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"Seeing the Life": Redefining Self-Worth and Family Roles Among Iraqi Refugee Families Resettled in the United States

Matthew Nelson[1] · **Julia Meredith Hess**[2] · **Brian Isakson**[3] · **Jessica Goodkind**[4]

Abstract Social and geographic displacement is a global phenomenon that precipitates novel stressors and disruptions that intersect with long-standing familial and social roles. Among the displaced are war-torn Iraqi refugee families, who must address these new obstacles in unconventional ways. This study explores how such disruptions have influenced associations between gender and apparent self-worth experienced by Iraqi refugee families upon relocation to the USA. Further, the psychosocial mechanisms requisite of any novel approach to a new social construct are explored and reveal that production in the family is at the core of instability and shifting power dynamics during resettlement, preventing family members from "seeing the life" in the USA that they had envisioned prior to immigration. Over 200 semi-structured qualitative interviews with Iraqi participants and mental health providers were conducted over the course of the study, which demonstrate a plasticity among social roles in the family and

✉ Matthew Nelson
mnelson@atsu.edu

Julia Meredith Hess
JMHess@salud.unm.edu

Brian Isakson
BIsakson@salud.unm.edu

Jessica Goodkind
JGoodkind@salud.unm.edu

[1] School of Osteopathic Medicine in Arizona, A.T. Still University, 5850 E. Still Circle, Mesa, AZ 85206, USA

[2] Department of Anthropology, University of New Mexico, 1 University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM 87131, USA

[3] Department of Psychiatry, University of New Mexico, 1 University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM 87131, USA

[4] Department of Sociology, University of New Mexico, 1 University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM 87131, USA

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community that transcends the notion of a simple role reversal, and illustrate the complex positionalities that families under stress must approximate during such physical and social displacement.

Keywords Refugee · Gender · Displacement · Health · Family · Iraq

Introduction

Global Movements

Forced or coercive migrations of people have long characterized the global history of human civilization. The movement of humans across the globe has never been as dynamic and complex as it is today, and while many associate this unprecedented circulation of people and families with inexorable cultural homogenization and a loss of traditionalism (Greig 2002; Klemm et al. 2005), the literature on cultural identity suggests otherwise (see Flache and Macy 2011; Gray 1998). In lived experience, notions of homogeneity are markedly absent as scholars such as Lyotard (1984) and Bhabha (1990) describe men, women, and children in continual flux, thereby creating an extensive array of novel experiences.

According to the US Department of Homeland Security (USDHS 2013), over 58,000 persons were admitted to the USA as refugees in 2012, of which over 20 % were Iraqi. At the time of this study (2009–2010), over 36,000 Iraqi refugees were granted admission to the USA alone, demonstrating the highest Iraqi admission rate to date (USCIS 2013). During this period, approximately 130–140 Iraqi refugees were resettled in a midsized Southwestern city, representing roughly 36 % of all refugees resettled in the respective state (USDoS 2011, 2013a). Among these were nuclear and extended family units that fled Iraq due to religious persecution, conflict, generalized violence, or human rights violations. The displacement of families, rather than isolated individuals, presents a unique opportunity to evaluate the family as a dynamic and complex structure and elucidates the plasticity of familial roles in the face of novel stressors faced by Iraqis in the USA.

Resettlement Agencies

Various resettlement agencies in the USA function as local liaisons for newly admitted refugees, with the goal of achieving financial independence typically within 8 months of arrival (Dwyer 2010). Resettlement agencies vary in terms of the services they can offer, but most have the ability to assist with housing, education, and employment, while receiving $1875 per refugee to help with the cost of initial resettling as well as agency staff salaries (USDoS 2013b).

In addition to the 3 months of assistance granted by the Department of State, refugees are eligible for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Medicaid, and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (otherwise known as food stamps) to offset immediate financial burden. However, if acquiring such assistance as an American citizen is onerous, it is even more difficult for an international refugee with cultural or linguistic barriers (Holcomb et al. 2003). These structural and

other cultural barriers such as language difficulties have created the need for community-level policy and programs that can more precisely target obstacles in the resettlement process.

