

THE EXPERIENCE OF BURMESE REFUGEE STUDENTS
IN HIGHER EDUCATION: BLOOMING OUT OF CONCRETE

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DEDICATION

First and foremost, I dedicate this dissertation to my Almighty God. Thank God for always loving, guiding, and protecting me. Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path (Psalm 119:105). Also, this dissertation is dedicated to my husband, Yohong Roh, my father, Jaebum Lim, and my mother, Miae Jung for their love and support throughout this journey. I could not have achieved my Ph.D. without Yohong who has endlessly supported and encouraged me. With my parents' unconditional love, support, and prayer, I was able to start and finish this long journey.

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Minyoung Lim

THE EXPERIENCE OF BURMESE REFUGEE STUDENTS IN HIGHER
EDUCATION: BLOOMING OUT OF CONCRETE

The United States is the world's top resettlement country for refugees and the third largest community of Burmese refugees lives in the state of Indiana. Many refugee families look to their college-age youth to enhance their well-being. This study explored the lived experiences of Burmese refugee college students' resettlement and the role that social support plays in that approach. In order to explore the refugee students' resettlement experiences and the role of social support, social support theory and conservation of resources theory were used to explain the importance of social support for refugee students' successful resettlement.

A qualitative study using thematic analysis was conducted using 32 in-depth individual interviews with Burmese refugee students in higher education. Through an in-depth examination of the lived experiences of Burmese refugee college students' resettlement, four main themes were identified: challenges of resettlement, resettlement needs, the resources of social support, and resettlement experiences. Refugee students actively cultivated their life and showed aspirations of being successful members of this new environment. Even though they faced many challenges and needs identified through interviews, the participants overcame these barriers including a different culture and language and prosper in their lives in the host country. The social support from the co-ethnic community and people in the host country both affected the participants' successful resettlement. Co-ethnic community also plays an important role to pursue higher education.

The study findings will be used by social work practice, programs, and policies to improve the success of Burmese refugee students' resettlement. This study would serve as a foundation for enhancing refugee students' resettlement and understanding the critical role of social support resources during the resettlement period. Burmese refugee students would be an important avenue to develop international relations and achieve social justice. In spite of a variety of barriers and prejudices, Burmese refugee students bloom and flourish in their new environment in the United States. They are beneficiaries but also currently benefactors. The perspectives on refugees need to change and move from victims to the citizens of the world.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The United States is the largest refugee resettlement country in the world (UNHCR, 2018). Since 1976, the U.S. government has approved over 3 million refugee resettlements from all over the world (UNHCR, 2018). Table 1 indicates that refugees from Burma are one of the top refugee groups who have resettled in the United States. The top three countries of origin for refugees to the U.S. in FY 2018-2019 were the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burma, and Ukraine (WRAPS, 2019).

Table 1

*Top Ten Origin Countries of Refugee Arrivals, FY 2017-19**

2019*			2018			2017		
Country	Number	Percent	Country	Number	Percent	Country	Number	Percent
Dem. Rep. Congo	6,907	46.6	Dem. Rep. Congo	7,878	35.0	Dem. Rep. Congo	9,377	17.5
Burma	2,571	17.4	Burma	3,555	15.8	Iraq	6,886	12.8
Ukraine	1,825	12.3	Ukraine	2,635	11.7	Syria	6,557	12.2
Eritrea	932	6.3	Bhutan	2,228	9.9	Somalia	6,130	11.4
Afghanistan	330	2.2	Eritrea	1,269	5.6	Burma	5,078	9.5
Syria	286	1.9	Afghanistan	805	3.6	Ukraine	4,264	7.9
Iraq	234	1.6	El Salvador	725	3.2	Bhutan	3,550	6.6
Sudan	168	1.1	Pakistan	441	2.0	Iran	2,577	4.8
Burundi	150	1.0	Russia	437	1.9	Eritrea	1,917	3.6
Colombia	148	1.0	Ethiopia	376	1.7	Afghanistan	1,311	2.4
All other countries, including unknown	1,257	8.5	All other countries, including unknown	2,142	9.5	All other countries, including unknown	6,069	11.3
Total	14,808	100.0	Total	22,491	100.0	Total	53,716	100.0

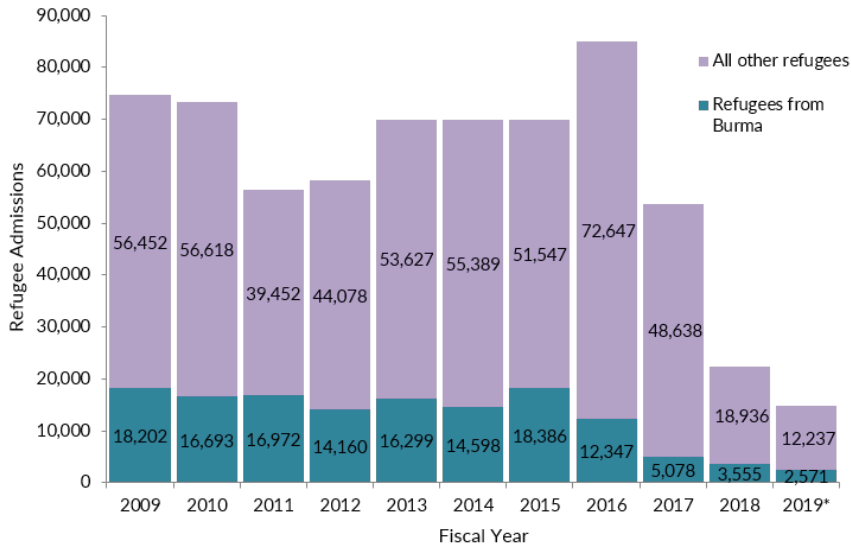
Source: MPI analysis of State Department WRAPS data.

Note. Data for FY2019 are partial between October 1, 2018 and April 30, 2019.

As can be seen in Figure 1, Burmese refugees have been one of the largest groups to resettle in the U.S. In FY 2015, refugees from Burma represented 35 percent (18,386) of the 51,547 refugees admitted.

Figure 1

Number of Admitted Burmese and All Other Refugees, FY 2009-2019



Note. Data for FY2019 are partial between October 1, 2018 and April 30, 2019.

Explanations to the number of admitted Burmese refugees and all other refugees, FY 2009 – 2019. Reprinted from “Refugees and Asylees in the United States”, by B. Blizzard & J. Batalova, Online Journal of the Migration Policy Institute. Copyright 2019 by Migration Policy Institute.

After entering the United States, refugees have the freedom to live safely. Though there are policies in place to provide for adjustment to the United States, refugees face many obstacles including structural and cultural barriers to resettling in the host country. Sometimes these policies are not consistent with refugees’ need for social support (Simich et al., 2003). Many refugees have a lack of knowledge about U.S. culture, limited English language skills, and very different cultural backgrounds (Refugee Council USA, n.d.). Moreover, when the eight-month period of cash assistance ends, refugees meet

significant financial problems. Refugees who are not employed at that time face challenges because of severely limited financial aid.

Previous studies have demonstrated that social support plays an important role in refugees' successful settlement, integration, and satisfaction of basic needs in the host country (e.g., Stewart et al., 2008). Refugees need to build new social networks in the resettlement area, but most experience social isolation and lack the social support that they had in their homeland (Simich et al., 2005). Most newcomers consider immigrants and refugees who came to a host country before them an important source of support because they have already gained knowledge of the host country, customs, and the settlement process (Stewart et al., 2008). Even though refugees endeavor to adjust in the host country, they continuously experience barriers and challenges resettling in the new society.

Only one percent of refugee youth enroll in universities (UNHCR, 2016); however, 34% of youth around the world go to university (UNESCO, 2014). Higher education will be a bridge for refugees who want to be leaders in their communities and in the host countries. Highly educated refugees will contribute to the economy of their host countries and have a better chance to resettle successfully with self-sufficiency (UNHCR, 2016). Focusing on how refugee students in higher education resettled in their host country will be the lens through which we understand how to help newly arrived refugee children and youth with their successful resettlement.

Until now, various studies about refugees' resettlement have been focused on refugee adults or refugee children instead of refugee college students. For the population of refugee students in higher education, most of the studies have prioritized educational

outcomes or psychological factors. However, this study explored Burmese college refugee students' experiences by examining their resettlement approach and the resources of social support during their life in the U.S. This study aims to be a cornerstone of uncovering refugee students' voices by spotlighting their lives in the United States.

Definition of Refugees in the United States

In the United States, a refugee is defined under the U.S. Immigration and Nationality Act (1980):

(A) any person who is outside any country of such person's nationality or, in the case of a person having no nationality, is outside any country in which such person last habitually resided, and who is unable or unwilling to return to, and is unable or unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of, that country because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion, or (B) in such special circumstances as the President after appropriate consultation (as defined in section 1157(e) of this title) may specify, any person who is within the country of such person's nationality or, in the case of a person having no nationality, within the country in which such person is habitually residing, and who is persecuted or who has a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. (§1101(a)(42))

Currently, 67% of the refugee populations worldwide came from five countries: Syria, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Burma, and Somalia (UNHCR, 2018). Most refugees cannot return home.

Refugee Resettlement Process in the United States

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is responsible for the majority of referrals of refugees to the United States for resettlement. Referrals by the U.S embassy or non-governmental organizations (NGO) include a much smaller subdivision of cases (U.S. Department of State, 2013). Under the guidance of the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM),

Resettlement Support Centers (RSC) manage refugee applications for U.S. resettlement consideration (U.S. Department of State, 2013). The RSCs compile biographic and other information from the refugees to arrange for interviews and security screening (U.S. Department of State, 2013).

Security screening is conducted by the Department of State and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) in collaboration with the National Counterterrorism Center and the Department of Defense. Within DHS, the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) reviews every application and completes in-person interviews with every applicant (U.S. Department of State, 2013). After that, USCIS-permitted refugees undertake health screening to prevent contagious diseases from entering the country. Then, the RSCs ask for “sponsorship assurance” from U.S.-based resettlement agencies that provide assistance to newly arrived refugees.

Last, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) schedules and arranges refugees’ travel to the United States. Almost all refugees will undergo a brief cultural orientation before arriving in the United States (U.S. Department of State, 2013). The entire processing time from the initial UNHCR referral to arrival in the U.S. takes about one year to 18 months on average: however, processing times vary because every case is different such as applicant’s location, policy changes, and other circumstances (U.S. Department of State, 2013).

After arrival in the United States, refugees receive federally funded transitional assistance through the state department-funded Reception and Placement (R&P) program. This program provides a monthly stipend of about \$1,000 per single person for the first three months in the United States to support their initial resettlement (Brown & Scribner,

2014). Local resettlement organizations help refugees to find appropriate housing that can be covered with the stipend (Holcomb et al., 2003). However, refugees are not eligible for apartments with reduced payment. After three months of stipend assistance from the Department of State, refugees may qualify for other assistance such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Medicaid, and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (otherwise known as food stamps) to meet their basic needs (Holcomb et al., 2003).

Refugees are expected to find a job within a few months after arrival. Public assistance is limited to eight months (Refugee Health Technical Assistance Center, 2011). Therefore, if they do not find a job, they will not become self-sufficient and may face extreme hardship. However, it is difficult to qualify for the above assistance even as an American citizen, and for international refugees with cultural and linguistic barriers acquiring these supports is much more difficult (Holcomb et al., 2003). One year after admission, refugees can apply for Lawful Permanent Resident status. Refugees do not need to be employed to qualify for Lawful Permanent Resident status.

When refugees arrive in the United States, state and local communities have important roles to play in providing ongoing support services. Funding from public and private sources and volunteers from the local community provide support to refugees (Trieu & Vang, 2015). The organizations supporting refugees' resettlement have the goal to help them start their new lives in the U.S. (National Immigration Forum, 2020).

Background of Burmese Refugees in the United States

After Burma gained independence in 1948, an ongoing civil war started in the country. From 1962 to 2011, armed conflicts between ethnic groups and the central

government afflicted the country, and the military regime continued to oppress the country (“Myanmar,” n.d.). Since 2010, Burma remained under the newly elected government (“Myanmar,” n.d.). The current Burmese refugee situation is a result of the tragic history with various events unfolding from the 1960s; the military rule executed counterinsurgency efforts that were opposed to ethnic minority armed forces, their relations, and local residents (Trieu & Vang, 2015). Over several decades, the country carried out brutalities against groups that menaced the ruling power.

For the above reasons, associations that demanded democracy started to change the military government’s economic and social policies. On August 8, 1988, a mass demonstration by college students led to the death of thousands and incarceration of key organizers. However, the demonstration failed to change the military government’s policy. Gradually, the government-occupied regions controlled by ethnic minorities induced the displacement of more than a million people to bordering countries, including Bangladesh, India, Malaysia, and Thailand. After inhabiting the refugee camps for two decades, since 2005, more than 30,000 Burmese refugees in Thailand (McKinsey, 2008) received the opportunity to resettle in a third country (Trieu & Vang, 2015).

Burmese Ethnic Groups

Through the above process, refugees can be resettled in a host country. Many Americans view Burma as a single country, and any person who comes from Burma is simply “Burmese.” However, there are eight major ethnic groups as well as various sub-groups in Burma. Members of ethnic minority groups do not want to be referred to as “Burmese,” but prefer to be considered as members of their certain ethnic group such as

Karen, Chin, and others (Bridging Refugee Youth and Children's Services [BRYCS], 2013).

Burma is made up of seven states and seven divisions; the states are ethnically-based. The largest division is composed of Burmans. The seven states are made up of Arakhan (Rakhine), Chin, Kachin, Karen (Kayin), Karenni (Kayah), Mon, and Shan (Cultural Orientation Resource Center (CORC), 2007). Chin is one of the major ethnic groups in Burma (Christian Solidarity Worldwide Hong Kong (CSW HK), 2006). In addition to Chin, there are seven other major national ethnic groups: Kachin, Kayah, Kayin (Karen), Bamar, Mon, Rakhine and Shan (Amnesty International, 1999). Karen and Chin are the largest refugee groups from Burma in the United States (Southeast Asia Resource Action Center, 2011).

Moreover, each of the major ethnic groups has several sub-groups. For example, the Chin have 53 sub-groups. Overall, the Burmese population is composed of 153 ethnic groups and sub-groups (Myanmars, 1998). Most ethnic groups are distinguished through language, dress, food, music, dance, festivals, and celebrations that differ from one another (Burmalink, 2013). Burmese ethnic groups have unique national, cultural, and linguistic identities; most ethnic groups have individual languages even though Burmese is the most widely spoken language (Burmalink, 2013).

