about the dilemmas of fathers and husbands in the face of not being able to adequately, in their view, fulfill their role as protectors and providers and the challenge this presents to them. Similarly, there is a contribution here to the work reviewed by Sangalang and Vang on the complex interactions between generations with regard to trauma experiences. The roles of parent, provider, and protector are in flux post-migration – new roles have been taken on in some cases, and some have had to be postponed until stability returns in terms of peace, safety, educational opportunities and health care.

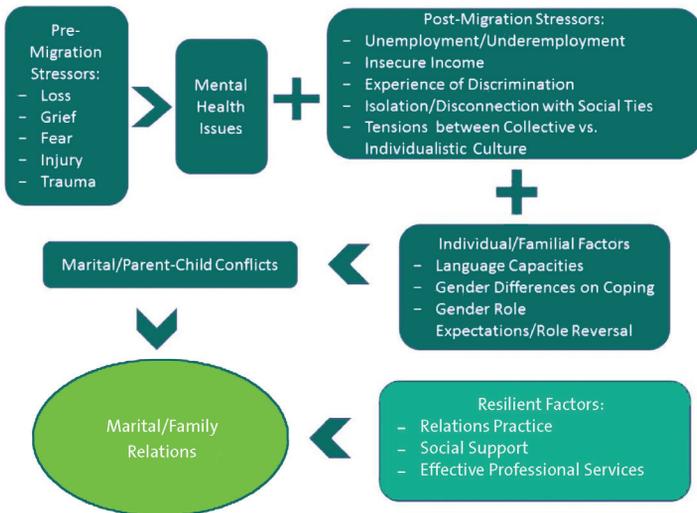
The experiences of these families are not uniform, but there are common themes of change being both frightening and, when it involves safety and security, desirable. Changes associated with women's and men's roles, as well as different expectations about the actions of parents are, not unexpectedly, quite challenging. The couples with whom we spoke addressed those challenges in a range of ways, sometimes relying on professional help and often by creating more distance (metaphorically or physically) in their relationships. There is risk of physical aggression or violence in some cases as the trauma, acculturative demands, and relational conflict become too much. These findings suggest the ongoing importance of understanding and listening for the complexities of adaptation post-trauma and post-migration. These are not changes that will be completed in a short time-frame for most families.

These are also families with dreams about the future, especially for their children and a desire to make these changes work for the next generation and their new community. Collectivist values, alongside religious and cultural tra-

ditions, continue to be quite important. This is an important echoing, perhaps, of the sources of resilience identified by Betancourt and colleagues (2015).

The service providers who participated in this study identified that, in many areas, they are unprepared and insufficiently equipped with the needed resources from the federal, provincial, and municipal governments to serve these newly arrived newcomers. This appears to be specifically the case in the face of the large numbers of Syrian families who came to Canada within a short period of time between November 2015 and January 2017. Even though private Canadian sponsors and the Government of Canada did provide a “safe home” for these Arab families, there are gaps in the settlement and integration process. These gaps appear to be most evident when refugee families are expected to be self-reliant after the first 12 months of financial assistance from their private sponsor or the Government of Canada (Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, 2016). Among other concerns, language proficiency and the recovery from trauma would take more than one year to address and, as evidenced in this study’s findings, significantly influence the physical, psychological, social, familial, and financial well-being of these Arab families. Figure 1 below summarizes the complexity of pre- and post-migration stressors as well as resilient factors that have impacted the marital relations among Arab refugee families in Canada (however, this figure is not intended to suggest a linear relationship):

Figure 1. Complexity of pre- and post-migration stressors and resilient factors



To address these complex issues among Arab families, these findings underline the need for more secured multi-year funding support from the federal, provincial, and municipal governments and co-ordinated services by health care, social services, and education sectors.

First, extend the current model of financial and settlement support. The findings in this study echo other literature (Hassan et al., 2015; Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, 2016) that refugees from war conflict countries need more than a year to be able to live on their own to overcome the trauma and language barriers and to redevelop employable job skills in Canada. Moreover, there is an important distinction to be made between “settlement” and “integration” services. Settlement services are limited to providing orientation, basic needs, health care, preparing children for school, etc. Integration is a longer process that includes different levels and dimensions of changes as well as support services from multi-organizational co-ordination. The assumptions that settlement services are equipped to provide integration services is not realistic or accurate. Immigration policies should make this important differentiation. This is to say that adaptation and integration following forcible displacement, trauma and migration, as well as dramatic socio-cultural change, requires time. However, current refugee families only receive one-year finance and settlement support by the federal government under the government-assisted refugee program or by their private sponsor under the privately sponsored refugee program. Therefore, there is a need to review current immigrant policy on the government-assisted and the privately sponsored refugee programs and to extend its length of support for government-assisted refugee families as well as providing government financial support to privately sponsored refugees when their 12 months of private sponsorship expires.

