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Negotiating family, navigating resettlement: family connectedness amongst resettled youth with refugee backgrounds living in Melbourne, Australia

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Refugee adolescents resettling in a new country face many challenges, and being part of a supportive family is a critical factor in assisting them to achieve wellbeing and create positive futures. This longitudinal study documents experiences of family life in the resettlement context of 120 young people with refugee backgrounds living in Melbourne, Australia. Family instability was a core feature of the early settlement period. In this paper, we focus specifically on changing household composition, and levels of trust, attachment, discipline and conflict in family settings during young people's first years of resettlement. Our results suggest that while families are central to the wellbeing of these young people, changing family dynamics can also pose a threat to wellbeing and successful settlement. We argue that youth focused settlement services must explicitly engage with family contexts in assisting refugee youth to achieve wellbeing and successfully resettle.

Keywords: refugee; youth; family

Refugee adolescents resettling in a new country face many challenges, and being part of a supportive family is a critical factor in assisting them to create positive futures. While loving and close family relationships are central to the wellbeing and development of all young people (Fuligni 1998, Beiser *et al.* 2002, Wissink *et al.* 2006), the family is a key determinant of positive resettlement outcomes for refugee youth who have frequently grown up in conflict settings (Rousseau *et al.* 1998, 2004a, Brough *et al.* 2003). Families provide the immediate social context within which they grapple with the challenges of adolescence in a new country. However, war, flight, violent displacement, and the death of and separation from relatives have profound impacts on the functioning and structure of families from refugee backgrounds (Rousseau *et al.* 2004b, p. 1096). For those few who are provided with the opportunity to resettle permanently in a host country, family life is also significantly affected by the possibilities and challenges of building lives in new social, cultural, economic and institutional contexts (Lee *et al.* 2009).

How, then, do adolescents with refugee backgrounds negotiate the challenges of resettling with their families in a host country? What are their experiences of rebuilding family life? To what extent does family context promotes wellbeing? How

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do young people engage with social values of their host country that may conflict with those of their own families and communities? In this paper, we explore these questions through the experiences of a group of young people with refugee backgrounds who have resettled in Melbourne, Australia. A complex picture emerges of how these youth navigate new social domains — including school, neighbourhood and peers — within the family context. Importantly, we highlight how families are characterised by continuing change. While families are central to the wellbeing of young people with refugee backgrounds, changing family dynamics can pose a threat to wellbeing and successful settlement. We argue that youth focused settlement services must explicitly engage with family contexts in assisting refugee youth to successfully resettle.

Background: refugee resettlement and the family

One-quarter of Australia's annual humanitarian intake are young people between the ages of 10 and 19 years (DIAC 2007). Of the approximately 13,500 humanitarian refugees resettled in Australia each year, most arrive as 'families'. The Australian Government considers immediate family members to be a spouse or de facto partner and dependant children under 18 years of age. However, the family structures of many refugee and humanitarian entrants differ from this definition: they are shaped by culture and reconfigured by refugee experiences as members are lost during conflict and flight and new members are included through marriage, adoption and interactions associated with obligation, affection and dependence (Lewis 2008, p. 694). Settlement polices of host countries also frequently lead to ongoing separation from family members (McDonald-Wilmsen and Gifford 2009).

Nonetheless, the fundamental importance of family to human wellbeing is explicitly recognised in resettlement policies at both international and national levels. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) states:

> the family unit has a better chance of successfully . . . integrating in a new country than do individual refugees. In this respect, protection of the family is not only in the best interests of the refugees themselves, but is also in the best interests of States. (UNHCR 1999, p. 159)

The priority to resettle individuals with their families is based on the recognition that families are central to the promotion and maintenance of psychosocial wellbeing, cultural continuity, economic support, belonging and solidarity amongst migrant and refugee populations who are settling in a new country (Loizos 2000, Steinglass 2001, McMichael and Manderson 2004, Montgomery 2005).

Although family structures in resettlement contexts can provide positive and health-enhancing effects, they can also affect wellbeing in negative ways (Richmond and Ross 2008). Family separation can have long-term negative consequences for refugees (Manderson 1998, McMichael and Manderson 2004). Yet, in their study of resettled Congolese refugees in Canada, Rousseau *et al.* (2004b) suggest that reunion can also challenge families as they must re-establish continuity in spite of potential rifts. Furthermore, the demands created by forced migration can create tensions within families and this has harmful impacts on psychosocial wellbeing (Menjivar 2000, McMichael and Manderson 2004, Lewis 2008). Relationships

during resettlement may also be strained by loss of family members, reduced economic resources, loss of status, loss of cultural traditions and the challenges of resettlement (Boss 2002, Kim *et al.* 1991, Detzner 1996).