Along ethnic or religious lines, Burma has experienced a complicated and long history of armed opposition groups (Burmalink, 2013). The various conflicts are linked to goals and concerns of each ethnic racial group (Burmalink, 2013). Therefore, researchers who study Burmese refugees have to acknowledge and understand the complexity of those historical, social, and linguistic aspects of Burma.

Burmese Refugee Resettlement Status in the United States

According to the Burmese American Community Institute (BACI) in Indianapolis, the Burmese refugee population in the U.S., as of July 1, 2015, totaled 141,440 (BACI, 2015). To be specific, the ethnic sub-groups within the Burmese population are shown in Table 2.

From 2008-2014, more than 117,000 Burmese refugees have been resettled from refugee camps to the United States (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 2016). The state of Indiana has the third largest group of Burmese refugees in the U.S. (CDC, 2016). The largest community of Burmese refugees in Indiana lives in Indianapolis (n= 13,896) and the second largest group is in Fort Wayne (n= 5,960). The remaining 114 Burmese refugees are scattered across other various cities in Indiana (BACI, 2015). The Chin ethnic group is the largest ethnic group of Burmese refugees in Indianapolis with 7,906 people (BACI, 2015). The entire secondary migration of the Burmese refugees in Indianapolis is also the Chin ethnic group with a total of 5,090. Secondary migration means moving out of state, whereas relocation means moving within the state (Weine et al., 2011).

Table 2

The number of Burmese ethnic sub-groups in the United States, 1990-2015

Ethnic group	Number of refugees
Chin	50,147
Karen	64,759
Karenni (Kayah)	11,619
Kachin	3,359
Arakanese	2,345
Burman	5,167

Mon	2,022
Shan	1,118
Other ethnic groups	904
Total	141,440

Source: BACI, 2015

Issues and Challenges in Refugee Resettlement

Various potential problems make refugee resettlement challenging. The eight-month period of federal financial assistance for refugees is inadequate to resettle in the United States. Typically, refugees have a lack of knowledge about U.S. culture, limited English language skills, and different cultural backgrounds (Refugee Council USA, n.d.). Including the above problems, refugees also face bureaucratic obstacles. According to an interview with a refugee by Wadekar (2016), “an International Refugee Committee (IRC) officer told me that the clinic has a translator and to just drop them off. So we did. And the next thing you know there was no translator, and I was getting calls saying ‘We cannot understand what they’re asking us to do’”. This is one example of the irresponsibility of bureaucracy.

With the above challenges, refugees continue to come into contact with various barriers that may be difficult to predict by non-refugees. Moreover, the refugee children also face various concerns related to resettlement in the host country. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 1994), children account for more than half of the refugee population. In addition to the above issues faced by refugee adults, refugee children subsequently experience social disruption, loss of access to services, civil and political violations, and various physical and psycho-social threats due to traumatic situations that occur as part of the refugee experience (Boyden et al., 2002).

Various studies have revealed issues regarding the second language acquisition of refugee children. With sufficient English language skills, refugee children were able to adjust very well to new school settings in the host country (Olsen, 1998, 2000). Moreover, due to insufficiency of language, refugee children faced being placed in special education classes or in low academic tracks even though they have a greater potential ability as learners (Olsen, 1998, 2000).

Many refugee children experienced psychological trauma in their own countries and that trauma may have hindered their capabilities to learn (Sinclair, 2001). Thus, refugee children experience trauma through conflict from their own country, in refugee camps, and during resettlement (Hynes, 2003). As a result, refugee children easily suffer distrust or fear through a series of traumatic experiences. Even though they face various challenges with resettlement in the host country, some parental factors were considered as barriers to refugee children (McBrien, 2005).

Refugee parents often have difficulty providing emotional and social support to their children (Ascher, 1985). Refugee parents were not only victims of the trauma as well, but also have more difficulty learning a second language, English, than their children (Ascher, 1985). After arrival in the resettlement country, refugee children typically learn the language of the resettlement country faster than their parents. Therefore, the refugee children became translators for their parents for hospital visits, school meetings, and so on. The role switch between parents and children may cause conflict and identity confusion in the family (Zhou, 2001). As the refugee children get older, they may go to higher education and then this parent-child conflict may go on for a long time and worsen over time.

The refugee resettlement policy has had an enormous impact on refugees in their new lives. Including the above problems, the United States Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) has had some challenges. The refugee policy has not been comprehensively amended since it was codified in 1980, whereas now the demographics of resettled refugees have grown more complex over the years (Office of Refugee Resettlement, n.d.). The challenges have been listed under the following broad categories: “Conflicting policy goals, funding, coordination among agencies, and a lack of systematic monitoring and evaluation” (Brick et al., 2010, p. 5). The Refugee Act established a resettlement program to both “provide for the effective resettlement of refugees and assist them to achieve economic self-sufficiency as quickly as possible” (The Refugee Act, 1980). Moreover, the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) which was founded after passage of the Refugee Act of 1980, aims to help refugees to be “integrated members of American society” (Office of Refugee Resettlement, n.d.). However, refugees face many challenges in the United States that thwart their efforts to become integrated—both socially and economically. All of the stakeholders from local organizations to the federal government have been confronted with these issues. While much of the existing federal policy relates to initial financial support, relatively little attention is paid to the importance of social support. To assist refugees’ resettlement in the host country, refugees’ social and cultural needs have to be considered.

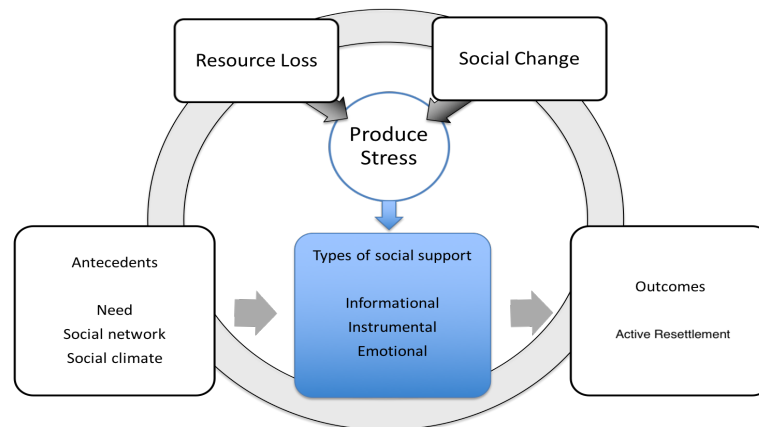
Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

Social support is a complex and dynamic concept that has been difficult to conceptualize, define, and measure (Hupcey, 1998). When people face stressful events, social support can be one of the most powerful resources (Kim et al., 2008). Social support from others including family, friends, relatives, colleagues, and neighbors is important for a distressed individual (Thoits, 1986).

Issues in refugee resettlement may be better understood from social support theory. Additionally, conservation of resources theory (COR) supports the foundation of social support theory. Combining social support theory and conservation of resources theory brings a multi-theoretical conceptual model (see Figure 2) to help explain how refugees can resettle successfully in the United States. Conservation of resources theory explains the need for and the role of social support in refugees' resettlement in the host country. The multi-theoretical conceptual model incorporates the important role of social support and will be used as a context for exploring refugees' role in their resettlement.

Figure 2.

Multi-theoretical conceptual model of refugees' successful resettlement, combined social support theory and conservation of resources theory by Minyoung Lim.



Social Support Theory

House (1981) identified three types of social support as emotional, instrumental, and informational support. Simich et al. (2002) employed House's (1987) concept of social support to investigate the circumstances, sources, and appraisal of social support in refugee populations (Simich et al. 2003). Finfgeld-Connett (2005) also identified two types of social support as emotional and instrumental support. According to Simich et al. (2003), "The immediate social support needs of refugees are not trivial and could be met most beneficially in partnership with those who can affirm their migration and settlement experiences" (p. 888). For purposes of this study, three types of social support (House, 1981) were employed to explain the multi-theoretical conceptual model.

Instrumental support refers to materials or assistance provided by others for solving practical problems including financial aid or necessary services (House, 1981). Instrumental support will be helpful for persons who need direct solution of concrete problems such as aid, material, and tangible support (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Instrumental support helps refugees to resettle in the new community; however, without accurate information, this support cannot play a significant role for refugees (Simich, et al., 2003). Informational support refers to guidance, communications of opinion, advice, and information that might help an individual solve problems (House, 1981) and includes advice, appraisal support, and cognitive guidance (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Emotional support refers to expressions of sympathy, love, caring and encouragement (House, 1981). This type of support has been called esteem support, expressive support, self-esteem support, ventilation, and close support (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Emotional support interventions are critical for traumatized refugees and some immigrants (Barnes &

Aguilar, 2007). Many studies have discovered that social relationships are one of crucial factors to determine health and longevity (House et al., 1988). Finfgeld-Connett (2005) explained that “antecedents of emotional and instrumental support include a perceived need plus a social network and climate that are conducive to the exchange of social support” (p. 1). The nature of social support will be explored by learning from refugee students’ experiences. Each refugee student has different resettlement experiences. Their experiences will spotlight refugee students’ life in the United States.

Conservation of Resources Theory

The conservation of resources (COR) theory by Hobfoll predicted that “resource loss is the principal ingredient in the stress process” (Hobfoll, 2001, p. 337). Stress outcomes were predicted by COR theory in health outcomes, traumatic events, and stress on a daily basis (Hobfoll, 2011). Stress is caused by the threat of the resources’ loss (Hobfoll, 2001). The stress will be visible to the refugees who are in the resettlement process. Refugees are constantly faced with the loss of resources from their homeland and in the resettlement region. The migrant adjustment to new areas depends on their ability to acquire resources and reacquire lost resources (Ryan et al., 2008).

Ryan et al. (2008) stated that “human survival depends on certain basic needs being met” (p. 7). To satisfy the needs, resources are required. The resources are not only necessary for need satisfaction but are also invested in the pursuit of personal goals and in managing the demands faced throughout the course of life (Ryan et al., 2008). Original resources by Hobfoll (1989) are initially suggested under four categories: object, conditions, personal characteristics, and energies (see Table 3).

Table 3*Original resources category proposed by Hobfoll (1989)*

Kinds of Resources	Definition	Examples
Object	“Object resources are valued because of some aspect of their physical nature or because of their acquiring secondary status value based on their rarity and expense”	Shelter, necessary appliances
Conditions	“Conditions are resources to the extent that they valued and sought after”	Marriage, tenure, and seniority
Personal characteristics	“Personal characteristics are resources to the extent they generally aid stress resistance”	Hope, social support, positive sense of self
Energies	“Energies are typified not by their intrinsic value so much as their value in aiding the acquisition of other kinds of resources”	Time, money, knowledge

Note. All definitions are quoted from Hobfoll (1989, p. 517)

Applying Hobfoll’s COR theory, migrant groups who are in the midst of the resettlement process with a low level of resources are at risk of poor adjustment (Ryan et al., 2008). These groups may have the lowest level of personal and social resources and will have greater difficulty accessing new resources (Ryan et al., 2008). Hobfoll (2001) explained that groups with greater resources have greater access to opportunities for resource gain and are less susceptible to resource loss. As a result, refugees who have more resources or who have important resources such as proficiency in the host country language are in a greater position to adjust to their new area (Ryan et al., 2008).

Empirical research has provided support for COR Theory, such as identifying resources from Somali refugee families and children as protective resources (Betancourt et al., 2015). Snyder et al. (2020) examined COR theory in a setting of armed conflict in

Africa. Using COR theory, the study of migrant adaptation examined factors that facilitate or restrict access to resources (Ryan et al., 2008).

The experience of Burmese refugee students also is expected to highlight the importance of resources during resettlement in the U.S. Resource deficiency heightens the need for social support. Since their parents do not have experience as students in the U.S., refugee students need to seek and find the resources by themselves with little or no help from family. Thus, college refugee students can be disempowered in their new settings. The existence of social support will affect refugee students' resettlement approach. Moreover, examining the importance of social support for refugee students is important to assist this population.

Chapter 3: Review of the Literature

Refugee Resettlement Experiences

Resettlement is defined as “the transfer of refugees from an asylum country to another State, that has agreed to admit them and ultimately grant them permanent settlement” (UNHCR, n.d.). Resettlement is also defined as “a process during which a refugee, having arrived in a place of permanent asylum, gradually re-establishes the feeling of control over his/her life and develops a feeling that life is “back to normal” (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2003, p. 62). In this study, successful resettlement means that the refugees feel their life is “back to normal”.

Colic-Peisker and Tilbury (2003) categorized refugee resettlement styles as passive or active. Active resettlement style is defined as successfully achieving social and emotional well-being and re-creating the feeling that refugees’ life is “back to normal” (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2003). In the active style, the refugee takes an approach of seeking goals, positively thinking about their migration experience, and integrating into the host society (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2003). Peisker and Tilbury (2003) discovered that mainly younger refugees tend to choose an active approach and they prioritized language acquisition, so that they are better able to mix in the mainstream community.

In the passive style of resettlement, refugees are treated as if in a sick role and as helpless victims in the host country (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2003). Refugees following a passive style tended to have a negative approach to their migration experience and they did not consider their life as recoverable or as “back to normal” (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2003).

Refugees are easily labeled as mentally ill and as traumatized victims in western society (Eggertson, 2016). Under an international therapeutic model, war victims were generalized as traumatized and subject to psychosocial dysfunction (Pupavac, 2002). However, refugees' main concerns in their everyday lives are achieving economic independence and regaining the feeling of control over their lives (Eastmond, 1998). Pupavac (2002) criticized the western therapeutic model as a form of cultural imperialism. However, studies about refugees' mental health using the western therapeutic model have been continuously published (Hynie, 2019; Lustig et al., 2004; Silove et al., 2017; Verviliet et al., 2014). However, this study did not focus on refugees' resettlement styles and did not categorize them. Instead of focusing on how they resettled, as an exploratory study, refugee students' voices were uncovered with their lived experiences during the resettlement period. The participants have unique experiences, and their stories would be helpful for readers to understand refugee communities. This study aimed to amplify the voices of refugees through their lived experiences. During interviews, study participants always appreciate the researcher for providing the chance to share their stories in the host country.

Social Support

Social support is defined in varied ways by immigrants and refugees such as help, assistance, emergency services, charitable donations, aid for initial settlement, job search assistance, and mechanisms for ensuring social justice and equity (Stewart et al., 2008). Service providers and policymakers identified social support as an informational, instrumental, and emotional support and as a continuum from informal to formal (Simich et al., 2008).

Social support also acts as a resource for managing stress caused by resettlement barriers (Stewart et al., 2011). With social support, refugees are able to reduce loneliness and isolation (Beiser et al., 2010, 2011; Bhui et al., 2006; Jaranson et al., 2004) and to integrate more readily into the host country (Stewart et al., 2008). Chinese immigrants and Somali refugees in Canada described social support in various ways such as any assistance, emergency services, charitable donations, help delivered to disadvantaged populations, and job search assistance (Stewart et al., 2008).