Second, develop culturally integrated services that are adequately funded. In order to respond to the complex needs of refugees, we need to encourage ethno-cultural community initiatives and support cultural or faith-based initiatives and services. These kinds of services should not be limited only to mainstream settlement services. In-service training in culturally competent practices should be a mandatory requirement for public-funded service providers who work with refugee families. Specifically, training should focus on understanding complex family dynamics and the impact on family relationships following migration and in the context of collectivist cultures. At a minimum, relevant workshop and training materials should be accessible via webinar so that service providers can easily access basic training in the event of an assignment with

short notice. As described by Baobaid and Ashbourne, (2016), culturally integrative programs and interventions can support formal and informal supports for families within our communities. Culturally integrative programs provide a means of addressing the complexities of family relationships and integration that are identified in this study. Specifically, local ethnic groups, religious leaders, and peer mentors who were Arab refugees but have successfully integrated into the Canadian communities, together with mainstream or more formalized service providers, can be engaged in the process of co-ordinated program development and interventions that involve collaboration and inclusion.

Third, develop responsive programs that address the specific needs of refugee families. As pointed out by the Secretary-General of United Nations: “...refugees have the will and potential to become self-reliant in their places of refuge” (United Nations, 2016, p. 19). Canadians and the Government of Canada have made an important first step in receiving these Arab families. What comes next is to address existing service gaps, understand and meet the complex needs of these Arab families, and acknowledge the resilience of these families under such hardship circumstances to develop their potential to the fullest. Among others, specific programs for children and young people from Arab refugee families should take into account that this younger age group have encountered not only the trauma of war, but also tensions between preserving their cultural identity and integrating into mainstream society. Providing culturally appropriate programs to these younger generations will ensure successful integration and contribute to developing the future social capital of our society.

Fourth, provide cultural competency training for service providers. Cultural competency training for front workers in the health care, social services, schools, and law enforcement agencies are crucial for effective intervention. This is because the traumatic experiences these Arab refugees have gone through may have an impact on current behaviors. For example, there may be distrust toward the police or other law enforcement officers because of the political violence they previously experienced. The cultural competency training should also incorporate a course of study on the difference between collectivist and individualistic cultures. Such cultural competency training is specifically important for child protection agencies and the police when they respond to reports on suspected child abuse or domestic violence. This is because in their home countries such familial matters are usually dealt with through their extended family members or religious leaders instead of state intervention.

Equally important is the accessibility of trained interpreters. As these Arab refugees have to restart their lives in Canada, they will need to have contact with many government departments or government funded services for various reasons. The availability of trained interpreters would help these refugees overcome the language barriers. Provincial government departments, which oversee health care, education, and social services could join together to provide interprofessional training on cultural competence and initiate co-ordination efforts as the service providers from these professional sectors are likely to serve the same families. A co-ordinated effort may save time and manpower as well as provide a better outcome. At the municipal government level, some small and mid-sized communities are receiving a sudden influx of Arab refugees for whom these communities are scrambling to find suitable accommodation. For example, the average size of the families who participated in this study is six (rounded to full number). Looking for low-cost accommodation to house these large families is a challenge, especially in some communities like Vancouver and Toronto where rental costs have skyrocketed. The federal and municipal governments would need better co-ordination in terms of when and how the numbers of refugee families are placed among the 36 receiving communities across Canada.

Finally, long-term intervention is needed for integration. Refugees were forced to flee their home and have experienced tremendous losses. Restarting their families in a foreign country takes time and the foremost factor is employment. A secure and gainful employment not only provides income to these families, but also serves to recognize the knowledge and skills these refugees could contribute to the host country. However, a majority of the participants in this study have expressed difficulty in securing gainful employment, and have been unable to find jobs similar to those they previously held in their home country. There are many reasons for this, such as loss of documentation of credentials due to war, language barriers, and disabilities as result of war conflict. Therefore, employment training is vital. Among the various employment training programs being offered, some bridging programs or co-op programs that provide internship opportunities can provide better success rates than others, because many employers look for people with so-called “Canadian experience”. Such internships would allow these refugees to develop their local work experiences and connections.

Moreover, a welcoming community is so fundamental for successful integration. Any attempt to create racial discrimination should be rejected. Therefore, public education is necessary to promote awareness, to

embrace diversity, and to accept the fact that these refugees are human capital for Canadian society, which is facing a labor shortage (Statistics Canada, 2011).

For future research directions, attention could focus more on the inter-generational challenges for refugee families with adolescent family members. In addition, monitoring more closely the impact of cultural-based training, use of cultural brokers, or implementing a system of culturally integrative practices within a community could contribute to understanding best practices at the level of integrating services and effectiveness within marginalized communities.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

This study provides a close look at the challenges and day-to-day struggles in post-migration for Arab refugee couples who have had to flee their countries of origin due to war and political conflict. The implications of this flight, journey, and post-migration settlement for families are significant. Spousal and family relationships are challenged by changed gender roles – first, in response to extraordinary circumstances and family flight; second, in response to dramatic sociocultural changes associated with moving from the Middle East to Canada. While adaptations and adjustments are being made by these families, they are not always easy or desired, and they take time. The impact of trauma on individual and couple well-being is also significant, requiring sensitive provision of therapy and counselling which is not always available and for which service providers do not always have adequate cultural training. These families, at the same time as being quite challenged, are also demonstrating their great wisdom and resilience. By drawing upon one another, utilizing new Canadian supports, learning language, acquiring new skills, and stretching their views of what is necessary and what can be changed, they move forward to an uncertain but hopeful future.

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