However, there is limited research focusing on the role of families in the settlement of young people from refugee backgrounds. This paper reports the findings of a longitudinal study of settlement and wellbeing amongst recently arrived young people from refugee backgrounds in Australia. The study employed qualitative and quantitative research methods. Data collection focused on five key themes: identity/perception of self, connections to people, connections to place, health and wellbeing and hopes and aspirations for the future (Gifford *et al.* 2009). In this paper, we focus on the experiences of refugee youth in relation to family composition and roles, and levels of trust, attachment, discipline and conflict during their early years of resettlement in Melbourne, Australia. We describe both patterns of support and conflict in family lives and discuss the implications for promoting wellbeing and optimal settlement outcomes.

Methods

The findings reported in this paper are part of the Good Starts Study, a longitudinal study of settlement and wellbeing among refugee youth. The objectives were to identify the psychosocial factors that promote successful transitions during the settlement process, and to describe the contexts and processes that facilitate health and wellbeing amongst young refugees. The research methodology and theoretical frameworks were informed by anthropology and social epidemiology. Quantitative measures were used to examine the relationships between psychosocial factors and health and wellbeing outcomes, while qualitative methods were used to generate a richer picture of the contexts and processes that influence settlement and wellbeing over time. Detailed description of the study methods has been published previously (Gifford *et al.* 2007, 2009).

Newly arrived immigrant and refugee youth are eligible to spend 6–12 months in an English Language School in their first year in Australia. Young people were recruited through three geographically dispersed English Language Schools that had high numbers of students with refugee backgrounds. Ethical clearance was given by the Human Ethics Committee of La Trobe University and by the Institutional Ethics Committee of the Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture (VFST). To preserve anonymity, culturally appropriate pseudonyms are used.

Data collection involved activities carried out in school, home and community settings over 4 years, between 2004 and 2008 (Gifford *et al.* 2007). This paper reports on qualitative data collected over 4 years, and quantitative data collected during Years 1–3. Participants were given a 'settlement journal' in which they recorded their experiences through drawings, photos and written responses to questions. Data collection were facilitated by research assistants and interpreters/bicultural workers.

Specific information was collected about the people who live in young people's houses, including both family and non-family members. In each year of data collection, participants were asked to write the names of people they live with inside a picture of an empty house. This exercise was important for charting changes to household composition and for anchoring discussions about family relationships

(Coventry *et al.* 2002). Information about the parent/guardian responsible for the young person was collected.

The Heikkinen Social Circle (Heikkinen 2000) was adapted to examine young people's social networks. The circle is divided into five domains: family or relatives in Australia, family or relatives overseas, friends in Australia, friends overseas and others. Participants wrote the names of all the people with whom they have a close relationship within the appropriate domain. Participants then indicated the people they can turn to for help and the people who they support. Finally, participants circled friends in Australia who are from their ethnic community. In addition to providing numerical data on social networks, the social circle provides an anchor for in-depth discussion about young people's social connections and a method to compare changes over time.

Quantitative data were elicited through the use of standardised questions and scales commonly used in studies of wellbeing and adolescent health. Levels of trust, attachment, discipline and conflict in family settings were measured using items adapted from the Harvard University Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey (Kennedy School of Government 2000) and the Adolescents Health and Wellbeing Survey (Bond *et al.* 2000). Quantitative analyses of these variables are represented by smooth estimates of the mean scores, using date of arrival in Australia as the common baseline. This is an accurate way of identifying changes over time as participants were interviewed at different times after they had arrived in Australia. The Generalised Estimating Equations (GEEs) model (Diggle *et al.* 1996) was used to assess the association of outcome variables with time and gender. Quantitative data analyses were conducted using SPSS version 15.0 (SPSS 2007).

Qualitative data were collected through informal discussions, in-depth interviews, field-notes and non-narrative methods including drawings and photographs (Gifford *et al.* 2007). Interviews were digitally audio-recorded and researchers also maintained comprehensive field-notes. The qualitative data provide important contextual insights into the everyday lives of participants. Qualitative data in the form of field-notes, open-ended survey questions and interview transcripts were analysed for thematic content (Patton 2002)**.** The coding scheme used a directed content analysis process that was structured according to the main thematic areas of the research. Data coding were managed using NVivo software (QSR International 2006).