The types of support are different depending on the period of resettlement (Stewart et al., 2008). During refugees' early resettlement period in Canada, the types of social support received by refugees affected their migration decisions and well-being (Simich et al., 2003). Stewart et al. (2008) described Chinese immigrant and Somali refugees' pattern of social support seeking in Canada. During the initial stage of resettlement, instrumental supports are primary and then, support for facilitating long-term settlement and adjustment to socio-economic trends in the host country become important. Later, support for achieving higher social mobility and professional ambitions for a better future become important (Stewart et al., 2008). Chinese immigrants and Somali refugees reported that language acquisition was one of the important means for successful resettlement in Canada (Stewart et al., 2008).

Simich et al. (2003) emphasized that in addition to professional support from agencies, affirmational support from successfully resettled refugees is also important to manage the newly arrived refugees' mental well-being and to bridge cultural disparity within the host country. Cuban refugees stressed the importance of practical support such as jobs, transportation, housing, food, and education to meet their survival needs (Barnes

& Aguilar, 2007). Sources of social support can offer insights about how to mentally prepare being and living as a refugee in a new society (Simich et al., 2003).

Refugees and immigrants from diverse ethnic groups need similar practical and emotional support (Barnes & Aguilar, 2007). Culturally-appropriate social support interventions using first languages through peers helped African refugees in Canada to overcome the challenges they faced during the initial resettlement period and reduced refugees' loneliness and feelings of isolation (Stewart et al., 2011). Somali refugees and Chinese immigrants in Canada reported various barriers to resettlement including language difficulties, employment status, navigating the system, disrupted family dynamics, inadequate child care, and immigration status (Stewart et al., 2008). Cuban refugees referred to the importance of emotional support including companionship, encouragement, and acceptance (Barnes & Aguilar, 2007).

Refugees' secondary migration might be considered as support-seeking behavior (Simich et al., 2003). Except for one study by Simich et al. (2003) in Canada, not many studies have considered the social support from people who came to the host country ahead of them as an important source of support. Many refugees found their jobs through informal social networks in the United States (Ioannides & Lory, 2004). Little has been published about Burmese refugees' resettlement and social support in the United States. Studies about Burmese refugees are needed to facilitate and help Burmese refugees' resettlement, especially in Indianapolis because Indianapolis is the one of the largest areas of Burmese refugee resettlement.

Social Support and Refugees' Well-Being

Tran and Wright (1986) described the importance of social support for the

subjective well-being of Vietnamese refugees. Tran and Wright (1986) recruited 145 Vietnamese refugees in Texas and Oklahoma. This study determined that stronger social supports, having interactions with Americans, relatively high family income, and marital status affected Vietnamese refugees' feelings and anxiety (Tran & Wright, 1986). English language communication skills, social support from the ethnic community, length of time living in the United States, and education were crucial factors in Vietnamese refugees' well-being (Tran & Wright, 1986). Tran and Wright (1986) insisted that "a good refugee resettlement policy must take into account the important role and function of social support systems" (p. 457).

Furthermore, Simich et al. (2003) emphasized that with professional support from agencies, affirmational support from successfully resettled refugees is also important to manage the newly arrived refugees' mental well-being and to bridge cultural disparities in the host country. Through interviews with 47 government-assisted refugees in Canada, Simich et al. (2003) discovered that support from people from the same background or country of origin who already experienced similar situations and challenges with migrating and resettling is powerfully helpful for refugees. Moreover, they discovered that refugees' secondary migration might be considered as support-seeking behavior (Simich et al., 2003). Community integration also positively affects refugees' resettlement and their well-being in the host country (Lee et al., 2015).

Typically, refugees end up seeking their support system by themselves, despite language barriers, different culture, and unstable financial situations. Furthermore, the lack of social support may be a factor in refugees' health risks (Simich et al., 2003). Lee et al. (2015) asserted that "identifying factors associated with community integration

would facilitate the formation of informed and tailored policies and interventions to improve the well-being of this vulnerable population” (p. 335). To support refugees’ overall well-being, we need to focus on building social support during the resettlement period.

Social Support from Service Providers and Policymakers

Many refugees do not have much knowledge of the location or the culture of the host country (Agbényiga et al., 2012). The support from resettlement agencies and staff members is an essential and significant source including providing housing, employment, and healthcare services (Agbényiga et al., 2012). Refugee resettlement agencies play a significant role in refugee’s resettlement. Nine national resettlement agencies with over 350 local affiliates are responsible for providing a wide range of resettlement services to refugees in the U.S (UNHCR, 2020). The United States government funds these agencies (Rush, 2018).

A local refugee resettlement agency called Mohawk Valley Resource Center for Refugees (MVRRCR) in the State of New York accommodated refugees’ initial resettlement needs including language proficiency, education, employment, and housing (Smith, 2008). Agency staff can serve temporarily as emotional support and acceptance of refugees (Agbényiga et al., 2012).

Lack of social support negatively affects refugees’ resettlement in housing and language acquisition (Agbényiga et al., 2012). The agencies are not able to cover all of the refugees’ needs and thus religious groups play a role as the non-government agency and social networks of refugees (Kenny & Lockwood-Kenny, 2011). Due to a lack of social support, refugees looked for supportive networks from members of their own

ethnic groups or religious institutions (Agbényiga et al., 2012). However, in respect to religious freedom, this dependence on religious groups may negatively impact refugees' resettlement (Kenny & Lockwood-Kenny, 2011). Among Burmese refugees, the church community plays an important role not only as a religion but also as a place for social meeting, mutual support for community integration, and instrumental support including job, health service, and transportation (Lee et al., 2015).

Newcomers' cultural backgrounds also affect their perceptions of social support and help-seeking strategies (Stewart et al., 2010). Newcomers such as immigrants and refugees considered social support as an important source of managing their stress related to immigration and resettlement challenges (Stewart et al., 2010). Stewart et al. (2008) also emphasized "the negative impact of culturally irrelevant services" (p. 152) for refugees. Refugees who consider mental health issues a stigma do not disclose their problems. Slobodin et al. (2018) highlighted the importance of culturally sensitive mental health interventions for refugees to prevent shame, guilt, and fear of negative stigma.

Linguistically and culturally appropriate services for newcomers are necessary (Stewart et al., 2010). Culturally appropriate support programs and peer communication in first languages help refugees to overcome the challenges (Stewart et al., 2011). Socioeconomic climate, historical background and social norms, and organizational structures for coordinating resettlement services are important ecological factors for refugees' successful resettlement (Smith, 2008).

Agbényiga et al. (2012) highlighted the importance of agency support, the impact and on individuals and family, and the importance of community ties for Burmese and Burundians refugees' resettlement in the United States. The professionals also

emphasized that holistic and sustainable social support for refugees would be helpful to overcome several barriers including communication and economic integration (Simich et al., 2005). Since culturally appropriate social support is crucial for refugees' successful resettlement, involving newcomers in policy recommendations is suggested to improve refugees' integration in the host country (Stewart et al., 2010). However, the current refugee resettlement system has continuously been centralized and highly professionalized over time due to being funded by the federal government.

Social Support and Refugee Students in Higher Education

Studies about refugee students in higher education have mainly focused on their academic and educational success (Gray & Irwin, 2013; Harris & Marlowe, 2011; Kanu, 2008; McBrien, 2005; Taylor & Sidhu, 2012). Education is important for refugees' successful resettlement and adjustment in the host country. Education also plays a significant role for refugees' social mobility (Htoo, 2014). Bowen et al. (2005) explained the role of higher education as a gateway for socio-economic mobility in terms of accessing high quality jobs and high wages as well as entering the middle class.

Htoo (2014) studied the relationship between academic motivation and academic achievement for Burmese refugee students. Three domains were highlighted to promote access to higher education of refugee students in Australia-- prior life experiences, language development, and the culture of learning environments (Naido, 2015). However, including education, it is also important to understand refugee students' needs and challenges outside of academia. During the refugee students' learning, social support for refugee students' well-being and mental health plays a significant role in their

socioeconomic status and quality of life (Lenette, 2016). Table 4 shows profiles of 20 studies on refugee students in higher education from 2000 to 2020.

As shown in Table 4, only three of the 20 studies focused on Burmese refugee college students. Also, only three studies were conducted in the U.S. From 20 studies, the majority (13) report on empirical research conducted with people from a refugee background in relation to higher education. The empirical articles are broadly qualitative (11), with one article drawing on data collected via mixed methods. Only two studies were quantitative. Seventeen focused on the higher education system including accessing higher education and educational outcomes. Only four articles included social support; however, they are about support for the educational system. Refugee college students' resettlement experiences in the U.S. have not been focused on. The support system for Burmese refugee college students during resettlement also has not been studied. Increasing access to higher education brings refugees various economic and societal benefits in the host country (Ferede, 2010). Successful higher education is helpful to curb the refugee students' marginalization and to enhance their potential contribution to the host country's socioeconomic development, and to increase refugee students' social cohesion with better settlement outcomes in the host country (Lenette, 2016). Ferede (2010) called for studies about refugee students' experiences with accessing higher education in the host society.

Table 4*Profile of Studies on Refugee Students in Higher Education, 2000-2020*

Author/ Year	Location	Theory Identified/ Design	Sample	Source Country of the Refugees	Measure & Data Collection	Social Work Presence	Resettlement Style and Social Support Identified	Findings/ Results
Baker, Ramsay, Irwin, & Miles/ 2018	Australia	Conceptualization of 'hot' and 'cold' knowledge Participatory research	Seven participants were from African (n = 6) and Asian (n = 1) at a regional Australian university	Africa and Asia	Individual interviews	None/ Education	The importance of support from universities	Identified forms of support from hot to warm to cold. Refugee students prefer warm support that is from trusted people. University needs to develop warm support to refugee students.
Dryden-Peterson, & Giles/ 2010	Canada	None/ Critical Analysis	None/ Literatures and policy	None	None	None/ Education and policy	None	Insisted the role and importance of higher education as a policy priority for refugees and society

Earnest, Joyce, De Mori, & Silvagni/ 2010	Australia	None/ Needs analysis	Six male and four females from Sudan, for interviews / nine male and five females for focus group.	Sudan, Somalia, Afghanistan, Sierra Leone and Eritrea	Focus groups and In-depth, semi-structured interviews	None/ Education	None	In University, current support systems and programs for refugee students are not enough. Identified academic needs of students from refugee backgrounds.
Ferede/ 2010	Canada	Scoping review	None	None	None	None/ Education	None	Identified the economic and academic factors related to refugee students' access in higher-education system of Canada.
Gray & Irwin/ 2013	Australia	Critical analysis	Literatures about refugee students and higher education	None	None	None/Education	None/ support from universities	Described refugee students' educational and cultural barriers from the existing literatures.
Harris, & Marlowe/ 2011	Australia	None	Focus group with twenty refugee students. Individual	Somalia, Sudan, Liberia, Ethiopia, and Sierra	Qualitative study	None/Education	None	Identified refugee students' challenges and problems experienced in the

			interviews with academic staff at one Australian university.	Leone				host country education system.
Hartley, Fleay, Baker, Burke, & Field/ 2018	Australia	Participatory project	88 responses to the online survey (67 university staff members, 21 representatives from community organisations working with people seeking asylum) 28 interviews (11 refugee students, 11 people representing nine	N/A	Online survey and individual semi-structured interviews	None/ Education	The importance of language support and the role of higher education.	Refugee students meet various challenges and barriers to access higher education such as Federal Government policy, university system, individual issues.

			universities , 6 representati ves from community organizatio ns.					
Hickey & Choi/ 2013	United States: Midwest	Phenomenol ogical approach,	18 male and 12 female participants for interviews.	Burma	In-depth interviews	None/ Education	None	Described Burmese refugee students' specialized educational needs, structural and pedagogical challenges.
Htoo/ 2014	Thailand	Correlationa l research design	201 students completed survey questionnai res.	Burma	Academic Motivatio n Scale (AMS) assessed the ptp's academic motivation . Grade point average (GPA) was utilized to measure students'	None	None	discovered academic correlation and academic achievement of Burmese refugee students in higher education are negatively correlated.

					academic achievement			
Jack, Chase, & Warwick/ 2019	England	The health-promoting university (HPU) and the social ecological model (SEM)	10 student participants and two academic staff from supporting student health and well-being and one manager from the health and well-being team.	Burundi, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Congo and Somalia	A qualitative interpretive research and three data collections ; Photovoice, narrative inquiry and key informant interviews . Content analysis and analysis of photographs.	None/ Psychology	None/ health and well-being	Using an SEM approach, acknowledged refugee students' needs from higher education and identified factors that impact on psychosocial well-being.
Joyce, Earnest, De Mori, &	Australia	None/ Need analysis	six male participants and five	from Sudan, Somalia, Sierra	Focus groups and In-	None/ Education	None	Refugee students' needs and barriers to success their education.

