

**FORGING A NEW HOME: COMMUNITY SIZE SHAPES THE SETTLEMENT
EXPERIENCE OF SYRIAN REFUGEES IN CANADA**

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Abstract

Many immigration and settlement studies in Canada focus on large urban centers, leaving a gap in research addressing the unique needs and experiences of newcomers in smaller communities. This phenomenological research delves into the settlement experiences of Syrian refugees in the small city of St. John's, compared to those in the larger city of Ottawa. Through one-on-one, in-person, semi-structured interviews with seven Syrian refugees in St. John's and eight in Ottawa, data was collected, and thematic analysis was used to gain insights into the data. The study reveals that St. John's provided a haven for Syrian refugees escaping war. However, its lower ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity compared to larger cities challenged Syrian refugees' integration. Additionally, their economic integration was hindered by inadequate settlement services, difficulties with the recognition of foreign acquired skills and experience, workplace discrimination, and language barriers. In contrast, interviewees from Ottawa reported being well-integrated into the social and economic fabric of the city without perceiving the same barriers perceived by the Syrian refugees in St. John's. These findings stress the need for new settlement programs and services. They also highlight the significance of fostering the economic integration of refugees by providing them with the support they need.

General Summary

This study looks at the experiences of Syrian refugees settling in two different Canadian cities: St. John's, a smaller city, and Ottawa, a larger one. The research found that while St. John's provided safety for refugees, its lower ethnic and cultural diversity made integration challenging. Syrian refugees in St. John's are more likely to face difficulties with jobs, recognition of their qualifications, workplace discrimination, and language barriers compared to those in Ottawa. These findings emphasize the importance of creating new settlement programs and services to support refugees in their journey to find employment and integrate into their new communities.

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List of Abbreviations

ANC: Association for New Canadians

AXIS: Acquiring Experience Integrating Skills

CCI: Catholic Centre for Immigration

CMAs: Census Metropolitan Areas

CNA: College of North Atlantic

ESL: English as a Second Language

FFHC: Family First Health Centre

GARs: Government Assisted Refugees

HREB: Health Research Ethics Board

IOM: International Organization for Migration

IRCC: Immigration Refugee and Citizenship Canada

MUN: Memorial University of Newfoundland

NBMC: New Brunswick Multicultural Council

NL: Newfoundland and Labrador

OCISO: Ottawa Community Immigrant Services Organization

RAP: Resettlement Assistance Program

UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

YMCA: Young Men's Christian Association

Chapter 1

Introduction

The world has witnessed a dramatic increase in forced displacement during the past two decades due to armed conflict, violence, persecution, and human rights violations. The number of forcibly displaced people reached 108.4 million at the end of 2022, including 35.3 million refugees (UNHCR, 2023). Refugees are defined as “persons with a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion; who are outside their country of origin or habitual residence; who are unable or unwilling to avail themselves of the protection of that country or to return there for fear of persecution; and who are not explicitly excluded from refugee protection” (Nicholson & Kumin, 2017, p. 18).

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) provides international protection for refugees and seeks solutions for their problems in cooperation with its member countries. Canada is one of the UNHCR’s members; it provides permanent resettlement for refugees to save lives and provide stability to those fleeing persecution with no hope of relief. Admitting refugees to Canada offers the opportunity to address the demographic challenges represented by the low fertility rates and aging population (IRCC, 2020), especially in the Atlantic provinces where population growth is lower compared to other parts of Canada, especially Newfoundland and Labrador (NL), the only province seeing population drop in Canada since 2016 (Statistics Canada, 2022).

Newfoundland and Labrador had the lowest five years retention rate of refugees across Canada in 2015 (36%) (Statistics Canada, 2015). Even though refugee retention in NL has

increased significantly to 76.9% for the 2020 admission year, it is still the lowest across Canada (Statistics Canada, 2022a). Many refugees who arrive in NL initially choose to relocate to larger urban centers, as highlighted by Fang et al. (2018). The challenge of securing employment in a small community has emerged as a significant barrier to the successful settlement and integration and, ultimately, the retention of refugees in NL.

Research found that refugees leave NL looking for opportunities that align with their education and skills and offer better incomes than they can find in the province (Gilroy, 2005). The non-recognition of foreign credentials in regulated occupations, as well as foreign work experience in various professional and non-professional fields, poses a significant barrier to the settlement and integration of refugees in NL. This issue was highlighted by Gilroy (2005), and according to Fang et al. (2018), there has not been much improvement since then. The most significant reason behind refugees' decision to leave St. John's for larger cities was the scarcity of economic opportunities, followed by family ties in other provinces, poor weather, the high cost of living, and social isolation (Fang et al., 2018).

In their 2015 study, El-Bialy and Mulay found that refugees in NL faced challenges in integration due to factors such as low ethnic diversity, the unique natural environment, and the prevailing culture. These challenges contributed to a sense of isolation among refugees, negatively impacting their overall settlement experience in NL. The well-being of refugees was particularly affected by the cultural hurdles they encountered, which were deeply rooted in Newfoundland's colonial history. This historical context presented obstacles for refugees in establishing meaningful connections and partnerships within the community. The study highlighted that the historical homogeneity and isolation of Newfoundlanders played a significant role in the integration difficulties faced by refugees. Refugees in the study discussed

that the local population's lack of trust and the manifestation of "othering" behaviors further complicated the process of them becoming an integral part of the community.

In a more recent study by Fang et al. (2020) on the integration of Syrian refugees in NL, they found that locals exhibited friendliness and were welcoming, positively impacting refugees' integration. They also found that the high education opportunities in NL held the potential for a promising future for their children. However, a notable area of concern was the limited employment opportunities, prompting uncertainty among a majority of the surveyed Syrian refugees about their long-term stay in St. John's.

Immigration research in the Canadian context focuses on the three large cities of Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal, where most newcomers to Canada settle (Statistics Canada, 2022b). In contrast, fewer settlement studies address smaller Canadian cities, particularly those about the impact of community size on the settlement of newcomers. The present research contributes to the literature addressing the impact of settling in a small community on the settlement experiences of newcomers to Canada. It uses St. John's- the capital city of Newfoundland- as an example of such communities and compares it to the large city of Ottawa. It focuses on Syrian refugees, representing a new and rapidly growing population in NL. Syrian refugees started to arrive in St. John's in 2016 under the Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP) as a part of Canada's response to the conflict in Syria. Understanding the settlement experiences of Syrian refugees in St. John's and how they differ from those in larger cities is important to identify the supports and challenges associated with settling in a small community and inform policies to attract and increase the retention of refugees in St. John's.

Study Context

Population growth in a country comes from natural increase (the difference between the number of births and deaths in a given period) and migratory increase (the difference between the number of immigrants entering the country and the number of emigrants leaving the country) (Statistics Canada, 2018). However, the demographic changes behind population growth in Canada are more complex than simple mathematics. Canada's population is aging, and fertility rates are decreasing. The total fertility rate in Canada has decreased from 1.55 births per woman throughout her reproductive lifespan in 2017 to a record low of 1.43 in 2021 (Statistics Canada, 2022c); this falls below the threshold needed for a population to replace itself (at least 2.1 births per woman). Canada has not met this threshold since 1971 (Statistics Canada, 2020).

Although the baby boom generation played a significant role in contributing to both the population and economic growth in Canada, the country's demographics are undergoing a shift due to the aging of baby boomers. Immigration is now playing a role in boosting the numbers in younger generations, significantly contributing to population growth in Canada, accounting for 80% of the country's population growth in 2019 (IRCC, 2020). Immigration is not just a key driver of population growth, but without it, Canada's population growth could be close to zero in two decades (Statistics Canada, 2018).

According to Statistics Canada (2022b), more than 90% of new immigrants resided in Canada's 41 census metropolitan areas (CMAs), which are major urban centers with populations exceeding 100,000. Consistent with the trend observed over the last five decades, Toronto (29.5%), Montréal (12.2%), and Vancouver (11.7%) remained the top destinations for recent immigrants in 2021. Although the Atlantic provinces have not been as successful in attracting immigrants, the percentage of recent immigrants to the region has nearly tripled, increasing from

1.2% in 2006 to 3.5% in 2021. Over the span of 15 years, the proportion of recent immigrants settling in Nova Scotia grew from 0.6% to 1.6%, in New Brunswick from 0.4% to 1.2%, in Prince Edward Island from 0.1% to 0.4%, and in Newfoundland and Labrador from 0.1% to 0.3% (Statistics Canada, 2022b).

The importance of attracting more newcomers to the Atlantic provinces to foster population growth, economic prosperity, and diversity was stressed in different immigration documents, including Francophone Immigration Strategic Action Plan 2023-2028 ([Francophone Immigration Strategic Action Plan 2023-2028 | Government of Prince Edward Island](#)) for Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick's Population Growth Strategy 2013-2018 ([PopulationGrowthStrategy2014-17.pdf \(gnb.ca\)](#)), Immigration Strategy 2022-26 ([Halifax Immigration Strategy | Halifax](#)) for Nova Scotia, and The Way Forward on Immigration in Newfoundland and Labrador: 2019-202 Initiatives ([The Way Forward on Immigration in Newfoundland and Labrador – Office of Immigration and Multiculturalism \(gov.nl.ca\)](#)).

According to Statistics Canada in 2022, the number of deaths in NL exceeded that of births (3,850 births compared to 6,144 deaths) (Statistics Canada, 2022d). In addition, NL has the lowest fertility rate across Canada (1.36 children per woman during her reproductive lifespan in 2019) (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2023).

Newfoundland and Labrador not only has the lowest number of immigrants but also the lowest retention rate across Canada (Statistics Canada, 2022e). Research indicates that the lack of social support has been a barrier to newcomers' settlement in NL (Mullings et al., 2021). Additionally, the limited job opportunities, poor weather, poor public transportation network, lack of basic information about life in Canada and Newfoundland, racism and discrimination, and social isolation were all reported as barriers to attracting and retaining immigrants in NL (El-

Bialy & Mulay, 2015). While some factors cannot be controlled, such as the weather, other barriers can be addressed through providing pre-arrival support. This includes offering accurate and relevant information about Canada so that refugees can make informed decisions and begin the settlement process. This involves preparing for employment while still abroad, enabling them to arrive in Canada better prepared to integrate into the Canadian society.

While immigration primarily focuses on attracting skilled and family-class immigrants (IRCC, 2022), it's essential to acknowledge the valuable contributions of refugees to Canada's population and economy. While refugees are admitted to Canada on humanitarian grounds and are not traditionally viewed as a source of population growth, they can become a crucial source of population and economic growth when they are successfully settled and integrated into the social and economic fabric of Canada (Fang et al., 2018).

Newfoundland and Labrador (NL) is the easternmost province of Canada and was the last province to join the Canadian Confederation in 1949 (Baker, 2003). Newfoundland and Labrador is widely known for its remarkably homogeneous settler population of English and Irish origin, attributed to the historical settlement patterns of Europeans in Canada and relatively low levels of subsequent immigration compared to other regions of Canada.

The Indigenous population of what is now Newfoundland and Labrador includes three ethnic groups, the Innu, the Inuit, and the Mi'kmaq. Most present-day NL's population are descendants of migrants who arrived from England and Ireland between the mid-17th and mid-19th centuries. Fish in NL attracted English and Irish immigrants to settle permanently in NL after their crews used to cross the Atlantic for seasonal fishing only. At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, several Chinese men came to Newfoundland. Despite both official and unofficial discrimination against them, they established themselves as residents—

several opened businesses - at first laundries and later restaurants (M. Wright, 2021). Also, people from Lebanon arrived in Newfoundland during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and, as has been the case for Chinese migrants, people from Lebanon experienced discrimination and mistreatment. Despite that, they successfully settled in Newfoundland (Clair, 2021).

The cod fishery had been the main driving force of NL's economy, and it peaked by the 1880s that it could no longer absorb the rapidly growing labour force. As a result, the government started pursuing a land-based development and diversification policy like the other parts of Canada. A heavily subsidized railway was constructed across the island, and inducements were offered to promote agriculture, manufacturing, and resource-extraction industries. However, cod fishing remained the dominant contributor to NL's economy. In 1992, the cod stocks collapsed due to over-fishing and cod fisheries were closed to commercial harvesters, which magnified the declining population that the island has been witnessing since the early 1990s. The economic difficulties resulting from the closure of fisheries resulted in around 35,000 residents losing their livelihoods, resulting in significant out-migration (Mather, 2013).

Small numbers of people from various ethnic backgrounds have arrived on the island in recent years. Memorial University of Newfoundland (MUN) has attracted immigrants of diverse ethnicities, including students and staff. Additionally, there has been an increase in the number of refugees coming from different countries, such as Syria, Afghanistan, Somalia, Ukraine, Nepal, etc. The arrival of newcomers is changing the homogeneous nature of NL's population, and it is now contributing to higher ethnic and linguistic diversity. However, this newfound diversity also brings with it a set of unique challenges, particularly in retaining newcomers within the province. It's a reality that many newcomers eventually leave the island in search of job opportunities

elsewhere in Canada. Thus, the driving force behind this work lies in addressing the challenges faced by newcomers in NL. By gaining a deeper understanding of these challenges, we aim to inform policy changes that can better support and retain newcomers, ensuring NL continues evolving as a vibrant and inclusive community.

Research Objectives

The objectives of the present research are:

1. To explore the employment experiences of Syrian refugees in the small city of St. John's compared to the large city of Ottawa and inform policies to support their economic integration in smaller communities.
2. To explore the settlement experiences of Syrian refugees in the small city of St. John's, Newfoundland and to identify the support systems available to them and the challenges they encounter in this urban setting.
3. To provide policy recommendations that would improve the settlement and integration and, ultimately, the retention of refugees in smaller Canadian communities.