Refugee Well-Being Project

The Refugee Well-being Project (RWP) is a community-based participatory research project that is built upon the concepts of mutual transformative learning and advocacy. The model was initially developed by community psychologist Dr. Jessica Goodkind and first implemented among Hmong adult refugees in the state of Michigan (Goodkind 2005, 2006; Goodkind et al. 2004). Subsequently, the RWP model was applied in New Mexico with African refugees from 2006 to 2008 (Goodkind et al. 2013; Hess et al. 2014), with Iraqi refugees in 2009 from which this data has been collected, and currently with groups comprised of multiple national origins, with the hope of addressing mental health challenges experienced by refugees as a result of war trauma, flight, refugee camp conditions, and difficulties related to resettlement. Although not expressly a component of the RWP, this research is based on data collected during the RWP research arm of the project, with the intent to study how Iraqi family structures may be aggravated by resettlement.

People Out of Place

Gender in Iraq

The Middle East is characterized by a multiplicity of religious, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity—complicated by hegemonic forces that stratify class, tradition, and heritage, which has sustained a rich heterogeneity in the region (Smail Salhi 2013). In her latest work on the gendered properties of the Iraq war, feminist scholar Cynthia Enloe (2010) suggests that gender roles, particularly in Iraq, are irreducible to terms such as wife, widow, or mother, and this indeed appears to be the case historically, as women had been independently productive—both culturally and economically in Iraq, acquiring education and training at universities in the 1970s, during the burgeoning of the Iraqi oil industry. In fact, economic expansion was so rapid, the Iraqi government decreed that all male and female university graduates would be automatically employed. However, conservative and patriarchal values persisted in the ruling Baath party in spite of female employment, insomuch that when this ideology overlapped with later political/economic repression, reliance on a strict definition of the nuclear family persisted to the point of relatively rigid gender roles today (Al-Ali 2005, 2008). Additionally, Beitin and Aprahamian (2014) argue that both political context and a profound patrilineal undercurrent sustain seemingly rigid roles, while maintaining a small tolerance for insult to family status. They continued to highlight that family relationships may endure sometimes-deleterious stress upon relocation to communities that expect more plasticity within and between family roles, leading to divorce, but that such positionalities appear far more complex than the simple male domination/female subjugation dichotomy, a notion that is further supported by this paper.

Productivity and Personhood

Refugees, according to Malkki (1992:32) are "people out of place," because they are in continual conflict with extant notions of identity as they attempt to replace their selves in the novel social and geopolitical contexts that are thrust upon them. In her work with immigrant children, Suarez-Orozco shares that immigration in general, "removes individuals from many of their relationships and predictable contexts—extended families and friends, community ties, jobs, living situations, customs, and (often) language" (2000:195). Displaced individuals are compelled to account for these contexts in sometimes vastly divergent and xenophobic environments (see Suarez-Orozco 2000; Flache and Macy 2011; USDoS 2011). In this way, the malleability of identity and personhood is as adaptively advantageous as it is potentially detrimental, as displaced individuals must be willing to alter sometimes deeply rooted values in order to accommodate these new contexts.

In her book on gendered experiences of geopolitical space, Scott (1992:26) maintains that, "it is not individuals who have experiences, but subjects who are constituted through experience." As such, experiences like work and employment have proven significant in generating both collective and individual identities. Further, in her work with Japanese laborers, Kondo (1990) argues that work is not only a source of identity and pride, but it is also a signifier of a productive individual. Among the socially and geopolitically displaced, work and production can hold great value to individuals who have otherwise been stripped of the more overt stimuli of identity, such as residence, place, citizenship, and kin. Thus, production, or the ability to *feel productive*, is paramount in maintaining refugee mental health through the resettlement process. Further, the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR 2012) includes in its most recent Letter to Congress, "The overall goal for all parties involved is to effectively meet the needs of refugees while promoting their self-sufficiency," suggesting that employment and work are closely tied to one's expected role as a refugee in the USA (see also Dawood 2011).