Silvagni / 2010			female participants	Leone, Uganda, Liberia and Eritrea.	depth interviews			
McBrien/ 2005	United States	None/A review of the literature	Literatures about refugee students resettled in the United States	None	None	None/Education	None	Reviewed with highlighting important factors; premigration and acculturation stress, language ability for refugees from various cultures and time periods
McKenzie, Stephens, Bayfield, & Mills / 2019	England	Program assessment	Described programs and interview with two students	Syria	Case study	Education	None	Suggested how higher education institutions can improve refugee students' accessing
Morrice/ 2013	England	Bourdieu's framework	Two women and two men	Iran, Iraq and Zimbabwe	Semi-structured interviews / A thematic narrative analysis and cross-case analysis	None/ Education	None	Described how important pre-and post-migration experience to begin higher education in the host country. Do not over-generalize or universalize the

								needs and the experience of refugee students.
Naidoo/ 2015	Australia	Intercultural pedagogy and sensitivity/ Qualitative research	14 university students and 39 secondary students / 6 to 8 staff at the three different universities	Nepal, Burma, Bhutan, Bosnia, Iraq, Iran, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Kenya and Pakistan	Semi-structured interviews with university students/ Semi-structured focus group interviews with university staff and high school students	None/ Education	None/ Support for academic success	Established three primary factors that educators need to acknowledge for refugee students' academic success: prior life experiences, language development and the culture of learning environments.
Peterson/ 2010	Canada	Scoping review	None	None	None	None/ Education	None	Described the origins and development and importance of the student refugee program of the World University Service of Canada.
Ramsay & Baker/ 2019	None	A meta-scoping	Literatures about	None	None	Education	None	Explored a holistic view of

		study – scoping review	refugee students and higher education					higher education in refugee camp and host country.
Sontag/ 2018	Switzerla nd	None	Four participants with individual interviews.	N/A	Case study	None	None	Examined the skills of refugee students and identified the barriers to integrate their skills into host country.
Streitwieser, Ohorodnik, & Jeong/ 2019	United States	A review of the literature	Higher education interventio ns initiated between 2013 and 2017 in North America and Europe	None	None	Education	None	Examined higher education interventions to decrease barriers for refugee students' access to higher institutions.
Zlatkin- Troitschans kaia, Happ, Nell-Müller, Deribo, Reinhardt, & Toepper/ 2018	Germany	Evidence- centered design Program assessment	Students' assessment -based feedback for the online study program	Syrian Arab Republic (37%), Somalia (8%) and Afghanist an (6%); the other	Descriptiv e analysis of students' backgroun d data during the SUCCESS project.	Education	None	Refugee students with various background of are interested in this program. Described specific challenges about

			from 1,376 refugees	half of the students come from other African, Arab or Asian countries.				integration into higher education.
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With parents' expectations for greater opportunity to become a successful immigrant, higher education is key for refugee youth. Studies focused on refugee students from higher education are needed to describe the refugee group's goals in the host country. As mentioned above, refugee children tend to learn English faster than their parents. Because parental English proficiency affects switching roles between parents and children, parent-child conflict and generational dissonance has emerged (Zhou, 2001). In this complicated situation, among refugee studies, few have focused on refugee students in higher education except in relation to educational outcomes. This study focused on Burmese refugee students in higher education and aimed to explore their lived experience with resettlement and the role of social support.

Study Rationale

According to the NASW Code of Ethics (2015), social workers' primary goal is to provide help to people in need and to address social problems. NASW (2015) describes the primary mission of the social work profession as: "to enhance human well-being and help meet basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty" (p. 1).

Refugees are people in need and social workers have the ability to help refugees successfully resettle in the United States. Social support is crucial for refugees and the role of social workers is important for refugees' resettlement in the United States. Refugees are socially isolated and face lack of social support in the host country (Simich et al., 2005), and so need to build new social networks in the resettlement area. Refugees in the United States have their own cultures, and their culture varies depending on the ethnic group even though they came from the same country. Powell (2001) has

challenged social work professionals to expand their horizons. Social workers need to be open toward client diversity, and to help clients of varying backgrounds make positive changes in their lives (Ringstad, 2014).

However, so far, many studies about refugees focus on mental health and trauma (Beiser & Hou, 2017; Lindert et al., 2016; Marshall et al, 2005; Mölsä et al., 2017; Montgomery, 2008; Pumariaga et al, 2005; Riley et al., 2017). This tendency may limit refugees to being passive during the resettlement period. Targeting refugees' mental health in research and among service providers was criticized because it may pathologize refugees (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2003). To avoid considering refugees as victims, this study aimed to explore the resettlement experiences of Burmese refugee students in higher education in the state of Indiana. Studies about refugee students in higher education mostly highlighted their academic success (Gray, & Irwin, 2013; McBrien, 2005; Shakya et al., 2010). Instead of concentrating on the students' educational outcomes, this study explored the role of social support in refugee students' resettlement to represent and understand their experience in the United States.

Also, only 1 % of refugees go on to earn a college degree (UNHCR, 2016). This study aimed to learn from this unique population of refugees who are working on earning a degree in higher education. The participants are in the 1 % of refugees who enrolled in universities in the world.

This study will be a foundation to enhance the importance of studying refugees' resettlement experiences to seek their social and emotional well-being in the host country. Social support was identified as a key component of successful resettlement. As mentioned in the literature review, choosing a qualitative method for this exploratory

study is appropriate due to the lack of studies of Burmese refugee college students in the United States.

Chapter 4: Methodology

Author Positionality

Before I present the findings, it is helpful to understand the researcher's positionality and the researcher's lens on the data. The researcher is an Asian female scholar who identifies as Korean with expertise in immigrants and refugees. However, as an international scholar who has researched immigrants and refugees in the past, I acknowledge that my positionality influenced the interpretation of the findings to some extent.

I have lived in the United States since 2012 as an international student and as an Asian woman. As a non-native English speaker and person of color, I experienced socioeconomic, cultural, and institutional oppression in the states. My experiences in the United States overlapped with the refugee participants' resettlement experience in the host country. The participants in this study are non-native English speakers and people of color. I also experienced the same needs and challenges of refugees as an international student, minority, and female in the U.S.

I considered myself a Christian. my social and religious experience has similarities with the participants. All participants are Christian. However, being an international student in the United States is different from being a refugee in this country. I acknowledged the difference in the status. This different position might impact the process of data analysis.

Data Collection Procedures

This study was exploratory because, as aforementioned, refugee students in higher education have not been studied other than in terms of academic outcomes or mental

health. Choosing a qualitative method for this exploratory study was appropriate due to the lack of studies of Burmese refugee students in higher education in the U.S. The purpose of this study was to learn about the experiences of Burmese students pursuing higher education in the U.S., especially their resettlement experiences and the role of social support. This study was cross-sectional, as the data for the study was collected at a single point in time.

This research explored: 1) the lived experiences of Burmese refugee college students' resettlement, 2) the roles they perform in family, school, and society, and 3) the influence of social support on the resettlement experiences of Burmese refugee college students.

Prior to data gathering, institutional review board (IRB) from Indiana University approved this study to ensure protection for research participants. The researcher proceeded with recruiting participants through Myanmar Student Organizations in IUPUI and Indiana University-Bloomington for one-on-one interviews. The participants were also recruited through social network platforms such as Facebook and Instagram.

To be eligible for this study, participants had to meet the criteria as follows:

1. Identifies as a Burmese student enrolled in an institution of higher education
2. Resettled in the U.S. as a refugee
2. Ability to speak English
3. Resides in the state of Indiana

A Burmese American who was born in the United States was not considered as eligible to participate in the study. This study employed purposive sampling. As a non-probability

sampling approach, the research results cannot be generalized. However, purposive sampling was appropriate to the study purpose. This study recruited 32 participants.

Prior to the individual interviews, participants were asked to respond to a demographic survey (See Appendix A). Demographic items inquired gender, age, length of time in the U.S., English proficiency, college major, family size, living arrangements, employment status, ethnic group, marital status, parental status, and year in school. Due to the COVID 19 pandemic, the individual interviews were conducted via Zoom. The semi-structured individual interviews took 60 to 90 minutes. All interviews were audiotape-recorded and then transcribed verbatim. The participants were selected voluntarily and received a small amount of compensation (\$10 gift card).

The interview questions were open-ended to allow participants to freely and fully describe their experiences. While several questions were prepared in advance (see Appendix B), the interview was guided by the participants' narratives and themes that emerged as the data collection and analysis process evolved. The shortest interview was 52 minutes long, while the longest was 100 minutes. A total of 32 interviews were completed from February 19, 2021 to March 16, 2021. The voices of the students provided a detailed description of their experience as refugees in the United States.

Data Analysis

For transcription, this study used audio recordings of each interview. The researcher transcribed each interview word-for-word. Through this step, transcripts became the data for analysis. Moreover, the researcher used memoing with audio recording concurrently. Audio-recording and note-taking were complementary to conduct a thorough analysis of the narrative data.

Descriptive analysis was used to summarize the participants' demographic data. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the narrative data. This method is used to identify and analyze themes of meaning patterns in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006) as well as to manifest the important themes within the phenomenon of the study (Daly et al., 1997). Thematic analysis is appropriate to describe a data set in detail.

Phenomenology is widely used for qualitative research that focuses on researching an individual's lived experiences (Neubauer et al., 2019), perceptions, and feelings (Nemtay & Hines, 2020). In phenomenological research, the meaning of interviewees is explored more deeply about the questions that they are asked (Hall & Hall, 2004). However, instead of deeply focusing on the individual's perceptions and feelings, this study explored realities, meaning, and experiences of refugee students. To report participants' experiences and reality, thematic analysis can be considered a constructionist method which reflects the participants' realities (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The purpose of this study was to describe Burmese refugee college students' resettlement experiences using participants' own words. However, the existing research literature on this agenda is very limited. As a flexible, useful, and foundational method, thematic analysis is widely used in qualitative research methods (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Moreover, Thematic analysis can generate unexpected insights on under-researched area (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Therefore, as an exploratory study, thematic analysis was appropriate to analyze the data about Burmese students' resettlement approach and to describe the importance of social support for their resettlement.

Thematic analysis was conducted through these processes:

In Phase I, the researcher began reading and re-reading the transcripts of individual interviews to familiarize herself with the data. Then, for phase 2, the researcher highlighted the text identifying key words of the text across the entire data set, thus generating initial codes. After generating the initial codes in phase 3, the researcher searched for themes among the codes and gathered all the data related to the potential themes. A theme can be understood as “composed of coded data grouped together according to similarities or patterns” (Labra et al., 2019, p. 8). After searching for themes, the researcher reviewed the themes from phase 3. This is phase 4 – reviewing the themes. This review process was conducted using several questions (Labra et al., 2019) such as:

- Is this a theme, sub-theme, or code?
- Does the theme accurately represent the data with which it is linked?
- Is the theme too abstract or difficult to understand or, conversely, is it so specific that it cannot be linked more broadly with data?
- Is there a clearly identifiable logic to the hierarchical relationships between themes, subthemes, and codes?
- Which data does the theme include and which do these exclude?
- Is the theme a good representation of the sub-themes? Are the sub-themes a good representation of the codes?
- Does the thematic matrix contain the information necessary to answer the research question and the study objectives? (p. 11)

After reviewing the themes, the themes were defined and further refined to present through the analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) explain that ‘define and refine’ means “identifying the essence of what each theme is about and determining what aspect of the data each theme captures” (p. 92). In phase 5, the researcher decided whether the themes would be retained or not. After defining and refining the themes, labels were given to each theme for the final analysis.

In phase 6, the final analysis was produced as a report with sufficient evidence of the themes across the data set. This final analysis needs to provide a “concise, coherent,

logical, non-repetitive and interesting account of the story the data tell within and across themes” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 93).

Strategy for Rigor, Trustworthiness, and Ethical Consideration

Auditing was employed to enhance the rigor and validity of this study. All explanations of the research decisions were presented through this study (Koch, 2006). Then, the research process and the product of inquiry were examined to confirm the trustworthiness of the findings. The researcher maintained a log of all research activities, improved memos, preserved research journals, and recorded all data collection as a detailed audit trail. In addition, the researcher analyzed all of the study procedures (Creswell & Millar, 2000). Through memoing, this study verified the credibility and trustworthiness of this research. The coding was also reviewed by my chair and colleagues. I discussed any changes with my committee chair.

Participants were treated fairly and carefully with openness and respect by the researcher (Mills, 2000). The researcher used pseudonyms to protect participants’ identity. Participants had the right to decline any questions and withdraw from the study at any point without fear of repercussions. The researcher tried to eliminate unnecessary risks from the research design. The benefits to participants and society must exceed the potential risks of the research (Banister, 2007). The file of transcripts was stored on a password-protected computer. Any back up data files were also stored in a secure location.

Member Checking

After data collection, member checking was used to increase the confidence that the participants’ experiences were accurately captured. Member checking involves

providing transcribed interviews and emerging themes with the participants to determine whether they are accurate (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Ten of the participants participated in the member checking process through email to provide comments and feedback about the accuracy of the results. Transcribed interviews and major themes were provided to the participants to ensure their accuracy. The participants confirmed the accuracy of the results with positive feedback and did not request any changes. The member checking was conducted throughout the analysis process. The interviewees' comments and feedback determined the truth value of the data. By involving the participants to check and confirm the findings, the potential for researcher bias can be reduced (Birt et al., 2016). The accuracy of the interview and themes were ensured using member checking.

Chapter 5: Findings

This chapter describes the sample of refugee students in higher education who participated in the one-on-one interviews and their resettlement stories in the United States. The aims of the data analysis were to explore:

- 1) the lived experiences of Burmese refugee college students' resettlement
- 2) the roles they perform in family, school, and society, and
- 3) the influence of social support in the resettlement experiences of Burmese refugee college students.

This chapter presents the socio-demographic characteristics of the sample and the results of the thematic analysis.

Study Participants

The one-on-one interviews were conducted in February and March, 2021. At first, the Myanmar Student Association at Indiana University-Bloomington and the Myanmar Student Organization at IUPUI were contacted by email to identify potential study participants. However, not many students responded to the initial study invitation. In the meantime, the researcher acknowledged that Burmese college students are actively using social network services, for example, Instagram and Facebook. At the same time, the researcher contacted Burmese churches and community organizations in the state of Indiana to request their assistance with recruitment of participants. However, they also did not respond except for one community organization for Burmese refugees, the Burmese American Community Institute (BACI).

Instagram was the most powerful channel for the recruitment of the participants. The researcher searched Burmese college students' accounts through the Myanmar

Student Organization of IU Bloomington and the IUPUI Instagram account. Each organization has its own Instagram account. The researcher individually sent a recruitment flyer to the Burmese students on the Myanmar Student Organizations’ Instagram. Initially, 33 students expressed an interest in the individual interviews and ultimately 32 Burmese students participated in the study. Thus, 32 cases were used for the descriptive and thematic analysis.

The final sample consisted of 32 Burmese college students in the state of Indiana. It was suggested that qualitative studies with between 20 and 30 participants achieve saturation (Dworkin, 2012). Table 5 presents the socio-demographic characteristics of the study sample. The participants met the criteria as Burmese refugees resettled in the U.S. who could speak English and who were residents of the state of Indiana. All of the participants were born in Burma. Religious persecution of Christians in Burma led these students and their families to flee their country.

The sample was predominantly female (84%). Participants ranged in age between 19 and 26 years with a mean age of 21. Among the 32 students, 25 have been in the U.S. for more than 10 years. The average age of study participants when they arrived in the U.S. was 9.5 years old (see Table 5).

Table 5

Socio-demographic Characteristics of Study Participants (N=32)

		N	%	Mean
Age				21.1
	18-22 years old	28	88	
	23-26 years old	4	12	
Gender				
	Female	27	84	
	Male	5	16	
Religion	Christian	32	100	

Have lived in the United States				11.1
	Less than 10 years	7	22	
	More than 10 years	25	78	
Average age when the participants arrived in the U.S.		9.5 years old		
Classification in college	Freshman	8		
	Sophomore	5		
	Junior	8		
	Senior	8		
	Graduate/Professional	3		

Table 6 presents the profile of study participants. To protect participants' identities, the interview data is described using pseudonyms that were selected by the participants. The majority of participants (90%) were undergraduate students. Only 2 of 32 participants had parents who graduated from college, both of whom were the father, rather than the mother.