Thesis Road Map

The study's findings will be disseminated through two manuscripts. Drawing on a phenomenological research methodology grounded in the frameworks of Human Capital and Social Capital theories, the manuscripts delve into the insights derived from one-on-one semi-structured interviews with Syrian refugees in St. John's and Ottawa, shedding light on both the broader settlement context and the economic experiences of Syrian refugees. In alignment with earlier research underscoring the pivotal role of economic integration in fostering the attraction and retention of newcomers in St. John's, one manuscript focuses on unraveling the economic experiences of refugees in this locale while drawing insightful comparisons with other provinces. Despite the inherent challenges in refugees' economic integration in St. John's, a noteworthy observation emerged: some refugees chose to remain in the city. This prompted a more in-depth exploration into the factors influencing refugees' decisions to stay and an investigation into the available support structures within this small community in the second manuscript.

The thesis is organized as follows:

Chapter 1: Introduction, Study context, and Research Objectives. The Introduction section introduces the topic under investigation. The Study Context section provides an understanding of the study context, including its ethnic and cultural background, population trends, migration dynamics, and economic factors. The Research Objectives section provides the key research objectives.

Chapters 2 and 3: Chapters 2 and 3 have been crafted as independent manuscripts, prepared for potential submission to academic journals.

Chapter 4: Conclusion and Recommendations. Chapter 4 synthesizes the previous chapters' findings and discusses their implications. Additionally, this chapter provides policy recommendations based on the research outcomes.

Co-authorship Statement

In the following two manuscripts, Nour Khalil is listed as the first author and Dr. Shree Mulay is listed as the second author. The following is a brief description of each author's contribution:

Nour Khalil: Conducted a comprehensive literature review, obtained ethical approval from the Health Research Ethics Board (HREB), developed an interview guide, recruited participants, obtained their informed consent, collected data through in-depth interviews and observations, translated the interviews from Arabic to English, analyzed data, and drafted the manuscripts.

Dr. Shree Mulay provided continuous supervision and direction, starting from the conception of the research question and extending through to the final stages of analysis and writing; she carefully reviewed and critiqued various drafts of the thesis manuscript, offering constructive feedback and insights to elevate the quality of the research. Dr. Mulay also ensured strict adherence to ethical standards and methodological rigour.

Chapter 2

Does Community Size Impact the Experience of Employment Among Syrian Refugees in Canada? A Comparative Study

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Abstract:

The settlement of Syrian refugees in Canada initially attracted considerable attention in the media and scholarly articles; since then, however, little attention has been paid to them, particularly those residing in smaller urban centers. In this phenomenological study, we explored the settlement experiences of Syrian refugees in both a small city (St. John's) and a larger city (Ottawa), with a specific focus on employment as a critical aspect of their integration. Using Human Capital and Social Capital Theories, we assessed how community size impacts the economic integration of Syrian refugees. Our findings reveal that social capital played a key role in the economic integration of Syrian refugees in Canada, as their prior human capital alone had little or no value. While Syrian refugees in Ottawa had robust social capital represented by a well-established Arabic community and diverse settlement and integration services, those in St. John's had limited social support, negatively impacting their economic integration. We recommend advancing the economic integration of Syrian refugees in St. John's. This can be achieved through proactive public engagement, expanding available settlement services, and establishing new programs and services. Additionally, we recommend providing pre-arrival integration support and encouraging entrepreneurship initiatives.

Keywords:

Syrian refugees. Community size. Employment. Settlement. St. John's.

Introduction:

The civil war in Syria and the ensuing displacement of people led to a significant exodus of Syrians. Growing calls for a political response to the humanitarian crisis in Syria, partly fueled by media reports and images of the lifeless body of the young Syrian refugee, Alan Kurdi, marked a turning point. In 2015, Canada extended a compassionate hand by offering to accept 25,000 refugees from Syria (Statistics Canada, 2019). A refugee is defined as a person who has a well-founded fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion (Nicholson & Kumin, 2017, p. 18). By 2020, 44,620 Syrian refugees had resettled in Canada (Government of Canada, 2021). Canadian settlement policy is based on the principle of integration (Beiser, 2009). Integration is the process by which groups and/or individuals become able to participate fully in the political, economic, social, and cultural life of the country (IRCC, 2017). Employment plays a key role in facilitating refugees' integration into social and economic networks, allowing them to build strong social and economic capital (Jackson & Bauder, 2014). It is also reported as the primary reason behind refugees' decisions about staying or leaving their initial destination (Coombs-Thorne & Warren, 2007; Locke & Lynch, 2005).

The geographical distribution of refugees in Canada is unbalanced (Kaida et al., 2020). Small communities in Canada struggle to retain refugees; many choose to relocate to large urban centers with more economic opportunities (Huang & Graham, 2018). While large cities, especially Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal, have been the main focus of immigration studies in Canada, fewer settlement and integration studies address small and medium-sized Canadian cities, and many of these studies stress the importance of refugee integration and retention in smaller communities and the role that employment plays in it (Agrawal & Sangapala, 2021;

Billah et al., 2013; Fang et al., 2018, 2020; Coombs-Thorne & Warren, 2007; Kitchen et al., 2015; Walton-Roberts, 2005).

Even though refugees are selected for settlement on humanitarian grounds, they can make a significant economic contribution to their settlement communities if integrated successfully (Fang et al., 2018). They are also a source of population growth and economic prosperity in small and medium-sized communities. However, it is challenging to keep them in smaller communities, and many move to larger cities for better economic opportunities (Jackson & Bauder, 2014).

The settlement experiences of Syrian refugees are shaped by the size of a city, a factor determined by its population density and community patterns, as highlighted in the study by Agrawal and Sangapala (2021). Larger cities, such as Ottawa (with a population of 1,017,449), present distinct challenges and opportunities compared to smaller cities like St. John's (with 110,525 inhabitants) (Statistics Canada, 2022).

This phenomenological study seeks to compare how Syrian refugees perceive their settlement experiences in two distinct urban settings: St. John's, a smaller city, and Ottawa, a larger city. Our primary focus is on employment, recognizing its significant role in settlement and integration. The interpretative framework for this research is rooted in Human Capital and Social Capital theories. Furthermore, the study delves into the existing disparities in settlement services provided to refugees in St. John's and Ottawa, and it investigates how these differences impact the economic integration of Syrian refugees.

Literature review:

There is a significant body of research on the settlement of refugees in developed countries; many of these studies focus on employment (Bakker, 2015; Bevelander, 2011; Bevelander & Luik, 2020; Damm, 2009; Fang et al., 2018; Jackson & Bauder, 2014; Picot et al., 2019). Scholars discuss the role of employment in facilitating the integration of refugees into social and economic networks, fostering their social and economic capital, and allowing them to develop a sense of belonging to their new home (El-Bialy & Mulay, 2015; Fang et al., 2018; Jackson & Bauder, 2014). Refugee integration hinges on securing employment and recognizing refugees as a crucial economic asset for the countries in which they settle. Picot, Zhang, & Hou (2019) discuss that, despite not being chosen for economic purposes, refugees can yield substantial economic benefits for the host country when they are effectively integrated into its labour market.

Human Capital Theory, as extensively explored in the literature on the economic integration of immigrants in host countries (Chiswick & Miller, 2001), revolves around the concept of human capital defined by Rosen (1989) as “the productive capacities of human beings as income-producing agents in the economy.” This theory states that individual skills, encompassing education, work experience, and language proficiency, dictate success in the labor market. Essentially, individuals with higher human capital are more likely to secure employment and seamlessly integrate into the host country’s labor market.

Picot et al. (2014) discuss that, during the 1990s and 2000s, Canada predominantly embraced the human capital model of immigration for selecting economic immigrants. This model contends that choosing individuals with substantial human capital, particularly those with higher educational levels, yields long-term benefits. The rationale behind this approach is that immigrants with advanced education not only contribute vital skills to a “knowledge-based

economy” but also demonstrate heightened adaptability to both cyclical and structural shifts in the labor market compared to those with lower educational attainment.

In contrast, refugees are not chosen for economic reasons; however, their human capital significantly influences their economic integration. A crucial distinction is drawn between pre-migration and post-migration human capital, as discussed by Bratsberg and Ragan (2002) and Friedberg (2000). Friedberg (2000) underscores that the value of an individual’s human capital is contingent upon its origin, with foreign education and work experience being considerably less valued than their domestic counterparts. Moreover, Bratsberg and Ragan (2002) highlight that immigrants who acquire education in the host country tend to earn higher wages than those obtaining education in their home country.

In line with the Human Capital Theory, research indicates that refugees’ education, language training, and work experience, if specific to the host country, positively impact their employment (De Vroome & Van Tubergen, 2010; Lamb, 2003). In contrast, refugees’ foreign credentials are less valued in host countries, negatively impacting their economic integration (Jamil et al., 2012; Krahn et al., 2000; Senthanaar et al., 2021). Research indicates that refugees are less likely to be selected according to labour-market skills compared to other immigrants, and their work experience is underestimated by employers; this results in a longer period of adaptation to the labour markets of their host country (Chiswick, 1999).

Research conducted by Jackson and Bauder (2014) about the employment of refugees in Toronto, Ontario, concluded that refugees often find themselves confined to temporary and part-time positions. These positions not only offer very low wages but also lack any potential for career growth, effectively they are dead-end jobs with no future prospects. Hou and Beiser (2006) argued that, even though a refugee’s foreign human capital is often undervalued in the

Canadian labour market, those who possessed higher education before arriving in Canada were more likely to attain language proficiency compared to refugees with lower or no educational backgrounds; this proficiency enhances their chances of securing employment.

The impact of refugees' country of origin on their employment levels, average earnings, and overall economic integration has been a subject of several investigations. This phenomenon persists even when accounting for various demographic and human capital factors, as noted by Bevelander & Luik (2020) and Picot et al. (2019). A contributing factor could be assumptions about the quality of education that refugees had received in their home country. For instance, Bevelander & Luik (2020) discovered that there is a discrepancy in Sweden regarding initial employment levels and the rate at which Syrian refugees catch up with other refugee, immigrant, and native groups. This suggests that the educational background and skills acquired prior to migration play a key role in shaping refugees' economic trajectories in their host countries.

Social capital is defined as “the features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions” (Putnam, 1993). Social Capital Theory, as applied to the economic integration of immigrants in host countries, offers a nuanced perspective on the role of social capital as valuable resources in the development and accumulation of human capital (Portes, 2000; J. D. Wright, 2015). Scholars argue that social capital will increase when the individual has more social connections, when their social connections have better resources, and when there is a greater willingness to share resources on the part of social contacts (VanTubergen, 2006).

The impact of social capital on the economic integration of immigrants is substantial, particularly in relation to the labor market. Scholars like Aguilera and Massey (2003) highlight that social capital provides valuable insights into navigating the complexities of the job market.

Immigrants with robust social capital are better equipped with effective job search and placement strategies. Moreover, social capital plays a pivotal role in shaping the overall immigrant experience in host countries. Kanas and Van Tubergen (2009) highlight its role in facilitating connections between immigrants and individuals who know about available job opportunities. These connections are instrumental in expediting the job search process and fostering a robust support system for immigrants. This comprehensive support may potentially alleviate challenges associated with adapting to a new cultural and economic environment.

Despite the trauma refugees experience due to displacement, they remain part of familial networks. After resettlement, refugees expand their social networks in the settlement community to include neighbours, community members, and service providers; these social networks provide the support refugees need to find employment (Lamba & Krahn, 2003). Research indicates that refugees use family and ethnic networks as a primary source of help when searching for employment; however, refugees find that relying solely on their social networks does not compensate for their downward occupational mobility attributed to their lack of human capital that is specific to Canada (Lamba, 2003). In contrast, George and Chaza (2004) found that social capital offered newcomers job opportunities aligned with their education and experiences. Hanley et al. (2018) argue that social capital was helpful in accessing better employment and building human capital and accessing different social networks, and therefore, different information, resources, and opportunities.

The resettlement services refugees receive impact their economic integration in the host country. Refugees receive a wide range of resettlement services during their first year in Canada; some services are provided to help them integrate into the Canadian labour market, including language and professional training. However, refugees still face obstacles that prevent them from

taking advantage of the available programs and services; these include a lack of capacity on the part of service providers to help all who need support, inadequate or inaccurate information that refugees receive from unofficial resources about available services, and financial constraints that prevent refugees from investing in training and personal development (Wilkinson & Garcea, 2017).

The size of the settlement community significantly influences the employment opportunities and experiences of refugees. According to previous research, approximately 48 percent of refugees fall within the working-age category. Interestingly, around 62 percent of these working-age refugees tend to locate in larger urban areas with better economic opportunities (Huang & Graham, 2018).

Research findings from Canada underscore the appeal of larger cities as preferred immigration destinations over smaller ones due to their greater linguistic and cultural diversity, as well as the broader array of economic opportunities they offer (Hyndman et al., 2006). In contrast, Agrawal and Sangapala (2020) offer a differing viewpoint. They contend that smaller communities can effectively facilitate the settlement and integration of newcomers; however, refugees resettled in these smaller communities have concerns regarding the availability of suitable employment (Agrawal & Sangapala, 2021).

The aim of this research is to explore the settlement experiences of Syrian refugees in St. John's and Ottawa, especially their economic experiences, and provide policy recommendations to enhance their employment experiences, thus promoting their integration and retention in smaller Canadian communities.

Methodology:

A phenomenological research approach was used for the purpose of this study. Phenomenology is a qualitative research methodology that aims to delve into the lived experiences and perceptions of individuals with a specific phenomenon or concept; it involves an in-depth analysis of what participants experience and the context in which they experience it (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Phenomenology aims to explore the essence of participants' experiences to inform policy development or change.

The phenomenon under examination in this research is settlement, a multifaceted process that offers numerous opportunities for Syrian refugees escaping war to start a new life in a safe place. Nevertheless, navigating the complexities of adapting to a new language and culture can be overwhelming, especially when combined with other challenges associated with employment. Employment is significant for refugees, as it plays a crucial role in fostering self-reliance and establishing roots in their new home.