Role Inversion

As forced displacement has been an unfortunate feature of human existence, a large body of research has attempted to make sense of any effects this may have on migrant life experience (Boehm et al. 2011; Buriel and De Ment 1997; Colson 2003; Suarez-Orozco 2000). However, few studies attempt to make sense of how refugee families experience displacement and resettlement. Although some scholars describe how familial connections transcend the geographic space that represents the physical dislocation of migration (see Napolitano 2002; Rouse 1995), many are unable to comment on the complexity involved among the vast social intersections that characterize families. This is in part due to a traditionally limited approach at understanding how parents and children both shape the identity of the family and thus its members. Clavering and McLaughlin (2010) describe how exclusively quantitative measures can mistakenly represent a child's perspective, reducing the picture of the family toward a parental bias, as children are seldom queried directly through quantitative means due to limited literacy. Qualitative studies of the human experience attempt to let complexity be the driving force of the research and thus may be more amenable to

understanding the experiences of children and adults as familial dynamics transform the meanings these processes have for people at different life stages. This can be observed among migrant families where the resettlement experiences of children and adolescents are starkly different than their parents and thus worthy of further scholarly attention (Suarez-Orozco 2000; Boehm et al. 2011).

In Colson's (2003:10) commentary on the influence that forced migration may have on families, she concludes that a "lack of political and economic resources put familial roles in question" (see also Sluzki 1979). In referencing Hitchcox's (1993:158) study on behavioral change among Vietnamese refugees, Colson (2003) argues that men "suffered from the total loss of their role as decision maker and provider for the family. They were worse off than the women… because the latter at least could rely on the familiar occupations of childcare, cleaning the living space and washing, making and mending clothes."

These examples illustrate how dynamic, culturally rooted roles that were adopted for more familiar contexts, such as those previously discussed regarding the traditionally gendered Iraqi family, are accommodating new stressors, such as forced displacement, by reassigning such roles to its members based on the potential for productivity. Shuval's (1980) research on the inherent stress of relocation suggests that familial values shift upon migration, and former family leaders may be demoted. Gold (1992:291) suggests further that these phenomena may be deemed "role reversals," stating that refugees "have various degrees of reversal of the 'provider' and 'recipient' roles that existed among family members." Continuing, "The wife takes on the breadwinner role and some of the status and power that accompany it," implying that the position of producer is being redistributed to others in the family, leaving the men disempowered and dependent. Within this redistribution, Gold recognizes a commonly seen inversion that exists between parents and children, which revolves around the ability to provide cultural experiences to the family, in that children were found to learn the English language, along with other cultural elements at a more efficient rate than that of the parents—even to the point of serving as linguistic and cultural translators—what Buriel and De Ment (1997) describe as cultural brokers (see also Suarez-Orozco 2001; Boehm et al. 2011; Orellana et al. 2003; Orellana 2009).

While familial units renegotiate gender roles and relations, "new scripts concerning gender relations, child-rearing values, parent-child relations, and social attitudes come to the fore" (Suarez-Orozco and Qin 2006:169). Women may take novel positions of power within the family, which as Suarez-Orozco (2000:198) suggests in her review of women and children refugees, "may at once provide them with newfound independence and create tensions within their relationships." Scholars have suggested that the demotion and disempowerment of prior producers in the family may lead to a number of deleterious emotions and adverse effects such as degraded feelings of self-worth, depression, resentment, hostility, and refractory rigidity in patriarchal values (Gold 1992; Kirmayer et al. 2011; Suarez-Orozco and Qin 2006; Volkan 1993). However, as Boehm et al. (2011:11) suggest, novel notions of family may eventually emerge, where "parents and children reconfigure and reinterpret their roles through migration and still engage in meaningful relationships," insomuch that "family collectivity, cohesion, and well-being" may be generated instead (see also Trask 2010; Suarez-Orozco 2000). Goodkind et al. (2013; Goodkind 2005) suggest that facilitating such reconfigurations,

where individuals may address these issues as a group, may support familial matrices that prove beneficial in the resettlement process.