Findings

One hundred and twenty participants were recruited: fifty-five (46%) were female and sixty-five (54%) were male. At first interview, participants were aged 11–19 years, with a median age of 15 years. Participants were born in 12 different countries, with 72% born in Africa (Sudan, Ethiopia, Liberia, Uganda and Burundi) and the remaining 28% born in the Middle East (Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran and Kuwait), Eastern Europe (Bosnia and Croatia) and south-east Asia (Burma). At first interview, the average length of time in Australia was 5.6 months. All participants arrived in Australia on humanitarian visas.

Forced migration leads to reconfiguration of family networks. All participants in the study were connected to family members living in Australia. Few, however, arrived in Australia as part of an intact family. Only 34% arrived in Australia with both their mother and father. About one-third arrived with their mother but not

their father, while three (2.5%) participants arrived with their father but not their mother. Eighty-two per cent came with one or more siblings. A small number of participants arrived with aunts and uncles (5%), cousins (5%) or grandparents (2%). Two participants arrived unaccompanied, without any family member.

Young people's accounts of family life in Melbourne illustrate the fluidity of family composition. In her third-year journal, Nyagony wrote:

> [My sister] is important because when my mother died, she the one who look after us. [Grandma] the one who went to take us from Sudan so we can have a better life. (Female, Sudanese)

For most, there is considerable change in household composition over the 3 years post-arrival. In the first year of settlement, 18% of youth reported that both their mother and father were responsible for them, and this increased to 31% in the second year and then fell to 28% in their third year. About one-quarter of the youth had only their mother responsible for them on arrival and another quarter had their father only. Two participants were living by themselves in their first year in Australia, but by the third year 13% of participants said that no one was responsible for them.

Young people spoke of many reasons for changes in household composition in the resettlement context including interpersonal conflicts, marriage, overcrowding, transition to independent living, arrival of family members and separation of parents:

> My dad is here with us. Yeah he's in Australia, he lives with my uncle now…in Melbourne here. 'Cause last few months they had a fight with my mum and he had to get out of the house…It's kind of hard without him, yeah, and my mum has to do everything now, yeah. It's her responsibility to take care of us. (Nanjour, female, Sudanese)

> I still go and see them, like you know, three times or four times a week. Yeah I go and see them, have dinner with them … I didn't go 'cause of something bad, you know what I mean. I was like 'now I think I can look after myself'. (Malong, male, Sudanese)

For these young people, family is pivotal to their lives and a key source of support. The family is often described as providing a sense of belonging, shared under-standings, guidance and designated roles:

> [I spend my spare time] at home because my family is in there and I know that I belong to them. (Hakima, female, Afghani)

A wide range of family members provides support: mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts and grandparents. Apat, for example, is a Sudanese teenager who arrived in Australia with her mother and two brothers. At the time of arrival, Apat's father, older brother, aunts and uncles lived overseas. In her settlement journal, Apat consistently referred to her mother and brothers as the people who make her happy. In Year 2 she wrote: 'the best thing I hope to happen in my life is to be together with my mum, brothers, because they all take care of me'. In Year 3: 'my mother is the most important person in my life because she's the only person in my life who's taking care of me and my brothers'. Apat, her mother and younger brothers have

shared not only the challenges associated with flight and displacement, but also the transitions of resettlement. Her family make her feel safe, happy and supported.

Participants said that family provides support on emotional, practical and financial levels. They help with homework, cooking and housework, provide guidance and advice around schooling and relationships, and pay for things they need. Charles spoke about the support his sister has provided since he became a father:

> – And so how is it being a dad?

> – . . . yeah, sometime it's hard for me, you know, like it just happened . . . Yeah my sister, yeah she's OK, she used to help me. She help me sometime when I have a problem, 'cause all my other parent they're back overseas. (Male, Sudanese)

Hannah described her mother's efforts to maintain their household:

> She does everything. In the morning she prepares breakfast, like if we're going to school fix everything, our like lunch for school. After school she cook, and sometimes for tea, and we do everything together . . . but she do most. (Female, Liberia)

Young people also identified themselves as having important roles to play in supporting family. They take on responsibilities including housework, looking after younger siblings and assisting family members with settlement issues. Some work part time in order to contribute financially to their families in Australia and they also contribute to remittances that are sent to those who remain in difficult circumstances overseas. Some young people described how they learnt English more rapidly than their parents and accordingly translate for their parents and assist them to access services and resources:

> No-one gonna help my mum and my mum she don't know how to speak English. And my other brother he can't help my mum because like he don't know many place and he don't know how to do this stuff. So you have to do it and I have to go with my mum everywhere. Yeah, so I have to help her. (Agol, female, Sudanese)

Challenges to family life

Despite the important role of family, both the quantitative and qualitative data highlight the challenges to family life experienced by young people. The quantitative analyses highlight issues of eroding trust, attachment and discipline and increased conflict within families over the first 3 years of settlement. The qualitative data provide experiential accounts of these key themes, which are highlighted through young people's accounts of resettlement challenges, changing household composition and roles, and intergenerational tensions around cultural continuity and adaptation.