Table 6

Profile of Study Participants

	Name (Pseudonym)	Age	Gender	State of Resettlement	Major	Year	Parents with college degree
1	Rose	25	Female	Indiana	Civic Leadership	Senior	No
2	Jen	21	Female	Indiana	Psychology	Senior	No
3	Leon	20	Male	Indiana	Christian Ministry	Freshman	No
4	Zi	22	Female	New Jersey	Biology	Senior	No
5	Nini	20	Female	Maryland	Psychology	Sophomore	Yes, father only

6	Lisa	20	Female	Indiana	International Business and Business Management	Sophomore	No
7	Jenny	19	Female	Washington	Nursing	Freshman	No
8	Jelly	22	Female	California	Management	Senior	No
9	Sillia	21	Female	Indiana	Exercise Science	Junior	No
10	Alen	20	Male	Indiana	Political Science	Freshman	No
11	Chimmy	21	Female	North Carolina	Nursing	Junior	No
12	Moon	23	Female	Indiana	Psychology	Graduate	No
13	Maya	22	Female	Ohio	Psychology and Political Science	Junior	No
14	April	23	Female	Indiana	Social Work	Senior	No
15	Levi	23	Male	Indiana	Sociology	Senior	No
16	Thian	23	Female	Tennessee	Neuroscience	Graduate	No
17	Dou dou	20	Female	Indiana	Political Science	Sophomore	No
18	Jane	26	Female	Kentucky	Public Health	Graduate	No
19	Molly	22	Female	Indiana	Liberal Studies	Senior	No
20	Fiona	21	Female	Indiana	Human Biology	Junior	No
21	Mang	19	Female	Indiana	Elementary education	Freshman	No
22	Dot	19	Male	Indiana	Business	Freshman	No
23	Grace	21	Female	Indiana	Health Services Management	Junior	Yes, father only
24	Forest	18	Female	Tennessee	Neuroscience	Freshman	No
25	Michele	22	Female	Indiana	Marketing	Junior	No
26	LYLY	22	Female	Indiana	Accounting & HR	Sophomore	No
27	Eloise	19	Female	Indiana	Political Science	Freshman	No

28	Sang	21	Female	Indiana	Human Resource Management	Senior	No
29	Tial	21	Female	Indiana	Human Resource Management	Junior	No
30	Sung	20	Female	Iowa	Psychology	Sophomore	No
31	Rain	22	Female	North Carolina	Community Health	Junior	No
32	Lauren	20	Male	Indiana	Accounting	Freshman	No

Identifying Major Themes

This section describes the themes that emerged from the coding process of the analysis. Four themes were generated from the narrative data that helped to answer the research questions. Many of the themes are interrelated. Four major themes were identified: Challenges of resettlement, Resettlement needs, Resources of social support, and Resettlement experiences (see Table 7). These themes are examined in detail throughout this section.

Table 7

List of Major Themes

Themes	Sub-themes
Challenges of resettlement	Language barriers
	Cultural differences
	Racism
Resettlement needs	Learning English
	Welcome place
	Transportation
	Educational mentor
Resources of Social support	Co-ethnic community support
	Connections with Americans

Resettlement experiences	Blooming flower out of concrete
	A shift from feeling shameful to feeling proud
	Enrolling in college to avoid family shame

Challenges of Resettlement

Through interviews about refugee students' resettlement, various challenges were identified. The primary challenges were language barriers, cultural differences, and racism. Most of the interviewees and their families did not have any knowledge or experience about English and American culture before arriving in the U.S.

Language barriers

A lack of knowledge of the English language was a main challenge to refugee students when they arrived in the United States. Language is not just a language. Language affects every aspect of human life. To adjust in the new environment, language is a necessary and vital tool. However, refugee students and their families did not have the opportunity to learn English before arrival in the host country. This language deficiency was also a barrier to integration and thus their well-being. Lauren explained that due to the lack of English, it was hard to interact with other American students in school:

It was very difficult. I would say cause I'm since I felt like I was like the only Burmese student [in the school]...When I first came here, I didn't know that English was the thing and then even the language that they were teaching me I didn't even know that it was English because this ESL teacher, she was trying to teach me and then I would teach her back at my language...

In the beginning, for me, like since I didn't know English and stuff it was hard for me to find friends and stuff so it was just me and then. Like I didn't have any other relatives or anything and then until I'm till I got into like first second grade or so like I started being close with my teachers and then making interactions with the students more.

Chimmy also shared how she and her family struggled due to language barriers:

It was definitely the language barrier because, obviously, if I don't speak English and I can't do my homework, I can't participate in class, I can't do the things that they asked me to do in class so language is definitely one of them [barriers]. The other thing could also be since our parents don't speak English, other kids if they go home and they need help their parents can help them, but us we either guess we either know how to do it because we already spoke English. But I didn't speak English, then yes, so I didn't know how to do it, or we just guessed or we didn't do it at all, so the homework, it would kind of seem like we didn't try, but we just didn't know how because we don't understand the language yet. So that just goes back to language barrier but yeah that was definitely one of the biggest ones.

Sung also shared that if she had better English skills, she would have readily adjusted to the host country:

I think if I understood English or had people that we're like of the same ethnicity, I would have adjusted just fine. It's almost liked the biggest thing.

Rain struggled a lot compared to her American friends due to the lack of English skills and was eager to learn English:

I would have to work extra hard compared to my friends, compared to like my Burmese friends and also once I know the language, I have to still work extra hard compared to my American friends, because I didn't know the language and I came in there [America] like late. So, there was a lot of that struggle, so I have to just study harder stay for tutoring extra, even if I didn't know ask for help extra and then I think I struggle really hard...Language that I needed to learn faster.

Jenny also described language as her biggest barrier to adjust to new environment and different culture:

I think the language was the biggest barrier for me. The language and the culture, I would say, because I grew up in like Christian oriented family and like where I guess you can say very traditional and because I was just like I started living in the US like I didn't know about their cultures like what they thought like what for them was right. I couldn't really differentiate it because I didn't understand the language, it was even harder for me to like try to understand everything else as well ... I think the most important factor [to adjust in the United States] would be like understanding the language like knowing the language [English] –

The language barrier affected both the participants and their parents. Sung shared how the lack of English has influenced the views of her parents regarding mental health or therapy in the United States because they do not understand the importance of mental health, which is explained in English, not in their native language.

Usually, when it comes to mental health is usually in English which is why it's hard for parents to really understand what it 's really about and understand how impactful it can be. So I just hope that maybe I could be the bridge. Parents understanding mental health better since I'll be speaking Chin; a Burmese while also understanding everything in English. So maybe I can help them understand better and even going to therapies and stuff. I think for our parents it's hard because they always need like a translator or interpreter. But if it's like a person that speaks the same language as them, I hope that maybe that can bring them more comfort in they go into therapies and stuff if they need to. So this kind of like my goal is to bring more awareness about mental health to my community.

Cultural differences

Along with the language barrier, cultural differences were also identified as one of the challenges when refugee students resettled in the host country. Burma is an Asian country with different culture and language from America. Interviewees needed to learn about a new culture and society, and then build their life from nothing. Alen explained that it was hard to make American or White friends due to the cultural differences:

It was hard to make friends at first, I'd say, like the trying to talk to them, but then eventually I found the other Chin kids and we would like make friends and stuff. But, like, for some reason it's always hard to make friends with non-Asians are like non ethnic people like trying to be friends with like Americans is really hard for some reason, like it's just we're just whole different like connect with them like a deeper level, I guess. I'm not sure like why, but like I'd have like a Mexican friends and stuff like we can like talk about whatever you want is of be friends and stuff but then like with. The Americans like what the way it would say white people. Like I don't like their lives is, to me, is just seems so vastly different to ours and, like any friends that I had like I couldn't really if I wanted to, I couldn't really talk to them about like any problems that I was going through at home or anything like that it would just be like very surface level conversations with them. I wouldn't go any deeper than that.

Participants shared that they struggled to have American meals in school. Chimmy explained that adjusting to American food in school was one of the barriers:

Definitely, the food, food because yeah because my taste buds is very, very Asian and even to this day, like I don't like the toppings of Pizzas. So I only like the crust and then I eat food really weirdly like I don't like mac and cheese. I don't like a lot of the American foods, I would say so in school, we all we have American food. The first few times like I probably didn't like my food. But I think as I grew older like middle school I just started to accept it, but I didn't love it, you know. We were probably too embarrassed to pack our lunch, too, because we don't want to be the kid that brings their lunch from home. I don't know why we thought about that, but that's how we thought elementary kids and middle school. Food is food was probably one of the barriers.

April shared that if she was able to have Asian foods in school, it would be good for her because she did not eat during the school day because of the unfamiliar foods:

The food was not good. You know because I was not getting used to the food, so if they had like a food that's kind of like customize the Asians, that would be really great as because when I arrived here, I was not used to the food and I would just go the whole school day without eating. Just because I didn't like it.

Grace also shared that she did not enjoy the school food because American food is different from her own ethnic foods:

Adjusting to their [US] food. I did not like school [foods] like it was just pizza I still don't like pizza till now. So it was like the lunch food I don't like it either, because it's a different culture we eat rice stuff every morning and stuff.

Moreover, the cultural difference also affects identity. Nini shared her experience of a cultural identity crisis:

People in my age group struggle a lot with mental health because, as refugees and also just I guess trying to like figure out like where we belong, like the cultural identity and a lot of pressure from our communities. There's a lot of pressure for us to like succeed and do good since we are the first generation so and also, we have to I guess there's really no one there to help us like whether it's like failing

FAFSA [Federal student aid] or like during that kind of stuff since our parents never like didn't go to college here, so they don't know the process, so we have to figure it out ourselves so I guess that's a lot of pressure for us to.

Racism

Living in a different culture and language brought various experiences with racial discrimination. Participants experienced racism and discrimination since they resettled, but one participant also faced racism in higher education by professors and peers.

Forest shared that one of the reasons to relocate Indiana from Tennessee was racial discrimination by her neighbors:

When we first arrived [U.S] here we didn't get that sense of community there like in Nashville. A lot of people were being racist to us and I feel like having people you can lean on and like some people can help you would be really nice.

...

When I lived in Nashville, I thought all of the people were racist.

...

In Tennessee, because the place where we left like it was very racially discriminated, we got a lot of discrimination against us, so we had to move.

Nini also experienced racism by her classmates when she started to go to school in the United States:

I understand what all my classmates are saying and I face a lot of racism, too, but I didn't understand for the first three months, because they would be like go back to China and I'd be like I'm not even Chinese why you saying that. I just said that but didn't like thinking back, I was like oh, they were actually being racist but I didn't understand that at the time.

Jen experienced microaggressions from her professors and peers in college. The professors considered her with biased views they had about an Asian female student in the United States:

As for the environment of the school, it was very challenging because I'm a female, and I'm an Asian. It's so many professors who have this negative stereotype to get towards me that you know. I'm an Asian and female therefore they automatically assume that I'm an international student, therefore, you know they have this bias that the international students are backed up by their parents' money so they automatically assume that like I don't really want the education, I just do it to get the degree, so that you know I can work at my dad's company or something of that sort, so those factors really do have a huge influence is by academic, especially college, there are very many instances where I receive so much racism from even professors and peers.

Jen also endured racism from classmates in college:

Especially in psychology, the majority of them are white people and minority is a low percentage, so if it's a small discussion psychology class and you were there, and most of them are like white girls and when you were there 'are you actually in the right class?' so it's really crazy.

Resettlement Needs

Through the interviews, participants consistently mentioned how they and their families struggled to adjust to the new environment and the needs for their resettlement as newly arrived refugees. This theme was identified by participants' firsthand experiences. Refugee students went through the refugee resettlement process as children at an early age. Therefore, the sub-themes are related to participants' childhood experiences. The sub-themes related to adjustment needs were learning English, a welcome place to feel a sense of belonging, transportation accessibility, and educational figure and guide for their school life.

Learning English

Participants shared how they struggled to adjust to the new environment due to language differences. When they arrived at the airport, most participants reported that they could not speak and understand English. To resettle in the host country, they had to start to learn the new language and needed translation services.

Jenny explained that how the translation services is necessary for the newly arrived refugees:

Translation might be one of the most important things because if you don't understand the language and what they're trying to say to you, you can't really get anything out of.

Chimmy shared how the translator was helpful for her adjustment:

In Indiana, we have like ESL classes, so those are really, really helpful. We were able to communicate with our other Chin friends and we also had interpreters there, because Indiana you know the Chin a lot of the Chin community is based here, so there were when I was in second grade, there was a translator already here, so he was a very, very good help.

Welcome place

Another important need for the refugees is a welcome place with a sense of belonging. Interviewees highlighted how the welcome or safe place played an important role in the students' adjustment. Maya noted the importance of a safe place with people from the same ethnic groups for her adjustment:

After we created the church and more people came, I think that helped a lot because it was a place where we all gather and talk about our own experiences like what we went through that week, so it was like a safe space almost so the church really helped a lot. And we would need a safe space where we can talk about our own experience, because we couldn't really go to American person and because we couldn't speak English that well, so it was nice to have someone that like people that were able to speak our language and understand what we went through. I think that [the same ethnic group community] was like really good resource for us.

Michele also shared how a sense of belonging and connections are important to resettle in the new environment:

Newly arrived refugees need a community and a sense of belongingness, a sense of being known and where you are welcomed into a community like connections, I think, it is really, really important because people need connection, people need that validity in like their relationship to kind of feel like they belong there and they can live there and be happy and have like a fulfill like life there. I think that's the most important thing.

Transportation

Transportation accessibility was one of the key needs and challenges facing refugees newly arrived in the United States. As one of the basic needs, transportation affects newly arrived refugees' survival. Forest shared that her foremost need was a car:

A car was definitely needed because, like, I was very busy during my high school year but, since I didn't have a car like it was very hard for me to be like involved in like a lot of things that I wanted to do.

Lauren said that she had to walk to school due to her family not having a vehicle:

We didn't have a vehicle or we didn't have a car and then transportation was hard. Because in the beginning of my school year, they said that there was no transportation. So, I had to since I was too small to go to school, by myself here. My mom or my dad or my relative parents would always have to take me to school and then since my parents didn't have a car, and if the relatives are working, they would have to walk me to school... When we first came here, vehicles and house were needed.

Molly also highlighted the need for a car in her resettlement because she could not do activities without transportation:

Car is a much needed in order to get to one place, even if we want to get involved in school activities, we need to be picked up way after school and the bus don't want any more so yeah because of transportation, there are a lot of times we didn't get to do things that we wanted to.