Methodology

RWP Data

The data for this study were collected under the auspices of the RWP in 2009–2010, shortly after approximately 140 Iraqi refugees were resettled in the metro area of a midsized city in the Southwest. In all, 35 refugees completed the 6-month RWP intervention and participated in the research arm of the project in that year. During the course of the program, each adult and child participant completed six interviews: one preliminary qualitative interview that aimed to identify the resettlement stressors and coping strategies of Iraqi refugees; four mixed-method interviews that included qualitative questions about refugee experiences in the USA and quantitative measures of quality of life; and finally, a qualitative interview with his or her student advocate, which focused on the participant and advocate's experiences and accomplishments during the intervention. Five providers who work with the refugee population were interviewed once, individually. Members of the research team, who were accompanied by one of three Iraqi interpreters, conducted each of the interviews. All interviews were audio recorded and lasted between 30 and 90 min, averaging 45 min in duration.

The analyses conducted during this study included data from 215 interviews (five interviews with each of the 35 adult and child participants, in addition to five provider interviews). Inclusion criteria for providers included employment as a social worker and recent experience in assisting Iraqi families during the resettlement process and were included in the analysis to grant an additional perspective of resettlement and to highlight how non-Iraqi observers conceptualized change within Iraqi families. Eighteen families participated in the interviews, and participants were interviewed individually and in their homes. In most cases, Arabic-speaking interpreters were utilized during the interview. Of the 26 adult (over the age of 18) participants who were originally enrolled in the RWP, this article focuses on those who completed both the intervention and all five interviews (n=24 adults). Additionally, interviews with children and adolescents (n=11) between the ages of 7 and 17 regarding relocation experiences were conducted. Of the adult participants, the majority were either Muslim or Mandaean, with only four participants claiming a Christian religious affiliation.

The audio recordings of the qualitative interviews were transcribed, both by members of the research team and by a professional third-party transcription service. After initial transcription was complete, the transcripts were checked and processed for errors against the recordings. Processed transcripts were then imported into NVivo 8, a qualitative data analysis software package (QSR International 2008). The University of New Mexico Institutional Review Board approved this research, and all participants provided informed consent and/or assent in their chosen language. Interviews were recorded with the consent of the interviewees.

Qualitative Analysis

The first level of qualitative analysis involved initially coding the content of each interview according to questions posed, to examine each answer across the dataset. Additionally, members of the data analysis team carried out text-based coding for each interview—identifying recurrent themes or statements. The coding tree for Iraqi refugees was loosely based on an extant coding tree designed for an African population that had previously participated in the RWP (Goodkind et al. 2013). As new themes surfaced, the research team convened to define and agree upon changes to the structural framework. This process elucidated the relationships of themes to each other and the overall coding structure, which enabled the team to code the extant data in a way that not only ensured comparability with previous years of data (from African refugees) but also enabled the structure to incorporate themes that were particular to Iraqis. In this way, our analyses revealed the range of diversity between various refugee experiences in their national, political, and social contexts. After the data were categorized into thematic codes, the final level of analysis involved querying the data to isolate text that was coded at dominant themes to then analyze the content for patterns, frequency, and meaning according to various categories (Richards 2005)—most prominently gender, employment, and dignity/self-worth. Memos were created to analyze the predominant subthemes, patterns, and meanings for each theme.

Results and Discussion

Dignity and Self-Worth

During the analysis of the qualitative data, the research team identified themes that appeared to be important to the participants regarding their transition as refugees in the USA. Some of these themes varied from the extant coding tree used for African refugees, most prominently the discussion of dignity and/or self-worth, which occurred in the majority (20 of the 24) of the adult preliminary interviews, although no interview questions specifically focused on these domains. Dignity and self-worth were identified in the interviews as accounts of personal value and were frequently narrated in the context of feeling respected by those around them. This prompted an additional round of coding, looking specifically at dignity, how it was discussed by participants, and the contexts in which it was discussed. The results of this additional coding process were organized into three categories: (1) participants who narrated a predominantly negative sense of self-worth at the time of the interview, (2) participants who narrated a predominantly positive association with self-worth at the time of the interview, and (3) participants who did not narrate dignity or self-worth during their interviews at all.

Upon examining these categories for gender differences in the data, we found that males recounted a negative outlook involving dignity and/or self-worth in a much higher proportion than did females. Of the 24 adults who completed the preliminary interviews, 11 narrated dignity positively, 9 negatively, and 4 left it out of their interview altogether. Of the 11 positive reports, ten were female and one was male. Of the 9 negative reports, seven were male and two were female. Lastly, two of the 4 who did not address dignity and self-worth during their interviews were female.