Trust

Trust is an important marker of social capital and is strongly associated with wellbeing. While the degree of trust that youth have in their families remained high over the 3 years, the inverse is not the case. Ninety-seven per cent of young people

report high levels of trust towards parents and family on arrival in Australia and these levels remain high over time. There are no significant differences between males and females. However, when asked whether or not their parents and family trust them, ninety-eight per cent of participants reported high levels on arrival which then decreased significantly over the first 3 years in Australia ('My parents trust me', $p = 0.006$; 'My family trust me', $p < 0.001$). There are no significant gender differences.

As with the quantitative data, most participants said they had trust in their parents and families, and they look to their families for both practical and emotional support. For example, Zoran, a young male from Serbia said:

> Who you gonna trust if you not gonna trust your parents. Like, they don't wish you anything bad, you know … Obviously I can trust them … you've just got to trust them, you know. They're there to help you … In some situations you find yourself you do not know what to do and anything, like you know, they give you the advice which choice you're gonna take.

However, young people described how they increasingly felt that their parents and families did not trust them. They said that parents attempt to control their lives and appear suspicious of their everyday activities and friendships. They suggest that because of their parents' loss of everyday bearings and lack of familiarity with new surroundings, they are anxious about their children's lives outside of the home. A common theme from the qualitative data was that young people regard their parents as too strict, causing a sense of frustration over their own lack of autonomy:

> I always hope my dad to let me go with my friends just for shopping or come to library … I'm not going to drink, I'm not going to have a cigarette, something like that, never … I'm not going with a boy or I kiss the boys or something like that, I'll never do that, yeah. That's why my father's scared about. Not just me, about my friends, about everyone. (Basima, female, Iraqi)

> They always tell me like to go to school and study whatever. But I never talk about school 'cause I always talk about, ah, 'from this place I've been dancing practice, I've been in shows'. They always say, 'no don't talk about this, just talk about school'. (Abraham, male, Ethiopian)

Attachment

Attachment refers to the connectedness of individuals to others in their social environment (Barrera 1986). Youth arrive in Australia with high levels of family attachment but these decrease over time ($p < 0.001$). However, the third year shows a tendency for girls' family attachment to decrease while boys' family attachment increases (see Figure 1).

Participants frequently described tensions and arguments with parents and other family members. Developmental factors associated with adolescence (Manderson *et al.* 2002, p. 381) contribute to tensions between young people and their parents and families, and can be considered a normal part of family life. Senay described arguments he has with his father around issues such as freedom and autonomy, household responsibilities, choosing appropriate friends, caring for siblings and homework:
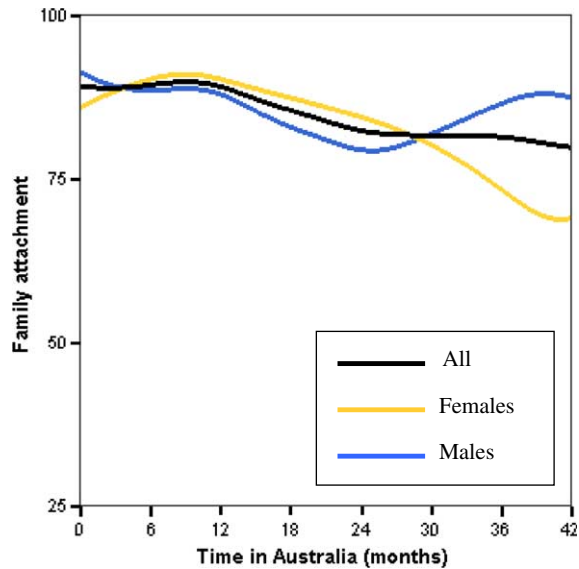
Figure 1.   Changes in mean family attachment score over time.