The principal researcher had worked part-time as a settlement worker at the Association for New Canadians in St. John's in early 2022. In this role, she assisted Arabic-speaking refugees, including Syrian refugees, fostering mutual trust. Her experience as a service provider proved invaluable for gaining insight into the settlement process and the associated challenges for Syrian refugees. During data collection, interviewees openly shared their perspectives on settlement in St. John's. It's important to note that, at the time of the interviews, the researcher was no longer an ANC employee. Her former role at ANC did not grant any power over participants' access to services or support. This aspect played a crucial role in their voluntary choice to participate in the study, fostering an open and honest conversation.

Methods:

Sampling:

Criterion sampling, a commonly used recruitment method in phenomenological research, was used (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Criterion sampling requires all participants to have experience with the phenomenon under investigation. Eligibility criteria included Syrian refugees aged 18 years or older who arrived in St. John's or Ottawa under the Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP) before October 2021. The focus was refugees who had been in Canada for at least one year at the time of the interview, as one year is the point when their financial support ends, encouraging them to look for employment.

Recruitment in St. John's involved inviting contacts of the principal researcher who met the eligibility criteria by phone or in person. This method resulted in recruiting seven people. Eligible participants in Ottawa were invited through one of the principal researcher's contacts—a Syrian refugee who initially arrived in St. John's and later relocated to Ottawa. However, only five refugees were recruited through this method. To expand our sample in Ottawa, snowball sampling was used, where the principal researcher asked participants to pass information about the study, along with the contact information of the principal researcher, to other Syrian refugees. A couple of them contacted the researcher and were included in the study after screening for the inclusion criteria. Snowball sampling resulted in recruiting an additional three people, reaching a sample of 8 Syrian refugees in Ottawa.

Data collection:

The first step of data collection was locating the site and population. This study took place in St. John's, a small city (110,525 inhabitants) with lower ethnic and cultural diversity (35% of its population of multiple ethnic or cultural origins), and Ottawa, a larger city (1,017,449

inhabitants) with higher ethnic and cultural diversity (45% of its population of multiple ethnic or cultural origins) (Statistics Canada, 2022).

Data was collected through one-on-one, semi-structured, in-person interviews with seven Syrian refugees in St. John's between October and December 2022 and eight Syrian refugees in Ottawa in January 2023. Interviews were held at a place convenient and acceptable to the interviewee; these included a library room, their home, or a café. Those interviewed in their homes were interviewed one-on-one in a room where no other family members were present. The duration of the interviews varied between 40 to 60 minutes. The principal investigator used an interview guide to capture information about participants' demographics, including age, gender, and family status. The guide also included questions to capture information about their experiences before and after settlement in Canada, including their social and economic status. Interviews were conducted in Arabic. They were audio-recorded using a digital recording device. Participants were reimbursed 25 dollars for their time.

Data analysis:

Considering the myriad advantages offered by computer software in qualitative data analysis, including data organization, retrieval, searching, and visualization, the research employed ATLAS.ti (<https://atlasti.com/>), as recommended by Creswell and Poth (2016), to facilitate the analysis process. The initial phase of analysis involved transcribing and translating the interview text from Arabic to English. This task was performed by the principal researcher, a native Arabic speaker. Subsequently, the data underwent a review and exploration process, during which codes were generated. These codes were then further reviewed and synthesized into thematic categories that elucidated the experiences of the participants and the contextual factors influencing those experiences. Finally, the study reported on the challenges and support

mechanisms related to the settlement of Syrian refugees in St. John's and Ottawa based on the insights derived from the participants' experiences.

Building rigour in the analysis:

The principal researcher worked closely with Syrian refugees in St. John's for a few months. This in-depth involvement resulted in establishing trust and rapport and helped gain valuable insights into their settlement experiences. Unlike the situation in Ottawa, where the principal researcher was unfamiliar with the Syrian refugee population and settlement dynamics, this extended engagement in St. John's facilitated triangulation, ensuring a comprehensive and accurate representation of the settlement process.

Recognizing the importance of validating the findings in both contexts, a member checking approach was implemented. Throughout each interview, the principal researcher revisited key points with participants to guarantee that the perspectives presented in the study precisely mirrored their experiences, minimizing the risk of misinterpretation.

Ethical considerations:

The research was submitted to the Health Research Ethics Board (HREB) of Newfoundland and Labrador, and approval was obtained before recruitment and data collection. The principal researcher provided potential participants with information that would help them make an informed decision about taking part in the study. An informed consent form in Arabic that included information about the research and the rights of participants, including their right to refuse participation, withdrawal, and privacy and confidentiality, was provided. An informed consent form in Arabic that included information about the research and the rights of participants, including the right to refuse participation, withdrawal, and privacy and

confidentiality was provided to the participant. The principal researcher did not collect any identifiable information. If any identifiable information was provided by a participant, the principal researcher anonymized the data. Dr. Shree Mulay has custody of the data; interview recordings and transcripts were stored on an institutional password-protected computer owned by Dr. Shree Mulay. Only the research team had access to the data.

Findings:

Refugee sample profile:

The principal investigator interviewed seven participants in St. John's, consisting of five men and two women. Their ages ranged from 19 to 53, with a median age of 43. Among these participants, two were single, one was widowed, and the remaining were married. Three interviewees had been resettled in Canada from Jordan and four from Lebanon. All interviewees arrived in St. John's with family members.

In Ottawa, the principal investigator interviewed eight participants, all of whom were men. They were all Syrian refugees who escaped war and resettled to Canada under the GAR program. The ages of the participants in Ottawa ranged from 23 to 42. The median age of interviewed refugees was 35.5. Two participants were single, and the rest were married; all came to Canada with family members. One of the participants was resettled from Turkey, one from Libya, three from Jordan, and three from Lebanon.

Economic integration:

Of the sample of Syrian refugees in St. John's, six had jobs and one was unemployed. Two participants attended school and had part-time jobs; one did a cleaning job, and the other worked in a restaurant. The sample also included professions such as a truck driver, a cook, a personal

care attendant, and a farmer. Notably, one interviewee had previous experience in construction but was facing unemployment at the time of the interview.

A noticeable disparity came to light when comparing the employment and wage dynamics between Syrian refugees in St. John's and Ottawa. Except for the truck driver, who earned approximately \$30 per hour, all other refugees in St. John's earned minimum wage, which, they voiced, fell short of meeting their basic living expenses, especially for those responsible for supporting their families. In contrast, most of the Syrian refugees interviewed in Ottawa had already successfully settled in the city; they became self-employed and generally expressed satisfaction with their work situations; seven individuals were self-employed, engaging in a variety of trades such as carpet installation, auto-body repair, mechanics, carpentry, construction, and barbering. Only one person from Ottawa in our study was unemployed due to a health condition at the time of the interview.

Various obstacles to securing suitable employment were identified during interviews with refugees in St. John's; the language barrier being one of them. In Canada, refugees receive financial support from the Federal Government for their first year to help them settle while learning the language. Nevertheless, after one year, refugees in St. John's appeared to still be struggling to adjust to life in Canada. One year was insufficient for them to attain language proficiency, resulting in their engagement in lower-paying occupations.

“My English is still limited. Thus, I had to find a job where I could work without having to communicate with others. I serve food and take care of older people. There are many things that I do not understand, especially medical concepts. However, I can communicate a bit when I have to.”

Syrian refugees in St. John's also faced other structural obstacles hindering their economic integration. These obstacles included non-recognition of their foreign work experience, complicated licensing requirements for specific professions, as well as differences in work methodologies and the way employees were paid in specific trades between Canada and the countries where they accumulated their experience. These complexities hampered the refugees' efforts to integrate into the labour market of St. John's.

“I have previous experience in the field of mechanics. When I wanted to practice here, I was advised to pursue further education. The process involves a three-year college program leading to a professional license. If I want to open a garage, I should accumulate four years of experience working under a licensed mechanic's supervision.”

“In the Middle East, work practices differ significantly from here. For instance, in the Middle East, whether you complete a task in an hour or half an hour, you get paid the same. That allows you to take on additional tasks and make more money. In contrast, here, you work a fixed 8-hour shift for a set salary.”

“The government poses many challenges when it comes to starting a business. I wanted to open a grocery store and a restaurant, which requires a license. Typically, the licensing process takes about three months, during which I would have to cover property rent expenses without any incoming revenue; I would be wasting my money.”

While income-tax rates in Newfoundland and Labrador (NL) are lower than in other provinces, such as Quebec, participants expressed that these rates discouraged them from working. When individuals earn a minimum wage, and after taxes are deducted, they are left

with only slightly more income than they would receive through social assistance. Consequently, there appears to be little incentive for them to engage in employment.

“There are some issues in this place. The taxes for refugees are too high. If I were to find a job with a monthly salary of \$2,000, they would deduct 15% for taxes, which feels excessive. The Government has been helpful to us, but I believe there should be some changes. Lowering the tax rate could motivate people to work more. If I worked, my maximum income would be \$1,700 after tax deductions. I’d need to allocate \$600 for rent, leaving me with \$1,100. Currently, I receive \$700 without paying rent, so the net gain from working would be only \$400. However, I’d also have to factor in increased expenses for gas since I’d be commuting. Additionally, it would require a lot of effort. Is the extra \$400 worth a month of hard work? At the same time, I do want to work for a better life. I need a job to eventually buy a house. It’s a bit confusing; I can’t make up my mind.”

Syrian refugees in Ottawa appeared to be navigating the labour market with greater ease, as they did not report encountering the same challenges that Syrian refugees in St. John’s reported. This disparity was largely attributed to the nature of Ottawa’s job market, which enabled them to receive training and use their native language without encountering significant language barriers. Over time, interviewees reported that they acquired English proficiency from interacting with others at work on a daily basis.

In Ottawa, older interviewees found it relatively easy to continue their previous professions upon arriving in Canada. They did not encounter significant challenges with the licensing process or getting their prior experience recognized. Some reported that they found jobs in their area of expertise, and all they did was prove their abilities in doing the job. Two of

the interviewed refugees took on general labour upon their arrival in Canada. However, after a couple of years, they sought training in new trades and started businesses in those trades.

When the principal investigator asked one participant: “How did your employer evaluate your experience?”, his response was as follows:

“Through my excellent work. As you know, this type of trade is not regulated in Syria. There is nothing that can validate your experience other than your excellent work.”

One of the interviewees in Ottawa explained about the certification process for certain professions and clarified how he got his foreign experience approved in Canada. Even though the licensing process in Ottawa was not easy, it was still reasonable compared to St. John’s; it only included collection of certificates of expertise and some paperwork and did not require further education or prolonged training.

“You should provide a certificate indicating your experience from a known company within a particular field or obtain a license from the Craftsman’s Guild in Syria, for instance. It’s possible that they could contact your previous employer to confirm your professional background. When I applied for my job, I provided the company I was applying to with the name of my previous employer, and they promptly reached out to verify my employment history.”

Human capital:

Two participants in St. John’s were enrolled in high school at the time of the interview, one had a high school diploma from Syria, and the rest did not have a high school education. Only one participant in St. John’s had previous knowledge of English before arriving in Canada since

it was integrated into her educational curriculum during her secondary schooling; however, her previous training did not enable her to communicate fluently.

Upon their arrival in St. John's, individuals within the younger age bracket (ranging from 19 to their early 20s) were counseled by service providers to consider enrolling in high school and pursuing post-secondary education. They were placed in a special program for newcomers, where they could choose subjects such as physics, chemistry, and social studies, alongside receiving English language training. Their education differed from that of their Canadian peers in the same age group due to the specialized language and transition support provided to them.

Older Syrian refugees wanted to find jobs after acquiring English proficiency; they reported attending English as a Second Language (ESL) classes every weekday for a period that ranged based on individual circumstances, including adaptation to English. The ESL program offered six levels, and most participants aimed to complete level 4 as it was a prerequisite for obtaining Canadian citizenship.

All participants in Ottawa had received education in Syria, but it was below the secondary level. Three participants and their families left Syria during their secondary school years. These refugees could not access education in the asylum country; two had to engage in employment to support their families, while one resided in Libya, where schools had been shuttered due to the country's precarious situation.

Participants in Ottawa mentioned that they began attending English classes within a few months after their arrival. While the two participants aged 19 to 20 years in St. John's decided to pursue higher education in Canada, participants of the same age in Ottawa focused on employment. Some initially took on unskilled jobs like cleaning and dishwashing before seizing

training opportunities in new trades. One participant returned to their previous construction profession, another received training in carpet installation, and a third pursued barbering training.

While refugees in both St. John's and Ottawa received English training, it appeared that participants from Ottawa achieved a higher level of English fluency. According to them, this was due to their job experiences that required interaction with others, which greatly aided their language learning process.

“I speak to people every day. Schools teach the basics only. I learned the language from interacting with people at work.”

Recognizing foreign work experiences posed greater challenges in St. John's than in Ottawa. In Ottawa, refugees were required to demonstrate experience in a specific profession to practice it. In contrast, individuals in St. John's could not resume practicing their professions in Canada, as doing so required education and training from the beginning. One participant who arrived in St. John's and moved to Ottawa after one year attributed the aforementioned complexities to the limited number of Arabs in St. John's. Ottawa boasts a substantial Arab community, which has been established in Canada for a considerable period and has successfully navigated the process of having their education and experience recognized. This community provides an invaluable source of information and support for newcomers.

“If there were Arabs in St. John's who had prior experience and were familiar with the process, perhaps our journey would have been smoother. Lebanese people here in Ottawa have straightforward approaches, having navigated similar processes before; they provide assistance and guidance to newcomers throughout the process.”

Social capital:

In Ottawa, participants reported having strong social capital through friends and other community members who were eager to assist them in their settlement journey and job search. Refugees in Ottawa often mentioned that their reception centers and local mosques served as common gathering places where they made new friends. Also, respondents reported expanding their social networks as they frequently met new people through their existing acquaintances, which fostered their integration and sense of belonging to the city.