Educational Mentor

Interviewees also explained how they struggled to adjust to the school system without any help such as mentors or advisors. An educational mentor was noted as a foremost need for the refugee students' resettlement in the host country. Their own country and America have different school systems. Jane shared that:

When I first arrived, I was very young, I would say, helping with my schoolwork. Because both of my parents don't know English well, I had to ask my friends and

they don't speak English too, so I think we struggled with that the most in not like sense like I don't know where Asian like you know completing your work and doing homework is very important, so when I first come here and. When the teacher like things that I don't do my work because I don't want to do it was very hurtful for me. It wasn't because I don't want to do it it's because I don't know how supposed to do it. Math was the only thing that I could do I couldn't do my reading I couldn't do my social study things like that, so I think helping with schoolwork.

Chimmy shared her experience in school:

In North Carolina like I said they didn't really have any types of program, for I think foreigners, because they weren't used to it, yet so back then I just had to like learn on my own kind of thing. My teacher, she was able to help me, sometimes, but obviously I don't understand what she was saying so maybe like having some type of [I don't know like maybe] like a study buddy or someone that like came and helped me with like my homework, or something like that, because I probably didn't know what I was doing.

Alen mentioned the importance of an educational guide:

As a high school that I know that I wish that I knew more about the College application process and, what it takes to be successful...How prepared, you should be to start writing and stuff like I had trouble with procrastination basically, and so I think if I knew more about like how important scholarships were to college and like how much how expensive colleges, it would have helped me a lot I think in being motivated.

Resources of Social Support

The influence of social support in the resettlement experiences of Burmese refugee college students varied greatly from the Burmese and American communities. In analyzing the data, the resources of social support were deeply related to the refugee students' adjustment to the host country. To be specific, support from members of the same ethnic group was indispensable to the newly arrived refugees.

Co-ethnic Community Support

Refugees who cannot speak the host country's language face language barriers after arrival in the host country. Burmese students also experienced the same challenge as

foreigners because they did not speak English. For newly arrived refugees, language does not mean just language. For refugees, language is an essential tool to survive and resettle in the new land as a foreigner in the host country. Thus, support from people in the same ethnic group who speak the same language was tremendously important to the newly arrived refugees. Most of the Burmese students shared about the importance of the Burmese community for their early resettlement.

Eloise shared how the Burmese community helped her family,

“I think it [social support] was probably like my family, um our relatives. A lot of relatives live here like we have our own community like of villages. And they helped us a lot like find like they help us like go to like grocery shopping like they help my parents find jobs, help us find like a house”.

Nini described the source of social support,

“Yes, most of them [source of social support] are for my relatives and then also like church [Burmese church] members. I would say again my relatives on my aunt and also my uncle they're both from my dad side they lived in Maryland so they helped us a lot, but just like adjusting. Our pastor, he helped us a lot, too, because we didn't have a car for like the next three or four months since we got to the United States and so. He was always like driving us around to like our appointments or other needs”.

Molly likewise shared the importance of support from the co-ethnic community,

“If I don't have friends [Burmese friends], I, usually don't get out of my comfort zone too. I have to push me a little bit, So I get out of my comfort zone and do things that [with my Burmese friends]” and also shared that “I would say the church, people from church [resources of social support], they offered us ride because we didn't have any car anything or houses at all at that time, so when we have appointments and stuff and my uncle families are not available, we talked to the people from church and they offered us a ride even like sometimes translation and stuff like that interpretation”.

Moreover, the established Burmese community also played an important role for Burmese refugees' secondary migration. When refugees decide to move to a different

state, referred to as secondary migration, they are not eligible to receive resettlement support from the government. Due to the secondary resettlement, Jelly did not receive any support from the government:

Since we moved from San Diego like we don't receive any help from the government at all. In San Diego, we received help, but we lived there only for 2 weeks. We came to Indianapolis and we did not receive any help because we didn't come to Indianapolis from Malaysia.

Despite such difficulties, many refugees chose secondary migration in order to settle with people from the same ethnic groups. Several interviewees reported that Indianapolis is like a Burmese town in the States. They can feel home in Indianapolis because the majority of Burmese refugees in the U.S. live in Indianapolis. Students described the critical importance of the Burmese community for the newly arrived refugees. Michele explained the importance of the connections and belonging for the newly arrived refugees:

Newly arrived refugees need a community and a sense of belongingness, a sense of being known and where you are welcomed into a community like connections, I think, it is really, really important because people need connection, people need that validity in like their relationship to kind of feel like they belong there and they can live there and be happy and have like a fulfill like life there. I think that's the most important thing.

Connections with Americans

Getting to know the host country's culture and society affects the newly arrived refugees' resettlement. Adjusting to a new environment needs lots of support socially, culturally, and economically. Moreover, Burmese refugees speak a different language and have a different culture from the host country. In this context, Levi shared about the importance of cultivating American friends:

For me Noah [Levi's American friend] would be the most important person that helped me settle in school and in my life because whenever I know a little bit English, he introduced me to his family and then you got to know each other, and then I played soccer with him. And then honestly, he not only helped me in school, but he also helped me settle in, as in the community also he's probably one of the most important persons I've ever met and when uh, yeah he helped me in a lot, even with the language barrier.

Maya shared how Americans helped her and her siblings:

“I would say, like the two people, the two ladies from Jehovah Witness”. “They taught us English, even though we're Christians. They were very willing to help us they taught my parents and I and my siblings and I. They taught us English and then they were able to teach us how to read and write, which was very awesome.

Michele shared the difficulty of knowing nothing about America culture when she first arrived in Indiana. However, through her American friend Michele was able to adjust well to the new society. She shared:

I have like one friend, one American friend that like really understood me and actually took time to learn more about me so it was really nice for people to ask me questions and just try to understand me more than just like she's an Asian kid and just stereotypical you know things.

Resettlement Experiences

This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of Burmese refugee college students' resettlement in the United States. Most of the students described how they actively cultivated their future in the United States. Three of 32 participants explained they were afraid of revealing their refugee status to their peers when they were young. However, at the time of the interviews, all of the participants stated that they are very proud of themselves and of their refugee status.

Blooming flower out of concrete

Participants highlighted having more opportunities after they fled their own country and considered living in America as privileged. Rain summarized her life during

resettlement in the host country as a flower blooming out of concrete. The theme, a blooming flower out of concrete was identified from the participant's quotations to show and emphasize the refugee students' active and powerful approaches to their lives in the host country.

Rain shared her attitude toward life in the host country as:

I think, no matter how people stepped down on you how you know, the struggle that you've been through whatever like rain, sun, and hot whatever come down to you, eventually, you will grow back up again, and concrete is very like symbolize the hardships. If you learn to grow out of that and you are blooming like my life. It isn't always the same as back in the day and so much better now compared to back in the day, so I think that's a blessing and grateful for that.

Jenny explained how her life has changed after she resettled in the U.S.:

I would say I'm more independent. I do feel like the US does give us a lot more opportunity in education and in the workforce as well and like the education that we received back in Burma, it was very like low like we didn't really learn anything. And so like coming here, I know that with what you know I've learned a lot what I can do in the future, like with the education that I have here like even as a high schooler, I could use a lot of that like knowledge that experience that I have to help my people back in Burma.

Chimmy also shared the meaning of being resettled in the U.S.:

Resettlement was about like finding more value and meaning in life because we get separated from our family so when we talk to them, it means more verses like if we're there next to them because we're used to them, you know. I feel more lively here [United States] because If I were to be there right now, I don't think I would have had the opportunity to I wouldn't be the person I am today.

Sung explained how living in the U.S blessed her with various opportunities:

Life in Untied States was hard at first but, overall, it's a good experience. Living in the US, I do feel a lot more blessed than the people that are back in my country because of all the resources that we have all the opportunities that we have the other people don't have... I would say I'm pretty proud of myself for like doing the life and going to college and everything choose [her achievements] in the U.S. I do feel pretty proud of myself.

Dot shared what she wants to accomplish:

I want to be like successful. Have you heard of like the American dream? Somewhere like that's like what I want like towards the American dream. I'm a very goal-oriented person. I have a lot of things I want to accomplish.

A Shift from Feeling Shameful to Feeling Proud

Some participants reported that they were shameful about their status as refugees when they were young. Molly shared that she tried to avoid the word "refugee" when she needed to identify herself. However, now she accepted her status and feels very proud as a refugee through her achievements:

I would get a little bit embarrassed to get called refugee because it feels like a bit lesser than the citizen than people from here so yeah just get a little bit embarrassed and I wouldn't use refugee a lot. I try to avoid using the word refugee instead I would use immigrants and stuff like that. But I think I kind of just accept it as it is now. Just accepted refugees, so it doesn't really make me anything less than other people. I go through all the stuff and I'm in college now. If I look at all the accomplishments that I accomplished, achieved, I feel proud as a refugee. I don't like to get embarrassed or ashamed of it anymore, because of all the things I have achieved now.

Forest was also initially hesitant about identifying herself as a refugee because she does not know the meaning of refugee. However, after she recognized how refugees went through lots of difficulties and challenges in the host country, she started to feel proud of herself as a refugee. Forest shared:

Honestly, if someone were to call me a refugee like or immigrant when I was younger, I would have been offended. I would have been offended, but I didn't know much about it, but now that I know a lot about it, like, I honestly feel proud I'm a refugee and immigrant because I back to when I was younger, I didn't know much of the history, or like what people went through but to be called a refugee or like an immigrant now. I feel happy and proud. It does show that we went through a lot like.

Through interviews, Burmese refugee students expressed how they are proud of their status, living as refugees in the United States. Alen shared the meaning of being a refugee:

I think, for me, what I think of like a refugee, as might like me as a refugee right, it does feel like I'm like being honest, I think it does feel like I'm less than what other people are but then that doesn't mean that I'm not worth or as capable as other what other people are like I think as a refugee it's something that allows me to get like a different perspective on like how valuable the things that I have here are like and that they're actually a privilege that I'm able to go to school and stuff like that you know, and I think I don't know I'm like as a refugee, I guess we go through different struggles and stuff, but I think it's more to me. It's hasn't been like a hurdle in any way that you know it hasn't caused me like anything bad because I was refugee. I'd say we're all proud of where we're from.

Enrolling in college to avoid family shame

Many participants shared the importance of enrolling in college to avoid family shame in their co-ethnic communities. Jenny explained how her parents had concerns if she did not go to college. She shared that if a high school student did not go to college, it was considered a shame for the student's parents:

In the Asian Community, like going to college was a big thing for their students like if they don't go to college, it's like “oh he or she is not smart or he or she isn't going to have a future” and that's not necessarily the case but that's how like people were viewed at the time, and so. For me, I knew my parents were scared that I just had a not going to college because if a student if a kid did decide to do that, like this shame was on their parents, instead of being kid mostly it was on their parents like they didn't raise their kids well enough. For them to attend college, it was stuff like that, and so that was like what was embedded in my mind, since the very beginning it was like I have to go to college. It's a must for me and so that's how it always was, but when I was a sophomore in high school, I really didn't know what I wanted to do with my life at the time, like I knew I had to go to college, but I didn't know why I needed to go to college or what I would even major in. I didn't know anything about that. I felt like it was a waste. It would be a waste for me to go to college for nothing like It would be a waste of money and everything.

Alen shared that going to college was viewed as very respectful in his ethnic community:

I think college or high education or education itself is viewed as something that's very valuable and it's very esteemed like someone that's graduated college would be looked up to and a lot of our community leaders are college graduates as well.

...

If you don't go to college is like, you'll be looked down upon and said which is not a very good thing to have in a community.

...

So, like college is definitely viewed as something very highly.

Lisa also expressed pressure about going to higher education when she was in high school. Going to college was also considered as a prestige among her ethnic community:

There's a lot more pressure on going to college because they're like you have in the education and like these are successful students who have gone to college, and you can do it too.

...

For the Chin Community, [If] you go to college, you make your chin Community look better.

Rose shared how her ethnic community viewed students who did not go to college as a failure on the ethnic community:

Like if you don't go to college, you're basically a disappointment in my community.

...

It's like [when] you show up at church, they will ask you "hey I heard you graduated high school and what college are you going to?" It's kind of like pressure, and let's say you're one of the few people that say, "hey I didn't want to go to college, I have a different path". they'll be like okay, and they won't say anything, but you can feel that they're judging you so part of it is the pressure and part of it is because we, a lot of the younger Burmese people that finished high school came with parents that could not speak English. And they came to America solely for their children to get higher education. We feel like if we don't pursue higher education, we are failing our parents that basically gave up everything to come to America for us. Our parents gave up so much for us. This is what we can do in return for them.

Chapter 6: Discussion

The purpose of the study was to explore the lived experiences of Burmese refugee students. This qualitative study focused on the participants' resettlement experiences and the needs and barriers to their resettlement in the U.S. In this chapter, the researcher further explores the key findings of this study and points out how the participants' resettlement experiences changed over time in the host country. This chapter provides a discussion of findings, limitations, and implications for practice and research. The chapter ends with recommendations for further research and conclusions.

Examining the Findings

The study centered on participants' resettlement experiences. The researcher designed the study to explore the participants' resettlement experiences, their needs, and barriers to their resettlement, as well as the role and importance of social support for their resettlement. While the needs and challenges of participants of this study corroborated previously reported findings, this study explored new aspects of understanding Burmese refugee students' lived experiences during resettlement. Furthermore, the sources of social support were explored to examine their influence. The study also aimed to explore participants' roles in their family, school, and society; however, these topics were infrequent in the interviews. Below are summaries of the thematic patterns constructed from the data with relevant literature.

Theme 1. Challenges of resettlement

The themes under challenges of resettlement revealed Burmese refugee students' lived experiences. The differences in language and culture were uncovered as the primary

challenges during the resettlement period. Experiences of racial discrimination were also identified as one of the main challenges to refugee students.

Theme 1a. Language Barriers

Language is one of the major challenges and barriers to resettling in the new environment. Burmese refugees came from completely different cultures, languages, and customs. The participants expressed how the language differences negatively affected their resettlement and thus their daily lives. Not knowing English initially affected their school life because it was hard to interact with teachers and friends. Moreover, compared to American friends, they needed more time and energy to complete their school. The participants shared how they struggled to complete their school work when they were new in the host country.

The participants' parents also did not speak English so the children had to help their parents even though they were still struggling to adjust to the new environment and the new language themselves. One participant shared how she and her family members struggled when they resettled not knowing English. She tried to help her parents relate to English, but she also struggled to learn English. It is common that immigrant children act as translators in their families (Morales & Hanson, 2005; Orellana, 2010; Orelana et al., 2003, Perry, 2014). After they started to learn English, all of the participants helped their parents as translators. Language is not just a language in refugee families. Language is a tool for the survival of the entire household. In this case, the participants faced many struggles during the initial resettlement period in the host country due to not knowing English.