> Sometimes if I don't back down or if my dad didn't back down the argument just, yeah, it's gonna keep going. Sometimes it keeps going for – you know. But usually it's just, yeah, just we resolve pretty quickly ... Two years ago I was close to my dad, but now I'm getting a little bit far away 'cause I don't know. But probably when I get like maybe twenty something I'll probably come back. (Male, Eritrean)

However, the developmental transition into adolescence and early adulthood does not account for all tensions. Young people's accounts of family difficulties highlight the impact of resettlement challenges, ongoing changes to household composition, family separation and cultural adaptation.

Participants spoke frequently of the difficulties their parents and families face following resettlement. These accumulated stresses can lead to reduced attachment and support:

> Too much stress, everybody is stressed out in the house ... Too much people and sometimes they don't do anything, and they eat, put things down, and you have to cook for big. You know, it's too much ... and so you have to clean every day. It's not like two people living in the house. (Nyagony, female, Sudanese)

Specific challenges include changes in roles and responsibilities within the family, financial difficulties, under-employment or difficult working conditions, lack of affordable housing, language barriers, discrimination and racism. Rayak, for example, is a young male from Sudan who lives with his brother. His brother works long hours in order to make ends meet, but for Rayak this means there is limited opportunity for interaction and emotional support:

> No he's not home much. He go work 4 o'clock in the morning and he come back about 5 and he relax for two hours. Then I think, like, Wednesday go to school and Sundays he go for church, do work, and then later come from church. He's really tired and then

sleep and then tomorrow morning wake up. And sometimes I find him went to sleep already. (Male, Sudanese)

Ongoing family separation creates a keenly felt loss of everyday attachment. The majority of young people spoke of family members who remain overseas, including parents, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, grandparents, step-brothers and step-sisters:

– And with whom did you go to Egypt?

With my dad and step-mother, my brothers, my step-brothers and . . . yeah, and my older sister, she came with me in Egypt. We left them in Sudan, my mother and younger sisters in Sudan . . . I think we left two girls and one boy in Sudan, yeah with my mum, and then we came with my step-brother and my step-mother. (Ashai, female, Sudanese)

One young woman explained how she was 'very sad and worried' because her brother and sister were still in Sudan and their application to come to Australia was recently rejected: 'because Australia didn't want them because they had too many people'. This young woman explained that her mother died when she was young, her father was in Kenya, and her sister who raised her was in Sudan. She said that the best thing that had happened in the past year was talking to her aunt and sister, both still in Sudan, on the telephone. For some participants, family reunion brought happiness and increased support:

Before I was lonely, I was the only one girl and I don't have someone to talk and to tell about girl stuff, yeah. And now when [my aunt] come I feel like talk properly. (Kadani, female, Ethiopian)

But for others it brought changes to household dynamics and increased tensions as relationships, roles and daily routines were negotiated.

Discipline

Youth arrive in Australia reporting good levels of family discipline and management but these show a statistically significant decline over the first 3 years in Australia ($p < 0.001$). Females reported that they experience higher levels of discipline over time than their brothers and other boys in their communities ($p < 0.001$) (see Figure 2).

Young people frequently talked about discord with parents and other family members in relation to maintenance of culture. The desire to establish continuity following displacement and migration through maintenance and transmission of culture has been documented in studies of refugee communities (Camino and Krulfeld 1994, Rousseau *et al.* 2004b, Atwell *et al.* 2009). In this study, young people said that their parents remain rooted in cultural tradition and values. Participants said that parents have culturally shaped expectations about when young people should move out of home and initiate relationships, and their roles within the family and household. Almost all participants expressed pride in their ethnic background and identities. But in comparison to their parents anchoring in tradition, participants often stated that they learn rapidly about their host society and absorb new values and expectations. In particular, they have expectations of greater freedom and independence:
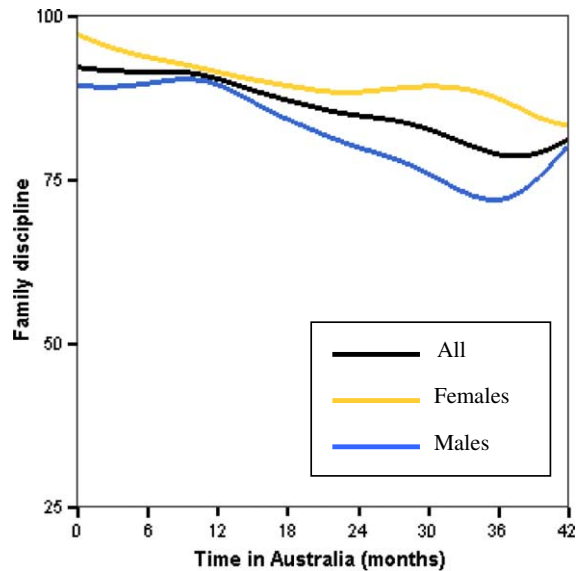
Figure 2. Changes in mean family discipline score over time.