“Some Arabs would stop at the hotel where newcomers initially reside to offer help. Certain individuals find joy in helping newcomers. They understand that newcomers often require guidance, thus, they visit to offer their support.”

Participants mentioned reaching out to community members to inquire about job opportunities or gather information about the labour market. One of the participants said:

“I encountered a man from the Arab community in Ottawa and discussed my circumstances with him. He offered me a job at the company where he worked, and this position included housing. I inquired about the application process, and he, being more knowledgeable about it, requested my resume. I visited the company, which was a large company, and I felt unsure if I had a chance there. I emailed my resume to him, and he subsequently passed it on to the employer. He mentioned that he recommended me for the job, as he was involved in the decision-making process for recruiting and training new employees at the company.”

In St. John's, Syrian refugees reported being socially integrated and having meaningful social contacts in the city. Given their limited fluency in the official language, respondents tended to form closer bonds within their own community and primarily communicated in their

native language. Additionally, the prevailing culture in Canada differed significantly from the culture of these participants; this cultural difference was a concern for refugees in both St. John's and Ottawa; however, it was more prominently highlighted during interviews with refugees in St. John's. This distinction, mainly presented in differences in language and social norms, emerged as a key factor in explaining why participants showed a preference for developing friendships with fellow Arabs rather than with local residents.

Having social contacts with Arabs helped Syrian refugees in St. John's find jobs; these jobs, however, were low-paying jobs with poor future prospects. In contrast, having social relationships with Newfoundlanders in St. John's was more helpful for Syrian refugees; one participant reported building meaningful social connections with local people. These social connections provided a significant source of social support for her family. Additionally, this participant was very skilled at cooking. After she began selling her food, her social connections helped her promote her cooking in the city, resulting in a better income.

Another participant reported developing a friendship with a Canadian lady who provided a significant support for him to grow a farming project he had started:

“I met a man named Steve through Sarah, who was my English instructor. Sarah was incredibly supportive during my time in St. John's. She not only introduced me to Steve but also brought me the seeds I needed. I constructed a plastic greenhouse in her parents' garden. Steve informed me that he plans to support this project, and if it's successful, I will have the opportunity to work for the government and oversee other farmers.”

Resettlement Services:

Settlement services played a vital role in both the initial reception and the long-term integration of Syrian refugees in St. John's. Respondents reported receiving a wide range of services from the Association for New Canadians (ANC), the federally funded resettlement and settlement agency in Newfoundland and Labrador. These services included temporary and permanent accommodation, assistance with banking and budgeting, support with shopping, English language training, interpretation services, as well as accessing healthcare services and mandatory provincial and federal programs. Respondents noted that they received these services from ANC for the first year of their arrival in St. John's. However, interviewed refugees reported witnessing a significant decline in these services after their first year in Canada ended.

When asked about the help they received to find employment, refugees consistently reported that service providers needed to prioritize work. Instead, settlement workers believed that ESL training was more important, as it would eventually lead to better employment opportunities for refugees in the long-term, reflecting a paternalistic attitude towards the refugees.

“I believe that settlement counselors do not focus on employment. They think that it is more important to learn English and work will come later. ANC only helps a little in terms of employment.”

Some Syrian refugees in St. John's mentioned the Acquiring Experience Integrating Skills (AXIS) program, an employment division at ANC that provides career-focused programs and services for refugees in NL. Respondents reported being assisted by the AXIS program during their job search, including help writing a resume and guidance through the job application process.

Two respondents in St. John's reported successfully securing employment through the AXIS program; one of them received support to start a small food-selling business, while the other received the necessary training to work in homecare and is now employed as a personal care attendant. The rest of the interviewed refugees in St. John's reported that the AXIS program wasn't helpful and that they sought help from their social contacts instead:

“I work as a freight driver and obtaining a Class 1 driving license was essential to get this job. I sought the help of an interpreter I knew. I completed the written test. Following that, I enrolled in a private driving school, where I spent \$3000, and in return, I acquired my license within a couple of weeks after completing the road test. I knew about the process through a friend of mine. When I inquired at ANC, they said I would require a year-long training program, which would cost \$11,000.”

Respondents in Ottawa mentioned that they had access to multiple immigration and integration services upon arrival in Canada; these services were provided by different immigration and settlement agencies, including the Catholic Centre for Immigration (CCI), Ottawa Community Immigrant Services Organization (OCISO), Family First Health Centre (FFHC), and the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA). These agencies provided refugees with a comprehensive suite of settlement and integration services, including reception and accommodation, help with accessing federal and provincial programs and services, interpretation services, and other services and supports. Furthermore, families with young children received assistance from FFHC when shifting from receiving financial support from the government to entering the workforce; this included help enrolling children in school and recreational activities and financial support.

These findings show a noticeable disparity in the duration of reliance on settlement services between refugees in St. John's and Ottawa. In Ottawa, Syrian refugees reported achieving independence within a couple of months after arriving in Canada. Conversely, refugees in St. John's expressed an ongoing need for settlement services, especially interpretation services. This need persisted for several years, especially in healthcare settings, primarily due to language barriers. The diverse social fabric of Ottawa and the existence of an established community of Arabs were crucial in facilitating Syrian refugees' integration. One of the participants in Ottawa said:

“Every time I go to a bank here, I encounter an employee who speaks Arabic. There are Arab employees at the hospital, and my family doctor speaks Arabic. The pharmacist I deal with speaks Arabic as well. Even though my English is not very good, I still can manage here.”

Discussion and Conclusion:

This qualitative research aimed to explore how the size of the settlement community influences the settlement experience of Syrian refugees in Canada. Our central focus was their experience of employment, recognizing the significance of finding appropriate work in their settlement and integration.

The research findings suggest that the employment experiences of Syrian refugees are shaped by the size of the community in which they settle, as reflected in the availability of social capital. The presence of a robust social capital to assist Syrian refugees in meeting their initial and long-term settlement needs had a positive impact on their experiences, this aligns with previous research by Kanas and Van Tubergen (2009), Aguilera and Massey (2003), and Lamba

and Krahn (2003). Additionally, the availability of adequate immigration and settlement services, as outlined by Wilkinson and Garcea (2017), played a crucial role in their success.

In alignment with prior research conducted by George and Chaza (2004), Jamil et al. (2012), Krahn et al. (2000), and Senthanaar et al. (2021), the foreign work experience of Syrian refugees was underestimated; however, this was more pronounced among Syrian refugees in St. John's. Interviewees in Ottawa were younger and possessed greater skills compared to those in St. John's, their success in the labour market was largely dependent on their ability to secure employment and demonstrate their competence. Even those who arrived in St. John's with valuable work experience encountered barriers that prevented them from practicing their professions; this restricted their capacity to utilize their existing expertise and skills, making it more challenging for them to contribute to their new community, and, crucially, increase their earnings to provide for their families.

Social capital played a significant role in facilitating the economic integration of Syrian refugees in St. John's and Ottawa. Our findings reveal that the economic integration of Syrian refugees in Ottawa was smoother, mainly due to a well-established Arab community in the city. This community's pre-existing network and support systems played a key role in facilitating the transition of Syrian refugees into the local economy.

As discussed by Kanas and Van Tubergen (2009), Arabs in Ottawa provided newcomers with valuable guidance on how to get their foreign experience recognized and information about the labour market, including where jobs are available and how they could apply for those jobs. They also offered newcomers training opportunities in new trades while mitigating the impact of the language barrier on their integration into the local economy. Over time, refugees acquired human

capital specific to Canada; this included work experience and language skills, which aligns with the findings of Portes (2000) and M. Wright (2015).

In contrast, Syrian refugees residing in St. John's faced challenges in building substantial social networks primarily because of the absence of a sizable Arab community that could assist them in addressing their resettlement and settlement requirements. Those refugees who relied on their social connections when searching for employment reported that it often led to low-paying employment that did not adequately meet their financial needs. However, some refugees found hope in fostering relationships with local residents, which offered them potential opportunities for success in their jobs.

Through these interviews, we discovered that accessing the labour market in St. John's posed more challenges than Ottawa, particularly regarding the recognition of foreign experience and skills. In Ottawa, refugees were required to demonstrate their work experience to potential employers, whereas, in St. John's, refugees encountered a more demanding process, necessitating a fresh start that encompassed enrolling in lengthy education and training programs. Additionally, for Syrian refugees looking to establish businesses in St. John's, the path was far from smooth, as they encountered various obstacles, notably when it came to obtaining the required licenses and permits.

In Ottawa, Syrian refugees had access to a wide range of resettlement and settlement services, but they reported using these services less frequently than Syrian refugees in St. John's. In St. John's, where social resources for refugees were limited, settlement workers played a crucial role as the primary source of assistance. However, some interviewees pointed out that these workers did not prioritize employment, which in turn hindered refugees' integration into the local economy. While the training provided by these workers proved valuable for certain

refugees and enabled them to develop essential skills and secure employment opportunities, others reported that the services they received were inadequate and the quality of information about the job market was poor.

In conclusion, refugees' foreign skills and qualifications often have limited or no immediate value in the Canadian job market unless they also have a strong social network that allows them to adapt and apply their skills effectively within the host country. Unlike smaller communities, larger cities with established immigrant communities have facilitated the economic integration of refugees. This poses a significant challenge to settlement agencies in smaller communities, as they are the main source of support for refugees in integrating into social and economic aspects of life in Canada. It can be challenging for settlement workers to meet this demand, especially in light of the increased numbers of newcomers. Additionally, refugees residing in smaller communities encounter structural barriers to employment, particularly those related to obtaining necessary licenses and having their foreign qualifications recognized.

Based on our research findings, we provide key recommendations that would promote the settlement and integration of refugees into smaller communities:

- 1. Shaping Public Discourse.**

In Newfoundland and Labrador (NL), actively engaging stakeholders in a public discourse about the economic integration of refugees is imperative, including governmental and non-governmental entities, employers, refugees, and other key participants. This engagement is vital for fostering a robust public discourse aimed at raising awareness about the demographic and economic challenges faced by NL. Additionally, it emphasizes the benefits of refugee settlement as a practical solution to these challenges.

Such a public discourse serves a dual purpose: firstly, to educate the community about the intricacies and depth of refugees' experiences, and secondly, to illuminate both the positive and negative aspects of resettling in a new community. Through facilitating an open exchange, the goal is to establish a platform for understanding the multifaceted realities involved in refugee settlement. Moreover, this discourse strives to unite diverse stakeholders, fostering collaborative efforts to develop strategies. These strategies are designed to empower refugees by providing them with the necessary skills to thrive in professions with high demand and facilitating the recognition of their credentials, thereby addressing critical labour shortages in the region. This collective endeavor is vital for fostering a supportive and inclusive environment that benefits both newcomers and the broader community in NL.

Importantly, drawing inspiration from successful practices in other provinces is essential. A notable example is the “New Conversations” public discourse initiated by the New Brunswick Multicultural Council (NBMC) ([15 Virtual Events Planned Across NB to Discuss Future of Population and Workforce - New Brunswick Multicultural Council : New Brunswick Multicultural Council \(nbmc-cmnb.ca\)](#)). This initiative engaged stakeholders from 15 small towns and cities in a conversation about demographic and economic challenges, aiming to formulate policies tailored to address these issues. The outcome was a comprehensive community dialogue that prompted communities to identify and implement solutions tailored to their unique circumstances.

2. Improving Available Settlement Services and Establishing New Services.

We recommend advancing the employment services available for refugees in smaller communities by conducting a comprehensive assessment of their skills, followed by targeted job training programs aligned with local labour market needs. We also recommend allocating more

resources to establish new settlement services in response to the increased influx of newcomers. These services should be designed to meet the growing demand, providing comprehensive support for refugees and ensuring alternative options for accessing assistance in case of conflicts with local settlement agencies or service providers. This approach aims to improve the responsiveness and effectiveness of support systems for refugees in smaller communities.

3. Delivering Pre-arrival and Settlement Support.

Providing pre-arrival and settlement support is essential. Maple Leaf Company provides comprehensive support while recruiting international workers to meet labour needs and reduce turnover. Before arriving in Canada, these workers undergo 160 hours of English language training and receive an orientation package on Canadian culture and settlement information. This successful model serves as a commendable benchmark for best practices. Extending similar pre-arrival support to refugees entering NL would provide integration and contribute to regional economic prosperity.

4. Fostering Entrepreneurship.

It is important to foster entrepreneurship amongst refugees in St. John's, similar to the practice in Fredericton, New Brunswick. Fredericton successfully uses immigration and entrepreneurship to address population decline. They have a program called the Business Immigrant Mentorship Program (BIMP), started in 2009, which helps newcomers with business-related tasks like registration, accounting, taxes, and understanding the local economy (Blower, 2020). Also, there are different entrepreneurship programs for newcomers in Ottawa, such as Ottawa Newcomer Entrepreneurs Hub (ONE Hub) that help newcomers establish a business ([World Skills Employment Centre - Ottawa World Skills \(ottawa-worldskills.org\)](http://ottawa-worldskills.org)). This

approach could be beneficial for refugees in St. John's, aiding them in starting businesses and integrating into the local economy.

By implementing the aforementioned recommendations, we suggest that the overall support system for refugees in smaller communities could be significantly improved, promoting their social and economic integration and fostering economic prosperity in St. John's.

Limitations:

The gender distribution of refugees in Ottawa was influenced by prevailing gender roles and cultural norms within the studied population. Specifically, due to cultural norms, Syrian refugee women in Ottawa experienced more limited mobility and were less inclined to interact with outsiders. As a result, including them in this research posed a challenge, which placed a limitation on this study, as the settlement experiences of refugees in Ottawa was not explored from a gender perspective. This study encountered another limitation due to its small sample size, which hinders the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, employing snowball sampling in this research could potentially introduce bias and diminish the representativeness of the study.