Theme 1b. Cultural differences

Adjusting to a different culture is one of the biggest challenges with traumatic experiences for refugees (Joyce et al., 2010). Burmese refugees need to accept the different cultures in the host country. When refugees arrived in the host country, they started to build their new life from scratch in a completely foreign place. Moreover, they did not have a chance to learn the host country's culture before arriving in the host country.

Participants shared that they struggled with the American meals offered in school. Their own ethnic food was not available in school. Several participants shared that they did not eat during school because of the different taste of the American food. Another participant shared that when she was young one of the hardest barriers to adjust to in the United States was unfamiliar American food.

The participants shared how hard it was to make friends with American peers in school due to the different cultures. Some refugee students also experienced an identity crisis in trying to figure out where they belong in the host country's culture, which is different from their own ethnic culture. This identity crisis also affected the refugee students' mental health. Many refugees shared how they struggled with mental health issues such as anxiety, panic disorder, and depression. However, refugees who were committed to both cultures – their own ethnic culture and that of the mainstream-host country – showed some advantages in dealing with their challenges (Brooker & Lawrence, 2012).

Theme 1c. Racism

Many studies discovered that Asian Americans have been experiencing discrimination due to race, language, or culture (Choi et al., 2020; Gee et al., 2007; Noh & Kaspar, 2003). Asian immigrants have been experiencing discrimination systematically and socially for a long time in the U.S. (Gee et al, 2007; Okihiro, 2001; Zia, 2000). The participants also experienced racism when they arrived and then even after they went to college, still they experienced racial discrimination.

One participant shared her first experience with verbal racism in U.S. She was able to speak English before coming to U.S. unlike the other Burmese refugee students who did not know the language at the initial period of resettlement. In school, she understood what her classmates said to her, but at that time she did not acknowledge the meaning of what they said to her. She did not understand the true meaning behind the ostensibly racist words spoken by her classmates. She had never experienced verbal racism before arriving in the U.S. Therefore, she was not initially aware that comments directed at her were racist.

Another participant shared about racial discrimination by her neighbors when she arrived in the United States. Her family did not feel welcomed by her community. Due to the racial discrimination, her family needed to relocate from Tennessee to the state of Indiana. Even though the participant did not understand what her neighbors said to her and her family due to the language barrier, she felt that they were racially discriminated against. Discrimination is one of the most common stressors for immigrant adolescents when they adjust to the majority culture (Romero et al., 2007). The participant shared that she considered all of the people in the United States as racists. She said that Indiana was

more welcoming to refugees than Tennessee. She explained that if she initially arrived to U.S. at an area more welcoming to refugees, her experience would be totally different.

A few participants had lived in various states prior to settling in Indiana. However, any geographic pattern of perceived racism was not apparent in the interviews. The main reasons for the secondary migration were to join co-ethnic communities and networks.

Unlike the above cases, the Jen also faced racism in the higher education system. She experienced several racist behaviors in college from professors and peers in the classroom. Those experiences with racial discrimination led her to seek a diverse community to live in. After graduation from her college, she moved to a multicultural city to avoid the chances of racism.

Racism was not discussed in the literature review, chapter 2. However, racism was identified by participants as one of the challenges to resettlement. This theme showed that perceived racism and discrimination persist among Asian-Americans, including refugees from Burma.

Theme 2. Resettlement Needs

Burmese refugee students' resettlement needs are associated with the challenges they faced learning English, a welcome place to feel a sense of belongingness, and lack of transportation.

Theme 2a. Learning English

With theme 1a, learning English was a primary need. As mentioned above, language is a necessary and vital tool to adjust to the new environment. Likewise,

language was one of the main stressors for Sudanese refugees trying to adapt to host countries' life and to manage their education (Poppitt & Frey, 2007).

Refugees' host country language ability was discovered as one of the significant gateways for academic and vocational opportunities in the host country (Brooker & Lawrence, 2012). However, refugee students and their families did not have any chance to learn English before arriving in the U.S. All of the refugees who are from non-English speaking countries struggled to resettle due to the difference in language. The participants also struggled because they had never learned or experienced English. Translation services were essential to the participants. Most of the participants shared that without the interpreter services, they could not adjust to the school system in the host country. They said that the translation services were one of the most important services they needed and are essential for newly arrived refugees.

Theme 2b. Welcome place

One participant used the words “welcome place” in describing a need for the refugees' resettlement. Participants shared the welcome place means a gathering place where they were able to feel a sense of belongingness and connection in the host country. A welcome place with the co-ethnic groups is one of the essential needs for the participants. Participants highlighted that speaking their own language – Burmese or the ethnic group language – was powerful for their adjustment. The participants were able to share their own experiences using their own language within the same ethnic groups.

The host country is a totally new environment for the refugees. To successfully resettle, they need places that feel welcoming and safe. In Canada, many rural and smaller communities are creating welcoming paces for refugees and this brought lots of

refugees' successful resettlement stories (Haugen et al., 2019). In these welcome places such as co-ethnic community or churches, participants were able to share their own experiences of what they went through in the new environment.

Theme 2c. Transportation

Transportation accessibility is considered as one of the major needs for newly resettled refugees. Many studies examined refugees' transportation challenges and discovered how it negatively affected refugee and refugee children's resettlement (Bose, 2014; Ozkazanc, 2021; Stewart et al., 2012; Vais et al., 2020). This study also demonstrated the effects of lack of transportation on refugee students' resettlement. After arriving in the U.S., refugees started to face a whole different situation that they could not go anywhere without transportation. Even though they were able to use public transportation, the system of public transportation was very different from their own country. Moreover, the participants are residents of the state of Indiana. But Indiana's public transit system is not as actively operated compared with bigger cities like Los Angeles, New York, or Chicago. Participants shared that they could not actively participate in school events because they did not have a car.

Theme 2d. Educational Mentor

Along with differences in language and culture, educational systems are completely different from the refugees' own country. The refugees need to learn the education system for their children. However, due to different cultures and languages, refugees find it difficult to understand America's education system. Refugee students needed to figure out the education system in the U.S. by themselves even though they did not know the language. As students, participants needed educational figures or mentors to

guide their life in school and in the host country. Mentors for refugee youths from Bhutan, Iraq, and Burma played a substantial role in the refugee students' positive school and academic engagement positively (Yarrow, 2012).

Many participants shared that they could not do school work due to unfamiliarity with English. The participants' parents could not speak English, so they could not help with their children's school work. However, they were able to complete Math because they did not need to read English to do math assignments. Even though the participants' teachers tried to help with school work, they could not communicate with each other due to the different language. Refugee students struggled a lot to adjust to the school without language ability. Moreover, this also affected their motivation to seek higher education. One of the participants shared that if he had an educational mentor, he could have been more motivated to study and to enter college. The participants are now actively helping and motivating younger Burmese refugee students as mentors. Even though participants lacked educational mentors, they provide that support to other refugees as educational mentors or tutors.

Theme 3. Resources of Social Support

Many studies have documented the importance of social support to refugees (Simich et al., 2003; Stewart et al., 2008, 2010, 2011; Tran & Wright, 1986). Little has been published about Burmese refugees' resettlement and social support in the United States. Studies about Burmese refugees are needed to facilitate and help Burmese refugees' resettlement, especially in Indianapolis which is the one of the largest areas of Burmese refugee resettlement. The sub-themes highlight how a variety of sources of social support is important for the participants' successful resettlement. Sources and the

importance of social support were shared by participants. Two sources of social support – people of the same origin and American people – were discovered as important sources of social support for the Burmese refugee college students.

Theme 3a. Co-ethnic community support

The same ethnic community and extended family are one of the most powerful sources of support for the refugees. All of the participants shared that the reason their parents made a decision to resettle in the state of Indiana was because of the large Burmese community and their extended family. The state of Indiana has the third largest population of Burmese refugees in the United States (CDC, 2016). When refugees arrived in the new environment, they were able to seek help and gain various information from members of their ethnic community and their extended families. The exchange of experience and mutual support from the ethnic community played a key role for refugees to deal with new challenges in the host country (Correa- Velez et al., 2010).

When participants arrived in the host country, the Burmese community was helpful to the participants to meet their basic needs including transportation, translation services, finding housing and jobs, and introducing them to the community. Lopez et al. (2022) highlighted Latino religious leaders as cultural and language brokers who help facilitate first-generation Latino immigrants to adapt and to navigate new systems in the United States. The participants serve their ethnic community as cultural and language brokers as a first-generation refugee. All of the participants shared how much the Burmese community provided guidance and aid to them. Moreover, some participants moved to the state of Indiana from a different state as a secondary resettlement. In this case, they might not receive aid and service from the government

because the state of Indiana is not their first migration destination. However, they decided to move to the state of Indiana to live with the same ethnic community despite the difficulties.

The same ethnic community also can offer emotional connections and belongingness to the newly arrived refugees. One participant highlighted the need for connections and belongingness from people from their own ethnic background. The support from the ethnic community can promote well-being and successful resettlement in the host country.

Theme 3b. Connections with Americans

Participants shared the importance of connections with the American people. The participants described the importance of American friends in their resettlement. American peers played a key role in refugee students' successful adjustment in the school and in the new culture. Participants were able to learn the different culture and English through their American peers. A study found that refugee youths' same ethnic and cross-ethnic friendships showed a positive association with their psychological well-being (Karataş et al., 2021).

Interestingly, one participant shared her friendship with members of Jehovah's Witness. Even though the participant is a Christian, the ladies from Jehovah's Witness taught English to the participant and her family. Through this help, the participant and her family were able to learn English at no cost. Many faith-based organizations provide refugee assistance and advocacy. Individuals from religious communities also provide help and support to the refugees in their community.

Theme 4. Resettlement experiences

This study's purpose was to explore Burmese refugee students' resettlement experiences. Two themes emerged from the narrative of data: Blooming flowers out of concrete and A shift from feeling shameful to feeling proud, which were extracted from the participants' own words.

Participants demonstrated their personal and detailed life goals that they wanted to accomplish. It was very impressive that many participants shared their desire to be a bridge between their own country, Burma, and the host country, the United States. Their goals are not simply for their own life, but included making a contribution to global relations. Moreover, many participants shared the desire to contribute to the host country as a citizen, not just sojourners. They are strongly and actively resettling in the host country.

Theme 4a. Blooming Flower Out of Concrete

This study's purpose was to explore Burmese refugee students' resettlement experiences. Participants considered their status as privileged even though they passed through many difficulties before and after arriving in the host country as refugees. They actively sought and cultivated their life for their own purposes instead of blaming their status on the difficulties. Through interviews, participants showed how they were blessed compared to the people in their own country. Many participants shared that they were able to gain more opportunities in the U.S. and have a dream to help their own country after graduation.

One participant shared that she felt blessed to be together with her family members through the refugee experiences because her family was separated in the

refugee camp. Most of the participants were separated from one of their parents before coming to the U.S. The participant also shared that she felt livelier in the United States. Another participant expressed her strong desire to achieve her goals as a goal-oriented person. Participants are blooming and flourishing in their life in this country despite the challenges and struggles. Most of the participants became very proud of their refugee status.

Theme 4b. A shift from Feeling Shameful to Feeling Proud

Three of 32 participants shared the fear of revealing their refugee status to their peers when they were younger. A study by Colic-Peisker and Tilbury (2003) explained that refugees' passive resettlement style showed negative approaches to their resettlement. However, none of the participants showed this approach to their life and their resettlement period. A few of the participants were ashamed of their refugee status when they were young. Another participant also shared that she chose immigrant as her status when she needed to identify herself instead of refugee status. However, the participant now felt proud of herself and took a positive attitude towards her refugee status. All of the participants showed optimism about their future. This tendency appeared in all of the participants. Every participant was proud to be a refugee having overcome many obstacles and challenges in their lives.

It is important to consider the refugees focused on their strengths instead of seeing them pathologized. Through the interviews, participants showed confidence and passion with their own goals in their life as well as for their own country. After the Myanmar coup, the Burmese community in the United States have been actively working and

helping the people in Myanmar. Many participants' relatives are still living in Myanmar under the coup. Every participant is afraid of the current situation in Myanmar.

The researcher was particularly impressed by one participant. She is a nursing student, but she has a concern for the Burmese second generation living in the U.S. because they are losing their roots and history. She is working on documenting the history and the ethnic groups in Burma by herself. Even though she is young, she tries to protect and preserve her own ethnic group culture and history. Many participants are also actively involved in social activities as a citizen in the United States. Even though they fled from their own country to seek freedom, now they are helping others in this country to transition from recipient to helper. The Burmese college students are passionate and full of enterprise. Support for refugee students' academic and personal growth are essential to achieve refugee students' goals. When they graduate from college, they are on track to be an asset in their new communities.

Theme 4c. Enrolling in college to avoid family shame

Most of the participants shared that not attending college meant shame for their parents within their ethnic community. They were expected by their own ethnic communities to show successful outcomes and to be role models. Moreover, the participants also experienced additional pressure as the first college students in their families. Their parents and members of their own ethnic culture insisted that they must go to higher education.

An important and unique aspect of this study is presenting the perspectives of refugee college students. This theme showed refugee students' perspectives about enrolling in college among their ethnic communities. Going to college is not just for their

future career, but for their family reputation, specifically their parents, among their co-ethnic communities. Only 2 of 32 participants' parents graduated from college and both of them were fathers.

According to Felix (2016), ethnic communities affect refugee students' educational attainment. The ideals and teachings of co-ethnic communities also play an important role in understanding and perceiving the value of postsecondary education. Also, failure to enter college negatively affects the family's prestige in the community. Most of the participants are first-generation college students. Through interviews, it was observed how Burmese refugee community aspirations for education are high and they see the importance of education as an avenue of upward mobility for their children and their family.

Limitations

This study has some limitations. Even though many efforts such as writing memos and peer debriefing were utilized to increase the rigor and trustworthiness, the findings of this study may not be generalizable to the larger population of refugees. However, the purpose of the study was met to explore the lived experiences of Burmese refugee college students' resettlement and to document the importance of social support. This study can serve as a foundation for enhancing refugee students' resettlement and understanding the critical role of different types of social support during the resettlement period.

Although the sample size is appropriate for this study, it was not representative of all refugee communities in the U.S. This study only included Burmese refugee students. Moreover, this study interviewed college students, meaning that the resettlement experiences of refugees not in higher education was not included. The results are not generalizable as the data was collected from one ethnic group in only one state, the state of Indiana.