> When we came to Australia because maybe she might worry because we are in a new country and new freedom, you know. That's why she don't want us to be like other people, like have a lot of freedom . . . I learn about Australia, I know, but she's kind of like the old generation, you know. Her background is the old generation and now my generation is a new country, a new place, a new world. (Wan, female, Burmese)

Particularly in the third year of settlement in Australia, parental discipline and management begins to focus on boyfriends and girlfriends, and this is especially problematic for young women. This issue is complicated by the comparatively greater freedom that Australian society allows many adolescents in relation to expression of sexual identities. Over the course of the study, 11 participants became pregnant or had babies. Of these, nine were female and two were male. This raises concerns about the health risks associated with unprotected sex and the impact that early parenthood has on education, employment and social wellbeing. Early pregnancy also affects young people's relationships with parents and other family members. Amir, a young woman from Sudan, said: 'I have the baby . . . It's a little bit hard but it's OK 'cause my mum is here'. However, a number of young parents described arguments with parents due to unplanned pregnancy. Aciek, for example, described her mothers' reaction:

> She was really upset, she was very upset. She didn't even talk to me. (Female, Sudanese)

In the third and fourth year of settlement, arranged marriage emerged as a source of conflict especially between girls and their parents. Nyandeng's father was trying to arrange a marriage for his daughter to an older man. She fought with her father because she did not want to enter into the marriage and wanted to finish school:

> That man come and he need to marry me and my dad saw him. 'I don't want you to marry yet, still at school', my mum say. 'Yes, talk to him but tell him you don't have time

to marry now, but maybe later on'. But I don't like that man, I told her. I don't like him. He's too old, he look like my dad. (Female, Sudanese)

Finally, young people emphasised the importance of meeting family expectations and being successful in their studies. Participants have high hopes for their education and careers. They aspire to post-secondary school education and to be involved in the labour force. However, parents have a strong sense of ambition for their children's educational and socioeconomic success and this places them under pressure. Some feel that their parents' ambitions are not realistic given the challenges of both catching up with curriculum following disrupted education and of studying in English language. This point is illustrated by Rosa:

> My father he said to me 'read, read and don't think of everything. Just read and continue the school and go to university'. I said to him 'I can't go to university because they bomb me out'…I can't do it, a lawyer, or I can't a doctor. I can't because it's very hard. Yeah, I said to him 'like, I want to be something like how I can do, but not hard. I can't do it'. And he said to me 'no, no'. I said 'no, I can't. I can't read, my English not very good'. I want to be something. .. I'm here just one year and a half. How I can go to university? (Female, Iraqi)

Conflict

Participants report low levels of family conflict on arrival to Australia but these show a statistically significant increase over time ($p = 0.017$), mainly in the first two years (see Figure 3). Overall, there are no statistically significant gender differences in reports of family conflict over the three-year period.

Several young people described serious and recurrent interpersonal conflict within the household. These family conflicts revolve around a range of concerns, including discipline, alcohol use, initiation of sexual relationships and unplanned
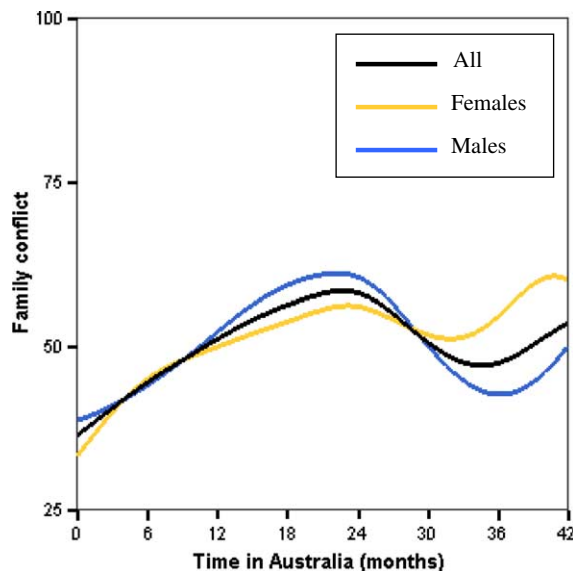