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Chapter 3

Settlement of Refugees in a Small Community: Pros and Cons

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Abstract:

This research contributes to the existing literature on the settlement and integration of refugees in smaller Canadian communities. Drawing on a phenomenological research approach, we examine the experiences of Syrian refugees in the small city of St. John's, Newfoundland-the city with the lowest retention rate of refugees across Canada, shedding light on the factors that both challenge and support their settlement in smaller communities. Our findings reveal that the safety of St. John's supported Syrian refugees in establishing roots within the city. Nevertheless, significant challenges arise from inadequate local community support, limitations in settlement services, and restricted access to meaningful employment opportunities, impacting their integration, and ultimately, their retention in the city. Settlement agencies in St. John's emerged as a significant source of social support for Syrian refugees. To enhance their impact, it is recommended to broaden their scope by expanding and establishing innovative programs and services aimed at facilitating the integration of refugees into the social and economic life of St. John's.

Keywords:

Settlement. Community size. Integration. Syrian refugees. Retention.

Introduction:

Smaller communities in Canada are facing challenges represented by decreased fertility rates, aging populations, and shortages in the labour force (Fang et al., 2018). One potential solution is the settlement of refugees in these smaller communities through the Government Assisted Refugee (GAR) program. This initiative designates specific locations for refugee settlement, with settlement programs sponsored by the federal government of Canada providing support during their first year in the new community. These programs aim to assist refugees in becoming self-reliant and support their settlement and integration in Canada.

In the wake of the Syrian war that started in 2011 and led to the displacement of 6.5 million refugees (UNHCR, 2023), the Liberal leader, Justin Trudeau, pledged during his 2015 election campaign to resettle 25,000 Syrian refugees in Canada by the year's end, a commitment that resulted in his election to power (Parry, 2015). By October 2020, Canada had welcomed 44,620 Syrian refugees (Government of Canada, 2021). A refugee is a person with a well-founded fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion (Nicholson & Kumin, 2017, p. 18). Although Syrian refugees are admitted to Canada on humanitarian grounds, their successful settlement and integration hold the potential to drive population growth and increase economic prosperity (Fang et al., 2018).

This phenomenological research aims to explore the settlement experiences of Syrian refugees in St. John's, the capital city of Newfoundland and Labrador (NL), a small urban center with an estimated population of 110,525 inhabitants (Statistics Canada, 2022). Newfoundland and Labrador had the lowest five-year retention rate of refugees in 2015 (36%) (Statistics Canada, 2015). Even though refugee retention in NL has increased to 76.9% for the 2020 admission year, it is still the lowest across Canada (Statistics Canada, 2022a). The size of a city,

reflected by the size of its community, has a significant impact on the availability of social support, resources, and employment opportunities. These factors collectively shape the overall success of refugee settlement and integration. Consequently, gaining insights into the specific challenges and opportunities faced by Syrian refugees during their settlement in St. John's is necessary to inform policies to promote their integration and increase their retention in such a small city.

Literature review:

The size of a settlement community plays a significant role in shaping the experience of newcomers. Research has consistently shown that immigrants gravitate toward large urban centers where economic opportunities, social services, and ethnocultural resources are available, as highlighted by Dean et al. (2018), Kobayashi et al. (2011) and Panori et al. (2019). These factors are not only instrumental in fostering their wellbeing but also significantly contribute to their overall success, as noted by Walton-Roberts (2005). However, this preference for larger cities has led to a concentrated influx of newcomers in these areas. As pointed out by Akbari and Haider (2018), this concentration has resulted in an imbalanced distribution of the economic and cultural wealth that immigrants bring to the country.

This study makes a clear distinction between refugees and immigrants. While the term "immigrant" lacks a universally recognized legal definition, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) defines immigrants as individuals who choose to leave their home country for another nation with the intent to settle (IOM, 2011). On the other hand, refugees are individuals who have fled war, violence, conflict, or persecution and crossed international borders to seek safety in another country (Nicholson & Kumin, 2017). It is crucial to note that refugees constitute a subset of immigrants, different from regular immigrants who can choose their

destination, whereas refugees lack this freedom of choice (Crawley & Skleparis, 2018). Additionally, refugees often face unique challenges, including forced displacement, trauma, compromised health, lower educational attainment, and limited language skills, making their settlement and integration into a new society much more difficult and complex (Hynie, 2018).

Immigration Refugee and Citizenship Canada IRCC disperses GARs to cities throughout the country. Nonetheless, research suggests that refugees who settle in smaller Canadian cities are less likely to remain in those communities, with many opting to relocate to larger urban centers (Abu-Laban et al., 1999; Fang et al., 2018).

There is a growing body of research on the impact of the size of the settlement community on newcomers' attraction and retention in Canada. A study conducted by Hyndman et al. in 2006 delved into the factors that newcomers take into account when they arrive in a new place. Their findings emphasize the significant role that the size of a city plays in determining its appeal to newcomers. Larger cities, characterized by the presence of family, friends, and fellow immigrants, tend to be the preferred destinations for newcomers. This preference primarily stems from the abundant social connections available in these urban centers, a crucial factor in the successful settlement of immigrants and their sense of belonging to the community, as emphasized by Campbell et al. in 2016.

Social capital represents “the benefits that accrue to individuals and groups through their social relationships” (Story & Glanville, 2019). Social capital plays a vital role in enhancing the overall well-being of immigrants, leading to increased employment opportunities and improved socio-economic status, as indicated by Lamba (2003) and Nakhaie & Kazemipur (2013). Regardless of their social capital, immigrants who settle in larger cities experience better

economic prospects than those in smaller Canadian communities, as demonstrated by Matthews et al. (2009).

Immigration studies have focused on larger Canadian cities where the majority of newcomers to Canada settle. However, scholars are now increasingly broadening their scope to include smaller communities. Unique challenges emerge when it comes to attracting and retaining newcomers in smaller communities; these challenges primarily revolve around limited job opportunities and a lack of social support due to the smaller immigrant populations in these communities compared to larger urban centers (Fang et al., 2018; Hyndman et al., 2006; Williams et al., 2015). Chadwick and Collins (2015) argue that social support availability is generally higher in smaller Canadian cities compared to larger ones; they found that personal relationships and settlement agencies play pivotal roles in providing social support to newcomers in these areas. However, they contend that despite the greater availability of social support in smaller communities, it does not necessarily translate to better mental wellbeing among newcomers.

Settlement agencies are a critical source of support for newcomers as they settle and establish themselves in their new homes (Ashton et al., 2016; Drolet et al., 2008). These agencies serve as significant providers of social support for newcomers (Chadwick & Collins, 2015). In smaller cities, settlement workers take on various roles throughout the settlement process, from initial arrival to long-term stay (Drolet et al., 2008). However, smaller Canadian cities often face challenges in delivering resettlement services that fully meet the needs of newcomers, posing a significant barrier to successful settlement and integration (Ashton et al., 2016).

Contrary to existing literature, Agrawal and Sangapala (2021) argue that “small municipalities were more creative, nimble, and efficient in settling newcomers” (p. 653). They

highlight that settlement services in smaller cities, with fewer newcomers arriving, are better prepared to establish quick and flexible connections within the settlement sector to provide enhanced services and support. El-Bialy and Mulay (2015) also discuss that settling in smaller communities offers newcomers a sense of peace and familiarity that they deeply appreciate.

This phenomenological research aims to explore the settlement experiences of Syrian refugees in St. John's, NL. Given the unique challenges faced by refugees globally and the opportunities they hold to their settlement community, understanding the specific experiences in a small urban setting like St. John's becomes crucial. Syrian refugees represent a growing community in this city, yet their experiences remain undervalued. Utilizing a phenomenological approach, this study seeks to identify the factors that both support and challenge the settlement and integration of Syrian refugees in St. John's. By gaining insights into their lived experiences, the research aims to inform retention policies not only for St. John's but potentially contributing to broader refugee resettlement strategies.

Methods:

Study context:

St. John's -the capital city of Newfoundland and Labrador- is located on the eastern tip of the island of Newfoundland. Around 42% of NL's population resides in St. John's (219,119 out of 525,972 inhabitants) (Newfoundland and Labrador Statistics Agency, 2023). The remaining portion of NL's population is scattered across small towns, villages and rural areas. The island's landscape is characterized by rocky cliffs that extend into the sea and towering hills. The combination of foggy weather and rocky coast creates a captivating and challenging environment (Newfoundland and Labrador Heritage, n.d.).

According to Mather (2013), cod fishing had been the main driving force of NL's economy until 1992, when cod fishery was closed to commercial harvesters, resulting in 35,000 persons losing their livelihood. This contributed to significant out-migration that accelerated population decline, the province has witnessed since the 1990s (Mather, 2013). Despite the recent growth in the offshore oil industry that contributed to NL's economy, there continues to be a net out-migration of workers from NL to other provinces (El-Bialy & Mulay, 2015).

Until 2016, when 403 refugees arrived in Newfoundland and Labrador as part of the Government of Canada's Syrian refugee resettlement initiative, the province had received approximately 155 refugees annually (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2016). In 2022, 488 refugees were admitted to NL, including government-assisted refugees (GARs) and privately sponsored refugees (PSRs) (Association for New Canadians, 2022).

The Association for New Canadians (ANC) is the resettlement agency responsible for administering the Refugee Assistance Program (RAP) in NL by providing resettlement services for government-assisted refugees, including temporary and permanent accommodation, banking, budgeting, shopping, English training, accessing healthcare services and mandatory provincial and federal programs and services (Association for New Canadians, n.d.).

Methodology:

The qualitative research approach used for this study is phenomenology. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), phenomenological research aims to explore the lived experiences and perceptions of individuals related to a particular phenomenon or concept. Phenomenology involves a thorough examination of shared experiences among participants and the contextual aspects surrounding their experiences with the phenomenon. The primary goal of this research

approach is to explore the essence of participants' experiences, offering valuable insights that can inform the development of new policies.

Reflexivity and positionality:

The principal researcher positions herself as an outsider to the population being studied. This distinction stems from her immigration experience, having come to Canada through a different immigration stream, specifically as a student. Her settlement journey differed from that of refugees, as she did not face the same challenges, such as language barriers. Despite these differences, she shares a common cultural background with participants; Arabic is also her native language. This mutual cultural background established mutual trust, facilitating the collection of reliable and meaningful data for the study.

The principal researcher had previously worked part-time as a settlement worker at ANC in St. John's in early 2022. This role involved assisting newcomers, including Syrian refugees. This experience fostered mutual trust. However, it is important to note that the researcher was no longer associated with ANC during the interview phase; thus, she had no authority over participants' access to services or support, enabling them to make an informed decision about participating in the study.

Sampling:

Criterion sampling was employed for recruitment, a method commonly used in phenomenological studies. It is crucial that all participants have experience with the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The study focused on Syrian refugees aged 18 years or older who arrived in St. John's under the Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP) before October 2021 and had resided in Canada for a minimum of one year at the time of the

interview. This duration aligns with the length of the Refugee Assistant Program and allows ample time for settling in the city. Recruitment in St. John's involved contacting eligible individuals through the principal researcher's network by phone or in person, resulting in the recruitment of seven participants.

Data collection:

Data was collected through one-on-one in-person semi-structured interviews with seven Syrian refugees in St. John's between October and December 2022. Interviews were held at a place convenient and acceptable to the interviewee; these included a library room, their home, or a café. Those interviewed in their homes were interviewed one-on-one in a room where no other family members were present. The duration of the interviews varied between 40 to 60 minutes. The principal investigator used an interview guide to capture information about participants' demographics, including age, gender, and family status. The guide also included questions to capture information about their experiences before and after settlement in Canada, including their social and economic status. Interviews were conducted in Arabic. They were audio-recorded using a digital recording device. Participants were reimbursed 25 dollars for their time.

Data analysis:

Incorporating computer software for qualitative data analysis offers numerous advantages, such as data organization, retrieval, searching, and visualization capabilities. In this study, ATLAS.ti (<https://atlasti.com/>) was employed to assist with data analysis, as recommended by Creswell and Poth (2016). The initial phase of analysis involved transcribing and translating the interview text from Arabic to English. This task was performed by the principal researcher, a native Arabic speaker. Subsequently, the data underwent a review and exploration process,

during which codes were generated. These codes were then further reviewed and synthesized into thematic categories that elucidated the experiences of the participants and the contextual factors influencing those experiences. Finally, the study reported on the challenges and support mechanisms related to the settlement of Syrian refugees in St. John's, based on the insights derived from the participants' experiences.

Building rigour in analysis:

The principal researcher closely worked with Syrian refugees in St. John's for several months. This engagement facilitated the establishment of trust and rapport, providing valuable insights into their settlement experiences. It also contributed to triangulation, guaranteeing a comprehensive and accurate representation of the settlement process. To further validate the findings and enhance reliability, member checking was employed. In each interview, the principal researcher revisited the main points with participants. This member checking process ensured that the perspectives presented in the study accurately reflected the participants' experiences and minimized the risk of misinterpretation.

Findings:

Refugee sample profile:

The sample of Syrian refugees interviewed in St. John's included five men and two women. The age of the participants ranged from 19 to 53. The median age of the interviewees was 43. Two participants were single, one was widowed, and the remainder were married. Two participants were attending high school at the time of the interview, one had a high school diploma from Syria, and the rest did not have high school education. The sample included one cook, one farmer, and one driver. Participants attending high school had part-time jobs at the

time of the interview; one did a cleaning job, and the other worked in a restaurant. One of the participants did not have a job back in Syria and worked in homecare after arriving in Canada. One was unemployed at the time of the interview. The interviewees were resettled to Canada either from Jordan (3 participants) or Lebanon (4 participants).

Pre-migration and migration experiences of Syrian refugees:

When asked about their lives in Syria, all respondents unanimously described their lives prior to the war in Syria as prosperous. They enjoyed stability, held steady employment, and resided in comfortable homes. While the primary reason for leaving Syria was the pursuit of safety, some interviewees also cited economic pressures as a contributing factor, as they lost their livelihoods due to the war and lacked the financial resources required for survival.