These data suggest that when asked a similar open-ended question about the benefits and challenges of resettlement, males narrated feelings of negative self-worth strikingly more than females. In fact, of the 14 women who participated in the preliminary interviews, 12 narrated self-worth either positively or not at all, while only two negatively. In contrast, of the ten male participants, seven narrated self-worth negatively, while the remaining three recounted it positively or not at all (see Table 1).

As dignity and self-worth appeared to follow traditionally gendered roles in the Iraqi family, we began to probe the data for potential explanations of such disparate results. While men were particularly valued in Iraq for their potential to provide stability and comfort for the family, the men in our study were either in low-paying service industry jobs or unemployed after relocation to the USA, which may account for a portion of the reported decrease in self-worth (Ross and Mirowsky 1995). However, as many of the men in this study were previously employed as professionals and businessmen, with advanced degrees and often many years of experience in their chosen fields, the loss of a forum to practice and/or signify their skill may have deleterious effects on their identity and therefore alter their sense of self-worth.

Hamas (pseudonyms are used throughout this article), a former restaurant owner and businessman in his thirties explained, "I have never worked under anyone – always been a businessman, so it is very difficult for me now [to work] for somebody else." Hamas continued to struggle for employment throughout the 1-year course of the study, facing hardships that caused him to question not only his ability to perform his role as a family provider but also difficulties in placing himself into the context of hope about what lies ahead, saying,

> "I don't know about the future right now, my future is not clear… I don't have a job, and I don't have any government assistance… It's difficult for me, that is, my life in the future is not clear."

Like many other men in this study, the inability to see oneself in the future was a prominent phenomenon.

Colson (2003:10) suggests, "self-definitions derived from work are at risk when professional skills are ignored in a resettlement area or camp or when they are denied the right to practice or work in old occupations as immigrants." As seen with the men in this study, fragmented gender-based familial roles, such as provider and producer, have led to a degradation of self-worth, insomuch that hope is fleeting, and frustration and sadness abound. Such frustration was clear during Akeem's interview, when he asked the interviewer, "An American doctor who's spent 30 years in pharmacies or hospitals, can he

Table 1 Negative and positive reports of self-worth by gender in adult participants

	Negative account	Positive/no account
Adult males	7	3
Adult females	2	12
% Female	.22	.80

go back to zero and be a worker or carrying things? Can he do that?" Adding a familiar sentiment to other participants, he said, "If you see any Iraqi that is a cleaner—cleaning toilets—be sure and certain that he is crying."

Concurrent to the observed degradation of the self-worth in many of the men in our study was a paradoxical movement for Iraqi women. This inversion was explained by Doaa, a young mother and wife in her final interview with the RWP, who stated,

> "The big difference between here and Iraq is that they value women in America. They value women. In Iraq they don't."

Similarly, Dema, a young woman of similar age and family circumstance to Doaa shared that the Americans she had encountered early after her relocation were very respectful, stating, they "respect me so much and treat me kindly." Dema frequently mentioned her approval of what she observed as gender equality in the USA, including the right to speak and act independently, which she sharply contrasted with her previous life in Iraq. Thus, among men, the inability to fill a vital role in the family initially triggered negative feelings of self-worth, while the women in the study who felt more valued and respected in the USA, overwhelmingly reported positive notions of self-worth.

Production and Ambition

The ability to be productive was described by participants through the lens of employment and self-worth. It was described interchangeably with ideas of provision, in that providing for the family—particularly as a man—was simply inherent in the familial charge to be productive. As productivity afforded self-worth and purpose, employment for Iraqi men was the focus of many interview questions aimed at soliciting the difficulties faced in the USA. Among the 23 preliminary interviews conducted, all participants discussed a need for employment when asked about the most important unmet needs in the Iraqi community. Among the 24 adults interviewed in the pre-, mid-, and post-intervention interviews, 23 described the social and economic need for employment opportunities, particularly among the men. Even 4 of the 11 children interviewed expressed concern regarding the employment of men in the family, illustrating that although typical refugee parental goals include minimal social disruption in the lives of the children, these ruptures do not go unnoticed (Boehm et al. 2011; Suarez-Orozco 2000). For example, Hakeem, a young woman in her teens described the sadness she felt for her father, who formerly ran his own food supply business in Iraq, stating, "He had a really good business back home and now he is not having a good job. He is relying on his savings." Out of all adult male participants, over 90 % were employed prior to resettlement, and less than 10 % of adult women were employed prior to resettlement.