Another limitation of the study is that participants were asked to retrospectively report about the resettlement period that they experienced growing up. However, they might have forgotten some details of their experiences. Some participants were unable to answer some questions, as they did not remember some aspects of their resettlement process. As for the other limitation, the researcher's presence during data gathering might affect the interviewee's responses. Due to social desirability response bias, some participants might respond in a positive way in explaining their experiences or cover up their weaknesses or negative aspects of their resettlement experiences.

Implications

This study has implications for social work practice in relation to refugee students in the community at the state and federal government levels. Indianapolis has several community organizations, Exodus Refugee Immigration, Catholic Charities, and World Relief, that assist with refugee resettlement. This study offers recommendations to such organizations to work more appropriately and effectively with refugee students.

Moreover, this study's findings can be helpful to develop more appropriate services and aids for the refugee students thereby decreasing the issues and barriers that they face in the U.S. and increasing the chance of successful resettlement. Burmese refugee students' experiences shed light on their own perspectives about their resettlement experiences. It is important to listen to the recipients' voices. Social work practice needs to gather the recipients' voices and opinions about the available services. Since 1948, the U.S. has been receiving refugees and helping them to resettle their new homes. The refugees are now citizens of the United States. The needs and barriers reported by participants will bring a different insight to practitioners in the field, and the practitioners can use these findings to provide services to their clients.

This study offers new insight into exploring refugees' resettlement approaches. It is important to widen the point of view of refugees from being simply passive recipients or victims to being pioneers in the new land. Refugees are coming to the host country with the hope of starting a new chapter in life. When I talked with refugees, I was able to see how they are passionate about their lives and their communities. Many of the refugees whom I met discovered the passion to help their own country and the newly resettled refugees drawing on their own experiences. They were beneficiaries but also can

be benefactors in this society. Refugees can play a significant role to help newly resettled refugees bringing various positive effects to the community.

This study has implications for the education sector in relation to refugee students in primary and secondary-level and higher education systems. Primary and secondary schools would need to begin to offer some ethnic foods for newly arrived refugees. Participants shared the struggles of food in school as one of the barriers during resettlement. For instance, school systems would investigate ethnic foods for various ethnic groups, and then provide culturally preferred, nutritious foods for the newly arrived refugee students. Higher education can promote refugee college students' emotional well-being as well as their academic success. Some of the study participants indicated that they still experience mental health challenges. Campus wellness staff and/or social workers can help the refugee students to seek their dreams and life paths, while also guiding them to counseling centers to promote their psychological well-being. Refugee students could benefit from educational and life mentors in campus wellness center. Additionally, higher education can match current refugee students as peer advisors with refugee students who are in first year of an undergraduate program. The peer advisor can provide mentoring and advising to the refugee students using their own experiences. Universities can provide tuition assistance to peer advisors.

At the community level, it can be difficult to figure out refugee college students' needs. Campus social workers and/or wellness staff will replace this role to help the refugee students and also can partner with refugee-serving organizations to meet the needs of refugee students. The role of campus social workers will be different from

campus counseling services. Through a variety of wellness supports, refugee college students can grow as healthy citizens with psychological well-being.

This study has implications for research and policies for refugee students' resettlement. Evidence-based research and practice are requested for newly arrived refugees. From analyzing the data, it appears that a better understanding of refugees' lived experiences will improve the effectiveness of refugee resettlement policies and better serve the refugee families in the refugee aid system. Refugees who chose secondary migration after arriving in the host country hardly receive refugee resettlement services such as time-limited cash and medical assistance from the government. However, many refugees are choosing secondary migration for their successful resettlement. According to Hobfoll's COR theory, migrant groups experience a low level of resources with a risk of poor adjustment. Participants who chose secondary migration also faced a low level of resources in resettled areas firstly. To have greater opportunities for resource gain, the refugees moved to the state of Indiana. Even though refugees cannot receive resettlement services and aids from government, they acknowledge that moving to the state of Indiana will give them more chances to successfully resettle in the United States.

Refugees should not have to choose between essential financial support and critical social supports. Policies need to reflect current situations and connect between different states to help the secondary refugees. Culturally-appropriate support services for refugees are needed to help them prepare for their new lives as U.S. citizens. The participants and other refugee college students would be a great group to advise policymakers and offer recommendations on what refugees need to successfully resettle and adjust in the United States.

Future Research

This study could be a foundation to focus on the lived experiences of Burmese refugee college students' resettlement for future research. This study is the first study exploring Burmese refugee college students' resettlement experiences instead of considering refugees as victims or solely focusing on students' educational outcomes. However, examining refugee groups from different countries may bring different results.

Evidence-based research can be conducted to identify best practices for newly arrived refugees' successful resettlement. Research about refugees also needs to focus on refugees' passion and hope for their lives instead of portraying them as victims. It is important to study refugees' mental health and psychological well-being. Refugees need to seek psychological well-being; however, at the same time, they need to take root in the new environment. Future research should shed light on their passions and dreams in the new country instead of solely focusing on refugees' mental health issues or challenges. Refugees are coming to the host country expecting a new chapter in their lives. Research about their aspirations will be beneficial to help them as citizens, not as strangers. Refugees are citizens in this country. They are not strangers or foreigners anymore. Focusing on their strengths would positively affect society. The researcher believes this will provide refugees more opportunities to successfully resettle in the United States.

Conclusion

This study explored Burmese refugee college students' lived experiences with the resources of social support, and their needs and challenges during resettlement. The number of refugee students is growing and social support is well studied in social work and many other fields. However, most of the existing studies about refugees are related to

mental health and trauma. Few studies about Burmese refugee students have been studied from a social work perspective. Instead of solely focusing on refugees' mental health or trauma, the researcher wanted to learn more about refugee students' resettlement experiences as members of society, not as sojourners in the U.S. Refugees came to the host country to begin and develop their new lives as full-fledged citizens. They come here to be community members, not strangers.

Most of the participants shared how they actively resettled and adjusted to the U.S. after arriving even though everything was new to them. Despite huge differences in culture, language, food and weather, Burmese refugee college students who participated in this study overcame a variety of challenges and aspire to be contributors to their home nation and to their new communities in the U.S.

The researcher discovered how refugee students actively resettled in the United States. Only two of 32 interviewees (N=32) experienced a passive resettlement style in the initial period of resettlement, but later, they transitioned to an active approach to resettlement. Eventually, all of the participants shared how they have a deep passion and eagerness to successfully resettle in the U.S. to be healthy members of this society. Instead of being pessimistic or getting stuck in trauma, participants have thrived in a whole different country. Refugees are usually considered victims or people who need help. That is simply not the whole story. They are continuously blooming their lives from concrete. Living in the host country is not optional, but a matter of survival. The participants survived and now share their stories with this society. They are beneficiaries but at the same time, they are benefactors. As cultural and language brokers (Lopez et al., 2022), the participants would play an important role in the Burmese community for

newly arrived refugees. This study continuously delivers this message to researchers, practitioners, and policymakers.

The various sources of social support for Burmese refugee students to successfully resettle in the U.S. were also highlighted. The support from their ethnic group was critical for refugees to have a sense of belongingness within a different culture. Also, the support from the American peers was significant for refugees to successfully resettle in the U.S. Refugee students struggled to have friends or relationships with Americans in school. Having relationships with Americans was helpful for refugees to adjust and learn about American society. The policies and practices need to pay attention to this need and develop strategies regarding how to build relationships between different cultural communities.

All of the participants were grateful to share their stories. Refugees struggle to have a sense of belonging and social support in the host country. Listening to their stories and experiences will give them a chance to be recognized as important members of this society. Refugees can play important roles in the host country as a change-maker for their community and family and as a bridge for international relationships. When refugees successfully resettle and thrive in the host country, social justice will be achieved. This study revealed not only the resilience of the refugee population but also the strength of this population. Reframing the concept of refugees is required globally to welcome refugees as members of their new country.

Appendices

Appendix A

Demographic Questionnaire for The Experience of Burmese Students in Higher Education

Name _____

Email _____

Contacts _____

What is your age?

- 18-22 years old
- 23-26 years old
- 27-30 years old
- 30-33 years old
- more than 33 years old

What is your sex?

- Female
- Male
- Other (please specify)
- Prefer not to answer
- Other:

What is your current employment status?

- Employed full-time (40+ hours a week)
- Employed part-time (less than 40 hours a week)
- Unemployed (currently looking for work)
- Unemployed (not currently looking for work)

What is your marital status?

- Single (never married)
- Married
- Separated
- Divorced
- Widowed
- Other:

Where were you born? _____

If applicable, please specify your religion

- Catholicism/Christianity
- Judaism
- Islam
- Buddhism

- Hinduism
- Other
- Prefer not to say

How long have you lived in the United States? _____

How long have you lived in the state of Indiana? _____

How old were you when you first arrived in the US? _____

Which college are you in? _____

What is your classification in college?

- First-year
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior
- Graduate or Professional
- Unclassified

Where do you now live during the school year?

- dormitory or other campus housing
- residence (house, apartment, etc.) within walking distance of the institution
- residence (house, apartment, etc.) within driving distance
- fraternity or sorority house

What is your major? _____

Did either of your parents graduate from college?

- no
- yes, both parents
- yes, mother only
- yes, father only
- don't know

I will use pseudonym in research reports, which name do you want to be called?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION! If you have any questions, please let me know!

Appendix B

Study Interview Questionnaire

- How did you come to US? Where did you stay before you arrived in US? Tell me your migration story from your own country.
- If you have an experience at a refugee camp, please share your story in the refugee camp.
- Why did your family decide to go the U.S?
- Do you remember the reason why your family decided to resettle in the state of Indiana?
- Would you describe your experience when you resettled in the U.S at first?
- What kind of social support have you received when you resettled in U.S ?
- Tell me about your family.
- What are your relationships with your family?
- Can you tell me about how your relationship with your family has impacted you in the initial period of resettlement and now? What has accounted for these changes?
- Who makes decisions in your family?
- What kind of social activities does your family have together? (e.g. church, school or and so on)
- If you recall the time when you arrived in the U.S., what kind of social support did you need?
- What are your needs and barriers in relation to adjusting to school and in society?
- What kind of support do you need from school and government?
- Have you received support from any other Burmese refugees who resettled before you?

Were they an important source of support?

- What resources did you need? What resources do you need currently?
- What is most important factor to adjust in the U.S?
- What processes or people were helpful for your adjustment in the U.S.? Can you tell me a specific incident?
- Tell me about how you happened to get into college.
- Why did you decide to go to college?
- Is there an important meaning to go to college within your ethnic group?
- What do you want to do after graduation?
- What does it mean going to college for you and your family?
- The term of Refugee, what do you feel about this? Has this term influenced you?
- What do you think about the US government's stance on refugees?
- When you evaluate your resettlement period, what comes to mind??
- What is the most important need for newly arrived refugees?

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Curriculum Vitae

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EDUCATION

Doctor of Philosophy, Social Work (2022)

Indiana University, IN

Dissertation title: *The experience of Burmese refugee students in higher education:
Blooming out of concrete*

Master of Social Work (2014)

University of Pittsburgh, PA

Bachelor of Arts, Social work (2011)

Chong-shin University, Seoul, Korea

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Bethel University

Social Policy Practice (Undergraduate) **2022**

Social Welfare History (Undergraduate) **2022**

Social Work research Methods (Graduate) **2022**

Social Work Practice I (Undergraduate) **2021**

Advanced Social Work Practice I (Graduate) **2021**

Social Welfare History and Policy (Graduate) **2021**

Indiana University

Social Work Practice Evaluation **2020-2021**

Practice Evaluation **2020**

Social Work Research **2019**

PRESENTATIONS AT SCHOLARLY CONFERENCES

Lim, M., (November, 2022), The Lived Experience of Burmese Refugee Students in Higher Education, Council on Social Work Education Annual program Meeting, Anaheim, California.

Kim, E., and **Lim, M.**, (November, 2022), Parental perceptions of racial discrimination among first-generation Korean Americans, Council on Social Work Education Annual program Meeting, Anaheim, California.

Ashirifi, G., Bellian, P., Kaboi, M., **Lim, M.**, Kyere, E., and Lee, J., (May, 2022), Uncovering Social Resiliency for Nurturing Transnationalism among Youth of Immigrants' Household: The Role of Critical Qualitative Inquiry, International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry, Online conference.

Lee, J., Kyere, E., Bellian, P., **Lim, M.**, Kaboi, M., and Ashirifi, G., (May, 2022), Applying the Sort and Sift, Think and Shift qualitative approach to decolonizing knowledge, International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry, Online conference.

Lim, M., (October, 2020). Refugee Children's Post-migration: Needs and Barriers to School Adjustment, Council on Social Work Education Annual program Meeting, Online Conference.

Lim, M., (July, 2020). Burmese Refugee Children's Needs and Barriers to School Adjustment in the United States, International Federation of Social Workers 2020, Online Conference.

Lee, J., & **Lim, M.** (Nov, 2019). Low-Value Health Care Usage Among Bhutanese Refugees Resettled in the United States. 2019 American Public Health Association, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Bragg, N., **Lim, M.**, & Garry, C. (Nov, 2018). Cultural Diversity in the MSW Learning Space: Exploring Awareness, Acceptance, and Perceptions. 2018 Council on Social Work Education Annual program Meeting, Orlando, Florida.

Lee, J., & **Lim, M.** (Jan, 2018). Low-Value Use and Emergency Department Usage Among Bhutanese Refugees resettled in the United States. 2018 Society for Social Work and Research, Washington, D.C.

Lee, J., & **Lim, M.** (Jun, 2017). Low-Value Use and Emergency Department Usage Among Bhutanese Refugees resettled in the United States. 2017 North American Refugee Health Conference, Toronto, Canada.

Lee, J., & **Lim, M.** (Jun, 2017). Relational Qualitative Methods in Community-Engaged Health Research with Bhutanese Refugees. 2017 North American Refugee Health Conference, Toronto, Canada.

HONORS AND AWARDS

Community Engagement Associate scholarship , Indiana University	2020 – 2021
Travel fellowship , School of Social Work, Indiana University	2016 – 2020
Research Assistantship , School of Social Work, Indiana University	2019
Graduate Assistantship , School of Social Work, Indiana University	2016 – 2018
Honoree , University of Pittsburgh	2014
Human Services Management Certificate , School of Social Work, University of Pittsburgh	2014
Scholarship of Charlotte J. Dunmore Grant , School of Social Work, University of Pittsburgh	2012 – 2014
Academic Achievement Scholarship (4 of 7 semesters), Chong-shin University	2009 – 2010
Million Peoples' Scholarship (3 of 7 semesters), Chong-shin University	2009 – 2010
National Employment Scholarship , Korea Student Aid Foundation	2009 – 2010