Like other refugees, the participants' migration journey was fraught with peril. One refugee reported that upon their arrival in Jordan, they were compelled to reside in a refugee camp near the Syrian border and were denied entry into the country. Since the camp lacked essential provisions, the family was compelled to endanger their lives and pay a smuggler to gain access to Jordan. Another participant recounted how they had to enlist the help of a smuggler within Syria to escape the city in which they resided, as it was heavily impacted by the conflict and besieged by armed forces. The following quotes from these participants vividly depict their harrowing experiences:

“We departed on a shipment hidden among boxes, without the Jordanian army's knowledge. This was necessary because once people are taken to the camp by the army, they are generally not permitted to leave.”

“We had been isolated. We didn’t know anyone, but we heard about smugglers who could assist us, and they aided us in escaping Damascus.”

Respondents also shared their experiences of facing challenges in the asylum country. These difficulties included instances of discrimination, financial constraints, low-paying jobs, limited educational opportunities, and instances of fraud. The subsequent quotation exemplifies a few of these challenges:

“I have daughters, and I couldn’t afford the costs of their education. Furthermore, life in Beirut was unstable, with ongoing issues. Additionally, there was racism, especially towards Syrians, as Lebanese people tend not to like us. When we were offered the opportunity to come here (Canada), I accepted it.”

“My husband found a job in construction. He earned \$20 per day. Transportation was also quite expensive. We lived in deplorable conditions there. We had limited financial resources in Lebanon, unlike Syria, where we were prosperous. In Syria, we owned a few assets. However, the war destroyed everything.”

“I worked in Lebanon. Employers swindled us. Once, I worked for \$3,000, but after I finished, they only paid me \$1,500. This kind of thing happened repeatedly.”

“Once, my husband shared a cab with some other passengers. During the ride, the cab decided to take a different route to avoid a checkpoint. The cab driver was aware that my husband, being Syrian, might face difficulties at the checkpoint, so he opted for a longer route to keep things smooth. However, there was a problem. My husband only had 30,000 Lebanese pounds, but the cab driver asked for 60,000 LP for the ride. Since my husband didn’t have enough money to pay the full fare, the driver refused to take him any

closer to our home. He dropped my husband off about 7 kilometers away from the house where we lived in Lebanon. This left my husband with no choice but to walk the rest of the way, which caused his feet to swell. As a result, he couldn't go to work the next day."

Settlement:

Refugees' general impression:

Refugees expressed a wide range of emotions upon learning about the chance to relocate to Canada. Some were hesitant and anxious as things were moving swiftly. Meanwhile, others were excited about the opportunity and happy to relocate to a new place where they might have a better life and future. The following quotes capture these feelings:

"In the beginning, I hesitated to come to Canada. My son and daughter were upset; they told me that no one would ever refuse such an opportunity, but I was afraid. First, people in Canada speak a different language, and I knew nothing and no one here."

"The United Nations sent us a message on the same day, saying our application got accepted. We were really, really happy, I promise."

"I was gripped by fear of the idea of relocation. Hesitation consumed me. The memory of the night before my travel remains etched in my memory, impossible to forget. I cried a lot."

When participants were asked if they had prior information about Canada, they said they knew nothing about Canada, including its location and weather. Participants experienced a cultural shock after arriving in the country. They also mentioned that they didn't know anything about Newfoundland and Labrador (NL) and didn't expect to live in such a geographically

diverse area with varying weather conditions; some were disappointed, while others were pleased.

“We didn’t know anything. They said we were going to NL. They mentioned it using the abbreviation NL, but we did not know what it was exactly. We did not realize that it was an island. We didn’t know that this would happen. I mean, things are a bit difficult here.”

“Prior to arriving in Canada, my knowledge of the country was limited to tidbits I had picked up from my father, who occasionally mentioned Canadian flour and wood.

However, beyond that, I didn’t know much information about Canada—its geographical location or population. Its language, policies, and weather were entirely foreign to me.

Thankfully, our decision to move here has proven to be a rewarding one. Thank God we came here. We are thrilled.”

“Even though I finished high school, I did not know what Canada was. I did not know anything about this country or the weather here. We didn’t even know anyone in Canada.

We had no one to ask about life here.”

Initially, Syrian refugees viewed NL as an outlying and isolated island with low cultural and linguistic diversity. One of the participants feared oceans and never imagined living on an island. Another participant felt very lonely after moving to St. John’s; it lacked the community support that newcomers usually receive in larger Canadian cities since there are only a few Arabs here. Interviewees also reported difficulties finding the food they are used to in St. John’s. The following quotes capture the above-mentioned feelings and concerns:

“When we arrived here, we couldn’t find our usual food. Instead, we found some Arabic cuisine in a store that is quite far away.”

“I don’t like living on an island. It is scary to live here. I fear the ocean. I do not think that I will be living here in two or three years from now.”

Participants expressed a range of feelings regarding life in St. John’s. While some interviewees viewed Newfoundland and Labrador (NL) as a small and less diverse place, others believed that residing in a compact city like St. John’s fostered a sense of familiarity and security. In response to questions about racism, all interviewees indicated that they had never encountered racism in St. John’s, which significantly contributed to their overall wellbeing and integration. Additionally, they noted that the province’s lower crime rate, when compared to larger and more densely populated regions of Canada, eased their concerns about their children’s safety.

“I like the fact that it is quiet here, like us. We don’t like crowded cities; they scare me. I feel safe here. It is a good place for our children.”

“We’ve heard a lot that it is a safe place to live. People are friendlier as well; they aren’t racist at all. I want to live in a peaceful place with my children. We fled from war, and now we want to settle down. There is a lot of racism in other provinces; I’ve heard a lot about it.”

“Other provinces are not distinct from this province—they are larger with vast distances separating everything. One would find themselves constantly commuting back and forth. Paying a visit to someone often entails a minimum 40-minute drive. Overcrowding is an issue in those provinces as well. What I like about St. John’s is that it is quiet here, offering a safer environment for my children. We are thrilled here.”

Financial support:

When asked about the financial support participants received upon arrival in Canada, all reported receiving assistance from the Federal Government for one year. Federal assistance included a start-up allowance to cover the initial cost of settling in Canada; a monthly allowance to cover basic needs such as food, incidentals, and shelter; and a transportation allowance (Government of Canada, 2018). Federal support is adjusted based on different factors, most notably the size and structure of the family. Financial support for participants varied; it was challenging to determine the exact amount of money a refugee in St. John's receives. One participant indicated that he and his wife received \$1,350 in total.

After their first year in Canada, participants who needed further financial support received assistance from the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, slightly lower than the Federal support (lower by around \$75 per person, according to one of the interviewees). Adult refugees living with their parents were not entitled to receive assistance from the provincial government.

While provincial and federal support provided some relief to refugees, it fell short of fully addressing their needs. The pressure to secure employment was even more pronounced for those who did not receive provincial support. Searching for a job proved to be particularly taxing for participants, especially those who struggled with limited English proficiency. Interviewees consistently emphasized that the one-year timeframe allocated for support was insufficient for them to acquire the necessary skills for employment and attain financial independence.

“After some time, I realized that I should become independent. There are challenges. I understand that individuals who are 18 years or older are not eligible for provincial assistance. There's no alternative. People should strive for independence and earn their income.”

Resettlement services:

When asked about the settlement services they received in St. John's, participants mentioned that upon arrival, they were assigned to a settlement officer who provided them with a range of services to help them settle in St. John's. These services included assistance with applying for mandatory provincial and federal programs, banking, life skills orientations, and more. Participants noted that they received settlement services for a year.

To further explore Syrian refugees' settlement experience, the principal researcher asked them about their satisfaction with the services they received. Participants mentioned existence of gaps in the services they received, including inadequate English training for younger adults pursuing high school:

“I was presented with two choices for my education: either enrolling in a language school or attending a high school. I opted for high school. When I entered high school, I did not know English. High schools typically do not offer English instruction; they focus on subjects like chemistry and physics. Attending high school alone did not help me learn English, particularly because my friends were primarily Arabic speakers. Additionally, comprehending the curriculum was a challenge due to the language barrier. I was looking for English training, but I lacked guidance on how to pursue it.”

Participants also noted that they did not receive the support they needed to find meaningful employment:

“I only recently discovered a program designed to assist refugees in finding work, despite having been here for nearly two years. Had I known about it earlier, I would have

inquired about potential job opportunities or sought their assistance in my job search. I would have found a job earlier.”

“I perceived that settlement counselors do not focus on employment. They think that it is more important to learn English and work will come later. ANC only helps a little in terms of employment.”

Two participants mentioned receiving professional training; one reported that it helped them acquire English proficiency and find a job. Another participant also mentioned receiving help from ANC to start a small business in St. John’s.

Participants reported dissatisfaction with the settlement services they received. One of the participants mentioned that service providers breached their privacy. Another participant also noted that they had a health emergency upon arrival in Canada and didn’t know what to do or where to get help.

“Whenever I encountered a health issue, other community members knew about it. I think service providers repeatedly disclosed my privacy. Else, how would others know about my health concerns?”

“On our first day in Canada, my son fell off the bed, and his head was injured. He was bleeding. We called the emergency number we were given by our settlement counselor upon arrival, but no one answered. We called an interpreter we met at the airport and asked for help.”

Syrian refugees who arrived in 2016 expressed better satisfaction with the resettlement services than those who arrived later in 2020 and 2021. The reason behind that is the increasing number of newcomers in St. John’s, posing many challenges for the local resettlement agency in

St. John's and for newcomers. The refugees who arrived in St. John's in 2016 mentioned that they were matched with volunteers from the community to help them settle in St. John's, which was very helpful.

Social integration:

Syrian refugees in St. John's expressed that they were overwhelmed by the generosity of Newfoundlanders, their compassion, and support, which made them feel welcomed and embraced. However, language and cultural differences represented barriers for Syrian refugees to develop strong connections with Canadians.

“I only made Arab friends here. You know, English is a barrier. Also, people who have jobs don't have time to socialize.”

However, for some, lack of English proficiency didn't hinder social integration, and they could build meaningful and supportive relationships in St. John's.

“Once, our car broke down. We took the car to a garage. My husband explained to the mechanic that it would be very tough without a car because we needed to drive our children from and to school. The mechanic lent my husband a car. We kept the car for a year. He became our friend. He visits us regularly and he loves the food I cook. He invited us to his house, and we met his family. I know all his family. After one year, he told us that our car was irreparable and that we could keep his car as a gift.”

Education and employment:

Education emerged as a significant factor in the decision of refugees to stay in St. John's, especially for those with dependent children. Some participants mentioned that the availability of

various educational institutions, including Memorial University of Newfoundland (MUN) and the College of North Atlantic (CNA), supported their decision to stay in St. John's. However, two participants mentioned a desire for a religious schooling system in St. John's that would allow their children to grow in an environment that aligns with their cultural and religious background.

Employment was also significant for interviewees. Refugees' economic integration in St. John's wasn't very smooth. Interviewees reported different barriers to meaningful work, including lack of social and governmental support, scarcity of job opportunities, and non-recognition of previous experiences in the Canadian labour market. The following quotes capture participants' experiences:

“I have experience repairing cars. One doesn't need a degree to open a garage in other provinces but does need one here. It seems like they don't want people to work; they want them to rely on income support indefinitely.”

“I received a job offer shortly after arriving, but I could not accept it because I did not speak English. It was a job in cleaning. I declined it because I wouldn't have been able to communicate or discuss anything if any issues arose. Language is the biggest barrier for newcomers in finding employment.”

Future goals:

When the principal researcher inquired about future aspirations, most participants expressed a desire to continue residing in St. John's. Their inclination to remain in the city stemmed from the prevailing sense of safety it offered, creating a profound feeling of peace that was greatly valued by refugees.

“St. John’s is a safe place for my family. I want my children to live in peace. I heard that larger cities could be dangerous.”

“I am comfortable in St. John’s. It offers a sense of security and coziness. One can easily navigate the city and get our needs met. I don’t want to risk everything I have here for moving to another place.”

The future plans of Syrian refugees were significantly influenced by two crucial factors: education and employment. During the interviews, participants emphasized the advantage of having access to quality and affordable education in St. John’s. While some struggled to secure employment in their previous areas of expertise, they noted the availability of minimum-wage jobs in St. John’s. Additionally, some interviewed refugees aspired to start businesses to achieve a decent livelihood, despite the numerous obstacles they had encountered since their arrival in St. John’s.

“People said St. John’s is a good place for people pursuing education. Since I plan to go to college, I prefer to stay here.”

“I really like it here. I am comfortable and happy. I just want my farming project to grow. This is my hope.”

Discussion and conclusion:

Our study initially aimed to investigate the settlement experiences of Syrian refugees who arrived in the small city of St. John’s through the Resettlement Assistance Program. Our primary focus was on understanding the factors that influence their settlement experiences, particularly in relation to the size of the settlement community. The focus was on Government-Assisted Refugees (GARs) to gain insights into how refugees navigate settlement in St. John’s, given the

absence of the social support provided to privately sponsored refugees (PSRs) by their sponsors. This paper presents policy recommendations designed to promote the integration and long-term retention of Syrian refugees in St. John's, grounded in a comprehensive understanding of the support systems and challenges they encountered during their settlement journey.

As demonstrated by Ashton et al. (2016) and Drolet et al. (2008), the significance of settlement services emerged as a significant theme during our interviews with Syrian refugees. Refugees' first point of contact was settlement workers, who played a significant role in the first year of refugees' settlement by providing the essential services they needed upon arrival. Most of the interviewees reported developing some sort of independence within a few months of arrival. However, language proficiency remains a challenge for refugees, posing a significant barrier to their integration, particularly affecting their access to employment and healthcare. Refugees mentioned an ongoing need for interpretation services, which remained unmet for some, even years after their arrival. Notably, those with prior education in Syria reported having stronger language skills compared to those without formal education.