Additionally, productivity was deemed requisite for proper "settlement," as though the resettlement process in its entirety was not complete until familiar roles were restored to premigration configurations. Akeem, a young husband and new father explained that although he was thankful for the safety that relocation might promise his family, in his view, the resettlement process had been incomplete, stating that there had been,

> "No settlement, because of no jobs and no language. This is the most difficult. All of the Iraqis have ambition – they want to do something here. They want to have a better life, better jobs."

Many male participants described an overwhelming desire to be more productive, reporting, "we did not come here to sleep," and that not working, "is against our nature." Akeem, like other Iraqi men in the study, recognized that although ambition and a fervent desire to feel productive were important in placing themselves into expected familial roles, unfavorable structural mechanisms had to be accounted for, such as the faltering economy and xenophobia.

At the time this study was conducted, the USA was suffering from one of the highest unemployment rates in its history, with a national rate topping out at 10 % during 2009–2010 (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2014), and the state trending similarly. This impacted both the refugee population directly and also support services such as the local resettlement agency, which already worked with a minimal per capita budget (USDoS 2013b). Additionally, demand for public assistance programs such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and food stamps grew, leaving behind many families who would otherwise qualify (see Wise 2009). Further, the War on Terror's xenophobic legacy (Salem 2011; Maira 2009) left many Iraqi men questioning the practices of both their employers and potential employers, voicing worry that they were not being treated equally due to their Iraqi heritage. In explaining her confusion regarding the seeming discriminatory practices of her husband's temporary employer, Mara stated,

> "They told him that his work for today was done, so he can go home and they will send for him – telling him what time he has to come the next day. When he went home, they called and said not to come back again… They told him the reason is that they don't have a lot of work to do, and they have a lot of workers, so they don't need him. But after three days, they hired a lot of people."

Unemployment, and the inability to feel productive early in their resettlement process appeared to be difficult for many of the men in our study, who were forced to reconcile their new position in the family based on extant ideologies of being a husband and father. Gabir, a young father struggling to find employment, related that fulfilling his role depended on his ability to "provide a good life for my family and my kids." Other men echoed this sentiment, expressing their ambition to, "provide the family with what they need," "to provide our life with many things," and "to do everything to provide a good life for my family" in order to seemingly regain some missing element in life. However, both men and women described this element in a myriad of ways, such as comfort, familial support, settlement, hope, dreams, seeing the future, and "seeing the life." In essence, it provided a purpose—a way for a formerly productive man to feel needed and to contribute to his family once more.

Early in the project, women also iterated that the balance and well-being of the family necessarily included a productive male provider. Aasera, a young wife and mother, spoke of her husband's inability to fulfill a previously established familial role, saying, "He needs a job so he can feel comfortable. He can provide his family with

what they need, and want." Further, in inquiring of an Iraqi woman of similar circumstance regarding the requisite male provider in the family, she explained,

> "Having a job and supporting the family is not only related to dignity, but honor also… In Iraq, it is very rare that you can find someone who does not work, especially men. Everyone should support *his* family (emphasis added)."

In reference to the recently relocated Iraqi men in her cohort, Habiba adds, "They need jobs, so that they can see the life."

While familial roles can form and reform with many permutations even within the previously discussed paradigm of role reversal (Gold 1992), the Iraqi participants appeared to generate novel roles within the family—roles that blended and dispersed production and consumption among different family members. However, this revision was experienced divergently across the dataset, as the men continued to seek traditional forums for productivity that were simply not available in the USA, while women and children adopted new responsibilities such as family provider and cultural broker.