Figure 3.   Changes in mean family conflict score over time.

pregnancy, discordant values and parents' lack of trust in their children. As a consequence of family conflict some young people leave home, others described a loss of sense of safety at home or deterioration of communication amongst family members. It is of concern that a number of participants spoke of occasions in which conflict led to physical violence within their families:

> My brother hit my sister and my sister called the police on him, so that happened two times, three times so she couldn't take it anymore. She had to call the police, and my brother lives by himself now . . . My dad and my mum were separated, they were divorced . . . and that's the main reason, you know, bashing each other and having fights . . . My brother, you know, saw my dad hitting my mum so he learnt something like that from my dad and start doing it to my sisters. (Shaker, male, Iraqi)

Discussion

Several studies of families and migration have documented that the social support provided to children by their families is crucial to overcoming barriers in the new society, improving educational and psychosocial outcomes, and facilitating physical and mental health (Fuligni 1998, Portes and Rumbaut 2001, Drukker *et al.* 2005, Qin 2009). In this study, the experiences of refugee young people highlight the importance of family in early resettlement and the difficulties in remaking family life in a new country. While many young people struggle with changing family dynamics, this is not to suggest that there are no happy families – there are. Most families and youth actively rebuild family life within the context of resettlement in Australia and family is central to their wellbeing and sense of belonging. Young people make important contributions to their families including: financial support by working part time, acting as cultural brokers and translators for family members who do not speak English, looking after younger siblings and undertaking household responsibilities. They have high levels of trust of their families. These young people bring considerable personal strengths to the challenges of resettlement, and the support of and involvement with their families is critical.

However, all of the families of Good Starts youth shoulder significant burdens associated with displacement and resettlement and these impact on young people's experiences of support, belonging and trust within their families. The picture that emerges is one where the supportive context of family weakens over time – family trust in young people is perceived to decrease, family attachment decreases, modes of discipline are challenged and conflict increases.

Reported difficulties within the families of young people with refugee backgrounds are compounded by the differential rates of adjustment between parents and children to their new country and culture. This is a common theme in the broader literature on migration, life-course and intergenerational differences with elders often becoming more 'traditional' as they age (Gardner 2002). Portes and Rumbaut (2001) argue that the different pace of cultural adaptation between parents and children leads to communication breakdown and reduced familial support. A number of studies have highlighted the negotiations between the culture and identity associated with home and host societies amongst displaced people. In their study of Congolese refugees living in Montreal, Rousseau *et al.* (2004b) show that women navigate between home and host society in terms of family roles, social integration, memory of the past and future longings. Similarly, Lewis' (2008) study of Cambodian refugee

families living in the USA explores intergenerational exchange and highlights tensions between aspects of Cambodian culture that are considered essential to maintain, such as elder reverence, and new values adopted through everyday life in the USA. However, relatively few studies have explored identity, adaptation and intergenerational exchange from the perspective of resettled young people with refugee backgrounds.

In this study, young people spoke of difficulties experienced by their parents adapting to their children's push for increased autonomy and independence. Participants emphasised that young people in Australia are afforded a high level of freedom, and their experiences of parental control and involvement are perceived in this cultural context. While the large majority retain a sense of pride in their own culture and ethnic identities, they also want greater independence and freedom to spend time with friends, choose clothes, have boyfriends and girlfriends, manage their time, and make decisions about study and work. Participants also highlighted their parents' high academic expectations which they felt were difficult to meet given their experiences of disrupted schooling and the pressures of learning in English language. These tensions are aligned with the quantitative findings related to decreasing sense that parents trust their children. In this way, young people's accounts of family life highlight both continuity and disruption: continuity in terms of maintaining ethnic identity; disruption in terms of seeking greater independence from parents, challenging expected family roles and remaking family life in the transformative resettlement context.

Furthermore, family separation represents a difficult reality for many families. Being part of a 'transnational family' entails multiple responsibilities, concerns and expectations (Bryceson and Vuorela 2002). Rousseau *et al.* (2004a) highlight the distinctive nature of family separation and reunification amongst refugee families: people feel guilty, powerless and depressed about separation from relatives who may be in difficult situations abroad; family roles are reconfigured; and it is challenging for reunified families to establish balance and redefine relationships. A number of other studies have identified that family separation is associated with depression, anxiety and somatisation (Lie 2002, Rousseau *et al.* 2004b, Luster *et al.* 2008) and is found to contribute significantly to long-term trauma (Gorst-Unsworth and Goldenberg 1998, Silveira and Allebeck 2001). In this study, participants spoke of longing to see family who remain overseas, ongoing worry about these relatives, provision of remittances and efforts to sponsor relatives through Australia's family reunion programme. Thus, transnational family life for young people is an environment characterised by loss, change and adaptation.