Settlement to St. John's was an opportunity for Syrian refugees to start a new life in a safe place. Even though navigating a new language and culture was stressful, refugees eventually developed some sense of belonging to their new home. Refugees reported that the limited linguistic and cultural diversity in St. John's represented a challenge for their social integration, as they felt more comfortable building connections with people from their own community and speaking their language, aligning with previous research by Campbell et al. (2016). However, they were able to make meaningful relationships in St. John's over time.

Education and employment emerged as significant factors for successful settlement during the interviews. Education was more important than work, especially for families with

dependent children. Parents' main concern was their children's safety and access to quality and affordable education. Settlement in a small city with a lower crime rate promoted participants' feeling of safety and familiarity. Also, the availability of quality and affordable educational facilities in St. John's was a factor that supported the interviewees' decision to stay in St. John's. However, the lack of a religious-affiliated school system was mentioned to be a downside of settling in St. John's. Participants reported a desire for religious-affiliated schools in St. John's that allow their children to grow and learn in an environment aligned with their traditional, cultural, and religious beliefs and practices.

In line with the existing literature (Chadwick & Collins, 2015; El-Bialy & Mulay, 2015; Williams et al., 2015), our findings reveal a lack of adequate social support in St. John's. Both settlement agencies and local communities provide social support for newcomers. Given the limited immigrant network in St. John's, settlement agencies are the primary source of social support for newcomers throughout their settlement, posing challenges for both service providers to offer adequate services and for refugees to meet their needs.

In accordance with the findings of Agrawal and Sangapala (2021), participants who arrived in St. John's in early 2016 reported higher satisfaction with the settlement services they received than refugees who arrived later in 2019 and 2020. In 2016, a smaller number of newcomers arrived in St. John's, a situation explained by the increased numbers of newcomers recently arriving in the province. The challenges posed by the surge in newcomers are particularly notable, as only one settlement agency bears the brunt of providing settlement services in the province.

During interviews with Syrian refugees, their primary motivation for settling in Canada was consistently identified as the pursuit of a peaceful and secure life for themselves and their

families. Additionally, they expressed a strong desire to attain meaningful employment, particularly within their areas of expertise. Our findings align with existing research and highlight the challenges refugees face in finding satisfactory work (Argwal and Derwing & Krahn, 2008; Fang et al., 2018; Hyndman et al., 2006; Portes, 2000). Various factors were identified as barriers to employment among participants, including a lack of social and government support. Four interviewees attempted to establish businesses in St. John's, but only one succeeded, indicating that refugees encounter structural barriers such as language difficulties, non-recognition of foreign qualifications and experiences, and a lack of financial support.

The Association for New Canadians administers the Acquiring Experience Integrating Skills (AXIS) program to assist newcomers in St. John's in their job search. Some participants mentioned that they only learned about the AXIS program a couple of years after arriving in St. John's. Meanwhile, others sought the program to find employment but did not experience positive outcomes. Our discussions with refugees revealed that employment was not a primary focus for settlement workers when providing services to refugees. Consequently, refugees relied on their social networks to secure jobs. While these social connections provided information on where to find employment and the application process, refugees reported limited success in their job searches. These social ties predominantly led participants to low-paying jobs, such as cleaning, which left them dissatisfied due to the perceived lack of financial and professional growth opportunities.

The findings of this research strongly suggest that St. John's has the potential to become an attractive destination for newcomers. The city has positive attributes represented by its safety and welcoming population, making it a conducive environment for refugee settlement. The

factors contributing to refugees' decision to stay in St. John's were associated with its small size, which made it familiar and convenient. However, the factors that challenged refugees' settlement in St. John's also stemmed from its small size, including the lack of an immigrant community providing adequate social support, scarcity of economic opportunities, and the incapability of the local settlement agency to offer sufficient settlement services for the increased numbers of newcomers.

It is essential to address the existing challenges and enhance the support systems in place in order to attract and retain newcomers. One key recommendation is to expand the settlement and integration services in the province by allocating funding to establish new settlement organizations. By doing so, newcomers will gain better access to improved and diverse settlement services, including language training, employment support, and cultural integration programs. Expanding settlement services would also promote diversity and create job opportunities in the province.

Economic integration is also crucial for a successful settlement. Based on the findings, we recommend facilitating refugees' economic integration by supporting foreign experience recognition in the Canadian labour market and bridging existing skills gaps by providing the professional training that refugees need to adjust and develop their skills to meet Canadian standards.

It is essential to recognize the significance of social support in the settlement process. Despite the welcoming nature of St. John's, the limited availability of social support for refugees in the city poses a significant barrier to their social integration. We recommend implementing measures to strengthen the support networks for refugees, such as partnering with local

community organizations, engaging volunteers, and promoting social cohesion initiatives. These actions can foster a sense of belonging for refugees and enhance their wellbeing.

Although refugees in St. John's reported a lack of racism during the interviews, it is important to point out that their perspectives are influenced by their understanding of racism, which extends beyond mere words and behaviors. Racism manifests in more insidious ways, such as exclusion from employment opportunities and encountering barriers in accessing services. Additionally, it's essential to recognize that a refugee is less likely to face racism if isolated. Racism is more likely to be unmasked when refugees are engaged with the broader community. Since interviewees in St. John's had limited mobility, further research is needed in this area.

The support provided to Ukrainian newcomers in NL in 2022 was in contrast to the assistance offered to Syrian refugees when they were sent to NL. Syrian refugees were initially settled in NL without prior information about the province, the Ukrainian Family Support Desk initiative demonstrated a proactive approach (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2022). Government representatives traveled to Warsaw to provide comprehensive settlement guidance to Ukrainian newcomers, ensuring a smoother transition. Moreover, flights from NL were organized to bring those interested in relocating to NL. The government's call for local volunteers and job opportunities facilitated the creation of a support network for Ukrainians interested in coming to NL, strengthening their on-the-ground support. In contrast, Syrian refugees lacked similar support, hindering their economic and social integration. This comparison underscores the necessity of further investigation to understand the differences between these support systems and identify areas of improvement in current and future humanitarian efforts.

In conclusion, St. John's has the potential to become an attractive settlement destination for newcomers. Its safety and welcoming community strengthen newcomers' integration, fostering their sense of belonging. However, to fully harness St. John's potential for attracting and retaining newcomers, it is significant to address the challenges by enhancing newcomers' social and economic integration. This can be achieved by establishing new settlement services and expanding the social support systems in place.

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Chapter 4

Conclusion

This research project was inspired by the background and experience of the principal researcher, a Syrian student currently studying for a Master of Medicine at Memorial University of Newfoundland (MUN) in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador (NL). Her journey began in 2013 in Syria when she started working with people who had been displaced in Syria and became refugees. In 2018, she moved to Portugal for a master's degree in public health. Her research focused on understanding the challenges that Syrian refugees in Portugal face in accessing healthcare services.

More research is needed to gain a better understanding of the settlement and integration of refugees in small Canadian communities. These communities consistently grapple with the necessity of attracting and retaining newcomers to encounter population decline and meet labour market demands. This study was conducted to address this research gap and focuses specifically on the case of St. John's. A particular emphasis was placed on exploring the experiences of Syrian refugees, a new and rapidly growing population in NL.

A qualitative research approach rooted in phenomenology was employed to investigate the settlement experiences of Syrian refugees in Canada. Our aim was to explore their experiences and how they are influenced by the size of the settlement community. Addressing the unique challenges faced by Syrian refugees and identifying the available opportunities is essential to inform policy and facilitate their integration into the community, ultimately increasing their retention in NL.

The principal investigator positions herself as an outsider to the group being studied. She does not share the experience of being a refugee or undergoing forced displacement. Her educational background and proficiency in the official language has also afforded her enhanced access to economic and social opportunities compared to the refugees she is studying. Thus, she had a distinct migration and settlement experience compared to this of refugees.

Despite her outsider status, the principal investigator shares the culture of the group under investigation. Having Arabic as her native language has not only broken down communication barriers but has also laid the foundation for a strong sense of trust among the participants. This shared language has proven essential in fostering an environment where individuals feel comfortable expressing themselves openly.

During her role at ANC, the primary researcher initially held assumptions regarding the limited potential for refugees to establish themselves independently in Canada. These assumptions were grounded in the prolonged reliance on services and the elevated unemployment rates among refugees in St. John's, regardless of their length of stay. However, a transformative shift occurred during the researcher's interactions with Syrian refugees in Ottawa. Through hearing their narratives of successful integration, the researcher's preconceived notions were challenged. This experience ignited a renewed commitment to comprehending the unique context of St. John's and how it might contribute to the vulnerability of refugees rather than empowering them.

The primary researcher initially expressed concern regarding the power imbalance between herself, formerly an ANC employee, and the participants who were ANC clients. It is important to note that, at the time of the interview, the researcher had already transitioned out of her role as an ANC employee. Surprisingly, she found that her previous employment did not

influence the participants' informed decision to participate in the research. Contrary to her initial apprehension, the researcher discovered that her prior work experience fostered a comfortable environment for the participants. Having a history with the principal researcher seemed to create a sense of familiarity and trust, encouraging participants to freely express their concerns and share their feelings during the research process.

Recruiting refugees for this research was challenging. The challenge was primarily rooted in social and cultural norms. Refugee women have lower mobility and are less likely to engage in employment compared to men making it harder to reach them and recruit them for the research; this resulted in a gender imbalance, with women being underrepresented in this research. Having worked with refugees in St. John's before, the principal investigator had better access to the population being studied and engaged with Syrian refugee women as a part of her job as a service provider, facilitating the recruitment process. However, in Ottawa, where the principal investigator had no previous knowledge of the Syrian refugee population and had to rely on one of her acquaintances to connect with them, this limitation became evident as she struggled to recruit female participants.

To a large extent, this research focused on employment, which posed a unique challenge in recruiting participants. Many of the Syrian refugees in Canada were engaged in cash employment at some point in their lives here, and they understandably felt apprehensive about discussing their under-the-table work for various reasons, such as fear of legal consequences. The principal researcher demonstrated empathy and respect toward those who chose to participate and committed to ensuring their anonymity; this created a safe and trusting environment for participants to share their experiences openly. However, some requested that I

halt the recording at specific moments during the interviews to ensure their conversations remained off the record.

This research provided a comprehensive understanding of the key differences between smaller and larger cities in Canada regarding the settlement and integration of refugees. Chapter 2 included significant findings concerning the challenges faced by Syrian refugees during their employment journey in Canada and compared these challenges between a small city (St. John's) and a large city (Ottawa). In Chapter 3, we delved into the settlement journey of Syrian refugees in St. John's, highlighting the challenges they encountered and the support systems available for refugees settling in a small urban center.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, our research findings demonstrate that smaller Canadian communities have provided a secure and comforting haven for individuals escaping conflict in search of safety. St. John's has proven to be a welcoming home for Syrian refugees, especially those with young children. Participants expressed their satisfaction with living in a place where their children are safe. Syrian refugees in St. John's have highlighted several advantages of residing in the city, such as its low crime rate and the absence of racial incidents. Moreover, they perceive St. John's as a compact and easily navigable city, which fosters their sense of familiarity and belonging. However, Syrian refugees have also mentioned that the city's foggy weather and limited ethnic and cultural diversity have presented challenges to their integration and overall well-being.

Some of the refugees we interviewed in Ottawa initially arrived in smaller communities such as St. John's, Windsor, and Saint-André-Avellin before deciding to relocate to Ottawa. Several factors influenced this choice, including the presence of an established Arab community in Ottawa, which allowed them to build meaningful friendships and connections. Furthermore,

participants perceived the weather in Ottawa to be better than it is in the cities where they first landed, which played a significant role in their decision, as did the availability of diverse cultural and religious amenities and various entertainment facilities within the city.

Findings from Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 revealed that without a well-established Arab community to assist Syrian refugees during their settlement and integration process in St. John's, the settlement services provided the primary source of social support. Nonetheless, these settlement services were inadequate in meeting the specific needs of Syrian refugees, especially given the rising number of refugees arriving in St. John's. This deficiency became apparent in the extended and more pronounced reliance on settlement services by Syrian refugees in St. John's compared to those in Ottawa.

Settlement services in St. John's were not always helpful in assisting Syrian refugees in finding employment. Employment did not appear to be a priority for service providers. In St. John's, the emphasis seemed to be less on immediate employment and more on other aspects of resettlement. Conversely, in Ottawa, Syrian refugees could access the labour market shortly after arriving in the city; this was associated with positive outcomes. It positively impacted their English language skills, as gaining employment helped them develop better communication abilities. It also reduced their dependency on settlement services, leading to a quicker and smoother integration process. In Ottawa, the focus on employment helped refugees secure livelihoods and was crucial to their linguistic development and self-sufficiency.

Chapter 3 also sheds light on a critical concern that surfaced during our interviews. A participant from St. John's shared a distressing experience of their privacy being violated by service providers. This underscores the pressing demand for improvements in the services offered to refugees in St. John's, particularly in the realm of interpretation services.

Chapter 2 delved into the economic integration of Syrian refugees, shedding light on the various challenges they face in finding suitable employment opportunities in St. John's. These findings underscore the presence of multiple obstacles that hinder Syrian refugees, such as structural barriers obstructing the acquisition of business licenses and the lack of recognition for their qualifications and experiences. Consequently, these challenges force refugees into low-wage occupations, leaving them less motivated to seek employment. Furthermore, one participant disclosed instances of refugees encountering discrimination within the labour market, resulting in their exclusion from favorable job prospects and supervisory roles.

Recommendations

Based on our findings, we provide the following recommendations:

Providing employment and economic opportunities for refugees:

After fleeing war or persecution, finding employment that allows refugees to support themselves and their families is a vital step towards rebuilding their lives with dignity and in peace. According to research findings, we strongly recommend that both governmental and non-governmental organizations support initiatives to facilitate the economic integration of refugees. This approach would empower the local refugee community, enabling them to integrate successfully in NL and assist incoming refugees in the future.