Role Plasticity and (Dis)empowerment

Through the integration and disintegration of familial roles during the resettlement process, new identities and power differentials were assumed. Although men in the study appeared to exhibit the most pronounced disruption in status, women and children were forced to accommodate changes as well. In reflecting back on the adjustments that had occurred in his family over the course of his resettlement, Baha, a father of three supposed that, "there might be some changes. It's a new life for everyone." Indeed, many participants, including children, reflected on some sort of adjustment at the level of both the individual and the family. Badr, Baha's adolescent son, responded that his family was now "Upside-down. My mom's working and my dad's not working." Badr's keen observation of shifting roles within his family parallels Gold's (1992) notion of role reversal among Vietnamese refugee families.

As their male counterparts were stripped of their productivity, the Iraqi women were able to produce food, money, and healthcare via food stamps, employment and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and Medicaid, respectively. Further, as the state's Income Support Division (ISD) officers routinely listed the women as heads-of-household in applications for assistance—even if accompanied by their husbands—role forfeiture now seemed to carry state authorization to be reinforced by the women's personalized Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card.

As discussed previously, shortly after relocation, women in the study expressed their concern over the self-worth and productivity of their husbands. In Maha's attempt to explain the distress over her husband's persistent inability to fill the role of family provider, she said, "I'm not feeing comfortable… I cannot really feel comfortable." Additionally, Amal, a homemaker since marriage and young mother of two expressed her frustration as unemployment persisted and support services such as TANF and food stamps dwindled, remarking, "I'm not talking about my husband. I need to know how to drive, I need a car, and then I need a job."

As the men in the study described considerable loss of self-worth, fruitless ambition, and overall frustration with their inability to fill the role of family provider, women

began to absorb this responsibility. Anisa, a mother of two very young children, secured employment at a restaurant where she worked 6 days a week, sharing that she enjoyed the much needed income. Aamina was also compelled to seek employment as her husband struggled to find work. When asked about this approximately 6 months after resettlement, she shared, "I love my work, and I love what I'm doing." A later interview revealed that Aamina's job had changed her life, in that it has enabled her to support and provide for her family.

Similarly to the empowerment observed in the women of this study, children also experienced an expansion of their roles within the family and were thus empowered as cultural and linguistic brokers. Nine-year-old Ihab shared that he planned to be an interpreter for his family, particularly those who had yet to immigrate. Children in this study were often the superior English-speakers in their homes and thus found themselves in unique positions of power, moderating interactions between their parents and teachers, coaches, physicians, and others.

Just as women were pushing the boundaries of traditional family roles, young girls were redefining themselves in these new contexts. Basit, an 8-year old girl with an unemployed father and working mother, explained her discontent with rigid gender roles, rehearsing,

> "My brother left something here and the house is not really clean, and I don't feel like I want to clean it. My dad says, 'Come on, clean the house, you're a girl,' and I hate that. Why should I be a girl then? [My brothers] aren't girls, but still, it's their stuff."

Basit further suggested that she wanted to make "the boys have to behave just like others, because they're not special." Health providers in the study also recounted the difficulty that adolescent Iraqi boys were having when female teachers encroached upon traditionally male roles.

As familial values and roles necessarily shifted upon resettlement, it was at first apparent that men appeared demoted as Shuval (1980) described, divested of power, and the ability to be productive for the benefit of the family. The lack of employment opportunities due to the recession, language barrier, and xenophobia of potential employers seemed to prevent the productivity of men in this refugee cohort to the point of damaging self-worth. "There are no jobs… so there is no life," exclaimed one man who was desperately searching for any outlet of productivity that would enable him to "see the life," and find purpose once more. However, as time passed, we found that the men were indeed not demoted as Shuval suggests; rather, their roles had simply adapted to novel social and structural contexts, and thus generated novel positionalities within a dynamic family.

In Hamas' final interview, he clearly articulated the change that had occurred over the first year of resettlement for many of the Iraqi men, saying,

"Here, an American man or woman must participate and have responsibility for everything in the home, not like in Iraq, where the man must not participate, but be responsible for everything. Here, the woman and man share, and the kids grow up until about 18, when they have to choose to leave the home and to be responsible for his life."