Gender is an important variable in the challenges and experiences of migration and resettlement (Lee 2001, Suarez-Orozco and Qin 2006). In this study, the quantitative analysis revealed no statistically significant gender differences in reporting of trust, family conflict and attachment. However, females reported higher levels of discipline and management from parents than their brothers and other boys in their communities. Similarly, the qualitative data indicated that young women experience more parental control over their behaviours and activities: females appear to have more household responsibilities, less autonomy around friendships and social involvement, and higher levels of family discipline and conflict around intimate relationships and marriage.

Finally, all participants and their families are coping with the challenges of displacement and resettlement. People from refugee backgrounds, including young people, experience a range of traumatic events including violence and conflict, destruction of homes, separation from and disappearance of family members, dangerous journeys, lack of access to health services and disrupted schooling (Kaplan 2009). For the few who are able to resettle in a third country, life in their host community is not without challenges. Refugees experience ongoing sadness associated with family separation, difficult economic and material circumstances and the everyday challenges of resettlement such as learning a new language, adjusting to a different culture and managing the practical realities of becoming established in a host country. It is within this context that youth are forging their lives and their futures in Australia and their struggles and successes can not be separated from those of their families.

There are a number of limitations to this study. First, the sample was not randomly selected and may not be representative of the overall recently resettled refugee youth population in Australia. However, our sample closely resembles the population of refugee youth arriving in Australia between 2003 and 2006 in terms of country of birth and gender (DIAC 2007). Second, this study examined the family related outcomes of a culturally diverse population of resettled youth. While it was not evident from the data that participants' ethnic groups influenced understanding of questions, differences in interpretation could have occurred. Third, while pre-migration contexts have a profound influence on refugee family and community dynamics (Rousseau *et al.* 1997), this study provided limited opportunity to explore pre-migration experience. Fourth, due to the absence of a control group of non-refugee migrant youth, it is difficult to identify the extent to which the issues illustrated here are related specifically to refugee experience. However, the refugee experience of war, violence and loss seriously impact on the way families negotiate between traditions and values of home and host society (Rousseau *et al.* 2004b), and forced migration adds further strain and challenges to the task of resettlement and building family life in a new place. Finally, given the potential importance of family in promoting the health and wellbeing of young people from refugee backgrounds, further research is required that investigates parents' perceptions about the connectedness and wellbeing of their children. Nonetheless, this is one of the few longitudinal studies of resettled young people with refugee backgrounds. The longitudinal study design is able to document contexts and processes that influence settlement and wellbeing over time (Beiser 2006). A further strength is the use of qualitative and quantitative methodologies and interdisciplinary theories, which facilitated detailed and rich analyses of resettlement.

Conclusion

Families within resettled refugee populations play a central supportive role, but there are challenges in remaking family life. Family can be considered both a risk and a protective factor for psychosocial wellbeing. The presence of social resources, including a supportive family network, has significant impact on levels of distress, wellbeing and future outlook (Williams and Berry 1991, Silveira and Allebeck 2001, Beiser 2006, Warner 2007). Family plays a pivotal role in providing emotional, physical and material support. Family anchors the individual's identity by affirming

mutual understanding of roles and experiences. A better understanding of how war, displacement and resettlement affects family is critical to the development of programmes and policies that take account of the opportunities and constraints in the everyday lives and environments of newly arrived young people with refugee backgrounds (Rousseau *et al.* 1997).

Supporting family is a key strategy for improving settlement outcomes for people with refugee backgrounds, and for supporting young people in particular. People with refugee backgrounds bring a determination to build a good future, and family networks can provide an important source of social support and enable young people to create positive futures. Resettlement services must engage with families, address underlying issues which lead to intergenerational conflict and loss of trust, and support families to meet the challenges and take up the opportunities of resettlement. Furthermore, the young people in this study demonstrate that support is sought and provided not only through parents, but also siblings and other extended family members and care-givers. As a key host country in the UNHCR humanitarian resettlement programme, it is critical that the Australian humanitarian and refugee intake and family reunion programmes both have a broad and inclusive definition of family and that family is understood as a central emotional, social and economic support for refugees and humanitarian entrants.

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