We propose several strategies to create employment and economic prospects for refugees:

1. Collaborate with local businesses to establish job opportunities for refugees. A partnership between refugees and local enterprises can lead to mutually beneficial outcomes represented by fostering the economic integration of refugees and addressing labour market shortages.

2. Promote diversity and inclusion in hiring practices to ensure that refugees are integrated into the workforce without discrimination or bias.
3. Provide language and job training programs to help refugees adapt their skills to align with the requirements of the local job market.
4. Promote the establishment of entrepreneurship programs to facilitate the process of starting a business and help refugees acquire the skills required for that.

In addition, we recommend simplifying the process of recognizing foreign work experience for refugees. This can be accomplished by providing financial assistance and support services to help them navigate this process. Moreover, it is crucial to assist skilled refugees in gaining their initial work experience in Canada within their respective professions.

Expanding and establishing new settlement and integration programs and services:

The findings of this research stress the need for increased funding toward establishing new settlement programs and services in NL. The increased influx of newcomers places an enormous strain on service providers, thereby challenging their capacity to meet the surging demand, resulting in insufficient support for newcomers. Furthermore, the absence of alternative settlement agencies can leave refugees and immigrants with limited options for seeking help, potentially hindering their successful integration and adjustment.

Expanding and establishing new settlement programs and services is not only helpful to address the pressing need for support, but it also creates job opportunities within the province, contributing to economic growth and stability. Additionally, promoting diversity is essential for the social fabric of NL, and having multiple settlement agencies can facilitate a broader range of cultural and linguistic support, fostering a more inclusive and harmonious society.

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Appendices



Research Ethics Office
Suite 200, Eastern Trust Building
95 Bonaventure Avenue
St. John's, NL
A1B 2X5

October 05, 2022



Dear Ms. Khalil:

Researcher Portal File # 20230720
Reference # 2022.164

RE: Does Community Size Impact the Experience of Employment Among Syrian Refugees in Canada? A comparative Study

Your application was reviewed by the Health Research Ethics Board (HREB) at the meeting held on September 8, 2022 and your response was reviewed by the Chair and the following decision was rendered:

X	Approval
	Approval subject to changes
	Rejection

Ethics approval is granted for one year effective October 5, 2022. This ethics approval will be reported to the board at the next scheduled HREB meeting.

This is to confirm that the HREB reviewed and approved or acknowledged the following documents (as indicated):

- Application, approved
- Research proposal, approved
- Interview guide-Version 2, approved
- Informed Consent Form Version 2, approved
- Budget, approved

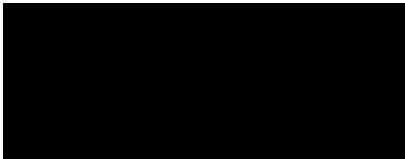
Please note the following:

- This ethics approval will lapse on October 5, 2023. It is your responsibility to ensure that the Ethics Renewal form is submitted prior to the renewal date.
- This is your ethics approval only. Organizational approval may also be required. It is your responsibility to seek the necessary organizational approvals.
- Modifications of the study are not permitted without prior approval from the HREB. Request for modification to the study must be outlined on the relevant Event Form available on the Researcher Portal website.
- Though this research has received HREB approval, you are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research.
- If you have any questions please contact info@hrea.ca or 709 777 6974.

The HREB operates according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2), ICH Guidance E6: Good Clinical Practice Guidelines (GCP), the Health Research Ethics Authority Act (HREA Act) and applicable laws and regulations.

We wish you every success with your study.

Sincerely,

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A black rectangular redaction box covering the name of the sender.

Health Research Ethics Board

You Have Received Ethics Approval, Now What?: HREB Reporting Requirements

Once a study has received ethics approval from the Health Research Ethics Board (HREB), there are still associated reporting requirements. In the conduct of approved research researchers are required to report to the HREB, in a timely manner, proposed changes from approved research that affect participants at any stage of the process. This includes, but is not limited to, changes to the consent form, changes to the tasks or interventions involved in the research, or changes to measures to protect privacy and confidentiality.

Any substantive change to the research should not be implemented prior to documented approval by the HREB, except when necessary to eliminate an immediate risk(s) to the participants. Below are examples of post approval documentation that must be submitted to the HREB:

Amendments

Any proposed change in the conduct of a study must be submitted to the HREB, and approved, before the change may be implemented. Such changes might include modification of recruitment procedures, inclusion or exclusion criteria, revised sample size, addition or deletion of study sites, changes to an intervention, consent forms, questionnaires or scripts, etc. If there are changes in project team members or changes to funding source(s)/sponsor(s), there are specific forms to complete to report this to the HREB.

Adverse Events

Serious and unanticipated adverse events that occur within Newfoundland and Labrador are required to be reported to the HREB. Such events may occur in both clinical trials and in other types of research, e.g. collapse during a rehabilitation program, emotional breakdown requiring follow up care during an interview, or breach of privacy during correspondence. Serious adverse events that are fatal or life-threatening are required to be reported to the HREB as soon as the research team is aware of the event.

Protocol Deviations

Deviations from an approved study protocol must be reported to the HREB. Changes that eliminate immediate hazards to participants do not require prior approval, but must be reported soon as reasonably possible.

Safety Reports

Safety reports providing information on all serious adverse events (SAEs) occurring in a clinical trial must be provided by the sponsor to the HREB, normally on a three or six monthly basis (i.e. in accordance with the specified reporting timelines that were outlined in the approved ethics application).

Investigator Brochure (IB) and Product Monograph (PM)

Throughout the course of a clinical trial, changes may be implemented to study documents. All revisions to approved study documents must be submitted to the HREB to ensure the record is up to date. If the revisions include new risk or safety information there may be a requirement to notify research participants.

Ethics Renewal/Study Closure

Ethics approval lasts for one year. Ethics renewal is required annually, on the anniversary of the date of the HREB notification of approval. Once data collection is no longer ongoing, a study closure form is required to be submitted to the HREB for the study to remain active or to be closed in good standing.

Interview Guide

**Does Community Size Impact the Experience of Employment Among Syrian Refugees in
Canada? A comparative Study**

Demographic information:

Age:

Gender:

Date of arrival to Canada: mm/yy

City of residence in Canada: St. John's/Ottawa

Questions:

1. I would like to start by asking you to share a little bit about yourself.

Probe:

- Please confirm that you are a government-assisted refugee.
- How long did you receive assistance under the program?
- Where did you live before you came to St. John's/Ottawa?
- Tell me whether you traveled to another country before arriving in Canada and your experience during that journey.
- Did you live in a refugee camp? How long did you stay in the camp?

2. Do you remember when you came to St. John's/Ottawa?

Probe:

- How was your trip?
- How is your adaptation to life here in St. John's/Ottawa?
- Did you receive information about how to navigate life in St. John's/Ottawa?
How? Was the information sufficient?

- Did you receive support by any organization after your arrival in St. John's/Ottawa? What kind of support did you receive?
3. Did you come to St. John's/Ottawa by yourself or with your family?
- Probe:
- Which family members came with you?
 - Which family members could not come with you? why?
4. How is your social life in St. John's/Ottawa?
- Probe:
- Did you have family or friends in Canada before you came?
 - Did you make any friends here in St. John's/Ottawa?
 - Are your family/friends helping you navigate life here in St. John's/Ottawa?
- How?
5. Were you able to speak some English before you came here?
6. What other languages can you speak?
7. Since you came to St. John's/Ottawa, have you been attending any English as a Second Language classes?
- Probe:
- How long have you been attending them?
 - At this time, do you attend English as a Second Language classes regularly?
 - Has your English improved since you started attending these classes?
8. Before you came to Canada, were you employed? What kind of work did you do? What was your profession?
9. Are you currently working?

Probes:

- What work are you doing?
- How long have you been working?
- Are you working full-time or part-time?
- How satisfied are you with your current job?

10. What educational qualifications do you have that could be used to secure a good job?

11. Have you considered pursuing education/training here in St. John's/Ottawa? Would you please tell me more about it?

12. How are you doing financially in Canada? Were you doing any better before you moved to Canada?

13. Have you faced any discrimination in St. John's/Ottawa in the workplace?

Probe:

- Can you describe the circumstance(s)?
- How did you feel about it?
- Did you do anything about it?

14. Would you move to another city to find a better job elsewhere?

15. What would you like to see implemented that you think would help you secure a good job?

16. Do you have any questions for me?

17. Would you like to receive a summary of the research results? If so, could I have your contact information which would be stored in a password-protected folder in a Dropbox.

Thanks for your time

Informed Consent Form

Research team information:

Principal investigator: Nour Khalil

Division of Community Health and Humanities, Memorial University of Newfoundland

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You are being invited to participate in the research “Does Community Size Impact the Experience of Employment Among Syrian Refugees in Canada? A Comparative Study”. Taking part in this research is voluntary. This consent form has important information to help you make your choice. It may use words that you may not understand. Please ask me to explain anything that you do not understand. It is important that you have as much information as you need and that all your questions are answered. Please take as much time as you need to think about your decision to participate or not and ask questions about anything that is not clear. You may find it helpful to discuss the study with your friends and family.

Principal investigator and funder information:

This research is required for a master’s degree in applied health services research from the Division of Community Health and Humanities at Memorial University of Newfoundland MUN. Nour Khalil is the principal investigator. Nour is from Syria. She arrived in Canada in 2020 to join MUN. She holds a bachelor’s degree in pharmacy and a master’s degree in public health. Nour devotes her research work to address refugee issues. This research project is funded through a funds awarded to Dr. Shree Mulay by Memorial University of Newfoundland.

Introduction to the project:

This research aims to explore the experiences of Syrian refugees who resettled in a small urban center like St. John’s and compare it to that of Syrian refugees resettled in a larger center like Ottawa. This study will focus on a critical aspect of settlement- employment. The reason behind doing this research is the low retention rate of refugees in St. John’s. Most refugees who arrive in St. John’s leave the city for larger cities like Ottawa. Thus, it would be helpful to understand their experience and address the barriers they face in obtaining employment in a small city. It is also essential to understand how their experience differ based on the size of the settlement community. Results from this research will be used to inform policies that would eventually increase the retention of refugees in St. John’s.

Inclusion criteria:

- Syrian refugees who arrived in Canada before September 2021.
- Participants should be government-assisted refugees.
- Participants should be 18 years or older.
- Participants should either be employed, looking for employment, or have worked in Canada.

Data collection and use:

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be interviewed for about 40 to 60 minutes using an interview guide. The interview guide will include questions about your experience before and after you came to Canada. The interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed. Data from the interview will then be analyzed. Data collection will take part at your home or any place that is convenient. The researcher will make an appointment with you and meet you at a place that is convenient to you.

Potential risks:

The interview process might be associated with emotional distress. Participants, especially those who had experienced traumatic events and difficulties before they came to Canada, may get stressed or emotional from recalling those events. Also, they may get stressed from discussing their experiences in Canada, as resettlement and settlement can be very stressful for newcomers. However, you can choose not to answer any question you would prefer not to answer. Also, you have the right to ask to stop the recording/interview at any point. If you get emotionally distressed, you can reach out to one of the mental health services listed below.

List of services in St. John's:

- Doorways (709) 752-4903
- Mobile Crisis Response Team 811
- Adult Central Intake (709) 752-8888

List of services in Ottawa:

- Ottawa Ontario Mental Health Residential Program 1(855)795-7380
- Mental Health helpline: 1-866-531-2600
Mental Health Crisis Line 613-722-6914

Potential benefits:

You will not benefit directly from this research. However, results from this research and policy recommendations may be used by policymakers to improve the employment experience of Syrian refugees in St. John's and overcome the barriers they face to finding appropriate work. You will be given a 25\$ in cash or gift card as a compensation for your time.

Participants rights:

- Your participation in this project is voluntary.
- If you decide to take part in this research, you can withdraw your consent any time before data analysis is completed. Consent withdrawal will have no impact on you. The expected date of data analysis completion is March 30th, 2023. If you decide to withdraw, your data will be removed at your request at any time up to the date of data analysis completion.
- You may choose not to answer questions you are not comfortable answering.
- Your data will be stored securely in a password-protected folder and only the research team will have access to it.
- Your confidentiality will be protected.
- If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact the Health Research Ethics Authority at (709) 777-6974 or info@hrea.ca.

How participants' confidentiality will be protected?

- Interview recordings and transcripts will be stored in a password-protected folder in a dropbox file controlled by Dr. Shree Mulay. The principal investigator will have access to this data. Data will be stored securely in a password-protected computer.
- You will not be asked for your name or any other identifying information during the interview. However, if you provide identifying information, we will ensure it is deleted from the transcript. Information that would reveal participants' identities will not be collected.
- Pseudonyms will be used to refer to participants in data analysis and representation, as well as in the written thesis and any papers that may be published in peer-reviewed journals.
- Representatives from the Health Research Ethics Board may examine the study records under the supervision of the study staff to check that the information collected for the study is correct and to make sure the study followed the required laws and guidelines.

Signature Page

My signature on this consent form means:

- I have had enough time to think about the information provided and ask for advice if needed.
- All my questions have been answered and I understand the information within this consent form.
- I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary.
- I understand that I am completely free at any time to refuse to participate or to withdraw from this study at any time, without having to give a reason, and that this will not change my entitlements or the services I receive.
- I understand that it is my choice to be in the study and there is no guarantee that this study will provide any benefits to me.
- I am aware of the risks of participating in this study.
- I do not give up any of my legal rights by signing this consent form.
- I understand that all the information collected will be kept confidential and that the results will only be used for research purposes.
- I agree to take part in this study.

Signature of participant

Name

Day Month Year

To be signed by the investigator:

I have explained this study to the best of my ability. I invited questions and gave answers. I believe that the parent/guardian fully understands what is involved in being in the study, any potential risks of the study and that he or she has freely chosen for the child/ward to be in the study.

Signature of Investigator

Name

Day Month Year