Conclusion

New Perspectives

Our analysis of the data identified three phenomena that define the larger process of role redistribution among Iraqi families. Although not all families progressed through these junctures in any given sequence, the majority of the 18 participating Iraqi families narrated these three positionalities in some configuration. The points included: (1) productivity loss, (2) shifting self-worth, (3) redistribution of roles. These phenomena have each been addressed previously, but it is important to note that although some participating families were not able to restore production and provision within more traditional boundaries, the family as a unit was still able to provide for its members through novel means.

"Seeing the life" was not accomplished through restoring men and women to former roles, rather, as families accommodated the stress of dislocation, they were able to respond in socially advantageous ways. Women and children became empowered in their new roles as major providers in the family. Children pushed the boundaries of gender and familial hierarchy. Men focused more on the familial participation and cultivated what their children considered to be "better relationships."

However, not all refugees in the USA are successful at renegotiating familial roles in the context of the social pressures they must consistently address. The inability to construct new roles around novel challenges may lead to further degradation of self-worth to the point of what the literature describes as further social exile (Goodkind 2005; Kirmayer et al. 2011), perpetual mourning (Volkan 1993) and repeated dislocation via incarceration or "return migration" (Hing 2005), or even voluntary return to places of origin. Additionally, research suggests that violence, domestic and otherwise, may follow significant power-swings in family relationships (Colson 2003; Gold 1992). In her illustration of domestic violence in Hungarian refugee camps, Colson (2003:11) states, "Women were given and readily took on several roles that were considered men's 'domains' and men who had little to do became listless, depressed, and in some cases violent." She further argues that, "in the humiliation of the devalued lies the roots of much of the violence, especially against women and children." While violence was not evident in our study, social exile and perpetual morning did feature prominently. However, the data indicate that these feelings subsided as participants settled into their new lives in the USA.

Limitations

The data for this research was collected before, during, and after the interventional phase of the Refugee Well-Being Project (RWP) over the course of 1 year. This was done to better understand resettlement over an extended time period and to assess the utility of the RWP in addressing the social barriers of the Iraqi refugee population. The analysis was performed by researchers who were also part of the interventional arm of the project, which carries a potential for bias. Additionally, data regarding self-worth and changing family roles may be influenced by the interventional nature of the concomitant larger RWP project.

Recommendations

For refugee-associated resettlement agencies to be most effective, the unique stressors that are inherent in displacement ought to be identified early in hopes of buffering a difficult social transition. It is the recommendation of this paper that resettlement agencies, the Office of Refugee Services (ORS), and local resettlement programs more directly address the three distribution phenomena discussed previously: (1) productivity loss, (2) shifting self-worth, (3) redistribution of roles. This has been done with moderate success by the local RWP through two interventional components, mutual learning, and advocacy. The former focuses on the pragmatic and therapeutic elements of cultural exchange (Goodkind 2006) to foster cohesiveness and support within the RWP cohorts themselves, and to serve as fora for the reinforcement and/or generation of new familial roles in response to resettlement stressors. Advocacy provided support in education, as well as health care, finding safe housing, and assisting with immigration and residency logistics (Goodkind et al. 2011). Goodkind (2005) found that both mutual learning and advocacy applied together were successful in mitigating some of the deleterious effects of displacement and resettlement over the course of the 1-year study and can be applied with other refugee groups. Given such success, the ORS would be wise to invest more funding in local community-based programs that can tailor needed services for a specific family dynamic. Additionally, increased ORS funding may prove beneficial in areas that promote stability and production in the family in culturally appropriate ways such as increased access to employment training with local colleges and/or employment programs and thus reconcile the role-shuffling that occurs with resettlement.

When asked about how a forum for mutual learning and advocacy had contributed to her family, Latifa, a mother of three said, “I believe that this program helped us to build trust all together,” and “we became like a family,” speaking of the relationships both within and outside of her immediate family. The Iraqis who participated in this study have continued their resettlement process in the Southwest and, as Latifa states, will continue to become “like a family,” as new barriers arise and productivity and power necessarily create more change. It can thus be inferred from this study that providing a forum for the redistribution of family roles may be advantageous in assisting families in both the reinforcement of meaningful productivity, for the generation of new familial roles—both of which appear requisite to address familial stressors and “seeing the life” once more.

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